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CrOCEVIA • *Engaging Wor(l)ds in Postcolonial Studies: Human Rights, Environmental Humanities and Well-being*

Guest Editor: Roger BROMLEY
Editors: Carmen CONCILIO & Pietro DEANDREA

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CrOCEVIA

ENGAGING WOR(L)DS IN POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES: HUMAN RIGHTS, ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES AND WELL-BEING

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INTRODUCTION

Roger BROMLEY (GUEST EDITOR)
Carmen CONCILIO (EDITOR)
Pietro DEANDREA (EDITOR)

The present issue of the monographic section of the Journal, called "CrOCEVIA", that is crossroads, gathers contributions meant for or inspired by the past four editions of the international AISCLI Summer School, hosted by the University of Turin, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures and Modern Cultures.

The Summer School on World Literatures in English and postcolonial studies, organized and promoted by the Italian Association for the Studies of Cultures and Literatures in English is a platform and workshop where to test, compare and disseminate the results of international academic research, and at the same time – thanks also to the students' participation and specific interests – it helps promoting new research, ideas and projects.

Amongst other topics, the School's main concerns, normally debated within a one-week intensive course, have revolved around Human Rights, Environmental Humanities, and Well-being. Each article included here elaborates on the type of lectures offered at the School, and addresses at least one of those areas. The contributions are characterized by a strong commitment, openness to all genres, a high degree of hybridity and interdisciplinary approach, and an aspiration to connect different geographies, histories, peoples and stories. Given their shared focus, it is not surprising that many of these articles offer reflections on the concept of biopolitics.

In his opening essay, Roger Bromley focuses on two graphic novels (by Shaun Tan and Maya Neyestani) and on their visual techniques meant to convey the unsettling process of re-cognition of reality involved in the experience of migrancy – an extremely appropriate issue for the name of this journal and the founding concept behind it. Carmen Concilio's environmental contribution concentrates on the topicality of the access to water as narrated by two famous novelists, Arundhati Roy and Anne Michaels, examining their literary strategies in the face of the power-ridden question of megadams. Centred on transcultural identities, Roberta Cimarosti's contribution studies a literary classic such as *Heart of Darkness* from the lens of Joseph Conrad's migrant identity, then moving to how the novel was read (or re-written) by four contemporary postcolonial writers such as Chinua Achebe, David Dabydeen, Derek Walcott and Caryl Phillips. Paola Della Valle's focus on New Zealand engages with a wide range of literary texts to discuss different ideas of well-being; she emphasizes the colonial bias lurking behind the image of New Zealand as the country with the world's highest life expectancy (until the 1940s), and how the picture changed with the rise of Māori forms of cultural resistance and alternative concepts of environmental and public health. Marta Cariello approaches another marginalized people, Palestinians, and more specifically the case of Palestinian refugees: through a biopolitical perspective on the gendered and racialised body, she analyses Susan Muaddi Darraj's short stories and their crucial crossroads between the oppressed body and inter-generational memory; in its turn, this relationship is shown as impinging on the spatial interactions between the refugee camp and the exiled Palestinian community, and on the interaction of these spaces with the urban dimension of migrant communities in the US.

Nicoletta Vallorani's contribution further develops this interest in urban spaces, in her case elaborating on the colonial implications they carry and on how they may be appropriated and re-signified (another significant connection with our journal's title) in the dimension of the so-called 'postcolony'; her main case study, the Ethiopian Abebe Bikila winning the 1960 Rome Olympic marathon, is analysed through the differing slants of an "Istituto Luce" historic document and a contemporary docu-film. Finally, many of the abovementioned issues re-appear in Pietro Deandrea's reading of David Bowie's lyrics and their concern for the dispossessed, in some cases inspired by key authors of British committed literature such as Alan Sillitoe and Keith Waterhouse; arguing that the interest in human rights pervades Bowie's oeuvre and consequently embodies the politically critical side of postmodernism, the article complements the dominant view of Bowie as an experimenting gender-bender and as a visual trend-setter.

Literature, then, is intended here in its widest and most composite sense, including cinema and documentary, graphic novels and pop music. It composes a varied picture which is highly appropriate to our idea of commitment in relation to human rights, environmental humanities and well-being: something that may aspire to reach out of academic literary studies, to engage with words and worlds in our specialized fields and in our everyday life at the same time.

A final word must be spent to illustrate the choice of the cover picture. We liked the idea of a library built on the basis of eco-sustainable principles. It stands as a symbol of the right to education and well-being, two of the driving concepts behind the Panafrican policies of Kwame Nkrumah, to whom the library is dedicated. The brooding clouds seem to allude to climate change and extreme, uncontrollable weather conditions, while the vegetation offers a natural background to this artefact of human imagination.

THE SECTION EDITORS
Roger Bromley
Carmen Concilio
Pietro Deandrea

PS: As local 'section editors' we would like to thank all those who contributed to give the Summer School an international resonance: Roger Bromley (University of Nottingham), Christa Knellwolf (University of Vienna), John McLeod (University of Leeds), Radhika Mohanram (University of Cardiff). Besides, we would like to thank likewise the Italian colleagues who work abroad, Michela Borzaga (University of Vienna), Pier Paolo Frassinelli (Monash Universty, Johannesburg), Luisa Percopo (University of Cardiff), Tiziana Morosetti (University of Cambridge). To all the Italian and local scholars who also took part in the Summer School as teaching staff, headed by Annalisa Oboe, goes our renewed gratefulness and friendship.

(C. Concilio, P. Deandrea)

OUT OF FOCUS

The Migrant Journey*

Roger BROMLEY

ABSTRACT • This article briefly touches upon the debate about whether the conditions of the 1951 Geneva Convention are too restrictive in so far as they limit the definition of the refugee to a specific fear of persecution. It asks questions about whether those fleeing from poverty, material and environmental degradation, and profound social disadvantage should also be considered alongside those with a claim to political refugee status. Richmond's typology of 'reactive migration' demonstrated the inadequacy of existing criteria which surround the refugee situation and, with this in mind, the article examines two cultural texts – both graphic novels but with very different styles – which feature migrants, one, on the surface, an economic migrant, the other an asylum seeker who fled from "a genuine fear of persecution". Although the protagonists in both texts face quite different challenges, they both suffer from a profound ontological insecurity.

KEYWORDS • Migrations, Graphic Novel, Asylum Seekers, Shaun Tan, Neyestani

As Europe is "on the cusp of a humanitarian crisis" ("Guardian" 3/3/16), with thirty times more refugees entering the continent in January and February of this year (2016) than in the same two months last year, it is timely to ask what kind of lives will these people be able to live in spaces of asylum, presuming that these are granted. Given that the majority of refugees will have already suffered trauma, exclusion, conflict and personal loss well before they reach the borders of Europe, then what is the likely impact of these experiences on their well-being, their emotional or mental capital? The fact that so many have got so far, across deserts and seas, suggests a certain amount of resilience and cognitive resource, an ability to meet and overcome challenges. How might they enhance their 'wellness' in the face of the complexities of different asylum processes, assuming that they have managed to surmount the obstacles placed in their way by fences, border patrols, and local hostilities? How can they develop and flourish in their new environment? Apart from the physical depredations of the migrant journey, account also has to be taken of the effects on mental health. Will this generation of refugees be able to progress from a condition of passive victim to flourish as an active citizen with choices, a restoration of agency? Inner resources are likely to be severely depleted and each family, or individual, will need assistance in acquiring the various dimensions of well-being and accessing new living spaces, physical and mental health, and social networks.

All of this has to be done in the context of what Foucault called *biopolitics*, the preoccupation of the state with the health and well-being of its populations, a preoccupation which does not necessarily extend to, and in many cases is actively opposed to, those not entitled to national health programmes. A British government minister discouraged the rescue of those drowning in the Mediterranean on the basis that it only led others to make the same

* Acknowledgement: I should like to thank Ghazal Mosadeq and Hicham Yezza for assistance with the translation of the Neyestani text.

journey. Biopolitics often implies a 'reciprocal exclusivity' – a policy of live and let die – which minimizes, where it does not totally deny, the rights of 'others' to welfare. This leads to policies and legislation designed to deter the migrant, except for certain privileged categories. The vast majority of displaced people never get anywhere near to Europe. The massive influx of refugees, mainly but by no means only from Syria, into Europe in the past two years or more, has been seen by some states as leading to a crisis of the sovereignty of the border which, in turn, has produced a militarisation of border controls. Far Right political parties have grown in strength in many parts of Europe, demonising and 'othering' the migrant, relegated to the status of the 'sub-human', Muslims in particular. The so-called 'war on terror', a term dropped from political discourse for a while but now returned, has been used to generate a culture of fear and ethno-nationalism in Europe and the USA.

So far, my explicit focus has been on the refugee but, in the popular imagination, distinctions between asylum seekers, EU migrants, and 'irregular' economic migrants are conflated. In academic, legal and policy circles, there is now a debate about whether the conditions of the 1951 Refugee Convention are too restrictive and questions are being asked about whether those fleeing from poverty, material and environmental degradation, and profound social disadvantage should also be considered alongside those with a claim to political refugee status. Does material destitution, threats to well-being, and 'involuntary economic migration' constitute a deterioration in mental capital and ontological security which should merit consideration together with those currently with a right to claim asylum? Anthony Richmond (1993) emphasizes:

> [T]he complex interaction between political, economic, environmental, social and bio-psychological factors [determines] the propensity to migrate. Thus it demonstrates the inadequacy of any definition of a "refugee" which singles out one element in the causal chain, such as having "a genuine fear of persecution", because such fear is often only one factor in a much more complicated relation between predisposing factors, structural constraints, precipitating events and enabling circumstances. (23)

In addition to this, Michelle Foster argues that "a range of emerging refugee claims challenge traditional distinctions between economic migrants and political refugees" (Foster 2012) and this situation is likely to increase, at a time of ever-widening global inequality and risks to well-being, as environmental disasters are added to already existing levels of economic deprivation, hunger, and resource depletion. Writing in the early 1990s, Richmond anticipated much of this contemporary debate by claiming that "a distinction between voluntary and involuntary movements […] is untenable". He constructed a set of 25 categories of what he called "reactive migration", linked to those whose life choices and well-being were "severely constrained", such that "decisions made by both 'economic' and 'political' migrants are a response to diffuse anxiety generated by a failure of the social system to provide for the fundamental needs of the individual, biological, economic, and social" (Richmond 1988, 17). With all the media emphasis on Syria, it is important to remember that what Richmond says applies to many countries today, including Eritrea, Somalia, South Sudan, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

Richmond's typology of "reactive migration" demonstrated the inadequacy of existing definitions which surround the refugee situation and with this in mind, I shall proceed to examine two cultural texts – both graphic novels – which feature migrants, one, on the surface an "economic migrant", the other an asylum seeker who fled from a "genuine fear of persecution" in the terms of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Although the protagonists in both texts face very different challenges, they both suffer from a profound ontological insecurity, or *dépaysement*, that insecurity and disorientation felt in a foreign country or culture. In the one

case, the man in Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* (2006), this fear and anxiety is produced by the migrant journey of 'unsettlement', and in the other, the case of the figure of M in Mana Neyestani's *Petit Manuel du Parfait Réfugié Politique* (2015) it is the asylum process itself which destabilises and unsettles. In both instances, this experience has a significant impact on their mental capital and ability to function at the level of well-being, as their senses are atrophied and, although aware of the objects and forms around them, they are not capable of understanding their functions or meanings.

Each protagonist in the texts under discussion undergoes a process of transformation in which they are rendered temporarily superfluous and those skills, resources, understanding, and knowledges which they had developed prior to migration are almost totally undermined as they become figures of 'expulsion' almost, and dispossession: disposable people. Their previous well-being might be described as a form of possession, empowerment and self-ownership, part of their belonging. The migrant journey, in the first instance, is a journey of 'unbelonging', of defamiliarisation, in which all habits of recognition, language, time, space and relationships become precarious. Mobility on one level produces a measure of immobility at the level of cognition and navigation, a feeling of maplessness is undergone. If, as Thomas Nail argues, "the migrant is the political figure of our time", then the figures in these texts are both specific and individuated, as well as being, in some ways, archetypal in so far as they represent people within "regimes of circulation" (Nail 2005), who are in flux, moving from a sedentary, territorially defined *heimat* (homeland) to being in motion and in spaces of unpredictability, the unknown. The whole process is one of re-cognition, explored through what Bidisha Banerjee (Banerjee 2016) calls "the lens of difference", leading to the restoration of a sense of territory and habituation, and of temporal and spatial predictability as a precondition of a renewal and of mental and physical capital, that movement from the status of the "expelled other" (Nail), metaphorically if not always literally, to a position of resettlement, arrival.

While accepting that well-being is a dynamic process, in many instances it is related to, what has been called, mental maps or 'mental capital', that is having the resources and command of life skills which enable a person to navigate the circumstances of everyday life. It could be argued that such mental capital stems from an ability to be at home with one's self. Not always, of course, but often this means literally being in a place surrounded by family and the familiar, forms of attachment – people, objects, images, sites, routines, language, spaces; perhaps, above all, proximity. Together, this matrix of perceptions and actions form a prism through which later experiences are filtered. For the migrant, forced or otherwise, who travels across the world in search of a better, or at least different, life, the moment of departure marks the beginning of a rupture, the first of a series of interruptions to the known and the customary, the initial stages of a loss of well-being in which a sense of lack and abandonment sets in. As the journey progresses and each new obstacle is encountered, and each new experience is seen as strange, all the ready-made sources and resources of meaning and belonging break up; above all, language and customary codes and modes of understanding. Habitual reflexes no longer function effectively and identity has to be totally re-thought and newly configured, like beginning to walk again metaphorically – finding a place in a realm of placelessness.

These ideas will be explored initially through an analysis of Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* (2006), a graphic novel which traces the long and tortuous journey of a father and husband from an unspecified location through a range of alienating, nameless spaces and surreal events to a point of eventual arrival and family reunion, the resumption of shared mental capital; the last gesture of the book is his daughter pointing towards the future. Technically very sophisticated in its design, the displacement at the centre of the journey is charted wordlessly, the silence carrying the absence of meaning at the core of much of the narrative, suggesting the painful struggle to decode new and challenging signifiers.

Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* opens at a particular juncture in the life of its protagonist, an unnamed husband and father. The design of the book is integral to its narrative of displacement, a narrative which is eclectic in its sense of both time and place. The book has the physical appearance of a well-worn, partly 'distressed' photo album, a familiar register of the private and the familial. Its cover, title page and publication details bear the stains of time and usage as well as, in their sepia colouring, carrying the traces of inspection, certification and registration (date stamped documents etc.), signifiers of immigration, of mobility. The album framework and the signs of passage denote the personal and the individual – on the title page there is a small photo insert of the protagonist, the hat and tie recognisably male but with an undefined face. The narrative trajectory which follows supplies the definition. Countering, and accompanying/framing, the individual marks of journeying are the 60 images on both end papers, each individuated and drawn from a range of, mainly, non-European ethnicities, predominantly male, and presumably forerunners of migration and displacement, those expelled and 'othered' on a global scale, mainly by colonialism, and over a considerable period of time, going back to the nineteenth century and earlier. These expressionless faces are part of a generative archive designed to historicize and generalize the specific migrant journey to follow but also to suggest that the migrant experience is ongoing, one repeated story in a continuum.

The narrative starts at a point of departure with a grid of nine panels of images and objects of domesticity, symbols of belonging and belongings, resources of value – a clock, a hat and coat on a peg, a cracked teapot, a chipped cup, a child's drawing of a family, a family portrait, travel tickets, an origami crane, and an open suitcase with clothing inside. The bird, the travel tickets, and the suitcase are indices of flight/travel and suggest a fracture in the domestic, a rift in belonging. The furnishings, the damaged crockery, and the battered suitcase secured by a belt, give an overall impression of relative deprivation and insecurity which hints at a motive for the husband's decision to leave. Man and wife clasp hands over the suitcase, a time of parting and sorrow. It is a familiar migration scenario, the man leaving in the hope of a better life for his wife and child. The time is indeterminate, some point in the early to mid-twentieth century. There is a sense in which the book is designed as a document of post-memory, a narrative to be read at some time in the future by the daughter, perhaps, or her descendants.

There are several images of the daughter which indicate the future, the need for a legacy of security. The family travel together in a darkened street, shadowed by a monstrous dragon-like tail, a possible index of oppression, and pass by shabby, asymmetrical and identical tenement buildings which almost dwarf the family who are diminished and obscured. The fact that the man has travel tickets and departs from a train station suggests that he is an 'economic migrant'. A number of other, indistinguishable passengers wait in the smoke-filled station, presumably on a similar journey. The father tries to distract the child with the origami bird – a motif which will recur throughout as a bond between them. The wife weeps and the child, husband and wife join hands. Child and mother return home alone, the tail of the dragon still looming.

The book is very much about *scale* and *perspective* – ways of seeing and being seen, and as the man is viewed in transit on a ship placing the family portrait – itself a recurring point of anchorage – on the cabin chest of drawers, an image of him seen through a porthole gradually diminishes as his specificity is lost among numerous portholes. The ship, in turn, is diminished and displaced in a vast, darkening sky and seascape as 60 panels of differing cloud formations signify the sea crossing, and the passage of time and increasing distance. The passengers are grouped on deck as 'huddled masses', already figures at a loss, lacking any eye contact as they watch huge dragonfly-like, origami figures flying above them. Apart from the earlier dragon tail, these figures are the first break with the 'photorealist' drawings, the initial signs of the non-real, the surreal, indicating the migrant's entry into a de-familiarised, discontinuous world – zones of indistinction – where images are no longer anchored in a knowable context. As

'knowability' is a condition of well-being, this marks the first stage in the gradual depletion of mental capital. Although the images of estrangement are given a strong visual presence, they could also be seen as projections of a sense of internal loss and anxiety, of cultural/mental incapacity. The husband, trying to recover a thread of continuity, writes in his journal/diary and tears out a page to shape into an origami bird. The attempt to sculpt and fold meaning in the form of this bird is a moment of anamnesis, a link with his child.

The arrival at an unspecified port is shown in contradictory, full-page panels from different realms – on one page a realistic cityscape which 'bleeds' into the facing page showing a mythical space in which a giant-sized 'oriental' traveller is greeted by a similar-sized host, their identities indicated by their headgear, their presence a symbol of 'welcome', analogous to the Statue of Liberty in New York harbour. The disembarkation scene is drawn, Tan says, from iconic Ellis Island imagery which suggests a generational and archetypal moment, but the immigration hall has a large banner in a non-Western language, an *ersatz*, Cyrillic-styled alphabet positioned to signify the strange: unfamiliar, unknown codes which are part of the estrangement of migration, the language deficit. Migrants, seated in long rows, are processed – medically examined, labelled, and tagged – as yet another stage in their transformation, their re-inscription. The man is shown in numerous poses indicating bewilderment, failure to understand, at a cultural and cognitive loss, part of the diminution in well-being. Characterised by passivity, he is infantilised as his coat is covered in tags and stickers, his signed and stamped papers issued. These are all new forms of recognition, of certification, of emergence into migrant space, the first of many thresholds encountered.

The man leaves the hall – an atemporal, liminal space – and enters a new temporality, an 'Eastern' cityscape, a surreal, fantasy scene with dream-like qualities, perhaps an analogue of the migrant hope but also a space of alienation and category confusion. He is transported in a Pegasus-like, Tardis structure and deposited in a bizarre, part-realistic, part-fantastic space with mythical birds. This is the most dramatic stage of his disorientation, at a loss and unable to decipher, the lowest point of his loss of well-being, virtually resourceless. He wanders the city trying to read the signs, attempting to wrest meaning from the new environment, his ontological status suspended. The whole book is wordless, emblematic of conceptual and cognitive ruptures, the migrant 'lack', and the man uses graphic means to communicate with someone who takes him to a lodging where a 'real' landlady is mixed with surreal creatures, and his room is full of tubular structures which puzzle and confuse because they are outside his framework of understanding. He now has a place but is still dis-located and struggles to make sense of any of the household implements, objects of an alien domesticity which he will have to learn. In the process, he comes across a small, alien creature – described as a "walking tadpole" by Tan (www.shauntan.net) – who will figure throughout the narrative as a kind of 'familiar', a magical companion. If the man is an Everyman type of figure, then the "tadpole" could be compared with Knowledge in the medieval play *Everyman*, who says "Everyman, I will go with thee, and be thy guide, in thy most need to go by thy side". As a bearer of Knowledge – key component of well-being – the guide is there to help the man navigate the new world of migrant experience and to find ontological security. Migration, apart from all the features already mentioned, is also a form of disenchantment – almost akin to depression or trauma – and the creature is a guide back to a world of enchantment. Slowly settling, the man opens his suitcase and re-acquaints himself with his knowable past, aspects of his mental capital, by imaging and imagining his wife and daughter by hanging the family portrait. A series of familiarising images follow which are seeds of agency but these are intruded upon, punctured, by the still, as yet, alien creature. That this is a period of relative well-being is indicated by an outside view of the hotel whose windows look like picture frames and the city resembles something from a magical fairy tale, a space of potential enchantment.

Although his sleep is troubled and he is still uncertain about his 'familiar', the man does manage a series of normative actions – showering, shaving, dressing – which are tokens of an incipient agency, the beginning of a new mobility, despite the unreadable map with which he sets off for the surreal city of conical structures, flying boats, and spaces and images which resist meaning. He has the confidence to approach a woman who shows him how to get a ticket for one of the flying boats. By introducing himself to the woman by means of his ID card he takes a step towards sociality and, as she shows her ID, the onset of reciprocal mutuality, itself a condition of well-being. What we become aware of is that this is a city of migrants, newcomers who exist on a graduated scale of acculturation and in/security. In 24 dark-toned panels, the woman tells a story of abjection and the trauma of her abduction, confinement and forced labour cleaning industrial chimneys. This very different backstory from the man's indicates that she is a refugee. She eventually escaped her captors and sought refuge in this cosmopolitan space. The man parts from her and continues his journey through the fantasy spaces in continuing bewilderment but meets a man with Western features and draws pictures of food in order to make his hunger understood. This man and his son provide food and guide him to the port. The father relates his story of terror and flight from unspecified persecution. He and his wife are shown in a number of darkened panels and enclosed in a vast Cubist structure, from which they finally escape with the help of a friendly figure who guides them to a harbour where they find a small boat to take them to where they are now. The presence of their son, absent from the dark story, indicates that their refugee journey has lasted about eight years. The family offer hospitality, sharing their now relative comfort, another example of empathy and the kindness of strangers. The man makes an origami figure of a fox for the son, metaphorically substituting him for his daughter. This family story, like that of the enslaved woman, is both specific and also generic, exemplary parables of the migrant situation, securing for the man evidence of the fact that integration and adaptation, a process of continuous adjustment, can take place even if 'arrival' is a long drawn-out process. The origami is linked to "the production of spatiality [which] results in folded spaces" (Ek 2006: 383), as the man gradually unfolds the spaces around him.

As the man makes his way through the city in search of employment – another condition of well-being – the range of people he encounters all indicate, through their differing clothes and headgear, a city of displacement but also the positive *difference* of a postmigration situation. He seeks work at four sites but to no avail. Finally, he is taken on as a bill poster but hangs them upside down as he does not understand the signs. Literacy/legibility is a symptom of well-being, missing at this stage. A delivery job enables him to make some sense of the city until he is chased by a giant alien creature. Eventually he settles into a factory assembly line, standing alongside vast numbers of workers in the shadow of huge machinery. 20 panels of limited motion show people monotonously placing objects in a tube. This is another generic stage in the migrant journey, the availability of low-level, unskilled and repetitious labour, jobs vacated perhaps by earlier migrants who have moved on. A fellow worker, in a conical hat, shares a drink with him on the assembly line, another phase in his 'welcome', another mark of sociality. The factory images are grey/black and, in a series of flashbacks, his fellow worker is shown as a younger man, part of a returning army parading through a city to a ticker tape welcome. We see the images deteriorate from hard, cobble stoned paving to feet wading through mud and slime, and soldiers retreating under an overwhelmingly dark cloud. The skulls and corpses on the battlefield, which show the other side of the victory parade, give way to 12 images of an individual amputee, finally seen alone in a ruined city. The fellow worker is another generic and particular exemplary figure, the migrant in flight from conflict, finding refuge in this cosmopolitan space. The conflation of refugee and 'economic migrant' offers a challenge to the

rhetorical use of these distinctions in both popular discourse and legal procedures. The motivations for flight are demonstrably complex and infinitely variable.

Clocking off together, and collecting their wages, the two men walk into a huge surreal sunset, augury of a new level of consciousness, and the man is invited to a game of skittles with his fellow worker's ethnically diverse friends. Gradually, the new culture becomes part of his nature, through a series of appropriations of the strange objects and environment, and he is moving to the centre of his own being after displacement. Having established a measure of security and social integration, the man writes a letter home, folding the paper into an origami bird and adding some money. The bird, as has been said, is an emblem of his bond with his daughter and the letter a sign of confidence that he has achieved the necessary stage in his path to 'arrival' which will enable family reunion. The shared hospitality, the drink at the factory, the game of skittles, the wages and the letter are all features of a renewed well-being, the restoration of mental capital, a feeling of being at home with himself. These are all stages of internalisation of the strange, of familiarisation, beginning again. Yet another 'guide' shows him where the post-box is.

This moment of confidence is followed by a series of images depicting the changing of the seasons and the passing of time. The man's room is no longer bare but furnished with objects of his new belonging which are now endowed with meaning and usefulness. A letter in the form of an origami bird arrives. The man rushes through stormy, wet streets towards a Pegasus-like structure. Images, of his wife dismayed and his child uncertain, emerge from the vehicle and echo his earlier bewilderment in the face of the strange and incomprehensible. Now, he runs with ease towards them, hailing wife and child. The daughter's face is transfigured. The man, woman, child merge into one – father/husband/wife/mother/daughter/child – in the dwarfing, surreal landscape, as their footsteps are traced away from the vehicle moving inwards, mirroring the perennial migrant journey. Images of a new domesticity mirror the original home – the same, nine grid structure of panels is used – but almost every panel now has a new inflection; only the hat on the peg and the family portrait are the same, and the latter has taken the place of the earlier suitcase. The man's hat is a recurring, and important, signifier, as Banerjee has shown, an image of continuity as well as being a signifier of a generational belonging, part of the homing instinct. The cup is now intact and the teapot complete but they are also now of a different design, auguries of the new. The changed images are metaphors of adaptation, negotiation, and compromise, signs of transformation, markers of arrival; the structures are familiar but they are converted into new forms, different belonging/s. They are not the objects they have kept but are part of a recognisable continuity. The family meal is now in a comfortable room and the daughter's drawings, which proliferate all over the room, depict her new world, readily absorbing the different shapes and perspectives. Independent and competent, a figure of well-being, she has acclimatised rapidly and has the confidence to find her own way round the streets, accompanied by the pet 'familiar'. In a recall of her father's original experience, she meets a woman, with a similar – iconic – suitcase, trying to make sense of a map, and the child, arm outstretched, points her with certainty in the right direction for her migrant journey, enacting the guidance her father received earlier. This 'relay' effect is a key part of the migrant experience. The final page of the book – Artist's Note – has no traces of the earlier signs of transit, of temporariness, but instead carries a child's drawing of a substantial house/home with smoke coming from a bold, red chimney, emblem of habitation, a secure future, of well-being.

In both texts, each of the primary figures experiences a range of the objective and subjective factors which confront the migrant. Stories of migration are, as Shaun Tan has commented: "a constellation of intimate, human-sized aspirations and dilemmas; how to learn a phrase, where to catch a train, where to buy an item, whom to ask for help and, perhaps more

importantly, how to *feel* about everything" (Tan 2010; emphasis in original). Problems of language, finding accommodation, seeking employment, and negotiating officialdom are common to almost all migration stories but it is the *affective* level which is often experienced as the most unsettling as the migrant shifts from her/his position of a relatively privileged gaze and familiar visual and verbal codes of the place of origin to being the object of scrutiny, lost in a regime of unknowable symbols.

Where *The Arrival* draws upon an extensive use of sepia panels with dense backgrounds, and deploys varying degrees of timbre, tone and colour, *Petit Manuel* relies almost exclusively upon relatively simple pen and ink, line drawings, a fair amount of hatching and cross hatching, and sketchy backgrounds. Both protagonists undergo considerable discomfort but this is represented in very different genres of suffering – the epic journey and the picaresque satire.

As Linda Kinstler shows (2015), *Petit Manuel* draws upon George Mikes' 1946 classic novel *How To Be an Alien* in its parody of the tyranny of the asylum procedure in France (equally applicable to the United Kingdom) with its grotesque, two-dimensional, mechanical and puppet-like bureaucrats, simplistic and stereotypical, pitted against the *naif* asylum-seeker, M, optimistically assuming that, having fled the vicious Iranian regime, his entry into civilized France would be easy. Mana Neyestani's graphic memoir, *An Iranian Metamorphosis,* which details his experiences in an Iranian jail, has been widely described as 'Kafka-esque' and this is no less true of his *Petit manuel* which is an autobiographical account, in comic form, of the everyday experience of an asylum-seeker in the French administration system. Originally an editorial cartoonist for a number of reformist and oppositional publications in Iran, and subsequently, a children's comic book writer, Neyestani was imprisoned by the Iranian regime for an allegedly offensive cartoon and eventually fled into exile. A combination of autofiction, reportage and newspaper cartoon, the book draws upon traditions of classical satire and features of the Theatre of the Absurd. The book comes with a replica of the author's "Titre de Sejour" (residence permit) issued in 2012 (and due to expire in 10 years) which underlines the quasi-autobiographical nature of the work. An illustration of a maze on the front cover anticipates the asylum journey to follow. In the foreword, Neyestani points out that the story of each refugee is unique and that his experience of the procedure was a lot simpler than the majority of cases, as his situation was documented and known, and he entered France at the invitation of the city of Paris. He had accommodation, regular work with dissident Iranian websites, and much less red tape to contend with than most asylum seekers, like the hapless M in this graphic novel. The French word for red tape is *paperasserie* which is much more expressive than the English equivalent – paperwork.

Although the book is only *quasi* autobiographical, Neyestani was aware of the many obstacles faced by asylum seekers – long queues, humiliating situations in waiting areas, strict and arrogant attitudes, delayed decisions as a result of negligence, and erratic office opening hours – ontologically devalued. His protagonist is, therefore, specific and generic, both the author and an archetype based upon a number of interviews with his associates. This being the case, I have designated the protagonist as M. Portrayed as the little man, a Chaplinesque or Woody Allen figure, M is, with his small stature and oversized spectacles, shown as anxious, nervous and oppressed, the innocent abroad, without language or resources, trapped in an irrational and illogical system, the coils of a serpent. Condemned to navigate an absurd, dystopian procedure, he is forced into a series of repetitive actions in the face of circumstances described by the author in his Foreword. Like a character from vaudeville, M is both comic and almost tragic at times. Above all, he lacks any of the resources or skills necessary for well-being, his mental capital is severely depleted, as he journeys through an undecipherable system, bewildered and frustrated, subjected to the arbitrariness of the bureaucracy, a plaything of power, of semiotic instability. France, like other western powers, reproduces in its asylum

system the discourses and forms of its former colonial authority – a narrative designed to enlist and license the 'other' on its own, incontestable terms. The satirical account of this system constitutes a postcolonial critique, a questioning of the "coloniality of being": "This is in great part achieved through the idea of race, which suggests not only inferiority but also dispensability" (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 259).

Although, unlike *The Arrival*, *Petit Manuel* uses words and captions, the strength of the work lies in what I would describe as its graphic, visual theatre, the drawings expressing what language is not capable of putting into words. Each panel is an articulate metaphor of both an external situation (delay, obstruction) and an internal affect (frustration, depression). Were it not for the fact that what is represented in comic form is the very real experiences of countless asylum seekers, the work could be seen as akin to Edward Lear's nonsense verse, a ridiculous dystopia which makes its points through the graphic medium of 'extremity'.

This absurdity is located right at the start of the story as the diminutive M is contrasted with a number of militant, placard carrying protesters, and bomb-throwers who are ignored by the regime while he is seen as more dangerous and is arrested simply for wielding a pen for "scribbling" (griffoner). This contrastive method highlighting incongruity is used frequently, for example when two facing pages (14 and 15) show, on the one hand, the open, smiling faces of the Paris of romance and myth, of tourist attractions and cafes (shown in montage) and, on the other, the Paris of shabby back streets where the Refugees office is based and where faceless men and women gather, a prostitute lingers, and a man urinates against a wall. Here, the only colour on the tourist page is the yellow of the sun which is contrasted with the yellow liquid trickling from the wall. The next page contrasts an upright figure with a tourist visa or an invitation to a cultural event with M bent over double entering the country illegally concealed by a bunch of sheep. These postural and gestural contrasts recur throughout and the visual caricature is far more expressive than the accompanying words. This use of an extreme visual example extrapolates from the general tendency of the asylum process nowadays to require convoluted deceptions.

M becomes an asylum seeker and is shown approaching a group of aimless refugees still queuing late at night. Half the full-page panel is taken up by a banner in colour signalling the office of the association "France Terre d'Asile" (FTA). The lateness of the hour is indicated by the bizarre image of a cockerel fast asleep on a pillow in the street, the absurdity of which would be impossible to convey verbally compared with the simple visual of a snoring cockerel (at the same time, this animal being the national symbol, it may be seen as hinting at the simple fact that 'citizens' are supposed to be asleep). M is also portrayed as a pawn in a game on a large chess board played by the over-sized, iconic faces of party political opponents, the electoral success of one of which will determine his fate – either as a gentle kick up the backside (shown as red footprint) or a massive kick to his whole body (portrayed as a blue footmark). Caught in the large and confusing spider's web of the FTA, M seeks advice from refugees gathered in a local park. This place and its inhabitants, dispensers of street wisdom, act as a chorus throughout, a space of sanctuary and refuge from the nightmare of the asylum process. Here, he receives more guidance and direction than from official sources. Once inside the offices, M is diminished even more in scale – a giant hand is seen flicking him away to search for an address, a lodging place, before he can start the asylum application. As he makes a phone call, he dreams of an ideal house (shown in a bubble as a childlike drawing) but makes no progress. The list of charitable and philanthropic organisations he is given has been photocopied so often that it is falling to pieces. Again, a contrast is shown between the refugee taken on by 'do-gooders', almost as a trophy or pet (M is visually 'paired' with a small dog) and the person sent to accommodation miles from the city centre on the outskirts, the banlieues. The absurdity of this spatial remoteness is shown temporally when he encounters Asterix and Obelisk, comic

characters from another timescale and era. This exaggeration is one of the characteristics of satire used frequently in the text. Later, finding himself in a claustrophobic, prison-like lodging house (indicated by a resident who chalks up his 100 days waiting for his application to be processed) M, ironically, tells another resident how happy he is now that he is no longer in an Iranian prison. The verbal/visual incongruity carries the satire.

An alternative scenario is developed in which, as a journalist, M is welcomed with open arms at the House of Journalists (La Maison des Journalistes), given access to a library, a place to work and to live, but is thrown out after the maximum six-month period has expired. Moving to a large city, he visits the Prefecture where, in normal times, he takes a few seconds to reach the entrance but on days when it is open to refugees, the waiting time is up to three hours. Instead of space-time compression, the asylum seeker experiences space-time expansion. Once inside the office, the scale of the drawings emphasize the power relations, as large, bureaucratic figures bark orders at 'shrunken', intimidated refugees. Like many others, M does not speak French and his documents are incomplete. In an aside, one of the most absurd moments in the whole satire depicts, in flashback, a mother telling M as a small child defacing a picture of the Ayatollah, that if he is to become a refugee he should start learning French now – all good refugees should in their infancy anticipate that they will seek asylum and, as a consequence, learn French.

Once the asylum procedure starts, each refugee is shown with their identity number having replaced their face and M goes through the process of being photographed, contorting himself into various poses for the photo booth, only to be told that spectacles are prohibited. This is one of many false steps on the route of a nightmarish sequence during which his dossier is placed on hold for five months while his fingerprinting is completed, immobilised in a zone of total indifference. His increasing anger and frustration are shown through exaggeration as 18 fingerprints are reproduced. The park sages advise committing a minor infraction so that he can be fingerprinted by the more efficient police system and speed up his delay. His lack of identity is graphically indicated by an image of his severed head hovering over his body. To obtain the necessary papers, he has to start all over again, filling forms, being photographed, and waiting endlessly. This waiting is represented hyperbolically by a skeleton in clothing holding a number. In a later panel, M's headstone is shown, suggesting that he has died before exhausting the asylum process. These two instances are examples of the ways in which the satire works using hyperbole. This, along with distortion (e.g. the inflated lawyer who is literally shown being pumped up), exaggeration and magnification of scale, and over-emphasis, is all part of the technique of incongruity and extremity to reveal dysfunction, designed to arouse indignation at the inhumane treatment of both the Candide-like figure M in particular and asylum seekers in general, in order to inspire a re-modelling of the system.

The hardest part of the asylum process in many ways, apart from all the delays, is the demand placed on the applicant to produce a convincing narrative of dissidence and persecution, the interview feared by most asylum seekers. Again, advice is given from the park about body language – the caricatures of possible poses are reduced to absurdity – evidence of scars, and the problems with interpreters. Attention to minutiae and trivia is advised, irrespective of political militancy, but he is told to construct a narrative of continuing protest in France against the Iranian regime. Accordingly, M shows that he can 'out activist' any of his peers, on the streets and online. In other words, the asylum process is reduced to a *performance*, a series of gestures, timing, and poses which the graphic form is able to capture very effectively. Framing all of this is the experience of waiting – both duration and endurance – missing train stops, going to the wrong place, misreading acronyms, all aspects of insider decipherability, the kind of skills and knowledge characteristic of well-being, resources of mental capital. Duration is linked, again through hyperbole, to M's period of imprisonment in Iran, an ideal preparation for

seeking asylum, especially the refusal and appeal process which is time-bound. Even when asylum is granted, another set of procedures follow, related to accommodation, employment, language learning, social security, health insurance, and transport passes. Again, there is constant queuing and delays as he is bounced back and forth between different sectors of the bureaucracy – graphically enacted in the form of a table tennis match between two large, iconic figures with M as the ball. He has progressed from pawn in a chess game to a celluloid object. The relentless bureaucracy extends to every aspect of his life, including attempts to join the societies for artists or writers, neither of which accepts him as his designs have too many words for the one and he has no publications in French for the other. He is enmeshed in a latter day Catch-22 as he tries to set up a bank account, claim benefits, or permits to travel beyond France.

The penultimate page of the book is a sequence of nine different body positions and expressions as M fills in a visa form which requires him to indicate his nationality. He fills in "Iranian", then erases it and then "French" and erases that, until on the final page M is shown at a desk, asking where he belongs ("Où suis-je à ma place?") with his legs morphing into rootless trees. Erasure has been the potential condition of the asylum seeker throughout, forced to adapt to, and adopt, the style, norms and performative gestures of the host society that sees him as the dangerous other it seeks to limit and control. Success, or otherwise, depends upon how far he can become a mimic man.

In the best traditions of satire, *Petit Manuel* works against its professed function as a short guide. A guide presupposes a set of procedures, is logically set out, with step by step instructions, coherently laid out and leading to clear outcomes. Its format would be sequential, proceeding from A to B, linear and progressive. Its purpose is, presumably, positive and enabling, a 'how to' manual. The book does outline the asylum process in France but through a series of Orwellian negations and disruptions, incoherent and inconsequential, designed to obfuscate rather than illuminate. Rather than proceeding from A to B, the applicant metaphorically zigzags through every letter of the alphabet to finally arrive at his destination – residence, but even this is conditional and provisional. So, the book is a mock Guide (as in mock-heroic), a 'how not to' rather than a 'how to' manual, step by misstep, more akin to a game of snakes and ladders than an ordered procedure. Each stage of M's process carries the risk of being sent back to square one, a state of conditional probability or sequence of random variables in a continuous, time-absorbing Markov chain. In this ironic sense, the structure of the book accurately reproduces its ostensible subject.

The book is organised principally around *time* in the form of waiting, delay, duration, repetition. Sequential in some respects but also reversible, it is a continuum confined and determined by spaces and spatial forms – queues, interiors, reception areas – staffed by iconic, monumentalised officials bearing the prevailing relations of power over the asylum applicant. The marks of time are also carried by hourglass timers, headstones, skeletons, and scratchings on a wall. There is an appearance of forward movement but this is countered by a sense of people marching on the spot, marking time in the military sense. The supplicant outsider is subject to measurement, quantification, categorisation, and objectification as his subjectivity is exposed to random erasures by the hierarchy of authority. In an irregular labyrinth of time and space, the person is evacuated and the appearance of order gives way to its opposite. In *Petit Manuel*, the forces which inhibit and limit the migrant and his well-being are active, explicit and categorical, and time is inimical, convoluted and negative. In *The Arrival* the forces which constrain are more the consequence of fears projected upon his circumstances and environment by the man himself, anxieties and doubts brought about by being a stranger, a figure lacking the decoding vocabulary needed to 'read' the new and the different. In a sense, his progress through the alien terrain is almost a learning partnership or a process of recognition, a gradual unfolding in which time could almost be seen as benign.

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WATER AND DAMS

A Political and a Lyrical Approach: Arundhati Roy and Anne Michaels

Carmen CONCILIO

ABSTRACT • This essay starts by quoting Aesop's fable of "The Wolf and the Lamb" as an allegory of conflicts related to the control and distribution of water in our contemporary world. Megadams are among the controlling factors not only as far as distribution of water is concerned, but also as far as the mere life of people is concerned. To control water means to control people's life. And megadams have become the subject matter of recent literature. The aim of this essay is to analyse different stylistic ways of approaching the themes of dams, water and human rights, through the works of a well-known writer-activist, Arundhati Roy, and a Canadian poet and novelist, Anne Michaels.

KEYWORDS • Literature in English, Ecocriticism, Water, Dams, Arundhati Roy, Common Good, Anne Michaels, Human Rights

The property, the availability and the use of clean water is increasingly becoming a matter of contention in the First as well as in the former Third World. From time immemorial the property of water is claimed by tyrannical and arrogant financial powers at the expenses of the weaker people in the World. Aesop's fable *The Wolf and the Lamb* established this type of highly asymmetrical relationship between a voracious power and a defenceless consumer. What moves both the wolf and the lamb to the stream of water is their thirst ("siti compulsi"), but soon it becomes clear that while the lamb's thirst is for water, the wolf's thirst becomes hunger ("incitatus iurgii") and a more metaphorical one for power over life and death ("lacerat iniusta nece"). In the end, the lamb ends up being slaughtered first on the false assumption that he is polluting the wolf's drinking water, in spite of the fact that the lamb is positioned downstream, and then on the false assumption that either he, or his father, has ruined the wolf's reputation. The moral of the fable is "for those men who oppress innocents with false excuses", men who ("fictis causis innocentes opprimunt") (Perry 1965: 190).[1]

This fable might be taken as an allegory standing for various types of hegemonic practices. A case in point is "downstream Uzbekistan […] now obliged to confront actions both threatened and carried out by the relatively weaker upstream Tajikistan" (Cascão, Zeitoun 2010: 30). Another case in point is "environmental racism" as "discriminatory treatment of socially marginalised or economically disadvantaged peoples" (Huggan, Tiffin 2010: 4). This is clearly evident in the documentary film by Irena Salina, *FLOW*, *For Love of Water* (2008), where

[1] A draft version of this paper had been presented at the 15th Triennial EACLALS Conference, *Uncommon Wealth*: *Riches and Realities*, University of Innsbruck, Austria, 14-28 April 2014, within the panel: "Liquid Wealth, Water Wars". Convener and panelists: Annalisa Oboe, Giulia D'Agostini, Carmen Concilio, Gerd Bayer. My thanks go to professor Serenella Iovino, among the first to introduce ecocriticism in Literary Studies in Italy, who suggested further bibliography.

major private multinationals play the role of the wolf and the poorer people in the world – mainly slum dwellers, and dispersed communities in the heart of underdeveloped rural areas – unwillingly become their victims.

Private Corporations controlling water act by "greenwashing in the countries of the rich, through high-minded advertisement campaigns," and

> through rarified talk about being fine stewards of our delicate planet. Meanwhile, back on planet Earth, they persist in their profitable devastation of impoverished, less regulated societies – societies that have little visibility and recognition value in the rich-country corporate media. (Nixon 2011: 37)

It must be said that the poor are by no means passive victims, for the opposition between them and financial powers is tackled differently in the words of scholars such as Harden and Naidoo,

> the central conflict [is] between agendas of major transnational corporations with respect to water on the one hand, and the global citizen movements and critical non-governmental organizations (what we refer to as the "water justice movement") that oppose these agendas and advance an agenda of human rights on the other. A Gramscian approach to hegemony and counter-hegemony is helpful in framing this understanding of global water conflict. (Harden, Naidoo 2007: 2)

The "water justice movement" includes various grassroots transnational organisations, a citizenship on the move, at war with those same multinationals that claim profits for themselves from the privatization of water resources.

Arundhati Roy's critical essay *The Greater Common Good* (1999) is inscribed within this "global water conflict" as one among many contemporary 'translations' of Aesop's fable. It shares with the docu-film *FLOW* a precise attitude in naming names, and in accusing the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Roy's essay is a text that Graham Huggan and Hellen Tiffin define as "the most eye-catching ecocritical intervention by a recognised postcolonial writer" (2010: 44). This does not mean that it is unconditionally praised. Both Huggan and Rob Nixon (2011) critically appraise also the flows of Roy's enterprise, of her voice and style:

> Roy takes rhetorical liberties with her disempowered Adivasi subjects, converting them into mythologised victims in her own highly personal moral crusade against the tyrannies of the modern Indian state. (Huggan, Tiffin 2010: 46)

In referring to the "complex, often vexed figure of the environmental writer activist", who engages "the environmentalism of the poor" Nixon includes Arundhati Roy in this category: "Indian opinion about her interventions split between those who lauded her for putting her celebrity in the service of the poor and those who lambasted her for behaving in a self-serving manner" (Nixon 2011: 23-24).

India's Federal Government and State-powers together with foreign multinationals embody the voracious power of the wolf, thirsty for profits and financial gains, while dalits, or untouchable, and particularly adivasis or tribals, the indigenous inhabitants, play the role of the sacrificial victims: those who are thirsty for clean water for they are used to living off – and by – natural resources. They are the "people lacking resources who are the principal casualties of slow violence" (Nixon 2011: 4).

Roy's essay, which sounds like a *j'accuse,* is by now a classic example of ecocritical postcolonial discourse. It has been included in various anthologies of postcolonial ecocriticism.

Since the text is well-known, I am not going to deal with it in too much detail. It is certainly an example of committed and activist literature, which contributed to "global consciousness-raising" (Huggan, Tiffin 2010: 33). It may be also thanks to Arundhati Roy that megadams have become an interesting and fascinating topic for literature, for after all, it is "a highly *literary* text" (Huggan, Tiffin 2010: 49).

In Roy's text, discourse about water inevitably becomes political discourse "on the very nature of democracy." She then asks: "Who is the owner of the land? Of the rivers, of the forests, of the fish?" The answer from the State has been a violent armed response (Roy 1999: 10). To Roy this is the crucial issue to be debated. A plea for democracy is also Vandana Shiva's preoccupation, when she – a famous physicist and eco-activist, author of the well-known essay *Water Wars* – claims that: "the solution to an environmental crisis is environmental, while the solution to injustice is democracy" (Shiva 2002: 32). Now, to separate the environment from democracy is risky, for, after all, is not the environment a concern for everybody? And, with Roy and with Shiva we might ask: who "owns" the environment?

Roy demonstrates how only the popular movement that slowly coalesced against the construction of megadams, called Narmada Bachao Andolan, had a chance not only to defeat the Federal Government of India but also to draw the attention of international newspapers and televisions, and also international environmental movements on the Narmada project, and it managed to convince the World Bank to withdraw its investments. That was true until the year 2000 when the Supreme Court established that works on the Narmada should be completed according to the original plans. In terms of hegemonic power, India displays its material power:

> This most visible form of power includes economic power, military might, technological prowess and international political and financial support. India's ability to undertake a massive river interlinking programme, with little consideration of the upstream or downstream protestations from Nepal and Bangladesh, serves an example. Asymmetries in material power can influence the control exercised over water, in particular when combined with bargaining and ideational dimensions of power. (Cascão, Zeitoun 2010: 31)

With the same determination, dams along the course of the Nile had been planned in the mid-twentieth century:

> President Nasser's engineers drew a white line on the banks of the Nile to mark where his monument, the Aswan High Dam, would be built. Egyptian advisers strongly opposed the project, in favour of canals to link African lakes and a reservoir at Wadi Rajan – already a natural basin. But Nasser would not be dissuaded. In October 1958, after Britain declined to support the dam, in retaliation after the Suez conflict, Nasser signed an agreement with the Soviet Union to provide plans, labour, and machinery. (Michaels 2009: 23)

Apparently, nothing can stop progress. Yet, Arundhati Roy is not alone in idealistically believing in – and actively promoting – grassroots engagement, not so much against the advancement of progress, but in favour of local negotiable solutions. Arjun Appadurai, too, speaks of the importance of new transnational grassroots movements:

> The knowledge and democracy revolutions of the last few decades, powered by the spread of new information technologies, have combined to encourage the greatest diversity of popular and transnational civil society movements that we have witnessed in the history of mankind. (Appadurai 2011: 34)

These civil movements are instances of what Appadurai calls "deep democracy", that is to say, not a general democratic principle that involves larger and larger groups of people, but a

democracy capable of including the slum dwellers, the outcasts of society, the dalits and the tribals and all those who are kept in extreme poverty:

> a rather different sort of cosmopolitanism can be discerned in the world of internally generated forms of activism incubated among the world's poorest populations, […] what I call "cosmopolitanism from below" has […] the urge to expand one's current horizons of self and cultural identity and a wish to connect with a wider world in the name of values which, in principle, could belong to anyone and apply in any circumstance. (Appadurai 2011: 32)

In short, The Alliance, a triad of slum dwellers' organizations in Mumbai, is a working example of democracy that does not spread horizontally but that reaches deep down the social ladder and produces a new "capacity to aspire, the raw materials of a politics of hope" (Appadurai 2011: 41).

The above-mentioned docu-film *FLOW*, *For Love of Water* (2008) may be counted as proving the effectiveness of popular movements of mobilisation of citizens, which shows various examples of effective activism in various parts of the World, fighting for the right to clean, drinkable water.

Leaving Arundhati Roy's India for a while and moving to the other side of the globe, the Torontonian poet and novelist Anne Michaels seems to respond to that political call, and transforms the building of dams into a lyrical subject matter. Writing from inside one of the capitalistic economies of the First World, in her touching novel *The Winter Vault* (2009), the perspective from which Anne Michaels exposes representations of megadams construction is completely different from Roy's perspective. This novel is particularly interesting because of its complex structure, because of its historically and geographically multi-centered, yet interconnected narratives.

> Set in 1964, *The Winter Vault* chronicles two great mid-century displacements caused by massive engineering projects – the building of the Aswan dam in Egypt and the St Lawrence seaway in Canada – likening these, in emotional and political terms, to upheavals caused by war. (Brownrigg 2009)

It is also a novel about present-day migrants, and last but not least, it is a novel about gardening as a therapy which goes hand in hand with mourning. Both issues are well intertwined by means of metaphors of transplantation (Hayward 2009).

