

The Smart Wizard: Literature as a Lie, Theatre as a Rite (Giorgio Manganelli reads W.B. Yeats)

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Abstract

The present essay investigates the relationship between the literary critic and writer Giorgio Manganelli, and W.B. Yeats. It is composed of two parts. The first deals with the idea of literature as a lie presented by Manganelli in his famous book collecting several essays on literary figures, *La letteratura come menzogna* (1985) and focuses on the articles written by Manganelli on Yeats over the years, explaining why the Italian writer was so fond of the Irish poet. Whereas in his first essays Manganelli proposed an introductory reading of Yeats, though centered on peculiar aspects of his poetry, later he concentrated on the idea which lies beneath the conception of Yeats's poetics. Yeats's poetry suggests to Manganelli the deep meaning of literature providing the most correct interpretation for all fictional work. In the second part of this essay focus shifts from literature in general to the idea of theatre expressed by the two writers. The attempt is to find the similarities between their conceptions of the theatrical work and their experimental plays, considering Yeats's plays as a fundamental model for Manganelli's theatre. The keyword which joins together their poetics is the return to the rituals of the primitive stage and the ceremonial aspects of ancient times.

Keywords: W.B. Yeats, G. Manganelli, drama, ritual, ceremony

1. *Yeats and Manganelli*

1.1 *Manganelli writes on W.B. Yeats*

«William Butler Yeats (1865-1939): that triple name, those age-old dates could indicate an encyclopedia entry or perhaps could be included, bureaucratic and glorious, on the name plate of a road, a road that I suppose to be peripheral or frequented by strange people: believers of improbable religions, irregular couples, illegal immigrants»¹. When the writer meets

the literary critic, an original definition for describing a poet it is the result. Giorgio Manganelli's words represent more than a clue to understand how much he was interested in the poetry of the Irish writer. Every now and then Manganelli makes no secret of his elective affinity with Yeats. In his personal canon Yeats is an immovable reference point. His assiduous attention to the writings of the 'smart wizard'² is remarkable.

In 1949, in the literary magazine «La Fiera Letteraria» Manganelli published *I simboli assediavano Yeats*; with the translation of *Sailing to Byzantium*. In 1950 his five talks on the Celtic Revival were broadcast on Italian radio (Terzo Programma). In 1955 he published in the magazine «Il Mulino» a review of the *Autobiographies*³ (1926), and one year later translated four of Yeats's Celtic plays which were intended to be published by the Italian publisher Guanda⁴. He also translated some eighty poems by Yeats, but they never appeared in print. In 1965 he wrote a review for the magazine «Il Mondo» on the symposium held the same year on the Irish poet⁵ - this review is now included in the well known collection of essays *La letteratura come menzogna*. He wrote three more essays on Yeats in 1973, 1984 and finally in 1987; they appeared respectively on the occasion of the publication of the Italian translation of *A Vision*⁶ (1925), *The Tower*⁷ (1928) and *The Celtic Twilight*⁸ (1893). There are also many unpublished pages that Manganelli wrote on Yeats (notes and reflections) held at the University of Pavia, 'Fondo Manoscritti'.

In 1998 Viola Papetti organized a symposium on Giorgio Manganelli. The conference proceedings⁹ include an article by Papetti - *Manganelli e gli inglesi* - in which she lists the most significant figures of English literature who contributed to the literary formation of the writer. Yeats was one of them: Manganelli was more and more deeply interested in and influenced by the poetry of Yeats. This deep interest became a sort of indoctrination; not to the principles expressed in *A Vision*, as one might think at first, but rather to the idea that lies behind this theosophical philosophy.

The first essay on Yeats is a quick overview on his life and poetry. Yeats is presented as the link between the aesthetic school from Swinburne (and the influence of the French symbolist movement) to the poetics of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. The idea here expressed probably follows in the footsteps of T.S. Eliot's essay, *Yeats*, dated 1940, in which he focused on the different stages of Yeats's poetry, talking of a «slow and continuous development of what is always the same medium and idiom»¹⁰. The second essay, «Yeats autobiografico», is more specific. Here Manganelli tries to explain the importance of the *Autobiographies* in the Yeatsian literary corpus. He states that «those cumbersome excogitations»¹¹ gave Yeats «psychic coherence and matter for his poetry»¹² and that they could be seen as a lifeline («improbable occult life jackets»¹³) which made his career over the years and distinguished him from other contemporary poets defined under the label of «tragic generation»¹⁴.

The two following essays, *Il mago astuto* and *C'è un balcone sul destino* open with a quote from the introduction of *A Vision* where Yeats describes how his wife had ventured into automatic writing and how this book was born. The explicit formulation of the theory which gives order to the entire corpus of poetry already published and that had yet to come, embarrasses the critic because it opens a most serious problem for the interpreter.

1.2 *The problem posed by A Vision*

The scrupulous attention paid to *A Vision* is symptomatic of the deep interest Giorgio Manganelli had in the Irish writer. Giorgio Melchiori once told me that in the Fifties the British Library held only one copy of the first version of *A Vision* (1925). The book was damaged and its pages were held together by a string. Giorgio Melchiori had gone to London in order to study that particular edition, but he found out that another Italian was at the time viewing the book. He was told where this man had a seat so that they could arrange turns to view the book. The other man was Giorgio Manganelli. This anecdote is particularly relevant if we consider the fact that Manganelli wanted to study that particular edition of *A Vision*. He wanted to compare it to the second and most common one – which has now been translated into Italian too¹⁵. It must be said that the two editions are quite different¹⁶. The second is a systematic essay where all the schemes, patterns and tables elaborated by Yeats are presented in an organic way. The first one, on the other hand, is presented as a sort of tale introduced by the fictional characters of Aherne and Michael Robartes; its form is more like a fictional story than an organic pseudo philosophical treatise (like those of the Middle Ages or the Renaissance). Unquestionably, whoever wanted to see the first edition had to be a serious scholar, not just an amateur.

