



Recensioni / Reviews

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Frank McGuinness, *May Twenty-Second*, Oldcastle, The Gallery Press, 2022, pp. 126. £ 19.50. ISBN: 978-1-91133-833-8.

Frank McGuinness, *Dinner with Groucho*, London, Faber and Faber Ltd., 2022, pp. 54. £ 9.99. ISBN: 978-671-38096-1. (The play, directed by Alison McKenna, was first staged by “b*spoke theatre company” at The Civic, Dublin, on 27 September 2022, and subsequently at Belfast International Arts Festival and the Arcola Theatre, London.)

1. May Twenty-Second

At the heart of Frank McGuinness’s latest collection of poems is what even by his challenging standards is an astonishing achievement: a group of some twenty-three short, tightly-packed lyrics (57-68) inspired by Goya’s album, entitled *The Witches and Old Women*. One can easily guess which of Goya’s particular images has prompted which poem, but it is not the descriptive power that is at once enticing, shocking, freeing, but the wild exuberance of each imaginative outpouring. There is a total entering into the spirit of each sketch, an inhabiting (possession?) quite devoid of any judgemental distance; instead, a reader is immersed in the sensory freedoms found by those women that lie beyond the decision to deny all traditional codes of behaviour or belief, any limitations to be imposed on experience. Rather the poems embrace the maelstrom that constitutes human awareness at any given moment in time, the sheer *range* of sensual, intellectual, emotional possibilities and stimuli with no holding back. The rhythms push the reader powerfully onward, not relaxing their hold, as an irresistible wildness takes over: “spread the word, hell is dead, roar it from steeples” (62). But we are not exclusively in the world of Goya’s images or any traditional expression of diabolism. We are not allowed the comfort that would come with such historical placing; instead, rapidly glimpsed allusions hint at cultural, political, private (gay), local (Irish), historical analogies that bring a wide-ranging inclusiveness to the poems despite their lack of an easily definable focus. When one embarks on a poem, anything might happen; the direction is fierce, but the objective is elusive; the conclusions are emphatic, but never expected. The collection is preceded by an epigraph from Lorca celebrating how “there is no straight road in this world”, only “a

giant labyrinth/of crossroads intersecting” (56). McGuinness enters that labyrinth fearlessly, relishing the tangential turnings, the byways (more than the highways). When Theseus entered the classical labyrinth, he held the safeguard of Ariadne’s thread; throughout McGuinness’s sequence there is a safeguard offered by the shared form of each poem: twelve meticulously observed pentameters (unrhyming) give a sense that the anarchy is worth pursuing confidently for the rewards that will be discovered, even if there is no obvious sense of an ending. Maybe the experience of complete release is its own reward; maybe that is the witch’s gift.

To turn to the other four parts of the collection after coming to terms with “Dancing with Goya” is to appreciate the degree to which these new poems mark a significant change in McGuinness’s vision and approach. Though the subjects fall into categories familiar from McGuinness’s earlier work, they are treated with a new freedom matched with more penetrating insights. Rather than confront a subject head-on and uncompromisingly, these poems explore their chosen theme from ever-changing perspectives. Again, the transience and multiplicity of factors contained within a time-span are now recorded meticulously; it is like a kind of poetic impressionism. Consider “Jocasta” (17-18), a monologue pitched between direct address and inner rumination: steadily the facts that define her myth are intimated, though not in any chronological sequence: rather what is explored is a mind searching the past to fuel a present anger, as that mind, increasingly aware of being a mere toy in the hands of the gods, accepts how she and Oedipus are inexorably “heading to the noose, the neck and the eyes” (18). That final line is precise and decisive, but it is reached through a powerful empathy for the emotional traumas that are layered within her psyche, much of it showing Jocasta repeatedly the victim of cruel circumstance. Her mind can settle on nothing to bring ease or respite: time only adds to the horrors. This is tragedy less as social event than as accumulating pains in the depths of self.

Repeatedly the poems fuse present and past(s) to show the complexity of such selves within the flow of time. In “Chaos 1945” (119) historical event and a private family anecdote capture, in their frank juxtaposition, how they might bizarrely come to be held in suspension within human memory, where there is no sense of either being privileged as superior in importance within the processes of recall. “The October Devotions, 1962” (106-107) explores how a traditional celebration was that year cut through by the all-too-human fear generated worldwide by the Cuban missile crisis, so the abiding memory is not of spiritual uplift but of streets “empty, waiting” (107). The assassination of Lyra McKee is strangely evoked through seven meditations (32-35) on how such a tragedy might be evoked through the vision and cinematic language of seven notable contemporary film directors. The implication is that, for all their particular genius, no one of them, any more than McGuinness himself, could give an appropriate response or adequate artistic expression to such wanton carnage. Daringly, each poem is couched in lines of varying syllables (frequently thirteen, fourteen or fifteen), but usually of five stresses, making for an effect that intimates a prose poem that is never quite realised; this is a most difficult metre technically to sustain, if one is to avoid a flat-footed pedestrianism. The effect here in this sequence is profoundly disturbing; however, brilliantly each director’s style is evoked, the impact, given the metre, seems off-kilter, humbling, too self-conscious for all the depth of feeling clearly at work. Where lie our priorities? How can one *celebrate* a wasted life, however powerful the impulse to do so, while the vocabulary, the imagery and symbolism that form an artist’s personal style are readily to hand?

In a lighter vein another sequence, “Meryton” (98-104), affectionately challenges Jane Austen’s assured confidence in how she chooses to present several of the minor figures that people *Pride and Prejudice*. Here are the likes of Caroline Bingley, Aunt Phillips and Sir William Lucas, but with their portraits expanded in a manner that saves them from being reduced simply to

caricature. Mrs. Bennett twitters like her prototype, but we are invited to see her in older age, conscious of how risible she must appear still fretting, “wittering on” but “saying nothing” (98). That she *knows* she is irritating to husband, family and acquaintance, best seen by them as a figure of fun, brings a poignant dimension lacking in Austen. There is suppressed anguish too in the loss of her husband’s affection. Was their one-time passion only for him a means to secure “an entailed estate” (98)? Equally kindly is the view of Sir William Lucas struggling to remain the buoyant self of the novel, despite increasingly suffering from flatulence which keeps him outside the politest society. And Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Darcy’s mother in “Sisters” are presented cheerfully as ambitious, go-getting Sligo belles, marrying in hope of acquiring estates and houses, whose social graces and cultivated snobbery mask a determined cupidity, fuelled by a wish to escape the confines of an Irish background. In all six case studies, a degree of human weakness brings a darker element to the characterisation, enriching Austen’s artistry and broadening her canvas by placing each within the contexts of aging, disappointment, failings, frailties and a carefully structured resilience. They too are caught in the complexities of time but freed from the limitations of Austen’s mocking approach.

Another group of poems, spread throughout the collection, interrogate issues of gender-definition. There is Mark Smeaton, the brilliant Tudor performer, “adept at viol and virginals/a master of flute and organ” and dancer of rare ingenuity, who to escape the label of “Sodomite” bragged of a heterosexuality he did not possess to ingratiate himself with ruthless nobles bent on destroying Anne Boleyn; they used him despite knowing him to be a lying informer, then “cut the strings”, leaving him “a scarlet silence” (46). The poem moves through the violently contrasting facts of Smeaton’s career but always filtered through his sensibility, his exulting in his matchless expertise, the luxury of lying to inhabit a masculinity out of dread of his truth to self, and the final painful recognition of that self as “soft boy crying for his mother” (46). The capturing of a period sensibility and the period pressures moulding the awareness of an outsider (socially and sexually), as he tries to find his *place* in his world, is deftly achieved, but all within the perspective of the writer’s modern sensibility and its sympathies. There is no reaching after a rhetoric of horror or shock, which would be wholly misplaced; only an honest recording of the facts (the levels of internal and social duplicity are especially well envisaged) that profoundly respects Smeaton’s complex identity, its failings and its strengths.

The career of the self-promoting fantasist, “Vicky de Lambrey” (90-92), is an ideal subject for McGuinness, fascinated by the glitter-ball effect of endlessly shifting facets of a personality. Registered as male at birth (David Lloyd-Gibbon) but transforming into “a beautiful self-possessed woman” (Vicky) (91), when financially down on his/her luck; a commoner who assumed the role of a scion of the Rothschild family (successfully, until the family paid him “to do a runner”, 90), a gourmand who was a shameless thief, a pragmatist who posed as a fortune-teller and spy: the selves were in endless flux prompted by changing circumstance and need. In all seriousness, Yeats voiced a wish to “remake” himself (“An Acre of Grass”, line 14), to develop new powers and authority as he faced old age; but this is a re-making of the self that knows no bounds, or defined purpose, beyond survival and the exuberance of discovering new creative potentials. De Lambrey embraces the status of outsider enthusiastically: the poem rollicks along, never settling into a focus for long, even into the role of “the soul of the party” (92). Through ten stanzas, we share in a consciousness without shame or conscience, intent only on the need to *be*, beyond gender, class-consciousness, morality, nationhood, conventions of any kind: totally, confidently alone. It is a wonderful, liberating feat of the imagination: this too is a dancing with Goya’s witches.

Just how bold the concept and execution of “Vicky de Lambray” it becomes clearer if one compares that poem to “Caroline Blackwood” (112-114), another portrait of an outsider, but one not celebrating complete independence rather one seeking to sever all ties with “our big house” (112) and an over-bearing, titled mother, intent on imposing her own values on her daughter’s upbringing. This is a far more limited and circumscribed objective: the poem runs to eight stanzas but noticeably the first four continually circle about Blackwood’s conflicted feelings for her mother (“revere her as a she-devil”; 112), as if in truth she cannot break away fully, or needs the very fact of her mother to justify her own alterity. The remaining stanzas (and most of the first stanza too) outline her mode of escape which invariably relates to a man, not trust in herself. Lucien Freud confirms her own opinion of her mother yet the language chosen shows the extent to which he denigrates Blackwood too; Israel is a musician but the child born of their union is still-born, denying Blackwood a chance at motherhood. Independence then becomes a matter of fighting legally for her financial rights to fund her lifestyle, till the advent of Robert Lowell, “my last husband” (113), who nonetheless left her to her by-now alcohol-raddled state (“I perfume rooms with bottles, / giving birth to vodka noggins”; 113). There is none of de Lambray’s joy in being alone: instead of independence, sadly, a cycle repeats itself of searching for new forms of dependence. The opening of the final stanza defines the degree to which she fails to escape a searing conscience about all this activity: “Can I be blamed for flitting...?”; 113. Blackwood throughout her monologue is framing an elegy for her life (“There are always yesterdays...”; 113); no energy is left for questing onward; the poem is no manifesto for needful change. In these constant attempts to remake herself, it is the circumstances only which change, not the motivating psyche. McGuinness need not intrude to make a critique; Blackwood does that herself and devastatingly.