In this respect Anne Michaels's novel seems to satisfy Nixon's argument about the aesthetic and cosmopolitan agency of ecocritical literary works:

> Ecocritics – and literary scholars more broadly – faced with the challenges of thinking through vast differences in spatial and temporal scale commonly frame their analyses in terms of interpenetrating global and local forces. In such analyses cosmopolitanism – as a mode of being linked to particular aesthetic strategies – does much of the bridgework between extremes of scale. (2011: 34)

In Anne Michaels's novel all the major themes have in common the theme of loss – individual and collective losses, destruction and reconstruction of physical places as well as cultural spaces – and what might be salvaged.

In the novel, Egypt and Canada are somehow likened as sites appropriate for the building of megadams along the Nile and along the St Lawrence. England looms behind the two countries' history, as the old colonial power, which provides the know-how, for everything had happened there before, as, for instance, the construction of big dams in Scotland.

Roy's ironic, pamphlet-like reportage and Michaels's lyrically disheartening novel share an emblematically ethical reading of reality, in a way that seems to echo Appadurai's politics of "hopes and aspirations."

Both Arundhati Roy and Anne Michaels focus their gaze primarily on the rivers per se and on their sacredness, as ancient, resourceful cultural sites, thus producing an ethical approach to environmental discourse:

> The Nile had been strangled at Sadd el Aali, and its magnificent flow had been rerouted before that […] Avery knew that a river that has been barraged is not the same river. Not the same shore, nor even the same water. […] Holiness was escaping under their drills, was being pumped away in the continuous draining of groundwater. (Michaels 2009: 5)

As a second stage in their criticism, both writers mournfully lament the forced removals of people, while describing the material process of the building of dams. Forced displacement and relocation become the main targets of their ethical discourse. Arundhati Roy ironically writes that:

> the preoccupation of the Supreme Court judges in Delhi (before vacating the legal stay on further construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam) had enquired whether tribal children in the resettlement colonies would have children's parks to play in. The lawyers representing the Government had hastened to assure them that indeed they would, and, what's more, that there were seesaws and slides and swings in every park. (Roy 1999: 8)

Similarly, Anne Michaels mentions resettlement policies: "No word would be uttered of the Nubians who had been forced to leave their ancient homes and their river, nor of the twenty-seven towns and villages that had vanished under the new lake" (2009: 35). The long list of names of the Nubian villages is paralleled with a similar list of names of Canadian towns along the St Lawrence Seaway. Naming their names, as if they were dead people, the writer creates a map of dead towns:

> Abri, Kosh Dakki, Ukma, Semna, Saras Shoboka, Gemaii, Wadi Halfa, Ashkeit, Dabarosa, Qatta, Kalobsha. Dadub, Faras…
> … Farran's Point, Aultsville, Maple Grove, Dickinson's Landing, half of Morrisburg, Wales, Milles Roches, Moulinette, Woodlands, Sheek Island… (Michaels 2009: 35)

In describing both Nubia and Quebec, Michaels creates a parallel and identifies a common destiny for the two geographies and the people who used to inhabit them. All those places have been submerged, and therefore are now lost both to history and to geography. The complete erasure of villages and small towns from the world map is represented as an act of unjustified State violence and as an infringement of democratic principles. It gives the citizens the status of non-existence. Thus, forced removals, dismemberment of families and relations are described as terribly painful. A minor character in Michaels's novel tells the story he witnessed back in Egypt:

> I was in Faras during the first evacuation. […] and I went to witness it. I saw a mother and daughter saying their farewells. They had lived in two villages that were side by side, a short walk from each other. The daughter had moved to live with her husband's family when they were married, but the mother and daughter saw each other very often, just a walk of a short distance between the two villages. However, the villages happened to be on either side of the border between Sudan and Egypt […] and so now the mother was being moved to Khashm el Girba and the daughter fifteen hundred kilometres away to Kom Ombo. […] The train moved off into the desert, the mother

> looked down at her feet and saw the satchel she had meant to give her, with family things inside. Now left behind. (2009: 137-138)

In order to describe forced removals, Anne Michaels uses narrative strategies that are typical of trauma narratives (Caruth 1996). The suffering of bearing witness to the tragedies of others, the trauma of loss and separation, the identification of the effects of symptoms and syndromes in the life of people as the *acte manqué* of passing down some tokens of family life.

What is important to stress here is that the narrative by Roy is characterised by her talent as reporter and as storyteller, and she shares these skills not only with an intellectual such as Mahasweta Devi, whom Roy has chosen as the model of the "organic intellectual", but also with a writer-reporter such as Amitav Ghosh (*Incendiary Circumstances*, 2006), with whom Roy shares the same urgent need to be there, personally, on the frontline, as for instance in her essay *Walking with the Comrades* (2010), dedicated to the Maoists or Naxalites in the state of Chattisgarh.

In contrast, the poet and novelist, Anne Michaels, produces a narrative of accusation by using a very different tone and style. Well-conscious that her lyricism and aestheticism might attract severe criticisms, she foregrounds this response in her own writing, by mentioning the sentimental factor:

> the chairman of the hydro-electric commission, Sir Adam Beck, had referred to the future drowning of the villages along the St Lawrence and the evacuation of their inhabitants as the "sentimental factor." (2009: 40)

Yet, apart from being "sentimental" Anne Michaels's novel is a piece of ecocritical postcolonial discourse, too. Her style is ironic when she sums up the history of the colonization of Canada:

> Along these leafy shores of the St. Lawrence, towns and hamlets had sprung up, founded by United Empire Loyalists, settlers made up of former soldiers in the battalion of the "Royal Yorkers." Then came the German, the Dutch, the Scottish settlers. Then a tourist by the name of Charles Dickens […] Before this came the hunters of the sea, the Basque, Breton, and English whalers. And, in 1534, Jack Cartier, the hunter who captured the biggest prize, an entire continent, by quickly recognizing that, by bark canoe, one could follow the river and pierce the land to its heart.
> The great trade barons grumbled, unable to depart their Atlantic ports and conquer the Great Lakes with their large ships, groaning with goods to sell. (2009: 37)

And her discourse turns out to be strictly ecological and ecocritical when she describes how dams affect the ecosystem around the Nile:

> Instead there would be a massive reservoir reshaping the land – a lake "as large as England" – so large that the estimated rate of evaporation would prove a serious misjudgement. Enough water would disappear into the air to have made fertile for farming more than two million acres. The precious, nutrient-saturated silt that had given the soil of the floodplain such richness would be lost entirely, pinioned, useless behind the dam. Instead, international corporations would introduce chemical fertilizers, and the cost of these fertilizers – lacking all the trace elements of the silt – would soon escalate to billions of dollars every year. Without the sediment from the floods, farmland downriver would soon erode. The rice fields of the northern Delta would be parched by salt water. Throughout the Mediterranean basin, fish populations – dependent on silicates and phosphates from the annual flooding – would decrease, then die out completely (2009: 34).

This passage sounds relevant here, because it echoes what Roy also claimed with regard to the Narmada:

> Dams are obsolete. They're uncool. They're undemocratic. They're a Government's way of accumulating authority (deciding who will get how much water and who will grow what where). They're a guaranteed way of taking a farmer's wisdom away from him. They're a brazen means of taking water, land and irrigation away from the poor and gifting it to the rich. Their reservoirs displace huge populations of people, leaving them homeless and destitute. Ecologically, they're in the doghouse. They lay the earth to waste. They cause floods, water-logging, salinity, they spread disease. (Roy 1999: 16)

However, a third point in this analysis of the consequences of dams building regards Human Rights. Often, the Right to water is symbolically and ritually connected to the Right to life. In most narratives water is culturally and traditionally seen as connected with life and death. In Anne Michaels's novel, for instance, according to an ancient tradition, new-born babies are brought to the Nile:

> One week after the child is born, he is carried to the river. We must bring the *fatta* and eat by the Nile, but not all – we must share it with the river […] Then we must wash the baby's clothes in the river and bring a bucket of river water back to the house so the mother can wash her face […] Then – this is the most important – the mother must fill her mouth with water from the river and pour it from her mouth onto the child. It is only when the river water flows from the mother's mouth over the child that the child will be safe. (Michaels 2009: 142)

Similarly, in the docu-film *FLOW*, Vandana Shiva explains how a drop of water from the river Ganges is put into the mouth of a new-born baby as well as of a dead person. Thus, both Vandana Shiva and Anne Michaels refer to cultural violence. A violence that denies the sacredness of water and implies the control of rivers by means of dams which cause the displacement of masses of people who live by the water.

> We bring the ashes of our people to this river when they die. Until those ashes pass the river, the spirits and souls are not considered to have had salvation. When a child is born you put a drop of the Ganges water in his mouth. When someone dies the last rite is a drop of Ganges water … It is considered purifying in a deep, spiritual sense. […] It is the river that gives us our humanity. (Vandana Shiva's words. My transcription. FILM 42.50 – 43.52)

Forced removals and relocations do not affect only the living but also the dead. As Nixon also observes, people ask for very little: "access to clean water […] some respect for the cultural (and therefore environmental) presence of the guiding dead" (Nixon 2011: 41). In Michaels's novel a woman complains about having to leave behind her husband, who had been buried in the local cemetery:

> If you move his body then you'll have to move the hill. You'll have to move the fields around him. You'll have to move the view from the top of the hill and the trees he planted, one for each of our six children. […] Can you move what was consecrated? (Michaels 2009: 47)

A few pages later it is left to a priest to explain that:

> There is such a thing as consecrated ground. In this case, when the congregation moves, the church must move with it. The first place must be deconsecrated so that it cannot be desecrated, even accidentally, by other customs. (Michaels 2009: 69)

The story becomes even more gruesome when the author describes how people are afraid of swimming in the lake for fear that corpses might be surfacing in the water. In another case, huge rocks had been used to seal cemetery, so that the bodies would not float freely because of the flooding. A similar issue is raised by a relocated South African woman in the docu-film *FLOW*:

> Many of our ancestors who died a long time ago are still there. But the authorities told us that when we moved, we would have to live our graves behind. Perhaps they are submerged under the waters of the dam. (English Subtitles. FILM 49.20-49.31)

Zooming out of the life of local communities, and writing a global novel, Anne Michaels does not lose the thread of geo-political international implications:

> Did you know, said Daub, that the first plans for the High Dam were drawn up by West Germany to appease Egypt, after compensating Israel after the War? There is so much collusion, from every side, it might be possible to sort it out, if only a single soul possessed all the information. (Michaels 2009: 137)

After all, Anne Michaels sets her novel in the two decades after World War Two. Arundhati Roy also denounces the fact that the Indian Government keeps all relevant documents secret, so that the real figures about costs and benefits remain unknown to the larger public:

> Though there has been a fair amount of writing on the subject, most of it is for a "special interest" readership. News reports tend to be about isolated aspects of the project. Government documents are classified as "Secret". (Roy 1999: 11)

One more instance of how Anne Michaels's novel embeds environmentalism is through the idea of women dedicating themselves to gardening. In the docu-film here mentioned, where white men are the managers of the big water companies, black women and young girls are the ones who walk barefoot for miles in order to fetch water, every day. Their daily routine is not even considered as labour. For, as Vandana Shiva reminds us:

> For Third World women, water scarcity means traveling longer distances in search of water. For peasants, it means starvation and destitution as drought wipes out their crops. For children, it means dehydration and death. There is simply no substitute for this precious liquid, necessary for the biological survival of animals and plants. (Shiva 2002: 15)

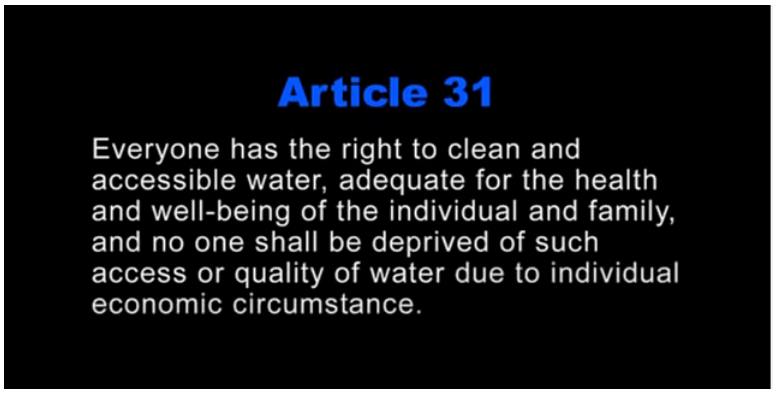
In Anne Michaels's novel there is a sort of gender split between the female characters who dedicate themselves to gardening and the male characters who are involved in the engineering projects.

Jean, the protagonist, who is compulsively transplanting her dead mother's garden into pots and vases and taking them to her small apartment in downtown Toronto, also devotes herself to salvaging little plants from the dried-up beds of rivers which have been diverted by the dams. Later on in her life, Jean becomes a botanist, but she still has the compulsion to transplant herbs and plants into the cracks of Toronto pavements and also in public gardens and parks. Her aim is to provide pleasure to migrants and uprooted people, who might recognize the smells of their home country, there, in the middle of downtown Toronto. Jean's gesture is timid, invisible and silent. Most of her gardening is done at night. Yet, it is a humane gesture that provides citizenship and rootedness to displaced people/plants.

The docu-film *FLOW* shows very well how solutions for water shortage can be found and adjusted locally and in different ways. Arundhati Roy also claims that "We have to fight specific wars in specific ways" (Roy 1999: 12).

What is needed globally is that the Right to water be acknowledged per se as a Right to life. Vandana Shiva, once more, points her finger at the fact that "people have a right to life and the resources that sustain it, such as water. The necessity of water to life is why, under customary laws, the right to water was accepted as a natural, social fact" (2002: 21). As other critics remind us "the UN Declaration of Human Rights does not explicitly mention water, and though the 'General Comment 15' from the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has recognized the universal right to water, a *formal* human right to water has not been agreed upon" (Harden, Naidoo 2007: 5). In 2010, the right to water and sanitation has been included among the inalienable human rights, but as subordinated to Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to the right to a good standard of living.

The docu-film by Irena Salina closes with the hope and aspiration that a specific article will soon be added to the Human Rights Declaration, that is Article 31 (FILM 1.16.09):



In order to update this enquiry into the problem of water, I will mention Amitav Ghosh's words. Ghosh is certainly one of the most lucid intellectuals of our age. In a recent public appearance, Ghosh said that only Pope Francis, with his Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*' has given voice to the only reasonable morally committed philosophy of our times. On the contrary, the document COP 21, or Paris Agreement 2015, is quite unsatisfactory: suffice it to say that the word justice appears only once and between inverted commas. Pope Francis's Encyclical Letter does include a chapter entitled "The Issue of Water" which is in tune with the film's main concern, namely the privatization of water:

> 30. Even as the quality of available water is constantly diminishing, in some places there is a growing tendency, despite its scarcity, to privatize this resource, turning it into a commodity subject to the laws of the market. Yet *access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights*. Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because *they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity.* (2015: 23)

In contrast, the article of the Paris document, COP 21, Ghosh refers to, promotes a series of actions on the basis of some matter-of-fact observations:

> The parties to this Agreement,
> […]
> *Noting* the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including oceans, and the protection of biodiversity, recognized by some cultures as Mother Earth, and noting the importance for some of the concept of "climate justice", when taking action to address climate change. […] Have agreed as follows…. (COP 21, Annex: 21)

Controlling the increase on global average temperatures, controlling low greenhouse gas emissions, limiting threats to food production and so on, are some of the measures agreed upon. Megadams and water privatization, even the planetary marketing of bottled water remain crucial issues, and Roy's and Michaels's texts remain among the milestones in the environmental humanities and environmental literature.

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MIGRATORY BIRD TAKES SECOND CHANCE

Reading *Heart of Darkness* with Chinua Achebe, David Dabydeen, Derek Walcott, Caryl Phillips

Roberta CIMAROSTI

ABSTRACT• *Heart of Darkness* has been the first distinct specimen in the increasing number of literary works that may be identified today as migration literature in English by writers for whom English developed as a foreign language. I will explore the way in which *Heart of Darkness* contains the story of Conrad's naturalized English, and the way in which the novella was received in the work of four contemporary writers who move natively within the transcultural, hyphenated world of English, empowered by the energy of their plural identity. How have they reacted to the novella and the indelible track it left in their skies? Does the track feel like a wound, like a remote route, like an orienting pathway, or just like poison polluting the migratory way? We'll find this out, along with an attempt to understand Conrad's use of English, in Chinua Achebe's well-known essay *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's* Heart of Darkness, David Dabydeen's novel *The Intended*, Derek Walcott's lines from *Omeros* and *White Egrets*, Caryl Phillips' 'video-narrative' *Bends in the River*.

KEYWORDS • Migration Literature, *Heart of Darkness*, English, Rewriting.

> Again, just as the door opens up and the author teases us with the possibility of weaving his own experience into the narrative, he quickly slums it shut again and continues.
> (Phillips2 2011: 262)

1. Taking Flight – Introductory Notes

> and having turned our stern toward morning,
> we made wings out of our oars in a wide flight
> (Dante, *Inferno*, XXVI: 124-25)

Heart of Darkness has been the first distinct specimen in the increasing number of literary works that may be identified today as migration literature in English by writers for whom English developed as a foreign language. I will explore the way in which *Heart of Darkness* contains the story of Conrad's naturalized English, and the way in which the novella was received in the work of four contemporary writers who move natively within the transcultural, hyphenated world of English, empowered by the energy of their plural identity. How have they reacted to the novella and the indelible track it left in their skies? Does the track feel like a wound, like a remote route, like an orienting pathway, or just like poison polluting the migratory way? We'll find this out, along with an attempt to understand Conrad's use of English, in

Chinua Achebe's well-known essay *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's* Heart of Darkness, David Dabydeen's novel *The Intended*, Derek Walcott's lines from *Omeros* and *White Egrets*, Caryl Phillips' 'video-narrative' *Bends in the River*.

European writers like Conrad who switch to English departing from their mother tongue, mostly in concomitance with a departure from their homeland, settle in a fluctuating state of dislocation, of estrangement and continuous wonder. They belong to the family of writers who, for a number of personal circumstances, develop and are moved by 'the thought of errantry', as studied in depth by Glissant, even before they switched to English and left the native shore. (Glissant 2010, 11-22) They uproot themselves from the acquired certitudes of a traditionally European sense of belonging, typically characterised by the triadic loyalty to one people, one nation, one language, which entails a clearly demarcated vision of oneself and of one's division from 'the others', on the basis of religion, ethnicity, class, gender, cultural tradition – of which one's national language is representative (Canagarajah 2013, 19-24). For writers like Conrad, articulating oneself in English means to set out *precariously* across this well delineated world and to violate its principles. It means to live a life of doubts, even about whether one will be able to arrive at destination and nestle in what one really had meant to say. It means to run the risk of falling apart and fail dramatically; to be ready for incessant fatigue. It also means to learn how to handle the unbridled passions of unbounded ambition, whose energy is yet also the fuel that propels one to take flight and then move onward, along with the 'incredible belief' that you can make it against all odds. Such a flight relies on an instinctual and inalienable devotion to literature, to the fragile strength by which it crosses the gravitational forces of historical and political matter of fact. When this kind of writing succeeds, the joy for the accomplished journey pays off and contributes to building more hope in a world where barriers increase in spite of the fact that its characterising complexion and features are those of migrants.

In many respects, this kind of writer resembles pretty much Dante's Ulysses. Unable to live in peace after his difficult arrival at home, he has to leave again, as if he didn't belong any longer *only* in his native place – "neither my fondness for my son nor pity / for my old father nor the love I owed / Penelope, which would have gladdened here,/ was able to defeat in me the longing / I had to gain experience of the world / and of the vices and the worth of men. (Dante 1982, lines 94-99) The horizon has become a compass needle wavering like his impatience to set out and thread it again. Crucially, the urge to take flight, to explore, matches with Ulysses' story-telling gift. It fulfils his love for words which blends with his wanderings, because encountering peoples of different countries is the material of his stories. No wonder that Dante the exiled patriot and maker of the Italian language looks with sympathy at Ulysses' treachery and ambition. Ulysses is the image of Dante's infernal roaming around medieval Italy, away from his native Florence, but undertaking the mission of forging a language more real than Latin, more representative of his vernacular culture.

To move in a foreign language, in a foreign territory, may be liberating and so enhancing one's humanity. This is the consequence of the fulfilled need to create bonds across differences, which, because human exchanges are by nature evolutionary, often turn out to show similarities. Shared things form a middle ground, a common space that wasn't there before, removed from immediate contingency and whose existence depends on constant cultivation of this delicate terrain. Reflecting upon her writing in Italian, Jhumpa Lahiri has recently compared it to the experience of walking around Venice. (Lahiri 2015) It may start with exhausting crossing of bridges – sentences, words, accents, gestures, meanings, etc. – that may make us feel unstable, precarious and even trip embarrassingly or wanting to switch back to the more comfortable element of the mother tongue. Still, in this erring dimension, even mistakes are heightening because they lead us to see and touch with hand the ceilings and precincts of language and of over-determined cultural spaces. Not that a writer is ever happy to go wrong. But to concede to

oneself that *you can* make a mistake and be helped, understood, correct yourself, and so convey your message through that comprehension, is a healthy exercise. In the best cases it makes one feel that boundaries may shift, along with the domains of the language, which is made to show its often buried multi-rooted dictionary, and given the chance of developing new meanings, of getting enriched and so to extend beyond its ordinary definitions.

This is the use of Dante's Ulysses in Primo Levi's *Se questo è un uomo* (*Survival in Auschwitz*) (Levi 1996). Ulysses' exhorts his crew to take flight anew so as to preserve their humanity. "Consider well the seed that gave you birth: / you were not made to live your lives as brutes, / but to be followers of worth and knowledge" (Dante 1982, lines 118-20). Primo Levi, in the Auschwitz lager, chooses this Canto to teach Italian to a young Austrian who likes languages and is in charge of the prisoners. It is not the content of the Canto in itself but the struggle to translate it – even using their French as a lingua franca to help the transition into Italian – that fulfils the meaning of the Canto by building a human space of comprehension within the lager. "Here I stop and try to translate. Disastrous – poor Dante and poor French! All the same, the experience seems to promise well: Jean admires the bizarre simile of the tongue and suggests the proper word to translate 'age-old'. (Levi 1996: 112)

However, if for a writer to take flight from the restraints of one's familiar world through a foreign language, may be a liberating act, yet it entails an important premise: it must be an act of love, not of protest. This is at best exemplified in Joseph Brodsky's explanation for writing in English: to honour his love for Auden's poetry, "To Please a Shadow", as his essay's title on this topic says. It is not primarily to escape from a regime that had long made his life and writing impossible and which eventually expelled him altogether. "In parole più semplici, si è modificati da ciò che si ama, talvolta fino al punto di perdere tutta la propria identità"; i.e. 'put it more simply, we are changed by what we love, to the point of losing our entire identity'. (Brodsky 2004: 114) You can only migrate into English to follow your call helped by warm winds and sounds that have become familiar because they have long talked to your inner world.

Joseph Conrad followed his call and travelled bravely across many oceans. In spite of all concrete difficulties in navigating the language at vertiginous heights, of harsh criticism and accusations of betraying his homeland (in times in which today's Poland was a province of the Russian empire), he ever claimed his natural bond to English, the fact that he could only write in it.

> The truth of the matter is that my faculty to write in English is as natural as any other aptitude with which I might have been born. I have a strange and overpowering feeling that it has always been an inherent part of me. English was for me neither a matter of choice nor adoption. The merest idea of choice had never entered my head. And as to adoption – well, yes, there was adoption; but it was I who was adopted by the genius of the language, which directly, when I came out of the stammering stage, made me its own. […] All I can claim after all those years of devoted practice, with the accumulated anguish of its doubts, imperfections and faltering in my heart, is the right of being believed when I say that if I had not written in English, I would have not written at all. (Conrad2 1919: v-vi)

When Conrad crossed the pillars of his known world, he left a troubled Europe that sent him along with his patriot parents out of Poland to live as exiles in Russia. He also left a childhood that had made him familiar with the early loss of his parents but also with foreign languages and literatures, particularly the English one that his widowed father translated by profession and taught him. Young Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski must have been looking for a wider space to live in than his cultural identity offered him, when he followed a still mysterious call to develop what he had enjoyed in life so far, and left to join the navy – the

French first and then the English, literally embarking on the two languages that he had studied at home, the latter to become his own craft.

> He travelled to Marseilles, where he signed on as a sailor in the merchant marine on a voyage bound for the West Indies and Central America. Conrad soon discovered that there was something reliably soothing about a watery horizon, and he grew to love the solitude of the sea. For the next two decades he voyaged extensively in the Far East, and in Africa and in the Americas, his circumnavigations of the globe providing him with opportunities for both education and adventure. [Phillips1 1999: xi]

Thinking of retiring from the sea, he contemplated the idea of becoming a writer and, in the best judgment of Virginia Woolf, he became the most 'illustrious' 'English' writer of the time. (Woolf 2016) Interestingly, in that essay Woolf commemorates Conrad as a 'divided' writer, as 'our guest', whose mastery will be no doubt remembered for his first novels, portraying typical English characters, i.e. seamen of actions, symbols of the nation. Not for the later novels which have contributed to keep him as a stranger in England, i.e. novels centred on Marlow, the disturbed, disturbing, narrator. This is the world that ex-alien T.S. Eliot rigidly circumscribed in his essay *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture*. The essay's subtitle reports the Oxford English Dictionary's first entry for the term 'definition' in connection with its historical root to obviously indicate its cultural, territorial, legacy: "1. The setting of bounds; limitation (rare) – 1483". (Eliot 1973) Eliot's essay maps out the entire English-speaking world as ranked by class, ethnic and religious belonging, providing a cartography of what it means to be part of the pure European and English tribe. The essay is a 20th-century compendium of a narrative that had tried to define the nature of 'the English people' across history, and which in the second part of the 19th century developed into a clear-cut division between the descendants of the white Anglo-Saxon root and those stemming from more distant colonial ethnicities. (Young 2008)

It was extremely hard in Conrad's time to be considered an 'English writer' even for those native to the language. Conrad was animated by a profound wish to belong in that species to which he felt alike. The price that he had to pay for not being able to identify himself as a Polish-English writer was the necessity not to ever speak of his native home and language in his works and so hide his real nature and the way it would have sounded in English. Instead, it is the sense of dislocation, of being ill at ease in England, which his novels portray. (Said 2002) The colonial world became the scenarios of his stories and gave him characters of uncertain identities, moral doubts, indefinable views, characters who struggle in a sea of racist rapports, injustice and inhuman conditions. These had never been described with this intensity before by any European, least of all in the language of the world's most capillary empire. In short, the colonial world gave him material for his pioneering writing in constant tension between the Victorian world he worked for and was loyal to, and his own colonial identity and feeling for the situations he came into contact with. This mismatch he put into words and sentences that he had learned from scratch. No other language, no other personal situation, could have better equipped him to depict the world in which he set out.

Soon, the colonial world drew to a close and that sea was crossed by writers from the ex-colonies whose crafts and calls moved much more easily in English. The English language had adopted, colonised, people but these writers had appropriated it by shaping it according to the sounds and contents of their cultures and languages. To them, the sounds and contents of British English are siren songs. Their crafts – Walcott's, Achebe's, Soyinka's and many others'– move through a rootedness in their homeland that never comes short and by the missionary need to question the foundations of European knowledge in which monstrous ideas were bred, that could lead to enslaving and deporting millions of people across continents, and which was even

able to implode by causing the Jewish holocaust and mass killings in the heart of Europe in two world wars. In this context, Conrad's work, *Heart of Darkness* in particular, is addressed as a member of an uncertain species: the European colonial writer with his disturbed psyche, his brilliant prose hiding treachery, the loyalty to an ambiguous cause, the unnerving vagueness of spirit, the unbearable aimlessness in the use of language.

The reception of Conrad's most famous novella by Achebe, Dabydeen, Walcott and Phillips is a precious lesson to anyone wanting to explore the complexities of writing in English today. But before starting to take notes from those responses, I will explore *Heart of Darkness* along the lines of its author's adventures into English.

2. Into the Trap – a Reading of *Heart of Darkness*

> It fascinated me as a snake would a bird – a silly little bird.
> (Conrad1: 22)

English may have naturally adopted him, as Conrad said, but it kept him in captivity. It demanded a sacrifice, which the writer had to make: to inhibit his complex identity, hence the roots of his affections. It embittered him and made his language sombre, depressing, poisonous. The novella depicts this condition of dwelling in the golden cage of English, within the secured fortress of Victorian convictions. It does so in two ways. 1) Its narrative frame – depicted by the yacht stuck on the Thames with its upper-class sea-lovers friends, including Marlow the freak – mirrors the rigid, inescapable cultural rules within which the novel speaks. 2) The Congo story is a swan song of sort, indirectly telling its own condition of diminished humanity, implied in the very fact that it intends to talk about it but restrains itself from doing it. It depicts the vacuous gaze within the cage of English.

We remember the frame of the Congo story. An anonymous narrator, an ex fellow traveller, reports the story that Marlow once told him and some other friends while waiting on the Thames to set off to some imprecise place. Marlow, who was there to function as the skipper of that sea-journey, played the narrator instead to pass the time. He's described as an extravagant, an exotic, whose words, we are intimated, are not to be taken too seriously. The narrator in the frame works as a buffet between Marlow's disquieting story and the audience whose peace must not be stirred, just as the Victorian status quo. The odd-one-out is bridled and cornered as the exception confirming the rule. So, after his grand praise of father Thames and all it means as a result of its accumulation of historical enterprises shaping the English tribe, Marlow's strange story too may be taken onboard.

The ordinary working of English as a colonial language, wielding its power over the people it rules, is also depicted in close detail, with an attentiveness and an alarmed alertness that may only come from one who lives in English but feels alien to it, one who, therefore, is sensitive to the body-language and silences that match sentences, and to the moves of inclusion and exclusion, which open or close the gate to a stranger. The entire first part of the novella stitches together reported conversations between Marlow and the 'Belgians' in charge of the company in the Congo: the Company's accountant, the manager, an agent. Just arrived at the station, Marlow meets the accountant and is struck by the way his appearance and job clash with the surrounding slavery and misery of the people who are dying while carrying out their labour and so absolving to the terms of their contract.

> a white man, in such an unexpected elegance […] I took him for a sort of vision. […] I shook hands with this sort of miracle […] I respected the fellow. Yes; I respected his collars, his vast cuffs, his brushed hair. His appearance was certainly that of a hairdresser's dummy; but in the great

> demoralization of the land he kept up his appearance. That's backbone. His starched collars and got-up shirt-fronts were achievements of sorts. (Conrad1: 36)

Later, just arrived at the Central Station, Marlow is summoned by the manager who couldn't care the less for his evident tiredness and keeps him standing to listen to an endless tirade. But most unnerving, to make Marlow hit the roof, are the manager's glances – indicating superiority, disappointment – and a smiling grimace bracketing every sentence he says producing a sense of uneasiness. It's the bifurcated tongue of power, saying two things at the same time, one of the two beating and insulting the person it speaks to.

> he certainly could make his glance fall on one as a trenchant and heavy as an axe. But even at these times the rest of his person seemed to disclaim the intention. Otherwise there was only an indefinable, faint expression of his lips, something stealthy – a smile – not a smile – I remember it, but I can't explain. … It came at the end of his speeches like a seal applied on the words to make the meaning of the commonest phrase appear absolutely inscrutable (41). He inspired uneasiness. That was it! Uneasiness. Not a definite mistrust – just uneasiness – nothing more. You have no idea how effective such a … a … faculty can be. (42)

The exchange with the agent displays the effect of the exercise of power through language: it weakens and kills the natural function of language, i.e. its functionality, its sense of purpose, which linguists have called its essentially 'goal-oriented' nature. (Leech 2008: 86-97) The agent's language is aimless, seems to have no practical use. In fact, it is moved by a thirst for gossips that tells of important connections, of promotions, of social relations that have nothing to do with language in itself but which use it to their own ends. This is in sharp contrast with purposeful Kurtz and his superb use of language to achieve his goal. "The chief of the Inner station […] the guidance of the cause entrusted by Europe, so to speak, higher intelligence, wide sympathies, a singleness of purpose." (47) Yet Kurtz had lost control of himself and of language and Marlow's secret mission is to rescue him and take him back to Europe.

When it is not describing the bars and intervals composing the cage structure, the novella turns inside and gives voice to its widely desolate emptiness. The expedition along the Congo river depicts this gloomy sense of loss and alienation from the cheerful sides of the self, from memories, from affections, from hope and dreams of the future. The disquieting, mourning atmosphere of the Congo journey seems to embody the feelings of an exiled writer as tangibly described by Edward Said; the sense of being forever cut off from one's affections and the unrecoverable bitterness that comes with it.

> Is it not true that the views of exile in literature and, moreover, in religion obscure what is truly horrendous: that exile is irremediably secular and unbearably historical; that it is produced by human beings; and that, like death but without death's ultimate mercy, it has turned millions of people from the nourishments of tradition, family and geography? (Said 2002: 138)

Marlow's Congo river experience seems to reproduce a state of melancholia from which one cannot recover. (Freud 2007) Africa and its inhabitants are made to work as objective correlative of this dispiritedness, deriving from an intrinsic chronicled state of reclusion. Out of it only a tale of grief may sneak along, with characters that are gigantic shadows cast by the bars of the language trap. The bleak atmosphere, the piercing cry, the sense of threats rising with the fog, – are uncanny returns of a kid's joyful dreams and hopes. (Freud 2005)

Within this spectral atmosphere the reader moves with great difficulty. We get entangled in sentences that are obscure and far too long, which unfold endlessly and turn upon themselves through repetitive terms. We get lost in the rising abstractions and fumble for a concrete sense

of where we are and what the story is getting at. It gives off a feeling of going nowhere, of being teased. One wonders if this was the feeling of a writer talking through the serpent's maws.

The journey through the jungle wants to lead us to find out Conrad's early, innocent, love of English. Marlow tells us about the moment when the terrible switch happened, and from the admired white-patched map of the English-speaking world, of the British Empire that had inspired the wish to travel, the snake had impetuously come out, in the shape of the majestic Congo river, "a mighty big river, that you could see on the map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled […] Then I remembered there was a big concern, a company for trade on that river. Dash it all! […] the snake had charmed me." (22)

The way the *bird* got swallowed by the *snake* is told cryptically through symbolic images which we are asked to decode and relate to each other as to reconstruct an enigma. They embody congealed fragments of unrecognisable memories, like pieces of the fledgling's feathers scattered on the cage floor by the serpent. On the way to the Inner Station, Marlow gets off the steamboat and gets into a hut where, on a wooden table, he finds an astonishing white-bounded book about the practicalities of navigation. On the book's margins are pencilled notes in a mysterious code, which is later discovered to be Russian. The book seems to stand for an early English handbook in which a kid studying in Russian (Conrad's other step-mother tongue) annotated equivalents, explanations, rules, pronunciations, and whatnots. We stop and wonder: Was English for Conrad an escape from hated Russian, the imposed language that also meant the exile of his parents and their own death? The moment of frenzied attachment that Marlow has toward this book and for the 'shelter' seems to plead with us to look for a recondite meaning that explains that outburst. We have reached the no-fly-zone of the novella's repressed biographical intention (Conrad: 66-67).

But it is exactly this fly zone of youth that we are – if secretly – made to enter when Marlow meets the crazed harlequin boy in love with anything English and of course with Kurtz's ways of speaking, i.e. the charming snake that keeps him in thrall. The novel makes us know that the boy and Kurtz have at least part of their name in common. While reading the 'illegible signature'(64) on the shelter's table, Marlow notices that it could be 'Kurtz but it's not because the signature is much longer'. Does the boy stand for the writer whose identity would be shortened after the adoption of English? This is surely what happened literally, as Conrad used his second surname 'Konrad' and written with 'C', to be identified as English. Does then Kurtz represent the switch to English as well as the effect it could have had upon the writer had he not restrained and raised the due limits to his own prose? Had Conrad obeyed Eliot's dictum contained in his *Notes*, in which getting too close to a culture not one's own, would lead to a transgression of the 'limits' of civilization, just as somebody 'by studying cannibals would end up becoming one'? "The man who, in order to understand the inner world of a cannibal tribe, has partaken of the practice of cannibalism, has probably gone too far: he can never quite be one of his own folk again." (Eliot 1973: 41) Is it in these wild terms that one's multicultural heritage and experience were asked to be thought of in Eliot's and Woolf's Europe, in terms of the old stereotypical encounter with non-Europeans?

The novella not only represents, if by enigmas, the reason of Conrad's self-limitation and self-repression. It also portrays the drama of his wound. A central episode revolves around the African "helmsman", an excitable freak that incoherently keeps opening the boat's shutter while under the harmless attack of Africans and who gets yet finally killed by a lance, dying a *mors Christi*, as a parable of God's Word, the incarnated Verb, which yet seems to have died before having been born. The dead helmsman's stare Marlow cannot take away from his eyes, feeling that a crucial message is being conveyed to him, which yet will remain mute, in the African man's mouth.

> Arrows, by Jove! We were being shot at! I stepped in quickly to close the shutter on the landside. That fool helmsman, his hand on the spokes, was lifting his knees high, stamping his feet, champing his mouth, like a reined-in horse. […] I had to lean right out to swing the heavy shutter, and I saw a face amongst the leaves on the level of my own, looking at me very fierce and steady; and then suddenly, as though a veil had been removed from my eyes, I made out, deep in the tangled gloom, naked breasts, arm, legs, glaring eyes, – the bush was swarming with human limbs in movement, glistening, of bronze colour. […] The man stepped back swiftly, looked at me over his shoulder in an extraordinary, profound, familiar manner, and fell upon my feet. […] stared straight up at me; both his hands clutched that cane. It was the shaft of a spear that, either thrown or lunched? Through the opening had caught him on the side just below the ribs; the blade had gone in out of sight, after making a frightful gash. (75-79, 89)

By following the signs which the narration has scattered all along for its autobiographical thread to be followed, we come to see the meaning of its cracked vision and voice: it stands for the cracked heart still beating in the darkness of the snake's throat. For Marlow the meaning of a story is in the 'cracked shell of a nut' and just as falling apart, unriveted, doomed to wreck, his steamboat is, image of his craft through the river of life. The finishing blow is portrayed in the final part of the story. Half-alive Marlow just come from inferno, goes to see Kurtz's betrothed, suitably called "the intended". She is closed in her bearable, dignified, unrecoverable mourning for dead Kurtz, and all he had meant and still means to her. Never mind that such knowledge is a load of lies and unsayable acts not worth of a human being. But Marlow, and Conrad, finally decided to keep the truth for themselves, and for those who have reasons to try and find it out by engaging with their stories.

3. Barred Vision – Chinua Achebe's *An Image of Africa*: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

The Nigerian novelist, father of African fiction in English, has notoriously condemned without appeal *Heart of Darkness* for its 'dehumanization of Africa and Africans' and claimed that 'Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist'. (Achebe 2010: 12-13) For Achebe, the novella has highly contributed to maintaining vivid the European stereotypical iconography and the myth of 'black Africa' spread in late Victorian times that depicts it as primitive and uncivilised. For Conrad there's no way out of Achebe's sentence. Even Caryl Phillips who dissents from this condemnation, after engaging in a thorough conversation with Achebe to understand his reasons, finally admitted that Achebe's position is understandable, for Conrad's was an insolent guest in Achebe's homeland, in a way that is difficult to see for a European.

> Were I an African I suspect that I would feel the same way as my host. But I was raised in Europe, and although I have learned to reject the stereotypically reductive image of Africa and Africans, I am undeniably interested in the break-up of a European mind and the health of a European civilization. […] Achebe is right; to the African reader the prize of Conrad's eloquent denunciation of colonization is the recycling of racist notions of the "dark" continent and her people. Those of us who are not from Africa may be prepared to pay this price, but this price is far too high for Achebe. However lofty Conrad's mission, he has, in keeping with time past and present, compromised African humanity in order to examine the European psyche. (Phillips1 2011: 206-07)

In fact, as in admission of guilt, Conrad's novella depicts its own fabrication of Africa. The scene of the helmsmen's death ends with the man becoming an African mask.

> Only in the very last moment, as though in response to some sign we could not see, to some whisper we could not hear, he frowned heavily, and that frown gave to his black death-mask an

> inconceivably sombre, brooding, and menacing expression. The lustre of enquiring glance faded swiftly into vacant glassiness. (78)

It is indeed a glassy admission, i.e. transparent, invisible. However, this process of 'mummification' is the characterising feature of Conrad's prose. Linguists have extensively analysed the impressive chains of noun phrases and nominalisations that characterise his writing yet without drawing any 'literary' or cultural conclusions. We need to understand Conrad's style along a consideration of the ideological effects that such use of naming has in English, which a native would hardly notice, so natural these naming constructions are to the regular use of English grammar. (Jeffries 2010: 17-36) The main structural consequence is that the transitive action that usually flows in the subject-verb-object articulation of English is blocked, and either the subject or the object of the noun phrase, or both, get loaded within words that over-define them, in such a way that their over-connoted meaning becomes granted, assumed, whose significance becomes hard to question. Subjects and objects cease to be seen as changeable, as related to the actions of an active verb. We need only try and read the following passages and see how the African labourers are being shaped by noun phrases (marked in italics) that thicken all around the simple subject by adding defining adjectives and gerunds that thicken all around them creating complex naming blocks which are impossible to disentangle and rewrite in a different way. The mummification in course culminates in the astonishing image "bundles of acute angles":

> A lot of people, mostly black and naked, moved about like ants. (32) […] Six black man advanced in a file, toiling up the path. They walked erect and slow, balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads, and the clink kept time with their footsteps. Black rags were wound round their loins, and the short ends behind wagged to and fro like tails. Each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking. (33) […] Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest. These moribund shapes were free as air – and nearly as thin. Near the same tree two more bundles of acute angles sat with their legs drawn up, scattered in every pose of contorted collapse, as in some picture of a pestilence." (35)

The only way we can change this image is by rewriting the entire passage, the entire book, by getting rid of this style made of chains of passive structures, tying gerunds, successive adjectives and similes, and by using, instead, a transitive structure in which meanings pulse and circulate in a more lively, healthier way, which clearly shows who the subjects and the objects are and, especially, which the relation is that binds them. This change requires that the writer add a lot more information about his subjects and objects, which may not be so easy to get hold of. In this respect, it is not Achebe's essay but his novel *Things Fall Apart* that is the most effective reply to Conrad's novella.

Was Conrad aware of the implications of his narrative style? Did he want to depict the use of English as a colonising language? In the pages that precede the passages reported above, we see Marlow's arrival in Africa on board of a ship. He speculates on the ridiculous names of places the ship passes by, while also noticing a "warship firing pointlessly at the African coast."

> We passed various places – trading places – with names like Gran Bassam, Little Popo, names that seemed to belong to some sordid farce acted in front of a sinister black cloth. […] In the immensity of earth, sky, and water, there the ship was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent […] called them enemies […] but these men could by no stretch of the imagination be called enemies. They were called criminals, and the outrage laws, like the bursting shells, had come to them, an insoluble mystery from over the sea. (30-31)

Marlow is very much aware of the devaluing consequence that naming may cause. In his typical dissenting view, he criticises the Western practice in defence of its victims. Why, then, has the novella made such an extended and fatal use of naming?

4. Fledgling within tiger's claws – David Dabydeen's *The Intended*

> "Poetry is like a bird," he said, "and it gliding or lifting and plunging,
> wings outspread or beating and curving, and the whole music is in the bird wing."
> (Dabydeen1 2006: 70)

David Dabydeen's novel opens a special dialogue with *Heart of Darkness*. It interrogates the novella wanting to know those parts that it is reluctant to tell which concern Conrad's identity as a colonial migrant and a Polish-Russian-English novelist. These unsaid but intended parts of the novella 'talk' to the young Indian-Guyanese-British writer, who arrived in England as a boy from British Guyana to live with his father but ended up having to take care of himself and of his education. He did so greatly, managing to study and read in Cambridge as well as to become a writer. (Dabydeen2 2011)

A poem by William Blake, *The Tyger*, which is only referred to as an unimportant detail at the beginning of the novel, can yet be used to explore the ways in which Dabydeen's novel opens its dialogue with *Heart of Darkness* with the specific purpose of engaging with its latent autobiographical references.

4.1."Fearful Symmetry"

To begin with, Dabydeen's novel addresses the correspondence between London and the Congo as pointed out by Marlow and confirms that 'fearful symmetry' is still in place.

> Tyger, tyger, burning bright
> In the forest of the night;
> What immortal hand or eye
> Could frame thy fearful symmetry?
>
> In what distant deeps or skies
> Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
> On what wings dare he aspire?
> What the hand, dare seize the fire?

The Intended depicts the 'fearful symmetry' between the London of the 80s and the Victorian London-Congo in four major respects. (A) Dabydeen's four young characters grappling in the jungle of the British education system and of widespread racism mirror, in opposite terms, Conrad's well-off fellow travellers stuck in the Nellie yacht. They represent South Asian migrants settled in the capital, "The regrouping of the Asian diaspora in a South London schoolground" (8). (B) We see the four youths trapped in the British education system and its learning method, which preclude their access to self-knowledge as well to find their ways into the meanings of literary texts. This is exemplified in an episode describing an exam in which the students have to interpret Blake's poem according to a given set of meanings which, although mortifying *The Tiger* yet would make them pass. So we see Patel, one of them, copy from explanatory notes which would apply to very different texts. Out of school, these boys are

literally hunted and beaten to death by gangs of racists and the novel depicts them as ending up as brutally diminished as Blake's tiger poem. Here is the protagonist looking at his best friend's brother who also ended up in hospital: "I fancied he looked like Patel's tiger vanquished by the hunt." (15) (C) Marlow's Congo journey upriver is reproduced in two more realistic and updated versions that describe the protagonist's student life in England but also an unsettled psychological condition that applies to the 'newcomers' in a broader sense. In the summer the protagonist works at a funfair's 'World Cruise', in which boats float by all countries of the world in alphabetical order, each one depicted in stereotypical images, like a sordid abecedary. (D) A deeper journey, parallel to Marlow's trip downriver, is the one which is described as taking place during the protagonist's tube-rides, depicting the 'underground', invisible, transitions taking place inside the immigrants' minds in which their life's times and places blur and blend, but which become invisible again once they emerge from the tube station back to daylight. "In the London Underground we were forced into an inarticulacy that delved beneath the stone ground and barrier of language […] and made for a new mode of communication: […] we flashed glances at one another, each a blinding recognition of our Asian-ness, each welding in one communal identity." (16)

4.2 "In the furnace of the brain"

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? And what dread feet?

What the hammer? What the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? What dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terror clasp?

None of these students manage to grasp the meaning of Conrad's novella, when at some point they have to study it for their English class by using the prescribed close-analysis interpretative method, which excludes references to the author's life and to historical background, as well as any imaginative incursion into the text. It is their illiterate pal Joseph, a Jamaica-born half-orphan vandal, who is made to personify Conrad in his youth, to do so, even by giving voice to Achebe's critical view of *Heart of Darkness*! It's a lively portrait that puts side by side the imagined lyrical intelligence of Conrad as a young man, versus the experienced Victorian Conrad we know. Joseph knows art by instinct and abhors interpretative artifices that cage its poetic flights. He talks about the way poems are taught in school but his words indirectly make a broader comment on the self-restraint that Conrad exercises against his own art in *Heart of Darkness*: "putting iron-bar one by one in a spacious room so the bird flying round and round and breaking beak and wings against the wall trying to reach the sunlight. You turning all the room in the universe and in the human mind into bird cage." (70-71) And when Joseph's criticises Conrad's depiction of Africans, giving voice to Achebe's view, he embodies the very 'frenzy' by which Conrad characterises the African helmsman, that 'frenzy' which, however, Achebe's essay sees as the clear mark of Conrad's racism, not seeing, or not wanting to see, the meaning Conrad had intended.

> 'But what about the way he talk about black people?' Joseph persisted, jumping up from the bed and pacing the room in a sudden agitation. 'What black people?' I asked uncertainly. He snatched *Heart of Darkness* from my hand and peered at the page, unable to decipher the words, unable to

> identify the blocks who had obviously set his mind blazing. 'Where the bit about them lying under the trees dying?' he demanded, shoving the book at me. […] I was spellbound not so much by his crazy exegesis as by the passion of his outburst, the sudden surge of eloquence. (72-73)

Joseph is a chain-breaker, at ease when close to open spaces. He is constantly depicted 'by a window', as to indicate his need of fresh air, of freedom, but also the fact that he inhabits the anonymity of transition spaces, lacking precise identification. However, his existential location qualifies him to understand the meaning of Conrad's 'harlequin boy', whom he sees as a clear image of himself– a person whose impossibility to define his composite nature brings it to pieces, which are at best assembled to look like a funny patchwork. (75) The novel subtly observes that Joseph is "weaving his personal history into the text" (75), hinting at the fact that not only is he breaking the norms of close-reading, but he is providing a most valuable interpretation of what *Heart of Darkness* intends to say through its harlequin.

4.3."Stars threw down their spears"

> When the stars threw down their spears
> And watered heaven with their tears:
> Did he smile his work to see?
> Did he who made the Lamb made thee?
> Tiger tiger burning bright,
> In the forest of the night:
> What immortal hand or eye,
> Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

By pursuing his gift as a young artist, moved by a wish to give shape to the still invisible presences of people like him, Joseph becomes a film-maker, and an increasingly conceptual one at that. His London-jungle films become ever more abstract and macabre to the point that his last achievement irritates the sympathetic protagonist, the only one who believes in his talent.

> 'What's the story behind it?' I asked after he had reeled off half a dozen more bizarre images which culminated with a stream of black ants carrying flecks of food, making their way up the chest and neck of the tramp […] only to be trapped in a mat of hair and sneezed out violently (this last image signified the experience of migration: the black ants were West Indians laden with suitcases landing on the tarmac of England, and the nostrils were the interrogation lounges at Heathrow). He ignored my question, as if it were too trivial to command an answer. (114)

Joseph is steadily moving toward self-destruction being utterly disillusioned about the chance of being understood. He wants his latest film to be buried in a coffin so as to be preserved for posterity. The film's "set of open-ended symbols" (115), its abstractness, will be decoded through the future spectator's understanding of its enigmatic images. In this way, the message will be saved and conveyed by transcending standard codification. Out of metaphor, Dabydeen's novel suggests that Conrad interred cryptic symbols in *Heart of Darkness* are meant to tell his story as a migrant writer in English. However, it was the wrong aesthetic choice. We read this response in the episode of Joseph's suicide as an extreme act of self-completion which he carried out by setting fire to himself after having made a last attempt to recompose his identity by inscribing its true name on the ground – COCOON. Dabydeen's novel gives us a full explanation of this cryptic noun (139-40), but it makes us also infer that it has also to do with that 'C' by which Conrad translated his second surname, Konrad, further reducing his real identity.

At the end of *The Intended*, the protagonist rises as a fledgling writer from the ashes of Joseph's self-sacrifice. We see him studying in Oxford on his way to becoming a writer, thinking of Joseph who will ever be in his thoughts.

