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STUDI IRLANDESI
A JOURNAL OF IRISH STUDIES

STUDI IRLANDESI. A JOURNAL OF IRISH STUDIES

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STUDI IRLANDESI. A JOURNAL OF IRISH STUDIES

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Editoriale / Editorial

Negli ultimi quarant'anni l'Irlanda è stata un 'luogo culturale' che ha suscitato grande interesse soprattutto per la sua 'eccezionalità'. Come suggerisce Michael Cronin (*Minding Ourselves. A New Face for Irish Studies*, «Field Day Review», 4, 2008, pp. 174-185) i motivi di questo interesse sono da rintracciarsi nel fatto che nel panorama europeo il paese ha rappresentato per lungo tempo un'anomalia: la scarsa crescita economica, la costante emigrazione, la presenza 'soffocante' della Chiesa in ogni ambito sociale, la severa legislazione che proibiva divorzio e contraccezione, il sanguinoso conflitto religioso, per decenni hanno reso l'Irlanda un 'caso' europeo. I mutamenti economici, politici e sociali avvenuti a cavaliere del secondo e terzo millennio hanno profondamente modificato il tessuto socioculturale dell'Isola dello smeraldo, che ormai pare essersi adeguata all'attuale temperie globalizzante, e si propone al mondo con una nuova, diversa 'eccezionalità': da aggressiva tigre celtica e calamita d'Europa, da luogo di immigrazione e inedita multiculturalità, l'Irlanda è divenuta felino in gabbia e ancora serbatoio di una nuova emigrazione; da luogo di conflitto è divenuta laboratorio di pace; da paese oscurantista è divenuta avanguardia per quanto riguarda i diritti civili e sociali. Le anomalie di un tempo son dunque divenute nuove occasioni di riflessione e prospettive d'indagine: come è avvenuta questa trasformazione? Quale peso ha avuto sulla cultura del paese e quali nuovi processi di ibridazione culturale ha prodotto? Come si è sviluppata questa nuova 'diversità'? «Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies» (SIJIS) intende contribuire al dibattito su questa nuova realtà, senza dimenticare il prezioso bagaglio del passato.

Nonostante la diffusione degli Studi irlandesi nel nostro Paese, che nel recente passato aveva trovato concreta realizzazione nell'istituzione di alcuni corsi accademici di letteratura e cultura anglo-irlandese (Firenze, Roma, Sassari, Torino e Vercelli), tutti cancellati dalle recenti plurime riforme, non esisteva ancora un periodico che di tale concreto interesse fosse tangibile testimonianza: SIJIS avrebbe dunque l'ambizione di colmare questa lacuna e continuare a dar voce a quella solida tradizione.

SIJIS è una rivista *open access* CCPL pubblicata nell'ambito della Collana "Biblioteca di Studi di Filologia Moderna: Collana, Riviste e Laboratorio" (<<http://www.collana-filmod.unifi.it>>) per i tipi di Firenze University Press, attraverso il sistema Open Journal System. La rivista, finanziata dall'Università di Firenze con il contributo del Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Culture comparate, è il prodotto del Laboratorio di ricerca, formazione e produzione editoriale open access che opera all'interno del Dipartimento. Il Laboratorio dedica particolare attenzione all'innovazione della comunicazione scientifica digitale a partire dai bisogni specifici dell'area degli studi umanistici, attraverso innovativi servizi editoriali, formativi e di ricerca.

L'aspetto più significativo è che la produzione editoriale del Laboratorio è fruibile gratuitamente secondo i canoni dell'Open Access, in accordo con i principi della Dichiarazione di Berlino firmata dall'Ateneo: la democratizzazione della cultura è infatti uno degli auspici e degli obiettivi primari di chi ha ideato e di tutti coloro che hanno collaborato alla prima realizzazione di SIJIS; scopo della rivista è dunque la più ampia circolazione possibile delle idee, poiché l'*open access* può ampliare la *readership* di una pubblicazione e rendere il suo contributo più conosciuto e diffuso, nonché fornire un più ampio *feedback* su ciò che viene pubblicato.

L'approccio generale della rivista sarà interdisciplinare e interculturale. Per questo uno degli scopi del progetto è anche quello di creare un *network* con riviste europee 'sorelle' quali «Etudes irlandaises» (<<http://www.pur-editions.fr/revue.php?idRevue=28>>) e «Estudios Irlandeses» (<<http://www.estudiosirlandeses.org/>>). Gli ambiti in cui SIJIS si muoverà saranno, oltre alla critica letteraria, artistica o cinematografica, la sociologia dei media – e più in generale gli studi culturali –, anche la linguistica – in particolare gli studi sulla traduzione –, la storia e la scrittura creativa. SIJIS, che avrà cadenza annuale, e pubblicherà contributi sia in italiano che in inglese, è una rivista *peer-reviewed*: i contributi proposti per la pubblicazione verranno sottoposti alla valutazione dei due membri del Comitato scientifico – la nostra comunità di esperti – più qualificati nel campo del contributo proposto. Il Comitato scientifico, composto dai maggiori studiosi italiani di cultura irlandese, da specialisti stranieri di grande prestigio e da cinque tra i più autorevoli scrittori irlandesi, è affiancato da un Comitato editoriale di cui fanno parte giovani studiosi e pubblicisti con ottime competenze nell'ambito della cultura irlandese e della produzione editoriale, che si occuperà principalmente delle recensioni, nonché della parte più strettamente tecnico-tipografica della rivista.

Ogni numero sarà in parte monografico. Questo primo numero propone un'indagine sui rapporti culturali tra Italia e Irlanda. Le altre sezioni che alternativamente troveranno collocazione nella rivista sono: *Cultura letteraria e linguistica* e *Storia e società*, che conterranno saggi di tipo accademico, articoli, ma anche contributi di ampio respiro e di taglio più divulgativo; *Scritture, traduzioni e letture*, dove saranno proposti inediti, traduzioni di contributi che prendono in esame il tema trattato nella parte monografica, e/o presentazioni (in lingua originale o in traduzione italiana) di estratti di opere che vorremmo vedere tradotte; *Progetti*, in cui s'intende presentare ciò che è *work in progress*, privilegiando le ricerche ancora in corso rispetto alle acquisizioni definitive, le ipotesi rispetto alle tesi, le aperture più che le conclusioni; *Voci*, dove troveranno sede interviste e auto-recensioni; *Recensioni e segnalazioni*, che presenterà gli eventi accademici e pubblici nazionali e internazionali che riguardano la cultura d'Irlanda, e dove verranno recensite pubblicazioni d'interesse irlandese apparse in Italia e nel mondo; *Bibliografie*, una sezione in cui proporremo bibliografie tematiche (su autori, generi, movimenti, ecc.) che possano essere d'aiuto alla ricerca.

Il logo di SIJIS è ispirato a un *triskell*. *Triskell* è una parola che deriva dal greco τρισκέλης, che significa «tre gambe»; i celti lo consideravano la rappresentazione di tre raggi di luce. È simbolo del tempo (passato, presente, futuro), delle tre età dell'uomo (infanzia, maturità e vecchiaia) e di tre elementi (acqua, terra ed aria) racchiusi in un quarto: il fuoco. Un *triskell* racchiude tre energie in una, perpetuamente in movimento e che sempre si rinnovano. È il simbolo della vita. Lo abbiamo scelto perché pensiamo rappresenti il movimento che porta al cambiamento, ma che ha la sua origine nella convergenza e nella collisione di movimenti diversi che, insieme, creano equilibrio.

Lunga vita a SIJIS! Long live SIJIS! SIJIS beo fada, agus rathúil!

Doverosi e sinceri i ringraziamenti a Beatrice Tottosy, direttrice della collana “Biblioteca di Studi di Filologia Moderna” e del Laboratorio editoriale open access del Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Culture Comparate, Università di Firenze; ai colleghi e al personale amministrativo del Dipartimento e soprattutto alla direttrice Rita Svandrlík; ai colleghi e amici irlandesi (italiani e stranieri) che hanno sostenuto il progetto, e in special modo a Donatella Abbate Badin preziosa e paziente co-curatrice della sezione monografica di questo primo numero; a Marco Vanchetti che ha ideato e realizzato la nostra copertina. Il ringraziamento più grande va ad Arianna Antonielli, infaticabile journal manager, attenta e impagabile coordinatrice del Laboratorio editoriale, nonché irlandesista appassionata. Grazie di cuore anche a tutta la redazione, e in particolare a Samuele Grassi, per l'impegno e la passione nella produzione di SIJIS.

Over the last forty years Ireland as a cultural entity has aroused great interest for its ‘exceptionalism’. As Micheal Cronin suggests (*Minding Ourselves. A New Face for Irish Studies*, «Field Day Review», 4, 2008, pp. 174-185) the reasons for this are to be found in the fact that for a long time, in the European context, Ireland has been an anomaly: the low levels of economic growth, constant emigration, the stifling and aggressive presence of the Catholic Church in every aspect of Irish society, strict laws on divorce and contraception, and the violent religious conflicts have all made Ireland a European ‘case’. The economic, political and social changes which took place between 1990 and 2010 have deeply modified the Emerald Isle’s socio-cultural fabric, and Ireland, adapting itself to the on-going process of globalization, now offers itself to the world with a new, different ‘exceptionalism’: Ireland, the aggressive Celtic Tiger and magnet of Europe, the privileged immigration destination characterized by an unprecedented multiculturalism, has become a caged feline and again the departure point for a new kind of emigration; the island of conflicts has become a peace ‘workshop’; an obscurantist nation has become a new State

in the avant-garde of civil and social rights. The former anomalies have thus become occasions for new reflections and new investigation perspectives: how did this transformation take place? What consequences has it had for the country's culture and what new processes of cultural hybridization has it produced? How has this new diversity developed? «Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies» (SIJIS) aims to contribute to the debate on this new reality, without neglecting the precious heritage of the Irish past.

In spite of the spread of Irish Studies in Italy before the recent educational counter-reforms, which were a tangible presence in Florence, Rome, Sassari, Turin and Vercelli, as well as a few other university programmes in Anglo-Irish literature and culture, a journal which bore witness to this deep interest did not exist. SIJIS aims at filling this gap and giving voice to the long established tradition of Irish Studies in Italy.

SIJIS is an *open access* CCPL journal in the “Biblioteca di Studi di Filologia Moderna: Collana, Riviste e Laboratorio” (<<http://www.collana-filmod.unifi.it>>) series, published by Firenze University Press by way of Open Journal System. The journal is funded by the University of Florence and its Department of Comparative Languages, Literatures and Cultures, and it is produced by the Department's Open Access Publishing Research Workshop. Through its innovative research and training programme, the Workshop devotes particular attention to digital innovations in academic communication, with particular regard to the specific needs of the Humanities.

The most significant feature of the workshop is that what it produces is accessible and downloadable for free on Open Access, in accordance with the Berlin Declaration signed by the University of Florence: the democratization of culture is one of the primary aims of the journal's general editor and of those who contributed to the realization of the first issue of SIJIS; the purpose of the journal is therefore the widest possible circulation of ideas, because the open access system can extend a publication's readership and make its contribution better known and more widely read, and also provide a more extensive feedback.

The general approach of SIJIS is interdisciplinary and intercultural. For this reason one of the main goals of the SIJIS project is to create a network with other European journals in the same field such as «Etudes irlandaises» (<<http://www.pur-editions.fr/revue.php?idRevue=28>>) and «Estudios Irlandeses» (<<http://www.estudiosirlandeses.org/>>). The journal aims to promote the international debate on themes and research issues dealing with every aspect of Irish culture. We hope to foster high quality research in the areas of literary criticism, visual arts, film studies, media communication and sociology – and more generally in the galaxy of Cultural Studies –, linguistics – especially Translation Studies –, history and Creative Writing. SIJIS is published yearly and accepts contributions in English and/or Italian. It is a peer-reviewed journal. Submissions will be given anonymously to the two members of the

Advisory Board – which I like to call our community of experts – who are the most qualified in the field of the proposed contribution. The Advisory Board, which includes the most distinguished Italian scholars in the field of Irish Studies, prestigious foreign specialists and five of the most outstanding Irish writers, is supported by an Editorial Board made up of young scholars who contribute their proficiency in Irish Studies and/or editorial and publishing matters: they deal mainly with the reviews section, but also with typographical and graphic issues.

Every issue will include a monographic section, and a miscellaneous one. The theme for the first issue is on *Italy-Ireland: Cultural Inter-relations*. The other sections which will appear alternatively in the journal include: *Literature, Language, and Visual Arts* and *History and Society* with scholarly articles but also wider-ranging pieces of research or contributions of a less specialized nature; *Creative Writing, Translations and Readings* will include unpublished texts, translations of contributions dealing with the theme of the monographic section, and/or excerpts (in the original language or in Italian translation) of works that we would like to see published, reprinted or translated; *Projects*: this section of the journal will be devoted to in-progress research, with a focus on recent developments rather than consolidated theories, and hypotheses and open discussions rather than conclusions. The policy of SIJIS is to encourage young scholars to publish the results of their research, completed or partial, and take part in the international debate, both in traditional formats and the digital media; *Voices* will publish interviews as well as self-interviews and self-reviews; *News and Reviews*: here national and international events dealing with Irish Culture will be announced, presented or reported; the sections will also include reviews and evaluations of books of Irish interest published both in Italy and abroad; *Bibliographies*: this section will include an annual bibliography of Irish interest contributions published in Italy, but also thematic bibliographies (on authors, genres, movements, etc.) that should serve as useful tool for all those interested in Irish Studies.

We hope that SIJIS will offer a showcase for the considerable interest about Ireland in Italy.

The logo of SIJIS is inspired by a *triskell*. *Triskell* is a word, deriving from the Greek τρισκελής, meaning «three legs», which the Celts considered the representation of three rays of light. It symbolizes time (past, present, future), the three ages of man (childhood, maturity and old age) and three elements (water, earth and air) encompassed by the fourth one, fire. A *triskell* is made up of three energies in one, in a perpetual movement of renewal. It represents the source of life; actually it is a symbol of life. We chose it because we feel it represents a movement which leads to change, but has its origins in the convergence and collision of different movements that create balance.

Lunga vita a SIJIS! Long live SIJIS! SIJIS beo fada, agus rathúil!

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the following friends and colleagues: to Beatrice Tottosy, the General Editor of the “Biblioteca di Studi di Filologia Moderna” series, and Director of the Open Access Publishing Research Workshop of the Department of Comparative Languages, Literatures and Cultures, at the University of Florence; to my colleagues and the Administrative staff of the Department, and to its Head Rita Svandrlik; to those colleagues and friends engaged in Irish Studies who have supported the project (both Italian and foreign), and in particular Donatella Abbate Badin, the meticulous and extremely patient co-editor of the monographic section of the first issue; to Marco Vanchetti, who has designed and produced our cover. The greatest debt is to Arianna Antonielli, the indefatigable Journal Manager and invaluable coordinator of the Workshop, with a real passion for Irish Studies. Heartfelt thanks also to all the members of the Workshop, and especially to Samuele Grassi, for their commitment and enthusiasm in the production of SIJIS.

Italy-Ireland:
Cultural Inter-relations

edited by

Donatella Abbate Badin and Fiorenzo Fantaccini

Introduction

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Keywords: Italy, Ireland, Cultural Inter-relations, reception, influence

Carlo Linati, an eclectic writer from Lombardy whose love for Irish culture led him to introduce Irish literature to Italy in the early 20th century¹, in a book of «prose lombarde» (Lombard prose texts) wrote that in spite of being so different in their «storia, luoghi, costumanze»² (history, places, customs), a great deal of affinities were detectable between the Italian and Irish peoples. Later, Linati went on to say that these affinities were «delicate e profonde» (delicate and deep) and that the two peoples were «storicamente compagni» (historically akin) because of the common «decenni di servaggio» (decades of servitude) from which both countries were freed «attraverso odissee di dolori e di sacrifici»³ (through odisseys of sorrows and sacrifices). Despite this early recognition, the cultural inter-relations between Italy and Ireland have seldom been investigated. With the emergence of globalisation, which has also affected literary studies by enhancing transnational/translational perspectives, increasing attention has been paid to the cultural interaction between Ireland and its various Others⁴ but the relationship of Ireland with Italy is still relatively underexplored.

The Irish experience of Italy in pre-independence days, however, deserves special scrutiny since it was only apparently shaped by British attitudes, sharing with the dominant country a similar enthusiasm but also similar stereotypes and denigrating observations. Underneath this surface similarity, however, there were specific differences in attitude, dictated primarily by the colonial and postcolonial status of Ireland and by a special relationship through the centuries partly due to common Roman Catholicism. As the opening essay to this section by Carlo Maria Pellizzi demonstrates, Ireland, too, had a privileged position in Italian consciousness. As for present day Ireland, first the Troubles and then the glitter of the Celtic Tiger have made it a focus of Italian interest and a cult tourist destination, especially for the young attracted by its music, the New-Wave craze for Celtic lore and the fame of its *craich*.

Among the examples of the special relationship between Ireland and Italy one could cite the monastery-founding Irish monks (St. Columban being the foremost) colonizing the peninsula from North to South, or the Irish colleges in Rome and elsewhere providing an education to Irish Catholic students

banned from Protestant universities (St. Oliver Plunkett, among others). 'The flight of the Earls' in the 17th century led Hugh O'Neill and other exiles to Rome where they received hospitality from Pope Pius V. Daniel O'Connell's dying wish was to have his heart buried in Rome. Exiles and *émigrés* to Italy not only made their country better known in the host land but brought something of Italy back to their own country. On the Irish front, Italian music and, especially, Italian opera contributed to closer links and appreciation while Italian visual art was always present on the Irish horizon. From such premises a special relationship was born, enhanced in the nineteenth century by the rising nationalism and aspirations to independence of the two countries, both under foreign domination.

Late twentieth century Italian scholarship regarding Ireland has been flourishing, following the pioneering steps of Giorgio Melchiori. Many books and essays on Irish literature have been published and there have been in the course of the last thirty years numerous important conferences dealing primarily with Ireland⁵. This also testifies to a special relationship. However, not much has been written, either in Italy or in Ireland, about the specific issue of interaction between the two cultures, with the major exception of Joycean studies (and now of groundbreaking work on Yeats) nor about reciprocal representations, myths and misconceptions. There have undoubtedly been some thorough studies on Medieval ties between Italy and Ireland⁶. Irish travellers to Italy (e.g. Oliver Goldsmith, Lady Morgan, Sean O'Faolain, Elizabeth Bowen to name just a few) and Italian travellers to Ireland (e.g. Giuseppe Acerbi, Mario Manlio Rossi) have left accounts which have offered the opportunity to investigate the theme of the representation of the Other and revealed the nuances which make the Irish gaze different from that of other northern observers. References to Italy in Irish literature (and vice-versa) and the influence of Italian literature and art on Irish authors (and vice-versa) have been highlighted in a number of very interesting studies. We can think offhand of some fine pieces on Dante's importance for Heaney and Ciáran Carson, or, conversely, on Thomas Moore's reception in nineteenth century Italian culture. These studies, however, are scattered in journals and miscellanies while, were they grouped together, they would gather momentum and give more visibility to the theme of interaction between the two cultures permitting an organic exploration of specific issues. Chiara Sciarrino's pioneering contributions on contemporary ties between Ireland and Italy⁷ work in that direction, opening up several new perspectives.

While both France and Spain, as well as several other countries such as Brazil and Japan, have had specialized journals⁸ which in the course of years have explored the many facets of the intercourse between their countries and Ireland and have provided a forum for their scholars to present their work, Italy until now has lacked a periodical publication regarding Ireland exclusively as well as an association of Irish studies with regular conferences (again with

the exception of the specialized branch of Joyce studies⁹). Therefore the fine scholars cultivating Irish studies, and especially the younger ones, have not had a regular forum in which to give more visibility to their work. Only the journal «Il Tolomeo» has regularly provided a section for reviewing works of Irish interest. The present publication aims at offering a showcase for the considerable interest about Ireland in Italy while the monographic section it harbours tries to make amends for the neglected discourse of Irish Italian cultural relations – a discourse which is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary – by filling some of these gaps. The essays gathered here examine Irish literature (and occasionally Italian literature) in a transnational perspective and range from the Middle Ages to the 21st century. Diverse forms of interaction are taken into consideration, from a study of the presence of Ireland in Italian culture and history, which opens the collection of essays, to one of Italy in Irish writing which concludes it, also taking in translation studies, the study of influences, travel literature and the representations of Italy.

Starting with the Middle Ages, Carlo Maria Pellizzi presents an ample overview of the representations of Ireland in Italy arguing that the same images recur, though intermittently, over the centuries. He does not only address literary transmission. Pellizzi's essay is truly interdisciplinary as he also takes in his stride historical facts and diplomatic and commercial exchanges as well as the influence of Irish exiles and *émigrés* in Italy. Through a variety of documents that range from saints' lives to accounts of Italian pilgrims and merchants and church documents, he studies the evolution of medieval and early modern representations of Ireland. As to the nineteenth century vision, Pellizzi, on the basis of articles from different sources including some by Cavour and Mazzini, argues that because of the anglophilia that reigned in Italy at the time of the Italian Risorgimento, the Irish liberation movement, which could have been seen as twin to the Italian one, was instead regarded with little sympathy and understanding. After Italy was unified, however, Ireland received much more attention and consideration and the cause of Irish independence was followed with great participation and drew support both from Catholic and from left-wing press, notably Mussolini's newspaper «Il Popolo d'Italia» which contained violently anti-British and pro-Irish articles by the future dictator. Later on, Ireland and Irish literature attracted much attention throughout the years of fascism as an alternative to the banning of literature from the enemies Great Britain and America. The post-Second World War years showed initially much neglect towards Ireland until the Civil rights movement of Northern Ireland reawakened interest in Italy which was itself going through a wave of terrorism. Pellizzi's long essay and the attached bibliography are a mine of information and quotations from little known sources. One could only wish that a similar kind of work also existed for the presence of Italy in Ireland; Chiara Sciarino's concluding essay about twentieth century literature is a step towards that goal.

As a result of interest in the Troubles, New-Wave craze for Celtic lore and the centrality of Ireland in youth culture, a spat of translations of Irish texts into Italian have seen the light followed by a number of translation studies which are well represented in this monographic section of our periodical. The specificities of the Irish situation and the Irish language have offered inspiration for two articles, Giulia Gozzelino, *The Dimension of Wit in Translation: Rendering Wilde's Puns and Wordplay into Italian*, and Elisa Armellino, *Translating Memories into Words. Hugo Hamilton's The Speckled People and Il cane che abbaiva alle onde*.

Gozzelino examines the different translation strategies adopted by three Italian translators of Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Luigi Lunari, Masolino d'Amico and Guido Almansi) to render all the ambiguities of the title and in particular the word play on Earnest / Ernest. Her analysis is extremely subtle but it does not deal with specific features of the Irish language or Irish society, as the concept of earnestness, which is being debunked by Wilde, is a characteristic of Victorian England. What is of Irish interest, however, is Wilde's ironic scepticism about British values, which the title conveys while the attempts at translating it fail to bring out. The other article dealing with translation studies is more Irish specific. Armellino's paper deals with difficulties of translating the «speckledness» at the core of Hugo Hamilton's *The Speckled People*. The interplay of the three languages, Irish, German and English which are part of the cultural identity of the author of the memoir, presents a great challenge to the Italian translator who has to deal with the multilingualism of the text and the frequent code-switching. But this is nothing compared to the difficulty of transmitting the sense of Irish identity which is closely tied to the complex interplay with the two other languages. The transgressive value of writing the memoir in English, the forbidden language in the author's Irish- and German-speaking home, must necessarily be lost to an Italian audience to whom only cumbersome notes can explain the painful language question of Ireland. Translations, concludes Armellino, transpose not only language, but a whole complex culture.

Some of the essays published in this miscellany prove that there is still a lot to uncover even about the major literary figures on whom apparently everything has been said even regarding their links with Italy. Research in the Zurich James Joyce Foundation has permitted Ilaria Natali to examine a collection of documents by and relating to James Joyce, recently donated by Hans E. Jahnke, son of Giorgio Joyce's second wife, Asta, and which has been, so far, neglected. Of particular interest are the poetry written in Italian and the private correspondence, especially the letters to Giorgio which contain a mixture of English, Italian and occasional Triestine dialect, with the Italian reserved for the more emotional passages and English for the descriptive and informative ones. Another sample of Joyce's use of Italian is the poem «Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana» which is closely interconnected to «On the Beach at

Fontana». Since the Italian poem is not dated, it is not possible to determine which was composed first and which is a translation/adaptation of the other. Natali notes the different registers of the two, the Italian poem being more archaic and formal, and conducts an accurate semantic and thematic analysis of both reaching the conclusion that translation as a form of rewriting is but one of Joyce's many forms of poetic experimentation. Indeed, the newly acquired documents testify to the Protean nature of Joyce's uses of languages rich in new relationships and associations and multiple meanings.

Within the scope of comparative studies no other subject has been as fruitful as that of the study of links and influences within and across cultures. The influence of *commedia dell'arte* in three of Austin Clarke's poetic plays is used by Christopher Murray to emphasize the international, self-reflexive nature of the Irish satirist and playwright. Nurtured by turn-of-the-century Irish drama with its concentration on poetic language and Celticism, Clarke soon turned to a more realistic and European perspective provided by the Gate Theatre, dedicated to Harlequin. And from then on his theatrical career oscillated between the Gate and the Abbey, with the *commedia dell'arte* providing a corrective to his Celticism. The influence of the Italian tradition is evident in some of his own plays staged or published between the 1940s and the 1970s. *The Kiss*, *The Second Kiss* and *The Third Kiss* use the characters of Harlequin, Columbine, Pierrot and Pierrette (the French avatars of Italian *commedia dell'arte* characters) and borrow many other features of the carnivalesque, libertine, tongue-in-cheek Italian genre, thus allowing Clarke to pay tribute to an ancient foreign style of comedy while also holding a mirror up to Irish society.

In *Derek Mahon's Homage to Pasolini*, Irene De Angelis focuses on Mahon's poem *Roman Script* (1999) published following a stay in Rome. The title echoes Gore Vidal's words in Fellini's *Rome* (1972): «Roma è la città delle illusioni, non a caso qui c'è la Chiesa, il governo, il cinema, tutte cose che producono illusione» (Rome is the city of illusions; it is no accident that the Church, government and the cinema industry are concentrated here, all of them producing illusions). Mahon had appropriated and adapted the expression «Roman illusions» in the elegies contained in *Life on Earth* (2008) to talk about the Romantic poets Byron, Keats and Shelley. The concept is the basis for an analysis of the many faces Mahon perceives in the Eternal City – from Rome as *Caput Mundi* to the metropolis of 'sublime decadence' through memories of Piranesi's etchings, 'la dolce vita' and Pasolini's proletarian myth. The core of the essay is dedicated to the latter to whom Mahon's line «amid disconsolate lives [...] a myth survives» refers.

Travel literature is *par excellence* the place where the comparison between two cultures finds its best expression and where Otherness is put into words, but also where, in talking about the Other, it becomes impossible not to be talking about the Self. Irish and Italian travellers and their respective repre-

sentations of their counterparts have been amply studied in Italy as well as Ireland, but there are still many travellers whose works have to be explored and many writers who are not primarily known as travellers to one of the countries in question but who have left interesting accounts. One such is Synge, whose articles on Italy for «The Irish Times» and in particular a piece of investigative reporting on some riots in Rome demanding Francesco Crispi's resignation are here analysed by Giulia Bruna. The article on the riots was published anonymously in the paper but, on the basis of jottings in Synge's diary (some of them in Italian) and a successive reportage for «The Manchester Guardian», Bruna conjectures that it might be his. Her analysis dwells on stylistic features, such as Synge's ability to capture the *soundscape* of a mob but there are also implicit appeals to an Irish readership such as dwelling on tramcars, a technical novelty widely discussed in Dublin at the time. The persona of a leisurely eyewitness of the riots, strolling through Rome and taking in the mob as well the most recent innovations in transportation, reminds Bruna of the *flâneur*, Leopold Bloom, the epitome of George Simmel's «metropolitan type of individual». Synge in writing about Italy ends up writing rather about his metropolitan self, a forerunner of an Irish trend that was to display itself through other cosmopolitan would-be journalists, Joyce, who would stroll through Rome ten years later and, we might add, O'Faolain fifty years later.

Donatella Abbate Badin's contribution deals with two kinds of journeys to Italy, a fictional one and a real one, both made at the time of the struggle for Italian independence. Edward Maturin's *Bianca. A Tale of Erin and Italy* (1852) takes the hero, a Trinity College student who has fallen in love with an Italian young woman, from Ireland to Italy on a tour which reflects all the ambivalence of the author towards possible similarities between Ireland and Italy, both suffering for the lack of independence and the oppression of foreigners, as Bianca points out to the hero's embarrassment. The novel, in spite of its Italian setting and characters and vague nationalist rhetoric, is a compilation of commonplace observations about a picturesque Italy, full of artistic beauties and villains. On the other hand, Lady Morgan is much more outspoken and radical. In her *Italy* (1821), the voluminous account of an actual tour, the author offers a multifaceted portrait of Italy and the political situation of the moment, that of a country, which, in her words, like Ireland, «can breathe the spirit of liberty beneath the lash of despotism». The occasions for demonstrating this are numerous and throughout Morgan displays great sympathy for the Italian people (though not for its rulers). Morgan, however, is an exception, Badin argues. Most Irish travellers of the period were too keenly aware that a portrait of Italy could be read as a metaphor of Ireland and that this could imply danger. Thus at a time when the Risorgimento might have represented an appeal for the Irish (as it did for many English radicals), as a rule the Irish kept silent because of the similarities perceived and concentrated instead, half-heartedly, on art, landscapes, beggars and *banditti*.

The example of Maturin suggests that nineteenth century Irish fiction, especially Gothic fiction, which is now being studied with great intensity, also promises to offer many interesting insights on this issue and that among the many authors considered minor who had their day and were forgotten we may discover new Italian settings and different perceptions of Italy.

The concluding essay by Chiara Sciarrino offers an organic attempt at a survey of the presence of Italy in Irish culture. Her survey includes various forms of transnational relations, starting with the most obvious one, the study of influences which she conducts basing herself on an earlier work published by the Italian Institute of Culture of Dublin in 1964 to dwell in more detail on the influence of Pirandello and Dante. Translations take the lion's share with a list of Irish poets who translated Italian poems and a detailed analysis of some of them (Denis Devlin, Derek Mahon, Paul Muldoon, Desmond O'Grady, Harry Clifton); mention is also made of Marco Sonzogni's collection of responses to Leopardi on the bicentenary of the poet's birth. The study also includes a brief discussion of poems dealing with Italy. Travel literature comes next as an example of intercultural exchange. Besides briefly examining the major figures of the Italian Grand Tour, Sciarrino also looks at accounts which are closer to autobiography or, even, at fictions about travel in Italy, such as Elizabeth Bowen's *A Time in Rome* and some of her short stories. A most original part of her essay is the section in which she examines the important role played by Italian visual arts in Ireland and their reflections in literature as, for instance, in Frank McGuinness' play about Caravaggio. Italian music and Tom Murphy's *The Gigli Concert* constitute yet another important part of the survey. As for the representation of Italians, a standard topos in comparative studies, Sciarrino takes an unusual approach: she concentrates on images of Italian migrant workers in Ireland. This essay provides a fitting conclusion as it takes into consideration many of the topics examined in the miscellany and introduces new areas of investigation.

The nine contributions published in this section of the journal offer a foretaste of the sort of work that could still be done, while bearing in mind what has already been achieved by the many scholars not represented here. Some of the issues that come to mind are stereotypes regarding Italy and Italians in Romantic and nineteenth century Irish fiction, especially by authors considered minor or marginal; the presence of Italy and of Italian paradigms in the Irish Gothic; travel books about Italy and their differences from British travel books; the influence of Italian intellectuals (e.g. Giambattista Vico, Antonio Gramsci, Italo Calvino) and of Italian authors (other than the ones already mentioned) on Irish critical and literary production; translations; the presence of Italian cultural manifestations (musical, artistic, material such as gastronomy) in the works of Irish writers. Much of this has already been dealt with in individual studies but a more systematic approach to single topics is needed. «Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies» aims at being the privileged forum for such debate and research.

Endnotes

¹ Linati translated plays by W.B. Yeats, J.M. Synge, Lady Gregory and several other Irish writers into Italian. See Carlo Linati, *Belli spiriti d'Irlanda. Versioni da Yeats, Lady Gregory, Synge & Joyce* (a cura di Maurizio Pasquero), Terra Insubre, Varese 2010.

² Carlo Linati, *Sulle orme di Renzo e altre prose lombarde*, Treves, Milano 1927, pp. 20-21.

³ Carlo Linati, *Irlanda e Lombardia sorelle senza saperlo*, «Corriere d'informazione», 12-13 aprile 1949, p. 2.

⁴ The relationship between France and Ireland has been explored thoroughly thanks to the groundbreaking work of Patrick Raffroidi, by his *Cahiers* of the University of Lille and the influential journal «Etudes Irlandaises». More recently the volume edited by Eamon Maher and Grace Neville, *France-Ireland. Anatomy of a Relationship*, Lang, Frankfurt-am-Main 2004, has added many interesting new perspectives. As for Germany there is Patrick O'Neill's *Ireland and Germany: A Study in Literary Relations*, Lang, Frankfurt-am-Main 1985, and the series *Irish-German Studies* edited by Joachim Fischer and Gisela Holfter at Limerick University. In Spain Antonio Raúl De Toro Santos has authored *La literatura irlandesa en España*, Netbiblio, A Coruña 2007. Looking further away from Europe one could cite Joseph Lennons *Irish Orientalism A Literary and Intellectual History*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse 2004, Irene De Angelis' *The Japanese Effect in Contemporary Irish Poetry*, Palgrave, Basingstoke 2011, and even some recent contributions on Irish-Caribbean relationships: Maria McGarrity, *Washed by the Gulf Stream: The Historic and Geographic Relation of Irish and Caribbean Literature*, University of Delaware Press, Newark 2008; Michael G. Malouf, *Transatlantic Solidarities: Irish Nationalism and Caribbean Poetics*, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville 2009; «Irish Migration Studies in South America», (2003-) a journal of the *Society for Irish Latin American Studies* available at <<http://www.irlandeses.org>> (07/ 2011).

⁵ Fiorenzo Fantaccini has furnished an exhaustive bibliography of Italian scholarship on Ireland: *Italian Contributions to the Study of Irish Culture*, in *The Cracked Lookingglass. Contributions to the Study of Irish Literature*, ed. by C. De Petris, J.M. Ellis D'Alessandro and F. Fantaccini, Bulzoni, Roma 1999, pp. 253-291.

⁶ Vincenzo Berardis, *Italy and Ireland in the Middle Ages*, Clonmore and Reynolds, Dublin 1950; Martin P. Harney, *Medieval Ties between Italy and Ireland*, St. Paul Editions, Boston 1963.

⁷ *Un'Italia fuori dall'Italia. Immagini di cultura italiana nella letteratura anglo-irlandese contemporanea*, Aracne, Roma 2005, and *Translating Italy. Notes on Irish Poets Reading Italian Poetry*, Aracne, Roma 2005.

⁸ Namely «Études irlandaises» (<<http://www.pur-editions.fr/revue.php?idRevue=28>>), «Estudios Irlandeses» (<<http://www.estudiosirlandeses.org/>>), «ABEI Journal. The Brazilian Journal of Irish Studies» (<<http://www.freewebs.com/irishstudies/abeijournal.htm>>), IASIL Japan. Journal of Irish Studies (<<http://www.musashino-u.ac.jp/iasil-j/journalofirishStudies.html>>).

⁹ The occasional publication *Joyce Studies in Italy* is printed by Bulzoni, Rome, and in 2010 its 11th issue was produced. The James Joyce Italian Foundation was created in Rome in 2006 and conferences on Joyce are held regularly. Bulzoni also publishes a series called «Piccola Biblioteca Jocyiana» edited by Franca Ruggieri.

«Ibernia fabulosa»: per una storia delle immagini dell'Irlanda in Italia*

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St Patrick's Purgatory, Risorgimento

1

Tra *Purgatorium* e Gerald del Galles:
il favoloso e il realistico nel Medioevo e Rinascimento

La storia dei rapporti tra Irlanda e Italia, e delle immagini italiane dell'Isola dei Santi, si può far cominciare all'inizio del VII secolo D.C., in epoca longobarda, quando giunse a Bobbio dall'Irlanda (con la Borgogna come tappa intermedia) il monaco Colombano, primo di una lunga serie di missionari *Scoti*, ovvero irlandesi (e poi anche di insegnanti e di torme di pellegrini), a mettere piede nella penisola¹. Per il formarsi delle scarse immagini italiane medievali dell'Irlanda contò più la diffusione, da parte di questi Irlandesi, della propria particolare agiografia, che non le loro buone opere e la loro presenza. Questi scritti agiografici di origine irlandese, che divennero popolarissimi in tutta Europa, sussumevano cristianizzandoli anche altri generi letterari dell'isola verde, come ad esempio gli *immrama*, resoconti di viaggi favolosi, nella *Navigatio Sancti Brandani*; e come i racconti mitico-magici sulle prove dell'eroe e sulla sua visita nel *sí* (l'aldilà fiabesco dei Celti), nella *Visio Tungdali* e nel *Purgatorium Sancti Patricii*². La ricezione dell'agiografia irlandese alto-medievale ha lasciato una eredità permanente nella nostra letteratura: già nel secolo scorso diversi nostri filologi si domandavano se Dante Alighieri avrebbe potuto concepire il suo aldilà senza conoscere il *Purgatorium Sancti Patricii*³. Il *Purgatorium* è del resto una presenza costante nella letteratura italiana medievale, rinascimentale e barocca, e l'agiografia irlandese ha contribuito a una parte delle immagini italiane medievali dell'Irlanda, quella che si può riassumere nella ariostesca «Ibernia fabulosa», terra ai confini del mondo dove tutto è possibile: «E vide Ibernia fabulosa, dove / il santo vecchiar el fece la cava, / in che tanta mercé par che si truove / che l'uom vi purga ogni sua colpa prava» (e si noti anche qui il richiamo al Purgatorio di san Patrizio)⁴. L'immagine medievale «favolosa» dell'Irlanda prende le mosse anche da alcuni dei *topoi* prediletti dalla parte della tradizione classica rappresentata da Solino (III secolo d.C.), quelli appunto più fiabeschi (ad esempio, le strane proprietà della terra d'Irlanda e delle isolette

circumvicine). Il *Polychronicon* di Solino era infatti diffusissimo nel nostro medioevo: nel suo «giro del mondo» Fazio Degli Uberti elegge proprio Solino sua guida, come Dante elegge Virgilio. Di tali *topoi* favolosi si può sospettare, per le innegabili coincidenze con il contenuto di alcune raccolte irlandesi alto-medievali, che le fonti originarie potessero essere proprio le narrazioni favolistiche e mitologiche dei bardi celtici. L'immagine dell'Irlanda favolosa si rafforza poi tramite la propagazione del «ciclo bretone» (o celtico) del romanzo cavalleresco e le sue versioni e imitazioni, italiane, di larghissima diffusione anche prima dell'introduzione della stampa. Ne fanno fede testi come la *Leggenda di Tristano*, del XIII secolo⁵, e come *I Reali di Francia*⁶ e il romanzo popolare *Il Guerin Meschino*, entrambi del toscano Andrea da Barberino, dell'inizio del XV secolo. Nel *Guerin Meschino* e nelle sue prime edizioni a stampa la leggenda del Purgatorio di Patrizio è integralmente recepita. Ma nelle edizioni posteriori quei capitoli sono censurati per timore dell'Inquisizione, dal momento che nel 1497 papa Alessandro VI aveva fatto distruggere la cella sotterranea sull'isoletta del Lough Derg, proibendovi il pellegrinaggio e il rito d'incubazione in quanto truffaldini e superstiziosi⁷. Il tema continua ad affiorare in seguito nelle opere italiane di questo genere poetico, fino all'*Orlando Innamorato* (1495) di Matteo Maria Boiardo e, appunto, all'*Orlando Furioso* dell'Ariosto. Comunque, se si prescinde dal riferimento al Purgatorio, nell'insieme di questa letteratura d'intrattenimento l'Irlanda è soltanto caratterizzata come terra lontana (intercambiabile, quindi, con ogni altra), e i personaggi irlandesi, comunque di sfondo e privi di spessore, non hanno nulla che li contraddistingua.

A partire dal XII secolo, con l'invasione anglo-normanna dell'Irlanda, si diffondono in Italia altri motivi riguardanti l'isola e i suoi abitanti, che pur insistendo sugli elementi 'meravigliosi' dell'isola ne introducono altri in parte più realistici (e certo più truci) di quelli meramente favolosi, e che sono il frutto della lettura degli scritti cronachistici e di propaganda anglo-normanni, largamente diffusi in tutta Europa. Si fa infatti subito palese, negli scritti italiani del tardo medioevo e della prima età moderna, una filiazione diretta dalle due opere in latino sull'Irlanda del XII secolo di Gerald del Galles (o *Giraldus Cambrensis*), il propagandista anglo-normanno dei diritti di conquista della Corona d'Inghilterra, che a più di quattro secoli di distanza dalla stesura della *Topographia Hibernica* e della *Expugnatio Hibernica* continuerà ad essere considerato la fonte più autorevole sull'Irlanda⁸. Gerald il Gallese, accompagnato da altri propagandisti anglo-normanni dello stesso periodo, come William di Malmesbury, raccoglie, accredita e diffonde in Europa, contro Irlandesi, Scozzesi e Gallesi restii alla sottomissione, molti temi, poco complimentosi con i Celti, ripresi dalla tradizione classica. Alla fine del XII secolo, quando Gerald scriveva, già da un paio di secoli non erano presenti in Italia molti Irlandesi⁹; ma dall'inizio del XIII secolo si riaprì un rapporto diretto tra l'Italia settentrionale e l'Irlanda, quando un consistente numero di mercanti italiani (tutti però chiamati «Lombardi» nei documenti coevi) si stabilirono

in alcune città dell'isola, sempre sulle orme della conquista anglo-normanna. La loro presenza è stata oggetto di studi nel nostro secolo¹⁰; anche il volume del primo ambasciatore d'Italia in Irlanda, Vincenzo Berardis, sul rapporto tra Italia e Irlanda nel medioevo, toccava necessariamente il tema. Come riferiva anche il Berardis, pare proprio che l'epurativo santuario patriciano sia stato, per secoli, mèta di un viavai di Italiani; strano quindi lo scarso rilievo che le opere generali sui pellegrinaggi nell'Europa medievale oggi conferiscono al pozzo del Lough Derg¹¹. Tra questi Italiani, nel 1358, si recò al 'purgatorio' anche il signore di Rimini Malatesta l'Ungaro, accompagnato dal ferrarese Niccolò de Beccari, fratello del rimatore Antonio¹². Anche Jacopo da Varagine, autore della *Legenda aurea* in cui viene riportato il *Purgatorium*, sembra che andasse in qualità di pellegrino al Lough Derg; mentre un monaco certosino di Roma del tardo XIV secolo, tale Giovanni, tanto bramava recarvisi che intendeva compiere il viaggio anche contro il divieto dei suoi superiori, e solo santa Caterina da Siena riuscì a dissuaderlo¹³.

Alcuni di questi pellegrini lasciarono qualche testimonianza scritta, anche se la sola di sicura attribuzione giunta fino a noi è quella del mercante fiorentino Antonio Mannini (della grande famiglia di commercianti e magistrati del libero Comune), che nel novembre 1411 era giunto pellegrino al pozzo di san Patrizio dopo un lungo viaggio intrapreso a quel fine da Dublino, ove allora risiedeva. Il resoconto di Mannini è la lettera che egli inviò non appena rientrato a Dublino, nello stesso 1411, all'amico Corso Rustichi. Antonio Mannini descriveva con grande vividezza tutte le fasi del rito di incubazione che veniva allora praticato nell'isola del Lough Derg, e la sconvolgente esperienza mistica che aveva vissuto in quel luogo, dalla quale «riuscì segnato»: un'esperienza forte, completa di apparizioni demoniache. Mannini non presta però particolare attenzione, almeno nella lettera a noi pervenuta, a quanto aveva visto durante il suo viaggio di tre mesi e mezzo per raggiungere il 'purgatorio' e tornarne. Certo risulta che la Dublino («Divellino») in cui il pio mercante risiedeva per gli affari della società di famiglia era un luogo pienamente integrato nella rete dei traffici dell'epoca, al cui sovrintendente o sindaco («mere») ci si rivolgeva per attestazioni o certificati, secondo l'incidentale testimonianza del Mannini; meno familiari le vie «pericolose per molte cagioni» che si dipartivano dalla città...¹⁴.

Un secolo dopo il nunzio pontificio in Inghilterra Francesco Chiericati, vicentino, in una lettera indirizzata alla sua patrona, la marchesa Isabella d'Este, moglie del signore di Mantova, Francesco Gonzaga, descrisse invece il nuovo Purgatorio di san Patrizio gestito dagli agostiniani, e ciò nel 1517, solo venti anni dopo la distruzione di quello originario¹⁵. Ma, a differenza di Mannini, oltre che del centro culturale del Lough Derg Chiericati riferiva anche di quanto aveva visto della vita irlandese, ponendo in risalto la differenza tra le parti dell'Irlanda sotto l'influenza inglese e quelle in mano ai Gaeli. Così ad Armagh, scriveva il prelado vicentino, «cominciamo a trover gente bestiale»;

il Fermanagh «è pieno de ladri et de boschi, lagi et paludi», mentre nel Tyrone «termina il dominio di Anglia», e Omagh è «pur pieno di ladri et ribaldi». In quelle zone in certe conchiglie di fiume si trovavano le perle cosiddette scozzesi, che secondo Chiericati nascono dalle nebbie: il sole liquefa tali brume, e le gocce che ne risultano cadono nell'acqua, e se per caso colpiscono una conchiglia aperta formano il primo nucleo intorno a cui cresce poi la perla. Cosa singolare per un nunzio pontificio, Chiericati sembra del tutto ignaro del fatto che Alessandro VI avesse ordinato la distruzione del 'purgatorio' originario, compiuta il giorno di San Patrizio del 1497, e che quello che visitava ne era soltanto una copia novella: per cui, temendo i fenomeni straordinari associati al pozzo originario, si astenne dal farsi calare in quello nuovo, a differenza di due dei suoi accompagnatori (segno che gli agostiniani che lo gestivano fingevano che fosse quello antico, e che producesse gli stessi fenomeni). Altrettanto singolare il fatto che Chiericati ignorasse che le arcidiocesi irlandesi erano quattro (e non le tre che egli indica nella lettera). «Il quale loco [la grotta, o pozzo] non ho possuto veder per non haver voluto mirar drento, spaventato da le cose, che si dice: ma stetti lontano da la porta tre passi», scrive il Chiericati, lamentando, rispetto alla penitenza dei suoi accompagnatori, che «la maior penitentia la fu mia a doversi expectare quasi per dieci iorni, ne li quali ne manchò gran parte de la victuaglia». Il Nunzio descriveva nei dettagli il santuario e i riti di espiazione che precedevano le ventiquattro ore da passare nudi e digiuni nel pozzo, e il libro (oggi perduto) «nel quale sono descripti tucti [i pellegrini] chi vano». Con sua grande sorpresa, «Il primo descripto fu Guarino da Durazzo [il Guerin Meschino], qual io cresi esser fabule. Ma adesso ivi l'ho visto descripto antiquamente in un libro pergamenno». Sulla via del ritorno, giunto a Downpatrick, Chiericati fu ospite del vecchissimo vescovo locale Tiberio Ugolino, che era di Viterbo¹⁶; e visto che la devota popolazione, sapendolo nunzio papale, gli voleva baciare a tutti i costi la veste, «quasi bisognava star in casa per forza, tanta era la molestia sua, che nasceva da una grande religione». Chiericati riassumeva così ciò che aveva visto dell'Irlanda:

La Isola de Hibernia è dreto Scotia et Anglia, et è un terzo più. Lo aere è temperatissimo et più caldo, che non è in Anglia, che è assai mirabile. Il re [d'Inghilterra] ne possiede una terza parte, cioè li lochi maritimi. Il resto è in mano de diversi signori, che sono poco più onorevoli de li n[ost]ri contadini. Dicono, che il Papa è il suo Re. Et li altri sui signori così ne le loro monete usano le chiave con le tre corone papale. Il Conte de Childaria [= Kildare] è il primo signor de tutti et è homo da assai et ha tucta la civiltà de Inghilterra. Così anche sono quelli de lochi maritimi. Il paese comunemente è povero, salvo che de pesce, animali e polli. Un bove val un ducato, un par de caponi dui dinari, che sono mezo carlino, de pesce apena che se ne trova a dinari; le genti sono versutissime et ingeniosissime et valeno molto ne le arme, perché sempre se esercitano in guerra fra loro, vivono de pane de avena, bevono la maggior parte lacte o acqua.

Descritte le tuniche zafferano indossate dai Gaeli di entrambi i sessi, e le «bellissime et candidissime» donne sorridenti, il nunzio riferiva della mentalità

irlandese (o, forse, di come gliela descrivevano i suoi accompagnatori inglesi o anglo-irlandesi):

Sono persone de molta religion, ma il furto non hanno per peccato, né li puniscono. Dicono, che noi siamo bestiali a far proprietà de beni de la fortuna et che loro vivono naturalmente, che ogni cosa deve andare in comune. Et per questa causa vi sono tanti ladri, che gran pericol di spoglio se non di morte vi è a passar il paese senza gran guardia. Ne li luochi più superiori verso septentrione sono più bestiali, come ho inteso, vano nudi, habitano in caverne de monti, et manzano carne cruda.

Immagini che ritroviamo puntualmente nei cronisti inglesi di epoca Tudor, e soprattutto elisabettiani (e nei loro trascrittori italiani), e che indubbiamente riflettevano, oltre alla realtà del conflitto etnico, lo scontro tra il diritto feudale inglese e il diritto tribale gaelico.

Si poteva trovare già due secoli prima una simile commistione tra elementi vagamente realistici e la citazione delle mirabilie dell'Irlanda nella descrizione dell'isola che compariva nel *Dittamondo* (XIV secolo) del pisano Fazio Degli Uberti, in cui però l'autore non sembrava prendere molto sul serio ciò che diceva, né cercare di spacciarlo come veridico, in quello che appare un gioco continuo con i lettori (che egli probabilmente si aspettava ammirassero la sua abilità di verseggiatore, più che credere al contenuto del poema). Nel *Dittamondo* si nota la confusione che il nuovo nome germanico di «Irlanda» aveva creato, nel sovrapporsi al più antico «Hibernia». Infatti l'Irlanda nel *Dittamondo* sembra essere un'isola diversa dalla «Ibernia» (tale confusione assume anche altre forme in quel periodo: nei *Reali di Francia* di Andrea da Barberino l'«Irlanda» è una città dell'«Hibernia»): «L'isola è poi d'Inghilterra e d'Irlanda, / Ibernia, Scozia e, ne l'ultimo, è Tile, / che più gente non so da quella banda»¹⁷. Prova di un'ulteriore confusione, quella sopravvenuta nel XII secolo tra Scozia e Irlanda, è che nel *Dittamondo* la stessa Scozia è trasformata in isola: Fazio Degli Uberti, lettore di Isidoro di Siviglia oltre che di Solino e di Pomponio Mela, credette che la «Scotia» isidoriana, che era l'Irlanda, fosse la Scozia dei suoi (e nostri) tempi. Così l'«Irlanda» di Fazio è un paese reale e realistico, ben noto ai mercanti 'Lombardi' (quelli dell'Italia del nord, Toscana compresa) per la sua produzione di tessuti di lana, le «sarge»: «Similmente passammo in Irlanda / la qual fra noi è degna di fama / per le nobili sarge che ci manda». Al contrario l'«Ibernia», dove Fazio e la sua guida Solino si dirigono subito dopo, è in gran parte quella soliniana, che viene però molto ingentilita rispetto all'originale:

Ibernia ora qui ci aspetta e chiama / e, benché 'l navicar là sia con rischio, / la ragion fu qui vinta da la brama. / Diversi venti con muggi e con fischio / soffiavan per quel mare, andando a piaggia, / lo qual di scogli e di gran sassi è mischio. / Questa gente, benché mostri selvaggia / e, per li monti, la contrada acerba, / non di meno ella è dolce a chi l'assaggia. / Quivi son gran pasture e piene d'erba / e la terra

si buona, che Cerera / niente a l'arte sua mostrar si serba. / Quivi par sempre, come
in primavera, / un'aire temperata che gli appaghi, / con chiare fonti e con belle rivera.

La descrizione del mare, sempre in tempesta e quasi intransitabile, che circonda l'«Hibernia», è tratta fedelmente da Solino; al contrario gli abitanti, che pur vivono in un paese selvaggio e aspro per via dei monti, non sono feroci e bellicosi come quelli di cui racconta Solino, ma ospitali (*gente dolce*) con il forestiero (questo mutamento di immagini era forse prodotto dal ricordo delle opere di monaci e santi irlandesi). Ricompare il tema dell'Irlanda 'fertile' e dai pascoli ricchissimi cara a una parte della tradizione antica, quella rappresentata da Mela e Solino e ripresa da Orosio e Isidoro, e ricompare il clima temperato orosiano. Ed ecco l'elencazione dei laghi e delle isole delle meraviglie, in parte tratta dall'opera di Gerald del Galles, in parte dal *Polychronicon* in latino iniziato da un contemporaneo di Fazio, il monaco benedettino inglese Ranulf Higden (1299-1363), e rapidissimamente diffuso in tutta Europa:

Quivi vid'io di più natura laghi / e un fra gli altri che sì mi contenta, / ch'ancor
diletto n'han gli occhi miei vaghi. / Dico, se un legno vi si ficchi, doventa / in breve
ferro quanto ne sta in terra / e pietra ciò che l'acqua bagna e tenta. / La parte sopra,
che sol l'aire serra, / da la natura sua non cambia verso, / ma tal qual vi si mette se ne
afferra. / Un altro ve ne vidi assai diverso: / che, qual vi pono di cornio una verghetta, /
frassin diventa quella ed e converso. / Ancora vi trovammo un'isoletta, / là dove l'uomo
mai morir non puote, / ma, quando in transir sta, fuor se ne getta. / E sonvi ancora
caverne remote / dove niun corpo si corrompe mai, / sì temperata l'aire vi percolte.

Due diversi laghi che pietrificano ciò che vi viene immerso sono presenti nella *Topographia* dell'anglo-normanno Gerald, uno nell'Ulster e uno in Norvegia: ma in questa versione, con la parte del legno che resta a terra trasformata in ferro, Fazio Degli Uberti ha seguito invece Higden, come per il lago che trasmuta il legno di corniolo in legno di frassino. Riprese integralmente da Gerald sono invece l'isola dove non si muore mai, e le isole Aran ove i corpi non si corrompono, trasformate in «caverne» dal poeta pisano. Che però questa «Ibernia» diversa dall'«Irlanda» abbia comunque a che fare con l'Irlanda medievale storica è mostrato dal seguito, in cui, dopo un richiamo all'abbondanza del bestiame, compare il Purgatorio di san Patrizio:

Carne e frutti diversi vi trovai, / c'hanno per cibo, e il latte per potò, / del quale
senza fallo n'hanno assai. / Così cercando il paese rimoto / e dimandando, ci fu dato
indizio / d'un monister molto santo e divoto. / Là ci traemmo e là fu il nostro ospizio.
/ Poi que' buoni frati al pozzo ci menaro, / lo qual dà fama al beato Patrizio.

Il poeta chiede ai frati se può tentare la prova del pozzo, ma quelli lo dissuadono, spiegandogli che solo uno su cento è sufficientemente «netto e puro, / costante e pien di fede» da sopravvivere all'assalto infernale.

E qui da' frati / preso commiato, li lasciammo stare. / Così passammo monti, ville e prati / e trovammo le genti, che vi stanno, / più ch'ad altro lavoro al cacciar dati. / Perle, gagate e assai metalli v'hanno / e sassagos, la cui natura è propria / che, poste al sole, l'arco del ciel fanno. / L'isola, per lunghezza, vi si copia / di cento venti miglia e 'l nome ad essa / quel d'Ibero oceano li s'appropia.

Le ricchezze minerarie poste da Fazio nella sua «Ibernia» sono tratte da Higden, come il *sassagone*, che in Higden è semplicemente un cristallo di quarzo esagonale; mentre è evidente la lettura delle fantasiose *Etimologie* di Isidoro di Siviglia, secondo cui il nome «Hibernia» deriva dal suo affacciarsi sul mare verso l'Iberia. Ci si può chiedere se le due Irlande di Fazio Degli Uberti, l'«Irlanda» e l'*Ibernia*, pur derivate da un fraintendimento toponomastico e geografico, non mostrino anche la confusa percezione di due diverse realtà fattuali: l'Irlanda sotto controllo inglese, concreta e dal punto di vista mercantile collegata all'Europa, sotto l'etichetta dell'«Irlanda» del poeta pisano; e l'Irlanda indipendente dei Gaeli, che Fazio chiama invece «Ibernia», paese sfumato e poco conosciuto dove tutto è possibile, ma dove anche si trova realmente il *Purgatorium Sancti Patricii*, mèta di pellegrinaggi. A fianco della visione favolosa dell'Irlanda sono infatti talvolta presenti, nell'Italia medievale e rinascimentale, anche elementi più realistici. Ad esempio l'Irlanda compare nella ottava novella della seconda giornata del *Decamerone* (1353) di Giovanni Boccaccio: ma per il Boccaccio l'isola è un qualunque paese del mondo cristiano del suo tempo, uno sfondo non particolarmente esotico, raggiungibile da qualunque mercante, anche se un po' fuori mano.

All'Irlanda quale landa dell'immaginario (simile alle terre del mitico Prete Gianni) appartengono invece gli «Iberni» celliniani, doverosamente dotati di coda. Questi Irlandesi non compaiono però in un poema cavalleresco, ma in una serissima lezione (per nulla fantasiosa nelle intenzioni) sulla rappresentazione del corpo umano nel disegno; Benvenuto Cellini nel 1565 sostiene di averne visto la coda con i propri occhi: «et io l'ho veduta che ella apparisce lunga quattro dita a quella sorte di uomini, che si dicono gli Iberni, e paiono cosa mostruosa, ma» – li giustifica il Fiorentino, con sicuro intuito naturalistico, riprendendo un *topos* sul freddo dell'Irlanda già presente in Strabone – «è non è altro, che quello che ti dico: che dove da noi ella volge in dentro, a loro la natura del gran freddo la fa volgere in fuori»¹⁸.

Sul registro del fantastico continuava a tenersi anche, nel 1594, Torquato Tasso, in un elenco di laghi prodigiosi nel mondo nel poema 'sacro' *Il Mondo Creato*, riprendendo dal cosmografo D'Anania lo stereotipo geraldiano dell'isola lacustre in cui non sarebbe possibile morire: «L'ha quel d'Ibernia, ov'uom languente ed egro / non può stanco spirar lo spirito e l'alma, / se quindi non è tratto»¹⁹.

2

La Riforma anglicana e le guerre di religione: nasce l'«Irlanda cattolica»

Il grande viavai tra l'Irlanda e l'Europa di aristocratici e sacerdoti irlandesi che cercavano di mobilitare le potenze cattoliche in favore della loro causa (e di agenti pontifici e delle potenze cattoliche che tentavano di usare l'isola come leva contro l'Inghilterra riformata), prodotto dalle guerre elisabettiane per il completamento della conquista inglese dell'Irlanda, non sembra abbia avuto grande influenza sul teorico della Controriforma Giovanni Botero. Infatti, nella sua descrizione dell'Irlanda contenuta nelle *Relationi Universali*, dalla fine del Cinquecento (1595) all'ultima delle edizioni da lui curate (quella del 1618)²⁰, Botero mescola una scarsa porzione di dati e motivi realistici (nell'insieme aggiornati), con altri tratti di peso dagli scritti di quattro secoli prima di Gerald del Galles, che nomina come autorità, e da Strabone. Così se l'inizio della descrizione è realistico, Botero vira subito verso il fantastico, riprendendo da Gerald un riferimento leggendario al lago Erne: «Del quale scriue Giraldo Cambrese, che nel sito, oue egli giace, non v'era altro, che un fonte, ma per li peccati detestabili de gli habitanti, proruppe in un subito tanta copia d'acque, che ne sommerse tutta quella contrada: e sino al presente si veggono sotto l'acque i campanili delle Chiese»²¹. Poi Botero passa di nuovo a un registro realistico, di sicuro tratto dai cronisti e geografi tudoriani, in particolare dall'anglo-irlandese cattolico Richard Stonyhurst (e anche dalla lettura del suo predecessore Gian Lorenzo D'Anania):

La parte più habitata di questa isola è l'orientale, e la meridionale fino a' confini di Mononia [Munster]; nel quale spatio sono due Arciuescouati, Armagnac [Armagh], che è la metropoli, e Cassel [Cashel]. sotto Armagnac, sono le città orientali: sotto Cassel le meridionali. quelle sono noue, queste otto. ma la città più importante, e più nobile si è Dublin, Arciuescouato, con quattro soffraganei, a' quali soggiacciono le parti più ciuili, e più habitate. oltre a questi, vi è la Metropoli Tuomense [di Tuam] con sei Vescouati. Ma le altre, che sono verso settentrione, e ponente, Vltonia [Ulster], Connacchia [Connacht], Mononia, ubbidiscono a diuersi signori, assicurati da paludi, e laghi, e boschi, che sono le loro fosse, e terrapieni, e castella: ma più dal la pouertà; non vi essendo che guadagnare con esso loro: e sono più sicuri di estate, che d'inuerno: perche l'acque, che d'inuerno agghiacciano, d'estate allagano i campi. E questi più che gli altri si sono mantenuti nella sincerità della fede Catolica, contra l'arti, e tirannie usate da gl'Inglesi per infettarli dell'empietà di Caluino, e di Zuinglio.

L'ideologo controriformista nota così, quasi di sfuggita, che i capitribù irlandesi che si oppongono al dominio inglese in Irlanda («più che gli altri», che invece lo accettano) sono di religione cattolica, e che l'Inghilterra tudoriana di Enrico VIII ed Elisabetta ha usato in Irlanda «arti e tirannie» per imporre la Riforma anglicana. Il perché di questo relativo disinteresse per gli Irlandesi (infatti descrivendo altri paesi, come la Germania e la stessa Inghilterra, Botero si diffonde lungamente sulla Riforma e sulle lotte in corso) viene spiegato

implicitamente nelle frasi successive, in cui vengono ripresi i motivi preferiti della tradizione antica sull'Irlanda, pur con qualche specificazione restrittiva:

Gli habitanti, che come scriue Strabone, stimauano cosa laudabile il mangiare i loro genitori morti, hanno ancora dell'agreste, e del saluatico assai. Sono nimici della fatica, e da poco. Egli è vero, che quei, che habitano alla marina, hanno, per la pratica de i forestieri, dell'amoreuole, e del ciuile tanto quanto. Nella guerra, alla quale vanno disarmati [qui si intende 'senza armature'], usano lance, saette, et accette. caualcano senza sella, e senza sproni: e fanno fare a i caualli quello, che vogliono, con una verga curua in punta, e co' freni, ò più presto capestri.

Giacché essi sono dei selvaggi, come sostenevano gli antichi, e per giunta (questo da Gerald e dai suoi discendenti inglesi e anglo-irlandesi) selvaggi fannulloni e dappoco, la resistenza degli Irlandesi all'Inghilterra riformata non può portare allori alla causa della Controriforma europea, e pertanto non conviene soffermarsi su di essa. Botero conclude il suo resoconto riferendo le meraviglie dell'Irlanda (Purgatorio di Patrizio compreso), traendole tutte da Gerald, con uno scetticismo che si può appena intuire da come inizia il suo periodo: «Di quest'isola si contano cose, per le quali l'Ariosto la chiamò fauolosa»²². La mappa geografica che nelle *Relationi Universali* raffigura le Isole britanniche è invece tutta 'realistica', secondo la cartografia dell'epoca, e aggiornata.

Era stato più misurato, pochi decenni prima del Botero, il teologo calabrese Gian Lorenzo D'Anania, dedicando all'Irlanda alcune pagine della sua *Cosmografia*, in cui citava tra le sue fonti «Girardo Cambiense» e William of Malmesbury, ma senza dare precise indicazioni sulle fonti delle notizie contemporanee sulla situazione dell'isola, pure presenti nel suo lavoro²³. Certo compaiono le fantasie medioevali diffuse da Gerald: «l'Isola d'Hirlanda, che i paesani hor nomano Erin», riferisce D'Anania, «non soffre cosa velenosa; anzi la terra, che se ne porta altroue, si fugge da Serpenti, quasi ombra di Frassinio, ouero odore di Cedro: il che altri attribuiscono à i priegi di Santo Patritio, ch'ella ha suo protettore in Cielo; et altri à celeste influxo»; e tra le altre 'marauiglie' non possono mancare quelle relative a san Patrizio:

[...] ne è senza qualche marauiglia: perciò che vi s'afferma scorrere alcuni fiumi, che conuertono per cagione delle minere, onde sorgono, le pietre in ferro; et altri, che muttano il legno in sasso, e dentro vna Isoletta del lago, che i paesani dimandano Foilo, il quale giace nell'Haultonia, par che quei, che stanno nel fine della vita, non possano spirare l'alma, senon sono trasportati altroue di fuori del lago, sentendo frà tanto così grande angoscia, e tormento, che paiono incompatibili: ne ciò lor accade, come gli antichi han finto succedere nell'estreme parti della Spagna pur à coloro, che si trouano nel medesimo affanno, crescendo l'Oceano quasi che per simil accidente si impedissero l'anime dall'aere, che si condensa per tale aumento, che non potessero partirsi da i corpi, come ch'esse fussero di sostanza corporea, e non come sono d'essenza spirituale; ma per oculto mestiero della diuina prouidenza; doue non essendo cose naturali, gli occhi della ragione vi s'abbagliano, quasi notturno

vccello per li raggi del Sole, et anco entro vn'altra Isoletta, indi non molto lontana, il famoso tempio di S. Patritio; doue non è animale, ch'entrandoui, non muoia subito, e pur nella Momonia vn viuo fonte: che chiunque vi si laua la faccia, diuenta quasi vecchio canuto con capei bianchi, et al rincontro nell'Ultonia vn'altro, che fa il contrario effetto. Di più vi si fauella del purgatorio di S. Patritio, che'n terrore, et spauento raguaglia l'antica spelonca di Trifonio, poiche, chiunque entra per humana curiosità in alcuna delle sue noue grotte, che'n tante s'afferma essere diuiso da i proprij Hirlanesi, resta, ritornato in se, rappresentandosegli diuerse imagini nella fantasia delle pene, e martirij, che sogliono patire l'anime, dell'inferno, gran tempo pensoso, et attonito. Il qual luogo si horribile narrano esser stato dimostro dall'Angelo à S. Patritio, mentre quelli Barbari cercauano, per conuertirsi, alcuni segni di quel, ch'egli predicaua, trattando delle pene, che si patono nell'altra vita da tristi, et infedeli, che non entrano nel lume dell'Euangelo.

E non poteva mancare la creazione miracolosa e castigante del Lough Erne:

Indi si ritroua nel continente il lago d'Erno, che molti affermano, essendo stato prima un picciolo fonte, esser sorto in tanta grandezza, come hor si vede, per la nefanda bestialità de' paesani: il che pare verisimile, veggendouisi su l'aere sereno molte habitationi; e l'incorruttibilità dei corpi, dal D'Anania attribuita alle isole Aran: «l'isole Arrane, i cui paesani non sepeliscono i loro morti ne' cimiteri, ò nelle Chiese (come si costuma tra' fedeli) per essere luogo sacro, tanto temuto dal Demonio; ma gli riserbano entro i loro giardini, oue, essendo incorrotti per lo gran freddo, possono i successori vedere con lungo ordine i loro progenitori.

Ma il D'Anania introduceua l'isola con una attenta descrizione della sua collocazione geografica, tra Terranova, Gran Bretagna, Islanda e penisola iberica, delle sue dimensioni, delle «quattro regioni» in cui è suddivisa («Connatia», «Momonia», «Liginia», e «Hultonia», nelle quali ripartisce i popoli antichi menzionati nella *Geografia* di Tolomeo), del suo clima, delle sue ricchezze naturali e dei suoi prodotti, della velocità del pony irlandese, e della ferocia e grandezza dei suoi uccelli rapaci e dei suoi cani da guerra. L'elenco delle città e dei luoghi geografici è anch'esso dettagliato, seguendo ordinatamente la costa e poi l'interno dell'isola. In esso compaiono tra gli altri luoghi «Dondalca, Drodagga, et Dublin città regia con la guardia d'Inglesi; Vesforda, Guaterforda città molto nobile, con le case gran parte fabricate di marmo fino azzurro», «Corca molto mercantile», e «Armagh, doue faceua, essendo Metropoli, residenza il loro prencipe, che si gloriaua hauer'ottenuta la corona regia dal Papa». Ma l'aspetto più interessante della descrizione di D'Anania riguarda la popolazione irlandese:

Ma quanto alle genti, et sue qualità, sono gli Herlandesi di statura alti, et robusti, bianchi, e biondi, con gli occhi azurigni, ma di costumi diuersi, e nell'habiti varij; percioche quei, che stanno ne i mediterrani, son mezo seluaggi, rozi, e d'animo fieri; cosi leggieri di corpo, et agili, che correndo auanzano lor Hobbee, ch'essi caualcano senza sella, vsando per sproni vna verga curua in punta; portano comunemente le

loro vestimenta di tela gialla, con la portatura alla Cingaresca; coprendosi d'alcuni tabbari molto grossali, che lor serueno per stramazzi [si tratta del plaid a quadrettoni tartan, che Irlandesi e Scozzesi usavano anche come sacco a pelo]: si diletano de' capei lunghi, e sparsi, e finalmente nel conuersare son del tutto Barbarj. Ma gli altri, i quali habitano nelle Città maritime, sono per la conuersatione de i forastieri, ciuili, et amoreuoli, e vesteno quasi all'Inglese: i nobili attendono alle cacciagioni, et alla musica, e taluolta alla guerra, doue vanno con dardi, spade, et lunghe lanze, vsando per tamburi zampogne. Sono tanto vaghi della libertà, che si contentano più tosto morire, che soffrire seruitù. Hor hanno due metropolitani, quel d'Armagh, e quel di Cassel, liquali iui sogliono essere, come nelle bande Orientali, gran parte Monaci; a cui portano questi Hirlandesi tanto rispetto, che si può con loro guida caminare per tutto da forastieri, con tutto ch'essi siano molto dediti a' latrocinij. Danno grandemente opera a gli studij della Theologia Scolastica, che gli è cagione, che sian rimasti molti di loro Catholici insin adesso: in oltre haueano, non è gran tempo, gli Herlandesi il proprio Re: hor sono sotto il dominio de gli Inglesi, essendosene impatroniti; mentre gli chiamarono contro il Re di Scotia [forse un riferimento alla spedizione in Irlanda di Edward Bruce contro gli Inglesi]: se ben alcuni Signori, i quali habitano entro terra, non conoscono taluolta superiore gente forastiera; rendendosi sicuri, parte, perche son valorosi, et essercitati nella militia: parte ancora, perche son circondati da molte paludi, laghi, e boschi, che lor serueno per castella, e fortezze, et massime à tempo d'estate: quando non vi si può marciare con essercito per la gran copia del fango.

Si noti qui come nel testo del cosmografo e teologo calabrese compaia probabilmente la prima menzione italiana dell'aver gli Irlandesi in maggioranza respinto la Riforma anglicana, «che sian rimasti molti di loro Catholici insin adesso»: fatto ch'egli attribuiva ai loro studi teologici!

Seguendo la falsariga del D'Anania, le immagini realistiche dell'Irlanda prevalgono anche a Venezia alla fine del XVI secolo, negli 'aggiornamenti' di diverse edizioni della *Geografia* di Tolomeo, che era uno dei 'bestsellers' dell'epoca. La prima delle 'aggiunte' significative è opera di Giovanni Antonio Magini «Padovano, Publico Matematico nello Studio di Bologna», curatore dell'edizione della *Geografia* del 1596²⁴. Nella sua *Nuova Descrizione dell'Isole Britannice* il Magini ripropone una descrizione fisica dell'*Ibernia* e delle sue fauna, flora, e ricchezze naturali; l'opera segue, generalmente, gli autori antichi e Gerald del Galles, ma aggiunge dettagli ricavati dalla prima edizione della descrizione dell'Irlanda di Stonyhurst (1577) e da quella (1586) della *Britannia* di William Camden. Vale la pena, invece, riportare nel loro ordine le descrizioni che Magini fa degli Irlandesi. Riguardo agli Irlandesi antichi Magini riassume con efficacia le immagini presenti negli autori greci e latini («Costumi de gli antichi Iberni»):

Anticamente gli Habitatori di quest'Isola erano rozi, ignoranti di tutte le buone arti, non voleuano ricettare forastiero alcuno, inhumani, empij, soleuano mescolarsi con le mogli altrui, con le loro proprie madri, e con le sorelle, erano Antropofagi, cioè, mangiatori di carni humane; cosa laquale anco attesta S. Girolamo, dicendo,

che da giouanetto vide queste genti tagliar via le natiche a' pastori, & alle femine le poppe, stimando queste sole delicie de' cibi.

Degli Irlandesi suoi contemporanei («Moderni costumi d'Iberni»), Magini però scrive:

Ma hora sono bellicosissimi, ingegnosi, bellissimoi di lineamenti di corpo, morbidissimi di carne, incredibilmente agili per la tenerezza de' Muscoli, e brauamente piegano, come vogliono, tutte le parti del corpo loro. Sono di natura più calda, e più humida de gli altri popoli, ciò si raccoglie dalla marauigliosa mollicie della lor carne. Si diuidono in Ibernici seluaggi, li quali sono detti Irishrie, e volgarmente Vuild Irish, & in Ibernici Angli. Questi hanno per santa l'auttorità delle Leggi, si lasciano giudicare, e sono amoreuoli, e ciuili; & à questi come à più trattabili, e ricchi, vengono le più volte gli Angli à trafficare, onde eglino facilmente imprendono i loro costumi, & in gran parte intendono la loro lingua, per l'assiduo commercio.

Poi Magini descrive i costumi degli Irlandesi più interessanti, quelli «selvaggi», restii alla 'civiltà' inglese («Ibernici seluaggi»), riproponendo anche, *verbatim*, alcune frasi di Gerald del Galles e sottolineando la loro «superstitione» e la loro barbarie:

Ma gli Ibernici seluaggi, che habitano, per il più, la Connacia [Connacht], sono fieri, & aspri, d'ingegno di bestia, non d'huomo. In qualche luogo se ne ritrouano di più inculti, che con marauigliosa diuersità di natura, & amano lo stare scioperato, & odiano il riposo. Nel vero sono tanto dediti all'ocio, che reputano grandissime ricchezze il non far nulla, e stimano somme delicie il godere la libertà. Iberni superstitosi. E la dolcezza della loro innata Poltroneria così fattamente gli intertiene, che anzi vogliono andar accattando il viuere ad vscio, ad vscio [alla giornata], che discacciare da se la pouertà con l'honeste fatiche, oltra modo s'ingombrano di superstitione, perche frà essi trouansi delle femine Maghe, & Indouinatrici, che hanno incantesimi efficaci à tutti i mali, onde ciascuno secondo il suo male, à loro và, perche li sia incantato. sono incontinentissimi, e di souerchio vogliosi d'ammogliarsi presto. Là oue à gli huomini si danno fanciulle di dieci, ò dodici anni solamente, quasi [come se fossero] mature. Di rado contragono matrimonij fuori delle terre murate [delle città], ne' quali non di presente promettono, mà di futuro, ò loro assentono senza deliberatione. Perche nata leggierissima lite, il marito se ne và ad albergare con altra donna, e la moglie con altr'huomo, che tutti sopra modo sono inclinati all'incesto, e sotto pretesto di coscienza, fanno spessissimi diuortij. Appresso loro i ladronecci non hanno infamia veruna, ma gli essercitano con somma crudeltà, perche si persuadono, che nè la violenza, nè la rapina, nè l'homicidio, à Dio dispiaccia, anzi più che tosto pensano, che la preda sie un presente, che loro faccia Iddio. Donde n'auuiene, che non perdonano à Chiese, non à sacri luoghi, che li depredano. Si diletmano con tutto ciò della musica, e specialmente del suono della cetra [arpa] da corde di rame, laquale toccano à misure musicali con unghie adunche.

Immagine che, pur sotto la manifesta truce influenza di Gerald, non si distaccava del tutto dalla realtà, e che derivava dalle fonti inglesi più fresche,

contemporanee al Magini. Ma subito dopo, scrivendo della fede cattolica degli Iberni «selvaggi», sulla scorta di Stonyhurst Magini riscatta le descrizioni precedenti, con osservazioni che trovano conferme alla lettera per quanto riguarda la pratica religiosa (o la cosiddetta 'religiosità popolare', termine coniato da cattolici 'moderni') nelle zone 'postceltiche' delle nostre Alpi fino a pochi decenni fa; e vi aggiungeva poche osservazioni sui loro costumi bellici:

Iberni religiosi. Nel restante in sì fatta fierezza, castamente, e puramente osservano la Religione Christiana, e quando alcuno di loro si rende Monaco, egli con certa religiosa austerità, insino à miracolo si contiene, veghiando, orando, e macerandosi con digiuni. Ma le donne per mutar in meglio i maritaggi, e le putte per maritarsi bene, costumano digiunare tutto un'anno il Mercordi, & il Sabato. Militia d'Iberni. Vestono di neri panni, che le pecore di questa terra sono nere, e la loro militia si fa di veterani à cavallo, che usano acutissime scurri, e di pedoni leggiermente armati, che adoprano correggiati dardi. Et in guerra per tromba si seruono della Cornamusa.

Dopo aver riassunto la storia della cristianizzazione dell'Irlanda (per il Magini, opera non di Patrizio, ma «d'una certa donna di nazione Pitta»: tradizione che andrebbe studiata più a fondo), accertato «Quando l'Ibernia cadde sotto'l Re dell'Anglia», nominati gli arcivescovati d'Irlanda, il matematico padovano ricade negli stereotipi soliniani e geraldiani, riferendo le «Cose mirabili d'Ibernia», e prosegue raccontando delle quattro diverse province dell'isola e delle loro ulteriori suddivisioni, viste però con occhio inglese.

Una seconda 'aggiunta' veneziana a Tolomeo, intitolata *Descrittione di tutta la Terra*, è quella del 1598 di Gioseffo Rosaccio alla traduzione della *Geografia* (pubblicata in prima edizione nel 1561) di Girolamo Ruscelli. Vi compaiono gli «Irlandesi selvatici» (in luogo degli *Ibernici seluaggi* del Magini), e vi viene data, seguendo l'esempio di D'Anania, una rappresentazione (che nel Magini mancava) del conflitto religioso tra 'indigeni irlandesi' e Inghilterra²⁵. Di fronte alla pura riproposizione dei motivi del micidiale Gerald del Galles e dei classici antichi, proseguita nei secoli e fino a Botero nei riferimenti episodici all'Irlanda, l'introduzione di immagini così realistiche da parte di questi Veneti dimostra che essi avevano avuto cura di aggiornarsi sulle fonti a stampa più fresche.

Da secoli l'Irlanda non aveva avuto un contatto tanto intenso e continuativo con il continente europeo come dal completamento della conquista elisabettiana, avvenuto nel 1603 (che comportò il crollo dell'ordine sociale gaelico e l'espropriazione o comunque l'emarginazione delle aristocrazie tribali celtiche). Come nell'alto medioevo, ma con numeri molto superiori, un flusso migratorio delle *élites* irlandesi invase i seminari, le corti e anche gli eserciti europei. Roma, la città del papa, fu il crocevia obbligato di questa emigrazione, anche se Francia e Spagna venivano preferiti come luoghi di residenza permanente. I primi esuli irlandesi furono seminaristi e sacerdoti, per i quali si aprirono sul continente numerosi collegi; quello naturalmente

destinato a divenire il più importante fu il Collegio Irlandese di Roma, fondato nel 1626, che fino al XX secolo manterrà un ruolo politico centrale nei rapporti tra Irlanda e Santa Sede (e anche nella formazione di una 'opinione pubblica' italiana sull'Irlanda). La seconda ondata di esuli irlandesi, costituita dai nobili gaelici ribelli e dal loro seguito, giunse in Europa al momento della sconfitta (1603) e negli anni immediatamente successivi, spianando la strada alla colonizzazione britannica e protestante dell'Ulster, iniziata subito dopo; i capi dell'ultima resistenza agli eserciti elisabettiani, Hugh O'Neill e Ruaidhri O'Donnell, scelsero la Roma papale come luogo di esilio. La rivolta irlandese del 1641-1653, intrecciata alla guerra civile inglese, vide (per influenza determinante del francescano irlandese Luke Wadding, residente a Roma) il coinvolgimento diretto della Santa Sede, che inviò come nunzio pontificio in Irlanda l'arcivescovo Giovanni Battista Rinuccini (della cui *Relazione* latina venne pubblicata una traduzione italiana solo nel 1844²⁶), con funzioni direttamente politiche e militari. La riconquista inglese cromwelliana produsse un ulteriore esodo verso il continente: emigrarono più di 30.000 combattenti degli eserciti della «Confederazione cattolica», seguiti quarant'anni dopo, per la sconfitta di Giacomo II nel 1692, da altri 20.000. Ma per i giovani membri della nobiltà gaelica e cattolica espropriata fu cosa comune scegliere l'esilio, e arruolarsi negli eserciti europei (vennero chiamati «ocche selvatiche», *Wild Geese*). La presenza delle *Wild Geese* è segnalata anche in Italia: nella prima metà del XVIII secolo, ad esempio, il Ducato di Parma e Piacenza si avvale di una Guardia Irlandese, composta di alcune compagnie, i cui membri si trasferirono in seguito al servizio del re delle Due Sicilie, Carlo di Borbone²⁷. Nel corso del XVII secolo gli itinerari d'esilio dei *Recusants* ecclesiastici irlandesi continuarono ad avere Roma come punto fisso: anche l'arcivescovo e martire Oliver Plunkett aveva vissuto nel centro del cattolicesimo, compiendo i suoi studi ecclesiastici, come un secolo prima l'altro arcivescovo e martire, Dermot O'Hurley. Gli esuli (e in particolare i sacerdoti) scrissero opuscoli e libri (come ad esempio la *Historiae Catholicae Iberniae Compendium* di Philip O'Sullivan Beare, pubblicata nel 1621; e il *Cambrensis Eversus* di John Lynch, pubblicato nel 1662, che attaccava il primo e principale propagandista della conquista inglese dell'isola), in genere in latino, per informare l'Europa cattolica sulle condizioni dell'Irlanda, vista come diversa dall'Inghilterra non solo per la religione, ma per lingua, costumi e tradizioni: veniva così elaborato per la prima volta un proto-nazionalismo irlandese, gaelico e cattolico, che prevedeva, in base al diritto naturale, l'indipendenza dell'isola dall'Inghilterra. Con tali premesse, è naturale che gli ecclesiastici irlandesi esuli sul continente fossero in contrasto con i loro colleghi inglesi: per i *Recusants* inglesi l'appoggio agli Irlandesi ribelli era lecito solo quale leva da usare per rovesciare i sovrani inglesi protestanti, sostituendoli con sovrani inglesi cattolici; il dominio inglese (beninteso, di un'Inghilterra riconciliata con la Chiesa cattolica e col Papato) sull'Irlanda non era in discussione. Una delle controversie riguardava la bolla

pontificia *Laudabiliter* del 1155, con cui l'unico papa inglese, Adriano IV (al secolo Nicholas Breakspear), aveva nominato «Signori d'Irlanda» Enrico II e i suoi successori. I *Recusants* irlandesi (come Geoffrey Keating e John Lynch) cominciavano a negare l'autenticità della bolla e con essa, di conseguenza, la legittimità di ogni dominio inglese sull'Irlanda, anche nel caso che la monarchia inglese fosse tornata ad essere cattolica. Altri invece, come il cardinale italiano Cesare Baronio (1538-1607) negli *Annales Ecclesiastici*, ma soprattutto gli esuli cattolici inglesi, accettavano l'autenticità della *Laudabiliter* e di conseguenza la legittimità del dominio sull'isola della Corona inglese, purché di nuovo cattolica²⁸.

Il formarsi in questo periodo di quelle che si possono chiamare 'immagini cattoliche' dell'Irlanda in Europa (alcune delle quali destinate ad avere grande fortuna nell'Ottocento, e i cui echi continuano a sentirsi di quando in quando ancora oggi) si fonda principalmente sulla lettura di questi scritti di polemica controriformistica dei *Recusants* inglesi ed irlandesi esuli sul continente, diffusi sia in forma manoscritta sia a stampa. Il nucleo di essi descrive un popolo oppresso dai conquistatori protestanti perché irriducibilmente cattolico e fedele alla Santa Sede. Tra XVI e XVIII secolo, comunque, in Italia non apparvero opere in italiano dedicate precipuamente all'Irlanda; immagini e riferimenti vividi all'Irlanda scarseggiano anche in scritti che si occupavano di argomenti comunque collegati. Solo dalla metà del XVIII secolo le gazzette e gli annuari italiani, scritti in genere da illuministi attenti alle *res novae*, dedicano più spazio alla situazione politica irlandese, seguendone gli sviluppi costituzionali e riformatori; in seguito, nel periodo rivoluzionario, vi è naturalmente grande attenzione, espressa anche in fogli volanti, per i tentativi insurrezionali dei repubblicani irlandesi.

3

Due risvegli nazionali che si voltano le spalle: Italia e Irlanda nell'Ottocento

Con la Restaurazione tutto cambia: i rapporti internazionali, le funzioni – anche simboliche – delle potenze europee, e le forze in campo nei singoli paesi. In Irlanda il movimento repubblicano degli *United Irishmen* si dissolve nel nulla dopo l'ultimo conato insurrezionale del 1803; nel 1800, con l'*Act of Union*, l'isola viene annessa a tutti gli effetti alla Gran Bretagna, nel convincimento che l'Unione sia una garanzia contro future ribellioni. In Italia, a dispetto della palesata restaurazione delle strutture dell'*Ancien Régime*, i mutamenti sociali resi irreversibili dal venticinquennio rivoluzionario stavano facendo sì che dalla 'opinione' delle 'classi colte' si passasse a una 'opinione pubblica', mentre la sedimentazione del passaggio napoleonico, unita al diffondersi del Romanticismo, creava il nazionalismo italiano moderno. La cesura rappresentata dalla Restaurazione trasforma completamente i riferimenti ideali di tutte le parti in campo (con ulteriori inversioni nel decennio

successivo). I ‘codini’ (sostenitori dei regimi restaurati) e i clericali (o ‘cattolici intransigenti’, come anche vengono chiamati da una parte della storiografia) italiani, prima della tempesta rivoluzionaria usi a considerare l’Inghilterra parlamentare e protestante con grande sospetto, le erano grati per averli salvati dall’idra rivoluzionaria francese, difendendo i sovrani in esilio con le sue flotte e salvando il potere temporale del Papato. Questa gratitudine, assieme al timore suscitato dal nuovo nazionalismo romantico e liberale italiano, può spiegare i nuovi contorni delle immagini dell’Irlanda di parte cattolica, che mutano sostanzialmente rispetto a quelle controriformistiche. Quando tali immagini dell’Irlanda appaiono, negli anni Venti del XIX secolo, si presentano con forme abbastanza precisamente connotate e codificate: l’Irlanda, oppressa dallo Stato dei conquistatori protestanti perché irriducibilmente cattolica, è un ‘popolo’ (e ‘popolo martire’, come la Polonia) solo in quanto ‘cattolico’, non perché ‘nazione in sé’. Il protonazionalismo dei *Recusants* irlandesi, pur gracile, sembrerebbe essere stato, nella maggioranza dei casi, abbandonato; della ‘povera’ Irlanda, ‘martire’, ‘oppressa’, ‘tragica’, ci si guarda bene dal sostenere il diritto all’indipendenza (e, a differenza dei due secoli precedenti la Rivoluzione francese, si considera la monarchia inglese in Irlanda, seppure protestante, come autorità legittima e, quindi, né sovvertibile né sovvertenda). Il sospetto clericale nei confronti dell’Inghilterra, Stato protestante, ricompare però per via degli indirizzi assunti a partire dagli anni Venti dalla politica estera inglese, oggettivamente sovversivi rispetto agli equilibri garantiti dalla Santa Alleanza. Esso era reso più vivo dalla consapevolezza che era l’Inghilterra l’anima dei mutamenti più profondi in atto in Europa, quelli scatenati dalla rivoluzione industriale; non è un caso che gli scritti polemici e paradossali del radicale inglese William Cobbett, *Storia della Riforma Protestante in Inghilterra ed in Irlanda*, venissero immediatamente tradotti e pubblicati nella Roma papalina (1825-1826; e addirittura quasi contemporaneamente all’edizione inglese, a puntate), e diffusi anche in altre traduzioni ed edizioni in tutti gli Stati “codini” della penisola. La posizione clericale coincideva con l’indirizzo (approvato dalla Chiesa) del movimento irlandese che tra gli anni Venti e gli anni Quaranta del XIX secolo faceva notizia: il movimento pacifico di Daniel O’Connell, prima volto alla completa emancipazione legale dei cattolici irlandesi e inglesi, poi all’abrogazione dell’*Act of Union* del 1800 e a una forma di autogoverno per l’Irlanda.

Sconvolgimenti forse ancor più forti erano avvenuti tra i liberali e i democratici sconfitti. Dagli anni Venti, grazie anche alla guerra d’indipendenza greca, l’Inghilterra, la nemica implacabile del tempo giacobino e napoleonico, divenne al contrario possibile alleato delle istanze liberali, soppresse e represses sul continente dalla Santa Alleanza. Non solo: per i nuovi liberali, sordi ormai al fascino delle picche della rivolta popolare, l’equilibrio costituzionale dello Stato britannico, aperto alla possibilità di riforme graduali, diventò un modello (se non ‘il’ modello) del sistema che volevano instaurare. Questo mutamento di

visione si rifletté necessariamente sulla loro immagine dell'Irlanda: ben presto, per il liberale o il mazziniano del nostro Risorgimento, l'Irlanda sarà soltanto una semplice sacca d'arretratezza e di inciviltà, usata dai clericali e dalla Santa Alleanza come leva per minacciare l'Inghilterra 'madre dei Parlamenti e della Democrazia'. Le immagini dell'Irlanda concepite in questa chiave dalla 'opinione pubblica progressiva' crearono durante il Risorgimento una barriera di quasi assoluta incomprendimento tra i due movimenti di liberazione nazionale, quello italiano e quello irlandese: la maggiore responsabilità dell'incomprensione reciproca fu della parte italiana, e fu causata principalmente da poco nobili e poco universali motivi di *Realpolitik*²⁹.

Ma l'appoggio del Vaticano al cattolico liberale O'Connell comportava la sua nemesis: infatti l'interesse verso le forme di lotta popolare pacifica da lui guidate e le informazioni sul suo movimento in Italia veicolavano coprendoli ben altri entusiasmi di quelli auspicati dai clericali, e rendevano facile operare paragoni odiosi tra la reazione dell'Inghilterra al movimento o'connelliano e quelle dei 'paterni' governi della Restaurazione a qualunque manifestazione di dissenso politico. Il cattolico liberale Cesare Balbo (fratello del gesuita Prospero) notava infatti nel 1845 come «quel modo di sollevazione recentemente inventato o perfezionato in Irlanda, e chiamato *per agitazione*» non si potesse praticare in Italia, in quanto «ei non può usarsi se non in paesi già molto liberi, e in che si voglia più libertà o indipendenza; ma in quelli così tenuti che v'è difficile ogni menomo movimento, è impossibile il movimento massimo dell'agitazione»; e paragonava l'Irlanda, «nazione cristiana», a Polonia e Italia: «LE NAZIONI CRISTIANE NON POSSONO PERIRE; né perì Irlanda per sette secoli d'una oppressione che poté anche essa parer distruzione. Irlanda ne va sorgendo a nostri dì, usando i mezzi lasciatile da una servitù che si può dir libertà al paragone [con Polonia e Italia]» (aggiungendo inoltre, in nota, «Veggansi gli altri passi dove parlo dell'Irlanda, per non interpretare con taluno ch'io desideri o creda nemmen desiderata dagli Irlandesi, la separazione di lei»). Per il resto Balbo mostrava di condividere l'interpretazione cattolica non liberale: i mali dell'Inghilterra, tra cui «le ingiustizie accumulate sull'Irlanda», erano «funeste reliquie della riforma»; e «il grande rimedio» a tali piaghe, e in particolare alla «prepotenza inglese in Irlanda [...] sarebbe senza dubbio il ritorno alla cattolicità»³⁰.

Anche la generale passione per le opere del cattolicissimo poeta irlandese Thomas Moore, tradotte negli anni Venti e Trenta dal milanese Andrea Maffei, avrebbe dovuto insospettire: come avrebbe notato un prefatore dopo l'unità d'Italia, le opere di Moore sono canti d'amore e di guerra insieme, [...] preghiere al Dio degli oppressi, maledizioni agli oppressori, canti funebri per onorar la memoria degli Eroi; sono insomma la vita politica dell'Irlanda, di questa terra magnanima ed infelice che avea levato il capo dal sepolcro ai primi soffi della libertà che asolarono [alitarono] dalle plaghe della Francia rivoluzionaria»; e, ancora, esse rappresentavano «l'Irlanda schiava dell'Inghilterra:

ma quel gagliardo canto varrà sempre a infiammare di santissimo sdegno il petto degli oppressi contro gli oppressori»³¹.

Il carattere, liberale sì, ma insieme cattolico, del movimento di O'Connell, e l'appoggio datogli dalla Chiesa, fanno sì, infatti, che negli anni Venti e Trenta se ne parli e se ne scriva³² senza insospettire le censure degli Stati italiani. La Francia, sottratta dal 1830 al dominio della Santa Alleanza, è il luogo da cui il pubblico colto italiano attinge più frequentemente le informazioni.

Quanto all'attenzione francese per le agitazioni irlandesi, non bisogna dimenticare che tra il 1833 e il 1837 due nobili cognati liberali francesi, Alexis de Tocqueville e Gustave de Beaumont, le considerano tanto rilevanti per l'avvenire del mondo da intraprendere più viaggi di ricerca in Irlanda per studiare la situazione: «la povera Irlanda desolata da tanta miseria, esacerbata da tante ingiustizie, straziata da tante convulsioni e discordie [...] è una piccola contrada, in seno alla quale si dibattono le più grandi quistioni della politica, della morale e dell'umanità»; inoltre, «dove meglio che dall'esempio dell'Irlanda [il moralista] potrà convincersi di quale conforto sia la Religione alla virtù?». Il frutto di tale inchiesta, *L'Irlande sociale, politique et religieuse* di Beaumont, del 1839 (con molte ulteriori edizioni), venne tradotto e pubblicato a Firenze nel 1842, con una buona tiratura³³. Esuli democratici italiani nel Canton Ticino tradussero e pubblicarono invece, nel 1846, la *Storia d'Irlanda* del pubblicista radicale francese Elias Regnault, che evidentemente ritenevano nessuna delle censure degli Stati italici avrebbe fatto passare, per via del suo troppo scoperto entusiasmo per le sollevazioni popolari irlandesi, e in particolare per quella repubblicana degli *United Irishmen*³⁴.

Poco dopo, all'inizio del 1843, mentre la campagna di O'Connell per il *Repeal* dell'Unione è al suo apice, un nobile liberale piemontese, molto preoccupato per le sorti dell'Inghilterra, ripercorre idealmente le orme di Tocqueville e Beaumont, ma tenendosi a est del mare che divide l'Inghilterra dall'Irlanda. Il giudizio sull'Irlanda di Camillo Benso Conte di Cavour (più a suo agio con la lingua francese che con l'italiana), espresso nel celebre saggio del 1844, *Considérations sur l'état actuel de l'Irlande et sur son avenir*, e nelle lettere riguardanti la sua pubblicazione, è rappresentativo di quello di tutti i liberali italiani 'alla Cavour', generalmente avversi, come si accennava, alle insurrezioni giacobine dal basso³⁵. «La situazione singolare in cui si trova l'Irlanda ha attirato l'attenzione di tutti coloro che, in Europa, si occupano di politica», notava Cavour all'inizio del suo saggio.

Non c'è probabilmente alcuno che non si sia domandato con imbarazzo dove potrà portare il movimento messo in moto da un uomo straordinario, che lo dirige con abilità così impressionante. I giornali, fedeli interpreti di questo interesse del loro pubblico, fanno dell'Irlanda uno dei temi abituali della loro polemica. Essi, di solito così laconici riguardo agli affari dell'Inghilterra, ora aprono le loro colonne ai resoconti dei più minuscoli *meetings* che richiedono l'abrogazione dell'Unione, e ci tengono

regolarmente al corrente dei dettagli più minuti del grande processo cui stanno ora venendo sottoposti O'Connell e i suoi compagni. Che cosa indica questa generale preoccupazione? Annuncia forse l'avvicinarsi di una di quelle grandi crisi politiche che modificano profondamente l'esistenza sociale dei popoli? E questa crisi minaccia forse una catastrofe violenta per l'antico edificio della costituzione britannica, che il passare delle epoche ha rispettato, e che le rivoluzioni europee, lungi dal distruggere, hanno invece consolidato?

Proseguiva dicendo che a giudicare dalle «speranze» e dalla «gioia malcontenta» di «certi» giornali e partiti politici (e alludeva insieme ai legittimisti e ai repubblicani francesi, in una sua insistente versione di una teoria degli 'opposti estremismi' che usò poi al meglio come statista) ci si sarebbe sentiti di dare una risposta affermativa; e prendeva subito posizione tra i preoccupati «amici» dell'Inghilterra, che esitano e «sentono venir meno la loro fiducia in questa costituzione, che credevano essere, più di ogni altra al mondo, al di sopra degli sconvolgimenti politici». Notava anche che «l'opinione pubblica, bisogna dirlo, in Europa non è in generale favorevole all'Inghilterra»: i «nemici dell'Inghilterra» erano infatti in numero «purtroppo molto grande». Ma per il bene dell'Irlanda, dell'Inghilterra e dell'umanità, secondo il conte piemontese, l'Unione doveva restare inviolata. Da questo scritto appare come, per Cavour e per quelli che condividevano il suo genere di liberalismo, contasse anche molto, oltre alle future brutali necessità politiche dell'alleanza con l'Inghilterra, l'immagine completamente 'anglofila' che avevano di quel paese, assumendolo a vero modello dello Stato che volevano costruire. Come scriveva Cavour, dandoci anche un ritratto di come considerava se stesso,

Solo alcuni, superiori alle passioni della folla e agli istinti del popolo, concepiscono per la nazione inglese la stima e l'interesse necessariamente suscitati da uno dei più grandi popoli che abbiano mai onorato l'umanità, una nazione che ha grandissimamente contribuito allo sviluppo materiale e morale del mondo, e la cui missione civilizzatrice è ben lungi dall'essersi compiuta [...]

(mostrando con queste parole quanto fosse labile il confine tra 'anglofilia' e 'anglolatria'). Nella visione dei liberali italiani, come dimostra anche lo scritto di Cavour, l'Irlanda veniva considerata alla stregua delle altre colonie dell'Impero britannico, luoghi che l'Inghilterra aveva il compito storico di 'civilizzare' e di liberare dalle loro abominevoli 'superstizioni', talvolta con metodi bruschi. Il fatto che essa fosse una nazione, e una nazione diversa dall'Inghilterra, non li preoccupava minimamente. Lo stesso Cavour, in futuro tanto sollecito nell'amplificare i «gridi di dolore» della meno ben definita nazione italiana, affermava esplicitamente che sarebbe stato molto meglio, per l'Irlanda e per la civiltà, se il suo carattere nazionale celtico fosse stato cancellato da subito, dalla prima conquista anglo-normanna. Gli «esponenti del liberalismo e del nazionalismo italiani», scriveva giustamente D'Angelo, «anglofilo di sentimento

e in una misura che andava molto oltre la media riscontrabile nei movimenti confratelli del continente, avevano in comune la tendenza ad interpretare le vicende contemporanee d'Irlanda in una maniera che colpiva piacevolmente la sensibilità degli inglesi»³⁶. Gli Irlandesi, quindi, erano «poveri, ignoranti, superstiziosi, animati da un odio inveterato per chi si è impadronito del loro paese», secondo Cavour. Per l'economista democratico Carlo Cattaneo erano addirittura «un popolo che si ravvolge nelle sue semibarbare tradizioni, ha più caro quel vivere spontaneo e spensierato con poche settimane di lavoro, che non le severe giornate e le assidue sollecitudini e i premeditati sponsali dei popoli industri e trafficanti»; «una plebe inculta e seminuda, che ondeggia tra un lavoro incerto e un ozio famelico»; «una popolazione lacera e ignorante», composta da «moltitudini di turbolenta e sucida vita», che «si adatta inesplicabilmente a vivere e moltiplicare» in una «spaventevole e nauseosa inopia»; essi «conservano le loro zingariche abitudini, vivendo accovacciati in gran numero nei più luridi abituri, [...] e [...] si mostrano sempre cordiali, allegri e fedeli, ma pur sempre vagabondi, improvidi e neglienti»; uomini dagli «animi caldi e indomiti», provvisti di «indole famigliare e compagnevole», che, «perché non furono sottomessi dai Romani, ai quali tutto l'occidente deve la sua civiltà, conservarono tutti i difetti d'una natura eslege e ineducata»³⁷.

Così gli Irlandesi vennero spesso considerati dai commentatori liberali italiani, ricalcando il modello propagandistico inglese, come mezzi selvaggi, 'fanatici papisti' e ubriacconi (seppur poetici e pittoreschi nella loro ingenuità), maltrattati senza alcuna tolleranza dagli Inglesi sì, ma bisognosi soprattutto di civilizzazione e 'spretacciamento'. Lo stesso Cavour, nelle *Considérations*, suggeriva al governo britannico una serie di misure (principalmente miglorie agrarie e una maggiore diffusione dell'istruzione popolare, che però escludesse i sacerdoti cattolici: «La loro profonda ignoranza, i loro numerosi pregiudizi, le loro opinioni politiche esagerate li rendono inadatti a svolgere l'ufficio di insegnanti»), nella placida e ottimistica fede che l'Inghilterra avrebbe sicuramente potuto e avuto a cuore di rendere l'Irlanda una prospera provincia inglese, e questo meno di due anni prima dell'inizio della Grande Carestia. Molto più perspicace Carlo Cattaneo, che analizzando i meccanismi dell'agricoltura irlandese nel saggio *Su lo stato presente dell'Irlanda* prevedeva nel 1844 la stessa Grande Carestia e i suoi catastrofici effetti, a meno di un anno dal diffondersi del micidiale fungo delle patate, ripartendone la responsabilità, *ante eventum*, tra il lascito storico della conquista inglese dell'Irlanda e la «selvaggia» popolazione irlandese (ma attribuendo a quest'ultima le maggiori colpe). Cattaneo individuava il baratro cui si stava avviando l'Irlanda, commentando l'introduzione della patata nell'agricoltura irlandese:

Il popolo irlandese si affidò colla sua naturale imprevidenza all'inaspettato dono. [...] Un milione di bocche, che forse l'Irlanda contava appena nel 1688, s'accrebbe in quattro o cinque generazioni alla strabocchevole cifra di otto milioni. [...] Tutta codesta colluvie di gente non ha speranza al mondo, se le manca il raccolto delle patate.

Ora, se quella pianta può porgere un gradevole e valevole sussidio alle popolazioni fornite di vari generi d'alimento, e se in un estremo di carestia può veramente salvarle dalle più dure calamità, essa non può rimanere a lungo il principale e quasi unico nutrimento d'un'intera nazione, senza esporla a irreparabili disastri. Dopo aver fomentato un improvvido addensamento di popolazione, il raccolto delle patate può per assidue piogge o altre avversità venir meno anch'esso. Quale riparo allora alla fame?.

Secondo l'economista lombardo «tutti questi gratuiti mali sono generati dalle vetuste istituzioni, dai perversi e strani modi di possedere la terra e di affittarla, e dall'abuso che si fa delle più sacre cose per alimentare una perpetua discordia»; e Cattaneo rivolgeva un duro atto d'accusa a O'Connell, alludendo ai suoi cosiddetti *Monster Meetings*:

[...] nell'inveterata avversione al traffico e all'industria e alle arti utili e belle, né l'Irlanda potrà mai fornirsi da sé il capitale, né facilmente troverà stranieri che lo portino là dove si gridò tante volte e si griderebbe tuttora alla loro morte, né potrà consolidare alla squallida terra le fatiche del coltivatore. Il secreto della rinovazione dell'Irlanda dipende adunque in ultimo conto dall'opinione! Tuttociò che fomenta li odii religiosi, [...] tutto ciò che perpetua i rancori delle antiche conquiste, tuttociò che può scemare la fiducia del capitalista, tuttociò che agita li animi e turba i lavori, il solo fatto di congregare a parlamento sul colle di Tara trecentomila infelici, è una influenza funesta a quella terra dissestata.

Più cinico fu l'atteggiamento dei mazziniani italiani, che non potevano invocare, come il Cavour delle *Considérations*, la necessità dell'equidistanza tra «i nemici del progresso e i partigiani degli sconvolgimenti politici», tra le aristocrazie e «le masse». Anche se prelati irlandesi e Gesuiti italiani inveirono contro i repubblicani irlandesi, i feniani, definendoli ad obbrobrio 'mazziniani', è poco noto il fatto che Giuseppe Mazzini, cospiratore prudente, li aveva respinti e sconfessati fin dalle origini. Quando negli anni Quaranta del XIX secolo dei giovani intellettuali irlandesi riportarono in vita il repubblicanesimo rivoluzionario, essi diedero il nome di *Young Ireland* al loro movimento, credendo (gli ingenui) di potersi inserire a pieno titolo, per l'identità ideologica dei programmi e in quanto branca nazionale, nel movimento cospirativo internazionale mazziniano della *Jeune Europe*³⁸. Dopo i primi contatti, Mazzini chiese loro se una ipotetica 'nazione irlandese' avesse, o no, una 'missione universale', e quale questa fosse. Avendogli essi risposto che la missione dell'Irlanda era principalmente quella di liberarsi dal giogo inglese e di creare secondo i comuni programmi una Repubblica democratica, laica e non confessionale, Mazzini replicò seccamente che in tal caso l'Irlanda, non avendo alcuna 'missione universale' da svolgere («degli interessi speciali, delle speciali attitudini, e, prima di tutto, speciali funzioni, una missione speciale da compiere, un'opera speciale da svolgere per la causa del progresso dell'umanità, di cui siamo tutti responsabili, ci sembrano le vere infallibili caratteristiche

delle nazionalità»), non era assolutamente una ‘nazione’; e quanto agli *Young Irishmen*, invece di fomentare rivolte per l’indipendenza irlandese (che a suo dire sarebbe stata «un obiettivo retrogrado»), avrebbero fatto bene a unirsi al partito liberale inglese («date alla causa liberale nel Parlamento britannico l’appoggio dei 105 deputati irlandesi. Non faremmo dei passi avanti?») e a sforzarsi di trasformare i loro compatrioti in ‘civili ed illuminati’ cittadini britannici. Scriveva, all’inizio del nostro secolo, Bolton King, il biografo inglese di Mazzini, tenero verso il suo eroe, ma non cieco:

L’attività della Lega Internazionale dei Popoli procurò una delle pochissime occasioni (per quanto se ne sappia) in cui Mazzini espresse le sue opinioni sull’Irlanda. Alcuni sostenitori dell’Abrogazione dell’Unione con la Gran Bretagna si lamentarono che nel rapporto della Lega l’Irlanda fosse stata omessa dalla lista delle nazionalità del futuro; e Mazzini venne incaricato di stendere la risposta. Il suo argomento era rivolto ai separatisti repubblicani, ma valeva quasi allo stesso modo per gli autonomisti; esso prova fino a che punto egli avesse completamente frainteso il movimento irlandese, e sembra che si sentisse su un terreno malsicuro. Egli credeva che la causa irlandese fosse soltanto, essenzialmente, la richiesta di un governo migliore; e simpatizzava con la “giusta consapevolezza della dignità umana, che chiede i suoi diritti a lungo violati”, degli Irlandesi, col loro “desiderio di avere amministratori, educatori, non padroni”, con le loro proteste contro “una legislazione fondata sul sospetto e l’ostilità”. Ma Mazzini non credeva che il movimento nazionalista fosse permanente, e si rifiutava di vedere in esso alcun elemento di vera nazionalità, in quanto gli Irlandesi non “invoca[va]no nessun diverso principio o sistema o legislazione di vita, derivati da caratteristiche indigene, che contrastino radicalmente con le necessità e aspirazioni inglesi”, e non sostenevano che il loro paese avesse alcuna “alta funzione speciale” da svolgere nell’interesse dell’umanità. Su ciò si può notare che la prima obiezione di Mazzini mostra la sua scarsa conoscenza dei sentimenti e della vita irlandesi, e la seconda comporta un requisito che non è stato mai, se non nelle teorie dello stesso Mazzini, richiesto ad alcuna nazione³⁹.

Più che a posizioni realmente ideologiche (come hanno sostenuto alcuni commentatori, parlando di «dottrinarismo rigido»⁴⁰) o al mero fatto che Londra fosse il centro della ragnatela del cospiratore italiano l’atteggiamento antiirlandese dell’anglofilo Giuseppe Mazzini era forse direttamente legato all’erogazione di fondi da parte di organi del governo britannico⁴⁰.

Su un altro versante, nella seconda metà degli anni Quaranta, tra gli entusiasmi iniziali del «Viva Pio IX» il sostegno a O’Connell anche da parte del clero italiano sbandò pericolosamente verso il liberalismo, nel famoso *Elogio funebre di Daniello O’Connell* del frate teatino Gioacchino Ventura⁴²: traducendosi poi, nelle edizioni curate dall’autore dopo l’inversione di marcia papale, in aperta insubordinazione e in palese solidarietà con nefandi ‘rivoluzionari’ più vicini. In seguito, dopo la fine tragica della stagione quarantottina, l’intransigentismo cattolico italiano strinse le fila, epurando chi tra i suoi seguaci si era lasciato tentare dalle idee liberali e nazionaliste, e si riorganizzò ideologicamente. Suo

organo centrale fu la rivista gesuita «Civiltà Cattolica», pubblicata a Roma dal 1850. Dalla sua nascita al Concilio Vaticano II il periodico (per almeno un quarantennio il più letto in Italia) fu la voce determinata del temporalismo e dell'integralismo cattolici più spinti, allora incoraggiati e sanzionati dalla stessa Santa Sede. Come risulta dalle pagine di quella rivista (e dagli scritti di altri zelatori delle stesse opinioni, come il sacerdote Giacomo Margotti, fondatore e direttore de «L'Armonia» di Torino), per quanto riguarda l'Irlanda l'appartenenza religiosa al cattolicesimo viene ad essere, per i clericali italiani, il più importante criterio che consenta di individuare un'identità 'nazionale' distinta. L'Irlanda, 'cattolica e martire', viene sistematicamente violentata da uno Stato 'protestante e massone', la cui posizione di avanguardia mondiale del progresso tecnico ed economico viene smascherata, specie nel caso irlandese, quale ipocrisia ed inganno, e causa di infinite, e davvero 'progressive', sofferenze e miserie per le popolazioni (con accenti talvolta vicini all'Engels delle *Condizioni della classe operaia in Inghilterra* [1845]; cosa che in realtà non sorprende, visto l'uso fatto già in precedenza, da parte degli stessi ambienti, degli scritti del radicale inglese Cobbett). In questi aspetti dell'immagine cattolica italiana dell'Irlanda è esplicita la costante polemica contro liberali e mazziniani in Italia, che prendevano invece l'Inghilterra a modello⁴³, e la paura fobica della 'rivoluzione', mostro in rivolta contro Dio, nato (secondo una delle versioni che compaiono sulle pagine di «Civiltà Cattolica») con la Riforma protestante e continuato nella massoneria. Mentre «Civiltà Cattolica» negli anni Sessanta si sente di escludere che gli insorti polacchi, guidati dai loro vescovi e sacerdoti nella rivolta armata per una Polonia 'indipendente e cattolica', siano parte dell' 'idra rivoluzionaria', questa ai suoi occhi è al contrario ben presente in Irlanda, e già dagli anni Quaranta: è il risorto repubblicanesimo irlandese, che vuole laicamente abolire ogni differenza tra *Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter* e che per giunta è spesso guidato da protestanti. Negli anni Sessanta del XIX secolo «Civiltà Cattolica» si scatena così contro i feniani, che definiva «i mazziniani irlandesi»⁴⁴. Nell'articolo principale (non firmato, come era costume della rivista gesuita) in cui Carlo Piccirillo presentava ai lettori i feniani, la descrizione delle origini e dei collegamenti americani dell'organizzazione repubblicana clandestina è nell'insieme corretta; e si passa subito ad «alquante considerazioni» dirette all'Inghilterra e all'Irlanda, ma anche «opportune alle condizioni della nostra Italia e del nostro tempo». Notando che in Irlanda le «sette» e le «congiure» hanno un sostegno popolare in altri paesi sconosciuto, il gesuita ne ravvisa la causa nei torti dell'Inghilterra, che esamina sotto tre profili: nazionale (l'Inglese «ha tolto all'Irlanda la sua indipendenza, i suoi diritti, i suoi costumi, e perfino le sue terre e la sua lingua», e le riforme sono troppo lente), religioso (notando i tributi che la popolazione era ancora costretta a pagare alla Chiesa di Stato anglicana) e agricolo e sociale (tutte le terre in mano ai proprietari inglesi assenteisti, che appaltano ad altri la riscossione degli affitti: «Il contadino irlandese adunque

è condannato a morir di fame»). Piccirillo indicava la contraddizione tra la pratica inglese nei confronti dell'Irlanda e le posizioni sostenute dai governi inglesi riguardo ai paesi europei:

L'ammutinamento dell'Irlanda non è solo frutto delle ingiustizie secolari degl'Inglesi, ma eziandio conseguenza dei principii propugnati e difesi da loro nel mondo. Questi principii sono principalmente tre: la nazionalità, la libertà di coscienza e il suffragio universale. Da questi tre principii indotti, i Ministri inglesi han dato non equivoco sostegno a tutte le rivoluzioni del continente di Europa. Or da questi tre principii seguirebbe manifestamente il dritto dell'Irlanda ad emanciparsi dalla dominazione inglese. L'Inghilterra adunque legittima anzi giustifica coi suoi principii tutti i tentativi irlandesi, mentre coi suoi fatti li provoca e li fa nascere.

Il gesuita napoletano faceva poi fosche previsioni sul provvidenziale castigo che attendeva l'Inghilterra, notando che l'odio irlandese contro di essa «andrà sempre crescendo». Ma poi si affrettava a chiarire, riguardo ai feniani: «noi li condanniamo espressamente e formalmente, [...] come li condanna il clero irlandese, come li condannano e debbono condannarli tutti i cattolici dell'universo». E ribadiva riguardo a essi la condanna papale delle società segrete:

Poiché, posto anche un diritto chiaro e inappuntabile d'insorgere, l'insorgere sotto la guida, o anche solo coll'opera dei Feniani, è assolutamente vietato alla coscienza dei cattolici irlandesi. I Feniani costituiscono una società secreta [...] Ora cotali società segrete sono illecite di per sé medesime, poiché nessuno può vincolare la sua coscienza col sacro vincolo di giuramento ad atti di cui ignora la onestà, ed a persone di cui non conosce gl'intendimenti.

E i feniani, salvo il nome, «non differiscono punto» dai Carbonari e dai Framassoni. E non solo:

la vittoria dei Feniani non segnerebbe che nuove persecuzioni alla Chiesa e nuovi disastri per la Irlanda. I Feniani non appartengono agl'Irlandesi di vecchia razza e di vecchi principii; essi non sono cattolici di opere e di affetti; essi non sono uomini di ordine e di autorità. Irlandesi della Giovine Irlanda, cattolici solo di nome, figli delle sette, essi porterebbero, col loro trionfo, in trono tutti i principii del moderno liberalismo, che si possono tutti restringere in questo solo, l'eliminazione di Dio e del Prete dalla società.

Piccirillo indicava come via per il riscatto dell'Irlanda i «mezzi puramente legali», contrapponendo alla Giovane Irlanda e ai feniani l'esempio di O'Connell⁴⁵. Esempio che continuava a essere apprezzato anche da cattolici meno intransigenti, come il marchigiano Antonio Papi, autore nel 1866 di un ponderoso e magniloquente libro sul tribuno irlandese, di cui rivelava lo scopo politico fin dalle prime pagine:

Mentre in Italia coloro che paiono più teneri della libertà, fanno mal viso alle religiose credenze che le varrebbero la più sicura guarentigia, non sarà, mi penso, altro

che bene descrivere i pericoli, le fatiche e gli affanni che il grande oratore [O'Connell] sostenne, affinché religione e libertà fra loro si congiungessero in amico amplesso, e l'Irlanda pel sospirato accoppiamento delle ineffabili sue sciagure si ristorasse⁴⁶.

