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Riane Eisler

Not to Worry, Not to Be Unduly Concerned

On the eleventh day of July sixteen years into the twentieth century, Isak Maimonedes Glanzman ran away from home. He was thirteen years old, a tall thin boy with round brown eyes, strong hands and arms, and straight black hair. He had cut it short for the journey, like that of a peasant, and on his head he wore his older brother's favorite cap. He knew his brother would miss it and he was sorry, but it made him look older and he thought more experienced. He avoided the roads and houses, keeping by the river, which would eventually take him to the provincial capital of Chernowitz. He carried with him a few shirts and handkerchiefs, turnips, cheese and bread to last four days, and his most precious possession, a book of verses by the poet Heinrich Heine. As he walked, he thought of a verse the poet had written about a lonely tree standing silent and sad in the rain, tossing its leaves, moist as if from tears of grief, and he suddenly understood the sadness of the tree and of the poet. He felt sad too, leaving the village where he had lived all his life, and his father and his brothers, and the green woods that would soon be only memories of home. Although he had often walked through the fields and meadows, he had never been this far. There were young saplings along the banks of the river, and behind them, in the distance, black and white cows and brown-roofed houses. He stumbled. When he caught his balance a man got up in front of him, blocking his way.

"Clumsy ox", he shouted in a German that was not the dialect of the province. "That was my face you almost stepped on".

Isak thought of running, but he had dropped the parcel with the book, and there would not be time to pick it up. He spoke instead.

"Excuse me", he said. "I did not see you lying on the ground. Excuse me".

The man grabbed his arm and took a good look at him. "Then your cap must have been over your eyes", he said with a quick laugh. "It is certainly much too big for your head". Isak turned his face and said nothing.

"You are younger than I thought", the man said and let go of Isak's arm. "A runaway, aren't you? And what will they do when they catch you?"

"They won't catch me", Isak said, and quickly picked up his parcel. "I am too far now. It has been months since I left".

The man laughed again. "You have been gone for no more than a day by the looks of you, and they're probably after you right this minute. But never mind. If they catch you, it won't be because of me. I'm a runaway of sorts too, you might say".

"You had better not follow the river any more", he went on. "There is a town coming up, and if they want you back they will be looking for you there. You better go up that hill and stay hidden in the woods for the night".

Isak put his bundle back on his shoulder, and the man licked his lips. "You don't by

any chance have some bread and cheese in there, do you? I'd give anything for a good piece of cheese or some bread. I've had nothing but frogs and roots for weeks and my stomach is aching".

Isak broke off a piece of his bread and the man swallowed it in one bite. He was not very tall and Isak now saw that he was dressed in a ragged grey uniform. He was a young man of perhaps twenty, but his hair and the stubble of his beard were almost white.

"You're not from here", Isak said. "Where do you come from?"

"From far away", the man said, looking greedily at the package. "From Germany".

Isak gave him another piece of bread. "From Germany?" He chose his words carefully because he had never spoken to anyone about these things. "That is a country ruled by the King Frederick". The German laughed. "Yes. Fifty years ago".

"Fifty years ago?" It had never occurred to Isak that the poet Heine might have lived in another time and that he too might be dead.

"Your history lessons are a little out of date", the man said.

"History lessons?" Isak did not know what that meant. He had been sent to school briefly to learn to read and write and to add and subtract, and except for the cheder, where every afternoon the rabbi taught him to read the Torah and the Talmud in that strange language he did not fully understand, that had been all.

"Well, at least you've heard of Germany", the man said. "I bet that's more than a lot of the types around here have. But we'd better get you to the hills before night. Come on". They walked silently until Isak could not stand it anymore. "Heinrich Heine, is he dead too?"

"Who?"

"The poet Heinrich Heine".

The young man stopped and looked at Isak again, very carefully. "What a strange boy you are. What does it matter?"

"Is he dead?"

"I don't know, I imagine so. What difference does it make?" Isak did not answer or ask him anymore, but the man seemed annoyed.

"What does it matter?" he muttered again. "What the devil does it matter?"

He turned, and Isak saw that his face was flushed with anger. "The death of one man more or less is no longer a matter of consequence. Not to me or to anyone else".

Isak had never seen anyone die. He knew about death, that there were different kinds of death, death from illness, death from murder and war and violence, and if he was to believe the poet Heine, death from a broken heart. He looked at the man walking with him and began to suspect that the poet had written the truth about that after all.

"What happened to you?" he asked. "What was it?"

The man looked at Isak for a moment and then turned his head away. "It was the war".

"The war?" Isak had heard there was a war someplace. "But there is no war here".

"There will be soon, sooner than you think".

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I know".

"You are a soldier?"

"Not anymore. I deserted. Two months ago".

"Won't they shoot you when they find you?" The question flew out before he could stop it.

"Yes". The soldier's voice was indifferent. "When they find me".

"Have you been hiding in the woods all this time?"

He shook his head yes. "But I am thinking it might be just as well if I go back".

"But you said they will shoot you".

"That is true. But there is nowhere to go".

"Why don't you come with me", Isak said on impulse. "Come with me to Chernowitz. I am told it is a big city. They will not find you there".

The man shrugged and Isak took it to mean he agreed. His name was Gunther and he knew where to camp for the night and how to make a fire from sticks and shelter it in the earth so it could not be seen from afar. Isak taught him what berries and mushrooms were safe to eat and which were poisonous and a few words of the local dialect. They spent the night in the hills beyond the river, and the next morning they set out again. They walked most of the day, avoiding houses and dogs, and before dark they again found a sheltered place to spend the night. Isak shared his bread and cheese and turnips with the soldier, and after they had eaten they again made a small fire in a hollow in the ground and Isak took out his book and read to himself.

"Will you read to me from your book?" Gunther asked.

Isak hesitated. He was afraid the soldier would make fun of him. He leafed through the book and chose the poem about the weeping tree. The soldier did not laugh.

"Will you read me some more", he asked when Isak was through, and the boy read on in his thin child's voice. When they came to the Hebrew Melodies, Gunther was surprised.

"So Heine was a Jew", he said.

"How do you know that?"

"Only a Jew would speak well of Jews".

"Are Jews bad then?"

"Yes", Gunther said.

"My father is not bad and he is a Jew", Isak said after a while.

"Then why did you run away from home?"

"I was not running away from home", Isak tried to explain, as he had to himself. "I had to go somewhere else and I could not stay and do that too. I love my father. My father is a good Jew and a good man".

The soldier looked at him indifferently. "There are always exceptions to the rule".

"But my mother was Jewish and she was good, and my brothers, they are Jews and they are good. It is the others, the ones who hate us and persecute us who are bad".

The soldier shrugged. "The Jews killed God", he said.

"But God is not dead", the boy said. "God is not dead".

The soldier began to laugh. It was a thin bitter laugh, like the sound of breaking twigs. "If you had seen what I have, you would know there is no God". He got up and began to

pace back and forth. Suddenly he threw himself on the damp earth pounding the ground with his fists. Isak tried to calm him, but the soldier pushed him off. He kept beating the earth, shouting as he pounded, until Isak was afraid someone would hear him and they would be discovered. At last, the soldier's arms went limp and he sprawled out on the grass. Isak sat down next to him.

"We must try to sleep", he said. "It is late and we have little food left and still a long way to go".

The soldier rolled over and looked at him. "So you believe In God". Isak nodded his head.

"In that case", the soldier said, "he must be, in the words of your poet, dying slowly of a broken heart". Isak shuddered at the blasphemy against the Lord.

"The fire has gone out", the soldier said. "We will never survive the night without fire. Go and get more twigs. But remember, take only the dry ones. Be as quiet as you can".

Isak did as he was told. The winter had made the branches of the trees brittle and there were many twigs on the ground. He walked quietly on the soft pine needles under the fallen snow until he saw a red flash in the sky and then another. He ran. He stopped when he saw the men. There were half a dozen of them, with drawn axes and scythes, and Gunther was crouched in their center, trying to shield his face with his arms. When he saw Isak he screamed and reached out his hand to stop him. One of the peasants chopped at him with his axe, and the others threw themselves on his body, cursing him for the fire that was coming out of the sky. They ran when they heard the hoof beats, but the bullets cut them down, one by one. A tall man in a grey uniform got off his horse. He walked over to where Gunther was lying and bent down.

"He's not from our regiment", he said. He turned to an orderly who had followed him. "Can you tell where he belongs?"

"It's hard to tell, sir". The man was trying not to look at Gunther's wounds. "I think it's the M Battalion".

"But that battalion is deployed on the western front", the officer said. He shrugged. "In any case, he is obviously a deserter".

"Shall I finish him off, sir?"

The officer climbed back on his horse. "Do as you like", he said, kicking his mount to start. "We have to move on".

The orderly touched his gun, but when he looked at Gunther again he too jumped on his horse and followed the officer into the woods. When they were gone, Isak ran to his friend. He thought the soldier was trying to say something and bent very close. There were gurgling noises coming out of his mouth with the blood, but he could not make out the words. Isak ripped off his shirt and tried to bandage his wounds, but there were too many. He covered him with his coat. Suddenly the soldier spoke a distinct word. "God". He said nothing after that.

Isak stood up. It was quiet in the forest now and the soft russet of the fires was beginning to fade into the grey smoky night. He buried the soldier in the place where he had been killed. The others he left as they had fallen, strewn around the grave. When he came

to Chernowitz, which had also been heavily shelled, the authorities were rounding up stray children. As soon as he entered the city, he was taken to an orphanage. He knew that he should not tell them he was a Jewish runaway. So he said his name was Isak Phrotzkanovich and that his parents had been killed in the shelling. The orphanage was like a prison, with bars on little windows, and monks in long black robes with huge chains of keys hanging from their waists. Most of them were old and took little interest in him or in the other boys. But one night a young monk with a shaven head and a brisk way of walking, bent over him.

"I see you reading that little book all the time". He reached out. "Show it to me".

It was an order, and Isak obeyed.

"Heine". The monk took one of Isak's hands. "You have the hands of a peasant".

He laughed then. "Those are your hands. They can be seen. But who can see into another's heart?"

The next day the young monk, whose name was Gregor, took the boy with him to the library. It was a large room, the largest room Isak had ever seen, and every inch was filled with books. Under the tutelage of Gregor, Isak began to read them. They were mostly books about God, commentaries and interpretations of the Bible, histories of the Church, the writings of St. Paul, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas of Aquinas. But there were also stories of the lives of the saints, and a whole section on mysticism, which Gregor, who was very interested in these matters, said were other paths to God. Gregor always talked with Isak about the books he gave him to read. Sometimes their conversations lasted into the night, so that the next day the boy was barely able to stay awake. As it was the custom of the monks to punish their charges by beatings, they cost him dearly. But Isak dug his nails into the cushions of his palms until he drew blood, and repeated to himself that each beating was, as the books and Gregor said, only another opportunity to come closer to his God.

He knew his God was the Jewish God, and as far as he could tell, Gregor's God was one and the same. But Gregor said that because his only son had been killed by the Jews, God was now only the God of the Christians. Isak did not see how this could have happened. He thought about it a great deal, but he knew it was not a subject he could ever discuss with the young monk who had become his only friend.

"Do you think, Isak", Gregor asked one day when the city was again severely shelled, "that God was here this morning when the bombs fell?"

"He must have been", Isak said without hesitation. "For God is everywhere". The shelling went on almost every day now, and the monastery also became an emergency hospital. Because of the shortage of trained people, the monks took over the duties of nurses and sometimes even of doctors. When a typhoid epidemic broke out in the city, Gregor worked day and night with the sick and the wounded.

After that he did not seem the same anymore. Isak saw how troubled he was, how every day he grew thinner and more haggard. He was saddened by the change in his friend but he did not know what to do. One day when Isak had been in the orphanage almost half a year, Gregor asked him what he wanted to do when he grew up. The question caught the boy by surprise, but he did not hesitate. "I want to learn".

Gregor laughed. "That is good", he said, "because I have arranged for you to take the state examinations in the fall. You will have to study very hard to prepare yourself".

Gregor had obtained special permission, and Isak was excused from all his duties. He studied from early morning until late at night. The books the monk now brought him were about another world, a world where instead of angels there was in the heavens a planet called earth that rotated around a star called sun, a world where animals and people were dissected into bodily components called spleens and livers and veins and muscles. It was a world of discoveries, where numbers, which Isak had until then used only to count potatoes and sheets and to add and subtract, came together in perfect geometric formulations. It was a world not of spirit, but of matter, a world of continents and oceans and statesmen and generals, a world where Isak learned that when the soldier had said history lessons he had meant the cataloging of past events into battles in many places and for many reasons that Isak still did not understand.

And where is God in all of this? he kept asking himself. But he did not ask the question of Gregor, partly because he was afraid, and partly because he suspected that his friend, who had not been well, might not know the answer. Late one night while Gregor was helping him with his Latin declensions, the young monk collapsed. The doctor said he had tuberculosis and a few days later he was taken away to a retreat in the country. Isak took his tests and was admitted to the gymnasium and given the scholarship Gregor had applied for on his behalf.

He saw the monk one more time, during the Easter vacation of his first year, when he went to visit him in the sanatorium. The war was still going on, but the land through which his train passed was peaceful and unaltered and in the fields the new green grass was growing. Gregor's skin was as thin as the old yellow parchments they used to read together in the library, and Isak knew that he would soon die.

"It must be God's will", the monk said in a flat thin voice. "You must never lose your faith in the Lord, Isak, even if His ways are inscrutable and His will sometimes wanders like a yearling in the spring".

He spoke on like that, and Isak tried to hold back his tears. But when he embraced him for the last time and felt how light his body had become, he ran out of the room. When he tried to come back, the nun would not let him in. In the end, he had to leave without ever seeing his friend again. Isak finished gymnasium and went on to the university. He had a larger scholarship now, so that he had enough left to return to his father's house every summer. There he was treated like an important person, an honored visitor from another place, in short, like a stranger. He rolled up his sleeves and worked with his brothers in the fields, but they thought the way he did things very peculiar and laughed at him for his awkwardness and his lack of knowledge of even the simplest of things.

Every summer that passed his father was more silent and more distant, until it became clear to Isak that to the old man his visits brought no joy. Perhaps he has never forgiven me for leaving, he thought. But whenever he overheard his father speaking about him to other people, it was with such pride that at first he could hardly believe that it was he that was being talked about. So if he is not angry, then what is it, he asked himself again and again at night, tossing and turning on the straw bed he now no longer found comfortable. Perhaps if I go back to the cheder, he thought, and again study the ancient texts, perhaps that will ple-

ase him. But when Isak told his younger brother he wanted to come with him to the cheder, Yankel, who was usually quiet and obedient, jumped up and raised his voice in a loud no.

"But why?" Isak insisted.

"I will not go", the boy shouted. "If you come to the cheder, I will not go".

"But you go every afternoon".

"Not if you come".

"But why?"

Yankel sat down and stared at the wall.

"Come on, Yankel. Why?" Isak was the one shouting now. "I want the truth".

Finally their father came in to deal with the quarrel.

"What is this?" the old man said, turning sternly to his youngest son. "What has gotten into you? I order you to go with your brother at once".

Yankel did not turn his eyes from the wall.

"You will disobey your father!" The old man lifted his hand to strike his son.

"I can't", the boy screamed. "I can't. They say he's not a Jew anymore, even the rabbi, that he's a goy". He burst into tears and ran outside.

Isak's father dropped his hand and avoided his son's eyes.

"Are you angry at me, Papa?"

The old man's voice was still harsh. "Angry? Should I be angry at you?"

Isak had never told his father what had happened at the orphanage, how he had lied about being a Jew, or about the monk, Gregor. He now saw that even without that, to his father he was no longer a good Jew, perhaps no longer a Jew at all.

"Should I be angry with you?" the old man asked again, and Isak saw that he was really asking himself the question. "Have you done anything that I should be angry about?"

"No, Papa" Isak said quickly, and his voice trembled, as it had when he was a child caught in a lie. "No, Papa".

"Then Yankel was wrong", the old man said in a hard voice.

"Yankel is right", Isak said quickly. "It is hard enough for him if they say that I am..." His father would not let him finish. "If you think of yourself as a good Jew, if you are righteous and if you observe the Jewish laws, that is all that matters before God".

Isak felt closer to his father than than he had ever before in his life, and for a few days after that he was happy. But after a while it seemed to him that his father avoided him even more now, and instead of better, everything had somehow become much worse. The following spring Isak wrote his father that he might not be able to come home for the summer. He could tell from the letter his family wrote back that they were less hurt than relieved. He continued his studies at the medical faculty in Bucharest, which for a Jew was almost unheard of, and when he graduated he was first in his class. He practiced medicine not only in the tradition of Hippocrates but also in that of Maimonides. He soon became one of the most sought-after medical men in Europe. Some of his colleagues suspected him of unorthodoxy and accused him of being a charlatan, but even they could not deny that his methods brought results, often in cases where more eminent doctors had failed. Isak still studied, not only all the new methods and theories about the human body and healing, but about everything.

He read voraciously, science, history, philosophy, poetry. Sometimes he went back to the old books he had discovered in the library of the monastery, of St. Catherine and St. Thomas of Aquinas. As he read he discovered a whole Jewish strain of mysticism, the Kabbala, the Hasidic fables and prayers, and later the philosophy and writings of Martin Buber.

Although he was often invited, he rarely attended social events. He had warm friendships, but no close ones, and through the years, a number of bittersweet love affairs, most of them with women somewhat older than he. He did not know why, but the tenderness of women caused him pain. Although in many ways he preferred their company to that of most men, and although he missed the pleasure they could give his body, he began more and more to avoid them.

He had never felt very close to his mother, who died when he was three, except in his dreams when he was a boy, where she always cried bitterly. He did not like to think of fear or pain, and although his mother still sometimes appeared in his dreams he rarely remembered them in the morning. He was in practice in Bucharest for two years when he was invited to join the faculty of the most famous medical school in Vienna. Since he never married or developed any other ties that would keep him in one place, he accepted right away. It was a time in Europe when people were still talking of humanism, but more and more the thoughts of the multitudes and their leaders were turning to politics and to power. In the thirties in Germany, anti-Semitism, which had for some time been dormant in the west, flared up into a violence resembling the pogroms of the Russians and the Poles.

A few months after the Germans entered Vienna, Isak received a letter relieving him of his post in the University and in the hospital where he was chief of staff, and he decided that the time had come for him to leave. He had learned to like Vienna, its old buildings, its parks, the charm of its people and its music, but his entire life had been so taken up with his work that when that was taken away from him there was no real reason to stay. I will go home, he thought, I will go away from this place, back to the country where it is still quiet and peaceful, back to the land. Since these matters were of no consequence to him, he had never given up his original citizenship, which after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire during the First World War, had become Romanian. As a citizen of that country, he did not even need a visa to enter it, and therefore he had little trouble getting out of Nazi Austria, even though he was a Jew.

They are right, he thought on the train crossing the border. He saw things differently now, from a new perspective. He looked at the people in the train stations, at the peasants working in the fields, at the elegant men and women sipping wine in the dining car. These are not my people, I do not belong with these people, I am not one of them. Isak had stayed in touch with his family and he always wrote to them for the Jewish High Holidays, exchanging with them wishes for a prosperous and happy New Year. His older brother had emigrated to America. But his younger brother Yankel and his father still lived on the same farm in the little village of Strojinitz. He was surprised how little it had changed. In twenty years the houses had become a little more shabby and the church, which once had been so grand and large, had shrunk to no more than a little white house with a small onion-domed tower. Yankel he would not have recognized, he had grown so large and tall. But like the

church, his father seemed to have shrunk. There were tears in his eyes when he embraced his son at the train station. "I thought I would not live to see you", he said, and kissed him on both cheeks, something Isak could not remember since he was a child.

They brought him home from the station to a laden table, and Isak saw that they were using their best dishes though it was not a holiday and that half the barnyard had been slaughtered in his honor. But the gaiety of the table was forced and there hung over them all, over his father and Yankel and his wife and their two children, a sadness. He thought at first that it was his presence that affected them so, but as the days went on he realized that it was a gloom, a greyness of mood that hung over all the Jews, and that while they rarely mentioned it by name, it was the old fear of death by Christian hands. When they heard that a famous doctor from Vienna had come to the Romanian provinces, the aristocracy of the region flocked to see him. Soon their friends and relatives came from other parts of the country and even from the capital. He listened carefully to their complaints as they each in their turn filed into the small cottage on the outskirts of the village where he had set up his dispensary and where he also lived. He treated them all the same, the Jews, the peasants, and the ladies and gentlemen. They were surprised at the simplicity of his equipment and at the absence of the usual surgical tools and knives.

"I have not operated in years", he explained when pressed. "I have come to believe the human body can heal itself, given half a chance. In any case", he added, "I am not a surgeon. For that one needs to know how to cut and sew and I was never very good at either".

Some thought he was crazy, or worse. But since he helped many, they came back, sometimes simply to say thanks, with words or with food or with another gift. His favourite present had been a cake baked by an old peasant woman he had treated. She had made it especially for him the one time when he had become sick himself during a flu epidemic. It was a large yellow cake on which she had managed to cram in the inscription, 'Not to Worry, Not to Be Unduly Concerned', which was what he always said to everybody who came to see him.

There were days when the line in front of his office spilled out into the street and it became almost a social gathering, so much so that when an enterprising Jew opened a coffee house across the street, it became an overnight success. Sometimes Isak thought of Vienna, of his students at the University, and he missed their eager questions and their awe of the human body. He remembered the concerts, the opera, the parks, the museums. At times he felt a certain regret for the loss of his friends, more than he had thought he would. But on the whole, he was happy in Strojinitz. He worked hard and long hours, but he had done that all his life. He enjoyed the walks he took early every morning and at dusk, his reading, the daily writing of his journal, and most of all, a new and unexpected pleasure, the company of his brother's small daughter and son. The boy was called Jehuda and his little sister's name was Ruth, and they always reached for his hands and called him Uncle Doctor and would have asked him questions from morning until night.

"Uncle Doctor, where do potato pancakes disappear after we eat them?"

"Why do sparrows fly?"

"Why are clouds white?"

“Is God angry when it thunders?”

They often came with him on his walks, and he spent every Shabbat with them and told them stories, sometimes read them a poem, answered all their questions, and every day he gave thanks to God for bringing these two children that he loved so very much into the world. Sometimes now he dreamed about his mother and when he woke up in the morning, he remembered her sad and lovely face. There were also strong memories of women he had loved when he was young, of cities he had seen, of large discoveries, and of little pleasures. He found himself thinking a great deal of the young monk Gregor, of his mother when he was small, and of God. His father liked to speak to him of God, of the God of Israel, of Abraham, and of Jacob. He was afraid, his father, afraid of the rumblings of war, afraid of the stories that were beginning to reach the village, afraid of the Germans and of what they were doing to the Jews.

“Why”, he said to Isak one day, “is God permitting this thing to happen? Why won’t He look after His people? Why is He letting us die?”

“He must be busy”, Isak muttered absently, and only then did he become aware of what he had said.

“But if God is too busy to help”, the old man asked, “who will?”

“That was a foolish thing I said, Papa. God is never too busy. If there is suffering in this world it is surely because it is God’s will, because it must be so. God would not permit it otherwise”.

The old man looked at him, as a child to its father.

“It is God’s will”, he repeated, and his voice was calm. “It was God’s will that you go away, that you become a famous doctor, and that you come home again. It was God’s will that you make people feel good, and so it must be God’s will that our people suffer and die at the hands of our enemies”. They walked silently for a while.

“Have you heard, Isak, that the Germans have entered Chernowitz?” Isak nodded.

“A woman who escaped from Poland said that they are rounding up all the Jews of Europe and burning them in ovens”, the-old man said and his voice began to shake. “Do you think that is God’s will?”

Isak reached out to steady his father. When he touched his arm, he felt the pounding of his heart and saw that the old man was gasping for air. He helped him lie down on the grass and opened his coat and shirt.

“I am going to die”, the old man said.

“No, Papa, you’re not going to die, you’re going to be fine”, Isak began to massage his heart.

He clutched his son’s hand. “Help me”. Isak continued to massage his father’s chest, but he could feel the heart becoming weaker and weaker, until the beat was like a whisper coming from far away.

“I am dying”, the old man gasped and his face became convulsed with terror.

“You will be fine, Papa”, Isak heard himself say. “Everything will be fine”. But the old man would not be comforted and his body shuddered and heaved for breath. Isak put his mouth on his father’s and tried to give his breath to him. At last he let himself believe that

his father was dead. He let his lips touch his one last time and stood up. He pulled his father's eyelids over his frightened dead eyes and looked at his face. It did not look peaceful in death. Isak looked away and for the first time in many years he remembered the young soldier who had died not far away so long ago. He stood for a long time, thinking of his dead father, and of Gregor and the soldier, and of his brother and his wife and of Jehuda and Ruth who were still alive, and he raised his eyes to God. The sky was grey red and behind the clouds the sun was beginning to go down. He felt an overwhelming heaviness, a weight of insupportable sadness, a hollowness of hopelessness and loss.

Suddenly he remembered the words the mutilated soldier had spoken the night when he was killed. "If there is a God, He must be dying slowly of a broken heart". He was surprised to hear that someone was laughing. "Don't worry. God", he heard himself say, and he realized that it had been his own laugh that he had heard before. "Don't worry God, everything is going to be all right".

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Chris Mann

Scapegoat

*Nicodemus of Alexandria, a wool merchant in ancient Athens,
to city officials at his door before the annual pharmakos (purification) ritual.*

I can take it when you badmouth me for doing something wrong,
Can take it when you say you think some people don't belong,
But ousting me won't bring more jobs or cure low self-esteem,
The burning and the looting starts within that twisted dream.

I've watched so many blame artists switch targets down the years,
It starts way back when we're still young, the teasing and the jeers.
If you think othering gets things right, well – have another go,
I've watched it make extortion, rape and bribery grow and grow.

It's not that I walk past the pain the poorest locals feel,
It's just that dumping stuff on me won't help the city heal.
Who's ever cleansed a market place of sleaze and avarice?
You're mad to think I'll bear your sins into the wilderness.

This scapegoating's a coverup, a scam you know can't last,
Next week your envy's bile will once again spew up the past.
Why don't you try a little love, and treat me like a friend?
A rabid dog knows more of peace than spite that doesn't end.

There're Syrians in the bankers' stalls, new money being made.
Why scowl at foreigners in bars? You've always lived off trade.
It's time you let Athena shush the doom-gods in your head,
Don't sulk at work, don't booze and brood then vent on me instead.

I see it now – a shrinking Greece of migrant loves and hates,
The longing for the road that leads towards Arcadia's gates.
The world's a place of broken dreams, just as it was before,
Well, I don't think I want to be a scapegoat anymore.

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Heart of the Labyrinth (2004); *Lifelines* (with Julia Skeen & Adrian Craig) (2006); *Home from Home: new and selected poems* (2010); *Seeing the Cosmos in a Grain of Sand* (2013); *Rudiments of Grace* (2014); *Epiphanies* (2017). Chris also performs song-poems with a guitar using the stage name Fafa Hopkins.

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Marco Fazzini

Speaking Out: Lawrence Ferlinghetti@100

Uno dei testi più belli e commoventi di Lawrence Ferlinghetti, il recente *Time of Useful Consciousness* (2012), usa un “phrasal verb” inglese del tutto incendiario: SPEAK OUT = “alzare o levare la voce, parlare contro”. Si tratta d’un verbo spesso usato da Ferlinghetti all’imperativo, perché si dia uno scossone alla reticenza della piccola borghesia o dei perbenisti bigotti, o al qualunquismo causato dal banale nazionalismo quando questo diventa populismo, o alle piccinerie che rendono uomini e donne (scrittori, giornalisti, politici, elettori, ecc.) esseri asserviti alle logiche dei potentati. Qui Ferlinghetti fa riferimento al “Jack di Cuori”, ricordando un testo famoso di Bob Dylan, ma parla in definitiva di se stesso:

Colui che reca la grande tradizione
e la rompe
Lo Straniero Misterioso che va & viene
Il Jack di cuori che leva la sua voce
nel tempo dello struzzo
colui che vede lo struzzo
colui che vede cosa vede lo struzzo nella sabbia
colui che scava il mistero
e se ne sta sorridente nell’angolo
come un Jack di Cuori
per quelli che non hanno nessuno che li guidi (Ferlinghetti 2012: 3-4).

Ferlinghetti usa quel verbo anche nel titolo d’una sua poesia più che provocatoria, “Speak Out” appunto, per prima pubblicata come cartolina in tiratura limitata (e firmata) nel 2003, uno sfogo contro il silenzio di tanti intellettuali inefficienti dopo la strage delle Torri Gemelle:

Ecco adesso per voi è arrivata l’ora di dire
Per tutti voi amanti della libertà
Per tutti voi amanti della ricerca della felicità
Per tutti voi amanti addormentati
Nella profondità del vostro sogno privato
Adesso per voi è l’ora di dire
Oh silente maggioranza
Prima che vengano a prendervi! (Ferlinghetti 2003).

Solo due anni prima, nel 2001, leggendo un suo testo (“To the Oracle at Delphi”) scritto per la Giornata Mondiale della Poesia a Delfi, in Grecia, poi incluso nel volume *San Francisco*

Poems (2001) e, in Italia, in *Scoppi urla risate* (2014/2019a), riflettendo sull'era oscura d'una Europa in ginocchio, e cosciente di provenire egli stesso dal Nuovo Impero mondiale – un impero molto più vasto d'ogni altro del passato, con le sue autostrade elettroniche, le sue monoculture, il suo monopolio linguistico operato grazie all'inglese della mondializzazione e del commercio – si indirizzava all'oracolo di Delfi con le seguenti parole:

O Sibilla da lungo tempo silente,
 Tu dai sogni alati,
 Pronunciati dal tuo tempio di luce
 mentre le costellazioni accigliate
 dal nome greco
 continuano a guardarci fisso dall'alto
 mentre un faro fa scorrere il suo megafono
 sul mare
 Pronunciati e fai risplendere su di noi
 La luce marina di Grecia
 La luce adamantina di Grecia (Ferlinghetti 2014/2019a: 63-65).

Nel corso del nuovo millennio la sua disponibilità alla denuncia e alla provocazione non ha reticenze, anche contro la stessa America che l'ha accolto quale figlio d'emigrati: "Noi siamo i conquistadores/Siamo i nuovi imperatori romani/Stiamo conquistando il mondo/È l'impero invisibile/del sorridente capitalismo rapace [...]" ("Blind Poet"); "Una cultura casinò fuori controllo/Un buco nella sua anima di ozono/Una lotteria Chi Vince Pigliatutto/Un tiro a segno per i padroni della guerra" ("A Casino Culture"); "In un sogno dentro un sogno ho sognato un sogno/in cui tutta la terra si seccava/riducendosi a un tizzone bruciato/per il celebre Effetto Serra/sotto una volta di anidride carbonica/soffiata fuori da un miliardo/di infernali motori a scoppio [...]" ("Cries of Animals Dying", in Ferlinghetti 2014). Ferlinghetti è lapidario anche nel curioso libro *Cos'è la poesia* (2000/2002), una summa di riflessioni epigrammatiche sulla scrittura, sul mestiere del poeta, sulla coscienza che dovremmo osservare nella vita sociale e artistica. Ecco alcuni frammenti:

Poesia è una voce di dissenso
 contro lo spreco di parole
 e la pletera folle della stampa

Poesia è un'incursione sovversiva
 sull'obliata lingua
 dell'inconscio collettivo

Poesia è lotta continua
 contro silenzio, esilio e inganno

Il poeta è un barbaro sovversivo
 alle soglie della città
 che sfida costantemente
 il nostro status quo (Ferlinghetti 2000/2002: 31, 49, 64, 65).

Quel verbo gli è caro: Ferlinghetti lo usa lungo tutto il percorso della sua lunghissima carriera, e ne incarna tutte le gradazioni emanate dall'alone di sinonimi e traduzioni che "speak out" può contenere. Si tratta di alzare la voce non solo su eventi e situazioni apparentemente recenti ma su ogni vigliacco rifiuto di dire le cose come stanno, e sulla reticenza passiva nei confronti delle ingiustizie e degli stereotipi populistici. Andando a ritroso, già Larry Smith, commentando sul primo libro di Ferlinghetti, *Pictures of the Gone World* (1955), osserva che l'autore negli anni Cinquanta scriveva "come l'uomo contemporaneo della strada che alza la voce ('speak out') per profferire verità sull'esperienza comune, spesso al ritmo riflessivo del musicista jazz. Come ogni poeta d'oggi, cerca di far sì che la poesia sia un'arte orale e impegnata" (Smith 1983: 200). Un decennio più tardi, in "Bickford's Buddha", la voce poetica del testo descrive le ore che precedono una lettura poetica a Boston, osservando tutti i luoghi comuni dell'America dei caffè e delle librerie circostanti l'Università di Harvard, a Cambridge, e passa in rassegna alcuni noti perbenismi che sembrano resistere quali bastioni ostinati contro ogni cambiamento dello status quo:

Sono questi i nostri Rivoluzionari?
 Parlerò chiaro con loro almeno
 Beh/Poi/come dicono i politici
 devo fare ulteriori studi
 preliminari prima
 prima di impegnarmi
 Devo fare ulteriori osservazioni prima
 Devo nutrire il mio dolore
 Devo nutrire la mia musa
 prima che i cannoni comincino a rombare (Ferlinghetti 1969/2000: 21).

Nella prima poesia di *Populist Manifestos*, la cui prima versione era stata mandata in onda da KPFA/FM a Berkeley, e quindi recitata di fronte alla platea della Rutgers University-Camden, il 23 aprile 1975, Ferlinghetti se la prende ancora con la classe intellettuale, ed esorta i poeti a scendere dalle loro Torri d'Avorio e a recitare per la gente: "Smettete di mormorare e levate la vostra voce/con una nuova poesia spalancata..." ("Stop mumbling and speak out..."), quindi invocando i suoi modelli-poeti-antenati che seppero praticare lo "speak out": "Dove sono i figli selvaggi di Walt Whitman/dove sono le grandi voci che urlano/con un senso di dolce & sublime..." ("Where are Whitman's wild children/where the great voices speaking out/with a sense of sweetness and sublimity..."); infine, scrive nello stesso testo: "La poesia non è una società segreta,/e nemmeno un tempio... È tempo di guardare avanti/nella vera posizione del loto/con gli occhi bene aperti./Tempo ora di aprire le vostre bocche/con un nuovo discorso aperto..." ("Populist Manifesto", in Ferlinghetti 1976).

Fin dall'inizio della sua carriera, Ferlinghetti non si tira indietro quando si devono denunciare corrotti e millantatori, reticenti e guerrafondai, leccini e arrampicatori sociali, e lo fa senza ricorrere alle urla degli invasati, o alla supponenza dei presuntuosi, ma neanche ricercando il plauso di politici, intellettuali e finanziari. Lo fa con la tenacia del gran lavora-

tore, con il gusto garbato e lungimirante dell'editore, con la semplicità linguistica che solo i grandi poeti raggiungono nella maturità, e con la visionaria sperimentazione dell'artista e del designer, ruoli che non escludono come soluzione dell'ingiustizia anche l'uso della forza poetica e della provocazione. Lo sguardo della sua poesia, come quello della sua arte pittorica, è capace di leggere attentamente la realtà che lo circonda, interessandosi di più a comunicare le problematiche della società piuttosto che le inquietudini personali. Infatti, proprio l'essere umano e le sue libertà individuali costituiscono il cuore della sua scrittura: l'uomo deve essere scervo dai vincoli imposti dall'etica, dalla religione e dall'educazione per aspirare alla libertà, abbandonando le leggi tradizionali e lasciando che le immagini (poetiche e pittoriche) se ne vadano sospese in uno spazio surreale, spesse volte visionario. Achille Bonito Oliva così sintetizza le sue osservazioni in merito, riferendosi non solo all'arte pittorica di Ferlinghetti: "L'invenzione di Lawrence Ferlinghetti scatta attraverso la continuità e l'accostamento imprevedibile di differenze linguistiche e di assonanze contrastanti, che non suscitano dissonanze o lacerazioni, non determinano campi di perturbazione visiva, ma fondano la possibilità di un'emergenza inattesa, attraversata e movimentata da una sensibilità leggera. L'opera di Lawrence Ferlinghetti è un microevento, che parte sempre più dall'interno dell'immagine, centro di irradiazione della sensibilità" (Ferlinghetti 1996: 51).

Nato cent'anni fa, il 24 marzo del 1919, a Yonkers (New York), Lawrence Ferlinghetti, nel 1945 frequenta l'Università della Carolina del Nord, a Chapel Hill, dove si laurea in giornalismo, e presta quindi servizio nella Marina Militare degli Stati Uniti nella seconda guerra mondiale. Più tardi, nel corso del conflitto, viene assegnato all'attacco trasporto USS *Selinur* nel Pacifico, e assiste in prima persona alle orribili rovine di Nagasaki azzerata dalla bruciante crudeltà della bomba atomica. Questa esperienza è all'origine della sua opposizione permanente alla guerra. Nel 1947 consegue un Master in Letteratura inglese presso la Columbia University e un dottorato all'Université de Paris Sorbonne. Quando nel 1950 dipinge la sua prima opera, non sa ancora se farà il pittore, il critico, l'insegnante, o lo scrittore. Eppure, non si può qui evitare di ripetere l'ovvia banalità che nell'appena sbocciato pittore si riusciva già a scorgere un famoso poeta, artefice del suo primo quadro ad olio, buttato giù di getto: "Deux". Sarebbe rischioso, d'altro canto, considerare l'arte e la poesia – i due principali linguaggi espressivi di Lawrence Ferlinghetti – operando arbitrarie separazioni, e sembra che il nostro autore sia ben conscio che forse la combinazione di entrambe avrebbe potuto ovviare i rispettivi limiti, come già Leonardo da Vinci ironizzava: "Se tu dimanderai la pittura muta poesia, ancora il pittore potrà dire del poeta orba pittura" (Da Vinci 2006: 185). In Ferlinghetti la poesia è sempre la chiave di lettura dei suoi dipinti, quando le sue immagini sono la metamorfosi della parola scritta. Se la sua arte è motore d'impegno sociale, di consapevolezza e di rottura contro la staticità delle istituzioni e l'esclusività della cultura, lo è anche la poesia, attraverso convergenze spesso parallele.

Ferlinghetti non rinuncia mai nei suoi dipinti al suo pacifismo radicale e alla critica della politica, come non si sottrae più a denunciare in poesia, soprattutto dopo aver vissuto in prima persona la spettrale visione d'una Nagasaki in ginocchio. Sa di certo che è innamorato della sua donna, Selden Kirby-Smith, che sposa nella contea di Duval, in California, nel 1951. Coglie poi l'occasione, tra il 1951 e il 1953, di insegnare francese e lavorare come

critico letterario e pittore. Eppure, New York al tempo non rappresenta e non inscena alcuna avanguardia, tranne quella jazz, così decide di stabilirsi a San Francisco, dove ha l'idea di fondare la prima libreria e casa editrice americana di soli libri tascabili, la City Lights. Così scrive su quella scelta:

Dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale
era come se tutto il continente si piegasse verso ovest
e la popolazione si mosse tutta assieme
e servì quasi un decennio
perché tutti gli elementi di un'America cambiata
si combinassero,
si amalgamassero
in una cultura postbellica radicale
E successe a San Francisco [...] (Ferlinghetti 2012: 64).

Aprì City Lights nel giugno del 1953, in collaborazione con Peter Martin, figlio d'un anarchico italiano, Carlo Tresca, assassinato nel 1943. Al piano terra c'è la libreria, mentre al piano superiore la redazione della rivista di cinema e cultura popolare di Martin, "City Lights", nome scelto in omaggio al film di Chaplin, *Luci della città*. È la decisione che gli cambierà la vita: non decide di vendere solo libri ma anche di pubblicare i primi lavori letterari d'una nuova generazione d'intellettuali e scrittori che vede sbocciare nelle strade della sua città: Kenneth Rexroth, Kenneth Patchen e Allen Ginsberg, lanciando una collana di poesia, la *Pocket Poets Series*, che di lì a breve diverrà storica. Nel 1955 riprende il cognome completo di Ferlinghetti, dopo che negli anni Trenta suo padre, di origini bresciane, lo aveva abbreviato in Ferling, morendo sei mesi prima della nascita di Lawrence.

Quando Ferlinghetti pubblica la sua prima raccolta di poesia, *Pictures of the Gone World*, nella stessa serie poetica da lui ideata, il suo destino è già segnato. Non sappiamo la data esatta nella quale lo stesso Ferlinghetti incontra l'amico Allen Ginsberg – forse nel 1954 o all'inizio del 1955 – nonostante entrambi tenessero al tempo diari e voluminosi taccuini; eppure, sembra che Lawrence sia già impressionato da ciò che Allen gli mostra, e lo stesso Allen, il 30 agosto, scrivendo a Jack Kerouac, accenna al fatto che la libreria City Lights sta pubblicando dei libretti di sole 50 pagine di poeti locali, e forse farà uscire *Howl* l'anno successivo. La data è strategica, perché al tempo Ginsberg ha completato solo la prima sezione dell'intera opera, e questo avviene almeno un mese prima della famosa lettura alla Six Gallery. Il resto è poi storia, veloce e duratura: la performance di Allen Ginsberg alla Six Gallery, con la quale dà voce alla sua opera ormai completa, impressionando amici e curiosi; le acide recensioni contro quel libro appena uscito, testimonianza che l'America conservatrice aveva già additato *Howl*, rantolando nella bile del suo stesso perbenismo; la denuncia e il bando del libro, che aprirà uno scenario comunicativo e di marketing inaspettato; il processo e la vittoria che porta notorietà non solo al poeta ma anche al suo editore, entrambi poi protagonisti della vampata che accese la miccia della Beat Generation.

Se Allen Ginsberg è da subito il leader e la star della nuova avanguardia americana, il 1958 decreta il successo poetico anche di Ferlinghetti. *A Coney Island of the Mind* è consi-

derata la sua opera più celebre nonché, a detta di alcuni critici, una delle raccolte poetiche più significative del Novecento, tradotta in seguito in tutto il mondo e venduta in oltre un milione di copie. Eppure, la critica americana e britannica sembra non accorgersi, se non tardivamente, di Lawrence Ferlinghetti: nella voluminosa *A History of Modern Poetry* (a firma di David Perkins, per Harvard University Press, 1987) a Ferlinghetti vengono dedicate solo nove righe, e sotto un capitolo intitolato: "Minor Poets of San Francisco" (Poeti minori di San Francisco). Eppure, Perkins riesce a scrivere una precisa osservazione: "molte delle sue poesie attaccano la civiltà americana, o con denunce dirette o, con ancor più efficacia, focalizzandosi su casi storici, come accade nel testo divertente e decisamente accurato dal titolo 'Lost Parents' (genitori perduti)" (Perkins 1987: 538). Ancora peggiore è la sua sorte in Inghilterra perché, quando nel 1979 esce lo storico volumetto *50 American Poets* (a cura di Peter Jones), Ferlinghetti non viene incluso, ed è menzionato una sola volta in qualità d'uno dei componenti del gruppo di Ginsberg. Tra i critici lungimiranti si devono almeno menzionare coloro che s'interessarono per primi a Ferlinghetti: M. L. Rosenthal (nel 1958), il noto poeta Kenneth Rexroth (nel 1961), Alan Dugan (nel 1962), il francese Alain Jouffroy (nel 1964) e L. A. Ianni che per primo scriveva sulla "quarta persona singolare" e la relatività del soggettivismo nella poesia di Ferlinghetti. In genere, e almeno fino agli anni Novanta, la sua poesia è più famosa in Europa, e in maniera più specifica in Francia (dove la sua alleanza con George Whitman, il fondatore della Shakespeare & Co. a Parigi, è ormai mito storicizzato) e in Italia, che non negli Stati Uniti, come accade per un altro eroe dello "speaking out" californiano, il suo amico e gregario Jack Hirschman. Nonostante le larghe vendite e la grande notorietà, e nonostante sia da oltre sessant'anni un promotore di poesia, eventi culturali, vendite librerie e aperture internazionali, la sua figura è spesso esclusa dai giochi della roccaforte colta della scrittura americana, in genere asserragliata a New York e a Boston, e nelle loro riviste accademiche e settoriali.

In Italia, nel corso dello stesso anno, il 1968, s'interessano a Ferlinghetti due personalità di spicco dell'anglistica e della traduzione italiane: Romano Giachetti (*Coney Island della mente*, Guanda, 1968) e Alfredo Rizzardi (*Tremila formiche rosse*, Guanda, 1968). Sono loro a dare inizio a una serie di traduzioni che negli anni Settanta presentano al pubblico italiano sia il romanzo *Her* (*Lei*, traduzione di Floriana Bossi, Einaudi, 1970) sia una scelta di poesie, corredate da una bella introduzione, a cura del poeta Roberto Sanesi (*Poesie*, Guanda, 1976), e le sue poesie politiche (a cura di Nat Scamacca, Celebes, 1977), ben prima che Fernanda Pivano arrivasse a introdurre volumi importanti dell'americano (nel 1981 e nel 1995), e quattro anni dopo l'antologia *Poesia degli ultimi americani* (Feltrinelli, 1964), che attingeva alla serie d'incontri e amicizie che la stessa Pivano coltivava negli Stati Uniti sin dalla fine degli anni Cinquanta. Oggi, i libri di Ferlinghetti in Italia sono svariati, ma forse l'introduzione più estesa e competente l'ha scritta Massimo Bacigalupo (in *Poesie. Questi sono i miei fiumi. Antologia personale 1955-1993*, Newton Compton, 1996), autore d'uno scritto in cui, con chiarezza, si fa il punto sullo stile particolare del nostro poeta che, tra citazionismo, collage, e 'spoonerism' ("gioco basato sulla sostituzione di poche lettere in una o due parole"), riesuma a un tempo le invettive poundiane all'usura, e gli attacchi di Ginsberg contro il grande Moloch, concludendo infine:

Ferlinghetti è discepolo di Eliot e Pound, che amavano citare. Con la differenza forse che Ferlinghetti, essendo un poeta più pubblico, cita dal repertorio a tutti accessibile, laddove Pound ed Eliot amavano scoprire citazioni peregrine e imporle ai loro lettori intimiditi. Occorre ricordare che Ferlinghetti ha fatto studi regolari in università americane e francesi, e ha dunque frequentato per così dire professionalmente gli annali della letteratura antica e moderna. E dopo li ha frequentati come si è visto in un altro rapporto di tipo professionale: libraio ed editore. Infine, si può rilevare che citare esplicitamente è un modo insieme di dichiarare un debito e di non farsene problema; altra cosa è imitare o essere plagiati (come Ferlinghetti ammette di essere stato plagiato da Eliot in gioventù) (Ferlinghetti 1996b: 12).