> I am no longer an immigrant here, for I can decipher the texts, I have been exempted from the normal rules of lineage and privilege; yet he, an inveterate criminal, keeps breaking in, to the most burglar-proof of institutions, reminding me of my dark shadow, drawing me back to my dark self. As my mind stumbles over the difficult words in *Sir Gawain*, I see a little boy's foot being trapped in the pits and cavities of hardened mud as he hurries after the sound of an old man's stick. (140)

The contemporary novel acknowledges its debts to *Hart of Darkness* for teaching the necessity of imbuing writing with real life. It thus gives itself the chance that Conrad's novella had denied to itself. *The Intended* is imaginatively patterned through Dabydeen's biography and a language that blends lyrical innocence and historical experience, long episodes of his childhood in Guyana and life as a young artist in Britain. The two worlds have been safely bound together. The repair process also being secretly inscribed by echoes of the Conradian 'rivets'. The 'cracked nut', the disjoined fractured narratives that composes life and writing in English, has become a secure vehicle to move in and on, because its 'kernel', its rich core, is fully there and visible, and it even emerges to make us crack many a smile in the several humorous memories telling of the kid and of the young adult.

5. Re-takes – Derek Walcott's *White Egrets* and *Omeros*

> Here is what the bastard calls "the emptiness"
> (Walcott 2010: 80)

There are two responses to *Heart of Darkness* in the work of Derek Walcott that are worth being considered here, for two reasons: 1) they refer exactly to the two parts of *Heart of Darkness* that I used before to point out the use of naming in Conrad's prose; 2) they are indicative of the way the novella negatively impressed writers of the ex-colonial world and the way they have corrected them as outrageous mistakes.

A poem in the latest collection *White Egrets*, addresses the inadequate use of the word "emptiness" in Conrad's description of Marlow's first view of the African coast, where he's observing 'the worship firing pointlessly at the continent' and – as I noticed before – being blandly criticised by Marlow for its wrong definition of the Africans as 'enemies'. As we saw, they are far less than enemies. Walcott's poem breaks down the single word 'emptiness' into eight descriptive lines in which we are made to see, hear, feel, what that abstract word actually contains.

> Here is what the bastard calls "the emptiness"–
> that blue-green ridge with plunging slopes, the blossoms
> like drooping chalices, of the African tulip, the noise
> of a smoking torrent – it's his name for when rain comes
> down the heights or gusts in sheets across the meadows
> of the sea – "the emptiness," the phrase applies
> to our pathetic, pompous cities, their fretwork balconies,
> their retail stores blasting reggae, either India in the eyes
> of uniformed schoolchildren or the emptiness. […] (Walcott 2010: 80)

With quiet indifferent anger the poem addresses the migrant writer who can be anyone writing after the colonised world has come into being, i.e. 'the bastard artist', who should not stop at the simplified ready-made perception and articulation of what he or she sees. Rather, this artist has to face and handle the emptiness, the void that seems to be out there beyond the given definitions. Facing the terror – the horror – is to take the challenge of feeling and trying to depict the complexities of today's world; the opposite of the paralysed prose of Conrad's novella.

Conrad's mistake is not only the consequential misnaming of places and people. It's an insult against his own art, i.e. a curse against the sacredness of his gift. This the poem seems to imply by making us read the image of the "warship pointlessly firing / into the huge empty jungle" as an icon of Conrad's own 'worship' of English but lacking the skill to handle it properly and, therefore, letting it go its own way into 'hurting meaninglessness'. What may have led the novelist to give up the bridles and be carried away by his sinuous prose? The poem gives us this answer: Conrad uprooted himself and had no anchorage upon which to make lever and resist the power of his own language.

> […] The image
> is from Conrad, of a warship pointlessly firing
> into the huge empty jungle; all the endeavours
> of our lives are damned to nothing by the tiring
> catalogue of a vicious talent that severs
> itself from every attachment, a bitterness whose
> poison is praised for its virulence. This verse
> is part of the emptiness, as is the valley of Santa Cruz,
> a genuine benediction as his is a genuine curse. (Walcott 2010: 80)

The second response is in *Omeros*. The autobiographical character meets his father in a Conradian colonial scenario and, specifically, in an infernal setting that echoes that of *Heart of Darkness*, in which labourers exhausted to death are depicted in beastly terms and like ants. However, here the workers are bestowed not only with their humanity but beauty and dignity. It's a lesson the father gives his son, asking him to write the same way they walk, following their balanced pace. It's the lesson that Walcott got, if in irritatingly opposite terms, from Conrad's novella. Only by being reversed, is it allowed access into the poem, where the strange controversial guest has been fully comprehended.

> From here, in his boyhood, he had seen women climb
> like ants up a white flower-pot, baskets of coal
> balanced on their torchoned heads, without touching them,
>
> up the black pyramids, each spine straight as a pole,
> and with a strength that never altered its rhythm.
> He spoke for those Helens from an earlier time:
>
> "Hell was built on those hills. In that country of coal
> without fire, that inferno the same colour
> as their skins and shadows, every labouring soul
>
> climbed with her hundredweight basket, every load for
> one copper penny, balanced erect on their necks
> that were as tight as the liner's hawsers from the weight.
>
> The carriers were women, not the fair, gentler sex.

Instead, they were darker and stronger, and their gait
was made beautiful by balance, in their ascending

the narrow wooden, ramp built steeply to the hull
of a liner tall as a cloud, the unending
line crossing like ants without touching for the whole

day. That was one section of the wharf, opposite
your grandmother's house where I watched the silhouettes
of these women, while every hundredweight basket

was ticked by two tally clerks in their white pith-helmets,
and the endless repetition as they climbed the
infernal anthracite hills showed you hell, early".

[…] They walk, you write;

keep to that narrow causeway without looking down,
climbing in their footsteps, that slow, ancestral beat
of those used to climbing roads; your own work owes them

because the couplets of those multiplying feet
made your first rhymes. […] (Walcott 2003: 128, 130)

6. Back into the Future – Caryl Phillips' *Bends in the River*

Caryl Phillips's video-narration *Bends in the River* shows us an apocalyptic *Heart of Darkness* projected in the future of present time. The film's voiceover reads key-passages of Conrad's novella that interweave with Phillip's voice commenting on today's Thames, over which he is spending some days having been asked to reflect on that Conradian scenario.

The film begins with a powerful image from the first pages of the novella trumpeted by its anonymous narrator, boasting the golden English tradition with the glorious colonial adventures disseminated all around the globe – "the dreams of men, the seed of commonwealth, the germs of empires". However, the words clash against the black and white desolation of the film's images and sounds so that we understand that the glimmering Father Thames of the novella has become a faded image of itself, an empty shell. The vigour of the English Empire and its colonial adventures disseminated all around the globe have yielded a stillborn reality, rendered through mourning, bleak sounds and sepia images of degradation and abandonment all scattered along the bends of the Thames. The young, cheerful, multi-coloured Britain which one would expect from centuries of colonial encounters have produced but sporadic timid signs of multiracial love – shown in beautiful images of young lovers – but lost in the widely desolate scenario.

The deluded view is that of a contemporary English writer momentarily returned to look again at the Thames, at his own legacy. If we immediately get the sense of his assessment, yet to understand his motivations is much harder. It requires us to see the point of each single reference he makes and then to see them all together in relation to each other. It's a viewpoint that requires at once anchorage and distance, depth and scope. For instance, we're still unsure if there is irony in his first original comment or if there is the joy for the still imaginable new birth of a multi-ethnic Britain:" And then I was rewarded with the drama of light crashing through the flimsy blinds and the dramatic announcement of a new day. I crawled out of bed and took in an

extraordinary vista: a 180°-view of London as she curves around a graceful bend in the river at the heart of the city." (Phillips 2013)

Then the narrative switches to a strange historical present, displacing us. It takes us to the London of the 50s by bringing the most well-known character of Sam Selvon's fiction into the picture. So we are still in the past, yet a time more recent than the one conjured through the quotes from *Heart of Darkness* – evoked as if it had congealed into the present but having lost the colourful liveliness and the music pervading Selvon's London. At this point in the video we have a chance to understand what it is that has disappointed this Englishman.

> Moses Alouette finds himself standing by the same river that I now perch high above. Despite the evidence of discrimination, poverty and power break that Moses is forced to endure throughout the novel, at the end of the novel our lonely Londoner is unable to jettison his images of expectation. He stands gloriously still on the bank of the Thames knowing that he can't help loving this city that has effectively rejected him and his kind and somewhat ironically he comforts himself by lovingly recollecting London's iconic images and locales. (Phillips 2013)

It is the cold, not-corresponded affection that England had for her first-generation migrants. The unconditioned love for London that the many 'Moses' demonstrate – in life and literature – is still unmatched these days and this backward stuck colonial mentality Phillips takes to amount for his legacy, as seen from his privileged position above the Thames. "I have exchanged visions of the Romans sailing on the Thames for Conradian visions of ships at anchor waiting for the fog to leave. I've contemplated contemporary images of immigrants sailing up the river and disembarking at Tilbury docks someway downriver to my right to my right." (Phillips 2013) Then, the voiceover quotes Marlow's words about the effects that the Thames had on him, but, in connection with what we have just been told and shown before, the video-narrative creates a blending of times and places, which has not yet happened neither in history nor in British society.

> To understand the effect of it on me you ought to know how I got out there, what I saw, how I went up that river to the place where I first met the poor chap. It was the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience. It seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about me – and into my thoughts. It was somber enough too – and pitiful – not extraordinary in any way – not very clear either. No, not very clear. And yet it seemed to throw a kind of light. (Phillips 2013)

The video's sounds, images and voices project a twofold view from over the Thames: one upon the river, unfolding memories of colonial conquests; the other on the street, showing a more ordinary and migrant Britain, the other side of the same story. They have not yet blended, the way they should have. This failure to mix, to grow up, is the reason why Britain is figured out as a just-born nation, one whose childhood won't be given the due care, as we infer from the image of an abandoned tricycle on the riverbank.

> I scanned to the left and back to the right and then looked down at the people on the streets and there seemed to be disjuncture between the narrative on the street and the narrative suggested by this particular view. Such questioning seemed to me to be part of the legacy of growing up in the second half of the 20th century during the years in which Britain lost an empire and somewhat reluctantly began to refigure her sense of herself. These were the years Britain kicking and screaming became both multiracial and European. (Phillips 2013)

In this connection, Marlow's famous claim about colonialism enters Phillips's narrative where it is yet made to represent the features of an infant Britain, not yet clearly defined, whose

formation is in progress. "The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much." (Phillips 2013)

Finally, although uninspired by the prospect of a boat-ride down the Thames, Phillips gives in, embarks on it and finds his Kurtz, i.e. the still undeveloped multi-ethnic Britain, which so far only literature and imagination have been able to develop. Predictably, he returns afterwards to his privileged iconic view over the Thames having brought home anything special to be treasured – "slightly more comfortable with my iconically powerful view." The video ends with the voiceover quoting the famous last lines of *Heart of Darkness*, intimating that the chance of setting out has been lost again for the time being. "'We have lost the first of the ebb', said the Director, suddenly." […] (Phillips 2013)

However, among the subtleties of Phillips' video, is the use of the tenses working like a tidal motion wider than the river, embracing, nestling it. The voices have switched from the past perfect and past tense of the quoted novella, to the past tense of Phillips's narrative recounting his stay above and along the Thames, clearly removed from the present, yet conceding a very brief opening, in the present perfect, to render his witnessing experience. This is soon sealed into the historical present describing Selvon's London of the mid 50s. However, in the expression of this hopeless desolation, the last quote from *Heart of Darkness* – bracketed as it is between present perfect and past simple and to be read in light of Phillip's journey down and upriver – may be interpreted as unfathomably optimistic. "'We have lost the first of the ebb', […] and the tranquil waterway […] seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness." It seems to be saying that 'yes, we may have lost a couple of chances to move on, but can't this swan song prelude to a real departure and lead to a brand new day?'

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CHANGING NOTIONS OF WELLBEING IN NEW ZEALAND LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT • Conceptions of wellbeing and good life vary considerably in different cultures. A recent study demonstrates that in the post-contact period, in particular between 1870-1940, New Zealand was the healthiest country in the world in terms of life expectancy, but only for non-Māori citizens. The introduction of Western culture and liberal economy was lethal for Māori who risked extinction. One people prospered to the detriment of the other. This trend changed when subalternity became resistance, and the government and public opinion acknowledged Māori 'cultural diversity' as an aspect of New Zealand national identity. The official recognition of specific indigenous views of health, development, social structures and wellbeing led to the establishment of formal institutions, strategic plans and frameworks to promote them. Māori have also influenced national policies on some cross-cultural issues, for example the protection and preservation of the environment. All this has been recorded in short stories, the most widespread genre in Aotearoa New Zealand. My article explores different notions of wellbeing in New Zealand short fictions by non-Māori and Māori authors such as Frank Sargeson, Roderick Finlayson, Noel Hilliard, Witi Ihimaera and Patricia Grace.

KEYWORDS • Health, Wellbeing, New Zealand, Short Stories, Māori culture.

1. Health, Wellbeing and Good Life in Aotearoa New Zealand: A Brief Historical Overview[1]

A 2014 study on the historical variations and improvement of world-wide life expectancy in modern times entitled *The Healthy Country?* has revealed that the New Zealand population could boast the lowest mortality in the world for roughly 70 years, from 1870 to 1940. In fact, this record was held by non-Māori citizens only.[2] In 1881 non-Māori life expectancy was 53 years for males and 56 years for women. In the period 1876-1940 it increased by 15 years. In 1881 life expectancy for Māori was 35 years less than non-Māori (18 years at birth). By 1946 the gap had closed to about 20 years (Woodward & Blakely 2014: 74). After 1940 non-Māori fell off the top of world rankings in life expectancy, although their longevity remained comparatively high. Māori mortality rate decreased slowly but steadily throughout the twentieth century. Today, according to the NZ Ministry of Health's data, the life expectancy of a non-Māori male and female born between 2012 and 2014 is respectively 79.5 and 83.2 years. In the

[1] *Aotearoa* is the Māori name of New Zealand. It literally means 'land of the long white cloud'.

[2] The correct way to write the word *Māori* is with a macron on the long vowel 'a'. However, in the past this rule was not generally respected, so in the quotations of some texts it might appear without the macron.

Māori population it is 73 years for males and 77.1 years for females.[3] If the present trend is maintained, the gap will be closed by 2040 (Woodward & Blakely 2014: 219).[4]

Measuring the average length of life may appear as a statistical construct that does not give a full account of population health and wellbeing. The first and most obvious objection to this point is that few would regard high mortality or short life expectancy as positive signs of a country's health. However, the authors of the research Woodward and Blakely, two New Zealand epidemiologists and public health doctors, demonstrate that their work does not only capture the mortality experience of a population over a certain period. Their collection of data from various sources and their comparison of different ethnic groups or nations at different times and in a specific economic, social and historical context provide us with information on the health and 'good life' of a country, with all its numerous variables. Life expectancy stands out therefore as a "sentinel measure of the social, political and environmental undercurrents in a society" (Woodward & Blakely 2014: 1).

The analysis of mortality rate and life expectancy in New Zealand between 1870 and 1940 is extremely interesting since it basically records what happened in the country after its formal annexation to the British Empire. It is difficult to determine precisely the number of Māori living in New Zealand when Cook arrived in 1769. Most sources estimate they were between 80,000 and 150,000 (Woodward & Blakely 2014: 54).[5] In 1840 the British Crown and the chiefs of most (but not all) the Māori tribes signed the Treaty of Waitangi, the foundational document that officially sanctioned the Queen's sovereignty over New Zealand, extended "Her royal protection" to its indigenous population and "impart[ed] to them all the Rights and Privileges of British Subjects" (King 2004: 32).[6] In 1830 there were around 300 Europeans living in New Zealand. In 1840 European settlers were about 2000 (King 2004, 36): Māori outnumbered them 50 to one. The Treaty prompted a huge flux of immigration from Britain and Ireland. By 1860 European settlers had reached parity with the Māori (Woodward & Blakely 2014: 52) or, according to another source, had surpassed them (King 2004: 40). The Māori population had already decreased in the period following Cook's arrival due to the spread of infectious diseases and increase in lethal warfare, especially in those areas of the country where there were greatest contacts with Europeans. Māori decline, however, accelerated after the Treaty: between 1840 and 1900, the period when statistics were first (although erratically) collected, the Māori population shrank by about two-thirds (Woodward & Blakely: 53-4). Beside the pernicious effects of the new pathogens spread by European immigrants (causing diseases such as tuberculosis, measles, typhoid fever, whooping cough and influenza), the Māori demise was determined by their impoverishment, displacement and dispossession, especially with reference to the loss of land by confiscation or sales. As the best parts of New Zealand land passed into the hands of the Europeans, villages were built in less desirable locations liable to flooding. There are many reports of crowded and poorly ventilated housing. Water was taken from shallow wells or from streams contaminated by sewage or other waste. Lack of money and loss of traditional knowledge also excluded them on one hand from the opportunities open to

[3] See the site of the NZ Ministry of Health/Manatū Hauora, "Independent Life Expectancy in New Zealand 2013", p. 7, in http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/independent-life-expectancy-new-zealand-2013-0.

[4] According to Woodward and Blakely, today the world record holders are Japanese women, who live 86 years on average (p. 228). Present-day longest-lived men are in Iceland (p. 263).

[5] Only one of the sources mentioned in the book claims they were 500,000.

[6] Quoted from the text of the Treaty by King.

Pākehā[7] on the other from the shelter of their own culture. Alcohol, malnutrition and tobacco were also health-damaging: "Although Māori were attracted by the prospects of new resources, and took advantage of British mercantilism in many ways, the new economy undermined the collective core of traditional society" (Woodward & Blakely 2014: 67).

As to the non-Māori population, the reasons of their longevity include many factors: the so-called "healthy migrant effect", that is, the medical/natural selection of migrants;[8] a plentiful protein-rich diet; wealth of local natural resources; low crowding and lack of health-damaging industry; low level of pollution compared to the European cities; an egalitarian society based on equal distribution of resources and land among non-Māori; a simple and flexible political system that could guarantee reforms rapidly; early introduction of an effective public health system; and early initiatives to extend education and promote the position of women in society. New Zealand was, in fact, the first country in modern times to grant women's suffrage with the Electoral Act of 1893 and to have the first woman mayor in the British Empire in the same year: Elizabeth Yates, elected mayor of Onehunga. Interestingly, an effect of women's early emancipation was the reduction of fertility in the late 1800s,[9] which led to both improvements in maternal health and lower child mortality, since more time and resources were available for each child. New Zealand was also one of the first countries to introduce primary education in 1877, which was free, compulsory and secular; and the first in the British Commonwealth to establish the principle of public responsibility for health services with the Social Security Act of 1938, ensuring free care for all based on an income-related social security levy (2014: 143). What emerges from the study of Woodward and Blakely is that a population's life expectancy is affected by a multiplicity of factors: material and cultural, physiological and medical, political and socio-economic. European immigrants prospered because in New Zealand they found better material living conditions than at home and a more egalitarian society while, at the same time, they could maintain their own culture and economic system. New Zealand social structure was more flexible and less classist than the British one. Here European citizens were closer to the centres of power and were guaranteed more possibilities and rights, but this occurred to the detriment of indigenous people.

The decline of Māori was followed by a slow resurgence which started at the beginning of the twentieth century and was first of all due to the reduction in deaths from tuberculosis and other infections (except for the influenza epidemic of 1918, which was the most serious setback to their recovery). Other causes contributing to this upturn include a more effective involvement of Māori communities in public health interventions, which helped infant nutrition and other aspects of primary care, the expansion of primary education, and a drive to open up opportunities for women (for example through nurse training). Improvement in housing and

[7] New Zealanders of European origin in New Zealand English. As for the word *Māori*, also *Pākehā* should be written with a macron on the long vowels 'a'. However, in some quotations it appears without the macron, as in the past this rule was not generally respected.

[8] Woodward and Blakely use the expression "healthy migrant effect" with reference to the selection of immigrants that took place prior to their departure from Europe: "Newspaper advertisements and posters in the UK in the 1870s called for married agricultural labourers and single female domestic servants, provided they were 'sober, industrious, of good moral character, of sound mind and in good health'" (2014: 86). After the formal health checks that potential settlers had to pass, the long and arduous journey constituted another 'natural selection': the frailest ones generally died before the arrival in New Zealand.

[9] Changes in expectations and public attitude towards women may have contributed to their delaying marriage and child-rearing. Generally, empowered and educated women tend to take greater control over reproduction. When women have their first baby at older ages, average family size is reduced. In smaller and more widely spaced families children receive more care, are better fed and have fewer accidents (2014: 100). All this had an effect in reducing mortality rate.

sanitation was effected by legislation such as the Native House Act of 1935. Another important factor was the activism of the so-called Young Māori Party in the first three decades of the twentieth century, in particular of James Carroll, Peter Buck, Āpirana Ngata and Māui Pōmare. These educated Māori politicians, "sophisticated in things Māori and Pākehā" alike (King 2004: 59), laid the foundation for a new style of Māori leadership, aimed at taking advantage of Western thinking and technology while at the same time promoting advances of Māori culture and identity.

As mentioned before, after 1940 non-Māori fell off the top of world rankings in life expectancy. Interestingly, the authors underline that "New Zealand's role as a major exporter of meat and dairy products may have affected the country's capacity to adopt new paradigms of healthy behaviour when the predominant causes of mortality changed from infectious diseases to chronic conditions such as heart disease and stroke" (2014: 143-44). So the post-Second-World-War trends in life expectancy depended heavily on what happened to cardiovascular disease and this, in turn, was influenced by economic policies determining consumers' dietary habits. Cancer and the effects of tobacco smoking also had a great impact on mortality in New Zealand throughout the twentieth century, together with road traffic crash deaths.

Māori longevity, on the other hand, increased markedly after 1940 thanks to more and more inclusive policies such as the 1938 Social Security Act, vaccination and sanitation programmes, and the urbanisation of Māori, which led to better housing, access to social and health services, educational opportunities and higher incomes (2014: 175). The Young Māori Party in the 1920s and 1930s had promoted land development schemes and cultural revival programmes. They wanted to protect and reassert Māori in traditional territories located in rural areas. Their aim was to offer "an opportunity for Māori culture, identity and confidence to recover after the trauma of nineteenth-century European colonisation" (King 2004: 116). This was certainly the first step of a process that took some time to develop and achieved maturation only later. The Second World War prompted a relocation of Māori people from rural to urban areas as a consequence of the new manpower regulations, the activities risen from the war effort, and the labouring and manufacturing jobs that became available in essential industries. King believes that the real Māori revival, the so-called Māori Renaissance of 1970s-1980s, occurred as a result of urbanisation. Although the migration from rural area to towns and cities initially weakened the Māori language and traditional values (the importance of communal spirit and the extended family, the cult of the ancestors, the bond with and respect for nature), it was "a prerequisite for Māori once again to imprint their culture and values on the nation as a whole. Urbanisation eventually brought the possibility of Māori remaining Māori, and at the same time participating in mainstream New Zealand social, cultural and political life" (King 2004: 116). The Māori Renaissance was in fact political as well as cultural. Māori made their voice heard in marches, demonstration, petitions and occupations. In 1975 the government established the Waitangi Tribunal to deliberate and rule on alleged breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi. Its powers were further increased in 1985, when its decisions could be applied retroactively. In 1981 two Māori educational institutions were founded: pre-school language immersion classes and primary schools with a curriculum based on Māori language, culture and traditions. In 1987 Māori was recognised as an official language of New Zealand along with English. At the same time, the Māori Renaissance marked a flowering of Māori cultural and artistic expressions, and produced the first indigenous published writers (Della Valle 2010: 95-6).

At present the increased political and economic weight of Māori in New Zealand life and politics has led them to have a say in the promotion of health strategies and the management of medical care according to specific ethnic and cultural principles of wellbeing. District Health Boards (DHBs) have been established with the aim to improve the health of Māori and reduce health disparities for Māori compared to other population groups in New Zealand. Māori Health

Plans (MHPs) are fundamental planning, reporting and monitoring documents, which underpin the DHBs' efforts to improve Māori health.[10] Official protocols have also been devised by the NZ Ministry of Health to develop constantly updated programmes, policies and interventions. In particular *He Korowai Oranga* (Māori Health Strategy) sets the overarching framework that guides the Government and the health and disability sector to achieve the best health outcomes for Māori. DHBs in particular should consider *He Korowai Oranga* in their planning, and in meeting their statutory objectives and functions for Māori health. The strategy was updated with input from across the sector during 2013/14 to ensure its relevance for the future. As explained in the Ministry's document, *pae ora* (healthy futures) is the Government's aim and reflects the specific notion of Māori wellbeing: "Pae ora is a holistic concept and includes three interconnected elements: mauri ora – healthy individuals; whānau ora – healthy families; and wai ora – healthy environments. All three elements of pae ora are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, and further strengthen the strategic direction for Māori health for the future" (Ministry of Health 2014: 4).[11] Interestingly, the document stresses the notion of Māori wellbeing as informed by a "holistic" approach, which sees individual, community and nature as interdependent and mutually collaborating to a healthy quality of life. The document acknowledges the crucial role of the family (intended as an extended community in Māori culture, including a large number of living relatives and the ancestors as well) for the individual's wellbeing claiming that:

> Each whānau is different and has a unique set of aspirations. To achieve whānau ora, the health system will work in a way that acknowledges these aspirations and the central role that whānau [family] play for many Māori, as a principal source of strength, support, security and identity. (Ministry of Health 2014: 5)[12]

Environmental issues such as the safeguard of primary natural resources (water, air, forests) and the threat of climate change are also explicitly mentioned as a cultural priority for Māori and a responsibility for them as New Zealanders:

> The concept of wai ora encapsulates the importance of the environments in which we live and that have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals, whānau [families] and communities. Wai ora literally refers to water, both as a resource and as an essential part of the environment that provides sustenance for life. The concept reflects the need for Māori to have access to resources and to live in environments that support and sustain a healthy life.
>
> Achieving wai ora will mean that the environment in which Māori, and all New Zealanders, live, work and play is safe. Wai ora also focuses on ensuring Māori have appropriate access to quality housing, safe drinking water and air, and healthy food, and that we are prepared for emergency events – for example, pandemics and natural hazards such as earthquakes. Dealing with the impact of climate change on health is also a focus for the future. (Ministry of Health 2014: 6)[13]

In 2006, the Ministry of Health released *Taonga Tuku Iho – Treasures of Our Heritage: Rongoā Development Plan*. *Rongoā* means 'medicine, healing'. The aim of the plan was to formalise the Māori traditional system of healing within the New Zealand public health system

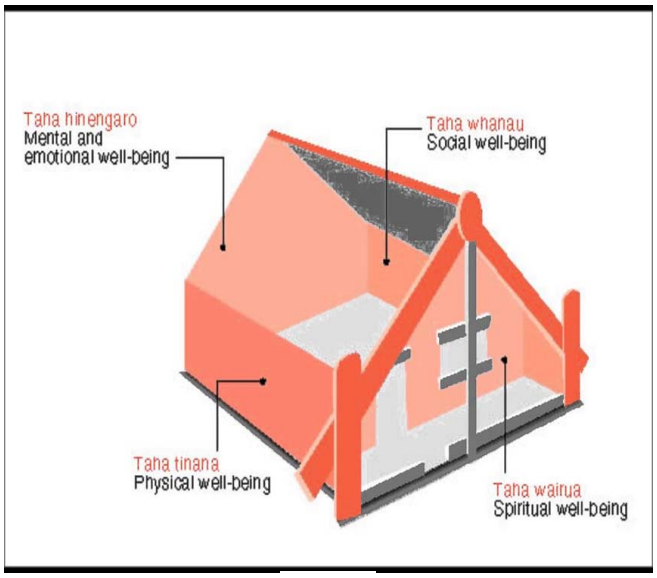
[10] http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/populations/maori-health/dhb-maori-health-plans-profiles-and-health-needs-assessments.
[11] See http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/guide-he-korowai-oranga-maori-health-strategy.
[12] See http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/guide-he-korowai-oranga-maori-health-strategy.
[13] Seehttp://www.health.govt.nz/publication/guide-he-korowai-oranga-maori-health-strategy.

and provide a framework for strengthening the provision of quality medical services throughout New Zealand according to cultural/ethnic principles. As the document explains: "Rongoā Māori is formulated in a Māori cultural context in which the understanding of events and consequences leading to ill health are addressed through a range of culturally determined responses. These culturally bounded responses include *rakau rongoā* (native flora herbal preparations), *mirimiri* (massage), and *karakia* (prayer)" (Ministry of Health 2006: 2).[14] Rongoā reflects a holistic approach to health and has a long story of usage and credibility among Māori despite the enactment of the Tohunga Suppression Bill in 1907, whose aim was to eradicate what was seen as "charlatanism in Māori folk medicine" at the time (King 2004: 67).

As I explored elsewhere (Della Valle 2013), also in psychiatry the prevailing idea is that among indigenous people cultural identity is a prerequisite for (mental) wellbeing. A major figure in this field is Māori psychiatrist Mason Durie, who has been working in public health since the late 1980s. He is the author of the concept of *Whare Tapu Whā* (the house of the four cornerstones or sides), which is his model of the Māori understanding of health, as shown in pictures 1 and 2. In his view there are four dimensions to health: *Taha Tinana* (physical wellbeing), *Taha Wairua* (spiritual wellbeing), *Taha Whānau* (family or social wellbeing) and *Taha Hinengaro* (mental and emotional wellbeing). Each of these four dimensions influences and supports the others. Should one of the four dimensions be missing or in some way be damaged, a person or a collective may become 'unbalanced' and subsequently unwell (Della Valle 2013: 137-8).

Picture 1

[14] See http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/taonga-tuku-iho-treasures-our-heritage-rongoa-development-plan



Picture 2

Te Puāwaitanga: Māori Mental Health National Strategic Framework, an official protocol issued by the Ministry of Health in 2002, acknowledges Durie's work as a guideline and claims that the project should reflect "Māori realities and Māori priorities", promote initiatives "in an inclusive and integrated manner", and implement "holistic models of care and wellbeing" (Ministry of Health 2002: 8). The subsequent document, *Te Puāwaiwhero: The Second Māori Mental Health and Addiction National Strategic Framework 2008–2015*, collects the gains of the previous protocol and further reinforces its view by underlining "the inextricable link between health and culture" and the centrality of healthy families for the mental wellbeing of Māori people. The framework also points to the socio-economic position as a determinant of mental health and underlines that "Māori are over-represented among those living in areas of highest deprivation relative to non-Māori. Māori therefore bear a disproportionate burden of risk for mental ill health due to socioeconomic disadvantage" (Ministry of Health 2008: 4). The solution is to be found with the development of responsive policies, plans and services, which recognise and accept a specific Māori cultural universe with different clinical and cultural needs: "Responding to the differences between Māori and other population groups is key to achieving at least equity in mental health for Māori by 2015" (Ministry of Health 2008: 17).

The conclusions we can draw from this overview is that health and wellbeing are deeply affected by power relations, socio-economic factors and governmental policies but they are also culturally embedded notions. In New Zealand history, colonisation transferred health-generating resources, such as land, from Māori to non-Māori: one group's gain was at another's expense. Europeans prospered in New Zealand by imposing their own culture and social organisation, as well as a system of capitalist liberal economy. The decline of Māori was due to the spread of new diseases but also to the disempowerment and deracination indigenous people underwent in their own country. This determined poor health among Māori and a gap in life expectancy between non-Māori and Māori, which has been slowly filled in the course of time through both harsh confrontation and intercultural dialogue, finally leading to political and economic changes. Interestingly, Europeans brought to New Zealand a system that first guaranteed their wellbeing as the healthiest country in the world, but the prospect of considerable gain caused them to lose the record. This happened after 1940, when the New Zealand government did not intervene to change the dietary habits of its citizens in order to protect its profile as primary producing and exporting country of dairies and frozen meat. As the logic of profit prevailed,

coronary heart disease and stroke affected mortality rate heavily.[15] However, some chinks in the armour of New Zealand capitalist economy had already appeared in the decade before 1940 due to the consequences of the 1929 Wall Street Crash and the Depression, as recorded in several literary works. One can also suppose that this crisis may have affected the later loss of New Zealand's world record in longevity for non-Māori.

Literature is a mirror of reality and is increasingly used in historical research together with documentary essays. The first appearance of truly autochthonous literary works in New Zealand is quite recent: it dates back to the 1930s and was produced by non-Māori only. For Māori published authors we have to wait until the 1970s. Despite its short life, New Zealand literature has not failed to offer a realistic picture of a country torn between the specificity of its local problems and the inclusion in the wide global market and finance. The second part will illustrate the contradictions of New Zealand socio-economic system – a provincial antipodean version of Western capitalism – and explore different notions of wellbeing among its citizens, non-Māori and Māori, through a selection of authors and short stories.

2. Health, Wellbeing and Good Life in Some New Zealand Short Stories

The society built by European settlers in New Zealand guaranteed them prosperity and better conditions at first, especially if compared to what they had left back home. However, this antipodean country was also susceptible to the oscillations of a larger financial and economic system. The Depression of 1929 left a deep scar on a Dominion that had thrived on the privileged commercial bond with 'mother Britain' and was considered its 'grocer'. The economic crisis brought Britain to its knees. The consequence was that, for the first time, New Zealand was left out in the cold and saw the dark side of capitalism and liberal economy. This is recorded in the works of Roderick Finlayson (1904-1992) and Frank Sargeson (1903-1982), two well-known Pākehā authors who started publishing in the mid-1930s.

Both writers are quite critical of the capitalist turn of their country, which resulted in pervasive materialism and individualism as well as widespread social inequalities, not only between Māori and Pākehā (as it had previously occurred), but within the Pākehā majority itself at the time of crisis. Finlayson chose to write only about Māori in his first collection of short stories, *Brown Man's Burden* (1938), as he explains in its preface:

> It may be asked why I have written almost solely of the Maori people in these stories of New Zealand life. […] For, in spite of the destruction of Maori culture by the European, and the gradual invasion of Maori life by modern materialism, the *Maori still retains much of the poetic life of his forefathers*. By "poetic" one doesn't mean a sentimental enthusing about flowers and moonlight, but rather a life dependent on the forces and powers of Nature – a life governed by poetic justice (which in the end is God's justice) rather than by convention and mere formal justice […].
> There is no place in art for the artificial or the imitative. And for my part, I prefer to write of those, left almost landless by the European, who are still more *truly of the land* than we who have dispossessed them. (1938: i-ii, my emphases)

His choice is reinforced in a pamphlet, *Our Life in This Land* (1940), in which he launches a vocal attack on the spread of industrialism, consumer society and capitalism in New Zealand and around the world. In outlining the history of the country he points out its increasing decline

[15] Woodward and Blakely note that the peak of the coronary heart disease epidemic in NZ was about 1970. Risk factors such as tobacco smoking, saturated fat and cholesterol also played a part (2014: 155-6).

due to the loss of that "salutary contact with nature" (1940: 4) that had been guaranteed by its isolation during the pioneering period and before its entry into a capitalist economy and a global market. Finlayson never mentions the word 'globalisation' but he somehow predicts a homogenised world dominated by the same economic logic and devoid of cultural individuality. He stigmatises mass production, intensive agriculture and the mechanisation of humankind, and denounces the system's encouragement of ruthless competition instead of cooperation, its making culture a mere distraction and leisure a pure emptiness of body and mind. Finlayson questions a notion of progress and civilisation grounded on material achievements, efficiency and the possession of technological items. He envisages mass migrations and wars as a consequence of the unfair distribution of wealth in the world and also the advent of a world environmental crisis. His words may seem dogmatic and polemic, as he himself admits in the preface, but he actually foresaw many issues of the present.

Finlayson's foreword to his first collection is a celebration of the core principles underlying Māori culture, which have been lost in Western materialist societies and which he thinks necessary to human wellbeing. In particular, the attachment to one's family or community of origin, the importance attributed to conviviality and human relationships, the acknowledgement of people's spiritual and emotional life, and an attitude towards the environment which is not merely dictated by economic profit but is grounded in the idea that humans are a part of nature not its masters. His stories do not fall into easy sentimentalism, but offer a realistic representation of the rural Māori of his time that becomes more sombre in his next work *Sweet Beulah Land* (1942), dealing with urbanised Māori. Readers can see the effects of colonisation and capitalist economy on indigenous people. As Lydia Wevers has noticed, Finlayson doesn't depict Māori as stereotypes or as less complex than the Pākehā. Though they are "comic, tragic, cheerful, drunken, dying, polluted, and corrupted, characterised by the muddled ambiguities of a colonized existence, the stories affirm a culture whose loss brings deprivation and caricature and absence to those Maori who reject or forget it" (Wevers 1991: 236). A typical example are the two stories dealing with Tamarua and his son Peta, who represent two opposite views of life. In "On Top of the Hill", the old man is content with his little shack located in the healthy place of the title, blessed by sunshine and fresh air, looking "out over the coastal flax swamps on the one hand and over the rich farmlands of Otane on the other" (Finlayson 1938: 16). Tamarua followed the advice of his father, the chief, who told him "never to live down on the flat" (16). At that time, however, Māori still owned their land, cultivated wheat, corn and root crops, and "nobody hungry, nobody poor then [*sic*]" (17). Now many landless Māori work and live in the swamps: relief workers and flax-cutters, making good money but also ending up "coughing their lungs away" (16). Finlayson's story signals the passage of the best land from Māori to Pākehā and the unfortunate Māori destiny to live and work in unhealthy environments, with the consequent spread of diseases such as tuberculosis and whooping cough, as mentioned in Blakely and Woodward's study. So, when Peta comes back from the city and tells his father he is going to work as a flax-cutter, Tamarua is very upset. He regrets having encouraged his son to get an education and look for better job opportunities. Peta tried and failed to make it in the Pākehā urban world. Now he is frustrated and angry. He denounces a system that exploits human and non-human resources to the last drop, does not provide a fair distribution of wealth and guarantees success only to very few: "It was the meanness and shabbiness of the Pakeha, Peta said. He couldn't stand it any more. They try to squeeze the last drop of life out of man, beast or earth – those town people. He worked hard and saved money, and what thanks did he get for it, eh? Pah! To hell with hard work!" (17-18). Having been hybridised and become 'un-Māorilike', he cannot stay on his father's land either, as advised by Tamarua, but decides to join the Māori labourers in the swamps. Peta's and Tamarua's different reactions exemplify a generation gap and the hybrid condition of Māori

youth, excluded from success in the new system but attracted by the apparent material wellbeing that this seems to offer:

> But Peta said no, he could never settle down to a simple life again. He was going down to his gay friends in the village. He must have a life with a bit of speed and pep in it. "You see" he told Tamarua, "I've found out just how rotten the Pakeha civilisation is. They don't pretend to follow the virtues they preach to the Maori. Religion, government, business – it's all the same – get what you can out of it and to hell with the rest. They taught me that anyway so I'm going to live that way for a change. The man who enjoys the fat of the land is the one who hasn't had to shed a drop of sweat or save a single penny in his life. The others go cold and hungry."
> Tamarua couldn't believe it was as bad as that. His forefathers knew neither poverty nor disease. They lived in this fertile land and wanted for nothing. (18-19)

Like many deracinated young Māori, away from the watchful eye of the community and devoid of strong cultural models, Peta has become addicted to a lifestyle that induces everybody to earn more and more in order to become great consumers but doesn't give everybody the same chances of success. He ends up taking the wrong path: he joins a gang and is arrested. In "New Year" Peta is sent to prison for using an iron bar to hit a rival who was harassing his sister. Peta boasts about his deed before the judge, openly challenging Pākehā authority: "He stuck to his story of how'd done it on purpose, as if he was proud of acting like a young Maori blood instead of a law-abiding Pakeha" (27). By doing so, he is sentenced to three years' hard labour and subsequently perishes in prison from tuberculosis.

In his last collection *In Georgina's Shady Garden*, published in 1988 but including stories written over a span of 40 years, Finlayson also shows the effects of Western materialism on non-Māori. He deploys a gallery of Pākehā characters who are one way or another, professionally or existentially frustrated, imaginatively inhibited and sexually repressed. They appear perceptively numbed, unable to solve their tensions and inexorably destined to disaster or failure. Those who are trapped in the cult of respectability and materialism act as persecutory agents of the unconventional or imaginative ones, enforcing an inquisitorial control on their morality. Human relationships become struggles for supremacy and are characterised by diffidence or distrust, due to miscommunication, enclosure or rigidity, or lack of perception. Marriage is the tomb of love and imagination in "A Nice Little Nest of Eggs" (1947) and "The Girl at the Golden Gate" (1948), where dull asexual wives act as strict normative agents leading their repressed husbands to seek affection elsewhere, only to be fooled by those women. The optician's assistant of "You Little Witch" (1978), who has renounced an emotional relationship and passively accepts a dreary life with his twin sister, escapes into a world of dreams and loses touch with reality. The only imaginative act he can make is misinterpreted and punished. In "Flowers and Fruit" (1982) the hypochondriac Weston, indulged by a mother-like elderly wife, vents his frustration on the inhabitants and flowers of the island where he has been appointed fruit inspector, projecting his destructive instincts on them. Finlayson seems to suggest that the material wellbeing and fulfilment provided in the Pākehā world have a price to be paid in terms of people's emotional, imaginative and instinctual life.

Sargeson was amply celebrated as the founding father of New Zealand national literature for his faithful rendition of the local idiom as well as his remarkable social fresco. He offers another bleak view of New Zealand society in the aftermath of the economic crisis of the 1930s. His work has been seen as an exemplary model of realist and socially committed literature, and deals mainly with the dominant Pākehā majority made of few soulless rich and a great number of destitute workers. Most of Sargeson's characters are itinerant labourers or job-hunters, often unemployed, seldom married and frequently without any apparent family connection. They are depicted either in their lonely condition of seasonal workers, in isolated farms or the bush, or

against the desolate background of cities inhabited by materialist and unimaginative bourgeois, like the narrator's uncle in "Conversation with My Uncle" (1935).[16] Sargeson dismantled the pioneers' faith in the 'New Zealand Dream', showing the immanent void of a puritanical bourgeois society, built on imported values that have lost their roots and deepest sense. As James K. Baxter noticed, the country described by Sargeson is one where "the prevalent philosophy is an amalgam of liberalism and broken-down Protestantism. Ethics remain with us though faith has departed" (Baxter 1954: 8). In this dislocated world of spiritual aridity, too narrow and too empty at the same time, economic success is reached only by few and only at the expense of their emotional and imaginative life. Man's primary affective needs are underestimated or neglected, and sacrificed to the principles of respectability and economic fulfilment. Families or couples, far from being foundational elements of the society, appear as broken structures, unable to offer any warmth or protection, as epitomised by the dull parenthood of "A Good Boy" (1936).

The above-mentioned stories depict the public and private side of a typical middle-class man. The uncle epitomises the pragmatism, cold rationality and emotional frigidity of the successful businessman who "wears a hard knocker", doesn't show interest in "what you've got to say any more than it interests him to look into people's faces in the street", "loves the sound of his own voice", "never reads books", "never went to picnics" and finally "can't suppose". The narrator's concluding remark leaves no doubts on Sargeson's critical view: "Oh Lord! It's a good job everybody isn't like my uncle. We don't want a world full of dead men walking about in hard knockers" (Sargeson 1973: 9-10). The father in "A Good Boy" seems trapped in a monotonous family life devoid of affection or excitement:

> I was always real sorry for mother and father. They didn't seem to have any pleasure in life. Father never went out after he'd come home from work. He just sat and read the paper. His stomach was bad too, and made noises, and he kept on saying, Pardon. It used to get on my nerves. I used to watch him and mother when I was supposed to be doing my homework. Sometimes the look on my mother's face gave me the idea that she wasn't properly happy and was wanting pleasure just the same as I was. (Sargeson 1973: 26)

The boy's description of his parents as "good people" who wanted to make a "good boy" out of him contrasts with the result of their repressive education: the boy ends up killing his girlfriend. Post-Depression society is marked by inequality. If the ruling middle class can still manage a dignified lifestyle, people from lower classes struggle to make a living. In "A Piece of Yellow Soap" (1935) the narrator is a milkman, who never succeeds in collecting the money owed to his firm by one customer: the woman with the yellow soap. The sight of her "fingers just out of the washtub", always "bloodless and shrunken" (Sargeson 1973: 12) and holding tightly the piece of soap, paralyses the man and deprives him of all his power. The soap, evoking fatigue and poverty, becomes her talisman and defence against creditors of an unjust justice. In "An Attempt at an Explanation" (1937) a hard-working single mother cannot afford to buy her son some food. After trying unsuccessfully to pawn the family Bible, mother and son sit on a park bench alone and miserable, and watch the minister of their Methodist Church passing by, strolling and admiring flowers. "They Gave Her a Rise" (1936) mixes the struggle for survival together with a further bleak view of a Pākehā family. Here, Mrs Bowman puts the

[16] The year in brackets of the short stories refers to their first publication, generally in newspapers or magazines. All the stories cited are included in the collection *The Stories of Frank Sargeson*, Longman Paul, Auckland 1973 [1964].

logic of profit before her daughter's personal safety by pushing the latter back to work in an ammunition factory after the explosion that has killed two of her friends.

The idea expressed by Finlayson in his preface that, unlike Māori, Pākehā New Zealanders are no more "truly of the land" and have lost the "poetic" quality of life is also formulated by Sargeson. In "Gods Live in Woods" (1943) he juxtaposes a taciturn farmer, Uncle Henry, and his verbose young nephew Roy, who is visiting him. Henry lives alone on his farm, which he has broken in from the heavy bush country. He epitomises the pioneering spirit of the white settler who tamed the bush to build his personal New Zealand Dream. Yet, he seems to question it too. The experiential knowledge he obtained by living in close contact with nature taught him to respect the environment. He looks knowingly at the slips that scar the soil he has cleared from the bush and mentions a flood that carried away the fence the winter before. Roy tells his uncle he has just joined a "Rationalist" group and turned his back on religion or any sort of spiritual approach to reality. His theoretical approach to nature makes him consider it as mere matter to be exploited. Consequently, he is surprised at hearing that Henry will not go on cutting out the bush, despite the profit he could get from it. Landslides, one consequence of deforestation, are recurrent images in Sargeson's fiction, symbolising the blindness of the Western notion of development as well as spiritual/moral blindness.[17] Henry's attitude epitomises the notion of agriculture as culture and knowledge as experiential knowledge (an approach very similar to the indigenous one). At the end of the story Roy gets lost in the bush. When he comes back late at night, scared and bleeding, his clothes filthy and torn, he has experienced the bush as a natural and spiritual force, and to exorcise his fears he takes refuge in his rationalist approach – his new religion – and claims that all bush should be got rid of. But Henry knows better than that. "Just Trespassing Thanks" (1964) features an old suburban recluse, Edward Corrie, who prefers to remain indoors immersed in his poetry to avoid seeing what "many abstract forces" together with bulldozers and builders, have done around his "ancient two-room cottage" (Sargeson 1973, 272). Interestingly, Sargeson uses the term "abstract" to indicate man's stultifying, rational detachment from practical knowledge and the adjective "ancient" to endow his cottage with a dignity from the past. Edward's senses are so offended by the sight of tarmac and cement and by the fumes coming from the nearby motorway that he seldom goes out and always wears dark sunglasses. Edward's dismay is conveyed in the following lines:

> While he was putting his feet up he glanced out the window, where the countryside had been replaced by cement and tarmac: *wilderness* was perhaps the appropriate name for what had once been woodland – and hardly the right kind of breeding-ground for a race of deities. (274, my emphasis)

While denouncing the uncontrolled development enforced by Pākehā society in the name of progress, Sargeson seems to connect it with the loss of a spiritual connection with nature, evidenced by Edward's definition of the urbanised area as "wilderness" unsuitable to gods. The trespassers, however, are not only the cement and tarmac invading Edward's house, but also a group of young people wanted by the police – two Pākehā and one of Polynesian origin – who are using his house as a temporary shelter. A subtle link is activated between the man and the three fugitives as they are poets. Poetry becomes the means to open channels of communication between different generations and races, to recreate a communal space or "a country of the imagination" (Sargeson 1973: 282) alternative to the dominating rationalist and economic logic,

[17] In Sargeson's novel *I Saw in My Dream* (1949) a couple of Pākehā farmers, the Macgregors, are buried under a landslide, which seems to epitomise the ultimate blindness of people who had proved backward, puritanical and racially prejudiced throughout the novel.

where "deities" can be repaid "by token money" (283). Imagination is seen therefore not only as a refuge but also as a subversive weapon, embodied by the young poets on the run from the law who defy the system.

Noel Hilliard (1929-97) seems to draw on both Finlayson and Sargeson. He delved into contemporary Māori life and issues in a way unprecedented in New Zealand literature, with the exception of Finlayson. Both Hilliard and Finlayson anticipated many of the themes later treated in fictions by Māori writers. Hilliard, however, was the first New Zealand writer to openly deal with the theme of race relations at a time when the urbanization of Māori had led the two cultures in close contact. He also continued Sargeson's socially committed realist tradition, although his choice of topics and characters was more radical and includes 'unseemly' categories such as prostitutes ("Girl on a Corner", "Anita's Eyes", "At Angelo's" and "Send Somebody Nice"), hippies ("The Dropout"), gays and lesbians ("The Telegram" and "Corrective Trainings"), and displaced young delinquents ("Absconder" and "The Girl from Kaeo").[18]

Hilliard describes the contradictions of a society that has imposed a model of fake wellbeing, based on material achievement, and has produced large inequalities among its members. The dominant attitude is one of closure towards any issue that does not conform to a logic of profit and cannot be analysed within a rational framework. Against this background, the Māori are the most disadvantaged category. Hilliard was particularly interested in contrasting Western and indigenous worldviews, which is the subject matter of his novel *The Glory and the Dream* (1978), dealing with the interracial marriage between Paul and Netta. The book succeeds in exposing culturally relevant differences that emerge subsequently in Māori literature too, in particular notions of time, money and ownership, family and communality, education, rationality and imagination, spirituality, progress and wellbeing. These contrasts can also be found in some short stories; for example, "Man on a Road", from the collection *A Piece of Land* (1963). A travelling couple stops the car to see the view of a beautiful bay from the top of a hill. When a Māori farmer passes by, they ask him information about the fish and seafood available in the bay. The man's account illustrates the effects of the Western notion of 'progress' on the area and exemplifies many other cases in New Zealand, where mass tourism and intensive fishing have caused pollution, consumption of the land and depletion of seabed resources. This happened when coastal land, traditionally belonging to Māori tribes, passed into the hands of private Pākehā investors and drift-net fishing started. Land and beach were divided into sections to favour touristic development. Camping-grounds, bungalows and baches[19] rose everywhere. Hordes of people came to practice fishing as a 'sport'. Some lots got a private beach and private access to the sea, too, an idea completely alien to Māori thinking, as claimed in the following dialogue between the Māori man and the narrator:

> He pointed to a tangle of wire-netting on the beach. "See that? He's got his own private beach down there now. Nobody else's, just his. Think of that. His own private beach. I used to spend half my summers down there on that piece of sand when I was a kid, and my boys did the same."
> "Yes" I said, "I suppose he wishes he could buy his own private sunset, too." (Hilliard 1977: 56)

In traditional Māori culture private property should not be applied to the land in the same way as it can't be applied to water or air. A further comment of the Māori man on the useless

[18] All of them are from the collection *Send Somebody Nice* (1976).
[19] In New Zealand English a "bach" is a beach house or holiday home, made of wood and very often modest.

decimation of fish in the bay expresses a different sensibility towards the environment between Māori and Pākehā:

> "The beach down there" – pointing to a furlong of sand between two tidal creeks – "used to be thick with flounder years ago. They started selling sections, put big advertisements in the city papers. People came in and built, they brought nets with them, they'd take hundreds at one sweep. Now the flounders've gone away, they've cleared them out. You can go out night after night and never see a one [*sic*]. I had to give it up. Too much like hard work, out half the night to get one or two if you're lucky. No, I'd never use a net. I only take what I need. Now, what did they do with those hundreds and hundreds they netted?" He peered at me intently with his deep-set eyes. "Well, they couldn't eat them all, so they just threw them away. The beach used to stink with the heaps of them. Flies… you never saw so many flies. I've seen them take flounder here by the hundred and count them and then dump them on the beach to go rotten – still alive – never even had the sense to throw them back. No they didn't want flounder. All they wanted was to go back to the city and say to all their friends, We caught so-many hundred flounder at the weekend. That's all they wanted. Not the fish." (Hilliard 1977: 56)

The total disregard for other species, the yearning for accumulation just for accumulation's sake, and the blindness to the consequences of such a behaviour for future generations imply an approach to the natural world in terms of absolute domination, which contrasts with the idea of being in harmony with the environment at the basis of the Māori notion of wellbeing.