The topic and arguments set out in *A Vision* are at least questionable; they are controversial, they represent an obstacle for commentators, they perplex even the most devoted admirers and the most experienced literary critic. This is an ideal situation for those who love taking the side of the accused, being the devil's advocate. Manganelli was among them; Yeats gave him a perfect opportunity to defy the negative critics with provocative literary paradoxes and defend the 'literary suburbs'. As a literary critic, Giorgio Manganelli, found in Yeats a congenial author.

Both in the first and second (to a lesser extent) edition of *A Vision* there are passages that look like autobiographical stories, or rather like fictional ones disguised as autobiographical stories. But the systematic nature of the treatise is absolutely rigorous. Thus not only as a scholar, but also as a writer, and following the English tradition of paradoxical treatises such as Swift's *A Modest Proposal* (1729), De Quincey's *Murder as a Fine Art* (1887), Wilde's *The Soul of Man under Socialism* (1891), Giorgio Manganelli felt deeply involved

in the reading of Yeats's work. *A Vision* is a shameless affirmation of faith in a mysteriosophical theological system. Yeats challenges the reader because, unlike the writers I have just mentioned, he does not wink at the reader for his paradoxes or absurd theories; his book stands as an extreme truth.

Apparently some writers, each in his/her own way, make fun of their audience, embarrassing, confusing or misleading the reader and the commentators. Joyce was proud to state that critics would have to spend ages to trace all the literary references hidden in his books; so it seems that Yeats too was eager to challenge his followers with the system exposed in *A Vision*. The philosophical-theological system consistently exposed in the second edition of *A Vision* is a structure created in retrospect to give order to Yeats's work as a whole. It is so difficult, complex and articulated, so cumbersome and awesome, in a way, that it represents an obstacle for the reader who tries to take it seriously. Whoever tries to get closer to Yeats's work wonders whether the poet believed in its system or not, and in that case, to what extent he did believe in it.

1.3 *The first inevitable question*

A.G. Stock in 1961 stated that «one naturally asks what Yeats himself thought about its sources and in what sense he believed in its contents»¹⁷. Recently Nadia Fusini on the occasion of the publication of Yeats's poems in Italian¹⁸, poses the same question, quoting from Edmund Wilson: «If he did not believe all his discourses either, why is he bothering us? Edmund Wilson asked himself many years ago. And we keep on asking ourselves why»¹⁹. Giorgio Manganelli is no exception. Time and again when he has to do with Yeats he asks the same question, as a sort of superstitious refrain or magic formula necessary to ensure poetic licence and the suspension of belief: «it is difficult to get rid of the problem concerning the meaning, in his own poetry, of that occult and hermetic system»²⁰.

A Vision is the stumbling block: «that book, since it was published, is the provocation and the trial of critics and readers of his poems»²¹. We are prone to believe that we should not take it literally and that there is «more than a suspicion of farce in that invention of such an esoteric, symbolic and magic system»²². The question is legitimate, but at last we should come to a different conclusion: if we cannot find a definitive answer, maybe the problem is in the question: the question is wrong! When Manganelli states that «the question is always the same: "what did Yeats believe?"»²³, he is lying because the question has changed. From 'did he really believe?' we have come to 'what did he really believe?' It will change once more.

To the first question George Yeats replied to Richard Ellmann, ambiguously: «Sometimes he believed it, sometimes he didn't»²⁴. But the answer is not that difficult. Yeats himself gave it in *A Vision*:

Someone will ask whether I believe in the actual existence of my circuits of sun and moon [...] to such a question I can but answer that if sometimes, overwhelmed by miracle as all men must be when in the midst of it, I have taken such periods literally, my reason has soon recovered; and now that the system stands out clearly in my imagination, I regard them as stylistic arrangements of experience comparable to the cubes in the drawing of Whyndham Lewis and to the ovoids in the sculpture of Brancusi. They have helped me to hold in a single thought reality and justice.²⁵

Saying that «sometimes he believed it» means being sometimes overwhelmed by a miracle. «The system which William evolved in *A Vision*, was one that had a sort of ant-system built into it»²⁶. Believing and not believing do not represent a contradiction. Thus the first question is not wrong but its answer, though satisfactory, is useless. Asking whether Yeats believed in his system makes no sense. Yeats's theology was based on a structure invented in retrospect. It is just a method to give order:

Our thoughts turn to Dante, whose poetry presupposes a theology, the organizations of a fictitious world of figures. It is designed to introduce a regular feature, a sort of geometric definition, a logic insistence. [...] In Dante, as in Yeats, theology exists because it is an organization of figures.²⁷

Moreover, no one wonders whether Dante thought that the structure of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise was indeed as he had conceived it in the *Comedy*. That he believed or not in the theology he adopted makes no difference for the critic or the reader. If we do not believe in the structure he gave to his Paradise, our idea of his work does not change:

The claim that visionary revelations are valid, and are worth to receive years of disciplined concentration, will be called sense or nonsense according to different readers' prejudices, but this is not the main point. Dante and Milton would probably have made it, and that does not prevent their writings from being understood by skeptics.²⁸

We can apply the same idea to William Blake who inspired Yeats, providing, among other things, the concept of the spiral figures representing the non-opposition of opposites: «There is a place where Contraries are equally True». Manganelli then concluded: «did Yeats really believe in this odd organization of images, in this theology communicated through such enigmatic and suggestive means?». This time the answer gets to the point of the question. Is the question legitimate? «The question has been posed several times, and perhaps it is typical of a certain rustic and honest way of talking about literature»²⁹. Manganelli finally found the key to solve the problem; it is in the already mentioned quote from Blake. Apparently the answer does not apply to Yeats only but to Manganelli himself.