Dal canto suo l'altrettanto cattolico recensore di Papi, Ivo Ciavarini Doni, presentava l'Irlanda come «classica terra dei santi», dei «famosi monaci ibernesi», di «tanti martiri cristiani, di tanti che in ogni occasione qualunque sacrificio fecero; emigrarono, impoverirono, caddero nella maggior abbiezione pur di non voler seguire il culto protestante»; e notava come

l'Inghilterra che gode fama di tanta civiltà, di tanti progressi materiali, di potente regina dei mari, che ha tanta estensione di domini in tutte le parti del mondo, l'Inghilterra tiene oppressa l'Irlanda, che resta misera, deserta e mezzo selvatica; e le impone la propria religione, l'anglicana. È questa per vero una delle più manifeste contraddizioni della Storia, ed una delle macchie più nere del nome illustre del popolo inglese. Come mai questa nazione così positiva e così pratica, come si suole appellare, ed onde gode un credito universale, non seppe per tre secoli e in tante occasioni farsi capace di un diritto naturale dei popoli?⁴⁷

L'intransigentismo cattolico italiano diede anche molto spazio alle parole (interrogazioni e proteste in Parlamento, petizioni, risoluzioni di consigli comunali) e alle azioni (l'invio negli Stati pontifici, fra il 1849 e il 1870, di migliaia di volontari in armi⁴⁸) dei nazionalisti moderati cattolici irlandesi in difesa del potere temporale del papa; e prima e dopo l'unificazione della penisola continuò a usare in tutte le salse l'Irlanda «cattolica» contro lo Stato liberale. Tra gli intransigenti l'uditore della Sacra Rota Francesco Nardi, celebrando nel 1868 gli inizi del *disestablishment* della Chiesa anglicana nell'isola e i grandi raggiungimenti della Chiesa cattolica in una Irlanda che «è tuttora cattolica, profondamente e ferventemente cattolica» a dispetto dei «tre secoli di ferro e di fuoco» della persecuzione protestante, notava che l'Inghilterra su scala internazionale «incoraggia, sostiene, festeggia, paga gli uomini più ostili al papato», e condannava debitamente la «tristissima congiura dei feniani», giacché la «nazione irlandese è innanzitutto profondamente cattolica, e il vero cattolico non è mai cospiratore». Ma era costretto a riconoscere: «Però se il clero unanime e tutti i saggi anche laici condannano questo moto, è pure incontrastabile che il moto dura, ed è forse la prima volta dopo lunghi secoli, che alcuna parte del popolo irlandese non obbedisce alla potente voce del suo clero»⁴⁹.

Quanto a Mazzini, in un poco noto risvolto ibernico della nostra storia nazionale, nei primi mesi del 1861 egli era impegnato (invano) a spingere il riluttante Giuseppe Garibaldi ad attaccare gli Austriaci o ciò che restava dello Stato pontificio, offrendogli, tramite i buoni uffici dell'agente dell'organizzazione mazziniana a Dublino, Augusto Cesare Marani, una brigata di unionisti protestanti irlandesi, desiderosi di lavare l'onta rappresentata dai volontari irlandesi pontifici:

Caro Garibaldi, il generale Wilson⁵⁰ ed altri ufficiali Irlandesi, sdegnosi degli aiuti dati dai cattolici d'Irlanda al Papa, organizzano ciò ch'essi chiamano un battaglione composto di 1046 uomini, che vogliono riabilitare l'Irlanda e combattere con voi le battaglie dell'Unità d'Italia e dell'emancipazione di Roma. Gli elementi appartengono alla milizia e hanno quindi certe cognizioni militari. Sono quasi tutti protestanti. [...] Garibaldi, facciamo l'Italia: non dipendete da anima viva: la darete poi a chi vorrete⁵¹.

Garibaldi accettò l'offerta, ma si riservò di decidere il «momento» dell'impresa: momento che – prevedibilmente - non giunse mai. E, seguendo un così autorevole esempio da parte di un Eroe (e per giunta Eroe dei due mondi), il Marani, che dei repubblicani mazziniani era stato rappresentante a Dublino per più di quattro lustri, decise di lì a poco di cedere infine all'italico costume e di passare il suo personale Rubicone, diventando il primo Console a Dublino di Sua Maestà Vittorio Emanuele II Re d'Italia⁵².

Pochi anni più tardi, nel 1867, il pallido vate italico, che, come è noto, di «alti fatti» (cioè attentati) e dei conseguenti «martiri» si intendeva bene, comunicava in una lettera a un'amica inglese i propri timori per la prosperità della sua Inghilterra (che Mazzini era solito chiamare «la mia seconda patria»), qualora la condanna a morte contro alcuni repubblicani irlandesi fosse stata eseguita. «Mi sento tra l'infelice e il furioso», scriveva, «riguardo ai feniani condannati a morte. Oggi, credo, è il compleanno della Regina. Non legge ella i giornali? Non può trovare nel suo cuore un sentimento femminile, e chiedere al governo di commutare la pena? Di fatto, l'uccisione di questi uomini si rivelerà un assoluto errore. Burke sarà il Robert Emmet del 1867. Il sentimento di vendetta rianimerà le energie dei demoralizzati feniani. Il loro sogno diventerà, tramite il martirio, una sorta di religione». Nel resto della lettera mazziniana, a onor del vero, affiorano preoccupazioni democratiche ed umanitarie:

Ma non è questa la mia sola preoccupazione. Si tratta del fatto che l'assassinio legale venga di nuovo applicato contro un *pensiero*, pensiero che dovrebbe essere confutato e distrutto soltanto tramite il pensiero. Burke e gli altri credono sinceramente nella nazionalità irlandese. Io penso che essi siano, filosoficamente e politicamente, in errore: ma dovremmo noi confutare un errore filosofico con l'impiccagione?

Dopo la commutazione della loro pena scrisse alla stessa destinataria: «Vi è stata risparmiata l'infamia dell'esecuzione di Burke. Ne sono lieto: ho un debole per l'Inghilterra, e non mi piaceva la vergogna che le sarebbe derivata da essa»; non risulta però che Mazzini abbia reso pubblica questa presa di posizione, né allora né in seguito, negli anni 1869-1871, quando molti in Europa si mobilitarono in favore di un'amnistia, su basi umanitarie, per i prigionieri repubblicani irlandesi⁵³.

Dall'inizio degli anni Ottanta il movimento per l'Autogoverno irlandese di Charles Stewart Parnell, accompagnato dalla cosiddetta «guerra per la terra», conquista l'attenzione dell'opinione pubblica di tutto il mondo. Ma mentre

il clero cattolico irlandese appoggia il movimento e vi partecipa, limitandosi a condannarne di quando in quando alcuni 'eccessi', il corrispondente della «Civiltà Cattolica» da Dublino guarda al fenomeno con grande sospetto, continuando a insinuare dubbi sulla guida del movimento, «il protestante Parnell». E quando nel 1888 papa Leone XIII condanna il *Piano di Campagna* degli autonomisti, suscitando la reazione indignata della maggioranza dei cattolici irlandesi (e anche di parte della gerarchia ecclesiale), la «Civiltà Cattolica» deliberatamente ignora le loro proteste (e la parziale marcia indietro del papa), accusando la stampa liberale italiana di avere montato il caso ad arte. Nel 1890-1891, di fronte allo scandalo per la causa di divorzio che coinvolge Parnell, alla scissione del partito autonomista, e alla morte del *leader* irlandese, la «Civiltà Cattolica» non nasconde un giubilo francamente sciacallesco. Leone XIII però dispone negli stessi anni di più urbani difensori delle sue posizioni sull'Irlanda, come lo sfornatore di opuscoli monsignor Edoardo Soderini⁵⁴. Invece il pubblicista filobritannico cattolico W. Mazzière Brady ne pubblica sempre a Roma altri, tesi ad accrescere il solco tra il Vaticano e il movimento autonomista irlandese, dimostrando l'alleanza di fatto tra i riformisti parnelliani e i rivoluzionari repubblicani, chiamata *New Departure* dalla storiografia irlandese⁵⁵; così come fa, in termini molto meno urbani e argomentati, il reverendo londinese Belaney, che cela sotto lo pseudonimo di 'Catholicus' la sua invettiva contro i «Feniani, dei quali il Parnell è il Capo irlandese dirigente», e contro «il signor Gladstone» che asseconderebbe «quel movimento rivoluzionario, il cui scopo dichiarato è lo smembramento del Regno Unito»; movimento che il Papa dovrebbe condannare, dato che esso, fomentando «l'anarchia, la devastazione e la miseria [...] ridurrà ad un deserto senza religione» l'Irlanda⁵⁶.

Mentre nei primi due decenni seguiti all'unità d'Italia liberali e democratici si occuparono dell'Irlanda solo di sfuggita, dagli anni Ottanta il movimento parnelliano, nei suoi molteplici risvolti, li costrinse a prestare maggiore attenzione. Oltre alle cronache dei quotidiani e dei settimanali popolari, lo dimostrano gli articoli dell'organo della corrente liberale *mainstream*, la rivista «La Nuova Antologia», pubblicata a partire dal 1866, autorevole e molto letta fino alla prima guerra mondiale, nella quale tutto ciò che succede in Irlanda, ostruzionismo, agitazione agraria, proposte di autogoverno irlandese, viene principalmente considerato in quanto questione di ingegneria costituzionale e legislativa, con una costante, cavouriana preoccupazione per il benessere dell'amata Inghilterra. Così l'Irlanda non suscita emozioni tra i cosiddetti 'democratici' italiani; con la possibile eccezione del 'bigino' di storia irlandese pubblicato nel 1886 da Arnaldo Carrera, che descrive un «popolo irlandese [...] fatalmente troppo religioso e pio per indole» e che, pur rammaricandosi del fatto che in Irlanda «l'entusiasmo religioso e l'entusiasmo nazionale si confusero inseparabilmente negli animi della razza vinta», fa questa notazio-

ne riguardo allo storico liberale inglese Macaulay: «Se un uomo moderno, uno storico come il Macaulay può essere animato da simili sentimenti verso il popolo irlandese, è facile immaginare come quel popolo disgraziato dovesse essere considerato e trattato dagli inglesi nei secoli scorsi»⁵⁷.

In casa mazziniana una delle adoranti amiche inglesi del Mazzini, la sua segretaria Emily A. Venturi⁵⁸, divenne negli anni Ottanta un'ardente sostenitrice della causa autonomista irlandese tra i liberali inglesi, ripubblicando un appello antiaustriaco mazziniano del 1851 (sostituendovi le parole *Austria, Italy, Austrians e Italians* con *England, Ireland, English e Irish*) allo scopo di contrastare l'uso che dell'anglofilia di Mazzini facevano gli unionisti britannici. Ma se è vero che i «gridi di dolore» dell'appello mazziniano contro il dominio austriaco in Italia si sarebbero potuti attagliare benissimo al dominio inglese in Irlanda, sia quando il 'profeta' lo scriveva, sia quando la Venturi lo riprese, è ancor più vero che Mazzini non si sarebbe mai sognato di esprimersi in quei termini riguardo all'Inghilterra: il terrorista genovese negava all'Irlanda persino il diritto di esistenza quale nazione. Nella sua polemica con gli unionisti, la Venturi sosteneva che il movimento di Parnell non era separatista, ma riformista; ergo Mazzini sarebbe stato, se fosse vissuto, un sostenitore di Parnell. Forse lo sarebbe anche stato: ma solo se ciò non avesse dato alcun fastidio al governo britannico in carica. Nell'utilizzare gli scritti del maestro in modo da fargli dire cose con cui sarebbe stato in totale disaccordo, le opinioni della Venturi anticipavano la svolta sull'Irlanda del 1918 dei mazziniani italiani, divenuti di colpo entusiastici sostenitori della Repubblica irlandese guerrigliera⁵⁹.

Altro tema favorito nella pubblicistica italiana tra gli anni Ottanta e la prima guerra mondiale fu il paragone tra l'Irlanda e le nostre campagne e soprattutto il Mezzogiorno, nella discussione di possibili riforme agrarie, che compare anche nella *Inchiesta Agraria* di Stefano Jacini e nel volume di Antonio Pittaluga prefato dall'economista cattolico Giuseppe Toniolo nel 1894⁶⁰. Nel 1897 il cinquantenario della morte di O'Connell produce una profluvie di scritti d'occasione di parte cattolica; tra essi la prima riedizione del breve saggio del futuro politico popolare Filippo Meda, poi riproposto innumerevoli volte nel trentennio seguente:

basterà ricordare come in Irlanda gli inglesi abbiano superato se stessi, perché ivi l'avversione politica si complicava coll'avversione religiosa: una Irlanda affamata, spogliata, rovinata, sottomessa a forza di miseria e di impotenza a loro non bastava: essi avevano soprattutto bisogno di una Irlanda o apostata o spopolata: di queste due soluzioni non ottennero che la seconda, e anche questa a metà: alla prima gli inglesi riconobbero presto, da un pezzo, di non aver saputo arrivare: in Irlanda infatti c'è sempre un popolo cattolico, che, stretto intorno ai suoi deputati, ai suoi preti, ai suoi vescovi, cammina alla conquista delle sue ultime libertà religiose, politiche e sociali;

e Meda poi notava il legame con l'Italia cattolica:

a Roma infine c'è la chiesa nazionale di San Patrick degli irlandesi, che s'innalza a proclamare in mezzo all'Europa cristiana e nel centro stesso della cattolicità la gloria e la forza della nazionalità cattolica dell'Irlanda, dopo tanti secoli di persecuzione⁶¹.

4

Il nuovo secolo: lotta per l'indipendenza in Irlanda, guerra e fascismo in Italia

A giudicare dalla «Civiltà Cattolica», il nuovo secolo e le sue novità (in Italia, l'ascesa al potere di Giolitti e la graduale entrata dei cattolici nella vita politica parlamentare) segnano rispetto all'Irlanda un adattamento progressivo dell'immagine dell'«isola cattolica» alla nuova realtà ecclesiale, in cui il nazionalismo romantico ottocentesco ha ormai fatto breccia tra gli stessi Gesuiti. I loro nuovi corrispondenti da Dublino guardano con incuriosito ma benevolo interesse al nuovo fervore nazionale, veicolato da organismi come la *Gaelic League* o come il *Sinn Féin* di Arthur Griffith; mentre poco dopo, con loro aspra riprovazione, il risveglio culturale e nazionalistico irlandese desta anche l'interesse dei modernisti Ernesto Buonaiuti e Nicola Turchi⁶².

La lotta costituzionale in corso nel Regno Unito sulla questione dello *Home Rule* negli anni immediatamente precedenti lo scoppio della Guerra mondiale, che produsse in Irlanda una radicalizzazione crescente, in Italia vide, oltre al continuato, prevedibile interesse dei liberali de «La Nuova Antologia»⁶³, nuovi generi di commentatori: ad esempio già nel 1914 lo scrittore nazionalista Jack la Bolina⁶⁴ si accorgeva con compiacimento, sul *Marzocco* di Firenze, del pericolo strategico che il nazionalismo irlandese, ormai armato, rappresentava per l'Impero britannico.

Nel periodo 1916-1923, stagione decisiva per l'Irlanda moderna, l'isola naturalmente si impose di nuovo all'attenzione dell'opinione pubblica italiana. Lo sconvolgimento provocato negli equilibri internazionali dalla guerra mondiale fece sì che dal 1918 l'adorazione per l'Inghilterra di liberali e democratici italiani scemasse assai, con conseguenze sulla politica estera dell'Italia anche riguardo all'Irlanda. Negli stessi anni l'ascesa del nuovo protagonista del cattolicesimo politico, il Partito popolare di don Luigi Sturzo e di Filippo Meda, rende il Vaticano più centrale anche nella politica italiana; e un viceministro popolare del Ministero della Guerra giunge a trattare con gli inviati di Michael Collins l'invio di un carico di armi e munizioni, poi non compiutosi per il sopraggiungere della tregua del luglio 1921 in Irlanda⁶⁵.

Sotto l'ala protettiva del Vaticano, dagli anni Dieci fino a tutto il corso del conflitto anglo-irlandese del 1919-1921 si mobilitarono instancabilmente in favore della causa dell'Irlanda i due successivi rettori del Collegio Irlandese di Roma, Michael O'Riordan e John Hagan, pubblicando libri, articoli ed opuscoli, favorendo i rapporti degli indipendentisti irlandesi con le forze politiche

italiane e il Vaticano e fungendo poi da appoggio logistico per la Delegazione irlandese a Roma, la missione mandata, nel 1920, dal *Dáil* della Repubblica d'Irlanda per ottenere il riconoscimento da parte dello Stato italiano⁶⁶. La non casuale beatificazione di Oliver Plunkett nel 1920 contribuisce alla «fervida ammirazione per la vecchia e generosa isola verde che cresciuta nell'amore di Roma seppe difendere eroicamente col sangue più puro de' suoi figli la libertà della fede» da parte dei cattolici italiani⁶⁷.

Il Partito popolare con il suo organo di stampa, «Il Popolo», sostiene apertamente la causa dell'indipendenza irlandese; così fa anche il quotidiano cattolico «L'Italia»; diversi parlamentari popolari propongono invano alle Camere mozioni in favore del riconoscimento della Repubblica d'Irlanda; gruppi di giovani cattolici legati al partito promuovono manifestazioni in favore della causa irlandese, e traducono e pubblicano rapporti sulle violenze delle truppe della Corona contro la popolazione civile dell'isola⁶⁸. Invece sulla «Civiltà Cattolica» le corrispondenze filo-nazionaliste, numerose fino a tutto il 1918, in seguito si diradano misteriosamente; non è chiaro se si fosse trattato di una scelta politica, o dell'assenza di corrispondenti da Dublino.

Il Partito repubblicano mazziniano, neoconvertito sostenitore di una Repubblica indipendente irlandese, si mobilita intensamente in quegli anni a favore degli indipendentisti, e durante la guerra civile nello Stato Libero (1922-23) prende le parti dei combattenti anti-Trattato. Anche riviste vicine al partito, come ad esempio *La voce dei popoli*, radicale e repubblicana, uscita per un paio d'anni tra 1918 e 1920, prendono posizione a favore dell'indipendenza irlandese, mentre, in un'area politica (a conti fatti) vicina ai democratici, *La Critica Sociale* non contiene invece alcun riferimento all'Irlanda. Per i socialisti riformisti, infatti, l'Irlanda era tabù, risultando spiacevole in tutti i sensi.

Il riesplodere violento della questione irlandese suscita l'interesse tenace della sinistra estrema. Subito dopo la Rivolta di Pasqua del 1916 il giornalista napoletano Dino Fienga, allora vicino all'area socialista, pubblicò un articolo su «L'Eco della Cultura», che venne ripubblicato in forma di opuscolo, col titolo *L'Inghilterra contro l'Irlanda*, nel maggio 1921⁶⁹. Compare così per la prima volta, ne «L'Avanti!» socialista massimalista e nella pubblicistica, un'Irlanda 'proletaria' e 'oppressa' e insieme 'ribelle' e 'rivoluzionaria'; come nell'opuscolo *L'Inghilterra che ammazza un popolo* del socialista populista milanese Paolo Valera, pubblicato nell'agosto 1921, dalla prosa ancor più iperbolica del titolo, che parlava di migliaia e migliaia di morti e di continui stupri commessi dalle truppe inglesi ai danni delle donne irlandesi⁷⁰. Meno iperbolico però di Zinoviev, che al Congresso dell'Internazionale Comunista del 1921 sostenne che gli Inglesi avevano sterminato in due anni trentacinquemila irlandesi. Che la guerra di guerriglia condotta allora dai Repubblicani irlandesi fosse un esempio da seguire per il proletariato italiano era, nel Fienga e nel Valera, cosa più implicita che esplicitata. Così anche ne «L'Avanti!», in cui si esaltava la lotta degli Irlandesi in quanto lotta di una piccola nazione

contro l'imperialismo britannico, con particolare attenzione alle violazioni dei diritti dell'uomo commesse dagli Inglesi, ma senza ricollegare il discorso alla situazione italiana.

Tra 1920 e 1923 faceva invece più diretti paralleli con la situazione italiana «L'Ordine Nuovo» di Gramsci, organo della frazione (e poi del Partito) comunista, che additava ai suoi lettori con più tenacia, e in ogni numero, l'Irlanda guerrigliera della guerra d'indipendenza come esempio per il proletariato, per la sua indomabilità anti-imperialista e le sue nuove tecniche di guerra proletaria e popolare. Si riconosceva talvolta che si trattava in Irlanda di un movimento di liberazione nazionale, e non della rivoluzione proletaria in marcia: ma si faceva notare l'auspicabile effetto di contagio che l'uso di mezzi di lotta illegali da parte degli Irlandesi avrebbe avuto sulla legalitaria classe operaia inglese. Inoltre si additava nell'Irlanda l'anello debole dell'imperialismo mondiale, che poteva, se spezzato, fare crollare tutta la catena, partendo dall'Inghilterra. Era presente anche un interesse per la nuova combinazione di forme di lotta inventata dai Repubblicani irlandesi, che coniugava le azioni pacifiche di protesta di massa con gli atti di guerra condotti dall'esercito clandestino dei volontari dello I.R.A. (combinazione in seguito ripresa da tutti i movimenti guerriglieri del XX secolo).

All'altro estremo, «Il Popolo d'Italia» di Mussolini svolse una politica di oculato opportunismo durante la guerra anglo-irlandese, pubblicando da una parte corrispondenze dall'Inghilterra filo-britanniche firmate 'Oxonienis' (pseudonimo di Angelo Crespi), dall'altra quelle violentemente pro-irlandesi di Franco Fabbris e della scrittrice Annie Vivanti, moglie del misterioso John Chartres, funzionario dei servizi segreti britannici apparentemente passato al nemico irlandese nel 1919, in séguito uno dei negoziatori di parte irlandese del famoso *Trattato anglo-irlandese* del 1921⁷¹. E nel 1920, sull'onda emotiva dello sciopero della fame fino alla morte del sindaco di Cork, Terence Mac Swiney, «Il Popolo d'Italia» pubblicò un articolo violentemente anti-inglese del suo direttore Benito Mussolini⁷², che restò naturalmente nella memoria (anche degli storici irlandesi attuali) più delle corrispondenze inglesi dello stesso giornale⁷³. Scriveva in quell'occasione il futuro Duce:

Il pubblico italiano, vittima di taluni più o meno tradizionali luoghi comuni, conosce superficialmente la questione irlandese – questione di fondamentale giustizia – e quasi quasi si rifiuta di credere alle gesta barbaramente tiranniche della repressione inglese. È vero che la cronaca nera di quell'isola lontana giunge sino a noi sotto la specie di una infinita serie di conflitti con morti e feriti, ma il pubblico italiano non si rassegna a pensare che il famoso e decantato liberalismo inglese sia una lustra menzognera. [...] Gli italiani, per motivi di giustizia e d'interessi, non possono negare la loro solidarietà agli irlandesi. L'Irlanda ha diritto di vivere indipendente e repubblicana.

E Mussolini concludeva: «Ci piace sperare che al morente sindaco di Cork giunga almeno l'eco del grido augurale che parte dai nostri cuori: Viva la Repubblica irlandese!»⁷⁴.

A partire dal 1932, in seguito alla salita al potere di Éamon De Valera e alla nascita delle Camicie Azzurre 'fasciste' in Irlanda, il fascismo, divenuto regime, cominciò ad interessarsi alla situazione irlandese, inizialmente nel quadro della desiderata creazione di una 'Internazionale fascista'. E dalla metà degli anni Trenta riprese in funzione antibritannica, con un uso che suona strumentale, la 'questione irlandese' come argomento propagandistico, utilizzando i temi non solo della iberniofilia cattolica, ma di quella socialista rivoluzionaria, in varia miscela, a seconda degli ambiti e del pubblico del discorso, e degli organi di stampa utilizzati. Parallelamente, nell'ambito del cattolicesimo politico, nella decina d'anni tra l'avvento e il consolidamento del regime fascista l'immagine della 'Irlanda cattolica' si manifestò ben poco, come conseguenza della poco lodevole fine, nel sangue e nelle stragi della guerra civile, del tentativo irlandese di raggiungere l'indipendenza. Essa rimase però quiescente, per poi riaffiorare con forza dal 1932, in seguito alla vittoria di De Valera e all'avvio delle sue riforme costituzionali clericocorporative, ispirate alla 'dottrina sociale della Chiesa'. In coincidenza con il Congresso eucaristico internazionale tenutosi a Dublino nello stesso 1932 erano stati pubblicati da cattolici italiani alcuni libri e opuscoli, ma volti al passato e alle glorie della Chiesa più che all'attualità politica, come il libro del francescano Anselmo Maria Tommasini sui *Santi irlandesi in Italia*⁷⁵. Anche l'immagine 'cattolica' dell'Irlanda venne ampiamente utilizzata, tra 1932 e 1945, da una parte della propaganda fascista (ad esempio, dal settimanale «Quadrivio»). In questo ambito il già modernista Nicola Turchi ad esempio scriveva: «L'unificazione quasi completa del paese e la sua emancipazione dal controllo inglese, è stata, pertanto, dovuta interamente alla salda unione di tutto il popolo cattolico irlandese, che grazie all'unità della fede ha potuto mantenere l'unità dei cuori e delle aspirazioni»⁷⁶. Su contenuti simili si muoveva anche la pubblicista americana italofila Amy A. Bernardy: la Roma «universale» cui l'Irlanda era «sempre fedele» era quella cattolica, ma con qualche forzatura poteva essere letta anche come Roma fascista⁷⁷.

Un testo italiano la cui pubblicazione coincide cronologicamente con l'inizio di questo periodo, ma assolutamente non collegabile alla propaganda del regime, è *Viaggio in Irlanda* del filosofo Mario Manlio Rossi⁷⁸. Il Rossi, grande intellettuale europeo e amico, tra gli altri, di Lady Augusta Gregory e di William B. Yeats, si trovò di casa in Irlanda; come scriveva all'inizio del volume: «Hanno chiamata l'Irlanda la terra dei Santi. La terra dei poeti. La Verde. Per me, resterà l'Isola degli Amici». Il libro, che il Rossi definiva «di divulgazione», è di una ricchezza e di una profondità non comuni per un resoconto di viaggio: la storia e la natura della società irlandese sono inquadrare nel lungo periodo e descritte con rara pregnanza e sensibilità. Rossi comprendeva (a differenza di quasi tutti i visitatori occasionali) la natura clanica, basata sulla famiglia estesa, che l'Irlanda mantiene tutt'oggi: «[L'Irlandese] è sempre rimasto ad una psicologia di 'clans': e considera la lotta nazionale

come conflitto tra 'clans'»⁷⁹. Così come si rendeva conto dell'atavismo e della resilienza caratteristici della società irlandese:

Questa resistenza a forme straniere (che è poi anche resistenza ad una qualunque evoluzione), questo permanere di un'anima che assorbe elementi nuovi o convive con altri popoli sopravvenuti adattandoli a sé, senza lasciar distruggere dal loro spirito le sue fondamentali aspirazioni ed i suoi fondamentali dissidi, è forse la spiegazione dell'Irlanda⁸⁰.

Il filosofo italiano prevedeva tra l'altro, con lungimiranza, i limiti e il necessario fallimento della politica di ri-gaelicizzazione imposta dai governi dello Stato Libero:

Ai bambini, lo si insegna con grammaticchette in inglese che fanno venire i brividi per loro. [...] Fosse lingua in uso, andrebbe bene: ma doverla insegnare grammaticalmente, quando ci sono cinque declinazioni di sostantivi e così via, caratteri diversi dai soliti (molto carini: ma il male si è che son solo 18 segni per indicare [...] 95 suoni diversi!), sarebbe come insegnare nelle nostre scuole elementari un inglese scritto in caratteri greci⁸¹.

Rossi dedicava un intero capitolo a Lady Gregory; ma dovette aggiungere un *Postscriptum* per lamentarne l'improvvisa morte, mentre il libro era già in bozze.

Da allora al crollo del regime si moltiplicano in Italia gli articoli di rivista sull'Irlanda, e vengono pubblicati vari libri di ineguale interesse⁸².

Ma il volume più rappresentativo della politica del regime fascista verso l'Irlanda venne pubblicato nel luglio 1934, a grande tiratura, dal giornalista Nicola Pascazio, giunto nell'isola per conto dei Comitati d'Azione per l'Universalità di Roma insieme a Gomez Homen, vice podestà di Firenze, per prendere contatto coi 'fascisti' irlandesi, e per studiare le forze politiche locali, in vista della diffusione delle idee (e della guida) del fascismo italiano⁸³. I contraddittori presupposti e raggiungimenti del viaggio di esplorazione di Pascazio risultano bene dal libro: stringere rapporti con forze irlandesi tanto diverse, e in così radicale conflitto reciproco, come il governo (e il partito) di De Valera, allora impegnato nella 'guerra economica' contro l'Inghilterra per costringerla ad accettare l'abolizione delle clausole più umilianti del Trattato del 1921, il Movimento repubblicano che continuava a prepararsi a una nuova campagna militare, e le *Blueshirts* irlandesi di Eoin O'Duffy, ufficiosamente 'fasciste' ma allora ancora parte del partito (invece costituzionale e parlamentare) dei vincitori della guerra civile del 1922-23, che alla campagna antibritannica di De Valera si opponeva, risultava impresa improba per gli emissari fascisti italiani. Il risultato era, come dimostra il libro del Pascazio, perlomeno bizzarro: anche se solo l'anno dopo il regime cominciò a scatenare la sua propaganda contro l'Inghilterra, alcune linee di tendenza della politica internazionale erano già

ravvisabili allora, e certo l'aver in Irlanda come referenti ideologici, o 'came-rati', chi si opponeva nelle piazze al nazionalismo irlandese, di fatto a favore della stessa Inghilterra, risultava estremamente imbarazzante. Pascazio cercava quindi di confondere le acque, esaltando nel generale O'Duffy una promessa di 'dittatura fascista' da coltivare, e ravvisando in De Valera, comunque grandemente rispettato, il principio della 'dittatura democratica'. La narrazione dei casi storici irlandesi era piena di strafalcioni (così come tutte le citazioni improvvidamente poste da Pascazio in un inglese improbabile), forse anche come effetto inevitabile di questa congenita confusione, che sembra costituire la nota dominante della visita irlandese di Pascazio, e in seguito anche della politica irlandese del regime stesso. Confusione che, incredibilmente, continuerà fino alla guerra mondiale e con effetti pratici, non solo da parte dei fascisti italiani, ma dei nazisti tedeschi; le vicende dei loro agenti in Irlanda nel corso del conflitto sono indubbiamente esilaranti, pur sullo sfondo della tragedia: infatti i poveretti prendevano contatto col fascista O'Duffy (ormai isolato, e senza più un movimento dietro di sé) perché facesse loro conoscere qualcuno dei suoi mortali nemici dello I.R.A.^{84!}

Dal 1935-36, dal punto di vista diplomatico, il regime fascista invertì apertamente la politica dell'Italia liberale riguardo all'Irlanda, sostenendo in chiave antibritannica il governo di De Valera (e sperando di guadagnarlo alla causa dell'Asse), e inviando nel 1938 il primo ambasciatore italiano a Dublino, Vincenzo Berardis. Il giovane ambasciatore, incaricato anche della propaganda del regime tra i Ciociari residenti nell'isola e tra gli Irlandesi stessi, una volta scoppiata la guerra fu ammonito dal governo De Valera perché cessasse i suoi tentativi propagandistici (mentre i suoi tentativi – peraltro inefficaci – legati al parallelo incarico di prendere contatto con l'Esercito Repubblicano Irlandese e di sostenerlo nella sua campagna militare anti-britannica venivano accuratamente sorvegliati dal servizio segreto irlandese, così come quelli del suo omologo tedesco Von Hempel). Berardis fu in seguito, nel 1950, autore di un libro auto-giustificativo sulla sua esperienza irlandese⁸⁵.

Come curiosità bisogna aggiungere che durante l'ultimo guizzo del regime, nei mesi di Salò, la casa editrice milanese Rosa e Ballo pubblicò diverse traduzioni (di Carlo Linati, e da lui curate) del teatro politico irlandese (dal momento che la traduzione di altre opere in inglese non era permessa): tra di esse opere del giovane William Butler Yeats, di James Joyce, di John M. Synge e di Sean O'Casey⁸⁶.

5

Tra un «Vietnam in Europa» e una «tigre celtica»:
dalla seconda guerra mondiale a oggi

Nel quarto di secolo successivo alla Seconda guerra mondiale l'Irlanda è presente di rado nella pubblicistica italiana, e per questioni settoriali. Compare

l'economia, interessante per un paese che sta ricostruendo la propria; la cultura, per l'abbondanza dei premi Nobel letterari irlandesi; nella «Civiltà Cattolica» i Gesuiti (negli anni Cinquanta ancora 'perfidì', e apparentemente 'al potere' in Italia) si occupano di 'questioni religiose', cioè additano quale esempio da seguire per gli Italiani il modo in cui il clericalismo della Repubblica irlandese delle ventisei contee del Sud si opponeva, 'in difesa della fede', a un governo che aveva timidamente tentato di introdurre in Irlanda qualche elemento di *Welfare State* sanitario, riuscendo a rovesciarlo nel 1951⁸⁷. Più tardi, quando in Italia qualcuno comincia ad avere qualche soldo per viaggiare per puro 'turismo', si pubblicano guide. La campagna dell'Esercito Repubblicano Irlandese del 1956-1962 nelle sei contee del Nord-Est non suscita alcun interesse che oltrepassi i dispacci d'agenzia. Nel 1966 fa notizia, ma in minima misura, il cinquantenario della Rivolta di Pasqua del 1916, scomodo fondamento dello Stato irlandese (dieci anni dopo un Governo irlandese particolarmente filo-britannico proibì infatti ogni celebrazione).

Solo dal 1968-1970, col movimento per i diritti civili nell'Irlanda del Nord e la sua repressione, che innescò l'aprirsi di una nuova fase del secolare conflitto anglo-irlandese, si assisté a una relativa ricomparsa dell'interesse per la 'questione irlandese' nei *mass media* italiani (come del resto in quelli di tutto il mondo, ormai irrevocabilmente cambiati dalla diffusione del televisore); la casa editrice Rizzoli tradusse per l'occasione un libro sulla rivolta irlandese del 1916 (pubblicato quattro anni prima per il cinquantenario) che finì ben presto sui banchi dei *Remainders*⁸⁸.

Nel corso del trentacinquennio successivo è rifiorita una pubblicistica sull'Irlanda, con tirature peraltro limitate, in cui transitoriamente sono riemerse quasi tutte le immagini italiane dell'Irlanda precedenti. Riaffiorano ancora tra la fine degli anni Sessanta e l'inizio dei Settanta immagini di matrice cattolica, come nel volume del 1971 del giornalista Gianni Cagianelli⁸⁹; ma nelle pubblicazioni degli anni Settanta predominano tuttavia le diverse letture 'di sinistra' (del P.C.I., di Lotta Continua, di terzomondisti e sinistra religiosa), in cui l'attualità irlandese è stata spesso usata principalmente con fini di politica interna, come accadeva nell'Italia unita prefascista.

Una scorsa agli organi di stampa del Partito Comunista Italiano permette di comprendere che l'interesse per l'Irlanda non era forte; certo, veniva dato risalto alle posizioni dello I.R.A. 'marxista' e riformista che esisteva nei primi anni Settanta, gli *Officials*, ma senza fare collegamenti espliciti con la situazione italiana.

Al contrario, cinquant'anni dopo «L'Ordine Nuovo», tra 1971 e 1976 il giornale (settimanale, dall'aprile 1972 quotidiano) «Lotta Continua», organo dell'omonima organizzazione politica rivoluzionaria, ripercorrendo le orme del giornale di Gramsci presentava nuovamente l'Irlanda in lotta (in questo caso la popolazione nazionalista della *Northern Ireland*) come esempio di cui far tesoro. L'organizzazione inoltre mantenne a Belfast per due anni, dal 1971

al 1973, un inviato speciale del giornale, il giornalista Fulvio Grimaldi. Nella primavera del 1972 le edizioni del movimento pubblicarono anche un libro, con disco di canzoni di lotta irlandesi (tradotte) allegato⁹⁰. Pur essendo impegnata, come i comunisti degli anni Venti, nel dibattito e nello studio delle possibili forme di lotta armata per condurre alla presa del potere il proletariato italiano, a differenza dei redattori del giornale gramsciano Lotta Continua sembrava non voler percepire affatto la specificità della guerriglia irlandese, il suo aspetto di guerra di 'liberazione nazionale'. Compariva invece una equazione quasi caricaturale tra la situazione italiana (nella interpretazione e secondo le parole d'ordine di Lotta Continua: «cacciamo la polizia e i fascisti dalle nostre fabbriche, dalle nostre scuole e dai nostri quartieri») e quella irlandese: gli Unionisti irlandesi diventavano senz'altro 'i fascisti', le milizie dello Stato britannico 'la polizia', mentre i Nazionalisti erano rappresentati *tout court* come 'i proletari'; e secondo la linea politica del 'prendiamoci la città' dell'organizzazione, un'attenzione spropositata venne dedicata alle effimere *no go areas* urbane, controllate dai Repubblicani tra 1970 e 1972, come esempi di 'contropotere proletario'.

Si nota comunque, in questo periodo, all'infuori degli esempi citati, il relativo disinteresse della maggioranza delle forze politiche. Quando nel 1973 la Repubblica irlandese di Dublino entra nella C.E.E. si riaccende, invece, un moderato interesse per l'Irlanda tra gli specialisti di economia comunitaria.

Dalla metà degli anni Settanta la situazione irlandese cambia, e parallelamente cambia quella italiana. È interessante vedere come mutino le immagini nel corso degli anni, quali siano le immagini che si presentano (per esempio verso la metà degli anni Settanta i guerriglieri dello I.R.A. diventano per parte della stampa italiana 'terroristi', e poi, finiti in Italia gli 'anni di piombo', ritornano ad essere 'guerriglieri'), e quali usi vengano fatti di tali immagini. In questa fase l'interesse internazionale per ciò che accade in Irlanda è scarso, se lo si confronta con quello degli anni immediatamente precedenti. Ciò si spiega in parte con la maggiore efficacia, dal 1975-76, della reazione dello Stato britannico alla sfida lanciata dallo I.R.A.: alle nuove tecniche controinsurrezionali che avevano riportato il conflitto nell'Irlanda del Nord ad un 'livello accettabile di violenza', tale da non fare in genere più notizia, faceva da contraltare la *self-censorship* nei *mass media* britannici e un'accurata gestione della propaganda da parte del governo inglese («Irlanda irrisolvibile conflitto tribale», e «guerra di religione» con lo Stato inglese come *peacekeeper*; «i padrini mafiosi dello I.R.A.», o «folli terroristi») che investiva il controllo delle notizie alla fonte, tramite le agenzie giornalistiche internazionali con sede a Londra. In parte si spiega invece con la minore ricettività dell'opinione pubblica internazionale, una volta sbiaditi gli entusiasmi 'internazionalisti' del ciclo (generalmente indirizzato in senso 'sinistrorso' *o/e liberal*) di lotte sociali, generazionali e politiche estesosi a tutto il mondo nella seconda metà degli anni Sessanta. Questo è particolarmente vero per ciò che riguarda l'Italia,

afflitta allora dalla questione del 'terrorismo': in quella stagione di ripiegamento le sinistre 'togate' (come già aveva fatto la stampa 'cattolica') abbandonarono ogni simpatia per il nazionalismo irlandese, anche solo sotto il profilo dei 'diritti umani'; simpatia che restò viva soltanto tra residue frange della sinistra 'rivoluzionaria', e che affiorò al contrario, proprio allora, nelle aggregazioni della estrema destra 'nazional-rivoluzionaria' (complice la definizione nazista di 'soldato politico', da esse applicata disinvoltamente ai volontari dello I.R.A., e in particolare a Bobby Sands)⁹¹.

Lo sciopero della fame del 1981 costrinse comunque di nuovo l'opinione pubblica italiana a confrontarsi con la difficile Irlanda, e parte delle forze politiche italiane a manifestare caute reazioni 'umanitarie'; comparvero anche interpretazioni sociologiche (o interpretazioni anti-terroristiche) di qualche serietà⁹². Gli anni successivi, fino al lancio del *peace process* con la tregua del 1994 da parte dei Repubblicani irlandesi, vennero in Italia prevalentemente segnati dalla crescente moda dei viaggi in Irlanda, con la pubblicazione di numerose guide⁹³, e dal sorgere della Celtomania anche nel nostro paese, con la fascinazione per musica, danza e folklore celtici, quindi anche irlandesi; mentre la stampa 'laica' cominciò nello stesso periodo ad interessarsi alle tappe della lotta per la secolarizzazione dello Stato nella Repubblica un tempo 'cattolicissima' di Dublino (ma fu pubblicato anche, senza che nessuno ne sapesse niente, il ponderoso volume sull'Irlanda di un serio geografo economico italiano⁹⁴).

La tregua dello I.R.A. e le alterne sorti del 'processo di pace' produssero una nuova messe di articoli sulla stampa quotidiana e settimanale italiana, e di notizie e brevi *reportages* nei programmi televisivi; vi fu anche la prima traduzione, in più di settant'anni, di una storia dell'Irlanda, seria seppur divulgativa⁹⁵, e la pubblicazione di vari altri saggi di argomento irlandese⁹⁶ (mentre da quegli anni continuano ad apparire sempre nuove traduzioni di autori della odierna 'giovane letteratura irlandese', insieme a quelle di autori più 'datati', come Yeats, James Stephens e Flann O'Brien⁹⁷, e dei cicli epici antichi, e di qualsivoglia 'mitologia celtica' di fonte irlandese). Il processo di pace attirò anche l'attenzione opportunistica della Comunità di Sant'Egidio, che sperava di avervi un ruolo; ne risultò la pubblicazione di saggi in genere non informati e pieni di risibili strafalcioni⁹⁸. D'altro canto destò l'interesse della nostra stampa il boom economico degli anni Novanta, quando l'isola sembrò trasformarsi in una ruggente 'tigre celtica'; così come oggi ne ha destato la crisi che invece l'attanaglia.

Ma dagli anni Settanta, e fino a oggi, si è anche manifestato nel caso del conflitto anglo-irlandese il degradarsi della professionalità dei giornalisti italiani rispetto al passato, dovuta in parte al ripiegamento provinciale degli orizzonti dell'Italia postbellica, ma forse ancor di più all'apparentemente inarrestabile processo di 'imbestiamento di massa' in corso in tutto l'Occidente.

Degrado particolarmente evidente nelle rubriche e nei servizi esteri dei grandi organi d'informazione 'indipendenti', che nella maggior parte dei casi

sono, anche se firmati, la semplice collazione di notizie d'agenzia. E peggio ancora quando c'è di mezzo un 'inviato speciale' o un corrispondente residente in un paese straniero: tranne eccezioni, tale inviato non teme nulla più della fatica del suo lavoro di giornalista, e fa, con successo, i salti mortali pur di evitarla. Così è pratica corrente parafrasare gli articoli (anche di commento) di giornali stranieri del giorno prima; quando poi quei giornali stranieri sono del tutto sconosciuti in Italia, è comune tradurne integralmente gli articoli; in entrambi i casi, presentando il risultato come farina del proprio sacco (e peggio ancora oggi, nell'era di Internet). E se, come accadeva nell'ultimo ventennio del conflitto anglo-irlandese, una delle parti in lotta è munita di *agencies* per i rapporti con la stampa straniera, ancora più comodo risultava tradurre la velina di turno, gentilmente profferta! Comportamenti che una volta presupponevano il fatto che il giornalista fosse prezzolato, o faziosamente schierato in senso politico, oggi sono correnti, e originati principalmente dalla pigrizia dell' 'inviato'.

Per fare un esempio di questo, relativo al modo in cui la 'questione irlandese' è stata riportata nell'ultima trentina d'anni nella grande stampa italiana, un 'inviato speciale' del più diffuso quotidiano italiano, oggi presentato dalla stampa e dalle televisioni come un altro Eroe dei due mondi, giunse a Dublino nell'autunno del 1979, dopo l'imboscata di Warrenpoint e l'uccisione di Lord Mountbatten. Nel suo primo articolo descriveva come alcuni uomini incappucciati lo avessero di fatto rapito, portandolo in qualche luogo segreto; e come, mentre il suo terrore cresceva, quelli gli avessero invece dato l'opportunità di intervistare l'Esercito Repubblicano Irlandese. L'intervista che seguiva, parola per parola, domanda per domanda e risposta per risposta, era la fedele traduzione dell'intervista rilasciata dallo I.R.A. al principale e più autorevole quotidiano irlandese, «The Irish Times» (del quale in quei tempi pre-Internet in Italia giungeva solo una copia, all'Ambasciata irlandese di Roma), pubblicata settimane prima. E quanto alle 'veline' di propaganda, per fare un altro esempio, il corrispondente da Londra dello stesso quotidiano negli anni delle ultime fiammate del conflitto anglo-irlandese e in quelli del processo di pace, attentissimo nel seguire sui tabloid inglesi la cronaca rosa e nera, tempestivo nel riferire al pubblico italiano ogni gemito amoroso della famiglia reale britannica, sollecito come divulgatore internazionale di pornografia soft e di fatterelli curiosi, quando si occupava d'Irlanda traduceva malamente 'veline' inglesi propagandistiche di 'serie C', quelle in Gran Bretagna riservate alla sola stampa 'popolare' (a tabloid quali «The Sun» o «The Daily Express»), e non era assolutamente capace di comunicare alcuna informazione senza grotteschi strafalcioni. A questo si aggiungeva il fatto che elaborava le sue 'veline' con rabido e indignato lirismo. Se il Sinn Féin vinceva alle elezioni, egli, con interpretazione che nessun serio quotidiano britannico avrebbe mai fatto propria, (stra)parlava: «In un clima di intimidazione, e forse con l'aiuto di alcuni brogli denunciati già durante il voto, gli estremisti cattolici avanzano» (ritengo che gli antichi Gesuiti non sarebbero stati d'accordo nel

definire i repubblicani irlandesi «estremisti cattolici»); e nelle more del processo di pace, quando nel 1996-97 lo I.R.A. compiva attentati in Inghilterra, egli assicurava ai suoi lettori: «È un esercito allo sbando, le sue gesta sono vuote di significato», e con sfoggio di obiettività giornalistica scriveva che Gerry Adams e i repubblicani erano solo «patetici criminali assassini» con cui non si sarebbe dovuto mai trattare⁹⁹. Quanto agli inviati in Irlanda (e al corrispondente da Londra) del secondo quotidiano italiano, essi negli stessi anni non erano molto meglio: la stessa ignoranza e approssimazione generali, con la stessa verificabile dipendenza dalla propaganda diffusa dagli organi di *public relations* dello Stato britannico, propaganda di cui venivano similmente ricalcati soltanto gli aspetti più scoperti e grossolani. Nel panorama della grande stampa italiana vi erano però alcune eccezioni, tra le quali «L'Avvenire», il «Sole 24 Ore» e «La Stampa».

Oggi un possibile contrasto a queste forme di disinformazione è rappresentato dalle opportunità offerte dal sempre maggiore sviluppo di Internet¹⁰⁰; e, naturalmente, dai buoni libri sull'Irlanda e la sua storia¹⁰¹.

* Una precedente versione meno ampia di questo saggio, col titolo *Una «terra dissestata»: immagini dell'Irlanda in Italia*, è stata pubblicata alle pp. 503-543 di C.M. Pellizzi, L. Vaccaro (a cura di), *Storia religiosa dell'Irlanda*, «Europa Ricerche» 7, I.T.L. 'Centro Ambrosiano', Milano 2001.

Note

¹ Si vedano in proposito, per curiosità in quanto ormai superati dalla ricerca storica irlandese, G. Domenici, *S. Colombano (543-615)*, «La Civiltà Cattolica», 28 gennaio 1916, pp. 308-320; 10 marzo 1916, pp. 680-691; e 7 aprile 1916, pp. 190-201 (poi pubblicato anche come opuscolo); e A.M. Tommasini OFM, *I santi irlandesi in Italia*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1932, volume peraltro ancora prezioso per le informazioni sui culti locali italiani che riguardavano questi santi (ampliato e aggiornato dall'autore, venne tradotto in inglese da J.F. Scanlan: A. M. Tommasini, *Irish Saints in Italy*, Sands and Co., London 1937).

² Per una versione italiana di tutti e tre i testi, vedi G. Battelli, *Le più belle leggende cristiane, tratte da codici e da antiche stampe, commentate e illustrate*, Ulrico Hoepli, Milano 1924 (*Purgatorium Sancti Patricii*, alle pp. 436-470; *Visio Tugdali*, alle pp. 467-470; *Navigatio Brandani*, alle pp. 471-492). Sulla *Navigatio*, composta in Irlanda probabilmente nell'VIII secolo, vedi G. Orlandi, *Navigatio Sancti Brendani: Introduzione*, «Testi e documenti per lo studio dell'Antichità» 38, Milano-Varese, Cisalpino – Goliardica 1968; come edizione italiana recente *La navigazione di San Brandano*, a cura di A. Magnani, Sellerio, Palermo 1992; e l'edizione di due volgarizzamenti e ampliamenti del testo latino, uno in toscano, l'altro in veneto, della prima metà del XV secolo, *Navigatio Sancti Brendani. La navigazione di San Brandano*, a cura di M. A. Grignani, Bompiani, Milano 1997. Per un'edizione italiana recente della *Visio Tugdali* o *Tnugdali*, del primo XII secolo, vedi *Il cavaliere irlandese all'Inferno*, a cura di A. Magnani, Sellerio, Palermo 1996.

³ Vedi ad esempio A. D'Ancona, *I precursori di Dante*, Felice Le Monnier, Firenze 1874 (anche in ristampa anastatica, Forni, Bologna 1989); e G. Osella, *Il Guerrin Meschino*, Casa Editrice Giovanni Chiantore Successore Ermanno Loescher, numero monografico di «Pallante. Studi di Filologia e Folklore», fasc. IX-X, Torino 1932.

⁴ Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533), *Orlando Furioso* (1516), a cura di C. Sepe, Mondadori, Milano 1976, canto X, 92.

⁵ Vedi una redazione della leggenda dal codice Riccardiano, fine del XIII secolo, *La leggenda di Tristano*, a cura di L. Di Benedetto, «Scrittori d'Italia» 189, Laterza, Bari 1942.

⁶ Si crede che la prima redazione manoscritta dell'opera sia del 1410 circa: vedi Andrea Da Barberino (1379-1431), *I Reali di Francia*, a cura di G. Vandelli e G. Gambarin, «Scrittori d'Italia» 193, Laterza, Bari 1947.

⁷ Sulla storia delle edizioni del *Guerino detto il Meschino*, la cui prima redazione manoscritta è del 1415 circa, vedi il già citato G. Osella, *Il Guerrin Meschino*, che contiene le parti dell'opera censurate nelle edizioni a stampa a partire dalla metà del XVI secolo. Il pozzo o purgatorio di san Patrizio, già pochi anni dopo la distruzione dell'originale, venne ricostruito su un'altra isola del Lough Derg dai canonici regolari agostiniani, e da essi sempre gestito divenne da allora meta di pellegrinaggio penitenziale non più di rari ardentosi, ma di massa, e senza più fenomeni straordinari. Il critico letterario italiano del XIX secolo Lodovico Frati suggeriva nei due articoli che citerò oltre che nella caverna distrutta su ordine del papa nel 1497 vi fosse stata una sorgente naturale di gas, fatto che spiegherebbe l'intensità delle visioni riferite, e i fenomeni associati, quali in alcuni casi lo stordimento immediato e in altri addirittura la morte del penitente.

⁸ L'edizione critica delle opere complete di *Giraldus Cambrensis* o Gerald del Galles (o Gerald de Berri, 1146-1223) è *Giraldus Cambrensis, Opera*, a cura di J.S. Brewer, J.F. Dimock, e G.F. Warner, 8 voll., «Rerum Britannicarum Medii Ævi Scriptores, or Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages» (meglio nota come 'Rolls Series') n. 21, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London 1861-1891. Le due opere di interesse irlandese, *Geografia dell'Irlanda* del 1188 e *Conquista dell'Irlanda* del 1205 circa, costituiscono il vol. V, *Giraldus Cambrensis, Topographia Hibernica, et Expugnatio Hibernica*, a cura di J.F. Dimock, London 1867. La seconda ha avuto una più recente edizione critica a cura di A.B. Scott e F.X. Martin, come vol. III delle *Ancillary Publications* della *New History of Ireland*, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin 1978. Sola traduzione italiana del testo della *Topographia* è *Giraldus Cambrensis, Agli estremi confini d'Occidente. Descrizione dell'Irlanda (Topographia Hibernica)*, a cura di Melita Cataldi, «Strenna UTET 2002», UTET, Torino 2001.

⁹ Gli Annali di Innisfallen però riportano la morte, nel 1095, di Eoghan, «capo dei monaci dei Gaeli in Roma», che dovevano quindi avervi ancora una comunità. Un ridotto numero di ecclesiastici irlandesi si recarono occasionalmente in Italia come pellegrini. Inoltre nel XII secolo, prima dell'invasione anglonormanna, alcuni tra i riformatori della Chiesa irlandese, tra cui in primo luogo san Malachia di Armagh, giunsero a Roma. Un cardinale italiano, Giovanni Paparo, compì nel 1151 il viaggio inverso, andando in Irlanda per imporre il pallio ai quattro nuovi arcivescovi metropolitani creati dalla riforma ecclesiale nell'isola (vedi A. Gwynn SJ, *Papal Legates in Ireland during the Twelfth Century*, «The Irish Ecclesiastical Record», vol. LXIII, Jan.-Jun. 1944, Dublin, pp. 361-370).

¹⁰ Vedi ad esempio M. J. Donovan O'Sullivan, *Italian Merchant Bankers in Ireland in the Thirteenth Century (A Study in the social and economic history of medieval Ireland)*, Allen Figgis & Co., Dublin 1962.

¹¹ V. Berardis, *Italy and Ireland in the Middle Ages*, Clonmore and Reynolds, Dublin 1950; riguardo ai pellegrinaggi al «Purgatorio» di Patrizio vedi pp. 87-88.

¹² Vedi pp. 49-48 di Lodovico Frati, *Tradizioni storiche del Purgatorio di San Patrizio*, in «Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana», vol. XVII, 1° Semestre 1891, Torino, pp. 46-79. In un resoconto di visioni ultraterrene avute nel pozzo di san Patrizio da un certo Lodovico di Sur (ma in realtà di filiazione direttamente letteraria, e scritto «in barbaro latino»), che il Frati pubblicava in appendice, l'ignoto autore sosteneva di avere visto giungere sull'isola il Malatesta e il de Beccari proprio mentre riaffiorava dal 'purgatorio'.

¹³ La lettera di Caterina, *A Don Giovanni Monaco della Certosa in Roma*, è la CCI della raccolta *Le Lettere di S. Caterina da Siena*, a cura di Niccolò Tommaseo, G. Barbèra, Firenze 1860.

¹⁴ Il resoconto del pellegrinaggio al Purgatorio di San Patrizio di Antonio Mannini venne pubblicato a stampa da Lodovico Frati, alle pp. 154-162 delle *Appendici* al suo articolo *Il Purgatorio di S. Patrizio secondo Stefano di Bourbon e Uberto da Romans*, «Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana», vol. VIII, 2° Semestre 1886, pp. 140-179.

¹⁵ La lettera di Francesco Chiericati a Isabella d'Este venne pubblicata per la prima volta in A. Portioli (a cura di), *Quattro documenti d'Inghilterra ed uno di Spagna dell'Archivio Gonzaga di Mantova*, Tipografia Eredi Segna, Mantova 1868. Il testo italiano, con una traduzione inglese non sempre aderentissima, è stato più di recente ripubblicato: M. Purcell, *St. Patrick's Purgatory: Francesco Chiericati's Letter to Isabella d'Este*, «Seanchas Ard Mhacha», vol. 12, n. 2, Armagh 1987, pp. 1-10.

¹⁶ Alcuni altri prelati italiani erano stati in precedenza ordinati dal papa vescovi nelle diocesi irlandesi con sede in zone sotto il controllo della Corona inglese: il domenicano Reginaldo era divenuto arcivescovo di Armagh nel 1247; Giovanni di Alatri vescovo di Clonfert nel 1266; e il fiorentino Ottaviano del Palagio fu arcivescovo di Armagh dal 1478 al 1513. Vedi su di loro M. Sughì, *The Appointment of Octavian de Palatio as Archbishop of Armagh, 1477-1478*, «Irish Historical Studies», vol. 31, n. 122, Nov. 1998, pp. 145-164.

¹⁷ Fazio Degli Uberti (circa 1305-1367), *Il Dittamondo e le Rime*, a cura di G. Corsi, vol. I: *Il Dittamondo*, «Scrittori d'Italia» 206, Laterza, Bari 1952; le citazioni che seguono riguardo all'Irlanda sono tutte tratte (quando non altrimenti indicato) dalle pp. 328-331 di questa edizione.

¹⁸ Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571), *Sopra i principj e 'l modo d'imparare l'arte del disegno*, in B. Cellini, *La Vita di Benvenuto Cellini*, a cura di G. Cattaneo, «I Cento Libri» VIII, Longanesi & C., Milano 1958, p. 726. Possibile fonte del Cellini (nonostante la sua protesta di *autopsia*) è il più prudente Fazio Degli Uberti, che non dell'Irlanda, ma di un'isoletta vicino alla Gran Bretagna diceva: «Non la vidi, ma tanto mi fu nova / cosa a udire, e poi si vi s'avera, [“e poi la si ritiene tanto vera”] / che di notarla, com' l'udio, mi giova: / che fra più altre un'isoletta v'era, / dove con coda la gente vi nasce / corta, quale ha un cervo o simil fera» (Degli Uberti, *Dittamondo*, cit., p. 320); quanto al clima dell'Irlanda, per il rimatore pisano, come s'è visto, esso era invece mite.

¹⁹ T. Tasso, *Il Mondo creato*, edizione critica a cura di G. Petrocchi, Felice Le Monnier, Firenze 1951, *Terzo Giorno*, versi 511-513 (cit., p. 78). Anche se, pochi versi sopra, il Tasso più prosaicamente e realisticamente menzionava *en passant* «E l'Inghilterra, e la vicina Irlanda» (verso 410, cit., p. 74).

²⁰ La prima edizione delle *Relationi Universali* del piemontese Giovanni Botero (1544-1617) venne pubblicata a Ferrara nel 1592. La descrizione dell'Irlanda, da cui sono tratte tutte le citazioni, è suddivisa tra le pp. 292-294 della Parte I, pp. 16-24 della Parte II, pp. 33-48 della Parte III dell'edizione di Brescia del 1595; nell'edizione, stampata sempre a Brescia, del 1599 è contenuta nelle pp. 498-500 della Parte I, con 1 carta geografica nel testo, nelle pp. 13-23 della Parte II, nelle pp. 45-67 della Parte III; nell'edizione di Venezia del 1600 è alle pp. 56-58 della Parte I, pp. 10-17 della Parte II, pp. 33-67 della Parte III. Nell'ultima delle edizioni curate dall'autore, quella di Venezia del 1618, il testo non presenta variazioni di rilievo.

²¹ La leggenda di paesi sprofondati sul fondo dei laghi (o del mare), dei quali si vedrebbero i campanili, e cui spesso sarebbero associati strani fenomeni (come la riapparizione in date particolari, l'emissione di musiche o la possibilità di accedere, tramite essi, ad un mondo fatato o sinistro) è, comunque, comune a tutta l'area europea postceltica (incluse le nostre Alpi).

²² E prosegue: «In Mononia è un fonte: le cui acque rendono le persone subito canute. Nell'Vltonia ue n'è un'altro, che impedisce in perpetuo la canicie. enne uno in Connachia sopra un monte, che cresce, et cala due volte il di: et un'altro, che in sett'anni, per la sua freddezza, conuerte ogni legno in sasso. In Mononia è un lago, che ha due isole. in una, che è la maggiore, non è mai entrato animale di sesso femminile, che non sia subito morto: nell'altra, che è la minore, non vi è mai morto nessuno naturalmente. Nel lago Dere [Derg] (che è nell'Vltonia)

vi è un'isola diuisa in due parti, una delle quali è amena, e gratiosa: l'altra horrida, e spiaceuole, oue sono noue fosse. chi capita quì, e vi dorme di notte, è trauagliato estremamente da gli spiriti maluagi. Questo luogo si chiama il Purgatorio di S. Patritio. Non mi accade far mentione delle isolette, che si veggono attorno Hibernia, per non hauer cosa degna di questa opera. Le più celebri sono le Arane [Aran], poste al suo Ponente. Di queste scriue Giraldo Cambrese, che i corpi humani non vi si putrefanno: e che per ciò, non li sepelliscono: ma li tengono all'aere incorrotti. I topi, de quali è gran copia nell'Hibernia, non vi nascono: e portati altronde, ò vi moiono, ò si gettano in mare. Il mar d'Hibernia è inestimabilmente copioso d'ottimi pesci; et ne abbonda non meno l'acqua dolce, che la salsa. Vi nascono anche delle perle, ma di color fosco, e simile al piombo».

²³ Giovanni (o Gian) Lorenzo d'Anania (Taverna – nell'odierna provincia di Catanzaro –, circa 1545-1609) pubblicò oltre alla *Cosmografia* diversi scritti di filosofia, teologia e angelologia. Ho tratto tutte le citazioni dalla seconda edizione di Giovanni Lorenzo d'Anania, *L'Vniversal fabrica del mondo, ouero Cosmografia, diuisa in quattro Trattati*, Venezia 1576, pp. 2-5. La prima edizione, che all'Irlanda dedicava meno spazio, pur dilungandosi maggiormente su elencazioni di luoghi geografici dell'isola, era stata pubblicata a Napoli nel 1573. Tale prima edizione è stata di recente ristampata in due volumi: Gian Lorenzo d'Anania, *L'Universal fabrica del mondo, ouero cosmografia*, a cura di U. Nisticò, Rubbettino Soveria Mannelli 2005-2009 (le pagine riguardanti l'Irlanda nel primo volume). Purtroppo la trascrizione del testo lascia moltissimo a desiderare, così come la cura (ad es. Gerald del Galles viene scambiato dal curatore per un misterioso pseudonimo dell'olandese Mercatore – p. 39, nota 18; e il pony irlandese, che D'Anania chiamava «Hobbee», viene dal Nisticò creduto essere «Un uccello simile al falco» – p. 58, nota 9).

²⁴ G.A. Magini, *Ricchissimi Commentarj*, in Cl. Tolomeo, *Geografia cioè Descrizione Vniuersale della Terra*, Giovanni Battista & Giorgio Galignani Fratelli, Venezia 1596, vol. II; le citazione sono tratte da pp. 26A-27B.

²⁵ Vedi Giuseppe Rosaccio, *Descrittione di tutta la Terra*, in Cl. Tolomeo, *La Geografia*, trad. di G. Ruscelli, Melchior Sessa, Venezia 1598.

²⁶ *La Nunziata in Irlanda di Monsignor Giovanni Batista Rinuccini, Arcivescovo di Fermo, negli anni 1645 a 1649, pubblicata per la prima volta su' MSS. originali della Rinucciana, con documenti illustrati*, a cura di G. Aiazzi, Tipografia Piatti, Firenze 1844.

²⁷ Vedi P.A. O'Sullivan, *The 'Wild Geese': Irish Soldiers in Italy, 1702-1733*, in *Italian Presence in Ireland*, Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Dublin 1964, pp. 79-114.

²⁸ Tra questi ultimi il gesuita inglese Nicholas Sanders (o alla latina *Sanderus*), *miles Christi* estremamente pugnace, cospiratore infaticabile, presente a Roma tra 1578 e 1579, sbarcato poi in Irlanda nel 1579 con il titolo di legato pontificio alla guida di una piccola spedizione vaticano-spagnola di settecento uomini in appoggio proprio alle tribù irlandesi ribelli, e ivi perito nel 1581 (su tale spedizione vedi Petrie, *The Hispano-Papal landing at Smerwick*, «The Irish Sword: The Journal of the Military History Society of Ireland», vol. IX, Dublin, pp. 82-94). Nel 1578-1579 Sanders scrisse in latino una storia polemica della Riforma in Inghilterra, *Vera et sincera historia schismatis Anglicani, de ejus origine ac progressu*, che fu tra le più lette (la prima pubblicazione del testo latino, Peter Henning, Coloniae Agrippinae 1585). Ciò ne favorì, nel 1602, una libera riduzione, in cui le parti relative all'Irlanda vennero però tralasciate, da parte del fiorentino Bernardo Davanzati Bostichi (1529-1606), col titolo *Lo Scisma d'Inghilterra*, Firenze 1602. Naturalmente nessuno in Irlanda o altrove, in precedenza, aveva messo in dubbio l'autenticità della *Laudabiliter*, peraltro confermata dalle tre lettere di papa Alessandro III del 1172, e dalla stessa *Rimostranza* del 1317 dei nobili gaelici sostenitori degli scozzesi Edward e Robert Bruce contro il dominio inglese sull'Irlanda. La bolla papale, che dava a Enrico II il compito, «in quanto principe cattolico, [di] allargare le frontiere della Chiesa, spiegare la verità della fede cristiana a popoli ignoranti e barbari, e sradicare le erbe del vizio dal campo del Signore» (e che costituiva, quindi, la legittimazione della conquista

anglonormanna dell'Irlanda), era stata il frutto diretto dell'opera dei riformatori ecclesiastici irlandesi del XII secolo, in primis san Malachia di Armagh (1094-1148), che premevano su Roma per un intervento in quel senso. Ed è evidente la filiazione diretta della *Laudabiliter* dalla *Vita Malachiae* (1149) di san Bernardo di Clairvaux ('instant book' dell'epoca, subito diffuso in tutta Europa, in cui l'influente amico cistercense del riformatore irlandese, subito dopo la sua morte, descriveva gli Irlandesi quali «barbarica popolazione», «popolo rozzo e che viveva senza legge», non «uomini» ma «bestie», e «cristiani di nome, ma di fatto pagani»). Inutile dire che quando, nel XIX e XX secolo, tramite il proprio maggioritario controllo dell'istruzione pubblica la Chiesa cattolica irlandese cercava di accreditare una versione della storia patria in cui essa era sempre stata l'unico baluardo della nazione gaelica, questa comprovata origine dell'invasione anglonormanna venne convenientemente 'dimenticata'.

²⁹ Sul difficile rapporto tra Italia e Irlanda durante il nostro Risorgimento, dal 1815 al 1870, si vedano due studi di sintesi: *Ireland and the Italian Risorgimento: Three Lectures*, a cura di R.D. Edwards, Italian Institute in Dublin / Cultural Relations Committee of Ireland, Dublin 1960; e G. D'Angelo, *Italia e Irlanda nel XIX secolo (Contatti e malintesi fra due movimenti nazionali)*, «Storia e Politica», XV, 3 (luglio), 1976, pp. 393-438. Si veda inoltre il capitolo II di N. Mansergh, *The Irish Question 1840-1921: A Commentary on Anglo-Irish Relations and on Social and Political Forces in Ireland in The Age of Reform and Revolution*, George Allen & Unwin, London 1965²; e *Daniel O'Connell. Atti del Convegno di Studi nel 140° Anniversario della morte*, a cura di L. Morabito, Quaderni dell'Istituto Mazziniano, Genova 1990.

³⁰ C. Balbo (1789-1853), *Delle Speranze d'Italia*, Tipografia Elvetica, Capolago 1845³ (I ed., Frères Firmin-Didot, Paris 1844); le citazioni da pp. 94, 146-147, 322 e 337.

³¹ In T. Moore, *Poemi*, introduzione di E. Checchi, Felice Le Monnier, Firenze 1864, pp. XIX-XX.

³² Vi sarà anche, tra le altre pubblicazioni, la traduzione italiana dell'unico scritto edito di D. O'Connell, *Memoria storica sopra l'Irlanda e gli Irlandesi*, Editore Pietro Marietti, Torino 1845.

³³ Vedi G. de Beaumont de la Bonninière, *L'Irlande Sociale, Politique et Religieuse*, Librairie de Ch. Gosselin, Paris 1839; e G. Di Beaumont, *L'Irlanda sociale, politica e religiosa*, trad. e a cura di C. Bianchi, «Il Mondo Contemporaneo» IV, Società Editrice Fiorentina, Firenze 1842; le due citazioni da p. 9 e da p. 16 dell'edizione italiana. I diari di viaggio di Tocqueville, al contrario, verranno pubblicati solo negli anni Cinquanta del nostro secolo: vedi A. de Tocqueville, *Journeys to England and Ireland*, a cura di J.P. Mayer, Yale University Press, 1958. Una recensione napoletana dell'opera di de Beaumont ebbe allora anch'essa grande diffusione: Achille Antonio Rossi, *Considerazioni sulla storia dell'Irlanda. Intorno al Discorso storico preposto dal Beaumont ai suoi libri sull'Irlanda*, «Rivista Europea. Giornale di scienze morali, letteratura ed arti», n. 10, 1845, pp. 397-450. Essa apparve contemporaneamente anche in «Museo di Scienze e Letteratura», nnova serie, anno II, Napoli 1845; e venne ripubblicata nel 1848 in forma di volume di 78 pagine.

³⁴ E. Regnault, *Storia d'Irlanda dalla sua origine fino al 1845, seguita da cenni biografici intorno a' suoi grand'uomini*, tradotto dall'originale francese da G.B., Tipografia Elvetica, Capolago 1846, pp. 247.

³⁵ C. Benso Conte di Cavour (1805-1861), *Considérations sur l'état actuel de l'Irlande et sur son avenir*, I ed. in «Bibliothèque Universelle de Genève», gennaio-febbraio 1844; lo si veda in *Gli scritti del Conte di Cavour nuovamente raccolti e pubblicati*, a cura di D. Zanichelli, Nicola Zanichelli, Bologna 1892, II, pp. 221-353.

³⁶ D'Angelo, *Italia e Irlanda*, cit., p. 403.

³⁷ Tutte le citazioni, e quelle che seguono, da Carlo Cattaneo (1801-1869), *Dell'agricoltura in Irlanda*, I ed., «Il Politecnico», vol. VII, fasc. XXXVII, 1844, pp. 83-112; poi (col titolo *Su lo stato presente dell'Irlanda*) in C. Cattaneo, *Opere edite ed inedite*, Successori Le Monnier, Firenze 1881-1892, vol. III, pp. 332-367. Si veda anche, a Grande Carestia già iniziata, C.

Cattaneo, *D'alcune istituzioni agrarie dell'Alta Italia applicabili a sollievo dell'Irlanda. Lettere a Roberto Campbell ufficiale della Marina britannica regio vice-console in Milano*, I ed., «Giornale del I. R. Istituto Lombardo di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti e Biblioteca Italiana compilata da varj dotti nazionali e stranieri», Tomo XVI, Milano 1847, pp. 171-238; poi (IV edizione), in C. Cattaneo, *Opere edite ed inedite*, cit., vol. IV, pp. 285-357 (la II ed. era stata pubblicata all'epoca come volume, Giuseppe Bernardoni, Milano 1847, pp. 85). E vedi, dopo la Carestia, C. Cattaneo, *L'agricoltura inglese paragonata alla nostra*, I ed., «Il Crepuscolo», anno VIII, n. 50, Milano, 13 dicembre 1857, pp. 793-798; n. 51, 20 dicembre 1857, pp. 809-812; e n. 52, 27 dicembre 1857, pp. 825-828; poi in C. Cattaneo, *Opere edite ed inedite*, cit., vol. IV, pp. 358-390; e C. Cattaneo, *Sui disastri dell'Irlanda negli anni 1846 e 1847*, I ed. in «Il Politecnico», vol. VIII, fasc. XLIII, Milano 1860, pp. 21-34; poi in C. Cattaneo, *Opere edite ed inedite*, cit., vol. III, pp. 368-385.

³⁸ *Young Ireland* non fu mai il nome ufficiale del gruppo, e venne molto usato dagli avversari o'connellisti e clericali per accusarne implicitamente i componenti di essere mazziniani e nemici del Papa. Ma secondo Michael Huggins, *Cosmopolitan nationalism: Young Ireland and the Risorgimento* (relazione al convegno 'Britain, Ireland and the Italian Risorgimento', London, 28 October 2011), a introdurre quella denominazione fu proprio il giornale del gruppo, «The Nation».

³⁹ B. King, *The Life of Mazzini*, J. M. Dent & Sons, «Everyman's Library», London 1902, pp. 105-107 (fu tradotto in italiano da Maria Pezzè Pascolato, B. King, *Mazzini*, «Pantheon», G. Barbèra Editore, Firenze 1903; ma qui la traduzione è mia). I brani qui citati dal King erano tratti da *Notes*, la risposta ai repubblicani irlandesi del Mazzini per conto della Lega Internazionale dei Popoli, che non mi risulta però contenuta nei 117 volumi della *Edizione Nazionale degli Scritti di Giuseppe Mazzini*, Tipografia Galeati, Imola 1906-1981.

⁴⁰ Come D'Angelo, *Italia e Irlanda*, cit., pp. 420-423, e Mansergh, *The Irish Question*, cit., pp. 95-102; più realistico invece il giudizio di K.B. Nowlan, *The Risorgimento and Ireland, 1820-48*, in *Ireland and the Italian Risorgimento*, cit., pp. 23-26. Anche se è vero che fino all'ultimo il Mazzini continuò a ripetere lo stesso ritornello contro l'esistenza di una nazione irlandese. Scrivendo da Londra a Francesco Crispi, che era anch'egli a Londra e doveva avergli chiesto ragguagli sulla *Young Ireland* in occasione della lettera aperta con cui Charles Gavan Duffy, che ne era stato uno dei leader, annunciava di abbandonare la politica in Irlanda a causa della guerra fattagli dal clero, Mazzini così si esprimeva, il 29 agosto del 1855: «Duffy fu uno dei capi più ardenti della così detta Giovine Irlanda, partito che sorse verso la fine della carriera di O'Connell, avversandolo siccome fiacco e tergiversatore. Lo era infatti invocando il discioglimento dell'Unione e incitando l'Irlanda a guadagnarla con le armi. Avevano un giornale intitolato The Nation. Imitatori in molte cose della scuola francese, erano nello stesso tempo per popolarizzarsi, ingiusti colle nazionalità straniere e soprattutto con noi, a cagione del Papa che rispettavano. L'agitazione pel *Repeal* non poteva riuscire, per la semplice ragione che lo scopo era falso. L'Irlanda sola sarebbe dominata o dalla Francia o nuovamente dall'Inghilterra dopo breve tempo. Ha diritti propri, non vera nazionalità. La via migliore era quella di cacciar tutto il peso del partito Irlandese in Parlamento – 70 e più membri – e fuori in favore del partito radicale inglese: avrebbero conquistato per sé e per tutti. Isolandosi, si perdevano. Io lo dissi e scrissi allora, al sorgere dell'agitazione. Così poi fu» (in *Edizione Nazionale*, cit., vol. LIV, pp. 289-290). E ancora, in una lettera da Lugano del 22 marzo 1870 a Felice Dobelli che intendeva curare un'antologia di scritti mazziniani, lettera che è una sintesi delle concezioni dell'agitatore repubblicano: «La nazionalità è una missione. [...] La Nazionalità è la divisione del lavoro nell'Umanità. Ogni popolo chiamato ad esser Nazione ha, per disegno providenziale, un ufficio speciale da compiere a pro' di tutti. Quell'ufficio, parte del lavoro tendente al Progresso comune, costituisce l'individualità di quel popolo; dove non esiste, gli uomini possono, come in Irlanda, agitarsi a posta loro in nome d'una nazionalità indipendente; non l'otterranno: dove esiste, la forza cieca e brutale dei despoti può, come in Polonia, soffocarne

per un tempo lo sviluppo e negarlo, ma non riuscirà a cancellarla e la Nazione risorgerà» (in *Edizione Nazionale*, cit., vol. LXXXIX, pp. 50-51). E pochi mesi prima di morire, nel settembre 1871, suggerendo da Lugano cosa pubblicare nell'organo repubblicano «La Roma del Popolo» al suo direttore Giuseppe Petroni, Mazzini scriveva: «Punti cardinali direttivi nella scelta dei fatti da citarsi dovrebbero essere, parmi, [...] non troppo peso dato ai moti irlandesi: non v'è materia in Irlanda per una nazionalità separata: sarebbero dopo un anno inglesi di nuovo, francesi o americani: la vera via sarebbe per essi d'unir le loro forze a quelle dei radicali britannici per battere l'aristocrazia e repubblicanizzare il paese» (in *Edizione Nazionale*, cit., vol. CI, p. 219).

⁴¹ A quanto sembra dimostrare, e proprio a proposito dell'Irlanda, la corrispondenza di Mazzini pubblicata nella *Edizione Nazionale*, la svolta avvenne probabilmente nei primi mesi del 1844, quando l'esule italiano si trovò vittima e protagonista del cosiddetto 'affare delle Poste' (su pressione dell'Impero asburgico il ministro dell'interno conservatore, James Graham, aveva dato ordine che i servizi di spionaggio inglesi leggessero di nascosto tutte le sue lettere - cosa che avveniva anche per la corrispondenza di O'Connell). Mazzini, pur denunciando aspramente e pubblicamente gli atti del ministro, entrò in quell'occasione in stretti rapporti con i settori che contavano dell'*establishment* inglese, tanto liberali quanto conservatori, dichiarandosi il migliore amico dello Stato britannico. Sta di fatto che prima di allora egli non sembrava dubitare dell'esistenza di una nazione irlandese, e di una nazione irlandese oppressa dall'Inghilterra; e mostrava sì una scarsissima stima per O'Connell, che considerava un demagogo, ma non perché questi facesse agitazione per l'abrogazione dell'Unione con la Gran Bretagna, bensì perché non era disposto a far seguire i fatti alle parole. Vedi, ad es., la recensione mazziniana del 1832 di un'antologia di poesia ceca pubblicata a Londra: «E le canzoni lamentose della *verde Erin*, dalle quali Moore ha tratta l'anima delle sue melodie non rivelano esse quanto ogni altro documento, l'indole religiosa, melanconica, insistente del popolo Irlandese, e il segreto di quella lotta ostinata, instancabile, nazionale, sostenuta da secoli contro l'Inglese?» (in *Edizione Nazionale*, cit., vol. I, p. 379). E vedi anche le lettere indirizzate alla madre, a Genova: ad es., *Edizione Nazionale*, cit., vol. X, p. 408; vol. XV, p. 184, pp. 282-283; vol. XXIII, pp. 184-185, p. 197; vol. XXIV, p. 134, pp. 165-166 (da Londra alla madre, 26 giugno 1843: «gli Irlandesi sanno bene che cosa vogliono, ma non possono ottenerlo fuorché battendosi, rivoltandosi»), pp. 176-177, p. 219, p. 320 (alla madre, 23 ottobre 1843: «Io simpatizzo estremamente coll'Irlanda, ma non tanto con O'Connell e col modo suo di mettere la questione. O'Connell del resto non è che puramente Irlandese, e come uomo europeo è da considerarsi piuttosto nostro avversario che amico. Maneggiato com'è purtroppo dal Clero Cattolico, egli serve piuttosto alle mire d'un partito retrogrado che a un concetto veramente liberale»), e pp. 342-343 (alla madre, 25 novembre 1843: «non v'è dubbio che O'Connell è un uomo singolare e amante del suo paese; ma il suo errore fondamentale è quello di volere l'impossibile, cioè la separazione dell'Irlanda, senza insurrezione violenta. Per mezzi legali la separazione è impossibile»). E le corrispondenze della primavera del 1837 di Mazzini da Londra per «Le Monde», rivista di H.-F. R. de Lamennais, in cui si chiede se l'Irlanda, «ce pays de misère», sia una provincia del Regno Unito, o non, invece, una sua colonia (*Edizione Nazionale*, cit., vol. XVII, pp. 67-68 e p. 125).

⁴² Vedi G. Ventura di Raulica (1792-1861), *Elogio funebre di Daniello O'Connell, Membro del Parlamento Britannico, recitato nei solenni funerali celebratigli nei giorni 28 e 30 Giugno*, Editore Filippo Cairo, Roma 1847; opera di cui in quegli anni si ebbero numerose edizioni (tra esse, Tipografia Fabiani, Bastia 1847, pp. XVIII-122; stesso luogo, editore e data, ma con diversa impaginazione, pp. V-98; Veladini e C., Lugano 1847, pp. XIX-148; s.e., Milano 1848; e in G. Ventura di Raulica, *Pio IX e l'Italia, ossia Storia della sua vita e degli avvenimenti politici del suo pontificato, seguita da molti documenti ufficiali e dalle orazioni funebri di O'Connell e del Can. Graziosi recitate dal Padre Ventura*, Stabilimento Nazionale Tipografico di Carlo Turati, Milano 1848. Vedi anche F. Andreu CR, *Fr. Ventura's Funeral Oration for Daniel O'Connell*, in *The World of Daniel O'Connell*, a cura di D. McCartney, The Mercier Press, Dublin e Cork 1980, pp. 163-174.

⁴³ Vedi ad esempio G. Margotti, *Roma e Londra: confronti*, Tipografia Forzani e Dalmazzo, Torino 1858.

⁴⁴ In quegli anni la rubrica *Cronache contemporanee: Inghilterra* si occupa a più riprese dei repubblicani irlandesi; vedi ad esempio quella datata 28 ottobre 1865, in cui tra l'altro si tratteggiano *Scopo ed estensione della setta dei Feniani* e il fatto che *Sono pubblicamente condannati dal clero*, «La Civiltà Cattolica», n. 375, 4 novembre 1865, pp. 374-384.

⁴⁵ [Carlo Piccirillo], *I Feniani nell'Irlanda*, «La Civiltà Cattolica», n. 374, 21 ottobre 1865, pp. 136-149, da cui sono tratte, nel loro ordine, tutte le citazioni.

⁴⁶ A. Papi, *L'Irlanda e Daniele O'Connell*, Macerata, Tipografia dei Fratelli Bianchini, 1866, pp. 296; la citazione da p. 12.

⁴⁷ Vedi I. Ciavarini Doni, *La libertà religiosa e il libro di A. Papi L'Irlanda e Daniel O'Connell*, Ancona, Tipografia Mengarelli, 1874, pp. 11

⁴⁸ Sui volontari irlandesi nelle truppe pontificie vedi G.F.H. Berkeley, *Gl'Irlandesi al servizio del Papa nel 1860*, «Il Risorgimento Italiano. Rivista Storica», anno VI, n. 5, settembre-ottobre 1913, pp. 863-895; e gli articoli e le note della rivista di storia militare irlandese «The Irish Sword: The Journal of the Military History Society of Ireland», pubblicata a Dublino dal 1949: Basil O'Connell, *The Irish Battalion in the Papal Service*, 1860, vol. II, 1954-1956, pp. 300-301; Cathaldus Giblin, *Roger O'Connor. An Irishman in the French and Papal Service*, vol. II, 1954-1956, pp. 309-314; Gerard A. Hayes-McCoy, *An Irish Papal Zouave in 1870*, vol. III, 1957-1958, pp. 226-233; Gerard A. Hayes-McCoy, *The Hat of an Irish Soldier of the Papacy*, vol. IV, 1959-1960, pp. 2-4; Cyril P. Crean, *The Irish Battalion of St. Patrick at the Defence of Spoleto*, September 1860, vol. IV, 1959-1960, pp. 52-60 e pp. 99-104; Norman William English, *Spoleto Veteran Charles Edgeworth Lynch*, vol. XI, 1972-1974, p. 54; John de Courcy Ireland, *Mark Parker and the Papal Navy*, vol. XII, 1975-1977, p. 256; Mary Jane Cryan Pancani, *New Light on the Background to the Irish Participation in the Papal Army of 1860*, vol. XVI, 1984, pp. 155-164; e Canice O'Mahony, *Irish Papal Troops, 1860 to 1870, with Particular Reference to the Contribution from County Louth*, vol. XXI, 1998-1999, pp. 285-297.

⁴⁹ Vedi Monsignor Francesco Nardi, *Memorie e pensieri sull'Irlanda. Estratto dall'Osservatore Cattolico Giornale di Milano*, Tipografia Gernia Giovanni, Milano 1868, pp. 48; e Mons. Francesco Nardi, *Ricordi di viaggio in Irlanda*, estratto da «La Voce della Verità», Alessandro Befani, Roma 1873, pp. 64 (le citazioni da p. 4, 5, 32, e 13 del primo di essi).

⁵⁰ Questo altrimenti ignoto 'generale' Wilson della milizia territoriale è forse il padre del famoso generale e politico unionista irlandese Sir Henry Wilson (1864-1922), il cui assassinio a Londra da parte di membri dello I.R.A. (peraltro di incerta affiliazione) portò nel giugno 1922 allo scatenarsi della Guerra civile irlandese (1922-23) nel territorio del neonato Stato Libero.

⁵¹ Lettera di Mazzini, da Londra, a G. Garibaldi a Caprera, 23 gennaio 1861, in *Edizione Nazionale*, cit., vol. LXX, pp. 309-310.

⁵² Il modenese Augusto Cesare Marani, nato nel 1814, era stato condannato alla galera dalla giustizia ducale per la sua partecipazione ai moti del 1831. Fuggito dalla prigionia in data ignota, dalla fine degli anni Trenta era esule a Dublino. Aveva di là scritto ai Mazzini per discutere della 'guerra per bande', che entrambi consideravano mezzo principe per la rivoluzione italiana. La prima lettera di Mazzini, da Londra, a Marani è del 28 marzo 1840 (in *Edizione Nazionale*, cit., vol. XIX, pp. 46-50). Divenuto di lì a poco agente della peraltro alquanto lasca organizzazione mazziniana, il Marani ebbe poi anche il compito di tenere informato Mazzini delle attività degli *Young Irelanders* e della loro pubblicistica (vedi, ad esempio, la lettera di Mazzini da Londra a Marani, 11 agosto 1846, in *Edizione Nazionale*, cit., ol. XXX, pp. 114-116, e cfr. con quella subito precedente alla madre a Genova, 7 agosto 1846, in *Edizione Nazionale*, cit., vol. XXX, pp. 112-113: Mazzini voleva conoscere la reazione della *Young Ireland* e de «The Nation» a una lettera aperta di John MacHale, arcivescovo di Tuam, che lo citava, insieme a Voltaire, quale malvagio ispiratore del gruppo indipendentista irlandese). Le lettere di Mazzini a Marani (e a Garibaldi a Caprera e al fiduciario di questi,

Federico Bellazzi a Genova) riguardo alla progettata brigata unionista irlandese, pubblicate in *Edizione Nazionale*, cit., vol. LXX e vol. LXXI, sono datate dal gennaio al giugno 1861 (dal vol. LXX, pp. 306-307, a Marani, 18 gennaio: «Scrivo subito a Garibaldi. [...] In principio, Garibaldi dirà di sì con entusiasmo di gratitudine ai bravi Irlandesi che si propongono di lavar la macchia posta sul nome di Irlanda dai raggiratori cattolici. Le condizioni saranno [da lui] accettate senza discussione. E anche l'unica che presenti qualche ostacolo, cioè il trasporto, sarebbe sormontata. L'unica difficoltà potrà venire dal teatro della guerra e dal dualismo che esiste fra Garibaldi e Cavour», al vol. LXXI, pp. 239-243, a Bellazzi, 16 giugno: «Un Comitato Garibaldino stabilito in Dublino ha per Segretario un John Spear, giovine protestante buonissimo. Quando [questi Irlandesi] credevano che Garibaldi avrebbe agito nel marzo, etc., avevano dato opera a organizzare un Brigata per lui, onde cancellare l'onta cacciata sull'Irlanda dai suoi Cattolici. Ne scrissi a Garibaldi e gli feci scrivere una lettera allo Spear; ma al solito, da quella lettera del 12 novembre in poi, non mandò più una sola linea. Oggi, esagerandosi per l'immensa gioia del Partito Cattolico le conseguenze della morte di Cavour, [questi volontari irlandesi] credono ad assalti dell'Austria, credono alla necessità per Garibaldi di snudar la spada; e hanno ricominciato a organizzare. Desiderano vivamente qualche nuova linea di Garibaldi e la chiedono a me, come prima. Io non corrispondo più con Garibaldi. Dovreste quindi chiedergliela voi: alcune linee nelle quali ei trattasse lo Spear come agente suo in Dublino, farebbero bene e basterebbero»), anche se il progetto era iniziato nell'autunno precedente. A. C. Marani, che negli ultimi anni insegnava Italiano al Trinity College, venne nominato Console a Dublino del Regno d'Italia il 12 dicembre 1862. Qualche anno dopo, l'8 febbraio 1865, un malinconico Mazzini, raccomandandogli un tale, gli scriveva da Londra: «Mi dicono che siate Console di S.M.. *Never mind*. I Consolati sono del paese, utili, ed è bene che siano rappresentati da onesti. S.M. passerà» (in *Edizione Nazionale*, cit., vol. LXXX, p. 43).

⁵³ Mazzini si riferiva a Thomas F. Burke, generale dell'esercito confederato americano, nato in Irlanda; l'esecuzione della sentenza venne sospesa anche in considerazione della sua cittadinanza americana (come avvenne mezzo secolo dopo per Éamon De Valera), e fu poi rilasciato nel 1871. Non furono così fortunati, più tardi nello stesso 1867, i cosiddetti «Martiri di Manchester», Allen, Larkin e O'Brien; ma la loro impiccagione ebbe proprio gli effetti previsti da Mazzini. I brani delle due lettere sono riportati da B. King, *Mazzini*, cit., pp. 199-200, ma esse non vennero pubblicate nella *Edizione Nazionale degli Scritti di Giuseppe Mazzini*, citata. Bolton King non ne indicava il destinatario (che ritengo fosse una donna: o Mary King, madre dello stesso autore inglese, o Clementia Taylor, moglie di Peter A. Taylor, a giudicare dagli epistolari inediti cui il King riferiva di avere attinto). Per una svista, nella prima versione, ridotta, di questo saggio (C. M. Pellizzi, *Una «terra dissestata»*, cit.) avevo indicato Emily Venturi come destinataria.

⁵⁴ Vedi ad esempio E. Soderini, *Leone XIII, l'Irlanda e l'Inghilterra. Estratto dal periodico 'La Rassegna Italiana'*, Tipografia Editrice Romana, Roma 1883, pp. 45.

⁵⁵ Vedi ad esempio W. Mazzière Brady, *Roma e il Fenianismo. La Circolare del Papa contro Parnell. Opuscolo*, Tipografia della Pace, Roma 1883, pp. 19.

⁵⁶ 'Catholicus', *L'Irlanda nella sua condizione attuale*, Tipografia A. Befani, Roma 1887, pp. 12; si ricava il cognome dell'autore, presentato come «missionario apostolico», da una nota manoscritta sulla copia dell'opuscolo che egli regalò alla biblioteca della Casa generalizia di Roma della Compagnia di Gesù.

⁵⁷ Vedi A. Carrera, *Storia d'Irlanda*, «Biblioteca del Popolo» 193, Edoardo Sonzogno Editore, Milano 1886, pp. 64; e [A. Carrera], *Irlanda*, voce in pp. 13.660-13.705 del vol. XV di F. Sabatini (a cura di), *Enciclopedia Popolare Illustrata*, E. Perino editore, Roma 1889.

⁵⁸ Emily Ashurst Venturi (Londra 1826-1893), pittrice e femminista, curatrice in Inghilterra delle opere di Mazzini e autrice di libri sul suo pensiero, nell'ultimo ventennio di vita dell'agitatore genovese svolse a tutti gli effetti il ruolo di sua segretaria personale.

⁵⁹ Vedi la serie di articoli, intitolata *Mazzini and Ireland*, in «The Scottish Leader» di Edimburgo, 14 luglio – 1 agosto 1888, di cui la Venturi mandò una copia (corretta di suo pugno) alla *National Library of Ireland* di Dublino. In essi la Venturi riporta integralmente le *Notes* sul separatismo irlandese citate da King, che Mazzini aveva indirizzato alla sua Lega Internazionale dei Popoli negli anni Quaranta; esse erano state pubblicate in «The Times» da un altro sostenitore inglese del Mazzini, Peter A. Taylor, che invece (correttamente) sosteneva che il genovese avesse aversato il nazionalismo irlandese in tutte le sue forme, fossero esse autonomiste o separatiste.

⁶⁰ A. Pittaluga, *La questione agraria in Irlanda. Studio Storico-Economico*, Ermanno Loescher & C., Roma 1894, pp. XXI-370.

⁶¹ F. Meda, *Daniele O'Connell*, «Piccola Biblioteca Scientifico-Letteraria» 4, Libreria Editrice di Giuseppe Palma, Milano 1890, pp. 64; poi in F. Meda, *Bassorilievi*, Tipografia Editrice S. Bernardino, Siena 1897, pp. 1-49; ultima ristampa a me nota in F. Meda, *Statisti cattolici*, Alberto Morano Editore, Napoli 1926, pp. 5-44.

⁶² Vedi E. Buonaiuti, N. Turchi, *L'Isola di smeraldo (Impressioni e note di un viaggio in Irlanda)*, Fratelli Bocca Editori, Torino 1914, sviluppato da due precedenti articoli pubblicati nella rivista della cultura liberale: E. Buonaiuti, *Impressioni d'Irlanda. La risurrezione di un popolo*, «La Nuova Antologia», 1 ottobre 1911, pp. 454-465; e E. Buonaiuti, *Il governo autonomo all'Irlanda*, «La Nuova Antologia», 1 agosto 1912, pp. 501-508.

⁶³ Tra i saggi di simile orientamento, vedi anche quello di Tomaso Perassi, *L'Home Rule irlandese*, «Rivista di Diritto Pubblico», luglio-agosto 1915, pp. 417-436, pubblicato poi anche come estratto, Società Editrice Libreria, Milano 1915, pp. 24; e quelli dedicati al movimento cooperativo irlandese diretto da Sir Horace Plunkett dall'economista Leone Neppi Modona, *Alcuni fattori della rigenerazione economica in Irlanda e le condizioni della proprietà rurale e della cooperazione agricola in alcune provincie italiane. (Segue la versione italiana della Legge Agraria Irlandese 14 Agosto 1903)*, Successori B. Seeber Libreria Internazionale, Firenze 1907, pp. IV-164; e L. Neppi Modona, *La Cooperazione agricola in Irlanda. Memoria letta alla R. Accademia dei Georgofili nell'Adunanza del dì 7 Luglio 1907*, Estratto dagli *Atti della R. Accademia dei Georgofili*, quinta serie, vol. IV, anno 1907, Tipografia di M. Ricci, Firenze 1907, pp. II-53. Vedi anche la traduzione del testo fondamentale di quel movimento (H. Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century*, John Murray, London 1904¹; ivi, 1905²), H. Plunkett, *La nuova Irlanda*, con Prefazione di Luigi Einaudi, introduzione e traduzione italiana 'sull'ultima edizione inglese' di Gino Borgatta, Società Tipografico-Editrice Nazionale, Torino, supplemento a «La Riforma Sociale. Rivista critica di Economia e di Finanza», anno XXI, tomo XXV, n. 5, maggio 1914, pp. XV-275; costituiva un saggio a sé l'introduzione dell'economista G. Borgatta, *Il problema della rinascenza irlandese e la nostra questione meridionale*, contenuta nelle pp. 1-48.

⁶⁴ Pseudonimo di Augusto Vittorio Vecchi (1842-1932).

⁶⁵ Sui rapporti tra Italia e Irlanda e sull'opinione pubblica italiana riguardo all'Irlanda in questo periodo lo studio più completo è A. Salvadori, *Italia e Irlanda 1916-1923*, tesi di laurea inedita, Università degli Studi di Milano, dicembre 1999 (rel. prof. S. Pizzetti), frutto di una ricerca di prima mano negli archivi di Stato italiani (Ministero degli Esteri e degli Interni). Sui rapporti politico-pastorali tra Vaticano e Irlanda, vedi D. Keogh, *The Vatican, the Bishops and Irish Politics, 1919-1939*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1986; e G. La Bella, *Santa Sede e questione irlandese 1916-1922*, «Religione», Società Editrice Internazionale, Torino 1996, più attento ai risvolti italiani.

⁶⁶ Vedi G. Hagan, *Insula Sanctorum. La storia di un Titolo usurpato*, Libreria Editrice Francesco Ferrari, Roma 1910; G. Hagan, *L'Home Rule. Estratto dalla Rivista Internazionale di Scienze sociali e discipline ausiliarie, Gennaio 1913*, Tipografia dell'Unione Editrice, Roma 1913; G. Hagan, *Home Rule. L'autonomia irlandese*, Max Bretschneider, Roma 1913²; e il cruciale [M. O'Riordan], *La recente insurrezione in Irlanda. Esposizione delle sue cause e delle sue conseguenze attinta da fonti ufficiali e da rapporti di pubblicisti inglesi*, [Tipografia Pontificia

nell'Istituto Pio IX], Roma, settembre 1916. Sull'attività in favore dell'indipendenza irlandese di O'Riordan e Hagan vedi T.R. Greene, *Michael O'Riordan's La recente insurrezione in Irlanda, 1916*, «Éire-Ireland», vol. 28, n. 4 (Winter 1993), pp. 53-73; e J. de Wiel, *Mgr. O'Riordan, Bishop Dwyer and the Shaping of New Relations Between Nationalist Ireland and the Vatican During World War One*, «Études Irlandaises», vol. 24, n. 1 (Printemps 1999), pp. 137-149. Probabilmente gli stessi O'Riordan e Hagan curarono e fecero pubblicare nei primi mesi del 1915, prima della entrata in guerra dell'Italia, l'opuscolo anti-inglese anonimo (ma di Roger David Casement, 1864-1916, il già diplomatico britannico e repubblicano irlandese impiccato per tradimento dopo la Rivolta di Pasqua), *Come combatte l'Inghilterra nella guerra attuale*, Officina Poligrafica Editrice, Roma 1915, pp. 35.

⁶⁷ La citazione dalla dedica alla memoria di O'Riordan di monsignor C. Salotti, *Vita e martirio del Beato Oliviero Pluncket* [sic], *Arcivescovo di Armagh e Primate d'Irlanda*, Libreria Editrice Religiosa Francesco Ferrari, Roma 1920, pp. 275.

⁶⁸ *L'Irlanda massacrata. Rapporto della Commissione d'inchiesta del Partito Labourista Inglese*, Stab. Tip. Luigi Rossi, Verona s.d. (ma 1921); e *La Commissione Americana sulle condizioni dell'Irlanda*, Cooperativa Tipografica 'Egeria', Roma 1921. Vedi anche i pareri teologici italiani sulla liceità dello sciopero della fame: F.M. Cappello SI, *Il caso del sindaco di Cork e una discussa questione morale*, «La Civiltà Cattolica», 9 dicembre 1920, pp. 521-531; A. Gemelli OFM, *Il caso di coscienza del Sindaco di Cork*, «Rivista del Clero Italiano», anno I, fasc. 11 (10 novembre 1920), pp. 550-555.

⁶⁹ Vedi D. Fienga, *L'Inghilterra contro l'Irlanda*, 'La Fiaccola' Editrice, S. Maria Capua Vetere (Napoli), maggio 1921² (I ed. come estratto della rivista «Eco della Cultura», Napoli, settembre 1916).

⁷⁰ P. Valera, *L'Inghilterra che ammazza un popolo*, «Gli uomini della 'Folla'», Casa Editrice 'La Folla', Milano agosto 1921.

⁷¹ Su John Chartres si veda Brian P. Murphy OSB, *John Chartres: Mystery Man of the Treaty*, Irish Academic Press, Blackrock 1995. Di F. Fabbris vedi ad esempio *L'Irlanda può fare da sé?*, in «Il Popolo d'Italia», Milano, 29 gennaio 1919; di Annie Vivanti ad esempio vedi *L'orco biondo*, pesantemente sbianchettato dalla censura di guerra (allora ancora in vigore in Italia), «Il Popolo d'Italia», Milano, 30 aprile 1919, in cui l'«orco» era l'Inglese; e *Una nazione martire (Annie Vivanti parla con De Valera)*, «Il Popolo d'Italia», Milano, 10 aprile 1919.

⁷² B. Mussolini, *MacSwiney agonizza... Viva la repubblica irlandese!*, «Il Popolo d'Italia», Milano, 29 agosto 1920.

⁷³ Vedi ad esempio Dermot Keogh, *Ireland and Europe 1919-1989*, Hibernian University Press, Cork e Dublin 1990³, che sembra ritenere «Il Popolo d'Italia» interamente pro-Sinn Féin.

⁷⁴ B. Mussolini, articolo citato. L'articolo era in prima pagina, nel luogo degli editoriali del direttore, in alto a sinistra.

⁷⁵ Vedi Tommasini OFM, *I santi irlandesi in Italia*, citato.

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⁷⁷ Vedi A.A. Bernardy, *Irlanda e Roma*, «Milliarium Aureum» VI, Istituto Nazionale per le Relazioni Culturali con l'Estero (I.R.C.E.), Roma 1942, pp. 81; in realtà il testo, pur pubblicato da un istituto del regime, seguiva la falsariga del Tommasini.

⁷⁸M.M. Rossi (1895-1971), *Viaggio in Irlanda*, Doxa, Milano 1932. Una versione ridotta del volume (51 pagine), tradotta dal suo amico irlandese Joseph Maunsell Hone (giornalista, editore e biografo, 1882-1959), venne pubblicata in Irlanda l'anno dopo in trecento copie, come tributo alla memoria di Lady Gregory: M.M. Rossi, *Pilgrimage in the West*, Cuala Press, Dublin 1933 (una ristampa fotolitografica ne fu pubblicata dalla Irish University Press nel 1971). Sul rapporto tra Rossi e Yeats si veda F. Fantaccini, *W.B. Yeats e la cultura italiana*, Firenze University Press, Firenze 2009, pp. 74-97.

⁷⁹M.M. Rossi, *Viaggio in Irlanda*, cit., Capitolo 8: *Nazione e 'clans'*, p. 40.

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⁸¹Ivi, p. 149.

⁸²Vedi, ad esempio, oltre ai testi già citati o citati di seguito, l'accademico Cesarina Baiocchi, *La separazione della Chiesa d'Irlanda dallo Stato*, estratto da «Annali di Scienze Politiche» 1933-1934, Libreria Internazionale Fratelli Treves, Istituto Pavese di Arti Grafiche, Pavia 1934, pp. II-107; l'importante primo volume di un giovane studioso prematuramente scomparso, Serafino Riva, *La tradizione celtica e la moderna letteratura irlandese. I. John Millington Synge, «Religio»*, Roma 1937, pp. VII-319; e il quaderno dell'I.S.P.I. (Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale), *Irlanda*, «Stati e Colonie», 21, ISPI, Milano 1938, pp. II-32, illustrato.

⁸³N. Pascasio, *La Rivoluzione d'Irlanda e l'Impero Britannico*, Editrice 'Nuova Europa', Roma 1934.

⁸⁴Sulle operazioni dell'Asse in Irlanda durante la Seconda guerra mondiale si veda ora, oltre a E. Stephan, *Geheimauftrag Irland: Deutsche Agenten im irischen Untergrundkampf 1939-1945*, Gerhard Stalling Verlag, Oldenburg/ Hamburg 1967² (tradotto in inglese nel 1963; trad. italiana *Spie in Irlanda. Agenti tedeschi e IRA durante la seconda Guerra mondiale*, «Storia», Greco & Greco Editori, Milano 2001), il recente, ben più approfondito volume di Mark Hull, *Irish Secrets: German Espionage in Wartime Ireland 1939-1945*, Irish Academic Press, Dublin 2002, che si occupa anche del personale diplomatico. L'opera della diplomazia fascista in relazione all'Irlanda meriterebbe uno studio approfondito. Purtroppo il volume sul tema di M. Martelli, *La lotta irlandese. Una storia di libertà*, «Gli Archi», Il Cerchio Iniziative Editoriali, Rimini 2006, al di là del titolo truffaldino (impostogli dall'editore) non soddisfa questa esigenza. Pur avendo avuto a disposizione tutti i rapporti dei consoli italiani in Irlanda (e dal 1938 dell'ambasciatore) il Martelli ha miserevolmente sprecato l'occasione.

⁸⁵V. Berardis, *Neutralità e indipendenza dell'Eire*, Istituto Grafico Tiberino, Roma 1950. In esso l'ex ambasciatore cercava di giustificare la sua adesione alla Repubblica sociale, che lo aveva fatto espellere dal servizio diplomatico.

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⁹⁰ Lotta Continua, *Irlanda: un Vietnam in Europa. Materiale d'informazione, documenti, interviste con dirigenti e militanti della lotta armata*, s.l., Edizioni di 'Lotta Continua', s.d. (ma primavera 1972), pp. 216, illustrato. Il volume, anche se comparso anonimo, era curato dallo stesso F. Grimaldi, cui si debbono le uniche foto esistenti della 'Domenica di Sangue' di Derry del 1972, quando i paracadutisti inglesi uccisero 13 dimostranti indipendentisti. Pubblicate subito nell'opuscolo illustrato anonimo (ma di Fulvio Grimaldi e della moglie Susan North), *Blood in the Street*, People's Democracy, Dublin, March 1972, e di nuovo nel libro italiano, sono state poi utilizzate come elementi di prova nell'inchiesta ufficiale sulla strage, istruita come frutto degli Accordi di Belfast del 1998. Una seconda edizione dell'opuscolo di People's Democracy, con nuove introduzioni, è *Blood in the Street*, Guildhall Press, Derry October 1998, pp. 78.

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⁹⁷ Pseudonimo di Brian O'Nolan (1911-1966).

⁹⁸ Tra essi si segnalano in particolare Luca Attanasio, *Guerra e pace in Irlanda del Nord (1969-2000)*, Edizioni Associate Editrice Internazionale, Roma 2001, pp. 135, e L. Attanasio, *Irlanda del Nord*, Editori Riuniti, Roma 2005, pp. 125. Nel secondo di essi non v'è pagina senza un errore fattuale o una stravagante invenzione: se ne veda in rete un'impetosa (ma documentata e puntuale) stroncatura all'indirizzo <<http://irlandanews.altervista.org/Attanasio.htm>>. Vedi anche Paolo Gheda, *I cristiani d'Irlanda e la guerra civile (1968-1998)*, Edizioni Angelo Guerini e Associati, Milano 2006, pp. 293. Omologo a questa impostazione, pur essendone autore un valdese, era anche Paolo Naso, *Il verde e l'arancio. Storia, politica e religione nel conflitto dell'Irlanda del Nord*, Claudiana Editrice, Torino 1996. Invece è uno studio serio, basato su documenti originali, il recentissimo Lucio Valent, *La violenza non è la soluzione. La Gran Bretagna, la Santa Sede e la guerra civile in Irlanda del Nord, 1966-1972*, Edizioni Unicopli, Milano 2011, pp. 296, che pure, nella scelta del titolo, intende pagare tributo a quel medesimo ambiente.

⁹⁹ Il padre di questo 'corrispondente' (il cui nome è bello tacere) era un giornalista fascista che tra 1937 e 1941 si occupava di Irlanda, con una certa serietà, pubblicando tra l'altro una serie di articoli nella rivista dell'I.S.P.I. «Relazioni Internazionali», e collaborando con altre riviste importanti. Ci si può lecitamente domandare se le imprese del nostro entusiasta 'velinaro' non fossero una freudiana rivolta postuma contro il babbo...

¹⁰⁰ Come antidoto alla disinformazione riguardo all'Irlanda presentata dai grandi quotidiani italiani, fu efficace negli anni del cosiddetto 'Processo di pace' il sito Internet italiano *Irlanda Notizie*, ora inattivo e trasferito all'indirizzo <<http://irlandanews.altervista.org/>>. Ma oggi ne sono nati molti altri ancora.

¹⁰¹ Come quello recentissimo di Riccardo Michelucci, *Storia del conflitto anglo-irlandese. Otto secoli di persecuzione inglese*, Casa editrice Odoja, Bologna 2009, pp. 285.

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La compilazione che segue non ha alcuna ambizione di completezza (e le omissioni sono molte), ma intende mostrare i molteplici – e talora singolari – aspetti dell'attenzione italiana per l'Irlanda, dando un particolare rilievo agli scritti e traduzioni italiani rivolti all'attualità politica e alla storia dell'isola, specie nel corso degli ultimi due secoli. Due bibliografie dedicate in prevalenza alla letteratura irlandese (ben più complete rispetto alle traduzioni italiane di autori irlandesi e agli studi italiani sulla letteratura irlandese qui inseriti perché rilevanti nella ricerca sull'immagine dell'Irlanda in Italia e sul modo in cui venivano e vengono viste l'attualità politica e la storia irlandesi nel nostro paese), sono invece quelle a cura di Fiorenzo Fantaccini, contenute rispettivamente in C. De Petris, J. Ellis D'Alessandro, F. Fantaccini (eds.), *The Cracked Lookingglass*, "Biblioteca di Cultura", n. 579, Bulzoni Editore, Roma 1999, pp. 253-291, e in F. Marroni, M. Costantini, R. D'Agnillo (a cura di), *Percorsi di poesia irlandese*, Tracce, Pescara 1998, pp. 277-311.

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Naturalizing Alterity: Edward Maturin's *Bianca: A Tale of Erin and Italy* and Lady Morgan's *Italy*

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It has almost become an axiom that otherness is a useful tool to define identity. Manfred Pfister has neatly summarized what he calls a «truism of Cultural studies»:

A culture defines itself by defining other cultures; the self defines itself by defining the other. The need for cultural and national identity always expresses and realizes itself in ascription of differences and otherness to the neighbouring cultures and nations. [...] The Other [...] helps both the individual and the culture to establish and maintain identity by serving as a screen onto which the self projects its unfulfilled longings, its repressed desires and its darkest sides (Pfister 1996, 4).

Englishness, in consequence, is defined, in part, in opposition to everything not English and, at least during the Renaissance and in the age of Romanticism, against everything Italian. Indeed the relevance of images of Italy in English and other northern literatures is a subject much investigated in our days. When it comes to Ireland, however, little progress has been made in the field of confrontation with Italy for which this journal hopes, in due time, to compensate. Admittedly, Anglo-Ireland, in one of the epochs which was most fertile for Anglo-Italian cultural relations, had to define itself mainly against England leaving to Italy a secondary but significant role. This significance lies, however, rather in the uses that were not made of the image of Italy than in those that were made.

«What is out there in the world», the Other, can have strong implications for the self with the provision offered by Joep Leerssen «that images work in an epistemological economy of *recognition* value rather than *truth* value» (Leerssen 2007, 284). The mental images of Italy held by some Irish Romantic writers served the purpose of underlining resemblance rather than difference, of creating a shock of recognition which would be dealt with more or less gingerly according to the personality and circumstances of the writer. The way the Irish naturalized the alterity of Italy, in fact, is rather ambivalent, on the one hand filtering the connection through their relationship with England

and mirroring stereotypes common to the English-speaking world and on the other hand establishing a special relationship of their own shaped by their ideological and cultural differences from the British. Since, as ethnologists assure us, «when a culture takes cognisance of another [...] it will inevitably do so, so that alterity while being noticed, processed and absorbed is invariably and automatically ‘naturalized’» (Bode 2004, 34), Irish writers of the first half of the nineteenth century reacted to Italy by focusing on those elements which were closest to their historical circumstances such as nationalism, dependence from a foreign power and a desire for and fear of insurrectional movements.

The experience of Italy as a land of refuge and the more recent historical events in both countries (the 1798 Rising in Ireland, the 1799 Rising in Naples, the influence of the French Revolution, with the establishment of a republican government in Italy, the rise and development of the Risorgimento in 1820-1821, in 1830 and in 1848) could have fostered a debate on nationhood and the separate identity of the Irish and the Italians and created a literary image of Italy which differed substantially from the English, that of a country, in Lady Morgan's words, which, like Ireland, «can breathe the spirit of liberty beneath the lash of despotism» (Morgan 1807, 48). Yet, with some exceptions such as Morgan's, Irish writers, although aware of the similarities, used great cautiousness in their representation of the Italian national character and circumstances, clinging to the old English stereotypes. They were clearly aware that a portrait of Italy could be read as a metaphor of Ireland in which case, as Seamus Deane warns, «the one element that had to be erased was the revolutionary element; for once that appeared, the commercialisation failed and Ireland became a territory as Other [for England] as revolutionary France» (Deane 1997, 67). Thus at a time when the Risorgimento could have represented an appeal for the Irish (as it did for many English radicals), as a rule the Irish kept silent because of the similarities perceived and half-heartedly concentrated on a picturesque Italy, full of artistic beauties and of villains.

An example of Irish ambivalence and circumspection is at the centre of an important scene of *Bianca. A Tale of Erin and Italy* (1852) by Edward Maturin, the son of the better known Charles Maturin. In the first conversation between Morven O'Moore, a Trinity College student, and Bianca Romano, an Italian exile in Dublin, the Italian woman exposes her ideas about the resemblance of the two people:

«Ah! Dear generous Ireland!» interrupted Bianca [...] «I can almost fancy myself again under my own bright sky, for the people seem almost the same. The same in fire – enthusiasm – their love of song – in all save their language

«[...] So you like the Irish?»

[...]

«I love them, for in their character I read the transcript of all that commends my countrymen to my heart – nay, even in our misfortunes we have sympathy – »

«To what do you allude?»

«The genius of Italy weeps at the grave of Brutus, but the freedom of Ireland reposes in its tomb without a tear.»

I felt the blood rise to my cheek, and anxious to evade any thing of a political character, I rejoined, «that if Ireland were now soldiered by a foreign foe, the blame lay in her own sons, whose energies were expended in maintaining religious faction rather than in asserting her independence. [...] Have you been long here?» I continued, anxious to change the subject (Maturin 1852, 39-40).

Obviously the theme of the resemblance of the two people in their suffering for the lack of independence and the oppression of foreigners – the epitome of patriotic rhetoric – is a cause of embarrassment for the Irish protagonist, and by attributing the fault of the situation to the «house divided» of Ireland, he tries to dodge the issue as does the author of *Bianca* himself, who also says and unsays things, recognizing and dismissing similarities and touching upon hot political issues and immediately dropping them.

Edward Maturin (1812-1881) was born in Dublin and graduated from TCD, emigrating soon after to the USA with letters of recommendation from Thomas Moore and other men-of-letters. After a stint at the bar, he turned to scholarship and writing, holding the chair of Greek and Latin at various American universities while publishing several literary works. He never lost touch with his Irish origins, however, and most of his creative works relate to Ireland either directly, as in the extravagant melodramatic national tale, *The Irish Chieftain* (1848), or, more often, in emblematic tales set in the classical past or in foreign parts which act as rather transparent metaphors for Ireland. Thus *Montezuma, the Last of the Aztecs* (1845) is a sorrowful tale about the Spanish conquest of Mexico in which it is easy to read parallelisms with Ireland; *Benjamin, the Jew of Grenada: a Romance* (1848) deals with the fall of the Moslem empire in Spain, while *Lyrics of Spain and Erin* (1850) brim with patriotic rhetoric. One of the poems, addressed to Napoleon, contains such tell-tale verses as «Thou taught'st mankind to break the chain / That bound the soul for ages long» (Maturin 1850, 207). Maturin thus chooses to dwell on stories of defeat, oppression and aspiration to freedom, skating dangerously close to Irish concerns but avoiding to take the final plunge and draw explicit comparisons.

Bianca (1852), a hodgepodge of narrative genres – Gothic romance and national tale, travel report and, occasionally, edifying story – has been (justly) condemned to ‘canonical silence’ yet it can offer food for thought regarding the literary representations of Italy in Romantic Ireland. Maturin narrates the thwarted love story of an Irishman, Morven O’Moore and Bianca Romano, a beautiful and very musical young Italian woman, exiled for mysterious reasons in Dublin, whom the hero saves from drowning. The two fall in love but on being informed that his brother’s machinations have disinherited him and

left him destitute, Morven can no longer hope to support and marry Bianca and disappears suddenly to look for employment. After a period of separation during which Morven, as a tutor in a ancient Irish family, gets sentimentally involved with the young lady of the house, Geraldine, and in a duel shoots his own villainous brother, the two former lovers meet again in Rome where it is now Morven's turn to be an exile while Bianca has become a famous and rich opera singer. Morven's pride, however, still forbids marriage since he is not only impoverished but also a fugitive criminal. Heart-broken, Bianca accepts to marry Salviati, a villain in the best Elizabethan or Gothic tradition, but on the altar, in a *Jane Eyre*-like scene, a mistress is produced, now a madwoman, whom Bianca recognizes as her long-lost mother. Shame and pity for her mother's dishonour at the hands of Salviati, abhorrence of the man she almost married and grief for having been abandoned by Morven lead Bianca to her grave, leaving the Irishman free to return to Ireland and discover that his brother had not died in the duel and is now repentant. He recovers his inheritance and marries Geraldine.

The apparent obstacles to the love of the Irishman and the Italian woman, in this emotionally charged romance, full of agnitions and half-resolved mysteries, however, are hardly convincing being due not to their nationality nor to political reasons but simply to a financial set-back. What might have been an intercultural marriage plot which could have led to a union between different and seemingly opposed cultures (as in the marriage plots of national tales) fails on the verge of coming true, sending the hero back to Ireland to a safe and uncontroversial union with a character who has not had a great role in the romance, Lady Geraldine, a true Irishwoman who plays Moore-like melodies on the harp. The dénouement of the novel comes almost as an afterthought, as if the author could not allow a true-blooded Irishman to become involved with a country which, unlike Ireland, was on the verge of full fruition of its secular aspirations (Italy would be unified and shake off foreign dominance in 1861) and which the first-person narrator represents, maybe to justify his turnabout, in the most derogatory way.

Much has been written on the allegorical value of marriage in Irish national tales (the marriage, however, being usually between the Irish and the English), and as to allegory, Fredric Jameson argues that all postcolonial texts (which he calls third world texts) are allegorical:

[All] third world texts are necessarily [...] allegorical, and in a very specific way they are to be read as what I will call "national allegories." [Texts] which are seemingly private [...] necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society (Jameson 1986, 69-73).

What, then, is the allegorical significance of Maturin's finale? A marriage with Bianca would have meant espousing her cause and accepting the

similarities between the two nations which the heroine had pointed out in the initial scene. It would have meant putting Irish nationalism in a European context and allying it to a cause, the Italian, which at the time the romance was published, 1852, had taken an open revolutionary bend (there had been bloody risings in 1820-1821, in 1830, in 1848) to which Bianca obliquely alludes when she exclaims: «We long to tread the spot where Freedom reared her altar, and the tyrant fell, or the field where countless thousands toiled and bled» (Maturin 1852, 51).