Another important point made in the story is the destruction of any other economic model by the all-pervasive capitalist development. The Māori man tells how his family once owned most of the land around the bay but had to sell it in times of need. He still has his own farm, some paddocks and the beachfront, which is constantly under assault from new investors. Some of his land was also confiscated by the council to allow access to the sea to neighbouring tourist activities. He laments that it is very hard to manage the farm alone in terms of costs and work, after his sons have moved out. The man is afraid he might have to sell it one day in the future. In fact, subsistence economy requires a large community, where every member plays a different role, but capitalism has broken traditional extended families. Young generations are attracted by the city and end up joining the flood of low-paid employed workers.

"The Girl from Kaeo", dealing with juvenile delinquency, offers another image of the blight resulting from the disruption of extended families, traditional economic structures and, indirectly, a specific cultural framework. The point of view is that of a seventeen-year-old girl fallen prey to a gang in which free sex is practiced and even forced on girl members. Interestingly, her stream of consciousness, reported in italics, is framed within the bureaucratic language of the social service officer who is examining her case, as in the following excerpt:

> Take this one now. Typical. When she was picked up she was wearing a man's shirt and jeans and no shoes, and she had bad teeth and crab-lice and sticking-plaster on a cut in her cheek. Look at her hair and fingernails. Note the tattoos on arms and hands and fingers and knees. […]
> this man he said to me Where you from? and I said Kaeo and he said That's nice Im [sic] from Kaeo too, where abouts [sic] in Kaeo? But I said nothing […] and when I said nothing he looked at me in a way to show he thought I was telling a lies [sic] about where I come from so I said to him All I remember about Kaeo is there was fifteen of us and we all slept on the floor and I never saw my fathers [sic] face because I was always looking at his boots
> Look into her living conditions. Was he living at home, or boarding, or sleeping around? Would you say her living conditions were very high? High? Average? Poor? Very bad?
> If she was not living at home, look into her relationships with her kinsfolk in general and scale them as Very Good / Good / Average / Poor / Very Bad. (Hilliard 1977: 93)

This narrative device shows (also graphically) contrasting approaches to notions of good life and wellbeing. In the girl's words, the reader faces the excruciating results of growing in poverty, without material certainties and emotional references. On the other hand the man's report is just a cold, rational, and quantitative evaluation, as if he was conducting a survey, and does not take into account the cultural and emotional framework of the subject in question. Another quotation will illustrate the two diverging viewpoints:

> Establish what her attitudes are towards authority in general and particularly towards the police, the probation service, welfare, and institution officers. Classify under Very Good / Good / Reasonable / Poor/ Antagonistic.
> and we use [sic] to get our water from the bush, the creek in the bush, but a slip came down and spoilt the place where we use to go and so after we had to get it from the side creek where is all the wiwi[20] and was all right too but not so good the bush water [sic]. And my mother she use to say the side creek water was not so good the bush water, that bush water it was beautiful water. Lovely water
> and in the city I use to think of my mother and my eyes they would prickle when I thought of the bush water and how my mother said it was beautiful water, lovely water
> and how many in the city that all think theyre [sic] so smart, how many of thems [sic] know about bush water or even there are different kinds of water and it doesnt [sic] just only come from out the tap? […]
> Form an opinion on her manner and ease of communication. Would you say she was very easy to get along with? Would you describe her as moderately open? Is she suspicious and evasive? Does she lie even when she can have no doubt the truth is already known? (Hilliard 1977: 94)

The above-mentioned passages, with their references to the importance of family bonds and a salubrious environment in achieving wellbeing, elucidate what has been previously mentioned about a culturally determined notion of good life. In this specific context, the disintegration of kinship communities and the loss of a healthy environment bring about only degradation and misery. For Māori, *pae ora* (healthy future) is a holistic concept including healthy individuals, as parts of healthy families and healthy environments. The material/physical, emotional/affective and environmental/external aspects are mutually interdependent and collaborate to one's health and wellbeing. The girl's practice of group free sex appears as a desperate search of love, warmth, and an absurd surrogate for a 'family':

> and it was loving and it was always too hard and much too often but always good and warm and loving and it was having a lot of real and touching people close to you and yes Johnny any time Johnny please Johnny too again please yes and how often you want me Johnny how often you like Johnny you so good to me Johnny please too sleepy no not and you must and if you want yes and never stop and not them Johnny no just only you Johnny please just only us please Johnny just only us this time please Johnny PLEASE (Hilliard 1977: 94-5)

What Sargeson, Finlayson and Hilliard have in common is the conviction that capitalist economy and its value system not only have irreversibly upset the indigenous cultural world but have promoted a fake model of wellbeing, based on material and monetary wealth, which has enslaved Pākehā as well. The great quantity of frustrated and unhappy Pākehā characters portrayed in literature together with the numerous images of misery and degradation of Māori are a signal of a general lack of real wellbeing. The Māori Renaissance of the 1970s (together

[20] The name for several species of native plant found on moist lands, in coastal marsh, and salty sand-flats.

with the increasing influence of Māori in New Zealand life and politics) served as a useful reminder of other possible notions of wealth, health and wellbeing for all New Zealanders.

Witi Ihimaera and Patricia Grace were the first published Māori writers in their respective gender. They both went through a 'pastoral' phase in the 1970s, characterised by the retrieval of Māori culture and identity, and then through a more militant one in the 1980s-1990s, marked by the denunciation of the destitute condition of their people in New Zealand society and the struggle for self-determination. As we mentioned before, some of their issues and topics had been anticipated by Finlayson and Hilliard. In more recent times Ihimaera's and Grace's works seem to have developed a wider perspective and overcome the horizons of New Zealand bicultural dualism: they look to problems relevant to the world (like environmental issues) and affirm values that are universally applicable. The collection *Ihimaera: His Best Stories* (2003) mixes old stories (sometimes with slight changes) of significance for the present and brand new ones. "The Seahorse and the Reef" (first published in 1977 and reprinted in the 2003 collection) is a good example. It conveys an idea of wellbeing grounded in the fundamental values of Māori culture: the centrality of the extended family, the importance of a convivial life, of sharing and reciprocity, the attachment to the ancestral land for one's balance and identity, and the respect of the environment. The story is set at a time when Māori were mostly urbanised and describes the Sundays spent by the narrator's family at the reef just outside the town where they lived. That was an important communal moment after the "diaspora" to the cities, "a good time for being family again and for enjoying our tribal ways" (Ihimaera 2003: 19). Women chatted happily while looking for seafood, men dived into the water to catch fish, children played together in the pools watching the plants and animals of the sea. The title refers to a specific episode, when the children found a seahorse but their father told them to "leave it here in its own home for the sea gives it life and beauty" (Ihimaera 2003: 20). These communal days also implied didactic moments, when adults taught children to respect the sea and treat the creatures living in it with reverence:

> "Kids, you must take from the sea only the kai [food] you need and only the amount you need to please your bellies. If you take more, then it is waste. […] The sea is good to us, it gives us kai moana [seafood] to eat. It is a food basket. As long as we respect it, it will continue to feed us. If, in your search for shellfish, you lift a stone from its lap, return the stone to where it was. Try not to break pieces of the reef for it is the home of many kai moana. And do not leave litter behind you when you leave the sea." (Ihimaera 2003: 20)

This timeless convivial experience is good both for the human spirit – insofar as it implies socialising and being in contact with natural beauty – and for the earth itself, because "with sharing there was little waste" (Ihimaera 2003: 20). However it is abruptly terminated one day, when they find a sign forbidding seafood gathering due to the pollution of the bay. The image of a yellow liquid curling like fingers around the reef recalls the compression of the neck by a hand, which is what is happening: the suffocation of natural life and healthy traditions. The story finishes with an old woman crying out a *tangi* (funeral) lament to the sea.

Environmental issues are a priority in Māori culture and in the collection. Nuclear threat is explored in "Wiwi" (2003 [1995]) through a reversal of perspective: New Zealand is conducting nuclear tests in the remote Îsle de la Cité, Paris, raising the disconcerted protest of French "natives" and governments of nearby "atolls" including Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Monaco, Italy, Portugal and Spain (156-7)."Dustbins" (2003[1995]) warns the reader about the consequences of consumerism and undifferentiated waste in the paradoxical final episode of the

unwanted baby thrown away into the rubbish-bin as any other useless object.[21] In "Someone Is Looking at Me" (2003) environmental, ethical and cultural issues are intertwined, showing paradoxical solutions to the problems of the present in an appalling Fourth Millennium. Unsustainable development and demographic growth have been handled by exploring space and colonising new worlds, which provide resources for "World 1". "Wise rulers", called "patriarchs", have preserved humankind by establishing a new world order based on the notion that all people are equal. Thanks to the progress of genetic engineering, they have managed to create only two types of men: rulers and workers. Workers have replaced computers. Nationalisms and biblical enmities have been replaced by ghastly homogeneity. The story tells of a woman who is sent with other workers to colonise "World 16" and develops an intense attachment to her last son, contravening her role as a simple "breeder" of workers. She hides her son for a year and breastfeeds him until she is discovered by the authorities, who take the child away following the protocol. However, the bond between mother and son cannot be erased and the son will recognise his mother's gaze in a crowd by telepathy, once he has become an important personality thanks to his special power. The story, a mix of fairy tale and science fiction, warns us about the dangers of a hyper-scientific global society and affirms the importance of individuality, diversity, family ties and emotional bonds. As the narrator paradoxically underlines: "It is a true story and it will happen soon" (Ihimaera 2003: 194).

Similar issues are at the centre of Grace's collection *Small Holes in the Silence* (2004). Consumerism is delicately made fun of in "Curly Top and Ponytail", where the narrating woman offers to entertain two six-year-old girls while their mother is buying her umpteenth pair of shoes in a shop. The short conversation between the narrator and the two children reveals the anxieties of the youngsters' brief existence in a tragi-comical way: what it means being step-sisters in a modern enlarged family of divorced and re-married parents, having two step-mothers, two houses, and two bedrooms but so little attention from adults. The story ends up with Curly Top pushing her shopaholic mother out of the store, to avoid the umpteenth quarrel at home with her dad about unnecessary shoes. An opposite attitude pervades "Busy Lines", where the protagonist calmly faces the 'death' of all her domestic appliances one by one, filling the 'void' they leave with new habits, new perceptions, new tastes and sounds. When the broom took the place of the broken vacuum cleaner, she discovered that "A broom was light and easy. It had no roar. It was a dancing partner with a gentle voice taking her from room to room" (Grace 2004: 8). Then the heater stopped working and she started using the fireplace. So she had to go to the beach every day to collect firewood: "It took time finding the right-sized pieces, but each selection gave satisfaction – which is something she explained to the wind, holding each piece up for it to see" (Grace 2004: 9). Then it was the toaster's turn to die and she began making toasts on a wire rack over the stove, which rewarded her "with richer taste and flavour" (Grace 2004: 10). Working by subtraction, the woman gradually eliminates objects and habits which were apparently indispensable to find what is really essential to her: the sounds and colour of the natural world, the richness of silence, the fullness of her thoughts. "Love Story" is about the importance of belonging and knowing one's origin. It tells the story of a 19-year-old orphan boy who falls in love with a statue, a central carved pole of the meeting house, who then turns out to be the representation of one of his ancestors. As a visiting Māori elder and genealogist says to him and other deracinated young people: "You gotta know your stories". This seems an essential requisite for one's wellbeing and realisation. Finally, Grace devotes herself to one of her favourite topics: the diverse, mentally ill or "sky-people". Grace uses this

[21] "The Seahorse and the Reef", "Wiwi" and "Dustbins" first appeared respectively in the collections *The New Net Goes Fishing* (1977), *Below the Surface* (1995) and *Kingfisher Come Home* (1995).

term to define all those who are "connected to the sky in their mind", that is, "other" or unconventional. They include outcasts and people with psychiatric disorders, who are the protagonists of her story "The Sky People" from the 1994 collection bearing the same title. In *Small Holes in the Silence*, the most memorable "Sky Person" is the eponymous hero of "Eben", the well-known crooked busker whose colourful performances passers-by could see at the Saturday market in the city of Parutai. Abandoned by his mother for his deformity, he was raised in an orphanage. The only straight part of him was his smile, which had no bend in it, like a "letterbox gap in across the lower part of his face" (Grace 2004: 39). An extraordinary attachment develops between Eben and Pani, a woman raised in the same orphanage. She knows well "what it was like to be left, not chosen, time after time and year after year, when people came to collect or adopt or foster a child" (46) and thinks Eben is a gift from heaven for her. She acts like a mother to him, even arranging the payments for Eben's solemn funeral in case she died first, which is what happens. In the coffin, Eben's body is straight for the first time, straightened by the morticians, while his lips are curved as in a smile. This story of loneliness and solidarity, of reciprocity between marginalised individuals, who are invisible to most people but precious for each other, sets a scale of priorities about the sense and scope of humanity.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries New Zealand was the healthiest country in the world for seventy years, but only for non-Māori people. Its entrance into global capitalist economy made it susceptible to all the privileges and drawbacks of the Western world in terms of health and wellbeing. As literature has recorded, Western social and economic models seem to have lost important values that are priorities for human wellbeing. Conversely, the condition of Māori has greatly improved in the course of time thanks to the retrieval and consolidation of their own traditions, culture and identity. While doing this they have also highlighted economic, social, psychological and environmental issues that should deserve the attention of all New Zealanders and of the West in general. Like most indigenous people they have shown us "an image of a future by which we can escape our present" and reminded us that "if a culture does not become like us, it may not be a failure but a gift to what is now an uncertain future", to use the words of American environmentalist Paul Hawken (Hawken 2008: 99). It is about time to reconsider notions of health, good life and wellbeing in the Western world.

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FEMALE GENEALOGIES OF PLACE

Nation, City and Refugee Camps in Susan Muaddi Darraj's *The Inheritance of Exile*

Marta CARIELLO

ABSTRACT • This paper aims at analyzing the ways in which the differential treatments of human bodies that are played out in the 'permanently exceptional' space of the refugee camps emerge in Palestinian-American author Susan Muaddi Darraj's 2007 short story collection, *The Inheritance of Exile: Stories from South Philly*. In particular, the focus will be on how such differential – gendered and racial – treatment of bodies is articulated into a differential form of memory and of genealogy, in narratives that are passed on, in the stories and through the stories, from women of different generations. This gendered genealogy, in turn, serves to re-configure the space (or non-place?) of the refugee camp as a problematic alternative to the militant equation of the temporary refugee camp as the potential Palestinian nation waiting for its people's return. The space of the refugee camp will also be pitted against, or read in parallel to, the urban space and its migrant communities, as construed in Muaddi Darraj's collection of short stories.

KEYWORDS • Arab-American Literature, Refugee Camps, Palestine, Female Genealogies

1. Refugee camps as border narrative

> The refugee camps. The very mark of our condition, the sign of the original deed which catapulted us all into this unending journey, the embodiment of what might have been, what was, what could be, the body which must be dismembered for so many to breathe lightly, rest back in comfort. The body within our body, the representation of our memory. The actual face of the encounter which has ceaselessly been miscast and untold over the years, but which will not stop telling itself to anyone who will look in its eyes. (Jayyusi 2002, n.p.)

Lena Jayyusi wrote these highly evocative words in 2002 in a text significantly titled "Letters from the Palestinian Ghetto", reflecting on the 'permanent status' the refugee camp has within the identity of the displaced, and, specifically for Jayyusi, of Palestinian refugees. The refugee camp is "the body within the body", permanently living within, wherever the refugee is or moves to. Indeed, the refugee camp is a mark of the contemporary condition that needs to be urgently addressed, first and foremost on a political and material level, but also on the symbolic and narrative level, because the space it is created in, and the one it creates, speaks to and of the crucial signifier of Western modernity, namely the nation and its constitutive principle of inclusion and exclusion. Refugee camps speak to and of borders, of individual and collective uprootedness, and of the consequential permanent need for retaining and reviving memory. The camps are, in this sense, the border-narrative of the contemporary world.

As Geetha Ganapathy-Doré writes in her Introduction to *On the Move: The Journey of Refugees in New Literatures in English* (2012):

> The study of the journey of refugees has several dimensions – literary, ethical, economic, political, sociocultural and legal. The journey of refugees sheds a different light on the postcolonial theme of the meaning of home and the plight of homelessness. (Ganapathy-Doré 2012: 2)

All these aspects conflate to create a common discourse on refugees and on 'the refugee camp' in particular, though clearly situations can be and are very different, depending on the geopolitical territories the camps are set in, the journey undertaken by the individuals or groups of refugees, the times and places left behind, and those found upon (temporary?) arrival.

When the issue of refugees began to be legally and politically dealt with, UNREF gave a (declaredly non-comprehensive or standard) definition of "refugee camp", which would designate "a group of dwellings of various descriptions […] which, mainly because of the poor conditions of the dwellings but also for other reasons, are meant to provide temporary shelter" (1958).[1] Clearly, the keyword in this description is the term "temporary", and, though the definition obviously needs updating given the changed and changing conditions under which people become displaced and the dramatically transforming international scenario, indeed the implied, albeit often illusory, temporariness of the condition of the refugee remains fundamental, both in terms of the practical implications on the lives of the displaced, and in terms of the interruption within the personal and collective narrative of refugees. This is, then, "the body within [the] body, the representation of […] memory" that Jayyusi refers to: the inhabitation within interruption that forcibly emerges, as will be shown in this article, in the narratives of refugees.

A more specific description of 'refugee camp' is that of an artificially designed habitat for incoming refugees, relying almost completely on external resources for economic and material sustenance.[2] A refugee camp is therefore juridically a site of exceptional, supra-national and temporary governance. It is also, however, a site of material and human subtraction and destitution; it is, furthermore, a cultural construct signifying otherness, no-man's land, the margin.

Marc Augé famously included refugee camps in the category of "non-places":

> A world where people are born in the clinic and die in hospital, where transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions (hotel chains and squats, holiday clubs and refugee camps, shantytowns threatened with demolition or doomed to festering longevity) […] offers the anthropologist (and others) a new object… (Augé 1995: 78)

While the conflation of "luxurious and inhuman conditions" under the same category appears today somewhat enmeshed in a strongly post-modern (or "super-modern", as Augé

[1] As concerns the personal status of refugees, this was established by international law thanks to the refugee regime set up in 1921 by the League of Nations. In 1948, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency focused on the Arab-Israeli conflict, setting up the Agency that would help refugees "whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict." (UNRWA, n.d. http://www.unrwa.org/) The Geneva convention (1951), defines the refugee as someone who, "owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it." (http://www.unhcr.org)

[2] Economic and material sustenance to an extent also designates the difference between a refugee camp and a settlement, with the latter relying at least in part on its internal resources.

would phrase it) anti-materialism, Augé's analysis does point to one fundamental aspect of the space of refugee camps: that of transit zones, and in particular of spaces that "do not integrate the earlier places" (Augé: 78). In other words, an interruption of spatial memory, a space where memory (and therefore time) is suspended. This suspension concerns not only the philosophical analysis of the relations of (super)modernity and time, but also, on a very practical level, the degree to which rootedness and identity can develop or be retained; at the same time, it leaves space for specific forms of governance and control. In this sense, in the study of the space of the refugee camp, a fundamental reference is Foucault's definition of "heterotopia of deviation", with the refugee camp organized, by the very humanitarian agencies that build it, as spatially separated from the "ordinary social and political order" (Foucault 1984; Agier 2002: 318).[3] This is particularly true in the case of the Palestinian refugee camps, essentially the incarnation of the oxymoron of 'permanent temporariness', where suspension keeps lives, memories, and history permanently outside a socially and politically 'normal' order, in the paradox of the potential/impossible return to the homeland, and therefore within a permanent space/state of exception (Agamben 2005; Zembylas 2010).

The issue of the space of the refugee camp is a multilayered one, and the risk is that of reducing its analysis to an all-encompassing view of 'the camp' as having certain characteristics no matter where or when it is located, along with the tendency to equalize the space of the refugee camp to all other 'camps'. It is, in this sense, useful but also somewhat risky to read the refugee camp solely through the perspectives of Hannah Arendt or Giorgio Agamben on concentration camps (Arendt 1973, 1998; Agamben 2005).[4] There are, however, juxtapositions that unavoidably come into play and indeed underscore the idea of the 'camp' itself; these are quite evidently, as already mentioned, the insistence the space of the 'camp' has on borders. In the case of the refugee camp, it is inhabited by displaced people, removed from one nation and thrown into the temporary space of another, to which, however, they do not belong and that does not belong to them. If then, Agamben speaks of "bare life" in the case of all those subjects that are cast outside the State, the discussion Judith Butler engages with Agamben in *Who Sings the Nation State* (2007) appears here even more poignant, to the effect that, speaking to and of the border, migrants, refugees, all the "expelled and contained" persons – those Butler calls "the jettisoned" – are never really 'outside' State power: they are "thrown on the border" precisely because State power exists and there is no place (or space) where a State does not exercise its power, be it even to cast someone out (Butler and Spivak 2007). Refugee camps, then, become the narrative of national borders, and always, inevitably, a critical one.

Along these lines, Alessandro Petti observes that

> [t]he camp system goes beyond the inclusion-exclusion dichotomy that operated as a barrier between citizens and non-citizens, and beyond what are today the borders of nation-states. The camp marks the limit of this mechanism, the degradation of a political organization. It is a desperate attempt to preserve an outdated political order through the construction of a space of suspension in which to confine all those who "do not belong." (Petti 2013, n.p.)

[3] This argument is also made in Anthony Barnum, "Marginalized Urban Spaces and Heterotopias: An Exploration of Refugee Camps", http://rumiforum.org/marginalized-urban-spaces-and-heterotopias-an-exploration-of-refugee-camps/. Foucault himself specifically addressed the issue of refugee camps – in relation to the then ongoing Vietnamese and Cambodian refugee crisis – in a 1979 interview by Uno, H., published in French in Foucault 1994, and translated in English in 2015 by Colin Gordon for openDemocracy.net

[4] For an interesting discussion of Agamben's theory of "bare life" in contrast to Hannah Arendt's distinction between human life and the political, see Owens 2009, as well as Butler and Spivak 2007.

Petti underlines the fundamental fact that the camp form first made its appearance "in the colonial context, as an instrument for ruling local populations" (Petti 2013: n.p.), thus connecting the Foucaultian perspective (though Foucault himself never really addressed the issue of colonialism directly) of 'the camp' as a space of suspension, where social control can be exercised, if not experimented (Latif 2008). The specific space of the refugee camp, then, intersects the suspension of the 'othered' with the specific suspension within the crisis of forced migration: the interruption of memory, life suspended in an impossible return, as in the case of the Palestinians.

However, as, again, Alessandro Petti underlines,

> [d]espite the fact that the "camp form" has been used as an instrument for regulating the "excess of the political dimension" of the refugees, the camp—as an exceptional space—is also a site for political practices yet to come. (Petti 2013: n.p.)

And, furthermore, in connection to Marc Augé's observation that "non-places" offer the anthropologists a "new form", it is equally important to note that

> although more recent scholarly work highlights the refugee figure as a central critical category of our present political organizations, these very conceptualizations have reduced the refugee to a passive subject, created by the exercise of power and lacking an independent and autonomous political subjectivity. (Petti 2013: n.p.)

The "political practices yet to come" that Petti refers to, as re-articulations of the relation between territory, state, and population confute indeed the idea of the refugee camp as a space for passive subjects. This very re-articulation re-writes the significations of nationhood, State borders and even citizenship in unexpected ways, in both artistic and militant projects inside the refugee camps, and in literary and artistic works born outside the material space of the camps.[5] These re-significations inscribe the camp, once again, "within the body" of the writer, of the individual or the collective, whose memory demands to tell, whose narrative is in turn inscribed in spaces and places that become part Western urban centers, part destitute refugee camps; all in one, surprising semiotic texture.

2. *The Inheritance of Exile*, the legacy of the camp

An example of the re-articulation of the relationship between national space, borders and memory is Susan Muaddi Darraj's short story collection, *The Inheritance of Exile: Stories from South Philly* (2007). Muaddi Darraj is an Arab American scholar and writer, brought up in the United States and daughter of Palestinian immigrants.[6] As the subtitle of her collection suggests,

[5] In his article, Petti gives an account of the Al-Feniq Cultural Center in Dehesha Refugee Camp, West Bank, which hosts the experimental educational program Campus in Camps (http://www.campusincamps.ps/). Such projects are based on the idea that improving living conditions for refugees does not conflict with the right to return, as has been so far the dominant political imperative. A rich survey of artistic and cultural practices coming from inside the material space of the camp, and from its cultural force-field is included in Solombrino 2016.

[6] Susan Muaddi Darraj has published two collections of short stories, *The Inheritance of Exile* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007) and *A Curious Land: Stories from Home* (University of Massachusetts Press,

the stories in *The Inheritance of Exile* are not set in a refugee camp; instead, they are declaredly rooted in a multicultural South Philadelphia, but this is in part what constitutes the very power that the space of the refugee camp assumes in its emergence *from within* the American city.

The Inheritance of Exile is divided into four parts, corresponding to the narratives of the four young women protagonists: Nadia, Aliyah, Hanan, and Reema. Their stories are independent but interconnected and are contrapunted (or completed, depending on the perspective) by their mothers', like the necessary backdrop not only in generational terms, but also in the legacy (or, the inheritance of the title) of the young women's inhabiting the Western urban space, and the Palestinian imaginary space of the land they lost before ever really possessing it. The inhabitation of this interrupted memory is fleshed out in the gendered-differential treatment of the four women's bodies, and of their mothers', in an interesting layering of socio-cultural constructions that compress and dilate the time-space of Philadelphia/Palestine.

The narrative layers of the stories create what Steven Salaita defines as "something of a structural tapestry that is not necessarily patterned but is interconnected" (Salaita 2011: 74). The narrative alternates between daughters and mothers, switching from the first to the third person in no particular order, except for a prevalence of the first person in the daughters' accounts, which results in a stronger emphasis on the occasional first-person narrative of the mothers. The every-day affairs of teen-agers and the tribulations and big or small tragedies endured by the four young protagonists are both the common events all coming-of age young women face virtually everywhere in the world, and the very specific circumstances tied to their condition of immigrants' children, and, more specifically, for two of them, of refugee's children. The even more specific trait of the stories unfolding in the voices of the daughters and mothers is precisely the female genealogy that emerges as the strongest tie, irremovable no matter their will or circumstances. The first story, in fact, opens with a deep female genealogy, reaching to an interestingly common trait in much Arab-American women's literature: that of the grandmother, and what might be called her 'extending touch' that outstands time, space, and even death.[7]

Nadia, the opening narrator of *The Inheritance of Exile*, begins her story ("Back to the Surface") in a direct connection with her dead grandmother:

> Nobody believed what I said about Siti, not even my mother. Maybe she didn't want to accept it, maybe it was too painful, like opening your eyes to the yellow glare of the midday sun, so she resisted. (Muaddi Darraj 2007: 3)

Nadia is isolated in her visions, which always involve only her grandmother, and, significantly, not her father, who died when she was twelve:

> My father had never spoken to me again after he died, though I willed him to. Many nights that year, I'd lie attentively in bed, conjuring up his image in my mind. […] On the other hand, my grandmother arrived in my dream the same night she died – she flew in quietly and settled into the brightest corner of my mind. (Muaddi Darraj 2007: 4)

After this first vision, Nadia faces her grandmother's death with utter calmness:

2015), as well as numerous biographies, scholarly essays and articles, and has edited and contributed to several volumes on Arab and Arab-American literature.

[7]On the trope of the grandmother in Arab-American fiction, see, among others, Salaita (2011: 77-78); Kadi (1994).

> She grinned and left, and I didn't cry two days later when we buried her, even though all my aunts beat their foreheads and wailed and my uncles sobbed into heir hands like children. They had flown from Jerusalem for the funeral, arguing that their mother should be buried back home. (Muaddi Darraj 2007: 5)

The dead grandmother's body serves not only here as connective tissue, so to speak, through the three (female) generations, but also as the vector that introduces the constant tension that will bring, throughout the entire book, Philadelphia – the Western urban center – to be constantly pulled to an 'elsewhere', a home that is far away, in space and time, but that is also, in the syncretic working of the literary word, here and now. Philadelphia and Jerusalem, in this case, are conflated into the construction of a polysemic home: the United States and Palestine, the Western metropolis and the stratified layers of history that are signified in the inhabitation of Jerusalem, its divisions, its displaced people, the refugee camps always in the background.

As Yousef Awad observes, in Darraj's stories the city serves as a space for negotiating belonging and home (Awad 2015). In particular, quoting Gilbert and Dikec (2008), Awad notes that in Muaddi Darraj, the city acquires "a new spatial level where the practice or performance of citizenship unfolds through local affiliations, in contradistinction to a notion of citizenship conceived merely at an abstract level and national scale" (Gilbert and Dikec 2008: 254). The specific space of the city, furthermore, houses the very sense of liminality articulated by the suspension of the space of the refugee camp, as noted by Alessandro Petti:

> These spaces in suspension are no longer inside or outside: they represent a sort of third area, in which an increasing number of individuals who are excluded from the polis are shut away. (Petti 2013: n.p.)

Here, the term 'polis' is clearly used in its political-philosophical meaning, but the reference is also, very explicitly, to the element of 'space', and the city (Philadelphia in this specific case) serves precisely as the urban space that, by its very nature, is always, already, something/somewhere else.

This tension of 'removed inhabitation' of Philadelphia, constantly projected in a specific 'elsewhere' (the Palestinian community/homeland) explicitly emerges again, and is a constant trait of the narrative, in the same story, when Nadia speaks to the vision of her deceased grandmother, assuring her that it would be fine for her to go on a trip with her boyfriend and some friends, and that she wouldn't have to worry about what "people would think":

> I assured her that we were going with a group of friends, that we'd be safe, that she didn't have to worry about *a-naas*. *A-naas* is a phrase that I had often heard her fret over: "What will *a-naas* say?" "What will *a-naas* think?" She always worked herself into a frenzy about the gossip circles created and perpetuated by *a-naas*, the small but organized network of Arab women and men in America who had the uncanny ability to transmit a single, juicy nugget of information about someone's reputation across the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea to the corresponding family network back in the Middle East. (Muaddi Darraj 2007: 7)

The juxtaposition of territories and spatial-temporal communities underscores the fundamental role of the construction of place, in *The Inheritance of Exile*, as "an additional character" (Salaita 2011: 73): Philadelphia is a place with its own, very specific and contingent memory, a memory that in this case is, surprisingly, that of the Middle East, of Palestine, of the refugee camps. Just like two of the mothers used to be 'camp children', so the substance of the city we read is the substance of the camps of the past; as if, turning the page of this specific Philadelphia, we found a carbon copy outlining refugee camps in the Middle East. In other

words, the stories of *The Inheritance of Exile* are 'spatial stories', in which, as in much postcolonial literature, the politics of place and space are fundamental. The urban space is very specific in this sense, in that it is, by its very nature, always multiple places at once, incorporating time and space into its multivocality. In Muaddi Darraj's stories, then, the lived territory is always inhabited in its material and imagined space: South Philly, Jerusalem, Ramallah, the camps.

The specific trip that Nadia discusses with the vision of her grandmother turns out to be the dramatic turning point the young woman's life, since she is involved in a car accident that leaves her bed-ridden for months, and in a state of barrenness that eventually leads her to leave her Arab-American boyfriend, in fear that her inability to bear children will drive him and his family away. This is the first instance of a gendered-differential construction of the body in Muaddi Darraj's book, that opens up a very interesting discussion on the different levels of such differentiations, which span, in the case of the four protagonists and their mothers, from the body as differentially treated on the basis of its potential to procreate (or lack thereof), to its inscription inside a racially differentiated construction of norms generated internally and externally to the Arab-American community. Finally, the ultimate differentiation emerges in the construction of space and time inhabitation deriving from the legacy of the refugee camps, transmitted by the women, to the women.

The first section of the book – titled "Nadia" – alternates the stories of Nadia and of her mother Siham; the former narrates in the first person and the latter in the third. In the final story of the section, under the title "Survivor", Nadia tells of the aftermath of her accident, including her breakup with her boyfriend, and concludes with an observation on the very legacy that ties her grandmother, her mother, and herself, through the blue stones (sent over the years by the grandmother back home) that are supposed to protect their house from the Evil Eye:

> The beads were flat, round, made of glass. A deep blue, "the color of the Mediterranean," Mama said, with a black center representing the pupil of the eye.
> I saw the beads, and I was reminded that I was a survivor, like my mother. (Muaddi Darraj 2007: 46)

Nadia's mother, Siham, is a survivor because her husband died, hit by a car, leaving her a widow in a strange land, with a child to look after; but she is also a survivor because of her very origins. Siham has not grown up in the camps, but her path from displacement to the comforts of America triggers the incident upon which the refugees camps are mentioned for the first time in the book as part of the stories and history of this small female community. In the flashback-story titled "Reading Coffee Cups", Aliyah's mother feels envious and resentful when Siham brags about her new dishwasher, and the seemingly wealthy life she and her husband are leading, and finds herself differentiating the treatment of her small group of friends on the basis of what she calls a "class conscience":

> Why did I resent her? Because she liked to show off? And I… I was no better than Samira and her mother, the way I still thought of Layla and even Reema, both of whom had grown up in the camps. Somewhere between leaving Palestine and having children, I had developed a class conscience. (Muaddi Darraj 2007: 65)

The two correlated and inseparable trajectories that determine the differential inhabitation of the Philadelphia territory for the four young women and their mothers are those of Palestine and of the refugee camps. These two, in turn, are inscribed in the wider discourses of immigrant identity, gendered identity, and, more specifically in this respect, the Arab-American

community and its endogenous and exogenous negotiations in terms of gender construction. So, the girls tell themselves, at one point:

> "…We're different, and that's it. They tell us we're not Americans and, sure, we listen to the music and drink the coffee" […] "We're just different, and that's OK". (Muaddi Darraj 2007: 74)

But, the camps appear also as an extreme element of what another of the four young protagonists, Hanan, in the story "Preparing a Face", wants to distance herself from, as representing what her mother is, and what she is not:

> When she was finally in complete silence, sitting on her bed and gazing at the pillows lined up like soldiers at the front line of a cultural war, when she finally felt safe in her fortified room, she decided she was not an Arab. Her father was American, born to Arab parents, but her mother hadn't been born here – she'd grown up in the hilly town of Ramallah, had fled a series of wars, had left behind camps strewn with shrapnel, legless corpses, wailing women, and eyes too weary to weep. But Hanan had been born right here, in Philadelphia… (Muaddi Darraj 2007: 81)

When, in unexpected moments, the refugee camps surface in the seemingly ordinary and safe life in Philadelphia, the projection of time and space is evident in the story that demands to be told, and in the impossibility of ever inhabiting a 'safe' place again. As Steven Salaita underlines, in *The Inheritance of Exile*, "[o]ne sensibility that binds all the women is a focus on safety" (Salaita 2011: 74). Hanan recalls the emergence of life as refugees at the dinner table:

> When I don't finish my plate at dinner, she lectures me about the refugee camps again, about her life before Baba, about how she and her sisters had to walk to the next village, and knock on the doors of the convent and ask for food. (Muaddi Darraj 2007: 109)

The suspension in her mother's narrative is clear when Hanan notes:

> My mother has never shown me a map, and I've heard these stories a million times, but she tells them like they are new, as if the memory just popped into her mind and she is living it again. (Muaddi Darraj 2007: 109)

The reference to the 'impossibility' of maps related to the Palestinian question here is evident; however the obliteration of cartography is also an indication of the constant presence and co-habitation of multiple territories, insolvably united, for Hanan's mother, even more, when her husband is violently robbed in Philadelphia. No place is safe, and, in an echo of Salaita's analysis, Hanan's mother tells her: "We have to always be scared, Hanan" (Muaddi Darraj 2007: 112).

Clearly, as, again, Steven Salaita argues, Muaddi Darraj

> incorporates the issue of Palestine realistically, illuminating how it has become an everyday factor, culturally and politically, in the lives of Arab Americans, those of Palestinian origin especially. (Salaita 2011: 76)

Indeed, Palestine becomes "an omnipresence that provides meaning to the characters habits and characteristics" particularly "when the mothers reflect on their childhoods in the refugee camps" (Salaita 2011: 76).

When Hanan is about to get married, shunned by her mother who disapproves her pre-marital pregnancy, Nadia's mother has a wedding veil shipped from Jerusalem, because "They don't know how to make veils here in America" (Muaddi Darraj 2007: 136). This incident

triggers the most explicit 'cohabitation', inside Muaddi Darraj's narrative, of the refugee camps within the urban life of Philadelphia. Like an isolated flash within the novel, Hanan reflects on the camps, becoming surprisingly close to her mother, so morally far away at that very moment:

> I had often envisioned the camps where Mama grew up. After all, I'd spent almost all my life hearing about them, so it was natural to picture them for myself: cement shacks with hastily decorated thatched roofs, children running barefoot on dirt paths, sidestepping donkey dung as they scampered about, old men sitting on wooden crates playing *tarneeb* with a badly worn deck of cards. The women in the camp wore clean but threadbare clothes, and flashed smiles that displayed missing teeth. At times I felt my imagination fail me, so I would ask Mama for the details, for the nuggets of information that would help correct the picture in my mind. (Muaddi Darraj 2007: 136)

Then, as if it were a poem:

> Was there food?
> Not much.
> Was there water?
> Barely.
> Were there schools?
> Not really.
> What was there?
> Only the hope of a better life.
> Only my family.
> Only love.
> How did you leave?
> (Muaddi Darraj 2007: 136-137)

This poetic fragment, thrown in to interrupt the steady narrative frame of Hanan's story, offers the affective space for Hanan – and with her the younger generation of women – to channel the maternal experience, in the suspension of linear language, through the semiotic space of poetic language (Kristeva 1984), preceding logic, preceding "the new world", preceding Philadelphia.

3. Female genealogies, textures of common inhabitation

What can be called, following Marianne Hirsch, the "postmemory" of the four young protagonists of *The Inheritance of Exile* is construed inside a female narrative of suspension, in which the stories are passed on, sometimes reluctantly, sometimes willingly, from the mothers to the daughters. Hirsch's definition of "postmemory", as Yousef Awad underlines, seems to evoke precisely the type of "relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents" (Hirsch 2001, 9, in Awad 2015: 6), a relationship "so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right." (Hirsch 2001: 9; 2011). Such 'acquired memory' is a common trope in postcolonial literature, while the reference to what might be called an 'acquired geo-erasure', with maps erased and interrupted, is very specific to Palestinian-American fiction, obviously referencing the primary struggle over occupied and subtracted land in Palestine. A specific instance of an often young woman picking up the legacy (or the burden) to tell her parents' interrupted story is found, for example, in Randa Jarrar's *The Map of Home* (2008). In Jarrar's novel, as in Muaddi Darraj's, the protagonist symbolically claims the power to write, seizing a pen that her family is convinced is a spy-pen, that belongs to her father; that same father who, in the beginning of the novel, uses a pen to write down her name on her birth certificate, at first mistakenly choosing a boy's name. The symbolic power of

claiming the instrument to tell stories with is unambiguously declared by Jarrar in the closing lines of the novel, in which it is the mother who, in the end, somehow passes the pen on to the daughter:

> Mama reached over and threw the pen out the window.
>
> I catch the pen now and listen to all our stories. (Jarrar 2008: 290)

The parallel with Muaddi Darraj's stories is strong, and indeed the conclusion of *The Inheritance of Exile* marks the official 'passing on' of the stories from one generation of women to another. Reema interviews her mother as part of her PhD thesis in sociology, and thus the book closes with a first person account of the camps (titled "The Scent of Oranges"), and the unending trauma of living under siege. Reema's mother, Huda, mentions a friend, whose father had been killed by a bomb, and whose mother had been wounded, but she says, in the italics that interrupt her direct account of her childhood:

> I shouldn't talk about Dina anymore. I don't want to.
> No, I will not. It's not my right to tell her story. I can only tell you mine.
> You? You can tell mine because I am giving it to you to keep safe, or to tell the people, or to tell your sociology professor. Do as you like. It is yours now. (Muaddi Darraj 2007: 192)

In the very last lines of the book, as to reinforce the genealogy of storytelling and the power of the new generations to appropriate and tell the stories of the camps and of Palestine, Huda delivers her words officially:

> I have to finish dinner now. OK? Good. Just shape the words I said the way you want – fix them and make them sound good. You are the writer, habibti, not me. (Muaddi Darraj 2007: 196)

As mentioned above, this female legacy of story-keepers and story-tellers is set against a discussion that unfolds, within Muaddi Darraj's writing, around the differential treatment of bodies, on various levels. Both generations of women negotiate throughout their lives the possibilities and impossibilities of inhabiting a space that marks them as female, as migrants, and as Arabs and, more specifically, Palestinians.

In this sense, again, a common feature of Arab-American women's writing is what might be called, following Salwa Essayah Cherif, "gendered memory":

> [I]n addition to asserting their ethnicity in a hostile, image-ruled environment, Arab American *women* must also voice their femaleness. Their experience of self is strongly gendered on account of the serious limitations for women that the journey to the past leads them to (dis)/(un)cover. The articulation of the self through the traditionally empowering return to the past, in their case undertaken to negotiate the Arab and the American parts of the self, requires the use of a gendered memory guiding through the silences about the female past. (Cherif 2003: 207-208)[8]

Thus, for example, Nadia's life is completely determined not only when she becomes barren as a consequence of the car accident she is involved in, with the possibility of reproduction as "the basis of a variety of social segregations" engendering "the development of

[8] Cherif refers in particular to Diana Abu-Jaber's first novel, *Arabian Jazz* (New York,Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1993), and Elmaz Abinandar's memoir *Children of the Roojme: A Family's Journey from Lebanon* (New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1991). See also Majaj 1996.

differential forms of embodiment" (Alcoff 2006: 172). She must also negotiate her belonging to a community. When she doctor's response comes, her mother warns her:

> "Habibti, George is the only son in his family – he has four sisters. His parents will definitely want him to have many children so he can carry on the family name." […]
> "They will not accept it if they know that you might have trouble having children. And that will put George in a very bad situation." […]
> "They are an Arab family, with only one son, who have put all their savings to send him to medical school in America. Do you think they will accept for him to marry and not have children?" (Muaddi Darraj 2007: 44)

In the end, it turns out George does not care about Nadia's condition, but this passage is still key in what can be, as already mentioned, defined as a discussion Muaddi Darraj opens on the construction of bodies and their inhabitation of the land, the home, the city. Nadia's condition is revealed through a reference to Frida Khalo – a direct call upon the icon whose life was strongly determined, and famously so, by her impossibility to reproduce:

> After the accident, I started reading Frida Khalo's work. About when she was a young woman, riding the trolley when it was involved in a horrible accident. A rod from the trolley broke loose and impaled her abdomen.
> This is not what happened to me. My accident was not nearly so dramatic. But I will never forget my mother's face when the doctor told us quietly, "The uterus was ruptured. We managed to save most of it, but it is also damaged internally." (Muaddi Darraj 2007: 42)

Hanan, too, experiences the construction of her inhabitation of 'legitimate' space on the basis of her potential to reproduce. She is cast outside the family space by her mother when she becomes pregnant out of wedlock (and then splits from her husband even before the child is born). But even earlier, when a cousin – Rola – visits from Ramallah, she first becomes an 'outsider', suddenly too 'American' compared to her cousin, so proper and 'Arab', only to be drawn into the same 'differential space', when Rola confesses she is pregnant:

> "I felt like such a slut." She pronounced the word more harshly than necessary, hitting the "t" emphatically. "That is what our culture does to you. It makes you feel like a slut for making a mistake."
> "American culture does the same thing, believe me. You should hear what some people here still think about single mothers." (Muaddi Darraj 2007: 94)

A common space opens here, for the inhabitation of the two women, where the marking of the female body as bearing the possibility/potential/danger of reproduction blends the two worlds they have grown up in.

Hanan will, eventually and significantly, find her own way inside the space of her mother's legacy, when she starts weaving baskets in the patterns she has learned from her mother, who in turn learned the craft in Palestine.

The symbolic use of texture and patterns is very clear, as Muaddi Darraj literally weaves the stories in *The Inheritance of Exile* like a mingling of the legacy that binds the two generations of women together in a common space of inhabitation and (sometimes) survival, and of the unpredictable deviations of gendered spaces, body politics and the language of borders: internal, national, interrupted, breached borders, re-written in the female word, passed on from mother to daughter.

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RUNNING THE CITY

Urban Marathon as (Story)telling

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ABSTRACT • Starting from Arjun Appadurai's notion that "We need to think ourselves beyond the nation" (Appadurai 1998), I will consider how this operation of "thinking beyond" has been symbolically and practically reflected in the experience of the city marathons a conscious or unconscious appropriation of an urban space that does not belong to the runner and that is progressively resignified through the very act of running through it. This act generates a narrative, a kind of story telling whose main characteristic is that of enacting the journey from the space of the former colony to the space of the postcolony (Appadurai 1998), also raising issues related to the impact of globalization on the practice of sports.

KEYWORDS • Abebe Bikila, Fred Lebov, Olympic Games, Marathon, Banksy

1. Hip hop in Gaza

Parkour in Gaza was issued and made available on the web in 2015, soon after Banksy's famous video *Make this year the year YOU discover a new destination* invaded it.[1] In response to the controversial artist's ironic commercial for a brand-new type of tour in an area where no tourists are admitted, a parkour team born and bred in the territory develops a similar video, with the explicit purpose of showing what real life is like in the Gaza strip and how street art may be conceived as a form of resistance.

http://www.theguardian.com/cities/video/2015/mar/10/banksy-parkour-gaza-shadia-mansour-video

Following the music of Shadia Mansour, the most famous female hip-hop artist from Palestine, 10 boys led by Abdallah Al Qassab jump, somersault, dance and run through the ruins left behind by the repeated bombings of the area. They volunteer to take Banksy – and any Western visitor with him – on an unusual tour through the war-ravaged, occupied territory, shown as it is, though ironically presented as picturesque and fascinating sights to see. The boys address Banksy directly, at the beginning of the video, declaring that "they are very available to show you around"; and they succeed in creating a very special text, desperate and yet full of hope, crudely realistic and yet brimming with the pride of being a Palestinian.

The ground-breaking aspect of the text, and what makes it all the more effective, is that the latest hit in the realm of sport – parkour: part run, part athletic performance and part dance – is exploited to produce a new type of psychogeography: an emotional journey through a space that needs to be reappropriated.

[1] The video is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3e2dShY8jIo.

The short home-made video – slightly more than two minutes – is impressive in itself, built up as it is on the clash between the cheerful vitality of the dancing gang and the landscape of ruins, a jarring gap culminating in the last few frames, which feature a few boys somersaulting while several bombs go off on the edge of the horizon. The performance becomes even more disquieting when framed within the endless Palestinian struggle to get back a land that used to be their home and no longer is.

While reflecting on what he defines as a form of "nationalism without a nation" (Appadurai 1998: 188), Appadurai mentions the case of Palestine, positing it as an example of how dubious and blurred the relationship between identity and territory has become in times of global nomadism:

> Even in those cases where territory seems to be a fundamental issue, such as in Palestine, it could be argued that debates about land and territory are in fact functional spin offs of arguments that are substantially about power, justice, and self-determination. In a world of people on the move, of global commodization and states incapable of delivering basic rights even to their majority ethnic populations, territorial sovereignty is an increasingly difficult justification for those nation states that are increasingly dependent on foreign labour, expertise, arms or soldiers. (Appadurai 1998: 21)

In other words, the spatialized syntax of the Gaza Strip makes for a number of social, political, and cultural peculiarities marking Palestine as a special case: the living conditions in the occupied territories in particular show with unarguable evidence the many complexities (and unfair proceedings) of the colonial occupation in late-modern times, a process that results from "a concatenation of multiple powers: disciplinary, biopolitical, and necropolitical" (Mbembe 2003: 29). It is precisely for this reason that *Parkour in Gaza* is so well suited to my argument here.

However, though I share Appadurai's position on the increasing irrelevance of territorial belonging in contemporary global times, I also think that, in terms of national and international perception, the Palestinian reality still appears and is perceived as troubled to the end by the feeling of the Palestinians having been pushed out and robbed of their own land. The otherwise theoretical notions of spatialization of identity and territorialization of power acquire the flavour of highly pragmatic and sorrowful experiences that are not only inbuilt in the Palestinian consciousness, but also familiar to the national and international audience. They form that kind of background knowledge from which a text such as *Parkour in Gaza* draws its most articulate meanings. The configuration of space (bombed houses, ravaged land, ruins, undrinkable water and unfriendly surroundings) effectively recapitulates on the organization of power in the occupied territory and its impact on individual and collective identity. All in all, given the time and space references in the text, the two key-notions of contemporary colonial occupation easily surface by themselves, and are impossible to ignore.

In this context, parkour is not merely a sport, an athletic performance originally blending acrobatics and efficiency in overcoming unpredictable environmental obstacles so as to choose the quickest path in an urban site, but also, and more significantly, becomes a method for reappropriating the city, a psychogeographical practice where land and identity become related not through a logical pattern but by means of the emotional echoes raised by the landscape in the body of the person traversing it.

If it is true that, as Fanon shows, "colonial occupation entails first and foremost a division of space into compartments" (Fanon 1991: 39), the Gaza Parkour Team featuring in this video seems devised to overcome any barrier and tell a different story.

2. Of marathons and the city

Here is the first point I am interested in. Since sport originated, and is still widely perceived, as popular entertainment resulting from physical performance, the stories it tells are deeply rooted in the popular consciousness of the community: a network of shared meanings that, as Raymond Williams implied in his critical work, represent the collective identity of a nation seen in the process of developing. They are often related to the political struggles, resistance fight, phases of transition, and in short the history of a community.

The connection between sport and postcolonial issues follows as a fairly natural consequence. Many researchers have already commented on the relevance of sporting performances in redeeming and/or remoulding national identity at the end of the colonial process.[2] What I want to do here is slightly different: I'm reflecting on sport in a different perspective, i.e. primarily as storytelling, the gradual unfolding of a narrative developed through unusual though codified signs. I would like to show how the athletic performance produces a narrative, that turns out to be a double-sided weapon: it offers the opportunity for the subaltern's voice to be heard but it may, in turn, be exploited by hegemonic power, through the process described by Stuart Hall in his "encoding, decoding model".