Ferlinghetti è ironico, sardonico, contestatore, elegantemente sfrontato e coraggioso, ladro palesemente dichiarato di citazioni da tanta poesia del passato distante e meno distante, abile rifacitore quando rielabora ad arte Cecco Angiolieri e Dino Campana, Walt Whitman e T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound e Pier Paolo Pasolini, Dylan Thomas e William Burroughs, Woody Guthrie e W. B. Yeats. La sua è una tecnica a innesto, tanto meno seria di quanto l'alto modernismo di Eliot e Pound aveva proposto negli anni Venti dello scorso secolo, comunque riepilogativa, ante litteram, della smargiassa auto-ironia del postmoderno, che è riuscito ad inglobare tutto ma che tutto ha anche pasteggiato, svuotandolo di significato. Si legga il modo in cui riscrive, in "Pity the Nation" (in Ferlinghetti 2014/2019a), un noto testo di Gibran e come, ormai oltre la soglia dei cento anni d'età, continui a essere ancora uno dei grandi paladini a sostegno delle libertà e dei diritti negati:

Pietà per la nazione le cui genti sono pecore
e i cui pastori le conducono in fallo
Pietà per la nazione i cui governanti sono bugiardi
I cui saggi vengono costretti al silenzio
e i cui bigotti invadono le onde radio
Pietà per la nazione che non alza la voce
ma punta a dominare il mondo
con la forza e la tortura [...] (Ferlinghetti 2014/2019a: 49).

Ferlinghetti riesce a non essere mai superficiale, o linguisticamente fine a se stesso, come è risultato più d'uno dei poeti Black Mountain, o del gruppo dei "L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E Poets": la sua poesia arriva diritto alla sensibilità del lettore, sia per il dettato argomentativo e musicale dei suoi versi sia per l'attualità delle sue tematiche. Non s'accontenta mai di risultare solamente divulgativa o jazzisticamente ritmica, e cade nella categoria della scrittura contemporanea del "flusso di coscienza" – tecnica significativamente ripresa nella sua ultima opera in prosa, *Little Boy* – quando questo si fa conciso e icastico, facendo coincidere, quasi ad ogni salto di verso, una nuova congerie d'immagini e citazioni, tanto che la sua sovrapposizione di accumulazioni consente più volte di associarlo almeno a due noti esempi contemporanei: Bob Dylan e John Ashbery. In una intervista con Rosanna Guerrini, pubblicata sul "Tempo" (18 gennaio 1969), rispondendo alla domanda su cosa pensa della poesia, Ferlinghetti afferma: "Penso che non si debba più usare il termine 'poesia' ma 'mes-

saggio orale destinato al pubblico'. Penso che le poesie bisogna gridarle, magari accompagnarle con complessi jazz e di musica indiana, insomma fare tutto il possibile perché questi messaggi orali riescano a cambiare un po' la coscienza e il cuore dell'uomo". I suoi testi si fanno sempre denuncia, sia quando largamente argomentativi sia quando telegraficamente epigrammatici, grido, scandalo additato, monito necessario per un'umanità ormai intrisa di qualunquismo, assoggettata ai grandi poteri del capitale e del consumismo, e ormai sull'orlo d'annegare nel pantano spietato nel quale il poeta (spesso un pescatore, o un cantastorie, o un cronista) lancia un'ultima lenza di speranza, interrogandosi sugli usi della poesia in "Uses of Poetry":

E io sono il cronista di un giornale
di un altro pianeta
arrivato a riportare una storia terra terra
sul Cosa Quando Dove Come e Perché
di questa sorprendente vita quaggiù
e degli strani clown che la controllano
con le mani sui davanzali
di tremende officine indemoniate
che gettano le loro ombre oscure
sulla grande ombra della terra
alla fine di un tempo sconosciuto
nel supremo hashish dei nostri sogni (Ferlinghetti 1993/1996b: 35).

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scozzese, *Alba Literaria*, è uscita per Amos Edizioni nel 2005 ed è il primo manuale di questo genere a essere pubblicato fuori dalla Scozia. Nel 2012 ha pubblicato un lavoro sulla canzone e la poesia per la libertà: *Canto un mondo libero*. I suoi libri più recenti sono due raccolte d'interviste con poeti del secondo Novecento: *Conversations with Scottish Poets* (2015) e *The Saying of It* (2017). Le sue maggiori sillogi di poesia sono: *Nel vortice* (1999); *XX poesie* (2007); *Driftings and Wrecks* (2010); *24 Selected Poems* (2014); *Riding the Storm: Ten New Poems* (2016), *21 poesie/poemas/poems* (libro trilingue, 2017). Insegna Inglese e letterature postcoloniali presso l'Università di Ca' Foscari (Venezia), ed è l'ideatore e il direttore artistico del festival di poesia "Poetry Vicenza".

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Mehmet Yashin

Les paroles d'un autre

La vision est revenue de nuit dans ma chambre
J'allais dire en rêve, c'était en réalité:
"Ne te crois pas seul" elle a dit "il y a quelqu'un ici.
Allons lève-toi, et ouvre la porte, que j'entre".

En allumant les feux s'enflammant avec ardeur
elle a indiqué: "Entres-y voyons!
Et ne dis rien non plus, écoute seulement
de sorte que la rose devienne langue de feu".

Rien d'autre que l'amour ne me faisait peur.
"Il n'y a rien d'autre" elle a dit "maintenant laisse-toi faire,
moi je parle, toi, écris:
Un autre m'a fait dire aussi cette parole".

*inspiré de Rumi
Cambridge-Nicosia, 2009
traduit du turc par Asli Aktug et Alain Mascarou

Mehmet Yashin is one of the unique poets of contemporary Turkish poetry. His poems, novels and essays are considered parts of the literature of Cyprus and Greece alongside Turkey. He has published 10 poetry collections, 3 novels, 3 essay collections, 3 anthologies and literary studies of multilingual Cypriot poetry in Istanbul. His books have played an important role in re-defining the literary traditions of Cyprus and Turkey. His work has been translated into more than 20 languages and his books have been published in various European countries.

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Andrew Greig

Poems

Clouds

Clouds slide back
their raggedy hatches

How human, we think
easing away from the dock

They look peaceful
yet their hearts are thunderous

Sometimes I wonder
how long they can stay up

what can we do with
such cargo as ours.

In a Dry Gorge

We walk each day
in the shadow of the valley

so occupied in conversation
our gesturing hands

entirely fail to grasp
the implication of our situation

The light that pours down behind these crags
this waterless gorge carved out by water

We block the light like sundial spikes
make time and tell

how dark the shadow that travels with us
the radiance it takes to cast it.

The Landing

When the children phone in
to tick us from their To-Do list,
we say Uh-huh Mmm Love you too
and when we put the phone down
see we've stopped winding
the clocks on Sunday mornings.

Do they know we just don't care?
Let light and dust fall as they will.
Our days have simplified
to getting up the stair.

Our world is one house
as when we were children.
All that matters is at hand.
We meet on the landing,
pause for breath and then
regard each other face to face again.

Registrar

She looked at the world
as though it had just died.
But not for good.

When we gave up on a heart
she would say
Pass the paddles Charge Stand back.
A world twitched and came back to us.

Most of course would die again
within hours or days.
Yet a few would go on to live
long and profitable lives
striding corridors of light.

In theatre she made everyone else
look like they were trying.

When she dropped her gloves in the bin
tried to join in the hi-jinks
her white coat stayed buttoned.
Her foot jiggled on the floor.
She sat on the edge of her chair
yearning for emergency.

In an unguarded moment she once told me
Nothing else comes close
and as always spoke truer than she knew.

Andrew Greig studied at the University of Edinburgh and is a former Glasgow University Writing Fellow and Scottish Arts Council Scottish/Canadian Exchange Fellow. He won an Eric Gregory Award in 1972, and his first book of poetry, *White Boats* (with Catherine Lucy Czwerkawska), was published in 1973. It was followed by two collections that reflect his interest in mountaineering: *Men on Ice* (1977) and *The Order of the Day* (1990). A selection of his poetry from 1970-2006, *This Life, This Life*, was published in 2006. In 1985 he published an account of the successful ascent of the Mustagh Tower, *Summit Fever: The Story of an Armchair Climber* on the 1984 Mustagh Tower Expedition, which was shortlisted for the Boardman Tasker Memorial Prize. A second mountaineering book, *Kingdoms of Experience: Everest, the Unclimbed Ridge*, was published in 1986. He published several novels: *Electric Brae: A Modern Romance* (1992), *The Return of John McNab* (1996), *That Summer* (2000), *In Another Light* (2004), *Romanno Bridge* (2008) and *Fair Helen* (2013); two books of memoir, *Preferred Lies* (2006), *At the Loch of the Green Corrie* (2011) and a book arising from a fishing quest for Norman MacCaig. Greig lives in Orkney and Edinburgh with his wife, novelist Lesley Glaister. His latest books are the poetry collections *As Though We Were Flying* (2011) and *Getting Higher: The Complete Mountain Poems* (2011).

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Giovanni Nimis

Il coraggio di amare tra realtà e fiction

Nel 1932, lo scrittore inglese Aldous Huxley, nel suo romanzo *Brave New World* (in italiano *Il mondo nuovo*), immagina una società futura governata a livello globale da una dittatura fondata sul principio del piacere e dell'utilitarismo di tipo benthamiano, nella quale, attraverso un accurato sistema di riproduzione umana in provetta e un sofisticato metodo di condizionamento pavloviano, i futuri cittadini vengono 'educati', tra le varie cose, ad odiare la natura e ad amare lo sport a fini consumistici. Si tratta di un atteggiamento che previene qualsiasi forma di riflessione profonda sulla propria relazione con il mondo e scoraggia sentimenti di libertà, amore e cura nei confronti della natura e del prossimo. In questa visione estrema, a ben guardare la società in cui viviamo, si cela, in realtà, un nocciolo di verità. La relazione con la natura è oggi spesso 'filtrata' dal concetto di sport, funzionale ad un mercato che offre materiali e tecnologie per poter entrare 'adeguatamente' in un ambiente naturale; per poter, ad esempio, andare in montagna, dove l'andare implica di per sé una distanza: vado in un luogo, di immensa bellezza naturale, che è distante da me. La distanza è sia fisica che psicologica. Io sono qui, la natura è là.

Che cosa significhi il qui e il là in questo contesto è una domanda che può sembrare banale e senza senso, ma è proprio nel tentativo di chiarire il significato di queste due dimensioni che si cela la possibilità di comprendere più a fondo la nostra relazione non solo con la natura, ma anche con l'altro da me; questo esercizio, infatti, ci forza ad esplorare la dimensione dell'essere, nella sua valenza ontologica e nella sua relazione con l'altro: quindi, in ultima analisi, sia con il qui che con il là.

È interessante notare che nel romanzo di Huxley *L'isola* l'ascesa alpinistica, e in particolare l'arrampicata su roccia, gioca un ruolo centrale. L'intento e i mezzi pedagogici legati all'arrampicata come strumento di educazione all'attenzione, alla percezione e alla trascendenza sono descritti nel capitolo dieci del libro, ma al lettore attento non può sfuggire che il romanzo inizia proprio con la scalata di una rupe e con la rovinosa caduta del protagonista Will Farnaby il quale, naufrago sull'isola di Pala, a seguito della sua caduta dalla parete, viene accudito e accolto da alcuni abitanti del luogo. La grazia, l'equilibrio e la capacità di porre attenzione e cura all'altro, che caratterizzano i suoi soccorritori, catturano l'attenzione del protagonista. L'incidente fornisce ad Huxley il pretesto attorno al quale costruire la narrazione e fare percepire e conoscere al lettore la società utopica dell'isola di Pala attraverso l'esperienza del protagonista.

Huxley, profondo conoscitore sia della società occidentale e dei suoi mali, che delle culture tradizionali dell'oriente, immagina una possibile società fondata sull'amore e sulla comprensione reciproca in cui la saggezza viene coltivata quanto l'intelligenza e in cui la prima guida la seconda, assieme alla compassione, nella costruzione di un tessuto sociale fondato su un modello di *partnership*, sulla percezione e su una sana ed equilibrata relazione

con se stessi e con l'altro. Al centro del percorso di crescita dell'individuo viene posta la conoscenza di sé, conseguita attraverso le facoltà della mente, non disgiunte dalla percezione sensoriale. I principi unificatori, non dualistici, del Buddhismo *Mahayana* e dello Shivaismo tantrico forniscono le linee guida del percorso educativo. Una relazione armoniosa con il proprio corpo e i propri sensi funge da veicolo per la trasformazione delle emozioni negative in stati positivi e gioiosi, volti all'accettazione, alla cura dei bisogni profondi dell'altro e alla comprensione di tutti gli aspetti della vita umana, siano essi legati alla felicità o al dolore, attraverso uno sguardo vigile, orientato dall'attenzione al qui ed ora e dalla consapevolezza, che viene coltivata dall'infanzia fino alla morte. Lo yoga dell'unione degli opposti è la chiave di volta dell'intero sistema sociale. Si tratta di una filosofia pratica, radicata nell'esperienza, fondata sull'empatia.

L'accettazione del rischio e della fatica nella salita su roccia viene promossa come strumento per sviluppare attenzione, consapevolezza e come antidoto contro la violenza: "Fare della roccia è una branca dell'etica applicata; è un altro surrogato preventivo della prepotenza" (Huxley 1977: 186).

L'incitamento all'attenzione emesso dagli uccelli imitatori addestrati, che fin dalla prima pagina intonano la nota chiave del *leit motiv* del romanzo, giunge purtroppo troppo tardi a Will Farnaby che cade dalla parete rocciosa proprio per mancanza di attenzione e a causa dell'ansia. Mentre con ironia drammatica l'uccello *minah* grida il suo monito "qui e subito, ragazzi", il narratore commenta: "Ma Will Farnaby non si trovava né in quel luogo né in quel momento. Si trovava sul dirupo, si trovava nell'istante spaventoso della caduta" (Huxley 1977: 19). Da questo momento tragico inizia per il protagonista un percorso di rieducazione alla vita, alla lucidità e alla consapevolezza unite alla capacità di comprendere la realtà attraverso i sensi: un processo che culminerà nel coraggio di amare. La dura lezione che Will Farnaby deve apprendere è che non si è in grado di accettare l'altro se non si accetta pienamente se stessi.

Alla radice del discorso di Huxley c'è la problematica, e storica, questione della relazione tra cultura e natura. Le riflessioni che Pierre Hadot conduce nel suo libro *Il velo di Iside* (Hadot 2006) possono aiutarci a comprendere più a fondo questo aspetto. L'autore concentra la sua ricerca sulla diversa interpretazione che è stata data nei secoli di un famoso frammento di Eraclito (500 A. C.): "la Natura ama nascondersi". Il pendolo della relazione tra esseri umani e natura sembra avere oscillato tra due atteggiamenti opposti che Hadot definisce 'prometeico' l'uno (basato sull'audacia conoscitiva, che applica forza nella ricerca dei segreti della natura) e 'orfico' l'altro (fondato, al contrario, sulla contemplazione del visibile): Hadot riconosce che entrambi gli atteggiamenti sono necessari all'uomo, ma sottolinea con forza come l'eccessivo sbilanciamento verso l'atteggiamento prometeico, iniziato nel Cinquecento come fondamento del mondo moderno, abbia portato l'uomo a dimenticare l'altro, altrettanto importante atteggiamento, quello orfico, legato alla contemplazione. Un'esagerata fede negli strumenti di indagine della natura, unita a un paradigma dualista nei confronti della realtà, ha condotto l'umanità sull'orlo di un abisso non solo ecologico, ma anche etico e spirituale. A livello personale, un paradigma che prevede una separazione oggettiva e netta tra uomo e natura è apportatore di malessere psicologico e spesso fonte

di delusione e di infelicità, dal momento che, come esseri umani, siamo invece delle unità psicofisiche. L'isola utopica descritta da Huxley rappresenta un tentativo ben riuscito di risolvere in modo profondo la questione. Sull'isola di Pala, si è compreso che una presa di coscienza intellettuale del problema non è sufficiente, per produrre un cambiamento né di approccio né di stile di vita, e che c'è bisogno di metodi efficaci che aiutino a cambiare rotta, innanzitutto a livello individuale e, di conseguenza, anche a livello collettivo. Questo perché l'essere umano è frutto di abitudini, spesso acquisite in forma inconscia e dettate da costumi, modi di pensare radicati nella collettività. Il cambiamento, quindi, non può che essere individuale e 'l'unica rivoluzione', nel romanzo di Huxley, è quella che ciascuna donna e ciascun uomo possono attuare dentro di sé, supportati in questo processo, da precise scelte politiche e pedagogiche.

Lo sforzo richiesto a Will Farnaby, che proviene da un mondo, caratterizzato come il nostro, nelle parole di Spiro Dalla Porta-Xydias, da idee di "potere, lucro, piacere" (Dalla Porta-Xydias 2012: 121), per riuscire a invertire la rotta e squarciare il velo dell'illusione in cui è cresciuto, è immenso, simile, per molti aspetti, alla scalata di una montagna. Dove si pubblicizzano l'agio e la sicurezza, si tratta di mettere in atto volontà e rischio. Volontà, si badi bene, non desiderio. Al posto del senso diffuso di paura (spesso illusoria) viene messo il coraggio, al posto dell'egoismo, l'altruismo, che in alcuni casi solo la difficoltà riesce a mettere allo scoperto. La narrazione di Huxley ci fa intendere che l'alpinismo può fornire un'occasione per la formazione umana. Infatti, una relazione matura con la montagna è una relazione con la realtà. L'alpinismo al giorno d'oggi può quindi venire inteso come un antidoto contro l'alienazione e contro tutti quei malanni che possono derivare da un eccesso di agio e di sicurezza, o forse come ricerca di qualcosa di nuovo, che aiuti ad affrontare il mondo con una nuova creatività post industriale. Questo processo creativo necessita, come evidenziato da Huxley nel suo romanzo utopico, sia di radicamento e quindi, in senso lato, di cultura storica, scientifica e umanistica, che di sradicamento e quindi di apertura al nuovo. L'alpinismo, così inteso, è qualcosa che va oltre e lo distingue dallo sport. Per il filosofo francese Frédéric Gros non ci sono dubbi: come recita il titolo del primo capitolo del suo libro *Andare a piedi*, "camminare non è uno sport". Secondo questo autore, contrariamente al camminare, "Lo sport è pretesto per cerimonie mediatiche immense dove si accalcano i consumatori di marchi e d'immagini. Il denaro lo pervade per immiserire gli animi, e la medicina per costruire corpi artificiali" (Gros 2013: 7). L'alpinismo favorisce e stimola riflessioni che vanno oltre il concetto di attività sportiva. Numerose sono le testimonianze che legano la frequentazione della montagna ad aspetti spirituali o alla speculazione filosofica. Valga per tutti l'esempio di Nietzsche (un filosofo decisamente orfico, nel linguaggio di Hadot) che ha scritto la maggior parte delle sue opere più importanti camminando (probabilmente con un'attrezzatura che il mercato dell'alpinismo considererebbe del tutto inadeguata). Nietzsche, come fa notare Frédéric Gros (Gros 2013: 17), non sopportava la vita sedentaria. Così si esprime in *Ecce Homo*: "Tutti i pregiudizi vengono dagli intestini. Il sedere di pietra – l'ho già detto una volta – è il vero peccato contro lo spirito santo" (Nietzsche 1977: 25).

Ma è lecito scomodare la filosofia per giustificare l'alpinismo? La risposta sarebbe assolutamente negativa in un contesto simile a quello di *Brave New World*: semplicemente non

deve esserci una motivazione, se non quella di fare dello sport. L'industria del turismo e dello sport cavalca l'onda della 'libertà' personale: ciò che conta è consumare: trasporti, abbigliamento (specifico, s'intende). Il consumismo di *Il mondo nuovo* è come il surf: si viaggia sull'onda, sopra insondabili abissi, sempre con il sorriso sulle labbra. Si va nella natura per svago. Ma svago da che cosa? Nel romanzo distopico di Huxley la gente non fugge da nulla: aggiunge svago allo svago continuo (indotto anche dalla droga *soma*) e viene condizionata fin dall'infanzia a non pensare in forma autonoma e a non percepire la realtà in tutte le sue dimensioni: fisiche, mentali e spirituali; nella nostra realtà, al contrario, sembra che l'andare altrove, in montagna, in campagna, nella natura (intese tutte in opposizione alla città), comporti uno svago dal qui della vita quotidiana. Se è vero che l'essere umano ricerca il piacere e rifugge il dolore, l'andare là, in montagna, è un rifuggire un qui percepito come non del tutto soddisfacente: "solo lassù mi sento libero e felice", qualcuno potrebbe dire: vado lassù per sfuggire dal qui. Non potrò tuttavia mai liberarmi di me stesso e della mia relazione con me e con l'altro da me. In poche parole: vedo il mondo e mi relaziono con esso attraverso il mio 'io': sia qui che là. Vivo, quindi, in una continua illusione che mi vincola, innanzitutto attraverso il linguaggio e di conseguenza attraverso l'intero sistema valoriale (altamente manipolabile, come dimostrato da Huxley nel romanzo *Il mondo nuovo*) e quello delle credenze ad esso legato. Sembra davvero non esserci via di scampo se non una fuga (illusoria) nella distrazione e nello svago: concetti che vanno mano nella mano con l'inconsapevolezza. Come accennato sopra, è proprio ciò che accade nella società descritta in *Il mondo nuovo*.

È indubbio, però, che tutti i percorsi intesi a raggiungere una matura capacità di amare, apportatrice di felicità e di equilibrio psicofisico, prevedono una progressiva presa di coscienza di sé. Quindi le due vie, quella dello svago e quella della consapevolezza sembrano escludersi a vicenda: se vado là per sfuggire dal qui escludo la possibilità di esplorare seriamente e in forma responsabile il mio essere nel mondo. Per farlo non serve, in realtà, andare da nessuna parte; prima, è forse preferibile imparare a stare fermi. In questa condizione si può iniziare a vedere se stessi, o meglio, ciò che spesso si crede di essere; questo significa iniziare a riflettere seriamente sulla natura e qualità del proprio essere nel mondo: si tratta di un processo che richiede responsabilità, lucidità, talvolta dolore. Ma non c'è via di scampo, come quando, in montagna, non c'è altra possibilità se non andare avanti. La porta è stretta. Si tratta di un compito davvero arduo. È una lunga avventura, non priva di rischi, delusioni, conquiste, gioie improvvisi, rivelazioni che, come in una ascesa alpina può condurre oltre la nube dell'inconsapevolezza, per una più profonda e gioiosa relazione con il mondo. È ciò che accade nel romanzo *L'isola* in cui la gente viene educata all'attenzione e alla consapevolezza della vita, della bellezza, ma anche della malattia e della morte. Infatti, se la società descritta in *Il mondo nuovo* è fondata su una mancanza di libertà direttamente proporzionale all'inconsapevolezza dei suoi sudditi, quella del romanzo *L'isola*, al contrario, ruota attorno ad una libertà radicata nella consapevolezza e nella responsabilità personale; si tratta di una consapevolezza coltivata per mezzo di un sensibile percorso educativo, mentre l'inconsapevolezza, descritta come un fine beato dell'individuo in *Il mondo nuovo*, viene raggiunta attraverso il condizionamento e la manipolazione.

Nel romanzo *L'Isola*, proprio perché così affine alla scalata di una montagna, il viaggio

verso la conoscenza di sé viene facilitato dall'arrampicata su roccia, non intesa come fuga, ma come autodisciplina, necessaria in tutti i percorsi di autoconoscenza. Scalare montagne richiede innanzitutto una buona relazione corpo/mente, forza fisica, buone condizioni di salute, coraggio, resilienza, calma e saggezza. Sono le qualità indispensabili in tutti i cammini spirituali. L'alpinismo può fornire uno spazio di libertà personale da dedicare alla coltivazione di valori fondanti e alla ricerca del Sé, oltre qualsiasi piccola esaltazione dell'io in cui, come la pulce nella farina, si corre il rischio di credersi mugnai. La posizione alta delle vette, il rischio calcolato e corso coscientemente, l'audacia che fa vincere la paura possono condurre oltre l'orizzonte angusto della propria personalità, dentro una visione più ampia e portare chiarezza, stabilità, umiltà, generosità, capacità di accogliere la diversità e l'autenticità nella vita di tutti i giorni.

L'alpinismo, inteso come una forma di yoga che agisce sul livello fisico, mentale e spirituale, permette che non ci sia un distacco nevrotico tra il qui e il là. Nel romanzo *L'isola* questo concetto di non dualità è espresso da una poesia scritta dal vecchio Raja: "Quassù, tu mi domandi / Quassù in alto dove Siva / Danza sopra il mondo, / Che diavolo credo di fare? / [...]. Quanto lontano, tu dici, dalle calde pianure, / Quanto lontano, mi rimproveri, da tutto il mio popolo! / Eppure quanto vicino! Poiché qui, tra il cielo / Nuvoloso e il mare più in basso, a un tratto visibili, / Leggo i loro luminosi segreti, ed i miei". I "luminosi segreti", o meglio "il segreto", come viene spiegato dal dott. Robert, nel romanzo, è il vasto spazio: "la Natura di un Buddha in tutto il nostro eterno perire" (Huxley 1977: 188-189).

Nel romanzo *L'isola* l'arrampicata viene considerata come una forma di yoga in grado di coinvolgere simultaneamente un rigoroso allenamento fisico e mentale che, come frutto, può offrire un raffinamento del sistema percettivo, e di quelle facoltà atte a cogliere gli aspetti più spirituali del nostro essere nel mondo. Nella tradizione indiana questo concetto è incarnato dalla antica disciplina dello Hatha Yoga, caratterizzata da pratiche psicofisiche, volte allo sviluppo di consapevolezza e tese al raggiungimento della liberazione dell'essere. Ne consegue che un legame tra yoga e alpinismo può interessare coloro che intendono l'alpinismo come una pratica atta a sviluppare coscienza, attenzione, senso di libertà e, in alcuni casi, trascendenza.

Il campo dello yoga è vastissimo e fare luce su questo tema è un esercizio salutare, in questo momento storico in cui anche la spiritualità rischia di diventare dominio del materialismo. Infatti, come fa notare il filosofo tibetano Chögyam Trungpa, il sentiero spirituale è pieno di biforcazioni e pericoli; uno di questi consiste nell'illudersi di trovarsi su una via di trascendenza, mentre, al contrario, si sta coltivando il proprio ego tramite tecniche spirituali. Trungpa propone il termine 'materialismo spirituale' per designare questo diffuso e infelice fenomeno (Trungpa 2002). Lo spirito originario della disciplina mira non solo a mitigare lo stress e ad apportare benessere, ma a superare, spesso con esperienze non prive di dolore, il velo dell'illusione, relativizzando per gradi l'egocentrismo e promuovendo la capacità di amare. La felicità profonda, come una cima, non può essere comprata, la si conquista con l'aiuto di forze più grandi di noi a cui è necessario sapersi arrendere. In realtà il vero cammino dello yoga nasce dove muore l' 'io' e la coscienza si apre alle forze incommensurabili della trascendenza.

Lo Hatha Yoga ha sempre considerato l'essere umano come un'unità psicofisica indissolubile. Mente e corpo si uniscono in un equilibrio indispensabile per una vita cosciente e per una predisposizione alla trascendenza. Si tratta di una preparazione continua alla vita, in cui il percorso viene anteposto alla ricerca del risultato, perché si è compreso che quest'ultimo è il frutto di una condizione dell'essere. Gli studi del linguista americano Benjamin Lee Whorf risultano illuminanti per comprendere il motivo per cui questo concetto risulta distante dalla koinè linguistico-culturale europea. Secondo questo studioso, i singoli individui e le culture in cui sono immersi interpretano la realtà attraverso le lingue che utilizzano per comunicare e per categorizzare il mondo. Una delle caratteristiche fondamentali delle lingue europee è quella di oggettivare la realtà, trattando anche concetti astratti, come il tempo, alla stregua di una serie di oggetti. Whorf osservò acutamente che altre culture, come quella degli indiani d'America Hopi, al contrario, intendevano la realtà come un divenire continuo. Da qui deriva, tra gli Hopi tradizionali, un atteggiamento profondamente diverso dal nostro nei confronti della realtà. Per queste popolazioni, l'essere qui ed ora è più importante del risultato e il modo di affrontare più o meno intensamente la situazione presente determina la condizione futura (Whorf 2012: 73-82). Credere quindi che domani non sia un altro giorno, ma semplicemente un oggi modificato, non permette la deresponsabilizzazione né del singolo né della comunità. Si tratta di un atteggiamento che stimola cura e attenzione verso il mondo e verso l'altro nella vita quotidiana. Questo concetto del tempo e dell'intensità vivida da dedicare al momento presente è uno dei grandi cardini della società descritta nel romanzo *L'isola*.

Coltivare l'attenzione al qui ed ora è anche uno dei pilastri dello yoga. Quanto questa qualità sia importante nell'alpinismo lo sa qualsiasi scalatore, specie quelli che non sono stati traditi da imperdonabili attimi di distrazione. L'arrampicata, in questo senso è simile alla pratica dell'Hatha Yoga. Quest'ultimo, a sua volta, può rendere l'arrampicata più sicura ed armoniosa, sia a livello fisico, che a livello psichico; ma il frutto più auspicabile della pratica dello yoga è il prendere contatto con una dimensione profonda, pre-verbale della mente, caratterizzata da una naturale, profonda bontà, in grado, a sua volta, di contattare una fonte di energia infinita in cui siamo da sempre immersi, ma che abbiamo imparato a non riconoscere più, né dentro né fuori di noi.

Capita a volte di trovarsi su di una cima alpina e di contemplare il mondo al di sopra e al di sotto di essa con un infinito senso di gratitudine: ci si sente uno con il tutto, per un attimo oltre la dualità. Abraham H. Maslow ha chiamato questo tipo di percezioni "esperienze di vetta" (peak-experiences) (Maslow 1994). Lo yoga consiste sostanzialmente in un metodo atto a dare valore, sostenere e prolungare tali esperienze e a integrarle nella vita quotidiana. Il valore psicologico e spirituale delle esperienze di vetta viene sottolineato da Huxley: "ma dopo lo yoga del pericolo c'è lo yoga della vetta, lo yoga del riposo e della distensione, lo yoga della completa e totale ricettività, lo yoga che consiste nell'accettare consapevolmente ciò che è dato mentre viene dato [...]. Te ne stai seduto lassù con i muscoli rilassati e l'intelletto aperto alla luce del sole e alle nubi, aperto alla distanza e all'orizzonte, aperto in ultimo a quell'informe, inespresso Non-Pensiero che il silenzio della vetta ti consente di divinare – profondo e duraturo – entro il fluire ciangottante del tuo pensiero quotidiano" (Huxley 1977: 192).

È in questa dimensione di non separatezza e di non dualità che si sviluppa pienamente la capacità di amare il prossimo, perché non altro da sé. La metafora della scalata sembra calzare alla perfezione: per gradi si sale dall'aria pesante della pianura all'aria rarefatta e cristallina della vetta. La scalata dello yoghi verso la libertà termina qui. La discesa a valle è inevitabile, ma comporta una relazione mutata con il mondo. Nel romanzo *L'isola*, l'esperienza della discesa dalla cima è altrettanto importante quanto la salita: "E ora è il momento della discesa, il momento di una seconda prova dello yoga del pericolo, il momento di un rinnovarsi della tensione e della consapevolezza della vita nella sua rifulgente pienezza, mentre sei precariamente sospeso sull'orlo della distruzione [...]. Poi di colpo, mentre torni da una delle tue spedizioni sui monti, sai che esiste una riconciliazione. E non semplicemente una riconciliazione: una fusione e l'identità" (Huxley 1977: 192-193).

L'esperienza profonda dello yoga comporta un cambiamento strutturale della personalità, un nuovo apprendimento in cui è possibile non solo vedere con lucidità i contesti, ma anche i contesti dei contesti. Si tratta del fenomeno descritto e chiamato da Gregory Bateson 'apprendimento tre'. È una condizione rara ma, secondo Gregory Bateson, possibile e più volte testimoniata. Comprende quello stato dell'essere in cui, come nei famosi versi di William Blake, è possibile "vedere il Mondo in un granello di sabbia, / e un Paradiso in un fiore selvatico" (Bateson 2001: 353). È la somma libertà da tutti i vincoli. Frédéric Gros individua nel camminare una via per giungere a questo stadio di somma libertà: "È nelle lunghe escursioni che si coglie bene questa libertà tutta di rinuncia [...]. E ci si sente liberi perché, non appena si richiamano alla mente gli antichi segni della nostra permanenza nell'inferno – nome, età, professione, curriculum – tutto, ma proprio tutto, appare irrisorio, minuscolo, inconsistente" (Gros 2013: 14-15). Gros cita, inoltre, Heinrich Zimmer, un famoso indologo del XX secolo e fa riferimento alla cultura indiana che prevede, a un certo stadio della vita, la via della rinuncia: "È la tappa della 'partenza per la foresta', dove occorrerà, attraverso il raccoglimento e la meditazione, imparare a familiarizzare con quello che, da sempre, è rimasto immutato in noi e aspetta di essere rivelato a noi stessi: quell'Io eterno che trascende le maschere, le funzioni, le identità, le storie" (Gros 2013: 14).

Nel romanzo *L'isola*, in realtà, le persone non vengono invitate a rinunciare a nulla, ma a integrare tutti gli aspetti della vita, nella ricerca della trascendenza, con particolare riferimento alla vita dei sensi e alla sessualità, che invece di venire repressa, viene vissuta con pienezza e con sentimento, attraverso la pratica tantrica del *maithuna*. Enfatizzando il ruolo della gioiosa accettazione e piena espressione della sessualità attraverso la antica tradizione del tantrismo, che mira ad un grande senso di fusione e di identità attraverso un incanalamento cosciente delle energie sessuali e della sensualità, in una sana relazione di vera *partnership* come descritta e promossa da Riane Eisler nei suoi *The Chalice and the Blade* e *Sacred Pleasure*, Huxley affronta e risolve uno dei nodi centrali della cultura europea: quello della complessa, spesso conflittuale relazione con la natura e con la vita dei sensi. È il grande problema sollevato da Oscar Wilde all'inizio dell'undicesimo capitolo del romanzo *Il ritratto di Dorian Gray*. Wilde sottolinea il fatto che la cultura occidentale è stata da sempre caratterizzata dalla paura degli istinti e della sensualità, che sono stati repressi a favore di una spiritualità volta ad una vita oltre la morte. Il tentativo di Dorian Gray, fallito in modo

catastrofico, consiste proprio nel cercare di colmare la frattura tra spirito e materia, dentro una cornice sociale e culturale che faceva di questa divisione il propellente per varie forme di 'progresso'. Che si tratti di un paradigma non inclusivo è dimostrato dalle violenze che lo hanno accompagnato nel corso della storia.

Il grande tema che sottende la narrazione del romanzo *L'isola* suggerisce che, se la mente logica, discorsiva, istintuale ed emotiva si frammenta e dimentica il principio unificante, se dimentica la grande rete che tutto connette nel mondo, rischia il naufragio sia a livello individuale che collettivo. La natura stessa è una rete di informazioni di incalcolabile complessità e raffinatezza. La coscienza di essere immersi in questo vasto sistema dà senso alla vita: tutto sembra essere radicato sia alla terra che al cielo e ogni nostra proiezione sul mondo naturale, ogni nostra protesi tecnologica appare effimera e, in ultima analisi inutile, di fronte a questa bellezza e complessità. La natura, di cui siamo parte, è una forza immensa che supera ogni categoria umana. È un'energia che non può venire 'utilizzata', può solo essere vissuta con intensità, pienezza e passione: nella mente, nel cuore e nel corpo. Questo grande desiderio di riunificazione è espresso nei miti della reintegrazione (Eliade 1989). Lo yoga tantrico praticato dagli abitanti dell'isola di Pala porta il mito nell'esperienza quotidiana, permettendo a chi lo pratica di fare esperienza diretta della reale possibilità di trovare il piacere di una sana reciprocità attraverso l'equilibrio e la consonanza tra corpo, mente, spirito e realtà. Il segreto della felicità sull'isola di Pala consiste nel trovare la semplicità e la contentezza, nel senso di sapersi accontentare, abbandonando il superfluo, per trovare il fondamento, la roccia, appunto, sotto i piedi. La natura è forte e delicata allo stesso tempo. Noi, come esseri umani, non facciamo eccezione. Il dono prezioso della coscienza gioca un ruolo centrale nella vita degli esseri umani: come una lama affilata, può tornare a nostro vantaggio o essere strumento di distruzione. È per questo che, nel romanzo *L'isola*, è la saggezza a guidare l'intelligenza e non viceversa.

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“Once Upon a Time” by Nadine Gordimer: A Fairy Tale for Peace

Abstract I: Considerata dalla critica una delle più significative e drammatiche dichiarazioni contro l’apartheid, “Once Upon a Time” di Gordimer si presenta anche come una sapiente costruzione retorica. Ponendo al centro della narrazione l’imbarazzante tema dell’infanticidio, la scrittrice costruisce con insospettata e ironica leggerezza una favola che, pur soddisfacendo i requisiti del genere, si allontana da esso per un eccesso di dolore. Sarà la tragedia antica, promotrice di un amaro modello di pace, a dettare le forme e i contenuti del breve racconto che perfettamente rispecchia le tre unità aristoteliche, che ha una struttura classica, e i cui argomenti principali attingono al repertorio della mitologia greca.

Abstract II: Critically acclaimed as one of the most significant and dramatic anti-apartheid testimonies, “Once Upon a Time” by Gordimer is also an astute rhetorical construction. By placing the contentious theme of infanticide at the centre of the narration, and with a touch that is unexpectedly both light and ironic, the author creates a fairy tale that, while meeting the requirements of the genre, also manages to distance itself from this through weight of grief. It is classical tragedy – as the promulgator of a bitter model of peace – that dictates both the form and the content of this brief story, which perfectly mirrors the three Aristotelian unities, with its classical structure and principal arguments drawing on the repertoire of Greek mythology.

Why is it that while the death of the novel is good for a post-mortem at least once a year, the short story lives on unmolested? It cannot be because – to borrow their own jargon – literary critics regard it as merely a minor art form. Most of them, if pressed, would express the view that it is a highly specialized and skilful form [...]. But they would have to be pressed; otherwise they wouldn’t bother to discuss it at all [...]. Yet no one suggests that we are practicing a dead art form. And, like a child suffering from healthy neglect, the short story survives (Gordimer 1977: 263).

In 1989 Frederik De Klerk, head of the National Party (which would subsequently become the New National Party), driven by the moderates within his own party and the business community, succeeded Pieter Willem Botha as the President of South Africa. That same year Nadine Gordimer published a short story in the South African alternative journal, *Weekly*

Mail, "Once Upon a Time: a Fairy Tale of Suburban Life". In 1990 the almost definitive version of the story came out in the American journal, *Salmagundi*, and in 1991 the final one appeared in the collection *Jump and Other Stories*.

Nelson Mandela was released in 1990. Apartheid was officially abolished in 1991, the same year in which Nadine Gordimer was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. This sequence of dates, and the coincidence of the publication date along with the ground work laid for the abolition of apartheid, that is, the hope of the renewal of freedom, cannot but prompt us to reflect on the success of literature as a political act, or at least an objective the writer herself aimed at: that of a change in mentality.

Ce que je peux faire en tant qu'écrivain blanc, c'est dire aux Blancs ce qu'ils ne veulent pas voir. C'est cela le grand problème: l'impossibilité de communiquer entre les communautés. La littérature peut contribuer à franchir ce gouffre, à le combler (Louvel 1994: 169).

Thus, in order to overcome this abyss of *omertà* and ignorance, in "Once Upon a Time" Nadine Gordimer tackles the most contentious of fictional themes, that of infanticide.

Edward Said observed (Said 1983: 16) that for a great many late-19th century – early-20th century writers, choosing characters who could not have children is a metaphor for a generalised condition of sterility, which affected all of society and the culture of the time. From Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895) to Conrad's *A Tale of the Seaboard* (1904), to the great works of Modernism, *Ulysses* (1922) and *The Waste Land* (1922), along with (outside Britain), *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912) and Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927). This literary panorama is populated by sterile couples and orphans, bachelors and old maids – even by women who cannot have children. There are significant predecessors in the Victorian novel (Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, George Eliot), but it is above all in Modernism the state of absolute sterility Said was referring to takes a firm hold in English-language literature. *The Waste Land* is emblematic, as is the vision of childhood in D. H. Lawrence's *The White Peacock* (1911). The situation becomes exasperated in the aftermath of World War II in the output of the Angry Young Men, prior to the Beatles (for example, *A Picture to Hang on the Wall* 1966 by Sean Hignett).

As far as the United States are concerned, it is noteworthy how the attention of writers from North America has concentrated more on adolescence than childhood. From *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) by J. D. Salinger to *It* (1986) by Stephen King, in the words of Pessoa, it is precisely the myth of adolescence that seems to authorise the identification of the United States with "the West, future of the past", to which the Portuguese poet refers in his poetry (Pessoa 1984: 140).

It was to be the task of the children from the literary terrain of the former colonies – India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Australia, Canada and the Caribbean – to help the adults come to terms with the fragmentary nature of existence, to live in a world of broken mirrors, of which many of the shards have been lost, thus making it impossible to retrieve a vision of the past and of history (both individual and collective) in its entirety.

The children of the postcolonial narrative not only retrace the deeds and feats of the

nations they belong to, filtering them through their childlike eyes; above all, like imperfect figures of innocence, which is a positive sign, they place themselves in contexts filled with future foreshadowings that are often, however, decidedly negative.

And so it is that, around the time of the passage from the second to the third millennium, in Britain children are appearing more and more in literature as elusive or distant creatures in a world populated by adults who are too caught up by their own fear of growing up to accept them, yet in postcolonial narrative children represent at one and the same time both hope for the future and the paradoxical repositories of historical memory, re-experienced through a fantastical re-elaboration of other stories and /or the memory of past events re-elaborated through the eyes of a child, even at the cost of their own life.

Jeanne Colleran underlines a recurring theme in Nadine Gordimer's collection which I have mentioned above, *Jump and Other Stories*:

As a kind of intellectual montage where real elements operate as part of the discourse, and signifiers, selected and charged, are remotivated within the system of new frames, the stories in *Jump* appropriate figurally – that most obsessive image of recent South African history, the dead child. Dead children – or tortured or damaged children – haunt the collection; they are found in nearly half of the stories, and appear in each of the collection's first three pieces as, first, the child offered up as sexual reward in "Jump"; then as the shredded little boy of "Once upon a Time"; and next as the malnourished baby brother, soon surely to die, of "The Ultimate Safari". Their near presence wordlessly, repeatedly insists: this is the cost, this is the cost, this is the cost (Colleran 1993: 242-243).

From *Midnight's Children* (1981) by Salman Rushdie to *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith* (1994) by Peter Carey, from the character of Maya in Bulbul Sharma's *Banana-Flower Dreams* (1999), or the character of Chuyia in Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Water* (1996), or Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* (1994), and many others: postcolonial children, to a greater or lesser extent, are often fairy-tale children.

Italo Calvino reminds us that

fairy tales are true. Taken as a whole, and in their continually repeated yet ever varied cross-section of human experiences, they amount to a general explanation of life [...]; they are a catalogue of the destinies that humankind may encounter [...] the persecution of the innocent and the possibility of redemption as the terms of an internal dialectic within every life; [...] the shared fate of succumbing to enchantments – that is, of being determined by complex and unknown forces, and the effort to free oneself and be able to choose freely understood as an elemental duty, along with that of freeing others (Calvino 1988: 19).

"Once Upon a Time" consists of two parts and begins with a first-person account in which the author explains that she has been asked to write a short story for children to be published in an anthology; but she refuses as she has the artistic right to write only what she wants. Next moment, as she is lying in bed, she is horrified to be awakened by a sound that

she thinks might be a burglar or a murderer, but she then realises that her fear was nothing real, since the sound which shocked her was just a creaking sound in the house. To calm herself down, she starts to tell herself a bedtime story.

The second part of story is narrated in the third-person and describes a family consisting of a father, mother, a little boy, a trustworthy housemaid and a gardener. The members of the family love each other and they also have a cat and a dog. Since the family is living in a suburb where burglaries and riots are frequent, they try to enhance the security system of their house. Despite having a sign on their gate that reads "YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED", the wife is still very scared as she wants to be sure that their house is safe from the homeless, the thieves, and the crooks that roam their street. As unemployment rises, the housemaid and the wife beg the husband to increase the level of security. The husband's mother is then described as "the wise old witch" (Gordimer 1991: 25) who gives the family some money as a Christmas present to make their brick wall higher, and gives the boy a Space Man suit and a book of fairy tales. The family decides to have rolls of razor wire from a company called "DRAGON'S TEETH" installed along the top of their wall and now the house looks much safer, so that they can once again aspire to live "happily ever after" (25). That evening, the mother reads a bedtime fairy tale to the boy. The next morning, the boy pretends to be the Prince from the fairy tale, "Sleeping Beauty", and tries to make his way through the razor wire. But he bleeds heavily and by the end, when the adult manages to cut him out and carry him to the house, he has died. The death of their child is thus the "cost", as Colleran writes, of his parents' attempt to safeguard their fairy-tale existence against the transient, marauding blacks. It is the story's most terrifying irony that what was meant to keep blacks out, kills the white child within. Gordimer's ironic use of fairy-tale features, what Lazar terms these "different zones of being" (Lazar 1992: 783-802) and the recurring image of the dead child, make "Once upon a Time" unique in *Jump*.

The title of the story immediately brings to mind two aspects: first of all, it acts as a warning for the reader, who is alerted, even before getting into the text, that they are about to read a fairy tale (it has the same function as the notice put on the gate of the happy family, "YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED"). Furthermore, the title "Once upon a time" creates distance in terms of time and place, which removes the story from contingency, signifying the transposition of a structure into the imagination that is reproduced in every life (this is how Freud speaks of Oedipus, a remote myth that nevertheless speaks of a complex that is relevant in every generation). In any case, fairy tales are open texts, as Jakob Grimm himself already noted in 1813: "All fairy tales were set down long, long ago, in infinite variations, which means that they are never definitively set down"¹.

In the English-speaking world, the re-writing of fairy tales is widespread, above all by women. For instance, *Transformations* (1971) by Ann Sexton, seventeen poems inspired by as many fairy tales by Grimm, among which is "Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)", is very interesting in this context.

As occurs elsewhere, in Sexton and in Gordimer fairy tales – minor myths that cross

¹ Letter written by Jacob Grimm to Von Arnim, 29th October 1810, in Steig & Grimm 1904, III, 271.

our lives (Ravasi 2014: 89) – provide an opportunity to investigate oneself and experiment with mythobiography², that is, a type of narration that explores the events surrounding the search for meaning, where the telling creates its own sense.

In “Once Upon a Time”, Gordimer is the opening narrator who invents and tells the fairy tale, thus placing herself on the edge of the narrative. In this case she appears both as a character and as the author, and so is simultaneously the object of a rhetorical plot and the subject of another – both insider and outsider with respect to the action – and thus perhaps a suitable allegory of the position of the white South African writer.

The story is carefully constructed. In the first part the writer creates the setting, not of the narration, but of the state of mind necessary to the reader in order to read the second part, which is not typographically separated from the first except for a white space. A silence. A pause. A gap. An omission, perhaps.