The instructors say repeatedly that their duty does not consist in ‘communicating the truth’; but it is obvious that they do not mean to communicate lies, that is the opposite of the truth. The term true belongs to a classification, to a judgment which implies the denial of its opposite; so it refers to a system that is exactly the opposite of the one Yeats aspired to. The opposite of the truth is a situation where true and false are not opposed. But if the category of ‘true’ collapses, the idea of ‘believing’ will collapse too.³⁰

Studying Yeats is for Manganelli a sort of esoteric training. The Irish poet gives him the opportunity to reflect upon literature from different perspectives, both as a scholar and literary critic and as a writer: «Yeats is problematic» Manganelli writes. For him it gets difficult to talk about the Irish poet «for reasons that I would define as ‘private’, perhaps as a private shame». This is why Manganelli, as an initiate, calls Yeats «ghostly companion»³¹.

1.4 *A change of perspective*

Manganelli feels very familiar with Yeats. He even uses various epithets: Yeats is the «theologian poet»³², and the «wizard» poet³³. And these are two couples of nouns that have no particular irreverent meaning. It is curious that Manganelli later kept the word ‘wizard’ (instead of the word ‘poet’) and accompanied it with an adjective which is more irreverent and implies some sort of judgment: Yeats is a «smart wizard»³⁴. Smart as Ulysses, whose ability consisted in fooling other people through a compelling rhetoric. Yeats is the perfect example of the paradigm supported by Manganelli in *La letteratura come menzogna*. Finally the epithet for Yeats changes again becoming «ghostly companion». The distance between the literary critic and his object of study has thinned. The poet is now a ‘companion’, that is, etymologically, the person who eats the same bread; it is a sort of literary banquet around the theme of literature which would be defined, according to Manganelli as completely amoral, dishonest duplicitous.

This study of the deep relationship between Manganelli and Yeats – that in the loop of the eternal return evoked by the cycles of history drawn in the Yeatsian gyres would almost seem mutual – gets finally to the real question we should pose when talking about Yeats. The question is no longer «Did he believe?» but, «what does ‘believing’ really mean?»; this is the closing sentence of the last paper by Manganelli on Yeats. In this question, which remains open, there is the answer too: «As he pointed out, ‘belief’ for the modern mind is not a word with precise, invariable meaning»³⁵. Thus our «ghostly companion»

creates and arranges images so as to express his sense of values, and this is the genius of mythology. A myth is a myth not because it is false to physical or historical fact but because, true or false, it offers just such an expressive image.³⁶

Mythology does not need to affirm its own truth, it is strong enough not to depend on the categories of true and false:

We have been taught Christmas as a lie, a trick, a tale, a jest, *santaclaus*, a joke, bullshit, a fraud, a story for handicapped. Even if it is literally true, that historically and actually, some thousand years ago the son of God was born, we have been taught it as a lie, and this is the way the news spread. Get rid of a 'true' lie, if you can, get rid of a 'false' truth.³⁷

2. For a ritual theatre: Yeats and Manganelli

2.1 Biographical coincidences

An initial biographical coincidence between Manganelli and Yeats is related to their experience with radio programmes. Yeats had been involved in broadcast talks with the BBC in 1937. In these programmes actors read Irish poems – among which Yeats's verses as well – accompanied by music. The programme was introduced and presented by Yeats who commented on the lines read. Giorgio Manganelli in 1951 held two radio lectures on the Lake District Poets and Poe's *Gordon Pym* (1838). Particularly important were also his lectures on the Celtic Revival in 1950 (in five parts) and those on English post-war poetry (from 1959) and finally a programme on Samuel Johnson in 1964³⁸.

He eventually produced works for the radio: *Teo, o l'acceleratore della storia* written together with Augusto Frassinetti in 1966, *Interviste impossibili*³⁹ and *In un luogo imprecisato* in 1974. All of these were originally radio plays and only later were they staged. Manganelli also translated English plays into Italian:

The attraction Manganelli had for the radio, then, is obvious, also because it is obvious that in this 'abstract' space of broadcasting, which is not constrained by the traditional way of staging, it is possible to have that condition of cancellation of the canonical scene, of transformation into an active darkness haunted only by language, a happening which the writer had often theorized.⁴⁰

Translations, broadcast talks, radio plays: all of these are experiences linked to the stage, but are not proper plays. Even the radio plays are something different from a play for the theatre. Manganelli's *Tragedie da leggere* (2005) cannot be described as traditional theatre plays. Their forms and patterns are peculiar; they belong to a different tradition. This is the first important coincidence with Yeats's theatre: both authors did not refer to the traditional theatre. If we are to find a model for their plays, we must refer to avant-garde writers, experimental theatre, symbolism, and some experiences linked to the Eastern theatre.