It is of course relevant to note what Mbembe writes about this when he states that "The colonial state derives its fundamental claim of sovereignty and legitimacy from the authority of its own particular narrative of history and identity" (Mbembe 2003: 27). What happens then when the same story is told in different ways and from different postcolonial perspectives? In what ways can sports icons become, at one and the same time, tools for promoting the new identities emerging from the postcolonial process and instruments in the hands of the former colonial powers?[3]

To try and provide a provisional answer to these questions, sport should be considered as a specific kind of narrative, by choice and at the beginning popular, collective, spontaneously triggered by the figure of the athlete. The mythopoetic process enveloping the figures of great athletes once they reach enormous popularity and become icons takes place over time and involves different, often conflicting agents. On the one hand, it springs up naturally when the athletic performance exceeds all expectations in a public and often popular context. Within this frame, storytelling – the flourishing of stories concerning the winning athlete – often becomes a way to recover the narrative of the colonized nation, proposing a revision of national identity in the light of the athlete's success.

On the other hand, sporting icons are soon made into market commodities that undergo the same rules as any economic exchange, by themselves stated and supported by the hegemonic power.

We may therefore organize the process into two steps, the first one being the moment when a number of popular narratives concerning the winning athlete develop spontaneously and are spread by word of mouth, and the second marked by the media taking hold of the

[2] Quite recently, the online academic journal "Altre Modernità" devoted a monographic issue to the interaction between sport practice & national identity. The issue, edited by P. Caponi & N. Vallorani, was entitled *Gaming Identity. Sport and Cultures, the Local and the Global* (14, 2015, http://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/AMonline/issue/view/866).

[3] Needless to say that there are plenty of sport narratives grounded on the issue of athletic performance as social and ethnic redemption. Alan Sillitoe provides a beautiful literary apologue of this kind in his *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1959), and filmic texts developed around these issues feed a constantly implemented reservoir and must often be counted as blockbusters.

mythopoetic process and adapting it to the needs of the market. Stuart Hall's reflections on how television communication works comes in handy here. It is certainly true that in this case

> Production, here, constructs the message (…) Of course, the production process is not without its 'discursive' aspect: it, too, is framed throughout by meanings and ideas: knowledge-in-use concerning the routines of production, historically defined technical skills, professional ideologies, institutional knowledge, definitions and assumptions, assumptions about the audience and so on frame the constitution of the programme through this production structure" . (Hall 1980: 92)

The encoded message that is handed to the audience in the form of meaningful discourse primarily results from the spontaneous mythopoetic process but is remoulded according to the needs and purposes of media communication. The audience decoding of this remoulded message may substantially differ from the media-driven "meaning structures" (Hall 1980: 93). Sporting narrative proves, on the whole, to be particularly affected by this semiotic process, so studying it is definitely a priority when dealing with athletic performance and the way it is transformed into stories. Of course, it depends on the sport we are dealing with. My choice to concentrate on the city marathon results from some specific characteristics of this athletic performance, and this brings us back to the example we started from: Parkour in Gaza. Though not specifically labelled as city marathon, parkour shares with it at least one basic feature: it is marked by an intention to reappropriate a space that belongs to someone else, and often, in the case I will deal with, to a community where the runner is clearly perceived as a foreigner, a stranger, an Other. And this is definitely a postcolonial issue.

One of the most famous city marathons all over the world is the one that takes place annually in New York. A few people know that the marathon arose out of a project by a first-generation Jewish immigrant from Transylvania. Fred Lebow, whose original name was Fischl Lebowitz, actually transformed a local city run held on the streets of the Bronx into an international event bringing the runners to Central Park where the first New York City Marathon was held in 1970. The whole story is told in a documentary film (*Run for Your Life*, 2008) and on a constantly updated website (http://www.fredlebowmovie.com/). And the narrative is basically about the amazing abilities – including marketing abilities – that allowed Lebow to triple the number of the runners in one year, exploiting his flair for showmanship and also emphasizing the popularity of running as a social activity. Even the scandals that he had to face for leveraging any opportunity to increase the marathon's success were eventually a minor problem: Lebow had already become the icon of the successful Jewish immigrant, and a paradigm of the proverbial self-made man. The film in particular – *Run for Your Life* – is a documented but at the same time fictionalized report: successful storytelling for the newly arrived in the American Dreamland.[4]

Though the figure of Fred Lebow is not directly related to athletic performance, his story is meaningful for our purposes. His success and the solidity of his legacy amply show what I would call the social and cultural effect of a city marathon. A "poor" sport in itself, not requiring any particular equipment or outfit, the marathon is open to everybody, provided she or he can run; it therefore creates an intensely democratic context, though limited in time to the duration of the marathon itself. It also allows a psychogeographic contact with space, it shares with Guy Debord's notion of *dérive* the fact of being a necessarily collective journey experienced in a highly individual way. Finally it is a sports event impressing its mark – again temporarily – on the city, overturning the relationship between *architectures and people* and reinforcing the idea that without its city dwellers the city simply does not exist. It may appear

[4] The film's trailer is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adn628NSY-c.

perfect – as it does in Piero della Francesca's painting *La città ideale* (1480–1490) – but it simply does not exist.

So, the questions I would like to answer through my next case study are: how does the practice of marathon involve the body and the city? What happens when a body is foreign or migrant or alien to the urban space it moves through? How do different loyalties interlace in producing the image of an *other* identity in a space that is designated as the space of a community?

This leads us to the case of Abebe Bikila in Rome.

3. Abebe Bikila: spotting the narrative threads

When Abebe Bikila, the Ethiopian athlete, won the Rome 1960 marathon, he was comparatively old for this sport (24) and had never run outside his homeland. A last-minute addition to the Ethiopian Olympic team, he was a member of the Imperial bodyguard in Addis Ababa, and mostly known as a good swimmer, an excellent horse rider and a reasonably good Guna hockey player.

He ran the marathon in the world-record time of 2 hours 15 minutes and 16.2 seconds. What made his performance legendary, however, was not the record in itself but the fact that he ran barefoot on the heavily cobble-stoned roads of Rome. The fact is that the shoe sponsor Adidas did not have the right size for the athlete, and the shoes nearest to his own size were so tight and uncomfortable that two hours before the marathon Bikila decided to run barefoot: after all, he was not used to wearing shoes when he trained at home. Also, Bikila's Finnish-Swedish trainer, Major Onni Niskanen, confirmed that it was not so unusual for an Ethiopian athlete to run barefoot, thus relating a bizarre decision to a definite national (and ethnic) belonging. The athlete, in fact, insisted that he was running anyway, even without shoes and even when his trainer suggested reconsidering his participation in the marathon, he stubbornly kept to his decision to run, presenting his choice as an attempt to demonstrate the strength and determination of Ethiopian people.

Later on, when he won the race, surprising everyone, what was in fact the result of an organizational problem (no available shoes for one of the runners) that determined his decision grounded the process of "iconizing" the runner in a very effective way, emphasizing his highly patriotic choice and his desire to "make history for Africa" (John Underwood 1965: 4) rather than the contingent necessity to avoid running in uncomfortable shoes that would have impaired his performance.

Quite obviously, what is at stake here is the complex theoretical discourse on how Otherness may be represented and is currently given a shape in Western contexts. Twenty years or so after it was proposed, Homi Bhabha's theory, that the image of the Other is substantially built up on Western expectations and on the process of exercising colonial power through discourse (Bhabha 1994b: 19), may easily be accepted and taken for granted, even though what is presented as the general attitude of Westerners needs further specification, according to which field we are referring to. In terms of sport and representation, I would stick to what Bhabha states about the possible outcome of what he calls the "subjectification of the Other", a process that has undergone some changes in recent times. Progressively, the subjectification of the Other has led to him/her being perceived "as sign, not symbol or stereotype disseminated in the codes" (Bhabha 1994b: 21).

This is the point I am interested in. It is my view that, in the process of the mutually exclusive acts of defining or rejecting the Other, Bikila becomes a sign – something more complex, semantically ambiguous and articulated than a stereotype – and he gives a new meaning to negative notions such as race, sub-human, beastly and the like when applied to

Otherness, and Ethiopian Otherness in particular. This sign develops through the narrative that fluently unfolds around his success at the Olympica marathon in Rome.

If we consider what happens in practice, the gradual articulation of the process of storytelling is very clear. The Olympic marathon in Rome was given full live coverage by Istituto Luce, which later edited the shooting so as to obtain a video of more or less seven minutes, i.e. storytelling in its most traditional form.[5] The video starts with the athletes beginning the run in a framework of beautiful Imperial landmarks, all reminiscent of the noble and powerful tradition mostly built on the ancient Roman conquest of the world but then replicated in the short colonial adventure of Fascism. The voice over – a reporter in charge of showing the progressive success of the unexpectedly brilliant Ethiopian runner – devotes the first couple of minutes to the beauties of the city. Bikila is presented only after about two minutes (1:51), and is presented as an outsider whose only peculiarity consists in running barefoot.

As in any good story, when the unexpected happens, suspense increases while the voice over becomes more and more excited by the prodigious talent of the Ethiopian runner. Several close-ups of Bikila's bare feet emphasize the conditions in which he is running, and his final victory is eventually the demonstration that anyone, even the wretched of the Earth, can have their moment of glory. The soundtrack is also fundamental in moulding the meaning of the short video. The music, suitably solemn, is accompanied by the public shouting and urging on the athletes, and these sounds are kept in the background.

On the whole, even though the video is far from sophisticated, the edited version of the live coverage shows how easily the simple report of an athletic performance, particularly if supported by the spontaneous reaction of the public, may be "fictionalized" into a tale of redemption, personal and collective, that is given sense by the social, political and historical references it triggers.

Narratively, the tale develops along three parallel threads: urban space as the space of a community; the figure of an alien moving through this space, therefore creating a discrepancy; the resolution of the discrepancy by moving the focus from the ethnic difference of the sportsman to the athletic wonders this body is capable of producing.

The three narrative threads are interlaced. The first dominates in the first part of the video, though the second is anticipated. In fact, what is perceived at once, right from the beginning of the video, is the notion of the city as the space of the community, overloaded with the memory of those who belong to it and moulded by its needs. Within this space – and contained by the safe limina of an urban topography interspersed with the marks of the western imperial history – an alien body is allowed to move freely provided he/she sticks to the rules of temporary democratic interaction stipulated by the marathon.

And here we come to the second narrative thread: being an alien in a semantically overloaded space.

The fact of Bikila being Ethiopian implies some considerations related to the fact of being an African in that particular niche of time and in a specific place. The urban landmarks evoke Italian colonial expansion that, though beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, became the hub of Italian national identity during fascism. Mussolini's obsessive desire for an Italian empire culminated in the Italian troops entering Addis Ababa on May 5, 1936. The conquest was soon accepted by the European nations and this was the start of a four-year domination that went under the name of the Italian East Africa Empire, a short-lived political entity that lasted until Haile Selassie came back to Ethiopia as emperor, triumphantly received on May 5, 1941.

[5] The video is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Dppdcy1pyM.

Bikila runs the marathon in 1960, i.e. nineteen years after the end of the Italian colonial conquest. At a national level, subjection is still a fresh wound, collectively experienced and therefore doubtlessly present in Bikila's feelings about Italy. While running the marathon, he is moving through an urban space where the landmarks of imperial oppression are distinctly visible. He is the black man, the African, the stranger.

At this juncture, the third narrative thread is triggered, and the characteristics of the urban marathon as an Olympic sport come into play. Its primary aspect is that it creates a democratic space where national and ethnic identity is not forgotten though widely tolerated because this obeys the rules of the game. And in the Olympic context, the coexistence of several national and ethnic differences is not only to be expected but also encouraged. It is a fact, however, that Bikila is moving through an urban space where the signs of Ethiopian oppression are clearly to be seen. A few kilometres from the finish, Bikila sees the Obelisk of Axum, which invading Italian troops stole from Ethiopia during World War II (and only brought back to Ethiopia in 2008). At this point Bikila is neck & neck with the Moroccan, Rhadi. According to the reporter covering the event, when he saw the obelisk he surged forward, and Rhadi couldn't keep up. And eventually he won by producing an amazing athletic performance that brought his body to the foreground not primarily as ethnic but as a wonderful machine.

All of the three narrative threads are present at the end, when the unexpected victory is celebrated. The narrative structure appears very tight and effective and precisely because it is very simple it is bound to produce a definite effect on the public.

4. Mythopoiesis: the encoded and decoded run

It is of course impossible to know to what extent Bikila was subjectively aware of becoming the protagonist of a wonderful tale. What is relevant in our analysis, however, is that the mythopoetic process concerning the figure of the athlete begins here, when his national belonging and the national belonging of his public start interacting.

I think it is worth remembering that, in the urban marathon, the athletes directly engage with the urban landscape, in this way developing a relationship between individual body and collective space that is often multilayered and complex. This relationship is necessarily revised and remoulded as the marathon develops and the leading] group comes to be defined.

When Bikila eventually wins, all the features related to his Otherness – including his decision to run barefoot – become mythopoetic elements: though alien or maybe *because alien*, the body of the athlete is capable of wonders otherwise unthinkable. This allows the integration of the athlete in a context where national belonging does not hinder success but actually determines it. And we may say that Bikila is accepted because he comes to be seen as what we could define as a postnational identity, anticipating the kind of debate that Appadurai will introduce in the late 1980s, reflecting on the application of the notion of discourse within the combined fields of cultural studies, literary studies and postcolonial studies:

> We need to think ourselves beyond the nation. This is not to suggest that thought alone will carry us beyond the nation or that the nation is largely a thought or an imagined thing. Rather, it is to suggest that the role of intellectual practices is to identify the current crisis of the nation and in identifying it to provide part of the apparatus of recognition for postnational social forms. Although the idea that we are entering a postnational world seems to have received its first airing in literary studies, it is now a recurrent (if unselfconscious) theme in studies of postcolonialism, global politics, and international welfare policy. (Appadurai 1998: 158)

What appears irrefutable is that the first outcome of Bikila's astonishing victory is the repositioning of his belonging, acquired through the act of successfully competing with other athletes in a space that belongs to the former colonizers of his nation. When he starts the run, he is primarily Ethiopian and a marathon runner made "different" by the unusual decision to run barefoot. When he wins, he becomes an icon of how the body of an athlete – independently of his belonging – can be patiently moulded to obtain the best of all possible performances. This implies "the inscription upon bodily habit of disciplines of self-control and practices of group discipline, often tied up with the state and its interests" (Appadurai 1998: 148).

The first, provisional end of the tale is therefore positive: in spite of his being a foreigner, poor and under-educated, he wins. The fact of his being Ethiopian (and therefore Other, colonized, Italian-colonized, supposedly subaltern) comes into play only as an element of surprise, and it grounds the mythopoetic process. The athlete's body becomes an icon that posits its abilities as an all-resolving tool to induce the white Italian public to forget he is Ethiopian, or to consider his being Ethiopian as an original flaw he has been able to overcome. At this juncture, the body is posited not as alien but as a "machine", whose performance is made into a spectacle, mobilizing the masses.

It is precisely then that Bikila becomes an example of how national and postnational issues interlace in some sports icons who have happened to become potent vehicles of meaning and have so transcended individual aspirations and desires to access a territory beyond space and time.

In the athlete's celebration after his victory, two aspects coexist, though they are not mutually inclusive: Bikila as the icon of a nation and Bikila as the universal example of the wonders/spectacle of the body. His body is alien. His unmistakable and visible Otherness calls into play issues concerning the much-debated problems of diversity and integration. These latter, however are narratively played not as a form of resistance to colonization and normalization, but as limits to overcome through athletic performance.

In other words, the spectacle of the Other neutralizes the political value of the athletic performance. The body of the Other is made into an object to be sold (practically and symbolically) and to introduce into the field of economic exchange (Hall 1997: 223–290).

Quite meaningfully, in more recent times, the figure of Abebe Bikila undergoes further elaboration that culminates in the making of a docufilm, *The Athlete* (2009, dir.: Davey Frankel & Rasselas Lakew). An Ethiopian-produced initiative, the film is intended as a homage to the profile of the athlete, and emerges as a celebratory biopic emphasizing the virtues of athletic training as a tool for emancipation.

Elijah Anderson, in his *Against the Wall: Poor, Young, Black, and Male*, states that "Black Men, particularly from the inner city, have an athleticized identity. This identity is not developed spontaneously through peer groups; it is passed down from older black men and propagated via media images and the racialization of such sports as basketball and football" (E. Anderson 2006: 148). Anderson refers primarily to basketball in the US context, but we may still apply the same kind of principle here. The act of practicing a sport is at the same time an ethnic mark and an individual, often very hard, choice.

Its subsequent cultural development is quite simple and obvious: public imagination takes hold of a historic profile, through a process of storytelling mostly led by the media and undergoing the usual moulding and remoulding that Stuart Hall explains through the above mentioned encoding and decoding model (Hall 1980). The sports performance is made into a narrative transforming the athlete into something of an example and allowing Westerners to identify a specific ethnic group, whilst at the same time transforming him into a *ubermensch*, who did what he did precisely because he was *different* from anybody else (stronger, more determined, braver, more intelligent …).

Such a profile also acquires a universal flavour, entering the imaginative tradition of sports culture, partly anticipating the intricate web of processes brought about by globalisation.

> The image, the imagined, the imaginary – these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: *the imagination as a social practice*. No longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is elsewhere), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people), and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity), the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility. (Appadurai 1998: 31)

And this is where the representation of the athlete – any successful athlete – in film, literature and imagination in general comes into play. Sports, particularly if associated with a highly popular background both in terms of the athletes and in terms of the public (and public gatherings), anticipates that transformation of the imagination into an organized field of social practices that Appadurai identifies with one of the consequences of the new technologies. And this transformation takes place through the tools of storytelling. The narrative triggered by the athletic performance shows how different loyalties interlace in producing the image of a *different* identity in a familiar time and space context. The discrepancy gives birth to a "set of links between gender, fantasy, nation, and excitement" that "could not occur without a complex group of historical contingencies involving empire, patronage, media, and commerce" (Appadurai 1998: 111). The multifaceted interaction among these fields takes place through the process of storytelling.

It is precisely storytelling that transforms the mere athletic performance into a social and cultural event, involving an individual body that undergoes a strict discipline (and therefore suffering an imposition of power, as Foucault maintains), that may eventually be made into an icon, bearing a specific national – or post/national – identity and mobilizing the masses.

When trying to trace a line between national and postnational implications with reference to the professional practice of sports, Appadurailists a number of examples, mostly drawn from the Olympic Games.

> The Olympic games of the past are full of incidents that reveal complex ways in which individuals situated within specific national and cultural trajectories imposed their imaginations on global audiences. In Seoul 1988, for instance, the defeated Korean boxer who sat in the ring for several hours to publicly proclaim his shame as a Korean and the Korean officials who swarmed into the ring to assault a New Zealand referee because what they thought was a biased decision was bringing their imagined lives to bear on the official Olympic narratives of fair play, good sportsmanship, and clean competition. (Appadurai 1998: 60)

What appears evident in this as in many other similar episodes is that the implications of national belonging by no means stop existing in a certain context and within the frame of a specific sporting context. I would suggest, instead, that some specific sporting contexts – most of them, in fact – might provide a workable model of affirmation of one's own belonging in a new community, fighting exclusion, claiming integration but at the same type keeping one's own culture. The whole process, when successful, amounts to the production-reaction of what Appadurai defines as a "community of sentiment", a group that begins to imagine and feel things together (Appadurai 1998: 8). Adapting Williams's famous definition of "community of feeling", Appadurai succeeds in picking up the most effective trigger in any storytelling related to the practice of sport: the ability to mobilize emotions as shared ground.

Now, the obvious risk that is always implied in the processes of media communication resides in the way in which "production, here, constructs the message" (Hall 1980: 92), which is "neither univocal nor uncontested" but obeys the "dominant cultural order" (Hall 1980: 98). It is quite clear, therefore, that Bikila as a sign undergoes a process intended to neutralize the possibly disturbing political implications of his victory and therefore fails to be dangerous. In practice, while it is true that the athlete's Olympic victory also brings about a historical repositioning of the Italian colonial enterprise in East Africa, this aspect of the narrative is always overshadowed by the athlete's celebration as an exception, thus reinforcing the impossibility of the story being told as a form of resistance. The possibility is there, but is not exploited to the full.

Even when Bikila's life becomes a biopic, the whole narrative develops around the many ways in which this extraordinary personality distances itself from the deprived national background he comes from. And ultimately, from birth to death, what emerges primarily from his parable is an inability to fully adapt to the Western, implicitly more civilized context.

For this reason, I would suggest that *The Athlete* as a film is not entirely successful and fails to capture the relevance of Bikila's success in terms of reflection on colonial and postcolonial issues. By transforming the athlete into a larger-than-life human being, the narrative also removes possible issues of resistance and political struggle that are necessarily implied in his being perceived as a sign of all that was unfair, violent and oppressive in the process of colonization. It also cancels any possible hope of exploiting the narrative as a tool for reconsidering aspects of the colonial process. To this purpose, paradoxically, the video resulting from the live coverage of the marathon is much more effective. There Bikila's march towards the finishing post of the marathon as told in the narratives springing from it and then shared by the public becomes a symbolic journey, related to what Appadurai states in his *Modernity at Large*:

> To widen the sense of what counts as discourse demands a corresponding widening of the sphere of the postcolony, to extend it beyond the geographical spaces of the former colonial world. In raising the issue of the postnational, I will suggest that the journey from the space of the former colony (a colourful space, a space of color) to the space of the postcolony is a journey that takes us into the heart of whiteness. (Appadurai 1998: 159)

And this is a story still to be told.

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SECRET THINKER
SOMETIMES LISTENING ALOUD

Social Commitment in David Bowie's Lyrics*

Pietro DEANDREA

ABSTRACT • This article analyses David Bowie's lyrics emphasizing their social commitment and their concern for history's dispossessed. It first focuses on some songs from the album *Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps)* (1980) and then moves to later songs from the 1980s and 1990s; finally, it looks back on Bowie's beginnings and the more narrative compositions of that period, where he was influenced by working-class writers such as Alan Sillitoe and Keith Waterhouse. This aspect of Bowie's output is often neglected by scholars, unlike his iconic stature as a gender-bender and the postmodern, fragmentary quality of his lyrics revolving on inauthenticity. I here argue that in some cases his social commitment, far from clashing with his postmodern style, exemplifies how constructedness can work as an instrument of political criticism. With regard to this, the present article makes use of Maurizio Ferraris's category of New Realism and its criticism of the reactionary parable followed by postmodern paradigms, reflected in Bowie's earlier references to the emancipating power of 'play' and in his later criticism of the post-ideological numbing use of irony.

KEYWORDS • Bowie, Music, Realism, Postmodernism, Sillitoe, Waterhouse

Taking away all the theatrics, all the costuming,
and all the outer layers of what it is, I'm a writer.
That's what I do: I write.
(from Des Shaw, *David Bowie: Verbatim*)

Those who are not familiar with Bowie's oeuvre may have felt some irritation, or maybe perplexity, at the number of his facets that were publicly recalled in the wake of his death in January 2016. As Francesco Adinolfi (8) wrote, there is no such thing as one Bowie, and everyone has his/her own Bowie to mourn. Not by chance did the acclaimed 2013 exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, still currently touring the world, carry the open-ended title *David Bowie Is*.

One world-famous Bowie is obviously the champion of gender-bending, the artist who, between the end of the 60s and the beginning of the 70s, staged a new freedom against public morality and its stifling norms, mixing gender and sexual identities, flaunting his masks against middle England's repressive atmosphere. (Martino 2016: 7) Novelist Hanif Kureishi, for example, remembers the song "Rebel Rebel" (1974) as an inspiration for him to leave south London's dull suburban respectability.[1] Philosopher Simon Critchley describes the impact of "Rock'n'Roll Suicide" (1972), where the shout "You're not alone!" becomes the emotional

* Many thanks to my longtime fellow Bowians: Roberto Mosca, Marco Ponti and Luca Scarpa.
[1] On the suburban landscape of his origins, see Marsh 27-28.

detonator for a whole generation of youth uneasy with themselves and with the world, pushing them to attempt to turn into something else, "something freer, more queer, more honest, more open, and more exciting." (Critchley 17) Often invested with an iconic nature, this Bowie is widely known and discussed, sometimes sidelining his literary-textual aspects.[2]

Another widely discussed feature has to do with his postmodern attitude, often identified with his debunking of all pretence to authenticity and with his self-conscious constructedness: "Art's filthy lesson is inauthenticity all the way down, a series of repetitions and reenactments: fakes that strip away the illusion of reality in which we live and confront us with the reality of illusion." (Critchley 26) These reenactments are often embodied in the composite intertextuality of Bowie's lyrics and musical influences, revelling in multiplicity and fragmentation.[3]

This article is centred on a textual analysis of some of Bowie's lyrics. It espouses the idea of the literariness of the song genre,[4] at times presenting music and literature as two discursive practices engaged in a fruitful dialogue that offers something more than a mere sum of the two arts (Martino 2015, 8, 15-16). I focus on the political side of Bowie's output, and more specifically on his keen eye for the wretched of the earth – in other words, for the many categories composing history's underdogs[5]: refugees, civilian casualties of war and marginalised war veterans, exploited labourers, the underprivileged in neoliberal economies, colonized peoples, and children.

I argue that his political orientation and the abovementioned postmodernist stance do not necessarily contradict each other. Rather, they are to be seen as the two sides of the same coin – i.e. of Bowie's gift for reverberating the cultural climate of his time while more latently elaborating ways of going against its grain.[6] One illuminating example of this is to be found in Nicholas Roeg's film *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976), where the alien Thomas Newton/Bowie is shown wasting his time watching dozens of amassed TV sets which simultaneously broadcast different channels. Christopher Frayling finds this "a key image of that 'culture of quotations' (…) breadth rather than depth; moving horizontally through information; life in inverted commas; no more grand narratives." (Frayling *et al* 285) Nevertheless, this also implies a criticism of that cultural moment: Francesco Donadio (325) rightly sees that image (and its related song "TVC15", 1976) as a metaphor for the alienation of contemporary man.

My argument is that Bowie's political drive constitutes a significant trait of his lyrics. More specifically, I focus on his denunciation of social ills and of lack of human rights, not least because I feel it has been neglected by scholarship on him. I am thinking mostly of the two publications that functioned as the ultimate official acknowledgements of his cultural status: Broackes and Marsh's catalogue for the 2013 exhibition *David Bowie Is*, and Devereux, Dillane

[2] A case in point is represented by Luca Scarlini's volume *Ziggy Stardust: La vera natura dei sogni* (2016), where an exclusive focus on Bowiesque images and fashion-related observations ignores the lyrics completely.

[3] About the fascination he felt for mixture, he called it "probably one of the continuums through my music" and with reference to *Station to Station* (1976) he added: "Using the wrong pieces of information, putting them together, and finding a third piece of information. It's a Burroughs thing. What our life has become in the 20th century: we live and assume our morals and stances from the fragmented pieces of information that we gleam from the media." (Shaw)

[4] I recently found it confirmed when I included the song "Lady Stardust" (1972) in my undergraduate course on gender literature and thus found myself supervising a very stimulating examination of its lyrics by a group of third-year BA students.

[5] I will not engage here with the issue of mental disease and the social mechanisms reproducing it, another popular aspect of Bowie's art (not least for biographical reasons).

[6] "Secret thinker sometimes listening aloud", the title of this article, is from his 1975 song "Win".

and Power's collection *David Bowie: Critical Perspectives* (Routledge 2015). Richard Fitch (24) incarnates this general attitude when he peremptorily writes that Bowie "does not denounce, as is usually the case in punk and folk". The following pages show that this is true only to a very limited extent, and that he also employed the straightforwardly referential power of language to expose the injustice of the dark sides of our age. They demonstrate this by starting from the 1980 album *Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps)*, presented as a catalyst for this aspect of Bowie's writing; then moving to some later, more commercial works, and finally going back to some of his early narrative songs inspired by post-war working-class fiction, where his political poetics may be seen in embryo.

Politically speaking, too, it would be misleading to say that there is *one* Bowie. Some 1975 interviews contain ambiguous statements on Nazism: they were later to be rectified, (very partially) justified by his then dangerous dependence on drugs, and also amplified by a photograph showing Bowie meeting a crowd of fans with a Roman salute. This is a delicate issue that is yet to be clarified,[7] and into which even sophisticated critics such as Simon Critchley dare not venture too much. (137) In any case, it is certainly another contested point that has sidelined the main topic of this essay – Bowie as the singer of the margins.

With regard to this, the crucial passage is the 1980 album *Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps)*, released at the end of a decade studded with memorable albums – from glam rock to the Berlin experiments[8] – and historically marking the demise of utopian ideals. In "Ashes to Ashes" Bowie resuscitates Major Tom, the astronaut who had given him his first success thanks to the popular "Space Oddity" (1969), a song which apparently celebrates the moon landing but where Tom becomes strangely lost, floating in space. The lyrics of "Ashes to Ashes" may be seen as hinting at a descending parable ("high"/"low") analogous to the burnt ideals of the late 1970s (and their many victims): Major Tom has turned into a slave of heroin and of the hallucinatory monsters that it generates, haunting him in outer space:

> I want an axe to break the ice,
> I want to come down right now
> Ashes to ashes, funk to funky
> We know Major Tom's a junkie
> Strung out in heaven's high
> Hitting an all-time low

However, the reality to which Major Tom would like to return is a far cry from offering a liberating deliverance. *Scary Monsters* represents one of the highest points of socio-political critique in Bowie's lyrics, to the point of suggesting quasi-prophetical subtexts. Its opening song, "It's No Game (Part 1)", is rightly considered by Francesco Donadio (401) the most exciting inception of all Bowie's LPs:

> Silhouettes and shadows
> watch the revolution
> No more free steps to heaven
> and it's no game (…)
> I am barred from the event
> I really don't understand the situation (…)

[7] On this issue, see Usher and Fremaux 63.

[8] David Buckley (224-25) considers Bowie's Berlin period as having exerted a "liberalizing and humanizing" influence, and shaped "David Bowie the chronichler (…) if not straightforwardly politicized (…) more alert to the world" in his writing.

Documentaries on refugees
Couples 'gainst the target (…)
Draw the blinds on yesterday
and it's all so much scarier
Put a bullet in my brain
and it makes all the papers
So where's the moral?
People have their fingers broken
To be insulted by these fascists –
it's so degrading
And it's no game

While the reference to fascist violence might be seen as a reply to that mid-1970s polemic mentioned above, these lyrics seem to foreshadow the dark side of the 1980s and beyond: the refugee issue, the increasing number of civilian casualties of war and an atmosphere of terror exacerbated by a widespread oblivion regarding past ideals ("draw the blinds on yesterday" resonates with the double meaning of "blind[s]"). Not to mention the totalizing – but ultimately trivializing, morbid and scandal-mongering – gaze of the mass media, where individuals are overwhelmed by images and turned into helpless, unaware, "barred from the event" spectators.

It is important to *listen* to "It's No Game (Part 1)", not least because Bowie yells it at the top of his voice, shrilly, as if he were being tortured, alternating with a woman (the Japanese actress Michi Hirota) who declaims the same lyrics translated into Japanese "like a drunken Samurai soldier" (Waldrep 152). In one of his witty (and alliterative) turns of phrase, Critchley writes that "Bowie's genius lies in the meticulous matching of mood with music through the medium of the voice" (37). I think we are also faced here with an example of what Chambers calls the affective economy of music (28), given the state of emotional – beneath the moral and ethical – indignation that this performance is likely to provoke. Bowie's vocal spasms become particularly twisted when he utters the song's title, "it's no game", as if to lament how the close of the 1970s and the end of ideologies lead to the appalling possibility of not taking anything seriously any longer, not even great global tragedies, so that everything loses its material presence in favour of the ephemeral. The song's end is marked by an increasingly overwhelming dissonant guitar (alluding to the deafening omnipresence of the mass media?), stopping abruptly only when Bowie hoarsely screams "Shut up!"

In the face of all this, Donadio's reading of this song surprisingly emphasizes a supposed attitude of disengagement. Like Fitch, he places emphasis on Bowie as unfit for the protest song genre (Donadio 293, 392), to the point of forgetting that part of Bowie's work can *also* be read from a political perspective. His cursory analysis of "It's No Game (Part 1)" is a case in point: in his view, we are faced with the *parody* of a protest song, where Bowie expresses a sense of futility towards composing songs about public events, from which he feels "barred". Donadio seems to privilege a view of postmodernism in its most disengaged sense, limited to a self-referential intertextuality. As I have said, one of the main theoretical tenets supporting Critchley's book is similarly based on Bowie's inauthentic, self-conscious, constructed nature, breaking "the superficial link that seems to connect authenticity and truth" – and I think that the complex multi-vocal layers of "It's No Game (Part 1)" perfectly fit this description. At the same time, Critchley envisions Bowie's postmodern constructedness as an instrument of criticism, resonating within us while causing a dissonance that impinges on our view of reality:

> Music resounds and calls us to dissent from the world, to experience a *dissensus comunis*, a sociability at odds with commonsense. Through the fakery and because of it, we feel a truth that leads us beyond ourselves, towards the imagination of some other way of being. (41)[9]

Moving from this idea of postmodern dissent, I read Bowie's lyrics not as a form of textuality hermetically sealed in itself, but founded on a direct contact with the world resulting from the referential power of language. In other words, I am following Robert Scholes's exhortation to "rescue the referent" in textual practice (85), whereas a dominant tendency among scholars seems to lie in emphasizing the meta-referentiality of Bowie's postmodernism. In the Italian context, this may be related to the recent debate about New Realism. In its theorizations, the philosopher Maurizio Ferraris describes postmodernism as trapped in a sort of short circuit, having moved from an emancipating drive against tradition to a negation of the real and its concomitant belief that everything is a construction. Among the tenets that he detects in this trend, he describes "ironization" (Ferraris 4-10) in terms that are reminiscent of what Bowie laments in "It's No Game": a distancing from statement, fact and norm in favour of the rise of the facetiousness and farce that dominate media populism (4-5).[10] Beside this specific song, I see very little, if any, of the supposed ironic/parodic side of Bowie's postmodernism in many of the lyrics selected here. Before Ferraris, Terry Eagleton levelled a similar criticism at postmodernist irony; according to him (28), postmodernism "has brought low the intimidating austerity of high modernism with its playful, parodic, populist spirit, and in thus aping the commodity form has succeeded in reinforcing the rather more crippling austerities generated by the marketplace."

My reading of *Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps)* as a political criticism of the neoliberal tendencies arising in the late 1970s/early 1980s (anticipating some aspects of current globalization) continues with the second song of the album, "Up the Hill Backwards":

> The vacuum created
> by the arrival of freedom
> and the possibilities
> it seems to offer.
> It's got nothing to do with you,
> if one can grasp it. (…)
> A series of shocks –
> sneakers fall apart.
> Earth keeps on rolling –
> witnesses falling. (…)
> More idols than realities

Freedom in its most liberal sense seems at stake here, with its new opportunities but, above all, its zones of forced exclusion for those who cannot "grasp it". The "idols" more numerous than "realities", in this reading, are to be seen as another reference to the vulgarization operated by media culture. As for the lines in between, they may remind (again) the listener of the

[9] With regard to this, Pippo Delbono (26-7) considers Bowie's extra-terrestrial persona as an antidote to the fearful standardization characterizing our contemporaneity.

[10] In a literary aside analogous to the multi TV set scene from *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, Ferraris (45) makes reference to Jerzy Kosinski's novel *Being There* (1970), where the protagonist Chance tries to eliminate what stands before him by clicking on his remote control. In his view, both Chance and postmodernism both believe that considering reality as a construction is enough to make us immune to the attrition of the real.

victims of history ("witnesses falling"), or offer a prophetic hint at Naomi Klein's 'shock doctrine' view of neoliberalism. But this is one of the many points in the later phase of Bowie's output where his lyrics become ambiguous, poetic, suggestive rather than narrative: according to Critchley (144), they are "strongest when they are most oblique. We fill in the gaps with our imagination, with our longing." I see this song as a lament for the fate of the victims of a new era. Not by chance, it is entirely sung by three voices in a sort of happy choir. Donadio rightly compares it to a nursery rhyme, but in its chorus (" Yea, yea, yea – up the hill backwards / It'll be alright ooo-ooo") he sees a streak of optimism, in accordance with his biographical reading of the song centred on Bowie's divorce and new life ahead (405).[11] For my part, I see this chorus as gesturing at the 1980s prevailing mood of optimism, due to a widespread inability to see the future consequences of such progress (embodied in the unnatural movement described in the song's title).[12]

The song that circularly closes *Scary Monsters*, "It's No Game (Part 2)", re-proposes the same initial song – almost. Socio-political criticism (and its prophetic hints, I would say) is further emphasized by adding another stanza on child labour, making the significance of the chorus and title ("It's no game") most disquieting:

> Children 'round the world
> put camel shit on the walls
> Making carpets on treadmills,
> or garbage sorting
> And it's no game

"Part 2" is sung in a radically altered manner, in a slow, warm, melodious, crooner-like voice. Again, I differ from Donadio in my interpretation of it: he takes it biographically as a sign of a more mature Bowie launching himself towards the worldwide popularity to come (425), whereas I detect a discordance between Part 2 and Part 1 (and between this second way of singing and the content of both) that hints at how even Bowie's most commercial songs may hide a more serious subtext. The director Lars von Trier caught this perfectly when, at the end of his film *Dogville* (2003) on the brutality of the American Dream, he closed his story with the massacre of the entire village followed by the start of the end credits: a sequence of pictures of social and human degradation to the musical accompaniment of Bowie's "Young Americans" (1975). This song is characterized by a cheerful rhythm, and it is generally taken by the mainstream public as a celebration of American youth (Donadio 293). Its lyrics, though, confront the sterilizing standardization of individuals, who are led (as in "It's No Game") to ignore the significance of past events:

> We live for just these twenty years,
> do we have to die for the fifty more? (…)
> Do you remember your President Nixon?
> Do you remember the bills you have to pay,
> or even yesterday?

[11] See also Pegg 253.

[12] Donadio does not altogether ignore Bowie's political message. Some parts of his volume, for example, aptly examine the overt and covert references to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (255, 262-4, 270-1, 278-82, 591) including the *Scary Monsters* song "Scream Like a Baby" (421-2) – even though the lyric "learning to be a part of soc-society" could be seen as, besides a stammering induced by shame, a consequence of coercive treatments or a reference to Orwell's INGSOC.

I argue that this ambivalence between entertaining and critical aspects continues throughout the compositions following *Scary Monsters*, which turned Bowie into a worldwide, mainstream commercial phenomenon (thus disappointing many fans). Bowie constantly kept a keen and compassionate eye on what he defined, in his single "Under Pressure" (1981, with the band Queen), as "the terror of knowing what this world is about", while "Love dares you to care for / the people in the streets / the people on the edge of the night."[13] I am referring to *Let's Dance* (1983), thinking of the music video of the title song centred on the condition of contemporary Australian aborigines. Forgetting *Scary Monsters*, Nicholas Pegg writes in his encyclopedia (135) that this music video is the first substantial example of Bowie's political engagement in the 1980s.

Continuing on the lyrics of this album, the (underrated) song "Ricochet" is pervaded by a sense of the utter disposability of human lives, evident in the image of the scythe and in words such as "forgotten":

> Like weeds on a rock face
> waiting for the scythe (…)
> These are the prisons, these are the crimes
> teaching life in a violent new way (…)
> Early, before the sun,
> they struggle off to the gates
> in their secret fearful places,
> they see their lives unraveling before them (…)
> But when they get home,
> damp-eyed and weary,
> they smile and crush their children
> to their heaving chests,
> making unfulfillable promises.
> For who can bear to be forgotten?

The people described here are characterized by fatigue ("struggle", "damp-eyed", "weary", heaving"), and are on the brink of a physical breakdown as a consequence of their labours. Deprived of agency ("unfulfillable promises"), their lives "unraveling before them" are based on violence and alienation. Most of these lines are recited by a metallic voice, reminiscent of an echoing tannoy and thus conveying feelings of oppressive standardization. In this bringing to the fore of the wretched of the earth there is a sense of what Iain Chambers (26-7) detects, in the power of some music, as the constitution of a narration alternative to the official discourse of modernity. Surprisingly, Waldrep (150) dismisses this song with the unexplained phrase "political posturing".

Bowie was to return to these topics recurrently in the albums released after *Let's Dance*. These, despite the quality of many of them, have been largely ignored by most writings commemorating his death.[14] One negative exception to this general observation is *Never Let Me Down* (1987), a poorly inspired album opened by "Day-In Day-Out", picturing a young woman leading a dispossessed life in an American ghetto; though perfectly convincing, its foundational idea of society being divided into the privileged ("stay in") and those who cannot have access to resources ("fade out") is ultimately marred by an excess of didacticism, as Donadio rightly states (453-4).[15] Worth mentioning is the album *Tin Machine* (1989), where the song "I Can't

[13] Donadio considers this song a sort of sequel to "It's No Game" (427).
[14] On Bowie's output in the 1980s, see Waldrep (passim).
[15] See also Pegg 66.

Read" is concerned with cultural depression and deprivation, with its memorable line that sounds today like a manifesto of globalization: "Money goes to money heaven / Bodies go to body hell."[16] The same album includes a cover version of John Lennon's "Working Class Hero" (1970), an anti-status-quo anthem sung by Bowie in a voice charged with rage[17]:

> When they've tortured and scared you for twenty-odd years
> Then they expect you to pick a career
> When you can't really function you're so full of fear (…)
> Keep you doped with religion and sex and TV
> And you think you're so clever and classless and free
> But you're still fucking peasants as far as I can see (…)
> There's room at the top they're telling you still
> But first you must learn how to smile as you kill

On the other side from the excluded, competition and its entailing violence are what must be expected of those who want to "stay in", alongside an induced numbing of critical faculties ("doped") that prevents one from seriously considering what one is doing. Lennon's "smile" is not too distant, after all, from Bowie's idea of "game" mentioned above. The image of a whole community in discord with itself later returns in "Dead Man Walking" (1997), a song contaminated by drum'n'bass sounds with lyrics composed by means of a cut-and-paste method which characterizes the whole album *Earthling* (Pegg 68):

> an alien nation in therapy
> sliding naked, anew
> like a bad-tempered child
> on the rain-slicked streets

The last point that I wish to discuss in this article is how Bowie's attention to the margins is evident from his very beginnings, in some early songs where he was still developing his writing in less oblique, fragmentary and more ballad-like, Dylanesque narrative techniques. One example of this is the song "God Knows I'm Good" (1969), narrating a shoplifter's desperation. More specifically, I focus here on two songs inspired by some of the post-war writers who brought to the fore the life of the British working class. "Little Bombardier" (1967) is a waltz centred on a war veteran who spends his days alone, hungry and aimless, sung in a melancholy tone intensified by a liquid consonance:

> War made him a soldier,
> little Frankie Maire.
> Peace left him a loser,
> a little bombardier

The song was inspired by Alan Sillitoe's short story "Uncle Ernest" (1959). A comparison of song and story shows where some details were maintained, slightly modified or radically altered by Bowie. In the concision of his lines, Bowie tends to make his protagonist less detailedly realistic and more simplified: if Sillitoe's Ernest is an upholsterer, Bowie makes him even more utterly dispossessed: "unskilled hands that knew no trade". On the other hand, Sillitoe craftily determines his character's identity through metaphorical language connoting his

[16] Donadio (467) shows appreciation for the song, but reads it as a mirror of Bowie's creative crisis.
[17] According to Pegg (269-70), this version has not been particularly appreciated.

war experiences, the café counter being covered by customers' hands "like a littered invasion beach extending between two headlands of tea-urns." (38) Bowie's lines

> Frankie drank his money,
> the little that he made.
> Told his woes to no man,
> friendless lonely days

develop a densely significant sentence from the short story: "drink jar after jar of beer, in a slow, prolonged and concentrated way that lonely men have" (37). The temporary turning point in the protagonist's life, his meeting with two children, is rendered by Bowie by borrowing many details from the story. In both works the protagonist spends all his money to help them, until two policemen intervene. Sillitoe narrates a long scene with a heated argument between the policemen and Ernest, where the police act "quickly and competently (…) still keeping hold of his wrists and pressing their fingers hard into them" (45). Bowie condenses and metaphorises this institutional violence in three lines intensified by three consecutive rhymes (the only instance of this in the song):

> Leave them alone or we'll get sore
> We've had blokes like you at the station before
> The hand of authority said "no more"
> to the little bombardier.

What Bowie does not include is related to Frankie/Ernest's agency. In Sillitoe, the policemen's words "Leave them alone" are taken up by Ernest in an act of loud defiance; albeit only momentarily, before being physically subdued, Ernest reacts against being usually "treated as if he were a ghost, as if he were not made of flesh and blood" (38):

> I tell you they're friends of mine. I mean no harm. I look after them and give them presents just as I would daughters of my own. They're the only company I've got. In any case why shouldn't I look after them? Why should you take them away from me? Who do you think you are? Leave me alone. Leave me alone. (45)

Another evident difference between the two works concerns the children's characters. The writer hints at the elder girl consciously exploiting Ernest's blind generosity, her requests expressed "only in a particularly naïve, childish way, so that Ernest, in his oblivious contentment, did not notice it" (43). Bowie ignores this, but adds an element of play:

> his life was fun
> and his heart was full of joy.
> Two young children had changed his aims,
> he gave them toffees and played their games.

And when the policemen threaten the protagonist, Bowie makes them ask: "Why was he friends with the children / Were they just a game?" In the light of the present article, I consider this addition significant insofar as it represents an earlier connotation of "game" than the 1980 sense: more consonantly with its period, this playing is to be seen as carrying an emancipating urgency in the face of institutional constraints, similarly to the earlier phase of the postmodern mentioned above in relation to Ferraris. In his study on Bowie's use of allusions, Fitch (19) traces another connection with the artist's postmodern intertextuality and play: "Etymologically, allusion can be traced to the Latin *alludere*, which means 'to play with'. (…) the key to

understanding the attraction of Bowie's work for the intellectually and culturally curious lies in his playful manipulation of allusion."

In any case, compared to Sillitoe, Bowie idealizes childhood. A similar kind of nostalgic attitude is detectable in another 1967 song,[18] "There Is a Happy Land", inspired by Keith Waterhouse's novel of the same title:

> There is a happy land where only children live.
> They don't have time to learn the ways
> of you, sir, Mr. Grownup.
> There's a special place in the rhubarb fields, underneath the leaves.
> It's a secret place and adults aren't allowed there,
> Mr. Grownup, go away sir.

As far as the circle of children is concerned, the song's atmosphere is definitely one of harmony, relating to the state of bliss associated to childhood since Romanticism.[19] The two following stanzas are composed of a list of children's names and their favourite activities, whereas the alternating chorus introduces variants of adults spoiling their fun. Though occasionally marred by harmless mischievousness, the children's state verges on the utopian ("Tony climbed a tree and fell / trying hard to touch the sky"), which is in tune with the mood of the inception of the novel: "It was better than Christmas, the way we rolled off down the road, shouting and bawling and pretending to limp" (Waterhouse 5). A deeper comparison between the two works shows that the song's lyrics include some details from the novel: amongst others, the rhubarb fields which are part of the children's improvised playground, their hiding den, and their parents representing an obstacle to their fun (see, for example, 72-4). Like in the previous case, the element of 'play' constitutes a contrasting element against accepted social norms. Nevertheless, as the novel progresses, this atmosphere becomes sombre and less innocent, until its tragic ending. This is due to the children's ruthless bullying of one another (Bowie expunges childhood's cruelty as he does in "Little Bombardier") and, above all, to some occurrences of paedophiliac abuse. Having read the novel, one inevitably senses that the song's sentence "and adults aren't allowed there, Mr. Grownup, go away sir" might carry a disquieting subtext. It is doubtful whether Bowie had this shattering of the childhood dream in mind. On the one hand, the song closes with a meaningless, toddler-like singing which conveys a sense of innocent childishness; on the other hand, its final words ("You've had your chance / and now the doors are closed sir, / Mr. Grownup, go away sir") reverberate darkly with the following passage, set in the abuser's run-down house: "There was this closed door that we had never opened. I looked at it and my heart started thumping and I thought for a minute of this blinking Bluebeard story, where he had this locked room full of women's heads." (Waterhouse 141)

Whatever Bowie's intentions, this composition is certainly one of many songs where he identifies in children another category marginalised and repressed by mainstream norms (as in "Wild Eyed Boy from Freecloud", 1969). These songs may be seen as a prelude to the youth culture that Bowie would champion in his following works, as in "Changes" (1971):

> And these children that you spit on,
> as they try to change their worlds,
> are immune to your consultations,
> they're quite aware
> of what they're going through

[18] Donadio (29-41) sees this nostalgic mood in the whole 1967 *David Bowie* album.
[19] With regard to this song, Pegg (238) makes reference to William Blake's poetry.

In Bowie's poetics, this link between children and the dispossessed is poignantly caught by Delbono when he comments on the lyrics of "Starman" (1972):

> We play with our star roles, like children who dress like kings and queens and then find themselves covered in piss and shit. And those excrements make us re-assume our true human condition, and make us feel deeply equal to the last of the last refugees of the world. (Delbono 31-2; trans. mine)

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ItINERARI

APLICAÇÃO DO CONCEITO DE CÂNONE ÀS LITERATURAS AFRICANAS EM LÍNGUA PORTUGUESA

O caso de Angola e *Yaka*

Noemi ALFIERI

ABSTRACT • The essay will consider some of the main problems related to the application of the Literary Canon to African Literatures in Portuguese Language and will focus on the particular case of the debate on the novel *Yaka*, written by Pepetela. Cosmological and political differences from Europe, social identity and ethnical variety are the main fields which need to be explored, aiming to go through the cultural contrasts that stand on the core of Africa and to allow the European reader to have the tools to understand the message of the written text properly. A short presentation of the Angolan Literature, with its linguistic plurality, will show how it has been used as a mirror of society and as a vehicle of the freedom utopias which held to the composition of a new nation after Independence: from Cordeiro da Matta to Raul David, from Luandino Vieira to Pepetela. The considerations on the case of *Yaka* – and on the observation of the Angolan Literary Critic Luís Kandjimbo on the novel and its supposed "coloniality" –, will be useful tools to disclose the possible distortions of the message of literary works.

KEYWORDS • Canon, Angola, Pepetela, African Literatures, Kandjimbo

1. Considerações sobre o Cânone Literário Angolano

> A um momento dado, mesmo que muito breve nalguns casos fomos puros, desinteressados, só pensando no povo e lutando por ele. E depois… tudo se adulterou, tudo apodreceu, muito antes de se chegar ao poder. Cada um começou a preparar as bases de lançamento para esse poder, a defender posições particulares, egoístas. A utopia morreu. E hoje cheira mal, como qualquer corpo em putrefação. Dela só resta um discurso vazio.
> (Pepetela, 1993)

O discurso sobre o Cânone, intrinsecamente em diálogo com a concepção de clássico e que implica já em si um conjunto de interrogações em relação às dinâmicas sociais, culturais e políticas que o influenciam, coloca uma série de problemas adicionais se for aplicado às Literaturas Africanas.

Não se pretende, com esse termo, proceder a uma generalização temática ou estética da literatura oral e escrita proveniente do mesmo continente. Seria, de facto, incorrecto reduzir a um grupo homogéneo produções que, se bem que procedentes de macrogrupos étnicos comuns e de cosmologias que apresentam rasgos gerais afins, se desenvolveram seguindo trajectórias

distintas[1]. O que, pelo contrário, se pretende destacar é a inegável presença de determinada visão do mundo, constitutiva e autóctone, que funciona como elemento substrático estando como tal na base da formação de um cânone literário escrito, representativo da identidade e da cultura nacional.