Such symbolic alliance could have been dangerous for Maturin if not politically (for he lived in America) certainly commercially. It was much safer (and pleasing to an Ascendancy readership) to revert to a bland, sentimental, Moore-like nationalism and antiquarianism epitomized by Lady Geraldine, who, dressed in green and with a shamrock crown on her head, plays and sings «as though the very soul of her country were breathing in and informing every tone» (Maturin 1852, 94). Even her repertoire derives from Moore, indicating the political significance of Morven's marital choice: «The halls of Tara, her Red Branch Knights, their martial prowess, and her present desolation, interrupted only by the sound that told her "tale of ruin", all were before me» (*ibidem*). Geraldine's country, like Moore's, is an unreal country, crystallized in its antiquarian rhetoric and with no connection to the present nor, especially, to present potentially violent realities such as were Italy's. There is no sign that the Famine, a real «tale of ruin», had taken place only four years before the publication of the novel. Nor, indeed, are there any hints to the 1848 Italian war of independence.

The Italy Maturin describes, is an invented country as unreal as his Ireland. Morven's impressions as he moves up and down the peninsula as a Byronic grand-tourist, are not based on real experience but are a collage of passages borrowed from other travellers with an insistence on difference rather than on similarity. While Bianca had repeatedly pointed out Italy's resemblance to Ireland, Morven on the contrary underlines its fascinating otherness comparing it to a Mecca, a Caaba in front of which Moslems bow (Maturin 1852, 198) or perceiving «something talismanic in the nature of that fair land» (Maturin 1852, 196). Indeed, departing by steamship from Genoa in the moonlight, «realized [Morven's] early dreams of enchantment in the Arabian nights» (Maturin 1852, 197). More often, however, Maturin voices all the italophobic prejudices and platitudes that recur in the vast literature about Italy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries along the negative Addison-Sharp-Smollet line. It is a land of Machiavellian villains (as in Jacobean drama or Gothic novels) and of «cringing and sycophantic» people (Maturin 1852, 212) capable of «deep craft and foul stratagems» (Maturin 1852, 256) like the Roman aristocrat Salviati who is Morven's rival for Bianca's love and the cause of her untimely death.

Only Bianca, whose alterity is constructed through sensory means by dwelling on her exotic beauty, seems to be an exception. Not surprisingly she is described with almost the same words and in the same situations as the Irish heroine Geraldine. In her singing, too, one could hear «the soul, the inspiration, proclaiming her Italian» (Maturin 1852, 67) especially when she is «[like the Sybil] pouring forth her prophetic fury in strains that mourned over the ruins» of her own country (Maturin 1852, 227) or, indeed, on those of Ireland when she plays Moore's «Hath sorrow thy young days clouded?» eliciting Morven's surprise: «A melody of old Ireland – and in Italy!» (Maturin 1852, 352). But she is also capable of fusing the souls of the two races when, as the famous opera singer she has become, she sings the role of the Celtic druidess in Bellini's *Norma*. In fact, Bianca is almost the Italian double of her Irish counterpart. Bianca and Geraldine are both brilliant musicians and ardent nationalists, their music telling «the tale of ruin» of their respective countries. And they both love Morven. If Bianca and Geraldine, as is quite obvious in this novel, stand for their countries, Italy and Ireland, which in the rhetoric of the time were considered feminine for their beauties but also for their softness and their tendency to be dominated, their resemblance has national implications which, however, Maturin chooses just to suggest but not to develop. Thus at the structural and thematic level, Maturin denies that alterity which he portrays on the surface of the romance; he dares not, however, to make it more explicit because of the possible implications.

The drawing of connections between the two countries represents, indeed, the most interesting and original aspect of the romance especially in its use of music as a device to reveal similarities and differences between Italy and Ireland and suggest historical and political realities which are not mentioned otherwise. Music and the rhetoric about the ruin of their countries link the protagonists and through music is effected that fusion of contraries which fails to be consecrated by marriage. Indeed, Bianca through her love for Ireland and her bi-national music seems to be the point of convergence in this rudimentary multicultural story.

Lady Morgan never wrote an historical romance about Italy as she did about Greece, India and Belgium (which all acted as metaphors of Ireland) but if she had, we might have expected that it would have celebrated through an intercultural marriage the similarities which she recognized in her monumental travelogue, *Italy* (1821). The book, by common consent one of the most sympathetic to the country, though not to its leaders, had been commissioned by her publisher, Colburn in 1818 to follow in the wake of her successful national tales (e.g. *The Wild Irish Girl*) and of her *France* and it gives a first-hand though ideologically biased account of the social and political situation in the various states of Italy examined in a strong spirit of Jacobinism. Italy, in her eyes, is not a mere «geographic expression», as Metternich had affirmed at the congress of Vienna, but an ideal community in which a sense of nation

was just beginning to reaffirm itself. By writing about Italy and concentrating on a few privileged moments of its history (the age of the city-states, of the republics, those of French influence) she can explore the meaning of national identity as she was doing for Ireland in her fictional production. The image of Italy she projects is that of a country characterized by an ardent love of freedom similar to that of Ireland.

Although Morgan is much more explicit than Maturin in recognizing Italy as a kindred country, she, too, often wavers and takes precautions. Travelling to Italy brings to the fore the ambivalence of her Anglo-Irish identity. Her pride of being British and belonging to a country that can boast of constitutional rights and of a sophisticated civilization is flattered by looking into the negative mirror presented by Italy. On the other hand it is in her Irish half we must seek the springs for Morgan's transculturation, in other words her identification and integration in the culture of the Italian 'Other', which frequently implies disowning her English identity and siding with the victims – Italian as well as Irish – of English hegemonic power. This is expressed at times overtly but most often it can be read between the lines.

Besides expressing patriotic feelings and the rhetoric of 'pining for freedom' and 'groaning under the yoke', which can be found in many other Irish writers as well, such as Maturin or, also, the poet Thomas Moore, Morgan sees Italy and Ireland similar in many much more tangible features. The poverty and bad reputation the two people share are due less to intrinsic factors than to similar causes: the economic and moral oppression of hegemonic powers. In these as in the love of freedom and the occasional uprisings (as for instance those in 1798-99 in both countries) lie the most obvious similarities of the two people which endear Italians to the eyes of the Irish writer and result in a portrayal much more favourable than what can be found in her contemporary fellow-countrymen's.

Italian poverty acts as a continuous reminder of her own people: «Irish eyes might well weep» in gazing on some «beggared-looking women» working in the fields and some «loitering men» and «Irish hearts might feel that human misery, seen where it may, has a constant type in the home of their affections» (Morgan 1821, II.xviii.153). Yet, Italy fares much better in comparison. Irish peasantry even lacks the small luxuries and simple ornaments worn by women near Tortona: «the worst habited among them might have passed for a princess in *grand costume* among that race, whose misery has no parallel in the lowest degradation of other countries – the peasantry of Ireland» (Morgan 1821, I.xi.216). The sight of prosperity, indeed, as in the case of the countryside between Piacenza and Bologna, becomes a source of grief because it shows Ireland's backwardness off: «Surely it is a dreary penalty paid for the enjoyment of foreign scenery», she comments, «to have the heart dragged back by inevitable comparison at every step, and to see, even in the oppression and misrule of Italian Principalities, a prosperity too forcibly

contrasting with the distresses and degradation of the land of one's birth and affections» (Morgan 1821, I.xiii.263-264). In a reversal of the more customary dialectical relationship between northern self and southern 'Other', Morgan realizes that the difference is tilted in favour of Italy not only because of a more generous nature, but because of a more advanced social system, whereas in Ireland, unfair legislation would forbid progress in spite of the favourable objective circumstances:

But even here, Nature, all lovely as she is, would smile in vain, if placed under such circumstances as operate in Ireland to degrade the labourer, and to ruin the soil. [...] At every step a conviction is forced upon the mind either that the boasted Constitution of England is inadequate to the prosperity of society, or that the Irish nation is mocked with its semblance and has never enjoyed it but under those corruptions, which are ever fatal in proportion to the excellence they strive to simulate (Morgan 1821, I.xiii.263).

The Italian and Irish people have also traditionally been the objects of ethnic jokes and of much more serious forms of denigration, as eighteenth-century travel literature about Italy illustrates. Harking back to *Topographia Hibernica* and Spenser, there had also been a long tradition of slander and accusations raised against Irish people. Morgan was quite familiar with these tactics and aware that generalizations are constructions often dictated by expediency. Thus she was quick to recognize them as put in practice in Italy about which negative stereotyping was rampant. Her daring explanation, for example, of the charge of «inherent viciousness» raised against Neapolitans could also apply to Irish people: «Conquered nations are always subjects of slander to their foreign masters, who seek to sanction their own injustice by assuming the worthlessness of their victims» (Morgan 1821, II. xxiv.383).

Made wise by her own experience, in the chapters about Naples she lashes out against all essentialisms.

It is a calumny against Providence and a solecism in philosophy, to assert that there are nations so marked by physical tendencies to evil, so instinctively devoted to particular vices, that they remain unredeemable by good laws, incorrigible by wise institutes [...] It has been the fashion to accuse the Neapolitans of an inherent viciousness, over which external circumstances could hold no control; but the prejudice has only obtained currency in European opinion, since that country has been the slave of Spain (Morgan 1821, II.xxiv. 382-383).

Because of her ideology and the implicit parallelism she establishes between Italy and Ireland, Morgan's sympathy for the local population is great. She even exonerates from blame those categories of Italians that were usually the target of other writers' criticism, such as beggars, criminals, outlaws, «banditti». «The people», she writes about Southern Italians, «are what ages of despotism and anarchy, bigotry and misrule, had left them, the least civilized,

and most debased population of Italy» (Morgan 1821, II.xxiv.371) and «The falsity and dishonesty attributed to the Neapolitans, and always exaggerated, are the inevitable results of their social position» (Morgan 1821, II.xxiv.385). Substitute Irish for Neapolitan and what she could not have written openly in her national tales is there to be read between the lines of her travelogue since in both kinds of writing she continues exploring the meaning of national identity.

Although Morgan dares not point an accusing finger against England for the oppression of Ireland, she lashes out against it in several examples of injustice regarding Italy which remind one of similar circumstances in Ireland. For instance, when she laments the role England played after the Congress of Vienna, in helping the Savoy dynasty incorporate the one-thousand-year-old maritime republic of Genoa, she pronounces tell-tale words which extend the role of plaintiff to other unnamed nations as well:

[Genoa] owes its misfortunes to the same councils and the same system, which, in a shameless conspiracy against the rights and feelings of humanity, are plotting the total extinction of liberty in Europe. The part which England has played in this surrender of this ancient republic, has earned for her the double obloquy of crime and of dupery; and the indignation which yet murmurs upon the lips of the whole Italian population, is largely mingled with contempt for a nation, whose indifference to the liberties of foreign countries they take as a certain sign and forerunner of the loss of its own (Morgan 1821, I.xii.255).

Admittedly the accusation of «indifference to the liberties of foreign countries» regards the present government, namely Lord Castlereagh, the Irish born Tory minister who «having destroyed the liberties of his own country [by the Act of Union], has laboured so hard to annihilate those of the nation, by which he has been adopted» (Morgan 1821, I.vii.153n). Castlereagh was instrumental in confirming also this other «Union», that of Genoa to Piedmont. As for the 1801 Union which made Ireland lose its parliament and semi-independent state, Morgan declares here openly her feelings of loss thus putting on a par her own country and Genoa as victims of a similar act of injustice.

An equal disrespect for national rights was shown by England in another episode of the history of the House of Savoy when the island of Sardinia was annexed to Piedmont and Savoy «at the interposition of our Queen Anne: as the English have since conferred on his Sardinian Majesty the Dukedom of Genoa, and as they have, with an equal disregard of national rights, ceded the Christians of Parga to Ali Pacha» (Morgan 1821, I.iv.48). What is left unsaid is that the same disregard for national rights is also displayed by England in Ireland.

Italian history particularly lends itself to Irish applications. With a sensibility made sharper by the situation at home she also comments on various moments of Neapolitan history which attract her attention because of affinities

with Ireland. Under Charles the Fifth and his heirs, the territory was administered from a distance by governors who were indifferent to the welfare and even to the culture and language of the natives: «They successively governed this beautiful and unhappy country, by that refinement upon all bad government, the delegated power of foreign despotism» (Morgan 1821, II.xxiv.361). One could almost read between the lines: «like the British in Ireland». Those who governed it did not have «any legitimate right to reign over a distant land of whose language they were [...] ignorant» (Morgan 1821, II.xxiv.362). Again one could read between the lines: «like the British in Ireland». «Their imposts upon the abundant produce of that teeming soil, on which Nature has lavished all her beauty, continually reduced the people to famine, perpetuated their poverty, and drove them into [...] insurrections» (Morgan 1821, II.xxiv.361). Once again the situation denounced in the national tales and in *Patriotic Sketches* or in *Absenteeism* presents itself to the mind.

Naples and Ireland are especially brought together by the evocation of the Jacobin revolution of 1799, as ephemeral as the 1798 rising in Ireland and like it a bearer of a new awareness and new aspirations. The chapter dealing with that page of Italian history is a masterpiece of allusiveness.

The over one thousand pages of *Italy*, however, also provide innumerable examples which could be used to disprove Morgan's appreciation of the country as they show her espousing the old stereotypes, nagging against superstition, corruption, bureaucracy, deceitfulness, dirt. What, however, interests us here are the moments when her understanding of Italy is enhanced by her knowledge of Ireland and the two countries are seen as kindred and her certainty of belonging to «the dominant order» is undermined by the suspicion of writing from a marginalized position.

On the strong evidence of these two Irish writers – and that of Thomas Moore with whom I have dealt in two forthcoming publications – one could advance the hypothesis (to be confirmed by more research) that there was in Ireland in the first half of the nineteenth century an awareness of the special historical and political conditions of Italy and of possible similarities with Ireland and that this awareness was at the root of the peculiar ambivalence which characterized Irish representations of Italy. Italy was perceived as a mirror – a dangerous mirror – in which to reflect one's identity. To the British citizens, proud of their Protestant and democratic tradition, Italy was a mirror in which to reflect the superiority of the community to which they belonged (as was the case for most of their English fellow writers). To the Irish nationals, Italy, oppressed by foreign domination yet aspiring to freedom, became a yardstick for gauging issues of subjugation, injustice, and national identity and invited sympathy from citizens of a colonized country. There lay the danger of the Italian mirror; it reflected a divided self with aspirations which were hard to confess publicly and even to oneself.

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The Dimension of Wit in Translation: Rendering Wilde's Pun Ernest/Earnest into Italian

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The present article examines different translation strategies adopted by three Italian translators of *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895): Luigi Lunari, whose translation had great success and was repeatedly reprinted¹, Masolino d'Amico, who has translated and edited many books of Wilde's works², and Guido Almansi, who translated Wilde's play in collaboration with Claude Béguin³. As the translations into Italian of Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* are conspicuous for their number and their diversity, a comparative approach to some of them may offer the advantage of pointing out the various working processes and the different policies adopted by translators. Great importance is here attributed to the approaches to the source text adopted by each translator: translator's notes and introductions are considered an additional channel to understand the diverse renderings of Wilde's humour. The textual analysis made here is limited to two elements: wordplay and puns, but it includes theoretical considerations to indicate the great linguistic potential of Wilde's text. The general aim of the article is to demonstrate that the translators have different concepts of 'optimal' translations for puns and different ideas for rendering the cultural context of the source text. Anyway, for all the differences between these translations concerning the strategies adopted, the fact that Wilde's wordplay is an element of inexhaustible potential for translation underlies them all. Though preserving and prising the originality of each different translating solution, the present study uses a descriptive method, inspired by Translation Studies, according to which the horizon of a translation is set within the target culture⁴, and it is not intended as a prescriptive comparison of different translations according to their similarity with the original, to support the traditional prescriptive approaches to translation⁵. The aim of this modest attempt at translation criticism is thus not to state what the translators should have done, but rather to describe what they have managed to do.

Oscar Wilde's epigrammatic style is most intellectually daring and provocative when it employs the pun, often defined as a «play on words», a device out of which Wilde is able to create ingenious and original mockery. The use of wordplay distinguishes Wilde's writing from contemporary Victorian writers' and makes the interpretation of his jokes a controversial question,

especially when the ‘interpreter’ is a translator who has to render words enlivened by original linguistic play into another language. It turns out that in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the title, introducing the comic atmosphere of the whole play through the pun on the expression ‘being Ernest’, is generally seen as the central problem to solve. As has been pointed out by Kaplan and Bernays, *The Importance of Being Earnest* is «a play about names and a play on names»⁶. The very title of Wilde’s play exploits the homophony between the name *Ernest* and the adjective *earnest* and the translator immediately has to deal with a problem: is the name Ernest to be maintained in its original form or to be reformulated? When the policy of renaming is adopted, is the name to be translated reproducing the ironic allusions to the values of earnestness? Can the Italian translator find equivalents to the original pun in meaning? It is obvious that the choices of translators are of the utmost importance, since this is one of the cases when «failure to translate puns can mean failure to translate the whole play»⁷.

Choosing how to translate the title, like any other step in the process of translation, is an intentional act, determined in this case by the possibilities to attribute an ironic meaning to the phrasing *The Importance of Being Earnest*. In this light a particular translating choice corresponds to an interpretative, thus intentional, activity, as it is the translator who, acting as an interpreter, may attribute irony, or not, to the title and the text of the play⁸. As far as translation is concerned, issues of intentionality are advisedly raised: the job of a translator cannot simply correspond to rightly comprehending the author’s intentions, because the translator has to enter into the ‘creative dimension’ involved in the production of literary translation and consequently has to propose his/her personal interpretation of the source text. Returning to the example of the title, Wilde puns on the words *Ernest* and *earnest*, creating the ‘new’ proper name *Earnest*. The pun falls within a particular category of jokes identified by Otto Jespersen as «a peculiar class of roundabout expressions in which the speaker avoids the regular word, but hints at it in a covert way by using some other word, generally a proper name, which bears a resemblance to it or is derived from it»⁹. Wilde’s pun is in a position of pre-eminence since it appears in the title: Wilde plays on the similarity among *Ernest*, *earnest* and *honest*, thus the idea of earnestness, implicit in the proper name *Earnest*, is the primary target of Wilde’s mockery.

To understand Wilde’s pun one has to recognise that the title is a manifesto of the intentions of the author: through wit Wilde hopes to unmask the false seriousness of high society, and the characters in the play continuously mock the ideal of earnestness. Victorian moral earnestness is grounded on the idea that «God did not send [men and women] into the world merely to eat, drink, and be merry»¹⁰, but the protagonist of Wilde’s play, Algernon Moncrieff, precisely embodies the «casual, easy-going, superficial, or frivolous attitude» that was attacked by those whom Walter

Houghton calls «the prophets of earnestness»¹¹. Algernon is characterised by his passion for food¹² and his lack of money, and these aspects of his personality are censured by a governess with stern moral values, Miss Prism, in the first drafts of the play: when she knows that Ernest (Algernon) does not pay his bills at the restaurant, she comments, «There can be little good in any young man who eats so much, and so often»¹³. Algernon's behaviour is a constant breach of etiquette and indicates disregard for English formal conventions. For instance, the cucumber sandwiches that Algernon orders for his aunt and then eats are there to give him an appetite and are never meant to satisfy Lady Bracknell's appetite; as Barbara Belford declares, «in *Ernest*, Wilde satirizes the British obsession with tea to the extent that Act One seems to be all about cucumber sandwiches»¹⁴. A strong physical desire for food contradicts the morally 'serious' conception of life, but the pleasure that the physical act of eating gives to Algernon is emphasised when he says: «I can't eat muffins in an agitated manner. The butter would probably get on my cuffs. One should always eat muffins very calmly. It is the only way to eat them» (341). As for Ernest, he too does not completely exemplify serious social attitudes. Indeed, Wilde ironically hints at 'the importance' of being *Earnest* to demonstrate its contrary, that a man, even if he is called *Ernest*, can be true to himself only when he *is not earnest*. Both men are, at different points of the action, the same person, *Ernest*. When Ernest, who is initially presented in the cast of the comedy as «John Worthing, *JP*» proposes to Gwendolen Fairfax, she says to him: «My own Ernest!» (62); when Algernon visits Hertfordshire and meets Cecily Cardew, the girl he will fall in love with, she declares: «You, I see from your card, are Uncle Jack's brother, my cousin Ernest, my wicked cousin Ernest» (98). In the play earnestness is merely a role that man accidentally plays, but earnestness was for the Victorians a mission in life, a value of 'vital' importance. The Victorians believed in earnestness insofar as it represented the strength of anybody «called upon to struggle with all his power against the forces of evil, in his own soul and in society»¹⁵ and this strength was displayed especially in the intellectual sphere.

At a time when the commitment of the educated man in the social sphere was considered a duty, Wilde subversively created characters who make this 'proper' behaviour look silly. Lady Bracknell ranks first in making Victorian behaviour rules seem ridiculous: she tests the earnestness of her daughter's suitor, Jack Worthing, by asking if he smokes, and when he replies «Well, yes, I must admit I smoke», she declares: «I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind. There are far too many idle men in London as it is» (68). As Anne Varty says, Lady Bracknell is «the epitome of inflexibility, and its representative in the upper classes»¹⁶, but when the great matriarch refers to a principle, she reduces it to nonsense. All her questions and her reactions to Jack's affirmations are the opposite of what one would logically expect¹⁷.

Wilde's male characters are idle smoking dandies who take pleasure in playing with words: when Algernon finds out that his friend's name is not *Ernest* but *Jack*, their conversation is a sort of linguistic game made of discrepancies between what one says and what the other understands:

Jack: Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country, and the cigarette case was given to me in the country.

Algernon: Yes, but that does not account for the fact that your small Aunt Cecily, who lives at Tunbridge Wells, calls you her dear uncle. Come, old boy, you had much better have the thing out at once.

Jack: My dear Algy, you talk exactly as if you were a dentist. It is very vulgar to talk like a dentist when one isn't a dentist. It produces a false impression (46).

Such characters, who continuously make puns and banter and never are «in earnest» but pass their time producing «false impressions» on others, become «eccentric» if put in the context of an epoch where man is «serious» only if he has «[a] passionate and sustained earnestness after a high moral rule, seriously realised in conduct»¹⁸.

Wilde's style of wit, paradox, and wordplay developed in a country and in an epoch when to play with words was as shameful as to play with ideas¹⁹, but it was inevitable since he had inherited some of the 'playful attitude to language' typical of his native country, Ireland. Vivian Mercier writes about Irish wit that «Ireland continued to produce wits all through the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries and to export a considerable amount of them», so that «any serious discussion of wit in the English language inevitably leads to the mention of several Anglo-Irish names – Shaw and Wilde being the two most likely to occur»²⁰. Wilde's finished and amusing style was highly praised by George Bernard Shaw who commented on the Irish origins of Wilde's style in a review of one of his plays using the following words:

All the imperturbable good sense and good manners with which Mr Wilde makes his wit pleasant to his comparatively stupid audience cannot quite overcome the fact that Ireland is of all countries the most foreign to England, and that to the Irishman (and Mr Wilde is almost as acutely Irish an Irishman as the Iron Duke of Wellington) there is nothing in the world quite so exquisitely comic as an Englishman's seriousness²¹.

The central point made by Shaw is that both he and Wilde use their wit to express contempt for whatever is ludicrous and absurd in English manners. Shaw's remark clarifies that wit is less a matter of style than a point of view, and Shaw's wit is an outstanding example of this concept, since his wit relies upon a skilful juxtaposition of ideas²². Wilde's wit relies more than Shaw's on «verbal facility», as critics like David Gordon have demonstrated²³, but it is precisely this element that links Wilde with his Irish predecessors like Jonathan Swift or Richard Brinsley Sheridan.

Luigi Lunari, who in his translation attributes great importance to Wilde's use and display of verbal skills, misconstrues Wilde's intentions in using those verbal skills, as he starts off his introduction to *L'opera di Wilde e L'importanza di chiamarsi Ernesto* giving an odd and personal definition of Wilde's writing style:

Abbiamo detto più sopra che il talento di Wilde si esprime soprattutto nelle opere minori e di più marcato disimpegno. Non poteva essere altrimenti. Se accettiamo il fatto che [...] non possono nascere capolavori dall'acquiescenza facile e interessata a una committenza come la società per cui Wilde scrisse, ecco che per strappare il meglio dalla sua penna dobbiamo attendere il momento del *divertissement*²⁴.

Lunari does not recognise the importance of satire in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, a feature that Wilde's play shares with the works of other Irish authors like Shaw. Lunari goes on to affirm that Wilde's witticisms are written with the specific intention of giving free play to his verbal skills (13-14), but he does not do justice to the audacity of Wilde's style: the light and witty tone of the play which Lunari calls *divertissement* is exceptional if one considers that Wilde 'wrote for' people looking at men of wit with suspicion.

One point on which at least everybody can agree with Lunari is the identification of the most vital aspect of Wilde's theatrical dialogues with wordplay and pure linguistic jokes free from any social constraint. The very title, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, shows that a pun is the best instrument to introduce a play that lays no claims to being instructive and does not have a moral point of view to defend. It is evident that the Italian version *L'importanza di chiamarsi Ernesto* cannot have the same effect for the Italian public, because *Ernesto* is a name which does not allude to stern behaviour as *Earnest* does, nor does earnestness have the same value in Italian society. If the public does not know the cultural context in which Wilde operates, they do not understand the joke, and consequently the title does not make sense.

The Italian title does not reflect Wilde's ironic allusion to the English 'obsession' about being earnest and does not adapt it to the Italian cultural *milieu*, but the translator finds a way to compensate for the loss of the initial amusing effect through a metatextual discourse. Lunari writes that he sees in the paradoxical and nonsensical aspect of the Italian title a way to pay homage to the «fondamentale aspetto di *nonsense*» (25) of the play; he makes his point in the preface – but it is a subjective and not always acceptable point of view – saying that in the play the reader comes across expressions like «a cloakroom at a railway station [...] could hardly be regarded as an assured basis for a recognized position in good society» (74), and he argues – unconvincingly – that these expressions do not mean anything but are the key to interpret the play. Lunari wants the title, like any other paradox contained in the play, to be considered a nonsensical phrase, as he stresses the importance of pure

nonsense when it comes to translating Wilde's wordplays. His point is that to regard Wilde's playful tone as «parodia dell'aforisma» would mean «caricare la commedia di una volontà che non possiede e che non vuole possedere» (15). Lunari's affirmations give rise to a series of observations. It is true that puns do not always have a target, that is to say that they are not necessarily directed against particular cultural or social elements, so that Wilde's puns or any other form of wordplay could well be considered a pure *divertissement*, or the signal of a desire to amuse, but Lunari, deciding to replace *Ernest* with the Italian correspondening form *Ernesto*, chooses not to see an ironic meaning where Wilde meant it²⁵, as there is no ironic correspondence between the name and the morals of society. Moreover, Lunari says that if English names like *Gwendolen* were put next to Italian names like *Franco*, the translation would not be acceptable: «[N]on si può parlare di Algernon, Gwendolen e "Franco", né si può evitare che usando il nome di Frank il gioco di parole venga del tutto perduto» (24). Lunari's translation and the words he uses in the preface point out the substantial untranslatability of Wilde's title. On the one hand Lunari, adhering to the norms of the current use and calling all the characters by their English names, loses the ironic connotations of *Ernest*. Wordplay with names can produce comic effects, and it is obvious from Lunari's example that keeping the original English name, in its source form or in its direct Italian translation, does not create the same humorous impact on the audience. The crucial question to consider is that Wilde intentionally changes the spelling of the word *Ernest*, attributing a new meaning to the proper name and adding a new signified, «serious, stern» to the existing neutral one²⁶. This becomes apparent at the beginning of the play, when Algernon, after having been told that Ernest's name is «Jack» exclaims: «You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest-looking person I ever saw in my life. It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn't Ernest» (46). Lunari concedes that the best translation would be *Franco* with a capital letter (25, 26), revealing that maybe the best solution to recreate the original text is to replace *Ernest* with a target name that also considers the ironical implications of the original, but finding the Italian original name corresponding to *Earnest* is such a difficult task that ultimately Lunari translates the name in a literal way.

The translation of the joke on *Ernest/Earnest* presents great difficulties, as it raises the issue of the presence or absence of the legendary «earnestness»²⁷, a concept that has essentially English connotations: Italian translators are then keen to look for any detail about the context in which Wilde operated. In his preface Lunari reflects on the social position of Wilde, as he repeatedly claims to pay attention to the peculiar «uncommitted» position of the author in writing the last of his social comedies which is so much in contrast with the theatre of ideas of such authors as Shaw and Ibsen²⁸. The effect of pleasant nonsense is the result of Wilde's use of words and in turn Wilde's use of

language comes from a precise aesthetic ideology: it indicates a 'divorce' of art and rationality, it is «a clear affront to bourgeois utility and rationality», and «an apparent indication of the art world's divorce from middle-class life»²⁹. In the light of these considerations, the pun in the title is not a mere linguistic difficulty to solve, as the translator is also concerned with the position of the author who invents the pun: in other words, he has to consider not only what Wilde writes in the title, but also who Wilde is. Wilde is a dandy, «the critical yet entertaining marginal man», as Regenia Gagnier skilfully defines him, «presenting a glowing image of the age while exposing its underlying ugliness», adopting witty language that exposes all the emptiness of social life. Wilde exposes the faults of English society most critically because he does not belong to it completely: as an Irishman he is substantially an outsider. Wilde's attitude towards his audience is characterised by exceptional directness, as the title demonstrates: the play is full of pointed remarks, set forth by an author of Irish origins, on the supposed virtue of the English upper classes, and the translator of the play has to keep it in mind. Wilde as Irishman «criticised and attracted» the English upper classes³⁰ because, as Barbara Belford writes, «he knew just how far to go with social criticism; the audience should savor scandal without being offended»³¹. Indeed, in challenging Victorian domestic morality, Wilde was as revolutionary and iconoclastic as Ibsen or Shaw³². Pointing out social obsessions with earnestness, Wilde attacked English society at its core while making his public laugh. As Cecily will later on declare in the play: «There is something in that name [Ernest] that seems to inspire absolute confidence» (Act II, 128), and the name surely had a strong impact on the Victorian public too; theatre audiences and actors were all exposed to the pervasive spirit of social 'earnestness'.

The Victorian public's reaction to Wilde's polite attacks is not so different from the modern reader's, as Wilde's wit is generally associated with a kind of pleasant absurdity. One advantage of focusing the translation of Wilde's title on the effect of 'nonsense' created by Wilde's playful style is that as a consequence of this translation choice Lunari has the possibility of enriching his version of the play with unprecedented puns. He can partly compensate for the loss of the wordplay, for instance, by adding a proper name when it is not present in the original. The translation of «I've now realised for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest» (Act III) as «mi sono reso conto ora, per la prima volta in vita mia, dell'essenziale Importanza di Essere un Serio Ernesto» (193), creates additional effects of nonsense, as Lunari connects two proper names, *Serio* and *Ernesto*. In this way the nonsensical aspect of the wordplay in the title is transferred to the dialogue in the translation. However, Lunari's translation cannot give Wilde's wordplay full weight, as Lunari is the only translator of Wilde's comedy who considers the fact of not translating the pun *Ernest/Earnest* as a 'gain' rather than as an irrecoverable loss.

Almansi's choice to translate the pun in the title using the name and adjective 'Fedele' represents his attempt to find an Italian counterpart of the pun on *Ernest/Earnest*. The comic effect of the title consists in the declaration of the importance but at the same time of the impossibility of being 'Fedele' for both man and woman in a married couple, since «in queste scorrerie matrimoniali il sesso femminile fa crollare tutte le convenzioni sociali alle quali sembrano così attaccate: il matrimonio stesso, la fedeltà, le buone maniere, l'educazione, il galateo, la famiglia»³³. *Fedele* is not as common a name in Italy as *Ernest* in England³⁴ but, yet, the irony is understandable. Anyway, the expression «essere Fedele» preserves the irony implied in 'being earnest' only partially, as the name evokes the idea of being faithful in the context of a marriage, and the idea is not contradicted by any particular behaviour of Ernest, that is to say that the public do not necessarily believe him to be 'infedele'. In particular, the pun at the end of the play is not translated by Almansi: «Al contrario, zia Augusta, per la prima volta mi rendo conto come sia vitale l'importanza di chiamarsi Fedele»³⁵. Ernest says «chiamarsi Fedele» but he does not say «essere Fedele» provocatively alluding to the fact that he has been or will be unfaithful to Gwendolen, and the question of conjugal fidelity remains unresolved. On the whole, the meaning in the target language is not exactly the same as in the source language, since the moral values that the names *Ernest* and *Fedele* recall are different and imply different ways of reading the play.

Masolino d'Amico has a third different approach to the pun *Ernest/Earnest*. He finds his solution by translating the name as *Probo* only in the title and in the final line of the play and motivates his choice as follows: «*Probo* – che comunque non è *earnest* – può dare un'idea dei valori antiquati di cui Wilde vuole prendersi gioco»³⁶. In Italian the name dates back to the tradition and fashion of the late XIX century, and since the name is not used nowadays as *Ernest* was in the Victorian era, d'Amico chooses to keep the 'immortal' original name: he does not translate *Ernest* as *Probo* in the play. As in the case of Luigi Lunari, the meaning of the humorous name *Ernest* is omitted in the play, but it is here preserved in the title.

According to the traditional source-oriented approach to translation: «Whenever the translator can discern the author's intentions [behind the choice of a name] the translator's unwritten code ought to determine him to transpose them into the target language»³⁷. From the analysis of the three translations of the title mentioned above, it appears that the effort to render the intentions of the author underlies them all: Lunari aptly strives to render in Italian the nonsensical aspects of the play, Almansi strives to find Italian equivalents to the original, d'Amico opts for translating into Italian Wilde's polite playfulness. In order for the Italian public to get the linguistic joke on *Earnest*, translations can use lexical addition in the text, as in the case of Lunari, or total transformation of the name *Ernest*, as in the case of d'Amico and Almansi. A particular choice for translating the title does not necessarily

preclude the translator from using different strategies when the same name *Ernest* appears in the play. According to d'Amico, who also translated the title of the play as *L'importanza di essere onesto* (1985), to translate the name in the title and to keep the name *Ernest* in the play is a suitable strategy, but to underline the connotative aspect of this name he also resorts to lexical addition, as he adds some words in the core of his translation to motivate the attraction of Gwendolen and Cecily for this name³⁸.

The choice of *Almansi* is peculiar because it indicates that Wilde has «interessi forti, anzi fortissimi, sia sul piano della morale contemporanea che della critica sociale»³⁹, and it suggests that the concept of loyalty, together with the concept of earnestness, are the keys to interpret the play. The name *Almansi* uses, *Fedele*, has in Italian the double meaning of 'trustworthy' and 'faithful': it symbolises two of the qualities – but by no means the only ones – which in the Victorian English world, as well as in the Italian cultural context can be considered important for any marriage 'made in Heaven', namely the absolute trust in the partner and the faithfulness to him or her. If the term *Fedele* does not correspond to *Earnest*, at least we can say that marriage is a frequently evoked theme in the play: Algernon declares he is shocked by marital faithfulness: «The amount of women in London who flirt with their own husbands is perfectly scandalous. It looks so bad. It's simply washing one's clean linen in public» (52). His aphorism, «Divorces are made in Heaven» (Act I, 40) which goes against the saying 'marriages are made in Heaven' confirms his cynical views regarding the values ruling in the present day society. The question of conjugal fidelity offers great opportunities for jokes: for instance, when Jack pretends Cecily is his aunt and clearly she is not, Algernon refuses to give his consent to Ernest's marriage to Gwendolen if he does not «clear up the whole question of Cecily» (42), as he suspects that Jack may have an affair with her⁴⁰. The Italian title hints at Wilde's ability to perceive the limits of his society, and ironically suggests 'the importance of being married'; this is, anyway, only a partial translation of the complex implications of *Being Earnest*. Moreover, for the Italian reader the name *Fedele* is associated with positive values and it conveys a strong moral message when it is put in the context of the play: eventually Jack, whose affection for Gwendolen is authentic, finds out that «all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth» (190) not because he has always been E(a)rnest, but because he has always been a devoted and faithful *fiancé*. *Almansi* manages to transmit the light tone of the original only partially, as the comic effect in the final line, where the name *Earnest* ends the play in a circle recalling the message of the title in a deeply ironical way, is almost completely lost.

Wilde's plays on words, as in the examples just mentioned, derive their comic quality from the effect of surprise they generate in the audience, and often it is not merely obtained by a double meaning within one word. Critics have repeatedly shown how humorous effects are obtained by subverting the

expectations of the audience⁴¹. It is obvious from the examples quoted above that Wilde's wordplay cannot be easily translated, and it is not possible to come to a generalising conclusion as to the problem of 'translatability' of wordplay: different but equally profitable renderings of the same passages indicate that the notion of 'optimal translation' is highly subjective. If a general conclusion is possible, it is that wordplay in translation, as in the original, derives its humorous potential from its linguistic nature, and that it is not always possible to find corresponding Italian terms to wordplay in meaning. Wilde's wordplay is often seen as a mark of his Irish upbringing because, as Vivian Mercier has put it, «the Irish reputation for wit, in so far as it is deserved, is in the last analysis a reputation for playing with words»⁴². In Wilde's witticisms the element of verbal play is very important, and the close resemblance of the two key words *Ernest/Earnest* in the title increases the reader's pleasure in the witticisms scattered all over the play. Wilde is considered one of the best representatives of Anglo-Irish wit and *The Importance of Being Earnest* is rightly located in the Anglo-Irish tradition established by William Congreve, Richard Brinsley Sheridan and Oliver Goldsmith⁴³: Oscar Wilde's works preserve into modern times something of the playful attitude to language typical of Irish literature and culture.

Endnotes

¹ The edition of Lunari's translation here considered is the sixteenth reprint: *L'importanza di chiamarsi Ernesto*, BUR, Milano 2003. The first edition of the translation dates back to January 1990.

² The edition of Wilde's works here examined is the sixth reprint, edited by Masolino d'Amico: O. Wilde, *Opere*, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, Milano 1993. The first edition of the translation dates back to October 1979.

³ The edition of Wilde's works is: O. Wilde, *Il ventaglio di Lady Windermere, L'importanza di essere Fedele, Salomé*, Garzanti, Milano 2007. This is the sixth reprint and the first edition dates back to March 1993.

⁴ For instance: *Translation/History/Culture: A Sourcebook*, ed. by A. Lefevere, Routledge, London 1992.

⁵ See for instance P. Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation*, Prentice Hall, New York 1988, and A. Bantas, *Names, Nicknames, and Titles in Translation*, «Perspectives: Studies in Translatology», 2, 1994, pp. 79-87.

⁶ J. Kaplan, A. Bernays, *The Language of Names: What We Call Ourselves and Why It Matters*, Simon & Schuster, New York 1997, p. 172.

⁷ H. I-min, *Puns*, in S. Chan, D.E. Pollard (eds.), *An Encyclopaedia of Translation: Chinese-English, English-Chinese*, Chinese UP, Shatin 2001.

⁸ See L. Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, Routledge, London 1994, p. 13.

⁹ O. Jespersen, *Language; Its Nature, Development and Origin*, Ghose Press, Salt Lake City 2008, p. 300.

¹⁰ C. Kingsley, *Yeast*, quoted in W.E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, Yale UP, New Haven 1968, p. 220.

¹¹ Ivi, p. 222.

¹² G. Almansi, introduction to O. Wilde, *Il ventaglio di Lady Windermere, L'importanza di essere Fedele, Salomé ...*, cit., p. xix.

¹³ The quotation is taken from *The Gribby Episode*, a part that appears in the draft of the play written in 1894 but not in the final version, and it is quoted in J. Bristow (ed.), *The Importance of Being Earnest and Related Writings*, Routledge, London 1992, p. 91.

¹⁴ B. Belford, *Oscar Wilde: A Certain Genius*, Bloomsbury, London 2001, p. 51.

¹⁵ W.E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind ...*, cit., p. 221.

¹⁶ A. Varty, *A Preface to Oscar Wilde*, Longman, New York 1998, p. 203.

¹⁷ For a discussion of the comic impact of the dialogue between Lady Bracknell and Jack see S. Eltis, *Revising Wilde: Society and Subversion in the Plays of Oscar Wilde*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1996, pp. 179-181.

¹⁸ R.W. Church, *The Oxford Movement*, quoted in Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind ...*, cit., p. 231.

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 225.

²⁰ V. Mercier, *The Irish Comic Tradition: The Keybook of Irish Literary Criticism*, Souvenir Press Ltd, London 1995, p. 78.

²¹ Review of *An Ideal Husband* signed 'G.B.S.' in the «Saturday Review» (12 January 1895), quoted in K.E. Beckson (ed.), *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*, Routledge, London 1970, p. 199.

²² V. Mercier, *The Irish Comic Tradition ...*, cit., p. 79.

²³ For a detailed discussion of the influence of Wilde on Shaw see D.J. Gordon, *Shavian Comedy and the Shadow of Wilde*, in C.D. Inness (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1998.

²⁴ O. Wilde, *L'importanza di chiamarsi Ernesto ...*, cit., p. 150. From now on the quotations from the text will be followed by the number of page in brackets.

²⁵ See J. Kaplan, A. Bernays, *The Language of Names ...*, cit., p. 172, where the pair *Ernest/Earnest* is defined as «heavily freighted» with ironic motivations.

²⁶ For neologisms in puns see S. Attardo, *Linguistic Theories of Humor*, Walter de Gruyter, New York 1994, p. 127 ff.

²⁷ R. Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public*, Stanford UP, Stanford 1986, p. 111.

²⁸ Lunari writes: «George Bernard Shaw stava conducendo la sua battaglia per un teatro di tesi e di idee ed è ben comprensibile la sua riluttanza ad accettare quel disimpegno così totale e rigoroso che abbiamo visto essere caratteristica portante dell'*Importanza di chiamarsi Ernesto*» (17).

²⁹ R. Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace ...*, cit., p. 11.

³⁰ Ivi, p. 117.

³¹ B. Belford, *Oscar Wilde: A Certain Genius ...*, cit., p. 188.

³² Ivi, p. 189.

³³ O. Wilde, *Il ventaglio di Lady Windermere ...*, cit., p. xix.

³⁴ See L. Dunkling, W. Gosling (eds.), *The Facts on File Dictionary of First Names*, Facts on File Publications, New York 1983, p. 86.

³⁵ O. Wilde, *Il ventaglio di Lady Windermere ...*, cit., p. 152.

³⁶ O. Wilde, *L'importanza di essere Probo*, in *Opere ...*, cit., p. 532.

³⁷ A. Bantas, C. Manea, *Proper Names and Nicknames: Challenges for Translators and Lexicographers*, «Revue Roumaine de Linguistique», 35, 3, 1990, p. 189.

³⁸ See O. Wilde, *L'importanza di essere onesto*, trad. it. M. d'Amico, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, Cles 1985, p. 34.

³⁹ O. Wilde, *Il ventaglio di Lady Windermere ...*, cit., p. xiii.

⁴⁰ The list of all the jokes on the theme of marriage would be too long to be fully presented here. Consider for instance that Lane, Algernon's servant, says referring to his marriage: «That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person» (Act I, 36) and when Algernon replies «I don't know that I am much interested in your family life, Lane», Lane, in turn, says: «No sir; it is not a very interesting subject. I never think of it myself» (ivi).

Later on in the play, Lady Bracknell will demonstrate the superficiality of marriages declaring: «To speak frankly, I am not in favour of long engagements. They give people the opportunity of finding out each other's character before marriage, which I think is never advisable» (170).

⁴¹ S. Eltis, *Revising Wilde: Society and Subversion in the Plays of Oscar Wilde*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1996; R. Gagnier (ed.), *Critical Essays on Oscar Wilde*, G.K. Hall, New York 1991; R. Gagnier, *Idylls of the marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public*, Stanford UP, Stanford 1986; G. Woodcock, *The Paradox of Oscar Wilde*, Macmillan, New York 1950, and many others.

⁴² V. Mercier, *The Irish Comic Tradition ...*, cit., p. 79.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

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‘In the Heart of the Roman Metropolis’: an Italian Prologue to Synge’s Investigative Journalism

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1 Synge in Rome

John Millington Synge throughout his career was an attentive travel writer and a keen journalist – as a brand new re-edition of his topographical essays has emphasized¹, historicizing the pieces in the context of their original publication in newspapers and literary magazines. In this perspective, the investigative reportage that Synge wrote in 1905 for the English newspaper «The Manchester Guardian» – originally titled *In the Congested Districts*, and edited in the *Collected Works*² as *In Connemara* – becomes particularly interesting. It was commissioned from Manchester to Synge and the painter Jack B. Yeats who produced a series of line drawings for it, in order to witness poverty and distress in the West of Ireland and to assess the work of the Congested Districts Board (CDB). The Board, which was the practical result of Lord Arthur Balfour’s Constructive Unionism policies³, was active in the most impoverished areas of the western seaboard and aimed at relieving the distress with the implementation of local enterprises such as fisheries, kelp-making, textile industries. As this article will analyse, Synge’s investigative reporting has an interesting antecedent related to the Italian political situation at the end of the 19th century, and specifically to Synge’s sojourn in Rome. The antecedent dates back to March 1896 when Synge witnessed the riots in Piazza Montecitorio, caused by Prime Minister Francesco Crispi’s resignation after the defeat against the king of Ethiopia Menelik, following the Italo-Abyssinian War, and posted an article on the riots to The Irish Times. This essay will explore also some literary echoes and Joycean connections in relation to Synge in Rome.

Almost like Joyce’s Bloom, ‘in the heart of the Roman Metropolis’, the traveller J.M. Synge happened to be in Rome since the first of February 1896, indulging in leisurely and artistic activities such as touring between the «Colosseum and the Fori Romani» (February 5th, 1896), «San Pietro and Lunch in

the Pincio» (Saturday 8th, 1896), or visiting the «Sistine Chapel and Raffael's Stanze» (February 17th, 1896), and going «to a conference in the Collegio Romano» (February 20th)⁴.

He had arrived from Paris where he had started taking Italian lessons a couple of months earlier «with a Dr Meli, planning a two-month trip to Italy»⁵. In Rome he kept taking language classes and reading widely on Italian literature. In the list of authors mentioned in his diaries, among the Italians, we find Edmondo De Amicis with *Cuore* and *La vita militare*, Petrarca, Tasso, Dante, Manzoni with *I promessi sposi*, Leopardi and Boccaccio. In his notebooks we also have compositions like short essays, such as one on Michelangelo's Mosè that Synge saw Saturday 14 March⁶ and that does not seem to fully satisfy him: «Non ho trovato il Mosè così piacevole come le altre opere di questo maestro, per esempio gli affreschi nella cappella sistina»⁷; or else letter drafts, and jottings with words translated in three languages, Italian, English and French, such as «sprecare, gaspiller, to waste»⁸.

2

The Demonstrations in Rome (by an eye witness)

In the diary entry dated Wednesday 26 February, in Italian, Synge wrote: «Visto i soldati che partivano per Abyssinia» (Saw soldiers about to leave for Abyssinia). In German, in the same diary, for Tuesday 10 March Synge noted again: «Wrote description about the present situation for newspaper»⁹. The newspaper in question is «The Irish Times» that would publish an unsigned article on Monday 16 March titled *The Demonstrations in Rome (by an eye witness)*. About Synge's presumed authorship of the piece, commentators are cautious, since in his papers, drafts, typescripts, notes or any sort of *avant-textes* do not exist. Therefore, we do not have any direct evidence that the article that appeared in «The Irish Times» is what Synge actually wrote. We only have the indirect source – Synge's own diary entry – that confirms the presence of it. For instance, W.J. McCormack states in his biography «[the article] may draw on his report»¹⁰. Ann Saddlemyer, too, does not say overtly that it belongs to Synge, but simply notes the presence of it in the newspaper, emphasizing the coincidental time frame with the diary entry in German that names it¹¹.

Unfortunately we do not have enough evidence to confirm that the piece is 'an original Synge'. However, the attribution *sine dubio* of the article to the Irish playwright is not the main focus of this critical piece: I do believe it is worth conjecturing that Synge is the author of it especially in relation to his successive reportage for «The Manchester Guardian». Therefore, for the purposes of this article, I will assume that Synge is the author of the piece. The juvenile *désengagé* report can be reminiscent of a certain descriptive style with a tendency towards nuances and a keen spirit of observation that will

become hallmarks of Synge's subsequent prose productions. Furthermore it engages overtly with political affairs and reports from the field and from direct testimony, a similar methodological approach endorsed for «The Manchester Guardian» series *In the Congested Districts* (1905).

On Thursday 5 March, 1896, Synge witnessed the mob in the streets of Rome after Crispi's resignation. The article is not politically judgemental, but paints faithfully the riots from the perspective of an 'eyewitness', as is remarked in the title. Synge's piece integrates another one on the same newspaper page, reproducing Reuter's reports to the press about the peace process, following the Italian defeat in the Battle of Adua. The title of this second article reads: *Italy and Abyssinia / The Peace Negotiations / Reinforcements Countermanded*, and explains the whole situation day by day, starting from Saturday 14 March. Four of these are Reuter's telegrams, three coming from Rome and one from Paris: they faithfully reconstruct the political and military events quoting also from many Italian newspapers. As historians have reconstructed, the reason why hostilities between Italy and Menelik's Ethiopia – at that time engaged in diplomatic discussions for the Italian expansion in Eritrea – rose, was the disagreement on the Treaty of Uccialli (1889) that was meant to regulate the commercial and colonial relationships between the two kingdoms. War started however, a few years later (December 1895), probably because of the Italian instability in its internal politics and the continuous scandals that were plaguing the brand new kingdom. This gap of time allowed Menelik to heavily strengthen his army that ruthlessly pulverized the Italian one in the Battle of Adua, on 1 March, 1896. Historians talk about the bloodshed with losses «more severe than the ones in the Italian Independence Wars»¹², a massacre authorised by Crispi who did not want to give in to diplomacy, despite the advice of his military forces stationed in Africa¹³. The echo of the *débauche* in the peninsula was incredibly loud and public opinion was manifesting its dissent with mobs in every square. On «The Irish Times», in the news agency reports, it is recounted how «desertions from the Italian Army are becoming more numerous, and many soldiers are crossing the Swiss frontier into Ticino»¹⁴.

It is from Piazza Colonna that Synge seems to have reported to his fellow countrymen. A concise opening describes the political and historical background that led to the mob and presents the facts in chronological order, counting them as already known by the public:

On the day of Crispi resignation (March 5th) Rome was in ferment from an early hour. The main events are already well known. A mob of over a thousand persons awaited the fallen Minister at the door of the Chamber. His arrival was greeted by hostile whistling and jeering with some applause. At 2.30 o'clock he rose in the Chamber, and announced that the Ministry had sent in their resignation, and that it

had been accepted by the King. His statement was followed by an outburst of hostility, to which the veteran statesman replied by repeated bows¹⁵.

The body of the piece, after setting the preparatory scene for the agitation, follows the pattern of a simple chronological narrative of cause and effect. Subsequently, the outburst of the disorders and the crowd protesting against the military are painted with a striking image of a 'semi-Ministerial paper' pro-Crispi – «Il Capitale» – burned to ashes in the air, the spark that ignited the whole real mob:

Before many minutes an enraged patriot put a light to one of the numbers, and threw it into the air. It was caught up by the wind and burned to ashes, while the mob yelled and howled with delight. Soon the whole Piazza was filled with smoke and burning paper, as this initiative was eagerly followed¹⁶.

After the crowd was dispersed by some military troops that had reached Piazza Montecitorio in order to help the other soldiers de-congest it, 'Reporter Synge' follows one of the many directions they had taken, presumably the more newsworthy, since that part of the mob was going towards Crispi's private house. The article gains momentum again at the end of the paragraph in the recognition of Prince Odescalchi¹⁷, and his patriotic declaration: «He was instantly surrounded and told to cry "Abbasso (down with) Crispi, viva Menelik"». He answered "I am an Italian. I will cry nothing but Viva l'Italia!" and forced himself free»¹⁸.

The description of the crowd in action seems to mirror Synge's tendency for nuanced particulars. The crowd in its collective and fluid state embodies the demonstrations themselves, and takes all the stage, especially after the burning of the pamphlet. It is described acoustically more than with visual connotations, despite Synge being the 'eyewitness': «the mob yelled and howled with delight», «the hoarse murmur of riot grew more and more threatening», «the mob howled and vociferated»¹⁹. It is the crowd that asks Prince Odescalchi to cry out loud «Abbasso Crispi, viva Menelik»²⁰. In emphasizing the aural nature of the crowd, more than its spatial distribution in the two Roman squares, Synge gives us a depiction of a chaotic entity not orderly arranged in lines like the soldiers: «Two more troops of military arrived at a double, and forming a line before the Chamber, began working the crowd down the streets»²¹. Furthermore, the crowd of protesters cannot even recognize the same sounds that imply order such as the bugle: «Every time the bugle sounded an advance, there was almost a panic and the crowd came rushing back tumbling over the orange and flower boys, who brought up the rear»²². The mob is therefore primarily noise and chaos. If Synge had read Alessandro Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi* (*The Betrothed*) we could have gone as far as arguing that his depiction owed something to the Italian novelist and his portrayal of the masses – «la folla manzoniana»²³: in the book, the masses achieve the

status of a full character, in some cases very much effective in the characters' resolutions and happenings. Unfortunately, Synge's diaries do not help commentators to indulge in this literary fascination: the entry that coincidentally refers to *The Betrothed* is dated 'after' our article, on Saturday March 18 1896, when Synge visited the Vatican as well. In these circumstances, since we are not supplied with direct documentary evidence, we could only but praise Synge's original musical ear: the same musical ear well stimulated by his training as a professional musician which, later on, will help him create the Aran Islands' «soundscape»²⁴ with «a faint murmur of Gaelic»²⁵ and the cries of birds and cormorants among the rocks. Furthermore, Synge's *penchant* for crowds' dynamics is evoked in *The Aran Islands* at the end of his second trip. At the train station in Galway, Synge describes «a wild crowd» standing on the platform and compares it with previous specimens he had encountered in Europe. Rome's mob is well etched in Synge's memory: «The tension of human excitement seemed greater in this insignificant crowd than anything I have felt among enormous mobs in Rome or Paris»²⁶.

The last paragraph of *The Demonstrations in Rome* starts with Crispi's house being already secured by the police and continues with the subsequent movements of the mob when the protest seems to grow in tone. Synge however, breaks the rhythm with an interesting digression for his Dublin readers, talking about electric trams: «It may interest Dubliners to hear that three electric trams, which arrived on the scene during the blockade, behaved most admirably, although they came on the crowd round a corner and down an extremely steep incline»²⁷.

The brief digression sounds almost like a sort of interpolation in the rhythm of the whole piece, and almost causes a switch in style, from current events to the colours of a lifestyle report. Nonetheless it reveals a very interesting detail about modern material culture and the way technological innovations in the field of transports were assimilated by public opinion at that time. According to historical notes about Dublin and its system of transports:

On 16th May 1896, Dublin's first electric trams began running between Haddington Road and Dalkey. Initially operated by the Dublin Southern District Tramways Company, the line was sold a few months later to the Dublin United Tramways, at that time running about 170 horse cars over 33 route miles. Despite concerted opposition, a reconstituted Dublin United Tramways Company (1896) Ltd. immediately set about total electrification²⁸.

Coincidentally, two months before the actual setting off of the first electric tram in Ireland, the author of the article with his digression, hints to the fact that Dublin public opinion at that time could have been concerned with this issue. It is my guess that probably, in the popular press, there had been a lot of talk about the new system of transportation. Therefore, from his Irish perspective, Synge decides to offer the reader another European metropolis,

suggesting that electric trams can work even in the most awkward situations such as that of a mob.

What is fascinating in this strange *captatio benevolentiae* towards the Dublin reader is the narrative perspective of the writer and the obvious literary echoes that this angle suggests. Synge seems to become an almost *ante-litteram* Joycean character strolling and witnessing a political event that will make history – ‘in the heart of the Roman Metropolis’ – recording also more or less extemporaneous details such as the tramcar and the different sounds of the crowd. Synge is an onlooker mixed amongst the crowd of the rioters, a sort of ‘Man in the Macintosh’ watching the Viceroy Cavalcade, and a Leopold Bloom *flâneur*, living in the city with its more recent technical innovations in transports. In Joyce, for instance, public transports are taken by his characters and become an essential way to explore the city. In *Wandering Rocks* the episode *par excellence* where the city becomes mobile, explored and framed from different points of view, Father Conmee takes «an outward bound tram»²⁹ getting off at the Howth road stop and making comments on his fellow passengers, on his readings and various thoughts that come up to his mind during the ride. Synge, in a sense, is captured by the stimuli of the city, in his case amplified by the helter-skelter of the situation. In a sociological study applied to the Joycean stream of consciousness, Franco Moretti quotes Georg Simmel and his *The Metropolis and Mental Life* where he describes the «metropolitan type of individual» and his psyche which «consists in the *intensification of nervous stimulation*, which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli [...] the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions»³⁰. Synge’s article can be seen as mirroring this phenomenon especially in the quick switch of style. However, while Moretti refers to the Joycean hero as possessing a «sociology of absentmindedness»³¹ because of this metropolitan over-exposure to nervous stimulation, we cannot realistically apply the same definition to Synge as narrator of the article, since his own stimuli in the end are conveyed and rationalised for the purpose of accurately reporting a fact, and in order *not* to overload reality with them. Furthermore, what struck me in terms of a Joyce/Synge parallel was, in a biographical sense, a coincidental time frame and their having partaken metropolitan experiences such as the one in Paris when they met. They both shared a certain degree of similarities in their cosmopolitanism and in their travelling in Europe, although it is an undeniable fact that they expressed their displacement very differently.

Joyce, ten years after Synge, spent some time in Rome, (from 31 July 1906 to 7 March 1907), although being a different kind of *flâneur* himself. He had arrived in Rome with Nora and Giorgio to take up a position as a bank clerk, and his experience with the Italian capital was that of a professional and not of a tourist. Joyce’s Roman months have mostly been described by some critics with a sense of failure in terms of his artistic achievements, the same

sense of failure that characterizes the tone of the letters to his brother Stanislaus at that time. Joyce laments not having enough time to write since he was working until late and was taking private tutoring in the evening in order to make ends meet; he was sarcastically disillusioned by the bourgeois working environment of the bank and, while there, got a couple of refusals from editors that said no to his *Dubliners*. Other commentators³², on the other hand, emphasized how Joyce, nonetheless, achieved some sort of «aesthetic gain»³³ in terms of readings such as the socialist daily «Avanti» or the Italian thinker Guglielmo Ferrero with *L'Europa giovane*. Most importantly, the Roman months are connected to John Millington Synge by a sort of chiasmic twist of fate: while Synge witnessed and wrote about the riot for Crispi's resignation, in 1896, Joyce commented on the *Playboy* riots in early 1907, in his private correspondence with his brother Stanislaus. Here, Joyce elucidates the whole controversy which he had read in Dublin newspapers that were sent to him, with details on the different positions taken by each part, bitterly remarking in the end that «This whole affair has upset me»³⁴.

3

Conclusion

To conclude, in 1896's Rome, 'Tourist Synge' became 'Reporter Synge' for the occasion, using his vantage point to create a piece of journalism for an Irish newspaper, presumably to make a little bit of money out of it, and to break the ice with 'the world and the job' of writing, in the same way as Yeats did³⁵. Eddie Holt in studying Yeats's journalistic prose, keenly points out how Yeats's «involvement came at a time when print journalism *was* the media. The golden era of print journalism [...] is generally estimated to have occurred between the 1880s and the 1930s, the precise half century he did it. Yeats understood its power»³⁶. If journalism was at that stage *the* media, it must have seemed almost unavoidable for people engaging their career in literary writing, to undergo a 'journalistic baptism'. Yeats did it, and even a reluctant James Joyce wrote articles for the *Irish Homestead* that he despised. For Joyce in particular, journalism on the Italian newspaper «Il Piccolo» of Trieste, was one of his scarce sources of income, while he was trying to make ends meet in the Italian city with a family to support. Synge apparently broke the ice in Italy with this relatively light piece of journalism, to engage almost a decade later with the reportage on the Congested Districts of the West of Ireland.

Endnotes

¹J.M. Synge, *Travelling Ireland: Essays 1898-1908*, ed. by N. Grene, The Lilliput Press, Dublin 2009.

²J.M. Synge, *Collected Works. Vol. 2 Prose*, ed. by A. Price, Colin Smythe, Gerrards Cross; Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C. 1982.

³ Nicholas Grene in his *Introduction* to the new edition of Synge's topographical writings explains how the CDB had been «instituted by a conservative administration [...] and associated with the politics of Constructive Unionism by which the government of the time sought to reconcile Irish people with the Union by an amelioration of their social condition». J.M. Synge, *Travelling Ireland: Essays ...*, cit., p. xxiii.

⁴ MS 4417 in Synge's papers held in Trinity College Library. I thank the Board of Trinity College Dublin for granting permission to quote from Synge's manuscripts (for further details see also *The Synge Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College Dublin: a Catalogue Prepared on the Occasion of the Synge Centenary Exhibition 1971*, ed. by N. Grene, Dolmen Press, Dublin 1971).

⁵ W.J. McCormack, *Fool of the Family*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 2000, p. 141 n.

⁶ MS 4417.

⁷ MS 4378, folio 7.

⁸ MS 4378, folio 8.

⁹ J.M. Synge, *Collected Letters Vol. 1*, ed. by A. Saddlemyer, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1983, p. 36.

¹⁰ W.J. McCormack, *Fool of the Family*, cit., p. 453 n.

¹¹ J.M. Synge, *Collected Letters Vol. 1*, cit., p. 36.

¹² P. Rossi, *Il Decennio Crispino e l'Era Giolittiana*, in *Storia d'Italia dal 1815 al 1914*, Mursia, Milano 1972, p. 294. See also G. Sabbatucci, V. Vidotto (eds.), *Storia d'Italia. Vol III. Liberismo e Democrazia. 1887-1914*, Laterza, Roma 1995.

¹³ In the telegram that opened the hostilities, Crispi wrote «[...] we are ready to any sacrifice to save the honour of the army and the prestige of the monarchy». See P. Rossi, *Il Decennio Crispino ...*, cit., p. 294.

¹⁴ See «The Irish Times», March 16th, 1896. Historian Rossi writes: «In Pavia's station the demonstrators tore the rails to prevent a group of artillery to leave for Africa. In Milan the crowd was walking the streets shouting "Crispi go away". The result was of one dead and five wounded. In Florence, Naples and even Rome in Piazza Colonna, anti-Crispi riots were organized». See P. Rossi, *Il Decennio Crispino ...*, cit., p. 297.

¹⁵ «The Irish Times», March 16th, 1896.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ Prince Baldassarre Odescalchi was a political deputy in one of the Roman districts; in the election of 1894 he was defeated by the socialist De Felice. The Odescalchis were also one of the families of the Roman high-nobility. See P. Rossi, *Il Decennio Crispino ...*, cit., p. 298.

¹⁸ «The Irish Times», March 16th, 1896.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ For further details see L. Nicoletti, *I personaggi dei Promessi sposi con uno studio sul mondo poetico, morale, e religioso*, Le Monnier, Firenze 1969.

²⁴ A. Saddlemyer, *Synge's Soundscape*, in N. Grene (ed.), *Interpreting Synge: Essays from the Synge Summer School 1991-2000*, Lilliput Press, Dublin 2000, p. 177.

²⁵ «The Irish Times», March 16th, 1896.

²⁶ J.M. Synge, *The Aran Islands*, Penguin, London 1992, p. 75.

²⁷ «The Irish Times», March 16th, 1896.

²⁸ See The National Transport Museum of Ireland website <<http://nationaltransportmuseum.org/b005.html>> (01/2011).

²⁹ J. Joyce, *Ulysses*, Hammersmith, London 1994, p. 284.

³⁰ G. Simmel, *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, quoted in F. Moretti (ed.), *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to Garcia Marquez*, Verso, London-New York 1996, p. 124.

³¹ Ivi, p. 137.

³² G. Melchiori (ed.), *Joyce in Rome. The Genesis of Ulysses*, Bulzoni, Rome 1984.

³³ C. Kaplan, *Question of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*, Duke University Press, Durham-London 1996, p. 36. Particularly, she is referring to the «aesthetic gain through exile» where «the modernist seeks to recreate the effect of statelessness – whether or not the writer is literally, in exile», and where «exilic displacement occupies a privileged position, legitimating points of view and constructing a point of entry into a professional domain».

³⁴ J. Joyce, *Letter to Stanislaus 11 February 1907*, in R. Ellmann (ed.), *Letters of James Joyce. Vol. 2*, The Viking Press, New York 1966, p. 212.

³⁵ Eddie Holt in his paper *Yeats, Journalism and the Revival* written for the first series of UCD Scholarcast *The Art of Popular Culture: From The Meeting of the Waters to Riverdance* has noted about W.B. Yeats: «He also, because he was poor, with a notoriously feckless father, made a little money from journalism. It was very little really. His letters show him waiting to get paid and looking for a rise. It's the typical life of a young freelancer. Until he became an established poet, he couldn't command the highest fees». Accessible online: <http://www.ucd.ie/scholarcast/transcripts/Yeats_Journalism.pdf>, p. 4 (01/2011).

³⁶ Ivi, p. 3.

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Joyce *l'italiano* and the Hans Jahnke Collection at the Zurich James Joyce Foundation

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Here I had found a man not made from dust;
one who had no narrow boasts of birthplace or country,
one who, if he bragged at all, would brag of his whole round globe against
the Martians and the inhabitants of the Moon.
O. Henry (William Sydney Porter)

Multilingualism characterizes both Joyce's works and his personal experience: not only did he spend most of his life outside the English-speaking world, but he also adopted a multicultural perspective and a polyglot style in his writings¹.

Interest in foreign languages, cultures and identities is intimately correlated to «voluntary exile»²: Joyce's curiosity for other European countries might have influenced the decision to leave Ireland, while his erratic life through several nations could have further stimulated his need for confrontation with different realities. Living in Pola, Trieste, Zurich and Paris undoubtedly helped Joyce master several languages and explore different cultures, but his cosmopolitan nature can be only partially explained by the fact that he was a migrant writer.

In his early youth, Joyce had already started learning Latin, Greek, French, Italian, Dano-Norwegian and Irish. During his expatriate experience he never limited his exploration of 'difference' to the countries where he resided and seemed to pursue at least an elementary knowledge of many European idioms: for example, he studied German, Yiddish, Spanish and Russian³. In every phase of his life, he continued to expand his linguistic (and cultural) boundaries in various directions. As Derek Attridge emphasizes,

[Joyce] crossed many national boundaries in his working career, in his outlook, and in his writing – extending his reach further and further until, in *Finnegans Wake*, he attempted to embrace the languages and cultures of the entire human community⁴.

Joyce's Babelic world was characterized by a deeper and more continuative connection with Italian than with any other language. Fascination with Italian had early origins and preceded his Triestine years: as early as 1894, Joyce chose it as his optional foreign language at Trinity College, Dublin. Encounters with

this new cultural-linguistic world must have been significant and revealing for Joyce. Figures of Italian teachers also people his first novels *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, where the characters Almidano Artifoni and Ghezzi, although satirically distorted, appear philosophically inspiring, and suggest an enriching negotiation of different cultural worlds⁵. Joyce's connection with the Italian language became crucial in 1904, when he found employment in Trieste⁶: he started writing regularly for a local newspaper, «Il Piccolo della Sera», and collaborated on the translations of Yeats' *The Countess Cathleen* and Synge's *Riders to the Sea*. Following his arrival in Trieste, Joyce wrote so continually in Italian that, Umberto Eco remarks, we can consider him «also an Italian author»⁷.

Joyce's commitment as translator, in particular, became increasingly more important and culminated in the well-known Italian version of two fragments from the *Anna Livia Plurabelle* episode of *Finnegans Wake* (1940), which Bolettieri Bosinelli defines «the last page of great prose that Joyce left us shortly before dying»⁸. Joyce adapted not only other writers' works to Italian, but also his own, showing a need for self-representation in the English-Italian literary mediation⁹. As a migrant writer, Joyce perfectly represents the translating subject, the foreigner who enters another language and therefore enters the *dimension* of translation.

Translation and self-translation represent one of the elements which testify to Joyce's cross-cultural position. Significantly, his relationship with the Italian language was not limited to his profession, but became a fundamental element of his personal life. The choice of the names for his children testifies to this special relationship: «Giorgio» and «Lucia» were the only two words «he never permitted to be translated»¹⁰. Communication between father and children was exclusively in Italian, even after leaving Trieste: according to Alessandro Francini Bruni, Joyce «used to say that the language for family affection could only be Italian»¹¹. Joyce's use of Italian in his 'public' and 'private' spheres has received ample notice and critical attention: much has already been said about his Italian essays, translations and correspondence¹². Recently, though, an extensive amount of new documentation has become available, allowing a new and a deeper insight into Joyce's special relationship with Italy. On 31 March 2006, the Zurich James Joyce Foundation acquired a collection of documents by and relating to James Joyce, material donated by Hans E. Jahnke, son of Giorgio Joyce's second wife Asta. The Hans Jahnke bequest to the James Joyce Foundation consists of a variety of documents, including *Finnegans Wake* material (concerning especially episodes I.8, II.2 and II.3), a 'Circe sheet' from *Ulysses*, manuscripts and typescripts of Joyce's poems, letters by and to James Joyce and legal, medical and business materials¹³.

What seems particularly interesting is that the Zurich collection sheds new light on two important aspects of Joyce *l'italiano*, namely poetry writing in Italian and the employment of this 'family language' in private correspond-

ence. I would like to focus primarily on these two aspects in the following discussion: first, I intend to propose a brief analysis of Joyce's 'Zurich letters', which are almost exclusively addressed to Giorgio. Most of the subsequent discussion will then be devoted to an exceptional and unpublished document, *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana*, which is evidently connected to the text of *On the Beach at Fontana*. The latter poem is included in the collection *Pomes Penyeach*, published in 1927¹⁴.

Despite its unquestionable relevance, the material in the Hans Jahnke bequest has received inadequate critical notice. Reasons for the relative silence on the new collection can be traced in the strict copyright laws that regulate the possibility of direct quotes from unpublished documents. Although circulation of contents is necessarily limited, the possibilities of research are not hindered: in my discussion, I will not extensively quote from the texts but only refer to exemplary words and phrases, which are crucial in the analysis of the documentation¹⁵.

1

The language of affection: Italian Letters in the Hans Jahnke Collection

The Hans Jahnke bequest to the James Joyce Foundation is especially characterised by the 'personal nature' of the material¹⁶: it includes about 115 letters, postcards and notes by Joyce and more than 200 letters and cards to Joyce and his family, most from the editor Sylvia Beach. About 60 documents testify to the correspondence between James and Giorgio: I have based my analysis on this latter material¹⁷. Joyce's letters to Giorgio are in Italian, except for a few cases, when Giorgio is not the only recipient.

The Italian letters in the Jahnke collection can open the way to new perspectives on Joyce's uses of Italian. Certain expressions question the common idea that Joyce's Italian «non traduce un testo concepito in altra lingua» ("does not translate a text conceived in another language")¹⁸ and testify to the migrant's relationship with the foreign language: Joyce's Italian often appears influenced by or even intermingled with English. Significantly, some letters addressed to both Giorgio and his wife Helen are written partly in English and partly in Italian, with the two languages alternating within sentences, as in «vi ringrazio della lettera alquanto scortese in prompt reply to my telegram of a fortnight ago» ("thank you for your rather rude letter in prompt reply [...]"), 19/07/1932). Since Helen could not understand Italian, we might assume that some textual segments were addressed to Giorgio alone. Actually, in some cases Joyce writes «[Giorgio] puoi tradurlo» (e.g. 09/07/1931), which means "you can translate it", and might imply that Giorgio 'was allowed' to translate the text for Helen.

It might be also noticed, though, that the Italian sections seem to carry more emotive participation than the English ones; moreover, Italian is gener-

ally used to express subjective views, while English sentences appear to have mostly a descriptive function, as in «Mme Jolas passed here [...] and secondo lei Lucia sta meglio» (“[...] and according to her Lucia is better”, 19/07/1932). In juxtaposing different languages, the letters to Giorgio and Helen open a new space of negotiation among various idioms, namely English, Italian and Triestine dialect: the 1932 letter reveals a complex and creative use of code-switching which appears to underline Joyce’s split identity as an expatriate¹⁹.

‘Emotive’ use of language characterizes most of the ‘Zurich letters’. For instance, on 24 July 1935 Joyce complains that his letter will get on «un altro imbecille di battello che salpa per quel ridicolo paese» (“another stupid boat which sails to that ridiculous country”: since Giorgio was pursuing a career as a singer in New York at the time, the “ridiculous country” in Joyce’s view must have been the United States). Emotive participation is often conveyed through word alteration: as Del Greco Lobner already remarked about the Italian writings, Joyce seemed to be fascinated with the possibility of ‘playing’ with suffixes, especially diminutives and augmentatives, or even combinations of the two²⁰. In the Jahnke documentation, words like «stazioncina» (12/08/1937), «regaluccio» (letter not dated) and «stupidone» (07/08/1933) often recur. Alteration is especially used when addressing the family members: in most letters, Giorgio becomes «Giorgino», Stephen is called «Stefanuccio» (19/07/1932) and «nipotino» (even when the message is in English, 27/06/1932 and 05/09/1936); Giorgio and Helen together are defined «pargoletti» (“little children”, 19/07/1932).

The function of morphological alteration varies (attenuation, affection, irony etc.) and is used in a variety of contexts, but especially when Joyce writes about the «stupidina» Lucia (21/05/1935). The occurrence of diminutives seems to suggest Joyce wanted to minimize some aspects of Lucia’s mental condition. Together with alteration, superlatives and ‘evaluative’ adjectives²¹ suggest Joyce’s deep emotional response to his daughter’s illness. In this sense, three letters dated 1934, 1935 and 1937 appear particularly interesting: they include semi-medical accounts of Lucia’s condition. The contrast between objective, pseudo-scientific vocabulary and emotive language is evident. For instance, after giving a medical explanation of Lucia’s case, Joyce describes her as often «profondamente triste» (“deeply sad”) and contemporarily «molto affettuosa» (“very affectionate”), «una povera e cara figliola, fantastica [...] ed esaltata» (“a poor, dear child, fantastic [...] and exalted”, 01/10/1934).

In the 1935 and 1937 letters, hyperboles and similes are used frequently when writing about Lucia. For example, on 12/08/1937 Joyce says that, according to the doctors, Lucia is «un caso nettissimo» (“a very clear case”) of infantilism. He mentions himself as a typical case of inveterate infantilism and comments: «vi sono migliaia e milioni di persone adulte che restano un po’ infantili vita natural durante» (“there are thousands and millions of people who remain a little childish for their entire natural lives”). In 1935, apparently

replying to Giorgio's complaints about Lucia's behaviour, Joyce writes in his daughter's defence: «la sua intelligenza quando è intelligente ha la chiarezza del lampo» ("her intelligence when she is intelligent is as clear as lightning", 21/05/1935). In the 1935 and 1937 letters, the frequent use of hyperboles and similes seems to have the function of either diminishing the seriousness of Lucia's illness, or emphasizing her qualities.

The letters in the Jahnke collection reveal an insistence on expressions connected with religion and the Church, which are used to «lend emotional colour to utterances»²². The Italian language apparently offered Joyce wide opportunities for re-exploring his relationship with religion in an irreverent or humorous way. For instance, Joyce's cat is called «Monsignor Gatto», whose purring might mean «bestemmia o saluto, non so quale» ("blasphemy or greeting, I do not know which", 21/05/1935); an inclement weather can show signs of «penitenza» ("penitence", 1936, undated) and a long journey westward is compared to that of the Magi (12/08/1937). The documentation also shows that Saint Gervasius, Servasius and Bonifacius must have had a special meaning for Joyce. These names are included in one of the parodic interpolations in the «Cyclops» episode of *Ulysses*²³: on 21/05/1935, Joyce mentions them again in a letter and writes, «S. Gervasio, S. Servasio and S. Bonifazio sono i tre più grandi mascalzoni che il sommo pontefice abbia mai canonizzati» ("S. Gervasius, Servasius and Bonifacius are the three greatest rascals that the Supreme Pontiff has ever canonized").

The mock-religious references in the Zurich material range from the saints to the highest celestial hierarchies: God, or Jesus, are generally mentioned when Joyce expresses his frustration and annoyance. For example, on 08/09/1937 Joyce reassures Giorgio that he would not have been able to achieve his goal even if «la Santità di Nostro Signore fosse intervenuto in persona» ("the Lord our God himself had intervened"); in 1935, Joyce ironically underlines the success of the writer Gertrude Stein, lists her honours, and ends the list with an invocation: «Dio beffardo, portami aiuto» ("God the mocker, help me", 14/05/1935). To sum up, Joyce's Italian prose can be said to be «supersaturated with the religion in which [he says he] disbelieve[s]»²⁴ like Stephen's mind in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

The register of the letters often switches from informal to formal in the space of a few lines; spoken language alternates to learned, even archaic lexical choices. The informal use of Italian appears particularly inventive and original: Joyce frequently distorts or transforms set phrases and idioms. For example, he claims to write «un poco in fretta, ma mica in furia» ("in a hurry but without rushing", 31/08/1936), an expression which echoes and transforms the Italian idiom «in fretta e furia». Only in a few cases does Joyce use set phrases without adapting and modifying them. For instance, he observes that «sangue da una rapa non si cava» ("you cannot get blood out of a stone" 23/08/1934) and, in a letter dated 07/08/1933, he wonders how the «Frankfurter Zeitung» «può

pigliare un granchio simile» (“can make such a blunder”: the newspaper had published a short story by Michael Joyce under the name of James Joyce).

Colloquial terms are sometimes combined in new turns of phrase and creative expressions, generating a humorous effect. For instance, in Joyce’s opinion, «gli irlandesi americani sono una tribù pestilenziale» (“Irish-Americans are a pestilential tribe”, 08/09/1937) and at the station one might see a «trenata di farabutti, mascalzoni, malandrini e brutti ceffi» (“a trainload of rascals, scoundrels, rogues and ugly mugs”, 06/01/1938). Both the transformations of linguistic clichés and the creation of original expressions suggest that Joyce’s process of appropriation of Italian implied a re-invention and a revision of the language. The letters in the Jahnke collection reveal Joyce’s attention to the vernacular of everyday speech and his expressive inventiveness, achieved through new combinations of familiar words.

Although Joyce makes wide use of colloquial phrases, Triestine dialect is found in only three letters of the Zurich collection and with completely different functions. On 12/08/1937 he refers to Stephen as «pizdrul», “little one”, using the dialect term as a means to express affection. On 10/5/1931 and 02/02/1938 the dialect expressions «fiol d’un can» (“son of a dog”) and «in malorsiga» (“to hell”) convey quite opposite feelings.

Ordinary language, as already mentioned, often contrasts with a learned vocabulary and use of a high register. Joyce frequently addresses requests to his son in a very formal way (e.g. letter from Beaujolais Hotel, Vichy, dated 1940), he uses archaic or learned terms like «sullodati» (“already praised”, 12/08/1937), «posdomani» (“the day after tomorrow”, 02/02/1938) and «cionullameno» (“nonetheless”, 31/08/1936), all expressions which stand out against the general tone and register of the letters. Examples of lexical archaisms can be traced in most of the Jahnke documentation (significant cases are also in the letters dated 07/08/1933 and 30/08/1932). Joyce’s tendency to consciously or unconsciously recover linguistic tradition was already noticed by his first Italian interlocutors, who defined his Italian *trecentesco*²⁵, or «una bizzarra mescolanza di lingua viva, di locuzioni dantesche, di frasario da libretto d’opera» (“a strange mixture of ordinary language, dantesque phrases and operatic text”)²⁶. When Joyce arrived in Trieste, we might suppose that his knowledge of Italian was essentially based on his readings of Dante and Cavalcanti: it is not surprising that he seemed to speak an ‘old’ language. Nonetheless, the material in the Zurich collection is dated well after 1904: most letters were written between 1930 and 1940, when Joyce had acquired an excellent proficiency in Italian.

The fact that Joyce never abandoned part of his linguistically ‘archaic’ tendency can be a significant element to understand his relationship with Italian language and culture²⁷. Linguistic recovery might express a need to access a local reality, or to constitute an identifying linguistic and cultural microcosm composed, for example, by his family members. The dynamic

nature of Joyce's use of Italian makes it difficult to establish a single function of archaisms in the Zurich letters. In some cases they may actually represent a link with the past, but more often archaisms can in fact be innovations and represent a form of linguistic renewal.

In the Jahnke collection, Joyce's 'archaic tendency' in writing Italian does not emerge only in the private correspondence, but characterizes also the text of *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana*, the Italian poem to which the next section of the present study is devoted.

2

Joyce's Italian poetry: the manuscript of *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana*

In *Ulysses*, Bloom hears some men speaking Italian and defines it «a beautiful language», then he asks Stephen Dedalus «why do you not write your poetry in that language?»²⁸. This incident from *Ulysses* establishes a relationship between Bloom's fictional suggestion and James Joyce's personal experience: the Hans Jahnke collection testifies to the fact Joyce wrote – or probably re-wrote – poetry in Italian.

One of the most interesting documents of the Zurich collection is an unpublished (and partially un-publishable) Italian poem titled *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana*. The manuscript, in Joyce's handwriting, is allegedly a fair copy, since writing is clear and ordered and the text presents only one modification in line 3. It should be noted, though, that it is not possible to establish with certainty if the text was composed by Joyce, or if he transcribed it from another source: we can only rely on the available material evidence, which contains no signs that Joyce might have 'borrowed' the text from elsewhere.

What seems certain is that the extant documentation of Joyce's poetical corpus includes two poems in different languages, *On the Beach at Fontana* and *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana*, which are closely interconnected. The first and most obvious relationship is in the title, but the two texts are also similar in contents and form, suggesting that the poems could be one the translation of the other. It is difficult to establish a chronological succession, since *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana* is not dated; *On the Beach at Fontana*, instead, is dated by Joyce around 1914²⁹

The compositional history of the English text can provide some useful points of reference regarding the dating of *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana*. The available documentation testifies that the text of *On the Beach at Fontana* underwent modifications in the years 1918-19 (Buffalo IV.A.I, Huntington E.6.b). In particular, lines 7 and 8 were modified through procedures of dislocation: «[...] touch his fineboned boyish shoulder / And trembling arm» in Buffalo IV.A.1 becomes «[...] touch his trembling fineboned shoulder / And boyish arm» in Huntington E.6.b. In lines 7 and 8, the Italian poem presents the reading «[...] tocco la sua spalla tremante timida / Il braccio di giovinetto», which is connected to the post-1919 readings of *On the Beach at Fontana*. In light of

this connection, it might be assumed that the Italian text was composed at least after 1919: it must have been written when *On the Beach at Fontana* had already been conceived and might be based on a late reading of the English poem. *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana* could then constitute a precious testimony of Joyce's self-translation in verse: before the Jahnke material was available, documentation of Joyce's poetry translations into Italian included only James Stephen's sonnet *St. Stephen's Green* (which was also produced in four other languages)³⁰.

The published English poem *On the Beach at Fontana* is composed of three alternately rhymed quatrains:

Wind whines and whines the shingle,
The crazy pierstakes groan;
A senile sea numbers each single
Slimesilvered stone.

From whining wind and colder
Grey sea I wrap him warm
And touch his trembling fineboned shoulder
And boyish arm.

Around us fear, descending
Darkness of fear above
And in my heart how deep unending
Ache of love!³¹

The poem opens with the perception of concrete images, namely the sea and piers, and closes with abstract ones, fear and ache. The second quatrain introduces both the poetic I and «him» (line 6): the referent of the third person pronoun is not identifiable within the contextual knowledge shared by the addresser and the addressee. The text does not provide information which would allow us to retrieve the referent of the pronoun: we can only assume the fictional existence of a male figure, evoked through mention of his fragile arm and shoulder.

On the Beach at Fontana is commonly interpreted with reference to extratextual information, in particular Joyce's biography: the figures by the sea are generally identified as James Joyce and his son Giorgio³². At the basis of such interpretation is a passage of the *Trieste notebook*:

Giorgino

You were a few minutes old. While the doctor was drying his hands I walked up and down with you, humming to you. You were quite happy, happier than I.

I held him in the sea at the baths of Fontana and felt with humble love the trembling of his frail shoulders: *Asperge me, Domine, hyssopo et mundabor: lavabis me et super nivem dealbalor*. Before he was born I had no fear of fortune³³.

The annotation, a reflection on Giorgio's birth, is echoed in the poem, which might be considered deriving from this passage. The images described in *On the Beach at Fontana* cannot be considered a mere portrayal of Joyce and his son: the verses are open to wider interpretations and the father/son relationship becomes instrumental to a second end, that of representing the passing of time and the various phases of human life.

The numbering of the stones (line 3) relates to the «unnumbered pebbles» in *Proteus*³⁴; both *Ulysses* and *Pomes Penyeach* present a connection to *King Lear*, where «[...] the murmuring surge / That on the unnumbered idle pebble chafes / Cannot be heard [...]» (Quarto 4.5, Sc.20:21-2). In Shakespeare's tragedy, father and son are on the beach: the youngster helps the elderly man saying «Give me your arm» (Sc.20:64). Similarly, in *On the Beach at Fontana*, the speaker touches the arm of the figure beside him in order to protect him. The connections with Shakespeare emphasise references to senility and introduce the theme of the father/son relationship in the poem, a relationship which is seen through multiple perspectives.

The idea of senility is substantiated in line 7: «his trembling fineboned shoulder» could refer to the fragility of old age. «Boyish arm», in the following line, apparently changes the whole picture: relevant information is deferred, causing an effect of surprise in the reader. We puzzle out the figure on the shore, which presents a fair amount of ambiguity: «boyish» could mean both belonging to a boy and boy-like, indicating the arm is as thin as that of a boy. Lines 7-8, therefore, open the way to a twofold interpretation of the poem: we cannot establish whether the speaker is wrapping a child, or an old man. The theme of the father/son relationship develops according to a double direction: the poetic I appears simultaneously father and son. Youth and old age reveal continuity, as time re-unites them in one single figure.

The Italian text, *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana* can be seen as a fairly literal translation of *On the Beach at Fontana*. The enjambements in lines 3, 5 and 11 are maintained and so is the opening chiasm in line 1: «Il vento guaisce, guaiscono i ciottoli» can be actually translated as «Wind whines and whines the shingle». The repetitions of noun phrases in the first and second quatrain characterize both poems, although with some variations. On the whole, both the Italian and the English texts are characterised by pervasive indeterminacy and allusiveness and seem to present the same degree of literary allusions, metaphorical thickness and semantic density. Syntactically, instead, the Italian text appears less complex than *On the Beach at Fontana*. Three neologisms in the English text lose their peculiarity of compound words in *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana*: «pierstakes» (line 2) and «slimesilvered» (line 4) are translated through prepositional phrases, while «fineboned» (line 7) is substituted with a completely different term. The introduction of prepositional phrases and other forms of textual 'expansions' is generally determined by the morphological-syntactic characteristics of Italian. This procedure of linguistic slackening³⁵

often implies de-nominalization: English can create «strings of adjectives and nouns, and particularly strings of just nouns, to form lexically-dense noun phrases»³⁶, which can be best translated into Italian through insertions of verbs, or prepositions. At the same time, however, Joyce tends to maintain syntactic compression even in Italian: for instance, he omits the verb in line 11, «Ma nel mio cuore angoscia profonda [...]» (“But in my heart deep anguish [...]”)³⁷.

The (alleged) Italian translation reconstitutes the overall verbal effect of the English text, but via lexically variant usages. While the formal and structural patterns are preserved, the two poems present a different choice of lexical items, which results in the creation of two different registers. *On the Beach at Fontana* is written in a language not far from common speech, while *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana* strikes the reader as more archaic, and decidedly more high-flown than the English text. In this sense, we might also say that the feeling of ‘familiarity’ brought about by the lexicon in *On the Beach at Fontana* becomes a feeling of ‘foreignness’ in *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana*. In the latter text, the high register is especially determined by three terms, each included in a different quatrain: «rovinosi» (line 2), «ammanto» (line 6) and «atra» (line 10).

In the second line of both poems, the English «crazy pierstakes» becomes «pali rovinosi» («ruinous piers») in Italian. The passage from the adjective «crazy» to «rovinosi» not only represents a change from an ordinary to a learned lexicon, but also implies a connotative shift. The Italian term «rovinoso» means «ruined», «liable to collapse», but is commonly used also with the sense of «damaging»³⁸. In the context of the poem, the choice of «rovinosi» (instead of an adjectival past participle such as «rovinati») is probably aimed at emphasizing that the piers are going to ruin in a process which is still *in fieri*.

The second term which contributes towards establishing a high register in *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana* appears in line 6 of the poem, where the English «I wrap him warm» (line 6) is modified in «l’ammanto caldamente» (“I mantle him warmly”). In Italian the verb «ammantare» (“to mantle”) is mostly used in a metaphorical sense and is not commonly coupled with an adverbial. Compared to the verb “avvolgere”, which might be a more literal translation of “to wrap”, it has more learned and lyric overtones.

The modifier «atra» (line 10) is one of the most interesting lexical choices in the Italian poem: «la paura atra» corresponds to the English «darkness of fear» in line 10 of *On the Beach at Fontana*. The substantive «darkness» is therefore substituted with an adjective which carries multiple connotations. «Atra» is a poetic term in which meanings such as «dark», «terrible» and «funereal»³⁹ merge. It bears a strong connection with the theory of humours, since it is commonly applied to *bile*: «atra bile» was regarded as a morbid symptom and as the cause of melancholy.

The reference to the theory of humours is only one of the relationships which add to the meaning of the poem: the term «atra» establishes a thick

intertextual web, since it was used in Italian works such as Dante's *Divina Commedia*, Petrarca's *Rime* and Boccaccio's *Teseida*⁴⁰. *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana* opens to a simultaneity of cultural and literary referents, which introduce the poem into an ancient and 'aureate' Italian tradition. Joyce seems interested in creating new associative intertextual chains for Italian readers, a procedure which was already noticed by Bollettieri Bosinelli in the translation of the *Anna Livia Plurabelle* episode of *Finnegans Wake*⁴¹.

By shifting to a higher register the Italian text may instantiate a different attitude toward the events narrated, as well as reframe the relationship between addresser and addressee in the poem. High 'poetic' language seems to partially stylize and depersonalize the images described in the text, with the effect of attenuating their concreteness. Compared to *On the Beach at Fontana*, *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana* might be said to convey the feeling of a greater distance between the speaker and the subject matter.

The choice of different lexical items is not the only aspect which characterizes the rewriting of *On the Beach at Fontana*: the transformation of the text includes procedures of dislocation and elimination of terms⁴². The positioning of elements in the sentence is modified in lines 5 and 6: the English «From whining wind and colder / Grey sea [...]» becomes «Dal mar senile, dal più gelido / Vento [...]» in *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana*. The substantives «wind» (line 5) and «sea» (line 6) are inverted, creating a sort of chiasmic re-arrangement of the elements introduced in the first quatrain. Rather than a strategy adopted to solve linguistic problems, dislocation could be meant to convey a different perception of things, or to change focus from one element to another. The adjectives «whining» (line 5) and «colder grey» (lines 5-6) in *On the Beach at Fontana* also undergo significant changes: in the Italian text, «gelido» (line 5) is displaced and modifies the wind, while «whining» is eliminated, weakening the connection between lines 1 and 5. «Grey» (line 6) is substituted with «senile» in *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana*, a modification which reinforces the connection between lines 3 and 5.

Lines 7 and 8, which can be considered pivotal to the interpretation of the whole English text, are slightly modified in *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana*. In line 7, the term «fineboned» is translated with «timida» («shy», «timid»). The shift is from a term which describes a characteristic of the human body, «fineboned», to one which expresses a personality trait. It might also be noticed, though, that «timida» can be understood primarily in its etymologic derivation from the Latin «timidus», «fearful». In this perspective, the substitution establishes a connection between a feature of the shoulder and a possible reason for its trembling. The ambiguity introduced by the term «boyish» in line 7 of *On the Beach at Fontana* is only partially rendered in Italian: in «braccio di giovinetto» (line 7), the preposition «di» introduces a genitive case and suggests the arm *belongs* to a boy.

The close of the English poem hints to a worsening state of things: fear descends on the poetic *personae*, supposedly provoking the speaker's «ache of love» (lines 9-11). In *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana*, fear is a static entity which surrounds the human figures and impends over them like a threat. Lines 11-12 undergo further crucial modifications: «And in my heart how deep unending / Ache of love» becomes «Ma nel mio cuore angoscia profonda / d'amore che non ha fine» (“But in my heart deep anguish / of love which has no end”). In line 11 of the Italian text the type of coordination changes from copulative to adversative («And» / «Ma»): the latter establishes a contrast between ‘external menace’ and the speaker’s feelings. Such contrast shifts the centre of attention to the individual’s emotional state, which receives maximum emphasis in *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana*. What seems even more relevant, the adjective «unending» (line 11 of *On the Beach at Fontana*) becomes a relative clause in the Italian text (line 12). The reasons for the change do not appear merely linguistic: on the one hand, the introduction of a relative clause could be principally aimed at exploring different rhythms. On the other, as Senn suggests, the relative clause allows placing the word «fine» (“end”) exactly at the end of *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana*⁴³. The term «fine» marks the cessation of writing, conclusion which, at the same time, is denied by the whole sentence, «che non ha fine», “which has no end”. Such dichotomy might be a fitting representation of the ambiguity Joyce felt about textual closure and completion⁴⁴.

On the whole, we might say that the Joycean corpus includes two similar poems in different languages which show a few, but significant, modifications: the change of language also corresponds to a different perspective on the material. Micro-variations determine new paths of meaning and new levels of connotation: the alleged rewriting of *On the Beach at Fontana* into *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana* can be perceived as both a ‘transferral’ and an ‘expansion’ of the text.

Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana opens new perspectives on Joyce’s whole poetic corpus: not only does it corroborates the idea that Joyce’s verse writing and re-writing characterized his whole literary life⁴⁵, but it also testifies to the fact that Joyce’s poetic experimentation took various directions, including composing in Italian. The fact that *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana* might be seen as a translation of *On the Beach at Fontana* is particularly noteworthy, since it suggests a sense of instability of the text: the creative detours give the poem a «movement of fragmentation, a wandering of errance»⁴⁶. The key feature of Joyce’s alleged translation is revealed to be the same which characterizes his whole production: dynamism. It is precisely in light of a continuative interest in mutation and transfer that Joyce’s activity as self-translator acquires particular significance. «Translation within the same language is not essentially different from translation between two tongues»⁴⁷: in this sense, *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana* can be related to the many rewritings that characterize Joyce’s English macrotext, a Protean corpus subject to incessant expansion and variation.

Self-translations, drafts and published works could be considered as a 'whole': a multifaceted but unitary dossier is a possibility.

The Hans Jahnke collection not only substantiates previous hypotheses on Joyce's uses of Italian but also opens the way to further speculation. The plural dimension of Joyce's existence is echoed in both the letters and *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana*. In particular, analysis of the 'new' documentation shows that Joyce perceived the language(s) and the text as dynamic, unstable elements, «evermoving wanderers» like the stars in *Ulysses*⁴⁸. The Zurich letters to Giorgio testify to how Joyce was interested in the different tones and registers of the language. He often alternated vernacular speech and formal expressions within only a few lines of writing and could easily move from a conventional to a creative use of Italian. *Sulla Spiaggia a Fontana*, a transformation of the poem *On the Beach at Fontana*, reveals a possible textual itinerary from English to Italian, an itinerary that generates new relationships and associations, so that multiple meanings can often co-exist and enrich each other. Joyce's «travellingself»⁴⁹ as an 'exile' is also reflected in his modalities of re-writing: each text, each new reading can be considered a new point of departure, but «a departure engenders a (new) departure, in these texts which are related to each other, recognize each other and cite each other by the complex motif, or concept, of departure»⁵⁰.

Endnotes

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² Joyce himself defines «voluntary exile» his drive towards migration. J. Joyce, *Letters*, ed. by R. Ellmann, Viking, New York 1966, vol. 2, p. 82.

³ All information concerning Joyce's biography is based on: R. Ellmann, *James Joyce*, Oxford UP, New York-Oxford 1959 and J. McCourt, *The Years of Bloom: Joyce in Trieste 1904-1920*, Lilliput Press, Dublin 2000.

⁴ D. Attridge, *Preface*, in Id. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, 2nd edition, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2004, p. xii.

⁵ Father Ghezzi is Stephen's Italian teacher in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (see J. Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1992, p. 271). It seems that Ghezzi was actually the surname of one of Joyce's teachers at University College. Almidano Artifoni is the Italian teacher in *Stephen Hero* (see J. Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, ed. by T. Spencer, J. Slocum, H. Cahoon, New Directions, New York 1963, pp. 169-170). This name recurs in Joyce's works: Artifoni is a music teacher in the *Wandering Rocks* episode of *Ulysses* (J. Joyce, *Ulysses*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1992, pp. 292-293). An Almidano Artifoni actually existed, and was the director of the Berlitz School of Trieste in the first decade of 1900.

⁶ Austrian city with an Italian spirit (and language), Trieste was characterized by a cosmopolitan atmosphere which included German, Italian and Eastern European influences. Trieste's cultural melting-pot is thoroughly analysed in J. McCourt, *The Years of Bloom*, cit., *passim*.

⁷ U. Eco, *The Aesthetics of Chaosmos: The Middle Ages of James Joyce*, Harvard UP, Cambridge MA 1989, p. xi.

⁸ R.M. Bollettieri Bosinelli, *Anna Livia's Italian Sister*, in K. Lawrence (ed.), *Transcultural Joyce*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1998, p. 197.

⁹ Translation must have fascinated Joyce since his youth: one of his earliest extant writings is a translation from Horace (1896), which was followed five years later by the English versions of Hauptmann's *Vor Sonnenaufgang* and *Michael Kramer*.

¹⁰ The testimony of A. Francini Bruni is included in W. Potts (ed.), *Portraits of the Artist in Exile. Recollections of James Joyce by Europeans*, University of Washington Press, Seattle 1979, p. 45.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² See for example G. Melchiori, *James Joyce scrittore italiano*, in J. Joyce, *Scritti italiani*, Mondadori, Milano 1979, pp. 7-19; F. Senn, *Joyce's Dislocutions. Essays on Reading as Translation*, The John Hopkins UP, Baltimore, London 1984; F. Ruggieri, *Esercizi di stile: dalle poesie alle traduzioni*, in J. Joyce, *Poesie e Prose*, Mondadori, Milano 1992, pp. XI-XLII; C. Marengo Vaglio, *Trieste as a Linguistic Melting-pot. Joyce et l'Italie*, «La Revue des Lettres Modernes», special issue, 1994, pp. 55-74; S. Zanotti, *Joyce in Italy. L'italiano in Joyce*, Aracne, Roma 2004; O. De Zordo, *James Joyce e le riviste fiorentine tra le due guerre*, «Rivista di letterature moderne e comparate», XXXVI, 3, 1983, pp. 251-259.

¹³ For an exhaustive description of the whole material see R. Frehner and U. Zeller, *The Hans E. Jahnke Bequest at the Zurich James Joyce Foundation*, «James Joyce Quarterly», 42-43, 1-4, 2004-2006, pp. 17-20. See also the website of the Zurich James Joyce Foundation, <<http://www.joycefoundation.ch/>> (07/2009).

¹⁴ J. Joyce, *Poems and Exiles*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1992, p. 47.

¹⁵ The International James Joyce Foundation website provides a useful guide to copyright, fair use and permission regarding Joyce's works and manuscripts, <<http://english.osu.edu/research/organizations/ijjf/copyrightfaqs.cfm>> (07/2009) which was recently published in: P.K. Saint-Amour et al., *James Joyce: Copyright, Fair Use, and Permissions: Frequently Asked Questions*, «James Joyce Quarterly», 44, 4, 2007, pp. 753-784.

¹⁶ See T. Kileen, *Joyce Collection Among The Most Personal Yet Found*, «The Irish Times», 16/05/2006, <<http://www.joycefoundation.ch/Jahnke%20in%20Times.htm>> (07/2009).

¹⁷ In particular, my analysis focuses on about 40 letters written by James Joyce to Giorgio from 1926 to 1940. In the Jahnke bequest, the letters are catalogued according to the year, month and day of their composition, as indicated by Joyce on the manuscripts.

¹⁸ S. Crise, *Epiphanies and Phadographs. Joyce and Trieste*, All'insegna del pesce d'oro, Milano 1967, p. 68; unless explicitly mentioned, all translations from the Italian are mine.

¹⁹ Incidentally, Joyce's condition of 'exile' is unconsciously expressed in a *lapsus*, or revealing mistake, which appears in a letter dated 30/08/1932: a 'foreign body' entering the eye of the migrant Joyce is defined in Italian a «corpo straniero», instead of «corpo estraneo».

²⁰ C. Del Greco Lobner, *James Joyce and the Italian Language*, «Italia», 60, 2, 1983, pp. 145-146.

²¹ With «evaluative adjectives» I am referring to Kerbrat-Orecchioni's scheme of subjective adjectives in C. Kerbrat-Orecchioni, *L'énonciation. De la subjectivité dans le langage*, Colin, Paris 1980, pp. 84-91. The scheme is discussed in P. Pugliatti, *Lo sguardo nel racconto. Teorie e prassi del punto di vista*, Zanichelli, Bologna 1985, p. 163.

²² F. Senn, *Ulysean Close-ups*, cit., p. 59. Senn is here discussing the effects of 'blessing and curses' in *Ulysses*.

²³ J. Joyce, *Ulysses*, cit., p. 441, lines 10-11.

²⁴ J. Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, cit., p. 261.

²⁵ C. Del Greco Lobner, *James Joyce and the Italian Language*, cit., p. 141.

²⁶ D. De Tuoni, *Ricordo di Joyce a Trieste*, All'insegna del pesce d'oro, Milano 1966, p. 59.

²⁷ Del Greco Lobner underlines that before leaving Ireland Joyce was already familiar with at least one modern Italian writer, Gabriele D'Annunzio. In light of this fact, the scholar hypothesizes that Joyce's employment of *italiano trecentesco* might have always been intentional. See C. Del Greco Lobner, *James Joyce's Italian Connection*, University of Iowa Press, Iowa City 1989, p. 21.

²⁸ J. Joyce, *Ulysses*, cit., p. 716, lines 31-32.

²⁹ Joyce indicates different dates in different drafts of the poem. In manuscript Buffalo IV.A.1 and Huntington E.6.b «On the Beach at Fontana» is dated 1915, while the published text presents the date 1914. I have analysed all manuscripts and typescripts of Joyce's poems on the facsimiles in: M. Groden *et alii* (eds.), *The James Joyce Archive. Chamber Music, Pomes Penyeach & Occasional Verse. A Facsimile of Manuscripts, Typescripts & Proofs*, vol. 1, Garland, New York-London 1978. I have discussed the composition of *Pomes Penyeach* in: I. Natali, «*That submerged doughdoughty doubleface*»: *Pomes Penyeach di James Joyce*, ETS, Pisa 2008.

³⁰ See M. Groden *et alii* (eds.), *The James Joyce Archive. Chamber Music, Pomes Penyeach & Occasional Verse. A Facsimile of Manuscripts, Typescripts & Proofs*, cit; some typescripts of the poem are also included in the Jahnke bequest.

³¹ J. Joyce, *Poems and Exiles*, cit., p. 47.

³² See for example: J.C.C. Mays, *Notes*, in J. Joyce, *Poems and Exiles*, cit., p. 291.

³³ The same annotation in the «Trieste notebook» was probably reworked in *Ulysses*, «Oxen of the Sun»: «Before born babe bliss had» (J. Joyce, *Ulysses*, cit., p. 502, line 7). I have analysed the «Trieste notebook» on the facsimiles in: M. Groden *et alii* (eds.), *The James Joyce Archive. A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: A Facsimile of Epiphanies, Notes, Manuscripts and Typescripts*, vol. 7, Garland, New York-London 1978.

³⁴ J. Joyce, *Ulysses*, cit., p. 50, line 23.

³⁵ The expression «linguistic slackening» is derived from the definition of the procedure of textual «diffusion» proposed in: C. Taylor, *Language to Language*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1998, p. 56.

³⁶ Ivi, p. 58.

³⁷ Donatella Pallotti reveals that nominalization is a characterising aspect of *Giacomo Joyce* and analyses its function in: D. Pallotti, «*Everintermutuomergent*»: *The 'Cobueb (Hand) Writing' of Giacomo Joyce*, in F. Ruggieri (ed.), *Classic Joyce*, Bulzoni, Roma 1999, pp. 342-343.

³⁸ See G. Devoto, G.C. Oli (eds.), *Dizionario della lingua italiana*, Le Monnier, Firenze 2008, «Rovinoso».

³⁹ Ivi, «Atro».

⁴⁰ D. Alighieri, *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. by G. Petrocchi, Mondadori, Milano 1966-1967, vol. 1, p. 96 (*Inferno* 6.16) and vol. 3, p. 93 (*Paradiso* 6.78). F. Petrarca, *Rime disperse e attribuite*, ed. by A. Solerti, Sansoni, Firenze 1909, p. 255 (207.46). G. Boccaccio, *Teseida delle nozze d'Emilia*, in G. Boccaccio, *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, a cura di A. Limentani, Mondadori, Milano 1964, vol. 2, p. 305.

⁴¹ R.M. Bollettieri Bosinelli, *Anna Livià's Italian Sister*, cit., p. 195.

⁴² The basic procedures of textual modification, which include dislocation, elimination, substitution and increase, are illustrated in: P. Pugliatti, *Avantesto e spazio della scrittura*, «Il piccolo Hans», 64, 1989-90, pp. 117-153.

⁴³ I am grateful to Fritz Senn for this helpful advice, which he offered me during an informal conversation in February 2009.

⁴⁴ Joyce often seemed to consider their texts as 'always in progress', unstable, as the compositional process of his works emphasizes.

⁴⁵ I have tried to reveal Joyce's unremitting interest in poetry writing in I. Natali, «*That submerged doughdoughty doubleface*»: *Pomes Penyeach di James Joyce*, cit., 2008.

⁴⁶ P. de Man, *The Resistance to Theory*, Minnesota UP, Minneapolis 1986, p. 92.

⁴⁷ O. Paz, *Traduzione: letteratura e letteralità*, in S. Nergaard (a cura di), *Teorie contemporanee della traduzione*, Bompiani, Milano 1995, p. 283.

⁴⁸ In *Ulysses*, reference is to parallax (one of the *Leitmotifs* of the novel), the phenomenon according to which a celestial body appears to change its angular position if observed from different points of view. The phrase «evermoving wanderers» only appears in the Gabler edition: J. Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. by H.W. Gabler, Vintage, New York 1986, p. 573, line 1053.

⁴⁹ J. Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1992, p. 358, line 13.

⁵⁰ H. Cixous, «*Mamãe, disse ele*», or, *Joyce's Second Hand*, «Poetics Today», 17, 3, 1996, p. 343.

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Three Plays by Austin Clarke and the *Commedia* Tradition¹

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1. Like most European countries, Ireland felt the theatrical influence of *commedia dell'arte*. But since Ireland had no native or indigenous theatre, influence was a matter of imbibing through colonial history. The Irish theatre, mainly situated in Dublin, was since the late sixteenth century an imitation and transplantation of the London theatre. In that respect, the Dublin theatre before 1899 broadly accepted the taste and repertory of the English coloniser. Consequently, pantomime became established from the eighteenth century and followed the same path as in England, making use of Harlequin and Columbine as lovers and creating what was called the harlequinade as an extended transformation scene². Even though pantomime was a debased form, it kept alive some vestiges of popular tradition, albeit in a very British and a very spectacular style. As a child, Austin Clarke (1896-1974) would have seen the Christmas pantomime in Dublin and discovered theatre as a place of magical possibilities.

But soon, too, the young Clarke came to know the plays at the Abbey Theatre, founded as an alternative to the colonialist theatre. In particular, he came to admire the poetic plays of W.B. Yeats, the driving force behind the Abbey as a cultural institution committed to the nationalist cause. As a poet, Clarke fell under the influence of Yeats, but as a twentieth-century Irishman he was also attracted to new ideas of European origin. On the one hand, Clarke saw his mission as following Yeats in the dual attempt to restore poetry to the Irish stage and to train actors to speak verse properly. On the other hand, since the Abbey was becoming more and more the theatre of realism, as seen in the plays of J.M. Synge and Sean O'Casey, Clarke found himself attracted to the great rival theatre in Dublin, the Gate³.

In the broadest sense, the Gate was dedicated to Harlequin. Founded in 1928 by two English actors as a modern theatre dedicated to an international repertory from Shakespeare to Goldoni to Ibsen, Shaw, Wilde, and so on, the Gate emphasised theatrical values, lighting, staging methods, new ideas on design and production. The logo for this theatre was a drawing of Harlequin pushing open two gates symbolic of magical revelation. The book one of the founders wrote was entitled *The Mantle of Harlequin*. In it the author Hilton Edwards paid tribute to *commedia dell'arte* and said that its spirit could be

summarized in the figure of Harlequin. When Yeats rejected Clarke's first poetic play it was staged at the Gate (1930). A second was not staged until 1939, for in the intervening years Clarke was in London, like so many Irish writers of his generation, seeking a living as a man of letters. Only then, after the death of Yeats, who had rather spurned the younger poet, did Clarke turn to the Abbey. It was at this point his work was accepted for the first time, and he established his own company, the Lyric Theatre⁴, using the Abbey on Sunday and Monday nights, to put on modern poetic plays, international as well as Irish.

The better to situate Clarke within the parameters of this essay, I would claim that through the binary relationship between two Dublin theatres, both modern but one (the Gate) modifying the English tradition and the other (the Abbey) creating a new Irish tradition, Clarke entered on a brief career as a playwright at once sharing and going well beyond the project which energized Yeats as co-founder of the Abbey. Clarke now, it can be argued, in a sense brought with him something of the Gate's ethos, and, I would maintain, strove for a stylistic synthesis of Gate and Abbey. While this is a large claim, the element of hyperbole in it may serve to draw attention to the gap Clarke helped to fill in Irish theatre at a time when the Abbey was sinking more and more into conservative realism. Moreover, it is worth noting that Hilton Edwards regarded Clarke as briefly restoring to the modern Irish theatre the poet which *commedia dell'arte* had banished in its heyday⁵. Until the fire which destroyed the old Abbey Theatre in 1951, and with it all further chance of developing poetic drama in that quarter, for ten years Clarke challenged Dublin audiences with poetic, experimental work by modern authors, and in two of his own plays staged in the 1940s he paid tribute to *commedia dell'arte*.

I focus on this aspect of his work because it provides the means of emphasizing the international, self-reflexive nature of Clarke the playwright, who is otherwise too often regarded as a learned, Celticist-style poet, along the lines contemptuously (and unfairly) dismissed by the callow Beckett in 1934. In a review article at this time, Beckett, writing for the «Bookman» under the pseudonym Andrew Belis, divided contemporary Irish poets into «anti-quarians» and «others», Clarke being classed among the former, traditional, conventional, lacking a central theme: «The fully licensed stock-in-trade from Aisling to Red Branch Bundling, is his to command»⁶. Clarke published no volume of poetry between 1939 and 1955, during which he concentrated on the theatre, and it should be noted that his 1955 volume, *Ancient Lights*, ushered in a new, satirical Clarke, whose theme became Irish society in all its drawbacks, hypocrisies and moral failures. Accordingly, it is justifiable to regard Clarke's interest in modern poetic drama, and his commitment to the work of the Lyric Theatre, as hugely formative in his own development as well as marking a significant challenge to what Beckett called the antiquarian inheritance from the Irish Revival. In short, therefore, this essay situates Clarke

within two traditions, the Irish dramatic tradition and the wider European tradition represented here by *commedia dell'arte*. The purpose is to identify Clarke as a neglected playwright whose interest in experimentalism offers grounds for a revised view of mid-century Irish theatre.

2. Before describing Clarke's two *commedia* plays from the 1940s, followed by *The Third Kiss*, which was a later addition, it is necessary briefly to comment on Clarke's ideology and sensibility. In the first place, as an Irish writer he was actually closer in outlook to James Joyce than to W.B. Yeats. He was educated by the Jesuits and unfortunately, because of his temperament, developed an overwhelming sense of sin. Unlike Joyce, that guilt never left him. In general terms, his work, in prose as well as verse, while basically a critique of institutional rigour and orthodoxy, is infused by an acutely painful conscience. As artist, as poet, novelist and playwright, he was able to create a drama between puritanism and sexual desire, perhaps his enduring theme. But he ran foul of the new censorship laws which were introduced in postcolonial Ireland after 1930, so that all three of his novels were banned. He turned to the theatre because no overt censorship was in force there and found a small but appreciative audience among Dublin's artists and intellectuals of the day.

The Kiss, *The Second Kiss* and *The Third Kiss* were not written at the same time – indeed, there is a gap of twenty years between the first and last of these – but they obviously form a group, loosely based on Clarke's appreciation of *commedia dell'arte*, its theatricality and its celebration of love, mischief and the carnivalesque. With one exception, Clarke used only four characters in these three plays: Harlequin, Columbine, Pierrot and Pierrette. The exception will be explained presently. The focus in the three plays is on Pierrot and Pierrette, less well known derivatives from the *commedia dell'arte*, especially the male figure. Pierrot, or Pierotto, based on Pedrolino, was developed in seventeenth-century France at the Comedie Italienne as «a servant or valet of dreamy and merry temperament», as Giacomo Oreglia describes him⁷. His costume was all white. First played by Giovanni Pellesini of the Gelosi company he was later played by Giuseppe Giaratone, who lent him a new refinement and delicacy, as Watteau's painting reveals. To quote Allardyce Nicoll (93), Pierrot «was invested almost with an atmosphere of mysticism» in France and became the central character in at least two French plays in the Romantic era. In the early nineteenth century Jean-Gaspard Deburau re-created Pierrot at the Theatre des Funambles as a silent character, «the white-clad, ever-hopeful, always disappointed lover»⁸. This was the tradition Clarke inherited, the rather sentimental, pathetic but moving figure brought to the screen by Jean-Louis Barrault in *Les Enfants du Paradis* in 1945, just three years after Clarke's *The Kiss* was first staged. But he would doubtless have been aware also of the debased versions of Pierrot and Pierrette common in English seaside entertainments from the 1890s on.

As to the style Clarke adopted, it was rhymed pentameter verse but considerably freer than Yeats's verse. Clarke's dramatic poetry, it has been said, «has a subtler and more varied music than Yeats's, while its flexibility suits the more human dimension of his plays»⁹. Literally, Clarke's plays were more down to earth. But the three plays under discussion were also much more self-consciously theatrical than Yeats's plays, with the possible exception of *The Player Queen* (1919), tended to be. As one critic has remarked, «[t]he characters are themselves actors in a play that they readily discuss with the audience, like their predecessors in *commedia dell'arte*. Sometimes they follow a script, sometimes improvise, playing variations on a theme, ingeniously making up situations and dialogue. It is as though they are in love with make-believe»¹⁰.

*The Kiss*¹¹ was first staged at the Abbey Theatre in 1942 but received a more important outing two years later when the great actor Cyril Cusack assumed the role of Pierrot. His wife Maureen Kiely played Pierrette. This 1944 production marked the beginning of a new theatre venture, the Lyric Theatre Company founded by Clarke, with the actress Ria Mooney directing the plays and Anne Yeats, the poet's daughter designing the settings¹². Mary Shine Thompson comments in her introduction *Selected Plays of Austin Clarke* (2005) that the Lyric played biannually at the Abbey for seven years with the declared aim 'to maintain the imaginative tradition of the Irish theatre which the poets of the literary revival made famous'(x), staging not only the plays of Clarke and Yeats but also plays by George Fitzmaurice, Donagh McDonagh, Padraic Colum and such contemporary writers as T.S. Eliot and Archibald McLeish. *The Kiss*, subtitled *A Light Comedy in One Act*, was based on a play by the French author Theodore de Banville, *Le Baiser*. In a brief programme note for the 1944 production Clarke called de Banville «one of the most graceful poets of the romantic movement and excelled in verbal dexterity» and said *Le Baiser*, first staged in Paris in the late 1870s, «was, in part, a light satire on politics and the monopoly system»¹³.

Clarke's play opens on a stage dark or in shadow except for one spot-lit area downstage, where a wood is suggested by «the mossy trunk of a fallen tree». It is a pastoral scene set near Dublin on an early morning in May. An old woman enters named Uirgeal, the one exception to Clarke's general use in all three plays of *commedia* characters. Uirgeal means «shining bright» or the like, and the old woman is meant to suggest a figure from folklore. «She is wrapped in a ragged cloak with a heavy hood and drags herself forward as if under the weight of centuries» (145). If an audience member had a theatre programme she would know that there are only two actors in this piece, and so must expect a surprise. Uirgeal lets the audience in on the plot in her opening soliloquy:

Why must I hobble, shudder with old age,
 Wrinkle the raindropped pools in tiny rage,
 Bedraggle the spine of the bramble rose,
 When by the very whiteness of the clothes
 He wears and their big buttons, I can tell
 Pierrot will surely break the wicked spell
 That keeps me old? (145)

Until Pierrot gives her the first kiss of his life, «so pure / He has not dared to dream of that first kiss» (145), she cannot escape from the evil spell placed upon her. She needs his ‘mortal innocence’ to save her.