It has been worth dwelling in detail on some eleven of the fifty-seven or so poems in *May Twenty-Second* to explore a new-found complexity resulting from McGuinness’s setting each subject within an intricate time-frame and the meticulous matching of each with a particular verse technique and metrical patterning. What results are new approaches to personal freedom that are nonetheless subtly contained by the chosen forms and warmed in each case by a sensitive compassion. Liberties are found to have their price, but the chance, given to the reader, to inhabit and explore these private worlds in imagination and experience their degree of success or failure is in itself freeing. That time is of the essence has a unique validity in this collection and is the source of its abundant riches.

2. *Dinner with Groucho*

The quotation from Lorca in *May Twenty-Second* about a lack of straight roads and the presence instead of endless labyrinths is an apt introduction to McGuinness’s latest play, which too claims as its subject, “confusions – contradictions – lovely labyrinths at the root of our lives” (47). *Dinner with Groucho* fizzles with outbursts of brilliance and flashes of insight. The result garnered an absolute firecracker of a performance from its cast of three. It is rare for a play to keep an audience absolutely on the edge of their seats for its entire duration, not knowing where dialogue or situations might swing next and all at a thrilling pace. Tangential shifts of direction, style, modes of delivery, and tempo have one constantly on the alert. McGuinness has seized on a brief moment of cultural history and elaborated wildly: the given fact is a meeting for dinner that did actually occur between T.S. Eliot and Groucho Marx in 1964, the culmination of a sporadic correspondence between the men that began three years earlier with Eliot writing a fan letter to Groucho, expressing admiration for his wit and sense of fun. Eliot

was to die a year later; Marx in 1977. Little is known about their encounter, so McGuinness gives his imagination free rein, proposing a restaurant-venue that may be in London, maybe on the verge of the hereafter. It could be heaven or could be hell (both men as artists have experienced a long after-life, subject to changing taste and values); their table is presided over by the Proprietor or is she perhaps God, encouraging the men to recognise their true destinies and sit in judgment on themselves? Both men are edgily nervous: the conviviality frequently sounds like a tactic for avoiding intimacy. They admit “We did not get what we expected of each other” and Groucho clarifies that he “expected better”, while Eliot responds that he “expected stranger” (28). The repartee has a brittle humour from the first, and there is a decided sense of them playing up to each other: *performing* for an admirer. Steadily we come to appreciate how they share a distaste for fame and reputation that can touch on derision, particularly in Eliot (“I know my limitations...a mug’s game – poetry”; 30-31), which explains why he prefers to introduce himself not as a celebrated poet but as a successful publisher.

The text is a gift for actors in its demands (all three performers rose admirably to the challenges): the tone shifts rapidly between the lyrical and the abrasive, from witty hilarity to heartfelt self-questioning, as the play moves effortlessly between comedy, which is viewed ultimately as “innocent, insane defiance” and tragedy seen as necessarily “paying the bill” (45). This matches the men’s searching intellects, shifting between self-presentation and a sense of weariness at the routines their lives have become: “the act is winding down” (the words are Eliot’s but the image is drawing on Groucho’s vaudeville world). “You have seen all I can do – I hope you find it amusing” (26). Lamely, they try to bolster each other’s confidence only to find they are quickly reiterating their epithets of praise and in no time they are “finished” (26), for this routine at least. Questioning why they have allowed their lives to take the shape they have (“Then for what – done your bit for what”, 27), Eliot confesses “I have earned my right to silence”. Marx questions this, wanting further insight into Eliot’s meaning, seemingly lacking in understanding; but shortly in the play he will quote Marianne Moore’s poem “Silence” in its entirety, as “the story of my life” with its assertion that the “deepest feeling always shows itself in silence” with Moore’s own self-correction here: “not in silence, but restraint” (44). For Moore there should be no settled home (“Inns are not residences”). Both men reveal sadly how difficult it is to sustain Marianne Moore’s state of mind (that forever questing confidently onward); even the restaurant, while welcoming, is still only a transient point of rest. Significantly, both men constantly summon ideas about King Lear lost in the storm, but deride the thought of Shakespeare’s protagonist as a role-model, fantasizing dismissively about his relations with his daughters and with his mother. The dialogue abounds in cultural cross-references (Beckett, Shakespeare, Dante, Coleridge, Pinter, Hopkins, Marie Lloyd) defining the scope of the men’s intellectual awareness, and both make the allusions readily. One wonders if McGuinness is perhaps testing through his characters and dramaturgy the ongoing validity of T.S. Eliot’s apology for the technique he deployed throughout *The Waste Land*: “These fragments I have shored against my ruins”.

But it would be wrong to see the play as descending into maudlin self-criticism. Both actors are required to show the gamut of their technical accomplishments: they sing, they dance (including a hilarious Charleston choreographed by David Bolger of CoisCéim); Tom Eliot (played by Greg Hicks) performs acrobatics; Groucho (Ian Bartholomew) ventriloquises with a wine glass and later with a plastic chicken; Tom resorts to magic and conjures cigars from behind Groucho’s ears, pulls a vast multicoloured silk cloth from Groucho’s pocket after placing there a modest handkerchief, and produces an egg from thin air, which he then transforms into the plastic hen. All this is required of the men while primarily they need

to focus on that undertow of darker feeling, as both artists recognise their descent into old age and confront an artistry now completed. While Tom welcomes efficiency in publishing over creativity in poetry, Groucho, after numerous appearances as comedian, sees himself as confined to residing in his audiences' memories as an endless shape-shifter: "I am a master of disguise" (40), always travelling "under cover" (40), never embracing a secure identity. Tom and Groucho are spurred on in these judgments by the Proprietor (played with teasing ambiguity by Ingrid Craigie) who must similarly be in command of a broad vocal and emotional range, being required by turns to adopt a tone suggestive of a séance (calling on an invocation from Euripides' *Alceste*), of music-hall gaiety, an intimate familiarity with Jacobean court life and its eating habits, an injured dignity, obsequiousness, even the staccato rhythms of one undergoing a fit. She finally orchestrates the shift to the play's more spiritual level with a surprisingly aggressive, feminist denigration of Hamlet's soliloquy "To be or not to be", as "all that piffle" (46), preferring an admission that "Our past is our present is our future" (46), where time and the individual life are seen as a continuum, all present in any given moment. *Dinner with Groucho* (like *May Twenty-Second* before it), expertly demonstrates the power and meaning of such vision. It is rare for a play of (often metaphysical) ideas to be so consistently zany in its modes of presentation and the cast worked at the top of their calibre, attentive to each other's performances to get the balance right allowing them, individually and as an ensemble, confidently to take risks at top speed. *Dinner with Groucho* is both theatre and *play* at their exhilarating best.

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Doireann Ní Ghríofa, *A Ghost in the Throat*, Dublin, Tramp Press, 2020, pp. 326. € 16. ISBN: 978-1-9164-3426-4.

A good translation, to be such, needs a "decelerated reading" (40). Reading and translating are the two focal points that enclose the prose debut of Doireann Ní Ghríofa. *A Ghost in the Throat* is an autofictional novel that takes as its basis a mostly random series of encounters with a text from the Irish poetic tradition, the *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* [Lament for Art Ó Laoghaire], an autobiographically-tinted poem composed by Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill upon discovering that her husband, Art Ó Laoghaire, had been assassinated. The protagonist of the novel, who coincides perfectly with the author Ní Ghríofa (in this text the words "author", "narrator" and "protagonist" will be used indiscriminately to refer to the same person), runs into the poem for the first time when she is just a child attending school: "I was a child, and she [Eibhlín] had been dead for centuries" (10). At this point, the young Ní Ghríofa was introduced to the lament through the Irish schooling system, without being able to be emotionally moved by it: "[h]er story seems sad, yes, but also a little dull. Schoolwork. Boring" (11). The second time she comes across it, she is an adolescent attending high school, but this time the meeting is "luckier". Indeed, Ní Ghríofa "develop[ed] a school-girl crush on this *caoineadh*" (*ibidem*), a symbiosis of feelings with the ancient Irish writer: "[w]hen Eibhlín Dubh describes falling in love at first sight and abandoning her family to marry a stranger, I love her for it, just as every teenage girl loves the story of running away forever" (*ibidem*). The third encounter is the most random, but also the most crucial to the novel and the life of the author: during a car ride, her "eye tripped over a sign for Kilcrea" (15), the cemetery where Eibhlín buried her assassinated husband. Thus, Ní Ghríofa decided to undertake a third re-reading of the *Caoineadh*, which

highlighted new elements of the poem for the author: “I was startled to find Eibhlín Dubh pregnant again with her third child, just as I was” (17). It is this reading that brought Ní Ghríofa to feel the desire to make her own translation of the lament.

Reading, re-reading and translating are intertwined, giving life to “a liquid book” (Patel 2022), a literary microcosm made of a mother’s milk and blood. Maternity is one of the main points around which the novel is built. Ní Ghríofa tells the story of a multifaceted maternity. On one hand, it appears to be strongly desired, considering the fact that she has given birth to four children; on the other hand, she tells the story of a very suffered experience of maternity: “in the milking parlour”, the fourth chapter of the novel, emblematically represents this suffering, narrating the difficult birth of her fourth child, during which the only source of support is the *Caoineadh* that she keeps under her pillow. Ní Ghríofa also presents to the reader a vision of maternity as an obsession and as a job, as can be seen by the care that she dedicates to her four children, placing them at the centre of her daily life. She also puts forward the idea of maternity lived as an experience of solidarity: “[i]n choosing to carry a pregnancy, a woman gives of her body with a selflessness so ordinary that it goes unnoticed, even by herself. Her body becomes bound to altruism as instinctively as to hunger [...] Sometimes a female body serves another by effecting a theft upon itself” (2020a, 35).