This coincidence is present in the structure of most of Manganelli's plays. Most of the times they are one act plays, or even more simply dialogues between characters without action, just like Platonic dialogues. Franco Ruffini in 2005 gave a definition for these plays⁴¹: he called them «chiavi di teatro», that is to say, key situations which could be the centre, or the main scene of a play. However they lack action, the dramatic development of a full play, they apparently do not have a proper background nor a traditional conclusion⁴². From this perspective they are potentially brilliant theatrical inventions though at a provisional stage, as if the author had left half his idea, waiting for someone to complete it. One can disagree with Ruffini's definition⁴³, however it marks an important point that will be examined after a brief reflection on Yeats's theatre.

We can state that it is also possible to apply the same definition to some of Yeats's mature plays: one act play, concluded by, or centred on, a ritual dance, that cannot be referred to as a traditional play. In a traditional perspective they would be miserable unfinished attempts. But this is the point: Yeats's theatre⁴⁴ just as Manganelli's cannot be judged by the traditional parameter of classical drama. Their plays are neither comedies, nor tragedies, it is impossible to talk about bourgeois drama or even to compare them to the Japanese Nō theatre⁴⁵.

Manganelli and Yeats had worked on a very different level, creating new dramatic genres with suggestions from very different experiences. Yeats had in mind the symbolist theatre, the Middle Ages morality plays, miracle plays and mystery plays, the Elizabethan stage and the Japanese Nō theatre⁴⁶. Manganelli too did not refer to traditional drama. Among his models are the Elizabethan stage, the symbolist movement, Artaud, Beckett, Plato's dialogues ... and Yeats!

Luigi Squarzina, at the time director of the Teatro Stabile di Genova, in a letter to Manganelli dated 1966, referring to the staging of Manganelli's radio play *Teo o l'acceleratore della storia* significantly raised the issue. He first said it was important to overcome the problem imposed by the radio setting. However, he noticed that this work could represent something particularly interesting and completely new which could not be valued according to the traditional theatrical canon. He wrote:

This new theatre of limited size which we are going to inaugurate with you, lends itself to *unusual forms* of theatricality, albeit reduced ones. There is a very direct relationship between the show and its audience. This is why the form of lecture, radio commentary, discussion of the text is an advantage rather than a disadvantage.⁴⁷

2.2 *In the beginning was the Word*

Yeats's and Manganelli's theatre are both a Theatre of the Word, according to Pasolini's definition of his own theatre. For them, the literary aspect of the theatrical production was of utmost importance. Speech had to be the centre

of the play. Yeats wrote: «[...] if we are to restore words to their sovereignty we must make speech even more important than gesture upon stage»⁴⁸; later on he proposed a model for his plays, choosing the best example in the use of language: «We have looked for the centre of our art where the players of the time of Shakespeare and Corneille found theirs – in speech, whether it be the perfect mimicry of the conversation of two country-men of the roads, or that idealised speech poets have imagined for what we think but do not say»⁴⁹. Yeats knew the importance of the versatility and richness of language in the theatre. Manganelli too refers to Shakespeare as an example, and exactly for the same reason as Yeats. The use of language in Elizabethan times, the possibility to decline it in different stylistic registers and the infinite possibilities and freedom given by its use represent the distinction of great art:

Shakespeare's plays are literature not because they show the characters, but because these characters represent active violent linguistic constants, and therefore are ambiguous, unstable and contradictory.⁵⁰

Language has to find again its own central position in the theatre, being closer to all aspects of real life. What Manganelli praised in the Elizabethan drama is the presence of a

[...] total language which feeds on the inventions of all classes, a language which is indecent, lewd, blasphemous, creative, never sentimental; it is a mixture of haggard Baroque, of vulgar and cunning slang, of real wisdom, of patched scholarship, of stylistic wit and oratorical incontinence.⁵¹

Yeats too focuses on the rich possibilities of language in Shakespeare's plays. He wrote: «Falstaff gives one the sensation of reality, and when one remembers the abundant vocabulary of a time when all but everything present to the mind was present to the senses, one imagines that his words were but little magnified from the words of such a man in real life»⁵².

The fact that the language used in the Elizabethan Age might be of difficult comprehension is not an obstacle for the two writers. Conversely, it is a value that contemporary societies have lost in search of the pursuit of success, pandering to the consent of the audience; this is what Manganelli writes:

I do not think that the writer tries to abuse his power through the words. He looks for freedom, a disorder other than that which can be found in a written text. I think of a non-'real' theatre, something that can be made with some libretto by Verdi (except Boito), with scurrilous scenes of Elizabethan plays, puns, nonsense, mystery plays (those with the Devil), or even modest tones, argumentations as monologues as in Molière... the writer knows, obscurely, in his dreams, that a word takes up space, it has a shape, a colour, and an unpredictable sound. He knows that the theatre finds again the incomprehensibility and the violence which are active in a word. The theatre is not made for being understood: this is the literary genre the writer looks for and will always look for.⁵³

The paradox that it is not necessary to understand everything in a play, has something to do with Yeats's ideas too. Surprisingly Yeats says something similar when he refers to the linguistic models for his new theatre: «all the old writers [...] wrote to be spoken or to be sung, and in a later age to be read aloud, *for hearers who had to understand swiftly or not at all*, and who gave up nothing of life to listen, but sat, the day's work over, friend by friend, lover by lover»⁵⁴; and Manganelli:

What I understand of this mysterious and marvellous monster which is the theatre, I do not think that its polymorphic intricacies have to be 'understood'; this event, made of words pronounced and not read, and thus phonetically plastic, and made of non words, of mental spaces, of not-existing inventions, of epiphanies and spells, does not aspire to be 'understood' but to be accepted.⁵⁵