She hides while Pierrot enters with a luncheon basket and proceeds to tell the audience its contents (probably miming the items he takes out of the basket one by one). He has two wineglasses and hopes to come across a pretty woman in the wood who will share in his repast. When Uirgeal slowly approaches him he comments to the audience on her ugliness and wishes he were alone with his cake and wine, «For who would call that one a Columbine?» (147). He shares with her nevertheless. She asks what he does for a living. «Nothing much, I fear», the actor replies, «delight in momentary fancies, dress in white» (148). But alarmed at her seeming frailty Pierrot asks if he can help her. «I only want a moment» (149), she declares. Always in Clarke the moment is sacred, and one of his last plays is entitled *The Moment Next to Nothing* (1958), referring to an irreversible decision in the choice between the physical, sexual life and the monastic, spiritual life. The sexual and magical meaning in *The Kiss* is conveyed when Uirgeal pleads for a kiss with the words, «What only takes a moment will not hurt you»; her seductive request neatly reverses the conventional plea by the male for the mystic prize of virginity. Of course, Clarke is referring to woman as seductress in the Christian tradition, especially in the lives of the saints, and he is using the simple kiss as synecdoche for complete sexual surrender or loss of soul as the puritan version of Christianity would have it. The moment is thus a moral moment, unlike Joyce’s epiphany. Pierrot moves down stage and confers with himself: «This strange old woman has alarmed my virtue, / My heart is jumping. I can feel it dash». Although parting with his first kiss may destroy his joy he decides that to do this good turn will help him to «endure what’s horrible», musing, «Did Theseus blench / When he went down to Hell for all the stench / Of sulphur?» (150). The mock-heroic tone indicates Clarke’s satire of contemporary Irish moral scruples. The comedy lies in the exaggeration of what is over-valued in a society made neurotic over the virtue of chastity.

When Pierrot heroically runs to Uirgeal and determinedly kisses her – however the actor was to act that – we get the following stage direction:

The moment he kisses her, the stage becomes fully lit and Uirgeal is transformed into a young girl. Still masked, she appears as the ideal Columbine of his thoughts. Pierrot is overcome with wonder and delight.

The wonder and delight can be mimed but Clarke also supplies Pierrot with a romantic speech analysing the magic in a series of questions, culminating in, «can I decline / Your loveliness, if you are Columbine?» (151). It is not entirely clear how Uirgeal *becomes* Columbine, but presumably her pretty white costume underlies the old woman's dark cloak and hood. The information that she is «still masked» lets the reader know for the first time that Uirgeal was masked from the start. The mask here is at first a mere disguise, then, but is it an ugly mask which Columbine then retains or does the actress somehow manage to turn it inside out or fold it in half? Clarke does not clarify the point.

Her mission accomplished, Columbine starts to leave the space. Pierrot then reveals what she has awoken in him and tries to persuade her literally to return his kiss. Here Clarke briefly turns the play towards comment on contemporary hypocrisy, as Pierrot compares the double standards in society for those in power as against those indictable for petty crime, and sees that he is opening a can of worms or, more precisely, «I touch a floating mine». This image is a reminder that when the play was first staged the Second World War was at its height. A trifle over a kiss would remind the audience that, after all, while the war raged in Europe and Ireland enjoyed neutrality, morality was a complex and dangerous topic, a floating mine, indeed. Pierrot wants Columbine to give all, in short her body, for his gratification. His initial idealism has easily shifted to self interest. Uirgeal, he considers, can start by unmasking, a metaphor for stripping. The metaphysics of the situation are teased out in Pierrot's hypocritical speech comparing the consequence to what faced the airmen engaged in bombing missions at this time. If he asks too much in asking her to unmask, what is the «reason of your own metempsychosis?». He goes on:

If one plain kiss return you to the sky,
 Dare we in one another arms be shy?
 Whisper to me of all that whiteness none
 Have been but airmen, flying past the sun
 Through icicles, before the lever drops
 The high explosive, whiteness that never stops [...]
 Although the clouded skies we know – are black
 With horror (153).

In a sense, Clarke is saying that moral questions, whether of love or war, are not black-and-white issues. Uirgeal/Columbine insists she cannot go against her character, her mask. Her nature, she says, represents light and innocence, whereas «mortal longings», or what we may call human passions, «are the deathward flight / Of midges towards the dusk» (154). Eros and Thanatos are intertwined. The question is as psychological as it is political, as Freudian as it is de Valerian. Uirgeal reduces it to a matter of legal contract or agreement: «We must be married first, / If I am to be yours» (155). Pierrot agrees but tries to cheat her over the

issue of a formal marriage licence. She sends him off to ensure there is nobody in the wood who might see her naked if she agrees to his request now. While he is offstage she unmask, and a tear has formed behind the mask in response to the birds and birdsong gathered all around her by Pierrot. «Must I weep ... weep ... come to earth?» (159), she asks herself, that is, does love imply human weakness? Having decided, on balance, to marry Pierrot when he returns she is instantly rebuked by the sound of «distant spirit voices» calling her name. These are her sisters, she tells Pierrot as she gives him back his kiss quickly and runs away. Left alone in despair Pierrot considers suicide but then reconsiders and decides instead to mourn his lost ideal in more romantic style by carving her name with his knife upon a tree, as the curtain slowly descends. The poet thus expresses his need for a Muse. The artist needs his lost love if he is to write.

Four years later, when the war was over, Clarke staged *The Second Kiss* at the Abbey. This time there were four characters, Pierrot and Pierrette (again played by Cyril Cusack and his wife), plus Harlequin and Columbine. This play takes the *commedia dell'arte* deeper into psychological territory while expanding the self-reflexive theatricality of the first piece. It opens in darkness to the sound of a long kiss, which, the stage direction says, «should exceed by three seconds the emotional duration allowed by the Film Censor» (249). In spite of this romantic opening, when the lights come up the subject is marital boredom, or, if you prefer, the day after the wedding. Pierrot and Pierrette look for ways to keep love interesting after marriage, including the promise of playing with their shadows at evening time and/or adopting roles such as Romeo and Juliet. They quarrel. When Pierrette runs off home to go to bed alone Pierrot is lost. He forgets his lines and goes stage right to ask for his cue. The prompter is Harlequin, who remains off-stage in the ensuing dialogue between them. He would appear to be Pierrot's alter ego, determined to seduce Pierrette. Pierrot stands up to him:

Back, silent masquerader,
My heart is free of you. I'm not afraid or
Dejected now. I know what devils feel (255).

Here Clarke accepts the demonic side of Harlequin's mask. Giacomo Oreglia tells us that Harlequin was originally devilish, and refers to his «typically demoniacal half-mask»¹⁴ which warns us of his amorality. In the play Harlequin is the «bright temptation» who re-appears all through Clarke's work, usually in the guise of a beautiful woman, as in the early poem spoken by the Young Woman of Beare:

I am the bright temptation
In talk, in wine, in sleep.
Although the clergy pray,
I triumph in a dream¹⁵.

Pierrot, attempting to control Harlequin, refers to the script to show «by every tap and page, / You cannot come tonight upon this stage» (256). In short, he's not in the story. Harlequin is silenced.

But Pierrot has no idea what his role is to be, and improvises while he consults the script. Not liking what he reads he addresses the audience: «This cannot be the play. / The lines are different. My head's astray». Coming down front he reads the title page: «“A Comedy” ... this light is much too dim ... / “By Austin Clarke” ... I never heard of him». And then, «*confidently to the audience*», «I'll read the stage directions, scan the plot» (256). He gets his bearings, finds lighting cues and stage setting obeying him, sits as requested while music plays preparatory to his falling asleep before Columbine is to come on, «daintily tip-toeing». All of this is in the script Pierrot reads aloud. It is not what he expected. Having read it, like a good Catholic he jumps up in panic and puts the script in his pocket, declaring, «I must be going. / I'm married now». And this is the situation the play will explore.

The play proper may be said to begin here, as Pierrot out of curiosity changes his mind and settles down to sleep on stage: «No harm to try ... just pretend to be asleep». The following action then takes place as if in his dream. Columbine enters hesitantly, fearfully. The stage direction tells us: «*She is dressed exactly in the same costume as Pierrette but wears a mask*». She moves around the stage «*gracefully and yet sadly*» until she discovers Pierrot asleep. The stage direction continues: «*The audience at this time has considerable advantage over the dreaming Pierrot and realises that Columbine is being played by the same actress who has already appeared as Pierrette*» (257). Further, she is the Columbine he met and lost in *The Kiss*. Awakened now into rapture Pierrot is surprised to find she is wearing a mask again and asks why. It is to hide the tears necessarily accompanying the pain of love, «The poison drops of joy» (258), and she will not remove it. What happened, Pierrot wants to know, when she ran away from him at the end of *The Kiss*? «Did some unexpected clap end the comedy?» (259). They struggle to reconstruct the scene and it is bound up in their memories with images of the war and of aerial bombardment and casualties on all sides. As the stage lights dim to black Columbine remembers why they both ran away: «As ghosts when all belief in them is dead. / A Glimmer of white clothes [...] / For comedy had seen the last of us». That is to say, the world was occupied with tragedy. But now, as they search for each other on the darkened stage, the light rises again, this time bright and coloured. «Look, Pierrot», shouts Columbine, «a skylight! Laugh and learn your part / Again». He searches for his script, but she knows the lines for both of them, she says. Were they improvising before? Are they improvising now? Clarke keeps the ambiguity going.

As they reminisce in romantic mood now it is as if they hover between their historical roles in the theatre, «the authors who invented / Excuses when

we tried to run away / Together—lest we spoil another play» and displease the «Dark gallery and pit, those hidden faces» (261), and the specifics of their always interrupted love affair. They find the roles of lovers again, just as it was before «the world went wrong» (263). If their fate was due to their being illicit lovers, Pierrot suddenly wonders, what if they now turned respectable, got married and settled down? She agrees and says she can now at last unmask. But she runs away again as soon as she unmasks and during Pierrot's search for her Harlequin leaps terrifyingly on to the stage, to appropriate sound and lighting effects. He wears a half mask under which he also wears a pair of goggles, perhaps to associate him with the airmen referred to in the earlier dialogue. He carries «a little rod or wand» (265). He is the author's *deus ex machina* in an ironic role, or as Pierrot puts it, «the devil striving to be orthodox» (266). His language is very rhetorical and boastful: «I am the spirit of all new inventions / Known for their speed and excellent intentions» and so forth (265).

Pierrot and Harlequin are opposites, one the eternal lover, the other the spirit that denies who yet is wonderfully mobile and mischievous. It was Harlequin who substituted *that* play, i.e. Clarke's play introducing Columbine, for Pierrot's own. Even if Pierrot is right to dismiss him as a fake, a «Jack-in-the-box, / Black in the face with rage that cannot hurt», Harlequin has the advantage in being well aware that all his attributes are but theatrical tricks, «I meant it all, believe me, as a joke» (266). Except, he insists, Pierrot's (real?) love endures, while Columbine is already his also. With that, with a playful wave of Harlequin's wand Pierrette reappears, dressed in white silk pyjamas and carrying a Chinese lantern. She rushes to Pierrot as Harlequin vanishes, and as the play draws to a close Pierrot and Pierrette resume the «long kiss» with which the play began and then they exit to bed. We are to imagine that Pierrot has for the time being successfully negotiated the two sides of his desire, for the real and the ideal, the persona and the anima.

3. *The Third Kiss*¹⁶, published unstaged in 1974, sums up much of what Clarke was trying to say in these little, poetic comedies. I shall just deal with three points and then comment on the epilogue in relation to Harlequin's interesting final speech. The first point is Clarke's interest in the theatre as the site of a Pirandellian debate on reality and illusion. *The Third Kiss* is something of an expressionist piece, where what happens may sometimes be a dream or nightmare.

The play is set in the old Abbey Theatre itself, in the year 1913, where Pierrot and Pierrette are actors in a realistic, sordid drama. In a prologue we see them getting into costume backstage. This is a self-conscious, improvised scene in which they look forward to abandoning their type characters, their «masks», and sampling what it may be like to be human and to share human emotions, when «we are real at last» (8). This is, then, a new kind

of transformation. Pierrot is quite prepared to depart from the text of the play they are to appear in, even if it shocks the author, in order to enjoy human love-making.

The play-within-the-play then begins, a slightly satirised slice of Dublin life in which Pierrot and Pierrette play Peter and Pauline, two would-be lovers divided by Pauline's religiosity. With her refrain, «What would Father Doyle say?» whenever Peter attempts to kiss her, we might be in one of O'Casey's later satirical comedies, such as *The Bishop's Bonfire* (1955). (Indeed, Pauline wants to leave the world and enter a convent)¹⁷. But from time to time Pierrot finds opportunities to drop out of character and improvise a love scene with Pierrette. These are brief contrasts to the mounting hysteria of Pierrette's role as Pauline.

This is the second point to be made. Clarke is dramatising the torments of conscience of a sexually repressed society. A few years earlier, after a trip to the United States, he had written a dramatisation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story, *Goodman Brown*, set in late-seventeenth-century Salem, under the title *The Impuritans*. There he showed how close his own imagination was to Hawthorne's and how he saw twentieth-century Irish society as unhealthily religious in the same way as Hawthorne saw his puritan ancestors of New England. In *The Third Kiss* voyeurs, voyeurism and the devil seem to occupy people's concerns to an abnormal degree. The saintly Father Doyle is not what he seems. When Pauline (i.e. Pierrette) sees a naked man rolling in nettles in a wood at dead of night to chastise himself for his sins her terror drives her to confess in church as if *she* were the guilty party because she «yielded to temptation» looked when the naked man stood up (28). The confession scene with Father Doyle is prurient in its question-and-answer format and climaxes, if the word is not too strong, when the priest asks if she knew the man she saw:

PAULINE (*suddenly aware of a change in his tone of voice, frightened*) How could I?

FR. DOYLE Look. Do you recognize / Him now?

(*He turns*)

PAULINE (*in horror*) You!

FR. DOYLE (*anguished*) 'Spirit that denies.'

(*black out*) (29)

Presumably, in referring to the «[s]pirit that denies», i.e. Mephistopheles, Father Doyle means Pauline and thus we have in this scene a compressed, imagistic expression of the neurotic misogyny (the demonization of women) underlying strict Roman Catholic ideas on chastity in the first half of the twentieth century. Conscience, in Clarke's astute account of it, is a kind of neurosis, to which the amoral attitude towards sex of *commedia dell'arte* stands in strong contrast.

The third point is the role of Harlequin in this play. It is directly related to the two preceding points, theatre and conscience. Once again Harlequin is

a behind-the-scenes figure, more the director than a participant in the action. He is now a more menacing «mask», however, intent on seducing Pierrette, and is deliberately related to the Gentleman in an Opera Cloak who accosts Pauline in a scene where she and Peter are racing three times around the Black Church. According to the superstition, for a Catholic to run three times around this Protestant church will result in meeting the devil. In saluting Pauline, «Good evening, Miss», the Gentleman turns, «*showing devil-mask*», as the stage direction says (20) and Pauline runs offstage screaming her discovery. The Gentleman makes a sign to the street lamp and it goes out as he vanishes. Running on in the blackout, Peter calls for Pauline and hears only the echo of his own voice «far off» (21). The Gentleman is listed among the cast of characters as well as Harlequin, who thus cannot be identified with him. He is intended to be real, a protected human species, another pillar of society who is secretly (i.e. masked) a corrupter of innocence. On the other hand, in claiming he is «an air-demon» and that his baton is «an heirloom / From Hell» (11) Harlequin is merely playacting. His presence in the play as mischief-maker contrasts with the ‘real’ devil feared by the respectable people in the play-within-the-play. Clarke plays once again on the ambivalence between theatre and life, showing in performance how real and unreal can be unsettlingly interchangeable concepts.

As already claimed above, *The Third Kiss* is in part an expressionist piece in which what happens may be dream or nightmare. In the fourth and final scene Pauline decides that her encounter with the Gentleman was just that, as she puts it, «a nightmare / Or trance [...] In rainy flickers» like a film, and yet terrifying. She comes to terms with it, abandons the idea of entering a convent, and commits herself to Peter, to a reality where the hegemony of conscience is discarded. Her decision reveals Clarke’s drama as one of dissent. Thus the lovers’ kiss literally brings down the curtain, as if to save the audience’s blushes. Clarke’s comic point is that Harlequin, a freer spirit than the members of the audience, continues to peep as Peter and Pauline undress backstage, knowingly conceding that voyeurism is his permitted vice. At least Harlequin can indulge without conscience intervening. At this point Harlequin un.masks, declaring «My wickedness, you see, is not really in earnest», then peeping through his mask adds, «Or is it?» (33).

Finally, to come to Harlequin’s big speech and its implications. He stands in front of the curtain, at first peeping through at the actors undressing (managing to create the illusion that backstage can be seen onstage). Then he launches into a dismissal of the playwright’s squeamishness before championing his own amorality and that of his colleagues in the world of *commedia dell’arte*, the Doctor, Brighetta, «the Clown and Scaramouche, / Old Pantaloon, the bragging Captain», because «Our lovers would be human, she – more, he – less». Harlequin asserts the primacy of bodily desires over longings for the ideal and the abstract. Where the priest in the play-within-

the-play identified with the «[s]pirit that denies» Harlequin declares «[p]leasure is in the affirmative». Pierrette is never safe from his intrigues, while Pierrot, doomed to chase in vain and «cold pursuit» after Columbine, finds only an image «made of cardboard» (34). And so the chase goes on all across Europe. «We are international types / Not local [...] *Commedia dell'arte* / Still carries on. The centuries have made us artful». With that, «*He turns, mimes the withdrawing of the curtain. It obeys him and he leaves, right*» (35). In his long speech, therefore, Harlequin speaks for the *commedia* («us»). Simultaneously he speaks for the spirit of theatre as embodied by the Gate, as his gesture of opening the curtain mimes the Gate's logo.

But there is one more scene to go in *The Third Kiss*. Harlequin wants us to see what the lovers are at backstage. Clarke makes good use in all three plays of the contrast between the liberal philosophy of the *commedia* and the puritanism of the Irish, but here in the epilogue to *The Third Kiss* the theme is ambiguously as well as dramatically rendered. We discover Pierrot and Pierrette onstage changing back into their own traditional costumes, now thoroughly disillusioned with the «lamentable condition» of humanity. They want nothing more to do with «Those tiresome human beings – [...] Unhappy, tormented / By conscience [and] Fear of sin» (36). Not realising that they are the playthings of Harlequin, the lovers rejoice in resuming their 'masks' and with them an imagined freedom.

Clarke can use the difference between the Abbey and the Gate in the same way as the difference between the real and the imagined. It is significant also that Harlequin made his big speech *in front of* the curtain, as if he were outside the frame of theatrical illusion. Then, with his final gesture magically opening up a space for himself inside the curtain again Harlequin shows that his world is absolutely and only of the theatre, and he makes his exit from the stage itself, presumably to loud applause re-affirming all he stands for. It is a clever way to entice the audience to endorse Clarke's critique of bourgeois society in the epilogue which follows Harlequin's exit. The use of *commedia dell'arte* in his three plays thus pays generous tribute to a specific and historically rooted style of comedy while also holding a mirror up to Irish society after Joyce.

Endnotes

¹This article is based on a lecture given to the International Forum on *kyogen* and *commedia dell'arte* at the Istituto Italiano, Tokyo, organizer Professor Masaru Sekine (Waseda University), in September 2007. I am grateful to the Forum, to Professor Sekine, and to the Italian Institute in Tokyo for support.

²For an excellent account, see D. Mayer III, *The English Pantomime, 1806-1836*, Harvard UP, Cambridge MA 1969.

³On Edwards-Macliammoir's Gate Theatre see *Enter Certain Players. Edwards-Macliammoir and the Gate, 1928-78*, ed. by P. Luke, Dolmen Press, Dublin 1978; C. Fitzsimons, *The Boys: A Double Biography*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin/Nick Hern Books, London 1994.

⁴ On the Lyric Theatre, Belfast see M. O'Malley, *Austin Clarke and the Lyric Theatre, Belfast*, «The Poetry Ireland Review», 22/23, 1988, pp. 105-109; C. O'Malley, *A Poets' Theatre*, Elo Press, Dublin 1988; R. Connolly, *The Evolution of the Lyric Players Theatre, Belfast: Fighting the Waves*, Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston 2000.

⁵ H. Edwards, *The Mantle of Harlequin*, Progress House, Dublin 1958, p. 22.

⁶ S. Beckett, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. by R. Cohn, John Calder, London 1983, pp. 72-73.

⁷ G. Oreglia, *The Commedia dell'Arte*, trans. by L.F. Edwards, Hill and Wang, New York 1968, p. 65.

⁸ P. Hartnoll (ed.), *Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, Oxford UP, Oxford 1985, p. 211.

⁹ R. McHugh, *The Plays of Austin Clarke*, «Irish University Review», 4, 1974, p. 63.

¹⁰ M. Harmon, *Austin Clarke (1896-1974). A Critical Introduction*, Wolfhound Press, Dublin 1989, p. 123.

¹¹ All quotations for *The Kiss* and *The Second Kiss* are from Clarke's *Collected Plays* (1963).

¹² The Lyric Theatre is not to be confused with the Belfast Lyric, founded in 1951 by Mary and Pearse O'Malley. However, Clarke's example was crucial to the development of the Belfast Lyric, where *The Kiss* was staged again as one of the opening productions. See Conor O'Malley, *A Poets' Theatre* (1988).

¹³ Lyric Theatre Company Programme for *The Kiss* and *The Countess Cathleen*, Abbey Theatre, 4-5 June 1944, courtesy Dardis Clarke.

¹⁴ G. Oreglia, *The Commedia dell'Arte ...*, cit., p. 57.

¹⁵ C. Austin, *Poems 1917-1938*, Dolmen Press, Dublin 1974, p. 164.

¹⁶ All quotations for *The Third Kiss* are from Clarke's *The Third Kiss*, Dolmen Press, Dublin 1974.

¹⁷ Foorawn, in O'Casey's play, takes a solemn vow of perpetual chastity. See S. O'Casey, *The Bishop's Bonfire: A Sad Play Within the Tune of a Polka*, Macmillan, London 1955.

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Derek Mahon's Homage to Pasolini

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Derek Mahon's poem *Roman Script* was published in a numbered edition by The Gallery Press in 1999¹. His first idea for it dates back to the autumn of 1998, which he spent in Rome, his base for visits to Naples, Pompeii and Sorrento, which feature in *Ghosts* (1881), written in the hotel where Ibsen wrote his play of the same name. The *Collected Poems* (1999) include other poems connected with Italian culture, such as *High Water*, about Venice, as well as a series of translations and adaptations drawn from sources ranging as widely as Michelangelo's sonnets and Ariosto, to Umberto Saba and Pier Paolo Pasolini. Mahon translated the opening passage of Pasolini's *Gramsci's Ashes* (1957)², as a sort of prelude to the themes of *Roman Script*. The elegy is set in the non-Catholic cemetery (generally called the Protestant Cemetery), in the Testaccio district. The small urn containing Gramsci's ashes stands not far from the tombstones of Keats and Shelley. Mahon shares Pasolini's yearning for «the ideal society which might come to birth / in silence, a society not for us» (*CP* 272). Rome is shown in her sublime decadence as a polluted metropolis, where the ruins of Empire survive alongside the desolation of the post-industrial period. If Pasolini's *Gramsci's Ashes* is Mahon's lament for the founder of the Italian Communist Party, his *Roman Script*³ might well be called *Pasolini's Ashes*, since it commemorates the brilliant Italian writer and film director so brutally murdered in 1975, against the backdrop of Rome. It is like a compressed, modern version of *Adonais* (1821), the elegy Shelley wrote after the death of Keats.

Roman Script is composed of eleven eight-line stanzas of four couplets each (as opposed to the 55 Spenserian stanzas of Shelley's *Adonais*), followed by a rewriting of a Metastasio sonnet. Actually the ten-line stanza *Ghosts*, which in the Penguin *Selected Poems* is placed immediately before *Roman Script*, is also very closely connected to it. In the first place, it too is a kind of elegy, Mahon's tribute to his parents – both dead by 1998 – and their losing fight against limited means and the cultural mediocrity of Belfast. Singing *Come back to Sorrento* was a poor substitute for foreign travel, more or less on the level of *Killarney*, where «memory ever fondly dwells».

Remembering how Pompeii and Treblinka epitomised two kinds of suffering in *A Disused Shed*, as a result of natural disaster and of human evil, the

reader expects another contrast to the Pompeiian disaster after the mention of Pompeii. But the tomb-room rhyme (ll. 4, 10), by evoking Shakespeare's frequent womb-tomb theme, leads in another direction. For excavation has not only brought innocent-looking little Pompeiian houses to light; it has also 'exposed' frescoes so lascivious that they immediately suggest the dissolute way of life of Captain Alving, in Ibsen's *Ghosts*. The horror here is that Alving did not scruple to transmit a horrible hereditary disease to his son Oswald. Such lack of scruple reappears in the dissipated figures of church and state in *Roman Script*.

Although, as I have said, Mahon has compressed *Roman Script* to a fifth of the length of *Adonais*, he has kept the Romantic rebel's essential message: the luminous worth of poets «gathered to the kings of thought / who waged contention with their time's decay» in opposition to the «ages, empires and religions / [that] lie buried in the ravage they have wrought» and «[...] borrow not / Glory from those who made the world their prey» (*Adonais*, stanza XLVIII). As to the rewriting of Metastasio, it might be describing Keats's imagination and 'fever of creation'; certainly it is his devotion to truth, as expressed in the last line of the *Ode to a Grecian Urn* (1819) that is reflected in the final Metastasio line: «May we find peace in the substance of the true».

Stanza VIII develops the theme of illusion. The Regina Coeli gaol is compared to «virtuality» (l. 5). This leads to the metaphor of Rome as «a film-set, Cinecittà, a cinema city» (l. 6), an immense set where everything can be shown «for our delight» (l. 8). The counterpoint to this 'virtual' Rome is that of the suburban proletariat (st. IX-XI), the 'other' Rome which Pasolini knew and described at first hand. While Pasolini saw the consumerist empire of the Sixties as a fate worse than misery, Mahon recognised that this new form of poverty was still rife in the Ireland of the Nineties, after neo-capitalism took over⁴. Hence he was particularly sensitive to those rejected by society, Pasolini himself «the poet of poverty» (*CP* 275-76) foremost among them. This essay will show how Mahon expressed in verse what the American prose-writer Gore Vidal prophesied in Federico Fellini's film *Rome* (1972):

Rome is the city of illusions; it is no accident that the Church, government and the cinema industry are concentrated here, all of them producing illusions. The world is growing ever nearer to the end. What more peaceful place than this city, which has died and been reborn many times, to await the end from pollution and overpopulation? It is the ideal place to see whether everything ends here or not⁵.

1

A Day on the Gianicolo

It is fitting that the first shot of Rome in *Roman Script* is taken from the Gianicolo, for it was here, above the Trastevere district, as well as in Villa Au-

relia and Villa Pamphili, that Garibaldi's men fought to the death in the cause of Rome as a Republic (1849). The first impressions of the city are auditive, since the shutters are still closed. Through them come the crowing of cockerels and the hum of early traffic: «cock-crow and engine-hum / wake us at first light on the Janiculum / and we open the shutters to extravagant mists» (CP 273). Then, when «we open the shutters» (st. I, l. 3) comes a Turner-like view through the mist. Against the dark green of «parasol» (not «umbrella!») pines a blaze of yellow and purple fruit and flowers stands out. Among them is a jonquil, surely virtual in «an autumn sun» or (st. IV, l. 3, «...November light»), a hint of Shelley's presence in this poem («If winter comes, can spring be far behind?», last line of the *Ode to the West Wind*, 1820). Together with the «glistening drop» they create a «Respighi moment» (st. I, l. 7), a combination of Respighi's own *Le fontane di Roma* (1916) and his master Debussy's *Jardins sous la pluie* (1903). To the uninitiated such compositions are examples of artists imitating nature. The idea of «life mimicking art» (st. I, l. 7) goes behind this *cliché* to see the artist not so much as creator as finder of patterns in nature that are already art⁶.

Mahon's taste in art is not limited to 'refined' composers like Respighi. «[A]s when the fiddles provoke line-dancing rain»⁷ (st. I, l. 8) introduces a more popular atmosphere, which might refer to the musical comedy *Singing in the Rain* (1952), in which the actor and co-director Gene Kelly dances the tip-tap in the rain. In the same film Kelly and the Irish-American Donald O'Connor improvise a scene as violinists, at the same time dancing in line to the rhythm of *Fit as a Fiddle*. This American musical-comedy was made at a time of transition from silent movies to the introduction of sound, when mimicry was the basis of film-acting.

While the first stanza of *Roman Script* gives us an outside view by day, the following one moves to a sunny interior. It might be a room in a large villa transformed into a boarding-house, which might still have «baroque frescoes» (st. II, l. 2), but also provides a 'space' for Mahon's imagination to fill with:

[...] Byronic masquerade or Goldoni farce,
vapours and swordsmanship, the cape and fan,
the amorous bad-boy and the glamorous nun,
boudoir philosophy, night music on balconies,
the gondola section nodding as in a sea breeze (CP 273).

The «Byronic masquerade» (st. II, l. 4) recalls Byron's life as a libertine in Rome and Venice («the gondola section», st. II, l. 8), while stanza VI refers to Mozart's masterpiece *Don Giovanni* (1787). Goldoni's brilliant farce is in the tradition of the *commedia dell'arte*, while the «glamorous nun» evokes some of Fellini's films with the starched veils of the nuns like white swallows' tails⁸. «[B]oudoir philosophy» is an allusion to Sade's *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795), which had a deep influence on Pasolini. Here Mahon seems

to be setting the scene for the entrance of the Italian artist, defined by the critic Gian Carlo Ferretti as «the cursed bard, the ‘scandalous’ writer and the rebel-victim of ‘being different’, the civilized poet and the poet-Narcissus, the aesthete and the intellectual as a public figure»⁹.

Stanza III passes from the ‘scenic interior’ of the Gianicolo to deal with the cultural bonds that link the Catholics of Ulster to Rome:

exiles have died here in your haunted palaces
 where our princes [...]
 dreamed up elaborate schemes of restoration (CP 273).

«Our princes» were the Irish rebels Hugh O’Neill¹⁰ and his son, from County Tyrone, besides Ruair O’Donnell and his brother Cathbarr, of the County Tyrconnell (Donegal). After the defeat of Kinsale (1601), in which Lord Mountjoy, representative of the Crown, forced the princes of Gaelic Ulster to make an act of submission, they fled into voluntary exile in Rome, where they were granted the protection of Pope Paul V. Meanwhile the English Crown planned the so-called Plantation of Ulster (1608-1610), that is the expropriation of the four counties of Tyrone, Donegal, Armagh and Derry for the benefit of the English and Scottish settlers faithful to the Queen. During their exile O’Neill and O’Donnell never ceased to hope for the re-conquest of Gaelic Ulster and make «elaborate schemes of restoration» (CP 273) but they never managed to turn this dream into reality. After their death they were buried with their families in the church of San Pietro in Montorio, situated on the Gianicolo. Their homesickness is expressed in «the squeal of a lone bagpipe / torn from the wild and windy western ocean...»¹¹ (echoes of Shelley’s *West Wind* again), while their world seems more remote than «Pompeiiian times» (st. III, l. 7), which is to say after complete destruction.

This brings us back to earth and the everyday routine of the poet’s day, even when travelling abroad. His new writing has to be typed up before he can allow himself a short sleep before going out in the evening. The second waking («when you ... come alive», st. IV, l. 2) is more meditative, almost like a small child observing every detail anew, the flies, the moths; the smell of camphor (that does not get rid of them); the sound of wood-worms making the old furniture creak («listen to the ... furniture», st. IV, l. 5) and a neighbour practising the piano; the fading of the light («watch», st. IV, l. 7), in which the tall poplars become no more than «smoke-stains» (st. IV, l. 8) against the yellowish stone of the buildings opposite. All this is grist to the poet’s mill, giving him access to the secret life of objects such as we find in the phenomenology of Edmund Hüsserl, whose motto «Zu den Sachen selbst!» influenced the French existentialists in the Thirties. The time Mahon spent in Paris, when he imbibed Camus, de Beauvoir and Sartre, probably lies at the root of his interest in things as phenomena.

Meanwhile the «ochreous travertine» (st. IV, l. 8) of the buildings opposite spurs the poet to plunge into the life outside his room, as evening falls.

2

Heights and Depths in the History of Rome

The inversion «Now out you go» instead of a descriptive «You go out» (st. V, l. 1) introduces a brisk new rhythm, as from the Gianicolo he goes down to the Trastevere district passing 'among' the *botteghe oscure*, the still numerous windowless workshops of the craftsmen of Trastevere, where the narrow streets create a sense of community (until after dinner, when they are invaded by tourists). Curiously there is no mention anywhere of *via delle Botteghe oscure* (well «over the bridge», st. V, l. 3, between Largo Argentina and Piazza Venezia), where Gramsci's Communist Party had its head-quarters for many years. At the time of Mahon's stay in Rome it was occupied by the DS party founded in 1998, following the PDS, founded in 1991. The suspicion arises that Mahon felt Gramsci's party was better represented by the old workshops «over the Tiber» than by these new groups.

Once really «over the bridge» (Ponte Sisto?) he probably passes the *Circo Massimo* where chariot races were held in Roman times, perhaps imagining it as a modern race-track for Fiat (not Ferrari) and Maserati cars, or perhaps considering that undisciplined traffic turned the whole of Rome into one gigantic race-track. He then takes a great leap to the «floodlit naiad and triton» (st. V, l. 5) of the Fontana del Tritone in Piazza Barberini (another Respighi moment) and so to Via Veneto and Harry's Bar, venue of the «beautiful and the damned» (st. V, l. 6), a reference to Francis Scott Fitzgerald's novel (1922) about the American rotten-rich society of the post-First World War years. In contemporary terms this translates into Fellini's famous film *La dolce vita* (1960), with «sexy dives ... as in the movie of our lives» (st. V, ll. 7-8). In the film the glamorous Anita Ekberg is wading rather than diving in the Fontana di Trevi and the scene is uninhibited, not disreputable as in the normal definition of 'dives', but the general effect is the same. Fellini's aim was to break away from the neo-realism of Vittorio De Sica and cultivate illusion, as he explained in an interview of 1971: «'True' cinema? I'm in favour of lies. Lying is the soul of show business, and I love the show business. Fiction is alright as a more perceptive truth of apparent everyday reality»¹².

With a big jolt stanza VI takes us to another category of the «damned»:

Here they are, Nero, Julia, Diocletian
and the grim popes of a later dispensation
at ease in bath-house and in Colosseum
or raping young ones in the venial gym (*CP* 274).

Nero ordered the first persecution of the Christians in 64 AD, including the beheading of St. Paul and the crucifixion of St. Peter; Diocletian was the Roman Emperor of the East responsible for the great persecution of 303-304 AD. Giulia Domna, inserted between the two, was called the «woman philosopher» in virtue of her foresight and magnanimity. She represents «the beautiful»¹³ in contrast with the two «damned» (st. V, l. 6). She was the wife of Settimio Severo and mother of Caracalla, becoming part of the Severi dynasty which was of Afro-Syriac origin and especially open to oriental influence. Both under her rule and under that of her daughter Giulia Mammea, Christians were widely tolerated in the Roman Empire. It is as if, by introducing this enlightened Empress, Mahon is wishing for a future 'era of women' to bring harmony back to history.

In any case the emphasis is on decadence, which survives down the ages «at least» (st. VI, l. 6) until (Byron's) Don Juan / Don Giovanni's precipitous fall to Hell. The implied moral being, as Romans III, 23 puts it; the wages of sin is death. Shrewd popes luxuriating in bath-houses may have been a novelty to Mahon's Irish readers, though their «raping young ones in the venial gym» (st. VI, l. 4) would have come as no surprise to them¹⁴.

In stanza VII the Vatican's Sistine Chapel, back across the Tiber, follows close on the Forum, reminding us of Gore Vidal's opinion cited above that everything in Rome, Church and State not least, manufactures illusions. Mahon mentions the forum without comment, speaking explicitly of ruins only in connection with the 'other' Rome in stanza X. The Eighteenth Century cult of ruins brought great fame to Giovanni Piranesi, whose *Views of Rome* were single prints made between 1748 and 1778. Mahon may have thought of his eerie, labyrinthine etchings of *Prisons* (1849) as a kind of flash forward to the Regina Coeli gaol in the following stanza. We can imagine however that his view of ruins coincided more nearly with that of François Volney, author of *Ruines ou Méditations sur la révolutions des empires* (1791).

The Sistine Chapel is mentioned for its «comic strip» (st. VII, l. 3), which Haughton (p. 322) takes for granted as referring to the panels of the Creation that Michelangelo painted on the ceiling of the chapel. In the strict definition of comic-strip as «a sequence of pictures telling a story» this is the only alternative. The term «violent» corresponds to the *terribilità* that the art historians use about Michelangelo. «[C]omic-strip» seems a little disrespectful. This may be because Mahon is revolted by the idea of Pope Julius II forcing Michelangelo to paint that great space, in those conditions, against his will. Or it may just be a matter of taste. Some people are constitutionally averse to baroque, and Mahon's liking for Paolo Uccello's *The Hunt by Night* (1470 ca.) or Pieter De Hooch's *The Courtyard in Delft* (1658) gives the impression that Mahon is one of these. Although «comic-strip» is hyphenated and in the singular, a doubt does arise that Mahon

meant 'comic stripping' as he was also thinking about the enormous, single fresco of *The Last Judgement* (1537-41), on the end wall of the chapel, which has caused such hilarity over the centuries because of the breeches-no breeches controversy. In 1998 he would have seen all the Michelangelo frescoes cleaned and restored. Which means that he would have been reminded of the controversy that followed the decision, made in 1564 after the Council of Trent¹⁵, to cover the 'indecent' nakedness of the crowds of figures in the *Judgement*. Shelley for one, said frankly that he could not see why a round tin object should be more decent than a cylindrical object made of marble. Before the cleaning, «strip» would only have been applicable in the plural, *strips* of drapery covering the offending nakedness. After it, «strip» could refer to the removal of these coverings, even more comical than the previous procedure, because only the later ones were removed, not those attributable to Michelangelo's assistant and friend Volterra, considered of artistic value. The breeches faction had not accepted defeat.

Mahon's 'detachment' from Michelangelo's «violent comic strip» contrasts with his positive response to the «soft marble thighs» (st. VII, l. 4) of Bernini's *Rape of Persephone* (1621) in the Galleria Borghese, on the opposite side of the Tiber from the Vatican. This is an acute observation of how the smoothness of marble can make it appear soft, and the way Pluto's fingers press into the flesh accentuates this. It reveals spontaneous receptiveness to the myth of the life-giving Persephone/Proserpine who, after being raped by the god Pluto/Hades was allowed to return from the underworld every spring and summer, so the crops should not fail.

The exhortation to «seize real presence, the art-historical sublime» (st. VII, ll. 4-5) is addressed to the photographer-tourist, already told to «snap out of his art fatigue» (st. VII, l. 1, emphasis added) and virtualize the actual body of St. Cecilia, patroness of Church Music, or the grave of Keats (the name of the classical god Endymion, whom Keats wrote a long poem about, transferred to the poet himself). The term «real presence» probably refers to George Steiner's 1989 volume *Real Presences*. It is not easy to understand how Mahon feels about photography and the cinema. On the one hand, he agreed to collaborate with John Minihan in the production of *An Unweaving of Rainbows: Portraits of Irish Writers* (1998), which is a splendid series of photographs. On the other, he seems to be saying that the sophisticated Nikon camera blinds (in an owl-blink, the reaction of the bird of darkness to light) the photographer, too anxious to appropriate all the finest works of art history; his «lightening storm» (st. VII, l. 7) desecrates St. Cecilia's body and Keats's grave; violates the work of art as Pluto/Hades raped Persephone/Proserpine. This impression is confirmed in stanza VIII, where the camera probes mercilessly into the tough reality of the Regina Coeli gaol. The wretched prisoners (the «wretched of the earth», st. VII, l. 3, is probably a reference to 1961 *Les damnés de la terre* by the Caribbean psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon) are instructed to

entertain visitors (like gladiators in the Colosseum) «for our delight» (st. VIII, l. 8), as if they were on a film-set in Cinecittà, «where life is a waking dream» (st. VIII, l. 9), as Keats said in his *Ode to a Nightingale* (1819).

Comunque, as Mahon says in Italian, a sort of «be that as it may», the inmates of Regina Coeli have not all been wretched criminals. The (many) ‘others’, political prisoners, antifascists, included Gramsci, who died in 1937. Remembering, perhaps, Pavese’s *Death Will Come and It Will Have Your Eyes* (1951), Mahon says death came to Gramsci «... with the eyes of a new age / a glib post-war cynicism re-styled as image» (st. IX, ll. 7-8). Such «glib», post-World War One «cynicism» was typical of the Futurists and similar groups (Imagists?) and characterized the political rhetoric of the fascist regime. This vacuity of language is indicative of the moral poverty in the society of the «lost years» (st. IX, l. 4) between the two World Wars, when *commodities* were already rated above people («hats, shoes, a glove» above women themselves) and nullified Gramsci’s dream of «a society based on hope and truth» (*CP* edit. «faith»). Before his death he spent nine years in various prisons and places of internment, including the small island of Ustica, where he inevitably observed the «morning sea» (st. IX, l. 3). In prison he chose solitary confinement («solitude», st. IX, l. 3) so as to be undisturbed in his thinking (the books and the newspapers he was allowed were quite inadequate) and writing (in the company of the little plants he tended in pots on the window-sill of his cell). Naturally, Gramsci suffered from political loneliness after the growth of fascism and the decline of the worker’s movement, which involved disagreement with the leaders of the PCDI.

3

The ‘other’ Rome and ‘Pasolini’s ashes’

Akin to Gramsci in his dream of a society based on hope and truth was Pasolini, the «poet of poverty» (st. X, l. 1), champion of the ‘other’ Rome, the drop-outs, the «refuse of mankind»¹⁶. Mahon thinks of them together. There is no break even in the punctuation «the poet of internment» (st. IX, l. 3), «and the poet of poverty» (st. X, l. 1), even though they are assigned to different stanzas. Pasolini’s experience as «irremediably different», the «gut heretic» of «absolute individualism»¹⁷ spelled his life-sentence to marginalization, since neither the critics nor the majority of the intellectuals of his time (Moravia was among the few exceptions) understood how profound his thought was. In the *Lettere Luterane* (1976) Pasolini says: «I do not believe in this history or in this progress, that things go forward *comunque*. Very often both individuals and societies regress or get worse. In this case the transformation *must not* be accepted»¹⁸.

The false progress Pasolini is speaking of is the ‘cultural genocide’ he witnessed in Rome between 1961 and 1975, when the materialism implicit in consumerism made the suburban working class turn middle-class. The

Lettere luterane tell us how deeply the Pasolini «who dreamed» (like Gramsci) «in youth / of a society based on *hope* and *truth*» (SP 149; «faith» CP 275, emphasis added) felt cheated politically. When Mahon changed «faith» (as in the «faith, hope and charity» of St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians), he was completing a thread of thought that runs all through these wry verses (see *The Cloud Ceiling* SP 166, st. VI, l. 2); «the verse hard wired» goes from stanza I, l. 7 («life mimicking art») to stanza IX, l. 2 («hope and truth»), through «deceived by art» (st. XII, l. 5) to the «substance of the true» (st. XII, l. 14).

Critics like Barth David Schwartz have spoken of the Christian roots of Pasolini's Marxism as follows: «In the Italian equivalent of the “untouchables” Pasolini found not only erotic communion, intellectual stimulus and human nature still intact but also the rejected (souls) chosen by Christ. In the *Lumpenproletariat* of Rome Pasolini found an extraordinary convergence of marxism and the Christianity which he knew he had inherited from his mother»¹⁹.

Pasolini's feeling of being let down by politics when his Gramscian dream was shattered is expressed elegantly and with vehemence in the *Scritti corsari* (1975), in which he speaks of a form of inter-class hedonism of consumer-power (283). He sees the consumerist empire as «an agonizing historical *déjà-vu*, since it recalls the industrial boom of the early post-First World War years, which were followed by the recession of the Twenties and then by the Nazi *regime*» (287). He fears the sameness of the young people in the *borgate* «in their clothes, their shoes, their hair-styles and way of smiling, behaving and imitating every gesture they see in the advertisements for the products of big industry» (283). While Mahon uses the term «commodity» about the materialism of the post-First World War, Pasolini foresaw what Sidney Lumet brought out in his film *Fifth Power* (1976).

In 1955 Pasolini, 'the poet of poverty', moved to Rome with his mother after creating a sexual scandal in his native Friuli. At first they lived near Ponte Mammolo, near the Rebibbia gaol. In *Una premessa in versi* and elsewhere Pasolini describes the misery of those first years in Rome:

*la mia figura economica, benché instabile e folle,
era in quel momento, per molti aspetti,
simile a quella della gente tra cui abitavo:
in questo eravamo proprio fratelli, o almeno pari.
Perciò, credo, ho molto potuto capirlo*²⁰.

That 'other' Rome that Pasolini loved aesthetically and sensually is not the one that had turned middle-class in the Sixties, but the immense plebeian metropolis of the post-Second World War years. What he calls «la città farlocca» is a world of tower blocks, rubbish dumps, a noisy circus in the distance, drugs and prostitution, hopelessly on the margins of a cunning (artful) society which Mahon describes as follow:

starlight and tower blocks on waste ground,
 peripheral rubbish dumps beyond the noise
 of a circus, where sedated girls and boys
 put out for a few bob on some building site
 in the cloudy imperium of ancient night
 and in the ruins, amid disconsolate lives
on the edge of the artful city, a myth survives (CP 276, emphasis added).

The Rome Mahon is describing here was growing fast after recovery from the Second World War. After reading about it in Pasolini's *Una vita violenta*, Pietro Nenni said: «I felt ashamed that I, a member of Parliament for 15 years, have politically ignored the *borgate*, their people and their misery»²¹. It is the city of Fanon's «wretched of the earth» where, to quote Pasolini's *Sex, the Consolation of Misery*, «nei rifiuti del mondo nasce un nuovo mondo» (CP 276). Mahon quotes this line of Pasolini's twice in *Roman Script*, first in the epigraph in Italian and then in his English translation of it in stanza XI («in the refuse...», CP 276). For those who insist on the Christian basis of Pasolini's Marxism, the baby Jesus, for whom there was «no room at the inn» (Luke 2,7) represents the rejected of this world, who will renew it. Actually the manger of Bethlehem was more humble than squalid, like the rubbish dumps etc. (Luke 13,30) – the «last shall be first and the first shall be last» – might be more pertinent to Pasolini's youthful ideals and belief in the class struggle. Even more than these, stanza XI of *Roman Script* brings to mind lines about the world's renewal by that other poet whose corpse showed up on the beach at Lerici. In the final chorus of his *Hellas* (1822) Shelley wrote:

The world's great age begins anew,
 The golden years return,
 The earth doth like a snake renew
 Her winter weeds outworn:
 Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam,
 Like wrecks of a dissolving dream.

Both in Pasolini's and in Mahon's poems the idea of those *rejected* by society is closely connected with the *refuse* that submerges and cannibalizes our cities. To understand the ideology of Mahon the «deep ecologist»²², his description of the suburbs of Rome, which Pasolini qualified as «the Third World», needs to be emphasized. Even the tower blocks are built on waste (infertile) ground. The youths of the suburbs, the prostitutes and the drug-addicts, all those that middle-class society rejects and hides away because they are «impure»²³, are relegated to the «rubbish dumps» or «some building site». For a moment it is uncertain if «in the ruins» means in the city centre (the Circo Massimo, once very ill-famed), but the edge or margin of the

artful (probably meaning cunning here) city reappears at once. Then comes the startling announcement: among all this squalor, a myth – the myth of Pasolini himself – survives.

Since he was killed at Ostia, the *true* direction he indicated has been lost. Once more the insistence is on the true/truth, recalling the analogy with Keats and once more imagery is presented as substituting real life, as part of the de-personalised sum of economic jargon («production values, packaged history» – Orwell! – «the genocidal corporate imperative») or else becoming: «[...] bright garbage ... / best seen at morning rush-hour in driving rain» (st. XII, ll. 5-6). It is only since the death of Pasolini, Mahon points out, that orders given by the big industrial firms («corporate imperative») have been widely recognized as *genocidal*. Irish people have been directly affected, since leaks from the old Windscale nuclear power station (now renamed Sellafield and honoured with a museum exalting the development of nuclear power, opened triumphantly by Margaret Thatcher) seeped into the Irish Sea and across to Ireland. Shell's record, not only in West Africa, is horrendous. In India the catastrophe of the American factory in Bhopal has caused mass deaths and prolonged mortal disease. In Italy corporate management refused to recognize the lethal effects of asbestos for decades. Though the high death toll in some areas is not immediately obvious, the global count is the equivalent of many genocides. And it is common knowledge that the people of the South American rainforests are being wiped out by the timber industry and land speculators.

In some ways Mahon's ecologist ideas²⁴ recall the proto-green Pasolini who was introduced by his friend Giorgio Bassani to the Italia Nostra association for the protection of Italy's artistic and cultural heritage. The disconsolate lives that haunt the ruins and rubbish dumps of *Roman Script* also recall the 'wasted lives' of Zigmunt Bauman, the British philosopher of Polish-Jewish origins. In his documentary *Pasolini e la forma della città* (1976), Paolo Brunatto portrays the Pasolini who lamented the disappearance of glowworms ('luciole', which in Italian may also refer to prostitutes) as a result of the use of weed-killers. He is seen as a melancholy man contemplating the architectural horrors perpetrated in the art-city Orte as he climbs a mountain of refuse. Piles of rubbish also appear along the road trodden by Totò, Ninetto Davoli and the crowd in *Uccellacci e uccellini* (1966), while in *Accattone* (1961) the hero falls in love with a woman who collects glass bottles for re-cycling for a miserable few lire a day. In 2006 Mimmo Calopresti shot the documentary film *Appunti per un romanzo sull'immondizia*, based on an unfinished script in which Pasolini meant to deal with the dustmen's strike in 1970. In *Che cosa sono le nuvole?* (1967-68), the third episode of *Capriccio all'italiana*, the dustman Modugno throws two marionettes that have been lynched by the public onto a rubbish dump, where they discover that the world is paradise²⁴:

Otello [Davoli] – Iiiiih, che so' quelle?
Jago [Totò] – Sono... sono... le nuvole...
Otello – E che so' le nuvole?
Jago – Boh!
Otello – Quanto so' belle! Quanto so' belle!
Jago (ormai tutto in comica estasi) – Oh, *straziante, meravigliosa bellezza del creato!*

Le nuvole passano veloci nel gran cielo azzurro²⁵.

4

Postscript?

At first sight Mahon's 're-write' of a Metastasio's sonnet looks like an appendix to *Roman Script*. On further consideration it is clear that he included it as stanza XII advisedly, as an integral part of the poem. There are several layers of art and meaning attached to this sonnet. First of all the name. Enamoured, like Keats, of the Greeks, Pietro Trapassi used the pseudonym Metastasio. His sonnet was based on his reaction to his own libretto for *Olimpiade* (1733), which ends with the separation of two dear friends. When he saw it performed he wept «at evils of my own design» (st. XII, l. 4). He laughs at himself for being so deceived by his own inventions, making it clear that he prefers genuine emotions that spring from real life.

As Mahon read Metastasio's sonnet, Mahon may have felt that his own 'rage' at the death of Pasolini, whom he could never have met personally, was too much a matter of the imagination. Ten years later he returned to write of this 'myth' in *Pasolini*, a section of the poem *Quaderno*, published in the collection *Life on Earth* (2008). Here he relates Pasolini's last hours in more detail, almost as they were reported in the newspapers:

PASOLINI

Cruising for wild *ragazzi* out of season,
 he sat late at Giordano's and drove down
 in his Alfa Romeo to the seaplane basin
 where, knifed and mangled in the sand and ash,
 a wreck but recognizable, he lives on
 as a bronze bird-shape shining amid the trash (20).

But surely, too, as Mahon read Metastasio's sonnet and decided to include it in *Roman Script*, he must have been struck by the many details that add up to a portrait of Keats. «That's Keats», he must have thought as, after «I invent dreams and stories ... dreams and romances» came «all my hopes and fears are fictions ...» and «I live in a ... fever of creation»; «the whole course of my life has been imagination», «the fancy cannot *cheat* so well / As it is famed to do, deceiving elf» (corresponding to Metastasio / Mahon's «when

not deceived by art») as well as «... a dream ... we wake» fusing into «waking dream» of the *Ode to a Nightingale*; and finally «... peace in the substance of the true» (*CP* 276-77), which is like a re-write of «Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty, – that is all / Ye know on earth and all ye need to know». And so, to the ashes of Gramsci and Pasolini *Roman Script* adds the ashes of Shelley, author of *Adonais*, cremated by his friends on the shore of Lerici.

Endnotes

¹In the same year *Roman Script* was included in the *Collected Poems*, which will be referred to hereafter as *CP*. I wish to thank Donatella Badin, Melita Cataldi, Fedora Giordano, Franco Marengo, Franco Prono and Claudio Sensi for their helpful suggestions concerning this essay. I am also grateful to my old friend Mary McCann who provided insightful hints for the interpretation of Mahon's poems. I should also like to dedicate this essay to the memory of Guido Zingari (professor of the Philosophy of Language at the Tor Vergata University) who died on 6 April 2009 in the earthquake which struck the Abruzzi region. I am indebted to him for his sensitive study on *Ontologia del rifiuto. Pasolini e i rifiuti dell'umanità in una società impura*, Le Nubi, Roma 2006.

²Recently included in *Adaptations* (2006), as well as in the *Faber Book of 20th Century Italian Poetry*, ed. by Jamie McKendrick.

³The critic Hugh Haughton emphasizes the fact that «the word "script" can refer to a type of font, a literary text, or film script» (H. Haughton, *The Poetry of Derek Mahon*, Oxford UP, Oxford 2007, p. 321).

⁴See D. Mahon, *L'ultimo re del fuoco. Poesie scelte*, a cura di R. Bertoni e G. Pillonca, Trauben, Torino 2000, p. 23.

⁵«Roma è la città delle illusioni, non a caso qui c'è la Chiesa, il governo, il cinema, tutte cose che producono illusione ... Sempre più il mondo si avvicina alla fine. Quale posto migliore di questa città, che tante volte è morta e tante rinata, quale posto più tranquillo per aspettare la fine da inquinamento e sovrappopolazione? È il posto ideale per vedere se tutto finisce o no». Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Italian are mine with the help of Mrs. Mary McCann.

⁶See Pierre Boulez, *Alea*, in Id., *Note di apprendistato*, trad. it di L. Bonino Savarino, Einaudi, Torino 1968, pp. 40-53.

⁷This line could also be read as a reference to the collection *Rain Dance* by John Hewitt (1978) and in particular to his 1968 political poem *For a Moment of Darkness over the Nation*, though the first stanza of *Roman Script* is light and sunny.

⁸Similar iconography characterizes *Otto e mezzo* (1963), as well as the «review of ecclesiastical fashion» in *Rome* (1972).

⁹G.C. Ferretti, *Pasolini: l'universo orrendo*, Editori Riuniti, Roma 1976, p. 120.

¹⁰For further reading, consult Robert Kee, *Ireland: A History*, Abacus, London 2003, pp. 35-50. The expression may also refer to the Stuarts, who plotted the restoration of their family to the throne of England in Rome.

¹¹Mahon's native Belfast was the only Irish city to be involved in the Industrial Revolution. It was in the great Harland & Wolff shipyards that the Titanic was built in 1912.

¹²F. Fellini in A. Licata *et al.*, *La città e il cinema*, Edizioni Dedalo, Bari 1985, p. 70.

¹³Beauty of the meaning of the Greek *kalokagathia*.

¹⁴Child-abuse among the clergy was common knowledge in Ireland at least since Joyce's *Dubliners* (*The Sisters*). It was also known that the practice was considered 'venial' by Church authorities and therefore covered up rather than expiated. Recent pronouncements by Pope Benedict XVI have completely reversed this attitude. The Protestant American Henry Adams

painted an equally damning picture of Rome in the first half of the 19th century: «The Rome I saw [...] was the most violent vice in the world [...]. Our emotions were immoral because no-one, priest or statesman, was honestly able to read in the ruins of Rome a lesson other than this», quoted in S. Negro, *Roma non basta una vita*, Neri Pozza, Venezia 1962, p. 253.

¹⁵ It was a friend and collaborator of Michelangelo called Daniele da Volterra who began covering this nakedness with the famous «breeches».

¹⁶ G. Zingari, *Ontologia del rifiuto. Pasolini e i rifiuti dell'umanità in una società impura*, cit.

¹⁷ G.C. Ferretti, *Pasolini: l'universo orrendo*, cit., p. 76.

¹⁸ «[Io] non credo in questa storia e in questo progresso. Non è vero che comunque si vada avanti. Assai spesso sia l'individuo che le società regrediscono o peggiorano. In tal caso la trasformazione non deve essere accettata», P.P. Pasolini, *Lettere luterane*, Einaudi, Torino 1976, p. 27.

¹⁹ B.D. Schwartz, *Pasolini requiem* (ed. orig. 1992), trad. it. a cura di Paolo Barlera, Marsilio, Venezia 1995, p. 364.

²⁰ P.P. Pasolini, *Una premessa in versi*, in L. Betti, M. Gulinucci (a cura di), *Pier Paolo Pasolini. Le regole di un'illusione. I film, il cinema*, Associazione "Fondo Pier Paolo Pasolini", Roma 1991, p. 13, emphasis added.

²¹ Nenni in V. Roidi, *Roma com'è*, Newton Compton, Roma 1987, p. 30.

²² See G. Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, Routledge, London 2004, pp. 20-23.

²³ Cfr. G. Zingari, *Ontologia del rifiuto*, cit.

²⁴ Mahon strikes another note in his 'green' poems, for example, the *haiku*-like in the 'Bashō in Kinsale' sequence: «Desert island books: / Homer and Rachel Carson, / Durable hardbacks» (D. Mahon, *Harbour Lights*, The Gallery Press, Loughcrew 2005, p. 47). «Desert island books» is a reference to the BBC radio programme *Desert Island Discs*, in which celebrities are asked to say which two books they would take with them to a desert island. Mahon speaks of his own preferences for Homer (following Joyce) and Rachel Carson, forerunner of radical environmentalists, with works such as his *Life on Earth* (2008). Mahon also recognizes his debt both to William Golding and to James Lovelock, in his *Homage to Gaia* (2000).

²⁵ Scene XII. *The Outskirts of Rome. Looking East. Day*. «The garbage lorry approaches, outlined against the sky, hugging the roadside. All around the sky, the sky! It's all the city! The other world, the world under the sun! Actually everything is filthy, abandoned, wretched. Tower-blocks in the distance, a few shacks, sagging wires, neglected vegetable gardens. . . . All the dead things the lorry is piled with roll down the slope like a brightly coloured landslide. Othello and Iago's bodies too . . . Othello's eyes shine with ardent curiosity, irrepressible joy. Iago's eyes too gaze ecstatically at that spectacle of the sky and the world that he had never seen before.

Otello [Davoli] – Iiiiih, what are those?

Jago [Totò] – They are... they are... the clouds...

Otello – And what are the clouds?

Jago – Who knows?

Otello – How beautiful they are! How beautiful they are!

Jago (in comic ecstasy) – Oh, *the agonizing, wonderful beauty of the world!*

The clouds cross swiftly across the great blue sky».

P.P. Pasolini, *Capriccio all'italiana*, in L. Betti, M. Gulinucci (eds.), cit., pp. 147-148.

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Translating Memories Into Words. *The Speckled People* and *Il cane che abbaia alle onde*

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Introduction

The purpose of the present essay is to study how the linguistic dimension of Hugo Hamilton's memoir *The Speckled People* – both in the form of specific linguistic choices and as a symbolical space inside the narrative – is dealt with by its Italian translator, Isabella Zani (who for *Il cane che abbaia alle onde* received the Premio Berto in 2004) and what are the differences in terms of the overall perception of the narrative(s).

Translation is always a rendering, in another language, of a text which was thought and written in another linguistic and cultural background. As Peter Newmark says: «Translation is a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in another language. Each exercise involves some kind of loss of meaning, due to a number of factors. It provokes a continuous tension, a dialectic, an argument based on the claims of each language»¹. However, the language in which the original text was written is also inscribed in a definite cultural context, language and culture being not distinct entities and linguistic choices being always influenced (if not shaped) by the culture in which they were made.

Thus, a gap always exists not only between the language of the source (T1) and of the target text (T2), but also between the culture in which T1 was written and the culture of T2 in which the translator operates. One of the main distinctions between the different translation strategies which can be adopted when facing the task of translation has been drawn by the German philosopher and theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher. He defines as «foreignizing» the translation which brings the reader nearer to the text by preserving its cultural difference and avoiding cultural homologation (this being the best method in his opinion) and as «domesticated» the translation which brings the text nearer to readers by conforming it to the culture of the target audience. However, even when a translator is perfectly aware of the need to respect the cultural dimension of the source text, s/he has to cope with the unavoidable differences between it and her/his own linguistic and cultural context.

The translating task is even harder when language is not only the writing tool with which a text is composed but is at the very core of the book itself, as one of its main themes and issues at stake, like in Hugo Hamilton's memoir *The Speckled People* (2004)². In my opinion, the Italian translation, despite being of value, has the tendency to domesticate the source text by adopting translation strategies which make it nearer to the culture of the target audience even when this could be avoided.

The idea of speckledness is at the very core of Hugo Hamilton's memoir. The sense of being «speckled» or, as the narrator also says, of being «spotted» and «flecked» haunts his memories and is deeply linked to the fact of his having two languages and two cultures (his father is Irish and his mother German). There is also a third linguistic and cultural identity in his life – English – which is banned from his house because of his Irish nationalist father's hatred for the English. In *The Speckled People*, the author (who also wrote a sequel, *The Sailor in the Wardrobe*, published in 2006) tells about his upbringing in Dún Laoghaire, a suburb of Dublin, the city where he was born in 1953 and where he still lives. The story is told through the eyes of his childhood self and makes all the contradictions of the world he grew up in emerge through his voice. What the narrator constantly communicates is his sense of alienation and his sufferings at being discriminated against by others, who see him as a foreigner and call him a Nazi. Thus, his 'speckledness', like the 'speckledness' of his brothers and of his sister, is like a brand of infamy for him. To be different means to be the target of insults and to know nothing about one's place in the world. A deep sense of loss is also inherited from his parents – his mother, Irmgard Kaiser, arrived in Ireland on a pilgrimage she made to forget the brutality of the Nazi period and a shocking event in her life (she was raped by her employer, in Germany). His father, Jack Hamilton, repudiated his father for serving in the British Navy and became a fervent Irish nationalist, obsessed by the need to win the 'language war' against English. As he says: «[Y]our language is your home and your country is your language and your language is your flag» (*SP*, 3). By banning English from his home, he imposes on his children an unnatural clear-cut division between English, on one side, and Irish (and German) on the other. This also means that they are divided from the world outside, which the young narrator associates with English and with a dimension which is not 'home': «I look out of the window and see the light changing [...]. Out there is a different country, far away. There's a gardener clipping a hedge and I can hear the sound of his shears in English, because everything out there is spoken in English» (*SP*, 8).

Indeed, language in the book has a double nature. On the one hand, it is a burden, something forbidden and dangerous: for singing a song in English the narrator's brother, Franz, is violently beaten by their father; the boys in the street insult the Hamilton children by shouting Nazi salutes in German at them). On the other, language is perceived, through the lenses of child-

hood, as an extremely powerful element of the world, which exists through language and for which language is all. English will be, for Hugo Hamilton, the language of the rebellion to his father's rules and the language used when becoming a writer.

At the end of the memoir, the narrator manages to overcome his fears and states: «I'm not afraid anymore of being German or Irish, or anywhere in between» (*SP*, 295). It can be inferred that he succeeds in coping with the idea of being 'speckled' and that this is no more felt as a limit to his life.

2

The Speckled People – Il cane che abbaiva alle onde

The following examples from T1 and T2 (that is, from the source text and the translation respectively) are chosen according to different aspects of translation which are relevant for the present essay.

The first is linked to the multilingual dimension of the work and to the way the translator decides to cope with it. Indeed, one of the main characteristics of Hugo Hamilton's memoir is that several languages coexist in the narrative. The story is told in English but there is a frequent code-switching to German and Irish (this means that there are several words and expressions which are given in these two languages, depending on the context and the memories which are being retrieved by the author)³.

In the English edition of the book, the words in German and Irish are never translated into English and are given in italics. The Italian translation is very faithful to the original in this respect, but explicatory notes are appended to the text to suggest the meaning of the German and Irish terms. Sometimes, mere literal translations are given. For example, for the expression in German used by the narrator's mother «Mein armer Schatz» (*SP*, 30), the note says: «In tedesco, *che impudenza*»⁴. However, there are also longer and more complex comments, as when the note explains the meaning of an historical allusion in T1 («To Hell or Connaught», *SP*, 25) by explaining that it is linked to Oliver Cromwell's fight against Catholicism. As the note says: «Si riferisce alla politica attuata da Oliver Cromwell in Irlanda contro i cattolici e riassunta nella frase "To Hell or Connaught". Dopo aver vinto la guerra civile contro Carlo I, nel 1649 Cromwell sbarcò in Irlanda a caccia degli eserciti monarchici alleati ai ribelli cattolici...» (*Il cane*, 260). As can be noticed, the explanation goes much beyond the need of suggesting the meaning of the words in the source text. There is an apparent didactic intent, which somehow makes the text to be seen from the outside, that is, from a perspective which enables readers to understand it and to reason on it, instead of being drawn inside the fictional realm created by the author when telling his story. The fact that the terms for which an explanation is offered are those which are in strong connection with culture specific elements in the source text also suggests that the book is being

perceived as ‘foreign’ and that an effort is made in order to make it understandable to readers. Interestingly, there is also a word – *lederhosen* – which is not in italics in T1, whereas it is so in T2. The word is not so uncommon in English – that is, it is used in the English language (an entry can be found on the Webster on-line dictionary) even though it is German. In addition, the author resorts to it when explaining what his mother usually made him and his brothers wear («I ran out wearing *lederhosen* and Aran sweaters», *SP*, 2) in order to make them look German and Irish at the same time. Though the type of trousers which is defined by the word «*lederhosen*» is strongly linked to German identity, the fact that it is not given in italics suggests that it is not sensed as ‘foreign’, that, somehow, it belongs to daily life. In Italian, to give the word in italics reinforces the idea of it as being ‘different’ and belonging to another culture.

There are also expressions which are typically Irish, expressions which link the characters immediately with the society they live in and with the local flavour of words given by the speaker’s linguistic habits. At the very beginning of the book, the child tells a non-sensical story (a sort of dream) about waking up in Germany and seeing Ireland from his window. Then, he remembers going out to the beach with his parents and, while running, falling over a sleeping man on the grass who reacts by exclaiming: «What the Jayses?» (*SP*, 1). Further on in the narrative, the narrator will explain that his brother Franz and he are trying to be Irish and to behave like all other children by pointing out: «We stand at the railings and look at the waves crashing against the rocks and the white spray going up into the air [...]. We’re Irish and we say ‘Jaysus’ every time the wave curls in and hits the rocks with a big thump» (*SP*, 5). Thus, the word «Jaysus» is linked explicitly to the idea of Irish identity; in fact, it is almost included in the picture the narrator gives of all the things that a good Irish boy is supposed to do. In this sense, the expression also applies to a stereotypical picture of Irish childhood and ‘Irishness’, words and cultural identities being always bound together. To translate «Jaysus», the Italian translation uses the Italian imprecation «Cristo», thus writing: «Siamo irlandesi e diciamo ‘Cristo’ ogni volta che l’onda si arriccia e colpisce gli scogli con un gran botto» (*Il cane*, 18). However, the ‘difference’ which is implied by the word «Jaysus» is totally lost. The word is not linked to Irish identity anymore, «Jaysus» being the way the word «Jesus» is normally pronounced in Dublin. It would have not been incorrect to preserve the word as it is in the source text («Jaysus»), by adding also – if needed – a foot-note on its meaning (an unwelcome strategy for being understood which, in my opinion, should be avoided each time this could be done). The importance of keeping the expression as it is in T1 can be explained by the fact that the meaning of this word in the narrative context depends on its form, that is, that there is also an implicit suggestion as to how the children are trying to be and to look as Irish as possible (thus speaking like all Irish children and Irish people in general).

Another interesting aspect is also offered by culture-specific words⁵. In order to render the word «Kraut», the translation provides the word «crucchi» in Italian. The term in T1 is derogatory when used in English («Kraut» in German referring to herbs but also to a type of traditional German food), exactly as the term in Italian is. Thus, the translation succeeds in conveying the same idea that was in the source text, even though, in order to do it, it resorts to a word which has a totally different origin from «Kraut». «Crucchi» does not come from German; it comes from the Slavic word «kruch», which means «bread»; it was applied by Italian people to the Germans during the Second World War. Therefore, the effect conveyed by T2 is the same of T1 but an Italian culture-specific word has been used. Thus, in a sense the translation has also operated a cultural shift from the English to the Italian culture.

However, the most interesting case – as far as culture-specific terms are concerned – is the definition given by Hugo Hamilton's father of his children, a definition the narrator remembers by saying: «[W]e are the speckled-Irish, the brack-Irish. Brack home-made Irish bread with German raisins» (*SP*, 7). The adjective «brack» comes, as is explained in the text, from the Gaelic word «breac» and means «speckled, dappled, flecked, spotted, coloured» (*SP*, 7). By using a term which is derived from Gaelic for his children, Jack Hamilton links them manifestly to Irish culture, even though he is suggesting that they are the 'new Irish', that is, that they are «half-Irish and half German» (*SP*, 7). The «barm brack» mentioned by the narrator is a metaphor for speckledness and this metaphor is again in strong connection with Ireland and Irish culture, the barm brack being an Irish bread (with raisins or sultanas). In English, 'brack' is used only in association with 'barm', that is, as 'barm brack'. Thus, it was no use for the translator to search for the meaning of 'brack' in an English-Italian dictionary. The final decision made by Isabella Zani was to translate the sense of the metaphor (that is, the implied meaning conveyed through it, the idea of speckledness), by resorting to a different image – the image of a dog and, more precisely, of a «bracco maculato» («speckled hound»). She explains her decision in *La nota del traduttore*:

Sono state le orecchie a suggerirmi la possibilità di una soluzione. Brack, brack, brack: come “bracco”. Un sostantivo al posto di un aggettivo è un cambio di valuta nel quale non si perde moltissimo, e il bracco è un animale, e un animale pezzato, maculato, punteggiato. Brack, però, non significa “bracco”: come giustificare una scelta del genere?⁶

Thus, there is a double reason for translating «brack» as «bracco»: these words are phonetically akin to each other and Irish hounds can be speckled, so that the idea of speckledness is somehow preserved. The translator also searched for an etymological root in common between the two terms but could not ascertain it. However, she observes that the word «brach» in William Shakespeare's *King Lear* is used for a female hound: «Mi è venuto in

parziale soccorso William Shakespeare, che in *Re Lear* nomina per bocca del Buffone una segugia: “Lady the brach may stand by the fire and stink” (Atto I, scena IV). Insomma mi è parso che da un punto di vista letterario, se non strettamente filologico, la mia scelta si potesse difendere».

Therefore, in T2 the statement in T1 («[W]e are the speckled-Irish, the brack-Irish. Brack home-made Irish bread with German raisins», *SP*, 7) is rendered as: «[N]oi siamo gli irlandesi maculati, i bracchi irlandesi. Pandolce irlandese fatto in casa, con uvetta tedesca» (*Il cane*, 20). Though the solution offered is interesting, there is no correspondence between the image offered in T1 and the image in T2 (and no etymological correspondence between «bracchi» and the Gaelic «breac» either). The translating strategy applied succeeds in preserving the idea of speckledness (what is speckled is the dog’s coat), that is, the sense of the metaphor, but cannot be compared to the procedure for translating metaphors that Peter Newmark defines «conversion of metaphor to sense»⁷ since a new meaning is also added which was totally absent from the source text.

We do not know why the image of the «barm brack» was retrieved by the narrator but, no matter why, it was certainly what came to his mind when remembering his father’s definition of him and the other children as «the new Irish» (*SP*, 7).

Furthermore, words and memories are strongly linked together in this work, sometimes words triggering recollections of past events and sometimes standing for entire sequences of events and deeper implicit meanings (as when, from the adjective «bald» in the song sung at school by the author when he was a child we come to know about his slapping his teacher on her face and being praised by his mother, this leading to a digression on the injustices suffered by his mother’s family under the Nazi regime).

Therefore, to change a word means to act upon the images of which the memoir is informed and which are the very texture of the narrative. In addition, the translation spells out what is a mental association made in the text between the narrator’s condition (his sense of displacement and ‘difference’ from others) and the image of a dog, which, like him, is described as being in front of the sea, barking at the waves as he shouts at them⁸. This association is never made explicit but it is likely that it is perceived even as more important than it is by reading about the «bracchi maculati» (this translation also establishing a further relation between the image of a hound and the idea of speckledness, which is of central importance in the book).

The translator is aware of having added a new meaning to the text, since she says: «Credo di non aver sottratto nulla al testo originale, alle parole dell’autore, alla descrizione intima e sofferta di quei bambini più ricchi e insieme marchiati per la mescolanza della loro origine; e credo, anzi, di aver loro regalato qualcosa».

Interestingly, by deciding to translate «barm brack» as «bracco», the target text has also applied to the word «bracco» a meaning that this word

does not have: «Un “bracco” dolce è un pane con dentro l’uvetta» (*Il cane*, 20). The fact that the two words sound in the same way is no reason enough for explaining the change in T2, though sounds are often important in a text both from the rhythmic and from the semantic point of view. As Kim Ballard notices, after listing the words «grub», «grumble», «grunt», «grudge», «grumpy», «gruff», «grubby»:

It is not unreasonable to propose that, since five of these seven words carry suggestions of impatience or irritability, there is some semantic link between those negative associations and the sound ‘gru-’ at the beginning of ‘grudge’, ‘gruff’, ‘grumble’, ‘grumpy’ and ‘grunt’. It may even be that this meaning of ‘gru-’ has come about because we clench our teeth when we feel irritated and ‘gru-’ is a natural sound to produce in this position⁹.

However, this is not the case of «barm brack», which is of use in the author’s attempt at representing his idea of speckledness for its semantic content and for the fact of deriving from Irish culture, the phonetic level being less important.

In order to translate the words in the source text, the translator has decided to resort to inventions again, as when she translated with «barra fonda» the expression «topsy dirty» in the original. However, this is a different case from the previous one, in that an invention or, better, a change in the standard form of the expression had been made in the source text too and needed to be rendered in Italian. Thus, the translator slightly modified the word «baraonda», which means ‘confusion’ in Italian, more or less like the English ‘topsy-turvy’.

Finally, T2 has rendered into Italian also those sentences which were defined explicitly as being in English in T1. Thus, for example, the narrator’s brother, Franz, is caught by his father singing in English «Walk on the wall, walk on the wall» (*SP*, 29), after building a line with bricks, and his father beats him violently for this, breaking his nose, because his children had to speak only Irish. The target text translates the words in the song as: «Monta sul muretto, monta sul muretto...» (*Il cane*, 39). Similarly, Mr. Hamilton gets angry when he listens to the narrator using English for saying «stones»: «“What did you throw?”, my father asked. “Stones”. I saw my face twice in his glasses and he made a face, just like when the O’Neills were chopping wood upstairs» (*SP*, 27). In T2, this is translated as following: «“Cosa hai tirato?”, disse mio padre. “Sassi”. In inglese. Mi vidi due volte nei suoi occhiali e lui fece una faccia, come quando gli O’Neills spaccano la legna di sopra» (*Il cane*, 37). In order to make readers understand that the character was pronouncing the word in English, the translator added: «In inglese» (*Il cane*, 37). This is an effective strategy to preserve clarity and to cope with the translating task and it also reveals how far apart the world of the source and the world of the target text are.

Though all the mentioned aspects are relevant to the present discussion, it is undoubtedly true that there are distinctive structures in languages and

distinct modes of representation which cannot be accounted for by translation. As Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf asserted, by suggesting somehow what had already been said by Wilhelm von Humboldt, language is inseparable from thoughts and thoughts are influenced by language. In addition, as Valerio Fissore argues in *The Liturgy of Language*¹⁰, language and discourse organization are the ways through which a culture is codified and, for this reason, a translation should be as much literal as possible. From this perspective, it is impossible for a translator to be faithful to the source text, that is, to render it in another language without altering its meaning. Thus, for example, the idea of time is rendered linguistically in distinct ways by English and Italian. Indeed, as Harald Weinrich in *Tempus* (1964) notices, in English the idea of time is expressed by two different words (tense and time), unlike other languages like Italian (and also French, Spanish and Portuguese, for example), which only have one word for both notions («tempo», «temps», «tiempo», «tempo» respectively). What is important here is that the extra-linguistic reality of 'time' does not coincide with the intralinguistic idea of time, as this is represented by tense. As Michael Lewis points out in *The English Verb. An Exploration of Structure and Meaning*, the present tense has several different functions (Lewis 38). It can define present time but also habits, general acknowledged truths with no reference to time (e.g.: «Wood floats on water»), and also past and future events (e.g.: «In he comes and hits me»; «We leave from Paddington tomorrow morning at 7.30»).

In the very first page of Hugo Hamilton's memoir, there is an example of the way in which this gap between the system of representation of time in English and in Italian produce unavoidable discrepancies. I will provide here an extract from page 1 of the source text and, immediately after it, the same extract in translation:

When you're small you know nothing.

When I was small I woke up in Germany. I heard the bells and rubbed my eyes and saw the wind pushing through the curtains like a big belly. Then I got up and looked out the window and saw Ireland. And after breakfast we all went out the door to Ireland and walked down to Mass. And after Mass we walked down to the big green park in front of the sea because I wanted to show my mother and father how I could stand on the ball for a count of three, until the ball squirted away from under my feet. I chased after it, but I could see nothing with the sun in my eyes and I fell over a man lying on the grass with his mouth open. He sat up suddenly and said "What the Jayses?" - He told me to look where I was going in future. So I got up quickly and ran to my mother and father (*SP*, 1).

The narrator draws a dream-like picture of what seems to be one of the first memories of his life. First, there is a statement in the present: «When you're small you know nothing». The rest of the description, from «When I was small I woke up in Germany» to «So I got up quickly and ran to my mother

and father», is entirely in the past tense. However, this same tense in English can be applied both to the description of an event which occurred far in the past (and which in Italian is normally rendered by a *passato remoto*) and to an event or action which was habitual in the past (rendered by the *imperfetto* in Italian). The description remains somehow ambivalent in English, since the tense of the verbs is the same. Only by interpreting the text can the reader decide whether the aspect of the verbs suggested is perfective or imperfective. However, whatever his/her decision is, the truth is that the ambiguity persists, allowing for a double perception of the facts. Far from being limiting, this empowers the narrator's ability to suspend that clear-cut boundary between logic and fantasy which is normally possessed by the adult world.

The actions which follow («I heard the bells and rubbed my eyes and saw the wind...») may be linked to the previous sentence («When I was small I woke up in Germany») by suggesting a continuity with it (when the narrator was a child, he normally «heard the bells», «rubbed his eyes» and «saw the wind pushing through the curtains»), but they could also break the inner logic of the narrative by a sudden switch from the imperfective («When I was small») to the perfective («I heard the bells and rubbed my eyes»). This lack of logic in time representation is indeed typical of children's perception and it is accompanied, as has already been hinted at, by a lack of realism in the rendering of spatial distances. In addition, by interpreting the verbs «to hear» and «to rub» as perfective, the sense of a world coming suddenly into life is also suggested. What the narrator is describing is not just the fact that he woke up in his bed in Germany; he is also describing the awakening of his consciousness, the coming into being of the world he lives in (interestingly, this is done right at the beginning of the book, when the narrative world is brought to life too).

In hinting at all these different nuances of meaning, the English language is able to preserve them for the very reason that the perfective and the imperfective aspects are not signaled explicitly by the verbs.

In Italian, this ambiguity is immediately lost, as the following extract demonstrates:

Quando sei piccolo non sai niente.

Quand'ero piccolo io mi svegliavo in Germania. Al suono delle campane mi sfregai gli occhi e vidi il vento gonfiare le tende come un'enorme pancia. Poi mi alzai e guardai dalla finestra e vidi l'Irlanda. E dopo colazione uscimmo tutti dalla porta verso l'Irlanda e andammo a piedi a messa. E dopo la messa scendemmo al grande parco verde davanti al mare perché io volevo mostrare a mia madre e mio padre che riuscivo a stare in equilibrio sul pallone contando fino a tre, finché il pallone non mi schizzò via da sotto i piedi. Lo inseguii, ma con il sole negli occhi non riuscii a vedere niente e inciampai sopra un uomo sdraiato a bocca aperta sull'erba. Lui si sollevò di scatto dicendo: "Cristo, che è stato?" - Mi disse di guardare dove andavo, in futuro. Così mi rialzai subito e corsi da mia madre e mio padre. Gli raccontai che l'uomo aveva detto "Cristo", ma erano entrambi voltati, ridevano davanti al mare (*Il cane*, 1).

Whereas there is an identity between the first sentence in Italian and in English in terms of verb tense and aspect (present), there is no such an identity in the rest of the paragraph, where the Italian translation shifts from the *imperfetto* to the *passato remoto* very soon. While the tense in «Quand'ero piccolo mi svegliavo in Germania» describes the repetitiveness of an action which is usually performed, the tense in «Al suono delle campane mi sfregai gli occhi e vidi il vento gonfiare le tende» suggests that what is being described is a specific moment in the past, an episode or an event which occurred only once in the narrator's life. As Bernard Comrie argues in *Aspect*, the imperfective defines «habitual situations»: «Habitual situations describe a situation which is characteristic of an extended period of time, so extended in fact that the situation referred to is viewed not as an incidental property of the moment but, precisely, as a characteristic feature of a whole period»¹¹. In the Italian translation, there is no sense of the actions being repeated (except from «Quando ero piccolo io mi svegliavo in Germania») and no habitual situation is described. However, the choice of the *passato remoto* must be made in Italian because there is the description of the small accident which occurs to the boy when falling «over a man lying in the grass». Since it is more logical that this happened only once and not every single day, the translator used the *passato remoto* for the entire description. What the English language could maintain as both perfective and imperfective, the Italian language defines as perfective almost from the start.

The gap between the source and the target text does not depend on the Italian translator's choices, the different rendering of the sense of time by Italian and English being at the basis of it. As Christopher Taylor argues: «[T]he Italian translator must be on his guard so as not to fall foul of mistranslations when faced with a sentence such as "I saw him in Paris". His options could be, of course: "L'ho visto a Parigi"; "Lo vidi a Parigi"; "Lo vedevo a Parigi", and he must search for similar signs amongst time markers, context, extra-linguistic knowledge, etc.»¹². Nevertheless, even by following Taylor's advice, it is still impossible to preserve that inherent ambiguity which the English text possessed originally.

3

Conclusions

Il cane che abbaia alle onde and *The Speckled People* are two texts with two different languages and cultures. Though the Italian translator is faithful to the original, makes refined linguistic choices and applies interesting translation strategies, there is an overall tendency at making T1 as understandable as possible to readers by making it nearer to the them and to the target culture. All the elements, both linguistic and cultural, which seem potentially obscure are not only translated but also presented through explanatory notes. Though it would not be correct to define the translation as 'domesticating', the 'foreign' elements in the source text are sometimes omitted or changed. In the book,

the sense of Irish identity, which in the memoir is something which is both imposed on the narrator by his father and something for which he struggles in order to conform to society, is conveyed not just by the events recounted but by language and by the images language tries to bring into life. The «barm brack», which alone conveys the complex idea of speckledness as it is used to describe the children's condition, is linked to Irish culture in such a way that it is impossible to translate it without losing something of the original meaning. Even though the solution found by the translator can be effective, the inherent cultural value of the expression in T1 will be lost irremediably.

Indeed, as André Lefevere argues when defining «translation»:

Translation can be seen as epitomizing the ideal of 'faithful translation', so dear to the heart of those in authority, who are intent on purveying the 'right' image of the source text in a different language [...]. But translatio is impossible. An exchange of signifiers in a kind of intellectual and emotional vacuum, ignoring the cultural, ideological and poetological overtones of the actual signifiers, is doomed to failure, except in texts in which the 'flavour' of the signifiers is not all important: scholarly texts, or non-literary texts in general¹³.

Though the «flavour of the signifiers» in the original cannot always be preserved in translation, what in my opinion should be done is to accept that 'foreign' elements come into the text, even though this obliges readers to make the effort of discovering new meanings and new ideas in connection with a different culture. By asking readers to go towards the source text, that is, to become aware that they are dealing with a product from another culture, it is likely that their understanding of the text itself will be empowered.

Indeed, the most significant element in *The Speckled People*, as far as the linguistic dimension is concerned, is that the author writes it in English. The forbidden language of his childhood is transformed in the language of his creative activity as a writer. Though in the story it is often mentioned as being something which belongs only to the world outside, that is, as an unknown, far away reality, the truth is that English is always there, because it is through it that the narrative is written and the story is told. Indeed, this language has a deep symbolical significance in the book, since there is a slow coming into awareness, by the child, about his right to choose which language to speak and his right to free himself from his father's strict and oppressive rules. At the end of the penultimate chapter of the memoir, he realizes that there are boundaries in his life which he can break only by learning to look at himself from a different angle. Many symbolical elements suggest that he experiences a kind of rebirth. The dog which was seen at the very beginning of the book as barking alone at the waves seems to be drowned but suddenly re-appears: «He didn't drown after all. He must have rescued himself. He must have got up the steps, and shook the water off his back and forgotten it even happened [...]. He started sniffing around my clothes and socks scattered on the ground.

He came right over and sniffed at me, too. He didn't blame me for anything and I was able to pet him as if we were friends for life» (*SP*, 294). Then, the dog follows him while he walks towards home:

On the way home I walked along the wall with the dog behind me. My shoes were squeaking all the way [...]. The sun was starting to come through the mist and it was not going to rain after all. I looked back and saw the sun coming out. The water was so white and so full of bouncing light that I could see nothing at all. It made me want to close my eyes and sneeze. When I looked into the shadows under the trees it was so dark that I could see nothing there either (*SP*, 295).

In this almost suspended dimension, between light and darkness, the boy realizes that he can be free: «I am not afraid any more of being German or Irish, or anywhere in between. Maybe your country is only a place you make up in your own mind. Something you dream about and sing about. Maybe it's not a place on the map at all, but just a story full of people you meet and places you visit, full of books and films you've been to. I'm not afraid of being homesick and having no language to speak in» (*SP*, 295).

Interestingly, his final liberation is achieved by accepting to have «no language to speak in», that is, by rejecting his father's conviction that «[Y]our language is your home and your country is your language and your language is your flag» (*SP*, 3). Interestingly, after this and at the end of the chapter, the narrator says: «I am walking on the wall and nobody can stop me». This sentence, which is reminiscent of the song in English for which his brother was beaten by their father («Walk on the wall, walk on the wall...», *SP*, 29), is the final comment on his new feelings about himself and the world around him. The adult voice of the author can be heard, here, coming to the surface from behind the voice of the young narrator. What he says helps us see that English is not, to him, the language of English culture only. It is a communicative tool he could not resort to during childhood and a challenge to the limits of the world he grew up in. Instead of binding him to a place, English enables him to deal with a far wider notion of 'home', as something which can be 'speckled' as much as he is.

All this suggests that English is more than a narrative tool. It is also a symbol of freedom and rebellion, the symbol of things to come which the child in the story is not able to foresee but which the author knows by speaking from his present. As Hugo Hamilton explains in his essay *Speaking to the Walls in English*: «In many ways it was inevitable that writing would become the only way for me to explain [my] deep childhood confusion. The prohibition against English made me see that language as a challenge. Even as a child I spoke to the walls in English and secretly rehearsed dialogue I heard outside»¹⁴. This explains why it is so important, in translation, to preserve the 'difference' of the source text. Though the language in which the original was written is replaced by another language, traces of it should be preserved

when possible, for example by considering the distinct ways in which English and Italian cope with the representation of time through tense. From this perspective, translation could be seen as a dialogue between the source and the target text rather than a replacement of a language with another. Indeed, the power of translations is strong and the encounter with another language is not necessarily damaging (as Lefevere argues: «Translation forces a language to expand, and that expansion may be welcome as long as it is checked by the linguistic community at large»¹⁵).

Nevertheless, there is also another aspect worth being mentioned. When the translator uses Italian for sentences which are defined explicitly by the narrative as being in English (see the examples in the previous part of the essay on the song and on the word «stones»), an otherwise half-hidden truth is revealed – that is, the translation rests on a pretension and the language which is being used is like a parallel world to which the story is transposed. By replacing English, the Italian language becomes more than a language used to tell a story which can be understandable to Italian readers. It also turns into a second dimension, a new form of the book which is at the same time akin to and different from the source text. I agree with Palma Zlateva when she states:

The pre-text and post-text problems [...] result from the profound difference in communicative situation between an author and the reader of his prototext on the one hand, and an author and the reader of the translation, or metatext, on the other. An author constructs a world based on the inventory of her native language and for an audience which shares her universe of discourse. The reader is presented with a text in her native language, which she is able to decode and judge in terms both of language and universe of discourse, no matter whether the author on occasion violates either, or both. When a translator plays the part of the reader, on the other hand, she must apply both her knowledge and her intuition to the author's universe of discourse, very conscientiously, but also very cautiously¹⁶.

In other words: «Any adequately translated literary text becomes a material fact not only in the target language, but in the target literature as well: it exists in both»¹⁷. However, this does not imply that the translator is free to modify the source text. The act of translation is always a cross-cultural act, which must avoid replacing the cultural elements in T1 with elements which belong to the target culture.

Since these elements come from another cultural and linguistic context, and since they are inscribed in a text for which another language is used (Italian in the proposed case), translations will be the product of a double process of transformation and preservation in connection with the original. The idea of speckledness which informs Hugo Hamilton's memoir is possessed also by translations, which cannot but be hybrid, composite cultural and linguistic textures.

Endnotes

¹ P. Newmark, *Approaches to Translation*, Pergamon, Oxford 1981, p. 7.

² H. Hamilton, *The Speckled People*, Harper, London 2004. Henceforth this work will be referred to as *SP*.

³ I have focused on the functions of multilingualism in this memoir in the essay *One Life, Many Languages. Hugo Hamilton's The Speckled People* which is forthcoming for *English Studies*, edited by R.A. Henderson and published by Trauben, Turin.

⁴ H. Hamilton, *Il cane che abbaia alle onde*, Fazi, Roma 2004, p. 259. Henceforth this work will be referred to as *Il cane*.

⁵ All words, in a sense, are 'culture-specific', since they originate in a specific culture. However, what I mean with this definition in the essay is all the words which belong only or especially to a particular culture, whether because the object they define does not exist or is less common in different cultural contexts or because it originated and is particularly used in that culture.

⁶ I. Zani, *La nota del traduttore: Il cane che abbaia alle onde*, <http://www.lanotadeltraduttore.it/cane_abbaia_alle.htm> (02/2010).

⁷ E.g.: «Gagner son pain» could be translated, according to P. Newmark, as «To earn one's living». The sense of the metaphor is respected, though the words used are different. P. Newmark, *Approaches to Translation*, cit., p. 91.

⁸ The first time the dog is mentioned is in the very first chapter of the book and the picture of it barking at the waves on the shore is used again and again in the narrative, until, at the end, when the narrator finally finds his own voice, it is discovered that the dog has not drowned as the child had initially suspected.

⁹ K. Ballard, *The Frameworks of English*, Palgrave, New York 2001, p. 6.

¹⁰ V. Fissore, *The Liturgy of Language*, in Id., *The Liturgy of Language. The Language of Liturgy*, Trauben, Torino 2009, p. 31.

¹¹ B. Comrie, *Aspect*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1976, pp. 27-28.

¹² C. Taylor, *Aspects of Language and Translation. Contrastive Approaches for Italian/English Translators*, Campanotto, Udine 1992, p. 26.

¹³ A. Lefevere, *Translating Literature. Practice and Theory in a Comparative Literature Context*, MLA, New York 1992, p. 18.

¹⁴ H. Hamilton, *Speaking to the Walls in English*, <<http://www.powells.com/essays/hamilton.html>> (02/2010).

¹⁵ A. Lefevere, *Translation: Its Genealogy in the West*, in S. Bassnett, A. Lefevere (eds.), *Translation, History and Culture*, Pinter, London 1990, p. 29.

¹⁶ P. Zlateva, *Translation: Text and Pre-Text Adequacy and Acceptability in Crosscultural Communication*, in S. Bassnett, A. Lefevere (eds.), *Translation, History and Culture*, cit., p. 32.

¹⁷ Ivi, p. 29.

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Influences, Translations, Settings: An Evaluation of the Literary Relations between Ireland and Italy

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The present contribution is an attempt to draw some conclusions from the results of some research in progress on the literary relations between Italy and Ireland. The experience of being an Italian in Ireland as an MA student of Anglo-Irish literature and drama raised in me many questions about my own identity and about the literary relations between Italy and Ireland and in particular on the role Italians play in Irish narratives of the early and late twentieth century.

Why and when does Italy appear to be attractive? And what about Italian culture? How are Italian characters described both while *being* in Ireland and in Italy? How is this otherness perceived? What role do Italians play in Irish narratives of the early and late twentieth century? How is communication between Irish characters on one side and Italian characters on the other accomplished? But, most important of all, is there a difference in the attitude Irish writers have shown over the last sixty years or so towards Italy and Italians? What kind of knowledge do Irish writers have of the Italian works they referred to? Do they read them in English or in Italian? What do they imitate? The style, the content, the ideas or the background? In what ways have these elements influenced the target text? What was it that interested Irish writers and Irish travellers most about Italian culture and literature?

An immediate answer would be: Italy is the place where the encounter between the I and the Other inevitably leads to the knowledge of oneself and to the discovery of what is different both in terms of people and of places.

I shall start with cultural relations which fall under many headings such as «influence», «reception», «intertextuality», «debt», «imitation», «translation», «source», «comparison» and «borrowing» and examine what these relations are and whether there has been evolution and change in the last 60 years. A good starting point can be a booklet published by the Italian Cultural Institute in 1964, exploring the literary Italian presence in Ireland, limited however to one-to-one type of relation.

1.1

Influences and Translations

From Synge to McGuinness, from Joyce to Heaney, many were the Irish writers who have contributed to enrich such a fruitful relationship between the two countries¹.

Lennox Robinson (1886-1958), for instance, was an enthusiastic reader of Luigi Pirandello's works which he tried to bring to the Abbey stage. *Henri IV* was staged in 1924, *The Pleasure of Honesty* in 1926, and *The Game as He Played it* in 1927 followed by a British company's production of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and some one-act plays like *The Man with the Flower in his Mouth*, *Sogni ma forse no (Dreaming am I?)*. Of *Six Characters* Lennox Robinson himself wrote an Irish version called *Church Street*. Thomas Kilroy also wrote two adaptations of Pirandello's plays, namely *Six Characters in search of an Author* and *Henry (after Henry IV)* which were published in 2007. Pirandellian influences are to be found in other works of his as well as in other Irish playwrights like Brian Friel (1929-) who first saw *Six Characters* in 1950² and Frank McGuinness (1953-) who translated *L'uomo dal fiore in bocca* into English and put it on stage at Bewley's Café Theatre in Dublin in 1993.

The Italian authors who most influenced Irish writers are Petrarch, Boccaccio, Ariosto, Leopardi, D'Annunzio, Pirandello and Dante.

An Irish Tribute to Dante on the 7th Centenary of his Birth (Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Dublin 1965) is probably one of the first examples of published acknowledgements of the following Dante's work had in Ireland. From the first Irish translation of the *Divine Comedy* into English (1802)³ to the translation of the *Inferno* into Irish by Pádraig de Brún⁴, Ireland experienced a growing interest in Dante's work not only from academics but, more importantly, from local writers.

From Louis MacNeice (1907-63) to John Montague (1929-), from Seamus Heaney (1939-) to Ciarán Carson (1948-), from Yeats (1865-1939)⁵ to Joyce (1882-1941), references and allusions to as well as borrowings from Dante's work have been acknowledged by the Irish writers themselves as well as discussed by critics. More specifically, the translation of the first three Cantos of the *Inferno* carried out by the Nobel Laureate Heaney and of the whole of the *Inferno* by the Belfast poet Carson have lately aroused much interest among Irish studies scholars⁶.

In an essay entitled *Envies and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet*⁷, Heaney writes about what concerns him most as a writer using Dante's text and what he adapts to his literary exigencies. Heaney's translating exercise involves Cantos I, II, III, XXXII and XXXIII of the *Inferno*. His reading of the *Commedia* appears as a highly personal interpretation of the poetic form and of the topics dealt with by Dante. *The Divine Comedy* becomes a starting point from which the Irish poet is able to observe the political reality of his time and to define his own aesthetic theory. In addition, in the collection of poems *Station Island*, he makes use of the structure and the pattern of the long poem and of the *terza rima*. Analogies between Medieval Florence and contemporary Ireland inevitably allow him to deal with the theme of the Troubles in Northern Ireland and the theme of the transcendent, i.e. the pilgrimage, which acts more as a poetic structure than as a religious motif. This

is what the reader also feels after reading Carson's version of the *Inferno*, which is an imaginative focus on language. Coming from a musical background and speaking Irish as a first language, the Belfast-based poet inevitably considers the rhyme pattern as an essential prerequisite for a good translation exercise. He creates a contemporary idiom which extensively draws from the «measures and assonances of the Hiberno-English ballad»⁸ and which inevitably stands in neat contrast with Heaney's more literal rendering of the Cantos. The result is a more colloquial language which tries to reproduce not the original text, but the translator's idea of it and, more specifically, the sounds it conveys and inspires. Apart from sounding humorous and inventive, his language sometimes runs the risk of being considered artificial and vulgar. Heaney, on the other hand, produces his own *terza rima* by appropriating features from the original text, in the light of a more faithful view of the translating activity and in an attempt to adopt the style as well as the content of the source text. He fully accepts to play the role of the invisible translator which he does even at the cost of sacrificing fluency and coherence.

1.2

Translations of modern Italian poems

Translation as a cultural metaphor is a sign of the degree to which in contemporary Ireland inherited definitions of national life [...] fail to account for much individual and collective experience.

Terence Brown

During the last fifty years or so, Irish poets like Derek Mahon, Paul Muldoon, Eamon Grennan and Desmond O'Grady, among others, seem to have been more concerned about translating rather than writing. Texts by Italian authors have offered themselves as multiple occasions for Irish writers to learn about other worlds and to experiment with new poetic forms. Ungaretti, Quasimodo, Montale and Leopardi have provided them with occasions for faithful renderings, interpretations, experimentations and re-writings. Each of these translated texts becomes a personal piece of work which illustrates the topics of the source text without neglecting the social, political and religious background the Irish writer lives in as well as the inevitable confrontation and identification between the local and the universal. The Italian places mentioned in such texts, while becoming more familiar, inevitably create a space of textual frontier where the Other is made more understandable, hence closer in the redefinition of notions of identity, history and religion. Sometimes heavily drawing from Hiberno-English and from the English spoken in Northern Ireland, these translations certainly contribute to a better circulation of Italian culture in Ireland and to the building up of images about Italy. Some of these images are inevitably linked to the translators' temporary thoughts, their

different travelling and living experiences in a changing social, economic and cultural background.

By deliberately siding and sharing interests and friendship with such Irish writers who left Ireland as Samuel Beckett and Brian Coffey, Denis Devlin, «the most cosmopolitan of recent Irish poets», as Beckett himself defined him, «who took the world as his province»⁹, was indeed able to bridge the gap between his own country and the outside world through translation. Most of his translations remain unpublished. A few were published in «Ireland To-day», a journal which published contributions from the ‘European intelligentsia’. Some of these are from French, German and Italian. Little is known about the circumstances which led him to translate. It was the years spent in Italy as a Minister Plenipotentiary first and as an ambassador later that made him an avid reader of European literature, and a frequent participant to literary meetings organised by the editor of *Botteghe Oscure*¹⁰. Eager to render – in his own way – familiar what was foreign and to «de-individualize» what he was reading, he translated three poems that feature in a book published by Robert Little in 1992. The translations of *Dove la luce* by Giuseppe Ungaretti (1888-1970), *Ride la gazza, nera sugli aranci* and a fragment from the poem *Strada di Agrigentum* by Salvatore Quasimodo (1901-1968) helped him to experiment with new poetic forms and to express his own aesthetic concerns. Devlin was undoubtedly interested in Ungaretti’s love for a return to order which was paradoxically represented by common subordinate clauses, inversions and complicated analogies which he faithfully tried to render in English, though, like their own original, they seem to be characterised by vagueness and by linguistic and literary strangeness:

That unchangeable, ageless gold
In its lost nimbus
Shall be our winding-sheet.

L’ora costante, liberi d’età,
Nel suo perduto nimbo
Sarà nostro lenzuolo¹¹.

In the opening line of the final stanza Devlin does seem to purposely mistranslate «ora» into «oro» by thus rendering «l’ora costante, liberi d’età» into «that unchangeable, ageless gold», which conveys a kind of metaphysical atmosphere to the stanza. Besides, Devlin was interested in using poetry as a way of living a religious, almost mystical experience in a world where either nothing made sense or some sort of illumination was instead finally achieved. Devlin certainly chose those texts he found most congenial to his view of life and poetry. The two poems by Quasimodo project the translator and the reader in a world of nostalgia where places are evoked by childhood memories

and with the scent of a faraway countryside. This is peopled by flowers and animals and is made universal in its elusiveness as in *Street in Agrigentum*:

There lasts a wind which I remember, burning
In the names of sidelong horses

Là dura un vento che ricordo acceso
nelle criniere dei cavalli obliqui¹².

Overall, Devlin's translation exercises from French – even though they tell a lot about his literary tastes and choices – seem to be just unconvincing literary attempts. More faithful representations of Quasimodo's poems are to be found in the translations done by Gerald Dawe (1952-). *Primroses* (*Primule*), *The Flower of Silence* (*Il fiore del silenzio*), *Serenity* (*Serenità*), *The Burning Myrrh* (*Mentre brucia la mirra*), *The Night Fountain* (*La fontana notturna*), *The Swallow of Light* (*La rondine di luce*) from the collection *Poesie disperse e inedite* (1971), project the reader into an almost bucolic background which is characterised by intense colours and smells and by feelings of love and affection towards someone who is never named but strongly present.

The scent of an orange blossom, an enchanted night fountain,
when sleep escapes me
I call you with the names of most delicate flowers [...]

I left two kisses on your orchid body,
they looked like two little flowers
like those which grow at the roadside,
so small, suffering the cold,
and outside the dappled sky bore my fever

and I thought I was happy.

Profumo di zagara chiusa, fontana notturna d'incanti,
io ti chiamo coi nomi dei fiori più fragili [...]

Lasciai due baci sul tuo corpo d'orchidea,
che a me parvero due margheritine,
di quelle che stanno sui lembi delle strade
e sono piccole piccole ed hanno tanto freddo,
e fuori, il cielo a macchie scure e bianche come una pernice
aveva la febbre, e io credevo d'essere felice¹³.

Tom Paulin's readings of Montale's poems are altogether a different kind of translation. *The Coastguard Station*, for instance, results in a series of contents and forms which are only loosely related to the source text. This was done to address his personal view of contemporary Northern Ireland. Besides, Paulin (1949-), who devoted special attention to the question of language, indicated

Hiberno-English as the language that had to be used in poetry so that poetry itself could speak about and be located within the cultural and political context of Northern Ireland¹⁴. *La casa dei doganieri*, from the fourth part of the collection *Le occasioni* (1939), dwells upon the themes of ‘occasions’. These are moments of sudden revelations, allowing one to better perceive reality. Through vivid and bizarre images, they are able to evoke solemn and almost religious moments. The melancholy tone of the poem achieved through the slow rhythm given by syntactical and metrical pauses and by a bare vocabulary, is complementary to its elegiac dimension, vacillating between the sadness of remembering lost love and lamentation for time gone by. By looking at the coastguard station, the poet recalls the anxiety he felt the day he had to meet a woman:

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Tu non ricordi la casa dei doganieri sul rialzo a strapiombo sulla scogliera: desolata t'attende dalla sera in cui v'entrò lo sciame dei tuoi pensieri e vi sostò irrequieto [...]</p> | <p>Henry Snodden and me we've nearly forgotten that scraggy coastguard station – a ruin from the Black and Tan war it stood on Tim Ring's hill above the harbour like an empty a crude roofless barracks - same as the station in Teelin or Carrick [...]</p> |
|---|---|

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Ne tengo un capo; ma tu resti sola né qui respiri nell'oscurità. Oh l'orizzonte in fuga, dove s'accende rara la luce della petroliera! Il varco è qui? (Ripullula il frangente ancora sulla balza che scoscende...).Tu non ricordi la casa di questa mia sera. Ed io non so chi va e chi resta.</p> | <p>then we'll watch as a new little colony of thatched breezeblock cottages – Irish Holiday Homes with green plastic oilgas tanks at the back – as a new colony starts up all owned by people like us from Belfast who've at last laid that claggy building's ghost well I wouldn't go as far as that¹⁵.</p> |
|--|---|

What strikes one at a first reading is Tom Paulin's re-contextualization of the poem into an-all Northern Irish background. This is achieved by referring to specific Irish names and place names like «Henry Snodden», «Black and Tan», «Tim Ring», «Teeling», «Carrick», «Irish holiday homes», «people like us from Belfast» and by using Hiberno-English words like «scraggy» and «claggy». The couple from the source text immediately is replaced by two male figures that find themselves in a place that bears the burden of history and that, in spite of everything, hints at a possibility of renewal which is faintly supported by the final line «well I wouldn't go as far as that», which asserts the need to stop remembering and to stop writing.

Another Irish poet living abroad, Derek Mahon (1941-) embarked on the translation of the same poem as well as of some other poems by Italian and French authors. As one immediately notices, there is no equivalence between the stanzas, no intention to remain faithful to the source text¹⁶, instead, a way of experimenting with new styles.

You never think of it, that coastguard house
 where a sheer cliff drops to a rocky
 shore below; desolate now,
 it waits for you since the night
 your thoughts swarmed there
 like moths and paused uncertainly.
 I clutch an end of it, but the house recedes
 and the smoke-black weathervane
 on the roof spins inexorably.
 I clutch an end of it,
 but you're out of reach
 and you don't breathe here in the dark.
 Sometimes a tanker in the sunset lights
 the horizon where it withdraws
 at the point of no return.
 Breakers crash on the cliff-face
 but you don't recall the house
 I recall tonight
 not knowing who comes or goes¹⁷.

The position of the speaking voice, ideally and nostalgically detached, in a house up on a cliff, seems to correspond to the position preferred by the Irish poet who observes the world as if through a window. From there he is able to observe, analyse and write his own way of interpreting Otherness and the Other.

Mahon immediately addresses himself to the other person. Adding the adverb «never» and changing the original idea of «remembering» into that of merely «thinking», he gives the impression that there is no room for continuity even though it seems as if the woman is part of the poet's present. The past, no longer explored, projects the author into the future, into a landscape which is also that of a desolate Northern Irish beach, almost a symbolically cosmic place which gives voice to a metaphysical pain. The translation seems to be characterised by Irishisms, more enjambements than in the original and a more discursive tone which renders the elegy of the last stanza more prosaic. Such an interpretation of the Italian poem is only part of a whole process of manipulation where intertextuality allows Mahon to draw from Italian culture: an evidence of this are the poems he wrote after Michelangelo; after Ariosto (*Night and Day*); after Saba (*A Siren*) and in some way after and about Pasolini (*Roman Script*)¹⁸. The wide range of intertexts, the strong interest for the sense of place – which is often represented by copious topographical details – and his constant desire to move out, to escape, which moulds his writing, allow him to move from his homeland to elsewhere as in *A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford* in which the Irish setting finally gives way to the image of the people of Pompeii.

Interpreting one's own history, one's own sense of belonging and one's identity through contact with other cultures is also what one other Irish poet, Paul Muldoon (1951-) does. Like Mahon's, Muldoon's poetry features acts of transition between Ireland and elsewhere. It appropriates and recounts the poet's own experience both in Ireland and abroad and does so by suggesting rather than overtly describing, by evoking rather than explicitly saying. Recurring to new poetic forms – from the long sonnet to rhymes and assonances – attributing new meanings to traditional words, indulging in riddles, conditionals and subjunctives all help Muldoon to question the conventional use of language and, through that, the supposed certainties of ordinary life.

The *Eel* (2002) is part of a collection of poems – the winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 2003 – which range from personal experiences both in Co. Armagh and in New Jersey, to translations and interpretations such as that of Yeats's *A Prayer for my Daughter* (1921). It is adapted from Montale's *L'anguilla*:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| L'anguilla, la sirena [...] | The self-same, the siren [...] |
| per giungere ai nostri mari, | to hang out in our seas, |
| ai nostri estuari, ai fiumi [...] | our inlets, the rivers [...] |
| di ramo in ramo e poi | against |
| di capello in capello, assottigliati, | the flow, from branch to branch, then |
| sempre più addentro, sempre più nel | from capillary to snagged capillary, |
| cuore | farther and farther in, deeper and |
| del macigno, filtrando | deeper into the heart ¹⁹ |

The poem, an expanded sequel to *The Briefcase* (1990), which had been written in response to Heaney's *Lough Neagh Sequence* (1969) – which was dedicated to Muldoon – where a case turns into an eel, is made of a list of objects and nouns. Such a recurring motif in Muldoon's poetry reinforces the idea of a continuous, mellifluous movement. While reading the target text, one has the feeling that the poet/translator's precise aim was to confuse, to disarray, to look at things in a different way:

I want my own vision to be disturbed, I want never to be able to look at a hedgehog again or a ... briefcase again – or at least the poem wants me never to be able to look at a hedgehog or a briefcase again – without seeing them in a different way²⁰.

In Muldoon's translation, the eel is not only a sexual animal but also a political one that returns to the recognisable British «green and pleasant spawning ground» and that has a «green soul» seeking life when «desolation» prevails:

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| l'anima verde che cerca | a green soul scouting and scanning |
| vita là dove solo | for life where only |
| morde l'arsura e la desolazione | drought and desolation have hitherto clamped down ²¹ |

When responding to the work of Leopardi the value of life is asserted by some of the one hundred and six Irish poets who were asked to read and interpret or simply refer to the Italian writer's work put together by Marco Sorzogni and published on the occasion of the two hundredth anniversary of the Italian poet's birth, *Or volge l'anno. At the Year's Turning* (1998) is an interesting volume in that it offers a wide range of readings of Leopardi's work. From faithfully translating to using some of Leopardi's stylistic features while disregarding the content; from imitating to commenting the poems themselves; from introducing elements of strangeness to employing specific Hiberno-English features; from conveying a general idea of the poem to distancing themselves from the source text, the Irish poets communicate their own concerns and feelings.

Two interesting versions of Leopardi's *La quiete dopo la tempesta* are provided by *After Leopardi's Storm* (1998) written by poet and TCD professor Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin (1942-), and by *The Calm After the Storm* (1997) written by Eamon Grennan (1941-)²². The first one is given here:

| | |
|---|--|
| Passata è la tempesta; | The sky clears, and at the top of the street |
| Odo augelli far festa, e la gallina, | I can hear the hen giving out her litany, |
| Tornata in su la via | The stream bounding down the slope |
| Che ripete il suo verso. Ecco il sereno | In its tunnel of broom. |
| Rompe là da ponente, alla montagna [...] | The lacemaker |
| L'artigiano a mirar l'umido cielo, | Stands at her window singing, |
| Con l'opra in man, cantando, | Her work still in her hand: a huge ruffle |
| Fassi in su l'uscio; a prova | Wavering its fins in the watery breeze ²³ . |
| Vien fuor la femminetta a còr dell'acqua. | |

The partial rendering of the content of the original text offered by Ní Chuilleanáin's version only maintains some lines randomly selected: from the image of the sky clearing – where there is neither mention of the storm nor of the birds chirping – to the coming out of the hen and on to the description of the river.

What is most interesting is that she draws the reader's attention by feminizing the protagonist of lines 11-12: «l'artigiano a mirar l'umido cielo» is turned into someone who makes lace and who also participates in the activity – as the repetitive use of the personal pronoun «her» designates – originally assigned to another character, «femminetta», that is, gathering rainwater.

Ní Chuilleanáin's poem then distances itself from the source text by asserting a female voice contemplating and trying to describe the landscape²⁴.

Harry Clifton's (1952-) oblique interpretation of Leopardi's *Il sabato del villaggio* which he gives in *The Dead of Poggio* is well anchored to the Italian reality. Like Leopardi's poem, it portrays the village people who dress up for the Sunday church ceremonies and walk up and down along the same streets. The poem is also about those who pay their respects to their dead and give presents to their children the day after. It is also about those who – like the

Irish – were forced to leave for America to make a living and about those who, one day, will be dead themselves. Thus, although loosely based on Leopardi, it is an independent poem with an Italian topos and setting:

Because there's no soil
 To bury them, the dead
 Are stacked above Poggio
 In honeycombed vaults
 Of an afternoon, I pause
 Among the plastic flowers
 And photographs – the dead
 Dressed in their Sunday clothes,

As if eternity
 Were a country dance
 They were going to²⁵.

1.3

More translations

All I wish to do is bring my Ireland into the greater Europe and bring that greater Europe into Ireland.

Desmond O'Grady

This is what the Irish poet Desmond O'Grady (1935-) wrote by way of introduction to his volume of translations²⁶. In 1957 O'Grady settled in Rome where he attended many literary and cultural events, worked on translating film scripts and broadcasting the news on Vatican Radio. As a Catholic Irishman, it was inevitable for him to be interested in Catholicism and to turn to the Vatican City as an ideal place not only where to live in but also to learn more about religion and eventually experience a different kind of religiosity.

For many years he devoted himself to both translation theory and practice. He believed that translating was a very personal experience which was born out of interest and which told a lot about his own writing experience:

When you read a translation of mine, I'm immediately recognisable in every poem I've translated. [...] When the language itself dictates to you, then you must obey. And you must obey in such a way that you can match the language as best you can. You stand or fall on that. But there are occasions when the language itself provokes interpretation and provokes what is the poet in you.

Having been criticised for having lost sight of poetry, O'Grady believed in the strong interrelationship between the act of writing poetry and the act of translating a poem, both informing each other and supporting the necessity to draw from western cultures:

When not writing my own poems I translate the poets who interest me [...] Now my writing pattern was to translate when not writing poems of my own [...] Translating poems helped me not only to get to know the work of the poets more intimately but also their languages and therefore their cultures. It has broadened and deepened my reading, sharpened my awareness, refined my sensibility – enriched me. It has shown me ways to give expression in my own poems to experiences I might not have done otherwise so that my poems and my translations inform each other. It keeps me in a prosodic and “creative” state of mind, active with the purpose of language and has given me sharper focus in my own writing²⁷.

His volume contains a good number of translations into English from such diverse languages as Greek, Arabic, Welsh, Irish, Chinese and Italian. Translating gave O’Grady the opportunity to work on the language he was still learning, i.e. Italian and through it, to become more and more familiar with its linguistic features. As a PhD student of Comparative Literature at Harvard, he insisted on the necessity of constant and mutual exchanges between Italian and Irish culture. He wanted, as he stated, to bring Ireland to Europe and bring Europe to Ireland. To this purpose he provided biographical information on the Italian authors themselves²⁸ before each set of translations and seemed to prefer those poems which described Italian places, like Umberto Saba’s poems *Milan*, *Turin*, *Florence*, *Old city (Città vecchia)* and told about emotional conflicts and stories of exile.

Evidence of this is provided by the choice of such poems as *Sera di Liguria (Ligurian Evening)*, *Sera di Gavinana (Gavinana Evening)* by Vincenzo Cardarelli (1887-1959):

Sera di Gavinana

Ecco la sera e spiove
sul toscano Appennino
Con lo scender che fa le nubi a valle,
prese a lembi qua e là
come ragne fra gli alberi intricate,
si colorano i monti di viola.
Per chi s’affanna il giorno
ed in se stesso, incredulo, si torce.
Viene dai borghi [...]
un vociar lieto e folto in cui si sente
il giorno che declina
e il riposo imminente.

Gavinana Evening

Here comes the evening and the rain stops
on the Tuscan Apennine.
With the descent of cloud on the valley,
caught here and there at the hedges
like cobwebs entwined among the trees,
the hills colour violet.
It’s pleasant to wander,
for those whom the day upsets
and for him [...]
From the villages, stirring here below,
comes the merry and busy sound
of this declining day
and imminent repose²⁹.

A look at the poem and its translation underlines the need for O’Grady to modify both the form and the content of the poem in order to make it more understandable to the English reader. He does convey the general at-

mosphere of the poem and avoids explaining the meaning of each line. Poems like this one seem to have inspired O'Grady when writing poems about his sojourn in Rome, about Rome as a place to visit and, above all, to describe as in *At Home in Rome, Return to Rome, Trastevere House, 10 Piazza Campitelli*. In the same way O'Grady's *Roman Autumn* can be compared to Cardarelli's *Autunno* where the author complains about «the best time of our life», i.e. «il miglior tempo della nostra vita»³⁰ that is gone. Celebrating the beauty of a city in both texts leads the way to the admiration for a woman and for Italian natural landscapes.

Another collection of translations by the Irish writer Pearse Hutchinson (1927-) devotes some room to Italian poems he selected from the volume *Le parole di legno. Poesia in dialetto del 900 italiano*³¹. From Giacomo Noventa's *What's beyond... (Cossa ghe xé, pare mio)* to Amedeo Giacomini's *Mad Toni (Pazzo Toni)*, the Italian texts seem to share the use of dialect and such themes as loneliness, the incapacity to fully understand oneself and the need to change one's life.

2

Notes on Travel Writing on Italy

Translating a language inevitably means translating atmospheres, translating places. Since the eighteenth century, Italy has been one of the favourite destinations of Irish travellers. Its artistic heritage and its natural beauties have been revisited and re-interpreted in many different ways.

My attempt at finding links between Italian and Irish culture has obviously been complemented by the necessity to study the role played by Italians within Irish society and by the Irish within Italian society. Commercial links between the two countries already existed during the thirteenth century. The presence of Irish monks in Italy is attested during the ninth century while Italian bankers and merchants played an important role in the development of the Irish economic situation during the twelfth and thirteenth century. After the Renaissance, Italy's image in England seemed to decline with inevitable consequences in Ireland too, where Italian influence was somehow superseded by that of France. Irish travellers, though, continued to choose Italy as one of their favourite destinations. Oliver Goldsmith (1730-1774) was one of them. He visited Italy on his long Grand Tour in 1755-56. He went to Piedmont, Florence, Verona, Mantua, Milan, Venice and Padua, where he stayed for six months. It took him nine years to write a long poem on his grand tour, *The Traveller: or a Prospect of Society: A Poem*, published in London in 1764³².