Maternity is what ties Doireann and Eibhlín hand in glove. Referring to her third re-reading, the narrator-protagonist writes “I had never imagined her as a mother in any of my previous readings” (17). It is upon this third encounter that Ní Ghríofa starts assiduous bio-bibliographic research on Eibhlín’s and her family’s lives: “She wanted to know more of Eibhlín Dubh’s life, to go beyond the poem and learn of this stranger’s girlhood and old age. She wanted to see what became of her children and grandchildren. She wanted to find her burial place and to lay flowers on her grave” (Ní Ghríofa 2020b). Even though she acknowledges that she does not have the right academic preparation to conduct such research, “I may not be an academic, but I believe that I can sketch her years in my own way” (2020a, 75), she is able to trace an almost forgotten genealogy through the reading and studying of any kind of text, “graveyard inscriptions [...], clergy and baptismal records in church ledgers, microfilm, letters, lists of student registrations, depositions, examinations, a transcribed family history written into a Bible” (Corser 2023, 124).

The text, in its broader sense, carries out a central role in the novel. To-do lists are one of the text typologies that follow the reader throughout the novel and the protagonist is almost obsessed with them, as her life directly depended on the tick that signals the accomplishment of one of the tasks: “I keep my list as close as my phone, and draw a deep sense of satisfaction each time I strike a task from it. In such erasure lies joy” (2020a, 6-7). The rhythm of her daily life is marked by the flowing of her pencil on the paper. Beyond her daily life, Ní Ghríofa’s literary and spiritual life is animated by a constellation of texts. The reading and re-reading of a text from the Irish poetic tradition such as the *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*, which curiously belongs to the oral tradition and was transcribed only later by others, is what brings the author to deal with a myriad of texts. Through her bio-bibliographic research and translation of the poem, Ní Ghríofa succeeds in giving a new voice to a woman who, by chance or due to a systemic repression, had lost it, by letting her speak through herself, like a ghost in the throat, “inviting the voice of another *woman* to haunt my throat a while” (10; my emphasis).

It is important to emphasise the word “woman” because women are what the novel is about. Ní Ghríofa does what she calls an “act of repair, or the attempted act of repair, I should probably say” (Patel 2022). She tries to patch the damages made by history, by a world made by men (for other men) whose actions ended up silencing entire generations of women. “This is a female text”

is the sentence that emblematically opens and closes the novel. *A Ghost in the Throat* is a female text, written by a woman for other women, not to be read only by them, but to do them justice, just as Eibhlín's lament does, a text also composed by a woman for other women and whose survival is solely due to their capability and necessity of passing down orally their tradition. As the author herself said during an interview for *The Paris Review*, her aim was to give one of the possible multiple interpretations of the experience of femininity and of a female text, acknowledging that her perspective is the "perspective of a middle-class, cis, white woman living in Ireland" (Sasseen 2021). Not only does Ní Ghríofa give life to another female text, but she also writes a feminist text. She fights against a patriarchal system through the use of words, using the text as a means of witness. She retrieves women and female texts destined to be forgotten by a forced condition of subordination. She does not carry out her fight through what she calls "feminist rage (which I absolutely do have)", but, as already said, through "acts of repair" (Patel 2022).

A Ghost in the Throat is also a novel about writing, a text that reflects on itself, on its own structures. Writing and translating are considered as a continuous "stitching and re-stitching" (2020a, 40) of the curtains of one's "stanzas", a word which also means "room" in Italian, letting the reader grasp a veiled reference to W.B. Yeats¹. Ní Ghríofa builds parallels between translation, writing, the decoration of a room and house chores: each stanza corresponds to a room, which needs to be taken care of in every minute detail:

For months I work methodically, deliberating between synonyms, stitching and re-stitching the seams of curtains until they fall just so, letting my eye move back and forth between verbs, straightening the rugs, and polishing each linguistic ornament. Like my housework, the results of my translation are often imperfect, despite my devotion. I forget to swipe the Hoover under a chair, or I spend hours washing windows and still leave smears. (*ibidem*)

However, the metareflexion goes much deeper. Indeed, the novel has an autofictional nature. An autofictional novel is a text where the protagonist, the narrator and the writer share the same name and surname, where elements of reality and fiction intertwine and where there is stylistic and linguistic experimentation (Effé, Lawlor 2022). All three of the conditions are perfectly realised in this novel. Firstly, the homonymy is evident from the very first pages through the use of the first-person narrator and the reference to poems that can be easily recognized as Ní Ghríofa's². Secondly, the experimentation is realised through the continuous interpolation of extracts from texts of every register: "parts of the *Caoineadh*, but also domestic lists, instructions for making paper dolls, and even, at one point, reproduced images of nineteenth-century handwriting. The text of *Ghost* is often fragmented, and its form varies from chapter to chapter" (Corser 2023, 126; italics in the original). Thirdly, the author does not mingle reality and fiction in terms of content, but of structure. As a matter of fact, the structure of the novel is revealed in the last chapter, in the very last words, when Ní Ghríofa's narration goes back, circularly, to the beginning of the text.

This time, I won't let myself begin by writing Hoover or Sheets or Mop or Pump. Instead, I'll think of new words, and then I'll follow them. As I turn the bend towards home, I find that I already know the echo with which that first page will begin.

This is a female text. (2020a, 282; italics in the original)

¹ The allusion here is to the expression "stitching and unstitching" in W.B. Yeats' poem "Adam's Curse" (Yeats 1989, 132).

² Doireann Ní Ghríofa is a bilingual Irish-English poet.

Such a revelation, that the text that has just ended was already in the mind of the author from the beginning, traps it in the autofictional genre. Indeed, such a discovery at the end changes the whole interpretation of the novel, which becomes, in the eyes of the reader, a self-conscious text, a text that, rather than hiding its own structure, prefers to self-evidently exhibit it. Such a condition reveals the autofictionality of the novel.

That is how *A Ghost in the Throat* brings together, under the light of a feminist autofiction, a variety of themes such as maternity, the Irish tradition, reading, writing, translating. In writing an autofictional female text, Ní Ghríofa manages to tie her life, maternity, and literary experience together with Eibhlín's and that of all the women whose voice and whose texts have been suppressed.

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Alberto Mini

William Wall, *La ballata del letto vuoto*, traduzione di Stefano Tettamanti, Roma, Nutrimenti, 2022, pp. 240. € 17.00. ISBN: 978-8-8659-4902-3.

Il capitalismo è stato l'acqua nella quale ho nuotato
da quando sono nata e non l'ho mai messo in discussione
(Wall 2022, 44).

La ballata del letto vuoto segna il felice ritorno di William Wall (Cork, 1955-) nel panorama letterario italiano, dopo il precedente romanzo *Il turno di Grace* (Nutrimenti, 2021), uscito nella traduzione di Adele D'Arcangelo in piena pandemia, circostanza che, purtroppo, ha impedito all'autore di fare un ciclo di presentazioni nel nostro paese, penalizzando la diffusione di un'opera di forte sensibilità e ispirazione poetica, che avrebbe meritato senza dubbio maggiore visibilità.

Wall, che è anche autore di racconti e di numerose raccolte poetiche, tra cui segnaliamo Le notizie sono, apparso nel 2012 per i tipi della faentina Mobydick nell'ispirata traduzione di D'Arcangelo, è, a differenza di molti suoi colleghi di lingua inglese, uno scrittore 'europeo' per formazione culturale e letteraria. Non a caso nel suo pantheon figurano non pochi autori italiani. Dante, in primis, cui Wall ha dedicato la splendida "We read The Inferno at the Beach", una delle poesie della sua raccolta più recente *Smugglers in the Underground Hug Trade. A Journal of the Plague Year* (Inverin, Doire Press, 2021). E, per quanto riguarda il Novecento e gli inizi di questo secolo, tra i suoi preferiti si impongono i nomi di Alberto Moravia, Cesare Pavese, Natalia Ginzburg, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Elsa Morante, Francesca Melandri e Paolo Cognetti.

Ma, nella Ballata del letto vuoto, apparso prima in Italia e solo nell'aprile del 2023 in Irlanda col titolo di *Empty Bed Blues* (Dublin, New Island Books, 2023), ripreso da una celebre canzone di Bessie Smith, le incursioni all'interno dell'impianto narrativo sono un omaggio ad autori di lingua inglese, in particolare Shakespeare (*Amleto e Macbeth*) e il Joyce dell'*Ulisse*, di cui Kate, una delle due protagoniste del romanzo, è una specialista. Incursioni che non presuppongono tanto una pretesa metaletteraria, quanto una saldatura, che risulta felicemente riuscita, coi temi che di volta in volta si sviluppano nel libro, quasi ad esprimere e a sottolineare la contaminazione e il dialogo tra generi letterari di epoche diverse. E, a questo proposito, è bene ricordare un'intervista rilasciata il 7 aprile 2022 da Wall ad Annalisa Volpone, autrice del saggio "La funzione Joyce nel romanzo occidentale"¹, dove l'autore confessa di essere stato talmente influenzato dall'autore dell'*Ulisse* negli anni universitari e di aver trovato la sua voce così "overwhelming" da essersi spinto a un tipo di scrittura che assomigliava a una sorta di pastiche joyciano, ma di avere in seguito capito che quei tentativi non erano sostenibili: l'unica strada era l'affrancarsi completamente da quel modello, da quello stile, che ora Wall può serenamente evocare nel suo romanzo, una volta consumato ed elaborato il parricidio.

Il plot ruota attorno alla vicenda di Kate che, appena vedova, scopre la doppia vita e il tradimento del marito, che l'ha lasciata in un mare di debiti in quell'Irlanda che, dopo i fasti della cosiddetta *Celtic Tiger*, dove il Pil volava a due cifre, si ritrova a fare i conti con una crisi che Wall aveva già prefigurato in *This is the Country* (London, Hodder/Sceptre) un suo romanzo del 2005 di forte impatto sociale.