So why cannot dramatists write today like Elizabethan playwrights? It is because contemporary society had pushed the author to adopt a less complex language. For different reasons and in different times Yeats and Manganelli gave similar explanations, blaming those writers who had followed this tendency, this inexplicable necessity to get closer to a full intelligibility, the ruin of literature:

if the difficult Shakespeare was popular in his own day, shall we think that the audience, the Elizabethan plebeians, were all geniuses? And if we no longer understand the difficult language, if we are not trained to, does this mean that we have become nitwits? I don't think that's how things are; I have the impression that this language has become incomprehensible just because our attitude towards language, and towards the way we can use language, has changed.⁵⁶

Talking about Eduardo De Filippo, Manganelli blames him for following this demeaning trend. So does Yeats referring to D'Annunzio and Maeterlinck: «The rhetoric of D'Annunzio, the melodrama and spectacle of the later Maeterlinck, are the insincerities of subjectives, who being very able men have learned to hold an audience that is not their natural audience. To be intelligible they are compelled to harden, to externalise and deform»⁵⁷. As I said before, the turning point of the matter is to be found in the language chosen by the author, in its distance from everyday speech, in the importance of the literary word.

2.3 *The actors and the scene*

True, the word is pronounced by the actor, whose role is fundamental. However, the histrionic actor had no place in Yeats's plays, nor in Manganelli's. In order to avoid the problems caused by traditional acting, Yeats decided to find his own actors among common people – the Fay brothers were non professional actors. He wrote:

At a time when drama was more vital than at present, unpaid actors, and actors with very little training, have influenced it deeply. The Mystery Plays and the Miracle Plays got their players at no great distance from the church door, and the classic drama of France had for a forerunner performances of Greek and Latin Classics, given by students and people of quality [...].⁵⁸

As for Manganelli:

the [...] main request was an absolute stasis of the actors, of a widespread darkness and of a diction as aseptic as possible, with a voice held constantly in a lower tone, thus eliminating the elements contributing to the traditional idea of a representation centred on the model of the 'great actor'.⁵⁹

The player is just a means, not the end of the performance. Similarly, scenery had the same role. It had to be changed drastically from that of bourgeois drama. Both writers did not want realistic scenery, nor a traditional description of what was on the stage. From this point of view too, Yeats could have been a model for Manganelli. The stage should only give an allusion to the mind's eye. This is what Yeats found, for instance, in the classical Nō theatre. As Ezra Pound had explained in *The Classical Noh Theatre of Japan* (1959): «[...] the properties and scene are not representational but symbolic, the hero-actor simply says in effect, "pretend that that is the tree and that the mountain"»⁶⁰.

For Manganelli it is exactly the same:

Oppose the symbolic essentiality to realism, to the most particular naturalism; oppose to the psychological and moral casuistry the invention of characters capable of gradually revealing themselves, but not of transforming themselves and whose dialogues have no conclusion, but only illuminate an external condition; [...] [Yeats] replaced a realistic language without style, with a way of speaking that was both poetical and popular, rich, in its unpredictable imagination, of endless metaphors belonging to the peasants' speech.⁶¹

2.4 *Rituals and ceremonies*

The two authors used similar words to describe the real nature of the theatre. Their reflections on the essence of theatrical practice leads to a general discomfort with their contemporary mainstream examples of the theatrical scene. Not that their conclusions are isolated in the literary panorama of their times⁶². However their theatre is experimental and marginal, or at least harder to comprehend. So they state with similar words, that a new theatre has to grow up on the ancient models of primitive theatrical experiences. The theatre was born as a ceremony; its roots cannot be forgotten and have to be revived as new models: «The theatre began in ritual, and it cannot come to its greatness again without recalling words to their ancient sovereignty»⁶³. The central part of the word in the theatre is directly linked to the ritual aspects of the play.

Yeats's conclusion is that «the hour of convention and decoration and ceremony is coming again»⁶⁴. Manganelli uses similar words:

We often speak of 'ceremony' of the theatre. That is to say that the audience is kept quiet by means of a calm terrorism, the actor replaced by the celebrant, ritual scenery, rigorous definition of the space designated for the miracle, and invention of the theatrical work as a prodigy. Ceremony and artifice. The theatre does not tell stories, it has no beginning and no end, it does not want to be praised. Applauding would be like applauding the priest at mass, because he managed to carry out a good transubstantiation.⁶⁵

There is a direct correspondence in the two authors' words: they both talk about a 'ceremony'. Yeats also says 'convention' which is another allusion to the ritual structure. Last but not least the word 'artifice' corresponds to 'decoration'. Its roots lie in the expression of artistic power especially in its most symbolic and articulated manifestations.

I will conclude with a most significant quote from Yeats that ends with three adjectives defining the idea of the two playwrights' reform of the theatre. I am convinced that Manganelli had these words in mind when he wrote his own *manifesto* for his theatre: «[...] as long as drama was full of poetical beauty, full of description, full of philosophy, as long as its words were the very vesture of sorrow and laughter, the players understood that their art was essentially conventional, artificial, ceremonious»⁶⁶.

Notes

¹ G. Manganelli, *Come parla Yeats, il poeta teologo*, in Id., *Incorporei felini II, Recensioni e conversazioni radiofoniche su poeti di lingua inglese (1949-1987)*, a cura di V. Papetti, Edizioni di Storia e letteratura, Roma 2002, p. 30: «William Butler Yeats (1865-1939): quel triplice nome, quelle date ormai annose potrebbero indicare una voce di enciclopedia, o forse figurare, burocratiche e gloriose, sulla targa di una strada, un viale che suppongo periferico, o di bizzarra frequentazione: fedeli di improbabili fedi, inventori del moto perpetuo, coppie irregolari, immigrati clandestini». All translations from the Italian are mine.