Italy was the place where Lady Morgan (Sydney Owenson, 1776-1859), one of the most important writers of the beginning of the nineteenth century in Ireland, travelled a lot with her husband and frequented the most important circles. Her interest in Italy – which led to a two-volume travel book entitled

Italy and to the 1824 *The Times and Life of Salvator Rosa*³³, is well outlined by Mary Campbell's interesting study *Lady Morgan. The Life and Times of Sydney Owenson*³⁴ and by two more extensive and recent works by Donatella Abbate Badin, *Lady Morgan's Italy: Anglo-Irish Sensibilities and Italian Realities* and *Un'irlandese a Torino: Lady Morgan*³⁵.

«Il Bel Paese» was also the place where Charles Lever (1806-1872) spent lengthy periods. In 1847 he settled in Florence, later he moved to La Spezia, and in 1867 to Trieste, where he was named a Consul of the British government. He died in Trieste on May 31, 1872. His Italian sojourn is dealt with extensively in Lionel Stevenson's biography, *The Life of Charles Lever*, published by Chapman in 1939³⁶. The same could be said of Thomas Moore (1779-1852), another Irish tourist in Italy, whose cultural and literary impressions are documented in *The Journal of Thomas Moore* and in *Travels of an Irish Gentleman in Search of a Religion* as well as by the poems contained in *Rhymes on the Road* and in *Fables of the Holy Alliance* (1820)³⁷.

The Irish philosopher George Berkeley (1685-1753) travelled quite a lot in Italy. In 1714 he was in Turin, Genoa, Pisa, Lucca and Florence. From 1716 to 1720 he visited many Italian cities for the second time and reached southern places like Rome, Naples and Sicily. Berkeley was a subtle observer of Italian society as were Sean O'Faolain (1900-1991) and his daughter Julia O'Faolain (1932-), who wrote a book, published only in Italian, about the Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti³⁸. The Cork writer, who is well remembered for his short stories, wrote two travel accounts *Summer in Italy* (1949) and *South to Sicily* (1953), in which he examines aspects of Italian culture by indulging in aesthetic reflections and by falling into historical and sociological digressions. How do Italians live their relationship with art, religion and history? Is it possible to find some analogies between the way Italians and Irish behave? What suggestions are offered by Italy to narrow-minded Irish society, in which a censorship law forbids the free circulation of ideas and the power of the Church slows all kind of revitalization? O'Faolain believed that the only way to find his answers to Irish problems was to look at Ireland from an external perspective, that is of Italy and of Italians in general, with their customs, beliefs and habits³⁹. When visiting Italy, O'Faolain did indeed follow in the footsteps of a man quite important for Irish Catholics, the theologian John Henry Newman (1801-1890) who had toured through Italy almost a century before.

It is difficult to do so when dealing with the work of Sean O'Faolain. He was indeed meticulous in describing what he observed and experienced. A perfect visitor, in his view, is someone who is able to distance himself/herself from what he is observing – while grasping its qualities as well as its limits – and who can fully appreciate the work of art:

Those faces of madonnas that we find so unearthly when we look at them in London or Paris seem so because our habit of regarding all religious painting as un-

earthly in its subject prevents us from seeing that it is entirely earthly in its models [...] because we are unfamiliar with their reality⁴⁰.

Apart from his two major travel accounts on Italy, O'Faolain also sets some of his short stories there. Though a great lover of Italian painting, he devotes much time to historical and sociological issues. In a volume devoted to the Irish short story writer's voyages through Italy, Marie Arndt claims that O'Faolain was actually looking for a kind of more liberal society where he could express himself better: «He had the notion that Italians, as opposed to the Irish, were able to embrace Catholicism without moral restrictions»⁴¹.

Walter Starkie (1894-1976), director of the Abbey Theatre for seventeen years, became most known for his wanderings through Spain and Italy. In order to learn more about Italian musical traditions, he brought his violin with him and happened to play music with people he met in the streets. Many of his writings among which is *The Waveless Plain. An Italian Autobiography*⁴², recount the various experiences he had had while in Italy almost twenty years before and testify to his interest in historic and literary sources as when he quotes from Verga's and Pirandello's books in order to draw the reader's attention to the reality he finds himself in⁴³.

Another Irish traveller who visited Italy in the 1950s was Elizabeth Bowen (1899-1973), author of a singular travel-book entitled *A Time in Rome* (1960). A three-month stay in the Eternal City was the source for a book which seems too impressionistic to be a successful one and too heavily intertextual to be considered original. Besides, Bowen herself – who was O'Faolain's lover – was not an accurate observer when it came to describing people and atmospheres, customs and places instead of statues and monuments which give her every opportunity to heavily rely on other texts and to consistently dwell on descriptions of events from the past. She spends little time writing about her feelings, about personal anecdotes, about meeting people she sees. Very rarely are there occasions like the following one provided by a conversation with a local:

People I met in Rome legitimately wanted to know what I was doing. Writing something? – Not while I was here.

– No, really? – Pity to stay indoors. – Sightseeing, simply? – Partly. – Ah, gathering background for a novel to be set in Rome! – No – No?

Then I did not care for antiquity? Not in the abstract. What did I see in Rome, then? [...] But what did I like about Rome? – It was substantial. – And? – Agreeable. – Once, or now? – Altogether. – Agreeable was hardly the word for history [...] Oh? Oh, yes! Attempts to write about Rome made writers rhetorical, platitudinous, abstract, ornate, theoretical, polysyllabis, pompous, furious⁴⁴.

Rome is then too ancient to 'appeal' to her and writing about it too unimaginative. Rome cannot provide her with useful material for her creative writing activity:

The idea of putting Rome into a novel not only did not attract me, it shocked me – *background*, for heaven's sake! The thing was a major character, out of scale with any fictitious cast. Other novelists had not felt this, and evidently (where they were concerned) rightly; their books were triumphs – if triumphs, also, over difficulties they had not had. For me, there was pointblank impossibility; not because I did not believe in art but because I did. There are two kinds of reality, which are incompatibles. Here in the spectacle of Rome was the story – and enough. A story to be picked up fragmentarily, humbly, and at heaven knew how many removes or at which points and in what order. The omissions probably would be the most telling. The fabric tattered away in parts, was people's existences and their doings⁴⁵.

Rome is the setting for two short stories, namely, *The Storm* and *The Secession*. It is the latter that gives her a literary equivalent of herself as depicted in the just mentioned description: one character named Miss Selby, seems highly autobiographical also in her attitude to the city. Miss Selby is a very reserved lady who sleeps in a *pensione* in Rome. The short story then also gives the narrator the opportunity to describe a little bit of Rome, starting from Piazza Barberini which is close to the place where the protagonist is staying. «Seen in any light», the English lady recorded in her diary, «the Roman streets are very mysterious and seen from above [...] the roofs and gardens of Rome are scarcely less so». Rome is also the city «from a long blade of hills behind the Vatican that would rise to cut away the brightness»⁴⁶.

There is no significant sign that the trip to Rome and, more generically speaking, the trip to Italy influenced Bowen insofar as her writing is concerned. If we look at her literary production, besides the two Roman short stories already mentioned, we find very few other short stories generally set in Italy. From *Requiescat*, set close to Lake Como but with details about Italy itself, depicted with cypresses and lemon trees to *Mrs Windermere*, vaguely referring to Italy and to some Italian friends the protagonist remembers, to *The Contessina*⁴⁷, the first Italian character who is given a significant role to play, we find very few examples⁴⁸.

No special encounter has occurred during her stay that has profoundly changed her view about Italy and Italians or her sense of identity. Nor does she give us specific reasons for undertaking this journey: no need to change from daily duties or anything similar; no curiosity to find, to praise the 'difference', the 'Other' and present it as more authentic.

There is obviously a difference between 'traditional' travel accounts and more recent books which are halfway between fiction and travelogues. Italy has changed in the imagination of Irish people and of Irish writers. Books like Monk Gibbon's (1896-1987) *Mount Ida* (1948) and Harry Clifton's *On the Spine to Italy* share though the common desire to show Italy as the prototype of the country where experience of oneself is accomplished through the encounter with the Other.

The Dead of Poggio is one of few poems contained in Harry Clifton's travel book, *On the Spine of Italy. A Year in Abruzzi*, published in 1999. The book,

while mostly set in a small village in the Abruzzo mountains, also explores other local realities in Italy, such as Perugia and Bologna. An account of the author's life within a specific community, while offering an insight into the changes occurring at a particular time, that is the events that took place before the collapse of the Political Left in 1989, the text describes the beauties of the surrounding nature and, in particular, of the native place of the Italian writer Ignazio Silone. It is the work of the local novelist, exiled in Switzerland during the 1930s that interested Clifton most. *Fontamara* (1930) and *Bread and Wine* (1936), while denouncing fascism, portray the unchanged realities of the never named village. Fascinated by the idea of visiting Silone's birthplace, Clifton goes south to Pescina de' Marsi and the plain of Fucino, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of his death:

Across this valley floor his village women had long ago marched in the heat to the district town to protest at the diverting of their water supply, to be laughed at by the government clerks, and provoked by the fascist gangs. The sour local wine, the half an onion the boy in *Fontamara* takes as food on the train to Rome to look for a job, grew on these barren slopes. The modern road signs – Sulmona to the south, Avezzano to the west, to the north L'Aquila – defined the geography of the novels⁴⁹.

In a mountain village half-proud, half-ashamed of its fascist architecture; in a region where many still bear the name Benito, where the church walls are scrawled with neo-fascist slogans, it is inevitable for Clifton to turn to Silone's works:

As a young communist in the Twenties, he had seen the boys of his own village strutting about in Black shirts. His family had had murder and torture visited upon it. In the Thirties, he had been forced into exile in Switzerland. There he had lived out of the dark spasm of the war years, writing the novels of Abruzzo mountain life which, when published openly in Italy after the war, made him synonymous with the ideals of the new left, the renewal of Italian political life that was to be disillusioned in the decades which followed. By an upstairs window, we read *Fontamara* and *Bread and Wine*. Outside we could see the realities of village life, unchanged since Silone had represented them fifty years ago⁵⁰.

An intellectual who fought against fascism, who was forced to emigrate and see his books first published in other languages in other countries, Silone in some way seems to share the condition of many 1950s and 1960s Irish writers whose works were subjected to strict censorship laws; whose destiny was to find more readers and better publishing opportunities in other countries.

As a writer who only some years ago decided to settle in Dublin with his wife, the novelist Deirdre Madden, after a long time spent in Europe, Africa and the United States, Clifton is used to looking from a different perspective: that of the eternal traveller who never settles and who never feels at home. Even the small Italian village he and his wife settled in during the summer before

now looks foreign to him. As time passes, with the coming of summer, with its heat and the return of emigrants, his perception of the place is modified by the feeling that his stay is almost at an end. The room where he has spent many afternoons writing, now looks a mere place of inanimate objects: «As I closed the door on it for the last time, I thought how only now, when I was deserting it, had it come to embody what I had wished for my own mind all along – an ideal of pure emptiness, pure receptivity»⁵¹. The village itself becomes representative of any little village he has seen in Europe, in the world:

Today Dublin, tomorrow Paris or Rome –
And the blur of cities
Is one City, simultaneous,
Eternal, from which we are exiled forever

And I say to you, 'Let us make a home
In ourselves, in each other'⁵².

On the Spine of Italy is indeed an account of a journey into another land with its own culture, with its prejudices, stereotypes and perceptions of some kind. But it also shows us the way in which Clifton relates to the Italian Otherness and comes to modify and define himself, his sense of Irishness and being in the world. Though always starting from the evocation of a place, Clifton's work tends to drop in cultural generalisations.

The book is also a representation of the way in which Clifton relates to a past which is not experienced but which is, though from a distance, all the more felt and shared by him, an Irishman who has let «a socialist with no party and a Catholic with no Church»⁵³ as Silone once defined himself, give voice to his sense of civil and political participation in a world at a time of changes⁵⁴.

The travel-book, if one wants to apply such a definition to Clifton's text, allows him to distance himself from the undisturbed provincial Irish society unshaken by or apparently unaware of what was happening in Europe, be it the rise of Fascism or of Soviet Communism.

3

Visual Arts and Literature

Dante could safely plead that no human pen
can truly describe what human eyes have never seen
and then promise to do his human best:
but here, where millions like me have been
worshippers or wondering sightseers, the poet is set
a task more mundane, yet more daunting, a theme
For which human speech is found to be
inadequate, not because poetry lags behind

these visual arts – all are necessary to reveal
the spiritual in our nature – but because the mind
acknowledges that this temple does not need
mere words: its hymn is of its own kind.

Cristoir O'Flynn

The question of the relationship between visual arts and religiosity is indeed at the core of some Irish writers' experience while in Italy. Among all the tourists who visit the largest artistic heritage in the world, many are Irish writers. Their work becomes an important expression of its beauties, of their individual fruition; it becomes a privileged ground for the exploration of the process of artistic creation; of its modes of being, of its national peculiarities; of its literary genres and changes in time as well as of every single writer's personal growth. Sometimes, the references to the artistic legacy of Italian cities recur so often as to give shape to the thematic network of the work itself.

Such references give writers the chance to reflect upon the origin and the significance of artistic forms and their interaction. By so doing, they also help readers to better understand the reasons and the forms of those writings: how does the transposition of a verbal enunciation into an iconic representation take place? What do we lose and what do we gain from this? What is there left of the original Italian work of art and in what way is it absorbed by the copy? The analysis of such questions imposes itself as necessary if one wants to understand the nature of the relationship between Italian visual arts and Anglo-Irish Literature.

3.1

Frank McGuinness as interpreter of Caravaggio

And yet you know, there is something very strange in this: that Ireland isn't a Christian country at all. What I like about Ireland is that just below this crust of Catholicism it is pure paganism.

Deirdre Madden

Some of the Irish writers seem to indulge in the often felt preoccupation of defining the religious nature of an object of art observed by the viewer in relation to the kind of religion professed in Italy and above all to their own notions of the 'sacred'. By becoming a reflection of reality, art almost paradoxically seems to lose its function, its purely sacred message.

It is not a coincidence then that Italy comes to represent a possibility of embracing a more liberal form of religiosity against the moral restrictions of Catholic Ireland.

It was probably during his visits to Italy that the Irish playwright Frank McGuinness (1953-) became interested in the work of the Italian painter Michelangelo Merisi, i.e. Caravaggio. «The most disruptive and experimental

of contemporary Irish dramatists» as he once was defined, not accidentally chose as protagonist of his play, *Innocence. The Life and Death of Michelangelo Merisi, Caravaggio*⁵⁵, a man who became famous for his works of art and for his rebellious life. Andrea McTigue sharply compares McGuinness's work and Michael Straight's *Caravaggio*. The work could also be examined in conjunction with Derek Jarman's film, *Caravaggio*. Both might have been inspired by Caravaggio's supposed homosexuality. The play, which caused a sensation, was criticised for being «shocking gay blasphemy» and for embracing «nudity, eroticised horseplay involving a cardinal and two boy prostitutes and much violent language»⁵⁶. The play is set in Rome on a specific day, that is when Caravaggio killed Ranuccio Tomassoni, in May 1606. McGuinness introduces the characters through the means of a dream and divides the play into two parts: the more public «Life» and the more private «Death». The images that appear in the dream are similar to the ones of Caravaggio's paintings: the skull appears in paintings like *Saint Francis in Meditation*, *Saint Francis in Prayer* and *Saint Jerome in Meditation*. In the same way, a decapitated head is in *David and Goliath* and *Salome with the Head of John the Baptist*. A red cloak appears in works such as *Madonna of the Rosary*, *Mary Magdalene in Ecstasy*, *Saint John the Baptist*, *Judith Beheading Holofernes* and *Death of the Virgin*. Lucio remembers how Caravaggio dressed him like a tree and with bunches of grapes and called him Bacco. In the same way the drowned Whore refers back to *Death of the Virgin*; the red cloak caressed by Lena evokes *Mary Magdalene*; Antonio is portrayed like *Boy with a Basket of Fruit*. Details of his life – his meeting with his brother who begs him to go back home, his looking for two male prostitutes, Lucio and Antonio, then mix with hints at his artistic production. The end of the first act introduces us to Tomassoni's killing which happens off stage: Caravaggio returns to Lena's brothel and has a heated conversation with her. Another dream follows: that of his sister Caterina, the Cardinal and his servant, Lucio, Antonio and the Whore. When he wakes up, Lena invites him to leave. The play ends with a *tableau vivant*, the one of the painting *Saint John the Baptist*. McGuinness presents Caravaggio like an artist who, though sent by God, is damned. His artistic creativity stands in neat contrast with his destructive impulses and with the committed crime. His brother criticises his art as he sees in it the hand of a drunken man: «Badly. It's as if you're asleep. All in the dark. A drunk man imagining in his dreams. Who listens to a drunk roaring?»⁵⁷. The connection between Caravaggio's passionate life and his paintings is made explicit by McGuinness himself when he states that only by knowing about Caravaggio's life and thoughts we better understand his works. Though the playwright makes the characters live through art, their salvation is anchored in reality, hence is only temporary. Paintings are never commented on, nor do we see Caravaggio painting them. McGuinness's interest in visual arts does not limit itself to this work but also involves some poems from the collection *Booterstown*⁵⁸ and one of his most

recent plays, *Dolly West's Kitchen* (1999) where the mosaics he admired in Ravenna are remembered by one of the characters who lived in Italy, Dolly, who is now in Buncrana, Co. Donegal, where the play is set:

Dolly: Ma, you would have loved them. The colour, the life in them. When I looked up at the walls and ceilings, for the first time I knew what it was like to have breath taken out of your body at the beauty of what your eyes saw.

Rima: What did you see, daughter?

Dolly: A procession of men and women. They were white and blue and gold, walking towards their God, and it was the walking that was their glory, for that made them human, still in this life, this life that I believe in. I believe in Ravenna. I remember it. I came home to Ireland, so I could remember it – there would be one in this country who would not forget in case Ravenna is destroyed. I think it's my life's purpose to say I saw it⁵⁹.

In the history of the relationship between Irish and Italian culture, visual arts occupy a major role. Paintings and sculptures, above all, by Italian artists have influenced in one way or another Irish writers. It was in 1963 that Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin admired and was inspired by Correggio's frescoes in Parma Cathedral. The experience led to the writing of a poem which also commemorates her mother, now dead, *The Fireman's Lift*. Correggio's frescoes which depict the Assumption of the Virgin give the Irish poet the opportunity to picture through words the movement of the virgin, sustained by a crowd of angels running after the others. The virgin reminds her of her mother, who, in the late years of her life, was looked after by some nuns.

Defining the religious nature of art and the type of religiosity being practised in Italy is almost a constant theme of novelist Deirdre Madden's (1960-) works. Besides, during her long stay in Italy, she was able to visit many cities and appreciate many works of art. From *Hidden Symptoms* (1986) where some lines are devoted to a description of Bernini's columns to *Remembering Light and Stone* (1992), ekphrasis dominate the thematic network while introducing the reader to the Sistine Chapel and Saint Peter, to the Cathedral of Siena where Duccio's *Maestà* is, to the Byzantine Church in Torcello, to Mantegna's *The Agony in the Garden* (National Gallery, London). Through them she is able to question her sense of religion and ask herself about what looks to her as an ungraspable, unreachable and all-present power of Christianity, a feeling which is so strong as to give her nightmares:

I was thinking of the churches, all the churches where the raw power of Christianity could speak to me from the anguished face of a painted angel, over the roar of the traffic, in the heat of the night, as I lay there wrapped in a sheet, feeling the pulse of my own heart, and hearing the voice of a tormented angel scream down through the centuries to me⁶⁰.

The religious motif is undoubtedly an inheritance of the cultural and sociological background of Ireland of the 1960s and 1970s. In a country

where Catholicism was inevitably seen as the «majority creed», «a nationality as much as a religion [...] a matter of public identity rather than of private faith»⁶¹, which, up until a few years ago, determined each aspect of life, it was inevitable for Madden to assign to art the role of making religion more understandable. Art has taken the place of religion and it does so also to provide occasions for subject matters.

Ekphrases distinguish parts of Edna O'Brien's (1930-) novel *Time and Tide* (1992). Partly set in Italy, the book introduces us to a young Irish woman named Nell who goes to Italy with her two sons. Visiting Arezzo, the protagonist is enraptured with the image of Piero della Francesca's *La leggenda della Vera Croce: l'incontro della regina di Saba con Salomone*.

3.2

More about paintings

«You are High Renaissance. Parmigianino?» he suggested, looked at her all over. «No, it must be a Florentine. Domenico called Veneziano?» No! Pollaiuolo? Or why not Botticelli? The sloping shoulders, the distant look, the firm legs. That's it. As a matter of fact there is a girl very like you in the Villa Lemmi frescoes».

Sean O'Faolain

The Fisher Child (2001) by Philip Casey (1950-), poet and novelist, mainly deals with the work of the Italian painter Fra Angelico, at the Museo di San Marco, in Florence. From the *Annunciation* to the different cells where he painted the various scenes from Christ's life, *Noli Me Tangere*, *Recovery of Deacon Justinian* – where Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene – the *Transfiguration* and *Coronation of the Virgin*, the reader is almost constantly given details of works of art. On holiday in Florence, the architect Dan and his wife Kate, born in London of Irish parents, are assigned the specific role of unconsciously intertwining the truth of their lives with the events 'narrated' by the paintings. Beato Angelico's *The Annunciation* hung on the wall of their kitchen back in London induces Kate to meditate upon the meaning of divine motherhood and on her unexpected maternity. The painting will convince her that life is a gift of God:

“Just look at the depth of the field, and the symmetry and rhythm of those columns”, Dan said. “I never realised the angel's wings had those colours”. “I thought angels' wings were white”. “They're like a rainbow from another world”. She wasn't religious as such, but the fresco gave her a woman's sympathy for the Virgin. “She's like a convent girl”, she said. “Maybe she was”. “A young nun, do you mean? Look at the light from her bodice!” “You'd almost need sunglasses. It's coming from the angel, of course. She's like the moon, reflecting sunlight”. “That beautiful dark blue of the coat draped over her knees – and what shade of green is the lining? It's fainter than I thought”. “It's like what you find under old wallpaper”. “How could you say such a thing!” He shrugged. “Do you see the silica sparkling in the light from the

window? Just look at it from side on". "Oh yes!" Oh yes [...] This tiny detail, which she would have missed, transformed her identification with the fresco, flooding her with an excitement in which she forgot herself completely⁶².

In the same way, *Recovery of Deacon Justinian* anticipates the truth that will out to an observant look of one visitor like Dan: his wife conceives a black baby girl. Dan, convinced that he has been betrayed by her, decides to go back to Ireland to find out more about his past and about himself. There he will find out that one of his forefathers was black. The news helps him to overcome the suspicion about his wife's infidelity and to accept reality as it is.

More examples of ekphrasis are provided by passages from William Trevor's short stories and novels. In novels like *Other People's Worlds* (1980)⁶³ and in short stories such as *On the Zattere*, *Running Away*, *Cocktails at Doney's*, *Coffee with Oliver*, *After Rain* (1996), the novella *My House in Umbria* (1992), the England-based Trevor (1938-) explores apparently unknown places in Italy.

Italian visual arts have also influenced Irish poets. From William Butler Yeats to Paul Durcan – who was commissioned to write two collections of poems on some paintings hung at the National Galleries of London and of Dublin – from Eavan Boland to Derek Mahon, the colours, the portraits, the scenes of Parmigianino, Iacopo Vignali, Canaletto, Correggio and Paolo Uccello among others, are present, either directly or indirectly. Such paintings become the starting point from which visual arts are commented on, subjects are explored, described, presented to the contemporary reader.

4

Italian Music and Anglo-Irish Literature

The presence of a rich musical season made up of Italian operas and Italian opera singers could be traced by carefully examining Irish plays and novels. In James Joyce's *The Dead*, for instance, we learn about the Italian companies who used to go to Dublin and perform at the Theatre Royal, in Hawkins Street, now Screen Cinema in D'Olier Street. From 1827, in that theatre, the Irish public attended a good number of operas, from Ferdinando Paer's *Agnesi* to Rossini's *Tancredi*, *L'italiana in Algeri*, *Il turco in Italia*, *La gazza ladra*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*. This lasted with much success until 1871 when the Gaiety Theatre opened. As John Allen⁶⁴ writes in a volume about music in Ireland, the operas performed at the Gaiety were more or less the same as those staged at the Theatre Royal during the nineteenth century.

Two most notable examples of 'influence' of Italian music on Anglo-Irish literature and drama are Tom Murphy's *The Gigli Concert* (1983) and Jim Nolan's *The Salvage Shop* (1998). From Caruso, quoted in Joyce's novella, to Beniamino Gigli and Luciano Pavarotti, the voice of Italian tenors resonates within Anglo-Irish literature.

4.1

Tom Murphy's *The Gigli Concert*

It is thanks to Tom Murphy (1936-) that a tenor like Gigli has become famous at least among theatregoers and scholars of Irish drama. Gigli undoubtedly became a messenger of Italian culture abroad and contributed to the diffusion of the myth of the Italian tenor. He gave concerts in Ireland at different times in 1934, 1937, 1939, 1946, 1949 and in 1954 but was generally less known than Caruso. This was the reason why Murphy chose him to give voice to his character's dramatic vicissitudes. Murphy was eighteen when Gigli went to sing in Ireland for the first time. It was his voice that he sometimes heard on the radio during his youth spent in Tuam:

But I had heard Gigli when I was growing up as a boy and I thought his voice was very beautiful and I think that if you talk about great singers you have to think about Italians [...] when we talk about opera for the general public that has to be [...] with La Scala, Italy in general. But, mainly, I think quality, the type of voice that Gigli had⁶⁵.

Murphy chose eleven excerpts from operas, recitals sung by Gigli and used them as preludes and in between the various acts of each scene: from *O'Paradiso* to *Tu che a Dio spiegasti l'ali* to *Lucia De Lammermoor*, to name just a few.

The Irish Man is obsessed by the idea of singing like Gigli. To be helped in overcoming such a difficult moment of his life, he stops to see a dynamotologist, JPW, who lives in his studio. While trying to convince him that he will make him sing like Gigli, JPW listens to his story. An overlapping of identities makes the understanding more difficult: the Irish Man starts telling details of the tenor's life as if they were his own. He is certainly a weak person who often gets depressed and when he does, he is each time overcome by strange fixations. In the meantime it is JPW who convinces himself that he will reach his goal. He documents himself by listening to a CD all night and once learnt the cues by heart, he even tries to sing like him.

Gigli's *Memoirs* play an important role in the making of the play. Some of the Irish Man's lines are quoted from the English translation of Gigli's *Memorie*. The information quoted does not integrate with the rest of the script: the story the Irish Man tells is not his. There is a literal transposition of its contents. The script reads:

IRISH MAN I was born with a voice and nothing else. We were very poor.

JPW What did your father do?

IRISH MAN A cobbler

JPW Making or mending them? It could be significant.

IRISH MAN He started by making them but factory-made shoes soon put paid to that.

Which is almost the same as the following passage from *Memoirs*:

I was born with a voice and very little else: no money, no influence, no other talents. Had it not been for the peculiar formation of my vocal cords, I should probably at this moment be planning tables or sewing trousers, or mending shoes as my father did, in the little Italian station town of Recanati where I was born on March 20th, 1890⁶⁶.

Murphy gives authority to Gigli's voice, to his written voice and with many details he gives his account of the way he first played the role of Angelica in an operetta in Macerata. JPW keeps asking him questions about his life and he does so to justify the narration itself of the tale.

The superimposition of details from two people's lives and the resulting confusion reaches its climax when the Irish Man states that he gave up his job and shortly after that he had come to this country. Which country is he talking about? It's only going back to Gigli's *Memoirs* that the audience can find further interesting details about the tenor's life. Not providing any reference to a bad relationship with his brother, the autobiographical account of his childhood confirms the Irish Man's inability to identify with an identity which is other in a credible way. By scene four JPW and the Irish Man have become almost friends and their roles are paradoxically inverted by the playwright. With a glass of vodka, sitting around the record-player as if «around a fire»⁶⁷, the Irish Man continues the story of Gigli and his falling in love with Ida. Words give voice to a dialogic orientation which is at the core of the play itself. Language becomes the ground for social and cultural contradictions which lead to a misunderstanding of the content of the play itself when at the end it is JPW who sings like Gigli and not the Irish Man.

Whereas at the beginning the playwright shares a feeling for the truth with us as audience – we know he is talking about someone else's life, he is not expecting us to know about Gigli's life nor the meaning of the arias – he then deceives us by making JPW sing like the Italian tenor. He expects us to believe he is singing like Gigli. How do we interpret *The Gigli Concert's* final scene then? Is it JPW who has finally taken a step forward and been able to sing like Gigli, or do we have to accept it as an illusion? Stage directions clearly specify that he is singing but on the stage he's miming the act of singing.

Tom Murphy leaves us with an open ending by way of a number of misunderstandings. He enacts a mere piece of fiction within fiction; he asks us to believe in the impossible, in magic.

He thus answers to my objections:

What about the singing itself? What about music? That when I listen to music I believe there is something spiritual within myself and any cause of blame would be that people in the audience would believe that he was singing or would believe that he believes he's singing⁶⁸.

4.2

Jim Nolan's *The Salvage Shop*

It is to the sounds produced by Luciano Pavarotti that the characters of the play *The Salvage Shop* by the Waterford-based writer Jim Nolan (1958-), seem to commit their emotions and their most intimate feelings. The presence of seven opera pieces, taken from different works, being played twice or sung, or referred to by the characters, give the play a very musical aspect and a role which could be defined as major in the deployment of the plot.

Opening at the Garter Lane Theatre in Waterford on January 1998 and restaged during the Dublin Theatre Festival at the Gaiety Theatre in October 1998, *The Salvage Shop* is a story about the relation between a father and a son, Sylvie and Eddie Tansey, in the town of Garris.

From the beginning of the theatrical performance, when the scene opens in the salvage shop, where raw material is worked and given new life – the idea of salvation, redemption recurs throughout the play – the aria *A te o cara* from Bellini's *I Puritani*, sung by Pavarotti, introduces us to the musical atmosphere of the play. We soon learn that Sylvie is concerned about the future of the local brass band he plays for and the fact that a certain Master Reilly is to take his place in directing the band during the upcoming competition. As he makes clear, he should have left the band before, were it not for his son's decision not to follow what was the family tradition, i.e. becoming a band conductor.

He refuses to eat and as soon as he goes to his room we can hear another piece, *Amor ti vieta*, from Giordano's *Fedora*: «That's a bad sign», comments Katie, Eddie's daughter who has just arrived. As the characters themselves will explain, music is for Sylvie a «comfort blanket»⁶⁹, able not only to console and relieve his preoccupations, helping and accompanying him in the memory of the past, but above all to give voice, speak for the most profound sentiments, thoughts, which, often, cannot be expressed with words. The next aria, *Una furtiva lagrima*, from Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*, for instance, used to be played, Eddie reminds Katie: «[...] for your grandmother. Not Pavarotti, of course – Tito Schipa or one of them boys... the lost evenings by the fire...he'd play her that song. This is for you, he'd say, this is for you. And she'd know the music was speaking for him. (Pause) I must try it myself sometime»⁷⁰.

The case of Mozart's *Idomeneo* comes as a perfect example: the very simple fact that it is to Eddie and not, as it usually happens, to Pavarotti's voice, that is assigned the task to tell the story of the King of Crete, testifies to the author's intention to render more direct and accessible the audience's understanding of the character's self-realisation of the damaging power of vows, promises and father's expectations and desires.

As a matter of fact, not everybody knows Italian nor is musically cultured⁷¹: then, instead of letting the music and sounds, not clearly recognisable,

speak for him, the playwright decides to assign to Eddie's language the role of giving voice to his feelings and thoughts. It is as if, after and before all the playing of the opera pieces interpreted by Pavarotti, the playwright wanted to pause for a while and more directly involve the audience⁷².

Nevertheless, no matter what the language and the vehicle employed, the play presents itself as a celebration of the power of the word. Indeed if music is most of the time in the background, it is primarily the voice, the words of the characters and of Pavarotti that stand out. In this respect, Nolan's choice of the Italian tenor is emblematic, for his story is a perfect example of a beautiful relationship between a father and a son and at the same time of a successful career as musical missionary of emotions.

The brief account of Pavarotti's life is of help to Sylvie, who, as secretly agreed between his friend Stephen, his son and the band, should leave the group after the following competition and who will insist on the significance of the band for the community's life:

(Gestures to the music upstairs room) Listen. A baker's son, you know. Luciano, I mean. Had the common touch and never lost it. But his voice, his voice, they say, touched by the hand of God, touched by something greater than the baker's son could ever dream of. All the great ones are. And so they strive to sound the sacred note, the one that joins us with them and enable us to soar as well, to remember what is still possible on the other side of the mountain *(Pause)* [...] He sang in the church choir at Modena, you know. That's where he started. And his father with him by all accounts. That must have been nice. Father and son, side by side. They say he still goes back there. Each summer, returns to his native place and offers his gift again to his own. And I wouldn't wonder if he receives more than he bestows. Maybe no more than a memory, a drink again from the wellspring. But maybe, too, amongst his own, he remembers something else – the sacred purpose of his gift. That his voice belongs to those who have none, that when he sings, he sings for those who cannot speak. I like that. There's a form of symmetry in that exchange, don't you think?⁷³

Sylvie's claim, after all, for a certain continuity in the family tradition, should not be blamed so much, if Eddie, from what his fiancée Rita reports, was «the best musician the band ever had»⁷⁴. The events of his life have rendered him a rather cold man, very much in the same way his father is, unable to define and give voice to his feelings, unable to free himself from the chains – and of chains his daughter will speak of chains later on – of the village life of Garris and its petty relationships of past and present grudges.

The band's defeat will have the result of opening Sylvie's eyes, making him realise that music is not the most important thing in his life now that he has to face the reality of his disease: the blindness that has characterised his behaviour has now taken the place of a straightforwardness that will sharply contrast with his son's future decisions.

Indeed, as far as Eddie is concerned, he seems to lose himself in daydreams as, reflecting upon the story of Pavarotti and his father, he begins to nourish the idea of inviting the great tenor to give a concert in the town:

That when he sings, he sings for those who cannot speak...Luciano! Luciano and his old man. Sylvie says they sang together in the church choir at Modena.

Rita: "Who the bloody hell is Luciano? Eddie: Luciano Pavarotti! Modena's where he comes from, see. Sylvie says he goes back there every summer and sings again for his own. I wonder is the oul' fella still in the choir...but where? A concert! For Sylvie. Tansey Productions presents for one night only, venue to be confirmed, Luciano Pavarotti in concert! (*Silence*) What d'yous think?"⁷⁵

Organizing a concert by Pavarotti for his father then develops as the last chance – and the focus of the second part of the play – Eddie has, of making his father happy for the last time in his life and making him really believe, as Stephen puts it, that «nothing is beyond redemption»⁷⁶. Eddie's thoughts and movements from now on appear as an obstinate attempt to organise every detail of the biggest event: we will observe him calling a public meeting, constituting a committee, appointing a secretary and a personal assistant, optimistically and incessantly typing letters, sending faxes, making calls, only temporarily interrupted by both Rita's and Katie's calls about the state of his father's health.

Besides, what convinces him to undertake such a project is the same belief in the power of music and of Pavarotti's voice: the tenor is able to bring out, show to ordinary people not just the different composers' intentions, the characters' emotions and his own but also and, most importantly, that of mankind itself apart from giving relief and accompaniment to the old man's last weeks⁷⁷. A detail of Sylvie's life given by Eddie helps us understand how much time the man has dedicated to music: at the age of seventeen he left for New York where he saw Ezio Pinza and Rosa Ponselle at the Metropolitan Opera House singing in Giordano's *Fedora*.

A musical background is used again to introduce the ending of the play, this time provided by Stephen's, Sylvie's and Rita's voices singing *La donna è mobile*, from Verdi's *Rigoletto*. They seem to be in good humour and propose a toast, but the idea of celebrating the night makes Eddie enraged, almost hysterical: the failure of his project has rendered him vulnerable, especially now that his father's health keeps deteriorating.

On the contrary, the fact that Pavarotti will never make his appearance in Garris is central in the process of self-realisation that it is not through music that one can save a relationship, but it is through love and friendship and communication.

The use made of Pavarotti's image and the story of the 'origin' of the play – Jim Nolan wrote it just after his father's death – help confirm that, though music is there with its inexpressible, unspeakable essence and universe of

sounds, it is words and human relations that play a primary role. The choice itself of the genre of opera agrees in a way with the playwright's intent to use musical invention as a great literary pretext.

4.3

More Books about Italian Music

Kate O'Brien's (1897-1974) *As Music and Splendour* and the most recent *As it is in Heaven* (1999), by Niall Williams (1958-) share an interest in the world of music and its performers. O'Brien's 1958 novel also reflects upon the relationship between art – here provided by music – and life in an Italian background. O'Brien spent the first months of 1954 in Rome, to work on her ninth novel. To this purpose, she went to Naples, Milan and Ferrara to visit the opera theatres and to listen to operas; she read some librettos and discussed about the world of opera with a soprano named Marguerite Burke-Sheridan, who was very famous in Ireland whom she used to meet at the Shelbourne Hotel in Dublin. After a brief stay in Paris where they are supposed to receive their education and be initiated in the career of opera singers, Clare Halvey and Rose Lennane are sent to Rome where they live with professor Buonatoli, conductor, teacher and manager of the two of them. «What's wrong with Ireland?» asked Rose in a fury. «Nothing, child, save its total ignorance about music»⁷⁸. From the beginning, Ireland is then presented as the antithesis to passionate, wordly and cosmopolitan Italy. The life the two girls would have lived had they stayed in their country is imagined and not at all desired. It is in Italy that the two women, once their traineeship is finished, will reach independence: Rose, who is luckier and more beautiful than Clare, will become the lover of a French tenor. After a few roles as *prima donna* and *seconda donna*, Clare realizes that she has been interpreting absurd and melodramatic roles which she comes to refuse. Being an artist makes her feel distant from reality.

Kate O'Brien explores the world of Italian opera in detail and she does so to illustrate the futility of love, to explore the consequences and the limits of independence and to assert her relationship with artistic and literary creation. Sometimes, though, it seems as if she is spending too much time and space on lesser matters. Whole pages describing the plots of the operas, the roles in each melodrama, the singing techniques and the history of Italian theatres monotonously follow:

In Italy, in the nineteenth century, through the persistence of a long tradition, theatre meant almost entirely il teatro lirico – opera. Almost every Italian town which was not a village had an opera house, a *teatro lirico* which was held in veneration of its citizens. Those theatres were used throughout the year for local concerts, lectures and amateur [...] performances of opera and drama. The tours stretched, in importance and in place, between say, Naples and Treviso, Turin and Bari. They presented therefore, up and down the peninsula, a considerable field for the speculation of impresarios.

These business men liked well to reap the summer profits [...] because in June, July, August and September, when all the great opera houses were dark, it was possible to get singers and conductors of standing, and even of fame, to perform in the lesser theatres – they always needing money, also desiring to extend their experience and their repertoires. Further, for the summer months it was possible to handpick singers, orchestral players and conductors out of the thousands of cadets and hopefuls thronging the musical academies and conservatories in Italy⁷⁹.

This is not the only example as O'Brien continues describing the contracts and the practices of managers and of artists; discussing the opening of the old Teatro Nobile di Torre Argentina in 1888, which had been closed for almost twenty years; the orchestra and choir groups that used to work in the summer; the precarious economic situation of those who worked in the field. From the beginning of her book, the author makes the reader learn about an innumerable number of operas and about the different roles the protagonists interpret: *Otello*, *Orfeo e Euridice*, *I Puritani*, *Lucia de Lammermoor*, *Rigoletto*, *La traviata*, *Le mariage de Figaro*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Don Giovanni*, *Don Carlos*, *Lucrezia Borgia*, *Figaro*, *Alceste*, *Norma*, *Fidelio*, *Il trovatore*, *Vespri siciliani* and *La serva padrona* are all the ones from which she selects the roles to assign to the characters; the arias they sing and the techniques they learn for a better execution.

The works that have here been examined show that when Irish writers think about opera they immediately think about Italy. As pretext, reason, opportunity, Italian music becomes the topic discussed by Irish characters. Music represents a way of living, an alternative to language and life; it solves theatrical problems; it functions as metalanguage which conveys the meaning of the text.

Other works make such different uses of Italian music such as Pat Kinevan's play, *The Plains of Enna* (1999) – where we see one character, Julia, in Italy while trying to learn how to sing – or as in the more recent Niall Williams' novel *As it is in Heaven* – where the protagonist, Stephen Griffin, meets and falls in love with an Italian violinist.

5

Italians in Anglo-Irish Literature

Adjacent to the men's public urinal they perceived an icecream car round which a group of presumably Italians in heated altercation were getting rid of voluble expressions in their vivacious language in a particularly animated way, there being some little differences between the parties. -Puttana madonna, che ci dia i quattrini! Ho ragione? Culo rotto! Intendiamoci MEZZO SOVRANO PIU. DICE LUI, PERO! MEZZO. FARABUTTO! MORTACCI SUI! MA ASCOLTA! CINQUE LA TESTA PIU ...

[Eumaeus, Episode 16] James Joyce, *Ulysses*

The sound of a barrel-organ playing is not a very unusual thing in Kensington, and why I took particular notice of a special organ, which was grinding loudly, I cannot tell, but I did, as it most strangely came to pass.

“Hilda,” I said, “do look at that little monkey on the Italian’s organ”.

Rosa Mulholland, *Giannetta*

Going through such a rich corpus of literary references to Italian culture, we can say that there is a real movement back and forth between Italy and Ireland, in the adaptation of techniques as well as in the use of settings, of allusions and of characters.

If we look at Anglo-Irish literature written during the last sixty years we find a good number of Irish writers intent, willingly or not, on reflecting in their works their opinions concerning the character of Italians, opinions which are bound to be subjective and affected by religious, political or personal prejudice. Understanding the reasons for attitudes of both ‘italophobia’ and ‘italophilia’ in the works that have been examined requires a cultural and historical knowledge of Italians living in Ireland.

The first groups of Italians started to settle in Ireland during the 1880s when the first chipper – that is the shop where they sell fish and chips – was opened in the Dublin central area of Pearse Street⁸⁰. In 1936 there were 325 Italian-born registered residents in Dublin. In 1961, they were 689. The growth of migration flux has been constant and in 1981 the number of immigrants amounted to 1,351. The 2002 Irish census revealed 3,770 people with Italian nationality resident in Ireland. The following year, the Italian embassy list records 5,000 Italians resident in Ireland although a more likely estimate is 7,000.

Many of the literary representations of Italian migrants not surprisingly focus on the activity of fish and chip shops which they seem to have introduced to Ireland. For many people in Ireland, fish and chip shops have been associated with Italian migrants, and with Italianness, in general.

One of the main characters of a 1963 short story by Benedict Kiely (1919-2007) is chipper during the winter and ice-cream seller during the summer. In *The Enchanted Place* from the collection *A Journey to the Seven Streams* (1963), the Italian Renato speaks through the voice of the unnamed narrator he works with. Renato, whose foreignness is persistently signalled by the epithet «the Italian», talks «in whispering Italian, vocalic as the songs of angels and strange at the same time»⁸¹. As a consequence, he obviously does not understand English very well nor does he try to improve it – and this is not after all the point of the short story – especially when Jack McGowan, from the town’s amateur dramatic society, talks about the films that are shown in the cinema. He sometimes attempts, though, to familiarize himself with English sounds as when, in a sort of ritual gesture, in a place which is extraordinarily enough «fragrant with the smell of spilt vinegar and fried chips he unrolled

his sleeves and read out aloud and very slowly the three-coloured poster»⁸². In the same way, he functions as an intermediary between his own culture and the Irish one as when he translates for the narrator «the words of some Italian song about love gone right and love gone wrong, about the world quiet and the heart at peace, about the world gone mad, the body burning, the heart in pain»⁸³ and as when he quotes an Italian saying.

From a poem by Michael O'Loughlin (1958-), titled *Exiles* (1988), in which the double exile of Italian migrants from Italy and within Ireland is narrated, to a short story by Eugene McCabe, Italian chippers then seem to take over. «You will find the Italian chippers in all the dead ends of Dublin»⁸⁴: O'Loughlin's voice well introduces the four Italian chippers who feature in Eugene McCabe's (1930-) short story *Roma* (1979), later adapted for television.

Both the short story and the film script are set in a fish and chip shop owned by Mr Digacimo, who, as the stage directions specify, despite the fact of being born in Portadown, has Italian origins, and by his all-Italian wife, who «speaks little English and cares less, lives her life surrounded by louts, pigs, chips, pots and pans»⁸⁵. The characterisation of Mrs Digacimo with all her lines in incorrect Italian and incorrect English, typical of Italian émigrés of a low social status, avails itself of all the elements of the cultural stereotype. Contrary to her husband who deals with their customers and who claims to prefer the Irish village they live in to the Italian place their family came from, the woman seems to represent the perfect stereotype of the Italian who does not make any effort to integrate into the new world and instead she is seen as different and 'other', especially when a role is given to her: «The voice said something in their speech», says the narrator referring to Mrs Digacimo addressing her teenage daughter named Maria. Mrs Digacimo's words culminate with the final comments on Benny, Maria's suitor. These are pronounced with a firm tone and are typographically distinguished by letters in block capitals and exclamation marks: «BRUTO, BRUTO... [Brute] LOUTS! (*She comes angrily into the shop*), Paulo [*talking to her husband*] is too much, no more [...] Ora BASTA! BASTA!»⁸⁶.

«E matto, matto» she insists in one grammatically incorrect scene, giving rise to angry remarks from her husband who does not hesitate to call her a stupid fool: «He frightened the child. Poveretta!!!! Poveretta!!!! Paulo, we should get police»⁸⁷.

Mrs Digacimo's exaggerated concern for her daughter, finally expressed by her suggestion to go back to her home place – «Poveretta Maria. We should go home to Sperlonga»⁸⁸ – only because Maria has been talked to by a very religious man called Benny, seems to be a trait common to one other Italian named Maria, i.e. one of the main characters of an Irish play by Bernard Farrell (1939-).

Kevin's Bed which opened in the Abbey Theatre in April 1998 is the story – set in the early seventies – of Kevin who, while studying for priesthood at the Irish College in Rome, meets an Italian woman.

After a period spent there, he comes back to Ireland. He is soon joined by a young woman presented as a «nun» to please his parents: «a nun singing, gallaring, yapping», who comes from Rome, will very reluctantly be accepted by Kevin's family who describe her as «roaring and shouting and ordering people around, when she's not frightening the life out of everyone – and that voice of her's would strip paint off the wall»⁸⁹. To such a cultural gap, Farrell adds the linguistic divide: except for Kevin, none of the characters know Italian nor does Maria initially understand English. Gradually, though, we see Kevin's mother, Doris, adjusting her English in order to make herself understood by Maria with the inevitable result of having hilarious scenes where stress is laid upon accent and intonation. The stage directions specify: «Doris, Kevin's mother (*In a similar accent*) Ah, Sister, come-a-in, come-a-in, there-a is something you-a want, yes?» (54); and a little further: «Doris: Kevin, does Sister want the toilet? (*To Maria in an accent*) Toileta? Lav-a-tory?» (55) or «Now sister, I'll leave you here with Kevin. (*In an accent*) With Kev-in. Me go. You stay. And no disturb. Okay» (60).

Farrell strongly stresses the role of language as when the hidden truth is revealed: Maria is not a nun. She is in Ireland because she is expecting a baby by Kevin, i.e. she is «incinta» and, because of this, herself and Kevin will soon have a family. Throughout the play, we are given another stereotypical image of the Italian who shouts, gestures, talks all the time, gives orders and is, after all, very emotional. Though a member of the family, Maria is still looked at as a «stranger» even after having spent twenty-five years in Ireland. When it comes to letting her character speak, the playwright himself forgets to check the spelling of Italian words and of Italian people's names.

The three examples shown above prove that there is not a real prototypical Italianness that is to be shown. There is not so much an essential Italianness as a basic desire to have such an essentialism at one's disposal for the strengthening of Irish identity.

If we look for more literary representations of Italianness, their absence in most of recent works tells a lot. If they are presented, Italians seem to be so more as some sort of an 'autochthonous foreign' presence, a little more Irish than other migrant groups, probably still in the background but more integrated. This is the case of Roddy Doyle's (1958-) novel *Paula Spenser* (2007)⁹⁰ where Italians are seen not in a chipper, but in a café, almost sending us back to the football atmosphere of Doyle's earlier *The Van*, where Italians are blamed for having defeated the Irish team.

Italians, here admired for their darker complexion and for their cooking abilities are somewhat easily replaced by Poles and Black people doing the job the protagonist does in order to earn a living, that is cleaning the toilets of public places.

Such a portrayal is very instructive about the workings of both Italian and Irish cultures and about the fundamental changes occurring in Irish society.

Overall, the presence of Italians in Anglo-Irish literature seems to reflect a smooth and successful integration process which is a synonym for cultural pluralism as opposed to the examples of assimilation and amalgamation previously given.

Such representations fulfil the social function of explaining a modified use of the image of Italians which is closely linked to the so-called Celtic Tiger immigration net of Poles, as well as of people from Africa and China and which is now characterised by *imagotypes* rather than stereotypes.

Novels by Irish writers which are set in Italy can still be found on the bookshop shelves but with more difficulty. Internationalism or internationalization, with a view to America, Asia, Africa and some European countries still dominates the market of Irish writing with Italy now occupying a lesser position than in the past.

6

Conclusions

There are still forms of 'influence' which are sometimes difficult to trace at a first reading and have here only been mentioned because they need further study. Other topics – like Yeats or Joyce in Italy, to take just two examples – have obviously been left aside because they have been dealt with by colleagues⁹¹.

The choice has been determined by the need to find a coherent pattern among all the different examples detected. The role of Pasolini, of his places and his ideas, for instance, has been acknowledged and remembered by Irish writers like Harry Clifton and Mahon. Antonio Fogazzaro is taken by Sean O'Faolain as a model of passionate religiosity, of a combination of both sensuality and spirituality, that is that sort of more liberal religious experience which the Irish writer was after.

We also have to remember, among others, the poet MacDara Woods, who, apart from living for long periods in Italy, has written poems evoking people, situations and places of his adopted country.

Translations, rewritings, influences, imitations, allusions, quotations, sources, intertexts: these are only some of the modes in which Irish writers have drawn from our cultural background. By physically and imaginatively setting their works/poems in a different country they have created their own personal small worlds, be they religious, artistic and literary or political.

Past rather than present, works of art more than landscapes are observed, admired and imitated by them. This was made possible also due to the great number of changes occurring in their home country: entering the European Union has certainly helped to renovate the country; the Second Vatican Council contributed to a wave of renewal especially among Christian devotees; artists were exempted from paying taxes. The economic boom of the 1990s turned Ireland into one of the wealthiest countries in Europe with obvious consequences for Irish writers

living both within and outside their country. In a multicultural, cross-cultural and intercultural context, the Celtic Tiger economy helped redefine the notion of space.

Ireland is no longer an isolated island but a place from which Irish writers can move even when staying at home. With a constant flux of people coming and going, with boundaries dissolving, they do not ask nor do they want their work to be solely Irish. They feel citizens of the world and in that world they learn more about themselves by meeting others and discovering otherness.

A question still needs to be answered though: how will they respond to the last two-years-period of recession which brought with it a high unemployment rate (and which is to change again the face of their country)? Will this change Irish writers' perception of both Italians living in Ireland and in Italy?

Endnotes

¹ John Montague, Thomas Kinsella, Tom McCarthy, Sean O'Faolain, Julia O'Faolain, Nuala Ní Dhomnaill, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, MacDara Woods, Jennifer Johnston, Deirdre Madden, Harry Clifton, Tom Murphy, Jim Nolan, Pat Kinevane, Desmond O'Grady, Peter Sirt, Ciarán Carson and Maeva Binchy are some others.

² *The Loves of Cass McGuire* (1966) and *Living Quarters* (1977) seem to be of Pirandellian influence in their deployment of the plot.

³ By Henri Boyd, author of *A Translation of the Inferno of Dante Alighieri, in English Verse. With Historical Notes, and the Life of Dante. To which is added a specimen of a new translation of the Orlando Furioso of Ariosto*, published in Dublin in 1785.

⁴ P. De Brun, *Coimeide Dhiaga Dante*, Gill & Son, Dublin 1963.

⁵ Yeats started to read Dante with Lady Gregory and somehow learnt more about his work while being in Rapallo where he visited Ezra Pound. See F. Fantaccini, *Yeats e la cultura italiana*, Firenze University Press, Firenze 2009.

⁶ The influence of the Florentine poet on Heaney has been identified and extensively examined by critics in relation to such collections as *Seeing Things* (1991), *The Spirit Level* (1997) and *Station Island* (1985).

⁷ S. Heaney, *Envious and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet*, «Irish University Review», 1, XV, 1985, pp. 5-19.

⁸ C. Carson, *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri. A New Translation*, Granta Books, London 2002, p. xxi.

⁹ S. Beckett, *Recent Irish Poetry*, in R. Cohn (ed.), *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, J. Calder, London 1983, pp. 70-76.

¹⁰ Devlin's home also became a meeting place for a number of Italian writers, including the neorealist novelist Ignazio Silone to whom the published version of *The Tomb of Michael Collins* is dedicated. A. Davis, *A Broken Line. Denis Devlin and Irish Poetic Modernism*, University College Dublin Press, Dublin 2000, pp. 117-118.

¹¹ D. Devlin, *Translations into English*, Dedalus Press, Dublin 1992, pp. 304-305. G. Ungaretti, *Sentimento del tempo*, Novissima, Roma 1933, p. 104.

¹² D. Devlin, *Translations into English*, cit., p. 307. S. Quasimodo, *Strada di Agrigentum*, in Id., *Poesie e discorsi sulla poesia*, Mondadori, Milano 2000, p. 102.

¹³ S. Quasimodo, *The Night Fountain. Selected Early Poems*, trans. by G. Dawe and M. Sonzogni, Arcpublications, Todmorden 2008, p. 150; S. Quasimodo, *Poesie e discorsi sulla poesia*, cit., p. 1101. Dawe studied at the University of Ulster, Coleraine and UCG, Galway where he taught from 1977 to 1987. He teaches English at Trinity College Dublin. He is the recipient of various awards, the author of collections of poems and essays and editor of «Krino», a literary magazine.

¹⁴ See Tom Paulin's *A New Look at the Language Question*, in Id., *Writing to the Moment. Selected Critical Essays 1980-1996*, Faber and Faber, London 1996, pp. 51-67.

¹⁵ T. Paulin, *The Road to Inver. Translations, Versions, Imitations 1975-2003*, Faber and Faber, London 2004, p. 11.

¹⁶ This is also evident from the fact that Mahon does not use Italy as setting.

¹⁷ *The Coastguard House* was published in «Translation Ireland», 14, 3, 2000, p. 14.

¹⁸ See D. Mahon, *Collected Poems*, The Gallery Press, Co. Meath 1999.

¹⁹ E. Montale, *Languilla*, in Id., *Tutte le poesie*, a cura di G. Zampa, Mondadori, Milano 2000, p. 58. P. Muldoon, *The Eel*, in *Moy Sand and Gravel*, Faber and Faber, London 2002, pp. 58-59.

²⁰ Quoted from E. Longley, *The Living Stream. Literature and Revisionism in Ireland*, Bloodaxe Books, Newcastle Upon Tyne 2004, p. 55.

²¹ E. Montale, *Languilla...*, cit., p. 58; P. Muldoon, *The Eel...*, cit., p. 58.

²² For more details see Giacomo Leopardi, *Selected Poems*, ed. by E. Grennan, Dedalus Press, Dublin 1995.

²³ E. Ní Chuilleánáin, *After Leopardi's Storm*, in *Or volge l'anno/At the Year's Turning. An Anthology of Irish Poets Responding to Leopardi*, ed. by M. Sonzogni, Dedalus Press, Dublin 1998, pp. 190-191; also in E. Ní Chuilleánáin, *The Girl Who Married the Reindeer*, Gallery Press, Co. Meath 2001, p. 36.

²⁴ The perspective of a woman who shares and sympathizes with another woman is the one adopted by the Irish poet when translating two poems by the Sicilian Maria Attanasio, *Double Listing (Doppia elencazione)* and *Nocturne 3 (Notturmo 3)*. The translator singles out and places her identity as a woman, as a mother, as a foreigner in a liminal space, between spirituality (it is no surprise to have the Italian «sciama» as neutrally identified as «holy») and corporality, between one place and another, between one language and another. The exaltation of the body, point of departure and of arrival, with its femininity and its limits too, in such lines, is inexorably linked to the awareness that her son, who is now different, is evidence of the inexorable changes brought about by the passing of time, as in *Nocturne 3*. The physical sensuousness given by the nudity of the dancing women's feet – a theme which is dear to Ní Chuilleánáin – and the glittering movement of the boy widen the horizon and are sustained by a clear language, made of simple lists of words that identify the various images. Strengthened by the target text verbs «wipe» and «blot out», these images emphasize the power of nature:

Ní Chuilleánáin's statement about the faithfulness to the source text, to its rhythm and to its fluency in order to provide some help to the reader who does not know the language, comes as no surprise: «I used to feel the business of the translator was to write a new poem, and I now feel that the business of the translator is to be as close as possible to the original poem; I think it gives important access for people who don't have the original language. It is nice to see the two languages swimming along in tandem; it's even better to think that you're actually making a lot of people understand something they wouldn't normally» (M. Böss, E. Maher, eds., *Engaging Modernity*, Veritas, Dublin 2003, p. 172).

²⁵ H. Clifton, *The Dead of Poggio*, in *Or Volge l'anno*, cit., pp. 108-109.

²⁶ D. O'Grady, *Trawling Tradition. Translations 1954-1994*, University of Salzburg, Salzburg 1994, p. xii. O'Grady is the author of *Rome Reshaped. An Account of the History of Roman Jubilees* (1999), Continuum, London 2007. He is also the author of an article on aspects of Italian history and culture: *The Wrong Targets*, «America. The National Catholic Weekly», 18 February 2002, which is about Aldo Moro, the politician who was killed by the group Brigate Rosse.

²⁷ D. O'Grady, *Trawling Tradition*, cit., pp. xi, xii.

²⁸ Leopardi, Montale, Ungaretti, Quasimodo, Pavese, Pasolini, Luzi, Guidacci, Sanguineti, Gentili, Cardarelli, Covoni, Palazzeschi, Campana, Onori, Bertolucci, Rosselli, Spaziani, Giuliani, Pagliarani, Lippi, Garufi, De Santis, Pozzi.

²⁹ V. Cardarelli, *Sera di Gavinana*, in Id., *Poesie*, Mondadori, Milano 1972, p. 101; D. O'Grady, *Trawling Tradition, Translations 1954-1994...*, cit., p. 431.

³⁰ D. O'Grady, *Roman Autumn*, in *The Wandering Celt*, Dedalus Press, Dublin 2001, pp. 130-131.

³¹ P.M. Chiesa, G. Tesio (a cura di), *Le parole di legno. Poesia in dialetto del 900 italiano*, Mondadori, Milano 1984. S. Penna's *To a latrine cool in the railway station...*, lines from E. Vittorini's *Conversation in Sicily*, N. Risi's *The maxim that torture degrades...* and A. Giacomini's *Mad Toni* are some of the poems that appear in P. Hutchinson's *Done into English. Collected Translations*, Gallery Press, Oldcastle 2003.

³² In two other works Goldsmith writes about Italy: *Some Account of the Academics of Italy*, «The Bee», 3 November 1759, and *Of the Present State of Polite Learning in Italy*, in *An Inquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe*, published in the same year in London by R. & J. Dodsley. See *The Miscellaneous Works of Oliver Goldsmith* (1868), with *Biographical Introduction* by David Masson, Macmillan, London 1915, p. 399.

³³ Lady Morgan visited Milan, Genoa, Piacenza, Parma, Modena, Bologna, Naples and spent longer sojourns in Rome, Florence and Venice. Despite the fact that the travel book was rather long, it sold quite well. *The Times and Life of Salvator Rosa*, Colburn, London 1824.

³⁴ Pandora, London 1988.

³⁵ *Lady Morgan, Un'irlandese a Torino*, Trauben, Torino 2003. *Lady Morgan's Italy: Anglo-Irish Sensibilities and Italian Realities*, Academica Press, Bethesda, Md. 2007.

³⁶ L. Stevenson, *The Life of Charles Lever*, Chapman, London 1937. Chapter XX (*Onlooker in Florence*) and XVI (*Exile on the Adriatic*) in particular recount these experiences.

³⁷ W.S. Dowden (ed.), *The Journal of Thomas Moore. Vol. 1. 1818-1820*, Associated University Presses, London 1983; *Travels of an Irish Gentleman in Search of a Religion*, Longman, London 1833. See D. Abbate Badin, *Lady Morgan and Thomas Moore: Irish Perceptions of Italy and the Uses of National Images in the Nineteenth Century*, «Journal of Anglo-Italian Studies», 10, 2009, pp. 109-111.

³⁸ *Ercoli e il guardiano notturno*, trad. it di I. Pittoni, Editori riuniti, Roma 1999. She also lived in Italy for a good while, studying at the University of Rome and teaching from 1957 to 1961 in Florence.

³⁹ Sean O'Faolain's travels to Italy have been extensively dealt with during a conference held in Turin which led to the volume edited by D. Abbate Badin *et al.*, *Sean O'Faolain, A Centenary Celebration (Proceedings of the Turin Conference, Università di Torino, 7-9 April 2000)*, Trauben, Torino 2001.

⁴⁰ S. O'Faolain, *A Summer in Italy*, Eyre & Spottiswoode, London 1950, pp. 228-229.

⁴¹ M. Arndt, *Sean O'Faolain's Italy*, in D. Abbate Badin *et al.* (eds.), *Sean O'Faolain, A Centenary Celebration*, cit., p. 247.

⁴² W. Starkie, *The Waveless Plain. An Italian Autobiography*, John Murray, London 1938.

⁴³ It took four years to Starkie to work on *Luigi Pirandello*, J. Dent & Sons, London 1926.

⁴⁴ E. Bowen, *A Time in Rome*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1960, p. 49.

⁴⁵ Ivi, p. 51.

⁴⁶ E. Bowen, *The Secession*, in Ead., *Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen*, Vintage, London 1999, p. 160, p. 164.

⁴⁷ The short story is set in Italy, close to Bellagio, in the north. The protagonist, the little countess, is a 16-year-old girl from a rich family, who is seduced by a married English man; ivi, pp. 136-146.

⁴⁸ Her novel *The Hotel* (1927), set in the Italian Riviera, for instance only regards British characters. Only the setting is Italian.

⁴⁹ H. Clifton, *On the Spine to Italy. A Year in Abruzzi*, cit., p. 17.

⁵⁰ Ivi, p. 15.

⁵¹ Ivi, p. 186.

⁵² H. Clifton, «In our own cities we are like exiles...», in *Night Train Through the Brenner*, Gallery Press, Co. Meath 1994, p. 11.

⁵³ See I. Silone, *L'avventura di un povero cristiano*, Mondadori, Milano 1968.

⁵⁴ The story of a young man who gives up his studies for the priesthood to become seriously involved in politics – which is the topic of one of Silone's books – is to Clifton a brilliant example of how one can well conceive the simultaneous co-existence of socialism and Christian values.

⁵⁵ F. McGuinness, *Innocence. The Life and Death of Michelangelo Merisi, Caravaggio*, Faber and Faber, London 1996. Directed by Patrick Mason, it was staged for the first time at the Gate Theatre, Dublin in 1986.

⁵⁶ R.A. Cave, *Innocence by Frank McGuinness*, in C. De Petris, J. Ellis D'Alessandro, F. Fantaccini (eds.), *The Cracked Looking Glass*, Bulzoni, Roma 1999, p. 227.

⁵⁷ F. McGuinness, *Innocence. The Life and Death of Michelangelo Merisi, Caravaggio...*, cit., pp. 34-35.

⁵⁸ See Bellini, Veronese, Titian and Carpaccio compose the sequence «Four Ways to See your Lover in Venice» in F. McGuinness, *Boosterstown*, Gallery Press, Co. Meath 1994, pp. 36-39.

⁵⁹ F. McGuinness, *Dolly West's Kitchen*, Faber and Faber, London 1999, pp. 39-40. The play was staged in Dublin from 1 to 20 November 1999.

⁶⁰ D. Madden, *Remembering Light and Stone*, Faber and Faber, London 1994, p. 9.

⁶¹ F. O' Toole, *Black Hole. Green Card. The Disappearance of Ireland*, New Island Books, Dublin 1994, p. 123.

⁶² P. Casey, *The Fisher Child*, Picador, London 2001, p. 9.

⁶³ W. Trevor, *Other People's Worlds*, King Penguin, London 1982; *Two Lives. Reading Turgenev and My House in Umbria*, Viking, London 1991; *Excursions in the Real World*, Penguin, London 1994; *After Rain*, Viking, London 1996.

⁶⁴ J. Allen, *Italian Opera in Dublin*, in R. Pine (ed.), *Music in Ireland, 1848-1998*, Mercier Press, Cork 1998, pp. 56-64.

⁶⁵ Personal interview, 21 November 2001.

⁶⁶ T. Murphy, *The Gigli Concert*, Methuen Drama, London 1997, p. 176. B. Gigli, *The Memoirs of Beniamino Gigli*, trans. by D. Silone, Cassell Company Ltd, London 1957, p. 1.

⁶⁷ Personal interview, 21 November 2001.

⁶⁸ Personal interview, 21 November 2001.

⁶⁹ J. Nolan, *The Salvage Shop*, The Gallery Press, Dublin 1998, p. 17.

⁷⁰ Ivi, p. 19.

⁷¹ It seems to me that the use of opera made by Nolan in a way is aimed at rendering the presence of music in the play more accessible. Besides, music is there as a background either when we observe a character moving around on the stage or when we have two voices speaking. In this case, we would have two registers at the same time, which of course could not be easy to follow. Nevertheless Nolan's technique – which could hazardously be defined contrapuntal – assigns a different voice and a well-defined role to each «melody», rendering the final product an ensemble of sounds perfectly in accordance the ones with the others.

⁷² Pavarotti will also be assigned a sort of minor role later during the play.

⁷³ J. Nolan, *The Salvage Shop...*, cit., pp. 34-35.

⁷⁴ Ivi, p. 36.

⁷⁵ Ivi, p. 44.

⁷⁶ Ivi, p. 41.

⁷⁷ «When he knows why, he just might, yes, I'll tell him why...it won't change the course of the events, but it would give the old fucker a reason to put his hat on. That would be something, wouldn't it, Rita?», ivi, p. 45.

⁷⁸ K. O'Brien, *As Music as Splendour*, Heinemann, London 1958, p. 46.

⁷⁹ Ivi, pp. 85-86.

⁸⁰ U. Power, *Terra Straniera. The Story of Italians in Ireland*, Nationalist & Leinster Times Ltd, Carlow 1988, p. 23; B. Reynolds, *Casalattico and the Italian Community in Ireland*, UCD Foundation for Italian Studies, Dublin 1993, p. 46.

⁸¹ B. Kiely, *The Enchanted Place, in A Journey to the Seven Streams*, Methuen, London 1963, p. 79.

⁸² Ivi, p. 80.

⁸³ Ivi, p. 87.

⁸⁴ M. O'Loughlin, *Exiles*, in *Invisible Cities. The New Dubliners*, ed. by D. Bolger, Raven Arts Press, Dublin 1988, p. 51.

⁸⁵ E. McCabe, *That's Enough*, in *Roma*, Turve Press, Dublin 1979, p. 8.

⁸⁶ Ivi, p. 38.

⁸⁷ Ivi, p. 53.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁹ B. Farrell, *Kevin's Bed*, Mercier Press, Cork 1999, p. 91.

⁹⁰ R. Doyle, *Paula Spencer*, Vintage Books, London 2007.

⁹¹ See F. Fantaccini, *W. B. Yeats e la cultura italiana*, Firenze University Press, Firenze 2009. See J. McCourt, *James Joyce. A Passionate Exile*, Orion Media, London 1999 and *The Years of Bloom. James Joyce in Trieste, 1904-1920*, The Lilliput Press, Dublin 2001.

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Althea Gyles' Symbolic (De)Codification of William Butler Yeats' 'Rose and Wind Poetry'

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O was it Love that conquered Hate?
Or was it Hate that set her free? --
To Death all questioners come late.
The sword and the woman all may see
And "Odi et Amo" graven there.
(Althea Gyles, *Odi et Amo*, ll. 9-12)

The only two powers that trouble the deeps are religion and love,
the others make a little trouble upon the surface.
(William B. Yeats, *A Symbolic Artist and the Coming of Symbolic Art*, p. 133)

1. When in *A Vision* Yeats bluntly declared «I am a poet, not a painter»¹, he was probably alluding to the simple assumption of considering himself a poet much more than a painter, despite his art-oriented studies². A consideration that could not obviously preclude him from carrying on, even if occasionally, his painting ambitions³, speaking «always of painting as a painter speaks»⁴, or meeting and appreciating his contemporary painters, keen to recognize and support their artistic value. Actually, from 1886, the year he decided to give up painting as a career, Yeats' connections with art ostensibly continued in his father's pre-Raphaelite *entourage* of painters⁵. As emerges from Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux's *Yeats and the Visual Arts* (2003), Yeats often appealed to the circle of friends related to his father for illustrations or book covers. Besides Edwin J. Ellis, with whom he would also work from 1899 to 1903 on the three-volume edition of William Blake's *opus*⁶; Jack Nettleship, discovering in his paintings «in place of Blake's joyous, intellectual energy a Saturnian passion and melancholy»⁷; John Trivett Nettleship, who drew the frontispiece of Yeats' *The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics* (1892); H. Granville Fell, who had illustrated Yeats' first edition of the *Poems* (1895) with gold lettering and Celtic design on front, back and spine⁸; and Aubrey Beardsley, in whom he admitted finding «[...] that noble courage that seems to me at times, whether in man or woman, the greatest of human faculties. I saw it in all he said and did, in the clear logic of speech and in [the] clean soft line of his art» (*Memoirs* 1992)⁹, later placing him in Phase 13 of *A Vision*, Yeats was mainly influenced by two other painters, Charles Ricketts and Charles

Shannon, whose reputation was mostly related to their co-edition of «The Dial» and the designs produced for Wilde's books. In 1904 he wrote about Ricketts' *Deposition from the Cross* (Tate, 1915): «Here is absolute genius. And the rarest kind of genius, for it is the romance not of the Woman but the romance of the Man, and hardly anybody but Michael Angelo and Blake and Albert Dürer have done anything in that»¹⁰. As well, in a letter he wrote on 13 November 1904 to Charles Shannon, in asking him «to do a lithograph or something of that kind for the collected edition of [his] writings if it comes off [...]» Yeats acknowledged: «You are the one man I would like to be drawn by»¹¹. Shannon's portrait of Yeats was painted in 1908.

Among these painters who deeply influenced Yeats' symbolic vision and art, it is still worth mentioning another artist, «the fey and slightly manic Irish artist»¹² Miss Althea Gyles (1868–1949)¹³, as Roy Foster was to define her in his *The Apprentice Mage* (1997)¹⁴. Known by contemporaries for her unamenable enigmatic character, her symbolic art and fascination for esotericism and occultism, Althea Gyles' fame is today mostly related to her outstanding book covers for Yeats' *The Secret Rose* (1897), *Poems* (1899), and *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899). Significantly defined by Warwick Gould as «the genius who invented a symbolic personality for Yeats»¹⁵, Miss Gyles was actually one of the few artists really able to understand, decode and translate Yeats' magical symbolism, his Irishness and Pre-Raphaelitism into her plastic forms. Despite the fact that their «connection [...] lasted for a few years only» during the 1890s, and that «Yeats had his reservations about her talent from the beginning» it was, according to Ian Fletcher, an «important, if puzzling» relationship¹⁶. A relationship that, from the first time, was characterized by common esoteric visions and fascinations, reinforced by a few shared occult experiences and circumstances, and supported but also compromised by a certain number of personal events. Actually, in his finding a possible cause for Yeats' and Gyles' 'private' and artistic divorce probably occurred before 1900¹⁷, Ian Fletcher points out that «Miss Gyles' broken relationship with him [Yeats] owes something to her voluntary abstention from work in design and something to a deflection of Yeats' own interest [...]. It also owed not a little to the difficult personality of the lady itself»¹⁸ and, I would add, to her own private affairs.

Born in 1868 in Kilmurry, County Waterford, into a well-to-do old family¹⁹, «she had quarreled with a mad father [...] because she wished to study art, had run away from home, had lived for a time by selling her watch, and then by occasional stories in an Irish paper»²⁰. She was «associated with the Dublin Theosophists, in what Yeats describes as their 'conventual house' at Dublin in the late eighties, starving, as her father disapproved of her taking up a profession»²¹. From 1889 to 1890, she had studied Art at the Slade School in Dublin, economically helped by E.J. Dick, the founder of the Dublin Theosophists' house and the well-known bearded Manichean engineer of Yeats' *Autobiographies*, who had «engaged her as a companion for his wife, and gave

her money enough to begin her studies [...]»²². About her staying at 3 Upper Ely Place, the Household of the Dublin Theosophists²³ – that «company of Irish mystics who have taught for some years a religious philosophy which has changed many ordinary people into ecstasies and visionaries» –, Yeats wrote in *A Symbolic Artist and the Coming of Symbolic Art* (first appeared in the «Dome», 1898)²⁴:

I know that Miss Althea Gyles, in whose work I find so visionary a beauty, does not mind my saying that she lived long with this little company [...]; and that she will not think I am taking from her originality when I say that the beautiful lithe figures of her art, quivering with a life half mortal tragedy, half immortal ecstasy, owe something of their inspiration to this little company. I indeed believe that I see in them a beginning of what may become a new manner in the arts of the modern world [...]²⁵.

Many years later, in *The Trembling of the Veil* (1922), Yeats would come back again to Althea Gyles' staying at the Dublin Theosophists', particularly enhancing the young painter's passion for art:

On a lower floor lived a strange red-haired girl, all whose thoughts were set upon painting and poetry, conceived as abstract images like Love and Penury in the Symposium-, and to these images she sacrificed herself with Asiatic fanaticism. The engineer had discovered her starving somewhere in an unfurnished or half-furnished room, and that she had lived for many weeks upon bread and shell-cocoa, so that her food never cost her more than a penny a day. Born into a county family, who were so haughty that their neighbours called them the Royal Family, she had quarrelled with a mad father, who had never, his tenants declared, "screwed the top of his flask with any man," [...]. For some weeks she had paid half-a-crown a week to some poor woman to see her to the art schools and back, for she considered it wrong for a woman to show herself in public places unattended; but of late she had been unable to afford the school fees. The engineer engaged her as a companion for his wife, and gave her money enough to begin her studies once more²⁶.

It was by the end of 1891, after studying art in Dublin and writing her first unpublished novel, *The Woman Without a Soul*, that Althea Gyles moved to London, where she took a room in Charlotte Street «[...] still pursuing art, first at Peddars, then at the Slade School, where her expenses were paid for by one of her Grey relatives. In those years she seems to have moved in literary society [...]»²⁷. In London, she became famous not only for producing Yeats' cover designs, but also for her cover of Dowson's *Decorations in Verse and Prose* (1899)²⁸ and her illustrations to Wilde's *The Harlot's House* (1904)²⁹. She was also associated with The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn³⁰, already joined by Yeats in 1890 – after his former experiences in the Dublin Hermetic Society (1885) and in Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical Society (1887)³¹.

«Most watched her in mockery», wrote Yeats in the *Autobiographies*, «but I watched in sympathy [...]»³². Miss Althea Gyles' life was characterized by several extravagant anecdotes and contradictory voices mostly connected, as already anticipated, with her artistic talent and mysterious temperament, but also caused by a miserable existence and occult disposition. She was variously defined as a painter and a poet of genius, as revealed by Mrs. Eleanor Farjeon's letter to Mrs. Cazalet, Althea's nephew (dated May 16th, 1951): «[...] thanks for sending me Althea's poems. She was, I think quite exquisitely gifted, as a writer and an artist»³³. As well, in one of his letters to Mrs. Cazalet, the Irish poet, artist, and stage designer Cecil French admitted: «[...] your aunt had a considerable reputation about 1900. She was a most difficult being with noble qualities, who invariably became the despair of those who had helped her» (*AGSC*). An opinion which was also shared by one of her editors, met around 1910³⁴, Clifford Bax, who wrote to Mrs. Cazalet on February 29th, 1949: «What an eccentric she was!», and continued «In my opinion, which is shared by Mr. French, she had a quite rare talent both as poet and painter» (*AGSC*). Yeats himself in *The Trembling of the Veil* observed that:

She had talent and imagination, a gift for style; but, though ready to face death for painting and poetry, conceived as allegorical figures, she hated her own genius, and had not met praise and sympathy early enough to overcome the hatred. Face to face with paint and canvas, pen and paper, she saw nothing of her genius but its cruelty, and would have scarce arrived before she would find some excuse to leave the schools for the day, if indeed she had not invented over her breakfast some occupation so laborious that she could call it a duty, and so not go at all. [...] composition strained my nerves and spoiled my sleep; and yet, as far back as I could trace and in Ireland we have long memories my paternal ancestors had worked at some intellectual pursuit, while hers had shot and hunted³⁵.

She was often rumored to be slightly insane and completely eccentric in both her life and manners, or in her choice to live in poverty, firstly challenging her father's authority and secondly rejecting her own friends' help. In Yeats' words:

She could at any time, had she given up her profession, which her father had raged against, not because it was art, but because it was a profession, have returned to the common comfortable life of women. When, a little later, she had quarrelled with the engineer or his wife, and gone back to bread and shell-cocoa I brought her an offer from some Dublin merchant of fairly well paid advertisement work, which would have been less laborious than artistic creation; but she said that to draw advertisements was to degrade art, thanked me elaborately, and did not disguise her indignation. She had, I believe, returned to starvation with joy, for constant anaemia would shortly give her an argument strong enough to silence her conscience when the allegorical images glared upon her, and, apart from that, starvation and misery had a large share in her ritual of worship³⁶.

Eleanor Farjeon claimed in her aforementioned letter to Mrs. Cazalet: «I used to go to her terribly poor, and very untidy room off King's Road, Chelsea, and found her fascinating and exhausting. I think everyone who knew her at all closely began by doing all they could and in the end simply had to slow down in self-defence. She had almost the most beautiful hands I have ever seen, and quite the dirtiest» (*AGSC*).

Finally, she was the object of gossip for her *liaison* with the well-known and much discussed pornographic publisher Leonard Smithers (1861-1907). «Gyles was seen by her friends as a naïve, virginal, spiritualized sort of figure, utterly devoted to her art. Consequently, her sudden liaison with the fleshly Smithers was universally viewed as nothing less than scandalous»³⁷. In a letter to Lady Gregory written in November 1899, Yeats himself did not hesitate to assert:

A very unpleasant thing has happened but it is so notorious that there is no use in hiding it. Althea Gyles, after despising Symons & [George] Moore for years because of their morals has ostentatiously taken up with Smithers, a person of so immoral a life that people like Symons and Moore despise him. She gave an at home the other day & poured out tea with his arm round her waist & even kissed him at intervals. I told her that she might come to my 'at homes' as much as she liked but that I absolutely forbade her to bring Smithers (who lives by publishing books which cannot be openly published for fear of the law) . . . She seems to be perfectly mad, but is doing beautiful work. I did my best last week to make her see the necessity for some kind of disguise, but it seems to be a point of pride with her to observe none. It is all the more amazing because she knows all about Smithers [*sic*] past. She is in love, & because she has some genius to make her thirst for realities & not enough of intellect to see the temporal use of unreal things she is throwing off every remnant of respectability with an almost religious enthusiasm³⁸.

The affair with Smithers probably began in 1899, when Gyles «on several occasions was seen with Smithers on his frequent trips to Paris», subsequently starting to work on her five illustrations for Oscar Wilde's *The Harlot's House*, published by Smithers in 1904: «In fact, it was on one of these business-*cum*-pleasure trips on the spring of 1899 that Smithers and Wilde [...] came up with the idea of an edition de luxe of the poet's poem "The Harlot's House" which Gyles, who was present, would illustrate»³⁹.

In *A Note on Althea Gyles (1868-1949)* Leonard Fletcher wrote (October 1957): «In 1900 she had a serious breakdown, probably as a result of a liaison with Leonard Smithers» and, he continues, «for the breakdown of this, see Aleister Crowley's story *At the Fork of the Roads* [*sic*], in the first issue of Crowley's magazine, *The Equinox* [*sic*] (March 1909)»⁴⁰. Althea Gyles' relationship with Leonard Smithers was first fictionalized in Faith Compton Mackenzie's novel *Tatting* (1957). Here Smithers appears as an «[...] abominable creature of high intelligence, no morals»⁴¹, with whom the heroine,

Ariadne Berden – who portrays Althea Gyles’ part – falls in love; secondly, by Aleister Crowley in his *At the Fork of the Roads* (1909), where he erotically and ironically reproduced Gyles’ affair with Smithers. In this work Althea is presented as the artist Hypatia Gay, fond of Will Bute, a poet based on the figure of Yeats, while Crowley is Count Swanoff. Smithers enters the scene when Althea-Hypatia takes some of her drawings to a Bond Street publisher, portrayed by Crowley with the following words:

This man was bloated with disease and drink; his loose lips hung in an eternal leer; his fat eyes shed venom; his cheeks seemed ever on the point of bursting into nameless sores and ulcers. He bought the young girl’s drawings. “Not so much for their value,” he explained, “as that I like to help promising young artists – like you, my dear!” Her steely virginal eyes met his fearlessly and unsuspectingly. The beast cowered, and covered his foulness with a hideous smile of shame⁴².

Immediately before Aleister Crowley’s death in 1947, Richard Ellmann visited him at Hastings. On that occasion, he received Crowley’s narration of his ambiguous relationship with the Irish artist Althea Gyles. From this account, later reported by Ellmann in his article, *Black Magic Against White: Aleister Crowley Versus W.B. Yeats*, published in 1948 in the «Partisan Review» and based on Crowley’s words, it emerges that Miss Gyles was on good terms both with the black magician and the white. She was aware of their totally different approaches to magic, of their esoteric vision and different use of connected symbols. Actually, during that visit, Crowley revealed to Ellmann Gyles’ deep involvement in the psychic quarrel between Yeats and himself for control of the Golden Dawn, immediately before its very division and MacGregor Mathers’ leaving⁴³. From Ellmann’s narration, it appears that Crowley – after receiving from Mathers a few «appropriate charms and exorcisms to use against recalcitrant members» – tried to keep possession of the Golden Dawn Vault of the Adepts, i.e. the temple of the Inner Order, at 36 Blythe Road, Hammersmith. Once defeated by Yeats, Crowley started «infecting London with his black masses and his bulging, staring eyes corrupted many innocents», records Ellmann. «Among them was a young painter named Althea Gyles, an unconventional young woman whose work had appeared in the *Savoy*. Althea felt herself surrounded by Crowley’s insidious aura, and went to her friend Yeats to ask if she could do anything to save herself»⁴⁴. Althea Gyles’ affair with Crowley probably started in that period, around 1900, before Crowley’s leaving his flat in Chancery Lane. In his own account of Crowley’s narration, Ellmann writes:

The poet was deeply concerned. [...] “bring me a hair of his head.” Althea thought that might be impossible, but would nothing else do as well? “Bring me any object from his rooms.” Althea accordingly went to Crowleys’ rooms for tea, and covertly managed to steal a hair of her host’s head [...]. But Crowley suspected foul play. Helplessly she allowed the magician to lead her down a long corridor [...], until

at last she arrived in front of a tabernacle covered with mystic signs and symbols. Crowley, after invoking the chthonian powers, suddenly pulled open the door of the tabernacle, and a skeleton fell into Althea's arms. She screamed, dropped the book, and ran off in terror. But she still had the hair of Crowley's head, and [...] she carried it to Yeats. The poet cast the requisite spells and exorcisms, [...]. That night when the black magician went to bed, he discovered a vampire beside him [...]. At last, desperate from loss of blood and sleep, Crowley went to consult another magician [...] and was instructed as to what to do. On the tenth night, as soon as the vampire put in an appearance, Crowley took her by the throat and squeezed with all his might. An then, just as the other magician had predicted, she suddenly groaned and disappeared. Her power was ended, and she returned no more. Althea unfortunately did not fare so well. In spite of Yeats's best efforts, she was willy-nilly drawn back to Crowley and finally forced to give way entirely to his baleful fascination⁴⁵.

On June 9th 1902, Yeats wrote a letter to Lady Gregory complaining about Althea's physical and mental conditions, showing that he was deeply acquainted with his Irish compatriot, sincerely regretful for her decisions and statements, but also firm in his own position:

My dear Lady Gregory,

My eyes have not been quite as well during the last couple of days owing I think to a cold & I want to write to you at once about Althea Gyles. [...] Althea Gyles has now left the Hydropathic having been the occasion of a "row" of some sort, she is evidently highly hysterical but her lungs have at any rate for the time being been cured. I must say that she fills me with despair, she hardly seems to me sane. She all but turned me out three times, the last time I was round, because I would not take up her quarrel about the Hydropathic.

I believe that a friend of hers will take charge of her in July & that after that she can go to Conn Gore Booth (that was) who may possibly bring her to Ireland where one can only hope she will somehow drift into the hands of her family who seem loath to do their duty in the matter. I doubt since I have seen Althea, if she will be able to work, at least to work enough to ever make her living. Her mind seems to me too unbalanced. She is absorbed in a feeling of indignation against everybody and everything. I could do nothing on Friday but repeat to her what Hume said about Rousseau: "If Jean Jacques were in the right, too many people would be in the wrong." (I think at this point she practically did turn me out) [...] ⁴⁶.

As reported by Ian Fletcher, «Her later years were to be spent in those dreary bed-sitting suburbs of South London, moving from Tulse Hill to Sydenham, casting horoscopes, collecting antiques of a shadowy value»⁴⁷. She died in a nursing home near Crystal Palace in January 1949, after spending her last years in complete poverty, assisted by a friend, Eleanor Farjeon, and by Compton and Faith Mackenzie. Jad Adams, in his biography of Dowson entitled *Madder Music, Stronger Wine* (2000), writes about the aged artist: «her flaming hair now grey, her independence an old woman's eccentricity, her punctilious craftsmanship becoming mere fussiness about domestic trivia.

She lived in bedsits in Tulse Hill and then Sydenham, casting horoscopes as the new century wore on, until she became a ghost from the 1890s in war-shattered London»⁴⁸.

2. *The Secret Rose*, Yeats' seventeen short-stories collection, was published in London in 1897 by Lawrence & Bullen, and illustrated by John B. Yeats. Two years later, in 1899, *The Wind Among the Reeds* was issued in London by Elkin Mathews and in the same year Yeats' *Poems*⁴⁹ were published for the second time – the first edition was printed in 1895⁵⁰. These three ornately-styled volumes deserve particular attention, not only for their considerable poetic value and conspicuous cross-references to Yeats' symbolism, but also for their most interesting cabalistic covers, all of them generated by Miss Althea Gyles' talented hand and visionary mind⁵¹. The three covers, perfectly mirroring the content of their related volumes, can be considered the most accomplished result of William B. Yeats' and Althea Gyles' common esoteric symbolism and imagery, as Richard Ellmann⁵², Ian Fletcher, Liam Miller⁵³, Warwick Gould and Richard Finneran have widely demonstrated in their studies.

Both Gyles and Yeats actually drew on a very ancient mystical source, chiefly reached after their entrance into the Golden Dawn⁵⁴. As widely known, both Madame Blavatsky's and MacGregor Mathers' occult societies were grounded upon a plethora of mystic and esoteric symbols, most of them of cabalistic and Rosicrucian inheritance; symbols that constituted a sort of primeval talisman or sign of identification for their adepts, growing in meaning and notoriety whenever employed by painters or poets in their works. Althea's «pictures with patterns and rhythms of colour» and «drawings with patterns and rhythms of line» stroke Yeats in deep since, as it is familiar, for Yeats «pattern and rhythm are the road to open symbolism»⁵⁵ and symbols are the secret keys enabling the adept to ascend the cabalistic tree of life and achieve the upper level of wisdom. «By contemplation and manipulation of certain symbols», writes Ian Fletcher, «the mystic can move into the spiritual world for which they stand. [...] For him [Yeats], the symbol as it appears in poetry or in the visual arts is not distinguished from the symbol as it appears in religion or in magic and it is the function of the artist in any field to mediate symbols»⁵⁶. And Miss Althea Gyles proved to be, for Yeats, a great mediator of symbols, as clearly emerges from *A Symbolic Artist and the Coming of Symbolic Art* (1898). In this essay, Yeats defined Althea's pictorial art as «full of abundant and passionate life, which brought to mind Blake's cry, "Exuberance is beauty", and Samuel Palmer's command to the artist, "Always seek to make excess more abundantly excessive"»⁵⁷. Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux remarks that Yeats mostly prized Miss Gyles' covers for their ability to combine words with designs, where the latter code or decode the former, or better, they artistically mediate those symbols intrinsic in his poetry, reinforcing their semantic and imaginative value.

Many had disappointed Yeats, but Althea Gyles's covers [...] pleased him, perhaps because the designs are not separate from the written word but attempt to work with it. They image the books' major occult symbols, declare the author's Irishness by using Celtic lettering, and set the poems and stories in the Pre-Raphaelite tradition by echoing the motifs and patterns of Blake, Rossetti, and Burne-Jones⁵⁸.

Althea Gyles' most famous cover binding for *The Secret Rose* is the one in deep blue stamped in gold letters and designs⁵⁹, «suggestive of art nouveau and the Pan-Celtic movement begun in literature around 1894»⁶⁰. The front cover appears to be divided into three main parts. The title is included within an upper frame. Immediately beneath the title, we find another wider frame including Miss Gyles' famous drawing of the two lovers⁶¹. The painting is endowed with a well-structured and highly recognizable body of esoteric symbolism, which seems to find its very origin in the main character, a human skeleton lying supine under a straight line probably standing for the earthly surface. The skeleton is what remains of a knight, who is still recognizable from his untouched armour, a helmet on his head and a spear in his left hand. The figure of the dead warrior is positioned horizontally, perfectly fitting the horizontal line of the frame, with the head on the right side and the feet on the left. The knight clearly brings back to the heroes of one of the four great cycles of Irish mythology, the Ulster Cycle, formerly known as the Red Branch Cycle. And Yeats' volume is actually devoted to these very heroes, inspired by ancient Irish history and legend, from the «proud dreaming king» Fergus to the Red Branch King Conchobar and the legendary Celtic hero Cúchulain, each one questing «the most secret, and inviolate Rose»⁶². In one of the stories devoted to the Secret Rose cycle, *Of Costello the Proud, of Oona the Daughter of Dermot and of the Bitter Tongue*, the poet writes:

The next day a fisherman found him lying among the reeds upon the lake shore, lying upon the white lake sand, and carried him to his own house. And the peasants lamented over him and sang the keen, and laid him in the Abbey on Insula Trinitatis with only the ruined altar between him and MacDermot's daughter, and planted above them two ash-trees that in after days wove their branches together and mingled their leaves.

Althea Gyles' cover might be partially inspired by the end of the story, narrating the death of the hero Costello, of his grave besides that of MacDermot's daughter, and the ash-trees planted above the two tombs, mingling their branches and leaves. In Gyles' design, from the skeleton's genitals originate the roots of a leaf-less tree. The tree's roots and branches in their continuous interweaving appear to recreate the most typical intertwining of the Celtic medieval manuscripts:

Stylised roots, wrought to resemble the Celtic knotwork of richly illuminated gospels such as The Book of Durrow, intertwine with the bones of the buried knight and grow out from the earth in serpentine folds to form a stylised rose tree⁶³.

The tree with its serpentine branches whose roots are intertwined and come out from the skeleton of the knight, also recalls to the famous cabalistic symbol of the Tree of Life, which connects the phenomenal world to the noumenic one⁶⁴. Now, the cabalistic Tree of Life is figuratively represented as a diagram composed of ten circles or spheres, i.e. the so-called Sephiroth or divine emanations. Each one of the ten Sephiroth has, within the tree, a very specific position given by its very role and function. If we analyse Althea Gyles' tree, besides noticing that it rises from a knight skeleton and is composed of several leafless boughs, it is worth observing that it is characterized by eight symbols that can be related to eight of the ten Sephiroth of the Tree of Life. The ten emanations forming the Tree are usually divided into three columns: one forming the central part of the tree, one its right side and one its left side. While the central pillar is made-up of four Sephiroth, the right and left pillars respectively have three emanations.

The tenth and lowest emanation of the central column is called Malkuth, the Kingdom, and it stands for the physical expression of the divine, as well as for the physical world and the physical body. By overlapping the Tree of Life with Althea Gyles' tree, it is immediately possible to notice that Malkuth, finding itself at the base of the Tree, has the same position as the skeleton's reproductive organs which, in turn, just like Malkuth, stand for physical life.

The ninth Sephirah, immediately above Malkuth in the central column, is Yesod, the Foundation. It stands for the creation of the material world. It is interesting to notice that this emanation finds itself in correspondence with the trunk of Althea's tree, upon which the whole tree grows.

Still going on across the central column of the Tree of Life, we find the sixth Sephira, Tiphereth or Beauty. Being at the core of the tree, Tiphereth corresponds to the heart of the human body. It coordinates and reconciles all the other emanations. In Althea Gyles' painting, the centre of the tree is characterized by the image of a rose and a cross, surrounded by seventeen segmented luminous rays. As widely known, the image of the rose and the cross is a fundamental esoteric symbol recalling the Rosicrucian emblem of the rosy-cross. Since 1888, the rosy-cross had been the very emblem of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, founded on the same year. The rosy-cross is composed of four arms, just like the Christian cross, but differently from the latter, each arm of the rosy-cross has a different colour standing for the four alchemic elements: red stands for fire, blue for water, yellow for air, and citrine, olive, black and russet – all of them colouring the fourth arm – for earth⁶⁵. Miss Gyles' «synchronic, unchanging, timeless»⁶⁶ rose is here made-up of four circular petals, which further contrast with the rationality and geometric harshness of the cross. Richard Ellman⁶⁷ states that the four petals of Gyles' rose represent the four elements, while the image of the rose intersected with the cross pertains to the Rosicrucian tradition, reproducing the fifth element or quintessence⁶⁸, a point of convergence between the spir-

itual and the material world. Actually, according to the Rosicrucian doctrine embraced by the Golden Dawn adepts, the rose is also the symbol of the mystic wedding, which can be contemplated only by those initiates who have already fulfilled their phenomenal pilgrimage and found their own cross and rose joined together. It is worth noticing that while the cross is the memory of each terrestrial fight and sufferance, the rose stands for love and beauty. Althea Gyles gives them a central position within her own tree. Exactly like the rosy-cross, the sixth Sephirah named Tiphereth stands at the centre of the Tree of Life and is in turn not only associated with beauty and love (the rose), but also with the sacrifice (the cross) that each man has to experience in order to be admitted to climb the Tree of Life: he has to sacrifice his own ego. Exactly like the rosy-cross, Tiphereth represents the equilibrium between opposite forces.

The fourth and fifth Sephiroth appear to be deeply connected. They are Chesed and Geburah, the former stands for mercy and benevolence and the latter for power and courage; Chesed is defined as the king-ruler, while Geburah as the king-warrior; Chesed contains the oral esoteric teachings, while Geburah the written teachings. Chesed is the absolute divine love, while Geburah a limited love. In Althea Gyles' drawing, just in correspondence to the positions assigned to Chesed and Geburah, the intertwined stylized foliage of the tree of life creates the faces of two lovers kissing each other, while their hands are placed on the rosy-cross at the centre of the tree. The two lovers appear to represent, like Chesed and Geburah, the two opposing principles of humanity, standing for male and female principles. Besides, if Chesed and Geburah find their reconciliation in Tiphereth, in which all opposites are conciliated, the two lovers can be restored to their primeval state of harmony only through the rosy-cross symbol; a reconciliation figuratively represented by Althea Gyles through the image of the two lovers' hands, joined together and laid upon the rose. The two lovers also recall Yeats' aforementioned story, *Of Costello the Proud, of Oona the Daughter of Dermot and of the Bitter Tongue*, and in particular the image of the spirits of Costello and Oona, whose after-death meeting is metonymically represented by the image of their interweaving branches⁶⁹.

Above the two lovers, the intertwining branches of the tree form a crown containing three roses, which completes the foliage of the tree and concludes its ramification⁷⁰. The central rose is slightly higher than the others. Interestingly, the three higher emanations of the cabalistic Tree of Life are in the same position as Gyles' three roses, with the central emanation slightly higher than the others. The higher three emanations are represented by Kether, the Crown or Father (in the middle pillar), by Cochmah, Wisdom or the Son (in the right or male pillar), and Binah, Understanding or the Mother (in the left or female pillar).

Trying to decode Miss Gyles' painting with all its symbolic and imaginative references, we can identify a trajectory starting from the skeleton's bones

and directed upwards, towards the three roses. The symbols reproduced in the painting grow in spirituality, from the knight's bones to the tree of life with its pulsing rosy-cross heart surrounded by the stylised light beams, up to the Crown (Keter) given by the three roses. Assuming that the main goal of all the Golden Dawn adepts was the soul's abandoning the phenomenal way in order to find the noumenic one, Gyles' painting may be conceived as a sort of diagram whose departure coincides with the earth and whose arrival is the sky; a map which is immediately recognized by the esoteric readers of Yeats' volume, visually anticipating for them the very content of the whole work. It is not material life that finds its origin from death (i.e. the knight's skeleton), but the spiritual life starting after death. And the initiate knows that he has to undertake a journey, where each step will correspond to a particular moment in his spiritual growth. This vision of life after death is evidently not a static but a dynamic one, and dynamism is given by this upwards trajectory, by the dead body of the knight, which is still able to originate life, by the intertwining branches of the tree, which in turn appear to go on lengthening and forming other images, by the beams of light that sprinkle from the rosy-cross and last by the two lovers kissing each other.

Concerning the two colours adopted, we should recall that while gold is the metal associated with the Sun where its yellow colour refers to the element of the air, blue is related to the element of water. Besides, yellow and blue are two of the three primary colours. Blue is also the colour characterizing the fourth Sephirah, Chesed, which, as already anticipated, is the symbol of divine love, while yellow is the colour of the fifth Sephirah, Tiphereth, the latter here corresponding to the rosy-cross. Moreover, gold immediately recalls to the very name of the Golden Dawn. Steven Putzel, in his *Reconstructing Yeats*, also claims that «The cover's rich blue and gold suggests the bejewelled book shrines crafted to house holy texts [...]»⁷¹.

The lower frame of the drawing contains the name of W.B. Yeats «in un-authentic yet Celt-looking script, densely surrounded by a design of points and stylised rose petals»⁷², observes Putzel, while Fletcher is much more scathing in his analysis, admitting that «[...] the lettering of the title is eccentric (and mediocre) [...]. This is particularly true of the *r* where the tail is snapped off. The *a* of Yeats is ordinary English. The form of the *e* is tenuously nearer to Gaelic script; Miss Gyles' lettering improves as she persists»⁷³.

The book spine bears the title of the volume, the name of the author, the publisher's name «A.H. Bullen» at the bottom. Concerning the lettering, as still argued by Fletcher, «That on the spine is hand-drawn. The T and H are traditional Irish, the B (of 'Butler') is not. Irish makes no distinction in the b (nor with later founts in the r or s) between upper- and lower-case. W and y do not occur in Irish, so that they have to be mocked-up: w is done as a u. The lettering is condensed»⁷⁴. Among the names of the author and the editor, and the title of the volume, Miss Gyles draws a spear sinking into a

bowl, a sort of cauldron or better, according to Warwick Gould, «a chalice»⁷⁵. The vegetation grows from this cauldron or chalice and is interweaved to the spear, as to reproduce the image of the skeleton (metonymically represented by the spear) and of the tree (metonymically symbolised by its branches). As well, it recalls the symbol of the caduceus or wand of Hermes, the image typically characterized by the two serpents twisting together around a rod. The latter is, writes Fletcher, «[...] a resonant emblem, relating to Hermes, Thoth and through its flowering to Moses and so to a familiar secret wisdom tradition [...] The caduceus involves hermaphroditism (the kissing heads in the tree of life seem androgynous rather than male and female) and its touch turns to gold [...] The flowers wreathed round the cone might well be fritillary, a spotted snake flower, elegant, sinister, white-purple-red touched with green and with a drooping cup»⁷⁶. Furthermore, the lance may also suggest the phallic symbol in its union with the female one, the latter given by the bowl. Putzel, referring to the caduceus image, points out that

[t]his emblem, like the front cover, coveys Golden Dawn iconography and stands as a symbol of sexuality, but it is also the spear of the God Lug with its point dipped in poppies to quench the flame of battle – one of the four treasures of the Tuatha De Danann (named by the dying woman in 'The Adoration of the Magi')⁷⁷.

According to Warwick Gould, the lance and chalice might also evoke the Holy Grail symbolism and related legends⁷⁸.

On the back cover is reproduced a mandala, showing the same rosy-cross emblem that is portrayed on the front cover. Here the cross is surrounded by twenty-eight broken rays or spears: seven coming out from each of the four angles formed by the two branches of the cross. The rose, the cross and the pointed spears are included within the four sides of a vertically positioned square. Each side is composed of the converging tips of two spears. This quadrangular image is itself included within a two-line circle, where the outer circle is «bounded by what appear to be stylised waves»⁷⁹.

Putzel maintains that this design constitutes «[...] an exact replica of the cover of Robartes' secret text which the narrator describes as 'a book bound in vellum, and having upon the vellum and the alchemical rose with many spears thrusting against it, but in vain, as was shown by the shattered points of those nearest' (SR, 249; VSR, 141)»⁸⁰. Actually, Althea Gyles might as well have gained inspiration by Yeats' *Rosa Alchemica*, where both the narrator and Michael Robartes are questing for a supernatural experience. The narrator tells of a visit received by his friend Michael Robartes, of their night conversation and of the narrator's decision to join Robartes' Order of the Alchemical Rose. Before starting the initiation ceremony, the unnamed narrator takes an ancient Ritual Manuscript, described by Yeats in «the page proofs of the 1897 edition, the italicized section having been cut by Yeats from the published book»⁸¹:

In the box was a book bound in vellum, and having *a rose-tree growing from an armed anatomy, and enclosing the faces of two lovers painted on the one side, to symbolize certainly the coming of beauty out of corruption, and probably much else; and upon the other, the alchemical rose with many spears thrusting against it, but in vain, as was shown by the shattered points of those nearest. The book was written upon vellum [...]*⁸².

Perfectly reflecting and joining Althea Gyles' illustrations, we are told that even the deepest sanctuary of the Order of the Alchemical Rose creates a mandala with a rose linking together earth and sky. Most significantly, the petals of the rose turn into immortal beings joining the mortals into an everlasting dance. Among the dancers is the symbol of a flouted cross, that evidently is related to the rose and to the ending Christian Era.

The reiteration of various opposing couples on the front and back covers, as well as on the book spine, such as the rose and the cross, the lance and the bowl, the rosy-cross and the spears are the epitome of a main opposition, the one between eternity and death, spiritual and material life. Althea Gyles' tree of life with the rosy-cross symbol at its very heart, perfectly reproduces the point of encounter between sensible reality and the spiritual one, the former given by the dead knight and the latter by the living couple. Physical death and spiritual or divine love meet each other in the middle of the tree, where the rosy-cross symbol reveals itself. Althea Gyles, in her plastic interpretation of Yeats' leitmotifs, expressed throughout the volume, is suggesting the contrast given by the afore-mentioned main opposing couples, by attributing a circular form to all the elements pertaining to spiritual life and a linear and rational form to all the elements pertaining to the sensible reality. The two epigraphs inside the volume are as well emblematic of this symbolic and opposing union, highlighting Yeats' vision of beauty and time. The first one is a quotation from the poet of «visionary beauty»⁸³, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam: «As for living, our servants will do that for us» (*Axel*). The other is a passage from Ovid's *Metamorphosis XV*, referring to the moment when the old Helen starts realizing her loss of beauty, ravaged by the passing years. Actually, in his dedication to George Russell, Yeats' friend and Irish writer better known as AE⁸⁴, Yeats anticipates that the real argument of his work is «the war of spiritual with natural order», celestial bliss and mortal misery find a proper actualization in the book stories and are definitely joint together into the symbol of the secret rose⁸⁵, in which all the conflicts are reconciled and resolved.

3. The first editions of *The Wind among the Reeds* were published both in England by Mathews and in America by Lane from plates produced in America. The parallel publication, at first opposed by Elkin Mathews who didn't want his former partner, John Lane, to go on with his own plan⁸⁶, was achieved in the form of a final compromise after a long diatribe involving

Mathews, Lane and Yeats himself. A conflict which, instead of being concluded with the American rights affair, subsequently shifted to another matter, the binding of the volume. As maintained by Charles Ricketts, «Mathews and Yeats have been at odds over the binding for *The Wind* for some time before its publication . . . Yeats envisioned his new book of poems with an appropriate cover design and a frontispiece»⁸⁷. Actually, in order to reproduce also figuratively the Celtic subject of the volume, Yeats «chose an artist close to the Celtic Movement, Althea Gyles»⁸⁸. Miss Althea Gyles' design and lettering in gilt on the covers and spine, defined by Ian Fletcher as her «most accomplished»⁸⁹, probably did not match with Mathews' low-cost and plain publishing style. Hence, Mathews' attempt to change gold for yellow and Yeats' own reply in the Autumn of 1898, after receiving from Mathews a yellow binding proof:

First the colour and the cloth won't do. It is a colour I particularly dislike. The colour should be the same dark blue as my "Secret Rose". Secondly the yellow lines won't do. This cover is simply ugly. The lines should be in gold or the cover should be perfectly plain. I thought it was understood that the design was to be in gold. Please either get the design printed in gold or abolish it altogether, letting me know what the block has cost. Surely you must see yourself that it is absurd to print a book of verse of any kind of importance with the same kind of common stuff on the cover that you put on a novel. [...] The cover you sent me would do neither of us credit. I believe on the other hand that if you make it a really charming book to look at you will help the book greatly⁹⁰.

It followed other proofs and letters⁹¹ but, in the end, the simultaneous first and second Elkin Mathews editions of *The Wind* came out according to Yeats' desire. Mathews actually resolved to cut a part of the publishing costs by removing, either from the first edition or from the following editions of the volume⁹², the frontispiece where Althea Gyles had portrayed a stylised Yeats «as Rosicrucian mage»⁹³. After the ordinary edition, Charles Ricketts proposed to Yeats a new version of *The Wind* in a full vellum deluxe binding, with Althea Gyles' design and lettering in gilt on the covers and spine. Yeats enthusiastically accepted Ricketts' proposal. Notwithstanding, «the ordinary third edition of 1900 still was issued in dark blue cloth with Gyles' design in gold as in the first and second editions; however, it was accompanied by an alternate binding style: blue-gray boards with Gyles' design stamped in black»⁹⁴. It was only in 1903 that twelve copies⁹⁵ were printed in the deluxe binding, with the design in gold on vellum binding, while the ordinary 1903 edition was issued in plain boards.

The edition of *The Wind Among the Reeds*⁹⁶ here referred to is the Elkin Mathews 1899 edition, in full blue publisher's cloth with gilt-stamped design by Althea Gyles on front, spine and back. Concerning the binding of the volume, the pages appear to be cut by hand and all edges are untrimmed. As in *The Secret Rose* binding, where the covers are in deep blue with letters and

designs in gilt and Yeats' name is within the lower frame «in unauthentic yet Celtic-looking script»⁹⁷, also in *The Wind*, Yeats' name is on the lower part of the front cover, at its centre, inside a straight frame. Ian Fletcher, referring to the front cover, argues that «the lettering is again accurate with the exception once more of the *B*. [...] we can trace a continuous evolution from *The Secret Rose*»⁹⁸.

In *The Wind* design Althea Gyles reveals again her indebtedness to the cabalistic tradition. The symbolic substrate from which she conspicuously draws, is clearly rendered at the figurative level as to reinforce the deep poetic connections between *The Secret Rose* and *The Wind Among the Reeds*. Actually, as it is widely known, the stories included in *The Secret Rose* are deeply related to the thirty-seven poems of *The Wind* collection, where the symbol of the secret rose also plays a centripetal force, attracting and evoking the most ancient mystical and esoteric symbols and imagery. It is in particular in the homonymous poem entitled *The Secret Rose*, that the rose receives a clear representation both at a semantic and symbolic level. In this poem, the rose exemplifies the point of union between the spiritual world and the material reality, sending back to the Rosicrucian doctrine of the Golden Dawn:

Far off, most secret, and inviolate Rose,
 Enfold me in my hour of hours; where those
 Who sought thee in the Holy Sepulchre,
 [...]
 Men have named beauty (1-3, 7).

Despite the fact of representing one of the most relevant symbolical connections between Yeats' *The Secret Rose* and *The Wind Among the Reeds* volumes, Miss Althea Gyles, in her *Wind* covers, does not figuratively pay any tribute to the rosy-cross symbol, the quintessential element. Far from the front and back covers of *The Secret Rose*, where it plays a central part, leaving a subordinate role to all the other esoteric symbols, and far from *Poems* (1899), where the image of the rosy-cross overtops the front cover and that of the rose the back cover⁹⁹, in *The Wind Among the Reeds* the rosy-cross symbol appears to be willingly concealed. Further, what is really worth noticing is the somewhat implicit, indirect, and simpler plastic representation of the esoteric and mystical cauldron *tout court*. The latter appears to be strictly reduced into Althea's drawing of the four natural elements, which are symbolically evoked by a plain design and nature-related images. In other words, the difficult symbolic and multilayered level enhanced by the weird figures appearing on the front and back covers of *The Secret Rose* is here replaced by an essential design, seemingly not complicated with any difficult obscure symbolism.

The front cover is characterized by a large frame including the central design, which is bordered by an upper and a lower panel. Within the lower

panel, tongues of fire seem to burn the name of the poet, thus evoking the symbolic meaning of the fire of inspiration. «The title at the top of the front cover was balanced at the bottom by the author's name rising over a flame-like pattern highly reminiscent of one of Gyles' mentors – both spiritual and artistic – William Blake»¹⁰⁰. We remember that in *America* (1793), William Blake portrayed his red demon, Orc, the very symbol of the new spiritual vision gained by a violent act of rebellion, as burnt by the purifying fire able to destroy his material clothes and to inspire him with a totally new transcendent perspective. As suggested by Putzel, «[e]ach of the four elements is present in the world [...] of *The Secret Rose* and *The Wind Among the Reeds*. Earth-heavy humans are blessed and tormented by the fire of inspiration that allows them to hear and sometimes see 'elemental beings' in wind and wave»¹⁰¹. In her representation of each one of the four elements, Miss Gyles implicitly suggests the image of the poet who, once burnt by the flames of inspiration, is able to perceive in Putzel's aforementioned words some elemental beings, probably in the portrayed reeds blown by the wind and generated by the water. Fletcher also supports this hypothesis, claiming that «[t]he cover expresses the origin of inspiration»¹⁰². The blow of the wind, which corresponds to the life blow or breath, accordingly symbolizes the element of the air which, in turn, stands for the invisible, spiritual life. The wind which blows among the reeds is thus the Air, i.e. the Spirit or Universal Mind which circulates, exchanges, and disperses, by penetrating the Earth, causing the Fire to burn, and mixing itself with the Water. Allen Grossman, in *Poetic Knowledge in the Early Yeats*, claims that *The Wind Among the Reeds* must be conceived as a single «mythological poem» about the «search for poetic knowledge»¹⁰³ and the poet himself, burnt by the fire of inspiration, is the subject of this quest. In his opinion, the reed bowed by the wind might suggest the poet's «self-image as the over-thrown artist»¹⁰⁴, an image Yeats probably derived from pre-Raphaelite painting.

In the central part of the drawing, Althea Gyles illustrates a row of intertwined reeds, bent by the wind, clearly performing at a plastic level the very title of the volume. Now, one of the most relevant myths emerging from the volume is that, in Grossman's words, of the «creative fire-self», of the «the cherubic Warder of Eden, the cabalistic Jehovah» representing the father, and the White Woman standing both for the Beloved and the Mother¹⁰⁵. According to Warwick Gould, «[a]t the centre of *The Wind Among the Reeds Plate 4*. is a complex projection of a hopeless love triangle, the lover, his beloved, and a pale woman whom passion has worn, or Yeats, Maud Gonne, Olivia Shakespeare» and, he continues, Althea Gyles' «rather Japanese design» might be «[b]ased on her reading of one poem, 'Breasal the Fisherman'», from which she could have derived the image of the net of reeds, of the poet as fisherman and the beloved as the fish, «suggesting perhaps the planned entrapment of the beloved [within the net]. It is reduced to chaos, tangle and escape on the back, as fire gives way to water»¹⁰⁶.

Although you hide in the ebb and flow
 Of the pale tide when the moon has set,
 The people of coming days will know
 About the casting out of my net,
 And how you have leaped times out of mind
 Over the little silver cords,
 And think that you were hard and unkind,
 And blame you with many bitter words¹⁰⁷.

The eight tetrameter lines of this lyric, later called *The Fish*, present «the words of a man who has been on an impossible supernal quest for many years»¹⁰⁸. The motif of the mysterious initiation is conferred by many images which are symbolic of his travel across different places and times. Leaping «[o]ver the little silver cords» of the sea, throughout several times that are «out of mind», he is able to cast out or elude a mysterious net, temporally and geographically extended by means of his own quest. Instead of considering the fisherman as the poet himself, Grossman suggests that «[t]he fish is the prima materia, the lapis philosophorum, the ultimate identity of the self, and Yeats is in search of it the more hopelessly because the moon, symbol of subjectivity, has set, and the creature of the moon is not to be found elsewhere»¹⁰⁹. In Miss Gyles' drawing, the arch-shaped net might suggest a sort of three-dimensional corridor that has to be crossed by an invisible quester. Going further, this stereogram-like image made of five couples of bowed reeds, if observed from above, also evokes the very vaults of a secret temple.

The whole design is extremely rational and essential¹¹⁰. On the front cover, the reeds appear to be disposed in a symmetric pattern, rising from the lower part of the frame as to symbolise their phenomenal generation. Being ten in total, five on the left and five on the right side, they are once again evocative of the Tree of Life with its ten emanations. Interestingly, they lean and are intertwined so as to form the aforementioned net-motif. By imaging the ten reeds to be divided into two parts or columns, we can see that each reed intersects with nearly all the reeds of the opposing column, thus forming four visible convergent arches. This artistic solution is achieved thanks to the different position assumed by the ten reeds: the five reeds belonging to the right part all lean towards the left side of the frame, where we find the other five reeds leaning, in turn, towards the right side. Their opposing movement, implicitly caused by two different winds respectively blowing in two different directions, eastward and westward, creates a sort of intersecting game among the reeds and the aforementioned net-motif.

Differently from the four higher couples of reeds, which converge into the center producing four arches by their interweaving, the lower couple, being figuratively represented only upwards, from the very point where the two cannas meet, does not form any visible arch. Besides, the two lower reeds are made up of an entire bough instead of a fragmented one, as in the case of the

other eight reeds which, in turn, are respectively divided in two, three, three, and two parts. Going further, while the four lower couples of reeds, even in their fragmentation, are still composed of simple bow reeds, the higher couple appears to split into two parts, in turn made up of a new reed and a leaf, where the former follow the usual circular trajectory, while the latter waves towards the edge of the cover, as if to interrupt or conclude the net-design. The two leaves, one on the right and one on the left side of the frame, depart from the point of fragmentation of the higher couple.

The extreme rationality conferred by the division of the reeds into two parts and by their perfect, proportional interlacing is evidently disturbed and diminished by the flexion of these same plants, where the exact, somewhat rigid proportions of the design contrast with the sinuous movement of the reeds. A movement, the latter, which is evidently caused by one of the four natural elements, the air, here represented by the wind. The contrast between the spiritual and the phenomenal world, expressed by the air and the water generating the reeds, is also microcosmically represented by the higher couple, where the division between the earth-generated reed and the wind-blown leaf becomes neat and complete.

The upper frame is characterized by the title of the volume «in an almost consistent Celtic lettering while the author's name on the front base panel, again in Celtic is surrounded by some Beardsleyish *japonaiserie*»¹¹¹. The frame is somewhat pervaded by a number of little black points, which, in one of her letters to Yeats, Althea Gyles interestingly defines as the «“dust of the Dead”» and represents this concept by drawing a black square full of several little points: «I think the best design you can have for the book plate would be a simple square filled with the “dust of the Dead”»¹¹². Evidently, the dust sends back to the symbol of Earth.

The spine bears the title of the volume and the name of the poet. Fletcher interestingly observes that «[t]he lettering on the spine [...] is academically accurate with the exception of the *e* which has no extended crossbar. There is an English capital *B* which is not found in Gaelic founts until they began to be aligned to international use. The author's name is vertically compressed. The imprint is in roman»¹¹³. Between the name of the author and the name of the publisher, Althea Gyles appears to interrupt the sinuosity of the reeds of the front and back covers with the image of a linear, straight reed with a «hyssop-heavy sponge impaled»¹¹⁴ at the bottom of the reed, which, according to Gould, «dares us to compare the sufferings of sexual passion with those of Christ on the Cross»¹¹⁵.

Writing about Robartes, Aedh and Hanrahan, Yeats admitted that

These are personages in 'The Secret Rose'; . . . I have used them in this book more as principles of the mind than as actual personages. It is probable that only students of the magical tradition will understand me when I say that 'Michael Robartes' is

fire reflected in water, and that Hanrahan is fire blown by the wind, and that Aedh is fire burning by itself. To put it in a different way, Hanrahan is the simplicity of an imagination too changeable to gather permanent possessions, or the adoration of the shepherds; and Michael Robartes is the pride of the imagination brooding upon the greatness of its possessions, or the adoration of the Magi; while Aedh is the myrrh and frankincense that the imagination offers continually before all that it loves¹¹⁶.