A Camogli, in Liguria, dove Kate si trasferisce alla ricerca di una verità che intuisce essere dolorosa, troverà la forza di reagire e costruire una nuova vita, grazie all'amicizia con Anna Ferrara, ex staffetta partigiana e figura di rilievo della sinistra italiana.

Da due solitudini e da due diverse sconfitte, una esistenziale, l'altra politica, nascerà un sodalizio basato sulla solidarietà che consentirà a Kate di riscrivere la propria esistenza.

Le parole chiave e i temi dominanti di questo romanzo sono l'amore, il tradimento, l'impegno e gli ideali politici, la critica del capitalismo finanziario, il debito sovrano, la Resistenza partigiana, uniti a una riflessione sulla letteratura, la traduzione, il valore del linguaggio.

William Wall si conferma scrittore *engagé*, capace di interrogarsi su alcuni temi cruciali della nostra epoca con una grande forza ideale, sullo sfondo di un paesaggio, quello ligure, dove il mare, descritto con grande maestria, diviene lo scenario su cui si stemperano le angosce e si disegna un percorso salvifico per entrambe le protagoniste: per Kate, che si affranca da un possibile naufragio esistenziale; per Anna, che ridà un senso alla sua passata militanza politica, non scevra di sconfitte, nel ruolo pedagogico nei confronti di Kate.

¹ Annalisa Volpone, "La funzione Joyce nel romanzo occidentale", in Massimiliano Tortora, Annalisa Volpone (a cura di), *La funzione Joyce nel romanzo occidentale*, Milano, Ledizioni, 2022, 245-268.

In un finale a sorpresa ambientato in Francia, ricco di colpi di scena, Wall, tra momenti drammatici ma anche divertenti, riesce a creare situazioni di autentica suspense, dispiegando tutto il suo talento di narratore fino all'epilogo che ci rivela il segreto custodito da Anna.

Daniele Serafini

Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poesie 1875-1889*, a cura di Viola Papetti, Torino, Einaudi, 2022, pp. 290. € 17. ISBN: 978-88-06-25105-5.

Giovane di vivace intelligenza, di famiglia tradizionalmente e orgogliosamente anglicana, nel 1863 Gerard Manley Hopkins si reca a Oxford per frequentarvi l'università. Ha diciannove anni e si è già distinto nella scuola secondaria per la sua intelligenza e preparazione nel campo degli studi classici. A Oxford viene in contatto con docenti e coetanei che ruotano attorno a un'idea della fede e della religione ispirata dalle riflessioni di un prete anglicano, John Henry Newman, tese a restituire alla chiesa anglicana quella spiritualità che si era molto attutita nel tempo. Newman, che aveva fondato nel 1833 il cosiddetto Oxford Movement, nel frattempo si era convertito al cattolicesimo ed era stato nominato cardinale. La stimolante atmosfera di discussioni, dibattiti, vivaci conversazioni quotidiane, il contatto con la vulcanica personalità del Cardinale e una crisi religiosa governata da una non comune razionalità, lo conducono infine, nel 1866, alla conversione al cattolicesimo, una scelta fortemente contrastata dalla famiglia. Il giovane non soltanto non torna indietro sulla sua decisione, ma sceglie di farsi gesuita. È una scelta meditata, che cambierà completamente il corso della sua vita. Con grande disciplina e una volontà di ferro si sottoporrà a una vita di sacrificio, di umile attività pastorale in luoghi lontani dai grandi centri industriali e culturali del Paese, prevalentemente nel Galles. Infine, negli ultimi cinque anni della sua vita, ricopre il ruolo di docente universitario di classici greci e latini in Irlanda, dove morirà di tifo nel 1889 a soli quarantacinque anni.

Fedele all'impegno pastorale che si è volontariamente imposto, Hopkins decide di non dedicarsi più alla poesia, distrugge quanto ha scritto fino a quel momento, per cui quasi tutta la sua produzione giovanile è perduta: rimangono alcune poesie complete, che non erano in quel momento in suo possesso, e molti frammenti. Passano circa sette anni, finché alla fine di dicembre del 1875 *The Times* riporta la notizia di un naufragio avvenuto alla foce del Tamigi, in cui una nave proveniente dalla Germania e diretta in America si è arenata in una secca durante una tempesta e la metà dei passeggeri, anche a causa del ritardo dei soccorsi, è affogata. Fra coloro che non si sono salvati ci sono cinque suore che fuggivano dalle persecuzioni dei cattolici decretate dalle cosiddette Falk Laws. Il racconto di questa tragedia e del coraggio e della dignità con cui le suore hanno affrontato la morte lo commuovono al punto da indurlo, anche con l'incoraggiamento dei superiori, a ritornare sulla sua decisione di abbandonare del tutto la poesia. Il risultato sarà un poemetto, un'ode, di trentacinque ottave, intitolato "The Wreck of the Deutschland" (Il naufragio della Deutschland), che sostanzialmente rappresenta l'inizio di un'attività creativa più originale, più complessa e sofferta di quanto prodotto in gioventù. Quindi, non a caso, proprio da questa sequenza, Viola Papetti fa iniziare il suo lavoro di traduzione e di puntuale analisi e commento di un sostanzioso corpus, che include molte delle poesie che Hopkins continuò a inviare soprattutto all'amico Bridges fino quasi alla fine dei suoi giorni. Quello che ci è pervenuto, infatti, è dovuto alla generosità e lungimiranza di Bridges, che ebbe l'accortezza di conservare le lettere indirizzategli dal poeta, contenenti non solo le poesie che di volta in volta Hopkins sottoponeva al suo giudizio, ma anche le sue osser-

vazioni – spesso in dura polemica con l'amico – sui principi della sua poetica e il significato da attribuire a certi vocaboli e locuzioni di sua invenzione, come *inscape*, *instress* o *sprung rhythm*, che hanno dato a lungo filo da torcere ai successivi commentatori e che Viola Papetti, nelle sue note esemplari, chiarisce con lucidità a lettori esperti e meno esperti. Per la verità Bridges si decise a pubblicare tutte le poesie in suo possesso solo nel 1918, quasi trent'anni dopo la morte dell'amico. Tuttavia, l'opera ebbe un'immediata risonanza e ha continuato a esercitare il suo fascino soprattutto sui poeti di lingua inglese.

La poesia di Hopkins, indubbiamente, non è facile: il poeta mette in atto una serie di strategie tese a trasformare il testo scritto quasi in uno spartito musicale, in cui a ogni parola, a ogni sillaba è attribuito un valore di intensità e durata e il verso è governato da un ritmo variato, che non deve discostarsi molto da quello della lingua parlata. Per ottenere ciò, Hopkins si serve di una tecnica in parte derivata dal gallese *cynghanned*, ma che egli definisce *sprung rhythm*, che più che sul numero delle sillabe si affida al numero degli accenti, i quali si appoggiano sulle sillabe delle parole portatrici di significato o a cui si vuole attribuire particolare enfasi. Nelle intenzioni di Hopkins, che nelle lettere ai suoi corrispondenti, Bridges in particolare, si affanna a teorizzare con acribia, questa tecnica conferisce ai versi una speciale qualità musicale, che la lettura ad alta voce metterà in evidenza. Se questo non fosse sufficiente, di molte parole viene modificata la funzione, altre vengono create ex novo e la sintassi tradizionale viene di frequente sconvolta. Quando, però, si entra nella logica e nel meccanismo che la realizza, la sua poesia acquista un'iconicità straordinaria, una forza modulata, capace di passare in meno di un verso dalla violenza alla tenerezza, dalla disperazione all'accettazione, dalla descrizione alla contemplazione. Il lettore che sappia seguire le sue istruzioni e interpretare i segni diacritici, che Hopkins in parte prende in prestito dalla musica, riuscirà a offrire all'ascoltatore la sensazione di un "recitar cantando".

Difficile definire questo poeta, inquadralo in una categoria. Definirlo poeta religioso, pur se la componente religiosa fa parte di una sensibilità che coglie nei vari aspetti e momenti dell'esperienza individuale la presenza e l'orma del divino, sarebbe riduttivo e fuorviante, perché Hopkins resta sempre stupito e ammirato della bellezza fisica del mondo e dell'universo con una sensibilità che tuttavia non scivola mai nel languore decadente di altri suoi contemporanei; e non è mai astratto, ma sempre consapevole dell'affanno di un'umanità che per generazioni si è trascinata nel tempo con fatica ("[g]enerations have trod, have trod, have trod" (v. 5, p. 44), che Papetti traduce "[g]enerazioni hanno calpestato, calpestato, calpestato" (v. 5, p. 45), perdendo il suono di passi pesanti dell'originale), dell'umiltà paziente di artigiani, soldati, contadini, perfino del fratello laico della Compagnia di Gesù, che per tutta la vita svolse il compito di aprire e chiudere la porta del collegio di Palma nell'isola di Maiorca, Sant'Antonio Rodriguez.

Tradurre poesia è sempre un azzardo perché non si tratta soltanto di trasferire da una lingua a un'altra contenuti e concetti, ma di tenere conto di tutti quei tratti soprasedimentali (altezza del suono, intonazione, ritmo), che spesso rappresentano la sostanza, anche in termini semantici, di un testo poetico.