Emerge em consequência e como já referido, no caso das Literaturas Africanas em Língua Portuguesa, um problema de sobreposição e fusão de visões do mundo opostas por ideologia, organização social, ligação com a terra, e que implicam divergências em relação à própria percepção de cultura. No caso específico de Angola, para além dos contrastes derivantes da oposição entre colonial e anticolonial, a situação complica-se pela variedade na composição étnica do país e da associação, frequentemente implícita, entre branco e colonialista.

A escrita serviu historicamente de ferramenta para a formação da nova nação, neste país provavelmente mais do que noutros[2]. Ao longo do século XX, assistimos a uma série de produções no filão de afirmação duma liberdade ideológica, factual e cultural em relação ao colonizador: uma difusa ética da intervenção. Se, como afirma Mukařovský, "a obra literária é um signo, e portanto, pela sua própria essência, um facto social" (Mukařovský, 1977, p. 94), será então imprescindível considerar os textos enquanto produtos do sistema sociopolítico em que se inserem e lembrar-se de que a inclusão ou exclusão do Cânone em determinada altura histórica não pode ser reduzida a factores de natureza exclusivamente estética. O texto e a sua estética não são, portanto, entidades fixas existentes *a priori*, mas variáveis que mudam ao longo do tempo.

Não me limitarei, no entanto, às orientações que consideram como literatura angolana apenas a produção posterior à Independência, teses que têm crédito entre alguns críticos brasileiros e que vêem a sua legitimação, em Portugal, na *Antologia da poesia pré-angolana (1948-74)* de Pires Laranjeira (Pires Laranjeira, 1975). Optarei, pelo contrário, por privilegiar uma visão que não reduz essa literatura nacional a um período cronológico na base de mudanças geopolíticas ou de uma rígida classificação temática.

Elementos tipicamente angolanos podem ser, de facto, encontrados pelo menos a partir da obra de Cordeiro da Matta (1857-1894): conhecedor profundo do quimbundo e redactor do *Ensaio de diccionario Kimbúndu-Portuguez* (Cordeiro da Matta, 1893), os seus poemas eram claramente influenciados por um ritmo e um léxico bantófono, quase sempre traduzido para português, numa "relação lógica e equilibrada das duas línguas" (Martinho, 1998).

As obras que surgem a partir deste período não podem ser consideradas unicamente como uma integração do trabalho etnográfico e antropológico sobre Angola[3]. Estamos, no caso de Da Matta, perante um escritor angolano para o qual o quimbundo é língua materna, dum autor que não se limita a redigir um simples testemunho linguístico, mas que integra a língua autóctone num mais amplo projecto de consciência, se ainda não propriamente nacional, de pertença a uma cultura histórica e geograficamente bem delimitada. É exactamente a partir daqui que aparecem as primeiras sistematizações em língua portuguesa de elementos linguísticos pertencentes à cultura autóctone e a paralela inclusão destes na transcrição ou reelaboração da literatura oral, veículo de valores e duma visão do mundo – como já afirmei – que pouco tem que ver com a europeia. Ao reconhecer a originalidade da literatura de Angola em relação à

[1] A questão é amplamente tratada em Mata (2001).

[2] Estamos, neste caso, a pensar nas análises levadas a cabo pela maioria dos críticos das literaturas pós-coloniais e numa visão acreditada sobre a literatura angolana no período anterior e imediatamente posterior a Independência.

[3] Veja-se, por exemplo, os trabalhos de Héli Chatelain (1894), estudioso suíço que publicou em 1894 uma edição bilingue kimbundu-inglês (com tradução literal) de *Folk tales of Angola*. Relevante também a contribuição de Carlos Estermann (1956-1961 e 1971).

portuguesa devemos começar a interrogar-nos sobre a efectiva aplicabilidade do Cânone Ocidental a esta produção literária, isto é, considerar a possibilidade de que obras que não obedecem às regras estilísticas ou de conteúdo para nós canonizadas não deixem de ter por isso idêntica dignidade cultural.

Nos anos da Guerra Colonial[4], as colectâneas de literatura tradicional tiveram uma difusão enorme. Foi neste período que foram publicadas obras do calibre de *Missosso*[5] de Óscar Bento Ribas (recolha de contos, adivinhas e provérbios) ou *Contos Tradicionais da Nossa Terra*[6] e *Cantares do Nosso Povo, versões escritas de cantos e poemas em língua Umbundu*[7] de Raúl David.

A transposição do léxico e da terminologia das línguas bantu para um português, que chega a ser português de Angola (variante furto das diferenças étnicas e linguísticas próprias do território), complementa-se com a recuperação das temáticas tradicionais para afirmar uma independência ideológica em relação ao colonizador. A partir dos anos cinquenta, e com a Geração da *Mensagem*, elementos de socio-realismo e de resistência tornam-se parte integrante – e componente preponderante – da literatura angolana, para "cimentar a consciência de pertença ao colectivo, isto é, à nova nação" (Laranjeira, 2002, pp.36-41). Escritores como Maurício Gomes, Viriato da cruz, Alda Lara e Agostinho Neto empenham-se numa produção de dimensão nacionalizante e construtivista cujo sistema não pode ser reduzido na sua totalidade nem às correntes negritudinistas dos períodos anteriores, nem às obras ditas lusotropicalistas[8]. Em países como Angola, as utopias libertárias converteram-se em bases para a construção de identidades nacionais que se afastavam do modelo eurocêntrico, correspondendo ao *modus vivendi* e à concepção do mundo típico de cada país.

A idealização da luta viu, no contexto urbano, *os musseques* [9] como cenário de consolidação da resistência. As condições sociais de privação generalizada são representadas,

[4] Não é nossa intenção entrar neste momento na discussão sobre a legitimidade da denominação Guerra Colonial ou Guerra de Libertação. Trata-se neste caso de uma referência meramente factual de conflito nos territórios que foram, historicamente e a nível administrativo, definidas pelos portugueses como colónias.

[5] Óscar Bento Ribas, *Missosso: literatura tradicional angolana*, Luanda, Tipografia angolana, 1962.

[6] Raúl David, *Contos Tradicionais da Nossa Terra I*, Luanda, União dos Escritores Angolanos, 1979.

[7] Raul Mateus David, *Cantares do nosso povo versões escritas de cantos e poemas em língua Umbundu*, Luanda, União dos escritores angolanos, 1988.

[8] A corrente da Negritude tem os seus iniciadores e principais teóricos nos escritores e políticos Aimé Césaire e Leopold Senghor, o primeiro martinicano e o segundo senegalês. Os dois intelectuais, que se formaram academicamente na Sorbonne, em Paris, punham em causa a tentativa de uniformização à identidade do colonizador. Senghor, em particular, com a ideia, em *O contributo do homem negro* (1939), de que "a emoção é negra", sublinha a preponderância da sensibilidade negra sobre a racionalidade europeia. O Luso-Tropicalismo é, nas palavras do seu teorizador Gilberto Freyre, "a especial capacidade de o português se misturar com os povos tropicais, trocando padrões culturais e criando sociedades sincréticas e harmónicas".

[9] De acordo com Guimarães (1962): "Musseque, grafia aportuguesada, é um termo originário do quimbundo, 'sendo etimologicamente constituído pelo prefixo «mu» (lugar) e pelo radical «seke» (areia)' (Ribas 1958, p. 144 *apud* Monteiro 1973, p. 53) que indica as zonas de areias avermelhadas, situadas no planalto de Luanda. O termo assume 'significado sociológico quando é utilizado para designar os aglomerados de cubatas construídas nestas áreas por indivíduos expulsos da cidade [centro] devido à expansão urbana' ou pelos novos migrantes (Amaral 1968, p. 113). A expressão musseque ganhou sentido pejorativo ao qualificar os moradores dessas localidades por seu baixo nível econômico e social. E daí o seu derivado mussequeiro: pessoa de baixa condição que habita no musseque (Monteiro 1973, p. 54)".

pela primeira vez, por Luandino Viera, que viveu em diferentes musseques de Luanda depois de ter emigrado de Portugal aos três anos:

> No seu canto, mulato Armindo já não está triste. Os olhos duros. A face dura. As mãos crispadas sobre a gaita parecem querer rebentá-la.
> Relembra a mãe – onde andaria agora a mãe? Vendendo-se pelo musseque! –, o pai branco, a saída da escola. Tudo por causa da branca que veio no navio.
> Como ele a odiava. As pancadas, as rixas, as lutas pela vida. Aquela vida de vadio dos musseques de Luanda. A expressão dura vai ficando trocista e os olhos têm um brilho mau. (Vieira, 1956, p.96)

O complexo de condições sociais do mundo urbano vai-se fundindo na literatura angolana com o testemunho de contrastes étnicos e é a partir destes elementos que os escritores procuram contribuir para a formação da identidade nacional. A contextualização até agora levada a cabo não quer ser um relato linear do ponto de vista cronológico, não necessário aos fins da nossa discussão e que constituiria uma tarefa complicada do ponto de vista metodológico, não tendo sido publicada, até hoje, nenhuma História da Literatura Angolana. Querem-se, contudo, delinear alguns dos aspectos recorrentes, temáticos e linguísticos.

2. O caso de *Yaka*: a dialéctica entre colonial e anticolonial

> Yaka, Mbayakam, jaga, imbangala?
> Foram uma mesma formação social (?), Nação (?) – aos antropólogos de esclarecer.
> Certo é que agitaram a já tremeluzente História de Angola, com suas incursões ao Reino do Congo […].
> Na Matamba, deram força à lendária Rainha Njinga (ou Nzinga),
> que empurrou o exército português até o mar.
> *Talvez Njinga fosse yaka? A hipótese ainda não morreu.*
> (Pepetela, 1984, p.9)

Onde colocar, portanto, a escrita de Pepetela? O autor angolano é considerado um dos maiores representantes da literatura angolana e recebeu o Prémio Camões pelo conjunto da obra em 1997. Os críticos destacaram, em distintas ocasiões, o empenho do autor na formação duma renovada identidade nacional, o seu olhar crítico face à situação do país e a dedicação ao ideal de justiça, num conjunto literário sem dúvida nenhuma altamente polifónico[10]. Rasgo distintivo de Pepetela, então, seria a elevada capacidade de representação das componentes étnicas e sociais do país, através duma escrita politicamente colocada no âmbito da Guerra de Libertação e, sucessivamente, no testemunho e problematização do contexto pós-colonial e dos jogos de poder. Uma parte consistente dos textos publicados pelo autor – catorze romances, duas novelas e uma fábula – refere-se de forma explícita à guerrilha e à luta armada para a libertação de Angola (*Mayombe*, *As aventuras de Ngunga*), à desilusão depois da tomada de poder (*A geração da Utopia*, *Predadores*) e a problematização da história contemporânea de Angola (*O Cão e os caluandandas, Lueji – o nascimento dum Império, Yaka*). Mesmo nas obras mais alegóricas, nas quais a ligação ao contexto de vida real não é verbalizada, Pepetela não se afasta do centro gravitacional ideológico subjacente a toda a sua obra. Assim, *A Montanha da Água Lilás* é uma metáfora das implicações ligadas ao controlo das riquezas naturais e do conceito de propriedade, enquanto *Muana Puó* é alegoria da luta entre colonizadores e colonizados.

[10] As referências são, a este propósito a Inocência Mata, Francisco Salinas Portugal, Laura Cavalcante Padilha e Rita Chaves, entre outros.

Tanto no último romance mencionado quanto em *Yaka*, um dos fios condutores do enredo é a máscara, cuja presença modula a narração. Se o nariz de *Muana Puó*, máscara Tchokwé em que é ambientada a luta dos morcegos para a libertação em relação ao domínio dos corvos é o maior dos obstáculos que os dois protagonistas devem vencer para a obtenção da liberdade, a máscara *Yaka* é o interlocutor privilegiado e silencioso do protagonista do romance homónimo.

De relevante interesse em relação à nossa reflexão sobre o Cânone é o debate que se originou entre Luís Kandjimbo e Pires Laranjeira exactamente em relação ao romance *Yaka*. Publicado na primeira edição em 1984, o romance chegou à sexta edição portuguesa em 2010. A obra repercorre a história duma família de colonos portugueses que se estabelece em Angola entre 1890 e 1974 e representa emblematicamente o fim da época colonial. O protagonista Alexandre Semedo é acompanhado ao longo da sua vida pela máscara Yaka, que comunica com ele, mas cujas mensagens não consegue interpretar.

Luís Kandjimbo, de facto, reitera a sua aversão ao romance de Pepetela em vários artigos e ensaios, a partir de *Yaka: a ficção e o estatuto da história ou um romance colonial?*, em que o crítico angolano afirma que a obra suscita "perplexidade para o leitor angolano avisado, numa trama que se traduz em inadequada superação das metáforas coloniais".

A proposta de Kandjimbo em relação à canonização é clara: é preciso "excluir do cânone literário angolano aquelas obras que reflictam a ausência dos Angolanos e a negação da sua autonomia no plano ontológico. Tais obras são, por exemplo, *Nga Muturi* de Alfredo Troni, a obra do poeta português Tomás Vieira da Cruz, a trilogia de Castro Soromenho, *Yaka* de Pepetela"

Apelando à especificidade, no plano ontológico, da produção literária angolana (caracterizada por uma conspícua componente de literatura oral e de textos em línguas nacionais) e realçando a herança platónica europeia como emblema do modelo totalitário aplicado ao ensino no Ocidente, Kandjimbo propõe para Angola um sistema de ensino alheio à reprodução social. A tal tipo de reprodução, opõe uma "reprodução cultural", que se encarregue da descolonização cultural, ao fim de "evitar que se consagre um cânone literário totalitário, ou seja, um cânone glotofágico que se confundirá certamente com parte de um certo eurocentrismo linguístico" (Kandjimbo, 1995, p. 57-74).

Em *Literatura, Cânone e Poder Político*, Pires Laranjeira define como "perversidade teórica" a dúvida sobre a anti-colonialidade de Yaka. Laranjeira faz uma distinção entre a posição de Kandjimbo, promulgador da Angolanidade, e as posições externas a Angola que vêm uma valorização do conceito de Crioulidade e que encobrem "as tendências Luso-tropicalizantes, afro-portuguesas ou declaradamente parafascistas e fascista" (Laranjeira, 2002).

A questão da Angolanidade é tratada por Kandjimbo no ensaio *O endógeno e o universal na literatura angolana* (Kandjimbo, 2013), no qual o conceito é definido como "aberto, marcado pela universalidade" e como "revelador da necessidade do diálogo cultural". O crítico promulga portanto a necessidade de incluir, no âmbito da literatura e da cultura angolana, aqueles autores nacionais (negros, brancos ou mestiços) que representam factores e características historicamente em relação com o povo angolano. Chamando em causa a opinião expressa pelo ensaísta Manuel Jorge em *Para Compreender Angola* (Jorge, 1998), contudo, Kandjimbo torna evidente a fraqueza teórica e lógica das suas considerações em torno a *Yaka*.

A seguinte argumentação do ensaio de Jorge (p. 159) é incluída directamente no texto de Kandjimbo (p. 6):

> Angolanidade constrói-se com tudo o que a história legou ao povo angolano: o substrato negro-africano e os elementos da cultura dominante que através dos séculos penetraram até ao mais fundo do inconsciente popular.

Logo a seguir, argumenta-se que a Angolanidade implica uma reacção às tentações hegemónicas das teorias do Luso-tropicalismo e da Crioulidade, constituindo-se como aderente aos objectivos de descolonização ideológica. A nível de enquadramento geral, os conceitos e as teorias de Kandjimbo assentam nos mais recentes estudos sobre os países de contexto pós-colonial, e implicam um olhar desconstrutivo sobre delicadas interacções culturais e sociais que foram durante demasiado tempo excessivamente simplificadas.

O que enfraquece, a nível lógico, a arquitectura do crítico é a aplicação forçada deste tipo de discurso ao romance de Pepetela. Seguindo este esquema, *Yaka* não deveria pertencer ao Cânone Angolano porque não representativa de nenhuma característica essencial da cultura angolana. Entre outros factores, a condenação baseia-se na hipotética desmistificação de Mutu-ya-Kevela, figura histórica de luta contra o colonialismo[11] reduzida, na opinião do crítico, a um monstro assustador de crianças.

A leitura das primeiras páginas de *Yaka*, ressalta certamente a singularidade do enfoque narrativo. Nisso, Kandjimbo tem razão, o ponto de vista representado é o do colonialista, a nível cultural e político:

> E contavam recontavam as mesmas cenas de horror: os «cabeças de alcatrão», cheios de liamba e feitiços, atacavam aos milhares uma loja isolada no mato, matavam os colonos, levavam todo o recheio da loja, depois punham fogo. Falavam no chefe, o terrível Quebera e seu amigo Samacaca. Como começara? Ninguém que sabia contar. Só que esse Quebera era um monstro, trazia uma pele de onça nas costas, dentes enormes que lhe saíam da boca a escorrer sangue. (Pepetela, 1984, p.42)

Parece também evidente que a utilização do ponto de vista do colonizador e as descrições depreciativas e caricaturais dos negros são um recurso estilístico da voz narrativa num claro efeito de verosimilhança. O tom utilizado serve para sublinhar os exageros e as contradições que caracterizavam os brancos, os quais não conseguiam encontrar uma posição definida na sociedade angolana. A ênfase na definição "brancos de segunda", reiterada ao longo do texto, não é casual, e expressa claramente a ideia de que o ódio racial e os juízos sobre os povos autóctones eram ditados, na opinião do autor, por uma insatisfação dos brancos: já não reconhecidos como portugueses pelo governo central mas ainda com dificuldades em definir-se, eles próprios, como Angolanos. Para além disso, a narração alterna duas vozes principais, a de Alexandre Semedo e outra, em terceira pessoa, que descobrimos ser a da máscara Yaka e que relata frequentemente os diálogos mais racistas e contraditórios atribuídos aos habitantes de Benguela. Será pertinente subestimar a sensação de afastamento em relação a estes juízos que qualquer leitor experimenta durante a leitura do romance?

Uma das poucas personagens melhor caracterizadas é a de Acácio, anarquista que ataca os governos – o central e o colonial – sem arrependimentos, defendendo publicamente os negros.

[11] Mutu-ya-Kevela liderou a revolta do Bailundo (na zona do Planalto Central de Angola), em 1902, contra os colonizadores portugueses. O pretexto para o início da luta foi a recusa, por parte de Mutu-ya-Kevela, de pagar umas ampolas de aguardente aos comerciantes portugueses, denunciando assim os truques que os colonizadores utilizavam para enfraquecer as tribos autóctones e converter os seus componentes em escravos. A revolta chegou a envolver vários *kimbos* Ovimbundu, mas foi violentamente reprimida.

Ele acaba por ser morto na sua loja, sem que as autoridades levem a cabo uma investigação real, atribuindo o crime a um genérico "Algum negro para roubar" (Pepetela, 1984, p. 94).

Estamos perante outro exemplo de condenação da corrupção colonialista, que se vai somando ao olhar firme de Yaka, que parece querer condenar Alexandre, quando este último impreca, cegado pela raiva:

Enquanto houver negros viveremos no medo. Estou-me cagando se se revoltam porque lhes roubam as terras boas para o café. Estou-me cagando se se revoltam contra o imposto de ter uma cubata ou contra o imposto de nascimento. Estou-me cagando se acham injusto pagar o ar que respiram. Estou-me cagando se a terra antes era deles. Não quero é viver mais no medo. E deixa de me olhar assim, Yaka, também me estou cagando para ti e para o que penses de mim.

Mais uma vez, parece não haver dúvidas sobre o facto de que a enumeração – cuja intensidade cresce até chegar à afirmação de que não importa se os negros são metaforicamente obrigados a "pagar o ar que respiram" – tem o objectivo de transmitir a ideia da total absurdidade das afirmações do jovem Semedo.

Estas considerações exemplificativas ajudam-nos a ter uma ideia do nível de "colonialidade" do romance em questão. As observações de Kandjimbo em relação a *Yaka* podem derivar, na minha opinião, de três distintas possibilidades: o crítico não leu o romance (ou a leitura foi parcial e desatenta); o crítico leu o romance mas não reparou nos inúmeros sinais deixados no texto a fim de permitir um distanciamento do ponto de vista das personagens (o que é pouco provável dada a bagagem cultural e metodológica de Kandjimbo); ou, finalmente, a "condenação" do crítico nada tem a ver com o valor literário e testemunhal do romance.

Por outras palavras, Kandjimbo parece abrir uma excepção e, ao considerar que a componente branca de Angola não é evidentemente representativa de nenhum rasgo característico da cultura do País, etiqueta o romance como colonial. O "crime" seria o de representar uma condição social que, se bem que eticamente condenável, não deixou de fazer historicamente parte da vida de Angola. A componente linguística é, neste caso, completamente ignorada, e o crítico considera unicamente que a obra aparece escrita em português – língua do colonizador –, sem pôr a necessária atenção no facto de a mesma incluir, ao mesmo tempo, uma variedade de termos angolanos directamente proveniente das línguas bantu, que nada têm a ver com o léxico do português europeu, pronunciadas pelos brancos (o que implicou a presença dum glossário de quatro páginas, com espaçamento simples entre linhas, na edição da Dom Quixote).

Complicam ulteriormente o debate as frequentes alusões do crítico a um estatuto ontológico da cultura angolana que se configura, na sua visão, como uma entidade quase autorreferencial. Quem vive fora de Angola e não tem origens angolanas, não pode compreender profundamente as raízes culturais do povo e não tem meios e conhecimentos suficientes para uma percepção fiável da representatividade real dum ou doutro autor. Afirmação, esta, cuja veridicidade é por um lado inegável. Neste caso, o problema lógico e crítico levantado é ainda maior: será esta uma observação válida unicamente para Angola? A recepção de obras que não façam parte da nossa cultura de origem será, então, necessariamente distorcida? A argumentação de Kandjimbo sobre *Yaka*, cuja função quer ser a de defender a tipicidade da literatura angolana em relação a literatura colonial portuguesa e o seu carácter endógeno, poderia – pelo contrário – acabar por isolá-la, limitando a sua área de interpretação.

A impressão complexiva que suscita a leitura dos vários ensaios do crítico sobre *Yaka* é a duma condenação prévia da obra, relacionada com questões ideológicas e com uma tentativa de negação de todas aquelas representações da história angolana que testemunham o ponto de vista dos primeiros brancos de Angola, aqueles portugueses "de segunda" que desenvolveram, eles mesmo, ligações ao solo angolano e que denotavam afinal uma desaproximação progressiva da

lógica colonialista. Mesmo no caso em que a perspectiva deles seja apresentada e revisitada em chave polémica.

O caso do romance de Pepetela é, em conclusão, altamente exemplificativo do carácter intrinsecamente problemático do discurso sobre o Cânone, que abrange não só questões literárias, mas também politicas, sociais e ideológicas. No âmbito da contemporaneidade, a circulação das obras não se limita ao território nacional e, frequentemente, nem ao continente de origem. Se esse fenómeno implica uma possível deformação dos conceitos identitários e a constituição dum imaginário parcial nos leitores internacionais, consideramos que o discurso canónico-crítico não pode, por outro lado, ofuscar o valor dos leitores os quais, mesmo não sendo críticos de profissão, têm todos os meios práticos para aprofundar os materiais culturais dos quais a literatura se faz porta-voz.

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RISCRIVENDO LA COMPLESSITÀ

Due opere tardive di Eça de Queirós e José Saramago

Maria Serena FELICI

ABSTRACT • The late literary production of Eça de Queirós appears as the point at which converges a meeting of opposite ideals. *Adão e Eva no paraíso* is a formidable example of it. The comparison with Saramago's *Caim*, makes this point emerge clearly. Both works acclaim the emancipation of human reason from faith; but while Saramago attackes strongly Christian worship, Eça appears more cautious. Is it a radical difference between the two writers or a different way of showing the same condition of senility?

KEYWORDS • Adam, Old Testament, Myth, Reason, Faith, Cain, Complexity, Eça de Queirós, José Saramago, Late Style.

> O progresso no uso das palavras segue, em Eça de Queiroz, um caminho paralelo ao do desenvolvimento geral da sua arte. Do vocabulário abstracto dos seus primeiros escritos, […] passa ao vocabulário de intenção objetiva que serve uma visão da realidade, que pretende ser flagrante e impassivelmente fotográfica, guiada e dominada como está pela férrea disciplina do realismo experimental. E de aí, em subtil evolução, chega a um uso do léxico, que funde os dois anteriores, para suscitar uma realidade irreal, voluntariamente acentuada e deformada pela fantasia. Nesta etapa final, a palavra deixa de perseguir a representação da realidade imediata e tangível, para apontar a uma realidade mais profunda e trascendente. Vemos assim como o escritor passa do propósito de verdade objetiva, do seu período realista – duramente conquistado contra fortes tendências temperamentais – à intenção da veracidade poética, a partir da libertação de toda a disciplina limitadora. *(Guerra Cal*, 1953, 28*)*

Questa analisi, che Ernesto Guerra Cal propone nel suo saggio sull'evoluzione dello stile linguistico-letterario di Eça de Queirós, si riferisce alla produzione tardiva dello scrittore, quella che vide la luce durante il suo soggiorno parigino (1888-1900) e che comprende opere a sfondo religioso-folcloristico come i racconti che compongono le *Lendas de Santos* e il romanzo *A Cidade e as Serras*, pubblicati postumi rispettivamente nel 1912 e nel 1901.

Il presente articolo intende riflettere su come il racconto *Adão e Eva no paraíso* (1897) rispecchi la tesi di Guerra Cal testimoniando il modo che Eça ebbe di affrontare gli ultimi anni di vita, senza rinnegare lo spirito "rivoluzionario" che aveva caratterizzato le sue opere giovanili ma amalgamandolo con una visione più ampia del reale; confronteremo poi questo approccio alla senilità con quello, estremamente diverso, di José Saramago, e vedremo in che rapporto essi si trovano.

Adão e Eva no paraíso è il settimo dei tredici *Contos* riuniti nel 1902 da Luís de Magalhães, precedentemente pubblicato da Eça nell'*Almanaque Enciclopédico*.

L'ordine dei testi raccolti da Magalhães disegna una parabola estremamente esemplificativa del percorso biografico-letterario dell'autore: in apertura troviamo *Singularidades de uma rapariga loira*, che fu scritto a Cuba nel 1874 e che presenta un Eça

sprezzante della letteratura romantica e fortemente ammaliato dalle tesi deterministe del romanzo sperimentale; segue *Um poeta lírico* (Bristol, 1880), una sorta di romanzo di formazione sotto forma di racconto che narra le tristi avventure di un giovane con velleità poetiche che disdegna il proprio destino di cameriere per via del poco dignitoso rapporto quotidiano con il cibo, cui preferirebbe l'esercizio di un mestiere come quello del contabile, parimenti modesto ma ben più *bohemien*; *No moinho* (Bristol, 1880), storia di una donna di campagna tutta casa e chiesa che viene traviata dall'esperienza del tradimento, è l'ultimo dei testi a forte trazione realista-naturalista. Segue *Civilização* (Parigi, 1892), nucleo tematico dal quale muoverà il romanzo *A Cidade e as Serras*, *O Tesouro* (Parigi, 1893), *Frei Genebro* (Parigi, 1893), *Adão e Eva no Paraíso* (Parigi, 1897), *A Aia* (Parigi, 1893), *O Defunto* (Parigi, 1895), *José Matias* (Parigi, 1897), *A Perfeição* (Parigi, 1897), *O Suave Milagre* (Parigi, 1898) e *Outro Suave Milagre*, che è una versione sintetizzata del precedente.

I comuni denominatori di questi ultimi racconti sono, tra gli altri, il minor livore antiromantico, l'elogio per la vita rurale e la rivisitazione della tradizione agiografica.

Un primo approccio critico all'ultimo Eça, dedicato principalmente all'analisi di *A Cidade e as Serras*, individua una virata idealista (se non simbolista), e la ricollega alla grande sensazione di estraneità che Eça provò nei confronti dell'alta società parigina[1]; tuttavia, se è senz'altro vero che lo scrittore mal sopportava la venalità, la viziosità e l'ingiustizia dilaganti nella metropoli francese – con la possibilità che ciò abbia inciso su di una parziale revisione del proprio concetto di estetica declinato tanto in rapporto alla scrittura quanto alla vita nel suo complesso – la critica più recente ha evidenziato i limiti di una lettura tendente alla semplificazione, e ne ha evidenziato le contraddizioni.

Miguel Real identifica le peculiarità della produzione tardiva dello scrittore attraverso dei punti chiave molto precisi:

> 1. Predominância da subjectividade face ao império da realidade, com forte atenuação do realismo como processo literário (que continua como processo formal, embora atenuado);
> 2. Revisitação de todos os temas fundamentais da História da Civilização Ocidental através das personagens criadas e basicamente da História de Portugal, como se Portugal e Europa se encontrassem, esgotados do seu esforço criador de mundos e tudo fosse necessário repensar, recomeçando uma outra Europa e um outro Portugal;
> 3. Atenuação da observação realista e sobrevalorização subjetiva do comparativismo histórico, dando lugar a textos (romances, crônicas, contos) em que mais se sobrevaloriza a componente ensaística do que a componente descritivista, isto é, textos de fundo e horizonte metahistórico;
> 4. No conteúdo romanesco e ensaístico, explícita sensibilidade e um empenhamento ativo na valorização do "pobre", apelando a uma solução política e civilizacional promotora do "pão" e da "casa" para todos. (Real 2006: 134-135)

Come opera Eça, in questo racconto, la 'rivisitazione dei temi fondamentali della Storia della Civiltà Occidentale' di cui parla Real[2]? In cosa si esplicita quella che egli chiama

[1] Lo scrittore si era trasferito nella capitale francese nell'ambito della sua carriera di diplomatico. Cfr. Cabral (1944); Gaspar Simões (1978).

[2] La tesi di Miguel Real risulta ancora più chiara in un altro suo scritto su Eça, di cui riporto una breve citazione: "O método que Eça seguirá é indubitavelmente, não a observação realista (que permanecerá mas mitigado), mas o método comparativo: a comparação entre tempos diversos, entre civilizações diversas e entre fases diversas de uma mesma civilização." (Real 2007: 125-137).

"attenuazione del processo realista"? Abbiamo già detto che la critica moderna tende a rifiutare l'esistenza di una 'svolta mistica' di Eça[3].

Ana Nascimento Piedade pone l'accento sulla necessità di cogliere la maggiore complessità dell'opera queirosiana tardiva rispetto a quella giovanile: non una scoperta del sentimento religioso e tanto meno del misticismo, dunque, ma una "coabitação de contrastes e antagonismos", "coexistência de uma pluralidade de facetas, de pontos de vista, numa palavra, um verdadeiro «universo plurivocal»" (Piedade 2003, 295) che, del resto, si evidenzia nella produzione letteraria tardiva di molti autori[4]. Frank de Sousa individua, nello stile dell'Eça "anziano", una apertura verso "outras perspectivas possíveis do real, eliminando uma postura dogmática e monolítica, traindo a consciência por uma impossibilidade de atingir certezas" (Sousa 1996, 87).

Il problema è dunque tutto alla radice: l'ultimo Eça, rispetto a quello di *O Primo Basílio*, delle *Farpas* o di *O Crime do Padre Amaro*, non scioglie i nodi della polemica giovanile; non si arrende alla semplificazione fideistica nel modo di rappresentare la vita umana, ma al contrario, la problematizza ulteriormente rispetto al periodo determinista, presentandola come molteplicità e non più come mera somma di fattori ambientali. Anzi, il determinismo cessa di essere un punto di riferimento per lo scrittore, che, negli ultimi anni di vita, si trova a fare i conti con l'incapacità del progresso scientifico di risolvere i problemi-cardine della società; si veda cosa scrive a tal proposito Marie-Hélène Piwnik:

> Mas como continuar a cantar "o mundo moderno e democrático"? É aqui, com toda a evidência, o ponto sensível. O fracasso da modernidade é evidente: asfixiante, desenfreada, ela deu lugar a uma civilização antinómica, perversão do cientismo positivista – não da verdadeira ciência – que decepciona as esperanças que se haviam colocado no progresso, o qual devia engendrar não a desigualdade social mas uma melhor repartição das riquezas, uma maior justiça. Em resumo, a noção de felicidade foi substituída pela de lucro e de materialismo a todo o transe (Piwnik 2012, 338-339)[5].

La riscrittura di leggende e tradizioni tipiche dell'Occidente, lungi dal rappresentare un ritorno di Eça sulle proprie posizioni dei tempi delle *Conferências* di Lisbona, testimoniano la volontà di mettere una cultura in discussione, utilizzando quello che lungo tutto il corso della sua opera è una delle sue risorse più sottili: l'ironia. Vediamo come tutto questo trovi riscontro nel racconto scelto per questa riflessione.

Appare più che mai evidente l'intento sarcastico contenuto nell'incipit del testo; nell'assurda pretesa di circoscrivere un tempo inafferrabile avvalendosi di una storiografia inesistente, si legge l'intento di arrotondare per eccesso il coefficiente di menzogna presente nella leggenda, il che testimonia esemplarmente l'inesistenza di una conversione dell'autore:

> Adão, Pai dos Homens, foi criado no dia 28 de Outubro, às 2 horas da tarde…

[3] A parlare di 'svolta mistica' è stato soprattutto António José Saraiva; cfr. A. J. Saraiva (1982: 87-90).

[4] Cfr. E. W. Said (2009: 22): "Un nuovo spirito di riconciliazione e serenità sovente espresso nella miracolosa trasfigurazione della realtà più banale. […] E se questa tardività artistica non fosse fatta di armonia e ordine, ma di intransigenza, difficoltà e contraddizioni irrisolte?"

[5] Piwnik ricorda che la rivisitazione di leggende agiografiche fu praticata anche da Zola e Flaubert: "Denunciar os efeitos de um romantismo choramingas, é também uma tarefa à qual o romancista não falhou, e cujo horizonte é até mais vasto do que parece: não são apenas as infelicidades de José Matias [...], são também as verdadeiras lições de realismo dadas a partir do romance histórico dentro do romance [...]que sobressai [...] a partir de mitos, lendas, parábolas revisitadas, na mesma perspectiva da escola flaubertiana, com elementos de Zola [...]." (Piwnik 2012: 338).

> Assim o afirma, com majestade, nos seus *Annales Veteris et Novi Testamento*, o muito douto e muito ilustre Usserius, Bispo de Meath, Arcebispo de Armagh, e Chanceler- Mór da Sé de S. Patrício (Queirós 2013, 123).

L'"attenuazione" dell'esperienza realista di cui parla Real è molto meno evidente in questo rispetto ad altri racconti di Eça[6] e a tratti appare addirittura smentita nella descrizione dei processi cognitivi affrontati da Adamo durante i suoi primi approcci con l'ecosistema circostante: "Porque avançam assim para êle, sem cessar, numa inchada ameaça, aqueles rolos verdes, com a sua clina de espuma, e se atiram, se esmigalham, refervem, babujam rudemente a areia?" (Queirós 2013, 132-133)[7].

> A Bíblia, com a sua exageração oriental, cândida e simplista, conta que Adão, logo na sua entrada pelo Éden, distribuiu nomes a todos os animais, e a todas as plantas, muito definitivamente, muito eruditamente, como se compuzesse o Lexicon da Criação, entre Buffon, já com os seus punhos, e Linneu, já com os seus óculos. Não! Eram apenas grunhidos, roncos mas verdadeiramente augustos, porque todos eles se plantavam na sua consciência nascente como as toscas raízes dessa Palavra pela qual verdadeiramente se humanou, e foi depois, sôbre a terra, tão sublime e tão burlesco. (Queirós 2013, 129-130)

Ma, a far da contraltare a questa apparente "razionalizzazione" del mito interviene bruscamente il finale del racconto, che dà un peso alle tesi che sostengono la "svolta mistica" di cui parla Saraiva:

> Mas, emfim, desde que nosso Pai venerável não teve a previdência ou a abnegação de declinar a grande supremacia — continuemos a reinar sobre a Criação e a ser sublimes… Sobretudo continuemos a usar, insaciavelmente, do dom melhor que Deus nos concedeu entre todos os dons, o mais puro, o único genuinamente grande, o dom de o amar — pois que não nos concedeu também o dom de o compreender. (Queirós 2013, 154)

Tali affermazioni devono a loro volta fare i conti con la spiegazione che Eça ci dà della cacciata dall'Eden in seguito alla disobbedienza dal precetto di non mangiare dell'albero della conoscenza del bene e del male; ecco le parole che accompagnano la cacciata dei rei dal paradiso terrestre:

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[6] Fra tutti *Frei Genebro*.

[7] Eça si affida al discorso indiretto libero per riprodurre lo sgomento del primo uomo di fronte a una natura così diversa da lui. Nel primo dei due brani riportati, il ritmico susseguirsi delle onde del mare è visto dall'ignaro Adamo come un avanzare minaccioso di strani esseri di colore verde, che si gonfiano e si ritraggono dopo aver sparso bava sulla sabbia; questa immagine ha tutte le fattezze di un artificio letterario quale quello dello straniamento analizzato dai formalisti russi e in particolare da Sklovskij con il nome di *ostranenie* (Cfr. V. B. Sklovskij, *Teoria della prosa*, Torino, Einaudi, 1976): elementi del quotidiano o comunque ben conosciuti dal lettore vengono stravolti per presentarne una lettura inedita, in questo caso consistente nella percezione del personaggio letterario coinvolto. Tale tecnica è usata dallo scrittore – o dall'artista in generale – che vuole creare un senso di spaesamento nel pubblico che vede messe in dubbio conoscenze considerate acquisite, come quella del movimento marino in questo racconto; per questo motivo, il ricorso a essa può essere letto come un'eco dell'Eça "rivoluzionario". Con una definizione che mirabilmente rievoca l'approccio di Adamo al creato nel racconto di Eça, lo stesso Sklovskij ebbe a definire così il concetto di *ostranenie*: "Grazie all'arte è come se ci togliessimo i guanti, ci strofinassimo gli occhi e vedessimo per la prima volta la realtà, la verità della realtà". In V. B. Sklovskij, *Testimone di un'epoca. Conversazioni con Serena Vitale*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1979, p. 52.

> E agora que acendi, na noite estrelada do Paraíso, com galhos bem secos da Árvore da Ciência, este verídico lar, consenti que vos deixe, oh Pais veneráveis!
> Já não receio que a Terra instável vos esmague; ou que as feras superiores vos devorem; ou que, apagada, à maneira duma lâmpada imperfeita, a Energia que vos trouxe da Floresta, vós retrogradeis à vossa Árvore. Sois já irremediavelmente humanos — e cada manhã progredireis, com tão poderoso arremesso, para a perfeição do Corpo e esplendor da Razão, que em breve, dentro dumas centenas de milhares de curtos anos, Eva será a formosa Helena e Adão será o imenso Aristóteles! […] Mas não sei se vos felicite, oh Pais veneráveis! Outros irmãos vossos ficaram na espessura das árvores — e a sua vida é doce. (Queirós 2013, 152)

Questo brano fornisce la chiave dell'intera opera: l'essere umano che acquisisce la sua autocoscienza di essere razionale non ha più bisogno di Dio e anzi, se ne allontana per sempre. Non è questa la sede per mettere in relazione tale molteplicità di sfumature del pensiero Eça con le vicende biografiche e politiche che le determinarono; tuttavia, la compresenza di nuove voci all'interno del coro letterario dello scrittore non trova altra spiegazione plausibile che non sia quella 'pluralidade de facetas', quella 'coabitazione di contrasti e antagonismi' di cui parla A. N. Piedade.

Caim è un romanzo tardivo di Saramago; pubblicato nell'ottobre 2009, meno di un anno prima della morte dell'autore (giugno 2010), propone una riscrittura di ampia parte dell'Antico Testamento immaginando un percorso salvifico che porti il figlio fratricida di Adamo ed Eva alla catarsi attraverso l'esperienza del futuro. L'apertura, com'è ovvio, è dedicata alla rivisitazione del mito adamitico.

Occorre specificare che l'obiettivo narrativo di Saramago diverge profondamente da quello di Eça: se quest'ultimo intende, come abbiamo visto, mettere dei punti interrogativi sul mito per risvegliare il dubbio nel lettore, l'autore di *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira* vuole mantenere fermi tali punti, e accendere invece i riflettori sulla crudeltà che trasuda dal testo sacro. *Caim*, cioè, non vuole far riflettere su quale possa essere stato l'approccio al creato del primo uomo e della prima donna; anzi, glissa il problema al punto da dar luogo a volute incongruenze: si veda cosa l'autore fa ironicamente pensare ad Adamo una volta cacciato dal paradiso, e cosa gli risponde l'angelo guardiano dell'Eden: "Não posso cavar nem lavrar a terra porque me faltam a enxada e o arado […], Falaste como um livro aberto, disse o querubim, e adão ficou contente por ter falado como um livro aberto, ele que nunca tinha feito estudos" (Saramago 2009, 30). Com'è evidente, Adamo non poteva conoscere zappe, aratri o libri. Le riflessioni sottili degli Adamo ed Eva di Saramago presuppongono inoltre una coscienza delle dinamiche interrelazionali umane che essi non potevano avere, come nel caso della gelosia suscitata in Adamo per il fatto che Eva si sia recata da sola alle porte dell'Eden per chiedere cibo al cherubino guardiano e abbia fatto ritorno con il bottino.

Non mancano, tuttavia, analogie sostanziali tra questi due "testi di seconda mano"[8].

"Non c'è da fidarsi di Dio" ha detto Saramago in una conferenza stampa[9] rilasciata all'indomani dell'uscita di questo romanzo in risposta alle aspre polemiche sollevate dal mondo cattolico[10]. Proprio questo sembrano suggerire anche gli Adamo ed Eva queirosiani, che, una

[8] La definizione, che si riferisce alle scritture storico-religiose, risale a Octavio Paz, (Paz 1952: 269).
[9] Cfr. *Diário de Notícias* del 21 ottobre 2009.
[10] Si veda quanto scrive Teresa Cristina Cerdeira da Silva, a proposito dell'altra grande riscrittura biblica di Saramago, *O Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo*. La sua tesi trova ampio riscontro in un discorso focalizzato su *Caim*: "sacrílego, pois, é sem dúvida este texto que se dispõe a ler o sagrado e a consagrar uma nova forma de apreendê-lo. Sacrílego porque não inventa uma outra história que ilumine os mistérios das dores e do destino dos homens. Sacrílego porque repete em diferença a mesma história, os mesmos

volta acquisita la razionalità, si allontanano da Dio; la ragione instaura tra loro e il Creatore una barriera insormontabile. Il Caino di Saramago compie un *iter* cognitivo che non lo conduce, come inizialmente pattuito, alla riconciliazione con Dio, ma anzi, lo porta a preferire una vita di stenti piuttosto che sottomettersi a Lui.

Tanto Saramago quanto Eça vogliono esprimere, cioè, come la distanza tra l'uomo e Dio sia un solco scavato e reso tanto più profondo quanto più si approfondisce l'esercizio intellettuale dell'essere umano. Gli abitanti dell'Eden di Eça sono presentati stilisticamente come un'infanzia dell'umanità, quelli di Saramago no, per i motivi che ho citato; entrambi, però, sono chiamati a compiere un viaggio verso l'età adulta nel senso più decisamente voltairiano dell'espressione, di distacco dalla 'culla' del paradiso terrestre che dona all'uomo la Conoscenza ma gli vieta di farne uso.

Ma c'è un altro aspetto che lega i due testi: apparentemente, le caratteristiche formali che identificano l'ultimo Eça sembrerebbero inapplicabili a un Saramago che non solo non problematizza la propria visione del mondo, ma la rende ancor più radicale e granitica, ponendo una pietra tombale dinanzi alla possibilità di dialogo con la tradizione:

> Caim és, e malvado, infame matador do teu próprio irmão, Não tão malvado e infame como tu, lembra-te das crianças de sodoma. […] morrerás da tua morte natural morte na terra abandonada e as aves de rapina virão devorar-te a carne, Sim, depois de tu primeiro me haveres devorado o espírito. […] A história acabou, não haverá nada mais que contar. (Saramago 2009: 180-181)

Eppure, pur concordando con Marie-Hélène Piwnik, che, nel brano riportato sopra[11], ci presenta un ultimo Eça disilluso dal determinismo e maggiormente preoccupato da tematiche sociali, non si può d'altro canto ignorare ciò che asserisce Miguel Real, nel suo saggio *Geração de 90*, che stabilisce un ponte fra gli autori portoghesi che segnano la fine dei secoli XIX e XX:

> Nesta nova fase, o ser de Portugal é encarado de um modo menos militante e mais complexo e profundo: a religião já não é tratada em bloco como um cancro repleto de superstições, mas, diferentemente, opera-se uma distinção […]. Não é expressão de fracasso do antigo militante do "Cenáculo" de S. Pedro de Alcântara, compensada por uma aproximação à religião; verdadeiramente, não existe aproximação à religião no sentido institucional do termo […], mas sim, aproximação à religiosidade popular e às expressões humanas do sagrado como uma das mais fundas vertentes da identidade tradicional de Portugal que, ultrapassada a fase militante da literatura, Eça de certo modo valoriza. […] É um Eça humanista, mas sem militância, suficientemente céptico para não crer que todo empenhamento, toda "afirmação", nada mais cria que ilusão […]. (Real 2001, 31-32)

È un Eça che ha abbandonato le velleità rivoluzionarie del Cenacolo e che si approccia ai problemi della società con il fervore di chi fa suo il disagio delle masse ma con la disillusione di chi non crede più di poter cambiare il mondo[12]. Ora, nello stesso saggio, Real attribuisce il medesimo disincanto, la stessa disillusione verso ideali più giovanili al Saramago anziano:

personagens, as mesmas passagens, que se transfiguram aos nossos olhos bastando que a eles se ofereça, simplesmente, uma nova forma de olhar" (Cerdeira da Silva 1996: 175).

[11] Cfr. *supra*.

[12] Cfr. C. Reis (1999: 88): "[…] the ideological purpose underlying critical realism derived from the need to regenerate through literature (the novel) the mores of a bourgeois culture in crisis: the crisis of the family, the priesthood and the crisis of religion, the crisis of literature itself, etc".

> Também para Saramago (à semelhança de Eça), a década de 70 e princípios da de 80 constituíram o tempo da *literatura militante* […]. Porém, a partir de meados da década de 80, principalmente, a partir de *Jangada de Pedra*, as preocupações sociais de Saramago não se integram já no quadro da luta exclusiva contra o estado capitalista e, diferentemente, à medida que a década vai finalizando, e muito solidamente a partir, da década de 90, o quadro histórico onde Saramago integra a sua escrita ultrapassa já a luta entre capitalismo e comunismo, reduzida esta aos séculos XIX e XX, para, ostentando as perversões da nossa civilização, se integrar na procura ficcional de una nova, outra civilização. (Real 2001, 34-35)

L'analogia è evidente. Siamo di fronte a differenti evoluzioni dello stesso pensiero, laico e socialista: rispetto alle prime pubblicazioni, Eça smussa i propri angoli – si pensi alla veemenza dei testi giornalistici giovanili –, Saramago li acuisce, ma, a ben vedere, si tratta di due facce della stessa medaglia, due modi diversi di sentirsi nella parabola discendente della carriera e della vita.

Ciò è evidente anche in alcuni aspetti peculiari, come l'uso dell'ironia, che Edward Said, nel suo saggio sullo stile tardo (Said 2009), annovera fra i tratti distintivi delle opere letterarie tardive e che abbiamo riscontrato in entrambe le opere. Lo studioso palestinese trae spunto dall'analisi dell'evoluzione stilistica di Beethoven operata da Adorno (2001) per estenderla ad altri artisti e ad altre forme d'arte, fra cui la letteratura; e nell'esaminare la produzione tardiva di alcuni scrittori europei, segnala la radicalizzazione riscontrabile in Ibsen, le cui ultime opere rompono con ogni convenzione formale e contenutistica che gli mise contro la critica, in modo analogo a quanto accaduto più tardi a Saramago. Said spiega questa rottura degli schemi con l'insofferenza, da parte dell'autore attempato, di adeguarsi agli schemi imposti dall'evolversi dei canoni, nonché con il progressivo venir meno di una convenienza personale a guadagnarsi il plauso del pubblico; né, secondo il saggista, lo stile tardo corrisponde necessariamente a un'anzianità anagrafica: esso è, piuttosto, "un momento in cui l'artista, pienamente padrone dei suoi mezzi, smette di comunicare con l'ordine sociale prestabilito di cui fa parte e stringe con esso una relazione contraddittoria e alienata. Le sue opere tardive costituiscono una sorta di esilio" (Said 2009, *Intr.*). Tale definizione rende applicabile la categoria individuata da Adorno e ripresa da Said anche per Eça de Queirós, che, come abbiamo visto, vive questo esilio da se stesso e dalla sua epoca senza aver mai raggiunto un'età realmente avanzata.

Said richiama così l'attenzione su di un momento, una fase, che forse è della vita ancor più che della produzione letteraria, in cui l'essere umano si ritrova faccia a faccia con convinzioni diluite dall'esperienza, dubbi non risolti, anelito alla vita che deve fare i conti con il sentore della morte; un addensarsi di sentimenti che, inevitabilmente, passa attraverso il filtro della personalità individuale, che fa la differenza. L'uomo potrà rassegnarsi alla complessità, come Eça, o gridare ancora più forte le proprie idee, come Saramago: vuoi per tentare di ignorare la complessità stessa, vuoi in modo autoassolutorio. Per ognuno, e fino all'ultimo, l'interrogativo è aperto.

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PYRAME ET THISBÉ, LE MYTHE EN MUSIQUE SUR LA SCÈNE FRANÇAISE DU XVIII[E] SIÈCLE

Marianna Consiglia VERCELLINI

ABSTRACT • The myth of "Pyramus and Thisbe" has often been a topic of research, especially in French literature. Its bibliographical prosperity shows the vitality of a myth which has survived over the centuries, clinging to the ideologies of each historical context. In actual fact, the young Babylonian lovers of the Ovidian tale take on different roles each time, depending on the era and the author's point of view. Therefore, in the Middle Ages they were spokespeople of a deep Christian belief that led them to become, in the libertine period, the supporters of a love that was set free from authority. From the beginning of the 18th century however, Pyramus and Thisbe came to be the protagonists of new genres: the musical component became an essential part of the tale, which modified, in whole or in part, the myth structure. We will focus on the18th century, in particular on *cantate* and *scènes lyriques*. The aim of this work is to recognize, through the study of the librettos, the mutation of the myth in the theatre of the 18th century and the influence of music on the scenic representation. The analysis will reveal the fundamental role played by music composition in the reduction of the structure of the myth.

KEYWORDS • Myth, French Theatre, Music, The 18th Century

Le succès extraordinaire de la triste et tendre histoire d'amour entre Pyrame et Thisbé dans la littérature européenne, d'Ovide à nos jours, est symptomatique de la vitalité de ce mythe, qui connaît notamment plusieurs réécritures et réincarnations littéraires dans la France des XVII[e] et XVIII[e] siècles. Nous nous proposons d'en étudier l'évolution dans les cantates et les scènes lyriques du XVIII[e] siècle: notre questionnement portera sur les changements opérés au niveau mythémique, ainsi que stylistique, par rapport à la source latine. Nous nous demanderons quelles ont été les modifications subies par la structure du mythe en fonction de la représentation scénique et de la composante musicale, qui à cette époque se superpose pour la première fois à la narration de cette légende.