What stands out for me in the first part is how Gordimer, in describing a real situation (finding yourself alone in bed, terrified by a noise, in a house that is relatively unprotected in the face of the threat from outside) manages to condense three interpretative levels of the text. Indeed, the initial situation from which the fairy tale in the second part is generated, can be read from the point of view of a white South African living in Johannesburg during those years (where “the fierce dogs who guarded an old widower and his collection of antique clocks were strangled before he was knifed by a casual labourer he had dismissed without pay” [Gordimer 1991: 24]); that is, a woman who is forced to experience her femininity in terms of victimhood (“A woman was murdered – how do they put it – in broad daylight in a house two blocks away, last year”, 24); and from the point of view of a writer. Regarding this last aspect, the message is clear: a writer cannot be forced to write in a certain genre (“A certain novelist said every writer ought to write at least one story for children. I think of sending a postcard saying I don’t accept that I ‘ought’ to write anything”, 23). When this happens, as the end of the story demonstrates, the situation is overturned and what was a fairy tale becomes a nightmare. Fear leads the woman, the white South African writer, to rapidly regress into childish terror: the child is afraid of the night just as adults are scared of death. In order to cope with this fear, fairy tales are invented.

Cristina Campo writes perceptively: “The teller of fairy tales is mysterious, but we know that every perfect event hinges on one person; that only the invaluable experience meted out by fate to an individual can reflect, like an enchanted chalice, the dream of a multitude” (Campo 1987: 143).

It may be that whoever writes fairy tales is similar to a person finding a four-leaf clover who, according to Ernst Junger, then gains the sight and occult powers. The writer starts the narration as a way of giving pleasure and suddenly the fairy tale turns into a magnetic field where inexpressible secrets from her life and that of the others come flooding in from all sides, taking shape as figures. For that again, when the nature of the narrative involves the constant use of metaphors, this opens up the possibility of making use of the dangerous yet remarkable gift of secrets. That this mystery is present in any fairy tale worthy of the name is demonstrated by every element in the fairy tale.

² According to the therapeutic meaning that Romano Màdera applies, in Màdera & Tarca 2003.

First of all, beauty. In fairy tales, the catalyst for the action is always something that represents pure beauty, yet clearly also represents something else:

In a house, in a suburb, in a city, there were a man and his wife who loved each other very much and were living happily ever after. They had a little boy, and they loved him very much. They had a cat and a dog that the little boy loved very much (Gordimer 1991: 25).

Beauty and fear, the tragic poles of the fairy tale, are together the terms of contradiction and reconciliation. The more material fears do not manage to distract the protagonists of the fairy tale from the more unreal beauty, and the nature of the mad quest is revealed through the nature of the tests that they have to overcome. In Gordimer's story, the parental couple functions as one, solid protagonist. Indeed, the characters do not have names and are "a man" and "his wife". The two of them repeatedly respond to the bewitching call that, each and every time, throws them back into the clutches of the Leviathan of fear. They are attracted to beauty, "they were living happily ever after" (25)³, but they are ensnared by fear: "YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED".

The parental couple is required to be simultaneously in two worlds: that represented by the happy oasis of their home, and the outside world, made up of people of "another colour" (25), of riots, violence and danger. The price of their happiness increases in proportion to the growth of their fear of others, of the Other. Defence strategies are intensified: first, electronic gates, then bars on the windows, and then with the money given by the "wise old witch", wall fortifications, until the final, fatal safety measure is reached.

That the nameless hero, the Different one, the Chosen one, is their "little boy" is demonstrated by the way in which the boy experiences the adults' fears and their safety measures from the very beginning of the story to its end. He observes the installation of the electronic security devices: "The little boy was fascinated by the device and used it as a walkie-talkie in cops and robbers play with his small friends" (26). And when the husband and his wife evaluate the effectiveness of the cruel systems of protection, "the little boy and the pet dog raced ahead" (29).

Similarly, the boy sees the barbed wire on the house, which is "the ugliest but the most honest in its suggestion of the pure concentration-camp style" (29) as a dragon to be fought, with briars to be destroyed in his passage through them in order to reach his longed for goal.

Just like in a court dance, in Gordimer's text good and evil exchange masks, and that the security measure then transforms into a lethal dragon only becomes apparent in the unthinkable dimension that the fairy tale leads to. Thus, the child lives in a world of upside-down mirrors. And with what assistance does the young mortal creature pass through

³ The phrase "were living happily ever after" occurs three times: on p. 25, just after the story begins; on p. 26, as the family begins looking out through bars on all the windows; and finally on p. 30 where they are all living happily because the Dragon's Teeth security wire has been installed above the wall that surrounds the house and presumably provides maximum security. As the story progresses, Gordimer's recurring use of the formulaic "were living happily ever after" becomes increasingly ironic, until finally the verb "were" assumes a simple past tense amid the shattering horror of the final image.

these fires, these mirrors? Angels and guides are not lacking: the fairy godmother (“the wise old witch”), the good genie (“and itinerant gardener”), the faithful nanny (“a trustworthy housemaid”), animal friends (“a cat and a dog that the little boy loved very much”); but they are not enough because on every fairy tale – as on every life – an impenetrable, crucial enigma comes to bear: fate, choice, and guilt.

The apparent simplicity – also linguistic – and brevity of the narration conceals a complex wealth of references and resonances, a sophisticated structure which, as we shall see below, is strongly influenced by ancient tragedy.

If there were more space available here, the Russian linguist and anthropologist Vladimir Jakovlevič Propp’s *Morphology of the Tale* would be a useful means for bringing order to the magma of meanings that emerge from a reading and, even more, from a re-reading of Gordimer’s text; it is a useful means not just for bringing the characters into focus, or the “spheres of action” (which in any case are Propp’s seven: the villain, the donor, the helper, the princess – or ‘sought-for-person’ – and her father, the dispatcher, the hero – seeker or victim – and the false hero, and are all present in Gordimer’s story), but also because, as in Propp, they are mere vessels for actions, mechanisms for distributing the functions around the story.

I would like to briefly mention that in Propp’s analysis it is not important who the character is – dragon, young girl or prince – but what the character does. This is where the framework arises of the thirty-one functions identified by Propp in accordance with a pre-existing, variable order, ranging from estrangement/distancing and prohibitions (functions 1 and 2), to the function of the donor and the reaction of the hero (functions 12 and 13), as well as punishment and marriage or coronation (functions 30 and 31). These functions, which are found – whether consciously or not – in all the most famous stories, and of course also in Gordimer’s, as a whole represent an alphabet of ideas that helps to build, yet also to deconstruct, an event, a plot, or any kind of narrative, making it more engaging and ‘logical’ in the mind of its readers, and therefore more effective in the transmission of the message that has to be communicated. And this is indeed a great objective, fully achieved, in Gordimer’s political fairy tale.

If there was more space, we could also turn to the studies of the psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim in order to gain a better understanding of the deeper significance and existential conflict in Gordimer’s text, which are at times only hinted at in the text. For instance: *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, describes and explains the mental state of mind that drives the boy to challenge the metal dragon:

Only by going out into the world can the fairy-tale hero (child) find himself there; and as he does, he will also find the other with whom he will be able to live happily ever after [...]. The fairy tale is future orientated and guides the child [...] to relinquish his infantile dependency wishes and achieve a more satisfying, independent existence (Bettelheim 1976: 11).

In addition, in the chapter “Life Divined from the Inside”, Bettelheim describes the sense of adventure and reward present in the most traditional fairy tales, as in “Once Upon a Time”:

Fairy tales intimate that a rewarding, good life is within one's reach despite adversity – but only if one does not shy away from the hazardous struggles without which one can never achieve true identity. These stories promise that if a child dares to engage in this fearsome and taxing search, benevolent powers will come to his aid, and he will succeed. The stories also warn that those who are too timorous and narrow-minded to risk themselves in finding themselves must settle down to a humdrum existence – if an even worse fate does not befall them (Bettelheim 1976: 24).

Unfortunately, the space available only allows me to touch briefly on this. I would like to conclude by suggesting that the role of reader be left off and that of spectator be taken on. Because, ultimately, it seems to me that what Nadine Gordimer offers on the stage of her story is the enactment of a real drama, which perfectly mirrors the three Aristotelian unities of time, place, and space; it is structured according to a rigid, classical framework, which draws on the repertoire of Greek mythology for its principal themes.

First of all, the genre chosen by the writer, tragedy, is the most suitable for channelling a strongly political message which, it hardly needs to be said, underpins the composition of the story: I will just mention that Greek tragedy is a theatrical genre in which the staging, for the inhabitants of 5th-century classical Athens, was a ceremony with strong social and political implications.

The story "Once Upon a Time" is clearly a tragedy in the etymological sense of the term. The Greek noun, *trago(i)día*, τραγωδία, derives from the union of the roots of "goat" (τράγος/*trágos*) and "sing" (ᾄδω/*á(i)dô*), as attested to in Horace's *Ars poetica*; it therefore means "song for the goat". The animal (whether it be a kid or a lamb, or in our case, a child) is to be taken here as meaning the first fruits as an offering representing the best thing that man can deprive himself of, an extreme sacrifice, an implacable warning: "the bleeding mass of the little boy was hacked out of the security coil with saws, wire-cutters, choppers" (Gordimer 1991: 30).

The principal themes dealt with in tragedy look to Greek mythology. Often, they focus on bereavement in some form, or in any case they showcase universal values, "A voice in the echo-chamber of the sub-conscious?" (23), a shared experience in the life of everybody and every society, such as:

Love and hatred: the man, his wife, the child, the cat and the dog all "loved each other very much and were living happily ever after" (25). Nonetheless, the man and his wife were looking forward to installing a security system made "of pieces of broken glass embedded in cement along the top of walls, there were iron grilles ending in lance-points" (29). What they ultimately chose was basically the one best suited for expressing their fear and hatred of the other.

The contrast between peace and war, between "the last muffled flourishes on one of the wooden xylophones made by the Chopi and Tsona" (24), and the clashes and riots in which "buses were being burned, cars stoned, and schoolchildren shot by the police" (25).

The relationship between good and evil:

It was the ugliest but the most honest in its suggestion of the pure concentration-camp style, no frills, all evident efficacy. Placed the length of walls, it consisted of a continu-

ous coil of stiff and shining metal serrated into jagged blades, so that there would be no way of climbing over it and no way through its tunnel without getting entangled in its fangs. There would be no way out, only a struggle getting bloodier and bloodier, a deeper and sharper hooking and tearing of flesh. The wife shuddered to look at it. You're right, said the husband, anyone would think twice [...]. And they took heed of the advice on a small board fixed to the wall: Consult DRAGON'S TEETH The People For Total Security (27).

Greek tragedy is structured in a rigid framework: it generally begins with a prologue (from *prò* and *logos*, a speech that precedes), wherein a character introduces the play and explains the background to it: in Gordimer's story all of the first part effectively carries out the function of the prologue. This is followed by the *parodos* (ἡ παράδοδος), the entry on stage of the fairy tale: "I couldn't find a position in which my mind would let go of my body - release me to sleep again. So I began to tell myself a story, a bedtime story" (23).

In the ancient play, the action on stage takes place over the course of three to five episodes (*epeisòdia*); in Gordimer's text the episodes (five) follow on each other in a *crescendo* of tension brought about both by external events as well as by the psychic tension of anticipating them, because as tragedy teaches us, a glorious adventure may befall the innocent just as the sins of the fathers fall on their children.

The function carried out by the chorus is central, which in a tragedy represents a collective character that participates in events as much as the actors themselves⁴. While in *The Eumenides* by Aeschylus the chorus is formed by the terrible Erinyes, here we have the "electronic harpies" (27) and the high-pitched sound of the alarms. These "called to one another across the gardens in shrills and bleats and wails" (27) and proleptically appear beforehand at the moment the bars on the windows are being installed and the cat sets the alarm off: it continues to accompany every episode and in the final one – that is, the exodus of the tragedy – it goes off again, together with the cries of the useless rescuers.

The unity of space and time in tragedy represents the falling of past events into the present and, showing the fallaciousness of the consensual history that the subject intended to tell of himself, it destroys him, causing his death or irreversible amputation, like the blinding of Oedipus, like the bleeding mass of the little boy.

Distances in space and in time in which the fairy-tale story has taken place, animate a space that depends on this: neither the narrator nor his audience can visit concretely that space or that place, it is devoid of any objectionable reference, and therefore stands out as ahistorical (*unhistorical*). The distance of the scene of the myth is structural to the epic or to the original story of the culture in which it is narrated, and its *metahistorical* reality is attested by the rites and cults that put at the heart the heroes and gods that are the actants.

The ahistorical character of the fairy tale puts this expressive form on the side of the night dream, which is given to the subject and belongs to him, but with respect to which the subject has not exercised any choice: we do not doubt that it is our dream that we remember when we wake up, but we can never consider the authors of it.

⁴ According to Aristotle, "The chorus too should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be an integral part of the whole, and share in the action, not in the manner of Euripides but of Sophocles" (Aristotle 1961: 18, 7).

Whether this is a fairy tale or a tragedy, "Once Upon a Time" leaves its mark on our memories just like the dragon's teeth do on the child's skin. It is a paradigmatic story, because it is permeated by a digging ethic, and because it avoids every temptation to remain on the surface, and lastly because it provides us with an important moral lesson.

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Angela Locatelli

**Plurivocal Narration as an Empathetic Response of Resistance to Colonial Prejudice.
Writing Alterity in *The Voyage Out***

Abstract I: Questo saggio intende chiarire come la letteratura possa promuovere un'“Etica dell'immaginazione empatica”. I testi letterari illustrano e spesso invitano all'accettazione di valori socialmente condivisi, ma possono anche, altrettanto spesso, tradursi in una sfida alla logica di tali valori, non solo a livello dei personaggi e dei loro comportamenti ma a partire dallo speciale uso del linguaggio e delle strategie narrative messi in atto dallo scrittore. La complessa plurivocità del letterario consente infatti la percezione di soggettività molto diverse e diviene efficace strumento di resistenza al pregiudizio consentendo un approccio più approfondito all'esperienza dell'alterità. Queste tesi verranno riprese in riferimento a *The Voyage Out* di Virginia Woolf. Un'attenzione particolare verrà data al divario tra le posizioni del narratore e quelle dei personaggi in quanto strumentale all'empatetica critica woolfiana al colonialismo.

Abstract II: This essay proposes that literature is instrumental to the development of an 'ethics of the empathetic imagination'. Literature illustrates, and often propounds widely shared cultural beliefs. But literature's association with any cultural system is also manifest *a contrario*, in the fact that it interrogates and challenges the very logic, codes, and elements of the system, not only at the level of characters' values and behavior, but also starting from the writer's special use of language and narrative strategies. The pluri-vocal quality of complex literature enhances the perception of widely different subject positions and becomes a powerful tool of resistance against prejudice in favour of a sophisticated assessment of alterity. This thesis will be argued also with reference to Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*, and special attention will be paid to the novel's empathetic dismantling of a dominator's colonial mentality. The antithetical positions of the narrator and most of the characters allows for a scathing and subtle critique of the colonial mentality.

Literature and an Ethics of the Empathetic Imagination

One of the major early contributions to the modern idea of empathy comes from The Scottish Enlightenment, a movement which includes David Hume, Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith, Thomas Reid and Adam Ferguson, and which paved the way to what was to become the new Romantic sensibility in both ethics and aesthetics. In his *Essay on the Nature and*

Conduct of the Passions with Illustrations on the Moral Sense (London 1728), Hutcheson argued against Hobbes' view of ingrained human selfishness and proposed that the quintessence of the human is benevolence and a pursuit of the happiness of others. His views spawned new approaches in ethics and aesthetics eventually developing into a new Romantic perspective.

With the advent of Romanticism, literature came to be appreciated for its power of creating empathy in connection with its imaginative dimension. In Percy Bysshe Shelley's famous words: "The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause" (Shelley 1970: 216-217). What I would call the new "ethics of the empathetic imagination" displaced the former neoclassical "ethics of retribution", based on the rhetorical imperative of *docere et delectare*, and resulting in a kind of literature in which good deeds were expected to be rewarded and bad deeds to be punished. For the Romantics literature was still at the heart of the ethical predicament, but in an entirely novel way¹.

The long wave of the Romantic perspective has reached into the postmodern and the posthuman epistemic and ethical context² where empathy has become one of the central concerns of new approaches to the understanding of the emotions in both philosophy and the cognitive sciences³. The philosopher Martha Nussbaum has recently defended the eudemonistic value of literature precisely in terms of its empathetic effects, *i.e.* of its power to allow readers to enter imaginatively into the life of distant others. Nussbaum's position recalls P. B. Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* both in its emphasis on literary empathy and on several other points, for instance when she opposes an abstract rule-governed moral reasoning to the empathetic imagining provided by literature⁴.

With reference to recent findings in narratology and the cognitive sciences Vera Nünning has suggested that:

[t]he comprehension of fictional stories depends on and evokes empathic feelings: without a certain amount of being able to feel like a character, it is impossible to understand him or her, let alone his or her actions. Empathy is therefore a key to comprehending characters and their actions (Nünning 2014: 104, emphasis mine).

Riane Eisler's approach to innovative social theory and her view of the contrast between a pernicious dominator's culture (to be rejected) and a valuable *partnership* culture (to be fostered in both the private and the public sphere) is also grounded in the concept of empathy⁵. Antonella Riem's recent volume⁶ on *partnership* studies in Australian Literature valuably contributes to the development of this line of thought.

In a stimulating article Doris Bachmann-Medick has critically dealt with the concept

¹ I have dealt extensively with these issues in Locatelli 2008.

² See Locatelli 2014.

³ See Jandl, Knaller & Schönfellner 2017.

⁴ See Nussbaum 1990, 1995 and 2001.

⁵ See Eisler 1989, 2002 and 2007.

⁶ See Riem 2017.

of 'alterity' and has asked important questions on the kind of approach(es) we can take to 'alterity', according to different ideas of 'identity', 'alienation', 'otherness', and according to various processes of 'othering' in our globalized world:

How can we guarantee that alterity can be brought to the fore as a critical concept without surrendering it to any hegemonic power of definition or to an all-too-easy, general availability? [...] The cross-cultural constellations of our world today demand changed recognitions of alterities, acknowledging more than ever alterities within the Self and other productive hybridizations beyond a binary framework (Bachmann-Medick 2017: 9).

Literature's Cognitive and Aesthetic Challenges to Unquestioned 'Values'

The involvement of literature with any system of values is visible in the fact that literature illustrates, and often propounds, beliefs that are shared within a culture (this is, of course, a case of *docere et delectare* towards the goals that a culture chooses to embody). But literature's association with any cultural system is also manifest *a contrario*, i.e., in the fact that literature interrogates and challenges the very logic, codes, and elements of the system, not only at the level of character, but also starting from the writer's special use of language and narrative strategies.

Characters in a novel, play or poem illustrate and usually impart to readers notions of normative, desirable, acceptable behavior (but, of course, what is desirable in a dominator's culture is far from acceptable in a *partnership* perspective). However, characters may question what is socially valued and what is taken for granted and suggest alternative ways of being in the world. This is how a critique of the dominator's mentality is made possible, whenever literature is able to resist entrenched indifference, and even hostility to the pleas of distant others (women, migrants, minorities). This can happen, provided that literature offers a plurality of perspectives on the fictional world, whereby the reader is invited to imagine both what a character feels in a certain situation, as well as what s/he would feel in the same situation. This valuable perspective-taking is one aspect of the issue that the cognitive sciences have pronounced crucial in reducing prejudice⁷.

Moreover, in literary texts resistance to the blind adoption of authoritarian, biased, and oppressive views is uniquely sustained by formal complexity. In *Proust et les signes*, Deleuze puts forward his well-known thesis that the poet speaks a foreign tongue in his own language⁸. In *Critique et clinique*⁹ he proposes a view of style as a stuttering of the language, as a tension of language towards its limits. Style can also be seen as a-grammaticality, i.e., as a resistance of the speaker/writer against the impositions and constraints of the standard language.

In a dominator's society (*sensu* Eisler) the resistance induced by literary readings against the mainstream *doxa* is a premise to the development of alternative cultural models,

⁷ See Elgin 2007, Batson 2009, Johnson, Jasper, Griffin & Huffman 2013.

⁸ See Deleuze 1964.

⁹ See Deleuze 1993.

including, first and foremost, the model of equitable and just relationships and the perception of hybrid identities.

Let me illustrate these dynamics with reference to a passage in Chapter 7, almost a digression, but an amazingly significant one, in Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*.

A Plurivocal Representation of the Colonial Mentality

In Virginia Woolf's first novel (1915), the depiction of the two cultural traits of misogyny and a colonial dominator's mentality is purposefully dealt with in a sort of narrative parallelism. The male protagonist, Terence Hewet, is the mouthpiece of some of Woolf's feminist views that were to be expressed more extensively in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938). Terence becomes the strongest voice against male chauvinism while engaged in creating a true *partnership* relationship with his beloved Rachel Vinrace. Their open, sincere, and dialogical relationship represents a quietly provocative counterpart to the patriarchal (*i.e.* dominator's) view of a conventional marriage as the (only) 'happy ending' of all male-female relationships. What both the hero and the heroine are seeking is no longer marriage as the most satisfactory outcome of the canonical love plot, but the fully lived and explored experience of 'being in love', and of gaining a deeper awareness of themselves and the world surrounding them. This unusual narrative choice (certainly more transgressive in Edwardian England than it is today) still forces the reader to 'think out of the box' of the dominant mind-set, *i.e.*, against the grain of the timeless strict prescriptions on masculine and feminine roles.

Among the many narrative innovations of the novel, one has hardly been noticed by critics, and will be my main focus in the pages that follow: it is the fact that the reader is invited to experience the 'voyage out' as an instance of direct contact with cultural difference. The voyage is directed 'out', both spatially and metaphorically; *i.e.*, it is oriented towards a symbolical alterity embodied in a distant geographical site and in an anthropological new setting. It is thus, for both characters and readers, an experience of defamiliarisation, a test, and an instrument towards intellectual honesty and cognitive sophistication, and ultimately towards the questioning of a narrow (Edwardian, British and Eurocentric) cultural perspective.

Most of the characters in the novel, *i.e.*, the group of English travelers who come on the *Euphrosyne*¹⁰ to Santa Marina, embody this biased ideological dimension and unquestioningly uphold it, because ideology often operates in terms of 'naturalizing' its assumptions, and tendentiously making what is culturally construed look natural, and universal. The majority of the English visitors to the tropical region fail to openly question the perspective of the ultraconservative Mr. Pepper, the pedantic, misogynous scholar who is, not surprisingly, a nostalgic promoter of British imperialism. And yet, what is significant in the novel is that the narrator's dissenting point of view is magisterially inscribed within the outspoken imperialist views of the character(s). In other words, the ideological clash between narrator and character is, remarkably, as sharp as it is subtle.

¹⁰ *Euphrosyne* in Greek mythology was one of the three Graces, the goddess of good cheer and merriment. She was also the goddess of chastity.

The narrator's judgment and negative evaluation of Mr. Pepper's words is not an ostentatious condemnation, a flat, dogmatic moral statement, but it is conveyed through the elaborate form given to the narrative while reporting the character's thoughts and speech. This is a clear instance of literary complexity¹¹, and of literature's power of saying more than one thing at the same time, and even of saying contradictory things simultaneously. In fact, the narrator's point of view and Pepper's imperialist ideology are juxtaposed in such a way that their discrepancies are brought to the fore. There is an oscillation between the narrator's omniscient's position and the characters' thoughts that are not voiced aloud.

This inscription of ideological dissent in an apparently linear narration is an illuminating example of the plurivocal and multi-perspectival dimension of literary discourse, a strategy that challenges the readers in their taken-for-granted assumptions. In this sense, plurivocality can transform unchallenged bias, both at a cognitive and ethical level.

Ultimately, this novel is an effective means of reducing prejudice (*sensu* Johnson, Jasper, Griffin & Huffman 2013), because prejudice, in the form of both male chauvinism and colonial arrogance, is stigmatized through Woolf's subtle irony. This is the point at which Eisler's philosophical views in *The Chalice and The Blade* and Woolf's literary discourse in *The Voyage Out* come to a clear and strong convergence. Both the novelist and the philosopher convincingly propose that the exploitation of another human being or ethnic group, and the so called 'war of the sexes' based on male dominance are not biologically determined or sanctioned by divine decree, but that, on the contrary, they are the bitter fruit of specific cultural practices of oppression.

Let me now provide a detailed analysis of a few passages in the novel that I see as both a simultaneous illustration and challenge of the imperialist predicament. While describing the commotion of arrival at Santa Marina, the omniscient narrator notes, almost in passing, that: "The lonely little island was invaded from all quarters at once" (Woolf 1989: 85). But 'invaded' is obviously an adjective chosen because charged with colonial connotations, despite the fact that the newcomers are supposedly 'harmless' visitors. The novel invites (without preaching) an ethical attitude of attention and respect towards 'the other', and may even suggest (to readers in our times) that Western tourism may not be entirely free from its colonial legacy ("Somehow or other, as fashions do, the fashion spread; an old monastery was quickly turned into a hotel, while a famous line of steamships altered its route for the convenience of passengers", Woolf 1989: 88)¹².

The arrival of the cargo boat at Santa Marina is described from the point of view of previously arrived passengers who observe it from more prestigious ships. Class is clearly one among the many discrimination criteria that promote an attitude of complacent superiority among the upper classes.

From a distance the *Euphrosyne* looked very small. Glasses were turned upon her from the decks of great liners, and she was pronounced a tramp, a cargo-boat, or one of those wretched little passenger steamers where people rolled about among the cat-

¹¹ See Locatelli 2009.

¹² See Bhabha 1994 and Geertz 1983.

tle on deck. The insect-like figures of Dalloways, Ambroses, and Vinraces were also derided, both from the extreme smallness of their persons and the doubt which only strong glasses could dispel as to whether they were really live creatures or only lumps on the rigging (Woolf 1989: 85).

The snobbery of the privileged anticipates the general British attitude towards alterity, from which the party that disembarks on the island is not immune. The passengers of the *Euphrosyne*, the despised, will soon display the same smug attitude towards the natives, a recurring trait that eventually escalates to open racist insult and to imperialist pronouncements, grounded in the Victorian doctrine of ‘the white man’s burden’.

The gaze of the Western visitors defines the exotic space, but the narrator’s omniscient voice intermingles, interferes with, and meta-comments their perceptions. Virginia Woolf’s is a multi-level narrative that allows for both the voicing of prejudice (in the mouth and minds of the characters) and a distancing from such biases in the narrator’s comments on their attitudes. The English travelers are surprised to find, after the sea voyage, so many “minute object” and “different forms of life” around them (Woolf 1989: 86). The primary objects of their gaze are: the hills, the mountains, the rich vegetation and the little white houses with brown roofs “settled, like nesting sea birds” (Woolf 1989: 86), which implies a perfect ecological integration of human activity and natural landscape. The simile “like nesting sea birds” suggests harmony; is it something that the newcomers think? Or, more likely, the point of view of the narrator who takes charge of the description?

This double and even plural narrative strategy is further enhanced in the passage that follows, when the silence is broken by Mr. Pepper: his thoughts are given full scope by the perceptive narrator, whose opinions diverge from those of this quintessentially ‘dominator’ and complacent character. Narratorial dissent gradually becomes more and more evident, and turns into a profound and thorough critique of the colonial attitude, as demonstrated in the following quotation:

“Three hundred years odd”, said Mr. Pepper meditatively at length. As nobody said, “What?” he merely extracted a bottle and swallowed a pill. The piece of information that died within him was to the effect that three hundred years ago five Elizabethan barques had anchored where the *Euphrosyne* now floated. Half-drawn up upon the beach lay an equal number of Spanish galleons, unmanned, for the country was still a virgin land behind a veil (Woolf 1989: 86).

Pepper’s recollections open with the idea that when the English sailors arrived, Spanish galleons were already anchored in the bay. Virginia Woolf’s fiction provides an accurate historical information, since the Spaniards and Portuguese had arrived to Central and South America at least eighty years before the English. The metaphor of the “virgin land behind a veil” belongs to mainstream colonial discourse of the colonisation exalting male prowess and domination over the land and local women, but in this passage the trope also illustrates its critical counterpart, which condemns colonisation as the rape of a shy, and presumably reluctant (“veiled”) virgin.

The story of the British conquest of the world is succinctly and imaginatively recounted in the single episode of what had supposedly happened in Santa Marina, but the episode is emblematic of the entire colonial enterprise: “Slipping across the water, the English sailors bore away bars of silver, bales of linen, timbers of cedar wood, golden crucifixes knobbed with emeralds” (Woolf 1989: 86). Colonisation starts and thrives as pillage. The English rob precious goods and artefacts (appreciated more for their worth in gold and emeralds than by their symbolic value); on the other hand, the informed reader recalls that the Spaniards had in turn despoiled the natives of their treasures to make their own precious artefacts. The whole history of colonialism is represented in this very brief fiction through the events on “the little island” (Woolf 1989: 95). It is a compact digression in the whole novel, one that, however, cannot be ignored if we are not just reading for the plot. The passage below also alludes to the fact that English pirate ships routinely attacked Spanish galleons richly loaded with colonial treasures. History tells us that the fight between the two was an inevitable outcome. This is metaphorically rendered in the novel as an image of a bodily fight on the shore of Santa Marina between the “drunken” Spaniards, overfed by the plentiful fruits of the “miraculous” land, and the “hardy”, “tawny”, “hairy” English, “with muscles like wire”:

When the Spaniards came down from their drinking, a fight ensued, the two parties churning up the sand, and driving each other into the surf. The Spaniards, bloated with fine living upon the fruits of the miraculous land, fell in heaps; but the hardy Englishmen, tawny with sea-voyaging, hairy for lack of razors, with muscles like wire, fangs greedy for flesh, and fingers itching for gold, dispatched the wounded, drove the dying into the sea, and soon reduced the natives to a state of superstitious wonderment (Woolf 1989: 86-87).

The negative stereotypical image of the enemies (“drunken” and “bloated”), is of course Dr. Pepper’s, as well as the macho and chauvinist picture of the English, clearly in line with his overt ‘dominator’ ideology (*sensu* Eisler). But a counter-image is inserted in the very portrait of English conquerors: their ruthless ravenousness is explicit in their “fangs greedy for flesh”, and their obsession with gain is clear in the metaphor of their “fingers itching for gold”. Greed and cruelty are the historical elements of a perverse course of events that Woolf’s fiction does not wish to ignore. Moreover, the “superstitious wonderment” of the natives and their supposed cultural inferiority has, of course, been a classical *topos* of colonial discourse, since Thomas Hariot’s famous travelogue *A Brief and True Report of the Newfound Land of Virginia* (1588)¹³. As I have argued elsewhere¹⁴, the disciplinary ideology shaping English subjects at home (including their recognition of the king’s authority and the ensuing pride in national identity) is taken a step further in the parallel process of the submission of the alien others abroad. The latter are not, however interpellated as subjects (Lecercle 2019) in the affirmative sense (*subjectivité*) but they remain subjects in the sense of

¹³ Thomas Hariot took part in Sir Richard Grenville’s expedition in 1585 and his travelogue is often mentioned as one of the sources of Shakespeare’s *Tempest*.

¹⁴ See Locatelli 2001, in which I have dealt with cultural strategies of inclusion/exclusion, stereotyping, labelling, etc.

assujettissement, i.e. as servants of the dominators. The English subject, in the very moment of his/her interpellation as such, feels entitled to force the 'Other' to recognize the subjectivity and superiority of the English. Thomas Hariot writes: "There is good hope they may be brought through discreet dealing and gouvernement to the imbracing of the trueth, and consequently to honor, obey, feare and loue us" (Hariot 1903: 69).

The dominators' ideology (*sensu* Eisler) is thus fully displayed in the dichotomy 'us' versus 'them', and its concomitant hierarchization of cultural difference, whereby 'different' is meant as 'inferior' (Bhabha 1994): Pepper is clearly moving in Hariot's footsteps. His delight in the success of English colonisation and his disappointment that it was not more extensive ("the map would undoubtedly be red where it is now an odious green"¹⁵, Woolf 1989: 87) registers the widespread Edwardian and Georgian anxieties on the destiny of the empire, and a parallel nostalgia for its Victorian climax:

Here a settlement was made; women were imported; children grew. All seemed to favour the expansion of the British Empire, and had there been men like Richard Dalloway in the time of Charles the First, the map would undoubtedly be red where it is now an odious green. But it must be supposed that the political mind of that age lacked imagination, and, merely for want of a few thousand pounds and a few thousand men, the spark died that should have been a conflagration. [...] From the interior came Indians with subtle poisons, naked bodies, and painted idols; from the sea came vengeful Spaniards and rapacious Portuguese; exposed to all these enemies (though the climate proved wonderfully kind and the earth abundant) the English dwindled away and all but disappeared. [...] English history then denies all knowledge of the place (Woolf 1989: 87).

The imperialist mind wishes for a continuous escalation of the conquest (metaphorically not just "a spark" but "a conflagration"). Stereotypical negative labelling is applied to natives and to enemies alike: the natives are idolatrous (which signals the English lack of respect for different cultures and beliefs), the Spaniards are "vengeful" and the Portuguese "rapacious". Projecting onto the enemy the traits that a culture does not admit as its own is a classical strategy to exalt one's own image and denigrate the other.

Fear is undoubtedly a prevailing emotion towards the Other in the colonial mindset. Woolf's keen perception and critique of the contemporary imperialist ideology goes even further: it includes an observation as to the fact that nationalist discourse is repressing all historical knowledge of the "dark" pages concerning the waning of British settlements and the causes of the gradual dismantling of "the great British colony". The implications of this historiographical omission are highlighted in the following consideration (most likely from the narrator's rather than from Pepper's own musing): "[...] The reasons which had drawn the English across the sea to found a small colony within the last ten years are not so easily described, and will never perhaps be recorded in history books" (Woolf 1989: 87).

Woolf is certainly ahead of her times when, within a fictional narrative and a relatively

¹⁵ Pepper alludes to the fact that red indicates colonial possessions in maps of the British Empire. It is interesting to note that green, a traditional attribute of nature, is assigned to the territories that do not belong to it.

short but not marginal digression, she manages to meta-comment the omissions of official historiography. Historians have only fairly recently begun to interrogate the forms of history books that have generally been taken for 'factual' truth, when they merely represent the truth of the winners. It is indeed striking that Woolf is able to represent the positions and motives that are responsible for reticent and omissive historiography, and that she does so through an exquisitely 'literary' style, i.e. through a special use of language, and complex emplotment strategies.

The history of colonisation that is told at home requires the oblivion of violence against the natives and includes the myth of the plentiful and beautiful New World, an obvious incentive to prospective settlers. The narrator suggests that schoolmasters played a central role in the enterprise: they are significant agents of the reduction of 'the Other' into a subordinate subject:

The movement in search of something new was of course infinitely small, affecting only a handful of well-to-do people. It began by a few schoolmasters serving their passage out to South America as the pursers of tramp steamers. [...] The country itself taxed all their powers of description, for they said it was much bigger than Italy, and really nobler than Greece. Again, they declared that the natives were strangely beautiful, very big in stature, dark, passionate, and quick to seize the knife. The place seemed new and full of new forms of beauty, in proof of which they showed handkerchiefs which the women had worn round their heads, and primitive carvings coloured bright greens and blues. Somehow or other, as fashions do, the fashion spread; an old monastery was quickly turned into a hotel, while a famous line of steamships altered its route for the convenience of passengers (Woolf 1989: 88).

Edward Said's *Orientalism* comes to mind (Said 1978) when the narrator acutely suggests that people are attracted to exotic places by the *couleur locale*, a "fashion", rather than by a serious desire to meet 'the Other'. The lack of respect and the philistine complete disregard for the sacred is evident in the adjective "primitive" applied to the indigenous carvings, and in the turning of an old monastery into a hotel. Other motives of colonial settlement are represented by Helen Ambrose's brother who "had been sent out years before to make his fortune, at any rate to keep clear of race-horses" (Woolf 1989: 88). A clean break with the past does not *per se* imply a transformative encounter with the other. In fact, the English prejudice engrained in the group disembarked from the *Euphrosyne* is further expressed by their superficial and stereotypical gaze on the local village:

The road passed through the town, where men seemed to be beating brass and crying "Water", where the passage was blocked by mules and cleared by whips and curses, where the women walked barefoot, their heads balancing baskets, and cripples hastily displayed mutilated members (Woolf 1989: 89).

The party's negative evaluation of the villa and its wilting garden is grounded in their obtuse persuasion that an English house and garden should be transplanted in a tropical region to improve it. The disappointment of the English in what they find 'different' is evident:

The villa was a roomy white house, which, as is the case with most continental houses, looked to an English eye frail, ramshackle, and absurdly frivolous, more like a pagoda in a tea-garden than a place where one slept. The garden called urgently for the services of gardener (Woolf 1989: 89).

A new focaliser, Mrs Chailey becomes the strongest voice of prejudice. She embodies the “political economy of difference”, discussed in Rosi Braidotti’s *The Posthuman*, whereby “entire categories of human beings” were devalued as “disposable others”, since “to be ‘different from’ came to mean ‘less than’” (Braidotti 2013: 28). Woolf writes:

The indecency of the whole place struck Mrs Chailey forcibly. There were no blinds to shut out the sun, nor was there any furniture to speak of for the sun to spoil. Standing in the bare stone hall, and surveying a staircase of superb breadth, but cracked and carpetless, she further ventured the opinion that there were rats, as large as terriers at home, and that if one put one’s foot down with any force one would come through the floor. As for hot water – at this point her investigations left her speechless. “Poor creature!” she murmured to the sallow Spanish servant-girl who came out with the pigs and hens to receive them, “no wonder you hardly look like a human being!” Maria accepted the compliment with an exquisite Spanish grace (Woolf 1989: 90).

Mrs Chailey’s racist insult, degrading the kind and welcoming Spanish girl to the level of the non-human, is explicitly contradicted by the perceptive and dissenting narrator, who notes that “Maria accepted the compliment with an exquisite Spanish grace”, thereby suggesting that Maria is more accomplished than her interlocutor (who obviously fails to recognize her “grace” probably because the girl appeared in the lowly context of pigs and hens). Poverty is callously taken for a mark of intellectual and moral inferiority in the biased mentality voiced by Mrs Chailey.

As the above passages demonstrate, an adjective, an adverb, a syntactical deviation from the standard language, *i.e.* the specificity of literary form suffices to compel readers to pause and think of the nature and meaning of historical narrations, and the partisan positions implicit in them. The passages quoted above provide a critical perspective on colonialism that anticipates the future progress in anthropology, and even aspects of ‘post-colonial’ theory.

Let me just conclude by recalling one of Antonella Riem’s statements on ‘the liberating power of storytelling’:

I see literature as a gift of partnership. It carries the instruments of knowledge, consciousness, passion, creative power to imagine, re-imagine and trans-form our world, our relationship with ourselves and others – meaning not only the human other, but also the animal, vegetal and the living planet Gaia (Riem 2017: 198).

I take this statement as a fit point of arrival for my line of reasoning, and as corroborating my view that literature is a beneficial ecological space to be preserved in our global techno-bureaucratic environment. Literature is certainly not antithetical to the demands of

science, but it provides a unique contribution not only to the development of emotional and intellectual sophistication, but also to the enhancement of our problem-solving faculties, hopefully oriented towards the construction of the more just and compassionate world advocated by Riane Eisler.

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Héliane Ventura

Empathy and Irony in “Keeping Fit” by Nadine Gordimer

Abstract I: Questo saggio offre un’analisi testuale di “Keeping Fit”, racconto pubblicato nel 1991 in *Jump and Other Stories*, quando in Sudafrica era stato abolito il regime dell’apartheid ma non era stata ancora introdotta la democrazia. “Keeping Fit” è a mio avviso uno dei racconti più ironici e ‘polarizzati’ della raccolta. Ritengo che il racconto sfidi i contrasti che mette in campo, attraverso la dissoluzione ironica e carnevalesca delle differenze, evocando al tempo stesso un forte senso del perturbante, che destabilizza gli steccati e le divisioni su cui è costruita la storia. La protagonista nera è presentata come amorevole e capace di empatia, mentre la coppia bianca è descritta come egoista e indifferente; eppure, il finale aperto suggerisce, con ironia, la possibilità di un cambiamento e rinnovamento.

Abstract II: This essay proposes a close textual analysis of “Keeping Fit”, a story published in 1991 in *Jump and Other Stories* at a time when South Africa was in a post-apartheid but pre-democratic situation. “Keeping Fit” is arguably one of the most polarised and ironic short stories in the volume. I suggest that the story challenges the polarisations that it installs by bringing about an ironic and carnivalesque dissolution of boundaries while conjuring up a strong sense of the uncanny, which destabilizes its own partitions and differences. While the black protagonist is presented as empathetic and caring, the white couple is described as selfish and indifferent, yet the open ending ironically suggests the possibility of change and renewal.

From the perspective of social neuro-science, empathy refers to “the capacity to understand and respond to the unique affective experiences of another person” (Decety & Philip 2006: 54). However, a large consensus has developed around empathy as a complex socio-emotional competency that encompasses more than a single ability. It has at least two interacting components: an affective response, which often entails sharing another’s emotions; and a cognitive capacity to take the perspective of others. Both may play a role in the processes involved in coping (Sun *et al.* 2019). In point of fact, empathy has long been considered a contributor to positive social interactions, such as developing affective bonds and understanding, and promoting caring actions between people (Sun *et al.* 2019: 3).

The possibility for empathy to promote caring actions between people as opposed to selfishness leading to asphyxia is remarkably illustrated in Nadine Gordimer’s life and works, if only because of the definition she herself provided for the act of literary creation.

She suggested that literature should hinge upon “relevance and commitment”¹ and she made it her lifelong task to dedicate herself to the fight against apartheid through the unremitting production of essays, conferences, novels or short stories (Clingman). An outstandingly productive writer, she contributed fifteen novels and sixteen volumes of short stories. In this paper, I will concentrate on one short story only from the volume entitled *Jump and Other Stories* published in 1991 in a country that Johan Jacobs described as “a post-apartheid but pre-democratic South Africa”, between Nelson Mandela’s release from prison and his election as President of South Africa (Jacobs 2001: 199).

Entitled “Keeping Fit”, the story features a white man of high socio-economic status who goes jogging on a Sunday morning and finds himself involuntarily embroiled in hot pursuit, assault and homicide. He witnesses a man savagely killed by a crowd and is himself rescued from a similar fate by a caring black woman of low socio-economic status who extends her arm out of her barrack in a squatter camp and draws the man in to provide him with invisibility and safety. When the jogger returns home, he finds himself confronted to a domestic problem that is left unresolved at the end of the story. A baby bird is stifling in the drainpipe of his house and if he does not climb on a ladder and extend his arm to rescue the bird in the same way he himself was rescued, no one else will do it in his place.

“Keeping Fit” is arguably one of the most polarised and ironic short stories in the volume. By irony I do not designate the conventionally accepted definition, “saying one thing but meaning another”, but I rather suggest the definition provided by William New: irony as saying at least two things at the same time, a process he calls “oversetting”: “For irony often means saying what you mean at a slant, or saying two things at once-oversetting: so that a reader might hear (through the performance of a given set of words) not only their split levels of implication but also the divergent relation between an apparent surface intent and an often political undertow” (New 2004: 6).

“Voice - writes the poet Lisa Robertson - is a hybrid of the sonic and the political’. This blur between *saying* and *meaning* creates a sort of rhetorical diversion, a pause while meaning and function can be figured out; and often the figuring out occurs in an act of recognition (or, as D. J. Enright has it ‘reverberation’) rather than an act of explanation” (New 2004: 6).

Gordimer uses polarisation as oversetting. She pits one situation against another for the reader to recognize the reverberation of one event upon the other. There is a spatial and socio-economic polarisation between the affluent white upper middle-class suburb, Alice-wood, where the protagonist lives and the shanty town where he finds a refuge. There is an axiological polarisation between the ethics of care as embodied by the black woman and the indifference or absence of commitment as represented by the upper middle-class jogger and his wife. More importantly there is a biological polarisation between breathing and asphyxia, between keeping fit and stifling, between the feast of life and the agony of death as diversely represented by the pumping heart of the white man jogging down the road on a Sunday morning and the bleeding corpse of the black man killed on the tarmac, or the baby

¹ “Relevance and Commitment” was the title of a lecture given by Nadine Gordimer at a conference entitled “The State of Art in South Africa” at the University of Cape Town in 1979. It has been anthologised in a volume edited by Stephen Clingman in 1988.

bird stifling in the drain pipe. There is even a sonic polarisation between the cockcrow at dawn on the other side of the fence in shantytown and the faint high-pitched sound of the trapped baby bird in the protagonist's home. Despite these apparently strongly enforced binaries, I would like to suggest that the story challenges the polarisations that it installs by bringing about an ironic and carnivalesque dissolution of boundaries while conjuring up a strong sense of the uncanny, which destabilises its own partitions and differences.

The first space we encounter is that of the affluent home of the white protagonist, which he leaves in the early morning hours to go jogging and which is repeatedly presented as one among many of the exact similar affluence and comfort. The bedroom is described more precisely in the last pages of the story with its lilac patterned blue silk curtains undulating with the breeze, the dressing table with the painted porcelain hand where the wife's necklaces and ear-rings are hanging, a red rose tripled in the angle of mirrors. This elegant, decorous setting stands in sharp contrast with the shack where the jogger finds protection from the crowd; the shack in which a family of seven black people are squatting is described as a place where rain pours in and where you have to stuff around the tin with plastic to try to keep it dry. The opulence of the former is pitted against the crowded deprivation of the latter. The two settings are in fact diametrically opposed, they are exactly poles apart, and yet they are presented in such a way that symmetry defeats alterity. Take the blue silk curtains of the master bedroom and compare them with the sleeping arrangement in the shack where there is no such thing as a private bedroom for the parents and no display of an open wardrobe with ties dangling thick on a rack. However, the bed is curtained: "the bed curtained for some attempt at the altar of privacy" (Gordimer 1992: 240). The use of the word altar in the shack ties in with the sacramental use of the color blue in the master bedroom. More strikingly, the protagonist is said to leave his wife still asleep in their bed "as if he has left his body in its shape impressed beside her and moved out of himself on silent running shoes" (Gordimer 1992: 230). His early morning departure is disquietingly compared with a near-death experience of a man leaving his body with the help of silent running shoes. This image is picked up again when he enters the shack: it is said that the intimacy of the habitation "presses around him, a mould in which his own dimension was redefined" (Gordimer 1992: 235). The metaphor of the mould used to define the shack implies a process of duplication between an original form and its actual imprint, which erases the difference between house and body.

The world of the other that Gordimer makes his protagonist enter is an uncanny universe, which obliterates frontiers between the animate and the inanimate, the organic and the inorganic, the human subjects and the objects around them. Consider for instance the description of the moment when the protagonist is saved by the black woman. She appears out of her shack, and tells him to get inside: "A firm grip, a big butterscotch-coloured upper arm in a tight filled sleeve, yellow and pink flowered" (Gordimer 1992: 233-234). The woman's help is literally presented as the hand of providence: her arm seems to be detached from her body and to exist on its own as a spare part. As such, the black woman's arm is diametrically pitted against the description of the painted porcelain hand, which stands on the dressing table of the white protagonist's wife and where her necklaces are hanging.

The white woman is metonymically associated with the fragility and coldness of porcelain, while the black woman is metonymically associated with the sweetness and goodness of butterscotch. Porcelain is a hard but delicate shiny white substance made by heating a special type of clay to a high temperature; it is pitted against butterscotch, a hard, light-brown colored, sweet food made by boiling butter and sugar together. The symmetry of the metonymic associations simultaneously reinforces the similarities and the differences, the alterity and the sameness between the two women.