Viola Papetti si è misurata con il difficile compito di riprodurre nella nostra lingua polisillabica e ulteriormente dilatata dall'uso di locuzioni preposizionali quella, asciutta, contratta, di volta in volta scarna ed esuberante, talvolta oscura e criptica, del gesuita inglese. Come osservato precedentemente, il senso della sua poesia emerge soprattutto dalla vocalità, vibra nell'accostamento di suoni vocalici e consonantici, nella varietà dei ritmi, nelle coerenze del macrotesto. Papetti sceglie di liberarsi di molte locuzioni preposizionali, di ridurre la polisillabicità della lingua, di forzare il vocabolo italiano al limite delle sue possibilità espressive; infine, in presenza di parole usate più volte dal poeta in contesti diversi, sceglie di usare lo stesso

vocabolo, col risultato di rendere il lettore avvertito dell'unicità dell'ispirazione poetica. Ad esempio in "The Wreck of the Deutschland", tredicesima strofa, il turbine nevoso che spingerà la nave al suo tragico destino è sintetizzata così nel penultimo verso: "Wiry and white-fiery and whirlwind-swivelled snow" (v. 103, p. 10), si tratta di perifrasi descrittive e compendiose che si riscontrano nell'antica lirica anglosassone e gallese che Hopkins conosceva bene. Viola Papetti traduce "filosa e di bianco fuoco accesa e da turbine attorta la neve" (v. 103, p. 11). In una poesia successiva, di tutt'altro carattere, "Inversnaid", Hopkins usa di nuovo quell'aggettivo "wiry" (v. 11, p. 108), e la traduttrice a sua volta fa ricorso allo stesso aggettivo italiano, "filos[o]" (v. 11, p. 109). Si può certo obiettare al resto del verso una eccessiva espansione rispetto alla sintesi dell'originale, ma si deve dare atto che a un parallelismo la traduttrice risponde con un altro parallelismo: due participi passati (accesa/attorta) e due inversioni verbo/complemento, che trasferiscono in italiano la furia della tempesta, seppur di colore diverso. Un altro esempio: in "The Starlight Night", il poeta, estasiato dalla bellezza della notte stellata, esorta il lettore/ascoltatore e insieme sè stesso a stupirsi di fronte al nugolo di stelle sospeso nel cielo, che è reso sinteticamente con "fire-folk" (v. 2, p. 46). Papetti traduce "fire-folk" con "fuoco-folla" (v. 2, p. 47), che ha un suono diverso, ma conserva, nell'allitterazione di "f", nella preservazione dei suoni liquidi (folk/folla) e nella velare (k/c), una fedeltà sostanziale all'originale.

Altre volte la traduzione non può che essere volenterosa, proprio per l'impossibilità di rendere conto nella nostra lingua dell'accumulo di accorgimenti fonici su cui l'originale soprattutto si regge. Un esempio lo si può trovare in una strofa, la seconda di dieci, di "Penmael Pool":

You'll dare the Alp? You'll dare the skiff?-
 Each sport has here its tackle and tool:
 Come, plant the staff by Cadair cliff;
 Come, swing the sculls on Penmaen Pool. (vv. 5-8, p. 32)

Osi l'alpe? Lanci lo skiff?-
 Ogni sport qui trova attrezzo è strumento:
 su, pianta il rampone sulla rupe di Cadair;
 su, ruota il remo nel laghetto di Penmaen. (vv. 5-8, p. 33)

Si confrontino i due testi: le parole ci sono tutte! Cosa manca allora? Proprio ciò a cui Hopkins teneva di più: il ritmo, il suono, il gioco delle rime, le allitterazioni.

Si tratta di una poesia leggera, scritta nell'agosto 1876 per il libro degli ospiti di un hotel in Galles, in cui ogni strofa mette in evidenza qualcosa di bello, di attraente nell'hotel e nel paesaggio tutto attorno, che Hopkins rende desiderabile proprio per la musicalità dei versi. La traduzione riporta tutto a dati di fatto, l'emozione e il desiderio sono scomparsi. Non si può far carico di ciò alla traduttrice. La scelta, per esempio, di conservare a ogni costo le rime alternate e tutti gli accorgimenti ritmici che il poeta mette in atto, sarebbe risultata intollerabile e non avrebbe salvato il messaggio. Forse è proprio per questa oggettiva difficoltà che non compare nell'antologia una delle ultime poesie, a cui peraltro Hopkins teneva in modo particolare, "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo", per la quale, in una lettera a Dixon, uno dei suoi più importanti corrispondenti, annotava: "I never did anything more musical" (p. 241)¹, e che più che letta prevedeva che venisse cantata da un coro, come aveva fatto in precedenza Beethoven con i versi di Schiller.

¹Catherine Philips, ed. (1991), *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Selected Letters*, Oxford, Oxford UP.

Hopkins non è stato tradotto, se non parzialmente, in Italia, mentre moltissimi sono gli studi critici che gli sono stati dedicati, come si desume dalla “bibliografia essenziale”, peraltro piuttosto corposa, cui Viola Papetti dedica una sezione a conclusione di un’articolata introduzione in cui oltre a una dettagliata biografia del gesuita inglese si offre al lettore un’analisi tecnica ed estetica della sua poesia. Ma ciò che caratterizza e dà particolare valore a questa edizione sono le note a commento delle singole poesie, che non si fermano – come solitamente accade – alla chiarificazione di luoghi particolarmente oscuri del singolo componimento, ma riportano frammenti dei commenti, giustificazioni e precisazioni sulla sua poesia, tratti dalle lettere di Hopkins ai suoi corrispondenti, a cui si aggiungono note critiche della curatrice, che riprendono, ampliano e contestualizzano alcuni concetti già esaminati più in generale nell’introduzione. Per ragioni di spazio, queste note sono stampate in caratteri piccoli, seppur tipograficamente chiari, e con spaziatura minima, il che può rappresentare un problema per quanti abbiano problemi di vista.

Il volume contiene in appendice la recensione di Giorgio Manganelli del volume di Alberto Castelli, *Liriche religiose inglesi*, in cui lo studioso si sofferma, in cinque compendiose pagine, sulla storia del cattolicesimo inglese nell’Ottocento, “antivittoriano e antiromantico” (p. 280) con una punta di “follia del barocco” (p. 281), alla cui base Manganelli individua “una saldis-sima razionalità” (*ibidem*). A Hopkins il critico dedica solo una mezza pagina, che però va letta all’interno dei presupposti teorici di cui si è detto. Eppure, in poche fulminee righe Manganelli individuava – nel 1948 – l’essenza del linguaggio del gesuita inglese, “estatico ed abbagliante”, “oscuro non torbido” (p. 282), e la concentrazione del suo pensiero che gli suggeriva sorprendentemente l’accostamento a un Tommaso Campanella, “non da amare, da temere!” (*ibidem*). Accoglierlo più da vicino, anche per effetto di antologie critiche come questa, avrà nel frattempo attenuato quel timore, accresciuto l’amore.

Giuseppe Serpillo

Anne Fogarty, Marisol Morales-Ladrón (eds), *Deirdre Madden. New Critical Perspectives*, Manchester, Manchester UP, 2022, pp. 280. £ 80. ISBN: 978-1-5261-1892-9.

Among the contemporary Irish writers whose voices resonate in the landscape of fiction and who certainly deserve more exhaustive critical attention, Deirdre Madden features conspicuously. An important and highly admired author, Madden has devoted herself to the art of fiction, and, unlike other writers, exclusively to the novel form. Over the span of more than thirty years, she has explored the time of the Troubles, the post-Troubles period and the changes of contemporary Ireland, shedding light on the themes of violence, trauma, memory, dislocation, identity, as well as the role of art and the artist. She is a writer who cannot be easily classified and who resists the label of Northern Irish writer: as she claims in the interview closing the present volume, she feels “profoundly European”, having travelled extensively across Europe and lived in different countries for many years. This has had a strong impact on her relationship with Ireland: “I understood Ireland better for having lived in Europe, and I love Ireland” (234).

The collection of essays edited by Anne Fogarty and Marisol Morales-Ladrón, *Deirdre Madden. New Critical Perspectives*, is a long-awaited contribution that fills a gap in the field of Irish critical studies, as so far a great variety of essays has appeared in international collections and academic journals, but no specific study of her fiction has been published. The title itself is self-consciously revealing of the novelty embedded in the undertaking of this work by experts in Irish studies, as the time has come for a diversity of critical perspectives in the analysis and

assessment of Deirdre Madden. These are all new essays especially commissioned for the volume, and the individual studies offer a variety of broad cultural and scientific approaches covering her *oeuvre* as a whole and creating a stimulating ensemble focussing on the complexity of her fiction.

The volume has a tripartite structure, each part dealing with a specific thematic facet. Notably, they are framed by a Preface by Frank McGuinness and the concluding interview, which acts as an apt synopsis or compendium of the contents of the volume.

The title of Frank McGuinness's Preface, "Deirdre Madden: a jagged symmetry", plays with oxymoron and antithesis and paves the way for the present book. The Preface points out Madden's "original voice" (xiii), which is actually the purpose of the whole volume whose essays explore the uniqueness of Madden's fiction. Touching in particular the novels *Hidden Symptoms*, *Nothing is Black* and *Authenticity*, it provides an overview of themes and issues – the North, identity, art, failure, torments – as well as cross-references and intersections with other writers, notably Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, as well as Jane Austen for the use of details. The colloquial opening – "She knows her stuff, Deirdre Madden" (*ibidem*) – highlights the rootedness in everyday life that characterises her fiction. McGuinness emphasises the "strong fabrics" of her novels (*ibidem*) and his lexical choice etymologically recalls the skill of making and the artist's work, from the Latin "faber", maker, thus underlining Madden's self-conscious concern with art. McGuinness's use of the word "stuff" is repeated in the second line and recurs in the final paragraph, a stylistic choice that creates a circular pattern. Madden is a writer obsessed with time in a variety of ways: past, present and future constantly, but, as McGuinness claims, she is also a writer of her time. Secrets abound in her fiction often to remain undisclosed. Complexity of themes and plots and narrative control characterise Madden's work whose greatness for McGuinness lies in her awareness that "some things can never be repaired" (xiv).

In the "Introduction", editors Anne Fogarty and Marisol Morales-Ladrón emphasise Madden's peculiar and exclusive devotion to the novel form. Defined as a "distinguished and sophisticated" novelist (1), she has published eight novels, three books for children and edited a collection of Irish short stories. A brief round-up of Madden's novels, prizes and recognitions anticipates the intertwining of themes in her fiction, her Troubles and post-Troubles novels, in which "the problems of existence" and "philosophical questions about the meaning of life" (2) recur constantly. Furthermore, the analysis of a variety of anthologies published between 1985 and 2017 help to contextualise Madden's position in the cultural climate of contemporary literature in Ireland, North and South, showing the marginalization of female writers from which also Madden has suffered, in spite of the reputation she has obtained internationally.

In particular, part of the "Introduction" is devoted to the existing critical reception of Madden's work, with specific references to at least a dozen published essays whose approaches and standpoints are analysed thoroughly as a form of assessment, but also as a springboard for the "new critical perspectives" the volume provides. This acts as a form of presentation of the essays contained in the volume and of the parts in which the collection is organised.