Assuming that each one of the four element might be divided into four further elemental categories, i.e. Fire of Fire, Air of Fire, Water of Fire and Earth of Fire, and so on, Yeats considered Robartes as «fire reflected in water», while «Hanrahan is fire blown by the wind». Now, observing Althea's covers from the front to the back, we can immediately notice that while the front cover is characterized by fire and wind, which might recall the figure of Hanrahan, on the back cover fire is totally replaced by water – the reeds here clearly appear to be originated by water, the latter figuratively represented, beneath the reeds, by six parallel stylised lines, so as to form the waves of a river – while the element of the wind remains constant. Watching together the front and back covers, they appear to be perfectly specular in their composition: the central design is on both covers devoted to the reeds, while the lower design represents fire in the front cover and water on the back cover, all together suggesting the figure of Robartes as «fire reflected in water».

According to Ian Fletcher, «In this design, there is greater use of the dark blue base colour, while the back cover with its whip-lash leaves is nearer to the prevalent art nouveau idiom. Asymmetricality renders it more visually exciting than the front cover»¹¹⁷. Actually, the reeds in the back cover do not shape arches by interweaving with each other and giving thus birth to a rational pattern, as in the front cover, but they appear to branch out into a new rational reed creating a semi arch-pattern, and in a leaf that, like a ribbon, wraps the still bowed reeds. The waving leaves evidently find their origin from the two leaves of the front cover and are even figuratively related to them. As observed by Putzel, «The symmetrical pattern of interlocking reeds has been broken and now the slender leaves swirl about the reeds in a visual version of Yeats' comment that 'the wind bloweth as it listeth ...' (WR, 86; VP, 806)»¹¹⁸.

Gyles reworked all this. All the elements she illustrated on *The Wind* covers contribute to the symbolic language of the volume and enhance Yeats' attraction for symbolic art.

In Gyles' artistic translation of his symbolic vision, Yeats achieved one of his desires, to publish all his books in a «uniform shape»¹¹⁹. And it is worth noticing, as Gould accordingly enhances, that «These spinal designs and blue-and-gold liveries by Gyles established Yeats' image across five further titles *The Celtic Twilight*, 1902, *Poems 1899-1905*, *Poems: Second Series*, *The Poetical Works of William B. Yeats*, *The Unicorn from the Stars*, and across four publishers (Unwin, Bullen, Ernest Benn and the Macmillan company [...])»¹²⁰.

In *A Symbolic Artist*, Yeats himself wrote:

Once or twice an artist has been touched by a visionary energy amid his weariness and bitterness, but it has passed away. [...] If one imagine a flame burning in the air, and try to make one's mind dwell on it, that it may continue to burn, one's mind strays immediately to other images; but perhaps, if one believed that it was a divine flame, one's mind would not stray. I think that I would find this visionary beauty also in the work of some of the younger French artists, for I have a dim memory of a little statue in ebony and ivory. Certain recent French writers, like Villiers De L'Isle Adam; have it, and I cannot separate art and literature in this, for they have gone through the same change, though in different forms. I have certainly found it in the poetry of a young Irish Catholic who was meant for the priesthood, but broke down under the strain of what was to him a visionary ecstasy; in some plays by a new Irish writer; in the poetry of "A.E."; in some stories of Miss Macleod's; and in the drawings of Miss Gyles; and in almost all these a passion for symbol has taken the place of the old interest in life¹²¹.

Endnotes

¹ W.B. Yeats, *A Vision and Related Writings*, ed. by Alexander Norman Jeffares, Arena Books, London 1990, p. 134.

² In May 1884 he entered the Metropolitan School of Art in Kildare Street, though he considered the teaching received there as «destructive of enthusiasm» (quoted in T. Brown, *The Life of W.B. Yeats: A Critical Biography*, Blackwell Publishers Ltd., Malden, Mass. 1999, p. 28).

³ See for instance, his Coole Park pastel (1903).

⁴ J. Masefield, *Some Memoirs of W.B. Yeats*, Cuala Press, Dublin 1940, p. 1.

⁵ Yeats gave an account of his father's circle of friends in the *Autobiographies* as «painters who had been influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite movement but had lost their confidence» (The Macmillan Press, London 1955, rev. ed. 1979, p. 44), alluding to their giving up Pre-Raphaelitism.

⁶ *The Works of William Blake; Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical. Edited with Lithographs of the Illustrated Prophetic Books, and a Memoir and Interpretation by Edwin John Ellis and William Butler Yeats*, Bernard Quaritch, London 1893.

⁷ W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, cit., p. 157.

⁸ «Fell gave him a front-and-back design of an aureoled, winged and helmeted angel, presumably St. Michael [...], vanquishing a serpent, all enclosed within a celestial harp-shaped border of thorned roses» (W. Gould, *Yeats and His Books*, ESB International, The University College Cork 2005, p. 15).

⁹ In April 1894, Yeats' play *The Land of Heart's Desire* was published by Fisher Unwin. The editor adopted for the cover and title page of the volume, the poster designed by Aubrey Beardsley for the Avenue Theatre production of Yeats' play.

¹⁰ W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats, Volume IV, 1905-1907*, ed. by J. Kelly, R. Schuchard, Oxford UP, Oxford 2005, p. 211. Hereafter *CL4*.

¹¹ Ivi, p. 671.

¹² Quotations from Gyles' poetry are taken from the *Althea Gyles Special Collection* of the University of Reading. As reported by Ian Fletcher in his *Poet and Designer: W.B. Yeats and Althea Gyles*: «Mrs Barrington [Althea Gyles' sister] with great generosity presented to Reading University Library such papers of Miss Gyles as were in her possession, securing the equally

generous permission of her daughter, Mrs Joyce Cazalet. Among these were a typescript of the greater number of Miss Gyles' poems; the first chapters of two novels—*Mrs Campton's Campaign* and *Pilgrimage*; a number of miscellaneous essays; two children's stories and several drafts of the play which Miss Gyles mentions in her letters to W.B. Yeats» («Yeats Studies. An International Journal», 1, 1971, *Yeats and the 1890s*, ed. by R. O'Driscoll, L. Reynolds, p. 79, n. 32; published a second time in I. Fletcher, *W.B. Yeats and his Contemporaries*, The Harvester Press, Brighton 1987).

¹³ «Miss Horniman, John Masfield, William Rothenstein, Ricketts and Shannon are much in evidence. He says in his autobiography that a fanaticism for mythology delayed his friendship with Ricketts and Shannon, men “in the great tradition”, but now he saw them every three or four days. The two young artists, Pamela Coleman Smith and Althea Gyles (who designed his first bookplate), also find frequent mention in his letters», J. Hone, *W.B. Yeats, 1865-1939* (1943), St. Martin's Press, New York 1962, p. 179.

¹⁴ R.F. Forster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life Volume I: The Apprentice Mage 1865-1914*, Oxford UP, Oxford 1997.

¹⁵ W. Gould, *Yeats and His Books*, cit., p. 16.

¹⁶ I. Fletcher, *W.B. Yeats and Althea Gyles*, cit., p. 42.

¹⁷ Ivi, p. 68.

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 42.

¹⁹ For any in-depth study of Althea Gyles' family, see I. Fletcher, *W.B. Yeats and Althea Gyles*, cit., p. 45.

²⁰ W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, cit., pp. 237-238.

²¹ From *A Note On Althea Gyles (1868-1949)*, written by I. Fletcher on October 1957. This most important document is included in the *List of Works by A. Gyles (1868-1949)* in the University of Reading Library (Manuscript 823.91).

²² W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, cit., p. 238.

²³ Ivi, p. 236: «The one house where nobody thought or talked politics was a house in Ely Place, where a number of young men lived together, and, for want of a better name, were called Theosophists. Beside the resident members, other members dropped in and out during the day, and the reading-room was a place of much discussion about philosophy and about the arts. The house had been taken in the name of the engineer to the Board of Works, a black-bearded young man, with a passion for Manichean philosophy, and all accepted him as host; and sometimes the conversation, especially when I was there, became too ghostly for the nerves of his young and delicate wife, and he would be made angry. I remember young men struggling, with inexact terminology and insufficient learning, for some new religious conception, on which they could base their lives; and some few strange or able men».

²⁴ For references to Yeats' consideration of Althea Gyles' talent, see Yeats' *A Symbolic Artist and the Coming of Symbolic Art. An essay on Althea Gyles*, «Dome», 1, December 1898, special issue (reprinted in *Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats*, ed. by J.P. Frayne, C. Johnson, 2 vols., Columbia UP, New York 1976) and Althea Gyles' portrait at pp. 237-239 of *Autobiographies*.

²⁵ W.B. Yeats, *A Symbolic Artist and the Coming of Symbolic Art*, in *Uncollected Prose*, cit., p. 133.

²⁶ W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, cit., pp. 237-238.

²⁷ I. Fletcher, *W.B. Yeats and Althea Gyles*, cit., p. 45.

²⁸ Ernest Dowson's *Decorations: in Verse and Prose* were published in London by Leonard Smithers' The Chiswick Press. As reported by Jad Adams: «It was probably in the preparation of *Decorations* that Dowson met Althea Gyles, one of the few women associated with decadence. She was a poet and painter who 'sacrificed herself with an Asiatic fanaticism' to her art, according to Yeats, living on bread and shell-cocoa so that her food never cost her more than a penny a day. She was a year younger than Dowson, a fiery woman with red-gold hair whom Smithers engaged to design a cover for *Decorations* [...]. The design for Dowson's book was a

double rectangle in gold on white, enclosing a stylized flower with thorns on the front with another pattern, of thorns and foliage, on the back» (J. Adams, *Madder Music, Stronger Wine: The Life of Ernest Dowson, Poet and Decadent*, I.B. Tauris, London 2000, p. 157).

²⁹ First published in «The Dramatic Review», on April 11, 1885 and in 1904 by Leonard Smithers' The Mathurin Press in London, with five illustrations by Althea Gyles.

³⁰ «Miss Gyles was associated with the Order of the Golden Dawn and her interests extended to anti-vivisectionism and a neo-Ruskinian view of economics», L. Fletcher, *A Note On Althea Gyles (1868-1949)*, cit.

³¹ For an in-depth analysis of Yeats' adhesion to the Theosophical Society and the Golden Dawn, see M.K. Schuchard, *Yeats and the Unknown Superiors: Swedenborg, Falk, and Cagliostro*, in M. Mulvey Roberts, H. Ormsby-Lennon (eds.), *Secret Texts: The Literature of Secret Societies*, AMS, New York 1995, pp. 114-168; K. Raine, *Yeats, the Tarot and the Golden Dawn*, The Dolmen Press, Dublin 1972 and *Yeats the Initiate: Essays on Certain Themes in the Works of W.B. Yeats*, Allen and Unwin, London 1986; S. Graf, *W.B. Yeats – Twentieth-Century Magus: An In-depth Study of Yeats's Esoteric Practices & Beliefs, Including Excerpts from His Magical Diaries*, Samuel Weiser, Inc., York Beach (ME) 2000; A. Antonielli, *L'esoterismo colto di William Butler Yeats dalla Società Teosofica all'Aurora Dorata*, «Il Confronto Letterario», 47, II, 2007, pp. 69-98 e *William Blake e William Butler Yeats. Sistemi simbolici e costruzioni poetiche*, Firenze UP, Firenze 2009.

³² W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, cit., p. 238.

³³ From the *Althea Gyles Special Collection* of the University of Reading. Hereafter AGSC.

³⁴ I. Fletcher, *W.B. Yeats and Althea Gyles*, cit., p. 76.

³⁵ W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, cit., p. 238.

³⁶ Ivi, pp. 238-239.

³⁷ J.G. Nelson, *Publisher to the Decadents ...*, cit., p. 270.

³⁸ W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats, Vol. II, 1896-1900*, ed. by W. Gould, J. Kelly, D. Toomey, Clarendon, Oxford 1997, p. 473. Hereafter CL2.

³⁹ J.G. Nelson, *Publisher to the Decadents ...*, cit., p. 268.

⁴⁰ L. Fletcher, *A Note on Althea Gyles (1868-1949)*, in *List of Works by A. Gyles (1868-1949)*, the University of Reading Library (Manuscript 823.91).

⁴¹ F.C. Mackenzie, *Tattooing*, Cape, London 1957, p. 12.

⁴² A. Crowley, *At the Fork of the Roads*, «The Equinox», I, 1909, p. 104; accessible online <<http://www.thule-italia.net/letteraria/Crowley,%20Aleister%20-%20The%20Equinox%20Volume%2001.pdf>> (08/20/2010).

⁴³ «Both Crowley and Yeats were members of a secret magical order, the Hermetic Students of the Golden Dawn; [...]. But when Crowley showed a tendency to use his occult powers for evil rather than for good, the adepts of the order, Yeats among them, decided not to allow him to be initiated into the inner circle; they feared that he would profane the mysteries and unleash powerful magical forces against humanity. Crowley refused to accept their decision. He went to Paris, and there persuaded the chief of the Golden Dawn, a Celtophile magician named MacGregor Mathers, to deputize him to wrest control of the London temple of the order away from Yeats and his friends. Mathers furnished Crowley with appropriate charms and exorcisms to use against recalcitrant members, and instructed him to wear Celtic dress. Equipped accordingly in Highlander's tartan, with a black Crusader's cross on his breast, with a dirk at his side and a skindoo at his knee, Crowley arrived at the Golden dawn temple in London. Making the sign of the pentacle inverted, and shouting menaces at the adepts, Crowley climbed the stairs. But Yeats and two other white magicians came resolutely forward to meet him, ready to protect the holy place at any cost. When Crowley came within range the forces of good struck out with their feet and kicked him downstairs» (*Black Magic against White: Aleister Crowley versus W. B. Yeats*, «Partisan Review», 15, 9, September 1948, p. 1049).

⁴⁴ Ivi, p. 1050.

⁴⁵ Ivi, pp. 1050-1051.

⁴⁶ J. Kelly, R. Schuchard (eds.), *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats, Vol. III, 1901-1904*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1994, pp. 198-199. Hereafter *CL3*.

⁴⁷ I. Fletcher, *W.B. Yeats and Althea Gyles*, cit., p. 79.

⁴⁸ J. Adams, *Madder Music, Stronger Wine: The Life of Ernest Dowson, Poet and Decadent*, cit., p. 178.

⁴⁹ W.B. Yeats, *Poems, 1899-1905*, A.H. Bullen, London 1906; Maunsel & Co., Dublin 1906. The cloth is characterized by Althea Gyles' typical gold design on spine. Concerning Miss Althea Gyles' design to the *Poems* cover, not analysed in this study, J.W. Gleeson White's comments: «The name of Althea Giles [*sic*] belongs properly to the neo-Celtic school and her cover [...] is highly characteristic of a sombre, mystical and weird imaginative power expressing itself through a talent still vagrant and diffuse» («Studio», special Winter number, 1899, p. 32).

⁵⁰ As Joan Coldwell remarks «Yeats's active concern with cover-design began with his objection to the "facile meaningless" of the cover to his *Poems*, 1895. [...] Yeats had admired one of Fell's designs at an earlier exhibition but he felt that the artist's work had deteriorated; in John Quinn's copy of *Poems* Yeats wrote, "... Dent had spoilt him with all kinds of jobs & when he did this the spirit had gone out of him. I hate this expressionless angel of his.» (J. Coldwell, «*Images That Yet Fresh Images Beget*»: A Note on Book-Covers, in R. Skelton, A. Sadlemyer (eds.), *The World of W.B. Yeats*, University of Washington Press, Seattle 1967, p. 135).

⁵¹ Yeats' play *The Shadowy Waters* (Hodder and Stoughton, London 1900) also includes a design by Althea Gyles. Concerning the frontispiece of *The Wind among the Reeds*, W. Gould writes: «Gyles's frontispiece portrait of Yeats, [...] was omitted, but its three-petalled Tudor rose and blown fourth petal found their way onto *The Shadowy Waters*, 1900, also in the Cantwell collection, in stamped gold on blue» (W. Gould, *Yeats and His Books*, cit., p. 19).

⁵² R. Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats*, cit.

⁵³ L. Miller, *The Noble Drama of W.B. Yeats*, Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, N.J. 1977, p. 365.

⁵⁴ Even though, as remarked by Clifford Bax and reported by Fletcher in his *Poet and Designer*, Miss Gyles' «[...] occultism», [...], 'was skin deep' (I. Fletcher, cit., p. 46). For more detailed information on the Order of the Golden Dawn, see the Historical and Biographical Appendix of *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats, Volume I*, ed. by J. Kelly, E. Domville, Oxford UP, London 1986). Hereafter *CL1*.

⁵⁵ W.B. Yeats, *A Symbolic Artist and the Coming of Symbolic Art*, in *Uncollected Prose*, cit., p. 134.

⁵⁶ I. Fletcher, *W.B. Yeats and Althea Gyles*, cit., p. 47.

⁵⁷ W.B. Yeats, *A Symbolic Artist and the Coming of Symbolic Art*, in *Uncollected Prose*, cit., p. 135.

⁵⁸ E. Bergmann Loizeaux, *Yeats and the Visual Arts* (1986), Syracuse UP, New York 2003, p. 90.

⁵⁹ Reserve 821.912. Accession No. 57, 697. Bibliotheca Universitatis Radingensis. Lawrence & Bullen, Limited, 16 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London, MDCCCXCVII. See also W. Gould, *Yeats and His Books*, cit., p. 44, note 80: «Two copies survive in which the designs, or part of them, are stamped upon dark crimson or reddish brown cloth. One copy is in D.B. Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario. [...] It has 'Lawrence & Bullen' stamped on the spine, in common with copies of the first issue, but there is no design upon the lower board».

⁶⁰ D. Kiely, *Partnerships in Symbolic Book Craft: W.B. Yeats and His Covers Designers*, «Bibliion: The Bulletin of The New York Public Library», 8, 2, 2000, p. 54.

⁶¹ The image of the two lovers was probably drawn by Althea Gyles from Yeats' poem *The Two Trees*.

⁶² W.B. Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Poems*, ed. by P. Allt, R.K. Alspach, Macmillan, New York 1973, p. 170. The first eight stories of *The Secret Rose* deal with Irish legendary stories, while the other six belong to the tales of the Hanrahan Cycle and are partly grounded

in the life of Owen Ruadh O'Sullivan, the poet who lived during the XVIII Century. The main character of the last story, taking place at the end of the 19th Century, is Michael Robartes, who is leading the narrator towards an occult temple. At first, the collection also included a short story entitled *The Tables of the Law*, which had been conceived by Yeats as part of a triptych to which *Rosa Alchemica* and *The Adoration of the Magi* should belong as well. But the three stories were conceived by the publisher to be not publishable all together, for their highly esoteric content. Hence, two of them were removed from the 1897 edition. *The Tables of the Law* was first issued by «The Savoy» in November 1886, while *The Adoration of the Magi* was published privately in a separate volume, together with *The Tables of the Law*, in 1904, by Elkin Mathews. The greater part of *The Secret Rose* stories have also appeared in «The New Review», «The Sketch», «The National Observer» and «The Savoy».

⁶³ S. Putzel, *Reconstructing Yeats: the Secret Rose and The Wind Among the Reeds*, Barnes and Noble, Totowa, NJ 1986, p. 23.

⁶⁴ See A.R. Grossman, *Poetic Knowledge in the Early Yeats. A Study of The Wind Among the Reeds*, The University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville 1969, pp. 46-51.

⁶⁵ For any in-depth analysis of the rosy-cross symbol, see P.F. Case, *The True and Invisible Rosicrucian Order*, Samuel Weiser Publishing, York Beach, Maine 1985; C. and S. Cicero, *Secrets of a Golden Dawn Temple*, Liewellyn Publications, St. Paul, Minnesota 1992; S. Jones, *I.N.R.I., De Mysteries, Rosae Rubea Et Aurae Crucis*, Kessinger Publishing, Kila, Montana 1996. H. Van Buren Voorhis, *A History of Organized Masonic Rosicrucianism*, Societas Rosicruciana, Brookline, MA 1983; R. Steiner, *Christian Rosenkreutz: The Mystery, Teaching and Mission of a Master*, Rudolf Steiner Press, London 2002.

⁶⁶ S. Putzel, *Reconstructing Yeats: The Secret Rose and The Wind Among the Reeds*, cit., p. 25.

⁶⁷ Cfr. R. Ellmann, *Introduction to The Identity of Yeats*, revised ed., Oxford UP, New York 1964.

⁶⁸ Yet, it is worth noticing that the basic rosy-cross symbol is that of a five petal rose appended to the junction of the two lines of a 6 square cross.

⁶⁹ For the image of the two lovers who meet each other again, after death, in the form of mingling rose bushes, see also Yeats' poem *The Three Bushes*.

⁷⁰ This very design also appears on the covers of the following Yeatsian studies: R. Skelton and Ann Saddlemyer (eds.), *The World of W.B. Yeats: Essays in Perspective*, Dolmen, Dublin 1965; R.J. Finneran, *The Prose Fiction of W.B. Yeats: The Search for 'Those Simple Forms'*, Dolmen Press, Dublin 1973; A.N. Jeffares, *W.B. Yeats: A New Biography*, Hutchinson, London 1988; W.K. Chapman, *W.B. Yeats and English Renaissance Literature*, Macmillan, London 1991. See also J. Genet, *Villiers de L'Isle Adam and W.B. Yeats*, in A.N. Jeffares (ed.), *Yeats the European*, Barnes and Noble, Savage (Maryland) 1989, pp. 63-64; S. Putzel, *Reconstructing Yeats: The Secret Rose and The Wind Among the Reeds*, cit., pp. 22-25; W.H. O'Donnell, *A Guide to the Prose Fiction of W.B. Yeats*, UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor 1983, pp. 90-91.

⁷¹ Ivi, p. 24.

⁷² S. Putzel, *Reconstructing Yeats: The Secret Rose and The Wind Among the Reeds*, cit., p. 23.

⁷³ I. Fletcher, *W.B. Yeats and Althea Gyles*, cit., p. 56.

⁷⁴ Ivi, pp. 55-56.

⁷⁵ W. Gould, *Yeats and His Books*, cit., p. 17.

⁷⁶ I. Fletcher, *W.B. Yeats and Althea Gyles*, cit., p. 55.

⁷⁷ S. Putzel, *Reconstructing Yeats: The Secret Rose and The Wind Among the Reeds*, cit., p. 24.

⁷⁸ W. Gould, *Yeats and His Books*, cit., p. 17.

⁷⁹ S. Putzel, *Reconstructing Yeats*, cit., p. 24

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁸¹ W. Gould, *Yeats and His Books*, cit., p. 16.

⁸² Quoted from W. Gould, *Yeats and his Books*, cit., p. 16. Italics added by W. Gould to underline the section cut by Yeats from the published volume. See W.B. Yeats, *The Secret*

Rose: Stories by W.B. Yeats: A Variorum Edition, ed. by W. Gould, P.L. Marcus, M.J. Sidnell, Macmillan, Basingstoke 1992, p. 272. The whole story can be read in W.B. Yeats, *Mythologies*, Macmillan, New York 1959, p. 283.

⁸³ See W.B. Yeats, *A Symbolic Artist and the Coming of Symbolic Art*, cit., p. 134.

⁸⁴ Concerning George Russell, in his *A Symbolic Artist and the Coming of Symbolic Art*, Yeats writes: «I do not believe I could easily exaggerate the direct and indirect influences which “A.E.” (Mr. George Russell), the most subtle and spiritual poet of his generation, and a visionary who may find room beside Swedenborg and Blake, has had in shaping to a definite conviction the vague spirituality of young Irish men and women of letters» (p. 133), thus implying, to some extents, that Althea Gyles, being an Irish woman of letters, was also influenced by Russell.

⁸⁵ It is worth noticing that the symbol of the rose had appeared in the Yeatsian *opus* since *The Wanderings of Oisín* (1889). Both in *The Countess Kathleen* (1892) and in *The Celtic Twilight* (1893, 1902), the rose is a Janus-faced symbol, standing either for Ireland or for esoteric truth. Trying to explain its first meaning, Yeats claims that the «ancient Celts associated the Rose with Eire, or Fotla, or Banba – goddesses who gave their names to Ireland [...]». Lionel Johnson and Ernest Dowson adopted the symbolic value of the rose attributing it, respectively, a typical Christian Dantesque meaning (the rose as the symbol of the Virgin Mary) and the paradigm of profane sensual love. Yeats probably adopted both traditions, assuming that for him the rose was «a multifoliate symbol». Actually, as maintained by Steven Putzel, «For Yeats, the Rose is more than a symbol of Ireland. As a neophyte in the Order of the Golden Dawn, Yeats was instructed to inhale ‘the perfume of this rose as a symbol of Air’. In 1893 he was accepted into the inner Order of the Golden Dawn as an ‘Adeptus Minor’, having proven to his superiors that he had mastered the secrets of the Rose symbol» (S. Putzel, *Reconstructing Yeats*, cit., p. 21).

⁸⁶ Namely, as maintained by Nelson, «When the partnership between Mathews and Lane was dissolved at the close of September 1894, Yeats sided with Mathews [...], promising him the right to publish *The Wind*, [...]». Mathews, at that time it appears, drew up an agreement for the book which he sent Yeats who, unwilling to sign it, threw it aside amongst some other papers. As a result, when Lane several years later—probably 1897—sought the American rights to *The Wind*, proposing to Yeats a plan whereby he would print the book through his New York branch of the Bodley Head and supply sheets to Mathews for the English edition, Mathews objected, arguing that the agreement which he had drawn up allowed him to dispose of the American rights» (*Elkin Mathews: Publisher to Yeats, Joyce, Pound*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 1989, p. 75).

⁸⁷ Quoted from James G. Nelson, *Elkin Mathews: Publisher to Yeats, Joyce, Pound*, cit., p. 77.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁹ I. Fletcher, «Yeats Studies», 1, 1971, p. 57. See also Allen R. Grossman, *Poetic Knowledge in the Early Yeats. A Study of The Wind Among the Reeds*, cit., pp. 46, 48, 50-51.

⁹⁰ Yeats to Mathews, 25 October [1898], Brotherton. CL2, pp. 279-280.

⁹¹ See Yeats to Mathews, 17 November [1898] and 2 December [1898], Brotherton, CL2.

⁹² See Yeats to Mathews, 21 August [1905] and [?] 1905, Brotherton, CL2.

⁹³ I. Fletcher, *Poet and Designer*, cit., p. 58. See note 51.

⁹⁴ J.G. Nelson, *Elkin Mathews: Publisher to Yeats, Joyce, Pound*, cit., p. 80. See also James G. Nelson, *Elkin Mathews, W.B. Yeats, and the Celtic Movement in Literature*, «Journal of Modern Literature», XIV, 1, Summer 1987, pp. 17-33.

⁹⁵ «In the Note in the Houghton Library copy of *The Wind*, Ricketts is reported as having said that twelve copies were so bound» ivi, p. 263.

⁹⁶ Reserve 821.912. Accession No. 116,069. Reading University Library. Copy included within the Ellis Collection. Elkin Mathews, Vigo Street, London 1899.

⁹⁷ S. Putzel, *Reconstructing Yeats*, cit., 23.

⁹⁸ I. Fletcher, *Poet and Designer*, cit., p. 58.

⁹⁹ For a detailed analysis of the rose symbol in *Poems* (1899), see W. Gould, p. 20: «The rose petals swirl in clouds rather like incense from the rose on the cross at the centre, which

acts as a thurible or censer. [...] The lower board image recalls that of *The Secret Rose*, while the spine is like a new close-up view of the rose-tree on the top-board of *The Secret Rose*, as the imploring hands of the lover reach for the beloved among the birds, branches and roses of the Tree [...]» (pp. 20-25). Althea Gyles' cover design for *Poems* continued to be adopted on all the following editions (thirty years).

¹⁰⁰ J.G. Nelson, *Elkin Mathews: Publisher to Yeats, Joyce, Pound*, cit., p. 82.

¹⁰¹ S. Putzel, *Reconstructing Yeats*, cit., p. 3.

¹⁰² I. Fletcher, *Poet and Designer*, cit., p. 58.

¹⁰³ A.R. Grossman, *Poetic Knowledge in the Early Yeats: A Study of The Wind Among the Reeds*, cit., p. xiv.

¹⁰⁴ Ivi, p. 47.

¹⁰⁵ Ivi, p. xvi.

¹⁰⁶ W. Gould, *Yeats and His Books*, cit., pp. 18-19.

¹⁰⁷ D. Karlin, *The Penguin Book of Victorian Verse*, Penguin Classics, London 1999, p. 757.

¹⁰⁸ S. Putzel, *Reconstructing Yeats*, cit., p. 174.

¹⁰⁹ A.R. Grossman, *Poetic Knowledge in the Early Yeats: A Study of The Wind Among the Reeds*, cit., p. 161.

¹¹⁰ Accordingly, in Bernard Muddiman's words, «In all her drawings the fancy that seems to have such free flight is in reality severely ordered by the designer's symbolism (*The Men of the Nineties*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York 1921, p. 120).

¹¹¹ I. Fletcher, *Poet and Designer*, cit., p. 58.

¹¹² R.J. Finneran, G.M. Harper, W.M. Murphy (eds.), *Letters to W.B. Yeats, Volume I*, Macmillan, London 1977, p. 56. The editors add that «Miss Gyles probably refers to the production of Yeats's *The countess Cathleen*» (p. 55).

¹¹³ I. Fletcher, *Poet and Designer*, cit., p. 58.

¹¹⁴ W. Gould, *Yeats and His Books*, cit., p. 19.

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁶ W.B. Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Poems*, cit., p. 803.

¹¹⁷ I. Fletcher, *Poet and Designer*, cit., p. 58.

¹¹⁸ S. Putzel, *Reconstructing Yeats*, cit., p. 146.

¹¹⁹ CL1, p. 402.

¹²⁰ W. Gould, *Yeats and His Books*, cit., p. 25.

¹²¹ W.B. Yeats, *A Symbolic Artist and the Coming of Symbolic Art*, in *Uncollected Prose*, cit., p. 134.

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Condensating into vivid portraits: l'intertestualità nascosta nella poesia di Medbh McGuckian

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Fin dalle prime raccolte, la poesia di Medbh McGuckian è stata accusata di oscurità eccessiva e di un gusto per il difficile per la sua non-linearità che, secondo alcuni, tende a ridurre e a indebolire la sua forza comunicativa. Kevin McEaney, per esempio, sottolinea come, a partire dal primo volume della poetessa di Belfast, *The Flower Master* (1982), la «sheer energy and intoxication of her inspired rhetoric tends in its choice of diction and dense imagery to obscure and create unnecessary confusions»¹.

McGuckian stessa si dichiara consapevole delle difficoltà interpretative che i lettori delle sue poesie devono in qualche modo affrontare. Ammette infatti che «[she] began to write poetry so that nobody would read it. [...] Even the ones who read it would not understand it, and certainly no other poet would understand it»². In un'altra occasione McGuckian collega questo aspetto della sua poesia all'aver trascorso la sua vita a Belfast, sottolineando così l'influenza della città sui suoi versi: «My life has been – well living here [Belfast] has been – pretty unliveable. So you wouldn't expect the poetry to be anything else but awkward»³. La difficoltà e l'oscurità delle sue poesie deriva quindi, almeno in parte, dalle sue esperienze nel Nord, esperienze che sono alla base di una complessità emotiva di fondo:

[...] the kind of poems that I write are not simple, they are not on one level, they are not just about one person, or one event, or one experience. [...] I have always so many conflicting feelings. I don't always feel that I've sorted them out fully. For me it's all like moral balancing acts⁴.

Da queste parole emerge come alla sua poesia sia attribuito quasi un potere morale e terapeutico: il suo fine è quello di indicare un equilibrio emotivo non ancora raggiunto e di accordare, soprattutto a livello personale, quei sentimenti contrastanti che l'autrice prova e che i suoi testi comunicano. Nonostante McGuckian non esiti a dichiarare e, anzi, a sottolineare la difficoltà delle sue poesie, la poetessa sposta spesso l'accento sulla finalità più 'emozionale' che intellettuale delle sue opere. Durante una recente intervista McGuckian insiste proprio su questo aspetto:

I don't care so much about being understood now, but I want to give pleasure. [...] poetry helps me to understand my life anyway: it helps me to clarify a lot of very complex attitudes and positions and meanings⁵.

Con queste parole McGuckian, oltre a fornire al lettore un'importante informazione circa la finalità della poesia, sottolinea di nuovo il potere 'chiarificatore' e, in un certo senso, terapeutico dei suoi testi⁶.

Talvolta il piacere della lettura è 'soffocato' da un tentativo di comprensione del senso che spesso non è immediato e appare persino inafferrabile. Sebbene sia veramente complesso interpretare questi testi, non ho mai pensato che potessero essere in qualche modo non-comunicativi. Al contrario credo che le poesie di McGuckian delineino e 'trasmettano' fin da una prima lettura un'immagine, o una serie di immagini, e delle sensazioni ben precise; in questo senso la sua poesia è immediata e diretta. Certo, al momento di 'sciogliere' ogni immagine e ogni verso, le cose si complicano notevolmente. I testi sono semanticamente tanto stratificati che ogni interpretazione appare essere personale e soggettiva. Ogni poesia è volutamente ambigua e spesso la lettura critica può evidenziarne solo un aspetto, trovandosi nell'incapacità di cogliere la sua poliedricità semantica. La generosità intellettuale e la gentilezza di McGuckian nel concedere interviste e nel fornire spiegazioni ha, comunque, alleviato la difficoltà interpretativa di gran parte della critica, e, in particolare, la mia⁷. Inoltre è tale l'insistenza di McGuckian sul valore personale delle sue poesie e sull'importanza formativa che le sue esperienze nell'Irlanda del Nord hanno avuto sulla sua scrittura, che mi sembra appropriato considerare, prima di ogni analisi, i suoi ricordi o le sue dichiarazioni poetiche.

Questo non vuol dire dare delle sue poesie un'interpretazione meramente biografica. Nella lunga citazione che segue, infatti, McGuckian indica due livelli di 'avvicinamento' alle sue opere: da una parte il proprio, quello di scrittrice, che non può e non deve prescindere dalla coscienza che «[her] work is almost totally autobiographic»⁸, e dall'altra quello del lettore che, non solo non deve, ma neanche può essere totalmente a conoscenza del *background* di ogni testo. Per esempio, a proposito della spazialità, che è un elemento centrale in tutta la sua opera poetica, McGuckian afferma:

If I go to a place, I will write a poem about it but it may not be what other people would write. Nobody would know from the poem that that was where I had been. I mean when I pick up the poem I know who it was for; each poem is associated with a person or a place or an event or a time. It's a very specific occasion but only for me. If the poem said what this is, I just feel that it wouldn't mean enough to other people if I kept saying "this is so very specific"⁹.

Insistendo sulla relazione tra scrittura e esperienza personale la poetessa si riferisce qui anche all'importanza di alcuni spazi, di alcuni «places» all'interno delle proprie poesie. È possibile estendere quest'affermazione anche all'influenza di determinati «places» testuali, o meglio intertestuali: McGuckian sovente si appropria, all'interno delle proprie poesie, di luoghi testuali di altre opere artistiche la cui provenienza rimane misteriosa per il lettore. A mio avviso questa caratteristica è stata molto sottovalutata e poche 'voci' critiche si sono

soffermate sull'intertestualità delle sue poesie, che invece offre spesso chiavi interpretative assolutamente necessarie, nonché una stratificazione semantica la cui portata estetica è, credo, imprescindibile¹⁰.

1

Un'intertestualità da scoprire

Nel suo modo di ricorrere a procedimenti intertestuali, la poesia di McGuckian si differenzia notevolmente da quella delle voci poetiche maschili a lei contemporanee e, anche in questo caso, si pone su un piano di oscurità maggiore. Molti testi, infatti, sebbene costruiti e costituiti da una fitta trama di riferimenti e di citazioni, nascondono questa loro qualità. Solo il lettore che conosce il testo di origine può scoprire come questo sia alla base della poesia di McGuckian.

In *Captain Lavender* (1994), per esempio, *The Aisling Hat* traduce e 'mischia' come in un *puzzle* ben undici saggi di Osip Mandel'stam¹¹. Questo testo esemplifica anche il confine, talvolta non così evidente, che separa la citazione dal plagio. Se è vero che, per quanto riguarda McGuckian, il suo uso 'rischioso' dei procedimenti intertestuali ha un fine artistico, è anche vero che esso costituisce comunque un caso-limite, almeno tra i poeti contemporanei dell'Irlanda del Nord. Quello che allontana la citazione dal plagio è la capacità di rielaborazione di McGuckian. Il suo comporre è, almeno in questa poesia, veramente originale: l'autrice riesce, citando quasi fedelmente alcuni passi dai saggi di Mandel'stam, ad adattarli al tema personalissimo del suo testo che tratta la morte del padre. A questo proposito McGuckian afferma: «I did not take from [Mandel'stam's] poems but hoped to impose my rhythm on his prose to produce a different and, to my mind, original poetry»¹². La volontà di comporre un lavoro originale è quindi palese. È vero che la fonte mandelstamiana non è dichiarata ed è identificabile solo da chi conosce il testo originale, ma ciò non è sufficiente a motivare un'accusa di plagio, sebbene sia innegabile che la poetessa non paghi del tutto il proprio debito letterario all'artista russo¹³. Almeno un esempio è necessario per mostrare come McGuckian si 'appropri' di Mandel'stam. L'inizio di *The Aisling Hat* recita:

October – you took away my biography –
I am grateful to you, you offer me gifts
For which I have still no need (vv. 1-3).

Secondo Shane Murphy è possibile identificare la fonte di queste parole in uno scritto dell'artista russo:

The *October* Revolution could not but influence my work since *it took away my 'biography'*, my sense of individual significance. *I am grateful to it*, however, for once and for all putting an end to my spiritual security and to a cultural life supported by

unearned cultural income. [...] I feel indebted to the Revolution, but *I offer it gifts for which it still has no need*⁴.

McGuckian riesce a stravolgere il senso di queste parole intervenendo sui pronomi personali. Non solo «it», che in Mandel'stam indica «The October Revolution», diventa sempre «you», che si riferisce al padre dell'Io, ma, al v. 3, non è l'Io ad aver offerto «gifts», doni immeritati come nel saggio mandelstamiano, ma, al contrario, ne diventa il ricevente. Allo stesso tempo parte del senso originario del testo è mantenuto, come avviene normalmente in una citazione. Le parole di Mandel'stam non possono non ricordare i sentimenti talvolta contrastanti che McGuckian, anche nelle interviste già citate, ha mostrato nei confronti della propria città e della 'rivoluzione' che vi è avvenuta. Da una parte un senso di insicurezza, talvolta di rabbia e di frustrazione, dall'altra una sorta di riconoscenza che la poetessa avverte nel momento in cui si rende conto dell'impossibilità di vivere e, soprattutto, di scrivere in un qualsiasi altro luogo¹⁵. Tutta la poesia è costruita in questo modo¹⁶. I doni che Mandel'stam sente di aver dato alla rivoluzione di ottobre diventano, qui, il dono immateriale che il padre, morendo, ha lasciato alla figlia: un insegnamento morale e forse anche ideologico («a way of looking at death»), di cui avrà bisogno in futuro. Questo procedimento intertestuale è efficace e originale. Il tono autobiografico che McGuckian usa dichiarando apertamente la propria identificazione con l'Io poetico, si accompagna ad un prestito quasi letterale, con le importanti differenze che abbiamo visto, da un testo molto 'lontano' di cui l'autrice si appropria cambiandone il senso. Anche il significato politico e sociale che connota per Mandel'stam il mese di ottobre viene eliminato: per chi è a conoscenza delle parole appena citate di McGuckian, ottobre è sì un periodo importante per la scrittrice, ma solo a livello personale¹⁷ e non collettivo. Non secondario a mio avviso è anche il fatto che il *puzzle* intertestuale formato dalle parole dell'autore russo, potrebbe passare del tutto inosservato: solo ad uno studioso mandelstamiano la poesia potrebbe non apparire completamente 'originale'. Un altro elemento non meno importante da sottolineare è che l'intero testo poetico è costruito attarverso l'uso di parole ed espressioni tratte da ben undici scritti di Mandel'stam, che con cambiamenti minimi McGuckian adatta al testo poetico.

The Dream-Language of Fergus, testo che appartiene alla raccolta *On Ballycastle Beach* (1988), è organizzato in modo simile. Ciò sottolinea non solo la costante influenza esercitata da Mandel'stam, ma anche la ricorrente modalità intertestuale di McGuckian. Pure nel caso di questa poesia la scrittrice usa brani in prosa di Mandel'stam come in un *puzzle* il cui filo conduttore è ancora una volta un evento autobiografico: l'acquisizione del linguaggio da parte del terzo figlio, Fergus. L'elemento autobiografico è sottolineato da McGuckian stessa in un'intervista in cui afferma che il fatto che il bambino avesse imparato a parlare lo facesse sentire più lontano da lei:

[...] his learning to talk is a kind of weaning, so the pain of the poem [...] is the fact that the child's growing away from me, and I'm losing it. [...] I can't get the child back into me, I wouldn't want that. [...] The child has to grow. There is nothing I can do. No poem can return the child into a seed. I wouldn't want that. [...] It's a very womyby poem¹⁸.

Questa poesia così autobiografica e 'femminile' «is almost entirely constructed out of quotations from [Mandelstam's] essays», tratte soprattutto da *Conversation about Dante*, da *About the Nature of the World* e da *Notes about Poetry*¹⁹. Il lavoro di riappropriazione e riuso di materiale letterario in contesti diversi è, quindi, volto anche ad una definizione e riaffermazione dell'identità personale. Come avviene anche in altre poesie di McGuckian «the creative dissolution and reformation of identity is performed in culture by the perforation of meaning in language due to its re-appropriation in new contexts»²⁰. Come in quelle di altri autori del Nord anche nelle sue opere i procedimenti intertestuali sono volti ad una ricerca di identità artistica e personale.

Un elemento però allontana la poesia di McGuckian da quella dei suoi contemporanei, ed è il fatto che per lei i testi di riferimento sono per lo più testi biografici o testi in prosa. Questa non è una scelta costante ed esclusiva, ma certamente dominante. Un volume come *Shelmalier* (1998), per esempio, è costellato da riferimenti a saggi e opere storiche sull'insurrezione degli United Irishmen contro gli inglesi che ha avuto luogo nel 1798. Questa 'presenza' è più «suggested» che «specific», e per McGuckian «reading about the Rebellion was just such an eye-opener»²¹. Nella raccolta tutto ciò che McGuckian ha letto a proposito del 1798 è trasformato e adattato al fine di descrivere e alludere ad aspetti molto lontani dal contesto originario, non ultimi i Troubles della seconda metà del Novecento e le altre grandi tragedie moderne come gli stermini avvenuti durante la seconda guerra mondiale. Qui i testi-fonte sono meno presenti rispetto ai casi precedentemente analizzati: si tratta di un'influenza costante ma meno diretta, almeno agli occhi del lettore. Forse, almeno per alcuni testi, sarebbe più corretto parlare di interdiscorsività, dato che il testo-fonte non è identificabile, ma sconosciuto o prodotto da una collettività. Frequenti sono le poesie che citano carceri e altri luoghi di segregazione, e non è facile risalire alla fonte che più ha contribuito alla stesura di questi versi. Celle e prigionieri possono rimandare tanto a descrizioni contenute in cronache ottocentesche, quanto ai diari dei reclusi degli anni '70-'80 del Novecento²². Questi testi mostrano anche l'importanza per McGuckian degli spazi liminari che frequentemente si ergono a dividere il 'fuori' dal 'dentro', lo spazio positivo, aperto, da quello negativo (v. qui «an iron gate», v. 6). Questi spazi non sono caratteristici solo della sua poesia ma anche di quella di molti autori nord-irlandesi a lei contemporanei.

Gli esempi su cui mi sono brevemente soffermata mostrano come nell'opera di McGuckian le modalità di 'fruizione intertestuale' di testi non

poetici, ma saggistici o documentari, varino considerevolmente. Quello che, a mio avviso, rimane costante è la sua volontà di rendere poetici testi in prosa che spesso non hanno un fine solo artistico. I suoi testi autobiografici in prosa, invece, sono costruiti come un continuo intreccio di allusioni, citazioni e traduzioni, e in questi casi la scrittrice non esita ad attingere da opere poetiche. Ricordando le sue parole è come se nelle sue poesie volesse trasformare in poetico ciò che non lo è, mentre i suoi testi in prosa spesso autobiografici come *Women Are Trousers* (2000), sono letteralmente composti da opere in versi di altri scrittori, da Ovidio ai grandi modernisti, come Joyce, passando per i romantici inglesi. Rispondendo ad una mia domanda sull'intertestualità delle sue poesie, McGuckian ha ribadito la sua preferenza per i testi non esclusivamente 'letterari':

In any life there may be only a few isolated poetic moments that you can yoke together. I would rarely use a novel or another book of poetry, unless in translation. My only regret is that most of the sources are by men, although I have used Winifred Gerin's biography of Emily Brontë. The poem I wrote about her was *Gigot Sleeves* which I hope condensed her personality into a vivid portrait²³.

Gigot Sleeves, contenuta in *Marconi's Cottage* (1991), è molto interessante dal punto di vista intertestuale. L'ipotesto è costituito dalla biografia di Emily Brontë pubblicata da Winifred Gerin nel 1971²⁴. Nella poesia di McGuckian non è presente nessun riferimento esplicito alla biografia e al personaggio di Emily Brontë. Eppure, seguendo le indicazioni della poetessa, ho trovato che *Gigot Sleeves* è costituito quasi nella sua interezza di parole e frasi tratte dalla biografia di Gerin, più o meno modificate per formare un mosaico poetico armonico. La tecnica seguita da McGuckian sembra proprio essere quella di composizione di un *puzzle* letterario, tanto più che le 'citazioni' sono talvolta costituite da 'tessere testuali' molto piccole, anche solo da una parola. La biografia di Gerin è di ben 265 pagine e la poesia di McGuckian attinge in modo non ordinato da luoghi testuali non consequenziali. Così un verso può iniziare con una citazione tratta dal primo capitolo e concludersi con un sintagma che si trova nella parte conclusiva dell'opera di Gerin. La descrizione che McGuckian stessa dà di questa poesia – una «condens[ation] of Brontë's] personality into a vivid portrait»²⁵ – indica il tipo di operazione condotta sul testo di Gerin. McGuckian sceglie espressioni, parole, frasi o sintagmi significativi e li adatta per formare un testo originale e diverso²⁶. La poesia costruisce un ritratto di Emily Brontë – il cui nome, ripeto, non è mai indicato – 'vivid' e originale, ma che allo stesso tempo è il 'compendio' di un altro testo. Il gioco intertestuale è, quindi, molto sottile, anche perché l'ipotesto costituito dalla biografia di Gerin si basa a sua volta su altri testi e su altre fonti. Cercherò di evidenziare gli aspetti più significativi di questa poesia. Il sintagma che costituisce il titolo, *Gigot Sleeves*, è presente nel testo di Gerin a p. 131, in cui viene citato un brano tratto dalla biografia di Emily Brontë scritta da E.C. Gaskell:

'Emily', she wrote, 'had taken a fancy to the fashion, ugly and preposterous even during its reign, of gigot sleeves, and persisted in wearing them long after they were "gone out". Her petticoats, too, had not a curve or a wave in them, but hung straight and long, clinging to her lank figure'²⁷.

Nella poesia di McGuckian *Gigot Sleeves* diventa il titolo, un elemento apparentemente insignificante acquista un valore preminente; il riferimento al fatto che la loro fattura fosse da tempo passata di moda è presente ai vv. 16-18 che, abbastanza atipicamente, costituiscono un'allusione e non una vera citazione del brano in questione: «the sleeves / Set in as they used to be fifteen years / Ago» (vv. 16-18). L'intervento di McGuckian ai vv. 25-26 è molto meno 'pesante': «Her petticoats have neither curve nor wave / In them»; solo una minima differenza sintattica caratterizza questa frase rispetto al brano di Gaskell (acquisito da McGuckian tramite Gérin). Altri versi che mostrano forse ancor più chiaramente la tecnica compositiva di McGuckian sono contenuti nella seconda e terza strofa: la ragazza

[m]asters a pistol, sleeps on a camp bed

Without a fireplace or curtain, in the
Narrow sliproom over the front hall (vv. 6-8)

I versi, che appaiono un insieme del tutto coerente e coeso, sono in realtà composti dall'incastro di almeno tre luoghi testuali diversi. «[She] Masters a pistol» riassume un lungo passo contenuto a pp. 147-148, che si sofferma su come Emily avesse imparato a sparare per accontentare il padre ormai quasi cieco e, quindi, impossibilitato a dedicarsi al suo «daily discharge of his pistols over the heads of the gravestones in the churchyards»²⁸. Infatti, sempre a p. 147, leggiamo che «to master a pistol might be a more congenial task than learning French grammar»²⁹. Solo il passaggio ad un tempo finito allontana queste parole da quelle contenute al v. 6. I vv. 6-8 condensano invece i seguenti passi tratti dalla biografia di Gérin: «At night [...] she lay on the low camp-bed under the curtainless window» (p. 64 della biografia), «the narrow sliproom over the front hall [...] was now indisputably hers [...]». The absence of a fireplace» (p. 66). La tecnica di condensazione e di mosaico letterario, cui accennavo precedentemente, risulta chiara. Gli interventi di McGuckian sono volti a formare un insieme armonico ricorrendo a 'tessere' testuali anche molto lontane tra loro e scelte per la loro capacità di comunicare, pur nella loro brevità, l'essenza stessa della vita di Emily Brontë. L'abilità poetica e intertestuale di McGuckian sta proprio nel riuscire a «condensare» le 265 pagine della biografia di Gérin nei 31 versi che compongono *Gigot Sleeves*, aggiungendo anche elementi 'nuovi' che caratterizzano la sua poetica. Ciò che è sorprendente è che nella poesia non troviamo nessun riferimento a

Emily Brontë o tantomeno a Gérin. Senza la ‘confessione’ di McGuckian, che nell’intervista a me rilasciata ha rivelato l’ipotesto, è possibile leggere *Gigot Sleeves* come una creazione poetica priva di qualsiasi riferimento letterario. La sua tematica appare, come evidenzierò nei paragrafi che seguono, tipica di McGuckian, poiché contiene il ritratto di una figura femminile colta nel suo ambiente domestico, un ambiente di cui si sottolinea la ristrettezza e la negatività.

Per quanto riguarda le influenze sull’opera poetica di McGuckian, alcuni autori ricorrono più frequentemente di altri e sembrano aver influenzato in misura maggiore la struttura di alcuni suoi testi. Ho accennato alla modalità associativa per cui da un’immagine McGuckian passa ad un’altra in una serie di concatenazioni le cui motivazioni restano frequentemente oscure al lettore. Rispondendo a chi le ha chiesto se questo possa ricordare in qualche modo la scrittura associativa di Joyce o di John Ashbery la poetessa ha affermato:

People say that. [...] But I haven’t directly read Ashbery or *Finnegans Wake*. I’ve read *Ulysses*, and I know about *Finnegans Wake*, but I just avoid it, because I know I couldn’t read it at the minute.

I guess I do work through association, but I think it’s so very female that it doesn’t help to talk too much about male predecessors. Tess Gallagher, the American writer, may be influenced by both, and I have been influenced by her, so that might be a kind of solution³⁰.

Circa quattro anni dopo questa intervista McGuckian sottolinea ancora una volta la centralità della scrittura di Gallagher in relazione alla propria crescita poetica. McGuckian ricorda come all’inizio le sue opere fossero fin troppo simili a quelle di altri poeti cattolici del Nord come Seamus Heaney, Paul Muldoon e Ciarán Carson:

It took me a good wee while to separate. Then there was Tess Gallagher, and she helped a lot. Her writing still inspires me. I find her incredibly important to me. She writes a lot about taboo subjects³¹.

L’influenza della scrittrice americana, quindi, è sia a livello strutturale – tanto che quasi la totalità delle poesie di McGuckian sembra essere guidata da un criterio associativo –, sia a livello tematico, sebbene, ammette la poetessa irlandese, «[Gallagher] is very explicit»³², più di quanto lei stessa non sia. È difficile selezionare alcuni testi all’interno dell’opera di McGuckian in cui l’influenza della scrittrice americana risulta più evidente. Quasi tutta la produzione poetica di McGuckian è costruita seguendo criteri associativi, e predilige, anche se non esclusivamente, tematiche ‘femminili’ e *taboo subjects*. I frammenti testuali a cui farò riferimento mostreranno queste caratteristiche, anche se solo McGuckian può sapere in quali poesie l’influenza di Gallagher sia più diretta.

Al di là del caso rappresentato dalla scrittrice americana è necessario, al momento di considerare il modo in cui McGuckian ‘affronta’ le ‘voci’ letterarie per lei più rappresentative, mettere in evidenza una problematica di fondo su cui si sofferma. Come già detto McGuckian pone spesso l’accento sulle difficoltà che deve superare al momento di ‘relazionarsi’ con i suoi predecessori letterari. Si sente, infatti, quasi sovrastata dalla loro presenza, dato che frequentemente questi autori sono lontani dalla sua realtà in quanto uomini e in quanto, spesso, inglesi. McGuckian però a differenza di altri poeti irlandesi, come Muldoon, non cerca di volgere in parodia o satira le opere di questi ‘grandi’, che sente come parte fondamentale del proprio *background*. Quello che la poetessa avverte è una certa difficoltà ad alludere o a citare i loro testi, sebbene la centralità di queste voci letterarie renda inevitabile la loro influenza. La dichiarazione di McGuckian a proposito dell’inutilità di «talk too much about male predecessors»³³, anche irlandesi, è esemplare. Simile valore ha un’altra sua affermazione preceduta da una considerazione più generale sulla lingua inglese:

Because it’s an imposed language, you see, and although it’s my mother tongue and my only way of communicating, I’m fighting with it all the time. I mean even the words “Shakespeare” and “Wordsworth” – at some level I’m rejecting them, at some level I’m saying get out of my country, or get out [...] of me³⁴.

L’ultimo periodo sottolinea la percezione della cultura dominante come qualcosa che, in un certo senso, si è impossessata di uno spazio che non le appartiene. I due imperativi finali presuppongono che McGuckian senta come la cultura maschile inglese appartenga sia al suo paese che a lei stessa. Allo stesso tempo, però, McGuckian percepisce una spinta antagonista e ‘indipendentista’ che la porta a prendere posizione nei confronti del canone letterario maschile, soprattutto inglese. Ciò è evidente in tutte le poesie che tentano di ‘decolonizzare’ la lingua inglese. In un’altra poesia McGuckian sceglie termini molto forti, anche se ancora una volta contrastanti: «I have to modify it, invert it. I want to make English sound like a foreign language to itself...but when I say the language repels me, I still love it»³⁵.

In modo particolare McGuckian percepisce l’influenza e, allo stesso tempo la sopraffazione letteraria esercitata su di lei dalla poesia romantica. Fin dalla prima raccolta, *The Flower Master* (1982), che rispetto ai volumi successivi non è così densa da un punto di vista intertestuale, è possibile individuare riferimenti a William Wordsworth. *Tulips*, infatti, sembra alludere polemicamente ai «daffodils» wordsworthiani:

Touching the tulips was a shyness
I had had for a long time –such
Defensive mechanisms to frustrate the rain
That shakes into the sherry-glass

Of the daffodil
[...]

[...] they sun themselves
Exalting to ballets of revenge (vv. 1-5; 13-14)

In particolare, l'ultimo sintagma («ballets of revenge») sembra riferirsi, e neanche tanto «tacitly»³⁶, alla poesia di Wordsworth, *I wandered lonely as a cloud* (1804)³⁷. Non si tratta qui di un'allusione così indiretta e implicita. Infatti la parola «daffodil» (v. 5) e il riferimento a un balletto floreale ricordano immediatamente il verso wordsworthiano, in cui l'Io descrive i «daffodils» come «Tossing their heads in sprightly dance. / The waves beside them danced» (vv. 12-13) e nella celeberrima chiusa afferma: «And then my heart with pleasure fills, / And dances with the daffodils» (vv. 24-25). La reazione al canone è indicata dalla conclusione della poesia di McGuckian che si riferisce alla «womanliness / Of tulips with their bee-dark hearts» (vv. 19-20). Dei tulipani è colta, quindi, la natura essenzialmente femminile, che sembra rispondere ai «daffodils» e al loro contemplatore romantico. Wordsworth, infatti, nella sua poesia elimina ogni traccia femminile dall'esperienza su cui si sofferma, occultando la presenza della sorella Dorothy³⁸.

Nella raccolta *On Ballycastle Beach* (1988) troviamo un numero ancora maggiore di riferimenti alla poesia romantica inglese, ma non sottoforma di lunghe citazioni dal testo-fonte, come invece avviene quando l'ipotesto è costituito da un testo in prosa. Inoltre, e questa è forse la differenza più significativa, la fonte è sempre dichiarata o facilmente identificabile. In *To a Cuckoo at Coolanlough*, per esempio, il riferimento a Shelley non è tanto letterario, quanto biografico:

[...] all I could think of was the fountain
Where Shelley wrote his 'Ode to the West Wind' (vv. 7-8)

Un altro riferimento più biografico che letterario è contenuto in *The Bird Auction* che si riferisce a

[...] the view at which Byron
Never tired of gazing (vv. 22-23)

Tra i poeti romantici inglesi quello che McGuckian sente più vicino è, probabilmente, Keats. Ciò che apprezza in questo scrittore è anche il suo essere in parte un *outsider* rispetto a quella cultura maschile inglese da cui la scrittrice tende a prendere le distanze. La poetessa, infatti, sottolinea che «[she] liked him because he was small and dainty and had died young. When you say you read Keats, I mean a sort of *lived* Keats»³⁹. Molte poesie di McGuckian sono

animate da una forte spiritualità, e la scrittrice ha anche affermato che «[she] always thought of the poet as a priest because of Keats»⁴⁰. *To the Nightingale (Venus and the Rain)* contiene un'allusione particolare all'ode di Keats: il testo di McGuckian si riferisce alla poesia romantica, ma è anche costruito in modo da spiazzare il lettore. Sebbene il titolo richiami immediatamente il testo keatsiano, *Ode to a Nightingale* (1817), leggendo la poesia di McGuckian scopriamo che l'influenza di Keats è molto meno diretta. Il titolo non costituisce, infatti, una sorta di dedica come nell'ode romantica, ma assume un altro significato che diventa chiaro leggendo i seguenti versi:

To the nightingale it made no difference
Of course, that you tossed about an hour,
Two hours, till what was left of your future
Began; nor to the moon that nearly rotted (vv. 11-14).

L'Io, che si rivolge ad una persona amata e non all'usignolo, come il titolo poteva far pensare⁴¹, sembra condividere con l'Io keatsiano solo la percezione di una frattura tra il mondo naturale, rappresentato dall'animale e dalla luna, e il mondo umano e sociale. Ma nel testo di McGuckian anche la natura non sembra del tutto benigna, almeno a giudicare dal verbo «to rot» il cui soggetto è la luna.

Un altro poeta romantico con cui McGuckian stabilisce, almeno nelle prime raccolte, una relazione privilegiata è Samuel T. Coleridge. In *On Ballycastle Beach* una poesia ha per titolo proprio il nome dello scrittore, del quale è colta l'influenza sulla sensibilità e i pensieri di una figura femminile, presumibilmente contemporanea. L'Io poetico, giocando con i pronomi personali e la loro alternanza, mostra come una donna si sia appropriata dei versi del poeta e li abbia interiorizzati. La poesia inizia con un'immagine onirica, in cui «he», Coleridge, lascia la casa della donna («In a dream he fled the house», v. 1), e continua con i seguenti versi:

Very tightly,
Like a seam, she nursed the gradients
Of his poetry in her head;
She got used to its movements like
A glass bell being struck
With a padded hammer.
It was her own fogs and fragrances
That crawled into the verse, the
Impression of cold braids finding
Radiant escape, as if each stanza
Were a lamp that burned between
Their beds, or they were writing
The poems in a place of birth together.

Quietened by drought, his breathing
 Just became audible where a little
 Silk-mill emptied impetuously into it
 Some word that grew with him as a child's
 Arm or leg. If she stood up (easy,
 Easy) it was the warmth that finally
 Leaves the golden pippin for the
 Cider, or the sunshine of fallen trees (vv. 5-25).

L'allontanamento della figura maschile è reso possibile da quell'interiorizzazione, da quella conoscenza poetica che rendono la donna indipendente dalla presenza fisica del poeta. È come se i versi scritti da Coleridge si fossero trasformati in quelli composti dalla figura femminile (vv. 6-8; 11-12). Questa poesia è centrale all'interno dell'opera di McGuckian, in quanto sembra descrivere il modo in cui l'intertestualità opera al momento della scrittura. La fonte letteraria che, spesso, come McGuckian stessa lamenta, è rappresentata dagli scritti di un uomo, di solito inglese, è in un certo senso resa 'femminile'. La donna protagonista di questa poesia si appropria così profondamente di quei versi, di quei ritmi, di quelle parole da riuscire a vederli, interpretarli e, probabilmente, ri-scriverli seguendo la propria sensibilità. L'esperienza della gravidanza e della maternità così centrale anche nella poesia di McGuckian, sembra influenzare a posteriori anche la ricezione dei versi del poeta romantico. L'Io usa il verbo «to nurse» al v. 6 e già da quel momento il testo poetico e la sua creazione sono in qualche modo associati alla gestazione e alla crescita di un bambino. Questo parallelo è poi ripreso ai vv. 15-16, in un'immagine che sembra cogliere proprio il valore dell'intertestualità in McGuckian: il poeta-fonte di ispirazione e la poetessa contemporanea, infatti, sono creatori entrambi, come se «they were writing / The poems in a place of birth together». Il parallelo tra creazione letteraria e filiale è reso esplicito ai vv. 21-22: qui ogni parola che viene alla mente del poeta romantico è paragonata ad una parte del corpo del bambino che prende forma. Non mi sembra che «McGuckian's equation of the birth of a poem with that of a baby turns Coleridge into a female»⁴², casomai è il tentativo di interiorizzazione e femminilizzazione, che oltrepassa i confini sessuali oltre che autoriali, a rendere possibili queste parole. La 'trasformazione' non avviene tanto in Coleridge, quanto nella donna che si appropria delle parole da lui scritte e riesce a cambiarle. Anche per questo non mi sembra condivisibile la posizione di Mary O'Connor, la quale afferma che questa poesia mostra «the poet's gratitude for her inheritance from the Romantics, and the sense that she has left that relationship»⁴³. L'Io infatti non si allontana né abbandona la relazione con la poesia romantica, ma al contrario quest'ultima è ormai stata metabolizzata. In un'intervista McGuckian ha collegato la propria esperienza del parto e del momento epifanico che ne seguì e che l'allontanò da un periodo psicologicamente molto difficile, alla figura romantica dell'«Ancient Mariner» coleridgeiano: «I felt like the man in

'he on honeydew hath fed' [...] I was the Ancient Mariner. I felt extremely on top of everything»⁴⁴.

Quando McGuckian si rivolge a poeti di lingua inglese la fonte originaria non è mai presente in modo diretto nel testo che vi allude. Il processo intertestuale cioè non arriva quasi mai ad essere una citazione letterale. Le cose cambiano quando McGuckian si rivolge invece a poeti di lingua non inglese che sente molto più vicini a sé:

I think as an Irish poet living here, I feel more in common with people writing in other languages translated into English. I feel more in tune with them than with people who write straight in English⁴⁵.

Come abbiamo già visto a proposito di Mandel'stam, per McGuckian, come per Heaney e altri poeti dell'Irlanda del Nord, l'influenza dei poeti russi è fondamentale e presente come prestito testuale, poiché provengono da una realtà altrettanto divisa e sofferente come quella di Belfast. Essi hanno rappresentato un aiuto psicologico ed emotivo non solo letterario. La loro 'vicinanza' le è servita, in un certo senso, per contestualizzare, capire e, talvolta, anche sfuggire alle difficoltà oggettive della vita contemporanea. Ecco cosa ha dichiarato McGuckian in una conversazione con Laura O'Connor:

My main interest at the minute is the Russian poets, because of my living through this particular revolution, if it is a revolution. It's heart-rending what we go through, and it's been so wearing in the last phase of this past twenty years. It's been a daily grind of death around you, and the Russian have been my solution; I just hang on to their love for each other – this little nest of four Russians [Akhmatova, Mandelstam, Pasternak, Tsvetaeva], where wonderfully there are two women who seem to be the source of it all. Those figures have become of mythic proportion to me, and there's Rilke, and they take me out of the local violence and into Europe⁴⁶.

Qui McGuckian riconosce il proprio debito letterario e umano nei confronti degli artisti russi e di Rilke, debito che è alla base di molti suoi testi poetici a partire da *On Ballycastle Beach*. In questa raccolta una poesia in particolare, intitolata *Harem Trousers*, è costruita grazie a una serie di continui riferimenti a Marina Cvetaeva e alla sua opera. Ciò è evidente fin dal titolo, che è una citazione tratta da un'opera di Cvetaeva in cui la scrittrice russa ricorda il suo primo incontro con la madre del poeta Maksimilian Voloshin che indossava «harem trousers». Cvetaeva racconta che con questi pantaloni la donna era stata scambiata per un ragazzo: attraverso questa immagine McGuckian rimanda al rapporto e allo 'scontro' tra uomo e donna⁴⁷. Il titolo allude anche alla scrittrice irlandese Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, a cui la poesia, almeno nella riedizione del 1995, è dedicata, e al fatto che Nuala, sposata con un turco, avesse trascorso molti anni in Turchia.

Nella conversazione appena citata è interessante notare il linguaggio spaziale che la poetessa usa. Il sollievo che la lettura dei poeti russi le ha

provocato è espresso in termini di liberazione da uno spazio «locale» e «provinciale»⁴⁸, verso uno spazio aperto e europeo. Quasi in apparente contraddizione con quanto detto è da notare che a permettere questo «salto» geografico e culturale è stato uno spazio ben più limitato. McGuckian non esita a definire quello occupato da Achmatova, Mandel'stam, Pasternak e Cvetaeva con il termine «nest» che nella poetica della scrittrice irlandese ha una connotazione ben precisa e si collega allo spazio domestico percepito come positivo e rassicurante.

Quindi le parole di McGuckian⁴⁹ contengono elementi degni di attenzione, che ad una prima lettura possono sfuggire; questa densità semantica, questo «ermetismo» è un altro elemento caratterizzante l'opera di Medbh McGuckian. Quando leggiamo le sue poesie è sempre necessario soffermarsi, più che per altri poeti, su ogni singola espressione, anche quella a prima vista più insignificante, al fine di capire o quanto meno «scoprire», i testi che stiamo leggendo. Lo stesso si può dire per i riferimenti intertestuali che raramente sono espliciti, come invece accade nella maggior parte delle poesie di Michael Longley o Ciarán Carson. Per McGuckian sembra che l'intertestualità abbia più importanza a livello personale che letterario. I testi degli autori che più significano, o hanno significato qualcosa per lei (come ad esempio Mandel'stam o Coleridge), diventano parte delle sue poesie, ma questo procedimento non è mai del tutto esplicitato. Alla mia domanda su come un'opera letteraria possa condizionare la sua poesia McGuckian ha risposto:

There are just some words that attract me at different times. Certain words always appeal more than others, probably because of my earlier education. I feel like some tree in which passing debris catches. It depends what I'm interested in at the time. When I was writing *Shelmalier* it was Irish history and so there are a lot of allusions to that. Recently I wrote an elegy based on Lorca's *Poet in New York*. This is called *The Blue of Lullaby*. It is quite clearly influenced by Lorca but then I hope I have brought it up to date with my own passions & grief. For instance, the epigraph is "We must have the arabesque of plot to reach the end", but I imply by quoting that a reference to Gregory Peck's film *Arabesque* with Sophia Loren⁵⁰.

Queste parole mostrano chiaramente come per McGuckian abbiano ugual valore tanto le allusioni storiche quanto quelle letterarie, tanto un riferimento alla storia irlandese (e *Shelmalier*, come mostrerò tra breve, ne è particolarmente ricco), quanto un'allusione a una poesia di Lorca, o un riferimento a un film con Gregory Peck.

Vorrei ora prendere in esame la poesia di McGuckian che riporta come epigrafe le parole lorchiane: «We must have the arabesque of plot in order to reach the end». Quando McGuckian me ne ha parlato *The Book of the Angel*⁵¹, il volume in cui la poesia è contenuta uscito l'8 luglio 2004, non era ancora stato pubblicato. Nell'edizione definitiva la poesia che contiene

quell'epigrafe non è *The Blue of Lullaby*, come era intitolata a quella data, ma *The Tenth Muse*. A proposito dei titoli delle sue poesie credo sia utile ricordare che McGuckian afferma di «always lay them down afterwards»⁵²; in un'intervista a Susan Shaw Sailer ha inoltre dichiarato che:

They come always afterwards [...] I never have a title before. Sometimes I get a title by accident or just from a twist. Sometimes I would deliberately want to write a poem for a special thing and the title would come to mind. But sometimes I like the title to be a little poem itself, so I try to make it catchy⁵³.

È possibile quindi che abbia deciso di cambiare il titolo alla sua poesia in un secondo momento.

Consultando l'opera lorchiana, ho individuato il testo-fonte di *The Tenth Muse* che contiene numerose citazioni tratte da *Iglesia abandonada*, poesia che chiude «Los Negros», seconda sezione di *Poeta en Nueva York* (1940). Il testo di McGuckian si apre con il riferimento alla morte di una figura maschile e l'ambientazione è spagnola:

I saw the news of his death
written in white blood
on the grass of Galicia (vv. 1-3).

Anche i colori irreali e le immagini 'stridenti' come questa ricordano le poesie surreali di Lorca, ma i riferimenti a *Iglesia abandonada* (*Balada de la gran guerra*) in particolare sono ben più evidenti nel corso della poesia. L'io lorchiano piange la perdita di un «he», suo figlio:

Once I had a son named John.
Once I had a son (vv. 1-2)⁵⁴,

e anche i versi conclusivi, che rispettano almeno in parte la struttura ciclica della ballata, riprendono quelli d'apertura:

the insanity of penguins and gulls will come to the stone
and make those who sleep and sing on the street corners
say:
Once he had a son.
A son! A son! A son
who was his alone, because he was his son!
His son! His son! His son! (vv. 38-44)

Un sentimento di desolazione e di perdita è presente tanto nel testo lorchiano quanto nella poesia di McGuckian, in cui l'io poetico cerca di definire la propria reazione alla notizia della morte di una figura maschile

prima, e al suo funerale poi. Alcune immagini, profondamente oniriche, sono tratte dalla ballata di Lorca. Ai vv. 15-16 di *The Tenth Muse*, per esempio, leggiamo:

I used to have a sea,
where the waves understood each other (vv. 15-16)

Il v. 15 cita il v. 13 di *Abandoned Church*: «Once I had a sea». Qui, l'Io lorchiano sembra reiterare la perdita dell'«absent child»⁵⁵ in altri elementi o figure che prima possedeva e che poi sono venute a mancare: «Once I had a little girl» (v. 11), «Once I had a dead fish» (v. 12), «Once I had a sea» (v. 13). In *The Tenth Muse* l'Io sta pensando al funerale della figura maschile defunta e afferma:

I know very well
That they'll give me a sleeve
Or a tie with all its omens
This cavalier winter:
but I'll find him in the offertory (vv. 41-45)

In Lorca le immagini non compaiono in quest'ordine, ma al v. 21 leggiamo: «I'll find you, my dear son, in anemones of the offertory»; e poi al v. 36: «I know very well that I'll be given shirt sleeves or a tie». Il riferimento, sebbene non esteso, è quasi letterale e, anche in questo caso, McGuckian non esplicita quale sia il testo da cui ha tratto ispirazione. Se infatti è vero che nell'epigrafe troviamo il nome di Lorca, solo il suggerimento di McGuckian e il suo riferimento a *Poet in New York* nell'intervista mi hanno condotto a leggere l'opera del poeta spagnolo e a identificare in *Abandoned Church* il testo-fonte. McGuckian quindi, partendo dalla suggestione letteraria di una poesia come *Abandoned Church* riesce a trasformare e ad adattare versi e immagini alla propria sensibilità: «I hope I have brought it up to date with my own passions & grief». Sull'ipotesto di Lorca McGuckian costruisce un testo completamente diverso in cui sono mantenuti, comunque, sia il senso di perdita sia le immagini della morte di una figura maschile. Gli 'allontanamenti' sono evidenti. In primo luogo McGuckian non sembra piangere la perdita di un figlio: infatti la parola «son», quasi un *refrain* nella poesia di Lorca, non è presente in *The Tenth Muse*. Il defunto è un uomo adulto, come i versi che descrivono il rito funebre sembrano indicare: l'Io si è già soffermato sulla preparazione del corpo e poi aggiunge:

his night lying face up,
no blush, ashen-maned,
camellia to be grazed on,
as if a man could outlive

or out-travel his beauty
like gardens (vv. 36-41).

L'adattamento' di McGuckian è caratterizzato dalla volontà della scrittrice di eliminare ogni riferimento alla Grande Guerra che nella poesia di Lorca compare fin dal sottotitolo, *Balada de la gran guerra*, e che suggerisce che il ragazzo sia morto durante la Prima Guerra Mondiale. In questo modo la poesia di McGuckian risulta dunque un testo assai più personale e 'contemporaneo'.

Ovviamente questo mio contributo si è soffermato solo su alcuni testi che però esemplificano chiaramente una modalità compositiva ricorrente in tutta l'opera di McGuckian a partire dalle prime poesie fino all'ultimo volume, *The Currach Requires No Harbours* (2006). I richiami intertestuali risultano dunque essere procedimenti intimi e personali, che aggiungono infinite sfumature di significato alla già semanticamente e iconicamente stratificata visione poetica di McGuckian.

Note

¹ K. McEneaney, *Flower Masters and Winter Works*, «Irish Literary Supplement», II, Fall 1983, p. 40.

² M. McGuckian, N. Ní Dhomhnaill, *Combrá. With a Foreword and Afterword by Laura O'Connor*, «The Southern Review. A Special Issue: Contemporary Irish Poetry and Criticism», XXXI, 3, July 1995, p. 590.

³ V. Groarke, *Interview* [with M. McGuckian], «Verse», XVI, 2, 1999, p. 37.

⁴ K.S. Bohman, *Surfacing. An Interview with Medbh McGuckian*, «The Irish Review», XVI, Autumn-Winter 1994, p. 96.

⁵ V. Groarke, *Interview* [with M. McGuckian], cit., p. 38. Credo sia utile ricordare le parole di un altro grande *Belfast poet*, Ciarán Carson, a proposito di McGuckian e come anch'egli sottolinei l'importanza del piacere, più che della comprensione, che deriva dalle poesie di McGuckian: «Too often, I have been asked, "But what does it all mean?" You might as well ask what Charlie Parker "means". He means music. McGuckian means poetry» (C. Carson, *This Great Estrangement*, «Verse», XVI, 2, 1999, p. 46).

⁶ Con queste parole, McGuckian sottolinea anche la difficoltà, in parte alleviata proprio dallo scrivere, del proprio 'posizionamento'. Tornerò fra breve su questo aspetto.

⁷ McGuckian, infatti, ha risposto a molte mie domande in un'intervista a me rilasciata tra febbraio e marzo 2004, cfr. G. Gamera, *Appendice 2. Intervista a Medbh McGuckian*, in Ead., *"Divided minds": poeti contemporanei dell'Irlanda del Nord. Intertestualità e spazialità*, Tesi di dottorato non pubblicata, rel. Prof. D. Pallotti, Prof. A. Serpieri, Università di Firenze, a.a. 2005-2006, pp. 262-264.

⁸ S.S. Sailer, *An Interview with Medbh McGuckian* (1990), «Michigan Quarterly Review», 1993, p. 113.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ Un'eccezione è costituita da un articolo di Shane Murphy dal titolo *Harem Trousers e The Aisling Hat* che presenta un'analisi puntuale di due poesie; cfr. S. Murphy, 'You Took Away My Biography': *The Poetry of Medbh McGuckian*, «Irish University Review», XXVIII, 1, Spring/Summer 1998, pp. 110-132. Anche l'articolo di Sarah Broom, che analizza l'influenza di Rilke in *Marconi's Cottage*, risulta interessante; cfr. S. Broom, *McGuckian's Conversations with Rilke in Marconi's Cottage*, «Irish University Review», XXVIII, 1, Spring/Summer 1998, pp. 133-150.

¹¹ I saggi, tratti da O. Mandelstam, *The Collected Prose and Letters*, ed. J. Gray Harris, Collins Harvill, London 1991, sono: *Jules Romains: Foreword to a Volume of Translations*, pp. 270-273; *A Poet About Himself*, p. 275; *A Statement about 'The Bassonist'*, p. 276; *Fourth Prose*, pp. 312-325; *On the Naturalists*, pp. 330-335; *Journey to Armenia*, pp. 344-378; *Addenda to Armenia*, pp. 379-396; *Conversations about Dante*, pp. 397-442; *Addenda to 'Conversations about Dante'*, pp. 443-451; *Goethe's Youth: Radiodrama*, pp. 452-467; *Notes, Jottings and Fragments*, pp. 468-471. Queste fondamentali indicazioni bibliografiche sono state identificate da S. Murphy, 'You Took Away My Biography': *The Poetry of Medbh McGuckian*, cit., p. 124. L'edizione dell'opera mandelstamiana è quella presumibilmente usata da McGuckian; cfr. anche S. Murphy, 'You Took Away My Biography': *The Poetry of Medbh McGuckian*, cit., *passim*.

¹² Questa affermazione è tratta da una lettera a Murphy, scritta da McGuckian il 16 gennaio 1997, citata in S. Murphy, 'You Took Away My Biography': *The Poetry of Medbh McGuckian*, cit., p. 124).

¹³ Questa 'mancanza' caratterizza il volume in cui la poesia è contenuta, dove non è presente né una nota, né un *Acknowledgement*, né alcun tipo di riferimento a Mandel'stam. In realtà, come ripeterò più avanti nel corso di questo mio lavoro, McGuckian, in altri contesti, ha sottolineato più volte il proprio debito verso gli scrittori russi e verso Mandel'stam, in particolare.

¹⁴ O. Mandelstam, *A Poet about Himself, The Collected Prose and Letters*, cit., p. 275, corsivi miei.

¹⁵ McGuckian afferma che solo a Belfast percepisce le proprie «roots and a sense of belonging and a sense of having spent forty years of your life [...] having voluntarily submitted to the worst twenty years in this country's history, probably, and lived through the worst of it. Then to get up and go when you've suffered so much – not you but the culture – it would be silly to leave [...]» (S.S. Sailer, *An Interview with Medbh McGuckian*, cit., pp. 119-120).

¹⁶ Queste parole di McGuckian sono tratte da un'intervista condotta da Shane Murphy, tenutasi il 19 agosto 1996 a Ballycastle (S. Murphy, 'You Took Away My Biography': *The Poetry of Medbh McGuckian*, cit., p. 125).

¹⁷ Come McGuckian afferma nell'intervista è proprio in ottobre che il padre «started to die» (*ibidem*).

¹⁸ S.S. Sailer, *An Interview with Medbh McGuckian*, cit., pp. 124-125.

¹⁹ Rimando al lavoro di Clair Wills per un'analisi dei saggi di Mandel'stam e della loro 'trasformazione' in questa poesia.

²⁰ C. Clutterbuck, *Watchful as a lighthouse. Review of Medbh McGuckian's Selected Poems*, «The Irish Review», XXIII, Winter 1998, p. 180.

²¹ V. Groarke, *M. McGuckian. Interview*, cit., p. 42.

²² Cfr., per esempio, B. Sands, *One Day in My Life*, Mercier, Cork 1982.

²³ Intervista a me concessa nel febbraio-marzo 2004; cfr. G. Gamerra, *Appendice 2. Intervista a Medbh McGuckian*, cit., p. 263.

²⁴ W. Gérin, *Emily Brontë*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1971.

²⁵ Intervista a me concessa nel febbraio-marzo 2004; cfr. G. Gamerra, *Appendice 2. Intervista a Medbh McGuckian*, cit., p. 263.

²⁶ È interessante notare come il termine «condensation» sia presente anche all'interno della poesia, sebbene sia riferito alle numerose Bibbie che si trovavano nella casa di Emily Brontë: «Here is the bible open, here is the bible shut, / a spreading here, a condensation there» (vv. 2-3). In realtà, come spero di dimostrare, il testo appare come una serie di «condensations» e «spreadings», dove, comunque, le prime sono molto più numerose delle seconde. È possibile, quindi, che McGuckian, inserendo questi versi quasi all'inizio del proprio testo poetico, abbia voluto fornire al lettore un'indicazione, per quanto indiretta, su come avvicinarsi alla poesia stessa.

²⁷ W. Gérin, *Emily Brontë*, cit., p. 131. La citazione è tratta da E.C. Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Everyman, London 1857, pp. 150-151.

²⁸ W. Gérin, *Emily Brontë*, cit., p. 147.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ S.S. Sailer, *An Interview With Medbh McGuckian*, cit., p. 112.

³¹ K.S. Bohman, *Surfacing. An interview with Medbh McGuckian*, cit., p. 106.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ «I guess I do work through association, but I think it's so very female that it doesn't help to talk too much about male predecessors» (S.S. Sailer, *An Interview With Medbh McGuckian*, cit., p. 112).

³⁴ M. McGuckian, N. Ní Dhomhnaill, *Combrá. With a Foreword and Afterword by Laura O'Connor*, cit., pp. 605-606.

³⁵ K.S. Bohman, *Surfacing. An interview with Medbh McGuckian*, cit., p. 105.

³⁶ T. Docherty usa questo avverbio proprio per questa allusione in *Initiations, Tempers, Seductions: Postmodern McGuckian*, in N. Corcoran (ed.), *The Chosen Ground. Essays on the Contemporary Poetry of Northern Ireland*, Seren Books, Bridgend 1992, p. 195. In questo studio Docherty si sofferma anche sull'influenza di *The Turn of the Screw* di James sulla seconda strofa di questa poesia. Per questa interpretazione, cfr. pp. 195-196.

³⁷ W. Wordsworth, *I wandered lonely as a cloud*, in Id., *The Select Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, vol. I, Bernhard Tauchnitz, Leipzig 1864.

³⁸ Dorothy Wordsworth, nei suoi *Journals*, racconta l'episodio che ha dato origine alla poesia *I wandered lonely as a cloud* e sottolinea come entrambi presero parte a quella passeggiata: «When we were in the woods beyond Gowbarrow park we saw a few daffodils close to the water side. [...] But as we went along there were more and yet more and at last [...] we saw that there was a long belt of them along the shore [...] Some rested their heads upon these stones [...] and the rest tossed and reeled and danced» (D. Wordsworth, *The Grasmere Journals*, 15th April 1802, in Ead., *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth (1798-1803)*, ed. by M. Moorman, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1971, p. 109). «'I wandered lonely as a cloud', owes much to Dorothy's prose description» (H. Darbishire, *Introduction*, ivi, p. XV), da notare anche l'uso del verbo «to dance» nel *Journal*, ma il poeta elimina ogni riferimento alla donna e l'Io è colto in un momento di solitaria contemplazione del campo fiorito.

³⁹ M. McGuckian, N. Ní Dhomhnaill, *Combrá. With a Foreword and Afterword by Laura O'Connor*, cit., pp. 591-592.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ «I remember our first night in this grey /And paunchy house: you were still slightly / In love with me» (vv. 1-3).

⁴² P.B. Haberstroth, *Medbh McGuckian*, in *Women Creating Women. Contemporary Irish Women Poets*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse-New York 1996, p. 144.

⁴³ M. O'Connor, *Medbh McGuckian*, in A.G. Gonzalez (ed.), *Modern Irish Writers. A Bio-Critical Sourcebook*, Aldwych, London 1997, p. 184.

⁴⁴ M. McGuckian, N. Ní Dhomhnaill, *Combrá. With a Foreword and Afterword by Laura O'Connor*, cit., p. 596. Giustamente, O'Connor estende il parallelo tra i due poeti, affermando che le parole di McGuckian «recal[l] [Coleridge's] famous definition of primary imagination "as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM." Coleridge's philosophy of the *logos* is filtered through Keats's aesthetic of sensation and remade in light of McGuckian's own imagination and her experience of maternity, Catholicism, and Irishness» (L. O'Connor, *Afterword*, ivi, pp. 610-611). Questo è sicuramente vero, ma, allo stesso tempo, mi sembra un'interpretazione che tende a razionalizzare troppo il pensiero di McGuckian.

⁴⁵ V. Groarke, *M. McGuckian. Interview*, cit., p. 35.

⁴⁶ M. McGuckian, N. Ní Dhomhnaill, *Combrá. With a Foreword and Afterword by Laura O'Connor*, cit., p. 605.

⁴⁷ Nella poesia in questione sono presenti altri riferimenti all'opera di Cvetaeva, per i quali rimando allo studio di S. Murphy, *'You Took Away My Biography': The Poetry of Medbh McGuckian*, cit., pp. 114-118.

⁴⁸ Per una definizione di 'provinciale', cfr. P. Kavanagh, *The Parish and the Universe, Collected Pruse*, MacGibbon and Kee, London 1976, p. 282, cit. in M. Longley (ed.), *Introduction, Causeway. The Arts in Ulster*, Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Belfast 1971, pp. 7-9.

⁴⁹ «My main interest at the minute is the Russian poets [...] It's been a daily grind of death around you, and the Russian have been my solution; I just hang on to their love for each other – this little nest of four Russians [Akhmatova, Mandelstam, Pasternak, Tsvetaeva], where wonderfully there are two women who seem to be the source of it all. Those figures have become of mythic proportion to me, and there's Rilke, and they take me out of the local violence and into Europe» (M. McGuckian, N. Ní Dhomhnaill, *Combrá. With a Foreword and Afterword by Laura O'Connor*, cit., p. 605).

⁵⁰ Intervista a me concessa nel febbraio-marzo 2004; cfr. G. Gamera, *Appendice 2. Intervista a Meabh McGuckian*, cit., p. 262.

⁵¹ Il titolo della raccolta è tratto da un documento irlandese, scritto in latino, appartenente all'ottavo secolo, intitolato proprio *Liber Angeli*, nel quale si racconta che un angelo concesse a San Patrizio la diocesi di Armagh. Allo stesso tempo, il riferimento è anche biblico, come suggerisce l'epigrafe all'intero volume: «*And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth.* - Revelation, X, viii», M. McGuckian, *The Book of the Angel*, Gallery Press, Oldcastle 2004, p. 10.

⁵² V. Groarke, *M. McGuckian. Interview*, cit., p. 34.

⁵³ S.S. Sailer, *An Interview with Meabh McGuckian*, cit., p. 126.

⁵⁴ McGuckian ha letto questa poesia solo in traduzione, a conferma del fatto che «[she] would rarely use a novel or another book of poetry, unless in translation» (Intervista a me concessa nel febbraio-marzo 2004; cfr. G. Gamera, *Appendice 2. Intervista a Meabh McGuckian*, cit., p. 263). F.G. Lorca, *Poet in New York*, transl. into English by G. Simon and S.F. White, Viking Penguin, London 1989 (ed. or. F.G. Lorca, *Poeta en Nueva York* (1929-1930), ed. M. C. Millan, Cátedra, Madrid 1998).

⁵⁵ C. Maurer, nella sua introduzione a *Poet in New York*, afferma che il tema dell'«absent child» caratterizza il volume lorchiano e porta ad esempio, tra le altre, proprio *Abandoned Church*: «In the void that is at the center of his swirling images, in the eye of the storm, in the resonant hollow of the well, is an absent child. No psychological explanation can account for the verbal adventure of *Poet in New York*, but figures like [...] the dead son in "Abandoned Church" testify to the poet's sexual frustration and his inability to engender a child» (C. Maurer, *Introduction*, in F.G. Lorca, *Poet in New York*, cit, pp. xi-xxx, pp. xxv-xxvi).

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Translating Others, Discovering Himself: Beckett as Translator

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Keywords: Beckett, translation, poetry, French language, Spanish language

Samuel Beckett's translation work both confirms and confounds the normalised environment in which translation is discussed and theorised. He was not only an original writer in English, but was also multilingual, and an original writer in his second language, French. Moreover, he occasionally translated his own work from English into French, and from French into English. In addition, he undertook the translation and adaptation of other writers' works originally written in French, German and Spanish.

Beckett's translated work, therefore, can be divided into two categories whose criteria are different: self-translation and translation of the works of others. My concern in this paper is solely with the latter field, and with exactly how, in early and mid-career, the style (and, in some cases, imagery and vocabulary) which he adopted in translating texts from French and Spanish, bears significant resemblance to the style which he later deployed to write his own original works in English. My aim is to explore thematic and acoustic resonance between works he translated and works he originated.

In their study of the processes of translation, Nida and Taber note that «[n]o two languages exhibit identical systems of organising symbols into meaningful expression. The basic principles of translation mean that no translation in a receptor language can be the equivalent of the model in the source language»¹. They also note that translation «will depend in very large measure upon the purpose to be accomplished by the translation in question»². So what was Beckett's purpose in translating? Mary Lydon offers an insight into why Beckett chose to translate so early in his career:

In Beckett's case [...] translation served initially as a 'pensum' (a word he favoured) that not only allowed him to perfect his French but to keep his pen moving even when he had no 'ideas'. By relieving him of the need to have 'ideas', translation freed him to concentrate on words [...]. Further, by leading him gradually to write directly in French, translation helped him to realise that he could both successfully blacken pages and continue surreptitiously to indulge his penchant for the 'shining phrase' simply by exploiting the vocabulary and idiom of the French language³.

Beckett's purpose in translating other writers' work, particularly in *Negro: An Anthology* (1934) and the *Anthology of Mexican Poetry* (1958)⁴,

was, very often, to find his own literary voice. While one reason for his acceptance of the commission to translate for *Negro: An Anthology* was undoubtedly the £25 he was given⁵, another was his sense that his literary career was stalling, before it had properly begun. For example, Beckett felt at the time that he was at «one of the knots in my life teak. I can't write anything at all, can't imagine even the shape of a sentence, nor take notes [...] nor read with understanding, *gout* or *dégoût* [taste or distaste]»⁶. This graphic admission makes it indubitable that, at least in part, translation provided Beckett with the opportunity to find something important about his own voice, in English, through translating the voices of others. This is reinforced by C. M. Bowra's remarks in his introduction to the *Anthology of Mexican Poetry*:

A mass of evidence shows that poetry is far less popular in western Europe and the United States than in countries like Persia or China or India, whose material civilisation is far less advanced but which have kept *a traditional taste for the beauty of words*⁷.

Beckett appears to have rediscovered his own passion for words and language in the act of translating.

Michael David Fox, in his essay *There's Our Catastrophe: Empathy, Sacrifice, and the Staging of Suffering in Beckett's Theatre*, suggests that part of our response to Beckett's drama is our awareness of the real suffering of the Beckett actor⁸. Similarly, an examination of his translations illustrates the very real 'presence' of the translator in the translations. For example, Beckett's alterations (including to the formal structure) of Eugenio Montale's poem *Delta*, translated in «This Quarter», provide one illustration. In 1969, George Kay translated a selection of Montale's poems, accompanied by the original Italian, among them *Delta*. Kay's translation remains faithful to the form and content of the original. Beckett's version, however, transforms the style and structure of the poem, inserting line numbers and line breaks clearly not present in the original:

1. To thee
2. I have willed the life drained
3. in secret transfusions, the life chained
4. in a coil of restlessness, unaware, self-angry⁹.

Whereas Kay maintains the structural integrity of the original, Beckett's more 'free' translation demonstrates the writer finding his own voice when freed from the need to give life to the creative act himself *ex nihilo*; and, when required by the necessities of translation, to engage in further *linguistic* exploration and experimentation.

In Kay's translation of *Delta*, the secrets of 'time' appear elusive, and heightened perception is momentary:

When time is thrusting against its dykes
 you harmonize your moment with that immense one,
 and drift up, memory, more revealed
 from that shadowy place where you descended
 as now, with the rain's end, green heightens new
 on the branches, on walls, their wash of red¹⁰.

Contrastingly, the emergence of time's secrets and memory are made more explicit in Beckett's translation, with access to time's «allconsciousness» more explicit than in Kay's more understated version. One other significant difference between the two translations is that in Beckett's version, 'time' is personified as male:

5. When time leans on his dykes
 6. then thine
 7. be his allconsciousness
 8. and memory flower forth in a flame
 9. rom the dark sanctuary, and shine
 10. more brightly, as now, the rain over, the dragon's blood
 11. on the walls and the green against the branches¹¹.

The «allconsciousness» of *Delta* (above) finds resonance later in the Unnamable's claims to have created, and known, all previous narrators in Beckett's work. Similarly, the image (above) of memory flowering forth in a momentary flame prefigures the «few images on and off», the brief moments of clarity, which form the narrative of a «life above in the light» in Beckett's *How It Is*¹². An examination, therefore, of Beckett's translations of the work of other writers, provides significant pre-echoes or foreshadows of ideas that emerge later in his own work.

1

Negro: An Anthology (1934)

Beckett's English-language translations from French for *Negro: An Anthology* are also illustrative of the writer originating in his translation work some of his key ideas and images of humanity. One such translation is that of Ernst Moerman's poem *Armstrong*¹³. Here Beckett's translation appears to reflect his desire to uncover an essence of humanity, a subject which later dominates his original work.

By comparison with the original by Moerman, Beckett adapts the line – and stanza – structures of the poem to suit his desired effect in English. The source text's opening four-line stanza is a case in point:

Un jour qu'Armstrong jouait au loto avec ses soeurs
 Il s'écria "C'est moi qui ai la viande crue".

Il s'en fit des lèvres et depuis ce jour,
Sa trompette a la nostalgie de leur premier baiser¹⁴.

A translation which follows Moerman's stanza form would read as follows:

One day when Armstrong was playing lotto with his sisters
He exclaimed "I'm the one who has the raw meat".
He made himself lips from it and since that day
His trumpet feels nostalgic for their first kiss¹⁵.

In Beckett's translation, this stanza is much more complex, and the effect more immediate:

[S]uddenly in the midst of a game of lotto with his sisters
Armstrong let a roar out of him that he had the raw meat
red wet flesh for Louis
and he up and he sliced him two rumplips
since when his trumpet bubbles
their fust buss¹⁶.

Beckett's translation of the poem, with broken, irregular lines suggesting syncopation and improvisation, appears to convey Armstrong's own passionate immersion in music, reflecting Schopenhauer's belief that music «depicts the true nature of the will, gives it a glowing account of its success and at the end expresses its satisfaction and contentment»¹⁷.

One problem, however, which emerges when examining Beckett's translations for *Negro: An Anthology*, the *Anthology of Mexican Poetry* and also for various journals, is the lack of some of the original source texts from which he made his translations. This problem has been noted by Alan Warren Friedman in *Beckett in Black and Red: The Translations for Nancy Cunard's Negro* (1934):

As Cunard details in *These Were The Hours*, "at least three quarters of the material I used in *Negro*" was destroyed during World War II [...]. Of the seven extant French originals that I have been able to locate, six were in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center [*sic*]; the seventh, the only poem that Beckett translated for *Negro*, is Ernst Moerman's *Armstrong*, which was published in Moerman's collection, *Oeuvre poétique* (1970). Except for Feuilloley's, which is handwritten, the essays are all typed, but they contain corrections and changes of various kinds, and are obscure or uncertain in places. I reproduce here the author's final intentions to the extent I can discern them, ignoring material clearly meant to be deleted¹⁸.

The lack of originals from *Negro* (alongside the difficulty of deciding what was or was not intended for inclusion, as Friedman noted) and a similar lack of originals for the *Mexican Anthology* and the journal pieces, makes it impossible to fully assess Beckett's work as a translator.

There is also the 'problem' that when Beckett was translating, translation itself was not a theorised subject. Writing in 1992, Mona Baker, in her book *In Other Words: a Coursebook on Translation*, notes that:

[I]f translation is ever to become a profession in the full sense of the word, translators will need something other than the current mixture of intuition and practise to enable them to reflect on what they do and how they do it. They will need, above all, to acquire a sound knowledge of the raw material with which they work: to understand what language is and how it comes to function for its users¹⁹.

Beckett's lack of any specific training or theoretical impetus has led to the belief (professed, for example, by Roger Little) that his translation work is «unscholarly, lacking in value»²⁰. However, the latter part of Baker's statement (above) may explain many of the apparent inconsistencies noted by critics regarding Beckett's translations. If part of the translation process is an understanding of language, its functions and potentialities, then, Beckett's translations might be noteworthy precisely because they illustrate someone coming to terms with new or further possibilities opened by language/s; someone coming to translation because he found himself temporarily unable to work creatively with English²¹.

Beckett's translation work played a crucial role in the formation of the distinctive nature of his original works. Part of that is witnessed in his emphasis on defining an «essence of humanity» both in his translations and in his original work. For example, as part of his work on *Negro: An Anthology*, Beckett translated Raymond Michelet's essay '*Primitive*' *Life and Mentality*, in which we find a celebration of African life and culture emerging from under the veil of prejudiced and convenient assumptions which rendered Africa and Africans nothing more than an exploitable resource. Beckett's English in the translation of Michelet's essay is simultaneously scolding and filled with awe at the 'vision-restored' when the racial blinkers (which corrupt one's own humanity and hinder one's appreciation of the humanity of others) are removed:

It is now time to consider a sphere of native activity distinguished by a more profound, ample and precise perception of reality. It should be noted in the first place that this perception is undoubtedly promoted by senses and a physical and nervous organisation much more delicately receptive than ours and which, while atrophied or inoperative in white men, have been highly developed in the Negroes by the mere fact of their mode of life²².

The responsibility of communicating Michelet's essay and thereby attempting to correct a misconception, combines with Beckett's desire to understand precisely how other people perceive reality, a subject often revisited in his own subsequent work.

Beckett was to return to the idea of correcting a misconception in, for example, *The Capital of the Ruins*, a work originally intended for broadcast on radio. In *The Capital*, Beckett is seeking to change the perceptions of his intended listeners in Dublin, where press coverage of Saint-Lô (almost totally destroyed during the Battle of Normandy, 1944) had led to the view of the hospital there as inadequate, and the more general view of Saint-Lô's citizens as somehow less human due to their bombed-out living conditions in the aftermath of World War II. Beckett, however, provides a counterbalance to such views with that «smile at the human conditions [...] deriding, among other things, the having and the not having, the giving and the taking, sickness and health»²³. These lines from *The Capital*, together with the «sense of a time-honoured conception of humanity in ruins, and perhaps even an inkling of the terms in which our condition is to be thought again»²⁴, reflect the «more profound [...] perception of reality» spoken of (above) in his translation of Michelet's *'Primitive' Life and Mentality*.

Yet, even while the communist ethos of the *Negro* project as designed by Nancy Cunard is inevitably reflected (to varying degrees) in many of Beckett's translations, the latter also move beyond mere ideological motivations. Beckett's translation, for example, of Robert Goffin's essay *The Best Negro Jazz Orchestra* offers language (including sound effects such as alliteration), dancing rhythms and shape-shifting imagery which strive to combine the essence of both the musicians and their music in a picture of human life which goes beyond the physical:

Oh you musicians of my life, prophets of my youth, splendid Negroes informed with fire, how shall I ever express my love for your saxophones writhing like orchids, your blazing trombones with their hairpin vents, your voices fragrant with all the breezes of home remembered and the breath of the bayous, your rhythm as inexorable as tom-toms beating in an African nostalgia!²⁵

The appeal of such translations lies in their 'vocalising', offering an incipient orality through which Beckett 'gives life' to the works, which largely avoid the tone of aggressive political messages, sustaining interest by drawing us in through imagination, emphasising our common humanity.

2

«This Quarter» (1932) and *Le bateau ivre/Drunken Boat* (1932)

In the early 1930s, seeking money and recognition, Beckett looked upon translation as a means of exploring his own creative impulses. To that end, the translations of poems and short prose pieces by André Breton and Paul Éluard for «This Quarter» (September 1932) and his translation of Arthur Rimbaud's *Le bateau ivre* appear to be part of his ongoing exploration of the possibilities of the English language with which he struggled to create originally.

Commissioned translations such as those of Breton's *Lethal Relief*⁶ and *The Free Union*²⁷ evidence Beckett's early encounters with surrealist literary thinking. Furthermore, his translations of Éluard's *A Life Uncovered or The Human Pyramid*²⁸ and *Invention*²⁹ prefigure Beckett's own musings on two of his particular preoccupations, the nature of the essential self and of artistic endeavour:

The art of living, liberal art, the art of dying well, the art of thinking, incoherent art, the art of smoking, the art of enjoying, the art of the Middle Ages, decorative art, the art of reasoning, the art of reasoning well, poetic art, mechanic art, erotic art, the art of being a grandfather, the art of the dance, the art of seeing, the art of being accomplished, the art of caressing, Japanese art, the art of playing, the art of living, the art of torturing³⁰.

Here Beckett's English-language translation points to life's variety, but ends with a sobering summation of life as «the art of torturing». Reflecting the torture associated later with both living and the arts in, for example, *The Unnamable*, the translation above also utilises the famous 'list' technique which Beckett deployed to great effect as a distraction-device in works such as *Mercier and Camier* and *Watt*.

Other images from Éluard, such as that of the «colourless sky from which clouds and birds are banished» in *A Life Uncovered*³¹, reappear in some of Beckett's own later work, as with the «birdless cloudless skies» of *Sedendo et Quiescendo* (1932)³². Examples such as this suggest that, whether he was conscious of it or not, Beckett's translations (including some which chimed with his own life-experiences or perceptions) later proved to be a source of inspiration, of images and actual combinations of words or phrases.

In *Redefining Translation: The Variational Approach*, however, Lance Hewson and Jacky Martin also note that «translation is evidently concerned with cross-cultural communication. Conceptions had to be constructed for individuals in society to be able to conceive of what lay *outside* the confines of their cultural world»³³. Beckett in the early 1930s especially but also throughout his life was deeply interested in «cross-cultural communication», in conceiving of «what lay outside the confines» of himself (as a writer and individual) and of English-language culture to which he had automatic, first-language access. Thus, as with the contemporary Irish poet Ciarán Carson today, *one* language simply wasn't enough for Beckett, and so he communed via translation with other world writers, including Arthur Rimbaud.

Louise Varèse's translation of Rimbaud's *Le bateau ivre* opens as follows:

As I came down the impassible Rivers
I felt no more the bargemen's guiding hands,
Targets for yelling red-skins they were nailed
Naked to painted poles³⁴.

Beckett's translation of the same work differs slightly in wording and tone:

Downstream on impassive rivers suddenly
I felt the towline of the boatmen slacken.
Redskins had taken them in a scream and stripped them and
Skewered them to the glaring stakes for targets³⁵.

Hewson and Martin note «that there can be no definitive translation [...] since the Cultural Equation relating texts across the boundaries of languages is constantly changing, thus contributing to the diversification of cultural values»³⁶. That there can be no definitive translation is reflected in the disparity between the two translations cited above. Beckett's translation of the poem offers a tortured journey on the horizon between life and death:

I started awake to tempestuous hallowings.
Nine nights I danced like a cork on the billows, I danced
On the breakers, sacrificial, for ever and ever,
And the crass eye of the lanterns was expunged³⁷.

Varèse's version lacks the sacrificial imagery of Beckett's:

The tempest blessed my wakings on the sea.
Light as a cork I danced upon the waves,
Eternal rollers of the deep sunk dead,
Nor missed at night the lantern's idiot eyes!³⁸

Where Varèse's translation more closely reflects the tone of Rimbaud's original with the speaker at peace, welcoming the darkness («sans regretter l'œil ni ais des falots!»³⁹), Beckett's is a more explicit and deliberately originating translation process, of the kind that we are perhaps more accustomed to describe as 'free' translation or even 'adaptation'. This becomes clear in the translation of Rimbaud's line, «Et j'ai vu quelquefois ce que l'homme a cru voir!»⁴⁰. Varèse's translation, «And sometimes I have seen what men have thought they saw»⁴¹, appears closer to Rimbaud's original than Beckett's «And my eyes have fixed phantasmagoria»⁴².

While some of his translations, notably those of Éluard and Breton, illustrate Beckett flirting with movements such as Surrealism, the rendering of Rimbaud's *Le bateau ivre* testifies to a growing independence emerging within the writer and his work. Thus, partly through experimentation with translation and other voices, Beckett creates a new path to tread in his works:

I want none of Europe's waters unless it be
The cold black puddle where a child, full of sadness,
Squatting, looses a boat as frail
As a moth into the fragrant evening⁴³.

In his own later work he followed his words here: abandoning Joyce's influence, and preferring to examine «impotence, ignorance [...] something by definition incompatible with art»⁴⁴. It is in translation work, however, that he literally began his abandonment of Europe, by turning to Africa, and then to Mexico and Mexican poetry. In his translation from Spanish of the Mexican anthology, there lies more evidence of Beckett's continued development of his own literary being through the medium of the English language.

3

Anthology of Mexican Poetry (1958)

In the introduction to the *Anthology of Mexican Poetry*, C.M. Bowra refers to the internationalism of poetry:

Though poetry cannot ever be so international as music or painting, it can exert a powerful influence in making men of different countries conscious that they have much to learn from one another because after all they are fashioned from the same clay and inspired by the same breath of life⁴⁵.

Reflecting the belief of Hewson and Martin that «the translator's objective is to diversify and motivate the possibilities of meaningful contacts between cultures»⁴⁶, Beckett's own later work is imbued with cross-cultural influences gained from his translation work, notably that of the Mexican anthology. Numerous motifs and concerns present in the translations for the Mexican anthology are later developed in his original work.

For example, in translating Matias de Bocanegra's *Song on Beholding an Enlightenment* Beckett presents us with a question about the issue of freedom:

In what law, Heaven, is it writ
that Stream, Rose, Fish and Bird,
born in servitude, shall enjoy
the liberty that never was their portion,
and I (absurdity!)
freeborn, not freely will?⁴⁷

The poem ends with the realisation that some freedoms bear many dangers:

If Stream, Fish, Bird and Rose,
for sake of freedom die,
by Fish, Bird, Stream and Rose,
'tis well thou shouldst be warned.

For if I captive live,
a willing prisoner I;

and scorn, if free I die,
such heedless liberty⁴⁸.

Similarly, Beckett's original work often explores the issue of freedom. He may have agreed about the dangers of 'heedless liberty', but his experiences both during and immediately after World War II, and his support for prisoners of conscience such as Václav Havel, show that some freedoms are too precious to relinquish.

In the Mexican anthology, Beckett's many translation-subjects include childhood, imagination, the search for an end to the need to express, and the human condition. However, it is worth noting the most marked of many distinct similarities between the works he translated in the anthology and those later produced with his own pen. In Joaquín Arcadio Pagaza's *The Crag*, for example, there is the following mountain-scene:

On the mountain's blind and rugged ridge
and dizzy pinnacle its throne is set;
its crown is laurel and its canopy
the clouds and the cerulean firmament.

Its fearful grasp is sceptered haughtily
with a green boulder of enormous mass;
the hills are subject to its majesty,
the far-flung valley is its empire.

It pours upon its awesome countenance,
its lofty port and dreadful attitude,
dark in the burnished crystal of the mere;

and its most sweet and pleasant music is
the flashing thunder and the desolate
screaming of the savage towering eagle⁴⁹.

This description pre-figures the description of a childhood haunt found in *Company* and in the opening of the *Texts For Nothing*⁵⁰. A second interesting simulacrum of the same image-complex is found in Beckett's poem *The Vulture*:

[D]ragging his hunger through the sky
of my skull of sky and earth

stooping to the prone who must
soon take up their life and walk

mocked by a tissue that may not serve
till hunger earth and sky be offal [...] ⁵¹.

Noted by P.J. Murphy as «Beckett's most important model of the creative process»⁵², the vulture of this poem and the eagle in Pagaza's *The Crag* are more-than-coincidentally comparable statements of the literary creative process conveyed via a vast skyscape/landscape out of which the creative waters flow, and upon which the vulture/eagle is looking.

As in the African anthology and in Beckett's own *Company*, his translations for the Mexican anthology also examine child-perception and storytelling, with Vicente Riva Palacio's poem *To the Wind* contrasting child and adult perception:

When I was a child I lay in dread,
listening to you moaning at my door,
and fancying I heard the sorrowful
and grievous dirge of some unearthly being.

When I was a youth your tumult spoke
phrases with meaning that my mind divined;
and, blowing through the camp, in after years
your harsh voice kept on crying "Fatherland."⁵³

The vividness of child-perception and imagination disappears, however, in adulthood:

Now, in the dark nights, I hear you beating
against my incoercible prison-bars;
but my misfortunes have already told me

that you are wind, no more, when you complain,
wind when raging, wind when murmuring,
wind when you come and wind when you depart⁵⁴.

Such examples suggest that while translating poetry dating back to the seventeenth century, part of another nation's history, Beckett was simultaneously translating himself, doing so in someone else's name. The opening lines of Manuel José Othón's *A Steppe in the Nazas Country* is a case in point:

No trace of verdant hillside, nor of meadow.
There is nothing, nothing before my eyes,
nothing save the burning desiccated
endless plain where spring has never reigned⁵⁵.

The «zone of stones» from *Ill Seen Ill Said* may perhaps have had its genesis in Othón's poem quoted above:

White stones more plentiful every year. As well say every instant. In a fair way if they persist to bury all. First zone rather more extensive than at first sight

ill seen and every year rather more [...] the grass has receded from the chalky soil. In contemplation of this erosion the eye finds solace. Everywhere stone is gaining. Whiteness. More and more every year. As well say every instant. Everywhere every instant whiteness is gaining⁵⁶.

The «whiteness» of *Ill Seen Ill Said* mirrors «the burning desiccated/endless plain» of Othón's poem. In addition, Othón's landscape is comparable to the «sheer white blank planes» of *Lessness*⁵⁷ and the flat, arid landscape of *For to End Yet Again* which is described as «Grey cloudless sky grey sand as far as eye can see long desert to begin»⁵⁸.

Many of Beckett's texts from the 1960s and 70s adopt a view of human (including the artist's) nature which is encapsulated in his translation of the lines «his unquiet/pupil, boring out into the gloom, interprets/the secret book of the nocturnal still» from Enrique Gonzalez Martinez's *Wring the Swan's Neck*⁵⁹. Beckett texts such as *Still, All Strange Away, Ill Seen Ill Said* and *Worstward Ho* echo this sense of peering into the dark to find some illuminating knowledge of the inner essence of humanity and/or the storytelling imperative which is the core of all that he wrote.

In examining just some of Beckett's translations, my intention here has been to offer evidence of the early appearances and indications of themes and images that were to surface later in his original writings. Translation provided Beckett with an additional key to working in English, a language with which he struggled as he began his career, by allowing him to bypass the other major question which permeates his work – that of the authorial identity of both himself and the characters to whom he gives voice.

Endnotes

¹ E.A. Nida, C.R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, E. J. Brill, Leiden 1969, p. 27.

² Ivi, p. 33.

³ M. Lydon, *Beyond the Criterion of Genre: Samuel Beckett's Ars Poetica*, ed. by M. Buning et al., «Samuel Beckett Aujourd'hui: Revue Annuelle Bilingue», 8, 1999, p. 67.

⁴ N. Cunard (ed.), *Negro: An Anthology*, Wishart, London 1934; O. Paz (ed.), *Anthology of Mexican Poetry*, Thames and Hudson, London 1958.

⁵ J. Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, Bloomsbury, London 1996, p. 137.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ C.M. Bowra, *Poetry and Tradition*, in O. Paz (ed.), *Anthology of Mexican Poetry*, cit., p. 9 (italics mine).

⁸ See M. Fox, «There's Our Catastrophe»: *Empathy, Sacrifice, and the Staging of Suffering in Beckett's Theatre*, «New Theatre Quarterly», 68, 17, 2002, pp. 358-359.

⁹ E. Montale, *Delta*, trans. by S. Beckett, «This Quarter», 2, 4, April-June 1930, p. 630. Or. ed. in E. Montale, *Ossi di seppia* (1925), Mondadori, Milano 2003.

¹⁰ E. Montale, *Delta*, in Id., *Selected Poems of Eugenio Montale*, trans. and ed. by G. Kay, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1969, p. 47, lines 5-10.

¹¹ E. Montale, *Delta*, trans. by S. Beckett, cit., lines 5-11.

¹² S. Beckett, *How It Is*, Calder, London 1964, p. 8.

¹³ E. Moerman, *Armstrong*, in A.W. Friedman (ed.), *Beckett in Black and Red: The Translations for Nancy Cunard's Negro*, University of Kentucky Press, Lexington 2000, p. 186. Beckett's translation of the poem is to be found in A.W. Friedman (ed.), *Beckett in Black and Red*, cit., p. 11. For contrast, I also include (below) a more literal translation by Professor Richard York, School of Languages, University of Ulster. This helps to illustrate some of Beckett's alterations in his translation: «One day when Armstrong was playing lotto with his sisters / He exclaimed "I'm the one who has the raw meat". / He made himself lips from it and since that day / His trumpet feels nostalgic for their first kiss. // Black earth where the poppy grows, / Armstrong leads the flood, in bridal gown, to sleep. / Every time that, for me, "Some of these days" / Crosses twenty layers of silence, / I acquire a white hair / In a vertigo like a lift*. // "After you've gone" / Is a mirror in which suffering watches itself grow old. // "You're driving me crazy" is a trembling dawn / In which his trumpet with its dilated pupil / Walks without a balancing-pole on the strings** of the violin. // And "Confessing" gives unhappiness some appetite. // Song of impatience, your sleep-walking*** music / Spreads through my veins where everything catches fire. / Armstrong, little father Mississippi, / The lake fills with your voice / And the rain rises up again to the sky. // Towards**** what villages do your arrows arrive / After touching us? / Do they traverse wild horses / Before poisoning us? / The roots of your song mix in the earth / Following the furrows the thunderbolt has traced. / Harlem nights bear the print of your nails / And snow melts blackly, in the sun of your heart. // I walk, eyes closed, towards an abyss / That the glances of your female notes call me to / More disturbing than the call of the sea». Notes: *Lift in the sense of elevator. ** Strings is a pun: the same word is used for tightropes. ***Sleepwalking; also the name of a classic French vaudeville theatre. ****Towards: the preposition doesn't make literal sense in French either.

¹⁴ E. Moerman, *Armstrong*, in A.W. Friedman (ed.), *Beckett in Black and Red: The Translations for Nancy Cunard's Negro*, cit., p. 186, lines 1-4.

¹⁵ Trans. by Professor Richard York, School of Languages, University of Ulster. See n. 13, first four lines.

¹⁶ E. Moerman, *Armstrong*, in A.W. Friedman (ed.), *Beckett in Black and Red: The Translations for Nancy Cunard's Negro*, cit., p. 11, lines 1-6.

¹⁷ A. Schopenhauer, *The World As Will and Representation, Volume 2*, trans. by E.F.J. Payne, Dover Publications, New York 1966, p. 457.

¹⁸ A.W. Friedman, *Appendix 3: Extant French Originals of the Beckett Translations*, in Id., *Beckett in Black and Red: The Translations for Nancy Cunard's Negro*, cit., p. 173.

¹⁹ M. Baker, *In Other Words: a Coursebook on Translation*, Routledge, London 1992, p. 4.

²⁰ R. Little, *Beckett's Poems and Verse Translations or: Beckett and the Limits of Poetry*, in J. Pilling (ed.), *Beckett Before Godot*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1997, p. 185.

²¹ J. Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, cit., p. 137.

²² R. Michelet, "Primitive" *Life and Mentality*, trans. by S. Beckett, in N. Cunard (ed.), *Negro: An Anthology*, cit., p. 739.

²³ S. Beckett, *The Capital of the Ruins*, in S. Gontarski (ed.), *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989*, Grove Press, New York 1995, p. 277. Henceforth this work will be referred to as *CSP 1929-89*.

²⁴ Ivi, p. 278.

²⁵ R. Goffin, *The Best Negro Jazz Orchestra*, trans. by S. Beckett, in N. Cunard (ed.), *Negro: An Anthology*, cit., p. 291.

²⁶ A. Breton, *Lethal Relief*, trans. by S. Beckett, «This Quarter», 5, 1, pp. 74-75.

²⁷ A. Breton, *The Free Union*, ivi, pp. 72-73.

²⁸ P. Éluard, *A Life Uncovered or The Human Pyramid*, trans. by S. Beckett, ivi, p. 89.