They also perform an uncanny dissolution of boundaries that is to be encountered throughout the story. For instance when the furious crowd is running to catch up their prey, the narrator says that the stink of adrenaline sweat was coming from the furnace within them" (Gordimer 1992: 232), thus providing the reader with a disquieting image which eliminates the crowd's odorous humanity and replaces it with industrial combustion. This process of transformation of the organic into the inorganic is reflexive in the sense that inorganic material is sometimes described with organic attributes, so that the inanimate becomes animate. Take the tarmac on which the man is running: it is described with the help of a hypallage as "the exhausted tarmac" (Gordimer 1992: 230) as if it was not only overused and damaged but also suffering from human fatigue. This description of the exhausted tarmac resonates with the description of the black woman's body which is similarly described as a "big used body" but it suffers a supplementary process of transformation. The tarmac is focalised at close range at the moment when the victim of the chase is bled to death: "on the oil stains of the tarmac blood was superimposing another spill" (Gordimer 1992: 233). The sedimentation that is described here is particularly macabre and disquieting because it mixes together the old waste oil from motorcars and the recently shed human blood of the victim, as if blood were sand or stones, that eventually formed a layer of rock superimposed over the tarmac.

The reflexive transformation of inanimate into animate and of animate into inanimate is also present when the protagonist scrutinises detritus and litter piling up in shanty town. A discarded car is then described as "the scabby body [...] like the eviscerated shell of a giant beetle" (Gordimer 1992: 233).

The dissolution of frontiers between the living and the dead, human and animal is everywhere to be found in shantytown: when the protagonist flees down among the shacks, he sees bare-arsed children squatting to pee who "jumped up and bounded from him like rats" (Gordimer 1992: 233). The man pursued by the enraged crowd and stabbed to death is described as a body who "writhed away like a chopped worm" (Gordimer 1992: 233). Not only is there an elimination of frontiers between the human and the animal, but we are also confronted with the abjection of indeterminate states. The eviscerated car and the chopped victim inhabit an uncertain region in which they are deprived of ontological specificity; the car is a supernatural being, which continues to exist although it no longer functions as a car, and the man's body is chopped up as if it were food destined to a ritual feast.

One of the weapons that has been used to kill the man is a club the size of which is compared to a child's head: "the man went down under chants and the blows of a club with a gnarled knob as big as a child's head" (Gordimer 1992: 233). There is something profound-

ly uncanny in this description of the instrument of death, which superimposes over the inanimate stick, the image of a child's head. According to Jentsch, a state of undecidability is the essential element in rendering an entity uncanny to the observer who "doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate" (Jentsch 1906, cit. Rahimi 2013: 459); Freud contested this definition of the uncanny and advanced his own. To him, the dark knowledge produced by the uncanny consisted of the realization that the 'familiar' body, which we were "previously used to regarding as a unified psyche," could so easily become an alien 'unfamiliar' object devoid of understandable meaning and lacking unitary cohesion (Freud 1919, cit. Rahimi 2013: 459).

In keeping with Freud's definition of the uncanny, the description that Gordimer provides of the victim's body transforms him into an alien unfamiliar object in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which recurs. The dead body bleeding on the tarmac is indeed a tar-mac. Tar is a black substance, sticky when hot, used especially for making roads and mac is an informal use when speaking to a man whose name you do not know as in "Hey, Mac". In Gordimer's story, the man under hot pursuit has been eliminated but he returns, not as ashes, but as tar. This is a tale full of sound and fury in which the horrific dimension stems from the uncanny specter of not-being. There is a profoundly tragic dimension to the description of the senseless violence which has led to this homicide but there is also at the same time, within the very tragedy which is depicted, a vision of extremity which is very close to the carnivalesque.

This is suggested by Gordimer herself when describing the chase in which the protagonist finds himself embroiled: "he who had blundered into the chase was whirled along as if caught up by some carnival crowd in which this time the presence of death was not fancy dress" (Gordimer 1992: 232). The chase in Gordimer's story is presented as part of the ritual of carnival if only because it turns into a social leveler. It brings together people of all echelons of society who in real life are irreducibly separated. Without this chase, the white protagonist would never have entered the black people's shack and would never have witnessed at close quarters the misery and deprivation of their habitation. There is also a process of crowning and de-crowning that occurs during this episode. The wealthy man in brokerage who sleeps in a bedroom with blue silk curtains is made to stoop into the tin shack and sit in the single sagging armchair it contains, while the woman with the butter-scotch arm is elevated to the status of a saintly rescuer.

However, the gruesome butchering which ends up the chase is a far cry from the spirit of rejoicing attendant upon the carnivalesque and cannot be regarded as its modern or South African version if only because it is no make-believe ritual enactment. It is a horrendous slaying, an assassination which is knowingly and savagely performed without any hint at the possibility of redemption for those who indulged in the act. A carnival is a time of destruction and rebirth, the festival of all-annihilating and all-renewing time, a devastation that has as its counterpoint renewal, it is marked by comedy and laughter. The hot pursuit of the finally butchered victim is no carnival-like degradation; it is a story of Kristevan abjection which does not appear to be concerned with regeneration.

It makes the reader hear the pre-linguistic yawls of animals; the narrator says of the

chasing crowd that “they were bellowing in a language he didn’t need to understand in order to understand” (Gordimer 1992: 232). Although the white protagonist veered off into the near-by shack and did not participate in the slaying of the victim, he seems to be part of the fray because of the words which describe his activity. The text begins with a description of his breathing efforts as he runs along and comes to his second wind. The first word of the text is “Breathe”, which is repeated under different guises: “breath”, “to breathe”, “breathless” and the plosive sound of the first letter keeps exploding throughout the first sentence: “Breathe. Breath. A baby, a chicken hatching-the first imperative is to breathe” (Gordimer 1992: 229).

The basic plosives in English are t, k, and p (which are voiceless) and d, g, and b (which are voiced). What we have in this first sentence is the voiced plosive [b] and the voiceless plosives [p] and [t]. Posited together at the very opening of the text they function as a sonic warning. They constitute a stop, also known as a *plosive* or oral occlusive, because they are consonants in which the vocal tract is blocked so that all airflow ceases. The occlusion may be made with the tongue blade ([t], [d]) or body ([k], [g]), lips ([p], [b]), or glottis ([ʔ]). The plosive speech sound produced in this opening are made with the tongue blade and the lips. They already embroil the protagonist in the major polarisations of the text, the biological polarisation between life and death. While they seem to mimic the sounds of birth, they already hint at the bellowing, which precedes the slaying of the victim as performed by the enraged crowd. They anticipate the white protagonist’s own fury against his wife when he discovers at the very end of the story that a baby bird is stuck in the drainpipe and that no one in his household is doing anything to rescue the bird: “He jumped from the bed and burst through the house, going after her, bellowing, his hands palsied with rage. – Get the bloody thing out, can’t you!” (Gordimer 1992: 242-243).

By opening the story with the bellows of the man’s heart and closing it with his bellowing against his wife, Gordimer definitely allows his white protagonist to become complicit with the bellowing crowd. The man and the crowd are positioned in the Kristevan semiotic, and make the reader hear the pre-linguistic pulses of animal fury and unbound mania. Gordimer situates her white protagonists in an ambiguous region. As opposed to the selflessness and generosity of the black woman with the butterscotch arm, the white broker demonstrates selfishness. He does not play the part of the Good Samaritan. He does not mean to get on a ladder and rescue the stifling baby bird yet he wants it to be rescued and resents his wife’s indifference to its plight. The wife pretends empathy but does not care about its death: “So, what’s to be done about it? Can’t exactly call the fire brigade. Poor little thing. Just wait for it to die” (Gordimer 1992: 242).

The wife is indifferent to the bird’s suffering and does not mind its stifling inside her own drainpipe. She displays no strategy of active coping. The man is disturbed by its faint cries but wants someone else to deal with the problem so that he can find peace after his eventful morning run. Through the story of the stifling baby bird stuck in the drainpipe, Gordimer is writing an ironic fable about the white couple’s selfishness, maladaptive coping and behavioral disengagement as opposed to the black good Samaritan who risked her own safety and that of her family to provide hospitality for the endangered jogger.

Gordimer is also writing a political and spiritual allegory in which she ironically denounces the absence of political commitment in the white population *vis-à-vis* the plight of the blacks during apartheid. She denounces the white population's carelessness and their lack of concern but she also denounces their sloth, their wrath, and their pride as opposed to the charity, faith, hope and prudence of the black woman with the butterscotch arm. In other words, she pits the spiritual sins of the former against the theological and cardinal virtues of the latter. The black woman is animated by a Christian philosophy of love that is in stark contrast with the neglectful and selfish behavior of the white couple. She is not simply an embodiment of *caritas*, she commands the respect of her family and of the white man because her behavior is adapted, appropriate, and effective. Under the circumstances, and given the title of the story, it may very well be that Gordimer requires her reader to try and question the concept of fitness.

The title of the story "Keeping Fit" is a reference to the condition of being physically strong and healthy and the necessity for human beings to try and retain that condition as long as possible, but "fit" is a polysemic word which also refers to suitability, that is to say the appropriateness of a conduct or of a person. The suitability of the black woman's conduct is exemplary but the white couple's behavior in front of the domestic problem of the bird stuck in the drainpipe is very much in question. Gordimer seems to be very ironically asking: who is the misfit? Who is using a maladaptive coping strategy? Is it the black family in their shack at the periphery of Alicewood or it is the white couple who refuse to take responsibility for what is taking place in their drainpipe or the vicinity of their well-appointed home? She seems to be challenging the white population with the last sentence of the text. The wife suggests that her husband should put up a ladder against the wall, and that he should climb up to try and dislodge the baby bird from the mistaken habitat that he has fallen into. Her injunction falls into the rhythm of a periodic aggrandisement: "Do it then! *You* do it. Do it if you can. You're so athletic" (Gordimer 1992: 243). In addition to the threefold repetition of the verb "do" with its plosive consonant which echoes those of the opening lines of the story, "breathe", "breath", "to breathe", we find an italicised interpellation, a challenge and the polysemy of the word "athlete". It is derived from the greek "Athlon" meaning prize or prizefighter. The wife is jealous of the activities that her husband indulges in on his own, and resents his taking time away from his family, so she alludes to his fitness to convince him to rescue the dying bird. She wants him to prize the baby bird out of the drainpipe because he is such a prizefighter. But the story finishes on the injunction without providing the reader with a definite solution. The ending is open and it is precisely this open-endedness that liberates the text from the rigidity of the polarisations it has installed. With this final, domestic, quarrel which highlights the selfishness of both white protagonists, Gordimer returns to the carnivalesque atmosphere of the beginning of the chase. With the woman's de-crowning of her husband and his possible crowning as a bird rescuer, the finale opens the way for a potentially regenerative conclusion. Should the broker actually climb on top of the ladder and bring the baby bird back to the world of the living, he will prove his moral adequacy and physical fitness. Should he refuse to climb the ladder, he will demonstrate a paralysis of the will, which will expose not only the couple, but white society in South Africa as devoid of the possibility of moral and political renewal.

Gordimer does not finish her story on the radiance of an epiphanic moment that captures a shift of authorities and truths. She does not force the moment to its empathetic resolution, she remains in an ironic and disquieting inconclusiveness, in a locus of unactualised possibilities, where barriers might eventually be removed², and paralysis and asphyxia transformed into living breath and appropriate renewal.

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² Apartheid came to an end in the early 1990s in a series of steps that led to the formation of a democratic government in 1994, with Nelson Mandela elected President of South Africa.

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Maria Renata Dolce

'Her-stories' per una cultura di pace: *Indigo, La tempesta* al femminile di Marina Warner tra passato e futuro

Abstract I: L'articolo propone una lettura del romanzo *Indigo* (1992) di Marina Warner alla luce della teoria della trasformazione culturale elaborata dalla studiosa Riane Eisler per evidenziare il ruolo cruciale dei racconti e delle storie nel processo di formazione delle coscienze e di rieducazione individuale e collettiva, sollecitando una riflessione sul potere della parola creativa e sull'importanza di una scrittura di *partnership*. Rivisitazione in chiave femminile de *La tempesta* shakespeariana, il romanzo affida alle storytellers, antiche e moderne Sibille, il compito di rivelare l'intreccio inestricabile di territori e popoli, di passato e presente, per esplorare con un approccio 'contrappuntistico' (Said) quelle 'shared histories' da cui ripartire per la costruzione di una cultura di pace fondata sulla 'comprensione' e sul rispetto per l'Altra/o.

Abstract II: This article offers a reading of Marina Warner's novel *Indigo* (1992) along the lines of Riane Eisler's "Cultural Transformation Theory" in order to point out the crucial role played by narrations and stories in the process of forging individual and collective consciousness and to reflect upon the power of the creative word in a literature of *partnership*. The novel, a re-writing of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* from a feminine perspective, assigns to storytellers, ancient and modern Sybilles, the task of revealing the inextricable connections of peoples and territories, of past and present, in order to explore with a contrapuntual approach (Said 1993) those 'shared histories' whose awareness represents the essential premise to build a culture of peace grounded in mutual understanding and respect for the Other.

Se è vero che forme di conflittualità dettate da sete di potere, ambizioni, egoismi, hanno caratterizzato il vivere comunitario nelle varie fasi e contingenze storiche, la nostra contemporaneità, quella delle cosiddette grandi e illuminate democrazie occidentali, è segnata da un inquietante riacutizzarsi di espressioni di intolleranza e di odio nei confronti dell'Altro, percepito ed etichettato in quanto tale per appartenenza razziale ed etnica, per differenza di sesso e di genere e, ancora, per credo religioso. Data per acquisita l'oggettiva crisi economica che investe con le sue ricadute parte consistente delle popolazione mondiale, generando profonde disparità di condizioni di vita con il conseguente approfondirsi del divario tra gruppi elitari, che fanno resistenza a mettere in discussione i privilegi acquisiti, e masse di

disperati alla ricerca di forme di sopravvivenza, di tale inquietante fenomeno non può essere ignorata l'indiscussa matrice culturale che richiede un processo urgente di 'rieducazione' collettiva al vivere nella comunanza, affinché esso sia improntato al principio del rispetto reciproco, nell'apprezzamento e nella valorizzazione delle risorse di ciascuno. Il modello mutuale di *partnership*¹ proposto dalla studiosa e attivista sociale Riane Eisler rappresenta un'efficace alternativa, e di conseguenza un potente argine, al dilagare di modelli relazionali cosiddetti di dominanza, un modello verso cui tendere con determinazione e perseveranza, sebbene esso sia di complessa realizzazione in quanto richiede una sostanziale trasformazione di carattere culturale e ideologico:

A shift from domination to partnership is a shift from relations of top-down rankings, be they man over woman, man over man, nation over nation, race over race, religion over religion, and so forth, to relations of mutual benefit, mutual respect, natural accountability (Eisler 2007: 24).

L'importanza di coltivare una cultura umanistica allargata e inclusiva, rinnovata nell'apertura all'ascolto e alla comprensione di voci altre, una cultura che possa rispondere alle esigenze di formazione e di sensibilizzazione delle coscienze di cui la contemporaneità ha urgente bisogno a seguito delle sue radicali trasformazioni, trova significativa espressione nella riflessione di Edward Said:

[...] humanism is not a way of consolidating and affirming what 'we' have always known and felt, but rather a means of questioning, upsetting and reformulating so much of what is presented to us as commodified, packaged, uncontroversial, and uncritically codified certainties [...] (Said 2004: 28).

Umanesimo inteso, dunque, quale cultura e valorizzazione di quell'*humanitas*, troppo spesso ignorata e vilipesa, di cui già Cicerone tratteggiava l'accezione più ampia come virtù di umanità in senso lato², riferendosi alla sintesi di disponibilità, gentilezza d'animo, capacità di comprensione e di cura, ma al tempo stesso di educazione e formazione. Una formazione individuale la cui ricaduta nel sociale è diretta laddove il singolo esercita il diritto, oltre che il dovere, a una cittadinanza attiva e consapevole, volta alla costruzione di una *societas* che si fa cardine strutturante della *civilitas*, per il perseguimento di un bene comune di cui ciascuno possa essere fruitore ma, prima ancora, responsabile generatore. Ai fini del rinnovamento e della trasformazione culturale e umana nei termini tracciati dalla Eisler si rivela pertanto centrale il processo di educazione e sensibilizzazione al vivere civile e condiviso nel quale parte rilevante giocano le strutture di pensiero che restituiscono forma alla nostra visione del mondo e alla nostra idea di realtà, consegnandoci uno spazio e un ruolo

¹ "Modello di sistema sociale basato sull'unione fra le due metà dell'umanità, ove i rapporti umani sono centrati sulla cura e l'empatia, e la diversità dei due sessi costituisce il fondamento per una loro evoluzione intrecciata" (Mercanti 2012: 671).

² Cicerone approfondisce il concetto di *humanitas* nei suoi trattati filosofici, tra gli altri in particolare nel *De Oratore*, nel *De Officiis* e nel *Pro Archia*.

da giocare sulla scena 'in relazione' all'Altro. Ecco dunque, è sempre la Eisler a suggerire, che "symbols, myths, stories play such a critical role in our lives, they can change our consciousness; therefore literature, education and language are a pivotal force for our cultural and human transformation" (Eisler 2007: 25).

La produzione narrativa e saggistica della scrittrice britannica Marina Warner sembra collocarsi idealmente all'interno di tale impianto teorico rispondendo in maniera esemplare alle sue sollecitazioni di fondo. Una lettura dei testi della Warner alla luce del modello interpretativo della *partnership* evidenzia l'attenzione costante e la cura consapevole della scrittrice per quella parola creativa che è in grado di attivare un processo di rigenerazione individuale e collettiva, nella consapevolezza che, come sintetizza S. Rushdie, "[...] re-describing the world is the necessary first step towards changing it" (Rushdie 1991: 14). La scrittura colta e raffinata della Warner sollecita una riflessione sui processi di costruzione delle narrazioni dominanti, sul ruolo dei simboli e dei miti fondanti che forgianno le identità e che disegnano l'immagine dell'Io e dell'Altro da sé, manifestando un'attenzione sempre vigile al nesso inscindibile tra un passato che si riversa nel presente come le onde dell'oceano, "swelling and falling back, then returning again" (Warner 2003: 95), e un presente che da esso non può prescindere per la comprensione della contemporaneità e per la costruzione del futuro. La consapevolezza di fondo che "there is always another story, beyond the story" (Warner 2003b: 265) e che, pertanto, nessun racconto può essere finito ed esaustivo, né tantomeno arrogarsi alcuna pretesa di assolutezza e oggettività, conduce la scrittrice a prestare ascolto agli "altri echi che abitano il giardino" (Said 1993: 336) che raccontano di storie diverse, adottando un approccio contrappuntistico che consente di abbracciare nella sua scrittura il detto e il non detto, le voci che si levano alte e il coro sommerso delle tante relegate al silenzio.

"Stories matter. *Many* stories matter" – ci ricorda la scrittrice nigeriana Chimamanda Adichie allertando sul pericolo di una 'storia unica' – "Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity" (Adichie 2009, corsivo mio). E per la Warner, fine studiosa di miti, simboli, leggende, profonda conoscitrice della Storia, e altrettanto attenta alle storie taciute, il racconto si fa strumento potente per ri-leggere e ri-narrare la realtà, per comprenderne la complessità e ripararne le ingiustizie: "[...] stories do offer a way of imagining alternatives, mapping possibilities, exciting hope, warding off danger by forestalling it, casting spells of order on the unknown ahead" (Warner 2003a: 212). Se le storie vengono individuate quali "activators of change" (Warner 2003a: 210), la sua scrittura creativa si propone di contribuire a mettere in moto un processo di conoscenza e di comprensione reciproca che consenta di superare gli steccati eretti per separare gli individui in compartimenti stagni sulla base di categorie artificiali che ostacolano l'elaborazione di una visione e di un progetto condiviso. La letteratura gioca in tale prospettiva un ruolo fondamentale: "literature is there to make reckonings with the past in order to talk with the present – and even, if we want to be bold and optimistic and grand (but not grandiose, I hope) – with the future" (Warner 1992: 123).

Il romanzo *Indigo*, pubblicato nel 1992, a 500 anni da quella 'scoperta' che ha dato avvio all'espansione coloniale degli imperi occidentali con la conseguente distruzione delle civiltà

e delle culture dei popoli sottomessi, è esemplare espressione del progetto della scrittrice “of rewriting wrongs” (Connor 1996: 198). Rivisitazione in chiave femminile de *La tempesta* shakespeariana, il romanzo si propone, come palesa l’autrice, di raccontare una storia altra che consenta di comprendere quella “shared history” (Dabydeen 1992: 121) frutto dell’inestricabile intreccio di territori e popoli determinato dall’impresa coloniale (Said 1993: 3-14), un’interconnessione troppo spesso ignorata dalla ‘tribù europea’, arroccata in difesa dei propri privilegi e riluttante, come ricorda lo scrittore di origini caraibiche Caryl Phillips, a riconoscere il peso e le conseguenze del suo ‘glorioso’ passato: “Europe is blinded by her past, and does not understand the high price of her churches, art galleries, and architecture” (Phillips 1999: 128).

La scrittrice porta per mano il lettore attraverso un cammino di auto-riconoscimento e di agnizione grazie a un racconto che si impegna “to tell another story to ourselves about who we are” e che, prendendo le mosse dal passato, riflette le contraddizioni di tutta la società occidentale e, in particolare, della Gran Bretagna contemporanea, “where we have many voices that are only heard a little or not at all” (Warner 1992: 122). A dispetto dei quasi tre decenni trascorsi dalla pubblicazione del romanzo in un paese che usciva a fatica dal regno della Lady di ferro per tentare di ricomporre equilibri sociali ed economici e di riposizionarsi sulla scena internazionale, esso conserva una urgente attualità perché, nelle parole della stessa scrittrice,

Indigo is about migrations, geographical, colonial, imaginary, and emotional. It’s about crossing barriers and about erecting them, about being foreign and strange in the eyes of someone else, and about undoing this strangeness in order to find what can be held in common (Warner 2003b: 265).

Palesa l’intento della Warner di fare della sua scrittura uno strumento per individuare quel terreno comune che può essere condiviso e rappresentare la base per la costruzione di una società nuova, perché, come ricorda sempre Said, “rather than the manufactured clash of civilizations, we need to concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other, and live together in far more interesting ways than any abridged or inauthentic mode of understanding can allow” (Said 2003: xxii). Fondamentale ai fini dell’acquisizione di tale consapevolezza è, pertanto, l’attenzione per le forme più diverse di ‘attraversamento’ in senso lato, che da una parte richiamano l’esperienza di spaesamento, alienazione e marginalizzazione, dall’altra aprono alla ricomposizione di identità frammentate, al superamento di confini fisici, mentali, ideologici, un’attenzione che non può prescindere dalla comprensione del contesto che quelle forme ha generato, le cui radici affondano nella storia dell’espansione dei grandi imperi occidentali.

Non a caso in *Indigo* la Warner instaura un dialogo quanto mai proficuo e affascinante con *The Tempest*, testo cardine del canone occidentale, per esplorarne il non detto e coglierne le voci ai margini, in una riscrittura che esalta la qualità metamorfica della grande opera letteraria la cui intrinseca plasticità si presta alle più diverse letture, interpretazioni e rifacimenti, generatrice di sempre nuove sollecitazioni e prospettive³. Il disagio intellettuale

³ In riferimento alla qualità metamorfica dell’opera shakespeariana che si ‘rigenera’ costantemente nei più

della scrittrice, che per biografia familiare è coinvolta, seppure indirettamente, nell'impresa coloniale britannica⁴, si traduce nel confronto con il capolavoro shakespeariano del quale, pur riconoscendo la grandezza letteraria e l'incanto affabulatorio, annota: "I was principally uncomfortable because so many voices in the play were silenced – especially women's voices – and one never really heard the other side of the story" (Warner 1992: 121)⁵.

Il ribaltamento della prospettiva consente alla scrittrice di ri-pensare l'alterità quale costruito artificioso funzionale all'affermazione della propria superiorità e all'esercizio dei propri privilegi, coinvolgendo in tale processo di riconoscimento il lettore cui la Warner assegna parte attiva nell'atto della fruizione del testo:

There exists the possibility of a material sympathy that we can have with the Other as it has been constructed. So that Caliban or Sycorax, his mother in the play, don't have to be seen as these horrendous, monstrous dreams of disorder and irrationality. I wanted to turn it around. I wanted to look at it from the other point of view which needs to be looked at (Warner 1992: 122).

Indispensabile perché quella forma di empatia e umana comprensione possa essere esercitata è pertanto la consapevolezza dei processi che hanno determinato la costruzione dell'identità dell'io e dell'altro da sé nei discorsi dominanti, discorsi alla cui elaborazione e diffusione partecipa la stessa letteratura prestandosi a veicolo di diffusione di rappresentazioni e visioni pregiudiziali, come pure a potente strumento per interrogarle e scardinarle.

Ma come dare voce a coloro che sono stati relegati ai margini e privati della facoltà di narrarsi senza incorrere nel rischio di sostituirsi arbitrariamente agli attori di quelle "lost histories" (Warner 2003b: 467), arrogandosi, grazie al potere restituito dall'arte della parola creativa, il diritto al racconto e alla rappresentazione? Si può 'parlare per l'Altro/a' (Spivak 1993) senza soffocarne ulteriormente la voce, 'abusando' del privilegio dell'uso intellettuale e colto del linguaggio che è in grado, come afferma la stessa Warner, di forgiare la realtà? Adottando a modello di riferimento l'opera di scrittrici e scrittori la cui immaginazione ha favorito la creazione di un rapporto empatico con i personaggi, rapporto che dall'autore si trasferisce al lettore coinvolgendolo in un circolo virtuoso di condivisione e di sofferta partecipazione al dolore dei vinti, la Warner riflette sul duplice pericolo che tale operazione comporta. Da una parte "History can be lost to view when it's personified in a suffering

diversi generi artistici, di grande interesse nell'ambito delle trasposizioni cinematografiche è la rilettura al femminile del testo nel film *The Tempest* (2010) di Julie Taymor, che vede una Prospera interpretata da Helen Mirren.

⁴ Quanto alle origini familiari si veda il saggio "Between the Colonist and the Creole: Family Bonds, Family Boundaries" (Warner 1993).

⁵ La Warner è consapevole che numerose sono le figure femminili, oltre a Sycorax e a Miranda, che nel testo shakespeariano restano nell'ombra. Alla madre defunta della giovane, figura di contorno nella vita del Duca di Milano immerso nei suoi studi, il testo seicentesco si riferisce appena. Altrettanto accennato è il personaggio di Claribel, la figlia del Re di Tunisi, il cui matrimonio combinato è espressione delle trame ordite da un sistema di potere patriarcale, sistema cui allude altresì il richiamo nel play alla figura di Didone. Donne ai margini della scena, ma pur sempre presenti, avvolte da un silenzio problematico cui Shakespeare sembra prestare attenzione.

subject" (Warner 2003b: 467), laddove l'attenzione catturata emotivamente dall'esperienza di sofferenza e alienazione del singolo ostacola una messa a fuoco più ampia della Storia nella sua complessità rischiando di trasporne la concretezza nelle forme sfumate dell'allegoria, dall'altra la compartecipazione al dramma dell'altro da parte tanto dello scrittore quanto del lettore può indurre a sottrarsi alle responsabilità personali e collettive che proprio la Storia ci impone di condividere. Se il romanzo della Warner invita all'attenzione per la storia degli oppressi ridotti al silenzio, con uno sguardo privilegiato all'esperienza di donne vittime a un tempo del sistema patriarcale e di quello coloniale, attraverso la sapiente strategia narrativa adottata nel testo la scrittrice si interroga sull'esercizio del potere della rappresentazione, rinunciando a una raffigurazione a tutto tondo per lasciare ampio spazio al non-detto, secondo un modello di ascolto e di racconto 'rispettoso'. Non solo i personaggi con le loro storie restano parzialmente 'sospesi' per sottolinearne l'impenetrabilità all'osservatore esterno, cui non è dato di catturarne in toto i tratti e di cogliere il senso definitivo degli eventi, ma sono gli stessi personaggi a non rivelarsi, a non palesare la propria lettura e interpretazione degli accadimenti, rivendicando con il silenzio, che in tal senso si trasforma in strategia di resistenza, la propria autonomia e inaccessibilità. Il lettore, spiazzato di fronte alle aspettative generate dall'invito sotteso nel testo a prestare attenzione alle storie altre, percepisce l'inaffidabilità di un racconto inevitabilmente incompleto e si interroga non solo su quale sarebbe stata l'altra storia che avrebbero narrato i personaggi, ma su quella che avrebbero raccontato nella vita reale i suoi attori silenti restati ai margini, una storia che resta sostanzialmente inconoscibile, tanto più quando essa si perde in un passato del quale non restano testimonianze da parte dei diretti protagonisti. Il tentativo di restituire voce a coloro cui la Storia con le sue narrative ufficiali non ha lasciato spazio, seppure condotto con onestà e rigore intellettuale, è dunque destinato a una riuscita solo parziale (Propst 2009: 333). La scrittrice, da intellettuale impegnata, si presta al compito di colmare silenzi e vuoti, ma è consapevole dei limiti insormontabili di tale operazione di cui mette a parte i lettori. Sollecitato a stabilire un dialogo ideale con i personaggi e con la stessa autrice, il lettore è a un tempo indotto dalla incompletezza e fallibilità della rappresentazione ad esercitare la propria facoltà di interrogarsi ricorrendo al beneficio del dubbio, laddove riconosce l'inafferrabilità e l'elusività delle vite e delle esperienze altrui le cui complessità sfuggono a ogni tentativo di definizione e controllo. Un'empatia mai auto-assolutoria rispetto alle proprie responsabilità è quella che la Warner cerca di stimolare nel suo lettore, fondata sulla consapevolezza della finzionalità, provvisorietà e incompletezza di ogni forma di rappresentazione e di racconto che non è in grado di dare piena voce all'Altro/a.

D'altro canto, sottolinea la scrittrice, "if History is an agreed fable [...] any initiative to change things must begin with stories" (Warner 2003b: 467). Una riflessione che detta la linea guida per la lettura dell'opera tutta della scrittrice che, tanto nella sua produzione narrativa quanto in quella saggistica, rinnova, seguendo una costante, il confronto con la dialettica Storia/storie per affrontare la questione cruciale delle forme e delle modalità del racconto, racconto le cui inevitabili manipolazioni rivelano l'arbitrarietà e la conseguente natura sempre mutevole non solo della narrazione, ma della realtà stessa che essa intende rappresentare. La funzione catartica e rigeneratrice della parola creativa, che si addentra

nei meandri più bui e contraddittori tanto dell'animo umano quanto di una storia collettiva spesso occultata e rimossa per rivelarne il non detto, trova sublime espressione proprio in *Indigo* di cui l'elemento strutturante più significativo si fa la qualità dialogica. Tale tratto distintivo si esprime *in primis* nel richiamo alla grande *Tempesta* di Shakespeare dalla quale il testo prende le mosse per un confronto pensoso e critico, seppure con tocchi di leggiadria e ironia, con il passato e con le sue rappresentazioni, al fine di riflettere sul nostro presente, nella consapevolezza che "there is something about this grip of our historical destiny, our idea of ourselves that has not yet been shaken sufficiently for a new story to be told" (Warner 1992: 122).

Sfuggente rispetto a banali categorizzazioni, il romanzo si muove fluido tra generi e tradizioni letterarie, per accostarsi, grazie alla sapiente e originale tessitura tra reale e fantastico, nel suo fecondo intreccio di miti, archetipi e storie, al genere della "historiographic metafiction" che, come osserva Linda Hutcheon, "self-consciously reminds us that while events did occur in the real empirical past, we name and constitute those events as historical facts by selection and narrative positioning" (Hutcheon 1988: 97). La relativizzazione dell'assolutezza delle ricostruzioni del passato, che comporta una re-visione dello stesso nei termini, a un tempo, di reinterpretazione critica e rielaborazione immaginativa, si manifesta proprio nell'apertura del testo a più voci e prospettive di lettura, in un dialogo ininterrotto tra il trascorso e il presente nel quale a giocare una parte fondamentale sono le cantastorie, antiche e moderne Sibille che incantano e rapiscono con l'arte affabulatoria e che, attraverso la fine tessitura delle parole, parole che hanno il potere "to bring things into being" (Warner 2003a: 102), disvelano mondi e realtà inesplorate, inducendo a nuove forme di comprensione e di riconoscimento.

È la voce di Serafine, l'anziana governante caraibica che si prende cura della piccola Miranda e della sorellastra Xanthe nella Londra contemporanea, ad aprire il romanzo con un racconto che introduce uno dei temi portanti dell'opera, la riflessione sulle forme materiali e metaforiche di rapacità, appropriazione indebita e violenza che hanno caratterizzato la storia dell'uomo, di cui espressione tragicamente rappresentativa è l'esperienza dell'oppressione coloniale. All'esercizio dell'immaginazione e alla parola creativa la Warner affida il potere "to help us confront the monstrous events of the past, while maintaining hope for the future" (Coupe 2006: 73). In una riflessione metanarrativa sull'arte stessa del narrare, in apertura del romanzo la Warner allerta il lettore che il racconto, fluttuante nella sua natura metamorfica, è in qualche misura inaffidabile, come le fiabe di Serafine in cui "everything risked changing shape" (Warner 1993: 4). "Just as history belongs to the victors and words change their meanings with a change of power", scrive la Warner consapevole che la rappresentazione della Storia è manifestazione di un esercizio di potere, "stories depend on the tellers and those to whom they are told who might later tell them again" (Warner 1995: 25).

Alle narratrici, dunque, il compito di rendere 'intellegibile' la realtà attraverso la sua reinterpretazione fantastica, una rilettura fatalmente manipolatoria che è cosciente della propria arbitrarietà, la stessa che la scrittrice mette in opera nel suo romanzo offrendo uno straordinario affresco di società e culture che scavalcano confini spazio-temporali per abbracciare la storia nel suo dipanarsi, dalla colonizzazione dei Caraibi nel Seicento alla contemporaneità nel vecchio e nel nuovo mondo, in un intreccio fecondo di passato e presente

in cui i piani narrativi e temporali si sovrappongono e, talora, si confondono, riecheggiano costantemente in un nesso inscindibile. La Warner si confronta con quel 'monstrous past' partendo dal proprio albero genealogico che affonda le radici nei Caraibi, per smantellare il mito celebrativo della grande impresa coloniale britannica racchiuso simbolicamente nel documento, prezioso cimelio di famiglia, che riconosce all'antenato Sir Thomas Warner il ruolo di primo governatore dell'isola di St. Kitts conquistata in nome del suo sovrano Giacomo I. Tessendo la sua "narrative of shame", commenta Caroline Cakebread, la scrittrice "undermines the solid structures of Britain's imperial history, approaching the past as a series of fragments and reconstructing it in terms that question the received 'narratives of military worth' that characterize her family's role in the history of the British Empire" (Cakebread 1999: 220-221).

Gli anni dell'insediamento nella nuova colonia oltremare sono quelli in cui *La tempesta* veniva portata sulla scena e poi pubblicata nel First Folio. Storia privata e storia pubblica trovano indirettamente riflesso e occasione di ripensamento proprio nel play seicentesco, ricco di suggestioni e di sollecitazioni, aperto a sempre nuove interpretazioni e procreatore di altre narrazioni. La natura proteica e metamorfica del testo attiva quel processo dialogico di riscrittura attraverso il quale la Warner rilegge il passato per raccontarne una storia altra e riflette sul presente che ne ha ereditato il fardello, puntando l'attenzione piuttosto che su quello che agli occhi della Miranda shakespeariana, incantata dal consesso reale naufragato sull'isola paterna, appariva come "a brave new world", sull'impatto e sulle conseguenze dell'invasione coloniale sulle popolazioni autoctone con il suo pesante lascito sino al presente:

The Tempest gave me a structure to work with. [...] The First Folio in which the play appears was published in the same year that Thomas Warner landed and began the 'Mother Colony' – changing the island of Liamuiga into St Kit's, the first of the British holdings of empire. *The Tempest* has often been interpreted as a drama about colonialism. [...] But as far as I know nobody attempted to discover in Caliban's mother Sycorax, another being beside the foul hag Prospero invokes [...] in my book she becomes the embodiment of the island itself, of its inner life as well as a woman of ordinary passions and skills who, I hope, grows to the dimension of full humanity (Warner 1992: 122).

Rispetto alle molteplici 'risposte' caraibiche alle sollecitazioni offerte da *La tempesta* sulla cui scia pure si colloca⁶, la Warner individua uno spazio lasciato vuoto nella rilettura del testo interpretato, in particolare dagli scrittori postcoloniali, quale dramma sul colonialismo. È alla figura di Sycorax, a quella di Miranda, e a tutte le donne che ne hanno condiviso l'esperienza di marginalità, dal passato al presente, donne relegate al silenzio e vittime dell'oppressione coloniale e, più estesamente, del sistema di potere patriarcale, che la scrittrice dedica intense e toccanti pagine per restituire loro una "full humanity", senza che mai

⁶ In particolare la scrittrice si richiama a *Une tempête* (1969) di Aimé Césaire e *Water with Berries* (1971) di George Lamming.

la propria voce autoriale sovrasti il sussurro, il bisbiglio di quanto resta spesso non detto e resiste all'interpretazione.

Sulle figure femminili e sulle operazioni di rappresentazione che le hanno trasfigurate in simboli, privandole di una loro storia e della complessità di un vissuto personale, la Warner concentra la propria attenzione sin dai suoi primi studi critici⁷. Sycorax, la strega malvagia che nel play shakesperiano partorisce il mostro Caliban dall'unione con Setebos, viene sottratta nel romanzo alle catene di una rappresentazione stereotipata che ne stigmatizza i tratti quale pericolosa 'Altra', per trasformarsi in una 'wise woman' seicentesca, saggia detentrica del sapere orale del suo popolo, donna forte, generosa, che vive in piena comunione con la natura e che dell'isola oltreoceano, seppure non sua dalla nascita, ha imparato a conoscere i più intimi segreti. L'indaco che estrae dalle radici delle piante, alla base dell'economia locale prima dell'imposizione straniera della coltura della canna da zucchero, e che trasforma nel colore brillante del mare e del cielo, si fa tutt'uno con la sua pelle. Sycorax subisce una metamorfosi per divenire parte integrante di quella terra di cui i colonizzatori vogliono prendere possesso violandone l'identità, come rivela il sottotitolo del romanzo nel richiamo all'operazione di mappatura delle acque che circondano l'isola di Liamuiga. Dotata di arti magiche e divinatorie Sycorax si ritaglia un ruolo attivo nella comunità a dispetto delle sue origini altre, acquisendo dignità grazie alla sua figura di guaritrice, levatrice, nutrice, a quelle capacità di 'cura' che nascono dalla conoscenza rispettosa della natura. Nei grandi vasi che con perizia di artigiana ha forgiato, la donna miscela sapientemente erbe e radici grazie a un'arte antica che nasce da un sapere tramandato oralmente, simbolo della sua facoltà di trasformare e ri/generare. Nella percezione degli abitanti del luogo spazio e tempo si fondono nel calderone della vita, "a churn or a bowl, in which substances and essences were tumbled and mixed, always returning, now emerging into personal form, now submerged into the mass in the continuous present tense of existence, as in one of the vats in which Sycorax brewed the indigo" (Warner 1993: 122), un'allusione che implica il riconoscimento dell'importanza delle arti creative della maga e del suo sapere ancestrale che sarà distrutto dalla 'civiltà' dei colonizzatori e dai nuovi modelli economici, societari e valoriali da loro introdotti.

"Filled with *sangay*, preternatural insight and power" (Warner 1993: 86), seguendo l'istinto che la lega alla terra e le voci misteriose che nella notte la rendono inquieta, Sycorax si reca presso l'albero dove corpi di schiavi, trascinati dalle onde sulle sponde dell'isola dopo il drammatico e fatale viaggio in catene attraverso l'Atlantico, giacciono coperti dalle foglie in attesa di definitiva sepoltura. Recidendo con il guscio di un'ostrica il ventre di una donna ormai senza vita ella compie il miracolo di generare una vita nuova, prendendo sotto la sua cura materna il neonato che chiamerà Dulé, parola indigena che sta per dolore, il dolore cui la sorte, che non è casualità, ma disegno della storia del quale gli uomini sono artefici e responsabili, consegna il piccolo igbo, "orphan from the sea" (Warner 1993: 85), destinato a vivere lontano dalla sua terra dalla violenza e dalla rapacità del sistema coloniale. Dulé

⁷ Si vedano *The Dragon Empress: The Life and Times of Tzu-hsi Empress Dowager of China, 1835-1890* (1972), *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (1976), *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism* (1981), *Monuments and Maidens* (1985) and *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (1995).

è un Caliban della diaspora nera che non rinuncia al sogno di ritornare alle sue radici per riscoprire e recuperare un passato che ai suoi occhi appare “as a lost country for him that he wanted to rediscover” (Warner 1993: 95). La sua storia personale, eco della più vasta storia collettiva di masse di individui costretti a migrazioni forzate, è scritta nelle acque dell’Atlantico che se ne fa custode, perché, come canta il grande poeta caraibico Derek Walcott, “The Sea is history”, e nei suoi abissi si cela il dramma di popoli invisibili ridotti al silenzio dalla brutalità della Storia. In un richiamo intertestuale di cui la Warner mette palesemente a conoscenza il lettore in numerosi dei suoi saggi (Warner 1994), il dipinto ottocentesco di J. M. W. Turner, *Slavers Throwing overboard the Dead and Dying –Typhoon coming on*, viene rievocato nel romanzo capovolgendone la prospettiva di lettura che, dal dramma della nave negriera in balia della furia degli elementi, si sposta sulle vittime di quell’ignobile commercio e sulle sue drammatiche conseguenze per tutti coloro di cui ha segnato tragicamente il destino, popoli inghiottiti e schiacciati dal sistema perverso della colonizzazione⁸. È a loro che la Warner presta ossequioso omaggio riscrivendone la storia attraverso lo sguardo dei vinti. Utilizzando e modificando, ciascuno a suo modo, i versi della canzone che nel testo shakespeariano Ariel canta per confortare Ferdinando, gli schiavi annegati raccontano la loro morte e la metamorfosi marina. Sfuggendo all’autorità di una singola voce narrante essi divengono parte di un coro polifonico, cantori-poeti della loro tragica sorte che, come indicano i puntini di sospensione alla fine di ogni frase, resta inafferrabile, incommensurabile nella sua drammaticità, e che pertanto si sottrae a ogni tentativo di rappresentarla nella sua esaustività.

Di quella storia Dulé è erede e testimone, esule e straniero come la stessa Sycorax, ma incapace, a differenza della donna, di adattarsi al nuovo mondo dove resta un ‘outsider’. Pur acquisendo familiarità con l’isola grazie alla guida della madre adottiva, sin da bambino coltiva il sogno di scavalcarne i confini per riallacciare i fili con la terra d’origine sconosciuta e colmare il baratro tra il passato e un presente nel quale vive il dramma della non appartenenza. Come una sorta di abile funambolo si libra nell’aria volteggiando sulla lunga scala costruita con i rami di un albero, conficcata nel terreno e tesa verso il cielo, dall’alto della quale esplora nuovi orizzonti e matura il suo sogno di libertà, una scala che si fa idealmente ponte ““Between the time now and the time I can’t remember”” (Warner 1993: 96). Se il Caliban shakespeariano alla fine del *romance* chiede perdono e si assoggetta al sistema di Prospero, Dulé scende in campo per sconfiggere il potere dei colonizzatori guidando una rivolta che sarà spenta nel sangue. Sebbene costretto a cedere di fronte alla violenza dei vincitori che, spezzandogli le gambe, lo costringono a zoppicare ‘piegandolo’ al loro potere, egli terrà sempre alta la testa e vivo il suo sogno di libertà, pronto a morire da eroe.

A condividere la sua condizione di sradicamento e di ‘in-betweenness’ è Ariel, rivisi-

⁸ “The slave ship” (1840) è ispirato da un episodio storico accaduto nel 1781, quando il capitano della nave negriera Zong gettò in mare 122 schiavi moribondi per ottenere la copertura assicurativa riconosciuta in caso di annegamento e non di morte per malattia. Turner che, commenta la Warner, “was always more interested in the weather than in people” (Warner 1994: 66), si concentra sulla rappresentazione a tinte forti della violenza del mare in tempesta, riducendo gli schiavi a membra scomposte inghiottite dalle onde.

tazione al femminile dello spirito dell'aria seicentesco, la bambina Arawak strappata alla sua terra natia e alla sua famiglia dai coloni che Sycorax prende sotto le sue materne cure. Ariel non solo proviene da un mondo altro, come lo stesso Dulé, ma è doppiamente guardata con sospetto e avvertita come temibile estranea tanto dai colonizzatori, che la sfruttano per carpire i segreti dell'isola, tanto dagli stessi abitanti dell'isola rispetto ai quali non solo è straniera, ma in qualche modo pericolosamente legata al mondo dei bianchi. Dal suo rapporto con Kit Everard, il conquistatore del nuovo mondo, personaggio che rievoca l'antennato della Warner e che incarna il ruolo del Prospero shakespeariano, vedrà la luce il piccolo Roukoubé, "a mongrel whelp" (Warner 1993: 172), rifiutato dal padre perché segno tangibile del peccato della 'misgenation', simbolo di un mondo che gli resta estraneo e sconosciuto, come la stessa Ariel la cui stranezza selvaggia è costruita attraverso la sua comparazione, nello sguardo di Kit, con la pura e illibata Rebecca, promessa sposa in arrivo dall'Inghilterra per sottrarlo al vuoto fagocitante dell'ignoto. La sua attrazione per Ariel viene attribuita alle arti diaboliche con cui la donna lo irretisce, ereditate della strega che l'ha accudita e che le ha tramandato l'oscuro sapere. Kit coltiva il mito celebrato alle fondamenta dell'ideologia imperialista delle magnifiche sorti e progressive dei colonizzatori che si presentano come agenti divini, "civilizers, land-holders, indeed; men like the ancient heroes" (Warner 1993: 180). 'Eroi' che iscrivono la Storia su una tabula rasa, prendendo possesso di una terra popolata da selvaggi senza umanità, "mere animals" (Warner 1993: 200) da domare, "forsaken and heathen souls" (1993: 200), come la banda di rivoltosi guidata da Dulé, il Caliban "cannibale" (1993: 201). Un mito a giustificazione dell'impresa coloniale che la Warner intende decostruire restituendo storicità, concretezza e complessità alla civiltà autoctona annientata dai nuovi padroni: "[...] in *Indigo* I did want to give voice to the ordinariness of the culture that had been crushed. I wanted to show that it was a practical, working society, not a place of voodoo magic and cannibals" (Warner 1992: 122). Il romanzo, pertanto, contesta la liceità di quell'impresa e ne esplora le drammatiche conseguenze e le ricadute sino alla contemporaneità rappresentando "an interrogation of Western arrogance, and a celebration of the wisdom that it ignores and displaces" (Coupe 2006: 77).