The essays of the three thematic sections occasionally intersect, thus providing an exhaustive overview and a diversity of viewpoints. Part I is concerned with "Memory, trauma, and the Troubles" and is devoted to the Troubles novels; Part II turns to "Art and objects", thus focussing on Madden's *Künstlerromane*, while Part III looks at "Home and place" in Madden's fiction. The topics thus cover in detail different and multifarious aspects of the writer's *oeuvre*.

The four essays in Part I take into account the Troubles novels *Hidden Symptoms* and *One by One in the Darkness* as trauma novels, and in their diversity of approach and analysis tackle the impact of the legacy of the Troubles on families and individuals, as well as the role of memory in the process of recent losses. In her sensitive essay, Stephanie Lehner deals with

memory and temporality in *Hidden Symptoms* and *One by One in the Darkness*, adding also the Celtic Tiger novel *Time Present and Time Past*. Characters are haunted by the past and by past memories, and memory images call into question the passing of time. She engages in the relevance of the visual quality of Madden's fiction and in photographs in particular, which in the three novels work as a form of memory relationship to the past. She states that Madden's Troubles novels are pervaded with Benjamin's concern with the past in the exploration of temporality, memory and in the creation of memory images. Lehner exploits the notion of "imagetext" to introduce the visual element as a marker for the irretrievable past and the acceptance of the pastness of the past.

Hidden Symptoms and *One by One in the Darkness* are also discussed in Elizabeth Chase's contribution, which sheds light on the issue of loss and memory concentrating on the ethics of remembrance. Chase claims that Madden's novels go beyond political themes and making reference to Levinas's work on ethics and the attention to human reality, she points out that small domestic objects are emblematic of "everyday pain" (36). The topic of the trauma Theresa goes through at the death of her twin brother in *Hidden Symptoms* returns in *One by One in the Darkness*, in which the Quinn sisters respond differently to the trauma of their father's killing. The memories of the dead are a way to commemorate the past and Madden chooses the everyday, the little things, as the ethical relationship between individuals.

Catriona Clutterbuck examines the issue of loss in *Hidden Symptoms*, but rather than sharing the negative conclusions of other critics, she considers the novel a true *Bildungsroman*, as it explores a "journey towards healing" (50), no matter how hard and demanding. Referring to Thomas Attig's studies of grief and mourning, Clutterbuck contends that a state of loss can be conducive to a process of transformation and self-discovery. She describes Theresa's entrapment in her private sorrow after the death of her brother in a route from grief to "coming to terms with loss" (55) and accepting her dead brother's faults. Interestingly, Clutterbuck pays great attention to the presence of mirrors in the novel, which she considers "synonyms for artworks" (57), thus anticipating the relevance of art and works of art in later novels by Madden. With *Hidden Symptoms* Madden starts to engage with the exploration of loss as a path towards a full acceptance of reality.

One by One in the Darkness is the object of Brian Cliff's analysis in terms of class and multiplicity, which turn out to be interconnected in the background of Northern Ireland's political divide. These are part of the "ambivalent qualities of the novel" (66) and describing class and class tensions allows Madden to avoid Northern Ireland's political range and commonplace elements of the Troubles fiction. Cliff takes into account these issues, which come to the fore in the Quinn family with the parents' social division: humble Charlie and middle-class ambitious Emily. Class turns out to be central in the context of the Troubles as a feature of diversity and multiplicity within the Northern Catholic community. Madden exploits class issues to emphasise the sense of insecurity of a specific historical time. The same sense of uncertainty emerges in the narrative choice of clarifying the effects and consequences of events rather than events *per se* – Charlie's murder for example is not described but continues to reverberate in the family's traumatised minds.

Part II, "Art and objects", is engaged with Deirdre Madden's *Künstlerromane* and the author's deep concern with art and the role of the artist. The five essays display particular attention to *Authenticity*, but also consider *Nothing is Black* and *Molly Fox's Birthday*, where figures of artists and issues of creativity predominate.

In this line, Sylvie Mikowski focuses on objects as realistic elements and as elements pertaining to the creative process in a variety of novels, especially *Nothing is Black*, *Molly*

Fox's Birthday and *Authenticity*. With a wide range of references to realist novels, both English and French, Mikowski sharply shows Madden's production as part of the realist tradition, in which objects are a way for constructing characters. In the mimetic stance, what they possess, where they live, the clothes they wear are signifiers for personality. In her attention to social changes, Madden sees in the need to accumulate things a sign of materialism as a result of economic development. In *Nothing is Black* the contrast between Claire's sparse life in Donegal and Nuala's obsessive shopping and stealing is the tangible feature of a materialistic life she intends to criticize. However, objects are also possessed with a specific aesthetic principle which becomes part of artistic production. Therefore, Mikowski claims, objects are also connected to creativity in Madden's work. A case in point is represented by Julia's artistic installations in *Authenticity*, a novel that remarkably investigates artistic creation and reflects on the capacity of the artist to reach a higher level of truth and authenticity. Through the choice of characters of visual artists as in *Nothing is Black* or actors as in *Molly Fox's Birthday*, Madden's *Künstlerromane* are self-reflecting and provide insight into Madden's own reflection on her own writing.

Two essays focus on *Authenticity* from different perspectives. Heather Ingman's analysis follows the steps of her critical research interests in recent years, concentrating on ageing and the passing of time in the novel. After contextualising the critical background of ageing studies and especially ageing studies in Irish writing, she chooses to discuss issues of identity and authenticity exploring the life of the artist. In particular, Ingman considers the different ways in which three specific characters in the novel, Dan, William and Roderic, face the ageing process and the passing of time.

Authenticity is also the centre of Hedwig Schwall's detailed psychoanalytic reading of the novel focussing on the psychological aspects of creativity. She defines *Authenticity* as a *Künstlerroman par excellence*, in which all the artists featured wish to find their own way as artists facing their traumas and looking for their unconscious through objects connecting them to their childhood experiences. Schwall resorts to Bollas's theory of objects relations and follows her analysis with the reaction to received objects of art and to produced objects of art. With particular attention to Julia's installation, Schwall points out that Madden's novel represents the individual's attempt to find their real self.

In the section dedicated to art, Teresa Casal characteristically goes back to the Northern Ireland novels to address the ethical question of the role of art in depicting sectarian violence. The title of her contribution takes up a double question that obsesses Theresa in *Hidden Symptoms*. The ethical question "what can we do?" is accompanied by the aesthetic question "What does art do?" in front of violence perpetrated by man on other human beings. Her analysis of the Troubles novels, *Hidden Symptoms* and *One by One in the Darkness*, is followed by *Molly Fox's Birthday*, written after the Good Friday Agreement. All of them imply that the reader is ethically and aesthetically challenged to consider both the process of grieving following trauma as well as "kinship with perpetrators of sectarian violence" (145) The reader's aesthetic experience cannot be separated from the novels' ethical sources.

Animals and objects are the concern of Julie Anne Stevens, whose study looks at Madden's children's books in the context of her adult fiction. Childhood and childhood memories feature in novels such as *Time Present and Time Past* and *Remembering Light and Stone*, and her children's books display cross-connections with her novels in terms of episodes, images, objects and animals. Thus, Madden reuses elements of her adult fiction in *Snakes' Elbows*, *Jasper and the Green Marvel* and *Thanks for Telling me, Emily*, such as the little cat as well as a Japanese fan Aisling used to possess as a child in *Remembering Light and Stone*.

Stevens opens her study making reference to publications for children in the twentieth century, in particular Edith Somerville's *The Story of the Discontented Little Elephant* and Elizabeth Bowen's *The Good Tiger*, whose worlds return in Madden's children's books. Robert Louis Stevenson's essay "Child Play" is analysed in order to contextualize children's perception. Animals have a central position – cats, dogs, parrots, owls are talking animals in the tradition of children's literature. However, Madden's animals are like objects, they can be easily transported and easily bought and sold, thus becoming commodities. Madden's venture into the world of children's books highlights the essential quality childhood and memory bear in her *oeuvre*, which characterises Stevens's essay as a relevant investigation of Madden's production.

The essays in Part III are concerned with home, in an extended sense, and place. As Madden herself mentions in the interview closing this section, home is a wide conception, ranging from country to language, house, possessions, landscape (235), and the choice of this topic in the volume highlights the centrality of home in her fiction.

Jerry White reads in the 1994 novel *Nothing is Black* an introduction to the changes and modernisation Ireland undergoes in the 1990s in relation to the European Union and to the impact the Celtic Tiger period will have on the country. White considers the novel "quasi-prophetic" (165) in the way it portrays a new middle class relying more and more on consumerism, a gradual secularisation and internationalisation. The character of Anna hailing from The Hague and choosing to come to Donegal is emblematic of a new European perspective, while Nuala looks at both foreign tourists and locals when opening a fashionable restaurant in Dublin. Claire, a painter, has moved to rural Donegal in search for a new way of seeing. The three main characters have all left home looking for a different kind of stability.

On the other hand, Elke D'hoker examines the different notions of home, the different forms home may take and the way in which they are deployed in Madden's novels. Pointing out the centrality of the issue of home in her fiction, D'hoker takes into account a variety of novels concerned with critical thinkings of home referring to the theoretical work of Mallet, Bachelard, Blunt and Dowling among others. Different notions and definitions of home as place, land, but also experiences and emotions underlie her "spatial imaginaries" of home (181), which may point out images of loneliness and alienation for example in *Hidden Symptoms*, whose opening image of the Bavarian barometer epitomises an unhomely home. Unhomy homes are extended to the city divided by sectarian violence, and homelessness is even more evident in *The Birds of the Innocent Wood* in which the destruction by fire of the house leaves Jane homeless. Home as house, family, neighbourhood, city, land, country and motherland (185) is variously present and variously developed in Madden's fiction, and D'hoker shows that home moves from rejection in *Hidden Symptoms* to the exploration of new forms of home in *Remembering Light and Stone*, *Molly Fox's Birthday* and *Authenticity*. Notably, if home is both fragile and solid at the same time (193), D'hoker also detects a feature of the unfamiliar in the issue of home; quoting from *One by One in the Darkness* she discusses the use of the word uncanny (189). This anticipates the following essay by Anne Fogarty on the "architectural uncanny" in Madden's fiction.