²⁹ P. Éluard, *Invention*, trans. by S. Beckett, ivi, pp. 87-88.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

- ³¹ P. Éluard, *A Life Uncovered or The Human Pyramid*, cit., p. 89.
- ³² S. Beckett, *Sedendo et Quiescendo*, in *CSP 1929-89*, pp. 13-14.
- ³³ L. Hewson, J. Martin, *Redefining Translation: The Variational Approach*, Routledge, London 1991, p. 22 (italics mine).
- ³⁴ A. Rimbaud, *The Drunken Boat*, trans. by L. Varèse, in *A Season in Hell and The Drunken Boat*, New Directions Publishing, New York 1961, p. 93, lines 1-4.
- ³⁵ A. Rimbaud, *Drunken Boat*, trans. by S. Beckett, in *Samuel Beckett: Collected Poems 1930-1978*, Calder, London 1999, p. 127, lines 1-4.
- ³⁶ L. Hewson, J. Martin, *Redefining Translation: The Variational Approach*, cit., p. 32.
- ³⁷ A. Rimbaud, *Drunken Boat*, trans. by S. Beckett, cit., p. 127, lines 13-16.
- ³⁸ A. Rimbaud, *The Drunken Boat*, trans. by L. Varèse, cit., p. 95, lines 13-16.
- ³⁹ A. Rimbaud, *Le bateau ivre*, in *Samuel Beckett: Collected Poems 1930-1978*, cit., p. 126, line 16.
- ⁴⁰ Ivi, p. 128, line 32.
- ⁴¹ A. Rimbaud, *The Drunken Boat*, trans. by L. Varèse, cit., line 32.
- ⁴² A. Rimbaud, *Drunken Boat*, trans. by S. Beckett, cit., p. 129, line 32.
- ⁴³ Ivi, p. 137, lines 93-96.
- ⁴⁴ J. Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, cit., p. 352 and p. 772, n. 57.
- ⁴⁵ C.M. Bowra, *Poetry and Tradition*, cit., pp. 19-20.
- ⁴⁶ L. Hewson, J. Martin, *Redefining Translation: The Variational Approach*, cit., p. 28.
- ⁴⁷ M. De Bocanegra, *Song on Beholding an Enlightenment*, in *Anthology of Mexican Poetry*, cit., p. 69, lines 177-182.
- ⁴⁸ Ivi, p. 72, lines 261-268.
- ⁴⁹ J.A. Pagaza, *The Crag*, in *Anthology of Mexican Poetry*, cit., p. 104.
- ⁵⁰ See S. Beckett, *Company*, Calder, London 1992, pp. 19-20, in which the narrator describes «a nook in the gorse». See also S. Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, in *CSP 1929-89*, cit., p. 100, where the narrator describes «a mountain, not a hill, but so wild, so wild».
- ⁵¹ S. Beckett, *The Vulture*, in *Samuel Beckett: Collected Poems*, cit., p. 9.
- ⁵² P.J. Murphy, *Reconstructing Beckett: Language for Being in Samuel Beckett's Fiction*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto-London 1990, p. 65.
- ⁵³ V. Riva Palacio, *To The Wind*, in *Anthology of Mexican Poetry*, cit., p. 100, lines 1-8.
- ⁵⁴ Ivi, p. 100, lines 9-14.
- ⁵⁵ M.J. Othón, *A Steppe in the Nazas Country*, in *Anthology of Mexican Poetry*, cit., p. 127, lines 1-4.
- ⁵⁶ S. Beckett, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, in *Nobow On*, Calder, London 1992, pp. 71-72.
- ⁵⁷ S. Beckett, *Lessness*, in *CSP 1929-89*, cit., p. 197.
- ⁵⁸ S. Beckett, *Figzle 8: For to end yet again*, in *CSP 1929-89*, cit., p. 243.
- ⁵⁹ E. González Martínez, *Wring the Swan's Neck*, in *Anthology of Mexican Poetry*, cit., pp. 160-161, lines 1-14.

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Seamus Heaney's Revelation of Self Through Community

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Don't shun your ancestors' customs, they're part
of you the way your blunted talent
sheathes the swift blade made them so sharp.
Cathal Ó Searcaigh¹

Seamus Heaney's poetry has always displayed a great deal of self-awareness with regard to identification with family and ancestry. In recent years the poet has readily discussed early attachments and identification processes when interviewed about his artistic sources². These attachments feed into Heaney's creative process and his aesthetic outlook in general, to such an extent, that self, parents, ancestry, and community appear as interdependent elements in the poetry. As Heaney puts it, «Poetry is born out of the watermarks and colourings of the self. But that self in some ways takes its spiritual pulse from the inward spiritual structure of the community to which it belongs»³. Whether or not the idea of a 'spiritual structure' in a community is accepted as a reality, it cannot be denied that poetry is the product of a self which is the product of a community. Heaney is not the only modern Irish poet to acknowledge the role which community plays in the creative process. For example, Thomas Kilroy challenges the widespread view that «literature is the product of an individualistic mind», and questions the popular association of «the act of writing [...] with a transcending of the ordinary, everyday social facts of existence»⁴. A psychoanalytical approach to literary criticism, in which the theory of Object Relations is applied to determine the key attachments influencing the poetry, offers fresh opportunities for interpreting Heaney's work. In particular, a study of how the poet has internalised a sense of ancestry and community and how strongly he identifies with these sources reveals much about his view of self identity.

D.W. Winnicott (1896-1971) suggests that the 'object' is fundamentally a symbol of the union between mother and child, and states that «the use of an object symbolizes the union of two now separate things»⁵. Furthermore, he theorises that, «to use an object the subject must have developed a *capacity* to use objects. This is part of the change to the reality principle. [...] The development of a capacity to use an object is another example of the maturational

process as something that depends on a facilitating environment»⁶. All individuals relate to certain objects as part of the process of identity formation, but the environmental conditions play a vital role in determining what becomes of these objects. The first object is usually the mother (many psychoanalysts including Melanie Klein suggest it is the breast⁷) but as Winnicott explains, each individual develops a personal pattern for relating to the «first “not-me” possession»⁸. However, only the individual whose early environment is stable and consistent (for example through ‘good-enough’ mothering) can start to use the object. According to Winnicott, the capacity to *use* an object «is more sophisticated than a capacity to relate to objects» and this results in «a world of shared reality»⁹. In a number of Heaney poems, it is obvious that he is not only *relating* to his objects, but internalising them despite their sense of ‘otherness’, and *using* them for his creative purposes. When one critic relates Heaney’s use of the words «boundaries», «old division», and «displaced», purely to socio-political issues, he misses a major opportunity to understand how the poet’s aesthetic endeavour is linked to his early personal experiences¹⁰.

A glance through the contents page of *Seeing Things*¹¹ indicates that Heaney identifies with and uses particular objects from childhood as the subject of many poems, for example, in *The Pitchfork* (p. 23), *The Biretta* (p. 24), *The Settle Bed* (p. 28), and *The Schoolbag* (p. 30). However, one of the best examples of Heaney’s object use in relation to exploring attachment and/or division is *Terminus* in *The Haw Lantern*¹² (p. 4). In this poem Heaney uses familiar objects from childhood to emphasise the pluralistic nature of his home environment, where modern industrialisation co-exists with nature and a traditional rural lifestyle:

When I hoked there, I would find
An acorn and a rusted bolt.

If I lifted my eyes, a factory chimney
And a dormant mountain.

If I listened, an engine shunting
And a trotting horse.

Is it any wonder when I thought
I would have second thoughts?

Rather than simply representing an image of contrast, difference, and ‘other’, the poet uses the ambiguities to illustrate how he has, in a sense, destroyed any opposing forces relating to the objects, by balancing them and reconciling them within himself:

Two buckets were easier carried than one.
I grew up in between.

My left hand placed the standard iron weight.
My right tilted a last grain in the balance.

The result of focussing on seemingly disparate objects is balance, harmony and the use of the object to achieve a highly successful (perhaps 'typically' Heaney-esque) aesthetic effect. 'Object' and 'Other' can be used as interchangeable terms in this context and it should not be forgotten that the first object is usually the person (male or female) who mothers the infant. The child's experience of early mothering dictates all future dealings with 'others' or 'objects', including those encountered and/or identified with in adulthood. Winnicott outlines the typical sequence of events as follows¹³:

1. Subject relates to object
2. Object is found by subject
3. Subject repeatedly destroys object
4. Object survives destruction
5. Subject can use object.

The first two steps are regarded as essential stages in the search for self and are linked directly to the female element of mothering and to identity formation:

[I]t is here, in the absolute dependence on maternal provision of that special quality by which the mother meets or fails to meet the earliest functioning of the female element, that we may seek the foundation for the experience of being¹⁴.

The word «destroy» as used in step three of Winnicott's sequence may seem harsh, but his commentary reveals that in the non-literal sense, this is a natural process. There is a positive value in destructiveness, which allows an individual to attain a mature psychological appreciation of the Other:

This destruction becomes the unconscious backcloth for love of a real object; that is, an object outside the area of the subject's omnipotent control. [...] a world of shared reality is created which the subject can use and which can feed back other-than-me substance into the subject¹⁵.

Common examples of this destructiveness might be a child's rebellion against a parental figure, an early move away from the family home, or the enactment of some other form of rejection. In Winnicott's theory, it is only when the subject recognises that the object has survived the destruction (step 4) that true love for the object as a separate being in a world of shared reality, can begin. Only when «continuity of care»¹⁶ is present, can the subject move on to step 5 of the process, whereby he/she can start to *use* the object. If this theory is applied to Heaney's poems which represent the mother, it can be seen that when he figuratively 'destroys' the ever-present and nurturing mother

figure by seeing her as Other (for example, in *Clearances* in *HL*, p. 24, and *Two Lorries* in *The Spirit Level*⁷, p. 13), he can move on to *using* her as a source for his creativity. This pattern which is formed in childhood and begins with the mother figure, is repeated throughout life (providing the environment is a nurturing one), and provides a benchmark for how the mature adult deals with other people in his/her life. In Heaney's case, 'object use' feeds into his creative work and surfaces in poems referring to other 'objects' and other 'others', both female and male.

In some of Heaney's poems, for example, in *Station Island*⁸ (1984), *The Haw Lantern* (1987), and *Seeing Things* (1991), Winnicott's words which describe «the unconscious backcloth for love of a real object» and «a world of shared reality» ring true⁹. In these collections, Heaney writes about Others in a mature and sophisticated manner, whilst using his own deep identification with the Other, to produce poetry which is original and thought-provoking. It could be argued that some of Heaney's earlier work does not display this level of maturity with regard to the Other, but self-identification issues certainly surface and resurface throughout his long writing career.

Heaney's process of identification relies a great deal on his sense of ancestry and community. The following discussion defines ancestry as the personal history of an individual and this incorporates family members, shared memories and inherited identities. Community refers to the local context and encompasses Heaney's identification with his home territory and the people who occupy that locale, as opposed to any broader sense of the term, for example, nationalist community, which is so often applied in a Northern Irish context. It is worth noting that Heaney's attitude to nationalism is reflected in his identification with Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen²⁰. The discussion reveals how Heaney's moderate nationalism can be compared to Tone's «concentration of affection for the land in which you live and the people with whom you share it»²¹. In Heaney's case, this affection extends not only to ancestors, whose influence seems ever-present in the poet's close-knit family, but also to the wider community around the Mossbawn farm and rural County Derry.

1

Attachment to ancestry and the wider community

Heaney's early poetry presents the reader with a detailed personal interpretation of his roots and ancestry. Poems such as *Ancestral Photograph* (*Death of a Naturalist*²², p. 15) and *Mossbawn* (*North*²³, p. 8) identify the poet as belonging to cattle-breeding, Ulster farming stock who still follow the traditional «calendar customs» (*N*, p. 10). Similarly, the descriptive lyrics in *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), for example *Blackberry Picking*, *Churning Day*, and *At a Potato Digging*, chronicle a pastoral lifestyle, which the poet presents

as his inheritance. Many of the poems in *Door into the Dark*²⁴ (1969) also reflect the gritty realism of growing up on a farm whilst there is evidence of the poet's respect for his rural roots, for example, in the prophet-like description of the magic done by the craftsman with «his Midas touch» in *The Thatcher* (*DD*, p. 8). However, the poet is constantly aware of progress and change in such a community and is equally aware of his enterprise, which, although recording his genealogical inheritance, is also «Closing this chapter of our chronicle» (*DN*, p. 16). There is perhaps ambiguity in Heaney's choice of title for his second volume of poetry, *Door into the Dark*, which is dedicated to his father and mother. Some of the poems in this collection could be said to have distinctly negative connotations²⁵. Poems such as *Night-Piece*, *Gone*, *Dream*, and *The Outlaw* certainly contain a sense of what has been lost, left, or even rejected, and at times the reader may detect a sense of the poet's entrapment in this community. Closely witnessed farm life, for example in *Turkeys Observed*, *Cow in Calf*, and *Trout* (*DN*, pp. 26-28) becomes oppressive, and perhaps if Heaney had confined himself to this limited community as a source, his poetry would have become oppressive too. Heaney's identification with his ancestral roots does not remain static or restricted however. Later poems such as *Making Strange* (*SI*, p. 32) explore issues of ancestry and identification by describing the unsettling collision between the poet's roots and his present life:

I stood between them,
 the one with his travelled intelligence
 and tawny containment,
 his speech like the twang of a bowstring,
 and another, unshorn and bewildered
 in the tubs of his Wellingtons,
 smiling at me for help,
 faced with this stranger I'd brought him.

The poet clearly sees himself as the link between his well-travelled, educated visitor and the practical, down-to-earth Irish farmer. The apparent clash of culture and heritage is highlighted by the poet's position between the two men and their two different worlds. In assuming the role of translator, the poet becomes aware of his own strangeness, both to his early self and his later self as it were. As ancestral roots and the past infringe on his present, an opportunity for reflection on the nature of self identity is afforded.

In a 1984 lecture, Heaney referred to «two definite ways of being touched by the influence of the past»²⁶. The first produces instinctive childhood responses to the past which «amplify and consolidate the sense of belonging to a family and a place», and the second, according to Heaney, involves «those images which widen this domestic past into a community or a national past»²⁷. On the one hand, Heaney recognises childhood attachments as essential to the formation of identity, but there is a sense that the consolidation of belonging may graft the individual to one people and one place. On the other hand, that

other past which «is not just inhaled naturally from our given environment but which is to some extent imposed, and to some extent chosen», is what Heaney sees as contributing to the development of the individual and «to our status as creatures conditioned by language and history»²⁸. This is the sense of the past which binds communities together but also allows the individual to broaden his/her horizons. However, the poet's concept of the co-existence of domestic/unconscious ancestral influence, and the more conscious/chosen identification with a wider shared ancestry, is not particularly straightforward. Tension created by the interaction of early innate attachments and later identification with influences outside the family, is apparent in much of Heaney's work. For example, *The First Kingdom* and *The First Flight* from *The Spirit Level* (1996) deal with the often debilitating effects of ancestry and the need to break away and free oneself from early attachments (*SL*, pp. 101-102). Whilst satirical in tone, *The First Kingdom* presents an image of stubborn and inflexible family members (*SL*, p. 101):

Time was a backward rote of names and mishaps,
 bad harvests, fires, unfair settlements,
 deaths in floods, murders and miscarriages
 [...]
 They were two-faced and accommodating.
 And seed, breed and generation still
 They are holding on, every bit
 as pious and exacting and demeaned.

Even this tribe's morality is transformed into a defect, «holding on, every bit / as pious and exacting and demeaned». There is an overriding sense of the need to escape all this in *The First Flight*, and it has been suggested that the poet «discovers a new kingdom to explore – the kingdom of imagination»²⁹. But this poem also contains ambiguity, as it suggests that while freedom may be fearful, a sense of belonging can also restrict personal development: «I was mired in attachment» (*SL*, p. 102). Since Heaney recognises the limitations of attachment to the purely personal definition of ancestry, his work seeks to encompass the wider definition, which involves a sense of a shared communal cultural identity. One trope, which allows the poet to focus on this second definition, is the image of the land itself as an ancestor or begetter.

2

Land and communal belonging

In *Kinship* (*N*, p. 40) Heaney defines the bog as archetypal earth mother, a begetter or source, and uses the phrase, «I step through origins» to describe a

walk over familiar land. The soft, giving, wateriness of the bog contrasts with the hardness of the cobblestone, which Heaney described as an inheritance from his great-grandmother, in *Clearances* (*HL*, p. 25), and the blackness of the turf in *Kinship* is an interesting link to the poet's mother. In both *Clearances* and *Two Lorries* (*SL*, p. 13) she is associated with coal, a fossil fuel, and is often portrayed as earth-bound, for example, in *The Swing* (*SL*, p. 48). It has been observed that from early on, Heaney «has tended to see the landscape as female. It is a feared and fecund mother; also, an insatiable lover»³⁰. In *Kinship* the female goddess image located at «the vowel of the earth» may be read as the central source of human creation and the spring of life, «This centre holds /and spreads», but Heaney's image of motherhood and female ancestry also suggests it can be a destructive force. Not only is the offspring compared to a weeping willow, but the land itself conceals a violent past (*N*, p. 45):

Our mother ground
is sour with the blood
of her faithful,

they lie gargling
in her sacred heart
as the legions stare
from the ramparts.

[...]
report us fairly,
how we slaughter
for the common good.

Heaney switches from the «I» of the first few stanzas to «we» and «us» and «our» by the end of *Kinship*, and in doing so, taps into Ireland's communal heritage of trouble and violence. Ancestry in this sense is a double-edged sword – maternity mingles with slaughter, and the goddess who «swallows / our love and terror» (*N*, p. 45), may be compared to a mother who is prepared to sacrifice her sons. This unsettling image/myth of motherhood parallels Heaney's often ambivalent (although less ferocious) representation of his own mother, for example in *Clearances* (*HL*, p. 24). In *Kinship*, Heaney's ravening goddess invokes the Irish patron goddesses, Banba, Ériu, and Fódla. This mythical triumvirate is not uncommon in Celtic mythology and folklore and has been described as giving «life to the land and people. She preserves them from misfortune, injury and danger. In her fiercest aspect, she is a warrior goddess wreaking havoc and death on intruders»³¹.

A similar image of the fundamental human connection to the land occurs in *Land* (*Wintering Out*³², p. 21). In this case, the farmer listens to the land

as he would listen to an elderly relative telling a story, but as he lies down in order to hear the land «drumming» back, it snares him with «an ear-ring of sharp wire» and thus, traps or enslaves him. This rather sinister notion of an unequal alliance between land and farmer is close to Kavanagh's «man on a hill whose spirit / Is a wet sack flapping about the knees of time»³³. This differs from the views of contemporary Irish poets, who have been described as displaying an «at one-ness with his or her place and people»³⁴. A good example of this attempt to express unity, is Cathal Ó Searcaigh's *Umblaigh/ Submit*, which aligns the land with «your ancestors' customs» and emphasises the connection between the poet's farming heritage and writing:

Open your eyes and look around
 at the boar-mountain tamed by the plough.
 This labour of love earned your kind
 a harvest each year.
 [...]
 Bend like your fathers' fathers to land-worship
 and work like you were born to this heirloom.
 The harvest will be yours: every field a poem³⁵.

This is reminiscent of Heaney's *Digging* (*DN*, p. 3) and the spade/pen/gun analogy: «Between my finger and thumb / The squat pen rests. / I'll dig with it» (*DN*, p. 4). However, *Kinship* and *Land* both posit more primeval, violent images. In identifying the land with the mother/ancestor and acknowledging the far-from-comfortable human relationship with it, Heaney reflects Freud's theory of the ambiguity inherent in the child/parent relationship and «highlights the way family relationships can be a burden as well as sustaining»³⁶.

It has been suggested that the use of names and the association of the self with a proper name, although a questionable occupation, is a vital step in identification processes³⁷. Place name poems such as *Anahorish* and *Broagh* (*WO*, pp. 16, 27) allow Heaney to explore a sense of identity in relation to land and language but he also uses his family surname to undertake the same enterprise in the highly personal *Alphabets* (*HL*, p. 1). The poet makes a point of linking 'Heaney', which the plasterer writes on the gable end of the new family home, to his own development as an individual identity, uniquely different from other family members. However, Heaney also frequently undertakes the naming of everyday objects and believes that «objects which have been seasoned by human contact possess a kind of moral force» and «transmit the climate of a lost world»³⁸. Whilst objects observed as a spiritual link to ancestors may be a common poetic trope, for Heaney, they often trigger the exploration of the inevitability of ancestral influence on self identity. The poem *Shelf Life* (*SI*, p. 21) illustrates how the poet internalises the spiritual nature of an object and uses it as a symbol for defining self identity.

3

'Transitional objects': sensing the past

Shelf Life (*SI*, p. 21) could be renamed '*Self Life*' because the poet uses the physical appearance of individual objects on shelves as a prompt, which leads to identification with different experiences, memories and inheritances amounting to a whole life. The title's pun may acknowledge the transient nature of identification processes and attachments as a life progresses. The objects described are a mixture of ancestral hand-me-downs and personal keepsakes, and are used to link the dual influences of ancestry and the creative impulse to write. Of the six objects mentioned in the poem, five seem connected by virtue of the hardness of their substance, that is, the granite chip, the old smoothing iron, old pewter, the iron spike, and the stone from Delphi. The sixth, the snowshoe seems incongruous but is associated with the act of writing, being a symbol of the impulse which allows the poet to hunt for the right words in his 'drift-still' room of a head. The cerebral nature of the poet's working life is represented by the elusive nature of the snowshoe (*SI*, p. 24):

The loop of a snowshoe hangs on a wall
 in my head, in a room that is drift-still:
 it is like a brushed longhand character,
 a hieroglyph for all the realms of whisper.
 [...]
 The loop of the snowshoe, like an old-time kit,
 Lifts away in a wind and is lost to sight.

The incongruity between the description of the snowshoe and the other, more concrete objects in *Shelf Life*, emphasises the poet's inner struggle to balance the disparate influences in his life. In short, the concrete objects can be read as symbols: the granite chip is the «Calvin edge in my complaisant pith», the smoothing iron is associated with the archetypal mother figure (*SI*, p. 21), the old pewter represents humble beginnings (*SI*, p. 22), and the iron spike recalls the poet's farming heritage. The stone from Delphi could refer to both Heaney's 'escape' from the North to the South of Ireland (*SI*, p. 24), and his 'escape' via education, to the wonders of the classical world and its literature.

Such a reading emphasises the dualities of Heaney's particular slant on his Irish identity and, characteristically, each symbol/object seems to embody pluralistic meaning. For example, the stone from Delphi carries all the associations of the sacred oracular stone of the ancient classical world. In the essay *Mossbawn*, Heaney describes the water pump outside the back door of his family home in County Derry as his «*omphalos*» and he suggests that «all children want to crouch in their secret nests»³⁹. This womb-like image focuses on the individual at the centre of the world and this is very much in keeping with other literary uses of Delphi. For example, Rousseau mused: «"Know Thyself" at the Delphi Temple was not such

an easy precept to observe [...] I felt fused as it were with all beings and nature»⁴⁰. Heaney's recall of his childhood self getting lost in the pea-drills and hiding in a beech tree or «the close thicket of a boxwood hedge [...] the throat of an old willow tree» prompts him to describe himself as «a little Atlas shouldering it all, a little Cerunnos pivoting a world of antlers»⁴¹. Like Rousseau, the poet fuses the developing individual self with the universe but the Rousseau quotation draws attention to the alleged inscription on Apollo's Oracle of Delphi temple. The full inscription, «Know thyself and thou wilt know the universe and the gods», extols the virtues of self-discovery and this is surely why Heaney includes this reference in *Shelf Life*. The poem primarily identifies objects which relate to the poet's complex sense of identity. Of course this is a process which all individuals can empathise with as all efforts to clearly define a 'core' self are fraught with complications and may ultimately lead to ambiguity and paradox.

In *Shelf Life* Heaney associates two objects in particular with his parents. The old smoothing iron is representative of the poet's mother and her possible resentment of domestic labour. The poet at first internalises the object (it is part of himself), and then externalises it by using it as a symbol for ambivalence towards work (including writing) in general (*SI*, p. 22):

like a plane into linen,
like the resentment of women.
To work, her dumb lunge says,
is to move a certain mass

through a certain distance,
is to pull your weight and feel
exact and equal to it.
Feel dragged upon. And buoyant.

The paradox is that hard work can burden and uplift at the same time. The object associated with the poet's father is the iron spike, found by a railway track in the United States, which resembles a harrow pin from his plough harness. This is where Heaney takes the opportunity to link the objects to the self, «I felt I had come on myself» (*SI*, p. 23). The poet, who has left behind his roots and rejected the traditional work of his father, travels the world and comes upon himself in an unexpected, yet enlightening way. It is an epiphanic moment in which the inner and the outer worlds «fuse» as Rousseau suggested. Heaney returns to the harrow pin as a symbolic object in *District and Circle*⁴² (2006), where he uses it to illustrate his father's practical, down-to-earth personality (*DC*, p. 23):

Let there once be any talk of decoration,
A shelf for knick-knacks, a picture-hook or – rail,
And the retort was instant: 'Drive a harrow-pin'.

It is ironic that *Shelf Life* refers to the sort of «knick-knacks» Heaney's father would have disapproved of, and emphasises the poet's attachment to objects, which not only have some sentimental value, but possess the power to stir and clarify. For example, duality is suggested by Heaney's use of the phrase, «unshowy pewter», which not only represents the poet's practical ancestors, but is also described in a simile aligning it with the natural world, «doleful and placid as a gloss-barked alder» (*SI*, p. 22). The link between ancestry and self identify is clarified when Heaney reveals a childhood memory of hiding from his family in a misty landscape (*SI*, p. 23):

Glimmerings are what the soul's composed of.
Fogged-up challenges, far conscience-glitters
and hang-dog, half-truth earnest of true love.
And a whole late-flooding thaw of ancestors⁴³.

In other words, the mature, reflecting poet has a clearer understanding of how his identity has been formed and more importantly, is willing to credit the role of his parents and ancestors. In this poem, they are elevated above the status of any British tradition suggested by the granite chip from the Martello Tower, which «I keep but feel little in common with» (*SI*, p. 21). However, «keep» is significant because the poet seemingly insists on being reminded of the «Calvin edge in my complaisant pith» and the 'punitive' nature of the granite chip which, when it speaks, says, «*You can take me or leave me*» (*SI*, p. 21). On the other hand however, the granite chip may also be a reminder of the Martello Tower's association with Joyce, whom Heaney credits as a guide and literary ancestor in the title poem of *Station Island*. In *Shelf Life*, the objects are directly associated with the poet's sense of identity, but this identity is never simplistic or clearly definable. Instead, it is pluralistic, complex and perhaps even fluid and changeable. In *The Settle Bed*, Heaney suggests that «whatever is given / can always be reimagined» (*ST*, p. 29), therefore, no-one need be restricted by their ancestral past or their inheritances. Each individual can decide to internalise and identify with whatever objects he/she chooses.

In *The Sense of the Past* Heaney refers to Carl Jung's autobiography and draws the idea from it that, «unconscious forces operating at the very centre of our being incline us to associate spirit with object»⁴⁴. Similarly, the poet suggests that «a community's sense of its attachments and its fortunes will be directed and to some extent determined by the selection of exhibits in its museums»⁴⁵. Everyday objects from the past are linked to an ancestral psychic inheritance which Jung describes as the collective unconscious. The Serbian poet Vasko Popa has also touched upon the unconscious links between ancestors and self in the poem *In the Village of My Ancestors*. Popa represents his awareness of familial collective unconscious in a dream where, «Unknown old men and women / Appropriate the names / Of young men and women

from my memory»⁴⁶. Like Heaney, the poet emphasises the influence of the dead ancestor on the living poet and describes a permanent attachment, which binds one to the other. For Heaney, this attachment is expressed in his poetry through images such as the aunt in *Sunlight* (*N*, p. 9), or the great-uncle in *Ancestral Photograph* (*DN*, p. 15), but also with reference to objects associated with the person such as his father's stick or the eclectic collection in *Shelf Life* (*SI*, p. 21). However, despite Heaney's belief in unity or even some kind of harmonious psychic or spiritual connection with ancestors, the poetry often refers to his personal awareness of the mature individual's inevitable detachment from family, particularly parents.

4

Darkness, detachment, and self discovery

Some critics have pointed to detachment in Heaney's poetry, and this is usually linked to his exploration of the binarisms inherent in the Northern Irish political situation, or his struggle with an inconsistent personal allegiance to his community⁴⁷. However, this sense of detachment can be just as productively interpreted in the light of the poet's relationship with his parents. Heaney's identification with D.H. Lawrence is explicit in *Clearances* where he refers to «our *Sons and Lovers* phase» (*HL*, p. 30) to describe his early relationship with his mother. There are parallels between Heaney's *Door into the Dark* volume with its dedication «For my father and mother», and Lawrence's use of darkness as a metaphor for Paul Morel's recognition of detachment from his mother. In *Sons and Lovers*, Paul and Clara discuss the difference between the old tribes who chose either to live in the dark woods or in light open spaces: «Yes, you *do* feel like one of the open space sort – trying to force yourself into the dark – don't you?»⁴⁸. This theme is continued throughout *Sons and Lovers* in the characterisation of Paul Morel who tries to separate himself from his mother, «[h]e would not take that direction, to the darkness, to follow her»⁴⁹. Lawrence's ideas are reflected in Heaney's attempts to describe the 'other' lifestyle which is actually that of his mother and father, and *Door into the Dark* seems to reveal a world from which the poet must detach himself.

It would be a mistake however to read 'darkness' as an undisputed negative concept in Heaney's work. For example, in *In Gallarus Oratory* (*DD*, p. 10), the ancient beehive structure is described as «a core of old dark walled up with stone», but also as «the heart of the globe». The confined, womb-like structure is a place of self revelation which offers release and a kind of rebirth for the community as they leave the darkness for the light, and see «The sea a censer and the grass a flame» (*DD*, p. 10). This seems to be in keeping with the fact that, «the pure concept of darkness is not, in symbolic tradition, identified with gloom – on the contrary, it corresponds to primigenial chaos» and a «path leading back to the profound mystery of the Origin»⁵⁰. This

may help explain Heaney's association of darkness with origins and sources. But another association of darkness may also be relevant. Christian mysticism since Augustine has stressed «contemplation and the unitive state» and «emphasized darkness and obscurity»⁵¹. In Samuel Beckett's plays darkness is often stressed, and then replaced by light, as in Heaney's *In Gallarus Oratory*⁵². It has been noted too that «second only to darkness, silence is the metaphor most often used by the mystic to indicate the presence of the divine», and the Pseudo-Dionysius speaks of «the dazzling dark of the welcoming silence»⁵³. This is very relevant to Heaney's poetry where silence is often emphasised, for example, in *Clearances*, with reference to his metaphysical response to his mother's death: «A soul ramifying and forever / Silent, beyond silence listened for» (*HL*, p. 32). Derek Mahon has used the expression «dazzling dark» to make a link between his generation and their ancestors:

And we have come,
Despite ourselves, to no
True notion of our proper work,
But wander in the dazzling dark
Amid the drifting snow
Dreaming of some

Lost evening when
Our grandmothers, if grand
Mothers we had, stood at the edge
Of womanhood on a country bridge
And gazed at a still pond
And knew no pain⁵⁴.

It may be worth noting that Mahon's identification with his female ancestors may not be a positive process, as the bridge which inspired this poem, was used by Edvard Munch in his somewhat disturbing painting *The Scream*. In any case, the darkness metaphor seems in keeping with Heaney's attempts to connect with his parents and his native community in *Door into the Dark*.

The title of *Door into the Dark* appears in the first line of *The Forge*: «All I know is a door into the dark» (*DD*, p. 7). That door leads to origins, ancestry, mystery, and memory, which Heaney uses as sources from his first collection, *Death of a Naturalist* to his latest, *District and Circle*. The «big-eyed Narcissus» who admits «I rhyme / To see myself, to set the darkness echoing» in *Personal Helicon* (*DN*, p. 46), also states that «memory has never ceased to be an active principle [...] When I hear the word “latch” or “scullery” or “chimney breast” I don't know whether they're dreaming me or I'm dreaming them»⁵⁵. The words act as triggers in the same way as the objects in *Shelf Life* do. The recesses of the poet's mind contain links to origins, which although sometimes dark, alien and 'other', have nevertheless been internalised and are very much

part of the self. For this reason, words and images associated with childhood, early attachments, and ancestral inheritances, have continued to surface in Heaney's poetry over his whole career. Whilst there is a seeming obsession with oppositions and the act of balancing roots and learning, for example, in *Terminus* (*HL*, p. 4), there are often signs of a struggle with allegiance to community in Heaney's poetry.

In this context, it is relevant to note that one critic suggests that «Heaney becomes a postmodern poet» in the title poem of *Station Island* when he takes his leave of «the oppressive ends to which myth and ritual function in the family»⁵⁶. Similarly, in his review of *Station Island*, Neil Corcoran interprets Heaney's «community» as «Catholic Ireland» and suggests that the poet's «painful attempt to extricate himself from religious and social forms» comes at «an unusually late age»⁵⁷. What these opinions overlook is the fact that the volume was published in 1984, the year in which Heaney's mother died. Perhaps all the dualities and binarisms are re-interrogated in 1984, not so much because the poet suffers a 'crisis' as Corcoran suggests, but because the anticipated effects of the poet's candour were reduced in his mother's declining years. Heaney may have feared betraying his devout Catholic mother and his own particular ancestral line more than 'Catholic Ireland'. The close relationship between mother and son and the binding effects of a shared religion, as described in *Clearances*: «Elbow to elbow, glad to be kneeling next / To each other» (*HL*, p. 30), comes to mind here. Melanie Klein has suggested that the painful experience of mourning a loved one can «sometimes stimulate sublimations» and can result in «a deepening in the individual's relation to his inner objects, in the happiness of regaining them after they were felt to be lost ("Paradise Lost and Regained")»⁵⁸. Heaney's return to the subject of his ancestry and roots may be more a result of the subconscious human process of mourning and coming to terms with loss, than any conscious effort to extricate himself from family and community ties. A good example of this is *The Blackbird of Glanmore* (*DC*, p. 75), where the poet returns to the subject of his young brother's death in 1953. Heaney first dealt with the tragedy in *Mid-Term Break* in *Death of a Naturalist*. The difference between the two poems can, perhaps, be explained by Klein's theory on a «deepening» of the individual's relation to his/her inner objects.

The critical tendency, indeed temptation, to constantly link Heaney's work to political unrest in the North of Ireland and his Catholic background in that context, usually ignores the influence of attachment issues in the field of the creative arts. For example, there is often an element of personal guilt or «the troubled conscience of the achiever»⁵⁹ in Heaney's references to his parents and ancestors. The poet has remarked that he attributes some of his ambivalence to the act of writing to thoughts about «the generations [...] rural ancestors – not illiterate, but not literary»⁶⁰. Furthermore, when one critical view of Heaney's poetry, «[h]is doors into the dark have not illuminated the

Catholic Irish subconscious»⁶¹, is scrutinised from the perspective of attachment theory and Object Relations, it appears vaguely ludicrous. Any poet who attempts to illuminate the subconscious of a large portion of his/her country's population, which inevitably contains much diversity, has arguably chosen an over-ambitious task. No poet can illuminate anything but his/her personal history, which in turn reveals attachments to parents, wider family, ancestry, and inherited and chosen communities. The poems discussed here illustrate how ancestry and community play vital roles in Heaney's poetic attempts to reveal a sense of the self. In general, the poet has apparently internalised his identification with previous generations, and as a result, elucidates a very positive and harmonious interaction between past lives (theirs) and present lives (his). This may be attributed to a spiritual belief in the unity of all being and a continued commitment to the belief that the self is formed, as Heaney put it in 1977, from «the inward spiritual structure of the community to which it belongs»⁶². For Heaney, whose early attachment to individuals and objects from childhood can be traced in every published collection to date, that community is invariably the first experienced community of the family farm at Mossbawn and the surrounding area of rural County Derry.

Endnotes

¹ C. Ó Searcaigh, *Umblaigh/Submit*, in Id., *Out in the Open*, Clo Iar-Chonnachta, In-dreabhán 1997, p. 56.

² See for example, Heaney's essay *Room to Rhyme*, University of Dundee Press, Dundee 2004; J. Brown, *In the Chair: Interviews with Poets from the North of Ireland*, Salmon Publishing, Moher 2002, and BBC Radio Ulster's, 17 April 2006.

³ S. Deane, *Unhappy and at Home: Interview with Seamus Heaney*, «The Crane Bag», 1, 1977, p. 62.

⁴ P. Connolly (ed.), *Literature and the Changing Ireland*, Colin Smythe, Gerrards Cross 1982, p. 179.

⁵ D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, Tavistock Publications, London 1971, p. 96.

⁶ Ivi, p. 89.

⁷ See for example M. Klein, *Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms*, in P. Du Gay, J. Evans, P. Redman (eds.), *Identity: A Reader*, Sage, London 2003, pp. 130-143 and D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, cit., p. 11, where the author suggests that «the word "breast" is used, I believe, to stand for the technique of mothering as well as for the actual flesh. It is not impossible for a mother to be a good-enough mother (in my way of putting it) with a bottle for the actual feeding».

⁸ D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, cit., pp. 1-4.

⁹ Ivi, p. 94.

¹⁰ N. Corcoran, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney: A Critical Study*, Faber and Faber, London 1998, p. 236.

¹¹ S. Heaney, *Seeing Things*, Faber and Faber, London 1991. Henceforth referred to as *ST*, followed by the page number.

¹² S. Heaney, *The Haw Lantern*, Faber and Faber, London 1987. Henceforth referred to as *HL*, followed by the page number.

¹³ D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, cit., p. 94.

¹⁴ Ivi, p. 84.

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 94.

¹⁶ Ivi, p. 141.

¹⁷ S. Heaney, *The Spirit Level*, Faber and Faber, London 1996. Henceforth referred to as *SL*, followed by the page number.

¹⁸ S. Heaney, *Station Island*, Faber and Faber, London 1984. Henceforth referred to as *SI*, followed by the page number.

¹⁹ D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, cit., p. 94.

²⁰ See for example J. Hobbs, *United Irishmen: Seamus Heaney and the Rebellion of 1798*, «The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies», 2, 1995, pp. 38-43. Hobbs refers to Heaney's «little-known» radio drama, *Munro* (1969), which celebrates the heroism of two Protestant leaders of the 1798 Rebellion. Heaney reviewed Thomas Pakenham's *The Year of Liberty* about the 1798 Rebellion in *Delirium of the Brave*, «The Listener», 27 November 1969, pp. 757-758.

²¹ H. Butler, *In the Land of Nod*, Lilliput, Dublin 1996, p. 36.

²² S. Heaney, *Death of a Naturalist*, Faber and Faber, London 1966. Henceforth referred to as *DN*, followed by the page number.

²³ S. Heaney, *North*, Faber and Faber, London 1975. Henceforth referred to as *N*, followed by the page number.

²⁴ S. Heaney, *Door into the Dark*, Faber and Faber, London 1969. Henceforth referred to as *DD*, followed by the page number.

²⁵ It is recognised that darkness is not necessarily always negative and this will be discussed later.

²⁶ Lecture to the Friends of Monaghan County Museum, 1984, published as *The Sense of the Past*, «Ulster Local Studies: Journal of the Federation for Ulster Local Studies», 20, 1985, pp. 108-115. The quote is from p. 114.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ Ivi, p. 111.

²⁹ E. Kennedy-Andrews, *The Spirit's Protest*, in Id. (ed.), *Seamus Heaney: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Macmillan, Basingstoke 1992, p. 208.

³⁰ E. Kennedy-Andrews, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*, Icon Books Ltd, Cambridge 2000, p. 120.

³¹ R. Anderson, *Celtic Oracles: A New System for Spiritual Growth and Divination*, Three Rivers Press, New York 2000, p. 21.

³² S. Heaney, *Wintering Out*, Faber and Faber, London 1972. Henceforth referred to as *WO*, followed by the page number.

³³ P. Kavanagh, *The Great Hunger*, in W.J. McCormack (ed.), *Ferocious Humanism: An Anthology of Irish Poetry from Before Swift to Yeats and After*, J.M. Dent, London 2000, p. 195.

³⁴ F. Sewell, *Modern Irish Poetry: A New Alhambra*, Oxford UP, Oxford 2000, p. 83.

³⁵ C. Ó Searcaigh, *Umhlaigh/Submit*, cit., pp. 56-57. Elsewhere however, Ó Searcaigh acknowledges that his generation is breaking tradition, «Like everyone else, I swap customs / for street cred and newer gods» (C. Ó Searcaigh, *For My Father*, in Id., *Out in the Open*, cit., p. 143).

³⁶ E. Kennedy-Andrews, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, cit., p. 41.

³⁷ See for example, P. Bourdieu, *The Biographical Illusion*, in P. du Gay, J. Evans, P. Redman (eds.), *Identity: A Reader*, cit., pp. 301-302.

³⁸ S. Heaney, *The Sense of the Past*, cit., p. 109.

³⁹ S. Heaney, *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978*, Faber and Faber, London 1980, p. 17.

⁴⁰ J.J. Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (1776), cited at <www.wisdomportal.com/EnlightenmentNews.html> (07/2010).

⁴¹ S. Heaney, *Preoccupations*, cit., p. 18.

⁴² S. Heaney, *District and Circle*, Faber and Faber, London 2006. Henceforth referred to as *DC*, followed by the page number.

⁴³ Edna Longley has remarked that the last stanza of *Old Pewter* «epitomises as well as summarises» *Station Island's* contents. See E. Longley, *Old Pewter*, «The Honest Ulsterman», 77, 1984, p. 54.

⁴⁴ S. Heaney, *The Sense of the Past*, cit., p. 115.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ V. Popa, *In the Village of my Ancestors*, from the volume *Homage to the Lamé Wolf*, Oberlin College Press, Oberlin OH 1987, reproduced at <<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/in-the-village-of-my-ancestors/>> (07/2010).

⁴⁷ See for example C. Carson, *Escaped from the Massacre?*, «The Honest Ulsterman», 50, 1975, pp. 183-186 and N. Corcoran, *Heaney's Joyce, Eliot's Yeats*, «Agenda: Seamus Heaney Fiftieth Birthday Issue», 1, 1989, pp. 37-47.

⁴⁸ D.H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1992, p. 280.

⁴⁹ Ivi, p. 464.

⁵⁰ J.E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, Routledge, London 1993, p. 76.

⁵¹ H.L. Baldwin, *Samuel Beckett's Real Silence*, The Pennsylvania State UP, London PA 1981, p. 17.

⁵² Baldwin refers particularly to Beckett's trilogy, *Malone, Molloy Dies* and *The Unnameable*.

⁵³ H.L. Baldwin, *Samuel Beckett's Real Silence*, cit., p. 23.

⁵⁴ D. Mahon, *Girls on the Bridge*, at <www.english.emory.edu/classes/paintings&poems/girls/html> (07/2010). Mahon published a different, shorter version in *Selected Poems*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 2000, p. 109.

⁵⁵ J. Brown, *In the Chair: Interviews with Poets from the North of Ireland*, Salmon Publishing, Moher 2002, p. 85.

⁵⁶ A. Davies, *Seamus Heaney: From Revisionism to Postmodernism*, in E. Kennedy-Andrews, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, cit., p. 72.

⁵⁷ N. Corcoran, *Heaney's Joyce, Eliot's Yeats*, cit., pp. 42-44. Heaney was 45 when *Station Island* was published.

⁵⁸ J. Mitchell, *The Selected Melanie Klein*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1986, pp. 163-164.

⁵⁹ T. Paulin, *Writing to the Moment: Selected Critical Essays 1980-1996*, Faber and Faber, London 1996, p. 178, with reference to Thomas Hardy as socially mobile but guilty.

⁶⁰ J. Haffenden, *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation with John Haffenden*, Faber and Faber, London 1981, p. 63. Heaney's interview was conducted in 1979 for «The London Magazine».

⁶¹ J. Simmons, *The Trouble with Seamus*, in E. Kennedy-Andrews (ed.), *Seamus Heaney: A Collection of Critical Essays*, cit., p. 65.

⁶² S. Deane, *Unhappy and at Home*, cit., p. 62.

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Personal Wounds, National Scars. Reflections on Individual and Cultural Trauma in Anne Enright's *The Gathering*

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Keywords: Enright, Irish fiction, cultural trauma, identity, Irish Catholicism

The Gathering, by the Dublin-born author Anne Enright, was awarded in 2007 the Man Booker Prize for fiction, a recognition that granted the book media exposure on some of the most important newspapers worldwide. The reviews that followed the panel's choice are symptomatic of the kind of strong, extremely personal and often emotional responses the novel has inspired in its readers; some, like Al Kennedy («The Guardian»)¹, have been entirely captivated by the author's spellbinding storytelling and by her insightful and incomplicit approach to her subject matter; some others, such as Michael Upchurch («Seattle Times»)², have despised her deliberately unpleasant imagery and have been baffled by the lack of an explicit coherence in the narration; most seem to have experienced an unsettling combination of pain and involvement, of loathing and admiration, for a book which can be dreadfully beautiful, or beautifully dreadful. In any case, it seems pretty clear that Enright's fourth fictional work, which does not wink at its readers and certainly does nothing to please, is one of those enthralling novels that creep up under one's skin and will not leave the readers' mind and body for a while after they have put it down. However, experiencing the novel is quite another thing from attempting a rational description of such an intense, multifaceted book by trying to answer the most straightforward of questions: what is it about?

If one is to rely on the few sure, factual events the author narrates, he/she would then be most likely to answer that *The Gathering* is about a person's death and the wake that follows. This could also represent a first step in trying to set the novel into a broader framework of an established literary tradition, as an Irish novel that revolves around a wake is bound to be instantly connected with one of the most ambitious works of fiction ever attempted in the English language, by possibly the greatest of Irish writers, James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. *The Gathering* could indeed be renamed 'Liam's Wake', as some reviewers have suggested. Yet, I would tend to look at a different part of the Joycean tradition to introduce Enright's novel, going back to his 1914 collection of short stories, *Dubliners*. The reference I would like to make is not to any of the stories in particular (even though *The Dead* would be themati-

cally relevant), but rather to the assertion Joyce based his collection on. In a well-known letter to his publisher Grant Richards, he declared: «My intention was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis»³.

Little less than one hundred years later, the very same statement seems to offer a key to a thorough understanding of the complex subtext of Enright's novel. In fact, if *The Gathering* certainly is about a suicide and the ensuing wake, there is also an underlying network of dense, often little explicit narratives telling a wider story. Between Veronica's obsessive, over-detailed reconstructions of her family's vicissitudes and her uncertain, almost hallucinatory memories of past events that may or may not have happened, there is indeed a chapter of the moral history of contemporary Ireland. This chapter portrays Enright's main character trying to work her way out of what could be termed, to borrow Joyce's terms again, a post-traumatic kind of 'paralysis', which has equally affected her personal life and, on a larger scale, her society. The pretext for her to finally come to terms with the effects and consequences of such trauma is the recollection of the sexual abuse her suicidal brother, Liam, underwent as a child, in a very protected domestic environment. Veronica herself may or may not have undergone the same violence. The exposure of these personal wounds is mirrored by the scars that are disfiguring the entire country, since Ireland's traditional self-image of observant Catholic country, has been violently disrupted in the last two decades by the revelation not only of a great number of domestic sexual abuses, but also of the same kind of practices within the Church institutions themselves. The consequences of such painful discoveries seem to have led to a reconsideration of some of the traditional cornerstones of Irish life, and Veronica's distressing interaction with her reality will here be read both as metonymic of this moment of destabilizing 'cultural trauma' which appears to be affecting her society, and as her own individual response to a specific traumatic experience.

It is clear from the very beginning that Enright's main character, 39-year-old Veronica Hegarty, is pervaded by an urge to give voice to a crucial episode of her childhood, but it is equally clear that the task she is setting out to accomplish will be all but easy. The contours of this remembered event are so blurred she even doubts it actually took place, and yet it is roaring inside her and needs, painfully, to be let out:

I would like to write down what happened in my grandmother's house the summer I was eight or nine, but I am not sure if it really did happen. I need to bear witness to an uncertain event. I feel it roaring inside me – this thing that may not have taken place. I don't even know what name to put on it. I think you might call it a crime of the flesh, but the flash is long fallen away and I am not sure what hurt may linger in the bones⁴.

If she was to put a name on it, she would call it a «crime of the flesh», but the actual revelation of what sort of crime she refers to is withheld until

very late in the novel. In the meantime, the reader is led through a maze of speculations and ambiguity, interspersed with few certain facts: it is certain that Liam, one of her too many siblings, the one she was more deeply connected with, committed suicide by drowning in Brighton, and that she travels to England to bring his body back to Dublin; it is certain that the family's idiosyncrasies, that she evokes throughout the novel by revealing some glimpses of the Hegartys' past, are encapsulated and synthesized in the crucial moment of «the gathering», the coming together of the «Hegarty clan» for Liam's wake; it is also certain that Liam, her little sister Kitty and herself spent one summer at their grandmother's (Ada) in Broadstone, and that, apart from her husband, there was another man in Ada's daily life, Lambert Nugent, who was her landlord and, in a rather controversial manner, her friend too. The rest is made of disturbing thoughts and associations, and intricate, tentative stories tirelessly reworked and enriched with new details; through this element of vagueness and the lack of an authoritative narrative throughout the novel, Enright exploits the possibilities of what Wayne C. Booth, in his 1961 book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, has called «unreliable narration»⁵; indeed, the readers never truly know whether they can trust the narrator, as they are not given any reliable instructions and are at the mercy of the protagonist's dreamlike conjectures.

This stylistic feature, widely explored in literary history with very different outcomes, from Joyce himself to, for instance, Henry James, is well exemplified in *The Gathering* by the stories of Ada's encounter with Lambert Nugent. Veronica chooses to set their first meeting in 1925, when her grandmother, Ada Merriman, was nineteen, and he was twenty-three, in a hotel foyer in Dublin at seven o'clock in the evening. Every single movement of the two, from the instant when their eyes first met, to the way they occupied the space around them, is played and replayed, and collocated into different emotional frameworks. The shifting moods of the two characters seem to settle on a more stable note of unspoken resentment on Nugent's side, as history tells Veronica that Ada, despite their (imagined) flirtation, did not end up marrying him. Ada chooses Charlie, Nugent's friend, and Veronica pictures in her head several scenes of their fulfilling marital life and sexual enjoyment⁶. However, Veronica believes Ada never really stopped flirting with Nugent, who had been calling in to her grandma's house regularly throughout the years; she even imagines the two having sex one day, which might have been sweet, rough, or might in fact never have happened. Her lovely grandma becomes a 'whore', almost someone to blame for some primordial disgrace that has brought destruction to their lives. The reader realises that Veronica's 'unreliable' narration, far from being a mere formal device, and equally far from being simplistically identifiable with the ravings of madness⁷ or with those of an alcoholic⁸, has in fact extremely deep implications in the economy of the novel. Why is she so perversely interested in piecing together a story which is

clearly just a fantasy? Why does she need to play these scenes over and over in her head until they find the most plausible, or terrible, of shapes? Because it is back in those days she knows nothing about that the seeds of her brother's death were sown⁹, when Ada's existence stumbled upon Lambert Nugent's, her life-long «friend», her «Nolly-May»¹⁰. This is her grandmother's biggest fault: having met, under imprecise circumstances, the man who will abuse Liam one summer in Broadstone, when Veronica was eight and he was nearly nine. And now that Liam, with stones in his pocket, a fluorescent jacket, no socks, no pants, has entrusted his unspoken hurt to the oblivion of the sea, she tries for a moment to «put an end to the shifting stories and the waking dreams»¹¹ and tell what «Nolly-May» did to him:

I know, as I write about these three things: the jacket, the stones, and my brother's nakedness underneath his clothes, that they require me to deal in facts. [...] It is time to call an end to romance and just say what happened in Ada's house, the year I was eight and Liam was barely nine¹².

Despite the fact that some details will continue to change throughout the book, and that her recollection will never be crystal-clear («even though it is *true* that this happened, I do not know if I have the true picture in my mind's eye»¹³), this is what Veronica discloses about that summer of many years before:

On this particular day I was variously bored on the stairs, or at the dining-room table, or in the hall, before I got bored again and decided to go into the good room.

What struck me was the strangeness of what I saw, when I opened the door. It was as if Mr Nugent's penis, which was sticking straight out of his flies, had grown strangely, and flowered at the tip to produce the large and unwieldy shape of a boy, that boy being my brother Liam, who, I finally saw, was not an extension of the man's member, set down mysteriously on the ground in front of him, but a shocked (of course he was shocked, I had opened the door) boy of nine, and the member not even that, but the boy's bare forearm, that made a bridge of flesh between himself and Mr Nugent¹⁴.

This is where everything began, or ended in fact. That distant moment in 1967 suddenly seems to clarify the most obscure aspects of Veronica's existence, from her almost psychotic search for meaning, to the raw, disturbing imagery that pervades her sexual life, to her failure to find truth and comfort in either the domestic and the religious sphere. But before I delve into these observations in further detail, I would like to take a step back and concentrate on the triggering factor of Veronica's sudden recollection.

As it is well known, a traumatic incident experienced personally (this option is never clearly ruled out in the novel) or, it may be said, «osmotically» (Veronica and Liam are, «quasi twins»¹⁵, they almost «overlapped» in

their mother's womb, and, as a consequence, she feels that she knows him «in her bones»¹⁶) usually results in a moment, life-long sometimes, of what I have previously called «paralysis». By paralysis I mean the traumatized subject's incapability to consciously and productively react to the psychological consequences of the harm he/she has undergone; the intricate mechanisms that traumatic events such as sexual abuse can set in motion in the mind of the victim, especially when he/she is just a child, include the actual impossibility for the subject to remember what has happened to him/her. In this case, memory is somehow paralyzed, be it for the creation of an actual blank space, or for the person's more or less conscious will or necessity to leave out information which is too painful to process. This is clearly a means of defence, an inhibitory process which, however, does not prevent the appearance of different sorts of intrusive phenomena in the victim's personality, which can be broadly referred to as post-traumatic stress disorders¹⁷. In its more general definition, Cathy Caruth underlines: «[T]rauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena»¹⁸. Even though the etymology of the word, meaning «wound» in Greek, takes us back to the original definition of trauma as «injury inflicted on a body», the term is more widely employed to refer to psychological wounds, which can nonetheless be a direct consequence of physical harm.

The Greek trauma, or “wound”, originally referred to an injury inflicted on a body. [...] But the breach in the mind's experience of the world – is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor¹⁹.

The person may recognize some traits of his/her personality as disturbed, but this does not mean that he/she will be able to go back to the primal cause. However, an event, or a series of events can ‘unblock’ this situation and make repressed memories resurface. In Veronica's case, the memory of Lambert Nugent and of that summer in Broadstone comes as a consequence of a progressing awakening of Irish society to a shocking reality of widespread abuse:

Over the next twenty years, the world around us changed and I remembered Mr Nugent. But I never would have made that shift on my own – if I hadn't been listening to the radio, and reading the paper, and hearing about what went on in schools and churches and people's homes²⁰.

The novel is set in 1998, and the end of the twentieth century has been crucial for the rising number of inquiries that led to a terrible chain of revelations, precisely what Veronica has been reading and hearing about. The

general disconcert and the initial disbelief were particularly high, because such horrors, inexcusable under any circumstances, were disclosed in the bosom of the Irish Catholic church, involving many ranks of the ecclesiastic hierarchy in different types of church-run institutions:

At the turn of the century, Irish people were shaken by revelations of clerical sexual abuse. It has been very difficult for us to accept that Roman Catholic priests and religious were responsible for harming thousands of children across the country. It has been even more difficult to accept that church authorities had in many cases known of the abuse, and had acted to protect the institutional church rather than vulnerable children²¹.

The gravity of child sexual abuse is in itself unbearable, but the situation has been made even more upsetting by the attitude of denial and covering-up which the church authorities have substituted at times to a more honest and humble self-analysis, as Maeve Lewis has pointed out. The combination of these two facts has undoubtedly played a major role in undermining, in the last two decades, the credibility of the clergy and of the ecclesiastic apparatus as a whole, reflected in what Tom Humbley has referred to as the «flight from the pews»²². It is impossible to deny that Catholicism in Ireland is undergoing a «severe crisis of faith», having been increasingly challenged by «the twin forces of secularization and modernization»²³, and now having to deal with this devastating staggering blow.

The «flight from the pews» represents a moment of drastic change in Irish society, where Catholicism has for a long time occupied a privileged position. Indeed, as it is well-known, the Irish traditionally like to think of themselves as belonging to an observant Catholic country, the most observant Catholic country in Europe in fact. The origins of Catholicism in Ireland date back to the fifth century, but it is from the years that followed Catholic emancipation by the British Parliament in 1829 that the cult truly began to secure a tight hold on Irish society. Little more than a century later, the development of Roman Catholicism as an institution in the country was ratified by an overt will to govern «in accordance to Vatican teachings»²⁴, promoted by Eamon de Valera in the 44th article of the Constitution he introduced in 1937. Ireland therefore consecrated itself as an overtly Christian state, and the rapid acceptance of the Constitution reflected the homogeneous nature of the people's belief:

The constitution was criticized at the time only by a minority. Most people welcomed it as an enlightened combination of the liberal values of parliamentary democracy and Catholic moral teaching. At the time there was a common wisdom in the Catholic world that Catholic social principles could be applied to secular life to create an overtly Christian state. This was what de Valera had set out to do, establishing on the one hand the separation of Church and State and on the other the primacy of

Catholic moral teaching and the State's obligation to abide by it. [...] Right into the 1960s Catholic Irish congregations were full (a feature of the Irish Church revived by Pope John Paul II's visit to the country in 1979) and genuine attention was paid to ecclesiastical pronouncements²⁵.

The empty pews of some of today's churches, and the decreasing number of young Irish willing to take holy orders, prove the entity of the change that is taking place within such an important sphere of Ireland's cultural legacy. However, the sex scandals connected with the church soon turned out to be just the top of the iceberg, a mere glimmer into a much wider reality of abuse, which corroded another foundational element of Irish self-image: the family, or, more generally, the domestic sphere, as Maeve Lewis points out in a recent article for of «The Irish Times»:

Five per cent of all Irish children who are sexually abused are harmed by clerics. However, 75 per cent of children who are sexually abused are violated by members of their own family, or by trusted adults known to them in their daily lives²⁶.

The figures presented in 2002 by the SAVI (Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland) report, conducted on a significant sample of the Irish population, are frighteningly high, as they talk of one in five women (20.4 per cent) having experienced «contact sexual abuse in childhood with a further one in ten (10.0 per cent) reporting non-contact sexual abuse»; as far as men are concerned, the statistics show that «one in six men (16.2 per cent) reported experiencing contact sexual abuse in childhood with a further one in fourteen (7.4 per cent) reporting non-contact sexual abuse»²⁷. This is almost to say that most people are likely to know someone who was interfered with as a child, and, as previously noticed, about three fourth of these events normally take place within one's own four walls. It becomes clear, thus, that in the past few decades in Ireland there have been many Liams and many Veronicas, and the overwhelming impact of such consciousness-raising certainly had a traumatic effect on Irish society. In this sense I think it is appropriate to borrow Ron Eyerman's definition and talk of «cultural trauma»:

There is a difference between trauma as it affects individuals and as a cultural process. As a cultural process, trauma is mediated through various forms of representation and linked to the reformation of collective identity and the reworking of collective memory. As opposed to psychological trauma or physical trauma, which involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion²⁸.

In the light of these considerations, it is now possible to interpret Veronica's attitude both as a manifestation of her personal distress and as a response to a more general loss of credibility of the world around her. Despite

the predominant presence of the family unit as one of the novel's pivotal element, there are very few occasions in which it is perceived and described by Veronica as a safe, warm haven. In *The Gathering*, family is a crowded place, an uncomfortable environment populated not by the fruits of two people's love, but by the thoughtless consequences of too much inconsiderate sex:

My mother had twelve children and – she told me one hard day – seven miscarriages. The holes in her head are not her fault. Even so, I have never forgiven her any of it. I just can't. [...]

I don't forgive her the endless hand-me-downs, and few toys, and Midge walloping us because my mother was too gentle, or busy, or absent, or pregnant to bother. [...] No, when it comes down to it, I do not forgive her the sex. The stupidity of so much humping. Open and blind. Consequences, Mammy. *Consequences*²⁹.

The novel challenges the idea of families as safe cocoons where no harm can ever be possible, as the places to run to when searching for comfort and sympathy. Veronica's is extraordinarily large (and family size in Ireland is traditionally relatively big, even though Veronica's is much beyond the average) and there is no time to truly look after every child as an individual, Enright seems to suggest; there are several passages in the novel where it is clear that her mother cannot even remember her name³⁰, she does not seem to be fully aware of which of her children she is talking to. She has «holes in her head», and it might not be her fault, but how can she be forgiven for being so absent? It seems too easy for each of the Hegartys to go down different paths of destruction with no one paying particular attention, no one being in the condition to truly care. The Catholic notion of the sacredness of family has for Veronica no value at all, it is a cheat, a misconception, as there can be just as much hurt within the supposedly love-filled space of domesticity as there can be in less protected (or supposedly so) situations. The household is a place of wounds, from those left by the disappearance of the one you loved the most (but still failed to protect, to save), to those left by the paradoxical loneliness within shared time and space. Being part of a family, says Veronica when walking down the aisle at Liam's funeral, is the «most excruciating possible way to be alive»:

My head twists away from whichever side of the church is more interested in my grief, only to show it to the other side. Here it is. The slow march of the remaining Hegartys. I don't know what wound we are showing to them all, apart from the wound of family. Because, just at this moment, I find that being part of a family is the most excruciating possible way to be alive³¹.

Hurt and failure are not confined to unusually large families only, as the same conditions perpetrate themselves even in contexts where the parents are not «just helpless to it» breeding «as naturally as they might shit»³². Each

family has its own ways of playing the «unhappiness game», and Veronica's frustrating interaction with her husband Tom, the father of her two little girls, is no exception. Between the lines of plain conversations there is unfulfillment, dissatisfaction, the shared existence of the couple being perceived as almost unnatural, constrained and constrictive:

[...] all those nights were the same.

'Do you want the light on?'

'No thanks'

'Are you coming to bed?'

Here we go, again. Always after a few drinks, but sometimes even sober, we play the unhappiness game; endlessly round and round. Ding dong. Tighter and tighter. On and on.

'No, I'll just sit up a while.'

'It's up to you.'

'Yes.'

Push me pull you. Come here and I'll tell you how much I hate you. Hang on a minute while I leave you.

[...] We rarely shout, myself and Tom, we just hate³³.

Even the thought of her two children seems unable at times to bring Veronica's reasoning back to a more positive note. If in her mother's case the act of childbirth was seen as the mere consequence of blind stupidity, in her own situation it comes to be perceived as a pointless act of selfishness: why should anyone bring into the world another existence if it will eventually just end up buried in the ground like the rest of them?

I look at my hands on the railings, and they are old, and my child-battered body, that I was proud of, in a way, for the new people that came out of it, just feeding the grave, *just feeding the grave!* I want to shout at these strangers, as they pass. I want to call for an end to procreation with a sandwich board and a megaphone³⁴.

However, Veronica's attitude should not be mistaken for cold, emotionless nihilism; her bleak, cynical reflections are the bitter consequences of defeat and disillusionment and therefore should not be regarded as the considerations of somebody who is incapable of loving, but as those of someone who has loved too much and yet has failed to save the object of so much affection. Indeed, Veronica cared for Liam immensely, he probably represented the most precious, purest bond she had in her entire life, and now not only has she lost him, but she also cannot help but think that it is, at least partially, her fault. She has, just like the rest of the Hegartys, watched him being slowly devoured by his alcohol abuse, just like she has silently observed his obsession for personal hygiene, legacy of a never-confronted need to wash away some residual 'dirt' that kept lingering on his body. What sense is there in loving someone so profoundly if you still fail to save him? Isn't love almost a waste

of energy after all, if your beloved ones just end up feeding the grave while your love will outlive their physical absence?

We each love someone, even though they will die. And we keep loving them, even when they are not there to love any more. And there is no logic or use to any of this, that I can see³⁵.

If family is not the place to turn to when searching for meaning and safety in an unstable world of chaos, neither is faith. Even though the cultural legacy of Catholicism is still evident in Veronica's daily life, heritage of a substratum of solid, shared knowledge that marked the upbringing of most Irish people, it is nonetheless deprived of its essential moral components. It survives in the form of spontaneous, almost subconscious associations, often uniting the sacred with the profane and, to some extent, proving that the 'aesthetics' of Catholicism can today still be perceived as the most accessible, perhaps better known, pool of images to draw from. For instance, when Veronica is first confronted with the sight of Liam's dead body, she instantly associates it with that of Mantegna's dead Christ: «If you ask me what my brother looked like after he was dead, I can tell you that he looked like Mantegna's foreshortened Christ, in paisley pajamas»³⁶.

Her own name, which she is not particularly fond of, is associated with that of the saint, and Veronica's memory goes back to her story in contexts which are almost blasphemous:

St Veronica wiped the face of Christ on the road to Calvary and He left His face on her tea towel. Or the picture of His face. It was the first-ever photograph, she said. I became quite fond of her; a figure leaning out of the crowd, both supplicatory and tender. I still think of her wherever wet towels are offered in Chinese restaurants and the old-fashioned airlines³⁷.

This has clearly nothing to do with faith. To Veronica, religion has fallen from grace, she no longer goes to church and has decided not to educate her children according to Catholic beliefs, even though her daughter Rebecca, at eight, is going through a pious phase, «probably to thwart me», Veronica says³⁸. She seems to have especially harsh views when it comes to the *men* who are called to embody the highest Catholic principles, and her utter distrust is most meaningfully exemplified by this statement, which also summarizes some of the most delicate issues here discussed: «I have never trusted men who pray. Women have no option, of course – but what do men think about when they are on their knees?»³⁹.

And when it comes to Veronica's most precious man, it is clear that for him, too, religion is emptied of all spiritual consistency. His sister's memories of his religiosity underline how the Catholic tradition only offers him a gallery of merely sketched figures. Among them, he has his own personal

preferences, and seems to favour some over others for reasons that would be more appropriate for cartoon characters, or comic strips:

Liam liked St Catherine of Siena, the sore-licker. He also liked three Roman saints with funny names who were turned upside down and had milk and mustard put up their noses, which killed them, apparently⁴⁰.

If there once was an order in the world, an order which was founded on two solid institutions called 'family' and 'church', today it is disrupted and, to Veronica's eyes, all is left at the mercy of destructive and uncontrolled sexual impulses. There is indeed a predominance of sexual imagery throughout the book, mostly negatively connoted and usually associated with dirt, sickness and perversion. One of the many examples of Veronica's obsessive insistence on sex, which she seems to see everywhere, is her train journey to Brighton, in which she appears incapable to think of anything but the erection of the man sitting beside her:

The man beside me on the train to Brighton lifts his pelvis slightly, and settles it back down. He is dozing in the flickering, sexual sunlight, lulled and unsettled by the movement of the train. I can sense the blood pooling in his lap; the thick oblong of his penis moving down the leg of his suit. [...] Such small things to have such large consequences⁴¹.

Another example could be the way she describes her sexual intercourse with her husband: «I lay there with one leg on either side of his dancing, country-boy hips and I did not feel alive. I felt like a chicken when it is quartered»⁴², or these considerations which precede Veronica's imagined passion between Ada and Lambert:

I would love to leave my body. Maybe this is what they are about, these questions of which or whose hole, the right fluids in the wrong places, these infantile confusions and small sadism: they are a way of fighting our way out of all this meat [...] because there is a limit to what you can fuck and with what, Nugent opening Ada's belly with his wicked, square fingers, delving into her cavities, taking with careful desire the beautiful lobes of her lungs and caressing – "Oh", gasps Ada, as the air rushes out of her – squeezing her pink lungs tight⁴³.

It is undeniable that a book like *The Gathering* is displeasing and extremely bleak, but there were no other colours for Enright to choose from to frame a particular moment of personal and social collapse, or, as Veronica puts it, of «drowning». The weight under which things are drowning is that of shame («This is what shame does. This is the anatomy and mechanism of a family – a whole fucking country – drowning in shame»⁴⁴), but if it is true that the elaboration of trauma necessarily entails the reworking of identity, it is also true that the first step towards it resides in the act of narration. This is where

the healing process begins, in the act of storytelling, in coming to terms with the overwhelming burden of the shame Veronica is referring to. She has done so by finally telling her own family's story, however partial and fragmented it may be; the same process has begun on a larger scale, since in the last few years the most disturbing aspects of a wider story have been publicly exposed. The path on which to start this new journey may not be clearly traced yet, but the open discussion that is possible today on this uncomfortable subject proves that the spell of paralysis has nonetheless been broken. As readers and 'spectators', we can only wait and see which new chapter of the moral history of Ireland will be written by 'tomorrow's Veronicas'.

Endnotes

¹ A. Kennedy, *The Din Within*, «The Guardian», April 2007, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/apr/28/featuresreviews.guardianreview17>> (04/2010).

² M. Upchurch, *Whew – This Gathering Gets Ugly Fast*, «Seattle Times», February 2008, <http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/books/2004169757_enright10.html> (04/2010).

³ R. Welch (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature*, Oxford UP, Oxford 1996, p. 159.

⁴ A. Enright, *The Gathering*, Jonathan Cape, London 2007, p. 1.

⁵ W.C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1961.

⁶ A. Enright, *The Gathering*, cit., pp. 135-140.

⁷ This is an option that the reader might indeed take into consideration, since there is a vein of madness in the Hegarty family, evoked through the references to Uncle Brendan.

⁸ All the Hegartys do drink (just never together), Liam was indeed an alcoholic and Veronica is undergoing a phase of inconsiderate drinking herself.

⁹ A. Enright, *The Gathering*, cit., p. 13.

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 101.

¹¹ Ivi, p. 142.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ Ivi, p. 144.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ «There were eleven months between me and Liam. We came out of her on each other's tails; one after the other, as fast as a gang-bang, as fast as an infidelity. Sometimes I think we overlapped in there, he just left early, to wait outside». Ivi, p. 11.

¹⁶ Ivi, p. 53.

¹⁷ D.L. Schacter, *Alla ricerca della memoria. Il cervello, la mente, e il passato*, trad. it. di C. Mennella, Einaudi, Torino 2001, p. 25 (or. ed. D.L. Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind and the Past*, Basic Books, New York 1996).

¹⁸ C. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience – Trauma, Narrative, and History*, The Johns Hopkins UP, Baltimore 1996, p. 1.

¹⁹ Ivi, pp. 3-4.

²⁰ A. Enright, *The Gathering*, cit., pp. 172-173.

²¹ M. Lewis, *Time to face up to facts of sexual abuse of children*, «The Irish Times», September 9th 2008, p. 14, <<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2008/0917/1221599424035.html>> (09/2010).

²² T. Hundley, *How Catholicism fell from grace in Ireland*, «Chicago Tribune», July 2006, p. 1, <www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-0607090342jul09,0,3397459.story> (04/2010).

²³ *Ibidem.*

²⁴ *Ibidem.*

²⁵ J. Ranelagh O'Beirne, *A Short History of Ireland*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1983, pp. 229-230.

²⁶ M. Lewis, cit., <<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2008/0917/1221599424035.html>> (10/2010).

²⁷ H.M. McGee *et al.*, *The SAVI Report. Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland*, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, Dublin 2002, <http://www.drcc.ie/about/SAVI_Report.pdf> (04/2010).

²⁸ R. Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma - Slavery and the formation of African American Identity*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2001, pp. 1-2.

²⁹ A. Enright, *The Gathering*, cit., pp. 7-8.

³⁰ For instance, see p. 5.

³¹ Ivi, p. 243.

³² Ivi, p. 25.

³³ Ivi, pp. 179-180.

³⁴ Ivi, p. 79.

³⁵ Ivi, p. 28.

³⁶ Ivi, p. 64.

³⁷ Ivi, p. 128.

³⁸ Ivi, p. 130.

³⁹ Ivi, pp. 65-66.

⁴⁰ Ivi, p. 131.

⁴¹ Ivi, p. 52.

⁴² Ivi, p. 40.

⁴³ Ivi, p. 140.

⁴⁴ Ivi, p. 168.

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*Creative Writing,
Translations, Readings*

That Evening In July

Francis O'Hare

My quest, to find the one wild rose in the world,
the only rose without a thorn, began
somewhere between my first and second sip
of sparkling wine that evening in July,
under a heaven of renaissance blue,
serenaded by ten thousand singing swallows.

My date, the type to make a strong man swallow
like Orpheus entering the Underworld,
was crossing her legs whilst discussing *Betty Blue*;
how typically I sided with DiJaan,
in viewing women as all roses in July
and thorn-traps in September, as she sip-

ped her own cool draught of the warm south, let slip
one silken thigh over the other, like a swallow
skimming water on an evening in July.
For such sights, men have burned half the known world,
or penned slow-burning lines like *when they begin*
the Beguine; I turned the air sea-blue

with what I dreamed of doing to her and blew
sweet Mediterranean zephyrs down her nape
as the second bottle of dry sparkling began
to work its magic. Twilight tasted of *Prosecco*
as we both entered the rich, strange world
of Belfast in the first week of July,

in the calm before the storm-clouds of July-
and the burning ground and the red, white and blue
of the streets reminding us of the real world,
where kids get stabbed with Stanley knives and cops
turn blind eyes while Sicilian gangsters swallow
their hard pride and accept a nice plea-bargain.

Up which blind alley, she ventured, we'd begun
to lose track of where our evening in July,

with all its sexy shades of sunlight, had been swallowed,
like the sea in a bottle, by the blue
depths of the sapphire-sparkle and rose-hip
of a summer's night, promising the world

to lovers as she slowly swallow-sip-
ped my tongue with hers, began to spin my world
under the blue heavens that evening in July.

Biography

Francis O'Hare was born in Newry, Co. Down, in 1970. Educated at Queen's University, Belfast, and University of Ulster, Coleraine, he now works as a teacher. He co-authored *Outside the Walls* (An Clochán Press, Belfast 1997) with Frank Sewell in 1997. A selection of poetry was included in *Poetry Introductions 1* (Lagan Press, Belfast 2004). His work has been widely published in magazines in Britain and Ireland.

The Flats

Leontia Flynn

In the first flat, up a flight of dingy stairs,
there was a sunlit room in which dust danced
and half a dead bee lay by a sash window
(where, we intoned with awe, was the other half?).
Four or five boys smoked joints on the brown carpet.

In the second flat there was also an air of decay:
– damp on the ceiling, cigarette butts in the hearth –
but someone had wistfully added a vase filled with flowers
and a colourful throw, as though by an effort of will
the existence of rooms beside this one might be known.

In the third flat, something had gone obscenely wrong.
The plaster and paintwork were new – but a sharp smell
hung near the unpacked goods in a choked alcove.
Who, furthermore, was the figure beneath that sheet
moaning in anguish. Who watched from the lamp-less chair?

Reminders

The bin collections and the times of Mass.
The names and dosage of prescription drugs.
My parents measure out their hours,
in this small back kitchen, regular as tides,
soothed by a filling kettle and a radio.

A fly completes a quick Grand Prix-style circuit
around the room, then rests against the pane.
'Don't leave key in lock'
reads a note, in capitals, pinned to the back door
above the key, in the lock.

Biography

Leontia Flynn was born in County Down in 1974, and recently completed a PhD at Queen's University, Belfast. In 2001 she won an Eric Gregory Award. Her first collection, *These Days* (Cape, London 2004), won the Forward Poetry Prize (Best Collection of the Year) in 2004, and was shortlisted for the Whitbread Poetry Award. In the same year, she was named as one of the Poetry Book Society's 'Next Generation' poets.

Leontia Flynn lives in Ireland and is Research Fellow at the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry. Her second collection of poems is *Drives* (Cape, London 2008).

Echo

Mutsuo Takahashi (trans. by Frank Sewell & Mitsuko Ohno)

for Takao Ono

Morning Angelus, evening Angelus,
on the tongues of thousands of bells
echoing between heaven and earth,
in paintings of the life of Christ
on old church and cathedral walls
where Lorenzo, Giovanni, and Alessandro,
amid crowds who heard His sermons
or saw His robe stripped from Him,
aim hard stares back at the viewer.
The faces and eyes of these liars
and real-life hypocrites soon fade
in time like their memory
but are restored over the years
by brush-strokes, drawing them out
from walls and murals, bringing the colour
out of their *quattrocento* clothes
into the bright *novecento*
where today's colourful crowds
see out the second millennium
as Gianfranco, Guido, Pierpaolo ...
Don't blame them for the lack of faith
in their modern faces and eyes.
Before these towns and cities were born,
God was always with them, the crowds:
Morning Angelus, evening Angelus,
on the tongues of thousands of bells
echoing between heaven and earth.
God said always, says now and forever:

*Blessed art thou,
the unfaithful.
I am
because thou art
unfaithful to Me.*

Biography

Mutsuo Takahashi is one of the most prolific authors in contemporary Japan, best known as a formally inventive poet and a master of the traditional poetic forms of tanka and haiku, although he has also written plays, novels and essays.

Takahashi was born on 13th December 1937 in the city now known as Kitakyūshū. In 1962, he graduated from Fukuoka University of Education and moved to Tokyo where he started working at the Design Centre. In 1964 he published his first book, *Rose Tree: Fake Lovers* (*Bara nō ki, nise nō koibito-tachi*, Tokyo, Gendaishi Kōbō, 1964). Takahashi has, to date, published about thirty books of poetry, including *Between Two Shores* (Dedalus Press, Dublin 2006), numerous tanka and haiku, and three collected volumes; and has also made a number of recordings of his works, most notably in the volume entitled *Voice Garden* (Star Valley Library, Zushi 1996).

Voci / Voices

Giuseppe Cafiero sulle orme di Joyce a Roma

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When you try to unravel something you've written, you belittle it in a way.
Don DeLillo, 1982

Può capitare che un libro finisca casualmente tra le mani. Può capitare che sia il suo titolo a sorprendervi e a farci sobbalzare.

Questo è successo a chi scrive con il romanzo *James Joyce, Roma & Altre Storie* di Giuseppe Cafiero (Pendragon, Bologna 2006). Un titolo così non poteva non incuriosire una che, come chi ha raccolto l'intervista che segue, aveva fatto parte del gruppo di ricercatori che sotto la guida di Giorgio Melchiori studiò nei primi anni Ottanta del secolo scorso il breve soggiorno di Joyce a Roma.

Fino ad allora la critica internazionale aveva sottovalutato, quando non del tutto ignorato, quei pochi mesi passati a Roma dal giovane irlandese come corrispondente estero della banca austro-ungarica Nast-Kolb e Schumacher, ma, dopo la pubblicazione del volume *Joyce in Rome – The Genesis of 'Ulysses'* (a cura di G. Melchiori, Bulzoni, Roma 1984), quello romano si rivelò essere il momento più disperato ma anche uno dei più creativi della parabola artistica di Joyce. Furono concepiti a Roma infatti *The Dead*, ultimo racconto della raccolta *Dubliners*, e il primo nucleo di *Ulysses*, oltre a essere Roma lo sfondo significativo del dramma *Exiles*. Inoltre le letture dettagliatamente commentate nelle lettere a Stanislaus testimoniano l'evoluzione di un pensiero ideologicamente marcato che sottende al grande romanzo del novello Ulisse.

Le prove documentarie di tutto ciò furono rintracciate nel fitto epistolario intercorso in quei giorni tra James e il fratello Stanislaus, rimasto a Trieste.

Una mostra fotografica, che ricostruiva con foto d'epoca e più recenti la Roma in cui Joyce, la compagna Nora e il figlioletto Giorgio si erano avventurati, fu allestita nell'atrio dell'Aula Magna dell'Università La Sapienza in occasione del convegno internazionale che celebrò nel 1982 il centenario della nascita dello scrittore irlandese «che aveva fatto della sua Dublino il nostro universo» come recita la lapide sulla casa di Via Frattina 52, dettata dallo stesso Giorgio Melchiori.

Il romanzo che mi trovai inopinatamente tra le mani e che mi affrettai a leggere trasformava quei documenti, quelle strade, gli avvenimenti di quei mesi che Joyce aveva seguito sui quotidiani, in narrazione, in "storie" appunto, in un racconto che aveva toni da *mystery*.

La trama è molto affascinante. Si tratta della costruzione di un macrotesto immaginario fatto di citazioni e riferimenti in nota, che serve a “inverare” il racconto di una *tranche-de-vie* dell’irlandese sottoposta all’occhio implacabile dell’investigatore Herr David Mondine di Trieste, assoldato dall’editore inglese Grant Richards, cui Joyce aveva sottoposto i racconti che poi saranno raccolti in *Dubliners*, per valutarne i comportamenti secondo la morale corrente.

L’incarico da parte della Henderson & Craston, agenzia investigativa di Londra, suona così:

Mr Richards desidera un rapporto dettagliato su questo tal James Joyce, sulle sue abitudini e frequentazioni, pur anche per la durata di settimane o mesi, e sin tanto che Ella non avrà in mano elementi certi che possano offrire un giudizio insindacabile ma accorto su questo scrittore d’Irlanda, che sembra, per il vizio suo di eccedere talora nell’alcol e di cambiare, sovente e con frenesia, città e abitudini, rifuggire realtà ed esistenza.[...] Il buon nome e il credito etico è, nell’editoria e nel commercio, virtù sacrosanta e temperanza discreta. Mr Richards avrebbe in buon animo e accorta saggezza di schivare spregi e baruffe per questioni e trattati immorali quantunque egli riconosca a questo tal Mr Joyce un certo qual talento, una salubre volontà riguadagnarsi a una scrittura stuzzichevole, uno spirito arguto nel narrare di vicende ed emozioni.[...] Dovrà insomma, dear Mr Mondine, seguirlo e tampinarlo con talento, da osservatore esperto e segugio consumato, ed esporci, in seguito e pratica ufficiale, impressioni e giudizi su di lui, sulla vita che mena e sul suo operare (pp. 30-31).

Il trucco nella creazione dell’ipotetico David Mondine è presto svelato quando la nota a piè di pagina recita: «Questa lettera è stata ritrovata, nel 1982, da Mr Buck Mulligan presso l’Archivio civile di Trieste, che l’aveva ricevuta in lascito alla morte del signor David Mondine. Sull’autenticità della lettera si nutrono, ancora oggi, dubbi certi e incerte convinzioni» (p. 32).

Dunque l’autore di queste ‘storie’ si aspetta che il proprio lettore sappia che nell’anno 1982 si è celebrato in tutto il mondo il centenario della nascita di James Joyce e che in *Ulysses* Buck Mulligan altri non è che l’amico rinnegato da Stephen Daedalus, l’*alter ego* letterario di Oliver St John Gogarty?

Nel romanzo di Cafiero Herr Mondine da Trieste segue, anzi tampina Joyce da Pola a Fiume, da Fiume ad Ancona sul battello e da Ancona a Roma sul treno e a Roma ne diventa l’ombra e, forse, l’unico amico o perlomeno l’unico che cerchi di indagarne i ricordi di Dublino che stanno prendendo forma di scrittura letteraria. Per sapere cosa passa per la testa dell’irlandese arriva a circuire Nora con la promessa di portarla all’ippodromo delle Capannelle.

Mondine è la voce narrante, un ometto spesso sudato e stanco almeno quanto Joyce, oggetto della sua indagine, che ovviamente è presentato in una stranianti narrazione riportata. Di Joyce sono ricostruiti gesti, parole e persino pensieri attraverso una serie di espedienti narrativi. Un oggetto ingombrante nella vita del povero Mondine fino ad apparirgli in veste di fantasma – «sollazzo

dell'immaginazione forse» - ai piedi del suo letto nella stanza della pensione Tellenbach, al n. 66 di via Due macelli.

“Per prima cosa bisogna guardare e rimirare gli oggetti della memoria per comprendere Dublin, respirarne l'aria, far di conto con tutta la gente balorda che la frequenta”, mi ha sussurrato Mr Joyce (p. 79).

La lettura stimola sempre più la mia curiosità. Riesco a mettermi in contatto con Giuseppe Cafiero che mi fa recapitare altri suoi lavori tra cui il dramma *James Joyce in una notte di Valpurga*, tradotto in inglese come *James Joyce on the Witches' Sabbath* dall'editore indiano Sanbun (2005), che leggo avidamente. L'impianto stilistico è quello del radiodramma, un gioco di voci che si rincorrono a delineare la complessa relazione tra Joyce, la figlia Lucia e il Dottor Jung che la ebbe in cura, voci tra cui figurano Nora, Stanislaus e John Joyce, la zia Josephine, ma persino William Blake, Lady Gregory, Oliver Gogarty, George Moore e Ezra Pound.

Altri libri che approdano sulla mia scrivania sono l'edizione inglese del romanzo su Joyce della stessa Sanbun (2010), *Vincent Van Gogh* (Pacini, Pisa 2008) e *Gli incauti negozi sulla vita e sulle opere di Monsieur Gustave Flaubert, scrittore* (Pacini, Pisa 2010).

Gradualmente il profilo artistico di Cafiero acquista consistenza. Il suo curriculum di uomo di lettere è di tutto rispetto: liberi adattamenti, riduzioni radiofoniche, traduzioni dal francese, teatro e come si è detto, biografie e racconti raccolti in *Le ambiguità della memoria – Decalogo* (Giovane Holden, Viareggio 2008).

Per parlare di questo autore ancora poco conosciuto in Italia, ma già tradotto all'estero, bisognerebbe iniziare proprio dal titolo della raccolta dei suoi racconti, perché è l'ambiguità della memoria a costituire la chiave di lettura di quelle che definiremmo *bio-fictions*, in cui si intrecciano *facts* e *fictions*, in quanto le vite o singoli episodi delle vite sia di Joyce e poi di Van Gogh e infine di Flaubert sono ricostruiti con strumenti mutuati da quelli della documentazione storico-filologica.

Si tratta di una tecnica che imita quella della storiografia accademica alla ricerca di fonti documentali con cui delineare sempre più accuratamente il contesto culturale e anche la geografia biografica di un autore, ma nelle opere di Cafiero i gesti, le persone e i documenti che ne sono memoria raramente sono quello che sembrano, men che meno affidabili sono perciò le fonti riportate. Ecco dunque che, come dice la quarta di copertina della raccolta dei suoi racconti,

il Lettore si ritrova così trascinato in un gorgo seducente e surreale, per il quale *... non è dato sapere se egli ricordò poi ciò che non era possibile ricordare, o dimenticò ciò che era possibile ricordare...*, in preda a uno stordimento mistico, provocato da termini

melliflui, talvolta evocati da tempi arcani e luoghi evanescenti come morgane: ... *allorché si riebbe, scopri, sgomento, di aver perso memoria e parola, se la voce articolava soltanto segni gutturali fra singulti accentuati, osceni, incomprensibili, e la mente vagava in un limbo di idee senza senso e attinenza.*

Giuseppe Cafiero porta avanti una serrata analisi e critica dei meccanismi della memoria non solo quella individuale, ma anche quella registrata nei documenti oggetto della ricerca storico-filologica. Ugualmente inaffidabili le storie e la Storia.

La biografia romanzata (*bio-fiction*) dell'artista, più spesso un pittore, ha una sua tradizione consolidata come genere sia in Italia ad esempio nei romanzi di Marisa Volpi, grande storica dell'arte, che all'estero. Di recente *The Girl with A Pearl Earring* (1999) di Tracy Chevalier è divenuto un film di grande successo. Diverso è il caso di biografie di scrittori redatte da altri scrittori, in cui ovviamente emerge una lettura "critica", edificante o meno a seconda del rapporto che lo scrittore biografo intrattiene con il suo oggetto. *The Life of Charlotte Brönte* (1857) di Elizabeth Gaskell valga come esempio. Ma più interessante è quanto avviene quando scrittori si misurano con le vite di altri scrittori, forgiandone episodi immaginari. Questo genere nelle letterature di lingua inglese ha il suo antenato più illustre in *The Aspen Papers* (1888) di Henry James. Se Shelley è al centro di quel romanzo jamesiano con ipotetiche sue lettere scomparse, Keats sarà al centro di *Abba Abba* (1977) di Anthony Burgess che arriva ad ipotizzare improbabili incontri del poeta inglese con Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli nella Cappella Sistina e con Paolina Borghese al Pincio. In tempi più recenti Colm Tóibín, basandosi sulla insostituibile biografia di Leon Edel, rivisita il genere con *The Master* (2004), di cui è protagonista proprio Henry James. Tóibín mutua da James registro e vocabolario, ma non lo stile. Tralascia il periodare lungo e articolato per un andamento più agile della frase in questo modo ottenendo quello scarto ironico che è spesso soffocato in James.

Giuseppe Cafiero adotta un registro e un lessico dell'italiano desueto, che ci riporta all'inizio del secolo scorso: è l'italiano di David Mondine. Non c'è il tentativo di imitare la scrittura – la *parole* joyciana. Joyce è 'detto' attraverso le parole dell'investigatore che lo segue. C'è nel lessico proposto una continua infiltrazione di termini stranieri, tedeschi, inglesi e di frasi dialettali, versione di *Globitalian* ante litteram che dovrebbe riprodurre il milieu linguistico multietnico di quella Trieste d'inizio del XX secolo in cui si muovevano Joyce e la sua ombra, Mondine.

Viene da chiedersi il perché della scelta di Cafiero di concentrarsi su James Joyce. Con le parole di Naomi Jacobs nel suo *The Character of Truth* (Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale 1990) possiamo dire che gli scrittori contemporanei «allow real people to wander in and out of their fictions as they wander in and out of our dreams» (p. 137). Il romanzo joyciano

di Cafiero è parte di questa estetica post-modernista che testimonia in modo efficace come Joyce oramai abiti il nostro immaginario per il lungo soggiorno italiano, mentre la sua opera da *Ulysses* a *Finnegans Wake* continua a sfuggirci per una sorta di intransitiva resistenza alla comprensione.

Diverso è invece l'atteggiamento della critica accademica verso i fatti della vita di James Joyce. Purtroppo la sfasatura tra l'uomo James, colpevole «di eccedere talora nell'alcol e di cambiare, sovente e con frenesia, città e abitudini, per rifuggire realtà ed esistenza» e lo scrittore Joyce, maestro del modernismo, ha generato una vera selva di studi biografici. Oramai uno sgradevole senso di saturazione e di nausea afferra chiunque si avvicini al campo degli studi joyciani, in particolare sugli aspetti più reconditi della sua biografia, in quanto si ha l'impressione che molto, moltissimo di quanto è stato scritto, raccolto e infine accumulato su dettagli della vita dell'irlandese non aggiunga nulla alla comprensione dei suoi testi. Si potrebbe ben dire che, anche se riuscissimo a conoscere un giorno persino "il colore della sua biancheria intima", non avremmo fatto un passo avanti nell'apprezzamento della sua opera, né contribuito ad aumentare il numero dei suoi lettori. È il gioco puramente autoreferenziale su cui sono basate molte carriere universitarie non solo in Italia. Sarà quindi questo il bersaglio dell'operazione letteraria fortemente ironica messa in campo da Cafiero?

Finora intorno alla figura e all'opera di Joyce erano fiorite narrazioni di stampo 'poliziesco' ad opera di giallisti di fama, da Amanda Cross (alias Carolyn Hailbrun) con *The James Joyce Murder* del 1967 (Gollancz, Londra) a Bartholomew Gill con *The Death of a Joyce Scholar* del 1989 (Macmillan, Basingstoke), ma il romanzo di Cafiero ha tutt'altro spessore e scopo. Quale? Qui non c'è un delitto da scoprire bensì il mistero della creazione artistica nella mente di un uomo. Il suo Joyce capovolge le sorti dell'abile gioco investigativo, scoprendo casualmente lo scopo della frequentazione fin troppo assidua di Mondine e il giallo volge in farsa e si conclude con la partenza precipitosa da Roma della piccola famiglia.

Domande urgenti si affollano nella mia mente e mi risolvo di chiedere allo scrittore un'intervista cui acconsente con insperata generosità.

Il nostro autore vive vicino a Lucignano in provincia di Arezzo e ha accettato di incontrarmi in una tiepida giornata d'inizio aprile.

D: *Vorrei conoscerla meglio. Qualche dato biografico sarebbe utile.*

R: Sono nato a Napoli, ho trascorso la mia infanzia in varie città d'Italia dietro a mio padre che era funzionario di banca. Mi sono ad un certo punto trasferito a Bologna dove ho frequentato i così detti ambienti intellettuali che ruotavano attorno a Roberto Roversi e alla sua libreria *Palma Verde*, alle

sue riviste e proprio sulle sue riviste ho pubblicato la prima parte di questo libro, *James Joyce, Roma ed altre storie*. Successivamente dopo aver lavorato per varie radio, soprattutto Radio Capodistria e la Radio della Svizzera Italiana, mi sono trasferito in campagna in Toscana. Qui finalmente posso dedicarmi alla lettura e volendo anche alla scrittura.

D: *Può riassumere in breve la sua formazione culturale e letteraria e il suo personale approccio alla scrittura.*

R: Significativo per me è stato Calvino. Calvino mi è rimasto dentro. È stato per me particolarissimo, di una sottigliezza e con una scrittura intellettuale straordinaria. Uno scrittore che è sempre sul mio comodino e che leggo continuamente è Borges; per me è stato un altro grandissimo, inimitabile, sublime esempio e che adorava Joyce. Sì, sublime. Joyce è intrigante, bellissimo, straordinario, ma Borges ...

D: *Scorrendo il suo curriculum accanto a quella che definirei una scrittura di rielaborazione/rivisitazione - liberi adattamenti, riduzioni radiofoniche, traduzioni dal francese - c'è molta scrittura creativa. Molti autori sono caduti sotto la sua lente d'ingrandimento e sono diventati forse fonte di ispirazione per la scrittura più propriamente creativa, il macrotesto della sua memoria. Lo spettro dei nomi è veramente ampio: da Shakespeare a O'Neill, da Raspe a Daudet, da Chatelet a Georges Lefebvre, da Toller a Brecht. Come si sono intersecate le due cose, la scrittura di rielaborazione e la scrittura creativa? Come approda ad opere che definirei "bio-fiction" come il libro su Joyce a Roma e Vincent Van Gogh del 2008 e infine Gli incauti negozi sulla vita e sulle opere di Monsieur Gustave Flaubert, scrittore del 2010?*

R: Tutti questi sono scrittori su cui ho indagato e che soprattutto ho reso in qualche modo fruibili dal punto di vista esclusivamente uditivo—perché ho fatto uno studio particolare sulla funzione della radio, che è molto diversa da altre funzioni. Per alcuni di questi autori ho avuto una particolare attenzione, ma soprattutto dal punto di vista, direi, sociale e mentale. Prendiamo gli ultimi libri, mi sono interessato di Joyce, Van Gogh e Flaubert. Tutti e tre erano persone con grossi problemi di carattere comunicativo, di carattere sociale, ma tutti e tre hanno cercato una forma di espressione, in particolare i primi due. Joyce e Van Gogh segnano secondo me due momenti straordinari di rottura - letteraria da una parte, della pittura dall'altra, due momenti di frattura completa rispetto a quello che era il prima. Sono stati due spartiacque incredibili sia Joyce, per un linguaggio particolare che a me interessava moltissimo, sia Van Gogh, con quella esplosione di colori e di bellezza straordinaria. Van Gogh e anche Joyce hanno rotto definitivamente con l'Ottocento del realismo. Siccome io sono uno cha ama le rotture e ama ogni forma di progresso ...

D: *Pensa che il racconto romanzato della vita di un artista, sia esso Joyce o Van Gogh o Flaubert, serva al lettore per interpretarne l'opera con maggiore consapevolezza? Oppure la sua è una operazione di stampo post-moderno: il nostro immaginario è oramai affollato di testi, opere d'arte la cui memoria serve come dice Eliot nella Waste Land solo a «puntellare le nostre rovine»? E' di questo fatto che vuole che il suo lettore prenda coscienza?*

R: Sì, questo è veramente il mio pensiero. Sono artisti che amo, amo svisceratamente. Io penso che voi lettori non possiate farne a meno, perché io li amo talmente che penso sia indispensabile avere nel nostro itinerario intellettuale la presenza di queste due, tre, forse quattro figure. Mi sarebbe sempre piaciuto scrivere qualcosa su Gustave Mahler. Io ho sempre avuto una grande passione per la sua musica ... anche se è un romantico, il che non mi piace, però la musica di Mahler mi affascina, in particolare la quarta sinfonia. Ma Mahler è gigantesco. Se riuscissi a trovare per Mahler uno spaccato di vita come quello che ho trovato per James Joyce - Joyce a Roma -, scriverei senz'altro qualcosa su Mahler.

D: *Veniamo al suo lungo lavoro su James Joyce: prima il dramma James Joyce in una notte in Valpurga del 1990 e poi il romanzo James Joyce, Roma & Altre Storie del 2006. Sedici anni tra l'uno e l'altro. Perché Joyce, innanzitutto? Non sempre e non spesso Joyce appartiene al canone di formazione di uno scrittore italiano. Perché e in base a quali intuizioni o letture che hanno destato la sua curiosità si è spostato dall'opera alla biografia? Certamente ha letto la biografia di Ellman e cos'altro?*

R: Il direttore della Radio della Svizzera Italiana era un attento lettore di Joyce e un amante di Joyce e mi disse: "Sei capace di scrivere un radiodramma su James Joyce? Non mi interessa cosa, ma un radiodramma su James Joyce?" Io scrissi il radiodramma *James Joyce in una notte di Valpurga*. Dopo aver scritto questo radiodramma, Roberto Roversi mi chiese, poiché all'epoca mi interessavo di poesia: "Potresti scrivere qualcosa per la nostra rivista, tipo 'la vita di Joyce attraverso i suoi versi?'" Avevo già letto Ellmann e pensai che l'unica parte della vita di Joyce che non era stata trattata con attenzione era il soggiorno a Roma. Secondo me invece era importante, perché non si è trattato di un giorno solo, ma sono stati diversi mesi in cui Joyce è rimasto a Roma. E a Roma succedevano avvenimenti molto interessanti e soprattutto era la capitale della Chiesa cattolica. Questo rapporto è molto strano. Prendiamo due irlandesi: Oscar Wilde era affascinato dalla sontuosità della Chiesa cattolica, dai suoi riti, mentre Joyce ne era scandalizzato eppure in qualche modo ne rimase sedotto per sempre.

Del periodo romano nessuno si era interessato per quanto ne sapessi io. Vedo invece che ci sono state pubblicazioni di grande spessore, e me ne compiaccio. Purtroppo sono uscite soltanto in lingua inglese e presso un edi-

tore universitario con limitata distribuzione. Un vero peccato per il pubblico italiano.

Per la stesura del mio romanzo e per quel che riguarda il percorso di Joyce, le lettere certamente sono state fondamentali e poi per le strade, le vie, i negozi, le pensioni la cartina di Roma e il Baedeker, per gli avvenimenti i libri sulla Roma di inizio secolo. Mi sono dovuto rileggere tutto il processo per il crack della Banca Romana e ogni ricostruzione di tipo documentario su alcuni avvenimenti particolari, ad esempio la costruzione dell'Altare della Patria.

D: *Qual è stata la prima opera di Joyce che le è capitata in mano?*

R: L'*Ulisse*, e poi i racconti, di cui ho faticato molto a capire la grandezza rispetto all'*Ulisse*. Ci ho lavorato moltissimo. Penso che l'*Ulisse* sia inarrivabile.

D: *Ha mai provato a misurarsi con Finnegans Wake?*

R: No, mi sono fatto mandare da una mia amica il testo in inglese, ma per me è assolutamente incomprensibile.

D: *Lei ha appena dichiarato di aver scritto il suo dramma sul rapporto tra Joyce e la figlia Lucia, malata di mente, su richiesta della Radio della Svizzera Italiana con cui collaborava. Ha avuto modo di visitare la James Joyce Foundation di Zurigo diretta da Fritz Senn, massimo studioso joyciano? Ha mai partecipato ai congressi in Italia o all'estero delle varie Joyce Foundations o alle iniziative de "La Bottega di Joyce" a Trieste? Se sì, quali sono state le sue reazioni a quello che ormai si definisce il Joyce business?*

R: No, assolutamente no. Assolutamente niente. Nessun congresso, mai partecipato a niente. Non mi interessa il mondo accademico. Come le ho già detto, le vostre pubblicazioni non arrivano al grosso pubblico. È la legge del mercato.

D: *Perché dopo sedici anni è passato dal dramma alla narrativa?*

R: Secondo me è questione non solo di scelta, ma di carattere. All'inizio è stato certamente ... per la pagnotta. Ma poi, avendo esaurito quella prima esperienza, non mi interessava più. Potevo oramai fare quello che volevo. Ho sempre desiderato scrivere in modo diverso, ma prima mi obbligavano a fare certe cose, poiché di mestiere facevo lo sceneggiatore radiofonico. A un certo punto ho smesso di farlo e mi sono dedicato ad una scrittura, una scrittura che è molto particolare, perché utilizzo la Storia per raccontare delle storie.

D: *Il suo romanzo emana una spaventosa erudizione, accanitamente abbarbicata agli episodi-capitoli del rapporto Mondine/Joyce. Quale reazione si aspetta dal lettore?*

R: Certamente sono io nei panni di Mondine, questo è indubbio. Soltanto che non è iniziato così, perché la scrittura è un esercizio progressivo. Io sono

molto lento. Per completare il romanzo ci ho messo sedici anni! Questo lo devo al maestro Flaubert, anche se non amo le sue opere. Sono capace di scrivere mezza pagina al giorno e poi su quella stessa mezza pagina ci sto altri tre giorni. Cioè, l'esercizio della parola per me è determinante, forse perché vengo dalla radio, che ha costituito un apprendistato incredibile. Ad esempio l'aggettivazione, che io curo moltissimo — forse anche troppo. E questo mi ha affascinato in Joyce. Il modo diverso di avvicinarsi alla narrazione. È una scrittura completamente dirompente rispetto alla scrittura precedente, straripante, eppure controllata. Ho capito che bisogna inventarsi un modo per comunicare. La forma è importante. Lui ha comunicato in un modo, io cerco di comunicare in un modo diverso. La comunicazione è il perno principale su cui si è mossa tutta la mia ricerca per questo libro. Il rapporto tra Mondine e Joyce è una forma di comunicazione e anche il lettore che non nomino mai, è però chiamato in causa.

D: Il tratto stilistico più interessante della sua opera consiste in un continuo oscillare tra vero e falso, spesso nella stessa frase si contrappongono due aggettivi di senso opposto, ossimori che creano sbandamento nel lettore. È un'inversione di senso puramente ironica? La sua è invece una riflessione sui meccanismi della memoria individuale e collettiva, testimoniata anche dalla raccolta di racconti Le ambiguità della memoria?

R: Mi aspetto anche un gran divertimento sia da parte mia, quando scrivo, che da parte di chi legge, altrimenti il gioco non funziona più. Con quel che ho scritto su Flaubert mi son divertito da matti. È il gioco della finzione, cioè dell'ambiguità. È un gioco secondo me reale. Cioè tutto ciò che è vero, non è vero e tutto ciò che non è vero, è vero. È questo il gioco strano della realtà

D: Lei sembra voler ingaggiare con il suo lettore, che non viene mai chiamato in causa direttamente, una sorta di partita a scacchi in cui è in gioco la sua erudizione e quella del lettore basata sulla oramai infinita messe di studi sulla vita dell'artista irlandese. Sta forse facendo il verso alla critica letteraria accademica, a quelli che Giorgio Manganelli, chiamò «i badilanti della letteratura»? Ha mai pensato che l'investigazione puntuale, quasi maniacale di Mondine assomiglia in modo sorprendente proprio a quella degli studiosi joyciani che cercano di ricostruire fin nel dettaglio, abitudini, amicizie, semplici frequentazioni dell'irlandese in tutte le città in cui ebbe la ventura di vivere, per cui Mondine è una specie di icona del "ficcanaso accademico"? Nell'indicare rimandi a documenti, lettere e altro del tutto inventati, c'era forse in lei un intento ironico contro il proliferare inarrestabile degli studi biografici su James l'uomo rispetto a Joyce lo scrittore?

R: No, assolutamente no. È che mi diverto a scrivere cose che mi interessano e per scrivere le cose che mi interessano uso un certo metodo. Ma la sua osservazione sulle reazioni del lettore è interessante. Ad esempio la traduttrice inglese non capiva dov'era la finzione e dov'era la verità. È andata

a cercare gli appunti miei in nota. Le ho detto: «Scusa, ma che cerchi? Sono invenzioni». Ma quella è andata a verificare se esisteva davvero la lettera a Mondine dell'agenzia investigativa di Londra!

D: *Come spiega l'uso continuo nell'edizione italiana dell'inglese "Dublin" per Dublino o di espressioni e toponimi riportati in tedesco o inglese, i vari "Herr" e "Mr" ecc., nel testo italiano?*

R: Perché secondo me è la sonorità che è diversa. Leggo sempre quanto ho scritto a voce alta e quando leggo la parola devo sentirne la sonorità; se non sento la sonorità desiderata nell'orecchio, non mi funziona. Forse perché ho iniziato a scrivere così poesie, anzi poemi. In quel caso mi funzionava più "Dublin". Era più suggestivo.

D: *Perché ha scelto il nome Mondine?*

R: Diciamo in modo casuale. Cercavo un nome particolare, che fosse italiano ma non troppo, la cui pronuncia potesse oscillare e variare dall'italiano al tedesco, all'inglese. Mi interessava giocare con Joyce il poliglotta. Mi è venuto in mente il nome del vice dell'ex presidente degli Stati Uniti Carter, Walter Mondale. In un flash, mi è venuto così. Infatti non ho mai saputo come si pronunciasse correttamente quel nome.

D: *Per le sue accuratissime e suggestive descrizioni dei luoghi del percorso di Joyce ha effettivamente visitato Trieste, Pola, Fiume, Ancona e Roma e anche Dublino e cos'altro ancora?*

R: A Trieste ho vissuto circa un anno, non di più. Ad un certo punto mi sono dovuto avvicinare a Trieste per via di Radio Capodistria. Ad Ancona son passato perché mio padre ci ha lavorato e quindi conosco quella zona. Per quel che riguarda l'itinerario del viaggio fatto da Joyce, avevo un orario dei traghetti di quel periodo e le tappe esatte che facevano i vari mezzi di trasporto. Per quel che riguarda Dublino, non sono mai stato in Irlanda. Tutto ciò che ho scritto su Dublino o in riferimento a Dublino l'ho potuto ricavare dai libri o da una documentazione piuttosto accurata. Assolutamente non mi muovo mai dalla Toscana.

D: *Come tanti studiosi di Joyce ho per l'opera joyciana una sorta di venerazione che rasenta il fanatismo perciò mi risultano particolarmente irritanti errori quali Finnegans Wake per Finnegans Wake che ricorre nella versione inglese del suo dramma pubblicata da un editore indiano. Si tratta di sviste del traduttore/ editore o di un fatto intenzionale?*

R: No, no, credo sia stata una svista dell'editore.

D: *Nell'edizione inglese del dramma non è indicato il nome del traduttore/ traduttrice, mentre il romanzo è stato tradotto da Marjorie Claire Baine Schiff. Ha avuto modo di collaborare con lei? Quanto è importante il rapporto autore/traduttore?*

R: Sì, con Claire ho un rapporto costante. Vive a Lucignano! La conosco da parecchi anni. È di origine australiana, ma ha vissuto a New York. Faceva la bibliotecaria, poi si è ritirata a Lucignano. Abbiamo un po' di difficoltà a collaborare perché lei ha ancora molte difficoltà a capire l'italiano, nonostante sia da tanti anni in Italia. Però è una persona molto attenta. Ad ogni dubbio mi telefona, ne parliamo. Nella versione inglese manca la prefazione, che Claire aveva tradotto, ma l'editore non ha voluto assolutamente pubblicarla, perché costituiva secondo lui una complicazione ulteriore, era l'ambiguità dell'ambiguità. Era la storia in qualche modo di Mondine. La versione inglese inizia col primo capitolo.

D: *Quali sono state le reazioni della critica internazionale alle edizioni inglesi delle sue opere?*

R: Al momento non ne ho notizia. Penso che l'editore indiano Sanbun si stia dando da fare. Per quanto riguarda l'Italia, non so se va in porto il progetto di fare un e-book plurilingue del romanzo. È un contratto che non mi è ancora arrivato da parte della casa editrice Pacini di Pisa che mi ha pubblicato i libri su Van Gogh e Flaubert. Mi hanno chiesto il *placet* per la traduzione inglese completa. Avevo avuto richieste del libro su Joyce in altre lingue e ne ho già la versione spagnola, per questo si è pensato all'e-book. Secondo me il futuro è lì. Da Pacini sono già pronti per gli e-book, li ho visti, ma senza contratto non si fa niente.

D: *Che cosa ha in cantiere ora?*

R: Lavoro sempre ma non so se andranno in porto due, tre cose che ho in cantiere. Ho un romanzo che vorrei finire, è quasi finito, ma sono cinquecento e passa pagine e devo rivederle. Si chiama *De Ambiguitate*. È sul periodo della successione ad Urbano VIII di Innocenzo X e si svolge tra la Francia, Bologna e Napoli. Mi interessava toccare Napoli. Chiaramente ho comprato tutti i libri che riguardavano il periodo. L'ascesa al soglio pontificio di Innocenzo X è avvenuta per grazia e volontà della cognata Donna Olimpia Maidalchini. E su Donna Olimpia ho letto alcune cose, ancora 'storie', come l'andirivieni degli ambasciatori di tutti i paesi che contavano, che mi sembrano ricordare le manovre della loggia massonica P2. Dalla Pimpaccia a Gelli è un bel salto. Ma è un po' difficile, complesso ... anche perché se si toccano certi argomenti... Prima di finirlo l'ho mandato ad una importantissima agenzia letteraria italiana. Mi hanno risposto in modo evasivo. Complimenti e reticenze che mi hanno fatto capire che c'erano ragioni per cui non potevano proporlo ad alcuni editori.

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Emma in Borderlands: Q&A with Emma Donoghue

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Having enjoyed considerable success and admiration among audiences and critics for more than a decade, Emma Donoghue is by now one of the most renowned female voices of contemporary Irish culture. The daughter of acclaimed academic critic Denis Donoghue and Frances, a former Aer Lingus flight attendant, she graduated at University College, Dublin and then left for Cambridge, where she took her PhD in English. She has since proven a very talented novelist, short-story writer, playwright, and literary historian, frequently enjoying the shift from one activity to one other.

Back in Dublin in the early 1990s, Donoghue started her productive cooperation with the feminist theatre company Glasshouse Productions. For them, she wrote her first play, *I Know My Own Heart* (1993) which draws extensively on the life of Fred-'Gentleman Jack'-Anne Lister (1791-1840), a Yorkshire landowner considered the first modern lesbian. Donoghue takes Lister's diaries and recounts her secret love relationships in eighteenth-century England. The actual, documented sources are conveniently used as tool, as an expedient to claim a space for lesbians in contemporary culture, and in that they demonstrate Donoghue's contribution to the rise of queer culture in and out of Ireland. Following the success of this first play, and due to the increasing respectability of Glasshouse Productions, the company went on to commission her a second play *Ladies and Gentlemen* (1996), a witty exploration of cross-dressing and gender trouble based on the life of male impersonator Annie Hindle (1847-19?). In 1993, Donoghue also published *Passion Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801*, a compelling archival record of printed texts containing lesbian themes and issues from Restoration England up until the nineteenth-century. However, to tell that she has an obvious fascination with the past is to oversimplify her keen ear for recovering lost stories of real women.

Like many women artists of her generation, Donoghue sees the power in getting neglected works by women back from the hidden corners of official *History*. Like most contemporary Irish artists, she works in liminal spaces which lull between the past and the present, yet with the future always in mind – hence, our choice of the term 'borderlands' to render the fluidity, the sense of movement and chance that permeates her writing. So, what is it that

makes Donoghue exceptionally Irish? And, above all, how can the border – in a material as well as a metaphorical sense – affect her and her creativity as writer? These are all issues taken up by the following interview, where Donoghue moves throughout her career, in particular its early years, and ends making some considerations on the future of women's and lesbian writing in Ireland. The fact that she emigrated to Canada towards the end of the 1990s somehow complicates the thread of the journeys undertaken by her characters, at the same time as it responds to a customary feature of many Irish artists.

Donoghue's debut-novel *Stir-Fry* (1994) is more than simply a coming-of-age story. She follows seventeen-year-old, country girl Mária and her sudden discovery of her own sexuality in contemporary Dublin. Its follow-up, *Hood* (1995) is about an Irish woman trying to cope with the aftermath of her partner's death. Lesbian subjectivity, desire for women, and coming-out are the shared background upon which the two novels seek to challenge heteronormative representations of women in Irish literature. Donoghue was seen one of those writers for whom the bubbling cultural context of 1990s Ireland provided an opportunity to depart from the legacy of a colonial past and finally enter a time 'new'. *Stir-Fry* and *Hood* were enough to bring the writer to international attention, and earned her translations into several languages.

There are stories that long to be told, and archived. There are names that demand to be called back again, or even for the very first time. Sometimes, dealing with the past is the best way to talk about the present. All this Donoghue knows too well and shows in her later works. *Slammerkin* (2000) is her first historical novel. Mary Saunders was a working-class girl in eighteenth-century London who passed from prostitution to the murder of her mistress only because she demanded a better life, which she saw in the ribbons and laces typical of the dress-code of the time. *Life Mask* (2005) is also set in eighteenth-century England. The unproven love triangle among comedy actress Elizabeth Farren, aristocratic Whig sculptor Anne Seymour Damer, and Edward Smith-Stanley is imagined in the backdrop of the French Revolution and how it influenced the minds of nobility in England. And again, *The Sealed Letter* (2008) is inspired by the true story of British feminist-spinster Emily Faithfull and her getting entrenched in the divorce of her long-lost friend Helen Codrington upon the latter's return to England. The story is enriched by the hidden secrets and grim details of Helen and Vice-Admiral Codrington's marriage, including the really insidious letter which gives the book its title.

Like a would-be inspector, Donoghue craves a desire to investigate sexual liaisons and affairs at times when it was unthinkable for lesbian love to speak its name, and especially when it had to be concealed behind the facade of respectability and honour, as in Victorian England. Morality and tradition are like beasts, Donoghue seems to say; they eat you alive and can go as far as to ruin the most human of feelings. It is with the same greedy appetites that readers are thrown into the challenges posed by Donoghue's rewritings of official history. This is a

creative thread begun with *Passion Between Women...* and resumed in her later works as literary critic. Yet, 'literary critic' is a category that hardly suits her, one which she fits seemingly uncomfortably, tightened as it is in the grip of issues like faithfulness, and taste. Donoghue performs the skilled cultural historian. She retrieves historical sources, documents them, brings them back to life and again expands them in order to show more of ourselves and the times and places we live in. She charts a sort of geography of feeling through which to hand back the memory of desires long lost, erased or strategically deprived of a voice of their own. So for instance, *We are Michael Field* (1998) is a biography of the late-Victorian Katherine Bradley and her niece and lover Edith Cooper, poets and writers of verse drama disguised under the one and same name Michael Field. In Donoghue's world, things (and people) seldom are what they seem. Furthermore, it is this ongoing play of reality and fiction, truth and fantasy which allows her to move freely within the 'here and now' of the bodily presence and desire for lesbians.

The metaphor of tradition leads to consider her first collection of short-stories, *Kissing the Witch* (1997). Here, she revises postmodern-style the genre of fables and fairy-tales – Cinderella, White Snow, the Mermaid Story, The Beauty and the Beast and many others – from a decidedly lesbian perspective. In a similar way to this greatly entertaining collection, *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* (2002) is a collage of impressive short-stories built on historical facts and folklore in the England and Ireland of seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries. Donoghue's latest collection to date, *Touchy Subjects* (2006), instead, sees her return to matters of contemporary life. In particular, motherhood and childrearing are contemplated from the standpoint of a linear development on five different stages of life (Babies, Domesticity, Strangers, Desire and Death), and along multiple journeys, from Ireland to the United States and Canada. Often in Donoghue's works, border crossing is functional to finding a strategic location, or perspective, no longer conceived of as a metaphorical, in-between land, a space of indefinableness and uncertainty; rather, a constant undoing of the rootedness demanded by the very notion of 'space'. Different layers of experience accumulate and give way to the richness conveyed by inquiring constantly into individual and social changes and experiences, historical facts and fictional landscapes. In 2007, the novel *Landing* followed closely the long-distance love story of an Irish flight attendant – perhaps, a reference to Donoghue's mother – and a Canadian historian into a stable relationship with another woman. Their differences in age, background and aspirations in life were metaphorically representative of the cultural clash Ireland-Canada. What makes Donoghue's writing so fascinating is also this on-going shift from one culture to another, as if to stress the purely Irish *habitus* to migrate.

An indefatigable writer, Donoghue has recently come back with two, new works. Published in May, 2010 *Inseparable: Desire Between Women in Literature* is a daring attempt to catalogue 'passions between women' in English, French, German, Italian, Latin, and Spanish literatures since the Middle Ages.

Donoghue speaks of this major effort as «a sort of map. It charts a territory of literature that, like all undiscovered countries, has been there all along»¹. Her comment discloses the captivating nature of every single work she has written. It seems impossible for Irish writers to depart from geography, as much as it would be inconceivable to recede permanently from the past. They may seem to reject it – and indeed most of them do, including Donoghue herself – but they do so only as a primary requirement to shape alternatives and hopes for the future. *Room* (2010) is her latest, much acclaimed novel. Told from the point of view of a five-year-old, Jack, the book is the complex story of the love between him and his mother, a theme decidedly new to Donoghue. One of the best lines by the histrionic writer is given to Annie, in *Ladies and Gentlemen*. Discussing her love relationship with Ryanny she realizes that, in spite of her success as male impersonator, «There aren't any songs about things like *this*»². And yet, Donoghue always gives us the lyrics. We are to find the tune, and make it our own.

Emma Donoghue currently lives in London, Ontario, with her Canadian partner and their two children.

The following interview has been carried out through e-mail communication. The first complete draft was later submitted to Donoghue in July 2010. Our gratitude to Emma Donoghue for her constant support and interest in our work.

Go raibh maith agat

Q: You were born and brought up in Ireland. How did the country's political and religious divisions influence your life and work?

A: I grew up in Dublin, the capital of the Republic, a country which was a rather extraordinarily homogeneous society compared with others in the West. Pretty much everyone I knew was white, had two Irish parents, and was a practising Catholic. I had no objection to all this until, at about fourteen, I realized I was a lesbian, and therefore, in my society's terms, a freak. This theme – not just homosexuality but the clash between individual and community, norm and 'other' – has marked many of my published works. As for the countries political divisions, I feel sheepish in admitting that they affected me much less; I was aware of anxiety about the Troubles in Northern Ireland, but never felt them to have much direct connection with my life. The country was partitioned in the 1920s, the era my parents were born in, and that fundamental split was just one of the realities I was born into. I would describe myself as only mildly Nationalist.

Q: You completed your PhD in Cambridge. How much of an impact was it moving to another country, with a culture characterized by difference, yet also contact zones with Ireland?