² Manganelli titles an essay on Yeats *Il mago astuto (The Smart Wizard)*. G. Manganelli, *Il mago astuto*, in Id., *Incorporei felini II*, cit., p. 21.

³ W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, Macmillan, London 1955.

⁴ W.B. Yeats, *Drammi Celtici*, BUR, Milano 1999.

⁵ A.N. Jeffares, K.G.W. Cross (eds), *In Excited Reverie*, Macmillan, London 1965.

⁶ W.B. Yeats, *Una visione*, translation by Adriana Motti with an essay by A.G. Stock, Adelphi, Milano 1973.

⁷ W.B. Yeats, *La torre*, introduction and commentary by A.L. Johnson, translation by A. Marianni, BUR, Milano 1984.

⁸ W.B. Yeats, *Il crepuscolo celtico*, a cura di R. Copioli, Teoria, Roma-Napoli 1987. These reviews and essays, together with other articles of similar nature, have been collected and edited in 2002 in the volume titled *Incorporei felini II*, cit.

⁹ V. Papetti (a cura di), *Le foglie messaggere. Scritti in onore di Giorgio Manganelli*, Editori Riuniti, Roma 2000.

¹⁰ T.S. Eliot, *Yeats*, in Id., *On Poetry and Poets*, Faber and Faber, London 1957, p. 252.

¹¹ G. Manganelli, *Yeats autobiografico*, in Id., *Incorporei felini II*, cit., p. 20: «quelle macchinose escogitazioni».

¹² *Ibidem*: «coerenza psichica e materia per la poesia».

¹³ *Ibidem*: «improbabili salvagenti occultistici».

¹⁴ Definition given by Yeats. It is also the title of a chapter of *The Trembling of the Veil*, in *Autobiographies*.

¹⁵ W.B. Yeats, *Una visione*, cit.

¹⁶ Nowadays we have both editions in print, but at the time only the second edition had been published (Manganelli at the British library wanted to see the differences between the two editions).

¹⁷ A.G. Stock, *W.B. Yeats: His Poetry and Thought*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1961, p. 146.

¹⁸ W.B. Yeats, *L'opera poetica*, translated by Ariodante Marianni, commentary by Anthony L. Johnson, introductory essay and chronology by P. Boitani, Mondadori, Milano 2005.

¹⁹ «La Repubblica», 21 novembre 2005, p. 33.

²⁰ G. Manganelli, *Il mago astuto*, in Id., *Incorporei felini II*, cit., p. 22: «il problema di [...] che significasse nel suo fare poesia [...] quella macchina occultistica ed ermetica, è difficile scrollarselo di dosso».

²¹ Ivi, p. 21: «quel libro che, da quando venne pubblicato [...] è provocazione e cruccio dei critici e dei lettori della sua poesia».

²² *Ibidem*: «più che un sospetto di farsa in quella invenzione di un sistema esoterico, simbolico, magico».

²³ G. Manganelli, *Il diavolo è passato di qui*, in Id., *Incorporei felini II*, cit., p. 34: «la domanda è sempre quella: "a cosa credeva Yeats?"».

²⁴ R. Ellmann, *Yeats the Man and the Masks*, Penguin, London 1948 and 1979, p. xxix.

²⁵ W.B. Yeats, *A Vision*, second edition, in the chapter "A Packet for Ezra Pound", pp. 24-25.

²⁶ R. Ellmann, *Yeats, the Man and the Masks*, cit., p. xxviii.

²⁷ G. Manganelli, *Come parla Yeats, il poeta teologo*, in Id., *Incorporei felini II*, cit., p. 31: «il pensiero va a Dante, la cui poesia presuppone una teologia, l'organizzazione fittizia di un mondo di figure, ha la funzione di introdurre un elemento costante, una sorta di definizione geometrica, una insistenza logica [...]». «In Dante, come in Yeats, la teologia agisce perché è una organizzazione di figure».

²⁸ A.G. Stock, *W.B. Yeats: His Poetry and Thought*, cit., p. 160.

²⁹ G. Manganelli, *C'è un balcone con vista sul destino*, in Id., *Incorporei felini II*, cit., p. 27: «Credeva veramente Yeats a questa bizzarra organizzazione di immagini, questa teologia comunicatagli attraverso mezzi tanto suggestivi, ed enigmatici? La domanda è stata posta più volte, e forse è sintomatica di un certo modo onesto e rustico di fare letteratura».

³⁰ *Ibidem*: «Gli istruttori dicono ripetutamente che non è loro compito 'comunicare il vero'; ma è ovvio che con ciò essi non intendono comunicare il falso, cioè il contrario del vero. Il termine 'vero' appartiene ad una classificazione, un giudizio che presuppone la negazione del suo contrario; dunque, allude ad un sistema che è esattamente contrario a quello cui Yeats aspira. Il contrario del vero sarà una situazione in cui vero e falso non si contrappongono, non esistono; ma se cade la categoria del 'vero', cadrà l'atteggiamento del 'credere'».

³¹ G. Manganelli, *Come parla Yeats il poeta teologo*, in Id., *Incorporei felini II*, cit., p. 29: «Yeats [...] pone dei problemi»; «per motivi che direi privati, forse di privata vergogna»; «compagno spettrale».

³² G. Manganelli, *Come parla Yeats il poeta teologo*, in Id., *Incorporei felini II*, cit., p. 29: «poeta teologo».