In fact, Fogarty sharply connects the issue of home to Gothic traits, themes and effects in *The Birds of the Innocent Wood* and *Remembering Light and Stone*. She examines the presence of Gothic patterns in both novels, which she considers "ambiguous and perplexing" (200) because haunted by family secrets which remain unexplored and/or unexplained. Without being Gothic novels *per se*, *The Birds of the Innocent Wood* and *Remembering Light and Stone* display hauntings, secrets, doublings or the divided self, and in particular houses, whether they be cottages, farms or flats, as the site of the "architectural uncanny", as introduced in the title of her essay.

Madden's Gothic traits are "protean" (*ibidem*) according to Fogarty, because intertwined with other themes and forms of narration; she claims that the Gothic is meant to emphasise the darkness of modern-day life and the sense of non-belonging of the main character. Thus, the uncanny house embodies the alienation of the heroines.

In the final essay of Part IV Derek Hand turns his attention to *Authenticity*, *Molly Fox's Birthday* and *Time Present and Time Past* in relation to the Celtic Tiger novel. He claims that the three novels respond to the Celtic Tiger period, characterised by speed, transformation and materialistic prosperity in a challenging way, relying on "stillness" (216) in plot and form, reflection on identity and attention to art and its nature with a focus on the private. For Hand, the novels consider and reflect on "living lives" (215) in relation to art as an essential aspect of existence.

Deirdre Madden. New Critical Perspectives closes with an interview and a full bibliography. "In conversation with Deirdre Madden" is the title Marisol Morales-Ladrón gives to what really is a conversation with its fluid rhythm and quiet pace. It opens with references to brief biographical details to move to Madden's childhood in a rural area in Northern Ireland, which did not entirely shelter her from the crudest features of the Troubles, bombs, barricades, road blocks, check points and helicopters. Memories of the Troubles as a child are split between the country and the city, they remain alive, and with her novel *One by One in the Darkness* – she says – "I wanted to bear witness to that time" (232). Madden discusses her move to Dublin to study at Trinity and her extensive travelling throughout Europe, which helped her to understand her country better. Literary influences and the prominence of art in her novels are accompanied by reflections on family and family ties, home, and her personal relation to objects – "a portal to the past" (239). Space is devoted to her method of work, her fascination with writing in longhand and the "paraphernalia" (236) of writing, such as notebooks and pens; her interest in visual arts and crafts lead her to consider writing as "an artisan activity above all" (237), an act of making. Interestingly, the pattern of the interview reflects the organization of the entire volume, thus creating the same circular pattern that characterises Frank McGuinness's opening Preface.

In its variety of essays, marked by critical sensitivity and careful and detailed analysis, *Deirdre Madden. New Critical Perspectives* is a very welcome and significant contribution, it provides an insight into the hues and varieties of Madden's work, thus highlighting the work of a writer whose work covers a wide range of issues with a typically subtle tone. It is therefore an essential tool for the academic working on Irish fiction and for the student looking for clear exposition and substantial investigation.

Giovanna Tallone

George Bernard Shaw, *Teatro*, a cura di Francesco Marroni, Firenze-Milano, Bompiani, 2022, pp. 3313, € 70. ISBN: 978-88-301-0454-9.

Da profondo conoscitore della società e della letteratura vittoriana ed edoardiana, Francesco Marroni ha portato a termine un impegnativo progetto editoriale su un eminente vittoriano / anti-vittoriano, George Bernard Shaw, curando per Bompiani un corposo volume, *Teatro*, che raccoglie tredici tra le più significative commedie del drammaturgo irlandese, insieme alle relative, lunghe e controverse *Prefaces*. Richard Ambrosini, Raffaella Antinucci, Benedetta Bini, Elisa Bizzotto, Fiorenzo Fantaccini, Loredana Salis, Enrico Terrinoni, insieme allo stesso Marroni – tutti specialisti di studi edoardiani, vittoriani, e/o irlandesisti – hanno contribuito al volume con note introduttive, note ai testi e nuove traduzioni (a fronte dei testi originali).

La scelta dei *plays* ha una sua *ratio* che privilegia la prima produzione shaviana, pur comprendendo i capolavori dell'età matura, fino ad arrivare a *Saint Joan* (1923). La raccolta si apre con gli esordi drammaturgici. Le prime raccolte di commedie sono presentate integralmente: i *Plays Unpleasant – Widowers' Houses* (1885-1892), *The Philanderer* (1893), e *Mrs Warren's Profession* (1893) – i *Plays Pleasant – Arms and the Man* (1894), *Candida: A Mystery* (1894) e *The Man of Destiny* (1895) – i *Three Plays for Puritans – The Devil's Disciple* (1897), *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1898) e *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* (1900).

Per tutte e tre le raccolte sono presenti anche le verbose e “farraginose” – come ebbe a definirle James Joyce sul *Piccolo della Sera* (Marroni, p. xxviii) – prefazioni a posteriori, i *tutorials* del *predicatore*, intesi a fornire la giusta “lettura” del nuovo teatro di idee: come nota Marroni nella sua introduzione generale al volume, “con [...] spirito militante, [...] con la tensione creativa dell'artista-filosofo, [...] Shaw scrive le sue prefazioni [...] che [...] rivelano quanto fosse ossessivamente interessato a orientare l'interpretazione delle sue opere e, ancor più, ad esercitare una sorta di controllo poliziesco sulla loro ricezione” (p. xxvi).

Nel volume non potevano chiaramente mancare gli altri capolavori shaviani: *Man and Superman: a Comedy and a Philosophy* (1901-1903), introdotta dall'*Epistola dedicatoria* e seguita dal *Manuale del rivoluzionario*; *John Bull's Other Island* (1904) di ambientazione irlandese, con due prefazioni ed una breve epigrafe; *Pygmalion* (1912) con la breve introduzione e il lungo brano in prosa in chiosa; *Saint Joan* (1923).

Le oltre 3300 pagine (tale mole rende il volume non troppo agevole da leggere) di *Teatro* di George Bernard Shaw sono corredate da una densa introduzione generale al volume dello stesso Marroni e, per ciascuna commedia, da un'accurata introduzione, da note e da apparati critici a cura di ciascun traduttore. Il testo originale che viene riprodotto a fronte delle nuove traduzioni è quello dello specialista Dan H. Laurence edito per la prestigiosa collana Penguin Classics.

Teatro di George Bernard Shaw è strutturato con coerenza e uniformità. Ogni nota introduttiva segue lo stesso schema: una sezione in cui viene narrata la vicenda, una per la storia del testo, una per le prospettive critiche e una per la fortuna sulle scene. Tutte sono seguite da almeno una fittissima pagina di riferimenti bibliografici. Ogni curatore introduce il testo contestualizzandolo nella temperie culturale, sociale e politica che lo ha ispirato, e dà conto della fortuna delle rappresentazioni e/o eventuali pubblicazioni tanto nel contesto anglofono coevo e più recente, tanto in quello italiano.

Notevole il lavoro di recupero delle informazioni relative proprio alle varie rappresentazioni dei *plays* e alla fortuna del teatro shaviano in patria (quale patria?) ed in Italia. Le sezioni dedicate alle rappresentazioni delle opere di Shaw sono accurate e dettagliate. Tutte le introduzioni danno conto degli allestimenti delle singole opere, menzionando sempre i debutti sulle scene, gli eventuali problemi legati alla censura, e le rappresentazioni successive più prestigiose e degne di nota, e le traduzioni italiane. I curatori riportano anche le produzioni televisive della RAI (ad esempio Marroni, p. 776; Bini, p. 373; Salis p. 1105) e quelle per la BBC (Bini, p. 372; Ambrosini, p. 613, per citarne alcuni). Ambrosini segnala anche il collegamento alla pagina *youtube* sulla quale si trova quella che definisce come tra le più godibili e recenti rappresentazioni di *Arms and the Man* (datata 1989). Ove presenti, vengono menzionati anche i radiodrammi, come quello di cui dà conto Fiorenzo Fantaccini per *La conversione del Capitano Brassbound*, allestito per celebrare il centenario della nascita di Shaw, il 29 maggio del 1956 sul secondo programma della radio, introdotto da una presentazione di Gabriele Baldini (p. 1549). Impossibile, chiaramente, dare il giusto credito a tutte le indicazioni relative a questo meticoloso lavoro di recupero.

Oltre a delineare la fortuna degli allestimenti dei drammi, tutte le prefazioni concorrono ad illustrare la natura del teatro Shaviano, e le componenti che lo caratterizzano. Ricorrono

riferimenti all'influenza della "modernissima drammaturgia di Ibsen" (Bini, p. 365) che porta Shaw, autore nel 1891 del saggio *La quintessenza dell'Ibsenismo*, "a quell'anticonformismo volutamente immorale il cui obiettivo sono i condizionamenti di una società che non si mette in discussione" (Salis, p. 197). Proprio al modello di Ibsen si può ascrivere l'epilogo di *Pygmalion*, un finale anti-romantico, a volte osteggiato dal pubblico e dalle compagnie teatrali (cf. Antinucci, p. 2644).