Sapere e saggezza antica sono prerogative di Sycorax che esercita sull'isola una sovranità femminile destabilizzante in ragione del genere e della razza di appartenenza. Non a caso sarà condannata all'esilio dopo aver favorito la nascita 'innaturale' di Dulé, una nascita che genera tra la gente del luogo il sospetto di pratiche associate alla stregoneria, mentre rinnova il terrore per il mostro marino Manijku da cui il piccolo nero potrebbe essere stato vomitato. Il destino della donna è segnato. In pagine drammatiche che rappresentano la violenza ingiustificata dell'invasore che si accanisce sul 'nemico' e devasta la natura, il suo albero verrà bruciato, come si conviene alla dimora di una strega da sacrificare sul rogo. Agli occhi dei colonizzatori "a cackling witch" (Warner 1993: 158), "a foul hag" (Warner 1993: 137), ella sarà presa in ostaggio da Kit Everard insieme ad Ariel, per poi morire prigioniera dei nuovi padroni dell'isola a seguito delle ferite riportate durante l'incendio. Ma il tentativo di mettere a tacere la sua voce scomoda è destinato a fallire, perché Sycorax continua a parlare, anche dopo la sua morte, attraverso il soffio del vento, attraverso le spaccature delle rocce e il frusciare delle foglie, lasciando in eredità la sua storia a tutti coloro che intendono

prestarle ascolto, per condividere la sua esperienza e quella del suo popolo con una comunità ideale allargata, oltre i confini dello spazio e del tempo:

The isle is full of noises [...] and Sycorax is the source of many. [...] Sycorax speaks in the noises that fall from the mouth of the wind. It's a way of holding what was once hers, to pour herself out through fissures in the rock, to exhale from the caked mud bed of the island's rivers in the dry season, and mutter in the leaves of the saman where they buried her (Warner 1993: 77).

Le donne dell'isola non cessano di recarsi presso l'albero per consegnare alla 'wise woman' le loro preghiere e a Sycorax non è data quiete: "Her long death had barely begun, however, for she can still hear the prayers of those who come [...] They push a tack into the bark of the saman tree and make a wish, they whisper their pleas to the spirit inhering in the tree [...]" (Warner 2003: 210). Sycorax sopravvive alla morte e, nella costruzione spazio-temporale binaria del racconto, si fa anello di congiunzione tra passato e presente. Dopo tre secoli continua ad ascoltare le storie dei vivi e si affligge per il destino della sua isola: "O airs and winds, you bring me stories of the living [...] you speak to me of pain [...] HEAR ME!" (Warner 1993: 212). Un'invocazione rivolta alle sue divinità "[...] so that we can return to the time before this time" (Warner 1993: 212), che si conclude con la promessa di rinunciare alle sue arti magiche, in un chiaro richiamo intertestuale al Prospero shakespeariano nella chiusa de *La tempesta*. Ma la richiesta reiterata di Sycorax di prestare attenzione alle sue parole sembra essere altrettanto rivolta al lettore invitato all'ascolto non solo della storia narrata, ma di quella cui il testo allude, una storia che sfugge al potere della rappresentazione, e che è dato alla sensibilità individuale di cogliere e interpretare.

A raccogliere il prezioso lascito di Sycorax nella contemporaneità, in una solida continuità matrilineare, sono da una parte Atala Seacole, sua diretta discendente, che nell'isola caraibica un tempo sotto la sfera di influenza delle potenze coloniali europee rivestirà il ruolo di nuovo Primo Ministro, dall'altra Serafine, cantrice di racconti in cui il passato coloniale si intreccia al presente, figura cui è restituito un ruolo chiave nel romanzo quale ponte tra la storia seicentesca della colonizzazione dell'isola caraibica e quella dell'Inghilterra del secondo Novecento segnata dai suoi strascichi.

Alla ignominiosa distruzione della civiltà e della cultura della sua gente negli anni dell'oppressione coloniale, seguita dallo sfruttamento delle risorse naturali dell'isola e della sua immagine di paradiso incontaminato nell'era del mercato globalizzato dell'industria turistica, Atala Seacole risponde introducendo politiche economiche e culturali volte a ripristinare l'armonia del luogo nel pieno rispetto della natura violata e ferita, con l'obiettivo di restituire al suo 'popolo dell'acqua', della cui identità è simbolo la barriera corallina, l'orgoglio dell'appartenenza, "to wear our blackness as a badge of pride" (376). Il suo potere di *partnership* ereditato da Sycorax, che è maestra nell'esercizio della cura e della condivisione empatica, si esprime nella programmazione di un rispettoso vivere nella comunanza che, seppure dai toni utopistici, rappresenta un progetto da coltivare, perché, ci ricorda la Warner nella chiusa di *From the Beast to the Blonde*, "It is time for wishful thinking to have its due" (Warner 1995).

Nella *storyline* novecentesca, della storia dell'isola si fa testimone Serafine, governante

caraibica giunta in Inghilterra negli anni del dopoguerra al seguito di Sir Anthony Everard, il discendente dei primi colonizzatori dell'isola, simbolo del sistema di potere patriarcale che la giovane nipote Miranda metterà in discussione. Serafine, nutrice e curatrice, erede del potere di *partnership* trasferitole idealmente da Sycorax, è dotata della forza della parola creativa che nei suoi racconti, collocati significativamente in apertura, nella parte centrale e in chiusura del romanzo a strutturarne la tessitura di fondo, costruisce una realtà immaginifica che consente di confrontarsi con il presente grazie al riconoscimento della storia passata. La storyteller offre a Miranda strumenti di conoscenza di sé attraverso il ricorso alla fiaba, al mito, alla tradizione popolare, una "narrativa di resistenza" (Corona 2001: 65) che prospetta un modello alternativo di comprensione e comunicazione, insegnandole "to resist, even though the surface messages of the stories she tells her are conformist" (Warner 2003b: 267). Serafine, pur dalla condizione di marginalità cui è relegata in ragione delle sue origini e del suo status sociale che influenzano l'apparente conformismo delle sue storie, esercita il diritto al racconto che le restituisce il ruolo fondamentale di elemento di congiunzione spazio-temporale tra due mondi, capace di trasformare suoni e voci dell'isola lontana in storie che curano e risanano l'animo, storie che invitano alla comprensione e alla riconciliazione. Se, come rivela la stessa scrittrice, "the book is about survival through language [...], about the power of memory, transmuted into stories, to shape experience" (Warner 2003b: 302), Serafine trasferisce il bagaglio del suo sapere orale alla giovane che accudisce la quale, a sua volta, lo lascerà in eredità per linea femminile alla figlia Feeny, cui viene dato il nome della vecchia governante, nata dall'unione con il giovane attore nero George Felix che Miranda vede interpretare la parte del Caliban shakespeariano in un teatro londinese. Storie preziose che consentono a Miranda di trovare il suo posto nel mondo e di ripensarlo alla luce delle conoscenze e della consapevolezza acquisita. Perché se a Sycorax la Warner restituisce una voce e la 'full humanity' negata dal sistema di oppressione coloniale, alla Miranda shakespeariana offre la possibilità di sottrarsi al potere patriarcale per determinare la sua vita: "Shakespeare was writing the father's plot [...] So I tried to write the daughter's plot, to take the story from the other side and show how the daughter extricates herself from the father's plot" (Zabus 1994: 524). Il racconto della Warner, rispettoso nel dialogo con il *source text*, non intende cancellare la storia già scritta, ma prospettarne una lettura e uno sviluppo alternativo: "In its postpatriarchal import, *Indigo* thus provides the (grand)Daughter's plot, which somehow 'supplement' *The Tempest's* plot" (Zabus 2002: 140). Miranda, coscienza centrale nella scena novecentesca, è una ribelle, una sorta di moderna Ariel che, come la ragazza Arawak, insegue la libertà e rivendica il suo diritto di scegliere. Nella Londra contemporanea sente di non appartenere, esperienza condivisa dal padre Kit la cui condizione di 'esule' è rivelata da quel "'touch of the tarbrush'" (Warner 1993: 22) che gli deriva dal sangue creolo della madre. Figlia della diaspora, straniera nella sua terra come sentiva di essere la stessa Warner, un'esperienza condivisa da tutti i protagonisti del romanzo seppure nelle esperienze e circostanze più diverse, Miranda reagisce al senso di sradicamento e al complesso di colpa per le ingiustizie perpetrate dai suoi antenati colonizzatori ai danni delle popolazioni sottomesse coltivando un nuovo linguaggio di *partnership*, "[...] a new language. Beyond cursing, beyond ranting" (Warner 1993: 388). Il passato non può essere spazzato via,

Miranda ne è consapevole: “She wasn’t living inside one of Shakespeare’s sweet-tempered comedies, nor in one of his late plays with their magical reconciliations [...]” (Warner 1993: 391). Il suo mondo, il mondo postmoderno di fine secolo, [...] the age of anxiety and of the lonely crowd” nella quale siamo tutti “[...] spiritually orphaned and alienated” (Said 1984: 54), è segnato da rotture e dislocazioni, da solitudine e confusione (Warner 1993: 392). Ecco dunque che lo *happy ending* fiabesco che corona il sogno d’amore di Miranda e del giovane attore afro-americano, simbolico Caliban che incarna secoli di abusi e sopraffazioni, non intende rappresentare una ‘magical reconciliation’ a facile chiusa del romanzo, ma piuttosto si presenta in termini provocatori come modello per una trasformazione culturale, in una tensione ideale verso una riconciliazione che richiede un cambio sostanziale di mentalità: “As Warner challenges the male myth of history as violence, she brings into being another, feminine myth, using magic, realism, mythology, and fairy tales to call for a future change of mentality” (Williams 2005: 268). E se il romanzo, nelle intenzioni dell’autrice, deve parlare “in the way fairy tales do, for hope, against despair” (Warner 2003b: 265), il racconto della Storia e delle storie non può prescindere da un serio e responsabile confronto con il passato da cui è necessario ripartire per immaginare e costruire un futuro migliore.

Indigo si chiude sulla scena di un’anziana Serafine alle prese con i tanti rumori che assediano la sua testa, rumori dal passato, rumori del presente: “[...] they whisper news to her of this island and that, of people scattered here and there, from the past and from the present. Some are on the run still; but some have settled, they have ceased wandering, their maroon state is changing sound and shape” (Warner 2003: 402). Il pensiero è rivolto agli esuli, a coloro che vivono ai margini, ridotti al silenzio, segnati dal senso di non-appartenenza e dall’esperienza dell’alterità, ai popoli dispersi in un esodo ininterrotto attraverso i secoli, a coloro che ancora vagano alla ricerca di dignità e riconoscimento e a coloro che hanno negoziato una nuova identità e che, almeno in apparenza, sono ‘arrivati’. L’isola è piena di rumori, scriveva Shakespeare, ma lo è altrettanto di voci che li hanno tradotti in storie, quelle narrate e quelle che attendono di essere raccontate, come Serafine, la *storyteller*, promette di fare. Storie che la scrittrice Marina Warner ci consegna sommessamente, nella consapevolezza della loro incompletezza e precarietà, quale base comune di riflessione e di comprensione reciproca, una ‘comprensione’ che include e abbraccia, punto di partenza per la costruzione di una cultura di pace fondata sulla solidarietà e sul rispetto per l’Altra/o.

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Laura Colombino

'To Inhabit in Tranquility': Landscape, Vision and Empathy in Ford Madox Ford's *No Enemy*

Abstract I: In *No Enemy* di Ford Madox Ford, la minaccia mortale rappresentata dalla guerra influisce sulle forme e sulla possibilità stessa di provare empatia. Dopo aver mostrato come Ford si inserisca nel dibattito coevo sulla *Einfühlung*, l'articolo approfondisce le riflessioni dell'autore sulle distorsioni subite dalla sua 'immaginazione simpatetica' e sull'angoscia per i territori mutilati dalla guerra. L'intento è di mostrare come le rare visioni surreali di paesaggi inviolati concedano a Ford di riconnettersi con i pensieri, le paure e i desideri più profondi dei suoi simili. I recenti studi di psicologia sui diversi livelli di empatia e sulla sua compromissione in situazioni di stress forniscono il quadro concettuale dell'analisi.

Abstract II: In Ford Madox Ford's *No Enemy*, the mortal threat posed by the war affects the forms and even the possibility of empathy. After showing how he participates in contemporary discourses on *Einfühlung*, I investigate his musings on the distortions of his sympathetic imagination and his grief for mutilated territories. The aim is to show how rare surreal visions of landscapes untouched by the war offer him the possibility of reconnecting himself with the deepest thoughts, fears and longings of his fellow beings. Recent psychological research on different levels of empathy and its impairment under stress provide the conceptual framework of my analysis.

Impressionism and the Sympathetic Imagination

In Joseph Conrad's oft-quoted definition of literary Impressionism, writing "must make its appeal through the senses": "My task which I am trying to achieve", he claims in the Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897), "is by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you see" (Conrad 1979: 147). Such vicariousness, the ability to make the imagination of the reader respond to the world created by the author, was at the core of Impressionist writing, a style which gained momentum between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Beside Conrad, a considerable number of writers have been associated with, or discussed in terms of, literary Impressionism, among them Arthur Symons, Stephen Crane, Katherine Mansfield, D. H. Lawrence, Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf. Yet Ford Madox Ford was by far the most central figure of this movement: despite his manifold experimentations throughout his long and prolific career, he always styled himself as an Impressionist and more than any other con-

tributed to defining the theoretical underpinnings of this kind of writing. Ford believed that literature should render – and reproduce in the reader’s mind – impressions as they impinge on the author’s consciousness; for this process to be effective, the reader should be a “sympathetic soul” (Ford 1992: 17), whose mind’s eye is sufficiently untrammelled by conventions to be impressed by the writer’s vivid renditions of reality.

Unsurprisingly, the epistemological question has been the province par excellence of Fordian and, more generally, early twentieth-century studies: conditions of perception and the limits of knowledge are, after all, the fundamental issues of Impressionism. Yet it is a well-known fact that, from the turn of the new millennium, scholars have largely lost interest in the question of representation and visuality. Other fields and intellectual formations – from cognitivism to affect theory – have pointed to new concerns and suggested new methods through which literature might be fruitfully addressed in epistemological terms. Yet, one may object that vision is too central to Ford’s writing to be dismissed on the grounds of the new academic agenda. And it is precisely on the premise of this objection that my article attempts to start revitalising the analysis of vision in Ford, by arguing its inextricable connection with one of the main subjects debated across the humanities and health sciences today: empathy. As Meghan Hammond argues in her 2014 monograph *Empathy and the Psychology of Literary Modernism*, “[l]iterary impressionism is valuable largely in that it stimulates sympathetic imagination or empathic thinking” (2014: 120). In this context, so I argue here, vision should be centre stage, as it is undeniable that images – be they physical or mental – involve the viewer emotionally and that Ford was especially prone to being moved by their evocative power. As he suggested in a letter to Stella Bowen on 11 May 1923, “Holbein’s portrait of Xtina of Milan or the Karats really make you feel at least all – & a great deal more – of the emotions one ough[t] to feel on meeting X. of M” (Stang & Cochran 1994: 199).

In Ford’s pre-war writings of good soldiers and nostalgic gentlemen, emotions are usually repressed or manifested only in very small gestures and brief remarks; often, they are evoked indirectly through colours or other aspects of the visual field. But when confronted with, and overwhelmed by, the traumatic experience of the First World War – which emerged in his writings of the 1920s – Ford felt that his power to receive and convey sensory impressions had been severely compromised, as much as his ability to feel and make us feel. Consequently, the Great War – an unprecedented challenge to imagination and emotion – is the best field to test the complexities of Ford’s Impressionism under strain, its ability to represent the violence done both to individual perception and fellow feeling.

Over the last decades scholars have offered explanations of Ford’s psychology of war through psychoanalytic, biographical, aesthetic and epistemological approaches. In the recent collection *War and the Mind: Ford Madox Ford’s Parade’s End, Modernism and Psychology* (2015) edited by Ashley Chantler and Rob Hawkes, for example, contributors have engaged with shell-shock in Ford’s war writings from a variety of perspectives: from the relationship of trauma with sexuality to parallels between individual trauma and the dramatic historical transformations brought about by the war. In this collection, empathy features in Meghan Marie Hammond’s essay, which investigates fellow feeling in relation to the importance of the eighteenth century in *Last Post*, while Eve Sorum invokes Deleuze and Guattari’s rhi-

zomatic theories to “argue that the characters in *Parade’s End* through their own alienation from their experiences and sense of disorientation with the emotional and experiential terrain, actually invite the reader into a world that might otherwise be inaccessible” (2015: 53). Along the same lines, Hammond claims elsewhere that in Ford “empathy and abstraction, two aesthetic processes that Hulme, following the work of Wilhelm Worringer, wanted to separate, can actually function productively together” (2014: 29). On the whole, the theory of empathy is still too recent to have had a significant influence on Fordian studies and these few contributions on the topic tend to focus mainly on techniques of fragmentation and effects of bewilderment in order to claim that modernist abstraction and shifting points of view can be conducive to the reader’s empathic response to the text. Their concern with the reader’s emotional reception loosely follows a line of enquiry set out by Suzanne Keen’s seminal book *Empathy and the Novel* (2007).

This approach is alien to the aims of my article, which is not concerned with the experience of reading. Rather, its objective is to make sense of Ford’s consciousness at war, where the prolonged mortal threat affects the forms and at times even the very possibility of fellow feeling, but also to investigate his displacement of the empathy for human beings onto forms of anguish for the disfigured landscape. After showing how he participates in early twentieth-century discourses of emotional response, I will investigate his baffled musings on the distortions of his sympathetic imagination. In particular, my analysis will try to make sense of his grief for territories devastated by the war which, to his own dismay, he experiences as more unbearable and heart-breaking than the view of slaughtered soldiers; but I will also show how rare surreal visions of landscapes untouched by the war offer him the possibility of reconnecting himself with the deepest thoughts, excruciating fears and intense longings of his fellow beings. In *No Enemy. A Tale of Reconstruction* (1929) – Ford’s book under scrutiny in this article – the poet’s “mind, always aware of itself, comments on its own complexity” (Stang 1977: 50), probing into the depths of the psyche, where a diversity of responses to the war stratify: the threat of dissolution, the exhilaration produced by escaped danger, the emotional numbness caused by the exposure to a traumatic space of mud and death, and, finally, the desire for an inviolable place. As Sondra Stang suggests, *No Enemy* is a sustained effort to examine “the nature of the mind under stress – the particular way it perceives, what it selects and uses, how it survives: and in the Poet’s case how the mind strengthens itself so that it can again function in a creative way” (1977: 50).

No Enemy is composed of two sections. Part One (“Four Landscapes”) draws upon particular views which have left an indelible trace on the memory of the poet Gringoire, Ford’s protagonist and alter ego. As he explains, “before August, 1914, I lived more through my eyes than through any other sense, and in consequence certain corners of the earth had, singularly, the power to stir me” (Ford 1984: 21). But from the outbreak of hostilities, “aspects of the earth no longer existed for him” (21) with the exception of the view of four landscapes: these became, according to Sondra Stang, quasi-Wordsworthian “spots of time for the mind under stress to repair to, reverting to its most nourishing activity – storing itself with ‘observed aspects’” (1977: 50).

Conceptual Frames

In the early twentieth century there was a flourishing of theories of empathy in England. The term first appeared in English as a translation of the German *Einfühlung* ('in-feeling') and its first recorded use, in 1904, is credited to amateur psychologist, novelist and travel writer Violet Page (alias 'Vernon Lee') (Cooke 2008: 155). A central concept in German aesthetics, *Einfühlung* captured the almost spiritual experience of the viewer who projects his or her feelings into natural forms, in a moment of deep consonance or sympathy between subject and object. Individuals, it was believed, attribute beauty to the forms in which they succeed in transferring their own vital sense; consequently, their aesthetic enjoyment amounts to an objectified enjoyment of themselves.

The idea of empathy became widespread above all following the appearance of the successful work of Wilhelm Worringer *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (1908). His study presented empathy as an aesthetic category suitable for understanding only classical and Renaissance art – which arise from a feeling of identification with organic forms – but inadequate to the appreciation of the art of primitive peoples as well as pre-classical and oriental civilisations, in which an anti-naturalistic feeling tends to prevail. Next to the need for empathy, claimed Worringer, the existence of an original impulse towards abstraction must be postulated, which tends to the inorganic, the regular and the geometric. Naturalistic art is that of civilisations who follow an immanent impulse, who feel at home in the world and confident about its knowability; to the contrary, the urge for abstraction comes to those who perceive the world as disquieting and unintelligible. Worringer described this anguish as a "dread of space", a "spiritual agorophobia in the face of the motley disorder and caprice of the phenomenal world" (Worringer 1997: 16, 129). In Susan Lanzoni's words, "[r]ather than leading one to extend oneself into forms in the world, the urge to abstraction produced a withdrawal from a chaotic and unsettling world. This chaos prompted the creation of repose and order in a new crystalline, geometric style, which was typical of the Byzantine mosaic or the Egyptian pyramid" (2018: 88). His idea of the relationship between archaic geometric form and agorophobia or space-shyness was reaffirmed for Anglo-American modernism by T. E. Hulme. Wyndham Lewis "would have found much to his liking in Hulme's interpretation of Worringer, which yoked the geometrical forms of machinery to those found in archaic art" (Hammond 2014: 125).

According to Kristy Martin, other writers, such as Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence, were more appreciative of empathy, which they conceived as a "bodily and yet ecstatic form of feeling", "a type of sympathy that was both sensuous and epiphanic" (2013: 9-10). Above all, it was Vernon Lee who wrote extensively on the topic and is credited with its popularisation for English-speaking audiences. According to Hammond, in the pre-war years Ford was familiar with "contemporaneous discourse on aesthetic empathy, especially that of Vernon Lee", as "[s]he was one of several female authors whom he featured in the pages of the *English Review*" (Hammond 2014: 121). Admittedly, he never used the word 'empathy', preferring instead the more widespread and long-standing term 'sympathy'. Yet, if today the latter defines "a distanced feeling of pity for another, whereas empathy is a deeper-going ability to engage with a variety of feelings and to inhabit, sometimes even bodily, the

other's perspective" (Lanzoni 2018: 5-6), in the early decades of the twentieth century the two words were used interchangeably.

Yet, one should not presume that concerns behind Worringer's preference for abstraction were altogether alien to Ford's own. Worringer's dread of space – which is engendered by its indefiniteness, its being the realm of phenomena, transformation and decay – accorded with Ford's sense of the war landscape as a vast, baffling space of sheer matter and dissolution, a mixture of mud and corpses, which does not encourage the empathic extension of the self into space but rather a withdrawal from it. Worringer saw the "geometric-crystalline regularity" of modernist art as a way of impressing upon the image "the stamp of eternalisation and wrest it from temporality and arbitrariness" (1997: 42); as will become apparent in the following, Ford found the same urge satisfied by the image of a safe nook, protective and inviolable, which allowed him to inhabit space again but also to find a way of reconstructing his ability to visualise and empathise.

My investigation of the mind at war as it appears in *No Enemy* is partly modelled on the theories of recent psychological research. These reveal that automatic, instinctive forms of empathy (usually defined as "emotional contagion") coexist with others which have an emotional and moral quality or even a cognitive nature. This complexity has generated various theoretical attempts to produce clear-cut definitions. Keen, for example, "distinguish[es] the spontaneous, responsive sharing of an appropriate feeling as empathy, and the more complex, differentiated feeling for another as sympathy (sometimes called empathic concern in psychological literature)" (2007: 4). For other theorists fellow feeling expresses itself at three levels. The most basic is "empathic resonance" (also known as "contagion"), which is an instinctive muscular response; often "[t]his so-called perception-action link is defined as an unconscious mimicry of the postures, facial expressions, and other behaviors" (Nietlisbach *et al.* 2010: 833). A higher level is "emotional empathy" which defines an individual's experience of another person's actual or inferred emotional state. Finally, the term "cognitive empathy" refers to the ability to understand and explain the mental states of others and is known as "Theory of Mind" (Nietlisbach *et al.* 2010: 832–833). These categories are recurrent in contemporary studies of the psychology of empathy but by no means stable, as different scholars tend to shift emphases and redefine boundaries. Moreover, as psychologist Eva Koopman has pointed out, although these theoretical distinctions may be useful, they are also difficult to make in practice and perhaps even arbitrary, because the various forms of empathy are likely to cooccur in real life (see Koopman 2015: 63).

Feeling for the Country, Feeling for Others

Throughout his career, Ford was concerned with what since the eighteenth century had been known as 'sympathetic imagination', "the moral and aesthetic concept debated by the philosophers David Hume, Adam Smith, and Edmund Burke" (Lanzoni 2018: 5). According to Max Saunders, the cultivation of understanding between minds was "Ford's most important aesthetic doctrine": "all his criticism rests on a broad sense of how art effects a 'contact' between individuals; how 'feeling with' or 'feeling like' someone quite other militates against human isolation; how it enables knowledge, understanding, self-understanding" (1996: 400).

As a second lieutenant in the British Army, Ford was sent to France in 1915 where he saw first-hand the devastating violence of the Somme and the Ypres Salient. In *No Enemy*, the carnage of the modern warfare leaves the veteran Gringoire, Ford's *persona*, with a capacity for feeling which is severely impaired, to the extent that – somewhat worryingly and in an evident state of dissociation – the protagonist speculates: “Perhaps I am lacking in human sympathy or have no particular cause to love my fellow men” (Ford 1929: 28). War generates alienation: “the battle did not exist for the purpose of stirring your emotions. Neither does the night, nor yet do the corpses. They are all profoundly indifferent to your existence”, writes Ford in the essay “Pure Literature” (Ford 1999: 261). Researchers in cognitive psychology have shown that impaired empathic resonance in post-traumatic stress disorder – which Ford suffered from as a consequence of shell shock – is a protective move: “[s]uppression of contagion might be an unconscious coping strategy of the aroused system, preventing the individual from being overwhelmed by the stressful experiences of others” (Nietlisbach *et al.* 2010: 841). According to psychologist D. S. Weiss, this compassion fatigue can be regularly observed in people overexposed to suffering (2010: 771).

Gringoire's puzzlement at his emotional numbness emerges repeatedly in *No Enemy* and finds an echo also in Ford's war essay “Arms and the Mind”, written at the front in 1916:

In battle – and in the battle zone – the whole world, humanity included, seems to assume the aspect of matter dominated eventually by gravity. [...] It is all just matter – all humanity, just matter; one with the trees, the shells by the roadside, the limbered wagons, the howitzers and the few upstanding housewalls (Ford 1999: 39).

“On the face of it I am a man who has taken a keen interest in the aspects of humanity – in the turn of an eyelash, an expression of joy, a gesture of despair. In the old days [...] I felt certain emotions”, Ford writes in the same essay (1999: 39). In peacetime such details and nuances can be taken in and rendered by impressionist writing, but the immense cruelty and devastation of the first modern warfare strain the limits of human comprehension: “I dare say it was just want of imagination: one couldn't perhaps figure the feelings of ruined, fleeing and martyred populations”, claims Gringoire (Ford 1984: 26). The constant, stressful exposure to the abjection of the body – its subsumption into the mud as undifferentiated matter – impairs empathic resonance, just as the sheer scale of entire suffering populations cannot be conceived (or, in impressionist terms, mentally visualised) and consequently produces a crisis of emotional empathy.

In the midst of this debacle of the sympathising imagination, Ford recognises nonetheless the power of narration. The abjection of human beings whose corpses have become one with matter may have impaired empathic resonance but this is one which words are still able to rekindle:

one of the young fellows began to talk of an operation for appendicitis he had had to undergo. We had to stop him: the mere talking of cutting flesh with a knife made us feel sick. Yet the sight of a man literally smashed into the dust had produced no emotions in us.... I know of no more striking tribute to the power of the word” (Ford 1999: 260).

The effect of contagion described in this passage recalls Vernon Lee's similar assertion about the capacity of narration to produce an instinctive muscular reaction: "[w]hen one felt the body 'shrinking at the narrative of an operation', one might experience imitative movements, what Lee called a 'sympathetic realization'" (Lanzoni 2018: 27). Ford is persuaded that the fictional evocation of an object is more conducive to vivid mental imagery than the observation of the object in the real world: as a pre-war writer, he claims in "Arms and the Mind", "I could make you see [...] anything I had seen, and still better, anything I hadn't seen" (Ford 1999: 36-37). It follows that only the reconstruction of the power to visualise, that is, to wrest moments of vision from the unintelligible, agoraphobic space, will restore his empathic abilities.

The drab abstraction of the war landscape entails the impossibility of inhabiting it visually and physically. Space may be mapped cartographically and its details may be memorised to facilitate the movements of troops, but they will present nothing meaningful to the soul of the poet who feels existentially stranded, without coordinates. Space is primarily a lived experience (Lefebvre 1991: 162) and the question of its embodiment is certainly crucial to Ford, especially in the midst of a space that threatens to engulf and assimilate his body, as he suggests in *It Was the Nightingale*:

houses. They had been used to seem cubic and solid permanences. But we had seen Ploegsteert where it had been revealed that men's dwellings were thin shells that could be crushed as walnuts are crushed. Man and even Beast... all things that lived and moved and had volition and life might at any moment be resolved into a scarlet viscosity seeping into the earth of torn fields [...] Nay, it had been revealed to you that beneath Ordered Life itself was stretched, the merest film with, beneath it, the abysses of Chaos (Ford 1934: 48-49).

If, in *No Enemy*, open places constantly produce states of dread and agoraphobia, the book is above all an attempt to retrieve the few quiet moments during the war when Gringoire's poetic imagination was reactivated. The significance of such spots of time becomes apparent to him only afterwards, in the long-desired quiet of the English cottage where he lives contentedly after the war, even if the damaged state of this haven clearly alludes to the incompleteness of his recovery. The cottage is "like a gingerbread house from a Grimm's fairy tale" but still in need of repair, "with a roof that leaks, walls that used to drip with damp" (Ford 1984: 22, 16). For Gringoire, the difficult process of psychological and artistic reconstruction is dependent on the possibility of dwelling in this safe corner of the earth, however precarious and ramshackle it may be. His desire to "inhabit in tranquility" (Ford 1984: 9) signals the quasi-Wordsworthian nature of Ford's enterprise: to recollect means to reconstruct, from a secure green nook of the earth and through the consonance with a natural landscape, the sense of a common human sensibility.

During the war, Gringoire fears that all the "nooks of the world were threatened by the tide of blue-grey mud" (Ford 1984: 63). If, as illustrated above, the suffering of entire populations is ungraspable for Gringoire's traumatised mind and causes a crisis of emotional empathy, such compassion is transferred from the civilians to the country itself: "what one

feared for was the land – not the people but the menaced earth [...] one couldn't perhaps figure the feelings of ruined, fleeing and martyred populations", he says (Ford 1984: 15). When he visits some gutted French villages, he is struck by "the feeling of abashment that seemed to attach to furniture and wall-paper exposed to the sky – not the sufferings of the civilian population" (27). The anticipation of the trauma that the war may inflict on the landscape always produces in him a sense of dread, just as the observation of wounded houses engenders melancholy thoughts:

what struck me as infinitely pathetic was lace curtains: for there were innumerable lace curtains, that had shaded vanished windows, fluttering from all the unroofed walls in the glassless window-frames. They seemed to me to be more forlornly ashamed than any human beings I have ever seen. Only brute beasts ever approach that (27).

As Susan Sontag contends in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, a village or "a cityscape is not made of flesh. Still, sheared-off buildings are almost as eloquent as bodies in the streets" (2003: 7). Gringoire's feeling for the landscape throughout the book is clearly a displacement of his sympathetic imagination, a compensation for his temporary inability to fully experience other people's actual or inferred emotional state. But it is also the sense that nature and civilisation – as they are revealed in the countryside, dwellings and poetry – transcend the destiny of human beings and preserve our humaneness for generations to come: "the real lives of men are enshrined in their products. To kill a poet is a small thing; to destroy his work is an irremediable offense" (Ford 1984: 109). Therefore, "[i]t is horrible to see houses go down in ruin under artillery fire; it is horrible to see fields mutilated and rendered infertile" (110). No longer the poet, whose life the war has revealed as tragically precarious, but rather poetry, nature and human artefacts are, for Ford, "the rock of defence for human nature" (Wordsworth 1992: 77): by destroying them, we jeopardise our possibility of remaining human.

In the essay "War and the Mind", written in 1916, Ford discusses what does or does not present an image to the "visualising mind" in the context of the war. He describes a "division" in his inner self between, on the one hand, the mind of the "Battalion Intelligence Officer" – constantly "observant", alert and engrossed in mapping the territory or performing other military tasks – and, on the other, the "quiescent mind [...] of the Impressionist in Letters" (Ford 1999: 42-43). In the disorienting landscape "obscured by clay" (Ford 1984: 22), only instrumental observation can sustain the self in the act of survival: "things were not objects that one looked at for themselves. They were landmarks" for the "workaday frame of mind" (Ford 1984: 23-24, 29): the land represented nothing visual to this kind of intelligence whereas the mind at rest – in the few moments when the usual preoccupations were somehow suspended – could contemplate the landscape in aesthetic terms. "So Gringoire had four landscapes, which represent four moments in four years when, for very short intervals, the strain of the war lifted itself from the mind. They were, those intermissions of the spirit, exactly like gazing through rifts in a mist" (Ford 1984: 24): these visions bring into focus a particular moment during his military service when the omnipresent thought of the

war receded from his consciousness and he was able to appreciate the landscape in itself in all its vividness.

The first is in England, at the outbreak of the war, a “day in 1915 when Kensington Gardens suddenly grew visible” to Gringoire. He has a trance-like vision of “old, stiff marionettes, rather homely courtiers and royalties” stepping out of the tall windows of the “Dutch orangery” and pirouetting on the lawn (Ford 1984: 25). This fanciful reverie is brief, suffused with the sense of a possible future invasion of England by a “mud-colored tide pouri[ng] toward us” (Ford 1984: 26). Marionettes, a frequent avant-garde motif also in Ford’s pre-war writing, may allude to the mechanisation of humanity produced by the war; yet here they appear poeticised by the playful quality of this vision, so that the reification becomes innocent and surreal, a childlike spectacle.

The second landscape appears when, in a railway station, Gringoire is informed of Lord Kitchener’s death. The news sets him in a peculiar state of mind: the whole world seems, as it were, suspended and there is nothing for him to think of but visible objects: “No war: an empty mind; a little open shed with benches; a hatchway in one plank wall where they served out tickets; a bit of platform; a high, brick signal-box with clocks or things ticking; a brick house, no doubt the stationmaster’s....The whole world, that was! And noiseless; and immobile” (Ford 1984: 34).

Then comes the third intermission of the spirit, which occurs after Gringoire’s worst shock of the war. A gunwheel has lifted the corrugated iron roof of the dugout where he is dozing and has crushed it down again. Miraculously unscathed, he walks downhill through thistles in hot sunlight and finds himself surrounded by swallows which fly at waist-height around him, concealing the corpses scattered on the ground underneath and screening them from his full awareness. In a moment of post-traumatic exaltation, he cherishes the illusion of the inviolability of his body:

And an innumerable company of wallows flew around him, waist high, just brushing the thistledown. “They were so near”, Gringoire said, “that they brushed my hands, and they extended so far that I could see nothing else. It is one of the five things of the war that I really see, for it was like walking, buoyantly, in the pellucid sunlight, waist-high through a sea of unsurpassed and unsurpassable azure. I felt as if I were a Greek God. It was like a miracle [...] I remember thinking [...] that there were a good many dead amongst the thistles and that I must be putting up a huge number of flies. But that again was the thought of my subconscious mind (Ford 1984: 44–45).

Finally, close to the Somme, the fourth landscape takes the shape of “a rhomboid of deeper, brighter green [...] precisely as you will see the colored image cast on a sheet by a magic lantern, then slowly, it hardened and brightened, took shape as a recumbent oval, like eighteenth century vignettes”. This image doesn’t connote a specific locality but the more abstract idea of the country as “a sanctuary” (Ford 1984: 66-67).

Contemplation, regression, eternity and protection are what these landscapes encapsulate. All of them are almost surreal, “like one of these visions that one’s eyes, when tired, will see just before one falls asleep” (Ford 1984: 66). They are moments which emerge to

awareness through the layers of the mind. The “subconscious” registers these visual aspects and the “unconscious” associates them not only with the fear of “death: a profound and unforeseen disaster” (46) but also with the attendant desire of inviolability. Yet, we wonder, are such spots of time purely solipsistic reveries or are they signals of a common experience?

Only at the beginning of Part Two (“Certain Interiors”) is the narrator able to visualise humanity at war – no longer as the affectless image of sheer matter but as the nightmarish vision of a vast territory populated by minute, ephemeral human creatures who become one with the wounded landscape. This time, feeling for the landscape (or rather for the entire earth) becomes one with feeling for the whole humanity at war. This all-embracing emotional empathy is so intense that it becomes almost unbearable:

stretching away under the high skies, in the August sunlight, millions, millions, millions of my fellow men were moving – like tumultuous mites in a cheese, training and training, as we there were training – all across a broad world to where the sun was setting and to where the sun was rising – training to live a little, short space of time in an immense, long ribbon of territory, where, for a mile or so the earth was scarred, macerated, beaten to a pulp, and burnt by the sun till it was all dust....The thought grew, became an immense feeling, became an obsession (Ford 1984: 128).

The grief for a humanised landscape foreshadows the powerful empathy (psychologists would probably categorise it as ‘cognitive’) which comes as a revelation at the end of the book, when Gringoire has an insight into the mind of those who died. As in “the old catholic idea that a man may find salvation between the saddle and the ground”, he expresses his belief that, in the moments preceding their death, soldiers must have found consolation in the thought of their own “imagined sanctuary” (Ford 1984: 277).

It becomes finally clear that the book has traced a journey towards the awareness of the feelings and aspirations common to us all. In the incipit, Gringoire is doubtful “if [his] experience of the war has been that of many people” (19). But the retrieval of his visual memories and the analysis of the workings of his mind has led him to conclude that we share the same way of thinking: under pressure or when approaching death, we need “the herb of oblivion” (139) and to be able to visualise an inviolable nook of the Earth, or, as Ford defines it in the Preface to the poetry collection *On Heaven* (1918):

a materialist’s Heaven. I know at least that I would not keep on going if I did not feel that Heaven will be something like Rumpelmayer’s tea shop, with the nice boys in khaki, with the haze and glimmer of the bright buttons, and the nice girls in the fashions appropriate to the day, and the little orchestra playing, “Let the Great Big World....” For our dead wanted so badly their leave in a Blighty, which would have been like that – they wanted it so badly that they must have it. And they must have just that. For haven’t we Infantry all seen that sort of shimmer and shine and heard the rustling and the music through all the turmoil and the mire and the horror? [...] that imagination is stronger than death (Ford 1999: 259).

This earthly paradise is a safe nook which can be real, as in the case of Gringoire's cottage, or imaginary, a figment of our mind between life and death, vigil and dream. At the end of *No Enemy*, musing on the many who died in the battlefields, Gringoire "hope[s] it is not a heresy to think that, as the eyelids of those who fell closed on their glory, they had long, long visions, like that green vision that came to me from time to time" (Ford 1984: 277), childlike pictures of marionettes and gingerbread cottages, delicate and frail as hopes and dreams are. Through this insight, the poet Gringoire, who dwells in his ramshackle post-war cottage, feels one with those who fell. His sympathetic imagination is finally reconstructed through the belief that, in our shared desire for this heavenly vision, lies our common humanity. The reconstruction of space (the possibility of inhabiting in tranquility) is the condition for the restoration of vision just as this restored vision is essential for the reconstruction of an empathic imagination.

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Fabiana Fusco

Femicide in the Italian Language: Which Words to Describe Gender-based Violence?*

Abstract I: La parola può dare forma all'esperienza raccontandola ovvero manipolandola; la scelta che facciamo delle parole è un atto decisivo che ha delle ripercussioni nel nostro agire poiché può costituire la premessa di pratiche discriminatorie. A partire da tali presupposti intendiamo proporre qualche riflessione sull'uso di talune parole ed espressioni e sulla consapevolezza del significato che proprio quelle parole ed espressioni manifestano quando trattiamo e valutiamo certi argomenti sensibili; inizieremo facendo qualche considerazione sul termine *femminicidio* per poi osservare come la violenza di genere appaia da un lato in un contesto della codificazione linguistica come un dizionario della lingua italiana e dall'altro nella stampa quotidiana nazionale.

Abstract II: Words can shape experience by narrating it or manipulating it. How we choose words is a decisive act which has important effects on our behavior since it can lead to discriminating practices. On the basis of these considerations, this article analyses the use of some words and expressions and focuses on how aware we are of their meaning when they are employed to tackle and judge delicate topics. We shall begin with some considerations on the term *femicide* and then move on to examining how gender violence is, on one hand, linguistically coded in Italian dictionaries and, on the other, in the national press.

Introduction

According to statistics released by ISTAT, about seven million women in Italy have suffered some kind of abuse during their lives and more than a hundred are killed every year by a man who is often an intimate partner. They are victims of behaviors, gestures and episodes of violence which journalists are often compelled to comment on. Besides being merely compelled by their right and duty to report facts, they are also called to contribute to a cultural turn by investigating the contexts in which violence emerges. Reporting a brutal aggression can, indeed, either nourish further aversion or promote a culture of respect for the most vulnerable, be they women, children or the elderly. How, then, can one spin an objective, accurate and precise narrative without promoting sensationalism? How can one narrate a dramatic episode while protecting the victim? Which words and expressions should

* I wish to thank Deborah Saidero for her revision of the English text and advice.

be used and which avoided? These are some of the questions raised by Loredana Lipperini and Michela Murgia in their promising book on femicide which takes up the challenge of changing the narrative of the phenomenon by focusing on the role played by the media in spreading the issue and on the lexical choices used (Lipperini & Murgia 2013)¹.

Our lives are fraught with a peculiar contradiction, namely our scarce perception of how powerful language really is. Our unique communication system is distinguished by extraordinary experiences, such as being able to talk and to talk to each other without misunderstandings and consents or to calibrate words according to the situation and our emotions. Words can thus shape experience by narrating it or manipulating it. How we choose words is a decisive act which has important effects on our behavior since it can lead to discriminating practices. On the basis of these considerations, this article analyses the use of some words and expressions and focuses on how aware we are of their meaning when they are employed to tackle and judge delicate topics. We shall begin with some considerations on the term *femicide* and then move on to examining how gender violence is, on one hand, linguistically coded in Italian dictionaries and, on the other, in the national press.

The Term *Femminicidio* (Femicide)

Over the past few years we have increasingly witnessed a daily crescendo of women being reported killed by their (ex-)husbands or partners on the news. The phenomenon is described as dramatic but unprecedented. Yet, the above-mentioned data and the numerous surveys carried out in many countries both in Europe and beyond suggest, instead, that these facts are both widely spread across the globe and rooted in history. They thus represent the tragic epilogue of a chain of violence which is as articulated in its manifestations as it is unitary in its origin. What seems new is, instead, the term used to describe these events, that is, *femminicidio*, which has circulated in the Italian lexicon (amidst some resistance and adaptations) for just about two decades. In her detailed reconstruction of the origin of the term and its use in newspapers, Della Valle (undated) points out that the term is documented from 2001 onwards and was preceded by *uxoricidio* (*uxoricide*), in the meaning of “the killing of a woman”, even if the Latin root *uxor*, meaning ‘wife’, alludes to the killing of a wife. The latter term was also used to include men and hence all partners in general. Della Valle (undated) laments the lexical void present in the Italian language, which lacked a term to refer to the killing of a woman as such, unlike in English where *femicide* has been attested since 1801 and *femicide* since 1992. The former term, made popular by the criminologist Diana Russell, was the model for other languages, among which the Italian term *fem(m)icidio*. The latter, instead, seems to derive from the word *femminicidio*, theorized and spread by Mexican anthropologist Marcela Lagarde to remember the homicides of many women that were committed on the border between Mexico and the United States. It is easy to understand that there was a proliferous intersection of points of view that originated in distant places and followed different paths but, nonetheless, met thanks to cultural movements that spread across many parts of the western world, including Italy.

¹ The volume, which incorporates numerous examples from the daily press, offers the interpretative lens which has inspired the comments presented herein.

Della Valle (undated) also points out that the term *femminicidio*, inspired by the Hispanic-American term, has gathered a great deal of consensus since 2008, following the publication of Barbara Spinelli's convincing essay which favored the use of term first in the daily and periodical press and then in current use (Spinelli 2008). To counter the harsh and corrosive judgements put forward against the term and its sociopolitical and ideological content² Della Valle (undated) aptly states:

Contrariamente a quanto si sente ripetere spesso, femminicidio non è una brutta parola. È una parola formata del tutto regolarmente, unendo e componendo insieme la parola femmina, con quella parte finale -cidio, che ha il significato appunto di uccisione. Uccisione di una donna. Non è la parola ad essere brutta e spesso si ha paura delle parole non per il loro aspetto esterno, ma per il significato e per l'avvenimento che evocano.

Contrary to what we often hear, femminicidio is not an ugly word. It is a word formed regularly by uniting and compounding the word femmina with the suffix -cidio, which means killing. Killing of a woman. It is not the word that is ugly. Often we fear words not because of their external aspect but because of their meaning and the event they evoke³.

Rosario Coluccia (2013) offers a further interpretation of the term *femminicidio* and, starting his analysis from dictionaries, contributes to its use and dissemination.

La voce "femmina" viene spiegata così: 'essere umano di sesso femminile, spesso con valore spregiativo'. Badate all'aggettivo "spregiativo", la soluzione è lì. Il "femminicidio" indica l'assassinio legato a un atteggiamento culturale ributtante, di chi considera la moglie, la compagna, l'amica, la donna incontrata casualmente, non un essere umano di pari dignità e di pari diritti, ma un oggetto di cui si è proprietari; se la proprietà viene negata, se un altro maschio si avvicina all'oggetto che si ritiene proprio, scatta la violenza cieca.

Io non so se questo atteggiamento sia generato da alcune abitudini della società in cui viviamo: una società che, insieme, esibisce sfacciatamente il corpo femminile visto come una merce e preferisce ascoltare chi urla e offende invece di riflettere sulla ragionevolezza delle argomentazioni. [...] Se una società genera forme mostruose di sopraffazione e di violenza, bisogna inventare un termine che esprima quella violenza e quella sopraffazione. E quindi è giusto usare "femminicidio", per denunciare la brutalità dell'atto e per indicare che si è contro la violenza e la sopraffazione. Bene ha fatto la lingua italiana a mettere in circolo la parola "femminicidio"; il generico "omicidio" risulterebbe troppo blando.

The definition for the entry "femmina" reads as follows: 'human being of female sex, often pejorative'. Attention should be focused on the adjective 'pejorative' as the so-

² See also Cantoni (2016: 41-54), who analyses the criticism put forward against the use of the neologism, as well as possible alternatives in use in journalistic communication.

³ All translations are mine.

lution lies therein. “Femminicidio” indicates an assassination based on the disgusting cultural attitude of someone who considers their wife, partner, friend or any randomly met woman not as a human being with equal dignity and rights but as a possessed object; if that property is denied, if another male approaches the object that one thinks his, then blind violence breaks out.