³³ G. Manganelli, in *Incorporei felini II*, cit., p. 23.

³⁴ G. Manganelli, *Il mago astuto*, in Id., *Incorporei felini II*, cit., p. 21.

³⁵ A.G. Stock, *W.B. Yeats: His Poetry and Thought*, cit., p. 146.

³⁶ Ivi, p. 151.

³⁷ G. Manganelli, *Discorso dell'ombra e dello stemma*, Rizzoli, Milano 1982, p. 44: «Il Natale [...] ce l'hanno insegnato come menzogna, trucco, favolello, arcatura, furbizia, santa-

claus, frode, burla, cazzata, storia per minorati. Anche se fosse letteralmente vero, storicamente, concretamente, che mille eccetera anni fa nasceva il figlio di Dio, ce l'hanno insegnato come menzogna e come tale ha proliferato. Liberati di una menzogna 'vera', se ci riesci. Liberati di una verità 'menzognera'».

³⁸ *Samuel Johnson e il suo tempo*, was on the air between the 27th of July and the 17th of August 1964. *Vita di Samuel Johnson*, is the tapescript of this programme, edited and revised by Viola Papetti, Edizioni di Storia e letteratura, Roma 2002; a new edition has been published by Adelphi in 2008, edited by Silvano Nigro. Manganelli took part also to the cycle titled *Un classico all'anno* with his contribution: *Il Morgante Maggiore di Luigi Pulci* (1972). His commitment with the radio had been rather assiduous.

³⁹ Twelve of them are written by Manganelli.

⁴⁰ L. Scarlini, *Dialogo notturno: un palcoscenico per Giorgio Manganelli*, introduction to G. Manganelli, *Tragedie da leggere*, cit., p. XL: «L'attrazione manganelliana per la radio, poi, è di fatto ovvia, anche perché è evidente che proprio in questo spazio di trasmissione 'astratto' e svincolato dalla rappresentazione tradizionale, si può dare quella condizione di annullamento della scena canonica, di trasformazione in buio, oscurità attiva e abitata e mutata dal verbo, che lo scrittore teorizzava».

⁴¹ The occasion was a conference organized by Viola Papetti at Università Roma Tre for the publication of Manganelli's *Tragedie da leggere*, a cura di L. Scarlini, Aragno, Roma 2005; this is a volume collecting all Manganelli's theatrical writings.

⁴² If I am not wrong Franco Ruffini said that the only exception among Manganelli's plays is represented by *Cassio governa a Cipro* (1977), whose structure is much more complex and articulated than that of all the other Manganelli's plays and can be considered a play in itself.

⁴³ In fact his speech produced more than a disagreement between the audience which was composed mostly by devotee and followers of the writer. Some of them were resentful, indignant and sceptical.

⁴⁴ F. Gasparini, *W.B. Yeats e il teatro dell' "antica memoria"*, Bulzoni, Roma 2002, focuses on this aspect: pp. 98-100.

⁴⁵ Yeats's plays were not intended as traditional plays. The ritual performances of the Japanese Nō plays were models which Yeats used and transformed in a new structure. Yeats transposed these forms in something original. The result cannot be compared to the Nō plays, because the *Plays for Dancers* represent something completely new in the western and in Eastern tradition (we are not even sure Yeats had ever assisted to the representation of a Nō play in the traditional form performed in Japan).

⁴⁶ See F.A.C. Wilson, *Yeats and Tradition*, Victor Gollancz, London 1958 and F. Luppi, *Cerimonie ed artifice nel teatro di W.B. Yeats*, NEU, Roma 2012.

⁴⁷ L. Squarzina, letter to Giorgio Manganelli of the 14th November 1966, quoted by Luca Scarlini in his introduction to Giorgio Manganelli, *Tragedie da leggere*, Aragno, Torino 2005, p. XXIX. My own italics: «Questo nuovo teatro di limitate dimensioni, che noi inaugureremo proprio con voi, si presta a forme insolite, seppur ridotte, di teatralità; con un rapporto estremamente diretto tra spettacolo e pubblico, fra attore e spettatore. È per questo che l'aspetto di conferenza, di radiocronaca, di incontro parlato del testo, costituisce un vantaggio anziché uno svantaggio».

⁴⁸ W.B. Yeats, *Sambain: 1903 - The Reform of the Theatre*, in Id., *The Irish Dramatic Movement*, ed. by M. FitzGerald and R.J. Finneran, Scribner, New York 2003, p. 27.

⁴⁹ W.B. Yeats, *Sambain: 1906 - Literature and the living voice*, in Id., *The Irish Dramatic Movement*, cit., p. 101.

⁵⁰ G. Manganelli, *Cerimonia e artificio*, in Id., *Cerimonie e artifici, scritti di teatro e di spettacolo*, a cura di L. Scarlini, Oedipus editore, Salerno-Milano 2000, p. 36: «Il teatro di Shakespeare è letteratura non perché esibisca i personaggi, ma perché questi sono delle attive, violentissime costanti linguistiche, e dunque ambigue, instabili e contraddittorie».

⁵¹ G. Manganelli, *Shakespeare*, in Id., *Cerimonie e artifici*, cit., p. 21: «linguaggio totale, che si nutre delle invenzioni di tutte le classi, impudico, lubrico, blasfemo, estroso, mai sentimentale; un impasto di sfatto barocco, i gerghi plebei e furbeschi, di autentica dottrina, di erudizione d'accatto, di arguzia stilistica e incontinenza oratoria».