A: To be honest, the culture wasn't that entirely different. Being a middleclass Dubliner who had grown up reading many British books and newspapers, and watching British television, in my experience the cultures of Ireland and Britain overlapped. If I had been an Irish (Gaelic) speaker from the rural West of Ireland, my experience might have been much more of a shock. As it was, I found the move to Cambridge, England simple enough, especially as I continued to visit Ireland every few months. My graduate school days there were rather liberating, on one level, because I found England a bigger, rather more diverse society that was more tolerant of difference, and I tapped into a strong feminist and LGBT movement.

Q: *You have since crossed another border and met another culture. How did you find the move to Canada and why did you decide to live there?*

A: Yes, I've now emigrated twice! (It is an Irish habit, after all.) My partner is Canadian, and after several years of commuting between England and Canada I became a Canadian permanent resident in 1998. This has been a much bigger move – because so much of the texture of everyday life, from the size of roads and meals to the idioms of speech, is different on this side of the Atlantic – but a happy one, especially because I've had such a concrete reason for it: I can work anywhere, whereas my partner's job ties us to Canada.

Q: *You've been living abroad for quite a long time now. Ireland's turn to globalisation and its shift towards new conceptions often contradicting or rejecting the past have been developing throughout the island. How do you feel about the Irish cultural scene of today?*

A: Fascinated, bewildered, nostalgic, irritated, thrilled ... It puts my head in a spin to walk the streets of Dublin. I thought the film *Once* (2007) was particularly smart in its combining the shabby informality and authenticity I remember from pre-Boom Ireland with the ethnic diversity of today. Roddy Doyle's story collection *The Deportees* (2008) is a great example of an Irish writer embracing all the changes instead of defending his stake in a changed culture.

Q: *Did you find it a difficult "border" to cross when you realized you were a lesbian? What impact did it have in finding your identity as a woman and as writer? Does your own experience of marginality/liminality add an extra dimension to the way a lesbian writer deals with identity and subjectivity? Is marginality/liminality an essential and/or stimulating condition?*

A: Yes, that was the trickiest border I've ever crossed; it took me most of my teenage years to come to terms with it. I wasn't bothered by religious guilt, only social shame; I found it hard to accept being socially abnormal. And yes, as you suggest, I think marginality/liminality is a stimulating condition; I recognise the same wry humour and fresh insights in many other writers,

for example First Nations or Indian writers here in Canada. To know yourself to be the Other is very educational.

Q: Critics have often stressed the fact that, for Irish women, writing novels is a much more rewarding activity than playwriting. Much more than literature, Irish theatre is marked by such imagery as that associated with Nationalist ideology which dates back to Yeats's Revival at the beginning of the twentieth century. You have always been openly lesbian. What difficulties did you find given your position as an openly lesbian playwright?

A: Perhaps that limited the audience for my first two plays, but actually I don't think this is an issue of being excluded from Irish theatre for being a lesbian; many novelists I know, female and male, have had a few theatre productions but not built a career on that side of their work. I have had some great experiences in American theatre too, with the Magic Theatre in San Francisco and others, and there I think the lesbian factor has really helped me get noticed by the companies. I have also written a lot of radio drama for BBC Radio 3 and 4, which is in some ways an easier means of finding a wide audience.

Q: Your first book Passion Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801 (1993) was a cultural history. Since then, you have always seemed quite at ease in crossing borders between different literary genres. Why do you think this is? And, how did you come to this path?

A: I think it's quite common for writers of my generation to define themselves that broadly – as writers – rather than as poets, playwrights or novelists. We are eclectic and highly professionalised, on the whole; we sell our words in a variety of forms and markets. The Internet has made this easier. If I, in particular, am a literary border-crosser, I suppose it's because my interests are diverse (I have no one landscape, or ethnic group, or theme that I build all my work on) and because I have enormous reservoirs of personal confidence. It has always seemed obvious to me that I can write in any genre I like. I chose to write a history of this “marginal” community because it needed doing. The main book in the field, Lilian Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men* (1982), had been published at the end of the 1970s, and there had been many new texts discovered and ideas hammered out since then. As a young lesbian scholar, I felt as equipped to write that book as anyone else

Q: What do you recall of your co-operation with Glasshouse Productions Company? How did it influence your first experience as a writer/playwright, and has it also somehow informed either your later works and/or your views on (the condition of) Irish women in “the Arts”?

A: I remember it very warmly as an extremely nurturing relationship that turned me into a real playwright. They took *I Know My Own Heart* (1993), which I had written and produced only at student level, and gave it profes-

sional productions in both a short and later a full-length version; then they commissioned *Ladies and Gentlemen* (1996), which put me in the luxurious position of not only being paid to write a play, but having feedback from the company who were committed to putting it on. I am not sure how the relationship informed my later works or views, but for a young writer it was a wonderful way to enter the world of theatre. I think the Dublin rehearsal period of *Ladies and Gentlemen* was the most thrillingly collaborative three weeks of my generally solitary working life: I remember it like a love affair!

Q: *In the 'Afterword' to the published version of your first play, I Know My Own Heart, you claim it is a play on women living in "a society based on codes and conventions", that is eighteenth-century England. Did it enclose a veiled reference to the Irish situation? In your opinion, what are the perspectives for feminist and lesbian drama and, more broadly, for women theatre practitioners in Ireland?*

A: Not a veiled reference, no – but of course I was drawn to Anne Lister's story, her sense of being the only one in the world, because I felt much the same in 1980s Ireland. As for women and theatre in Ireland now, I'm afraid I'm very out of touch so I couldn't say, but certainly there have been some prominent successes, such as Marina Carr, so I'm hoping 'women's issues' are more part of mainstream nowadays.

Q: *In Ladies and Gentlemen, you made extensive use of songs throughout the play. It is a strategy shared by many contemporary women playwrights (the most noteworthy example, perhaps, is Caryl Churchill). How would you comment on your own choice of songs in plays? Did it have for you any connection with the revision of dramatic structure(s) operated by women in contemporary theatre(s)?*

A: I'm afraid it was less a Churchillian/Brechtian device than a consequence of the fact that I was writing about vaudeville stars; not to show them singing would have seemed a waste! But certainly I relished the chance to rework some obscure Victorian songs, and in the show some of the most playful gender-bending happened at those moments.

Q: *The reported article from «The New York Sun» at the end of the same play tells about your frequent concern with the issue of retrieving the lost work of women-artists in general. This is also demonstrated by some of your works published so far. Both of your plays have as their core reported/real facts and portray real women. Can you say something about this?*

A: Yes, I don't know quite why it is, but I've never written anything purely fictional set in the past; I never get a chance to, because I always find myself hooked by a true story, whether in the case of my plays or historical novels. I suppose it's the academic researcher in me, but it also offers thrills I can only describe as forensic: the detective as much as the professor. Perhaps because of my background in lesbian history, I have a particular stake in the idea of

digging up what has been buried, giving voice to what has been censored – which is an attitude that stays with me even when I’m writing about things which have nothing to do with lesbian history.

Q: *Characters in your novels (such as Maria, Pen O’Grady and Mary Saunders) fight against marginal psychological states. What draws you to characters on the edge?*

A: It’s a taste I share with many writers. If a character is a calm person who is having a very ordinary day, it’s hard to make up a story about them! Readers like to experience all emotions vicariously; they only want the ordinary if it provides with a marvellous contrast with novelty or disaster.

Q: *Maria, the main character in your 1994 novel Stir Fry, moves from the country to Dublin, where she discovers her sexuality. Is there a link between the crossing of these two boundaries? Do you think that the ideological divide between rural and urban Ireland still exists?*

A: It’s a very familiar structure for a coming-of-age novel, the move from country to city, which brings with it many puzzling new discoveries; I think it’s found in many countries, not just Ireland. It might have been more original to have a Dublin woman move to the countryside and discover herself there! – but I was a Dublin woman, and I wanted to make Maria clearly distinct from me.

Q: *In Stir Fry and Hood (1995) you suggest that Catholic education hinders or limits subjectivity and creates a religious border. What is your opinion and your own experience of religion as a “border”?*

A: The Catholicism I was brought up in combined basic, wholesome ethical and spiritual education (God loves you, love your neighbor, etc) with a peculiarly obsessive insistence on Catholic theological details, particularly sexual roles. So it was better than nothing, but it left me with a lot of demons to fight off.

Q: *Kissing the Witch (1997) is a beautifully realized Postmodern experiment in genre contamination. Does literary hybridation fascinate you, and if so, how?*

A: Yes, I’d say *Kissing the witch* and *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* (2002), are both hybrids. The Mermaid story (the *Tale of the Voice*) in *Kissing the Witch* touched me particularly, because of its painful symbolism to do with becoming a hybrid. Emigration does similar things; emigrants soon become half-and-half, not fully at home in either place.

Q: *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits is a collection of historically based stories which combines “the historian’s question ‘What really happened?’ with the novelist’s ‘What if?’”. Have you crossed another border in writing this book?*

A: I suppose I have. *Slammerkin* (2002) was a big story extrapolated from a tiny source, whereas in many cases the stories in *The Woman Who...* are woven around the known facts, and could be considered history as well as fiction, especially as my source notes are included, to insist on the reality of the stories. Publishing this book was a great satisfaction to me, because I feel it drew all my skills – for research as well as fiction-writing – and stretched me to try many different styles.

Q: *A collection of critical essays on Irish women's writing (Border Crossing. Irish Women Writers and National Identities, 2000) explores "the connections between personal and national identities, politics and literary style, and gender and artistic vocation". What is your opinion of this premise? Do you think any of those connections are particularly revealing and, if so, in what way?*

A: Hmm, I can't tell how revealing those links in the abstract, I'd need some examples. I think Irish literature – or rather, its canon – is strongly patriarchal, and really only recently this thing has begun to change. Even now, I think truly innovative talents like Anne Enright have finally been given credit; I think her style is seen as female quirkiness rather than a pushing back of the boundaries of language.

Q: *Will you ever go back to writing for the theatre? And, what is your attitude towards writing for the stage, as compared to other genres you've been experimenting with throughout your career?*

A: Oh, certainly, I haven't renounced it. But I suspect you have to commit yourself body and soul to theatre to really succeed at it. Publishing novels is in my own experience easier than putting on plays: it's not about the writing, it's about the circumstances of cultural production. Publishers don't care where you live, whereas theatre tends to be about personal contact and live collaboration. Another factor is that a book sits on the shelves for years, for instance, awaiting its buyers, whereas a play might be all over in a week). All this – and the fact that my income depends on my fiction, specifically on American sales of my novels, actually – means that I have put far more of my time into fiction than theatre. Especially now I have small children, the precious daycare-hours can only fit so much, so I'm choosing to focus on fiction, which is the most satisfying genre for me anyway, and I suspect my best form. (I write good dialogue for theatre, I would say, but I am less strong at construction and physicality). But I do miss theatre; just answering these questions makes me want to rush off and write my next play!

Q: *In your later works, you have tended to focus more on the past. I am thinking of Like Mask (2005), The Sealed Letter (2008), and your very recent Inseparable (2010). Has that come to you as a sort of phase of work, like a particular urge, or rather as something you just felt compelled to or wanted to write?*

A: I don't see it as a phase – I think I wrote my first historical story, *Words for Things*, in 1992 when I was writing *Passion Between Women*, so I've been doing it all along. I suppose my career is a two-forked stream; I seem to be drawn to the past and the present about equally.

Q: *Dublin has changed a lot over the past few decades. I [SG] remember being there last year during the Gay Theatre Festival, and everywhere in town you could see posters depicting Oscar Wilde advertised just above Smirnoff vodka, which I found too funny and awkward. In a way, I think that picture captured the inherent contradictions related to the upsurge of "queer" in Ireland. How would you comment on this?*

A: Oh, I'm afraid it happens everywhere queers get a few civil rights; alcohol companies are always the first to jump on the band-wagon and co-opt our perceived trendiness!

Q: *Also, what do you think of your witnessing all these changes as an Irish woman in Canada, where you have now been living for a long time?*

A: It is a little odd to fly into Dublin roughly twice a year and encounter all these changes, but still, emigration has a long history as part of the condition of Irishness... so my feelings of confusion and sentimentality at Dublin Airport make feel thoroughly Irish.

Q: *When you think of "borderlands" as a term to refer to your writing fiction and criticism/cultural histories, do you think of it as something partially inherent in Irish culture, or as something to which you feel closer given your own personal background and experiences?*

A: I suspect writers always feel like border-walkers.

Q: *The connection of past and present, tradition and modernity has always been at the core of Irish cultural criticism and the artists' scene. In your opinion, can it be used to shape a possible way forward, in terms of a politics ahead of globalization and the current economic crisis investing all Europe?*

A: Sorry, you two, my daughter is having a hysterical fit on my office floor and I have to pack our bags to head off to Ireland tomorrow, so I can't manage any more coherent thoughts today!

Endnotes

¹The quotation is taken from Donoghue's introduction to the eBook version of the work, available in the *Reader Store* section at <<http://www.ebookstore.sony.com>> (accessed 05/2010).

²Emma Donoghue, *Ladies and Gentlemen*, New Island Books, Dublin 1996.

Contributors

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ments and Identification Processes in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney and Michael Hartnett. Her work is based on the conviction that psychological development in childhood can be as enlightening in the field of literary criticism as historical and political contexts and her approach has been described as forging new theoretical territory in Irish Studies. Current projects include a study of detachment and displacement in Michael Hartnett's *Inchicore Haiku* and an exploration of how Object Relations theories can be used as a framework for interpreting Heaney's *District and Circle*.

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Frank Sewell [F.Sewell@ulster.ac.uk] is Course Director of English at the University of Ulster. A writer, translator, musician and academic, his publications include *Modern Irish Poetry: A New Alhambra* (OUP, 2000) and numerous essays on poets such as Ciarán Carson, Derek Mahon and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill. Sewell's own poetry is featured in many anthologies, most recently *The New North: Contemporary Poetry from Northern Ireland*, ed. by Chris Agee (Wake Forest Press, 2008).

Francis O'Hare was born in Newry, Co. Down, in 1970. Educated at Queen's University, Belfast, and University of Ulster, Coleraine, he now works as a teacher. He co-authored, *Outside the Walls* with Frank Sewell in 1997. A selection of poetry was included in *Poetry Introductions 1* (2004), followed by *Falling into an O* (2007) and *Alphaville* (2009). His work has been widely published in magazines in Britain and Ireland.

Leontia Flynn was born in County Down in 1974, and completed a PhD on the poetry of Medbh McGuckian at Queen's University, Belfast. In 2001 she won an Eric Gregory Award. Her first collection, *These Days* (2004), won the Forward Poetry Prize (Best Collection of the Year) in 2004, and was shortlisted for the Whitbread Poetry Award. In the same year, she was named as one of the Poetry Book Society's 'Next Generation' poets. She lives in Ireland and is Research Fellow at the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry. Her second collection of poems is *Drives* (2008).

Mutsuo Takahashi is one of the most prolific authors in contemporary Japan. Best known as a formally inventive poet and a master of the traditio-

nal poetic forms of *tanka* and *haiku*, he has also written plays, novels and essays. Takahashi was born on 13th December 1937 in the city now known as Kitakyūshū. In 1962, he graduated from Fukuoka University of Education and moved to Tokyo where he started working at the Design Centre. He published his first book, *Rose Tree: Imitation Lovers*, in 1964. Takahashi has, to date, published over thirty books of poetry, including *Between Two Shores* (2006), numerous *tanka* and *haiku*, and three collected volumes; and has also made a number of recordings of his works, most notably in the volume entitled *Voice Garden* (1994).

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Recensioni / Reviews

Serenella Zanotti, *Joyce in Italy. L'italiano in Joyce*, Aracne, Roma 2004, pp. 194. € 12. ISBN 887-99-9829-3

Joyce in Italy. L'italiano in Joyce raccoglie vari interventi di Serenella Zanotti, in parte già comparsi su rivista tra il 2000 e il 2002, nei quali l'autrice affronta i complessi rapporti che legano James Joyce all'Italia. L'analisi segue percorsi molteplici all'interno della vita e delle opere dello scrittore, toccando diversi aspetti delle relazioni di Joyce con la letteratura, la cultura e soprattutto con la lingua italiana, comprese le sue varietà regionali e dialettali. Quasi a riflettere il bilinguismo del 'dublinese triestino' Joyce, lo studio di Zanotti è suddiviso in una sezione in inglese, *Joyce in Italy*, e una in italiano, *L'italiano in Joyce*. Il titolo e la 'struttura bipartita' sembrano anche evidenziare come il legame di Joyce con l'Italia non sia solamente correlato alla permanenza a Trieste: «l'italiano era in Joyce» ancor prima della sua esperienza nella città adriatica e vi è rimasto in seguito, quale elemento permeante della sua vita familiare e della sua produzione letteraria.

La sezione 'inglese' del testo, *Joyce in Italy*, comprende due capitoli e si apre con un'indagine del ruolo rivestito da Ezra Pound e Carlo Linati nell'incontro tra Joyce e il mondo letterario italiano. Grazie ad un lavoro di ricerca approfondito, basato principalmente su consultazione di documentazione inedita, Zanotti è in grado di fornire nuove informazioni bio-bibliografiche sugli anni che vanno dal 1918 al 1927 circa. Oltre a proporre un'accurata ricostruzione cronologica delle varie tappe nelle relazioni tra Joyce, Pound e Linati, Zanotti analizza i rapporti tra questi personaggi e l'attività delle maggiori riviste letterarie italiane del periodo, quali *Il convegno*, *La ronda* e *La tribuna*, prendendo in considerazione anche figure 'minori' nel panorama culturale dell'epoca. Parte del capitolo è dedicata, inoltre, alle *Prime versioni italiane dall'Ulysses*, estratti del romanzo tradotti da Carlo Linati e pubblicati su *Il Convegno* nel 1926. Pur tenendo conto delle difficoltà insite nel rendere in italiano la pluralità di significati che caratterizzano *Ulysses*, i testi di Linati presentano discutibili discrepanze con l'originale: costellati di scelte traduttive poco felici, spesso falliscono nell'interpretare anche le espressioni più comuni, come nel caso della frase «She kicked the bucket», che diviene «Essa diè persino un calcio al secchio» (p. 67).

Il secondo capitolo di *Joyce in Italy*, più breve, è incentrato sull'impiego dell'italiano in *Finnegans Wake*. L'analisi procede diacronicamente dalle 'origini' dell'opera, in particolare dal notebook comunemente noto come *Scribbledehobble*, per poi giungere al testo pubblicato. Nella trattazione di *Finnegans Wake*, Zanotti non solo si avvale delle prospettive critiche più autorevoli in materia, tra cui gli studi di Bosinelli, Marengo Vaglio e Milesi, ma propone anche un proprio contributo, individuando italianismi in precedenza inosservati.

La seconda parte dello studio, *L'italiano in Joyce*, ripercorre alcune tappe fondamentali della multiforme esperienza linguistica di Joyce, con particolare attenzione all'ambito triestino. Zanotti riconosce e illustra diversi usi dell'italiano all'interno del corpus joyciano, sottolineando come «dell'italiano [...] Joyce seppe sviluppare tutte le potenzialità espressive, percorrendone la tradizione e facendo delle sue stratificazioni d'uso materia letteraria»; si sofferma, poi, ad analizzare il *Quaderno d'Italiano di Joyce*, documento riprodotto in facsimile in *The James Joyce Archive*. È opinione comune che Joyce fosse dotato di una naturale predisposizione per l'apprendimento delle lingue straniere, e a tale attitudine spesso è attribuita la sua padronanza sia dell'italiano, sia del dialetto triestino. Le annotazioni nel *Quaderno* testimoniano come, in realtà, questa propensione innata fosse quantomeno supportata da uno studio metodico della lingua italiana: Joyce si dedicò, dice Zanotti, a «scandagliare le potenzialità del vocabolario, ora attingendo al ricco serbatoio delle allotropie fonomorfolgiche, [...] ora sfruttando, ed è questa la modalità più usitata, le risorse della sinonimia» (p. 138). L'avvicinamento dello scrittore alla lingua italiana e alle sue varietà, quindi, può essere pensato come istintivo e programmatico allo stesso tempo, in un'ambivalenza tra spontaneità e calcolata pianificazione che è individuabile, ad esempio, anche nella maggior parte dei processi di scrittura joyciani.

A chiudere *L'italiano in Joyce* è un capitolo dedicato all'auto-traduzione di due brani di *Finnegans Wake* tratti da *Anna Livia Plurabelle*. Se *Finnegans Wake* può essere considerato un testo multilingue scritto dal punto di vista anglofono, il passaggio da una lingua ad un'altra implica non solo riscrivere, ma anche 'ripensare' l'intero materiale dalla prospettiva di un parlante italiano. Emergono, quindi, nuove procedure di 'deformazione' che, così come avviene per l'inglese, creano una lingua completamente nuova – quasi in risposta all'imperativo «Dillo in lingua franca», che Joyce inserisce proprio nella 'traduzione' di *Anna Livia Plurabelle*. L'autore esplora l'italiano nella sua pluralità di stratificazioni, registri e dialetti, perseguendo quello che Zanotti definisce

un doppio intento: da un lato quello di rivitalizzare, ri-creandolo, un testo che evidentemente sentiva come ancora *in fieri*; dall'altro, quello di darne un'attualizzazione dialettale, rimanendo allo stesso tempo fedele alla sua idea di fondo: il forte radicamento a una specifica realtà geografica e culturale, quella dublinese, elevata a paradigma mitico di tutta l'umanità (p. 177).

In breve, *Joyce in Italy. L'italiano in Joyce* è un testo composito che, avvalendosi principalmente di analisi linguistica e indagini archivistiche, offre varie prospettive sul rapporto di Joyce con l'Italia. Esauriente e completo, questo studio rappresenta senz'altro un positivo contributo alla critica joyciana.

Ilaria Natali

Jonathan Powell, *Great Hatred, Little Room: Making Peace in Northern Ireland*, Bodley Head, London 2008, pp. 352. GBP 20.00. ISBN 978-18-4792-032-4

Basta un semplice scambio di battute per sintetizzare il solco apparentemente incolmabile che ha diviso inglesi e irlandesi dopo secoli di conflitto. Dicembre 1997: primo storico incontro ufficiale, a Londra, tra il governo inglese e gli ex membri dell'IRA. «Dunque è qui che sono stati fatti i danni», commenta l'irlandese Martin McGuinness prima di entrare nelle stanze del potere britannico, al n. 10 di Downing Street. Il portavoce di Blair, pensando che l'ex leader dell'IRA si riferisse all'attentato messo a segno proprio lì dagli irlandesi nel 1991, indica il punto esatto dove esplosero i colpi di mortaio e descrive le finestre che andarono in frantumi. «No – ribatte McGuinness, risentito – mi riferivo al Trattato che qui fu firmato nel 1921, e che scatenò la guerra civile nel mio paese». L'episodio descrive perfettamente la distanza tra la 'prospettiva a breve termine' degli inglesi e la 'sensazione d'ingiustizia' provata dagli irlandesi, che affonda le proprie radici in un lontano passato. Pochi mesi dopo quello storico incontro, il negoziato per la pace in Irlanda decollò fino al definitivo suggello dell'accordo del Venerdì Santo, il 10 aprile 1998. A raccontare quell'episodio e molti altri, a dieci anni esatti da allora, è il diplomatico inglese Jonathan Powell, ex braccio destro di Tony Blair, nell'attesissimo volume *Great Hatred, Little Room: Making Peace in Northern Ireland* uscito nel maggio scorso in Gran Bretagna. Capo negoziatore inglese negli anni cruciali del processo di pace in Irlanda del nord, Powell aveva tutte le carte in regola per effettuare finalmente un'operazione-verità nei confronti del lungo conflitto irlandese. Il sostanziale fallimento dell'operazione si percepisce però già dal titolo ('grandi odi, scarse possibilità') ed è confermato dal contenuto di un'opera che assolve ancora una volta l'amministrazione britannica, spiegando che gli ultimi tre decenni di violenze sono stati causati dalle divisioni ancestrali tra gli irlandesi, cattolico-nazionalisti da una parte e unionisti-protestanti dall'altra. Di fronte a un conflitto ormai concluso da anni, il governo inglese continua quindi a rivendicare un ruolo di mediatore disinteressato e neutrale, negando in modo implicito le proprie gravi responsabilità. Un punto di vista che emerge con chiarezza nelle pagine in cui l'ex fiduciario di Blair cita l'inchiesta che intendeva stabilire la verità sulla 'Domenica di sangue' di Derry del 1972: «è stata un errore, volevamo dimostrare a tutti la nostra imparzialità. Ma non ha soddisfatto nessuna delle parti in causa ed è costata un fiume di soldi pubblici, circa 200 milioni di sterline, che potevano essere spesi meglio». Come se il mondo intero non sapesse che i quattordici uomini inermi freddati dai paracadutisti di Sua Maestà erano tutti cattolici irlandesi. Chi si attendeva un *mea culpa*, o almeno un'ammissione di responsabilità da parte di Londra sulle vicende irlandesi, resterà dunque deluso da questo libro, che in oltre 350 pagine racconta una serie di

retroscena e aneddoti curiosi. Consegnando alla storia, per esempio, l'immagine di Blair che corregge i comunicati dell'IRA prima che vengano resi pubblici, o degli sforzi profusi dallo staff inglese per impedire che i figli del premier vengano fotografati mentre giocano con Gerry Adams nel giardino di Downing Street. E colpiscono, tra incontri segreti e intransigenze tenaci, quei sentimenti di reciproco disprezzo che si trasformano gradualmente in rispetto, talvolta in qualcosa di più, di fronte all'ostinato impegno per arrivare alla pace. L'autore stesso, come affetto da una sorta di sindrome di Stoccolma, ammette senza vergogna di aver stretto rapporti d'amicizia con alcuni tra i principali negoziatori irlandesi. Alla fine la pace arriva perché tra Londra e Belfast i contatti non si interrompono neanche durante gli anni più sanguinosi: un modello negoziale che secondo Powell potrebbe rivelarsi utile per risolvere altre crisi internazionali, a partire dalla lotta contro Al Qaeda. «Finora tutto ciò è mancato, per esempio, a israeliani e palestinesi – sostiene l'ex diplomatico – i processi di pace non devono fermarsi mai, ma procedere sempre e comunque, anche molto lentamente».

Riccardo Michelucci

Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Loise More Overbeck (eds.), *The Letters of Samuel Beckett. Volume I: 1929-1940*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009, pp. 882. GBP 30.00. ISBN 978-05-2186-793-1

Beckett wrote approximately 15.000 letters in his lifetime. This is an astonishing number which demonstrates the great significance he assigned to this particular type of literary creation, a cross between a narration and biography, namely letter-writing. In 1985, four years before his death, Beckett clearly stated that he wanted his correspondence to be published. Since then, and after a long and laborious process, a selection of 2.500 letters has been collected in the four volume edition *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, the first volume of which was published in March 2009. The main criteria used in the selection of the letters was the indication that Beckett himself gave to Barney Rosset, whom he appointed as general editor, to reduce the correspondence «to those passages only having bearing on my work»¹. Such a direction would prove to be the object of different interpretations over time. Eventually however, the editors made a decision to include in the collection not only the letters directly related to Beckett's published work, but also those letters which on the whole could add new perspectives to his formation as an artist. According to an inclusive interpretation of the words «bearing on the work», the collection encompasses all those letters referring to the many and various artistic influences that Beckett as a person was subjected to, and the connections that he, as a writer, created with those works of art in his own oeuvre.

In recent years, interest in Beckett's biography has rapidly increased among Beckett scholars, above all following the publication in 1996 of the only authorized biography *Damned to Fame. The life of Samuel Beckett*², by James R. Knowlson. *The Letters of Samuel Beckett* is a record of letters, which may be considered to follow from the relatively new field of study, Beckett's biography, and yet, paradoxically, it moves away from a simply biographical focus. In fact, generally speaking, a letter is an act of writing, written to a recipient (a reader), in a more or less structured form, and in a more or less stylistically aware manner. The letters themselves must then be considered as significant expressions of the author's voice and intentions, and not merely as an instrument to exchange information.

Moreover, with specific regards to Beckett, every single letter is the result of the author's increasingly difficult relationship with the act of writing itself and, more generally, with language. Each letter attests to the author's choice of writing despite his growing distrust in the reliability of language. Therefore, that which emerges from the reading of Samuel Beckett's letters, on the one hand illuminates the author's life, or rather the personal background of his work, and on the other hand, and most importantly, allows the reader a privileged point of view on the 'making of' Beckett's oeuvre: we can observe, step by step, letter by letter, both his decision to become a writer and his acts of writing, take form.

This is particularly true for the first volume of *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, a collection of letters written between 1929 to 1940. Throughout this period, Beckett's life can be summarised as a constant endeavour to move away from Dublin in search of a place better suited to him, which in the end would prove to be Paris. His movements were mainly between Dublin, London, Paris and Germany. His letters throughout those years depict, in constantly varying tones and modes, two important parallel and then converging aspects of Beckett's life. Beckett felt a desire to break away from Dublin life, the academic conventions of Trinity College, and above all, his family's way of thinking, in particular his mother's. At the same time however, despite his never-ending hesitations, Beckett chose to become a writer. These two 'narrative lines' are strongly connected: Beckett's literary vocation could not arise and flourish in that Dublin which he considered a «very very dry land»³.

Through the letters, the author's intimate thoughts during those years are displayed, as well as his desires and resolutions, uncertainties and personal defeats. If on many occasions Beckett's aspirations appeared to be doomed to a *fiasco* when Dublin life was his only option, letter-writing represented for the young Beckett the possibility of being elsewhere, a means of going beyond the narrow boundaries of his constrained situation.

Back in Dublin in 1930, after a period as a lecturer at the École Normale in Paris, Beckett began lecturing on French literature at Trinity College. In his letters, as well as his complaints («this grotesque comedy of lecturing»⁴), his desire to be elsewhere is clearly expressed. He misses «all that life in Paris that was an approxi-

mation to something reasonable»⁵, and in a quite melancholy mood he states: «I wish God I were in Paris again, even Germany, Nuremberg, annulled in beer»⁶.

Even when he was overwhelmed by general distrust, Beckett never ceased to develop his personal aesthetic. The many letters to Thomas McGreevy, the main recipient in those years, attest to the various interests of Beckett in painting, music and, of course, literature. Reading these letters it is possible to retrace the early phases of the author's artistic path. In this regard, his opinions about Cézanne's and later Jack Yeats' works are illuminating. Referring to Cézanne, Beckett reflects about what he calls the «deanthropomorphizations of the artist»⁷. Beckett is struck by the work of the French painter:

I do not see any possibility of relationship, friendly or unfriendly, with the unintelligible, and what I feel in Cézanne is precisely the absence of a rapport [...] because he had the sense of his incommensurability not only with life of such a different order as landscape but even with life of his own order, even with the life – one feels looking at the self-portrait in the Tate [...] – operative in himself⁸.

Some years later, writing about Jack Yeats' paintings, Beckett states:

[t]he way he puts down a man's head & a woman's head side by side, or face to face, is terrifying, two irreducible singleness & the impassable immensity between them [...] a kind of petrified insight into one's ultimate hard irreducible inorganic singleness⁹.

These two examples demonstrate the young author's 'permeability' in those years, his willingness to create connections with other forms of art, which would subsequently prove fundamental in the aesthetical structure of his own oeuvre. One needs only to consider his prose work *Ill Seen Ill Said* (written in 1979-1981), to understand how that «absence of a rapport» which he found in Cézanne, or that «petrified insight into one's ultimate irreducible inorganic singleness», which he found in Jack Yeats' paintings, are still, after so many years, pivotal aspects of the conceptual world from which his own writings arise.

Undoubtedly, James Joyce was one of the most influential writers on the young Beckett's growth as an artist. In response to Samuel Putnam, who in a review defined Beckett «the closest, perhaps as yet too close, to Joyce»¹⁰ among the «young after-Joyce Irishmen»¹¹, Beckett ironically claims: «I vow I will get over J.J. ere I die. Yessir»¹². Moreover, whilst talking about his prose work, *Sedendo et Quiescendo* (an extract of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*), Beckett admits that «it stinks of Joyce in spite of most earnest endeavours to endow it with my own odours»¹³. It was only in 1938, after many attempts to free himself of Joyce's shadow, that Beckett was finally able to conclude: «I don't feel the danger of association any more. He is just a very lovable human being»¹⁴.

However, Joyce was just one of the numerous writers that Beckett read and absorbed during those years. His readings ranged from Ariosto to Proust, from Dostoevskij to Céline, and it is surprising to see the important influence that unexpected writers such as Jane Austen, Fielding, Balzac, Goethe, Sainte-Beuve, Samuel Johnson, among many others, had on Beckett's formation. Beckett also studied philosophers, among which, Descartes, Guelincx, and was profoundly struck by Schopenhauer: «I am reading Schopenhauer. [...] An intellectual justification of unhappiness – the greatest that has ever been attempted – is worth the examination of one who is interested in Leopardi & Proust rather than in Carducci & Barrès»¹⁵. Seven years later, Beckett read Schopenhauer again: «I always knew he was one of the ones that mattered most to me, and it is a pleasure more real than any pleasure for a long time to begin to understand now why it is so. And it is a pleasure also to find a philosopher that can be read like a poet»¹⁶.

A further significant influence on Beckett's writing was derived from his personal interest in psychoanalysis. After suffering from heart palpitations and panic attacks, Beckett decided to move to London (as psychoanalysis was illegal in Ireland) in order to undergo psychotherapy with the therapist Wilfrid Bion. The period of time Beckett spends in London was profitable on more than one front. The cultural environment which Beckett found in London was more favourable to his interest in music and painting than Dublin, a city which the author found culturally limiting. In addition, most importantly, the psychotherapy treatment that the author underwent over a long period of time was beginning to bear significant results in his life. Even the language of his letters during this period reveals the inner processes that the author was undergoing:

[t]he strange, gentle pleasures that I feel at the approach of spring are impossible of expression, and if that is a sentence inviting ridicule, so much the worse for me. I have positively never watched it coming with so much impatience and so much relief. And I think of it as a victory over darkness, nightmares, sweats, panic and madness, and of the crocuses and daffodils as the promise of a life at least bearable, once enjoyed but in a past so remote that all trace, even remembrance of it, had been almost lost¹⁷.

Beckett did not only undergo psychotherapy treatment, but also studied psychoanalysis. He was particularly interested in Jung's theories after he personally attended a conference that Jung held in London. His expertise in this new field are evident in the novel which he began whilst in London, *Murphy*.

Wilfrid Bion, Beckett's psychotherapist, concentrated on the author's relationship with his mother, a very problematic issue which was strongly connected to the author's need to escape Dublin, and detach himself from all that his homeland represented to him. After hundreds of meetings with Bion, Beckett, having almost completely concluded his psychotherapy treatment, writes in a letter to his friend McGreevy:

For me the position is really a simple & straightforward one, or was until complicated by the analysis, obviously necessarily. For years I was unhappy, consciously & deliberately ever since I left school and went into T.C.D., so that I isolated myself more & more, undertook less & less & lent myself to a crescendo of disparagement of others & myself. But in all that there was nothing that struck me as morbid. The misery & solitude & apathy & the sneers were the elements of an index of superiority & guaranteed the feeling of arrogant "otherness", which seemed as right & natural & as little morbid as the ways in which it was not so much expressed as implied & reserved & kept available for a possible utterance in the future. It was not until that way of living, or rather negation of living, developed such terrifying physical symptoms that it could no longer be pursued, that I became aware of anything morbid in myself. In short, if the heart had not put the fear of death into me I would still be boozing & sneering & lounging around & feeling that I was too good for anything else¹⁸.

The intimacy of this letter and its straightforward tone demonstrate Beckett's will to close the gap between himself and the others. Further, it demonstrates his ultimate goal, which was to express that part of himself which had always been hidden behind a sense of «arrogant otherness».

From September 1936 to April 1937 Beckett travelled through Germany. This was an extremely important time. Beckett was immersed in his voracious interest in painting and visited as many art galleries as he could, pressed by a sense of urgency caused by the spread of pre-war Nazi Germany iconoclast cultural politics. Throughout this long journey and in reference to Ireland he states: «Ireland? I feel nothing but the dread at having to return»¹⁹. In fact, his travels through Germany must be considered as Beckett's final attempt to escape Dublin, but also as his final failure:

This trip is being a failure. Germany is horrible. Money is scarce. I am tired all the time. All the modern pictures are in the cellars. I keep a pillar to post account, but have written nothing connected since I left home, nor disconnected. And not the fhart of a book beginning. The physical mess is trivial, beside the intellectual mess. I do not care, & don't know, whether they are connected or not. It is enough that I can't imagine anything worse than the mental marasmus, in which I totter & sweat for months. It has turned out indeed to be a journey from, and not to, as I knew it was, before I began it²⁰.

However, despite the gloomy tone of this letter, Beckett's travels through Germany cannot be considered a total failure, given that in January 1937, whilst still in Germany, Beckett was able to conclude that: «[w]hen to have ever left one's village ceases to seem a folly; perhaps it is only then that the writing begins»²¹. In the «mental marasmus» of which Beckett complained, some important changes were occurring, and the connection between writing and the necessity to leave «his village» was finally clear to him.

After his long and tormented journey through Germany, Beckett returned to Dublin for a few months. Back at home in Foxrock, he again suffered panic attacks and accepted the prospect of living permanently in Dublin with resignation:

I have had the old internal combustion heart & head a couple of nights, in the bed where I had it the first time almost exactly 11 years ago, but as little anxiety as then. Perhaps it is that the phase of impatience with one's own limitations has nearly exhausted itself. I feel now that I shall meet the most of my days from now on here and in tolerable content, not feeling much guilt at making the most of what ease there is to be had and not bothering very much about effort. But perhaps I am wrong²².

And he was indeed.

A few months later Beckett wrote the so-called 'German letter' to Axel Kaun. The content of this letter is well known by Beckett scholars, as it is a kind of manifesto of his conception of literature and shows the direction he believed literature should take. Moreover, it is an implicit indication of Beckett's subsequent choice to write in another language:

It is indeed getting more and more difficult, even pointless, for me to write in formal English. And more and more my language appears to me like a veil which one has to tear apart in order to get those things (or the nothingness) lying behind it. [...] It is to be hoped the time will come, thank God, in some circles it already has, when language is best used where it is most efficiently abused. Since we cannot dismiss it all at once, at least we do not want to leave anything undone that may contribute to its disrepute. To drill one hole after another into it until that which lurks behind, be it something or nothing, starts seeping through – I cannot imagine a higher goal for today's writer. [...] At first, it can only be a matter of somehow inventing a method of verbally demonstrating this scornful attitude vis-à-vis the word. In this dissonance of instrument and usage perhaps one will already be able to sense a whispering of the end-music or of the silence underlying all. [...] On the road toward this, for me, very desirable literature of the non-word, some form of nominalistic irony can of course be a necessary phase. However, it does not suffice if the game loses some of its sacred solemnity. Let it cease altogether!²³

Once again, a letter and not an essay or an article, is the means chosen by Beckett to write about his work. Further, the German letter in particular, shows how the author's private dimension and his oeuvre are inextricably bound.

In the winter of 1937-1938 Beckett moved to Paris, where he would permanently settle. He writes: «[t]he sense for the first time for months of no more forced moves, of the streets & the houses & air not impregnated with farewell»²⁴. Once in Paris, Beckett no longer had any doubts about his commitment to writing. Although Ireland had not yet been completely

forgotten, the author's need to detach himself from his origins was clear and consciously accepted. His choice to live as a perpetual exile was the result, in the end, of personal and literary motivations.

In conclusion, through *The letters of Samuel Beckett*, one clearly sees the significance of the combination of the author's biographical aspects and creative activity, particularly throughout the years which one might call Beckett's 'apprenticeship'.

As the editors claim in the general introduction to this four volume edition:

[t]he line between the life and the work is not easy to distinguish. What may appear entirely personal in a particular letter may turn up, months or years later, practically unchanged, in a published work. What may appear as markedly literary has often emerged from an intimate, lived sense of connection or dislocation²⁵.

Endnotes

¹ S.B. to Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, 18 March 1985, private collection, in M. Dow Fehsenfeld, L. More Overbeck (eds.), *The Letters of Samuel Beckett. Volume I: 1929-1940*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2009, p. xiv.

² J.R. Knowlson, *Damned to fame: the life of Samuel Beckett*, Bloomsbury, London 1996.

³ S.B. to Thomas McGreevy, 4 August 1938, in M. Dow Fehsenfeld, L. More Overbeck (eds.), *The Letters of Samuel Beckett. Volume I: 1929-1940*, cit., p. 637.

⁴ S.B. to Charles Prentice, 27 October 1930. Ivi, p. 53.

⁵ S.B. to Thomas McGreevy, 5 October 1930. Ivi, p. 50.

⁶ S.B. to Thomas McGreevy, 14 November 1930. Ivi, p. 55.

⁷ S.B. to Thomas McGreevy, 8 September 1934. Ivi, p. 223.

⁸ S.B. to Thomas McGreevy, 16 September 1934. Ivi, p. 227.

⁹ S.B. to Cissie Sinclair, 14 August 1937. Ivi, p. 536.

¹⁰ S.B. to Samuel Putnam, 28 June 1932. Ivi, p. 108.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ S.B. to Charles Prentice, 15 August 1931. Ivi, p. 81.

¹⁴ S.B. to Thomas McGreevy, 5 January 1938. Ivi, p. 581.

¹⁵ S.B. to Thomas McGreevy, 18 to 25 July 1930. Ivi, pp. 32-33.

¹⁶ S.B. to Thomas McGreevy, 21 September 1937. Ivi, p. 550.

¹⁷ S.B. to Morris Sinclair, 4 March 1934. Ivi, p. 198.

¹⁸ S.B. to Thomas McGreevy, 10 March 1935. Ivi, pp. 258-259.

¹⁹ S.B. to Mary Manning Howe, 14 November 1936. Ivi, p. 384.

²⁰ S.B. to Mary Manning Howe, 13 December 1936. Ivi, p. 397.

²¹ S.B. to Mary Manning Howe, 18 January 1937. Ivi, p. 423.

²² S.B. to Thomas McGreevy, 26 April 1937. Ivi, p. 490.

²³ S.B. to Axel Kaun, 9 July 1937. Ivi, p. 518.

²⁴ S.B. to Thomas McGreevy, 3 December 1937. Ivi, p. 563.

²⁵ General Introduction. Ivi, p. xxii.

Davide Barbuscia

Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, *Fox, Swallow, Scarecrow*, The Blackstaff Press, Belfast 2007, pp. 354. GBP 8.99. ISBN 978-08-5640-807-6

Con la consapevolezza che scrivere sul presente è più complesso e rischioso che scrivere sul passato, il critico Derek Hand riflettendo nel 2001 sull'abbondante e vigorosa produzione narrativa irlandese degli ultimi decenni, lamentava il fatto che nessuno al momento fosse impegnato nella stesura di un 'Celtic Tiger novel'.

Fox, Swallow, Scarecrow di Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, pubblicato nell'ottobre 2007, sembra rispondere a questa esigenza e colmare questo vuoto. Accolto alla sua pubblicazione come il romanzo della 'Celtic Tiger', *Fox, Swallow, Scarecrow* mette in luce l'Irlanda prospera del primo decennio del nuovo secolo, un'Irlanda globalizzata che ha tratto il meglio dalle sovvenzioni europee, l'Irlanda del boom economico che da Paese di emigrazione è diventato Paese di immigrazione.

Eppure, da questo punto di vista *Fox, Swallow, Scarecrow* fa già parte del passato, perché il momento di recessione economica che attraversa il mondo occidentale non ha lasciato indenni gli artigiani della 'Tigre Celtica', che ora deve fare i conti con una nuova ondata di disoccupazione e di problemi economici che relegano l'immagine di un Paese rampante tra le icone ormai superate.

Fox, Swallow, Scarecrow rappresenta un momento di innovazione e di continuità nella ricca produzione narrativa di Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, un'autrice che scrivendo sia in inglese che in irlandese si serve della sua formazione di esperta di folklore per identificare parallelismi e continuità tra passato e presente e per portare in una scrittura essenzialmente postmoderna elementi e caratteristiche del passato, folklorico e non, del suo Paese. I suoi racconti spesso intrecciano forme narrative tradizionali con versioni moderne e attualizzate di testi antichi, come accade nel racconto *Midwife to the Fairies* e nell'impianto narrativo della raccolta *The Inland Ice*.

Dopo essersi occupata del futuro nel romanzo anti-utopico *The Bray House* nel 1990, dopo aver gettato lo sguardo sull'Irlanda degli anni Settanta all'inizio dei Troubles in *The Dancers Dancing* del 1999, in *Fox, Swallow, Scarecrow* Éilís Ní Dhuibhne si sofferma sul presente del nuovo millennio, mettendo in luce in modo impietoso le contraddizioni che un'improvvisa prosperità può generare.

Il mondo di *Fox, Swallow, Scarecrow* è una Dublino ricca, brillante e seducente, in cui si muove Anna Kelly Sweeney, un'autrice di libri per bambini la cui ambizione è di scrivere lo *Harry Potter* irlandese. Questo permette a Éilís Ní Dhuibhne di soffermarsi sul microcosmo dell'*intelligenza* dublinese, sull'universo dei giochi di competizione e delle dinamiche legate a pubblicazioni, successo e forme di sovvenzione. Nel fare una satira del mondo letterario di Dublino, Ní Dhuibhne affronta problematiche sociali contingenti, quali l'immigrazione e il lavoro degli immigrati, la violenza domestica, la speculazione

edilizia in zone rurali, oltre a stragi sulla strada, anoressia e corruzione a diversi livelli. Episodi realmente accaduti, quali la protesta dei lavoratori delle Irish Ferries del 2005, si intrecciano con nomi di personaggi reali. Seamus Heaney fa una comparsa fugace, ed una conversazione fittizia tra uno dei personaggi, l'editore Leo Kavanagh, e J.K. Rowling si svolge alla presentazione di un libro al Westbury Hotel. Nella prima parte del romanzo, una discussione ad un'altra presentazione lamenta la scarsità di scrittrici irlandesi nominate per il Booker Prize e il nome di Anne Enright viene citato tra quelli di coloro che meriterebbero il premio. Curiosamente, sarà proprio *The Gathering* di Anne Enright ad ottenere il Booker Prize quasi contemporaneamente alla pubblicazione di *Fox, Swallow, Scarecrow*. Analogamente, ulteriori riferimenti letterari e artistici comprendono tra gli altri W.B. Yeats e la sua residenza presso gli Woburn Buildings mentre Vermeer è implicitamente presente con l'attrice Scarlett Johanson e *The Girl with A Pearl Earring* di Tracy Chevalier.

Il romanzo offre così diversi livelli di lettura, e se la presentazione della complessità di mode e costumi dell'Irlanda contemporanea può fornire uno spaccato di storia sociale, la satira su quella che nel romanzo viene definita come «SAP» (*secondary art person*) offre lo spunto per una riflessione non solo sul mondo letterario ma anche sulla scrittura. Per la prima volta Éilís Ní Dhuibhne decide di porre al centro di un romanzo il personaggio di una scrittrice. Altri tipi di artisti e altre forme d'arte compaiono nei suoi racconti, ad esempio in *The Flowering* e in *The Makers* (1991), e nelle diverse raccolte – *Blood and Water* (1989), *Eating Women is not Recommended* (1991), *The Inland Ice* (1997), *Pale Gold of Alaska* (2000) – una borghesia intellettuale compare in modo ricorrente con figure di insegnanti, bibliotecari, curatori di musei, editori, agenti letterari. La presenza della parola scritta come 'protagonista' di *Fox, Swallow, Scarecrow* testimonia in Ní Dhuibhne la crescente consapevolezza dell'attività stessa della scrittura.

Al tempo stesso l'autrice gioca con – o si fa gioco di – generi letterari e processi di scrittura. Infatti *Fox, Swallow, Scarecrow* riscrive in chiave post-moderna *Anna Karenina* di Tolstoj, trasponendolo nel contesto della 'Celtic Tiger Ireland'.

Con *Anna Karenina* Tolstoj intendeva scrivere un romanzo familiare, il che si evince dalla programmatica frase di apertura «Tutte le famiglie felici si assomigliano tra loro, ogni famiglia infelice è infelice a modo suo». Parole molto simili aprono il capitolo diciassette di *Fox, Swallow, Scarecrow*, a suggerire l'interdipendenza intertestuale con *Anna Karenina* e la libertà che Éilís Ní Dhuibhne si prende con il pre-testo.

Felicità e infelicità sono i poli che segnano le due principali storie d'amore di *Anna Karenina*, che si intrecciano con una storia minore. L'amore tragico di Anna e del suo amante, il brillante e superficiale conte Vronskij, ha una controparte nella felice vita familiare dell'idealista Konstantin Levin e di Kitty, la principessa Šcerbàtskaja. Sullo sfondo, si svolge il dramma familiare di Stiva Oblonskij, fratello di Anna.

Ní Dhuibhne mantiene dei parallelismi evidenti nella rielaborazione dei nomi dei personaggi e nella loro caratterizzazione. In *Fox, Swallow, Scarecrow*, Anna Karenina è Anna Kelly Sweeney, sposata con il mago della finanza Alex, che a sua volta è l'*alter ego* del burocrate Aleksjéj Alexàndrovič Karenin. Il giornalista Vincy Erikson è come Vronskij al centro di eventi mondani, ed entrambi risvegliano l'interesse rispettivamente di Kate Murphy e di Kitty Šcerbàtskaja. Il fratello di Anna, Stiva, ha avuto una relazione con la governante francese così come il fratello di Anna Kelly, Gerry, ne ha avuta una con la ragazza alla pari svedese. E come Levin in *Anna Karenina* vive in campagna ed è vittima della sua complessa e difficile vita interiore, così l'editore ambientalista Leo Kavanagh vive nel Kerry ed è variamente coinvolto in imprese impossibili sia nella sfera personale che in quella professionale.

Al mondo dell'alta società di San Pietroburgo si sostituisce il mondo dell'*intelligenza* letteraria di Dublino, così che a balli e feste si sostituiscono incontri letterari e presentazioni di libri, il che permette di scavare all'interno dell'élite culturale dublinese e di riflettere sull'universo della scrittura.

Nel corso del romanzo, libri in inglese e irlandese vengono scritti, riscritti, letti, discussi, presentati, lodati o denigrati. Testi scritti vengono fatti oggetto di plagio, ed estratti da articoli di giornale e *work in progress* fanno parte della costruzione narrativa a sostenere l'illusione artistica. Anna Kelly per prima si pone delle domande su che cosa la spinga a scrivere, arrivando a chiedersi, di fronte alle borse del supermercato piene di manoscritti rifiutati che invadono l'ufficio della sua agente: «Could creative work be an end in itself, even if the product never reached an audience? She didn't know». Abituata a misurare la 'felicità' della scrittura con il successo finanziario che ne deriva, Anna si scontra continuamente con le dinamiche competitive della scrittura. Lo stesso Vincy in modo più o meno consapevole decide di entrare in competizione con Anna scrivendo un libro sull'Iraq. Un effetto clessidra viene così messo in atto. Lasciata sola ad affrontare la gravidanza, Anna combatte con pregiudizi quasi vittoriani mentre Vincy si fa conoscere come corrispondente da Baghdad. E mentre il libro di Anna non vedrà mai la luce, Vincy ha già un agente che ne assicura il successo. La conclusione aperta del romanzo lascia di nuovo spazio alla scrittura nel momento in cui Anna si lascia prendere dalla parola scritta in una triplice e al tempo stesso infinita ripetizione: «Lets the words. Lets the words. Lets the words».

Fox, Swallow, Scarecrow rappresenta una forma di continuità nella narrativa di Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, poiché l'organizzazione strutturale del romanzo rispecchia la sua fedeltà al racconto breve. Come l'architettura narrativa di Tolstoj vede racconti diversi giustapposti come se fossero romanzi indipendenti, così Ní Dhuibhne organizza la narrazione in capitoli episodici che potrebbero essere considerati racconti indipendenti, spesso dedicati a turno ciascuno a un personaggio diverso. Infatti, anche i numerosi personaggi secondari hanno un ruolo significativo, a cominciare dall'analfabeta Charlene, che invadendo

lo spazio domestico in senso proprio di Leo Kavanagh imponendosi come sua governante crea un legame con la scrittura chiedendo a Leo di insegnarle a leggere e scrivere.

Dove Ní Dhuibhne si allontana da *Anna Karenina* è nella conclusione. Costretta a scegliere tra due amori che si escludono a vicenda, l'amore per Vronskij e l'amore per il figlio Seriozha, in una scena che rimane al centro della memoria letteraria mondiale, Anna Karenina si uccide gettandosi sotto un treno. Nella Dublino del nuovo millennio, al treno si sostituisce il Luas, il metrò leggero che attraversa la città. Non è tuttavia Anna Kelly a rimanere vittima dell'incidente del Luas, ma Vincy, salvo poi ricomparire il giorno dopo per avere notizie di Anna. La conclusione ambigua e aperta lascia spazio al modo in cui Éilís Ní Dhuibhne gioca con il pre-testo tolstojano

Non nuova a forme di riscrittura, Ní Dhuibhne lascia aperto anche il titolo che non trova una spiegazione o una giustificazione se non nell'occasionale comparsa fugace, e non sempre necessariamente contemporanea, di tre elementi misteriosi, una volpe, una rondine, uno spaventapasseri. Chi si aspetta una spiegazione in chiave folklorica degli elementi singoli del titolo può rimanere deluso, tanto da pensare che il titolo sia puramente casuale. E forse nel gioco con il pre-testo, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne ha anche giocato con l'elemento paratestuale, quasi a segnalare che anche questo è un elemento della libertà creativa della scrittura.

Giovanna Tallone

Vito Carrassi, *Il fairy tale nella tradizione narrativa irlandese. Un itinerario storico culturale*, Adda, Bari 2008, pp. 208. € 18. ISBN 978-88-8082-778-8

«Per mezzo della narrazione l'uomo ha in pratica acquisito l'opportunità di creare il passato» (p. 12). È dall'idea del passato creato dall'uomo attraverso il racconto che Vito Carrassi, studioso di antropologia culturale e letterature comparate dell'Università degli studi di Bari Aldo Moro, prende le mosse per districare lo stretto nodo che intreccia la Storia (e le storie) e la narrazione, l'oralità e la scrittura. Perché ogni uomo che racconta il passato fornisce un'immagine *possibile* del passato, una delle infinite *possibili* immagini. Il racconto dei fatti è l'unica possibilità che l'uomo ha di ricordare, di trattenere il passato. Prima dell'avvento della scrittura – capace di fissare indelebilmente la parola – era l'*oralità* l'unico mezzo per tramandare e ricordare gli eventi, la «condizione originaria del narrare», la definisce l'autore. L'oralità, però, non possiede la capacità della scrittura di fissare, di incastonare il ricordo; è piuttosto una forma fluida, sempre diversa, che sempre si modifica. Il ricordo, se trasmesso oralmente, deve essere *ripetuto*, «la sua sorte è del tutto affidata alla memoria e alla volontà dei narratori che si avvicendano nel corso del tempo». Non solo: anche il pubblico, l'uditorio cui si rivolge colui che narra, ha il suo peso. Una storia raccontata è il risultato, più o meno equilibrato, del ricordo e della capacità affabulatoria di chi

narra e dell'interazione tra voce narrante e pubblico. Insomma, la trasmissione orale non è mai fissa, mai identica a se stessa, il racconto orale «finché non sarà stato *fissato e stabilizzato* dalla scrittura, conserverà il valore mutevole dell'*evento*, perennemente conteso tra la *potenzialità* e l'*atto*» (p. 13).

La scrittura, invece, crea gabbie e celle, luoghi sicuri (e immutabili) per proteggere parola e ricordo. Luoghi sicuri, di cui si conosce il 'proprietario', se così possiamo dire, l'autore. Una paternità impossibile da rintracciare nella trasmissione orale, perché «non è possibile esercitare un reale controllo sulla produzione di *tales* e sul sorgere di *storytellers*» (p. 13). L'autore analizza con precisione le variabili che rendono i racconti orali, i *tales* appunto, un genere *collettivo* e non *soggettivo*, «l'espressione di un intero popolo» (p. 13). E così si sofferma sul significato, etimologico e d'uso, di parole quali *tradizione* e *narratività*. Dalle parole ai concetti, dal particolare al generale, per ritornare, ancora, su oralità e scrittura, l'una un *sistema aperto* e l'altra *chiuso*. «Il racconto, allora, viene sottratto alla viva voce, imperfetta e mai uguale a se stessa del cantore di turno, per essere trasferito su una pagina, dalla quale non è più possibile sfuggire» (p. 15). Ci fa pensare a *Il narratore. Considerazioni sull'opera di Nicola Leskov* (1962) di Walter Benjamin, dove Benjamin associa la scomparsa del racconto orale all'avvento del romanzo. Un'analisi antropologica, linguistica e letteraria, quella di Vito Carrassi. Dal rapporto fra tradizione orale e tradizione scritta l'autore procede in un'analisi comparata delle due forme di tradizione, non dimenticando di sottolineare commistioni e interrelazioni. La natura della narrazione cambia profondamente con il diffondersi della scrittura e solo dalla combinazione delle due letterature (orale e scritta) «si può ricavare l'esatta dimensione e l'effettivo valore di una data tradizione narrativa» (p. 17).

Sarà l'Ottocento il secolo in cui si sentirà l'esigenza di recuperare il patrimonio orale, una tradizione di miti, leggende e fiabe che, se abbandonata alla memoria, in assenza di *storytellers*, sarebbe andata perduta.

Nella seconda metà del secolo, con l'affermarsi della moderna antropologia culturale, vengono elaborate idee che influenzeranno anche la ricerca sulle fiabe. Inizia a prendere forma, infatti, la convinzione che tutti gli uomini, a qualsiasi etnia o cultura appartengano, possiedano la stessa struttura psicologica e, se differenze esistono, queste sono di carattere culturale. Questa teoria implica che le *fiabe* e i motivi *fiabeschi* possano aver avuto origine dovunque, indipendentemente l'uno dall'altro.

Dai fratelli Grimm, Brentano, von Arnim, dunque dal romanticismo tedesco, si arriva fino a Yeats, Stephens e Joyce. L'Irlanda. Perché dal dibattito letterario-antropologico su oralità e scrittura, l'autore passa a domandarsi e ad analizzare le relazioni che tra le due letterature sono intercorse nell'ambito di un genere, la *fiaba*. Fiaba, genere strano, perché a metà strada tra menzogna e verità, perché «le fiabe non sono bugie, perché non hanno la pretesa di essere veritiere», come sottolinea Jack Goody nel saggio *Dall'oralità alla scrittura. Riflessioni antropologiche sul narrare* (Einaudi, Torino 2001). L'imbuto si

stringe e, in un veloce passaggio che riflette la profondità e la leggerezza di chi ha saputo soffermarsi senza perdersi nell'abisso del linguaggio, leggiamo la 'storia' della narrativa fiabesca, i significati attribuiti dal dibattito critico, le accezioni e traduzioni, la differenza (intraducibile) che separa l'italiano *fiaba* e *leggenda*, il tedesco *märchen* e *sage*, il russo *skazka*, fino al *fairy tale*. L'Irlanda è la nazione che più di ogni altra è riuscita a conservare nella propria cultura letteraria uno strettissimo legame con il più significativo patrimonio tradizionale, ed è proprio sul *fairy tale* e sulla tradizione irlandese che lo sguardo attento dell'autore si concentra. Ambito vasto e ambiguo, che include in sé le categorie del *meraviglioso*, del *soprannaturale*, del *fantastico*. L'autore propone un'innovativa ipotesi di interpretazione del concetto di *fairy tale*, ampliando la portata del termine e dando spazio ad una visione *trasversale* della materia narrativa definita *fiabesca*: il *fairy tale* offre una 'visione del mondo' e dunque esso si definisce non solo o non tanto attraverso la presenza di *fate* e *folletti* ma, piuttosto, attraverso il *soprannaturale*, inteso come tutto ciò che può essere ricondotto a un ordine che oltrepassi le leggi della natura e della realtà comunemente intesa.

Il *fairy tale* come zona franca in cui convivono e s'incontrano originalità del singolo scrittore e credenze popolari, tradizione orale ed elaborazione scritta, Storia e fantasia. Vito Carrassi propone una schematizzazione che permette una visione d'insieme, in *estensione* e in *profondità*, del percorso lungo il quale si articola la tradizione narrativa irlandese, a sua volta modellata sulle vicende storiche e pseudostoriche dell'isola. Lo schema prende forma sul dualismo *definito/indefinito*: dal *Mito* (che rimanda a un'epoca e a una tradizione unidimensionali, all'umanità ideale dei primi colonizzatori d'Irlanda) alla *Leggenda* e alla *Storia* (allorché più dimensioni, storiche e narrative, si sovrappongono, dando luogo appunto alla dialettica tra il *definito* e l'*indefinito*). *Definito* è il piano dell'oggettivo, del visibile, del presente; *indefinito* è, invece, il soggettivo, l'invisibile, il passato (da cui non si può più attingere direttamente). Il *fairy tale* si configura come spazio *intermedio* tra *Storia*, *Leggenda* e *Mito*, è lo spazio comune nel quale gli esponenti di ciascuno dei singoli 'spazi chiusi' possono convergere. Si concretizza in luoghi di confine (i.e. un bosco, la riva di un lago, etc.). Colui che *evade* dal suo piano non entra immediatamente in un altro piano ma, appunto, passa attraverso la zona franca che è il *fairy tale*.

William Butler Yeats, ispiratore e massimo esponente dell'Irish Revival, non fu solo un *collector* di *fairy tales*. Le raccolte di racconti da lui curate (*Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, 1888, e *Irish Fairy Tales*, 1892) mettono in luce, anche grazie all'*Introduction* che l'autore cita e analizza nel dettaglio, quanto Yeats sentisse la sua «come una vera e propria missione nazionale, una missione volta non solo a diffondere tra gli irlandesi la conoscenza e l'amore per il loro stesso patrimonio narrativo, ma anche a inquadrare quest'ultimo nella giusta luce» (p. 71). Attraverso le antologie curate da Yeats, Vito Carrassi

illumina il cuore letterario e storico-culturale della definizione e del recupero dei *fairy tales*: i vari racconti scelti da Yeats formano un tutto organico, la voce dell'autore non è nascosta dai racconti né essi soggiacciono all'autorità del 'redattore', piuttosto Yeats infrange le barriere tra *oralità* e *scrittura*, «con-fonde la sua voce [...] in quella collettiva del suo popolo» (p. 74).

L'analisi si spinge oltre e, considerando parallelamente gli *Irish Fairy Tales* di James Stephens (opera che viene assunta come l'apice letterario del filone inaugurato dalle antologie di Yeats), entra nei meccanismi compositivi del *fairy tale*, ne analizza strutture costanti e schemi ricorrenti, ma anche le variabili connesse al mutare dei contesti, dei narratori, del pubblico. Vito Carrassi rintraccia la struttura universale del *fairy tale* attraverso un'analisi che si snoda dal *príomscel* fino ai *fairy tales* di Stephens; una struttura che si articola su un insieme di *azioni* compiute da personaggi specifici, «gli *archetipi* di tutti quelli che, dopo di loro, andranno a compiere le medesime azioni, ricalcando, malgrado tutte le differenze riscontrabili, una sorta di *traccia* che non può più essere cancellata» (pp. 102-103). Dalle *tracce* del *príomscel*, l'autore si spinge a delineare i meccanismi che soggiacciono al genere: il *fairy tale* si fonda sulla compenetrazione di tre ordini di *fattori*: «un primo, costante, che è rappresentato dall'organizzazione spazio-temporale, [...] un secondo, variabile, costituito da personaggi chiamati [...] a *dare corpo*, mediante la loro *mobilità*, alla dinamica narrativa; sull'interazione tra questi due fattori opera quello *connettivo*» (p. 110), ossia il *movimento* che rende possibile l'incontro su un unico piano di contesti che altrimenti resterebbero separati.

Arriva, Vito Carrassi, a Joyce nel paragrafo, quasi sul finale, intitolato «Il *tale* joyciano alla luce del *fairy tale*». I *Dubliners* (1914) di James Joyce, studiati attraverso i criteri enucleati nell'analisi del *fairy tale* nei capitoli precedenti, diventano ponte tra oralità e scrittura, terreno comune di scontro e intesa. Perché i *Dubliners* sono cesura, distacco e lontananza dalla tradizione e, allo stesso tempo, ripresa (più o meno voluta) e continuità. James Joyce si allontana, recide le radici, da perfetto modernista, per ritrovarsi tutto inchiodato di quella tradizione che allontana. L'analisi procede ed enuclea i temi e le strutture della silloge di racconti joyciano: *An Encounter*, *The Boarding House*, *A Little Cloud*, *Counterparts* fino a *The Dead*, il racconto che chiude e illumina la raccolta. E se, nei racconti precedenti, Vito Carrassi aveva iniziato a rintracciare temi e strutture del *fairy tale* declinati nella personalissima cifra stilistica di Joyce, è con *The Dead* che l'analisi si fa scoperta e novità. Proprio nell'ultimo racconto – quando si legge di Gabriel (il protagonista maschile) che osserva la moglie Gretta *fast asleep*, subito dopo aver ascoltato da lei il racconto del *romance* della sua vita (un ragazzo, Michael Furey, che l'aveva amata tanto da mettere in pericolo la sua fragile salute, aspettandola invano sotto la pioggia fino a morire precocemente) – si assiste, forse, «a una sorta di deriva nel *fairy tale*» (p. 162). Si perché Gabriel, ascoltato il *tale within the tale* della moglie, avverte la presenza *indefinita*, proprio come in un *fairy tale*, di Michael Furey, un'invasione da un mondo altro di chi

aveva condiviso con Gretta qualcosa che a lui non può appartenere. Il racconto di Gretta lo trascina in una regione abitata dalla *vasta schiera dei morti*. Gabriel non immagina, avverte l'esistenza di un altro, inafferrabile, indefinito mondo. Epifania di un mondo. Forse, i *Dubliners*, ipotizza Vito Carrassi, si configurano come un *fairy tale*, senza *fairies*, ma nel senso di «una potenzialità narrativa cui occorre il giusto contesto per manifestarsi» (p. 162).

«Più in generale, tanto nell'opera di Yeats quanto in quella di Stephens e di Joyce, si assiste allo sforzo intrapreso dal racconto, e dal suo narratore, di *sconvolgere* la stasi del reale attraverso degli incontri più o meno *extra-ordinari*» (p. 163), è il *movimento narrativo*, la parola narrata (come nei *fairy tales* degli *storytellers*) a dare corpo e senso al racconto.

Vito Carrassi, intrecciando con cura ambiti scientifici tra loro diversi (antropologia, critica letteraria e narratologia), delinea ne *Il fairy tale nella tradizione narrativa irlandese* una «zona franca» (seconda di copertina), per riprendere le parole dell'autore, che apre al lettore una prospettiva nuova di interpretazione.

Elisa Fortunato

The Inferno of Dante Alighieri. A New Translation by Ciarán Carson, New York Review Books, New York 2004. \$ 14.25. ISBN 978-15-9017-114-1

Ecco un esempio di come un classico possa continuare a vivere attraverso versioni sempre nuove, grazie a traduzioni che propongono una rilettura in chiave attuale e moderna, ben situabile nella realtà sociale da cui scaturiscono. Ciarán Carson ci accompagna in questo viaggio ultraterreno invitandoci a seguire i passi del Sommo Poeta; al tempo stesso ci conduce per la sua città, Belfast, attraversando la quale egli cerca ispirazione, come ci ricorda nell'introduzione al volume. La città irlandese, travagliata e divisa, ricorda infatti la Firenze di Dante, segnata da lotte intestine e asti profondi.

Tradurre un testo come la *Divina Commedia* in lingua inglese significa accettare una sfida su più fronti. Il traduttore infatti ha davanti a sé l'impresa ardua di rendere uno dei testi più complessi e articolati della cultura occidentale; al tempo stesso si trova alle spalle una tradizione secolare di versioni che rispecchiano le diverse interpretazioni e i contesti culturali da cui sono scaturite, da quella tipicamente vittoriana di Henry Wadsworth Longfellow a quella proposta da Dorothy Sayers, forse la più nota del Ventesimo secolo.

Carson non soggiace al peso della tradizione che lo precede, ma cerca di mantenersi fedele all'originale attraverso un meccanismo di appropriazione e rielaborazione del testo che è anche – e soprattutto – personale. L'autore di *Belfast Confetti* (1989) si relaziona costantemente al poema dantesco cercando di estrapolare ciò che questo riesce a comunicargli, e rendendolo attraverso la lingua che più gli è congeniale, ovvero l'Hiberno-English. Carson è un intellettuale poliedrico, la cui arte non si esaurisce nella poesia, ma si estende alla narrativa e alla musica. Ha ottenuto numerosi premi letterari tra cui l'*Irish Times*

Irish Literature Prize e il *T.S. Eliot Prize*, e anche la sua traduzione dell'*Inferno* gli è valsa l'*Oxford Weidenfeld Translation Prize*. In tutta la sua opera la parola acquista un ruolo fondamentale, una parola demotica, che trae la propria vitalità dalla lingua comune, con tutte le sue peculiarità e stranezze. Il critico Steven Matthews, riconoscendo come la produzione dell'irlandese enfatizzi il valore contingente della parola, esalta la voce di Carson, che si fa 'presenza'.

Analizzare una traduzione dal punto di vista della perdita comunicativa che questa provoca non è una pratica che qui interessa. La sterilità di una tale osservazione riecheggia nelle parole attente di George Steiner: «Art dies when we lose or ignore the conventions by which it can be read, by which its semantic statement can be carried over into our own idiom» (G. Steiner, *After Babel*, Oxford UP, Oxford-New York 1992, p. 31). Certo una visione della 'vita' dei classici come quella di Paul Turner, che nel recensire una traduzione da Sofocle del premio Nobel Seamus Heaney mette in guardia contro gli effetti della rielaborazione poiché «[i]t would be a sad thing for everyone to go through life supposing that in reading the *Cure* he has virtually read the *Philoctetes*» (P. Turner, *The Cure at Troy: Sophocles or Heaney?*, in A. Brand Crowder and J.D. Hall, eds., *Seamus Heaney. Poet, Critic, Translator*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2007, pp. 121-135, p. 133), è senza dubbio accattivante. Ed è anche un monito verso la perdita culturale causata da una pratica traduttiva che prenda spunto dalla consultazione di versioni precedenti e non dall'originale.

Non è questo, a mio avviso, il caso del lavoro di Carson. Attraverso il costante ricorso alle espressioni del linguaggio comune – talvolta fortemente colloquiale – dell'Hiberno-English, il traduttore riesce a mantenere viva l'attenzione del lettore, rendendo il testo accattivante. Matthews osserva come nella produzione di Carson la parola assuma un valore contingente e come la poesia celebri «the voice as presence, as a way of capturing the 'here and now'» (S. Matthews, *Irish Poetry*, Macmillan, London 1997, p. 189.) E questo è ciò che forse rende così congeniale all'irlandese la traduzione del testo dantesco, così attento e capace nel presentare una poesia che si fa realtà; un linguaggio aulico unito ad un registro che esalta le passioni anche attraverso parole semplici, talvolta crude, specialmente nell'*Inferno*:

and like a starving man devouring bread
the upper chewed the nape of him below:
on bits of brain and spinal cord he fed (XXXII, 127-129)

Una sezione di note esplicative al termine del volume, pur non potendo certo dirsi esaustiva, fornisce una guida pratica al lettore che desidera poter fruire di questa opera magnifica pur senza addentrarsi nel complesso universo dantesco.

Il merito principale di Carson è quello di tradurre Dante con l'impegno costante a preservare la terza rima proposta dal poeta fiorentino. Resistendo alla tendenza, ormai popolare nel contesto dei paesi di lingua inglese, a eli-

minare la componente rimica dalla poesia, Carson riesce a preservare uno dei tratti più distintivi dell'opera. Ciò merita la massima considerazione, date le difficoltà strutturali dell'inglese rispetto alle sonorità italiane, specialmente nel caso del verso dantesco – i cui elementi, come osservava Borges, non sono mai ingiustificati. Ben consapevole di tale difficoltà, Carson ricorre anche alla struttura della ballata tipica della tradizione irlandese per ottenere le giuste cadenze attraverso il sapiente utilizzo di espedienti come la rima interna. Dosando magistralmente tali espedienti, Carson ci presenta un testo in cui la concatenazione fonetica riproduce il ritmo avvolgente dell'originale dantesco, come nel celebre passaggio de *i fioretti*:

As little flowers, bended down and curled
by chilly night, unfurl themselves, and stand
erect when touched by sunlight, as the world

awakes, so did my weakened powers; a plan
of daring action sprang into my mind,
and, newly liberated, I began:

'O Lady most compassionate and kind!
And courteous you, who rapidly obeyed
the words of truth she gave you line by line! (II, 127-133)

L'aspetto più significativo del lavoro di Carson sta nell'aver prodotto una traduzione che conserva il fascino dell'originale, presentando un testo che cattura il lettore e lo incita a continuare il viaggio seguendo il poeta fiorentino nell'altro mondo. Ci auguriamo che il viaggio non si interrompa, e che Carson accompagni il suo pubblico fino alla fine, traducendo anche le altre due cantiche.

Tommaso Borri

Stephen Watt, *Beckett and Contemporary Irish Writing*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009, pp. 234. GBP 50.00. ISBN 978-05-2151-958-8.
Maria Anita Stefanelli (ed.), *Tullio Pericoli's Many Becketts*, Centro Di, Firenze 2008, pp. 95. € 20,00. ISBN 978-88-7038-469-7

In *Beckett and Contemporary Irish Writing*, Stephen Watt explores the relationship between Beckett — or better, his literary, cultural, philosophical and linguistic heritage — and contemporary Irish literature. The main premise of this study is the idea, derived from Martin Esslin, that literary criticism should be «an attempt to find in the past aspects of human experience that can shed light on the meaning of our own times» (p. 16), refined through

the perspective of «double historicization» suggested by Pascale Casanova (p. 15), who sees National identity as one of the key factors to determine which place each author holds within the 'world's Republic of Letters'.

Watt suitably starts by trying to define the territory marked by one of the keywords in this study, i.e. «Beckettian», especially in relation to Irish and Northern Irish literature. In the first chapter, *Beckett and the "Beckettian"*, Watt builds his view mainly upon the works of Kearney, Kiberd, Muldoon and Badiou in order to clarify the distinctive elements that make up what we call «Beckettian», stressing at the same time how those characteristics are not only shared by other contemporary Irish writers, but also very present throughout the Irish literary tradition.

The following chapters are devoted to a more detailed discussion of how the «Beckettian» is present, in different shapes and measures, in the work of a selection of contemporary Irish writers. In the second chapter, *The Northern Ireland "Troubles" Play*, Watt starts by quickly discussing the issue of the so-called Troubles as a dramatic form of their own, and proceeds to a closer analysis of what he sees as Brian Friel's Beckettian turn, with particular emphasis on two plays, *The Freedom of the City* and *Volunteers*. Watt illustrates how the body and death not only have a similar function in Friel and Beckett, but are also treated with a kindred taste for the comic and the grotesque. These same elements (a certain kind of grotesque, death, the body) are at the centre of Watt's treatment of Bernard MacLaverty's work. Watt points out the similarity between two of MacLaverty's novels (*Lamb* and *Cal*) and Beckett's *Trilogy*, in particular because of a shared predilection for the trope of the world as a slaughterhouse, although in the former author this has strong political connotations (related to the Ulster conflicts) that are not as preminent in Beckett. Focusing on another of MacLaverty's works, i.e. *Grace Notes*, Watt points out that the two writers share a preference for a very specific variety of grotesque, that has much to do with the obsessive description of bodily automatism. In the fourth chapter of the book, *"Getting Round" Beckett*, Watt examines the relationship between Beckett and Derek Mahon and Paul Muldoon. In the former author's «burbles», apart from the explicit reference to the *mirlitonades*, Watt finds a typically Beckettian treatment of death. The Beckettian is also at work, significantly if not diffusely, in Muldoon's oeuvre, as an «affirmative, riantic, expansive» presence that emerges in moments of solitude or death. The fifth, and last, chapter, titled *Specters of Samuel Beckett*, focuses on Marina Carr and, interestingly, Sam Shepard, an American playwright to whom Watt awards a sort of honorary Irishness due to his special and long-lasting relationship with Abbey Theatre. While Beckett and Carr share their treatment of the relationship between birth, life, and death, and a certain taste for black humour, a lot of Shepard's work (*Kicking a Dead Horse* in particular) resonates with Beckettian echoes in the handling of the degeneration of the body, the definition of self, and God's figure. In the *coda*, *On Retrofitting*, Watt stresses that the intention of exploiting Beckett as a tourist attraction is in

fact causing a distortion and a re-shaping of his figure, in a way that can serve to attract more visitors from abroad and to promote Ireland's image.

In this book Stephen Watt, far from offering a mere analysis of Beckett's influence on contemporary Irish writers, manages to convincingly outline a dialogue between the former and the latter on the common ground of a shared Irishness. Watt's perspective is indubitably interesting, as it offers a stimulating analysis of a selection of Irish authors, while at the same time advancing the work regarding the contextualization of Beckett within the domain of Irishness, which is still a relevant contribution since, as we are reminded in the *Introduction*, until just a few decades ago Beckett was still indexed as French or, at best, British.

The volume *Tullio Pericoli's Many Becketts* reproduces a very ample collection of portraits of Samuel Beckett painted over the years by Maestro Tullio Pericoli, and combines them with some brief essays by Italian and Irish scholars. Pericoli's works are reproduced in colour and full-page, and are a testimony to the incessant interest of the Maestro in portraying Beckett. Pericoli's effort in capturing the most essential traits of the writer's character is well discussed by Cormac Ó Cuilleain, who observes the extraordinary effectiveness of the charcoal monochromes, that he finds somehow comparable to Beckett's later prose. This is consistent with the Maestro's idea of portrait. Indeed, Pericoli, as Fionnuala Croke reminds us, believes not only that our biography is carved into our faces by the passing of time, but also that the work of a writer changes his or her physiognomy. Samuel Beckett as portrayed by Pericoli can, therefore, be read like a text, or even like a *facescape*, to borrow the apt definition (p. 12) used by the editor. Beckett's face becomes a landscape in which, through Pericoli's essential lines and chromatic choices, one can almost see Beckett's poetics of *lessness*. Christopher Murray also focuses on the idea of the face as landscape, and of the landscape as something live and organic. Murray stresses how close Pericoli's aesthetic is to that of Beckett's, mainly in their similar reflection on the problem of representation and identity. Roberto Bertoni's very succinct essay, on the other hand, focuses on the comparison of Beckett and Calvino through portraits of the two authors painted by Maestro Pericoli. The final conversation between Carla de Petris and the Maestro allows us stimulating insights into Pericoli's views, not only of Beckett but also of James Joyce, and of the Irish and Celtic suggestions that are present in his paintings and drawings.

If our stories write themselves on our faces day after day, portraits are the narration of those stories, and therefore have an elusive, protean quality to them. In her essay, Franca Ruggieri discusses the problem of the representation of personal identity in Samuel Beckett's work through the lens of various authors, including James Joyce and Laurence Sterne.

This well-deserved tribute to Pericoli is a fascinating journey through the work of an artist who constantly tried to capture the most intimate essence of Beckett's personality, from the strong marks of the charcoal drawings to the piercing yellow eyes of the oil paintings. Pericoli's tireless research can certainly suggest a number of interesting perspectives on Beckett's work, as the essays collected in this book demonstrate.

Lorenzo Orlandini

Emma Donoghue, *Stir Fry*, Il dito e la luna, Milano 2007, pp. 219. € 16,00. ISBN 978-88-8663-347-5

Emma Donoghue, *Il bacio della strega*, Meridiano zero, Padova 2007, pp. 157. € 12,00. ISBN 978-88-8237-136-4

A più di dieci anni dalla pubblicazione della versione inglese, esce finalmente anche in Italia il primo romanzo di Emma Donoghue, nella traduzione di Rosaria Corrado e Margherita Giacobino. È il 1993 e in Irlanda la proposta per la depenalizzazione dell'omosessualità diventa legge. Gran parte del merito va all'attivismo del Campaign for Homosexual Law Reform, movimento al quale aderirono il senatore David Norris, nonché Mary Robinson, prima donna della storia a capo del governo della Repubblica. La nuova legislazione anti-discriminatoria non fa menzione alcuna del lesbismo. Questo aspetto sembra dimostrare il fardello di una nazione in cui le donne sono emblema del matrimonio ideale tra nazionalismo e religione, un'unione cementata dalla costituzione degli anni Trenta. La diciassettenne Mária, originaria della campagna a Ovest del paese, lascia la casa dei genitori per frequentare l'università (un riconoscibilissimo University College, quasi un tributo di Donoghue alla propria formazione accademica). Ruth e Jael, più grandi di Mária di qualche anno ma ancora non inserite socialmente, condividono una relazione stabile. L'arrivo della nuova coinquilina Mária dà vita a quel *pout-pourri* di odori, sensazioni, emozioni, significati che rendono l'esordio di Donoghue un singolare gioiello della letteratura irlandese al femminile. *Stir-Fry* è prima di tutto questo: un racconto di sapori. Donoghue si spinge ben oltre il genere letterario del *coming-of-age novel* e induce chi legge a trovare conforto apparente in una narrazione lineare, per poi rivelare un mondo in cui i confini tra ragione e istinto si confondono in un crescendo di pulsioni rivelatorie e verità.

Donoghue parla *attraverso e per* Mária, sebbene il trascorso non-urbano della protagonista sia un tentativo dell'autrice di separare con decisione il racconto dall'esperienza autobiografica (si veda l'intervista in questo numero). Ciò che rende il romanzo straordinariamente fresco e godibile è proprio l'abilità con cui Donoghue rifiuta un eccessivo legame empatico con Mária. Donoghue racconta le vite di tre ragazze che in quanto a esperienze e aspettative hanno ben poco in comune e le intreccia costantemente; e il romanzo acquista credibilità grazie a una serie di piccoli eventi ordinari con esiti molto spesso inaspettati. È quell'aria

immatura, goffa e bizzarra della stessa Mária a catturare l'attenzione di chi legge fin da quell'annuncio in bacheca per trovare un posto-letto. «La propria immagine è una specie di maschera che tutti possono vedere tranne noi stessi». Mária è ancora *vestita* dei valori della 'vecchia' Irlanda a scapito della sua giovane età e della voglia di conoscere, ascoltare, scambiare, partecipare alla vita brulicante che la circonda e di nuovo la cattura coi suoi mille sapori, le sue sfaccettature, la sua sfuggevole bellezza. Si sofferma spesso a riflettere in solitudine su una realtà a lei sconosciuta, prima che questa la travolga. Resistere all'impulso di lasciarsi andare davvero sarebbe inutile, inconcepibile, forse persino 'pericoloso', perché come afferma Ruth durante una passeggiata con Mária, «Come scorre in fretta l'acqua, vero?». Si tratta di una metafora efficace e incisiva del contesto in cui si sviluppano le vicende narrate: la Dublino di quegli anni è il luogo di grandi cambiamenti sociali e culturali, una città dove tutto scorre estremamente in fretta, proprio come l'acqua del fiume Liffey.

Gli incontri con associazioni studentesche in favore dei diritti GLBT o i ragazzi con cui Mária, timida ma acuta e spesso pungente, tenta di entrare in contatto le lasciano addosso un senso di insoddisfazione dal quale trarrà la forza di riconoscere a se stessa e a chi la circonda il valore di una vita senza menzogna. Donoghue riesce a narrare 'tipi' e 'stili' di vita senza mai correre il rischio di cadere in facili stereotipi, essere banale, scontata e, quello che importa, senza volerci insegnare nient'altro se non l'importanza di riconoscerci negli altri (per Mária nelle altre, Ruth e Jael). Il romanzo è suddiviso in otto sezioni, ognuna delle quali si pone inizialmente come racconto compiuto e omogeneo, quasi si trattasse di una raccolta; la bravura di Donoghue è nel 'mescolarle' e creare un *continuum* narrativo. Ancora una volta, il genere letterario e la sua decostruzione si sviluppano su due piani paralleli che, come gli ingredienti della ricetta cui allude il titolo, «si sarebbero esaltati a vicenda» per rivelare lo spettro di verità e nuove certezze del futuro di Mária, tutto da vivere, o meglio da *gustare*. È un peccato che la traduzione italiana talvolta fallisca proprio nel tentativo di rendere appieno le finezze stilistiche di Donoghue, a cominciare dalla scelta del titolo che ben poco coglie di quell'essere 'misto' suggerito dall'inglese, e che ben si *amalgama* alle vicende delle tre ragazze.

Stir-fry si dimostra un efficace ritratto sociale quasi documentaristico. Uno sceneggiato per il futuro, ma anche uno scrigno intimo di speranze. I significati esplodono, e il piatto è pronto in soli otto passi, otto capitoli. Scegli, mescola, amalgama, taglia, riscalda, aspetta, agita e servi: la ricetta per la felicità è semplice. Più facile a farsi che a dirsi, ed ha un sapore dolcemente salato.

La prima raccolta di racconti di Emma Donoghue vede l'autrice alle prese con il genere fiabesco che rivisita in chiave squisitamente lesbica. Dal titolo della traduzione a cura di Maria Rosaria Corrado (curiosa la resa dell'originale *Kissing the Witch*, Attic Press, Dublino 1997), si tratterebbe di storie sull'essere baciato *dalla* strega. Una strega che vuole baciare; la strega che bacia; la strega

che ci contagia, plasmandoci a suo volere con un bacio. Così almeno siamo propensi a credere, a cominciare dalla scelta del tutto opinabile del titolo. L'esatto contrario è quanto invece Donoghue intende e riesce a comunicare, e lo fa con quella originale genuinità, molto spesso divertendo, con cui sempre l'istrionica autrice irlandese riesce a parlare di lesbismo e *gender*. «Sono propensa a credere che una strega non dovrebbe baciare. Forse è il non essere baciata a renderla una strega; forse l'origine del suo potere sta nel soffio della solitudine che la circonda. Quella che viene baciata ne può anche morire, può risvegliarsi presa in qualcosa di inimmaginabile, essendosi trasformata in una nuova specie» (p. 156). È questa nuova specie a occupare interamente il territorio del *pastiche* narrativo con cui Donoghue riscrive le fiabe del folklore tradizionale. La traduzione di Corrado è talvolta poco accurata e risulta statica, tanto da appesantire uno stile altrimenti frizzante e scorrevole, col risultato finale che il 'gioco' costruito dalle fiabe dissidenti di Donoghue si perde del tutto.

Kissing the Witch si apre con *Il racconto della scarpa*, riscrittura della favola di Cenerentola dove la principessa mancata abbandona il suo principe per fuggire nel bosco con un'altra donna. Qui, Cenerentola le fa domande sulla sua 'natura', chiede di raccontarle la propria storia. Nel secondo, *Il racconto dell'uccello*, l'amante segreta di Cenerentola è una principessa rinchiusa in un castello da quell'uomo tanto atteso e desiderato, una donna in grado di trovare conforto e amicizia solo nel canto spezzato di una rondine moribonda. La metterà in salvo, accudendola perché possa tornare a volare e cinguettare; ma la rondine tornerà proprio da lei, e in quell'occasione le racconterà la sua vita precedente di donna. I tredici racconti di *Kissing the Witch* sono un continuo concatenarsi di storie di vite passate generate da una serie di scambi e incontri tra donne, in molti casi sotto le mentite spoglie di una seconda vita. Parodia e decostruzione, ma anche tradizione d'Irlanda e immaginazione fanciullesca tipica di fiabe e racconti nordici, fanno da sfondo a un lavoro dagli indubbi echi carteriani. Ne *Il racconto della rosa*, la fiaba-mito de La Bella e la Bestia è rivista con tale sincerità e efficacia da renderlo il racconto più toccante dell'intera raccolta. Attraverso tecniche tipicamente postmoderne di riscrittura, *Kissing the Witch* fa esplodere i significati di fiabe e novelle per crearne di nuovi; parodia, *pastiche*, e ironia servono a decostruirne i parametri con cui esse sono entrate a far parte della tradizione e dell'immaginario comune, per poi sostituirli con codici multipli.

L'espedito su cui Donoghue struttura la narrazione è a sua volta una rilettura, quella della figura dello *seanchai*, lo *story-teller* della tradizione irlandese, quasi a voler sottolineare l'ineludibilità del passato nazionale per trovare nuove rappresentazioni di identità sia individuale, sia culturale. Nei racconti, le cosiddette streghe sono donne che incantano e vengono incantate, rifiutano ciò che viene loro imposto dalle *madri*, dai *padri*, dal peso dell'onore e della rispettabilità; tutte loro hanno una vita da raccontare, presente o passata che

sia. Troviamo ad esempio una Biancaneve stufo di fare la massaia per un gruppo di boscaioli che l'hanno apparentemente tratta in salvo da una Regina poi non così cattiva, quanto piuttosto vogliosa di riscatto per il suo passato di serva. Lo stesso avviene per il teschio di un cavallo, anch'esso un tempo donna, e così via attraverso miti e stereotipi culturali continuamente decostruiti, ri-raccontati e elevati a manifesti lesbici. *Il racconto del bacio* chiude la raccolta e introduce la strega del titolo. Auto-condannata a una vita di solitudine nella grotta, la 'strega' scambia finte condanne e sortilegi nella vana speranza di trovare quel bacio in grado di trasformarla in altro da sé, come nell'immagine riflessa di uno specchio capovolto. Come ci insegna Donoghue ne *Il racconto della rosa*, di bestiale esiste solo la pretesa di apparire naturali agli occhi di chi ci osserva. Come in tutte le fiabe, anche qui esiste una morale, più inquietante delle creature che affollano la fervida immaginazione di Donoghue: è molto più facile rifugiarsi nello spavento indotto per nascondere la propria vera natura, piuttosto che renderci vulnerabili al cospetto di sguardi inorriditi.

Il bacio della strega è un gioco continuo di finzione e realtà in pillole. Si tratta forse di fiabe impossibili, fuori da ogni tempo e da ogni luogo eppure sempre presenti nel racconto, nelle storie di soggetti altri che reclamano i propri sogni, rinnegando la paura in cambio dell'opportunità di raccontarsi.

Samuele Grassi

McGahern John, *Love of the World. Essays*, ed. by Stanley van der Ziel, with an Introduction by Declan Kiberd, Faber and Faber, London 2009, pp. 496. GBP 20.00. ISBN 978-05-7124-511-6

Three years after the death of one of contemporary Ireland's finest artists, Faber and Faber publishes all his surviving non-fictional prose in an elegant and comprehensive volume. John McGahern (1934-2006) was a sparing writer and a bashful person, who refrained from explaining his works and never felt comfortable as a public figure. *Love of the World* (a title borrowed from Hannah Arendt (p. xli), and also the title of one of McGahern's last short stories, attesting to the writer's increasing optimism towards the end of his career) will therefore be welcomed by readers and scholars as a precious and insightful appendix to the *repertoire* of a writer who was not fast or prolific, continually reworking his fiction in the search for accurate words and for truth and consistency in that «revelation of personality in the language» (p. 263) that is style; appearing rarely at literary festivals, giving few interviews and occasional, intense readings; a writer whose affable loquacity and wit only partially concealed a deep reserve.

The publication of *Memoir* in 2005 had already allowed readers 'behind the scenes' of McGahern's artistic creation, and, despite his forceful and constant dismissal of self-expression in art, it confirmed (sometimes revealed) the deeply autobiographical matrix of his novels and short stories, thus au-

thorizing once for all an interpretation of his *oeuvre* in terms of a blurring of fact and fiction that extended to the former term of the equation far more than the writer was ever willing to admit. *Love of the World* reinforces such a hermeneutic pattern, bringing together reviews, essays, speeches, public interventions and travelogues that enrich our understanding of this writer's mind. McGahern's interventions on issues such as the Troubles in Northern Ireland (*County Leitrim: The Sky above Us*, pp. 19-26; *Life as It Is and Life as It Ought to Be*, pp. 160-165), the Irish referenda on abortion (*Shame in a Polling Booth*, pp. 122-124), the legacy of the Easter Rising (*From a Glorious Dream to Wink and Nod*, pp. 125-127), as well as his recollections of his childhood and education, and of the banning of his second novel, *The Dark*, in 1965, convey a picture of Ireland that will make *Love of the World* appealing also to those readers whose main interest lies in twentieth-century Irish history.

Some of the pieces collected here are well-known and often quoted, having appeared in magazines and newspapers, sometimes more than once and with only slight variations. Others are hitherto unpublished typescripts, coming mostly from the John McGahern Collection at the James Hardiman Library, NUI Galway, which the Editor almost philologically reconstructed through the incorporation of the writer's handwritten revisions.

Love of the World is divided in six parts. Section I, *Writing and the World*, brings together McGahern's rare utterances about the nature of art and creativity. Interestingly, ideas and questions he posed at the very beginning of his literary career would remain central and unvaried throughout his whole life, demonstrating a consistency of view and a less naïve approach to the art of fiction than a superficial reading of his work might suggest. The crucial role of memory and images in the artistic creation, for example, emerges already in his manifesto *The Image*, published as early as 1968, where McGahern explains how art is a «long and complicated journey» into the «still and private universe» of images that each person possesses, a strenuous search for «the lost image that gave our lives expression», and a continuous reworking of those images through words, «rejecting, altering, shaping», in the «attempt to create a world [...] over which we can reign», through «this Medusa's mirror, which allows us to celebrate even the totally intolerable» (p. 5). Memories, together with the places, people, activities and events around him, offered McGahern the raw materials for his fiction: «[e]verything interesting begins with one person in one place, though the places can become many, and many persons in the form of influences will have gone into the making of that single woman or man. [...] The universal is the local, but with the walls taken away» (*The Local and the Universal*, p. 11).

In Section III, *Autobiography, Society, History*, the Editor chose to match essays on the writer's intellectual formation with essays on the social transformation outlived by Ireland in the last four decades. A very logical decision, since «[t]hese essays all to some degree combine elements of personal recollec-

tion or memoir with reflections on Irish institutions and attitudes in the second half of the twentieth century» (p. xxxvi). And because McGahern was a writer who transformed his individual experience into the epic portrait of an epoch, using fictional alter egos as «masks [that] set [him] free» (as he put it in *Memoir*), extending or translating autobiographical details into a historical and sociological sketch of his country and times. One of the most interesting pieces collected in this section is *The Church and Its Spire* (1993), where McGahern quotes a letter by Marcel Proust to show how the spires of the French Gothic cathedrals «pointing upwards into the sunset», towards «an elevation and emancipation of the soul, of love and light, height and openness», stood in sharp contrast with «the low roof, the fortress, the fundamentalists' pulpit-pounding zeal» of the Irish Romanesque churches, where the preoccupation for sin and its consequences and «the darkly ominous and fearful warnings to transgressors» had become prominent (p. 145). Despite that, and despite the collusion of Church and State, «with unhealthy consequences for both» (p. 146), McGahern claims (here and elsewhere) to have always loved the church ceremonies and to have «nothing but gratitude for the spiritual remnants of [his Roman Catholic] upbringing, the sense of our origins beyond the bounds of sense, an awareness of mystery and wonderment, grace and sacrament, and the absolute equality of all women and men underneath the sun of heaven» (p. 133).

Section IV, *Literature*, reiterates once again McGahern's ideas about writing and the relationship of the writer with his readers and critics, this time through the praise of those writers who influenced him most: Marcel Proust, Gustave Flaubert, James Joyce, Anton Chekhov, W.B. Yeats and his father, John Butler Yeats. The Editor rightly points out that «McGahern's moments of artistic self-revelation are usually thinly veiled as comments on the work of other writers» (p. xxix). What he appreciated in the fiction, letters and poems of his literary heroes is what characterizes and defines his own novels and short stories: an almost obsessive attention to details and accuracy of language; a strong and long-lasting bond to places and nature; the nostalgic celebration of good manners and of a rural way of life which is disappearing; the need to distance oneself from one's experiences and to rework them through imagination and into art.

Section V, *Prefaces and Introductions*, hosts the rare pieces McGahern wrote to introduce or explain his works, or rather the revisions he made to his works, and the reasons and circumstances behind such changes. The Preface to the Second Edition of *The Leavetaking* (1983) offers a revealing insight into McGahern's experiments of the late '70s – early '80s, when he was trying to reflect and at the same time reconcile the different languages that correspond to «the purity of feeling with which all the remembered 'I' comes to us, the banal and the precious alike» and, on the other hand, the «poor reportage» through which we perceive «that more than 'I' – the beloved, the 'otherest', the most trusted moments of that life» (p. 277). More interestingly, this Preface also

acts as a piece of self-criticism and clarifies McGahern's aesthetic convictions when he says that in the first edition of that novel he had been «too close to the 'Idea', and the work lacked that distance, that inner formality or calm, that all writing, no matter what it is attempting, must possess» (p. 277). A crux, that of distance, on which McGahern returned also in the very last piece he published (Preface to *Creatures of the Earth: New and Selected Stories*, dated March 2006, only a month before he passed): his short stories, he admits, were sometimes «drawn directly from life. [But] Unless they were reinvented, re-imagined and somehow dislocated from their origins, they never seemed to work. The imagination demands that life be told slant because of its need of distance» (p. 279). One of McGahern's favourite quotations was Chekhov's definition of fiction as «'life as it is, life as it ought to be'» (p. 161), and here again he explains that «[a]mong its many other obligations, fiction always has to be believable. Life does not have to suffer such constraint, and much of what takes place is believable only because it happens. The god of life is accident. Fiction has to be true to a central idea or vision of life» (pp. 279-280).

Most readers will perhaps not be familiar with the pieces collected in Section II, *Places and People*, and in Section VI, *Reviews*. The former confirm McGahern's great ability to capture the natural and human landscapes both at home and in the foreign countries he travelled to (France, Morocco), always leaving the reader with a sense of actually having been there. Yet, the claim made by some critics for his fiction, that it is less convincing if the setting is outside Ireland, seems to also hold true for his travelogues. A writer so keen on linguistic accuracy would never have said «whole fields of deep blue and bright yellow wildflowers. Nobody knew their names», had he not been in the unfamiliar countryside around Rabat (*Morocco, the Bitter and the Sweet*, p. 53). McGahern is at his best when he describes his native Leitrim and Roscommon, the places he was deeply rooted in and that he had an accurate knowledge of, the places which imaginatively he never really left. Recollections of dead friends and acquaintances (Patrick Swift, Michael McLaverty, Dick Walsh, Patrick Kavanagh), are also hosted in Section II and help sketch a picture of the Irish intellectual scene in the 1950s and 1960s.

McGahern also wrote a surprisingly numerous and various amount of reviews alongside his fiction (from Frank McCourt to Liam Kelly, J.M. Coetzee, Leonardo Sciascia, D.H. Lawrence, Richard Ford, and many others). An avid reader, he believed that reading was first and most of all an act of love, so he tended to review books that he liked, that had influenced his way of thinking and writing, or that he thought had been unfairly neglected or forgotten. As a critic, McGahern «preferred to let work speak for itself in the hope that genuinely good writing might attract some new lovers» (p. xli), an approach which is reflected in his extensive use of quotations. The circumstances in which he came across a book, or the feelings it produced in him, are usually privileged over a mere and overt judgment of the work.

Other somewhat unexpected pieces – given the reserved character of this artist and the non-political nature of his fiction – are the ones where McGahern lucidly and trenchantly analyzes the relationship between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland («the people are more polite and businesslike than in the South, the Protestant work ethic more prevalent», p. 163. A «mental wall» exists between North and South, p. 162, and the radically different «states of mind» of Catholic and Protestant people of different ages and backgrounds «are the real foreign countries», p. 164. In the South, «[s]ocial unrest and economic failure was avoided by the proximity of Britain and the availability of work there. At the creation of a sectarian state for Catholic people, Protestant unrest was avoided by the existence of the North, where a majority of Protestants were able to create their own equally sectarian state. Both places closed their eyes and went their own way. If it was necessary, one side could always point to the other to justify their own bigotry», p. 162), or when he caustically recalls voting for the referendum on abortion («Confronted with the three referendum papers in the voting booth, I felt nothing but shame. Here I was, an adult male, in a democratic country, which is a member of the European Community of nations, being asked to give or withhold the right of a woman to travel or obtain information. [...] Surely, when a woman becomes pregnant it is a matter between her and her family, if she has one, and her doctor and is nobody else's business. Neither lawyer, priest or politicians like moral ground that is elsewhere», pp. 123-124), or comments on the 1916 Rising («Certainly, it meant little to the people in the crowded boat trains» in the 1950s, p. 125; what defined the political system in those years was more the Civil War than the War of Independence; «the Free State had become, in effect, a theocracy, in direct opposition to the spirit and words of the 1916 Proclamation», pp. 126-127).

Declan Kiberd's brilliant *Introduction* will prove essential for readers unfamiliar with McGahern, as it embeds the essays of *Love of the World* into a more general picture of the author's works, ideas and biography. Stanley van der Ziel's *Preface* explains the structure of the book and briefly introduces and contextualizes each piece; all bibliographical information and all details about textual variations and reinstated or added materials are provided here or in the *Notes and References* at the end of the volume. Throughout the text, footnotes are extremely rare; as a result, the book layout reminds that of a novel, although content-wise it is less cohesive and more repetitive. It is a different type of repetition than the artful, almost incantatory device that readers of McGahern's fiction are well used to, skillfully employed there to create a complex scheme of echoes and symbolic refrains; here the impression is rather that the price paid for completeness was sometimes a kind of redundancy.

The decision to arrange the essays by topic, dividing them into six different sections, results in a structure that is not only, by the Editor's own

admission, «somewhat arbitrary» (p. xxviii), but also arguably unbalanced (with Sections I and V being much shorter than the other sections) and ultimately not fully convincing, leaving the reader with the impression that some repetitions could have been omitted and that some pieces should have been located in different parts of the volume. A piece about sexuality like *Five Drafts*, for example, seems awkwardly at odds with the considerations on art and creativity that characterize the other pieces of Section I, and would probably have linked better with the *Preface to the Second Edition of The Leavetaking* reprinted in Section V. Similarly, *The Solitary Reader*, which tells the story of McGahern's fruitful encounter, as a child, with the extravagant neighboring Protestants, the Moroneys, who gave him the free run of their library, thus allowing him to discover his passion for reading, and eventually to become a writer («I came to write through reading», p. 87), would seem to be more suitable for Section I than for Section III. In much the same way, *What is My Language?*, which outlines McGahern's views of the role of literature and of the relationship between a writer and his readers (through the praise of Tomás Ó Criomhthain's *An tOileánach*, for his «persistent way of seeing and thinking [that] falls naturally into an equally persistent form of expression», p. 263) would appear to make more sense in Section I than in Section IV.

Bringing together John McGahern's essays, speeches and reviews, *Love of the World* offers precious insights into this writer's mind and reveals some of its less known aspects, adding a few more pieces to the puzzle of aesthetic and philosophical views that lurk between the lines of his deceptively simple fiction. Students and lovers of John McGahern's works will definitely not want to miss this book.

Claudia Luppino

Fiorenzo Fantaccini, *W.B. Yeats e la cultura italiana*, Firenze University Press, Firenze 2009, pp. 346. Accesso aperto all'opera: <<http://www.fupress.com/Archivio/pdf/3806.pdf>>. ISBN 978-88-8453-973-1

Arianna Antonielli, *William Blake e William Butler Yeats. Sistemi simbolici e costruzioni poetiche*, Firenze University Press, Firenze 2009, pp. 366. Accesso aperto all'opera: <<http://www.fupress.com/Archivio/pdf/3805.pdf>>. ISBN 978-88-8453-974-8

Gli studi critici di Fiorenzo Fantaccini e Arianna Antonielli, recentemente pubblicati dalla Firenze University Press (nella collana «Biblioteca di Studi di Filologia Moderna»), offrono uno sguardo analitico di ampio respiro su due aspetti importanti, e fino ad ora non molto frequentati, dell'*opus* del grande poeta irlandese William Butler Yeats. Il primo studio, intitolato *W.B. Yeats e la cultura italiana*, si prefigge di indagare i principali aspetti delle «dotte cose italiane» che permeano il macrotesto del poeta, nonché la storia della ricezione

della sua opera nel nostro Paese, attraverso sia le traduzioni sia i contributi critici; il secondo, dal titolo *William Blake e William Butler Yeats. Sistemi simbolici e costruzioni poetiche*, propone un'analisi dei rapporti fra la cosmogonia mistico-simbolica di Blake e il sistema teosofico di Yeats, sintetizzata nell'edizione delle opere del genio romantico comparsa nel 1893. Entrambi gli studi, seppur con modalità differenti, si pongono come obiettivo quello di restituire la complessa organicità del poeta irlandese, premio Nobel per la letteratura nel 1923.

Le due opere critiche si sviluppano sulla base di un assunto che percorre tutto il macrotesto di Yeats e, più in generale, l'episteme modernista, ovvero la scoperta di un sistema, di un disegno o una struttura che soggiace alla superficie testuale e a fronte della quale è possibile 'leggere' la letteratura e la cultura. Ciò che si evince è il tentativo di illuminare l'arcipelago di voci e di contaminazioni alla base della scrittura del poeta per veicolare un'immagine più polisemica possibile della testualità di Yeats, in modo tale da seguirne le evoluzioni, i tracciati e le curve descritte nei decenni, sia entro i confini della propria tradizione letteraria (nel libro di Antonielli) sia al di fuori dei margini nazionali (come ottimamente viene studiato da Fantaccini).

I due libri si configurano, infatti, come vere e proprie riletture del canone yeatsiano poiché elaborano e riflettono sul rapporto (in entrambi i casi preponderante) tra la funzione creativa e quella critica all'interno dei singoli testi presi in esame. Il loro approccio combinatorio rivela come Yeats, oltre a una predisposizione naturale e 'poetica' all'assorbimento della più variegata serie di materiali – che siano essi la vastità del materiale e dei motivi tratti dalla cultura italiana, oppure l'apparato misterico dell'occultismo –, possieda una spiccata coscienza formale in grado di ricercare, interpretare e di riscrivere un'infinità di temi e codici diversi, volta a restituire alla poesia una funzione privilegiata e quasi profetica di 'messaggio'. Da un punto di vista letterario, gli studi di Fantaccini e Antonielli dimostrano come Yeats intenda trasformare la poesia in una sorta di sistema universale e completo, un cosmo unitario in cui inserire la propria voce; mentre da un punto di vista critico, essi sviluppano un progetto di revisione canonica in grado di abbracciare sia i caratteri paradigmatici che le anomalie e le idiosincrasie che nutrono l'esperienza letteraria del poeta.

Fantaccini muove infatti proprio dall'analisi del sistema di riferimenti che sottende all'archeologia yeatsiana. Lo studioso, con scrupolosa attenzione, mai pedante o compilativa, riesce a stabilire i nodi, i passaggi e le dense stratificazioni dell'ordito di ciò che potrebbe definirsi come la mappa intertestuale dei modelli letterari di Yeats. Nelle tre parti in cui lo studio è articolato, occupano il primo posto le «dotte cose italiane», ovvero Dante, Castiglione, Vico, Gentile e Manlio Rossi nell'opera dello scrittore e l'influenza che questi hanno avuto su di lui. In questa sezione, Fantaccini legge l'opera di Yeats attraverso il filtro prismatico dei testi della cultura italiana e rivela un vastissimo e fertile

sostrato di riferimenti che non sono limitati a una citazione del passato, ma lo rimettono in moto, lo riattivano, uno scambio proficuo soprattutto perché dialogico. Così, ad esempio, Dante trasmette la sua voce attraverso allusioni dirette e indirette, ricontestualizzate nel presente, ma in modo da trasformarsi nella voce stessa di Yeats, ma trasformata e plasmata da quella, in uno scambio e infine in una fusione tra passato e presente (come già in T.S. Eliot e Ezra Pound). Da Baldassarre Castiglione, l'artista trae il senso della tradizione e dell'imitazione dei maestri del passato e, soprattutto, il concetto di *sprezzatura*, ovvero quella *nonchalance* che serve a dissimulare l'artificio e la maestria con cui, inevitabilmente, il poeta ricrea i modelli letterari del passato. L'idea di tradizione, dunque, tanto cara al Modernismo, non è un insieme di cose 'morte' ma, secondo Fantaccini, si arricchisce attraverso un confronto critico con le culture altre (p. 45).

Ed è proprio questo «richeggiare di voci nella partitura di Yeats» che costituisce il centro dell'indagine dello studio critico di Fantaccini, che sottolinea come l'influenza non sia una mera questione imitativa ma denoti un assorbimento strutturale dei principi alla base del modello rappresentato: Yeats assimila gli elementi fondanti strutturali dei vari sistemi che sussume e rielabora, come, nel '900, quello 'geometrico' di Croce, che si accomuna a quello mitico di Yeats, e il progetto pedagogico di Gentile. Essi rappresentano per Yeats una sorta di «conforto teoretico per il proprio sistema filosofico» (p. 68), scrive Fantaccini, e si pongono come conferme di una crescita spirituale che nel poeta non è mai avulsa da quella intellettuale. Inoltre, di particolare interesse filologico, è il capitolo finale di questa prima parte, dedicato ai rapporti che Yeats intrattenne con il filosofo reggiano Mario Manlio Rossi. Fantaccini ha ricercato e ricostruito lo scambio epistolare tra i due, in gran parte inedito, da cui si traggono importanti informazioni e suggestioni non solo per quanto riguarda la poetica di Yeats, e persino una fase ancora poco conosciuta della sua vita, ma anche il periodo storico internazionale entro cui tale corrispondenza si colloca. Yeats emerge da questa ricerca come uno scrittore cosmopolita, che viene preso a sua volta come modello dalla nostra letteratura nazionale.

Nella seconda parte del libro, Fantaccini esamina a fondo proprio la ricezione critica di Yeats in Italia, ripercorrendo i commenti sulla sua opera dei poeti italiani che hanno inoltre contribuito alla sua divulgazione e alla fortunata fama letteraria grazie alle traduzioni. La presenza del poeta irlandese, in questa fase della cultura italiana, è definita da Fantaccini «sotterranea», proprio perché, sebbene le opere di Yeats non circoleranno con regolarità nel nostro Paese fino agli anni '50, tale influenza è spesso percepita come sinonimo di «curiosi interessi e reciproca "attenzione"» (p. 113). Montale, Lucio Piccolo, Sergio Solmi e Giovanni Giudici sono i primi ad aver adattato i ritmi di Yeats alla prosa italiana, ispirandosi a una serie di assonanze, allitterazioni e griglie foniche strutturate in modo da trasmettere il più possibile il senso dell'unità

tra contenuto e forma stilistica così evidente nel poeta irlandese. Fantaccini, inoltre, offre anche una lettura linguistica dei testi yeatsiani con analisi sintattico-lessicali di grande interesse che costituiscono anche dei modelli di teoria e tecnica della traduzione letteraria *tout court*.

L'ultima parte del libro è dedicata alla fortuna critica di Yeats in Italia e, oltre a comprendere una bibliografia completa e aggiornata delle traduzioni, pone anche degli interrogativi canonici molto interessanti. Uno fra tutti è la bizzarra assenza del nome di Yeats rispetto ad altri paesi europei come la Norvegia o la Germania fino agli inizi del XX secolo. Fantaccini qui ripercorre le tappe di una ricezione che per molto tempo ha inteso leggere Yeats come artista principalmente folkloristico, legato ai miti e alle leggende della sua terra, perfino ossessivamente radicato in un nazionalismo che ne ha offuscato talvolta il vero valore letterario. Il critico riscatta la figura del Nobel irlandese, rivedendo le tappe di una divulgazione culturale finora mai trattata con ampiezza adeguata, e analizza sistematicamente le diverse fasi di appropriazione del materiale di Yeats (dagli anni '40 fino ai '60, cosiddetti della 'canonizzazione', fino alle antologie e gli approfondimenti critici degli anni '80) per descrivere una curva che parte dagli studi specialisti e di settore per arrivare fino al 'grande pubblico'. Di particolare interesse, sono gli anni '90 in cui la critica su Yeats subisce un'intensificazione che coincide con il rinnovato interesse italiano per l'orizzonte irlandese, visto come panorama incontaminato e vergine, ricco di spunti originalissimi che orientano l'attenzione degli studiosi. La ricezione parcellizzata di Yeats nella nostra cultura ritrova in questi anni una compattezza e un'organicità che Fantaccini, qui come altrove, tratta in maniera dotta e brillante, mantenendo viva l'attenzione del lettore mediante uno sterminato e denso apparato bibliografico completo e aggiornato.

Il volume di Arianna Antonielli, intitolato *William Blake e William Butler Yeats. Sistemi simbolici e costruzioni poetiche*, intende studiare l'influsso dell'universo visionario di Blake nella poesia di Yeats, che si concretizza nell'edizione curata da quest'ultimo delle opere del grande romantico, pubblicata nel 1893. Il raffronto tra i sistemi parte dall'analisi della cosmogonia di Blake, una delle più complesse della tradizione occidentale, e di quel «pantheon mistico-simbolico» che costituisce la colonna vertebrale del *corpus* poetico del poeta-vate.

Nel primo capitolo, Antonielli inquadra, in modo ricco e acuto, il pensiero del visionario nel contesto dell'Inghilterra empirista e materialista del suo tempo, focalizzando la propria attenzione sul ruolo dell'immaginazione. Grazie a una serie di esempi che mirano a spiegare le complesse gerarchie mistiche di Blake, Antonielli entra nei meandri del cosmo del poeta e esamina l'evoluzione della sua dottrina, gli influssi che subisce, e i rapporti che allaccia con la filosofia meccanicista di Newton, Bacon e Locke. Il sistema di Blake viene definito in contrasto con la cosiddetta «Age of Reason», poiché questa, peraltro secondo un'interpretazione poi discussa e anche smentita in molti studi

in epoche recenti, a livello filosofico e letterario, ma ancora talvolta adottata, è «naturalmente scettica di fronte ad ogni forma di esperienza mistico-visionaria essendo non l'immaginazione ma la ragione l'unico strumento capace di toccare la verità». La Ragione ha destabilizzato il vecchio pensiero radicato sui miti e sulle superstizioni, sostituendo, secondo Antonielli, a questo, in molti casi, l'egida schiavizzante del totalitarismo razionalistico, con il risultato che «il complesso dei mitologemi e delle leggende sembra subire un totale svuotamento semantico e formale» (p. 37).

La critica definisce, in questo contesto, 'rivoluzionarie' le complesse gerarchie spirituali di Blake, che si configurano come un tentativo di rovesciare la tirannia della arida ragione in favore di una riconferma dell'immaginazione, addirittura in forme esoteriche – posta in una provvisoria posizione subalterna – come forza propulsiva del creato. A dimostrazione della complessità di tali posizioni, la studiosa basa la sua disamina su una corposa presentazione dei trattati da cui Blake attinge e da cui emergono i dettami teosofici della cabala ebraica, dell'alchimia e dell'astrologia, insieme ai numerosi nomi che compongono l'archeologia arcana del poeta: da Agrippa e Paracelso, a Swedenborg e Boheme. Blake appare così al centro di una rete di influenze variegata, che rielabora e con cui dialoga per restituire ai miti, alle leggende e ai racconti un ruolo di guida nell'oscurità della realtà fenomenica. Attraverso un'analisi strutturale, Antonielli non solo è in grado di produrre una folta serie di riferimenti bibliografici e di fonti testuali che sono alla base della ricerca, ma anche di restituire al sistema di Blake una profondità e un'eco che si proietta al di là del proprio tempo.

Una delle continuità che tale sistema simbolico stabilisce nel futuro, e che costituisce la seconda e terza parte del volume, è data, infatti, dal rapporto con Yeats. Antonielli descrive il percorso esoterico e di apprendistato magico del poeta irlandese a Londra, la sua partecipazione alle riunioni della Società Teosofica e il suo interesse alle dottrine dei Rosacroce. Quest'ultima è trattata in maniera dettagliata e cronologica, soprattutto perché Yeats vi riscopre la cosiddetta *coincidentia oppositorum* (sintetizzata nell'immagine della rosa mistica), una sorta di dialettica degli opposti che tende alla creazione di un sistema universale in grado di contenere ogni genere di forza occulta: «lo scopo è ovviamente quello di toccare la verità ultima, riuscendo a traguardare i cancelli del regno fenomenico proprio come Blake, Boheme e Swedenborg» (p. 163).

Nell'ultima parte dello studio, Antonielli si concentra sull'analisi dell'edizione Quaritch delle opere di Blake, e quindi dell'interpretazione che Yeats dà delle opere del romantico. In questa sezione molto impegnativa, commentata e accompagnata da lunghe citazioni dalle opere, Antonielli analizza il progetto dell'edizione e il percorso che Yeats compie nell'avvicinarsi all'opera di Blake, sia da un punto di vista biografico, attraverso l'eredità del padre e la conoscenza di John Edwin Ellis, «piccolo esteta, artificiale» (p. 191), con il quale il poeta irlandese stringe una «prolifica vicinanza artistica» (p. 191), sia da un punto

di vista critico basato sul riscatto della figura del visionario inglese, a lungo tacciato di follia e oscurato dal canone letterario.

L'analisi dei due volumi delle *Works of William Blake*, e la sua ricezione critica in Inghilterra, è corredata da lunghi e dettagliati commenti che mostrano come Yeats interpreti Blake e ne mutui le strutture simboliche. Ne emerge un ritratto che rivela la polisemica impresa della studiosa, la quale non descrive mai un percorso interpretativo a 'senso unico', ma lascia avvertire la presenza di numerosi livelli, dati dalla giustapposizione delle straordinarie voci poetiche: «Yeats non scrive per interpretare, ma *riscrive*; non commenta con quel distacco di cui è solito servirsi il critico, ma 'fa suo', *ingloba, fagocita* per poi *rielaborare*. Cosicché, chiunque non si sia ancora avvicinato all'opera (ellis-) yeatsiana e voglia farlo, da *WWB* non riceverà una delucidazione sul Blake poeta visionario, profeta, voce contro l'Inghilterra razionalistica, monarchica ed ecclesiale, e autore dei *Libri Profetici*; riceverà piuttosto qualcosa di simile ma profondamente diverso: la *sua* visione, la *sua* interpretazione, il *suo* Blake, forse perché Yeats si sente il discepolo, il figlio, ma anche, e soprattutto, un poeta» (p. 326).

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