I do not know if this behavior is generated by certain customs of the society in which we live – a society which both shamelessly shows off the female body as if it were merchandise and prefers to listen to those who yell and offend, instead of reflecting on the sensibleness of the arguments. (...) If a society generates monstrous forms of oppression and violence, then it is necessary to invent a term that can express that violence and oppression. It is, thus, right to use “femminicidio” to denounce the brutality of the act and show that we are against violence and oppression. The Italian language was right to introduce the word “femminicidio” because the more generic term “omicidio” (homicide) is too bland.

These worthy linguistic considerations shed light on and actualize what would otherwise be discarded as a discussion not against the crime, but against the neologism used to describe it. Nevertheless, the insistence on the efficacy of the word, which is, no doubt, semantically powerful, reinforces, on one hand, the idea that the reality described is tangible and authentic, and on the other, associates the phenomenon with “una malattia cronica della cultura di buona parte del nostro pianeta basata sulla visione della donna come essere ‘naturalmente’ inferiore. Con essa sempre fanno i conti quotidianamente le donne di tutto il mondo e contro di essa lottano i movimenti femminili occidentali da oltre trenta anni” [*a chronic disease of the culture that is shared by most of the planet and which is based on an envisioning of women as ‘naturally’ inferior beings. Women all over the world have to deal with it every day and western feminist movements have been fighting against it for over 30 years*] (Paoli 2014: 52; see also Violi 2015: 141-143). Such an awareness is also confirmed by lexicographical evidences (*Neologismi* Treccani 2008 and *Devoto Oli* 2009) which list the term with the following meanings:

Uccisione diretta o provocata, eliminazione fisica o annientamento morale della donna e del suo ruolo sociale.

Direct or provoked killing, physical elimination or moral annihilation of women and their social role.

Qualsiasi forma di violenza esercitata sistematicamente sulle donne in nome di una sovrastruttura ideologica di matrice patriarcale, allo scopo di perpetuarne la subordinazione e di annientarne l’identità attraverso l’assoggettamento fisico o psicologico, fino alla schiavitù o alla morte.

Any form of systematic violence against women in name of an ideological superstructure of patriarchal matrix, in order to perpetuate subordination and annihilate identity through physical and psychological subjection including slavery or death.

Obviously, these statements refer to an ample context of reference which is not merely restricted to the domestic arena – that of “systematic violence against women in name of an ideological superstructure of patriarchal matrix”. Femicide cannot, therefore, be considered as a phenomenon linked to the personal histories of single individuals, because it is a political problem which is rooted in the “patriarchal matrix” and its culture. It is an interpretative category of reality which considers every kind of gender violence against women, in which women cannot claim or exercise their rights because they are women.

The adoption of a new term thus reflects the urgency for a discontinuity from the dominant culture which ‘inspired’, so to say, and justified crimes against women. We must, however, always be careful not to focus only on the semantics of the neologism, since this could lead us to neglect the issue in its full complexity, that is, its cultural implications and its repercussions on the development of a distorted idea of man-woman relationships. For this reason, it is necessary to continue monitoring the vocabulary of and on femicide in its various contexts of use. In the following sections, we will, thus, consider some examples from two points of view: the lexicographic and that of journalistic usage.

Gender Violence in Dictionaries

The meanings associated with the ‘feminine’ have over time contributed to non-neutrally spreading and mediating a series of well-established portraits, values, categories, judgements and prejudices. Through their communicative acts, women and men play out their social roles and thereby also describe the worldview they are part of. For this reason, studying words is a peculiar way of understanding cultural dynamics since it allows us to single out expressions with implicit value-judgements clearly conveyed in everyday speech. Even a dictionary, which is just apparently an impersonal compendium of words, can thus be analyzed as the symbolic reconstruction of a more complex world. As feminist scholars have often pointed out, the definition of *woman* as ‘the female of man’ is not rare in Italian lexicography (perhaps somewhat idly it is still found in many repertoires) and it says a lot about the masculinist ideology that underlies many dictionaries.

In order to test this idea, we shall consider the authoritative *Grande dizionario italiano dell’uso* (henceforth GRADIT) which, simply put, is a lexicographic tool that witnesses the ‘movements’ of the Italian language. As such, it documents contemporary Italian language and culture and carefully and rigorously reveals the threat of prejudice inscribed in language by amply signaling (albeit not systematically) ironic, playful and stereotypical uses. In particular we shall observe how Italian expresses the asymmetry between the *MOGLIE* (WIFE) and *MARITO* (HUSBAND) binary, by analysing the examples provided for these entries⁴.

The analysis shows that there are 233 attestations for *MOGLIE* and 134 for *MARITO*. What needs to be evaluated at this point is if the ‘immobile’ construction of the examples quoted can suggest an interesting split in everyday linguistic uses often tending towards the colloquial and simultaneously denounce certain ideological resistances. Let us begin by analysing the two main entries:

⁴ The theoretical and methodological framework for these considerations is inspired by the survey I carried out on the lexicographic corpora of the Italian language: see Fusco (2012 and 2016).

moglie: donna sposata, considerata rispetto al marito: *Maria è la m. di Franco*; *essere marito e m.*, essere sposati; *cercare, trovare m.*; *avere per m.*; *dividersi, separarsi dalla m.*; *prendere m.*, sposarsi; *chiedere in m.*, avanzare formale richiesta di avere in sposa; *promettere in m.*, sancire una promessa di matrimonio; [...].

wife: *married woman, considered in relation to husband*: *Mary is Frank's wife*; *to be husband and wife*: *to be married*; *to look for/find a wife*; *to have s.o. as one's wife*; *to leave, separate from one's wife*; *to take s.o. as one's wife*; *to marry (s.o.)*; *to ask s.o. to be one's wife*: *to formally propose, to ask for s.o.'s hand*; *to promise s.o. in marriage*.

marito: uomo sposato, considerato rispetto alla moglie: *Franco è il m. di Maria*, **ha un m. gentilissimo**; *essere m. e moglie, essere sposati*; *cercare, trovare m.*; *dividersi, separarsi dal m.*; *prendere m.*, sposarsi; *è in vacanza col m., con suo m.*; [...].

marito: *married man, considered in relation to wife*: *Frank is Mary's husband*; **she has a very kind husband**; *to be husband and wife*: *to be married*; *to look for/find a husband*; *to leave, separate from one's husband*; *to take as one's husband*: *to marry s.o.*; *she is on holiday with her husband*.

As we can notice, for the entry *MARITO* a benevolent example (*she has a very kind husband*) is provided, whereas for *MOGLIE* not only is there no such comment, but all the examples also emphasize her being dependent on her husband⁵.

Let us now verify if the positive allusion found under the entry *MARITO* also recurs and is reinforced in other contexts:

<i>appetibile</i>	piacente: <i>ha ancora un marito a.</i>
<i>desirable</i>	pleasing: <i>she has a desirable husband</i>
<i>devoto</i>	affezionato, sottomesso e fedele: <i>marito d., d. servitore</i>
<i>devoted</i>	attached/loving, compliant and faithful: <i>devoted husband; devoted servant</i>
<i>disperato</i>	che, chi è in preda alla disperazione: <i>era d. per la morte della moglie</i>
<i>desperate</i>	sth. that/sb. who is in a state of despair: <i>he was desperate after the death of his wife</i>
<i>gentiluomo</i>	uomo dal comportamento corretto e dai modi signorili e raffinati: <i>tuo marito è un vero g.</i>
<i>gentleman</i>	a man who behaves correctly and whose conduct is noble and refined: <i>your husband is a true gentleman</i>
<i>meraviglioso</i>	di qcn., degno di lode, ammirevole per le sue doti, qualità morali e sim.: <i>avere un marito m., essere una madre meravigliosa</i>
<i>marvellous</i>	of sb: praiseworthy, admirable for one's abilities, moral qualities and the like: <i>to have a marvelous husband; to be a marvelous mother</i>

⁵ Literary citations and terms referring to being someone's wife (i.e., *ambasciatrice* = the ambassador's wife, *capitana* = the captain's wife, *giudicessa* = the judge's wife, etc. whose ironic innuendoes are still badly recorded) have been excluded from the above analysis.

<i>santo</i>	che, chi è giusto, onesto, virtuoso; che chi, ha un animo buono, si distingue per altruismo e tolleranza: <i>una santa donna, tuo marito è un s.</i>
<i>saint</i>	sth. that /sb. who is just, honest, virtuous; whoever has a good heart, is altruist and tolerant: <i>a saint of a woman; your husband is a saint</i>
<i>splendido</i>	che si distingue per singolari qualità, capacità, virtù: <i>un marito s.</i>
<i>splendid</i>	sb. who stands out for their peculiar qualities, abilities and virtues: <i>a splendid husband</i>
<i>tesoro</i>	persona cui si riconoscono simpatia, grazia, ricchezza di doti: <i>che t. di marito!</i>
<i>treasure</i>	a person esteemed as nice, gracious and having many good qualities: <i>what a treasure of a husband!</i>

These praiseworthy peculiarities are, however, counterpoised to a number of negative behaviors which are embedded in the examples and highlight deep contempt for the partner:

<i>bastardo</i>	cattivo, spregevole: <i>quel b. del marito l'ha picchiata</i>
<i>bastard</i>	bad, despicable: <i>that bastard of her husband battered her</i>
<i>bistrattare</i>	trattare in malo modo, anche per disprezzo: <i>b. la moglie</i>
<i>ill-treat</i>	to mistreat also out of contempt: <i>to ill-treat one's wife</i>
<i>brontolio</i>	il brontolare in modo prolungato e noioso: <i>i continui brontolii della moglie lo esasperano</i>
<i>complaint</i>	prolonged and annoying grumbling: <i>the ongoing complaints of his wife exasperated him</i>
<i>cornificare</i>	tradire la persona cui si è legati da fidanzamento o matrimonio; essere infedele al proprio partner: <i>non perde occasione per c. la moglie</i>
<i>to cheat on, to cuckold</i>	to betray the person with whom one is engaged or married; to be unfaithful to one's partner: <i>he doesn't miss the chance to cheat on his wife</i>
<i>distrarsi</i>	cercare avventure amorose: <i>suo marito preferisce d. fuori casa!</i>
<i>to distract oneself</i>	to look for love affairs: <i>her husband prefers distracting himself out of the home!</i>
<i>picchiare</i>	percuotere, prendere a botte: <i>p. la moglie, i figli</i>
<i>to batter</i>	to hit, to beat up: <i>to batter one's wife, children</i>
<i>prostituire</i>	istigare o costringere alla prostituzione: <i>p. la moglie, p. un adolescente</i>
<i>to prostitute</i>	to instigate or oblige sb. to prostitution: <i>to prostitute one's wife; to prostitute an adolescent</i>
<i>schiaivizzare</i>	sottomettere alla propria autorità, al proprio volere in modo dispotico e intransigente: <i>ha schiaivizzato per anni la moglie</i>
<i>to enslave</i>	to subdue sb. to one's authority, to one's will in a despotic and uncompromising way: <i>he enslaved his wife for years</i>

<i>tuo</i>	può indicare altri tipi di relazione, come l'affetto, l'amicizia o la devozione: <i>il t. vecchio maestro, la tua amica, il t. compagno</i> può indicare anche relazioni di dipendenza, soggezione: <i>t. marito è il t. tiranno, il t. padrone</i>
<i>your</i>	can indicate other types of relationships, such as affection, friendship or devotion: <i>your old teacher; your friend; your mate</i> can indicate relationships of dependence and subjection: <i>your husband is your tyrant, your master</i>

The criticism we alluded to in the above-mentioned contexts is further confirmed by a group of entries which explicitly accuse the *wife* (or *woman* in general) of undertaking unedifying actions. Such examples call to mind a despotic and reprehensible wife:

<i>bruciare</i>	provocare fastidio, disappunto: <i>la sconfitta mi brucia, gli brucia che sua moglie guadagna più di lui</i>
<i>irritate</i>	to cause annoyance, disappointment: <i>the defeat irritates me; it irritates him that his wife earns more than him</i>
<i>carabiniere</i>	persona molto rigida e severa spec. nel sorvegliare e controllare gli altri: <i>sua moglie è un vero c.</i>
<i>dictator</i>	a very rigid and strict person especially when surveilling and controlling others: <i>his wife is a real dictator</i>
<i>colpevolizzare</i>	far sentire colpevole, caricare di sensi di colpa: <i>il marito la colpevolizza per le spese eccessive</i>
<i>to make sb. feel guilty</i>	to make sb. feel remorseful and regretful: <i>her husband makes her feel guilty for spending too much</i>
<i>dare di matto</i>	manifestare rabbia incontrollata: <i>quando ha saputo che la moglie lo tradiva ha dato di m.</i>
<i>to freak out</i>	to manifest uncontrolled rage: <i>when he found out that his wife was cheating on him he freaked out</i>
<i>micidiale</i>	di qcn. che provoca infelicità, tormenti': è una donna m., guarda come tratta il marito
<i>fatal</i>	of sb. who causes unhappiness, agony: <i>she is a fatal woman, look at how she treats her husband.</i>
<i>possessivo</i>	di qcn. che tende a dominare, a sopraffare, a pretendere una dedizione assoluta ed esclusiva nei rapporti affettivi: <i>un fidanzato p, una moglie p.</i>
<i>possessive</i>	of sb. who tries to dominate, to subdue, to impose absolute and exclusive devotion in intimate relationships: <i>a possessive boyfriend; a possessive wife</i>
<i>rigirare</i>	raggirare, indurre a fare ciò che si vuole: <i>la moglie lo rigira come vuole</i>
<i>to twist sb round one's little finger</i>	to get round sb, to induce sb to do what one wants: <i>his wife twists him round her little finger</i>

<i>rubare</i>	allontanare e separare una persona da qcn. o dalla famiglia per averne l'affetto o l'amore: <i>r. il marito all'amica</i>
<i>steal</i>	to separate or take sb away from sb or from their family to get their love or affection: <i>to steal her friend's husband</i>
<i>scappare</i>	abbandonare la famiglia, il tetto coniugale: <i>scappò di casa a sedici anni, sua moglie è scappata con il postino</i>
<i>elope, run off with sb.</i>	to abandon one's family, the marital home: <i>she eloped from her home at sixteen; his wife ran off with the mailman</i>
<i>schiavo</i>	di qcn., soggetto alla volontà e all'autorità di un'altra persona, non libero di disporre liberamente di sé o, anche, soggiogato interamente da una passione, da un vizio, da una consuetudine e sim.: è s. della moglie; <i>essere s. del fumo, della droga, del potere, del consumismo</i> ; anche s.m.: <i>fa tutto ciò vuole lei, è il suo s.</i>
<i>slave</i>	of sb., subjected to the will and authority of another person, not free to freely dispose of oneself or, also, entirely subjugated by passion, by a vice, by a habit or the like: <i>he is a slave to his wife; to be a slave to smoking, drugs, power, consumerism; he does everything she wants; he is her slave.</i>
<i>sobillare</i>	istigare, incitare, spec. di nascosto, ad azioni o atteggiamenti ostili, o alla ribellione: <i>s. la folla contro le forze dell'ordine, cerca di s. la figlia contro il marito, lasciarsi s. da qcn.</i>
<i>stir up</i>	To instigate, incite, especially covertly, sb. towards actions and hostile behaviours or rebellions: <i>to stir up the crowd against the police; she tries to stir her daughter up against her husband; to let sb. stir you up</i>
<i>succubo</i>	che, chi soggiace alla volontà altrui: <i>un uomo s. della moglie;</i>
<i>dominated by</i>	sb who succumbs to sb. else's will: <i>a man dominated by his wife</i>
<i>tradire</i>	mancare alla fedeltà, compiere un'infedeltà nei confronti del proprio partner: <i>t. la persona amata, ha tradito il marito con un suo collega</i>
<i>to betray</i>	to be unfaithful, to cheat on one's partner: <i>to betray the loved one; she betrayed her husband with one of her colleagues</i>

Other indirect allusions can be found in the following entries which, taken together, allude to the hardships and prostration that a cruel husband inflicts on his wife:

<i>manesco</i>	che viene facilmente alle mani; pronto a picchiare, a menare le mani: <i>odio le persone manesche, sono tipi maneschi che attaccano briga facilmente</i> ; anche s.m.: <i>il marito è un m.</i>
<i>quick to violence</i>	sb who easily raises his hands; ready to beat with one's hands: <i>I hate people who are quick to violence; they are violent guys who easily pick a fight; her husband is a person quick to violence</i>
<i>martoriare</i>	affliggere, tormentare: <i>i sensi di colpa lo martoriano; il marito la martoriava con la gelosia</i>
<i>to torture</i>	to afflict, torment: <i>the sense of guilt tortures him; her husband tortured her with his jealousy</i>

<i>martire</i>	chi è costretto a subire soprusi, maltrattamenti e sim.; anche scherz.: <i>è una m. del marito</i>
<i>martyr</i>	sb. who is obliged to undergo oppression, abuses and the like; also jokingly: <i>she is a martyr of her husband</i>
<i>riversare</i> <i>to lavish</i>	far ricadere: <i>riversa la sua frustrazione sulla m.</i> to dump onto sb.: <i>he lavishes all his frustration onto his wife</i>
<i>subire</i> <i>put up with</i>	sopportare, tollerare qcn. i cui comportamenti sono considerati fastidiosi, autoritari o violenti: <i>devo s. dei vicini rumorosi, s. un marito violento</i> to endure, tolerate sb whose behaviour is considered annoying, authoritative or violent: <i>I have to put up with noisy neighbours; to put up with a violent husband</i>
<i>tiranno</i> <i>tyrant</i>	tiranno che, chi abusa della propria autorità per imporre agli altri la propria volontà: <i>fare il t. con i propri dipendenti, in famiglia si comporta da t., un padrone, un marito t.</i> sb. who abuses of one's authority to impose his will on others: <i>to be a tryant towards one's employees; he acts as a tyrant in the family; a tyrant husband, master.</i>

To conclude this section, let us now consider these other entries which do not present a transparent relationship with the examples provided. They thus keep the image of the woman/wife confined within a socio-cultural context based on archaic and worn-out prejudices and convey a familiar image made up of betrayals, suspects, desperation and violence.

<i>incontrare</i> <i>to meet</i>	avere in sorte: <i>ha incontrato davvero un buon marito</i> to get sth. fortuitously: <i>she has truly met a good husband</i>
<i>incredibilmente</i> <i>incredibly</i>	in modo incredibile: <i>quella bisbetica è i. riuscita a trovare marito!</i> in an incredible way: <i>incredibly that shrew managed to find a husband!</i>
<i>insospettabilità</i> <i>blamelessness</i>	l'essere insospettabile, al di sopra di ogni sospetto: <i>l'i. della moglie è indiscutibile</i> <i>to be blameless, above suspicion: the blamelessness of his wife is unquestionable</i>
<i>interrogatorio</i> <i>interrogation</i>	successione incalzante di domande, spec. dal tono perentorio: <i>è rincasato tardi e la moglie gli ha fatto un bell'i.</i> prolonged questioning especially using a threatening tone: <i>he got home late and his wife gave him a hell of an interrogation!</i>
<i>mettersi in testa</i> <i>to become fixated</i>	Convincersi: <i>si è messo in testa che la moglie lo tradisce</i> To convince oneself of sth.: <i>he became fixated with the idea that his wife was cheating on him</i>
<i>perquisizione</i> <i>search</i>	ricerca in un luogo o su una persona, di oggetti o prove relativi ad una colpa o sim.: <i>la moglie ha fatto una p. della stanza per trovare quelle lettere</i> to look for things, evidence of guiltiness or the like in a place or on a person: <i>his wife searched the house to find those letters</i>

<i>qui</i>	locuzione q. lo dico e q. lo nego, per affermare qcs. senza assumersi responsabilità: <i>q. lo dico q. lo nego, ma sappi che la moglie lo tradisce</i>
<i>here</i>	expression: to deny what one has just said, to say something without taking responsibility: <i>your wife betrays you but I will deny it if you ask me to say it again.</i>
<i>quindi</i>	dopo di ciò, poi, in seguito: <i>prima mise in ordine la casa, q. uscì col marito</i>
<i>then</i>	after this, later on: <i>first she tidied the house and then she went out with her husband.</i>
<i>supporre</i>	porre come ipotesi, ammettere che qualcosa si possa verificare o si sia verificata in un dato modo: <i>supponiamo che sia stato lui a uccidere la moglie</i>
<i>to assume</i>	to hypothesize, to admit that sth may happen or happened in a certain way: <i>let's assume that he killed his wife</i>

The interesting aspect of this partial survey is that current usage or, some would say, our expectations, have made it customary for us to use (imagine) some of these words in combination with the term *MOGLIE*. We could even go as far as saying that some of these words, as they appear in the examples, tend to typically recur with *MOGLIE*, but not with *MARITO*, even if their meaning does not exclude other combinations. In this case, the limits to the distribution of the word would not depend on its meaning, but rather on purely contextual, that is, extra-linguistic elements. This asperity has been aptly pointed out by Alma Sabatini in her groundbreaking analysis of sexism in the Italian language, where she starts from the assumption that “la sedimentazione storica dei significati delle parole è codificata e fissata dai dizionari (la cui lettura è illuminante, per non dire edificante) e rivela inequivocabilmente quello che è il pensiero comune sulla donna” [*the historical sedimentation of the meanings of words is codified and fixed by dictionaries and unequivocally reveals the common ideas about women*] (Sabatini 1987: 32). Indeed, lexicographical repertoires are considered not only as indicators but also as privileged tools to promote a change in our habits and linguistic behavior. The image that emerges from dictionaries is not, however, completely innocent, since it provides us with a worldview influenced by the choices and value-judgement of the compilers. The female images portrayed (in our case) by the examples are more often than not devoid of perspective and movement. What we have are portraits described with words chosen by others and forged as we would like to forge the protagonists of the stories narrated.

Gender Violence in the National Press

As we have just seen, the words used in lexicography to describe attitudes which are traditionally considered female and male reveal a mindset that is reluctant towards changing perspective and, thus, also towards bringing about transformation. In order to test this hypothesis, let us now turn our attention to another context in which the choice of words is decisive, that is, the context of journalistic communication and the ways in which innumerable brutal acts against women are narrated. Even in this case it is necessary to start from the dominant cultural model and the role played by information media which can either sustain and echo that very model or, as many auspicate, transform the cultural reality in which they act. In order to counter femicide, it is, thus, crucial to observe the language through

which male violence against women is narrated, because this is the first step towards transforming the culture of our society⁶.

The expression *delitto passionale* meaning *crime of passion* (as well as *pista passionale* and *movente passionale*, namely to consider the lead of a crime of passion and to consider passion as the motive for the crime), often used in association with expressions that hint at jealousy, a complicated love relationship and the surge of sudden rage, is the most widespread in the daily press to describe the death of women who are victims of male violence when the crime is committed by someone close to them: an (ex)-boyfriend, an (ex)-husband or a refused lover:

Roma, uccide a coltellate moglie e un altro uomo. L'assassino ai carabinieri: "Erano amanti". Delitto passionale in una sede dell'Inps in zona Cinecittà. Il killer ha avvertito i militari: "Non sopportavo il tradimento. Quando li ho visti insieme li ho ammazzati" (*La Stampa*, 26 settembre 2014);

Rome, man stabs his wife and another man to death. The killer tells the carabinieri: "They were lovers". A crime of passion in an Inps office at Cinecittà. The killer told the police: "I couldn't stand betrayal. When I saw them together I killed them." (*La Stampa*, 26 September 2014);

Uccide la moglie per gelosia, arrestato nel Siracusano. La donna, 36 anni, di origini romene, colpita dal marito con un piccone a Canicattini Bagni al culmine di una lite per gelosia (*La Repubblica*, 17 giugno 2014);

Man kills his wife out of jealousy and is arrested near Siracusa. The woman, aged 36, of Romanian origin, was hit by her husband with a pickaxe at Canicattini Bagni during a rage of jealousy. (*La Repubblica*, 17 June 2014);

"Ha ucciso Antonella". Convalidato il fermo del fidanzato (...). Il movente passionale. Una storia d'amore molto travagliata, quella tra i due ragazzi, fatta di incomprensioni, feroci litigate, minacce e abbandoni e ritorni di fiamma. Il motivo dell'assassinio starebbe proprio in questa difficile relazione (*La Repubblica*, 6 gennaio 2012);

"He killed Antonella". The boyfriend has been arrested (...). The motive of the crime is passion. The love relationship between the two teenagers was indeed a very troubled one, full of misunderstandings, furious fights, threats, break-ups and reconciliations. The motive of the murder is most probably this difficult relationship. (*La Repubblica*, 6 January 2012);

"Ho dovuto farlo". "Ma non so perché": dopo 20 ore il racconto alla polizia di Rovereto. "Non so perché ho ucciso Barbara, non so dire il motivo. All'improvviso ho sentito il bisogno irrefrenabile di ammazzarla e l'ho fatto". Alessandro Persico non ha una motivazione da spendere, non si giustifica, non si dispera. Alla polizia di Rovereto

⁶ Many of the considerations made here are inspired by the numerous examples and recommendations contained in Trasatti (2013), Gamberi (2015) and Abis, Orrù (2016); equally interesting and thought-provoking are Cretella, Mora Sánchez (2014) and Priulla (2014).

è apparso assolutamente tranquillo e distaccato e ha raccontato con dovizia di particolari il delitto compiuto. Di qui l'ipotesi, sulla quale gli inquirenti lavorano, che il suo stato mentale possa essere alterato e che il raptus omicida possa essere maturato proprio in questo contesto (*Gazzetta di Modena*, 21 giugno 2011);

"I had to do it" "But I don't know why": he tells the police of Rovereto 20 hours later. "I don't know why I killed Barbara, I don't know the reason. Suddenly I just felt the irrepressible need to kill her and I did". Alessandro Persico does not have a reason, he doesn't justify himself, he doesn't despair. He appeared completely calm and detached to the Rovereto police. He told them everything about the crime he committed in great detail. For this reason the police are investigating the hypothesis that his mental state may have been altered and that the killing spree may have matured in this context (Gazzetta di Modena, 21 June 2011).

Indeed, numerous are the articles on killings and aggressions which use the vague and inadequate words *amore* (love), *gelosia* (jealousy), and *folia* (folly), to narrate such tragic episodes⁷. These extracts also reveal how unequal the description between the victim and her killer are: the former is often introduced merely through references to her marital status and her relationship with the culprit (for ex. *the wife* or simply her first name), while a greater deal of attention is given to the latter and to explaining the reasons for his actions. Whereas the portrait of the woman is made barely visible (except for the information about her amorous relationship with the man), the portrait of the 'culprit' is more detailed and foregrounds features – including psychological ones – which mitigate his responsibility. By invoking spree killing, the assassination is reduced to mental instability and the pathological sphere and thus fail to disclose the real causes of violence.

These are linguistic devices often used to avoid discussing issues like the fear of being abandoned or a partner's incapacity to deal with the woman's legitimate desire for freedom. This short circuit originates the recurring narrative pattern: "she threatens to leave him and he kills her"⁸. Gender violence is narrated as a crime which is scarcely threatening

⁷ It should be noticed that jealousy is no longer considered as an extenuating circumstance in trials. Art. 587 of the Penal Code disposed that: "Whoever causes the death of a spouse, a daughter or a sister, upon the act of discovering an illegitimate sexual relationship or in a state of rage caused by the offence against his or his family's honor, shall be condemned to prison for a period between three and seven years. The same punishment shall be applied to whoever, in the above-said circumstances, causes the death of the person who is in the illegitimate sexual relationship with the spouse, the daughter or the sister". These provisions on crimes of honor were, however, revoked by Law n. 442 of 5 August 1981.

⁸ Lipperini and Murgia comment: "la domanda del giornalista e del lettore davanti al delitto è: *perché l'ha uccisa?* Secondo la stragrande maggioranza degli articoli la risposta, se c'è, sarebbe da cercarsi nella volontà di abbandono da parte della donna morta. Che voleva lasciarlo e lui è impazzito. Che l'aveva già lasciato ed è scattata la follia. Che gli aveva messo contro i figli e lui era cieco di rabbia. Che forse lo tradiva e quindi lui ha perso la testa. Queste e altre affermazioni utili a colpevolizzare la vittima del delitto e assolvere il carnefice compaiono spesso già nel titolo degli articoli, come se fosse l'accertata ragione dei fatti; raramente vengono esplicitate per quello che davvero rappresentano, cioè la versione dell'assassino a fronte di una vittima che non può più fornire la propria" [*faced with the crime the journalist and the reader both ask: why did he kill her? According to the majority of the articles the answer, if any, is to be sought in the dead woman's desire to leave her partner. She wanted to leave him and he went crazy. She had left him and he went mad. She had turned his children against him and he was blind with rage. Maybe she cheated on him and he lost his mind*] (2013: 12).

from a social point of view and one which is almost random, fortuitous and fatal. Jealousy, passion, love, and folly become easy motives and extenuating circumstances. There is the risk that this type of communication may, on one hand, reduce, simplify and trivialise the responsibility of the person who murders the woman and, on the other, lower the audience's attention towards facts that are not anomalies, but rather a tangible and structural part of our country and the rest of the world. Femicide is also sensationalized by reporting it as crime news in which attention is focused on the brutality of the single act and on its (apparent) randomness and irrationality. The use of terms like *folia*, *gelosia*, *raptus* to explain the murdering of women signal instances of so-called linguistic avoidance and euphemistic trivialisation of the discourse on violence. These devices contribute to blur the seriousness of the facts narrated. As Patrizia Romito has pointed out: "l'evitamento linguistico è una tecnica, deliberata o inconsapevole, grazie alla quale i principali autori delle violenze su donne e minori, gli uomini, spariscono dai discorsi e dai testi sulla violenza maschile, che si tratti di documenti internazionali, lavori scientifici o stampa popolare. L'eufemizzazione è una tecnica parallela, che permette di etichettare un fenomeno in modo impreciso e fuorviante, tale da offuscarne la gravità o la responsabilità di chi l'ha compiuto" [*linguistic avoidance is a deliberate or unconscious technique thanks to which men, the main perpetrators of violence against women and minors, disappear from the discourse and texts on male violence, be they international documents, scientific texts or news articles. Euphemistic trivialization is a parallel technique which makes it possible to label a phenomenon in an imprecise and misleading way, so as to blur its seriousness or the responsibility of who committed it*] (Romito 2005: 58). These linguistic-communicative strategies consolidate a view in which violence against women is distorted, under-represented and, above all, obscured and 'silenced'.

The victims of violence are punished for a transgression, that of having abdicated the ideal role of woman imposed by tradition and taken the liberty to decide what to do with their lives on their own. Some of the above-quoted examples hint at complicated relationships, in which the narrative suggests that the motive lies in the representation of a 'violent' love affair: in these cases, affection is associated with femicide which is, instead, by definition the subjugation and negation of all relationships⁹. Journalistic information does, thus, not only spread a contradiction, that is the love-violence pair, but it also removes the cause from which the episodes originate, that is, the victim's gender: the woman is killed because she is a woman. When journalistic media focus their attention only on emotional behavior, psychological distress or the male aggressor's frustration and obscure the life and expectations of the female victim, the narrative will concentrate only on one point of view, that of the murderer, so as to legitimize it. This implicitly transmits the idea that the victim should be somehow blamed since she reacted, betrayed or made the man who then became her aggressor suffer.

It is thus clear that the crimes perpetuated by men both inside and outside the home,

⁹ Lipperini and Murgia explain that in newspapers: "certi uomini amano troppo, e questo li fa stare male fino a portarli ad uccidere; così certi altri stanno talmente male che questo ammalia anche il loro amore, che poi diventa omicida" [Certain men love too much, and this makes them feel so bad to lead them to commit murder; other men feel so bad that this mars their love as well, which then becomes homicide] (2013: 4).

ought to be interpreted and communicated from a socio-cultural dimension. It is not the isolated act of a single individual, a random occurrence or the predictable epilogue of attitudes and behaviors of the victim. The cultural roots of the phenomenon are to be found in the unequal relations between men and women:

Detto altrimenti, gli episodi di violenza che affiorano nel discorso mediatico rientrano in un continuum di sopraffazione maschile sulle donne, non individuale, bensì collettivo, che non riguarda solo la famiglia o la relazione sentimentale, quanto le relazioni fra uomini e donne. Si tratta di una violenza che si ritrova per esempio nelle discriminazioni sui luoghi di lavoro, nella cultura intrisa di stereotipi sessisti, nell'uso di un linguaggio declinato solo al maschile, nelle rappresentazioni univoche delle donne, ma anche degli stessi uomini. Presi nel loro insieme, gli atti di violenza maschile contro le donne hanno un significato preciso: la riaffermazione di una supremazia di un ordine gerarchico fra i generi laddove il maschile è ritenuto ancora il luogo di una presunta superiorità e autorevolezza (Gamberi 2015: 151).

In other words, episodes of violence that crop up in media discourse are part of a continuum of male subjugation over women, which is not individual but collective; it does not involve just the family or the sentimental relationship, but rather the relationships between men and women. This violence can, for instance, be found in gender discrimination on the workplace, in a culture replete with sexist stereotypes, in the use of an exclusively male-centered language, in the univocal representation of women and also of men. Taken together, male acts of violence against women have a specific meaning: to reaffirm the supremacy of a hierarchical order between the sexes, wherein the male is still considered the locus of an assumed superiority and authoritativeness.

Some Final Remarks

It is now time to conclude, but not to close the discussion once and for all. We have not covered all the issues we would have liked to here, as the problems and cases to discuss are many. However, it is clear that the relation between discrimination and violence, on one hand, and linguistic representation, on the other, simultaneously involves different levels which go beyond the linguistic one. It is not our intention here to offer a peremptory and definitive reading of the phenomena. What is certain is that the traces we find in our language every day, the archaic linguistic stereotypes that filter through dictionaries and the distorted narratives offered by the press contribute to mirror our (linguistic) behaviors and reflect them back into reality modified, corroborated and ready for use. In synthesis, certain lexical choices employed in certain contexts may well be responsible for fixing – even unconsciously – certain patterns of behavior and gender role expectations. Indeed, Alma Sabatini, who is well-aware of the relevance that language has and of the extremely conservative view that users have of it, states that: “La lingua è una struttura dinamica che cambia in continuazione. Ciononostante la maggior parte della gente è conservatrice e mostra diffidenza – se non paura – nei confronti dei cambiamenti linguistici, che la offendono perché disturbano le sue abitudini o sembrano una violenza ‘contro natura’. Toccare la lingua è come toccare la persona stessa (...). Certo è che, posti davanti al problema se accettare o meno un

cambiamento, una nuova parola, si assume spesso un atteggiamento ‘moralistico’ in difesa della correttezza della lingua, vista come una specie di cosa sacra, intoccabile” [*Language is a dynamic structure that changes all the time. Nevertheless, most people are conservative and diffident towards – perhaps even afraid of – linguistic changes which are seen as offensive since they disrupt their habits and appear as ‘unnatural’ violence. To touch language is like touching a person (...). It is certain that, when faced with the problem of whether to accept a change, a new word, or not, we often adopt a ‘moralistic’ attitude in defense of the correctness of language, which is seen as something sacred, untouchable*] (Sabatini 1987: 101).

The examples that have been commented on here, thus, witness a persisting discrimination towards adopting certain linguistic behaviors. The effort to discuss these issues shows, however, that there are attempts to contain it and to suggest solutions that go in the direction of a more inclusive and less violent language¹⁰. We want to conclude this essay by stating both that linguistic and social change is necessary and that language has a crucial performative power not only to induce us to adopt changes already in act, but also to promote new ones. It is unacceptable that words continue to perpetrate discrimination with apparent and (presumed) neutrality and thereby uphold power hierarchies through stereotypes and prejudices as Sabatini suggests. It is necessary to insist wholeheartedly that words can be an efficient tool in the battle against gender-based inequalities and that their ‘correct’ use can bring on an authentic change in the way we express ourselves. The true challenge is, as we said at the beginning, to change the narrative. Our attention should therefore be projected onto education, which (as Law n. 119 of 15 October 2014 states)¹¹ has the aim of elaborating and providing the younger generations with a different lexicon, through which the narrative can really change. The educational environment is indeed one of the main channels through which it is possible to promote a culture that accepts difference. By discussing these issues in class so as to point out the inequalities between men and women

¹⁰ Media operators have done a great deal to provide adequate information on the contents and communicative modalities through which to deal with femicide: see, for example, the debate retrievable on the blog of the *Corriere della Sera* ‘La 27esima ora’ and the *Raccomandazioni della Federazione internazionale dei giornalisti* published in Lipperini & Murgia (2013: 77-80).

¹¹ Art 5. states that the “Piano d’azione straordinario contro la violenza sessuale e di genere” [Extraordinary plan of action against sexual and gender violence, adopted in 2015] aims at guaranteeing homogenous actions throughout the national territory by pursuing the following objectives: “a) to prevent the phenomenon of violence against women by informing and raising awareness in the public so as to make men and young boys conscious players in the process of eliminating violence against women and in solving interpersonal conflicts; b) to sensitize media operators towards communicating information, even for commercial purposes, in a manner that is respectful of gender representations and in particular of women, also through the adoption of self-regulating codes; c) to promote adequate training programs for educators on the issue and against violence and gender-based discrimination and to promote within the national guidelines for the curricula of nursery, elementary, secondary, technical and vocational schools and in the curricular and extracurricular didactic planning for schools of every type and form, information, awareness-raising activities and the tutoring of students so as to prevent violence against women and gender-based discrimination, even by adequately valorizing the topic in textbooks (...)”. See also the 2011 “Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence” (known also as the *Istanbul Convention*), in particular chapters 3.a and 3.12.

and critically analyze dominant roles, it is possible to develop the antidote necessary for the valorization of relations based on mutual respect already at a young age.

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Francesca Di Blasio

We Are Going* by Oodgeroo Noonuccal. Aboriginal Epos, Australian History, Universal Poetry

Abstract I: *We Are Going* di Oodgeroo Noonuccal esce per Jacaranda Press nel 1964 ed è la prima raccolta di poesie con autorialità aborigena mai pubblicata. Il testo è interpretabile sia come epos aborigeno che come documento di storia australiana, e in esso le storie dei singoli individui si intrecciano dolorosamente con la macrostoria delle politiche egemoniche bianche nei confronti degli indigeni. L'elaborazione poetica del recente passato traumatico, collettivo e soggettivo, diventa una forma di superamento del trauma stesso grazie all'evocazione di un passato molto più antico, quello della cultura indigena precedente all'invasione. Il seguente lavoro analizza le poesie di Oodgeroo in questa prospettiva, tenendo presente la loro specificità come testi artistici, letterari e poetici. L'esperienza di tradurre *We Are Going* per la sua prima edizione italiana (Oodgeroo 2013) è stata una via privilegiata di avvicinamento al testo e ai suoi significati.

Abstract II: The first collection of poetry by an Aboriginal author, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, was published in 1964 by Jacaranda Press. *We Are Going* embodies key features of Aboriginal literature and can be interpreted as an Aboriginal *epos* as well as a document in Australian history. Individual stories often painfully interface with the macro-history of white policies towards Indigenous people. This poetical remembering of a recent and traumatic past becomes a form of recovery from trauma itself, since Oodgeroo's poetics preserve the memory of a much older past, the one of pre-invasion Indigenous culture. This paper aims at analysing Oodgeroo's poems in this perspective, by focussing on both their epical and historical features, while keeping in mind their specificity as artistic, literary, and poetic texts. The experience of translating *We Are Going* for its first Italian edition (Oodgeroo 2013) has been greatly instrumental in coming to terms with the richness and significance of the poems.

In 1964, a collection of poetry written by an Aboriginal author, *We Are Going* by Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1964), was published by Jacaranda Press, under the auspices of a foresightful Judith Wright. Oodgeroo (1920-1993) was both the first Aboriginal woman, and the first Aboriginal poet, to publish a book of verse. At the time, Oodgeroo's name was Kath Walker,

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and *We Are Going* proved to be a great commercial success, breaking the Great Australian Silence on the Indigenous question. Walker was an activist for Aboriginal rights and land rights, and her artistic production, spanning the period from the 1960s to the 1990s¹, was always intertwined with political issues. It is protest poetry, and undoubtedly a form of 'literature of identity'.

Oodgeroo's poetry is part of a process that makes memory alive through writing, and projects that very memory into the future. Her texts echo the ancient 'fables of identity', as they could be defined in a Western perspective, and act as border-crossings and hybrid forms of writing (Di Blasio 2005, 2013b, 2016); they sustain the potential of the future to unfold, through representations of the past. These poems of dispossession and reorientation interrogate the style of the dominant (and domineering) white establishment (Mitchell 1987) and pose, among many others, the following pressing questions: What does it mean to be a foreigner in one's own land? How can an identity suspended between past and present be re-articulated? Will artistic creativity dare to give voice to this suspended identity, and thus shape prospective changes? These texts also raise challenges for the future, since they invite discussion of seminal issues, such as: the need to preserve cultures that are under the threat of disappearance; the meaning of 'minor' literature and culture in the Deleuzian sense of the term (Deleuze & Guattari 1996); confrontation with forms of 'otherness'; the preservation or transformation of individual cultures in multicultural societies (Kohn & McBride 2011), social and cultural hybridisation.

Oodgeroo's collection is a form of memory in many ways. It often weaves in hegemonic and official Australian history, and individual stories interface, usually in a painful way, with the macro-history of white policies towards Indigenous people (Di Blasio 2018)². Alongside this form of memory, centered on a recent, traumatic past, and also a form of recovery from trauma itself, Oodgeroo's poems preserve the memory of an older past, the past of pre-invasion Indigenous culture (Assmann 2006). This pre-colonial memory, which can be defined as 'epic' memory, has been severely compromised by colonial policies, and yet it still survives, giving shape to the Indigenous *Weltanschauung* in many ways. A special dialectic originates in this to and fro movement between past and present: the remembrance of the past stimulates a searching attitude towards the future, and vice versa, in a dynamic relationship between memory and longing (Di Blasio 2009), beautifully expounded in the central poem that gives the title to the collection, a text which we come to and analyse in the pages that follow.

Oodgeroo's poems will be explored from a critical perspective focused on their epic and historical features, bearing in mind their specificity as artistic, literary, and poetic writings. The experience of translating *We Are Going* for its first Italian edition³ (Di Blasio & Zanoletti 2013b) has been one important mode of access to the text. The intimate and 'calligraphic', *i.e.* minutely detailed experience of translating a text from one language to another

¹ See also Oodgeroo/Walker 1966, 1988 and 1990.

² On the relation between literature, history, and cultural memory see: Hayden White (1987, 2010), Paul Ricoeur (2000), Catherine Gallagher & Stephen Greenblatt (2000), Angela Locatelli (2010).

³ All poems are quoted from this edition.

er, and of making it accessible from one culture to another, has proven extremely productive for a deeper understanding of this seminal collection. The need to deal with every single *word* articulating a *world* of trauma has been a complex and precious task for the translator. The many important issues to be faced related to struggle, recovery, protest, hope, political positioning, reinvented and regenerated identity, cultural memory, epos, negotiation, resilience, a foreshadowing of the future and a reconstruction of the past. To translate has meant to know, to know again, to know better, and of course also to share, with new readers and with students, the beauty of Oodgeroo's poetry and the value of the cultural memory which is part and parcel of it.

The poems analysed here are mostly concerned with the recollection of a far away cultural past, which is made alive again precisely by being evoked in and through poetry. The selection of less overtly political texts, in which a lyrical tone prevails, illustrates in a very effective way the power of literature to represent its subjects in an empathetic⁴, and emotionally involving way, which is able to provide readers with a special and effective form of knowledge⁵.

The first poem to be discussed is *Then and Now*, which is built around the dialectic movement between past and present outlined above:

1 In my dreams I hear my tribe
 2 Laughing as they hunt and swim,
 3 But dreams are shuttered by rushing car,
 4 By grinding tram and hissing train,
 5 And I see no more my tribe of old
 6 As I walk alone in the teeming town.

1 I have seen corroboree
 2 Where that factory belches smoke;
 3 Here where they have memorial park
 4 One time old lubras dug for yams;
 5 One time our dark children played
 6 There where the railway yards are now,
 7 And where I remember the didgeridoo
 8 Calling to us to dance and play,

⁴ On literature and empathy in the Australian context see Riem (2017). On literature and emotions see also Carroll & Gibson (2011).

⁵ The history of the critical reception of Oodgeroo's poetry is highly controversial. When the book was published, several critics belittled Oodgeroo's poems, judging them as "impoetic" (see, for example, the reviews by Andrew Taylor for the *Australian Book Review*, and by Leon Cantrell for *Poetry Magazine*). The political significance of Oodgeroo's poetry is recognised as a value beginning with the readings of Roberta Sykes and Colin Johnson/Mudrooroo Narogin. In order to define this kind of poetry, the latter coined the term "poetemics", which fuses the idea of poetry with that of political denunciation (poetics and polemics). In more recent times, Adam Shoemaker (2004) points out again how the value of Oodgeroo's poetry resides precisely in its being political, and politically passionate. Here, the readability of these texts as "poetry" is highlighted.

- 9 Offices now, neon lights now,
 10 Bank and shop and advertisement now,
 11 Traffic and trade of the busy town.
 12 No more woomera, no more boomerang,
 13 No more playabout, no more the old ways.
 14 Children of nature we were then,
 15 No clocks hurrying crowds to toil.
 16 Now I am civilized and work in the white way,
 17 Now I have dress, now I have shoes:
 18 "Isn't she lucky to have a good job!"
 19 Better when I had only a dillybag.
 20 Better when I had nothing but happiness (Oodgeroo 2013: 202).

At first glance, the theme of loss seems central to this poem, since the happy, almost Edenic recollections of the past sharply collide with the representation of an industrialised and alienating present. A series of images in the poem provides the reconstruction of a whole world and of a specific *lebensform* which is evoked in: the tribe (l. 1), the *corroboree* (l. 7), the *didgeridoo* (l. 13). These symbolic objects speak of the life of a community destroyed by white 'civilisation', but writing makes that very life *present* and clearly desired, because still *dreamt of* (l. 1), albeit not visible, given the interfering presence of the "offices" and "neon lights" (l. 15), and not audible, given the hissing of the train and the rushing of the car (ll. 3-4). This narrative strategy of memory is even more evident in the preterition that opens the last stanza of the poem (ll. 18-19), which emphasises the use of Aboriginal words, or words in Aboriginal English: "corroborree" (l. 7), "lubras" (l. 10), "didgeridoo" (l. 13), "woomera", "boomerang" (l. 18), "playabout" (l. 19), "dillybag" (l. 25), disclosing a whole world (Brathwaite 1995). In fact, what we have here is a mimesis of re-creation in absence, and the derogatory connotations of the signs of white presence which run throughout the poem increase the sense of longing for another past, as well as for another future.

It is worth noticing that the word "dream", used in the first stanza, is not a neutral term in Indigenous culture and in Aboriginal English. In its sketchy and undifferentiated version it could be considered a 'white invention'; still, the very word "Dreamtime" is often appropriated and refunctionalised in Indigenous literature as a mark of identity. Although the meaning of this loaded term has often undergone a process of oversimplification imposed by the homogenizing Western view on Aboriginal culture, a culture which is far from being a univocal reality, this mythical past of Creation, the time evoked by traditional stories, is often present in Oodgeroo's production. In Indigenous contemporary literature, traditional stories are usually not explicitly mentioned, or openly told, either because most of them belong to a given community, or because they are a sacred form of knowledge which requires belonging in order to be communicated and received. It is in the *corroborees*, *i.e.* in the sacred ceremonies, that they can be narrated to the community itself, as people from the outside are not permitted to participate or watch.