⁵² W.B. Yeats, *Samhain: 1904 - The Play, the Player and the Scene*, in Id., *The Irish Dramatic Movement*, cit., p. 70.

⁵³ G. Manganelli, *Questo è il teatro che non voglio*, in Id., *Cerimonie e artifici*, cit., p. 44: «Non credo che lo scrittore cerchi nel teatro di prevaricare grazie alle parole. Cerca una libertà, un disordine diverso da quello che può trovare sulla pagina scritta. Penso ad un teatro non 'reale', qualcosa che si faccia con un po' di libretti di Verdi (eccetto Boito), le scene scurrili dei drammi elisabettiani, giochi di parole, nonsense, sacre rappresentazioni (quelle col Diavolo), o anche toni dimessi, argomentazioni monologate alla Molière... Lo scrittore sa, oscuramente, nei sogni, che la parola occupa spazio, ha veste e colore e un suono imprevedibile. Sa che il teatro ritrova l'incomprensibilità e la violenza attiva nella parola. Il teatro non è fatto per essere capito: ecco il genere letterario che lo scrittore cerca e cercherà sempre».

⁵⁴ W.B. Yeats, *Samhain: 1906 - Literature and the Living Voice*, in Id., *The Irish Dramatic Movement*, cit., p. 107. My own italics.

⁵⁵ G. Manganelli, *Quella volta che mi tuffai tra le masse*, in Id., *Cerimonie e artifici*, cit., pp. 41-42, previously in «L'Espresso», 8 settembre 1974: «Per quel che capisco di questo misterioso e mirabile mostro che è il teatro, non mi pare che i suoi intrichi polimorfi vogliano essere 'capiti'; questo evento fatto di parole non lette ma pronunciate, e dunque foneticamente plastiche, e di non parole, di luoghi mentali, di inesistenti invenzioni, di epifanie e di magherie non aspira affatto ad essere 'capito', ma ad essere accettato».

⁵⁶ Ivi, pp. 39-40: «se il difficile Shakespeare era popolare ai suoi tempi, bisogna pensare che gli spettatori, i plebei elisabettiani, fossero tutti geni; e se noi il linguaggio difficile non lo capiamo più, se non con un certo allenamento, vorrà dire che siamo diventati bischeri. Io penso che le cose non stiano a questo modo; ho l'impressione che quel linguaggio sia diventato incomprensibile semplicemente perché è cambiato il nostro atteggiamento verso il linguaggio, verso l'uso che se ne può fare».

⁵⁷ W.B. Yeats, *A People's Theatre*, in Id., *The Irish Dramatic Movement*, cit., p. 133.

⁵⁸ W.B. Yeats, *Samhain 1904 - The Dramatic Movement*, in Id., *The Irish Dramatic Movement*, cit., p. 43.

⁵⁹ L. Scarlini, *Dialogo notturno: un palcoscenico per Giorgio Manganelli*, cit., p. XXVI: «la [...] richiesta principale era quella di un stasi assoluta degli attori, di un'oscurità diffusa e di una dizione il più possibile asettica con una voce tenuta in modo ferreo sempre bassa, eliminando così gli elementi che contribuiscono all'idea tradizionale di rappresentazione incentrata sul modello del 'grande attore'».

⁶⁰ Ezra Pound, *The Classical Noh Theatre of Japan*, New Directions, New York 1959, p. 22 (published in 1917 as *'Noh' or accomplishment, a study of the classical stage of Japan*).

⁶¹ G. Manganelli, *La rinascenza celtica: i riti drammatici*, introduction to W.B. Yeats, *Drammi celtici*, ed. by V. Papetti, Bur, Milano 1999, pp. 11-12: «... al realismo, al naturalismo minuto, opporre l'essenzialità simbolica, alla casistica psicologica e morale l'invenzione dei personaggi capaci via via di rivelarsi, ma non di trasformarsi, i cui dialoghi non hanno conclusioni, ma solo illuminano una condizione esterna; [...] al linguaggio realistico, privo di stile, sostituì un discorso insieme poetico e popolare, nutrito da tutta la imprevedibile fantasia, le infinite metafore della parlata contadina».

⁶² See what Pasolini maintains about the importance of ceremony in the theatre and what Thomas Mann writes about the ceremonial aspects of Wagner drama in F. Luppi, *Cerimonie e artifici nel teatro di W. B. Yeats*, cit., pp. 123-124 and pp. 49-50.

⁶³ W.B. Yeats, *Beltaine: May 1899 - The Theatre*, in Id., *The Irish Dramatic Movement*, cit., p. 150.

⁶⁴ W.B. Yeats, *Sambain: 1904 - The Play, the Player, and the Scene*, in *The Irish Dramatic Movement*, cit., p. 79.

⁶⁵ G. Manganelli, *Cerimonia e artificio*, in Id., *Cerimonie e artifici*, cit., p. 37: «Si parla spesso di 'cerimonialità' del teatro. Questo significa: pubblico tenuto a bada con pacato terrorismo, attore sostituito dal celebrante, scenografia rituale, rigorosa delimitazione dello spazio deputato al prodigio, ed invenzione dell'opera teatrale come prodigio. Cerimonia e artificio. Il teatro non racconta storie, non ha inizio né fine, non vuole approvazioni. Applaudire sarebbe come applaudire il prete a messa, perché gli è riuscita bene la transustanziazione».

⁶⁶ W.B. Yeats, *Sambain: 1904 - the Play, the Player, and the Scene*, in Id., *The Irish Dramatic Movement*, cit., p. 73.

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