Pour remonter à l'origine de la tradition littéraire du mythe nous devons nous intéresser à la première version écrite, contenue dans les *Métamorphoses* (IV, 55-166) d'Ovide: Pyrame et Thisbé y sont présentés comme des simples et tendres amants babyloniens, obligés de cacher leurs sentiments à cause de l'inimitié de leurs familles. Mais l'interdiction familiale sera déjouée grâce à une fissure, découverte dans le mur de leurs deux maisons contiguës, qui leur permettra de communiquer. Les jeunes gens décident alors d'organiser leur fuite, se donnant un rendez-vous nocturne auprès de la tombe de Ninus, à côté d'une fontaine et d'un mûrier blanc. La première à s'y rendre est Thisbé, mais elle est obligée de s'y enfuir à cause de l'arrivée d'une lionne, qui déchire et tâche de sang son voile avant de disparaître dans la forêt. Quand Pyrame arrive, il découvre les restes ensanglantés du voile et imagine la mort de son amante: accablé de

culpabilité, il se suicide. Thisbé revient sur les lieux du rendez-vous, elle constate la mort de Pyrame et se tue à son tour. L'histoire se termine par la métamorphose des mûres, qui prennent la couleur du sang en témoignage du sacrifice des amants, opérée par les Dieux, touchés par la force de leur sentiment.

Cette tendre histoire d'amour, qui symbolisait dans les *Métamorphoses* la pureté du sentiment des protagonistes, s'imprègne, à partir du Moyen Âge et jusqu'à la fin du XV^e^ siècle, d'une forte tendance moralisante, tout à fait étrangère au récit ovidien. Dans le *De ordine* de Saint Augustin, aussi bien que dans l'*Ovide moralisé* et surtout dans le *Piramus et Tisbé*, un lai en langue d'oïl du XII^e^ siècle,on note l'ajout d'une réflexion morale qui dénonce l'impétuosité de l'amour irrationnel de jeunesse. Si Augustin et l'auteur de l'*Ovide moralisé* plient le mythe en fonction de l'idéologie chrétienne, en condamnant aussi bien le sentiment amoureux que l'acte du double suicide, l'auteur anonyme du *Piramus et Tisbé* insiste plutôt sur le trop jeune âge des amants.

Une réécriture célèbre, provenant d'Italie, sera destinée à influencer ce mythe dans les élaborations françaises de l'époque qui nous intéresse: dans différents ouvrages[1], Boccaccio élabore une interprétation originale de cette histoire, s'éloignant complètement de ses proches prédécesseurs. Il défend l'impulsivité des deux protagonistes et condamne la sévérité de leurs parents qui avaient empêché leur relation. Contrairement aux ouvrages médiévaux, la leçon morale ne s'adresse donc pas aux deux jeunes protagonistes mais à leurs parents, pour qu'ils apprennent à mieux gérer leurs enfants.

Traversant les XV^e^ et XVI^e^ siècles sans modifications significatives, le mythe est adapté au théâtre pour la première fois grâce à Théophile de Viau, qui compose la tragédie en cinq actes *Les amours tragiques de Pyrame et Thisbé*, dont la première représentation se situerait entre 1621 et 1623. Héritier de la tradition qui précède directement, le dramaturge élabore la *fabula* en la pliant aux exigences dramatiques: les personnages sont au nombre de douze, pour permettre la multiplication des dialogues et, par conséquent, le développement psychologique; les obstacles augmentent, afin d'amplifier la tension structurelle de la tragédie. Mais la pièce de Théophile se fait surtout porte-parole de son idéologie libertine. Ici le dramaturge modifie profondément la structure de l'intrigue, en élaborant une configuration dont le sens est nouveau: il s'agit de la passion amoureuse d'un roi tyran qui veut faire assassiner son rival Pyrame pour posséder Thisbé. La péripétie est tout à fait novatrice, absente dans les adaptations antérieures de la fable ovidienne: en fait, la fuite des héros est due à la volonté de transgresser non seulement l'interdiction des familles, mais surtout l'abus de l'autorité. De plus, cette élaboration présente d'autres thèmes typiquement libertins, tels que l'horreur de la vieillesse et de la mort, l'exaltation de la jeunesse et de l'amour, la foi dans la Nature et dans le Destin, l'absence de Dieu et l'importance de la liberté de l'individu contre toute autorité. Il s'agit donc de la première interprétation idéologique du mythe, qui en résulte partiellement modifié bien que reconnaissable, et qui devient le symbole du refus de toute forme d'autorité (parentale, religieuse, politique) au profit de l'expression naturelle du désir et de la liberté individuelle.

Toutes les successives réélaborations théâtrales du mythe au XVII^e^ siècle véhiculeront cette dérivation mythémique: les tragédies *Le Pyrame* (1629) de Jean Puget de La Serre et *Pirame et Thisbé* (1674) de Jacques Pradon héritent aussi bien de la structure dramatique que de l'insertion du thème du pouvoir. Pradon en particulier semble renforcer la condamnation théophilienne du pouvoir absolu en faisant du père de Pyrame l'ambitieux général des armées royales : on assiste, pour la première fois,à la superposition dans un même personnage de deux

[1] *Filocolo* (II.9.4); *Teseida* (VII.62); *Amorosa visione* (XX.43-88; XXI.1-12); *Elegia diMadonna Fiammetta* (VIII); *De mulieribusclaris* (XIII. 12-14).

autorités qui s'opposent à l'amour, l'autorité parentale et l'autorité royale. La corruption s'affirme en tant que dimension aussi bien politique que familiale. À partir du Grand Siècle, le mythe se fait donc porteur d'une sorte de critique de la centralité du pouvoir royal, qui entrave la relation amoureuse et, plus généralement, la liberté des individus.

Au siècle suivant, le mythe des deux jeunes babyloniens révèle une vitalité remarquable, en se multipliant sur les scènes françaises: la tragédie en musique *Pyrame et Tisbé* (1726) de Jean Louis Ignace de La Serre, mise en musique par François Francœur et François Rebel ainsi que ses parodies, ont déjà été bien analysées par la critique[2], qui a mis en relief la dette de ces pièces envers la réélaboration théophilienne du mythe.

Rapprochons-nous maintenant de l'objet de notre étude, à savoir les cantates et les scènes lyriques du XVIII^e siècle, où nous porterons une attention particulière à la composante textuelle : on cherchera à répondre à la problématique initiale, c'est-à-dire de quelle manière la présence de la musique a influencé la reconfiguration du mythe en question par rapport à la source ovidienne et à son évolution historique.

La cantate, composition vocale et instrumentale à une ou plusieurs voix, est un développement du madrigal italien de la Renaissance et remonte au début du XVII^e siècle. Ce terme apparaît pour la première fois en 1620 grâce à Alessandro Grandi et ses *Cantates e Arie a voce sola*. La cantate pouvait assumer un caractère religieux ou profane. Généralement, elles étaient composées de trois récitatifs, formes de chant déclamé, et d'autant d'airs, chants de type strophique. Importée d'Italie, la cantate profane fut cultivée en France, de 1690 à 1750, et obtint un succès remarquable. La cantate française conservait une structure à une ou deux voix accompagnées avec la basse continue par un clavecin ou, souvent, par un ou plusieurs instruments qui dialoguent avec la voix. Après 1750, ce genre s'épuise.

Nous avons pu répertorier trois cantates consacrées au mythe de Pyrame et Tisbé composées pendant la période de la grande production de ces compositions en France, à savoir la première moitié du XVIII^e siècle: nous analyserons en détail la plus ancienne, afin ensuite de la mettre en relations avec celles qui suivirent.

Malgré nos recherches, aucun résultat n'a pu être produit à propos de l'identité du librettiste de la première cantate: il faut donc spécifier que l'étude a été possible grâce à l'existence de la partition qui présente aussi les paroles des chanteurs. Cependant, on connaît le nom de son compositeur, Brunet de Moland, dont on sait qu'il a vécu entre la fin du XVII^e siècle et le début du XVIII^e siècle.

La cantate *Pyrame et Thisbé* fait partie du recueil *Cantades et Ariettes françoises* publié en 1708. Elle se compose de trois Récitatifs et d'autant d'Airs, chantés à une seule voix sur l'accompagnement de la basse continue. Le premier Récitatif introduit le sujet de la cantate : la voix d'un narrateur déclame la présence d'une fontaine (presque toujours utilisée dans les différentes versions du mythe comme point de référence pour la rencontre entre les deux amants) et de Pyrame qui attend son amante, définie en tant qu'« objet de ses désirs » Au troisième vers,on prévoit déjà la fin tragique, « Tout sembloit lui prédire une attente si vaine » (Moland 1708, 22), tandis qu'au dernier vers du premier Récitatif la voix s'adresse au public pour qu'il puisse prêter attention à l'écoute « de sa peine ». L'Air s'ouvre avec l'invocation de Pyrame qui est répétée deux fois, en tant que refrain, aussi bien au début qu'à la fin de l'Air: « Charmant objet de ma fidelle amour / Faudra-t'il encor vous atendre. » (Moland 1708, 22-23).

[2] Rubellin, F. (2007).

Pyrame et Thisbé ont fixé un rendez-vous, mais la fille n'est pas encore arrivée. Pyrame profite de cette attente pour rêver de ses retrouvailles avec son amante, quand ils pourront se « jurer l'ardeur la plus tendre ». Entre-temps, il s'aperçoit de l'arrivée d'un lion, ce qui marque le début du deuxième Récitatif. Il est « rugissant et fumant de carnage », avec « des débris du voile précieux » appartenant à Thisbé. Après cette vision, Pyrame, désespéré, croit qu'elle est morte, immolée à la rage de la bête. Le deuxième Air décrit la douleur de Pyrame qui est sûr de « la mort de sa belle ». Le jeune homme préannonce son sacrifice: il est prêt à descendre « dans le tombeau » face à la perte de « l'objet qu'il adore ». Le troisième Récitatif nous communique l'arrivée de Thisbé. La voix du narrateur rapporte les mots de la jeune fille suite de la découverte de son amant agonisant:

> Quels Dieux cruels l'ont pu permettre?
> Tu n'es plus, je dois cesser d'être;
> Et ce fer dont les coups ont fait que je te pers,
> Lui même va bientôt nous rejoindre aux enfers […] (Moland 1708 : 28).

Après ce reproche aux Dieux qui ont assisté à cet acte barbare sans rien faire pour l'empêcher, Thisbé choisit de suivre Pyrame en se suicidant. Elle n'imagine pas qu'une équivoque est à l'origine de la mort de son bien-aimé, qu'elle pense avoir été tué par un inconnu: « Quelle meurtrière main vient de percer ton sein? » (Moland 1708, 28). Alors, elle se frappe et tombe, désormais morte, à côté de son amant.

La cantate se termine avec le troisième et dernier Air où, encore une fois, c'est la voix du narrateur qui s'adresse aux jeunes amants en leur donnant un conseil:

> Vous tendres cœurs qui devés feindre
> Cachés vos pleurs,
> Il faut contraindre vos ardeurs,
> Ou les éteindre. (Moland 1708: 29)

Ensuite, la voix insiste sur les conséquences funestes des passions. On comprend que la mort est la seule conclusion possible si l'on cherche à consommer l'amour trop jeune: « D'un amour tendre / Peuvent dépendre / D'un sort afreux » (Moland 1708, 30).

Si elle n'introduit pas d'éléments nouveaux à la structure mythémique par rapport à la source latine, cette cantate réalise pourtant une transformation de la narration, en se focalisant sur la deuxième partie de la légende. En effet, elle délaisse l'interdiction des parents ainsi que la métamorphose finale des fruits du mûrier. De plus, elle introduit la moralité finale, dérivée de la tradition moyenâgeuse, réalisant une focalisation sur le rapport entre les deux jeunes babyloniens. La présence de la musique semble avoir amplifié le trait lyrique de l'histoire, réduite à la séquence finale, du rendez-vous des amants jusqu'à leur mort, ainsi que la tendance moralisante.

Deux autres cantates sont à signaler, composées dans la période de notre intérêt. Le livret du *Pirame et Thisbé* de Marie de Louvencourt[3] a été mis en musique par l'organiste et compositeur Louis Nicolas de Clérambault et publié en 1713: écrit pour voix seule et haute-contre, flûte, violon et basse continue, il alterne des Récitatifs et des Airs, avec une plainte finale.

[3] Cf. M. Couvreur, *Marie de Louvencourt, librettiste des Cantates Françoises de bourgeois et de Clérambault*, in « Revue belge de Musicologie / Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Muziekwetenschap », 44 (1990), pp. 25-40.

La cantate *Pyrame et Thisbé*, écrite par un librettiste méconnu, Liebaux, et composée par le musicien M. P. de Montéclair, fut publiée en 1716: écrite pour « trois voix, un Dessus de Violon et basse continue », cette cantate alterne Récitatif, Air (ou Ariette) et duos. Les trois voix sont représentées par une soprano, un haute-contre et un barytone. Elle introduit deux nouveaux éléments dans la structure mythémique: on constate la présence de Diane, déesse de la chasse et de la nature sauvage, évoquée pour le fait que les deux jeunes gens se rencontrent dans une forêt, ainsi que la présence du fauve qui s'approchera d'eux; de plus, étant donnée qu'il s'agit de la déesse de la Lune, on évoques a luminosité, qui pourra aider les amants, en éclairant leur chemin. Dans la scène finale, inédite dans les versions précédentes, on imagine les amants après leur mort; un « nocher », les reçoit pour les conduire vers une nouvelle « vie »: mais, si cette figure mythologique fait penser à Caron, le nautonier de l'Enfer classique, ce n'est pas dans ce sens qu'il faut l'interpréter. Le « rivage » sur lequel Pyrame et Thisbé sont conduits est le lieu où ils couronneront leur amour: si la vie leur a empêché d'être heureux, ce sera la mort qui leur permettra de vivre ensemble pour toujours.

Les deux cantates de 1713 et 1716, contrairement à celle de Brunet de Moland, ne présentent aucune trace de moralité: par contre, le narrateur prend le parti de Pyrame et Thisbé, en exprimant toute sa compassion pour leur destin. Il les définit comme des sujets malchanceux, victimes d'une injustice, tandis qu'il n'éprouve que de la colère à l'égard du Dieu de l'Amour, qu'il juge comme une force méchante et insensible.

D'après cette analyse, on peut constater que les trois cantates montrent des similitudes. La présence de la musique semble avoir influencé la réécriture de la structure mythémique, dans le sens d'une réduction de l'intrigue, plutôt que dans le sens d'une réelle transformation. Les trois cantates commencent en *medias res*, c'est-à-dire avec le rendez-vous nocturne entre les deux amants, en passant sous silence toute la narration ovidienne consacrée à la naissance du sentiment d'amour et à la décision de s'enfuir à cause de l'opposition des parents. D'autre part, la composante musicale a permis d'amplifier le moment lyrique, à savoir la complainte des amants, célébrée soit par la voix seule dans les cas des cantates de Brunet de Moland et de Clérambault, soit par le duo (représenté par Pyrame et Thisbé) dans le cas de la cantate de Montéclair. L'élément moralisant, présent dans la première cantate, a disparu pour laisser place aux reproches qu'on les amants pour les Dieux: les protagonistes des cantates de 1713 et 1716 les accusent de ne rien faire pour empêcher leur triste destin. On ne peut absolument pas exclure que les trois librettistes se soient influencés, étant donné que leurs élaborations apparaissent semblables aussi bien du point de vue du style que du contenu. L'innocence de l'amour des deux jeunes babyloniens est un élément mythémique présent dans le texte source, qui est amplifié et souligné par ces relectures, bénéficiant de l'amplification pathétique de la musique. Maintenant, nous allons prendre en considération les scènes lyriques de la fin du XVIII^e siècle.

Le terme « scène lyrique » a été forgé par Jean-Jacques Rousseau à l'occasion de la publication de son *Pygmalion*, ouvrage mis en musique par le lyonnais Horace Coignet et représenté pour la première fois en 1775 à la Comédie-Française. Il s'agit d'un seul acte bref conçu pour un quatuor, un basson, deux cors, un hautbois, ainsi que deux acteurs. *Pygmalion* est considéré comme « le premier mélodrame de l'histoire » (Waeber 2005, 9), c'est-à-dire son ancêtre, parce-que cet ouvrage se caractérise par l'alternance mélodramatique entre texte (déclamé ou mimé) et musique: cette moitié prose moitié musique éloigne la scène lyrique de l'opéra. L'alternance parfaite entre texte et musique démontre que Rousseau contemplait ces deux formes expressives comme un tout : la musique n'était pas considérée comme un commentaire ajouté au texte déclamé. Le récitatif devient ici une « déclamation en musique. » (Waeber 2005, 31).

Les deux scènes lyriques analysées appartiennent à la deuxième moitié du XVIII^e siècle et n'ont jamais fait l'objet d'études préalables.

Malgré sa prédilection pour le comique, Charles-Jacob Guillemain a écrit une scène lyrique axée sur le mythe qui nous concerne, *Pyrame et Thisbé,* imprimée à Paris en 1781. Dans la préface à son ouvrage, Guillemain précise les raisons de son choix; après avoir fait référence à un rival anonyme, avec qui il aurait envie de lutter, il explique qu'il n'avait pas l'intention de faire paraître « cette petite production », publiée par l'intercession d'un de ses amis, un « homme célèbre » ayant sollicité son impression deux ans après son achèvement. Guillemain avoue sa crainte du jugement sévère des Gens de Lettres sur un genre nouveau, mais aussi d'avoir surmonté cet obstacle, en comptant sur la réussite de cet essai et sur la possibilité d'atteindre la gloire littéraire. Ensuite, il s'adresse aux Musiciens, pour que quelqu'un veuille « l'embellir des charmes de son Art » et à la Comédie pour qu'elle puisse « multiplier les nouveautés et les genres, de la représenter ». Guillemain possédait donc le goût de la nouveauté, et il avait écrit son livret avant la présence d'une partition. Dans une page intitulée *Aux Belles*, il anticipe le sujet de sa scène, déclarant qu'il n'était plus intéressé par la critique ou la satire, ayant décidé de se consacrer à un genre nouveau où « quelques larmes échappent au sentiment. » À la fin de cette page, il s'adresse au public pour qu'il soit clément à son égard:

> Daignez protéger cette bagatelle, et prouvez à ceux qui croyent que l'esprit seul a droit aux plaisirs littéraires, que l'âme en a qui lui appartiennent, et qu'ils ne sont pas les moins délicieux (Guillemain 1782, Préface)

Une didascalie annonce, avant l'incipit, quel devra être le décor scénique: un bois avec un mûrier dans un coin et, en bas, une espèce de gazon élevé. Pyrame arrive, muni de l'attirail d'un voyageur, il regarde autour de lui et commence son long monologue. Il est impatient de rencontrer Thisbé pour se consacrer à « des tentations agréables » Il sent qu'elle arrivera et qu'il pourra la posséder. Il déclare d'avoir tout quitté et oublié, car son seul but est celui de vivre avec elle. Pyrame est sûr des sentiments que Thisbé éprouve pour lui. Ensuite, la didascalie nous explique l'émotion et la joie de Pyrame, qui, à un moment donné, se lève et commence à parcourir le Théâtre. Pyrame s'adresse à sa Patrie, qu'il chérit: il précise qu'ils sont obligés de la quitter à cause de l'injustice de la loi. Pyrame ici fait référence à cette « loi » qui entrave leur passion, et aux parents, qui, en piétinant leur amour, vont perdre leurs « enfans ». C'est l'aurore et le soleil est prêt à éclairer leur fuite. Vu le retard de Thisbé, Pyrame s'inquiète. Où pourrait-elle être? Quelles sont les causes de cette absence? Il s'adresse à son amante: « Viens, ne regrette plus des parens qui ne t'aiment pas. Nous en trouverons d'autres, moins jaloux de notre félicité: tu le fais, ils te chérissent; tu m'aimes, ils nous uniront. » (Guillemain 1782, 7)

Pyrame déclare tout son amour à Thisbé, il l'implore de ne pas l'oublier: il cite les mots utilisés par son amante, face au mur « insensible » qui les séparait quand ils habitaient chez leurs parents:

> Je t'aime, cher Pyrame, oui, je t'aime, et pour la vie: pour toi j'abandonnerai tout, par-tout je te suivrai: la terre que nous habitons n'est point notre patrie, elle est où nous trouverons le bonheur, et je l'irai chercher par-tout avec toi […] (Guillemain 1782, 7)

Comme dans d'autres réélaborations du mythe en question, en particulier à partir du XVII^{e} siècle, notamment dans la tragédie de Théophile de Viau, le thème de la Patrie et des lois qui entravent le bonheur des jeunes s'affirme. De plus, on retrouve l'élément de l'accusation aux parents qui rendent leurs enfants malheureux, élément que nous avons souligné être superposé à la narration mythémique à partir de Boccaccio.

Thisbé n'étant pas encore arrivée, Pyrame se sent de plus en plus troublé. Il se pose des questions, il commence à marcher, après il s'arrête. L'anxiété a désormais pris le dessus. Il s'assied, la tête dans ses mains, et imagine qu'elle pourrait avoir été victime d'une bête sauvage. Il est de plus en plus plongé dans son délire: il s'adresse aux Dieux, successivement à Thisbé, il se lève et la cherche, dans une inquiétude effrénée. Il est tenaillé par la culpabilité, car il craint qu'elle ne soit morte à cause de son imprudence. Il imagine le cadavre de son amante, puis il espère la serrer dans ses bras. Il s'adresse aux Dieux qu'il définit « injustes ». La peur s'est désormais transformée en colère. Il est dur avec eux et les menace de se donner la mort: « Il n'est pas en votre pouvoir de me faire rester dans ce séjour que je déteste : avec ce fer, je puis vous braver. » (Guillemain 1782, 10)

Il a perdu tout espoir, il est prêt à sacrifier sa vie, imaginant pouvoir ainsi rejoindre sa Thisbé: il dégaine son poignard, pour se frapper, puis il hésite. Il n'arrive pas à interpréter son comportement: « Une force… ce n'est qu'une foiblesse. Qui pourrait s'intéresser à un misérable? Le Destin? Il n'en est point, l'homme est libre, le foible seul y croit. » (Guillemain 1782, 10). Ce passage marque un décalage important dans la réécriture du mythe: Pyrame semble décidé à se tuer avant la découverte du voile ensanglanté. Le monstre extérieur, cette lionne ovidienne qui était à la base du malentendu, est devenu un démon intérieur: la référence à la liberté de l'homme semble souligner la négation des puissances surhumaines.

Ensuite, il entend du bruit mais ce n'est qu'une fausse alerte. Alors, il soupçonne une trahison et, sur le moment, se méfie de Thisbé, en supposant qu'elle soit avec un autre amant:

> […] un autre amant peut-être… je ne sais… je succombe… Thisbé infidelle… Thisbé… cruelle, s'il étoit possible… s'il étoit vrai… si je connoissois le traître… craignez tous deux, tremblez…. je ne connois plus… (Guillemain 1782, 12)

Il est totalement en proie au délire et semble avoir des visions, après il retrouve sa lucidité, il se repent pour ses soupçons et s'excuse avec son amante. Il continue de s'interroger sur son absence et parcourt le chemin, sans sortir totalement de la scène. C'est alors qu'il retrouve le voile de Thisbé et se réjouit de l'idée de la revoir. Mais, bientôt, il en aperçoit les tâches de sang et la déchirure. Tourmenté et affligé par cette découverte, il est persuadé de sa mort. Le rythme de l'écriture est accéléré, pour marquer le total « délire de la raison », comme la didascalie l'explique. Il prend la parole à la place de Thisbé, il est absolument hors de lui. C'est juste à l'instant même où Pyrame se tue et tombe aux pieds du mûrier que Thisbé arrive, encore terrorisée et tremblante après sa rencontre avec la lionne. La didascalie de l'auteur nous décrit Thisbé qui, après avoir assisté à cette scène terrible, se jette sur le corps de son amant et crie. Pyrame l'entend; elle aperçoit son voile à ses pieds et comprend l'équivoque. Dès que Pyrame a expiré, Thisbé préannonce sa volonté, c'est-à-dire celle de le suivre:

> Tu ne m'attendras pas long-temps… Dieux! […] Vous exigez nos hommages, mais vous nous promettez des plaisirs semblables aux vôtres; eh bien, je vous rends ce que je vous dois, je vous invoque: il ne reste plus à votre justice, que de m'accorder ce qu'elle m'a promis. (Guillemain 1782, 15)

Thisbé aussi, comme Pyrame précédemment, s'adresse durement aux Dieux qui n'ont pas permis leur union. Alors, elle se penche sur lui, prend son poignard et se tue.

En ce qui concerne la grande absence de Thisbé sur la scène (elle ne déclame que quelque phrase), Guillemain justifie et précise ce choix en écrivant: « En général, la Pantomime de Thisbé doit être plus longue, plus violente et plus vive, en proportion de ce qu'elle parle peu. Ses actions doivent dire ce qu'elle ne prononce pas. » (Guillemain 1782, 16)Cette petite

didascalie de l'auteur, qui précède le mot « fin », a une importance considérable: de cette manière, Guillemain souligne la centralité de la compensation opérée à traiter la *gestuelle* sur la scène de Thisbé, dont les actions doivent se révéler plus dramatiques que les mots mêmes. Puisqu'elle est moins présente sur la scène, elle doit jouer de manière encore plus violente et tragique, car ce sont ses gestes – qu'il faut bien amplifier – à transmettre ses sensations et ses sentiments.

« *Pyrame et Thisbé*, scène lyrique, par M. Delarive, pensionnaire du Roi »: le frontispice de la deuxième scène lyrique nous donne déjà des informations à propos du titre, du genre lyrique adopté et de l'auteur de *Pyrame et Thisbé*, Jean Maudit Larive. Le livret en question a été imprimé à Paris en 1791, mais la première représentation de cette scène lyrique a eu lieu le 2 juin 1783. Après la note consacrée aux noms des acteurs qui ont joué, notamment M. Delarive dans le rôle de Pyrame et M^{elle} Sainval dans celui de Thisbé, la didascalie nous dévoile le décor de la scène, notamment une forêt près de Ninive, capitale de l'Assyrie. Il s'agit déjà de la première nouveauté de cette réécriture mythique, étant donné que toutes les élaborations précédentes ont été contextualisées à Babylone et que même les deux jeunes protagonistes étaient définis en tant que « babyloniens ». La didascalie nous annonce la présence d'une « symphonie » accompagnant l'arrivée de Thisbé qui traverse le théâtre en fuyant : cette fuite contraste radicalement avec l'effet provoqué par la musique, car l'auteur nous précise que cette symphonie « exprime le calme de la nuit » (Delarive 1791, 7). À propos de la musique, il faut préciser qu'elle fut composée par le musicien et compositeur Antoine Laurent Baudron[4]; toutefois, sa partition s'est perdue[5].

En revenant à notre livret, dès le passage rapide de Thisbé sur scène, c'est Pyrame qui y fait son apparition commençant son très long monologue. En effet, c'est lui qui domine la scène et joue pour la plupart de la pièce. L'action scénique commence donc en *medias res*: Pyrame arrive au lieu établi, mais il ne trouve pas son amante. Pyrame accuse leurs parents, appelés « cruels », qui ne pourront plus contraster cet amour dès qu'ils se seront échappés à la recherche du bonheur. Son inquiétude croît, l'agitation prend le dessus: Pyrame craint que Thisbé puisse être troublée par quelqu'un. Il continue son monologue expliquant sa véritable impatience et son tourment. Son imagination ne s'arrête pas et ses soupçons se font de plus en plus pressants. Pyrame rappelle le dialogue entretenu avec Thisbé juste le jour précédent: les mots prononcés par Thisbé font allusion à un garçon, appelé Cliton, flatté par son père. Elle tient à spécifier que Cliton n'a aucune importance pour elle: il est seulement un ami (de Pyrame) qui s'est prodigué pour eux. En particulier, il a cherché à réconcilier les parents des deux jeunes amants, mais sans y arriver, car ils se sont révélés « inflexibles ». Etant donné l'absence de Thisbé, Pyrame doute du père de son amante et craint qu'il puisse avoir obligé sa fille de s'unir à Cliton. Il pense désormais au pire et il voit dans sa tête l'image de son amante déjà promise au rival. La complainte de Pyrame se prolonge: il semble entrer en plein délire et s'en prend à son amante, désormais sûr qu'elle se trouve dans les bras de Cliton, l' « infâme séducteur » qui aurait profité de sa confiance et trahi leur amitié. Il se repentit de lui avoir parlé de Thisbé, de sa beauté et de son innocence. Il est fou de rage et le menace de se venger, car il n'a absolument pas l'intention de se résigner à la perdre. L'intrigue continue suivant la version ovidienne:

[4] A. L. Baudron (1742-1834) a été un compositeur et violoniste français. Pour sa biographie, faire référence à http://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/musdico/Baudron/166140 et http://www.cesar.org.uk/cesar2/people/people.php?fct=edit&person_UOID=316266, consultés le 16 décembre 2014.

[5] L'information de la perte de la partition d'A. L. Baudron est attestée dans le site http://cesar.org.uk/cesar2/people/people.php?fct=edit&person_UOID=316266 et a été confirmée par notre recherche.

Pyrame retrouve le voile, se poignarde, Thisbé entre en scène et se suicide sur le corps de son amant.

D'après la lecture de ces deux scènes lyriques, nous pouvons avancer des constats. D'abord, les similitudes littéraires, aussi bien dans le style que dans le contenu, nous font imaginer un contact entre ces deux auteurs, à partir des nouveautés insérées dans la structure mythémique. Aussi bien Pyrame que Thisbé adressent des reproches véhéments contre le Ciel et les Dieux: cet élément 'moderne' est présent dans beaucoup d'élaborations du XVIII^e siècle, comme dans les cantates analysées auparavant, mais particulièrement évident dans l'ouvrage de Guillemain. Loin du moralisme du Moyen Âge, la pensée laïque permet la prise de distance par rapport aux forces surnaturelles: ce qui comporte d'abord une révolte contre les Dieux, mais ensuite et encore plus la dénonciation de l'absence du Destin – un ciel qu'on soupçonne vide, l'homme étant abandonné à sa liberté. On remarquera que la jalousie et le délire de Pyrame constituent autant d'éléments redevables à une réécriture moderne du mythe: loin du personnage ovidien, Pyrame est devenu un caractère qui s'ouvre à la modernité en intériorisant son confit, sa décision de se tuer étant le fruit de son propre tourment avant d'être motivée par l'équivoque du voile. La conclusion tragique de l'histoire est la conséquence des « lois », parentales et divines. En particulier, ces lois sont transgressées pour défendre le sentiment d'amour et le désir de se rencontrer. Un autre élément commun entre les deux scènes lyriques est l'absence du mythème ovidien de la métamorphose qui, généralement, se trouvait à la conclusion de l'histoire et qui était absent déjà dans les cantates. Dans les grandes lignes, si les intrigues parcourent le sentier tracé par Ovide,toutefois Delarive semble s'en éloigner un peu plus, car il insère dans son réécriture mythémique un nouveau personnage, celui de Cliton, et il contextualise l'histoire à Ninive, capitale de l'Assyrie, et non plus à Babylone, comme dans toutes les versions du mythe de Pyrame et Thisbé. En ce qui concerne la présence de la musique, il est fondamental d'insister sur une différence considérable entre ces deux ouvrages. En premier lieu, lorsque Guillemain écrit sa scène lyrique, il demande à un éventuel musicien de mettre en musique son livret. On ne dispose pas d'informations à propos de la partition car elle n'existait pas au moment de la publication de son texte (et peut-être encore aujourd'hui). De plus, étant donné qu'il n'y a pas de renvois à la date de la première représentation de cette scène lyrique, on ne peut exclure qu'elle n'ait jamais été représentée. Par contre, dans les premières pages du livret de Delarive on lit que cette scène a été représentée en France à partir de 1783. En outre, la présence des noms des acteurs qui ont joué (y compris Delarive) nous fournit la certitude de la représentation. Malgré la perte de la partition d'A. L. Baudron, on retrouve une référence à l'aspect musical: le livret nous signale qu'une symphonie initiale accompagne l'entrée en scène des acteurs. De toute façon, dans ces scènes lyriques comme dans les cantates, la musique a déterminé un découpage semblable de la structure mythémique: les scènes commencent en *medias res,* le public est plongé dans l'histoire, notamment au moment du rendez-vous entre les deux amants.

On constate que le monologue de Pyrame domine la scène lyrique, même si la figure de Thisbé est toujours au centre de la complainte du personnage masculin.

Pour conclure, par suite de cette analyse littéraire, on peut affirmer que les différentes réélaborations consacrées au mythe de Pyrame et Thisbé s'accordent avec l'évolution de la mentalité et des idées du temps. Le mythe a bien survécu en s'ancrant aux différentes idéologies et selon les contextes historiques. L'étude de l'évolution de ce mythe a permis de découvrir des mutations très intéressantes: nos deux jeunes amants babyloniens ont fini par devenir les porte-paroles d'une idée toujours différente, à savoir chrétienne, libertine ou laïque.

Au XVIII[e] siècle la métamorphose, c'est-à-dire le phénomène qui donnait le nom à l'ouvrage d'Ovide et qui avait la fonction de témoigner du sacrifice des amants, a désormais disparu. Ce qui restera pour toujours est l'histoire de l'innocence de leur amour.

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PaSSAGGI

APARTHEID*

Ashley DAWSON

ABSTRACT • An autobiographical memoir about growing up white in apartheid-laden South Africa.

KEYWORDS • South Africa, Apartheid, Racial Violence, Whiteness, Colonialism.

In Sud Africa, da bambino, ero affascinato dallo sfarzo delle alte uniformi dell'era napoleonica. A quattro anni, il mio caro zio Jim, fratello di mia madre, mi regalò una pila di libri sulle guerre napoleoniche – libri che ad ogni pagina raffiguravano soldati dal portamento eretto, oppure appoggiati a un'arma di qualche tipo: moschetti, sciabole, cannoni. Ripetevo nella mia testa i nomi di quei reggimenti: le Guardie del Coldstream; il Reggimento dei Fucilieri Reali; le Guardie Scozzesi Reali del Dragone; i Blues and Royals; i cacciatori e i tiratori della Grande Armée di Napoleone. Passavo ore a fantasticare su quelle splendide divise da combattimento: gli shakò a cilindro della fanteria leggera, con pompon rosso acceso e distintivi reggimentali di ottone; gli splendidi cavallerizzi ussari, con attillate giacche corte di broccato d'oro e lunghi cappotti di pelliccia larghi sul fondo; gli alti colbacchi di pelle di orso dei Granatieri; corazzieri dalle ossa grandi con in testa magnifici elmetti con pennacchi di crine di cavallo che ricordavano guerrieri troiani; le Guardie del corpo, con le loro tuniche rosso intenso, gli elmi addobbati di piume di struzzo bianco e gli stivali neri lucidi. Da queste uniformi emergeva una ricca gamma di mascolinità pavoneggianti: uomini con grandi baffi a manubrio e lunghe barbe bionde intrecciate come quelle dei Galli. Ero incantato da queste cose e sognavo di indossare anch'io uniformi così favolose. E dal momento che, quando ero piccolo, in Sudafrica non c'era la televisione, furono queste le prime immagini che io vidi di un tempo al di fuori del presente – immagini di luoghi in cui gli uomini indossavano abiti infinitamente più appariscenti rispetto ai calzoncini color cachi e alle camicie abbottonate predilette quasi universalmente da mio padre e dalla maggior parte dei miei insegnanti. Ah, come mi sarebbe piaciuto portare abiti così eccessivi, vestirmi come uno di quegli abbacinanti Dragoni, essere una di quelle bellissime Guardie del corpo.

Non era certo per farmi fantasticare su ornamenti di piume di struzzo che mio zio mi aveva regalato quei libri – libri che facevano parte di un complesso di cultura bellica nel quale io, al pari di molti altri miei coetanei bianchi in Sud Africa, eravamo immersi. Con il passare degli anni venni iniziato alle fantasie strategiche di questo immaginario militare: gradualmente accumulai un'ampia collezione di soldatini di plastica alti trenta centimetri degli eserciti dell'era napoleonica. Erano soldatini di colore giallo scuro, decorati con le divise militari dei reggimenti di appartenenza. A ogni cavaliere si accompagnava un cavallo di plastica, a ogni fuciliere un cannone di piombo, a ogni fante una baionetta appuntita, anche quella di plastica. Me ne stavo disteso per ore, da solo, sul pavimento di legno della mia cameretta a schierare questi eserciti

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per battaglie immaginarie. Alcuni dei pezzi d'artiglieria sparavano palle di cannone miniaturizzate e così potevo sperimentare l'impatto distruttivo delle armi moderne sulle lunghe colonne di fanti che marciavano senza neanche un lamento verso morte sicura. Non una sola volta mi balenò nella mente che ci potessero essere dei nessi tra quei giochi e la guerra vera. E se mai fossero esistiti soldatini di plastica raffiguranti le SWAPO, le forze di difesa sudafricane, a me non vennero mai regalati. Il mio immaginario militare era fermamente relegato in un passato lontano.

Non ero il solo sospeso permanentemente in quel bellicoso diciannovesimo secolo. Doug, il padre del mio migliore amico Paul, maestro alla Bishop's – la scuola privata anglicana per ragazzi bianchi che frequentavo – aveva una stanza interamente dedicata alle guerre napoleoniche. I suoi soldatini erano di piombo e lui li dipingeva a mano, uno per uno, con grande cura. Su un grande tavolo Doug aveva costruito il plastico di una delle grandi battaglie di Napoleone – non ricordo più se Austerlitz, Sebastopoli o Waterloo. Forse quest'ultima, data l'anglofilia predominante tra i conoscenti dei miei genitori, benché i dettagli della battaglia – l'idea che Napoleone si presentasse come emissario della rivoluzione francese mandato a liberare i popoli dell'Europa dalla tirannia feudale, o che il Duca di Wellington lottasse per scongiurare la vittoria di un terrore repubblicano che avrebbe inghiottito il mondo intero – non venivano mai discussi. Visitando la stanza della guerra di Doug mi immergevo in immagini di eserciti nel pieno dello scontro frontale, un piacere altrimenti inarrivabile in un'epoca in cui in Sud Africa non c'era la televisione e la mia famiglia raramente andava al cinema.

Ma perché proprio l'era napoleonica? I soldatini che ricevevo in regalo da bambino evocavano un periodo storico in cui ebbero origine i giochi di guerra, ma anche un'era in cui sembrava che la guerra si combattesse secondo regole più nobili rispetto al conflitto totale che aveva definito tanto le due guerre mondiali quanto le successive campagne di guerriglia anticoloniale in luoghi come il Vietnam, l'Algeria o il Kenia. Ovviamente si trattava di un'illusione: la guerra è sempre orribile e cruenta. Ma, soprattutto, questi soldatini mi permettevano di calarmi in un immaginario militare specificamente europeo, in conflitti che si svolgevano a una distanza di sicurezza dalla mia Africa. Con i miei soldatini napoleonici potevo immaginare, da bambino, di uccidere persone che non facevano parte della mia realtà quotidiana, senza mai sospettare che un giorno qualcuno avrebbe potuto ordinarmi di ammazzare il giardiniere che lavorava presso di noi, o che lui avrebbe potuto cercare di uccidere me.

A otto anni, mia madre mi convocò nel salotto della nostra casa di Palmboom Road: capii subito che si sarebbe trattato di un discorso solenne. Era da poco che mi era stato concesso di cenare con i miei genitori nella sala da pranzo illuminata da candele invece che in cucina con la mia sorella minore Giorgina e la nostra governante Janet e l'idea di questa discussione misteriosa tra adulti nel salotto mi metteva in soggezione. Quando Janet mi accompagnò in sala, i miei genitori mi aspettavano seduti con grande formalità sul sofà vittoriano foderato. Mi prese immediatamente un senso di terrore e dovetti sforzarmi di recitare la parte del bimbetto coraggioso che io credevo si aspettassero da me.

Mia madre mi disse di avvicinarmi con un tono rassicurante, chiamandomi con il curioso soprannome che usavano in famiglia, Tav, abbreviazione del clan scozzese McTavish, che non aveva niente a che vedere con noi. Quando mi sedetti di fianco a mia madre, mio padre mi annunciò che avremmo lasciato Città del Capo e noi quattro – i miei genitori, mia sorella e io – ci saremmo imbarcati per un viaggio sull'Oceano Atlantico, sterminato e pieno zeppo di squali.

E perché? – domandai mentre sentivo gli occhi gonfiarsi di lacrime. E il nonno? – protestai. E i cani? Mia madre mi prese per mano e mi spiegò che la decisione di partire era stata presa per me: dovevamo lasciare la nostra casa, il nostro Sud Africa, per assicurare a me un futuro. Non a loro, né a mia sorella, ma *a me – il mio* futuro. In Sud Africa, disse mia madre, tutti i ragazzi devono fare il militare. Essendo inglese, mio padre aveva evitato la leva, ma poiché da bambino aveva visto di prima mano l'impatto della seconda guerra mondiale su suo padre, non aveva nessuna intenzione di vedermi arruolato nell'esercito. Se fossimo rimasti in Sud Africa, prima o poi sarei stato chiamato alle armi – proprio in un momento in cui il regime dell'apartheid era in guerra con tutti i paesi confinanti, tanto in luoghi dai nomi esotici come la Namibia e l'Angola, quanto all'interno dei confini nazionali. Eppure non riuscivo a cogliere la logica del loro ragionamento: amavo i miei genitori e mi fidavo di loro, ma mi domandavo che cosa centrassi io con quel futuro così remoto di cui mi stavano parlando. Com'era possibile che eventi ancora così lontani nel tempo mi potessero alienare dal paese in cui ero nato, mandando in frantumi il mondo che amavo, l'unico che conoscevo?

Mentre mi sforzavo di interiorizzare ciò che mia madre stava dicendo, spostai lo sguardo sulla stanza nella quale ci trovavamo, in cui ero cresciuto gattonando intorno alle gambe dei tavoli e delle sedie o rotolandomi sui tappeti orientali che ornavano il pavimento. Durante i lunghi inverni piovosi di Città del Capo avevo passato ore a guardare malinconicamente fuori dalla fila di finestre che si aprivano su un lato del salotto verso il giardino recintato. Era sul pavimento di quella stanza che avevo costruito un numero infinito di castelli con i blocchetti di legno e avevo gioito nel vedere i granelli di polvere che si muovevano fiaccamente fra i raggi del sole estivo. Mi sentivo una cosa sola con i colori dei quadri appesi al muro e con le venature dei mobili di quella stanza. Come poteva tutto ciò, una parte così intima di me, diventare incerto e transitorio come un sole di fine estate?

Se ripenso a quei momenti, sento ancora un forte senso di nostalgia per un mondo perduto. Il salotto della casa che i miei genitori avevano costruito a Città del Capo era intriso dai toni caldi del mobilio stile olandese coloniale che, lucidato con cera d'api, appariva di un rosso intenso e risultava liscio al tatto come pelle morbida. I miei genitori, che quando si erano sposati non avevano grandi mezzi, non avrebbero mai potuto permettersi di acquistare quegli oggetti nei costosi negozi di antiquariato di Città del Capo. Li avevano comprati alle aste, mobili malconci recuperati da modeste case rurali Afrikaner del Capo. Alcune credenze vennero consegnate nel nostro garage con ancora lo sterco di vacca attaccato alle gambe. Ricordo mia madre scartavetrare, oliare e lucidare per ore questi oggetti rovinati da tante riverniciature fino a farli tornare al semplice splendore originario. Sembrava accarezzare quei legni e, così facendo, riportarli in vita – legni dalle tonalità oro di piante che ancora crescono a Knysna e a Tsitsikamma, oppure *stinkwood*, un legno scuro usato per gli esterni dei mobili, cosiddetto "puzzolente" proprio per l'odore che emette quando è bagnato. Mia madre sapeva ridare una patina liscia come il miele a legni rovinati dal tempo e dall'usura.

Quel mobilio, di origine molto umile, richiamava un mondo perduto. Il *meelkis* appoggiato al muro del salotto, con le gambe alte per tenere le tignole lontane dalla farina. Il tozzo *warkis*, progettato per essere trasportato sui carri trainati da buoi dei Voortrekker, davanti al divano. La grande dispensa *jongmanskis* e un'umile sedia quadrata con seduta a strisce intessute di pelle di *kudu* che ricordavano la carne essiccata, talmente spesse che credevo si potessero effettivamente mangiare, se ve ne fosse stata la necessità. E poiché vedevo in quei mobili l'estensione della tenera premura di mia madre, non mi passò mai per la testa di fare domande su chi li avesse

originariamente costruiti – né tantomeno sul severo ordine coloniale che regolava le vite quelle persone.

Sui muri del salotto erano appesi i quadri di mia nonna e della mia bisnonna, Madeline Pettit and Frances van der Bijl. Il più imponente era un'enorme natura morta della mia bisnonna, raffigurante una ciotola straripante di uva bianca e rossa. Era un olio nello stile dei maestri europei, che aveva ben poco a che fare con il Sud Africa: non si vedevano né le fresie né le protee. Però gli acquerelli appesi intorno a quel dipinto centrale raffiguravano il Kluitjieskraal, detto anche KK, la proprietà colonica vicino a Paarl nella quale Frances trascorse buona parte della sua vita e in cui nacque mia nonna Madeline. Come il nome della casa, che univa la parola che in Afrikaans significa proprietà colonica con un cognome olandese, questi acquerelli suggerivano un passato ben più ibrido rispetto alla grande natura morta. Scene di cavalli che pascolavano seraficamente davanti a boschi di pini e ad alberi della gomma; oppure cumuli di nuvole sulle familiari vette gemelle di Mostert's Hoek; oppure ancora banani rigogliosi: mia bisnonna dipingeva quel che vedeva e così facendo creava un archivio visivo della flora e della fauna tipiche del Capo. Ma nei suoi quadri Frances non ritraeva mai le persone, estromettendo da quelle scene i lavoratori a cui si doveva lo splendore di KK e creando così un mondo patinato di bellezza naturale immune dal dolore.

I quadri di Madeline erano molto più sperimentali rispetto a quelli di sua madre. Ispirate a Cezanne, le sue nature morte erano pervase da un blu ceruleo intenso. Mi piaceva molto osservare mia nonna dare forma ai frutti e ai vasi sulla tela con i gesti ampi del mestichino. Quando dipingeva all'aperto, i quadri di Madeline coglievano tutta la vitalità dell'esistenza quotidiana del Capo. Il mio preferito era un dipinto di tre pescatori che aggiustano le reti sulla spiaggia di Muizenberg: i corpi sono blocchi geometrici di colore brillante, con teste triangolari di arancione bruciato che spiccano sui rettangoli blu intenso delle maglie e dei pantaloni. A mia nonna piaceva raccontarmi di come aveva obbligato il nonno Reg a posare per lei in modo da poter dipingere con esattezza gli indumenti di quei pescatori. E benché apparissero con colori brillanti e di aspetto bucolico, questi uomini facevano probabilmente parte della popolazione "di colore" del Capo. Discendenti del popolo indigeno Khoisan locale, servi a contratto malesi condotti in Africa dalla East India Company olandese o meticci, prova vivente dell'oppressione sessuale dell'insediamento coloniale, i pescatori di colore che mia nonna dipingeva avrebbero potuto raccontare molte storie di ingiustizie subite prima dell'instaurazione dell'apartheid vera e propria. Ma sulla tela questi individui erano convenientemente muti, simboli silenziosi di un passato violento che la mia famiglia teneva nascosto in bella vista.

Questa commistione di mondi europeo e africano, che da bambino davo per scontata, era frutto del colonialismo, della schiavitù, della servitù a contratto e della violenza sessuale e veniva mantenuta in essere attraverso un complesso di leggi che perpetuava l'ingiustizia sociale nei confronti dei cittadini di seconda classe del Capo. Troppo spesso i sudafricani bianchi, compresi i miei famigliari, sceglievano di non vedere quella realtà brutale, anche quando vi si ritrovavano faccia a faccia. Era una posizione di comodo, dalla quale derivava il fatto che non dovessimo mai fare i conti con le modalità attraverso le quali beneficiavamo di quella oppressione. Da piccolo, per esempio, non mi rendevo conto che la casa costruita dai miei genitori, quella il cui salotto mi è rimasto così nitido nella memoria, si ergeva su un terreno confiscato alla popolazione di colore in base alla legge nota come Group Areas Act dell'era dell'apartheid.

Che cosa spinge persone come mia madre a voltare improvvisamente le spalle alla spirale di violenza che sottende una cultura come quella del Sud Africa dell'apartheid? E come si fa a cambiare così radicalmente? Per quale ragione mia madre si oppose al militarismo del suo paese, invece di sostenerlo tenacemente come avevano fatto tanti altri? Riflettendo sulla tormentata storia della mia famiglia, mi tornano nitidi alla mente due episodi, che ho sentito raccontare più volte nel corso degli anni. E se è vero che la traiettoria di una vita si costruisce attraverso l'accumulazione graduale di esperienze e decisioni, è anche vero che vi siano punti nodali, momenti rivelatori nei quali la routine dell'esistenza si interrompe e la bussola della vita viene riorientata. Queste due esperienze di mia madre furono il catalizzatore di un riorientamento che la portò a lasciare il suo paese, se non addirittura a mettere in discussione il complesso di strutture sociali oppressive e di percezioni culturali su cui questo si fondava.

Da adolescente mia madre, che i parenti chiamavano Annie, era solita far visita ai vari nuclei della sua famiglia estesa che vivevano in tenute agricole nella zona semidesertica del Karoo, nell'est del Capo. Questi parenti erano proprietari di enormi allevamenti di ovini intorno alla cittadina di Graaff Reinet. La famiglia si era trasferita nel Karoo verso la fine del diciannovesimo secolo dopo che una infestazione di filossera aveva distrutto i vitigni che coltivavano a High Constantia, l'azienda vinicola di famiglia nel Capo. Annie faceva spesso visita a queste famiglie durante le vacanze scolastiche – e a due in particolare, i Blakeridge e i Rooiberg. Presso quei parenti, mia madre imparò i ritmi della vita di campagna – la sveglia di buon mattino, la rasatura delle pecore e le cavalcate nella tenuta a sorvegliare le recinzioni, che faceva con il beneamato cugino Charlie, di quattro anni più grande di lei.

Un giorno, quando mia madre aveva undici anni, Charlie chiese ad Annie di andare con lui a una battuta di caccia a cavallo e Annie accettò di accompagnarlo, senza dare troppo peso allo scopo della spedizione. Era sempre sbalordita dalla gentilezza del cugino nei suoi confronti, ma in quell'occasione l'avrebbe introdotta a un mondo sconosciuto. Le battute di caccia costituivano un momento importante della vita nella tenuta, perché contribuivano a tenere sotto controllo le popolazioni di animali selvatici quali le antilopi *springbok* e *kudu* che sottraevano alle pecore la scarsa vegetazione del Karoo di cui si nutrivano. Le battute di caccia venivano organizzate coinvolgendo una serie di tenute del vicinato, con l'obiettivo di mantenere la vegetazione in condizioni analoghe in tutta la zona: ad intervalli regolari durante l'anno, i proprietari terrieri si incontravano in uno dei casali della zona, condividevano un lauto pranzo e poi partivano a cavallo per la caccia.