A sense of this exclusion of all alien gaze animates the following poem, which depicts the scene of a *corroboree*, as anticipated by its very title:

Corroboree

- 1 Hot day dies, cook time comes.
- 2 Now between the sunset and the sleep-time
- 3 Time of playabout.
- 4 The hunters paint black bodies by firelight with designs of meaning
- 5 To dance corroboree.
- 6 Now didgeridoo compels with haunting drone eager feet to stamp,
- 7 Click-sticks click in rhythm to swaying bodies
- 8 Like spirit things in from the great surrounding dark
- 9 Ghost-gums dimly seen stand at the edge of light
- 10 Watching corroboree.
- 11 Eerie the scene in leaping firelight,
- 12 Eerie the sounds in that wild setting,
- 13 As naked dancers weave stories of the tribe
- 14 Into corroboree (Oodgeroo 2013: 206).

The nocturnal setting of the poem enhances the sense of mystery of the whole scene for the reader, while, in contrast, the protagonists experience progressively stronger involvement in the ceremonial event, as emphasised at the end of each stanza. The use of epistrophe creates a climax in the chronological sequence, starting with the planning of the ceremony (ll. 3-4) and ending with full participation in it (l. 15). Narration itself acquires a strong physical connotation (which re-actualises the sense of storytelling in Aboriginal oral literature)⁶ through the image of the “designs of meaning” (l. 4) depicted on the dancers’ naked bodies as they “weave” the stories of the tribe (l. 13). Reticence to disclose the actual content of these stories enhances the potential of their significance by opening up the interpretive process in different directions. Since the “common reader” is forbidden to know these stories directly, her curiosity is tickled and s/he is led to explore a variety of different hypotheses regarding their nature, plots and topics. This strategy sustains another form of desire: the desire for interpretation, fuelled, in this case, mostly by memory and its literary forms.

In the eponymous *We Are Going*, different chronological levels merge in the use of the present tense while the narrative itself concentrates on a past life. This rhetorical strategy climaxes in the striking assertion of line 14, “we are the past”. The speaking voice in the poem *identifies* with the past, and suggests that it can recreate that past in the present, albeit temporarily:

- 1 They came into the little town
- 2 A semi-naked band subdued and silent,
- 3 All that remained of their tribe.
- 4 They came here to the place of their old bora ground
- 5 Where now the many white men hurry about like ants.
- 6 Notice of estate agent reads: “Rubbish May Be Tipped Here”.

⁶ On the relation between literature and orality see Carlson, Fagan & Khanenko (2011).

- 7 Now it half covers the traces of the old bora ring.
 8 They sit and are confused, they cannot say their thoughts:
 9 "We are as strangers here now, but the white tribe are the strangers.
 10 We belong here, we are of the old ways.
 11 We are the corroboree and the bora ground,
 12 We are the old sacred ceremonies, the laws of the elders.
 13 We are the wonder tales of Dream Time, the tribal legends told.
 14 We are the past, the hunts and the laughing games, the wandering camp fire.
 15 We are the lightning-bolt over Gaphembah Hill
 16 Quick and terrible,
 17 And the Thunder after him, that loud fellow.
 18 We are the quiet daybreak paling the dark lagoon.
 19 We are the shadow-ghosts creeping back as the camp fires burn low.
 20 We are nature and the past, all the old ways
 21 Gone now and scattered.
 22 The scrubs are gone, the hunting and the laughter.
 23 The eagle is gone, the emu and the kangaroo are gone from this place.
 24 The bora ring is gone.
 25 The corroboree is gone.
 26 And we are going (Oodgeroo 2013: 224).

Anaphora ("We are" ll. 10-20) obsessively reaffirms a remembered communal identity; isocolon reinforces the centrality of the parallels between past and present, humans and landscape. However, in the closing line the progressive verbal form, "we are going", implies a twofold meaning: both permanence and annihilation, resilience and destruction. It is an ambivalent concluding line, one that can turn upside down the commonsensical significance of the poem, if taken merely as a celebration of identity. "We are going" here may in fact refer to the progressive ending of a culture and of a community ("we are disappearing together with 'all the old ways', the 'scrubs' and 'animals'"), but it may also refer to the sense of a movement *onwards*: "we are moving further, we keep on moving towards the future against all odds". The last line recaptures the anaphoric structure of the poem, and in so doing it seems to recover a sense of identity precisely from the previous assertions and their recollection of a long gone past. Memory guarantees continuity in absence. In evoking the past, the symbolic connotations of the images are always at work, for example in the mythical, circular time thematized in the central part of the poem. It is a time that runs from daybreak (l. 18) up to the nighttime camp fires (l. 19) and it makes up one whole day, *naturally* (l. 20) calling for another.

A subtle interplay of memory and projection into the future is to be found in *Dawn Wail for the Dead*, a poem of nostalgic commemoration, a dirge (ll. 5-11), but also a text thematising the need to build a new beginning (ll. 12-14) on the verge of an ending (l. 12), and isotopically referring to both the end of the ritual and the end of the poem itself:

- 1 Dim light of daybreak now
 2 Faintly over the sleeping camp.

3 Old lubra first to wake remembers:
 4 First thing every dawn
 5 Remember the dead, cry for them.
 6 Softly at first her wail begins,
 7 One by one as they wake and hear
 8 Join in the cry, and the whole camp
 9 Wails for the dead, the poor dead
 10 Gone from here to the Dark Place:
 11 They are remembered.
 12 Then it is over, life now,
 13 Fires lit, laughter now,
 14 And a new day calling (Oodgeroo 2013: 226).

Mourning is the theme of this poem, but from the collective remembrance and celebration of the dead, a cathartic epic song originates, a song that is able to heal and regenerate, and to give hope for the future, for the “new day calling” (l. 14).

In a subsequent collection entitled *The Dawn is at Hand*, published in 1966, the poem *The Past* reads:

1 Let no one say the past is dead.
 2 The past is all about us and within.
 3 Haunted by tribal memories, I know
 4 This little now, this accidental present
 5 Is not all of me, whose long making
 6 Is so much of the past.
 7 Tonight here in Suburbia as I sit
 8 In easy chair before electric heater,
 9 Warmed by the red glow, I fall into dream:
 10 I am away
 11 At the camp fire in the bush, among
 12 My own people, sitting on the ground.
 13 No walls about me,
 14 The stars over me,
 15 The tall surrounding trees that stir in the wind
 16 Making their own music.
 17 Soft cries of the night coming to us, there
 18 Where we are one with all old Nature’s lives
 19 Known and unknown,
 20 In scenes where we belong but have now forsaken.
 21 Deep chair and electric radiator
 22 Are but since yesterday.
 23 But a thousand thousand camp fires in the forest
 24 Are in my blood.

- 25 Let none tell me the past is wholly gone.
 26 Now is so small a part of time, so small a part
 27 Of all the race years that have moulded me (Oodgeroo/Walker 1966: 45).

Oodgeroo's lyrical voice is peremptorily clear in the opening section of the poem, summoning the readers to share a vision of a past which is not, by any means, gone for good. In these very intense opening lines, it is the present that has to be questioned and circumscribed to a "little now" (l. 4). The present is just a 'splinter of time' compared to the much longer process of past ages, continually forging the poet's identity from a tenaciously persisting past. This process is ongoing and the past still gives shape to the subject and her relation to a complex form of both individual and cultural memory.

The poem goes on, describing the poet in her current, urbanised context. The apparently cozy atmosphere of an intimate, domestic scene heated by an electric radiator soon expands into the *dream* of unextinguished camp fires and of a communal life which still gives full substance to the poet's contemporary identity.

The past articulated in this and in many other poems has the power of inhabiting the present. This is its main feature: it is a 'progressive past' (Di Blasio 2013a), in the positive sense in which a cultural rebirth is made possible after the traumatic experience of material and spiritual expropriation. Oodgeroo's past is not nostalgically sentimental, rather, it is a living and pulsing source constantly regenerating Indigenous existence.

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Maria Micaela Coppola

The Quest for Insight and Empathy in Alice Munro's Stories of Dementia

Abstract I: Le storie di malattie da demenza di Alice Munro forniscono strumenti narrativi per illuminare territori cerebrali altrimenti impenetrabili e per comprendere ed empatizzare con la malattia mentale. "The Bear Came over the Mountain" e "In vista del lago" si focalizzano su viaggi di ricerca di una comprensione profonda, nei quali chi legge è direttamente coinvolto/a in un processo di esplorazione narrativa del deterioramento cognitivo da due prospettive differenti (interna ed esterna). In "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" si accede alla 'mente dell'Alzheimer' dal punto di vista di Grant, che porta testimonianza della malattia della moglie; in "In vista del lago" i/le lettori/lettrici sono testimoni del progressivo declino cognitivo della protagonista. Il processo di lettura e comprensione getta una nuova luce sulla mente di chi è affetto dalla sindrome di Alzheimer, e mostra a lettori e lettrici le connessioni fra il guardare e il comprendere, e fra l'aver cura e l'empatia.

Abstract II: Alice Munro's dementia stories provide narrative tools for illuminating otherwise impenetrable brain territories and for gaining insight into and empathising with mental illness. The protagonists of "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" and of "In Sight of the Lake" set out on a quest for insight, involving readers in the process, who can narratively explore cognitive deterioration from two different perspectives (internal and external). In "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" we can access the 'Alzheimer's mind' from the point of view of Grant, who bears witness to his wife's illness; in "In Sight of the Lake" readers witness the protagonist's progressive cognitive decline. The processes of reading and comprehending throw light on the Alzheimer's mind, and show readers the connections between acts of seeing and understanding, and acts of caring and empathy.

Inside the Cathedral of Orvieto (Italy), there is a library – Libreria Albèri – which was built at the end of the fifteenth century. The walls of this study room are decorated with frescoes. One of these is quite incongruous among paintings that represent the major disciplines: it portrays a monkey, which is wearing glasses and a student hat, and is reading a manuscript. On its open pages we can read the Latin motto: "Legere et non intelligere est negligere", that is, reading and not understanding is neglecting, or being careless. If we reverse the maxim, we can say that reading and understanding means caring (Coppola 2015: 382-383).

The present analysis of Alice Munro's dementia¹ short stories is inspired by this aphorism, which equates the act of reading (and by extension, of seeing through words) with the act of gaining new insight, and ultimately, with the act of caring and of empathy.

The medieval Latin motto shows that the connection between insight and empathy (or sympathy, as they would have said before the 20th century) had already been investigated for centuries when, in 1903, Theodor Lipps used the concept of *einfihlung* ('feeling into', later translated in English with 'empathy') in association with the concept of *verstehen* (understanding) "to explain how people experience aesthetic objects and how they come to know other's mental states" (Coplan & Goldie 2014: xii. My emphasis). More recently, Amy Coplan has defined empathy as a complex imaginative phenomenon, comprising both cognitive and affective processes, as it implies observing and simulating another person's psychological states "while maintaining clear self-other differentiation" (Coplan 2014: 5). In this perspective, empathising, that is, taking the perspective of the other and simultaneously perceiving the other as distinct from oneself, is a form of understanding:

To say that it [empathy] is a 'form of understanding' is to say that it provides an observer with knowledge of another's person's thoughts, feeling, and behavior – knowledge that may (though need not) subsequently figure into the explanations, productions, and even actions of the observer (Coplan 2014: 17).

Suzanne Keen has analysed a specific kind of empathetic understanding: narrative empathy. According to Keen, empathy and altruism can be provoked by witnessing another person's emotional state and, in turn, this witnessing experience can be enacted through reading. Fictional characters and narratives can provoke identification, perspective-taking, and affective responses. Thus, reading, viewing, listening to fiction can invoke understanding, 'feeling into' and 'seeing into' the other, empathy and altruist emotions (Keen 2006, 2011).

In "The Bear Came Over the Mountain"² and in "In Sight of the Lake", Alice Munro portrays cognitive deficits associated with dementia, even though this syndrome is not explicitly mentioned³. The protagonists of "The Bear" and "In Sight of the Lake" set out on a quest for insight and empathy, involving readers, who can narratively explore cognitive deterioration from two different perspectives (internal and external). Reading "The Bear" readers can access the Alzheimer's mind from the outside, that is, from the standpoint of a retired college professor, Grant, whose wife Fiona suffers from an unspecified form of progressive cognitive impairment. In "In Sight of the Lake", readers are immersed in the mind of a woman, Nancy, whose visual perception, spatial orientation and cognitive functioning are deteriorating. Both stories provide narrative tools for exploring and illumina-

¹ Dementia is an umbrella term to describe a group of symptoms that impair mental cognitive functions. Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia. For the sake of brevity, I will use 'dementia', 'Alzheimer's disease' or 'Alzheimer's' as synonyms.

² From now on, I will refer to this short story as "The Bear".

³ Munro's short story "Spelling" (first published in *Who Do You Think You Are?*, 1978) focuses on a woman who exhibits signs of dementia and on her step-daughter. The quest theme is not a key feature; for such reason, this story is not taken into consideration in this paper.

ting otherwise impenetrable brain territories and, ultimately, for gaining insight into and empathising with mental illness.

To the Other Side of the Mountain

“The Bear” focuses on a couple – Grant and Fiona – as they are trying to come to terms with the consequences of Fiona’s cognitive decline (whose symptoms are consistent with dementia syndrome). The first paragraphs describe the onset of mental illness and readers witness Grant’s quest for insight, as he strives to make sense of their past life together, of his wife’s illness, and of his role of caregiver, which implies adopting a relational empathetic stance. Like the bear in the folk song the title refers to, Grant strives to overcome the barrier that Fiona’s cognitive deficits are building between them, but also the barriers of his own personhood, and to follow his wife to “the other side of the mountain”.

Before analysing the milestones in this quest, it is important to point out that an exceptional kind of relationship is established between patient and caregiver from the moment when the first signs of Alzheimer’s appear, and that this relationship changes radically as illness progresses. Dementia syndrome hugely impacts the ability to communicate, establish meaningful relationships, reason, remember life events, or even recognise close relatives. As patients inexorably lose these key identity and relational traits, they are isolated from their social and family environment, and they regress to a stage of total childlike dependence on others, usually their spouses or next of kin. While the cognitive distance between the sick and the primary caregiver increases, demands and dependency augment. Then, the caregiver’s subjectivity becomes relational (Hartung 2016: 176-180), since he/she is the one who negotiates between the outer world and the dementia sufferer, who is retreating into his/her unreachable inner world. The impossibility to communicate on equal terms enlarges the gulf between the shutting-in subject and the healthy one, and eventually the latter can no longer read the thoughts and feelings of the other. Ultimately, Alzheimer’s disease builds an insuperable wall, and the sufferer’s mind becomes impenetrable and inexplicable.

Grant and Fiona epitomise these relational turns. The third-person narration takes readers across several time-shifts, which are mainly focalised through Grant, a retired professor of Nordic literature. The enigmatic title comprises the core themes of Munro’s story. Critics (Ventura 2010: 2-3; Francesconi 2015: 47-48; 2009: 349) have noted that it refers to the North American folk song “The Bear Went Over the Mountain”. I would define both the song and the short story as quest tales, whose final destinations are insight and empathy. The quest theme is anticipated by the only verb in the titles: the song’s ‘went’ is turned into ‘came’ in Munro’s narrative version. In both cases, it is a verb of motion: the perspective from which the movement is observed differs, but the focus of narration – the action of moving – does not change. Then, reading the song’s first lines, it is evident that it tells the story of a quest: the bear is in search for vision – “The bear went over the mountain, [...] / To see what he could see”. In Munro’s story, what the bear represents (Grant? Fiona? illness?) is not explicitly stated, but this title foresees a similar quest narrative.

Moreover, if we focus on the song’s opening lines, we can note that the lyrics revolve around two verbs – the afore-mentioned motion verb ‘to go’ and the verb of perception ‘to

see'. I would argue that the bear embarks on a journey towards the top of the mountain not to obtain something, but to find a place from which to *see* something. Similarly, Munro's quest story features many acts of seeing and understanding (which are semantically related in the English language).

The title is the starting point of the journey Fiona and Grant embark on, whose direction is signposted by the progression of illness, Fiona's hospitalisation, the first thirty days in the nursing home, and the following period. At first, Grant's quest for insight seems doomed to fail: to him, Fiona, a free and unpredictable spirit, has always been somehow unreachable. When the first signs of cognitive decline appear, in Grant's eyes she remains "direct and vague...sweet and ironic" (Munro 2001: 277). He does not notice either the small changes of healthy aging or the signs of much more dramatic changes. In fact, he often refers to Fiona's dementia as a sort of "charade" she is putting on (Munro 2001: 274).

In the first stages of illness, Fiona and Grant's relationship turns upside down the typical dementia sufferer-caregiver relation: Fiona is responsible for pivotal decisions (such as negotiating the terms of hospitalisation), whereas Grant demands attention and support. These dynamics have always characterised their life together, with Fiona being a relational subject and Grant a self-centered person who had always filtered the world around him through Fiona's gaze. He was the passive observer and she was interpreter, that is, the one who read and comprehended the world for him.

Eventually, Alzheimer's disrupts these taken-for-granted roles. The first change in Fiona and Grant's manner of relating to each other occurs when the two can finally re-unite after the thirty-day separation. Following the nursing home rules, they spend this time away from each other – Grant in their old farmhouse, and Fiona in the long-term-care facility. Their experience of the passage of time is different: for Grant these are days of memories, loneliness, and longing; Fiona adjusts herself to the new context and establishes meaningful ties. So, when they meet each other again, he feels like "a hopeless lover or a guilty husband in a cartoon" (Munro 2001: 288), whereas she welcomes him with courtesy and detachment, and soon devotes all her attention to another man, Aubrey. When Grant senses that there is something unfamiliar in Fiona, he starts his quest for vision: he determines to observe her day after day, in order to see whether she is playing one of her charades, and to comprehend her 'true' feelings. At first Grant is a static observer, watching Fiona and Aubrey compulsively, but from a distance, so that he perceives himself as "stalking and prowling" (Munro 2001: 295). Then he diverts his attention to other people (a nurse, visitors, other residents), and he also decides to explore the care facility. Like the bear, aiming at the top of the mountain "to see what he could see", Grant sets out on a quest – both outer (in the rest home) and inner (to access his wife's mind) – and he keeps observing and moving, but he fails to gain insight. Grant's obsessive acts of observation and his search for a deeper understanding of Fiona's feelings seem to be unsuccessful, just as his attempts to find a way out of the nursing home maze are often a failure: "The more he explored this place, the more corridors and seating places and ramps he discovered, and in his wanderings, he was still apt to get lost" (Munro 2001: 298-299). Grant observes Fiona's mind and actions, but he cannot see clearly.

Moreover, Grant's inability to see is not confined to the nursing-home days. The inac-

cessibility of Fiona's mind, together with her inability to account for it, change this observer-interpreter dynamic. As DeFalco puts it, Munro's fictional narratives "posit an evolution of the role of witnesses, transformed from observers to participants, forced to grapple with new modes of meaning and being" (2014: 221). Likewise, Grant is forced into bearing witness to Fiona's thoughts, and to speak to and for her (Felman & Laub 1992: 3), since Fiona's cognitive and linguistic abilities are so severely impaired that she cannot communicate her own experience of illness and of love. Playing his new role of relational subject and caregiver, Grant takes on responsibility for his wife: he tries to come to terms with Fiona's attachment to Aubrey, and then he resolves that he will speak to Aubrey's wife, for Fiona's sake, even though this involves acknowledging and giving expression to his spouse's feelings for another man. Grant's shift from passive observer to active and empathetic witness takes place when Fiona and Aubrey are divided (after a temporary hospitalisation, his wife, Marian, takes him back home). Away from Aubrey, Fiona's dementia worsens, and she is on the verge of being moved to the long-term bed care on the second floor. At this point, Grant is forced out of his passive and egoistic attitude, and sets out on a new quest, with the purpose of taking Aubrey back to Fiona. So, dementia forces Grant out of his self-centred stance and ignites his quest for empathy: Grant bears the responsibility of observing and recognising Fiona's feelings. Quoting from the song, we could say that Grant starts his quest "to see what he could see", then he ceases to be the passive spectator and moves towards "the other side of the mountain". For this reason, from my point of view, "The Bear" tells the story of a pursuit for seeing and for insight.

However, Munro's short stories often defy closure. In this case too, it is difficult to say whether Grant's quest is successful or not. Likewise, we cannot determine whether the bear of the folk song reaches its goal. With Héliane Ventura, we could say that the verse "to see what he could see" opens up to expectations, which are eventually frustrated in the concluding lines of the song: "The bear went over the mountain, / To see what he could see. / And what do you think he saw? / [...] The other side of the mountain, / Was all that he could see". As in nonsense poems, the song and the quest end with a tautology (Ventura 2010: 3). In a circular movement, the bear's journey to the mountain top, searching for new horizons, merely takes the bear to the mountain top, where all he can see is a mirror reflection of the same landscape. In Munro's story, Grant's and readers' expectations seem to be directed towards the same dead end, as Fiona's increasing psychological detachment is paralleled by Grant's physical distance from her (in the attempt to find a sort of agreement with Aubrey's wife)⁴.

Reading for In-Sight

"In Sight of the Lake" offers means for plunging into the Alzheimer's mind. The story is told by an unspecified narrator, and it is presented mainly through a woman – Nancy – whose cognitive abilities are deteriorating. Nancy is the sole focus of attention for the narrator/reader. If in "The Bear" Grant is the observer-witness of the Alzheimer's brain, in "In Sight of

⁴ The theme of the sufferer-caregiver distance is also represented in the filmic version of "The Bear" (directed by Sarah Polley in 2006), as exemplified by the title, *Away from Her*.

the Lake" this role is played by readers. Moreover, this story accounts for a quest or, better, for two quests: Nancy's search for a doctor, and the readers' search for grasping what Nancy cannot understand, for seeing what she cannot see.

The title condenses the key themes of the story. On the one hand, the first three words – 'in sight of' – refer to the concepts of seeing (being 'within the range of vision') and of awareness ('within one's awareness'). To support this idea, we should consider the first two words together: gaining 'insight' means 'to see with the eyes of the mind', or, literally, to see inward. It indicates the concept of shedding light and understanding the hidden nature of a problem. However, 'in sight of' also implies the motion of a subject to reach a point from where a target spot is within the range of vision. In this case, the in-sight place is a lake and a nearby care facility. The referent 'lake' hints at muddy, dense and opaque water, which can only hinder, rather than facilitate, vision, and it also recalls images of stillness, illness or death (Simal 2014: 77). As anticipated by the title, the semantic fields of seeing and understanding are thoroughly explored in this short story, mainly from the perspective of readers.

The first sentence of "In Sight of the Lake" immediately draws readers in: "A woman goes to her doctor to have her prescription renewed" (Munro 2013: 217). The narrator introduces the protagonist, and the likeable theme of the story: a woman and her health. This sentence portrays a routine action: going to the doctor and renewing a prescription. Thus, Munro aptly exploits the suspense effect: this line raises questions and expectations (who is this woman? what is going to happen next?), which are not directly and explicitly answered. As a matter of fact, this suspense effect persists till the concluding section.

The second sentence introduces the first interruption of the routine: "But the doctor is not there" (Munro 2013: 217). The coordinating conjunction 'but' joins the first and second clause by establishing a fracture and a contrast, between the woman's intention and what is happening. From this moment, the story of this woman, Nancy, unravels on two levels: what Nancy sees, and what readers see. This idea is supported in the following lines: "It's her day off. In fact, the woman has got the day wrong, she has mixed up Monday with Tuesday" (Munro 2013: 217). The narrator introduces Nancy's slip of the mind by employing the discourse marker 'in fact', which also informs that more details are coming, and possibly more slips.

As we go on reading, we are given few biographical details about Nancy (her husband is swiftly mentioned), and we follow her driving to a nearby town in search for another doctor's office – the "Elderly doctor", who then becomes "the crazy-doctor" (Munro 2013: 218, 220). Instead of providing insight into the questions that have been raised, more doubts surface, specifically regarding the reliability of Nancy's version of her own story: is she a widow? retired? does her search for a doctor last one day or more? and is this town unknown to her or forgotten? Munro intersperses her narration with references to the unreliability of Nancy's account: the doctor speaking about an unspecified "mind problem" (Munro 2013: 217), Nancy's own fears and doubts, as well as her incoherent stream of thoughts, her blending of memories, dreams and real events, her spatial and temporal disorientation, her forgetting names or even the reason why she is walking on the streets of a mysterious town. Sentence after sentence we trace Nancy's descent into the darkest areas of her brain, whose functioning

is inexorably declining. Nancy's journey is mirrored by the reader's journey within her brain. She travels in space (Simal 2014: 71), while readers move along words and into her mind.

The alternation of the narrator's and Nancy's perspective, along with the use of present tenses, the interplay of direct and indirect speech, and also of story-time and discourse-time, slow-downs and ellipsis: these devices contribute to drawing readers into a chaotic mind, but also to establishing two levels of 'im-possible' comprehension of the deteriorating brain – Nancy's and readers'. Readers proceed along a narrative track that parallels Nancy's and yet diverges from it (Coppola 2015: 385-386): Nancy is searching for the rest home by the lake (the "sight" in the title), while readers observe as she gets lost, and in so doing see inside her mind problem. Nancy shuts herself into her private world and is progressively incapable of communicating with the outside, as readers see and comprehend what is happening to her: she is suffering from a form of progressive cognitive impairment. Nancy's mind eyes cannot see, while readers' vision is clearer and clearer. As a consequence, also perspective taking, identification with the character's suffering, and narrative empathy grow stronger. Nancy's journey can be visualised as a spiral down into the darkest depth of the mind. From the main street, to side streets of a seemingly desert town (or is she shutting others out?), she wanders in space and time, forgetting direction and purpose. She starts the last lap of her quest by looking at a medical building, and then she goes back to the same medical building. By now Nancy's vision is compromised:

She has an absurd but alarming notion that the sight of the medical building has provoked. What if the right name, the name that she said she could not find, has been waiting there all along. She moves more quickly, she finds that she is shaky, and then, having quite good eyesight she reads the two useless names just as before (Munro 2013: 226-227).

Along her quest, Nancy shows great interest in buildings and houses, describing in detail their design and history, and often imagining the stories behind their doors. At this stage, she (ironically) has "quite good eyesight" but she is not able to frame what she sees into known interpretative categories.

Unsurprisingly, Nancy's quest ends in a claustrophobic and dim building. In Nancy's perception, its hall is big, cavernous and hides secret compartments, the doors are all locked, the floor is slippery, the bell is nowhere to be seen and no one is behind the desk. As a matter of fact, in the narrator's words, the hall of Lakeview Rest Home is spacious and bright, with an easily accessible sliding main door, many secondary doors, glass panels, a shiny silvery floor, a bell to call the person on duty, and a reception desk. The contrast between Nancy's and readers' perception is dramatic. Nancy feels trapped inside the building, and readers are trapped inside her mind: "She goes up to one of these possibly accessible doors and knocks, then tries the knob and cannot budge it. Locked. She cannot see through the window properly, either. Close up the glass is all wavy and distorted" (Munro 2013: 232). This image of Nancy's altered vision through the glass panel is the reverse match of readers' insight. The action climaxes when Nancy realises that she is irremediably shut in and unable to call for help:

It is as if she has a blotter in her throat. Suffocation. She knows that she has to behave differently, and more than that, she has to believe differently. Calm. Calm. Breathe. Breathe.

She doesn't know if the panic has taken a long time or a short time. Her heart is pounding but she is nearly safe (Munro 2013: 232).

For a brief, breath-taking moment, Nancy knows, but soon she sinks back into her spatial, temporal and cognitive disorientation. The two narrative strings cross each other, and then diverge. The dramatic switch of the dual quest into the mind of a cognitive impaired woman is marked on the page: like a crack, a blank space breaks the insistent rhythm of the story and introduces the final section.

Closures and Openings on Empathy

"There is a crack in everything/ that's how the light gets in": these verses from Leonard Cohen's song "Anthem" (1992) recall the philosophy underlying our quest into Alice Munro's dementia stories: fractures (*i.e.* mental illness) can be transformed into something useful and beautiful, as they allow for the light to come through, reveal hidden 'in-sights', and open new perspectives on caring and empathy.

With the concluding passages of "The Bear", Munro lightens one of these revelatory cracks. Having given up the role of passive and self-centered observer, Grant speaks to Marian for the sake of Fiona, and manages to take Aubrey back to the care facility. When Grant enters his wife's room, he notices that Fiona is holding the book of Icelandic literature he has given her, which she has ignored up to this moment. Though Fiona's interest in his present might be the signal of a renewed connection with him, Grant pursues the objective of his quest:

"Fiona, I've brought a surprise for you. Do you remember Aubrey?"

She stared at him for a moment, as if waves of wind had come beating into her face. Into her face, into her head, pulling everything to rags.

"Names elude me", she said harshly (Munro 2001: 323).

Thoughts, feelings and memories fall into Fiona's mind, "beating" like wind. Then Fiona – who on their first meeting in the nursing home denied Grant an embrace – puts her arms around him:

"I'm happy to see you", she said, and pulled his earlobes.

"You could have just driven away", she said. "Just driven away without a care in the world and forsook me. Forsooken me. Forsaken".

He kept his face against her white hair, her pink scalp, her sweetly shaped skull. He said, "Not a chance" (Munro 2001: 323).

In this conclusion we can see that a new mode of communication is established between Grant and Fiona. Munro throws light on Fiona's and Grant's elusive language by employing devices that are typical of lyrics, such as metaphors, repetitions, and alliterations

(Ventura 2010: 3). The incorrect conjugation of the verb ‘to forsake’ in the sequence “forsook me. Forsooken me. Forsaken” also contributes to shaping these lines into a pattern that resembles a poem. It is noteworthy that these poignant verses are uttered by Fiona, who suffers from a deficit of expressive language related to dementia. Munro shows a revelatory crack in ordinary patterns of communication via her most unintelligible character in this story. Consciously or not, Fiona fully exploits the richness and depth of language, and creates new words, which replace the ones she is losing (“names elude me”) and serve the communicative purpose. In fact, Grant seems to be finally able to understand Fiona’s language, beyond literal meanings, and readily replies: “Not a chance”. In my opinion, Grant’s response should be interpreted beyond its literal meaning. His prompt reply and determination, more than his actual words, show that Grant can now grasp the meaning of Fiona’s nonsensical language. At the end of this lap of the quest for insight, Grant’s final tender remark suggests (with the ambiguousness typical of Munro’s closures) that he might have abandoned his self-centred stance in order to relate empathetically with Fiona.

The ending of “In Sight of the Lake” represents a similar quest for insight into and empathy with dementia. As Corinne Bigot (2015) points out, Munro often disrupts the narrative flow with devices (such as parenthetical structures and dashes) that crack the text surface and prevent closure. In my opinion, in the case of “In Sight of the Lake”, a blank space serves this purpose. An empty line separates the moment when Nancy feels trapped in the hall and readers are trapped in her mind, from the concluding paragraph, which foreshadows a new, untold story. In the space of this blank line, words are absent, but more questions are raised: was it all a dream? how long is the temporal shift that separates the two stories? Where is Nancy and where has she been? Also, the effect is disorienting from a temporal point of view: it is not clear whether it represents a slow-down or a speed-up of the relation between story-time and discourse-time.

The informative void of the blank line takes readers backwards, urging us to reconsider the first tale, and to embark on another narrative quest. This is shaped like a spiral, as the beginning of this last section is similar to the short story incipit; it generically mentions a woman – “There is a woman here whose name is Sandy. It says so on the brooch she wears, and Nancy knows her anyway. ‘What are we going to do with you?’ says Sandy” (Munro 2013: 232). Readers observe Nancy in an unspecified place (“here”), and from the caregiver’s perspective. They can understand that Nancy is in a care facility (the narrator refers to a brooch and, afterwards, to a nightie; and Nancy needs help for the seemingly simple act of getting dressed). Patronising attitude and childish language often characterise the caregiver’s interaction with an Alzheimer’s patient. This is also the case in this brief dialogue, particularly when Sandy says “All we want is to get you into your nightie. And you go and carry on like a chicken that’s scared of being et for dinner” (Munro 2013: 232). Sandy’s use of the incorrect form “et” instead of ‘eaten’ mirrors Fiona neologisms in “The Bear”. In the case of “In Sight of the Lake”, the grammatical mistake is not made by the sufferer. Still, Nancy is not puzzled by Sandy’s unconventional language:

“You must have had a dream”, she says. “What did you dream about now?”
 “Nothing”, says Nancy. “It was back when my husband was alive and when I was

still driving the car".
 "You have a nice car?"
 "Volvo".
 "See? You're sharp as a tack" (Munro 2013: 232).

Even though Nancy seems to be able to respond sensibly to Sandy's simple question, by now readers have gained enough insight to be suspicious of her mnemonic reliability. Eventually, Sandy's ironic comment reinforces the idea that all Sandy and readers can make out of Nancy's mental sharpness is cracking a joke. In so doing, Nancy's disease is not ridiculed, nor dismissed. On the contrary, witticism reveals an amusing, unexpected and enlightening way of dealing with Alzheimer's. By ending the short story with a prank, Munro plays with readers (Simal 2014: 71) and shows how fiction can be used for re-valuing and re-reading the stories of dementia.

In conclusion, the revelatory narrative cracks in Alice Munro's dementia stories open new 'in-sights' on the Alzheimer's mind and encourage readers to trace the connections between acts of seeing and understanding, and acts of caring and empathy.

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Pia Masiero, Laura Tosi

The (Difficult) Rehabilitation of the Fairy-tale Villain*

Abstract I: Questo articolo esplora quello che succede da un punto di vista cognitivo quando i lettori affrontano riscritture di fiabe in cui 'il cattivo' è un personaggio a tutto tondo rispetto al testo originale. I testi qui presentati – i romanzi di Donna Jo Napoli, *The Magic Circle* e *Zel* e il film di Disney *Maleficent* – sono incentrati su uno dei cattivi per eccellenza – la strega. L'articolo sostiene che queste streghe innescano un coinvolgimento del lettore che va al di là dell'attivazione degli schemi generici tipici del personaggio strega, creando un'esperienza di lettura più profonda, che mobilita il repertorio esperienziale dei lettori. Tale mobilitazione si esplicita in una riorganizzazione cognitiva che implica l'attribuzione di una coscienza e la sua simulazione – ingredienti, questi, necessari per un coinvolgimento etico da parte del lettore.

Abstract II:

This article explores what happens – cognitively speaking – when readers are confronted with those rewritings of folktales that provide the villain with a roundness which was not present in the source text. The cases here analyzed – Donna Jo Napoli's novels *The Magic Circle* and *Zel* and the Disney film *Maleficent* – concern one of the staple folktale villains – the witch – once it is reshaped in fractured folktales. The article argues that the newly characterized villains activate the readers' subjective experience not simply due to a recognition of generic repertoires, but due to the involvement of their broader experiential background. This involvement takes the form of a deep cognitive reorganisation that depends on attributing and enacting consciousness and allows for a more rounded ethical engagement.

Folk-tale characters are famously flat and static, with no psychological or physical depth. Unprompted by emotions or feelings, but exclusively by external impulses, in Propp's famous analysis of Russian folktales characters are reframed as functional roles in which different functions can be taken on by different figures (such as animals, supernatural beings, or even magical objects). Evil characters can play the role of "opponent/villain" or "false hero"; the ethics of folktale distributes character types around the polarities of good and

* Although this article is the result of a close and mutually enriching collaboration, Pia Masiero is the author of pages 139-144, Laura Tosi of pages 145-152.

evil: “folktale breaks down the rich complexity of human beings” (Lüthi 1982: 15) into one determining trait which is often represented as a label: Prince Charming, the Beautiful Princess, the Wicked Witch. Both Propp’s functions and (later on) Greimas’s actants responded to the structuralist urge to provide a taxonomy predictive of narrative sequences, which were, according to a take typical of classical narratology, the manifestation on the level of action of the features inherent in the functional (and actantial) orientation of each single character. It is not surprising that, unlike classical narratology, recent cognitive approaches have neglected fairy-tale characters, although Maria Nikolajeva’s article on empathy and ethics in Afanasiev’s “The Frog Princess” has questioned this traditional view and provided a more nuanced perspective on the way readers engage with fairy-tale characters’ interiority “even though, or perhaps especially because, there are no visible expressions of their thought or emotion in the text” (Nikolajeva 2015: 135).

Following in the steps of Nikolajeva’s invitation to redress this neglect, this article explores what happens – cognitively speaking – when readers are confronted with those rewritings of folktales that put the villain center-stage and provide him/her with a roundness that was typically not present in the source text. To address this issue, we focus our attention on one of the staple folktale villains – the witch – and we explore the cognitive activities that are plausibly at work when coping with the differences in characterization that these fractured folktales present. We are of course referring to specifically Anglo-Saxon (in particular Western European and North American) fairy-tale, oral, as well as retelling traditions; we are aware that the witch is a historically and geographically determined concept and symbol – what we write about witches in this essay would be hardly relevant to, for example, Yoruba beliefs in Africa, or the Slavic Baba Yaga (Zipes 2012), which arise from and interact with remarkably different cultural, religious and linguistic contexts.

We specifically argue that the newly characterized villains in the anglosaxon fairy-tale tradition allow for and invite a readerly involvement which goes beyond the mere activation of generic frames and scripts and mobilize an imaginative experience that involves readers more profoundly. We contend that villains belonging to fractured tales activate the readers’ subjective experience not simply due to a recognition of generic repertoires, but due to the involvement of their broader experiential background.

According to a cognitive model, characters are

text-based mental models of possible individuals, built up in the mind of the reader in the course of textual processing.[...] Reading for character is triggered or initiated by the reader identifying in the text a referring expression and opening a mental file bearing this name in which all further information about the corresponding individual will be continuously accumulated, structured, and updated as one reads on, until the final product or character profile is reached at the end of the reading act (Margolin 2007: 76).

It is highly probable that a fairy-tale textual/mental ‘database’ is established pretty early in life when children are first exposed to fairy-tales: a basic frame for the witch with a core set of traits, as well as a basic frame for the prince (or the like) find an easy enough collocation in that database. Postclassical narratology has focused on the processing mech-

anisms that are at play when we read, and the interrelated notions of frame and script that first-generation cognitive psychology has proposed appear particularly relevant and effective in mapping the reading processes at work in such a generic context as fairy tales, which revolve around strong character typologies. Frames and scripts are knowledge structures, experiential repertoires that, generally speaking, help us navigate the world around us by making the most of what we already know and have experienced¹ and they are certainly drawn upon by young readers when they are exposed to a new fairy tale. The basic frame of the witch is constituted by very few and rather general properties – this is, it appears, the way our brain makes sense of people – whether they are real or fictional.

The “back and forth movement between specific textual data and general knowledge structures stored in the reader’s long term memory” (Margolin 2007: 78) is reinforced by continuous exposure to tales with the witch as a central character (“Hansel and Gretel”, “Rapunzel”, “Snow White”, etc.). This reinforcement loop soon establishes a specific ‘witch’ frame in the young reader’s literary/mental encyclopedia, whose strength depends on the absence of any individualized name (the Witch, the Princess). This is well in keeping with folk psychology according to which a given role and its associations are sufficient to acquire a characterizing function (Eder, Jannidis & Schneider 2010: 37). The witch frame, thus, amounts to a mental representation of type, a traditional configuration in which the mimetic sphere (old age, crooked nose, warts, decaying teeth etc.) and the thematic sphere (the opposer, the villain) are connected through a top-down processing, from generic, typological expectations to textual data.

In retellings of tales that rehabilitate the villain, the frame that the reader has construed as a reader of fairy tales and has stored in his/her repertoires is activated as soon as s/he is exposed to a textual cue that sets it in motion. The simple spelling out of the word ‘witch’ is enough to retrieve the frame stored together with its relevant scripts. In keeping with any reader-response theory, the script both waits for textual data to be actualized and is already directing the reader’s attention in terms of expectation of sequential development. What happens in fractured tales can be profitably read through the defamiliarisation model of response: a frame is activated only to be unsettled by so called “recalcitrant materials” (Perry 1979: 53). Our working hypothesis is that the cognitive pay off of fractured tales depends on a more profound readerly engagement that is triggered by the inevitable activation of the witch frame. This requires, in the new context, a readjustment of the scripts concerning the witch². It is precisely in the cognitive clashing of apparently antagonistic/incompatible materials that a new ‘moral’ for the new tale may thrive; we would argue that the spawning of this new hybrid narrative both results in and depends on attributing and enacting consciousness, as we will discuss in a moment³.

¹ Schank and Abelson define a script as “A structure that describes appropriate sequences of events in a particular context [...]. Scripts handle stylized everyday situations [...]. [A] script is a predetermined, stereotyped sequence of actions that defines a well-known situation” (Schank & Abelson 1977: 141).

² We are aware that scripts and frames belong in the vocabulary of first generation cognitive sciences; we believe, however, that the two terms maintain a significant heuristic potentiality in the generic context we are here addressing.

³ Our proposal enters in conversation with studies concerning the phenomenology of reading that aim at

As Vivian Vande Velde has crudely put it, in order to fracture a fairy tale, you need to “1. Make the villain a hero, 2. Make the hero a villain, 3. Tell what really happened, 4. All of the above” (Vande Velde 1995, back cover). This role reversal is a technique that we occasionally find in illustrated fairy tales for children, often accompanied by the narrative unreliability of the first person. This basic inversion may allow the reader to appreciate a different perspective, and therefore adds new information to the literary character frame, but we think this is not enough for the frame to be sensibly updated. The structure of the illustrated fractured fairy tale, in fact, establishes a playful exchange of character traits that does not lead to a radically new evaluation of the character – it is a simple game of inversion that triggers the pleasure of recognition or the confirmation of the stereotype, rather than an empathic realignment with the evil character.

A couple of examples of this process are Scieszka’s *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs*, in which Mr Wolf attempts to rehabilitate his good name but sounds unconvincing, and Karina Law’s *The Truth about Hansel and Gretel*, in which a harmless if unreliable elderly lady gives her side of the story about the children’s insulting behavior. We may go as far as to say that the wolf and the witch frames here emerge unscathed by these reversals: they end up eliciting comic effects much more than a deep cognitive reorganisation.

A rather different cognitive situation presents itself when the reader is confronted with rewritings that expand the original story in the form of a longer narrative. Fairy-tale novels (intended for a teenage or YA or crossover audience) may, in fact, offer us a prequel to the story of the fairy-tale character which is structured in a similar way to that of the *bildungsroman*, and may include motivations, descriptions and new events and characters. As is well known, compulsion to subvert historically determined ideological meanings and character frames is inscribed in the genre, from Victorian questioning of gender patterns to the political-ideological appropriations of the Grimms’ tales in the Nazi era (Kamenetsky 1992), to more recent feminist adaptations which subvert and deconstruct female cultural identities.

When a traditional fairy tale is reframed as a Young Adult novel, the author addresses older readers with more developed cognitive and affective skills than a child (Nikolajeva 2018: 94). Let us consider the example of Donna Jo Napoli’s YA novel *The Magic Circle* (1983) in which the witch in “Hansel and Gretel” – the quintessential witch that is evil *because she is a witch* – is given a backstory, a prequel, so to speak. Cognitively speaking, Napoli’s book presents an interesting case. The witch frame is activated by the paratext that announces “She was turned into a witch against her will. Can she resist the temptation of evil?” (Napoli 1996) on the front cover and mentions Hansel and Gretel on the back cover. However, we cannot take for granted that the reader is aware of this information, especially the one on the back cover. We examine two cognitive scenarios in Napoli’s novel, depending on the fact that the reader 1) is aware only of the paratextual indication on the *front* cover 2) is aware of the paratextual indication on the *back* cover as well.

In the first cognitive scenario, the reader crosses the threshold of the text bearing in

providing a theoretical model to describe the engagement with narratives along cognitive lines. Empirical studies lie beyond the scope of this work but they may enter in fruitful synergy with the model our proposal presents.

mind the line on the front cover “She was turned into a witch against her will”. Here the witch frame is already active once we begin reading the novel, although the reader may not possess the knowledge of the specific witch here represented. “The Journey Begins”, as the title of the first chapter promises, on a double track: 1) a narrator employing a simultaneous present tense who offers an apparently unfiltered (by retrospection) perspective on the events as they unfold and 2) a reader whose (generic) knowledge directs (and thus potentially alters) his/her perception of what the story ‘should’ be about.

The narrator is referred to as “the Ugly One” on page 2 and will remain the only character in the whole novel without a proper name. The association between the Ugly One and the witch that the front cover has just announced is far from being unthinkable, both because of the kind of trait the name crystallises and because of the protagonist’s namelessness itself. And yet, in spite of this ready-made match, the book opens on the protagonist, who, before being called the Ugly One, presents herself as a caring mother of a beloved daughter, Asa:

Summer comes over the hill like a hairy blanket. [...] Asa rolls onto her side, and her light brown hair falls away from her pink cheek. [...] I run my fingertips across the fine fuzz of hair on her temple. “Ahhhh”, says Asa. “Good morning, mother”. [...] I reach over to the basket in the corner near our bed. “Look”, I say, holding up the treasure. Asa opens her mouth in awe. The amber ribbon matches the highlights in her hair. She plucks it from my hand eagerly. [...] Asa wraps the ribbon around her fingers. “It’s beautiful, Mother”.

“No more beautiful than you”.

I weave the ribbon into Asa’s hair, and she runs from the cabin to show the world (Napoli 1996: 1-2).

It is interesting to note that both *The Magic Circle* and Napoli’s later novel *Zel* (1993), a retelling of “Rapunzel”, feature witches who are also nurturing mother figures. Motherhood appears to be incompatible with the witch frame: the witches of folklore are normally represented as lonely women who live at the margins of a community, dangerous, aggressive and cannibalistic: in Bettelheim’s essentialistic reading, the witch in “Hansel and Gretel” is “a personification of the destructive aspects of orality” (Bettelheim 1991: 162), while Purkiss describes her as “the opposite of the nurturer, [...] a devourer, not a substitute mother but an antimother” (Purkiss 1996: 278). Both novels require the reader to substitute the original cannibalistic schema with the maternal nurturing one, which appears to be the great repressed of the traditional versions that is ‘uncovered’ in these retellings. As in the traditional version of “Rapunzel”, the girl is taken away from her natural mother, grows, and, on her 12th birthday, is locked in a tower and controlled by the witch. Napoli inserts the backstory, the missing motivation for this negotiated abduction, but not until chapter 19, in which Zel’s mother provides a prequel of the folktale in which the narrator describes her longing for a baby: “oh, how she needed, to be Mother. She needed it with every drop of blood, every bit of flesh, every hair, every breath of her body” (Napoli 1993: 125-126). It is in this chapter that the reader is alerted to the fact that Zel’s affectionate mother could be

a new revised schema of the witch of the traditional tale. However, her story of loneliness and longing is told in third person, as if at this particular moment the witch needed to distance herself from her past pain, and this distance could be achieved only by employing the usual narrating device of folk or fairy tales. As Crew has noted, “Napoli uses first person narrative to subvert the authoritative and impersonal narrative of the fairy tale” (Crew 2002: 78), but in this instance she abandons her most typical narrative style. In a way, the original “Rapunzel” becomes a sort of embedded narrative within the revised “Zel” narrative. Zel’s mother makes a Faustian pact with the devil in order to become a mother – she sells her soul in return for a relatively common experience in a woman’s life (she even manages to breastfeed through a combination of magic and herbal concoction). It is interesting that this change occurs within the frame of the witch configuration of the folktale – both the Ugly One in *The Magic Circle* and Zel’s mother are neither a humorous parody of the witch (as Granny Weatherwax or Nanny Ogg in Terry Pratchett’s Discworld novels) nor resemble the wise-witch schema (Stephens 2003: 199). They basically play the same part (or, in Proppian terms, they inhabit the same sphere of action) in Napoli’s novels as in the Grimms’ tales – there is no change of plot or ending – but the witches’ actions/functions are given very different meanings in the novels. Both *The Magic Circle* and *Zel* add the cultural narrative of the hostility of institutionalised religion towards the witch (*Zel* appears to be set in a particularly severe iconoclastic phase of the Reformation) so that the mother-daughter bond becomes a short-lived utopian space of feminine and domestic solidarity against a patriarchal and merciless world. As Crew has argued:

Napoli affirms the bonds between daughter and mother that are severed in the Grimm tale – bonds that have also been de-centred in traditional accounts of adolescent pathology. Napoli writes about the power of this bond: the power of a mother’s love and a mother’s sacrifice (Crew 2010: 41).