Non mancano riferimenti puntuali agli altri modelli e fonte di ispirazione dell'arte e del pensiero shaviano, da Wagner a Carlyle da Bunyan a Nietzsche. Si può leggere Shaw come Nietzsche su *generis* che mette in scena "superuomini e superdonne ai quali si deve l'evoluzione del genere umano" (Bizzotto, p. 1281), manifestazioni di quella *life force* "che l'autore riconosce negli individui che aspirano costantemente a migliorare se stessi" (*ibidem*). Nietzsche è "modello da imitare" in quanto "filosofo iconoclasta [che] non temeva di denunciare le ipocrisie dei potenti, una sorta di controparte moderna della figura di Socrate" (Marroni, p. 1729). Tra gli altri modelli, viene identificato un altro eminente vittoriano, John Ruskin, non a caso allievo di Carlyle, al quale (più che a Nietzsche) va probabilmente ascritta la visione Shaviana del superuomo, visione che emerge in particolare dall'idea del culto degli eroi, tra i quali si identificano Dante e Shakespeare (cf. il saggio *Ruskin's Politics* del 1921). E proprio Shakespeare viene contrapposto però a John Bunyan, quando "in occasione della versione teatrale del *Viaggio del pellegrino*, portata sulle scene di Londra nel dicembre 1896, Shaw scrisse una recensione che esaltava la grandezza di Bunyan a detrimento del valore di Shakespeare" (Marroni, p. xxvi), uno dei tanti paradossi shaviani che segnano lo stile del drammaturgo. Allo stesso modo, si può leggere Shaw come Wagneriano. Wagner viene visto come grande innovatore e indirettamente come predicatore. Il drammaturgo anglo-irlandese sostiene nel *The Perfect Wagnerite* (1883) che *l'Anello del Nibelungo* sia un riferimento alla classe operaia, dove lo gnomo che ruba l'anello altro non è che la rappresentazione della borghesia che usurpa il frutto del sudore della *working class*. Del resto, quello che Shaw diceva di Wagner si può attribuire a Shaw stesso: "Wagner can be quoted against himself almost without limit"¹. Il paradosso, tanto caro a Shaw, contagia anche la lettura dei modelli.

Dalle pagine introduttive dei drammi emerge la figura dello scrittore militante e riformatore (p. xxvi), del predicatore (che ha come riferimento il già citato John Bunyan) e, soprattutto, come Shaw stesso si definiva, del moralista: "I am a moral revolutionary interested [...] in the struggle between human vitality and the artificial system of morality, and distinguishing, not between capitalist and proletarian, but between moralist and natural historian"². Moralista e politico impegnato, Shaw trova nel teatro "un veicolo straordinario di satira e di denuncia" (Salis, p. 1096) contro "gli incancreniti stereotipi della moralità borghese [dimostrando] l'inadeguatezza dei codici etici e religiosi vigenti e la manchevolezza delle soluzioni convenzionali" (Fantaccini, p. 1539). Del resto, come sostenuto nella prefazione a *Mrs Warren's Profession*, l'arte altro non è che uno strumento in mano al moralizzatore: "I am convinced that fine art is the subtlest, the most seductive, the most effective instrument of moral propaganda in the world" (p. 384).

I curatori del volume danno largo spazio anche alla controversa questione del femminismo shaviano, presentando le donne delle commedie, spesso protagoniste della scena, come manifestazione dell'avversione per quella che viene definita la "womanly woman" (p. 56; p. 366). Così, la Signora Warren, protagonista di uno dei primi drammi, si distanzia dal classico cliché della *fallen woman*, o donna con un passato, e rappresenta invece la rivendicazione di

¹ G.B. Shaw (2021), *Major Cultural Essays*, ed. by David Kornhaber, Oxford, Oxford UP, p. 203.

² Cit. in Eric Bentley (1960), *Bernard Shaw*, London, Methuen and Co, p. 72.

una posizione di donna ricca e, per così dire, in carriera. Un attacco ad una società che non permette alle donne di avere una professione allo stesso tempo dignitosa e appagante, e che le renda indipendenti. Si tratta però di un femminismo che non ha mancato di suscitare critiche e polemiche, come quelle relative alla rappresentazione del personaggio di Giovanna D'Arco, definita da T.S. Eliot nel 1924 come “una riformatrice borghese [...] collocata su un gradino di poco più alto rispetto a quello occupato dalla suffragista signora Punkhurst” (citato da Terrinoni, p. 2903) e descritta, più recentemente, da Gainor³ come “rappresentante mascolinizzata, ovvero poco femminile, della *New Woman*” (Terrinoni, p. 2903).

Tra le letture proposte dalle prefazioni dei curatori non può mancare quella anti-colonialista, rintracciabile chiaramente in *John Bull's Other Island*, dove il personaggio di Larry Doyle, definito come “il più sottile studio sulle emozioni dell'esule irlandese prima di Joyce” (Fantaccini, p. 2271), fornisce una analisi della condizione della colonia *next door* vista dalla prospettiva distaccata di chi ha saputo abbandonare *l'altra isola* (come lo stesso Shaw, del resto). Questo, sebbene Shaw parlasse in termini diversi della propria *irlandesità*, considerandola come chiave di lettura esterna rispetto alla società inglese (e non irlandese). Nascere in Irlanda dà il vantaggio di poter avere uno sguardo esterno, e dunque obiettivo, sull'Inghilterra, ma con il completo dominio della lingua. Allo stesso tempo, però, emigrare da Dublino consente di avere la stessa lucidità nei confronti della *Other Island*.

La lettura anti-coloniale vale anche per altri *plays*, come *Caesar and Cleopatra*, interpretato come riferimento al coevo (rispetto alla composizione del dramma) conflitto tra Egitto Britannico e Sudan (Bizzotto, p. 1284) e in cui la menzione “Egypt for the Egyptians” (p. 1360) richiama per analogia la frase “Ireland for the Irish”. Allo stesso modo, anche *Candida* si presta ad una lettura anti-coloniale, proponendo la microeconomia e i rapporti di potere all'interno della famiglia come specchio della macroeconomia del capitalismo globale che ha prodotto il colonialismo con le conseguenti nefandezze provocate dal proliferare degli stereotipi di genere e razzisti⁴.

L'apparato critico e paratestuale fornisce dunque una esauriente panoramica sul percorso intellettuale e artistico dell'autore, dalle posizioni politiche fabiane e socialiste, alla questione morale, dall'idea di arte drammatica come anti-idealista e anti-romantica, alle teorie dei *natural leaders*. *Teatro* di George Bernard Shaw ripropone in Italia un grande autore in veste linguistica nuova. La scelta delle opere drammatiche più rappresentative e delle relative prefazioni offre una visione d'insieme su uno dei più grandi drammaturghi a cavallo tra Ottocento e Novecento. Da questo bel volume emerge la figura dell'iconoclasta e del moralista, dell'eretico vittoriano anti-vittoriano che pur di scioccare adottava posizioni estreme, incappando talvolta anche in sviste madornali, come il primo giudizio su Mussolini e Hitler. Emerge comunque “l'immagine di una personalità straordinaria, che, con la sua prosa impeccabile ed efficace, con i plurimi universi creati dalla sua immaginazione sempre in movimento, ebbe l'ambizione di mettere in scena la relatività di tutte le cose” (Marroni, p. xxxv).

Fabio Luppi

³ J.E. Gainor (1991), *Shaw's Daughters: Dramatic and Narrative Constructions of Gender*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press.

⁴ Cf. T.C. Davis (1998), “Shaw's Interstices of Empire: Decolonizing at Home and Abroad”, in Christopher Innes (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, p. 219.

Alan Titley, *Arriva Godot: Tragicommedia in due atti*, cura e traduzione dall'irlandese di Rosangela Barone, Fasano, Schena Editore, 2022, pp. 127. € 15. ISBN: 978-88-6806-303-0.

Arriva Godot, proclama il titolo della *pièce* scritta in gaelico da Alan Titley, romanziere, drammaturgo, accademico e presentatore televisivo irlandese. Godot arriva alla fine del primo atto (il sottotitolo, che ripropone quello della versione inglese che Beckett fece di *En attendant Godot* è "Tragicommedia in due atti"). Verso la fine del secondo atto però muore, fulminato sulla sedia elettrica, ma poi resuscita, vestito alla Groucho Marx, e se ne esce di scena a bordo di un'automobile. Dopo di che arriva il Ragazzo, quello che già nel testo beckettiano diceva che Godot non era potuto venire ("ma verrà domani"), e ripete la stessa fatidica frase a Vladimiro ed Estragone. I quali, stupefatti, dicono che ciò non è possibile, che lo hanno visto, che gli hanno parlato. Sta a vedere che colui che si è presentato come Godot non era affatto Godot. Le cose stanno come diceva Beckett: oggi non è potuto venire, verrà domani. O dobbiamo credere, invece, che il Ragazzo si è sbagliato, che Godot era venuto davvero?

Titley aveva scritto a Beckett per informarlo della prossima messinscena di *Arriva Godot* al Peacock (la sala teatrale più piccola dell'Abbey Theatre) e aveva ricevuto da Beckett una cortese risposta, con l'augurio di una buona riuscita dello spettacolo. Non è affatto detto, tuttavia, come riconosce Titley stesso, che la conoscenza non particolarmente profonda che Beckett aveva del gaelico gli avesse potuto consentire di capire bene il testo di *Tagann Godot* (questo il titolo originale di *Arriva Godot*).

La *pièce* di Titley comincia là dove quella di Beckett finisce. Anche questa volta il tentativo di impiccagione fallisce, ma per ragioni diverse: all'ultimo momento, come in un *melodrama*, prima che Estragone possa tirare la corda per impiccare Vladimiro, arriva il Ragazzo, il quale annuncia che Godot sarà lì "tra un paio di minuti". Anche questa volta, per il momento, non sarà così. Al suo posto arrivano invece (metamorfosi del duo beckettiano di Lucky e Pozzo) tre farseschi personaggi, due uomini e una donna, la quale è vestita come una valletta della televisione, oppure, a scelta, in costume da bagno. Per l'ingresso di Godot, sempre che sia lui, bisognerà aspettare ancora un po'.

Nella "tragicommedia" di Titley l'aspetto commedia è particolarmente insistito, con diverse concessioni alla farsa e alla pantomima. E soprattutto, con moltissimi riferimenti a personaggi, versi, canzoni appartenenti alla cultura irlandese, che, nei limiti del possibile, Rosangela Barone ha reso con grande abilità (e apparato di note a piè di pagina) nella sua traduzione italiana di *Tagann Godot*.

Per il lettore italiano, la possibilità di conoscere la *pièce* di Titley è frutto delle competenze linguistiche e dall'amore per Beckett e per la lingua gaelica di una studiosa che alla cultura irlandese ha dedicato tutte le sue attenzioni e le sue energie, sia come docente, sia come direttrice dell'Istituto Italiano di Cultura di Dublino: Rosangela Barone è stata una vera e preziosa ambasciatrice della cultura irlandese in Italia.

Paolo Bertinetti