Quel giorno, Annie si vestì con entusiasmo e raggiunse Charlie, che ordinò, in afrikaans, a uno dei braccianti di sellare per lei una giumenta. Annie era tesa all'idea di dover cavalcare con un gruppo di uomini, ma una volta nella boscaglia del Karoo si fece prendere dal movimento cinetico del galoppo e fu avvolta dall'eccitazione della caccia che stava per incominciare. Le antilopi erano state spinte in un quadrato della tenuta dal quale vi era una sola via di fuga e, non appena caricarono, impennandosi verso il cielo per liberarsi dal giogo in cui erano state relegate, gli uomini a cavallo fecero fuoco con i fucili. Uno dopo l'altro, i corpi senza vita degli *springbok* caddero a terra. Per Annie fu una scena scioccante, ma decise di tenere per sé il terrore che provava, per paura di mettere Charlie in imbarazzo davanti agli altri uomini.

All'ora di cena, nel rientrare alla tenuta insieme agli altri cacciatori, Annie tenne gli occhi fissi verso il basso: aveva capito di essere totalmente nel posto sbagliato. Gli uomini intorno a lei erano allegri, felici di aver abbattuto un gran numero di animali, garantendo così alle pecore ampi spazi di pascolo nell'anno a venire. Inoltre, avevano fatto un'ottima scorta di carne, che

avrebbero messo ad essiccare al sole possente del Karoo. Giunti nei pressi della casa, Charlie sussurrò ad Annie che avrebbe potuto esplorare la tenuta se avesse voluto, mentre gli uomini conversavano durante la cena. "Puoi giocare dove vuoi – le disse Charlie – ma non entrare nel capanno della rasatura". Parole assurdamente provocatorie: non appena vide gli uomini immersi nella conversazione, Annie svicolò immediatamente verso il capanno, aprì la porta arrugginita ed entrò nel buio più totale. Sentì prima l'odore: un fetore fortissimo, come di rame battuto mischiato a un lieve sentore di carne in decomposizione. Quando finalmente i suoi occhi si abituarono al buio, intravide le carcasse degli animali appese a testa in giù lungo il muro, sgozzate. Il sangue gocciolava sul pavimento di terra battuta. Sbigottita, Annie si trascinò fuori dal capanno e, appoggiandosi al muro esterno, vomitò.

Riuscì a tornare in camera per lavarsi senza essere vista dal gruppo di uomini in festa. Seduta sul letto, gli occhi le si riempirono di lacrime. "In parte è colpa mia", disse a se stessa. Fu in quel momento che decise che non avrebbe mai più mangiato carne. Ma non ne parlò con nessuno, perché la battuta di caccia era un evento chiave nella vita del Karoo. Gli agricoltori ritenevano fosse un loro diritto quello di abbattere la "selvaggina" che finiva nelle loro tenute e reputavano sacrosanto possedere armi. A Jim, fratello di Annie, avevano insegnato a sparare durante una visita a Blakeridge. Ma Annie, in quanto femmina, non era stata iniziata a questa cultura della forza bruta – lei in effetti aborriva la caccia. Messa di fronte a un aspetto della violenza su cui si fondava quell'ordine sociale, mia madre lo rifiutò, tentando di chiamarsi fuori dal sangue che macchiava la terra sulla quale viveva la nostra famiglia. Ciò nonostante, la domanda sul come la mia famiglia divenne proprietaria di quella terra, a chi era stata sottratta e attraverso quali violenti mezzi la loro proprietà era stata legittimata – queste domande non se le posero né lei né nessun altro membro della mia famiglia.

Bisognava sforzarsi molto in un posto come Blakeridge per non pensare a queste cose. Dopo aver espropriato la terra agli indigeni Khoisan nel diciassettesimo secolo, i bianchi di Graaff Reinet compirono più di una rivolta contro la Compagnia delle Indie Orientali olandese, che amministrava l'intera Colonia del Capo. Fu nel distretto di Graaff Reinet che per la prima volta venne proclamato un governo repubblicano – al servizio esclusivo dei bianchi – e fu di lì che provenne un gran numero di Voortrekker, i coloni Afrikaner che a metà del diciannovesimo secolo fuggirono verso est dalla Colonia del Capo dopo che i britannici avevano messo fuori legge la schiavitù. La natura fortemente indipendente degli Afrikaner trovò la sua espressione ideale nel sistema dei *kommando*, in base al quale, al bisogno, uomini del luogo si organizzavano in bande armate. Benché la gente di Graaff Reinet vedesse quelle formazioni militari come simboli di oppressione e, dopo la guerra anglo-boera, addirittura come forze di occupazione, il sistema dei *kommando* militarizzava la vita quotidiana del Karoo. E' possibile che il gruppo a cui Annie si unì nella battuta di caccia costituisse il nucleo centrale di uno di quei *kommando*, pronti a entrare in azione qualora se ne fosse presentata la necessità. Ma nel periodo in cui Annie andava in visita a Graaff Reinet, l'ordine coloniale vigeva ormai da lungo tempo, virtualmente incontrastato. E sebbene l'apartheid informale in vigore ai tempi dell'adolescenza di Annie apparisse uno stato di fatto immutabile, i segni della violenza con la quale quell'ordine era stato istituito erano ovunque. Bastava vedere uno dei cuginetti di Annie rivolgersi a uno dei lavoranti anziani della tenuta chiamandolo "boy" per capire che si era in un mondo in cui l'ingiustizia regnava sovrana. Nessuno usciva da quel mondo indenne, compresi i responsabili di quello stato di cose.

Mi piacerebbe poter dire che mia madre si ribellò all'apartheid, ma non sarebbe la verità. A un certo punto valutò la possibilità di entrare nelle Black Sash, un'organizzazione di

resistenza di donne bianche costituita nel 1955 per lottare contro la cancellazione, voluta dal governo del Partito Nazionale, della gente di colore dai registri elettorali nella provincia del Capo. Alla fine degli anni Cinquanta, le militanti del Black Sash organizzarono dimostrazioni contro le Pass Laws e, più in generale, contro l'inasprimento dell'apartheid ad ogni livello della vita in Sud Africa. Ma quando i miei nonni le chiesero di non immischiarsi con le Black Sash, mia madre obbedì: amava e rispettava i suoi genitori e condivideva i loro timori di possibili vendette dei Nazionalisti nei confronti degli oppositori dell'apartheid, bianchi o neri che fossero. Nell'accogliere la loro richiesta di non mettere se stessa e loro in pericolo, mia madre non solo rifiutò di offrire solidarietà alle donne bianche del Black Sash che con coraggio si opponevano pubblicamente all'apartheid – non solo cioè rifiutò di fare la propria parte, politicamente e psicologicamente, di fianco a uomini, donne e bambini che andarono al massacro a Sharpeville, presi a fucilate alle spalle per aver protestato pacificamente contro le Pass Laws – ma, così facendo, rifiutò – credo – anche di interrogarsi sui benefici che lei e la sua famiglia avevano tratto in termini materiali dal sistema dell'apartheid, indipendentemente da quanto sdegno abbiano provato di fronte ad atrocità come quella di Sharpeville.

Che diritto ho io di giudicare così severamente mia madre – io che non ho vissuto quei tempi così turbolenti? Certo non saprò mai che cosa volesse dire essere una donna giovane in una società così rigidamente maschilista. Ugualmente, sento il dovere di parlare con onestà di come mia madre e la nostra famiglia siano stati complici di quel sistema, proprio perché mi sento così fortemente attaccato a quel Sud Africa perduto, con tutti i privilegi materiali e sociali che proprio un'opposizione all'apartheid avrebbe imposto di rinnegare. E sono sempre consapevole della tenebra che alberga nel cuore dei bianchi.

Quando e in quale modo la violenza dell'ordine coloniale si manifesta tra coloro che ne beneficiano? E' normale – anche se doloroso – in Sud Africa assistere all'esercizio della violenza nei confronti delle popolazioni di colore. Lo era anche prima dell'instaurazione dell'apartheid formale nel 1948. Ed è anche lampante come la competizione tra le forze imperiali – nel caso del Sud Africa, l'Olanda e la Gran Bretagna – conduca a forme di pregiudizio tra differenti gruppi di bianchi. Dopo tutto, l'apartheid non fu solo un sistema di razzismo distruttivo ma anche, per un certo verso, un modo per gli Afrikaner, sconfitti, umiliati e impoveriti dalla guerra anglo-boera, di cercare una rivalsa. Ma come fu possibile che l'oppressione, così fondamentale nella società sudafricana, si verificasse anche all'interno delle singole famiglie bianche? Come avvenne che il militarismo, così centrale al potere coloniale in Sud Africa, si manifestasse anche nella vita quotidiana dei singoli nuclei famigliari? Da bambino in Sud Africa mi avevano insegnato a fantasticare sui paramenti militari, ma quali segreti e quali sporche menzogne si nascondevano dietro quelle divise e quelle insegne sfarzose?

Attraverso mio zio mi appassionai a tutto quanto aveva a che fare con gli eserciti, ma egli non mi raccontò mai di ciò che gli accadde veramente quando venne chiamato alle armi. Anni dopo seppi da mia madre che, da giovane, era stato mandato a mantenere l'ordine nelle township all'indomani del massacro di Sharpeville. Quando gli chiesi personalmente, mi disse che non aveva niente di particolare da raccontare: faceva freddo, era buio e molto spesso si annoiava. Gli mancava la famiglia, la quale visse momenti di terrore quando per settimane non si fece vivo, quasi inghiottito nel caos dei disordini che seguirono Sharpeville. Non riesco a togliermi dalla testa l'idea che ci siano delle verità a cui non riesco ad arrivare: mi sembra che ci sia qualcosa che mio zio continui a non voler affrontare, ma che allo stesso tempo non riesce a mettersi dietro le spalle. Gli è rimasta la passione per la guerra e possiede la più ampia

collezione al mondo di libri sul conflitto anglo-boero. Come si spiega questa ossessione costante per gli eserciti? Quali ferite si porta dietro, malgrado cerchi in tutti i modi di rimuoverle?

C'è un altro ricordo che conservo fisso nella memoria, una storia che in famiglia ho sentito raccontare molte volte. Sono passati due anni da quella battuta di caccia che l'ha traumatizzata e Annie ha tredici anni. Lei e il suo fratello maggiore Jim, lo zio a cui sono così affezionato, stanno litigando. Annie vuole osservare Jim e i suoi amici mentre costruiscono un carro allegorico per la parata della scuola. Jim le dice che sì, li può guardare, ma solo dalla sua stanza, con le imposte abbassate e le luci spente. Annie si arrabbia, dice che non è giusto. Jim la afferra, la spinge a terra e le si mette sopra, bloccandole le braccia contro il pavimento. Mentre Annie soccombe inerme alla forza del fratello, Jim raccoglie una palla di saliva nella bocca e la lascia scendere lentamente verso la faccia terrorizzata di Annie. Prima che la saliva le sfiori il volto, Jim la risucchia in bocca. Lei inizia a piangere e a chiedere aiuto. Jim stringe la presa e lascia di nuovo scendere la saliva. Annie, tra i singhiozzi, lo supplica di smettere. Jim trattiene la saliva a mezz'aria.

Seduto accanto ai miei genitori che mi annunciavano il trasloco imminente, sentì quel mondo a me familiare sussultare e lentamente allontanarsi da me. Capivo perfettamente che si trattava di una svolta decisiva della mia vita e venni assalito dagli attacchi premonitori di una nostalgia annunciata. Eppure, ripensandoci, era un mondo che non conoscevo affatto, un mondo pervaso di silenzi – i silenzi di chi si fa complice, di vite segnate dalla reticenza di un'amnesia storica di convenienza. Troppi silenzi e troppi rifiuti di voler vedere. Mio padre che non sapeva nulla e non nutriva nessun interesse per la violenza che impregnava la vita in Sud Africa. Mia madre che sconfessava le sue radici Afrikaner, così evidenti nel cognome olandese di mia bisnonna. Questo rifiuto era così profondo che impediva a mia madre di vedere non solamente il tradimento implicito nel ripudio, ma anche il prezzo dell'assimilazione. La costante fascinazione di mio zio per gli eserciti e i suoi silenzi sul suo servizio militare nelle township durante i mesi terribili che seguirono al massacro di Sharpeville. E infine, nata e coltivata sul terreno di questi silenzi, la mia reazione muta nel cercare di essere il bravo soldatino che pensavo i miei genitori volessero che io fossi. Come faccio a dar voce a questi ricordi senza perdere le persone che professarono un silenzio così totale? E che cosa implica provare nostalgia per una famiglia che scelse di non vedere per così tanto tempo?

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SeGNALI

Università di Torino
Problematiche traduttive ed editoriali nella traduzione letteraria: lingue vicine *e* lingue lontane *a confronto*
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Anna SPECCHIO

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KEYWORDS • Translation Issues, Editing and Translating, Italian Translations, Publishing Houses.

La traduzione è quel qualcosa che
trasforma tutto in modo che nulla cambi.
Günter Grass

Tra il 26 febbraio e il 4 maggio 2016 si è tenuto, presso la Sala Lauree del Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Straniere e Culture Moderne dell'Università di Torino, un ciclo di quattro conferenze dal titolo *Problematiche traduttive ed editoriali nella traduzione letteraria: lingue vicine e lingue lontane a* confronto, ideato e organizzato da Gianluca Coci, docente di giapponese presso l'ateneo torinese e traduttore. Ciascuno degli incontri è stato dedicato a una diversa combinazione linguistica: francese/giapponese, spagnolo/arabo, tedesco/cinese e inglese/polacco, e ha visto la partecipazione di esponenti della grande editoria, di traduttori professionisti e di docenti universitari: Maria Rosa Bricchi (Calabuig – Jaca Book), Alba Bariffi (Garzanti), Sabine Schultz (Neri Pozza), Francesco Guglieri (editor per Einaudi, autore del blog "Biancamano 2"), Anna Raffetto (editor e traduttrice dal russo per Adelphi), Enrico Ganni (editor per Einaudi), Yasmina Melaouha (traduttrice dal francese e docente presso la Civica Scuola Interpreti e Traduttori di Milano), Maria Nicola (traduttrice dallo spagnolo), Anna Nadotti (traduttrice dall'inglese di autori del Subcontinente indiano), Silvia Pozzi (traduttrice dal cinese e docente presso l'Università di Milano Bicocca), Marcella Costa (traduttologa e docente di Lingua tedesca tedesco all'Università di Torino) e Laura Rescia (traduttologa e docente di Lingua francese presso l'Università di Torino), e numerosi docenti-traduttori dell'ateneo torinese: Gabriella Bosco (Letteratura francese), Claudia Maria Tresso (Lingua araba), Krystyna Jaworska (Lingua e letteratura polacca), Carmen Concilio (Letteratura inglese).

L'idea di un ciclo di conferenze dedicate specificamente alla traduzione letteraria ha incontrato un ampio consenso e i vari incontri hanno visto la partecipazione di numerosi professionisti del settore, universitari e non, e di pubblico lettore, in particolare di studenti universitari, nel segno di un fecondo momento di incontro e di scambio tra due mondi, quello accademico e quello dell'editoria, che spesso paiono non comunicare adeguatamente.

Benché tenutesi in giornate distinte, le quattro conferenze si sono venute progressivamente costituendo come una

riflessione organica e coerente sulle problematiche traduttive ed editoriali in virtù del denominatore comune dei dibattiti, rappresentato dalla questione della distanza linguistica, intesa sia dal punto di vista sia delle difficoltà di traduzione sia delle insidie in fase di editing. La domanda centrale da cui è partito il confronto è infatti: si può parlare di lingue vicine e di lingue lontane? E qual è il metro per misurare tale distanza?

La prima ad affrontare questo argomento è stata Yasmina Melaouha, per la quale la vicinanza si impone come il pericolo maggiore: i suoi tranelli creano la lontananza, perché tradurre letteratura significa affrontare la multiculturalità del testo originale. L'esempio proposto dalla traduttrice è il termine francese *terrasse*, che si riferisce a quella parte dei *café* attrezzata con tavolini e sedie che dà sulla strada, all'aperto, e che indica un'abitudine tipicamente francese, che è parte della vita locale e che ha come traducente l'italiano *terrazza*. Tuttavia, *terrasse* non indica né una terrazza né un balcone. E allora come tradurre *terrasse* nella nostra lingua?

Un esempio eloquente della più stretta contemporaneità: in risposta agli attentanti del 13 novembre 2015, per ripopolare le strade di Parigi è partito l'*hashtag* "Je suis en terrasse", tradotto in italiano con "Sono in terrazza": possiamo affermare con certezza che il pubblico italiano abbia recepito lo stesso messaggio di quello francese? Evidentemente no, per gli italiani la terrazza non sarà mai l'equivalente di una pausa, mentre al tavolo di un caffé si osserva lo scorrere della vita cittadina. Questo, ha spiegato Melaouha, deve far comprendere come anche la traduzione da una lingua "cugina", come quella francese, presenti delle insidie portando il traduttore a muoversi nel testo da un livello a un altro, anzi, a superare ogni livello per sconfiggere il mostro finale, definito il *babao* del traduttore, ovvero il calco linguistico.

Poiché la vicinanza rischia di impigrire alcuni traduttori, è necessario dare per scontato che ci sia una certa lontananza e mantenere sempre un equilibrio tra la voce originale con la sua "estraneità al quadrato" (perché un testo tradotto da in una lingua straniera sarà sempre un po' estraneo) e l'idea che la pagina italiana sia totalmente autonoma. Non bisogna tuttavia essere troppo aderenti al testo originale: quello che conta, ha concluso Melaouha, è rimanere in uno stato di vigile passività, che permetta di stare in ascolto, senza correre subito verso l'italiano e, poco alla volta, raggiungere la controllata libertà che fa di un traduttore un professionista.

Anche Laura Rescia si è soffermata sulla difficoltà rappresentata dai culturemi, sul falso mito della vicinanza tra francese e italiano e sull'estraneità del testo di partenza: il traduttore, ha spiegato, è per prima cosa un lettore forte e un amante del testo di partenza, con il quale deve instaurare un rapporto fisico e carnale. A prescindere dalla lingua di partenza, in ogni opera è presente qualcosa che seduce e che si rivela difficile da fare entrare nella nostra lingua. Il traduttore deve quindi trasformarsi in un'acrobata che si muove con agilità per accogliere lo straniero nel testo, deve essere flessibile e deve aprire nuovi interrogativi, in quanto tutto ciò che è irrigidimento o ricerca di equivalenze facili e veloci non è traduzione letteraria. In questo senso, il traduttore è anche un mediatore culturale, capace di trasformare il testo senza però alterarne il messaggio e il significato.

Il discorso verte quindi inevitabilmente su un'altra tematica, assai complessa ma spesso semplificata nella formula ormai logora *traduttore, traditore*. Ma cosa vuol dire *tradire*? Gianluca Coci ha chiarito che esistono più modi per tradurre un testo. Le ritraduzioni dei classici non avrebbero ragione d'essere (affermazione che riapre il dibattito sulle traduzioni di *Moby Dick*, in particolare sull'ultima per mano di Ottavio Fatica, pubblicata da Einaudi, questione già ampliamente discussa, fra gli altri, da Davide Brullo nel suo articolo *E traduci come mangi! Da Moby Dick in poi le migliori (e le peggiori) versioni italiane* pubblicato su linkiesta.it il 29 Dicembre 2015). Per le

ritraduzioni è più corretto parlare di *versioni* dello stesso testo di partenza.

Nel caso del giapponese, la resa in italiano del testo di partenza è assai simile a una versione dal greco o dal latino. La prima stesura dal giapponese deve necessariamente essere una traduzione strettamente letterale, parola per parola, e il passaggio alla lingua di arrivo è graduale. Cancellare subito la lingua di partenza, o creare immediatamente un testo al cinquanta per cento italiano e al cinquanta per cento giapponese, porterebbe ad un testo d'arrivo imperfetto. L'intervento di Coci sulla lingua giapponese pone sotto i riflettori una questione ineludibile quando si parla di lingue lontane: l'aspetto grafico del testo. Chi traduce da una lingua il cui sistema di scrittura sia diverso da quello alfabetico familiare al lettore "occidentale", deve fare i conti con una lontananza che è anche visiva. La grafia, in lingue come il giapponese, il cinese o l'arabo, gioca un ruolo fondamentale per la comprensione del testo: tratti molto simili ma con due significati decisamente diversi, se male interpretati, possono compromettere la resa dell'intera opera.

A proposito dell'arabo, la lingua a noi più vicina tra quelle considerate lontane, Claudia Tresso espone alcuni dei problemi con cui il traduttore letterario dall'arabo si scontra e ai quali non può sfuggire: la grafia, appunto, che riconosce le lettere in base ai "puntini" (che nei manoscritti più antichi sono abilmente camuffati tra lapilli, escrementi di insetti e altre tracce del tempo), la polisemia che contraddistingue molti lemmi, la sacralità della lingua scritta che ne compromette la modernizzazione (facilitata, però, dalle varianti dialettali), la paratassi che sacrifica la subordinazione, lo stile. In arabo, la frase *lo scrittore ha scritto lo scritto con una bella scrittura* suona bellissima, ma in italiano possiamo "scrivere lo stesso scritto senza che lo scritto che abbiamo scritto risulti scritto male?", domanda giustamente Tresso. Un altro importante problema riguarda uno dei culturemi per eccellenza: il nome proprio. Nell'arabo, ha spiegato la docente torinese, il nome proprio è un vero e proprio curriculum, perché ogni nome contiene quello del padre, del nonno, il toponimo dell'area di provenienza, il mestiere e tanto altro, e se nel mondo occidentale chiamiamo Bin Laden in questo modo è solo perché i media hanno sentito la necessità di organizzare tutto secondo l'etichetta "nome-cognome".

Un'altra problematica traduttiva emersa in più incontri è quella relativa alla traduzione del cibo, in particolar modo quello sconosciuto in Italia. L'accento è stato posto sul ventaglio di decisioni a disposizione del traduttore, il quale può stabilire se mantenere il termine originale e rimandare a un glossario, se spiegare di che cosa si tratta o se, invece, tradurre alla prima occorrenza spiegando, per esempio, che il protagonista di un romanzo cinese sta mangiando dei *jiaozi*, ravioli cinesi al vapore. Tutti i relatori sono convenuti sull'idea che il proliferare di ristoranti etnici negli ultimi anni abbia contribuito alla diffusione di termini alimentari fino a pochi anni fa ancora sconosciuti ai più (basti pensare al *sushi*). Come comportarsi però quando si parla di lemmi che si riferiscono a due stati dello stesso alimento? Nello spagnolo, ha osservato Elisabetta Paltrinieri, esistono due termini per indicare il pesce: *pez*, se l'animale è vivo, *pescado*, se è morto. Il contributo di Paltrinieri ha introdotto anche la problematica delle spezie usate nelle cucine di altri paesi ma non in Italia: tradurle o non tradurle? Renderle al plurale o lasciarle al singolare? Tutti questi sono esempi che servono a far riflettere sul ruolo del traduttore, molto più carico di responsabilità di quanto si possa pensare.

Nuovi spunti di riflessione sulle distanze linguistiche sono emersi grazie a Silvia Pozzi, la quale ha presentato la sua esperienza di traduzione dal cinese dell'ultimo noir di A Yi, *E adesso?*, recentemente pubblicato per i tipi di Metropoli d'Asia. In *E adesso?*, il protagonista tende una trappola all'amica e, dopo averla brutalmente uccisa, ne occulta il cadavere nella lavatrice. Che cosa c'è di

strano? Per Pozzi, avvezza agli elettrodomestici made in China, forse niente, ma dopo l'uscita del romanzo le è capitato di leggere una recensione in cui ci si domandava quanto fossero grandi le macchine lavabiancheria cinesi per contenere il corpo di una donna. La verità, ha spiegato la traduttrice, è che le lavatrici cinesi sono di dimensioni tali da poter contenere anche due corpi, ma ovviamente non è possibile cogliere questo dettaglio nella traduzione.

A proposito di lingue vicine e lontane, è significativo il caso della lingua inglese anzi, dalle lingue inglesi: perché se è vero che l'inglese si è imposto a livello globale, allo stesso tempo non si può ignorare la varietà linguistica e dialettale che lo caratterizza, proprio in virtù della sua ubiquità. Anna Nadotti, traduttrice dall'inglese di autori del Subcontinente indiano, ha sperimentato in prima persona la distanza dell'inglese, e conferma l'impossibilità di esprimersi in termini di vicinanza o lontananza, perché lo stesso mondo è reso in più lingue anche dalla stessa persona. Ogni individuo è un soggetto frammentato.

L'esempio portato da Nadotti è quello di Eva Hoffman, che nel suo celebre *Lost in translation* (trad. italiana di M. Baiocchi, *Come si dice?,* Donzelli, 1996,) tocca il tema della lingua in relazione all'identità e alla cultura e che alla proposta di matrimonio avanzata da un amico fa rispondere alla protagonista in due modi diversi: *maybe yes (forse sì),* in inglese, *nie(no)* in polacco. Nadotti cita l'esempio a dimostrazione della pluralità della nostra identità linguistica, che è allo stesso tempo distante e prossima. La stessa cosa vale per le lingue inglesi: all'interno della stessa nazione coesistono lingue inglesi più o meno lontane, in virtù della variegata realtà linguistica che contraddistingue ogni nazione e che si arricchisce ogni giorno. Di conseguenza, più che di gradazioni di lontananza, è corretto affermare l'esistenza di una distanza a strati.

Ritornando alla lingua polacca, Krystyna Jaworska ha fatto riflettere su un tratto particoalre della sua lingua madre. In polacco coesistono sia parole di origine neolatina (usate per lo più nel registro alto) sia parole di origine slava (che rappresentano la maggioranza nella lingua colloquiale). Per questo, se un polacco racconta a un italiano che *Ania studiuje na uniwersytecie i preferuje gramatykę japońską niż muzykę chynską (Anna studia all'università e preferisce la grammatica giapponese alla musica cinese)*, per l'italiano sarà più facile comprendere questa frase piuttosto che una conversazione a tavola: *Na talerzu jest jedzenie którego nie lubię (nel piatto c'è del cibo che non mi piace)*. Di conseguenza, per un parlante italiano la lingua polacca può risultare sia vicina sia lontana.

L'ultimo intervento sulla lontananza linguistica ha spostato l'attenzione sulla coesistenza di più lingue all'interno dello stesso testo. In *Guerra e Pace* o in *Anna Karenina*, ha spiegato Enrico Ganni, una porzione consistente dei discorsi è in francese, la lingua dell'aristocrazia russa. In casi come questo, è necessario mantenere il francese o tradurre tutto in italiano? In quale misura il francese è compreso dal lettore medio italiano? Il traduttore che si confronta con questi testi, non può non porsi simili interrogativi.

Gabriella Bosco ha presentato un caso analogo. Durante la traduzione di *Sarinagara* di Philippe Forest, la docente si è imbattuta in alcuni *haiku* del poeta giapponese Kobayashi Issa, e solo in un secondo momento ha scoperto che erano stati reinterpretati da Forest. La conclusione più logica è stata dunque quella di procedere a una traduzione diretta dal francese. Stessa sorte non è toccata allo sfortunato traduttore nipponico, preso dallo sconforto dopo aver esaminato con zelo tutte le collezioni originali di Kobayashi Issa in cerca di quelle poesie, senza ovviamente trovarle.

In episodi come questo, è fondamentale poter consultare l'autore. Tutti i relatori hanno sottolineato l'importanza del confronto con lo scrittore. È bene interpellare l'autore ogni volta che l'occasione lo richiede: quando si hanno incertezze sui personaggi, dubbi di

interpretazione o altro. Non tutti gli scrittori però rispondono con lo stesso entusiasmo, e se da una parte si trova l'autore disinteressato che risponde laconicamente lasciando l'intera responsabilità al suo alter ego linguistico, dall'altra non è raro trovare l'autore oltremodo scrupoloso, pronto a collaborare fino all'ultimo dettaglio. A questo proposito, ha commentato ironicamente Enrico Ganni, i traduttori hanno ragione quando dicono che il miglior autore è l'autore defunto.

In ogni modo, la collaborazione più importante, anzi imprescindibile, nel settore dell'editoria rimane quella tra il traduttore e l'editor. La discussione sull'argomento è stata aperta da Maria Rosa Bricchi, che dal 2014 lavora per Calabuig, la collana di narrativa straniera di Jaca Book che nasce con l'intento di proporre ai lettori un giro del mondo attraverso libri di valore e che per la prima volta riporta il nome del traduttore direttamente in copertina. Secondo Bricchi, l'editor è il regista della traduzione, colui che ne tira le fila, in quanto il suo lavoro incornicia quello del traduttore. L'editor interviene esclusivamente sull'italiano, quindi sull'agilità e sulla plasticità della lingua di arrivo, e va a toccare quelle piccole cicatrici che non dipendono dalla lingua di partenza, come sottolineato anche da Alba Bariffi. Anche Francesco Guglieri si è mostrato dello stesso avviso: quando lavorano insieme, il traduttore e l'editor devono prestare orecchio al passo del testo, devono sentire la musica e trasmettere il ritmo, che è dato sia dal bianco che dal nero di una pagina, in quanto, ha spiegato, la punteggiatura è quella che regola le luci di una traduzione. Si pensi alle traduzioni dall'inglese, lingua che fa un massiccio uso del trattino: alcune traduzioni tendono a mantenere un uso eccessivo di tale segno di punteggiatura, poco usato invece in italiano – se non per gli incisi – che privilegia la virgola o il punto. Tali discrepanze dovrebbero essere tuttavia minimizzate dal revisore: il suo ruolo, ha spiegato Sabine Schultz, diventa l'ultima garanzia della conformità di un testo alle norme editoriali della casa editrice.

Tornando agli editor, il loro intervento non si limita a limare l'italiano o a interrogare il traduttore quando qualcosa nella traduzione sembra non funzionare; spesso si rivelano dei veri e propri collaboratori aiutanti, forniscono idee, spunti di riflessione e ottimi suggerimenti. È pur vero che laddove l'italiano s'increspa, ha spiegato Bricchi, molto spesso c'è un errore di traduzione, ma un altro dato di fatto è che le incertezze sono proprie di tutte le lingue e derivano da un vezzo comune a tanti traduttori: quello della cosiddetta *antilingua*, quella lingua cioè che non ha nulla a vedere con l'italiano corrente. Tendenza questa confermata anche da Anna Raffetto che ha più volte avuto a che fare con un italiano talmente normalizzato e fedele a una lingua pura e incontaminata da uccidere il testo. Come si può scrivere in un bell'italiano, dunque? Secondo Bricchi, ma anche secondo gli altri relatori, il traduttore deve innanzi tutto leggere e sapere usare con consapevolezza la varietà di strumenti dell'italiano, dalle grammatiche e i dizionari metodici ai vocabolari nomenclatori. Sempre di consapevolezza parla Yasmina Melaouha, perché a volte capita che anche senza strumenti la traduzione risulti spontanea e naturale, ma è proprio in questi casi che il traduttore deve sapere dosare la propria consapevolezza. Deve essere in grado di giudicare se, in ultima analisi, sia il caso di mantenere una traduzione "istintiva". È come se si conferisse alle scelte lessicali una specie di permesso di soggiorno, ha scherzato Melaouha, e poi, in base al ritmo, alla musicalità del testo e altri fattori, si interviene modificandola o meno, "perché la pagina deve cantare".

La sensibilità al ritmo di una traduzione si affina col tempo, e se da una parte si sente spesso parlare dell'*orecchio del traduttore*, ovvero quell'orecchio assoluto che permette di cogliere sin dalle prime esperienze la melodia delle parole, dall'altra è necessario saper ascoltare i testi altrui per non perdere

tale sensibilità. Le buone traduzioni di qualcun altro possono dare ispirazione, ha affermato Jaworska, come affermano i versi di Adam Zagajewski: "solo nella bellezza altrui / vi è consolazione, nella musica / altrui e in versi stranieri" ("Nella bellezza altrui", in *Dalla vita degli oggetti. Poesie 1983-2005*, a cura di Krystyna Jaworska, Adelphi, 2012).

Tutti i relatori si sono trovati d'accordo sull'importanza della lettura, evidenziata da Carmen Concilio che ha sostenuto che questa abitudine deve cominciare dall'Università. Ha ricordato quanto gli studenti del Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Straniere e Culture Moderne siano fortunati, avendo dei docenti che sono anche traduttori e avendo la possibilità di arricchire la loro interpretazione del testo utilizzando diverse traduzioni. E se è vero che molti traduttori sono anche professori universitari, come mai le Università non diventano un polo di interscambio con il mondo dell'editoria, si è domandata la docente?

Maria Rosa Bricchi, dal canto suo, ha portato ad esempio la propria ottima collaborazione con Gianluca Coci, che l'ha guidata nella scelta di pubblicare due importanti romanzi, *Sayonara, gangsters* di Takahashi Gen'ichirō (BUR, 2008) e *Il proiezionista* di Abe Kazushige (Calabuig, 2015). Tuttavia, prosegue l'editor, i traduttori soffrono spesso di una certa miopia, ed è questo il motivo per cui le case editrici non si affidano sempre e solo al loro parere. Uno studioso competente, spinto dall'entusiasmo, corre il rischio di consigliare un autore che in Italia non riscuoterebbe lo stesso successo avuto in patria. È proprio a questo livello che le "lingue ponte" si rivelano uno strumento eccellente: grazie alle traduzioni in altre lingue, gli editor possono arrivare a conoscere determinati testi e, dopo averli valutati, deciderne eventualmente la pubblicazione. Maria Rosa Bricchi, per esempio, non pubblica nulla nella sua collana che lei stessa non abbia letto in una "lingua ponte". È stata proprio l'assenza di una "lingua ponte", ha affermato Anna Raffetto, ad impedirle di promuovere alcuni suoi progetti.

Riguardo invece il tema scottante delle scelte editoriali, Francesco Guglieri ha chiarito innanzitutto che pubblicare opere in traduzione è più difficile che non pubblicare romanzi in italiano, perché la traduzione comporta sempre e inevitabilmente costi più elevati. Ogni casa editrice ha una propria linea editoriale, e sebbene gli interventi sul testo finale siano minori, poiché il livello dei traduttori è notevolmente più alto rispetto al passato, i tempi di traduzione e i costi di revisione rimangono invariati. Un vero peccato se si considera che la narrativa in traduzione è capace di creare dei veri e propri scossoni culturali, ha evidenziato Carmen Concilio, che si è domandata come le case editrici possano diventare istituzioni utili a chi svolge ricerca o attività didattica. A questo proposito, Guglieri ha presentato il nuovo sito di Einaudi, "Biancamano2", creato per dare spazio alle riflessioni sull'editoria letteraria. "Biancamano2" è uno strumento semplice, un sito che ospita diversi contenuti (interviste, recensioni, informazioni sui libri) che consentono di avvicinare il mondo della letteratura al contesto culturale italiano. C'è anche una sessione denominata "Telescopio" che contiene una rassegna stampa di documenti apparsi in rete anche all'estero. Leggendo il blog, che tra l'altro è un ottimo esempio di connubio tra nuovi media e discipline umanistiche, il lettore può navigare ed entrare nel dibattito attuale.

A ogni modo, i nuovi titoli arrivano alle case editrici più grandi per altri canali, in particolare attraverso gli agenti e gli scout presenti nei paesi geograficamente più vicini. In certi casi, gli scout propongono novità ancora in fase di stampa nel paese d'origine. La velocità in questo settore è impressionante, ha osservato Enrico Ganni: quando si tratta di romanzi angloamericani, spesso è necessario stabilirne la sorte (ovvero la pubblicazione nella propria collana) in due giorni. D'altra parte, il mercato della narrativa angloamericana è egemone, a discapito della produzione in arrivo da paesi come, per esempio, la Germania; dialogando con Marcella Costa, Sabine Schultz ha spiegato

che i titoli tedeschi lanciati sul mercato nell'ultimo anno non ricoprono che una minima fetta del mercato, e che la maggior parte di questi non appartiene alla narrativa. Anche il mercato dell'editoria polacca non naviga in acque migliori: Krystyna Jaworska è tornata in diverse occasioni sull'importanza della casa editrice con cui si pubblica, e ha affermato che la letteratura delle lingue meno note ha bisogno di grandi case editrici.

Il discorso è applicabile a tutte le lingue di partenza, ma molto dipende anche dalla ricezione da parte della critica e dalle recensioni. Talvolta, ha sottolineato Anna Nadotti, è questione di *pigrizia*. La critica italiana contemporanea è un monumento alla pigrizia, per cui può capitare che un traduttore faccia un ottimo lavoro ma che sia però bocciato o ignorato dalla critica. È chiaro che, stando così le cose, è ancora più difficile fare giungere un libro al pubblico. Serve uno sforzo ulteriore per rompere i silenzi e scongiurare le interferenze che caratterizzano il mondo della comunicazione. Oggi molti traduttori si autopubblicizzano e svolgono anche il lavoro di comunicazione che spetterebbe alle case editrici, aprono blog e forum di discussione. E grazie a questi nuovi scambi anche con altri media, creano nuove e promettenti sperimentazioni.

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Ugo CARDINALE e Alberto SINIGAGLIA
(a cura di)
Processo al liceo classico
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Mario SEITA

Anche alla base del diritto sta il gioco, secondo Huizinga [1]. Ho pensato a questo grande studioso leggendo il libro che recensisco, resoconto di un curioso processo svoltosi il 14 novembre 2014 nella solenne cornice del teatro Carignano di Torino: infatti l'imputato era il liceo classico, mentre autorevoli esponenti della cultura e di varie istituzioni formavano la corte oppure fungevano da parti processuali o testimoni; inoltre erano presenti tramite questionari più licei, anche scientifici, quasi tutti piemontesi.

Un gioco, dunque, con intenti però serissimi, visto che si tratta della formazione scolastica in una società profondamente cambiata rispetto a quando, poco meno di un secolo fa, entrò in vigore la riforma Gentile, di cui il liceo classico era uno dei perni.

Ugo Cardinale ricorda brevemente le varie tappe che hanno portato alla configurazione attuale di questo tipo di scuola e illustra le risposte dei docenti ad alcune domande riguardanti il significato del liceo classico oggi; le cause del rifiuto delle cosiddette lingue morte e la necessità o no di cambiamenti da introdurre; dai questionari emergono però risposte in larga misura autocelebrative, come si esprime Cardinale.

Nel processo le accuse mosse al liceo classico dall'economista Andrea Ichino sono tre: 1) inganna i propri iscritti facendo credere che prepara anche per i corsi di studio universitari in ambito scientifico; 2) non favorisce la mobilità sociale, scuola elitaria com'è; 3) è inefficiente nella società odierna, in cui bisogna avere sempre più competenze tecnico-scientifiche e conoscere le lingue vive, innanzi tutto l'inglese. Ichino cita due statistiche, dalle quali risulta che nell'insieme gli studenti con maturità classica non ottengono affatto risultati apprezzabili nelle prove di ammissione ai corsi di studio scientifici della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa e nei test di medicina dell'Università di Bologna. Ichino propone percorsi curricolari *à la carte*. Lo scrittore Marco Malvaldi e il matematico Stefano Marmi appoggiano le accuse suddette, sottolineando l'importanza delle statistiche e la necessità di saperle interpretare.

Alla difesa del liceo classico si provvede da più angolazioni. Per Luciano Canfora, filologo classico, esso fornisce senso critico mediante filologia, filosofia, storia e traduzione. Il latinista Ivano Dionigi ricorda quanto questo tipo di scuola sia proficuo, considerati sia la quantità e la qualità dei beni culturali del nostro paese, sia lo stretto legame della lingua italiana con il latino e la rilevante influenza della civiltà greca e romana sul pensiero giuridico e politico moderno; in sostanza, una scuola a marcata impronta umanistica « è il luogo dove si riflette il mondo intero; dove si apprende la cultura 'politeistica' dell'*et-et* e non quella 'monoteistica' dell'*aut-aut* ». Il logico e filosofo della matematica Gabriele Lolli

[1] *Homo ludens*, intr. di U. Eco, trad. di C. van Schendel, Torino, Einaudi, 2002 (ristampa), pp. 90-103 (edizione originale: Amsterdam 1939).

afferma che non bisogna limitarsi alla 'matematica dei quanti', intesa cioè come un semplice strumento in campo, per esempio, finanziario, ma collocare questa materia anche su un piano più alto, come suggeriva Platone, ai fini della conoscenza; occorre insegnare a essere consapevoli nell'uso degli strumenti matematici, tenendo ben evidenti pure i loro limiti, e le discipline umanistiche aiutano molto al riguardo, a cominciare dalla storia, soprattutto in tempi come i nostri, in cui i massmedia spingono a vivere in un perenne presente. Secondo Umberto Eco, lo studio del mondo classico contribuisce alla formazione di una cultura umanistica complessiva, indispensabile prima di specializzarsi in qualche ramo del sapere: altrimenti si corre il rischio di trovare chi sa tutto sulle malattie rare, ma ignora come si curi un raffreddore. Per il linguista Tullio de Mauro sarebbe un impoverimento intellettuale recidere le radici del nostro passato, tanto più che altre tradizioni culturali mantengono vivo nella scuola il rapporto con le proprie origini (Cina, Giappone, India…). Sulla medesima lunghezza d'onda di questi difensori si pongono il filosofo Massimo Cacciari; il filosofo della scienza Giulio Giorello e Massimo Giletti, ex allievo di liceo classico, presenti al processo attraverso interventi videoregistrati, esposti da Alberto Sinigaglia, presidente dell'ordine dei giornalisti del Piemonte, nel trarre un bilancio del processo.

Adolfo Scotto di Luzio, studioso delle istituzioni scolastiche, traccia una breve storia del liceo classico e spiega come la crisi odierna di questa scuola dipenda dal fatto che i ceti borghesi si sono ormai orientati verso scienza e tecnologia; la scuola pubblica si è adeguata penalizzando gli studi umanistici e l'insegnante ora richiesto « è meno capace di elaborare un pensiero critico della realtà, mentre diventa un affidabile esecutore delle intenzioni ministeriali ».

Completano il libro le pagine introduttive di Anna Maria Poggi, presidente della Fondazione per la scuola della Compagnia di san Paolo, e di Carmela Palumbo, direttore generale per gli ordinamenti scolastici (MIUR).

La sentenza della Corte è stata di assoluzione del liceo classico dai capi d'accusa.

Ovviamente, latinista qual sono, non posso che provar piacere per questa conclusione. Direi quindi: viva il latino e viva il greco, ampliando il felice titolo di un libro stimolante [2]. Tuttavia le difficoltà in cui versa la cultura classica sono evidenti, in stretto rapporto con la crisi degli studi umanistici tutti e, su un piano più generale, della scuola, come si apprende pure dai giornali[3].

Nel processo al liceo classico si è parlato spesso di statistica e io ritengo opportuno indugiare su un sonetto di Trilussa. Il poeta spiega che cosa sia questa materia e aggiunge che in base ai calcoli:

> risurta che te tocca un pollo all'anno:
>
> e se non entra ne le spese tue,
> t'entra ne la statistica lo stesso,
> perché c'è un antro che ne magna due[4].

Senza dubbio, Trilussa semplifica per far sorridere il lettore, ma credo che proprio le discipline umanistiche servano per andare oltre le cifre e non dimenticare chi *non* mangia il pollo.

Il libro merita di essere conosciuto: in particolare, lo leggeranno coloro che devono prendere decisioni sul futuro della scuola italiana?

[2] N. Gardini, *Viva il latino. Storia e bellezza di una lingua inutile*, Milano, Garzanti, 2016.

[3] Per esempio, R. Casati, *L'abbaglio della fine della scuola*, in « Il Sole 24 Ore », 15 maggio 2016, p. 23 e P. Mastrocola, *Contro la scuola facile*, ivi, 29 maggio 2016, p. 43.

[4] *I sonetti: La statistica*, in Trilussa, *Tutte le poesie*, a cura di P. Pancrazi, note di L. Huetter, Milano, Mondadori, 1951, p. 392.

MARIO SEITA • è ricercatore presso il Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Straniere e Culture Moderne dell'Università di Torino dove tiene i corsi di Letteratura del mondo classico. La sua attività di ricerca è soprattutto rivolta ai rapporti fra scrittori di Roma e potere politico, alla fortuna di temi e figure del mondo greco e romano nella cultura moderna, così come ad aspetti del mondo classico dal punto di vista antropologico e/o semiotico.

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IL PROGETTO EUROPEO PETALL

Buone pratiche per l'insegnamento delle lingue straniere

Elisa CORINO

Il 30 giugno 2016 si conclude il progetto europeo PETALL - Pan European Tasks for Language Learning (Ref. no. 530863-NL-2012-KA2MP). Il progetto triennale ha visto la creazione di una rete di ricerca e formazione, che ha impegnato partner provenienti da dieci paesi europei (Portogallo, Spagna, Italia, Germania, Olanda, Scozia, Grecia, Ungheria, Serbia, Turchia), con l'obiettivo di creare e promuovere buone pratiche didattiche. In particolare il focus del gruppo di ricerca, formato da tandem di esperti universitari e docenti della scuola, è stato l'integrazione tra attività task-based (TBLT) e tecnologie (TIC) e la loro introduzione nella classe di lingue straniere, con un'attenzione particolare alle indicazioni del Quadro Comune Europeo di Riferimento per le lingue (QCER).

Un task richiede che gli studenti usino la lingua in modo pragmatico per ottenere un risultato che sia valutabile in relazione all'appropriatezza del contenuto trasmesso; si tratta di un'attività che coinvolge gli apprendenti nella comprensione, manipolazione, produzione e interazione in lingua, mentre la loro attenzione non è focalizzata sulla forma in sé, ma sulla rielaborazione delle conoscenze grammaticali allo scopo di trasmettere un significato. Il fuoco sul contenuto fa sì che lo studente impari ad usare le strutture della lingua quasi senza accorgersene.

Parallelamente, l'uso delle TIC permette di assicurare un alto livello di motivazione e coinvolgimento da parte dell'apprendente, offre contenuti arricchiti e consente un processo di apprendimento più intenso e multisensoriale, oltre a un buon grado di differenziazione e adattamento alle necessità o abilità personali degli studenti.

L'interesse di ricercatori e docenti nei confronti della sinergia TBLT e TIC è un fenomeno relativamente recente; se già una decina di anni or sono autori come Ellis (2004), Nunan (2004), e Willis & Willis (2007) discutevano di aspetti del *task-based learning* quali la sua struttura teorica e il suo impianto metodologico, le proposte presentate erano per lo più orientate a contesti scolastici tradizionali con interazione frontale e il ruolo della tecnologia era decisamente trascurato.

Le caratteristiche specifiche dei nuovi contesti di insegnamento/apprendimento richiedono invece un approccio differente, che tenga conto dello sviluppo delle numerose tecnologie informatiche che possono essere utilmente sfruttate anche nella glottodidattica. Di fatto, negli ultimi anni le TIC sono diventate un requisito essenziale nelle competenze di un insegnante, così come l'accento sul linguaggio comunicativo in classe e sull'apprendimento funzionale hanno profondamente influenzato l'approccio didattico alle lezioni di lingua. Ciononostante la didattica di molti insegnanti è ancora ferma al modello PPP (Presentazione – Pratica - Produzione), vincolata ai libri di testo e anche l'introduzione di supporti quali LIM e tablet in classe non ha di molto modificato l'approccio tradizionale.

Tra i contributi recenti e più significativi allo studio delle relazioni tra ICT e TBLT i volumi curati da Thomas & Reinders (2010) e

González-Lloret & Ortega (2014), che difendono il principio secondo cui gli aspetti peculiari dell'insegnamento delle lingue basato sul task (TBLT) si incastrano perfettamente nella nuova didattica delle lingue e nelle nuove realtà di tecnologia digitale.

Il progetto PETALL (per una descrizione dettagliata si veda Lopes 2014) si inserisce in questo approccio didattico e si propone di formare insegnanti nell'uso pratico delle metodologie descritte, fornendo loro elementi per la gestione e la progettazione di task, per la definizione di strumenti di valutazione, oltre a una serie di attività (quattro proposte per tandem nazionale, per un totale di quaranta task) già sperimentate nei paesi del consorzio, che si delineano come modelli di uso delle TIC integrato al TBLT.

I docenti di Didattica delle lingue moderne del Dipartimento di Lingue e letterature straniere e Culture moderne dell'Università di Torino, insieme ad alcune scuole torinesi e alla rete AVIMES, costituiscono il polo italiano della rete europea e si sono occupati di sviluppare e diffondere sul territorio le proposte elaborate in sede internazionale.

Dopo aver individuato alcune classi[1] di scuola primaria (IC III Chieri), secondaria di primo grado (Spinelli) e secondaria di secondo grado (Avogadro, A. Steiner e Darwin), quattro delle attività proposte dai partner sono state implementate e poi discusse con gli autori per renderle ancora più efficaci, motivanti, adatte al livello degli studenti e ai possibili contesti di insegnamento. Similmente, le task italiane sono state sperimentate dai colleghi spagnoli e greci e, grazie al feedback degli insegnanti e alla collaborazione internazionale tra partner, anche queste sono state modificate e migliorate. Infine, valutatori esperti di didattica delle lingue hanno giudicato i prodotti nei loro contenuti, tenendo conto degli strumenti proposti e delle indicazioni del QCER, e avallandone la qualità.

I gruppi nazionali hanno poi organizzato corsi di formazione per docenti in servizio e tirocinanti di ogni ordine e grado di scuola, con l'obiettivo di insegnare a progettare, far sperimentare e mettere in atto le buone pratiche emerse nella fase di ricerca-azione.

In particolare il gruppo torinese ha organizzato due giornate di formazione (13-14 aprile 2015, circa 260 partecipanti) in cui sono intervenuti esperti internazionali, tra i quali Anthony Mollica e Pertti Hietaranta, e i docenti che hanno implementato le task nelle loro classi nella prima fase del progetto hanno presentato i risultati ottenuti. Un ulteriore momento di incontro è stato poi proposto nei mesi di ottobre e novembre, con tre incontri seminariali per un gruppo più ristretto di docenti di scuola secondaria ai quali è stato chiesto di progettare e sperimentare un argomento che vedesse l'utilizzo delle TIC in un'attività TBLT.

Peculiarità del corso del tandem italiano è stato poi l'accento posto sull'efficacia del binomio TIC-TBLT in contesti CLIL. La partecipazione alla formazione è stata infatti estesa anche a docenti di discipline non linguistiche, ed è proprio tra loro (e tra i loro studenti) che la metodologia illustrata ha riscosso il maggior entusiasmo e successo. Tra i prodotti presentati troviamo fumetti che raccontano delle proprietà della corrente, video che presentano come è fatta una cellula, cartoni animati che narrano storie di bambini, pubblicità a sfondo sociale, e-book con riflessioni su eventi storici...

Il percorso di PETALL si è infine idealmente chiuso con il convegno "New Trends in Foreign Language Teaching", tenutosi a Granada il 27-28 aprile 2016, in cui il progetto è stato presentato all'uditorio internazionale e insegnanti e ricercatori provenienti da tutto il mondo hanno discusso di tecnologia applicata alla didattica, di approccio task-based, di buone pratiche per l'insegnamento delle lingue. Un volume nato dalla selezione dei contributi più significativi è in preparazione presso l'editore DeGruyter.

[1] Si ringraziano tutti i docenti e gli studenti che hanno partecipato alla fase di ricerca-azione.

Molti dei materiali creati in seno al progetto sono liberamente consultabili − nelle dieci lingue del progetto − sul sito di PETALL (www.petallproject.eu) e attraverso le pagine Facebook, Twitter e il canale YouTube ad esso dedicati.

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