We find the same duality at the core of *The Magic Circle*. Well before the ending of the novel and the suggestion of a new moral and the possible activation of a maternal frame, the author sows the paradoxical seed of the juxtaposition of two opposing traits, ugliness and lovingness. No script within the witch frame allows for this narrative trajectory. Page after page we follow the Ugly One as she records her story as a loving mother and a blessed healer and the circumstances in which she is claimed and possessed by devils against her will, while all these events unfold. The cognitive processing of this kind of narrative development requires all along to keep (witch) scripts in abeyance while maintaining the witch frame active. When Hansel and Gretel eventually enter the scene, a reinvigoration of a very specific script (the cannibalistic witch) surfaces again. In this section, textual triggers abound because here Napoli realigns herself with the original tale. The key items of the story we have stored in our repertoires remain unvaried, but traits give way to motives. This is, indeed, a crucial difference.

The term motivation is inextricably connected with drives and desires, objectives and values; it couples a given state of affairs to a desired state of affairs and the resultant moves to attain it. Becoming privy to the motivation that leads a character to take certain deci-

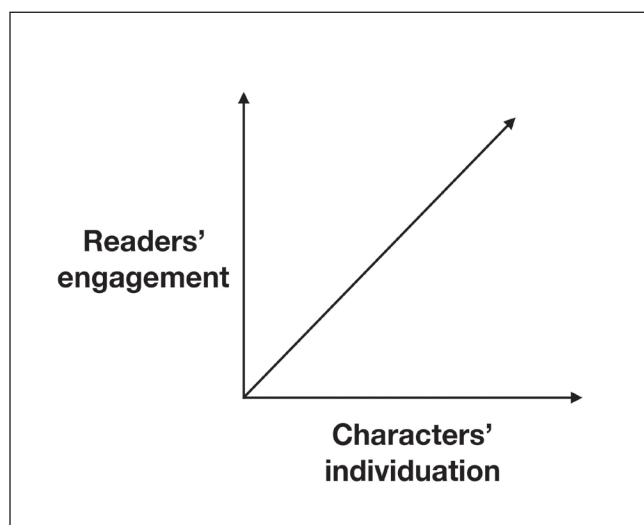


Fig. 1.

sions and to act in a certain way provides the foundation for the reader's emotional engagement and empathetic alignment. In spite of the still limited evidence available to demonstrate data concerning the one-to-one relationship between specific narrative strategies and empathetic engagement (Keen 2007), a correlation between our access to a character's mind and our potential involvement in his/her predicaments seems to be certain.

The two most obvious narrative situations that provide access to a character's mind are first-person homodiegetic narration and third person focalised narration. The latter even more than the former

would seem to foster trust because it is not associated with the potential unreliability inherent in first-person contexts. Napoli's narratological choice for *The Magic Circle* – a first person pronoun combined with the present tense – would seem to fend off potential unreliability because of the absence of a narrating, more knowledgeable (and thus manipulative) 'I'. The establishment of trust makes it easier to accept materials difficult to digest such as evil deeds. The building up of trust alters the absoluteness with which we evaluate evil in a given action – this is, as we shall discuss in a moment, precisely what happens in the film *Maleficent*. Once motives have been called into play, typological flatness gives way to a more rounded characterization. At this point a different cognitive dynamic is activated.

The more the witch becomes an individualised person, the more the reader is potentially engaged according to a directly proportional relationship (Figure 1). By engagement, we both mean the reader's emotional and experiential involvement and his/her evaluative, that is, ethical activity. In the case of traditional fairy tales the experiential background to be mobilized concerns essentially generic ingredients and the expectations emerging from them: generic scripts absorb and exhaust the emotions the plot activates because in fairy tales values attributed to characters tend to be polarised (good vs. bad). Fractured tales, on the other hand, activate experiential items more rooted in our individualized existential set-up. From an enactivist perspective⁴, not only is it much easier for a reader of a fractured tale to attribute consciousness, that is to say, to treat the witch as someone possessing a conscious mind (like a real person); the reader may go as far as to immerse himself/herself

⁴ The enactivist project dates back to Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch's *The Embodied Mind* (1991) in which a new way to understand cognition was launched. As the title itself suggests, enactivism is rooted in an embodied and situated conception of cognition. According to the enactivist approach, readers' engagement with stories has a "situated and embodied quality" and meaning "emerges from the experiential interaction between texts and readers" (Caracciolo 2017: 4). As Di Paolo, Rohde and De Jaegher demonstrate, this approach inaugurates second-generation cognitive sciences moving away from first-generation computational models.

so much in the character's existential predicament as to enact the witch's consciousness, a move we have previously termed empathetic alignment.

In the case we are analysing, the Ugly One becomes a healer because she is motivated by a desire to become God's helper; the fatal mistake that wins her to the Demons' cause and transforms her into a witch is a typical sin of *hubris*, a momentary lapse of humility. She is the first one to recognize her own arrogance and devises all possible tricks to avoid the initiation rite of eating a human child. She knows that "this [rite] is what separates a witch from all her past for the rest of eternity" (Napoli 1996: 66). Significantly, she understands that only her past – remembering it and cherishing it – can help her maintain her humanity in spite of the features she shares with traditional witches. These traits render the witch existentially recognizable beyond the witch frame and prepare the reader to negotiate (and accept) a new script depending on the specificities of this witch, who *has*, after all, a past. As with *Maleficent*, this rewriting does not revolve so much around a witch, but around *becoming* a witch and/or resisting being a real one. This resistance transforms the Ugly One's tale into a parable of liberation and purification from evil which can be related to the reader's own (not simply bookish) experiential background. This level of engagement, as Marco Caracciolo suggests, "brings into play – and allows [readers] to negotiate – real-world values" (Caracciolo 2013: 33) and inhabit fiction as the moral laboratory it is.

I lean farther into the oven. I must not think of the devil's question. [...] I lean farther, I am almost crawling into the oven. [...] And now I feel a tug at my cloak. Is the child trying to pull me back? Has she failed to comprehend, after all? [...] The heat, true to form, brings me no pain. I watch as my skirt and blouse catch fire. [...] "You are damned! Don't you dare burn up! Change into the salamander! Change right now!" [...] I can cry. And now I am crying for joy. Hallowed be hope, after all. I am crying with rapture. I am dying. Dying into the waiting hands of God. I am dying. Oh, glorious death. I am dying. Dying. Free (Napoli 1996: 116-117).

So, she *voluntarily* leans into the oven and dies "into the waiting hands of God", free from the Demons. The witch's sacrifice of her life in order to save the children and herself from evil mobilizes a more sophisticated consciousness attribution than just inverting traditionally good with traditionally bad characters. Napoli's rewriting goes a long way in preparing the reader to rethink a very specific witch: the cognitive implications of this rethinking in fact, are set against the typically polarised background of fairy tales: good/God/healing/life/nurturing vs. evil/demons/destroying/death/cannibalism, a binary that dominates the Ugly One's backstory as well. This causes the reader's mental categorizing to deviate from the original frame or even start a process of 'decategorization' which nonetheless belongs in the same structural, fairy-tale, pattern.

Let's move now to the second cognitive scenario. The second cognitive scenario assumes that the reader begins reading the novel after s/he has read the back cover. This presents a slightly different situation as the reader begins to read knowing that this is the retelling of the Hansel and Gretel story. In this second case, the reader will be much more alert to the details that connect this retelling to the 'original' one, while s/he expects the

familiar story to emerge fully. In this case, the effect of knowing that this is a specific witch who inhabits a specific tale is subtly reinforced by details such as the references to a prospective candy house or the protagonist's love for jewels. It is worth noticing that the back cover concentrates exclusively on the part of the story that is more readily connected to the original tale – "Deep in the woods lives the old witch called Ugly One". But the editorial paratext indicates a strange direction: "all she wants is to forget – that she was once a loving mother and a healer, blessed and powerful within her magic circle". This is contradicted by the text itself, which, as we have seen, presents *not forgetting* as the key for the Ugly One to redeem herself and save the children and for the reader to envision a new script for an old frame, a script that is rooted in a recognizably embodied experience of the world.

A similar example of an established fairy-tale villain whose schema is challenged by a revised narrative structure is the protagonist of the Disney film *Maleficent* (2014), which also refashions Perrault's tale as well as the Disney's earlier version of *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). It provides the back story of Maleficent's evil deeds: a story of mutilation, betrayal and revenge – from winged fairy to queen of a dark world. The very first words of the female narrating voice set the stage for what follows:

Let us tell an old story anew and we'll see how well you know it. Once upon a time, there were two kingdoms that were the worst of neighbors. So vast was the discord between them that it was said that only a great hero or a terrible villain might bring them together.

Which old story will be told anew has already been announced by the title – Maleficent. Here as well, the paratext plays a crucial role in activating the audience's pre-existing knowledge. Whereas in *The Magic Circle*, the reader was asked (in the first cognitive scenario we explored) to mobilize a generic witch frame, here the audience mobilizes the witch frame and a specific script conjointly. And yet the very first words of the narrating voice challenge the viewers' knowledge of the old story – possibly, the suggestion seems to be, the audience knows the old story but only superficially, that is, as far as generic frames and scripts go. The cognitive dissonance on which these kinds of rewritings appear to thrive is immediately aroused. And – equally important – the complexity of the ethical component is also activated. Mentioning "a great hero or a terrible villain" amplifies the polarity typical of fairy tales while challenging the possibility to resort to the old tale as we know it.

The truth about Maleficent is that the villain of the present was a victim in the past⁵. As Hogan has argued, empathy is triggered by suffering – by showing the (detailed, salient) suffering of characters who deserve punishment for their actions, we are pulled to identify with them: "the enemy soldier in pain looks just like the comrade in pain. It is difficult to sustain a distinction between them" (Hogan 2003: 214). In *Maleficent* we are offered motiva-

⁵ However, the choice of retaining the protagonist's name is problematic. If this is a story that explains how Maleficent's heart is turned from pure to stone (as explained in the DVD back corner), how comes Maleficent had this name even when she was a good, kind and trusting child with supernatural – even healing and nurturing – powers? Shouldn't her name have been "Beneficent"? More often than not, it appears that marketing strategies prevail over narrative logic.

tion, in the form of self-preservation and revenge. And once again the audience is invited to problematize ready-made, clear-cut evaluations. The new materials definitely require a redefinition of the initial frame, but it is exactly the very existence of this pre-existing frame that may pave the way for the recognition of stereotypes and for fostering skepticism about Manichean distinctions.

Our conclusion is that the new character variants that have been examined, in order to be acquired by the reader, must produce an expanded version of the original witch frame to include new traits as well as feelings and emotions that were never present in the original model. Often the witch is given a name, which points to individuality rather than a type, and often first-person narration encourages, if not, obviously, total reliability and trust, “a decrease in the imaginative distance between the narrator and readers” (Van Lissa *et al.* 2016: 48). Fairy-tale novels may require from their readers a capacity to employ empathic moves even towards the evil character. According to Leake, empathy “does not require that we share the same feelings of another person’s situation but instead that we use our emotional experiences to understand the feelings of another” (Leake 2014: 177). Sometimes empathising with the villain can be difficult. But “difficult empathy” – to employ Leake’s term – does not mean that we support Maleficent’s desire for revenge. It means that we entertain a form of double vision that allows us to reach out in order to make sense of the character’s choices and feelings: in other words, we move from consciousness attribution to (at least potentially) consciousness enactment. The case of the Ugly One goes in a similar direction as we can easily connect with the kind of *hubris* that turns out to be fatal for her.

As we exercise empathy for a traditionally undeserving character, the retellings also alert us to social and psychological conditions that may have brought about the evil in these characters thus enhancing our emotional intelligence. In folk tales the reader is required to perform (or repeat) a pre-ordained moral judgment in which cognitive and ethical abilities are not stimulated. In the retold versions, “difficult empathy pushes us not only to see others differently, but also perhaps to see ourselves differently” (Leake 2014: 184). This complex cognitive activity may require a more experienced or older reader – the self-conscious attempt to imagine the condition of the other person relies not just on imagination, but on the reader’s memories (Hogan 2011: 65), and the reader’s tapping into his/her own experiential background and remembering how it feels to be discriminated, unappreciated, disappointed, or betrayed. These texts very cleverly encourage the reader to evaluate the character’s behavior from an ethical point of view, as only one set of possible reactions to their textual past, although not necessarily the most adequate.

The closing schematization (Figure 2) sums up graphically the trajectory from fairy-tale witch to fractured-tale witch, the concomitant change in the reader’s positioning in the two texts that we have examined and the potential experiential activations at stake in the two textual situations.

The analyses of the rewritings here presented demonstrate how the insertion of back stories providing readers with the possibility to learn about the characters’ inner workings not only paves the way for the rehabilitation of witches, but also allows for a richer reading experience. Once generic traits become individualized and motivations enter the frame,

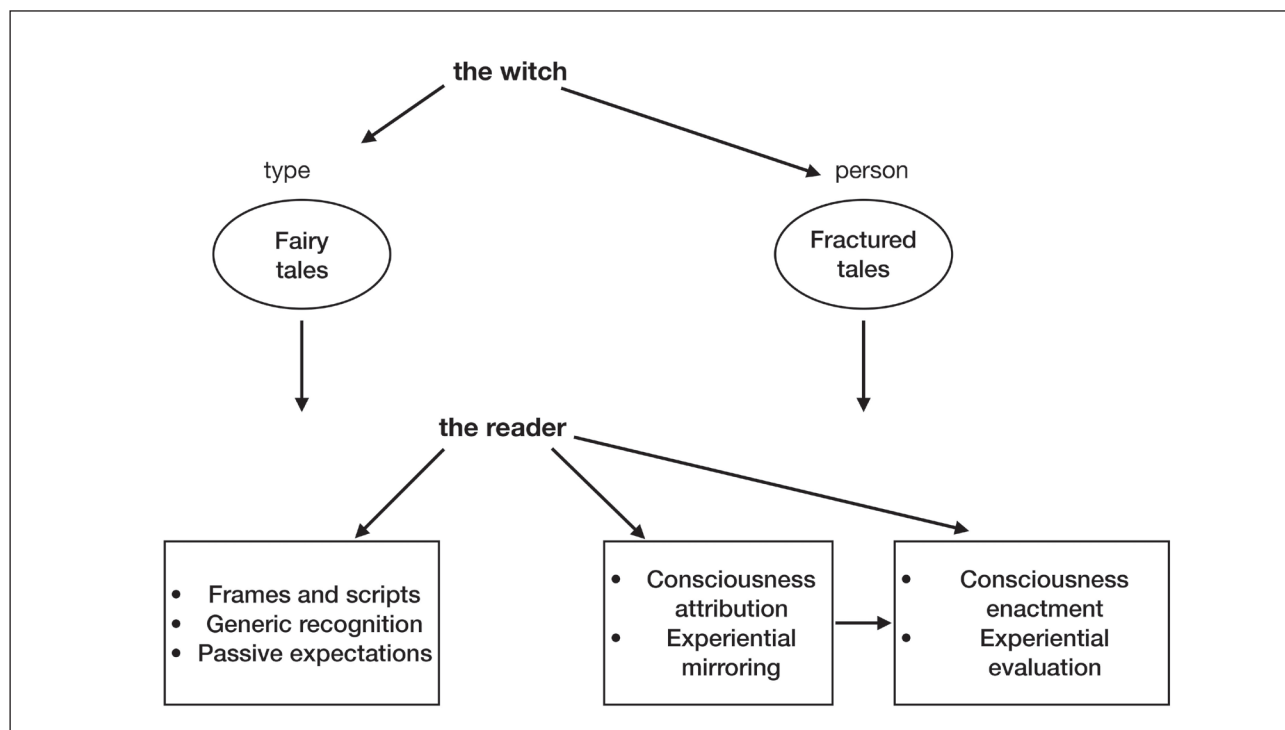


Fig. 2.

readers are caught in the net of potential empathetic responses, which are typically nested in the alignment with recognizable emotional situations. Reading about these fractured witches can provide a much more nuanced cognitive experience which requires readers to take a more complex ethical stance and empathize with these traditionally negative characters: after reading about these characters' 'past lives', one almost wonders whether witches are really that different from us, after all.

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Claudia Gualtieri

Vivere con la razza nei racconti di Elleke Boehmer*

Abstract I: Il saggio presenta la raccolta di racconti *Sharmilla, and Other Portraits*¹ come un'azione di *Hi/Storytelling* ove la narrazione della storia del Sudafrica nell'arco di circa venti anni si articola nel racconto delle storie di diversi personaggi. I ritratti sono colti attraverso la lente della razza, senza che essa emerga come tema centrale, ma venendo piuttosto percepita come parte integrante dell'esperienza quotidiana in un paese che ha vissuto per decenni l'imposizione della segregazione razziale. In questo saggio alcuni racconti sono utilizzati per proporre un paradigma di lettura del presente storico europeo e mondiale in una congiuntura di vasti movimenti di persone spesso contrastati da politiche di esclusione e di emarginazione. La dimensione estetico-letteraria di *Sharmilla* viene osservata considerando l'uso creativo e politico della parola per mostrare gli effetti del discorso della razza sui lettori. I racconti provocano forme di empatia verso i personaggi, interrogando gli stereotipi comuni e diffusi sulla diversità. In tale ottica il testo letterario rivela un valore pedagogico ed etico che trae ispirazione dalla prospettiva teorica degli Studi Culturali e Studi Postcoloniali.

Abstract II: This essay introduces *Sharmilla, and Other Portraits* as a form of *Hi/Storytelling*, namely, as a narrative both of the history of South Africa in the span from 1989 to 2010, and of the individual stories of the characters over the same period. The portraits are perceived and described through the lens of race - however rarely mentioned as such and without it emerging as a central issue. In this essay, a selection of short stories is used to suggest a reading paradigm of today's European and global condition, when vast movements of people are contrasted by policies of bordering, marginalisation, and exclusion. The aesthetic and literary dimensions of *Sharmilla* are examined by considering the creative and political use of words in order to lay bare the effects of the discourse about race on the readers. These effects generate forms of empathy with the characters and interrogate common stereotypes of difference. In this way, the literary text shows its pedagogical and ethical value which relies on the methodological approaches of Cultural Studies and Postcolonial Studies.

* Il titolo fa riferimento all'espressione "how it is to live with race" di Elleke Boehmer, utilizzata dalla scrittrice stessa per ipotizzare la rilevanza delle storie raccolte in *Sharmilla, and Other Portraits* per l'oggi.

¹ La traduzione italiana è *La ragazza che parlava zulu e altri racconti* (Boehmer 2019).

Nell'arco dei vent'anni in cui Elleke Boehmer ha pubblicato narrativa nelle forme del romanzo e del racconto breve, la sua riflessione si è articolata intorno alla questione della razza e alle interconnessioni che essa stabilisce nelle società, regolando i rapporti tra le persone, le rappresentazioni che ciascuno ha degli altri, le aspettative, le contraddizioni e le catene che imprigionano i pensieri e le azioni di chi ha esperito la brutalità e la cecità imposte dal pensiero della razza. Nell'ideologia della segregazione e della violenza, così come si è affermata in Sudafrica con il regime dell'apartheid, il concetto di razza ispira azioni divisive che si radicano nell'odio e comunque nella convinzione di una dipendenza delle razze classificate come inferiori dall'ideologia dominante, basandosi sul presupposto della superiorità della razza bianca. La storia familiare di Elleke Boehmer, così come viene autobiograficamente narrata nell'epilogo, nasce dalla condizione di essere figlia di genitori emigrati nel Sudafrica dell'apartheid. Anche l'appartenenza alla 'razza' bianca appare stratificata secondo le differenze dovute all'origine della famiglia, alla classe sociale e alla lingua; esse determinano i diversi gradi di subalternità in una ex-colonia britannica innestata su una precedente colonizzazione olandese.

In questo saggio intendo osservare come funzioni, nei racconti, la presenza del concetto di razza, allo scopo di verificare se vi si metta in atto quella poetica che la stessa Boehmer auspica in *Postcolonial Poetics*, ove si chiede se la scrittura postcoloniale possa liberarsi dell'etichetta della 'rappresentazione altra' del mondo e, invece, aiutare a comprendere l'oggi ponendo l'accento sull'interpretazione, ovvero, sull'atto ermeneutico della lettura. Tale analisi critica si fonda sulla convinzione che la letteratura postcoloniale possa contribuire a strutturare protocolli utili per la comprensione del presente e abbia "the capacity to keep imagining and refreshing how we understand ourselves in relation to the world and to some of the most pressing questions of our time, including cultural reconciliation, survival after terror, and migration" (Boehmer 2018a: 1). La prassi suggerita da Boehmer è quella di spostare lo sguardo critico e analitico verso l'aspetto comunicativo e interpretativo del 'come' piuttosto che soffermarsi sul 'cosa' della rappresentazione, verso il processo di lettura e ricezione piuttosto che sull'oggetto di differenza rappresentato nel testo (Boehmer 2017a, cfr. 2018b).

È questo un percorso che prevede un'attenzione acuta verso la parola parlata e narrata nella forma dello *Hi/Stortyelling* e acquista incisività nel momento in cui parla della storia rivolgendosi alla storia del presente. È anche un percorso che mette in primo piano la lettura e il coinvolgimento diretto dei lettori nella modalità del 'fare', ovvero, dell'accogliere la provocazione del testo letterario e assumere una posizione informata e consapevole. La partecipazione dei lettori all'azione intrapresa dal testo – ovvero, cosa 'fa' il testo postcoloniale, quale sia il suo riscontro etico e pragmatico sui lettori – è uno degli obiettivi politici della letteratura postcoloniale ed è anche un pilastro della pedagogia critica professata dagli Studi Culturali (cfr. Highmore 2018; Cameron 2012).

L'effetto poetico e politico del testo si trasforma allora nell'azione critica dei lettori – assunzione di responsabilità e pratica di resistenza – verso le dinamiche divisive della razza e dei razzismi (cfr. Boehmer 2018b; 2017b). Desidero quindi analizzare come i ritratti dei racconti di Elleke Boehmer possano mostrare "how postcolonial writing *as writing*, and as

received by readers, gives insight into aspects of our postcolonial world” (Boehmer 2018a: 2), alla luce delle metodologie critiche degli Studi Culturali e degli Studi Postcoloniali.

È utile sottolineare e sostenere la contiguità tra questi sistemi teorici e metodologici che si avvalgono di un’analisi contestuale e congiunturale dei fatti, delle azioni, dei pensieri e degli eventi intesi come espressioni culturali diverse che si svolgono nel quotidiano. Essi pongono attenzione agli squilibri che hanno generato le strategie e le reti dei poteri dominanti, e promuovono resistenza e dissenso nelle modalità dell’azione politica e dell’assunzione di responsabilità ideologica. La loro visione plurale e sfaccettata è anche coerentemente autocritica per il carico di responsabilità che comporta l’analisi del presente e per le difficoltà di scelta delle azioni politiche e pedagogiche che la complessità delle condizioni, dei contesti e delle relazioni pongono per l’intellettuale pubblico (cfr. Grossberg 2017; Giroux 2001; Pedretti 2017; Di Leo & Hitchcock 2016; Gualtieri 2019). Così come gli intellettuali pubblici hanno la responsabilità di mettere in atto e diffondere un progetto di rinnovamento che si radichi nella comprensione critica del presente e denunci le dinamiche di separazione, emarginazione, segregazione e violenza generate dal pensiero della razza, dei razzismi, dei suoi effetti e delle sue persistenti conseguenze, così gli scrittori e i loro lettori, accogliendo l’invito di Chinua Achebe in “The Novelist as Teacher” (1965), sono compartecipi dello sforzo di interpretare l’oggi attraverso la lettura e la comprensione critica del testo postcoloniale.

In questa sede si vuole proporre un collegamento fra la pratica dello *Hi/Storytelling* precedentemente annunciata e la produzione letteraria postcoloniale, disegnando una mappatura che colleghi il racconto della storia e delle storie alla scrittura letteraria postcoloniale e alla sua poetica. Dunque il termine *Hi/Storytelling* si spiega con la combinazione della grande storia – la *History* – con le piccole storie quotidiane, domestiche, taciute e segrete – le *stories* – tenute insieme dalla pratica del narrare, dalla potenza della parola parlata e creativa del raccontare.

I ritratti di Boehmer – che si collocano nell’arco di circa vent’anni della storia del Sudafrica, dal 1989 al 2010 – offrono sia una rappresentazione del contesto sudafricano sia un modello di lettura della Storia attraverso il racconto letterario. Essi compongono un quadro preciso della storia del Sudafrica e concatenano questa grande storia ufficiale con le storie individuali dei singoli personaggi che, nella loro diversità, si offrono come chiavi di lettura dei contesti e delle relazioni in cui il loro paese li ha inseriti. Si annulla così la possibilità di raccontare una Storia sola e univoca, quella dei potenti e dei vincitori – il ‘danger of a single story’ sottolineato da Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) – mentre si recuperano tutte le storie intrecciate delle persone comuni dentro e fuori dal testo letterario. Si umanizzano così i personaggi stabilendo forme di empatia con le vite dei lettori.

Da questa prospettiva è utile circoscrivere la definizione di ‘letteratura postcoloniale’ che include certamente le forme di scrittura che si sono sviluppate e affermate a partire dalla metà del Novecento, quando i grandi imperi coloniali europei moderni hanno dovuto concedere l’indipendenza alle loro colonie: una letteratura che è stata ampiamente studiata e sistematizzata nelle sue forme stilistiche ed espressioni contenutistiche. Tuttavia, accolgo e promuovo, in questo saggio, un’espansione e un aggiornamento del concetto di postcoloniale, come propongono molte analisi critiche dell’oggi. Si teorizza, infatti, che ‘postcolonia-

le' non indichi solamente il momento storico seguente la colonizzazione, quanto piuttosto una nuova condizione del nostro presente, caratterizzata da grandi movimenti di persone, dall'ibridazione delle culture, dal diffondersi e mescolarsi delle lingue: elementi che producono situazioni, relazioni e pratiche culturali nuove e mai viste prima (Mezzadra 2007). In tal senso, il postcoloniale si sposta dal contesto storico della recente colonizzazione europea che si è nutrita per secoli della tratta transatlantica degli schiavi, radicata nei nazionalismi, fino a raggiungere il suo apice nell'Ottocento e nella prima metà del Novecento, e si sposta anche dai contesti geografici delle periferie degli imperi, da cui le voci postcoloniali erano emerse con i loro il loro controdiscorso. Il postcoloniale dell'oggi connota una condizione globale ed estesa, e si caratterizza anche e significativamente sia come posizione intellettuale e teorica sia come una strategia politica e prassi operativa.

Su queste basi il saggio propone una lettura dei racconti di Elleke Boehmer che riveli come il ruolo della narrazione, della parola che racconta la storia, si esprima nella pratica pedagogica in senso lato, ovvero, si traduca in uno strumento creativo di trasformazione sociale e culturale. È utile allora richiamare nuovamente l'attenzione sulla responsabilità dell'intellettuale pubblico per avvalorare l'uso del testo letterario con funzione pedagogica, perché, come afferma Lawrence Grossberg in "Making Culture Matter, Making Culture Political": "the intellectual is responsible as well to the demand of producing the best knowledge possible about what's going on" (Grossberg 2017: 31). Ciò è possibile attraverso una visione articolata dei contesti e delle relazioni – "to think contextually, which Stuart Hall once described, following Marx, as 'a rigorous application of the premise of historical specificity'" (Grossberg 2017: 34) – che sempre mostrano complessità, molteplicità, contraddizioni e ibridazioni. Così definita, la posizione dell'intellettuale dentro la storia comporta per Grossberg la responsabilità di interpretare la realtà, di creare un ponte tra le contingenze che non ha come oggetto soltanto la cultura, "one is never simply studying 'culture,' never simply interpreting texts" (Grossberg 2017: 40), quanto piuttosto la sua funzione.

Applicata al testo letterario che è l'oggetto di questo saggio, la pratica intellettuale e pedagogica mira a combinare l'apprezzamento della bellezza estetica con la capacità del testo di rivelare come la cultura si produca, come si costruiscano i significati, come si descrivano i contesti e le relazioni, e come il raccontare agisca sui lettori. È una pedagogia che oltrepassa i confini e si esercita anche fuori dalle aule scolastiche e dalle accademie, investendo la pratica quotidiana della gente comune (cfr. Grossberg 2014; Giroux 2001).

Nella teorizzazione della funzione pedagogica del testo letterario si può cogliere la contiguità tra gli Studi Culturali e gli Studi Postcoloniali. Edward Said ha esplorato la complicità tra la produzione di cultura e il consolidamento del potere e ha anche identificato la possibilità dell'emergere della resistenza e del dissenso critico tra le crepe dei discorsi e delle pratiche dell'impero (Said 1993). In questo contesto di complicità e resistenza tra cultura e pratiche del potere, la posizione dell'intellettuale saidiano appare particolarmente cogente per l'argomentazione di questo saggio per via del modello investigativo che Said sceglie, ovvero, la propria esperienza di esule e dell'essere 'out of place' (Said 2002, cfr. 1994, 1983).

Desidero soffermarmi su questa dislocazione per ragionare sulla posizionalità dell'artista come soggetto creativo e anche come intellettuale pubblico, analizzando l'epilogo della

raccolta che, pur costruito in forma autobiografica, colloca la scrittrice/protagonista tra i personaggi del suo libro. La prospettiva della non appartenenza è utile per sostenere la funzione pedagogica del testo letterario, perché consente uno sguardo trasversale e la possibilità di attivare collegamenti empatici attraverso lo scarto dei punti di vista, la percezione delle differenze e l'attivazione della comprensione delle diversità. Per l'analisi, intendo mostrare come tale prospettiva 'spaesata' sia costruita tramite la lingua. L'aspetto linguistico è fondamentale in tutti i racconti, non tanto per le scelte stilistiche quanto piuttosto per la forma del narrare, appunto, per l'uso della parola parlata nell'atto del raccontare.

La parola letteraria propone la lingua, anzi le lingue usate nei racconti, come chiavi di lettura dello *Hi/Storytelling* che i ritratti offrono attraverso il genere del racconto breve. Le lingue compongono un arcobaleno di colori, suoni, voci e identità, separate e distinguibili, eppure conviventi nella lunga storia della nazione e nella parcellizzazione del paese segregato. Come spiega l'epilogo, aprendo alla comprensione dei ritratti, è attraverso la lingua che passano i sentimenti di appartenenza, la costruzione delle identità, la tessitura delle relazioni, la consapevolezza di sé in rapporto agli altri e in rapporto alla storia e alle storie nelle quali si trovano le comunità e gli individui. È il caso di Grace, la protagonista di "Zulu speaking" che, mentre in una situazione drammatica si accorge di comprendere perfettamente una lingua che non crede le appartenga, compie anche una revisione critica del proprio passato:

And then, suddenly, it dawned on her – yes, that she *understood* them. She had followed them, not only their every word but also the expression in their voices, the whispers, the significant pauses. Though she hadn't meant to, hadn't even consciously realized it, even as their words stilled her – she'd picked up their Zulu along with their English, from the start. At her high school in Durban, after all, no one had taught Zulu. [...] But Florence, short, spry, fast-moving, very dark, the "laundry girl" for the entire street, she had taught Grace Zulu regardless (Boehmer 2010: 107-108, corsivo nell'originale).

La consapevolezza che Grace acquisisce attraverso la lingua la guida anche alla conquista di una diversa determinazione di sé nel presente:

Still, headache or no, it became her favourite thing to stay at home on Saturday afternoons. No sooner had Charles driven off than she would make a cup of tea, organic rooibos had been Florence's favourite. She would sit in the comfortable armchair with her eyes shut, and her legs stretched out, and listen to the Zulu plays that were broadcast on Saturday afternoons on the radio (Boehmer 2010: 111).

Con il titolo "*né qui / né là: scrivere al di fuori della lingua madre*", l'Epilogo ripercorre la ricerca della scrittrice/protagonista volta a posizionarsi nelle 'sue' lingue, il nederlandese e l'inglese, e nei mondi che esse descrivono; ma interroga anche i lettori e la loro collocazione nei propri contesti di vita vissuta. La riflessione sulle lingue rende importanti dettagli spesso trascurati o pensati come irrilevanti e introduce al mondo delle 'parole ombra', come

la protagonista le definisce, dei significati che emigrano da una parola all'altra in diverse lingue, che si adombrano, rivelano e nascondono nello stesso tempo: "It lies in the fact that every word in the one language is shadowed by its counterpart in the other. *Sea* by *zee*. *Wode* by *rage*. *Language* by *taal*" (Boehmer 2010: 177, corsivo nell'originale). Ove ogni parola contiene esperienze individuali e significati culturali che, nella loro combinazione, hanno portati diversi, inediti e unici.

Ciò che affascina nell'epilogo è come la scrittrice/protagonista sia un personaggio dei ritratti e si connota anche come una persona comune, forse un lettore qualunque. Boehmer entra nel racconto e si mette in gioco: tenta di elaborare una definizione di sé dandosi la caratteristica di estraneità rispetto a qualunque luogo, ma rivela anche le necessità e le costrizioni del doversi definire e presentare, dell'apparire e del 'passare per'. Se nell'epilogo il termine inglese *pass* ha la doppia valenza di superare l'esame dell'apprendimento perfetto della lingua inglese e di conseguenza 'passare per' inglese – un successo che implica anche l'aver conseguito il riscatto sociale per la famiglia intera – nei ritratti torna come metafora polivalente dell'apparire, del nascondere e del confermare un'identità. Il lettore assiste al mascheramento, al gioco di ruolo, all'autodefinizione e alla combinazione di tratti identitari inconciliabili all'interno della prefissata coerenza delle classificazioni razziali, come nei racconti "Off-white", "Air India" e "Mrs Wedlake":

Mrs Wedlake had frowsy clothes and no job and no husband, they said. No, not even a boyfriend. Maybe there were children but none had yet shown their faces. Like as not, she didn't have any. "She could use a comb", Debbie Barker's mother said to Mrs Eunice Summers at the school gates. "And skin lightener cream along with that", Mrs Summers said, patting her daughter Grace's hair. "I'd never tan that dark". "Believe she drinks, too", Mrs Stevens added. "Bill was her chatting to the men in the queue at the bottle store. On the white side, thank goodness". [...] There was no doubt about it, Mrs Wedlake was a Curiosity, a Scandal even (Boehmer 2010: 17).

Ci sono anche dettagli determinanti, come i nomi propri di derivazione europea o africana, le abitudini culturali e la classe sociale, mentre la razza come invenzione del 'colore' rimane una costante non nominata, ma pur sempre presente e centrale in tutti i racconti.

Pare utile procedere con l'analisi dell'"Epilogue" come racconto rivelatore del concetto di appartenenza spiegato tramite l'atteggiamento verso la lingua e le lingue, che include le dinamiche di riconoscimento, di esclusione e rifiuto che passano attraverso l'uso delle lingue. Elleke Boehmer è una scrittrice bianca che viene da una famiglia olandese emigrata di prima generazione. Si presenta dunque in una situazione 'coloniale' diversa che la distingue sia dagli africani neri sia dai coloured e dagli Afrikaner, come si legge nell'epilogo. Ad acuire lo spaesamento, e a mettere in chiara luce il contesto in cui si trova la protagonista, contribuisce il fatto che la sua famiglia risiede a Durban, una zona di insediamento inglese, non olandese, ove le lingue più diffuse sono l'inglese e lo zulu, non il nederlandese, e ove l'inglese è dominante. La lingua inglese, infatti, perfettamente acquisita nella dizione e nell'eloquio, diventa per lei lo strumento del riscatto sociale e rivela le gradazioni di emarginazione presenti anche nel mondo bianco coloniale sudafricano. I genitori decidono che

deve parlare inglese, essere inglese, *passare per inglese*, perché ciò è necessario per come vanno le cose in Sudafrica:

But [my father's] love of the language, and his cultural investment in it and in that anglophile identity of his, was shaped within the medium of spoken English. This was the cynosure of all his attention. It was to this end, and the promotion of good English, of "the Queen's English", the "beautiful" English of King James Bible, that he made his momentous, life-changing decision with respect to his daughter. Around the time I turned four my father quite abruptly switched from Dutch to English in speaking to me and insisted I do the same in return. "Do you hear me, we talk English in this house now!" (Boehmer 2010: 171).

L'autobiografia linguistica dell'"Epilogue" è anche un'autobiografia letteraria: di una scrittrice bilingue che sente di non appartenere né qui né là e si trova nella condizione di scrivere fuori dalla lingua madre². Tuttavia, è assolutamente competente nella lingua parlata e scritta in cui scrive, come pure nelle lingue delle comunità che rappresenta nei racconti. La sua scrittura è evocativa e profondamente collocata. È una scrittura visiva che costruisce quadri, ambientazioni e ritratti definiti di cui il lettore immediatamente ravvisa l'immagine, il gesto, il colore, il volto e l'espressione. È una scrittura nuova, precisa e aggiornata che trascina i lettori dentro il testo facendo della lettura un'azione attiva e creativa. È una scrittura che dialoga con altri testi, instaurando un rapporto forte e costante con la letteratura postcoloniale: si vedano le epigrafi ad alcune storie, e i riferimenti a libri di lettura e testi canonici, come la *Bibbia di Re Giacomo* e il Dizionario dei sinonimi *Roget's Thesaurus*³.

Il racconto "Her walk in the park", che qui si cita in collegamento all'"Epilogue", inscena l'atto della creazione artistica. Il racconto segue la nascita di una composizione nella testa di una scrittrice: prendendo spunto da un tizio che ha incontrato e dal dialogo con lui, ella immagina di scriverne la storia. Gli atti del raccontare e dello scrivere diventano protagonisti in questo ritratto e infondono una luce particolare sui temi della narrazione artistica (la scrittura) e dell'ascolto (la lettura), perché dimostrano, nella prospettiva culturalista e postcoloniale, l'azione del testo, ovvero lo stabilire interconnessioni con i lettori. Tali collegamenti evolvono trasportati dal filo rosso della memoria.

L'immaginazione di una storia nuova, infatti, si realizza su piani sfaccettati e comunicanti: quello dell'incontro reale tra la scrittrice e il tizio con la faccia da bambino, il piano del ricordo di un incontro precedente che l'uomo cerca di richiamare alla mente della scrittrice,

² Questa dislocazione linguistica è raccontata da Elleke Boehmer in forma narrativa nel romanzo *The Shouting in the Dark* (2015): "At home there are no opportunities to learn Zulu, only English from Dad. Because they are Dutch, that is, foreign and civilized, the mother and the father don't employ a black servant. Irene is fresh out of Holland, fresh off the boat, people say" (9); e ancora si legge: "At night the mother reads Ella stories from English books in her broken English. The father tells her to. Ella's eye races ahead. She is listening to her mother but at the same time she's reading the words she recognizes further down the page. Under her breath she tries out the longer English words, the ones with tricky swishing sounds her blunt tongue can't quite push to the front of her mouth, like *parsley*, or *thistle*, or *Li-tull Bo-Peep*" (33-34).

³ Il racconto "Off-white" si apre con una frase di Athol Fugard: "I do not think of myself in those terms [of being white], I daren't. I don't let that into my life; you can't; it's a trap" (Boehmer 2010: 23).

la memoria che lei invano tenta di ricostruire e l'immaginazione, invece, di una storia nuova ove lui sia protagonista:

It would be a challenging story to write, Simone knows, she would need to find out more, more about the girl, the young woman, imagine things in closer detail, to get it right. But, no matter, she will not get round to writing it, not now, and, without writing it, she will not get to the bottom of it, she will not be able to grab hold of its meaning (Boehmer 2010: 145).

E forse c'è anche la storia che Eunice, la badante della scrittrice, ha intravisto mentre assisteva al dialogo tra i due, e quella della vita di Eunice stessa, oscura alla scrittrice, pensata tramite domande senza risposta. C'è forse un fallimento della parola immaginata che non riesce a prendere la forma del racconto, ma nelle tessiture della trama della memoria e dell'immaginazione ci sono le storie che i lettori hanno immaginato e ravvisato.

Si torna dunque all'atto ermeneutico della lettura e si comprende come l'ipotesi teorica avanzata da Elleke Boehmer in *Postcolonial Poetics* sia attivata dai racconti di *Sharmilla, and Other Portraits* che attraggono i lettori come protagonisti attivi nella comprensione e nella creazione delle storie narrate. Attraverso la parola creativa i racconti mettono in pratica la strategia postcoloniale del parlare della storia rivolgendosi alla storia del presente e realizzano in tal modo il procedimento dello *Hi/Storytelling* presentato nella prima sezione di questo saggio. Si tratta di un principio teorico e pratico che pone il valore della parola, l'indagine del tempo presente e l'ascolto attivo e fattivo come pilastri della comprensione critica e affettiva delle relazioni del nostro tempo.

"Her walk in the park" è dedicato a Nadine Gordimer, che sembra sia anche la scrittrice protagonista del racconto. La bellezza del ritratto non è prodotta soltanto dalla storia che si crea dentro la storia, dai personaggi immaginati nella mente che non trovano completezza senza l'ordine della scrittura, ma è anche dovuta allo sguardo alterato della scrittrice sulla temporalità e sul trascorrere del tempo. La sua prospettiva sovrappone le età del presente, del passato, della memoria e dell'immaginazione e proietta il racconto in una dimensione mentale ove i tempi convivono e si ricompongono nel pensiero artistico, uniti dall'atto del raccontare. È ancora un'indagine sul valore della parola che plasma il tempo e aggiunge un elemento di complessità che arricchisce il processo di *Hi/Storytelling* dell'imprescindibile dimensione singolare e umana.

La scrittura di Elleke Boehmer è contemporanea e inserita nel mondo globale, e si può definire postcoloniale in un senso ampio, perché aggiorna al presente le responsabilità che la condizione *dopo* la colonizzazione comporta. Perciò parla a un pubblico vasto di una condizione del presente, del mondo in cui viviamo, del potere della letteratura di guidare la comprensione critica, del valore dell'immaginazione, della rilevanza dell'osservazione acuta e, soprattutto, dell'importanza della storia: raccontare, scrivere, ascoltare e leggere la storia e le storie. Questa parola letteraria dà valore estetico ai racconti e li fissa come piccoli e originali cammei, ognuno unico e vivo all'interno di una molteplicità di culture, lingue e colori.

La descrizione accurata delle differenze e la penetrazione acuta dei significati di tali differenze definiscono l'umanità dei personaggi: è la differenza che diventa condivisibile,

apprezzabile e auspicabile, e che fa di questi racconti narrazioni di empatia, storie di interconnessioni storicamente molto connotate eppure esemplari di condizioni comuni a storie diverse e realtà lontane.

La parola è protagonista di questa funzione catartica del raccontare. Si è precedentemente discussa la parola come parte di una lingua, si propone invece di osservare ora la parola come elemento singolo, ripercorrendo i racconti e cogliendo alcune parole particolarmente interessanti.

Il termine 'razza' compare solo due volte nei racconti. In "Off-white" è citata la casella di spunta nel modulo in cui è obbligatorio autocertificare la propria appartenenza: "The third or fourth row of boxes is marked 'Race'. She ticks the place for *Coloured*" (Boehmer 2010: 27); in "Sharmilla", la protagonista descrive le caratteristiche dei propri clienti: "my clients hook on to things to do with their race" (Boehmer 2010: 151). Eppure, tutti i racconti sono intrisi, addirittura imbevuti delle costruzioni, invenzioni, sfumature, stereotipi, interrogativi, difficoltà, incomprensioni provocati dal pensiero razziale e dalla struttura sociale dominata dall'ossessione della differenza e dell'emarginazione razziale. In "Khaya" si legge: "But I like to watch the way she purses her fingers when she plucks at the mielie meal. At the table I am not allowed to do that, eat with my fingers" (Boehmer 2010: 3); in "Off-white": "'You know how your name's funny. And things are different at your house. How you wear vests and eat raw onion on everything. It's not like we do, it's not white really'" (Boehmer 2010: 31); and in "The bean-bag race":

Lavendar Samuels is my ma, yes, and I go to a white school, a formerly white school, but I'm not tall, and my hair is African and curly, it'd never lie flat. Even though I'm near the top of the class and meant to be obedient and studious, I've got sever pierces in each one of my ears. And me and my best friend Paulie Arends listen to Lauryn Hill, Mariah Carey, Angie Stone, slow-burning black singers with Mother Wit. And we wear kohl pencil on our eyes, thick enough to disguise what we might be thinking (Boehmer 2010: 33-34).

Il lettore si ritrova incatenato al pensiero classificatore, si interroga sulla 'posizionalità' dei personaggi, sulle relazioni squilibrate cui assiste, sui significati che l'appartenenza sottende senza che essa possa essere messa in discussione. C'è un disagio collettivo provocato dal pensiero razziale che esplose dai racconti e contagia i lettori.

Il punto di vista di bambini e adolescenti, presente in numerosi racconti, contribuisce vivacizzare i ritratti, perché fraziona e moltiplica gli sguardi sul mondo mentre sbilancia i criteri di valutazione grazie all'originale percezione della realtà e alla libertà di relazione e di giudizio tipici di queste età. La raccolta presenta protagonisti bambini nei primi racconti e, a seguire, adolescenti, poi adulti e anziani, percorrendo l'arco della vita umana e il mutare del punto di vista delle persone trasportate dalla loro storia personale e da quella della nazione. Ogni racconto frustra le aspettative e, in qualche modo, smentisce il proprio titolo, perché non si esaurisce nell'anticipazione che il titolo fa prevedere, né si concentra su quadri tipologici e monocromatici. Oltrepassa invece i confini, distrugge le previsioni e mescola le differenze. In tal modo, rispetto ai personaggi, i racconti compongono figure a tutto tondo e,

in relazione alla storia della nazione, rompono le separazioni imposte dall'ideologia e dalla pratica segregazionista. Tuttavia, essi mettono i lettori anche di fronte alle complessità umane dei singoli individui e alle ancora maggiori difficoltà della nazione di fronte alla sfida di tenere insieme le diversità.

"The father antenna" esplora la provenienza e l'appartenenza descrivendo, dal punto di vista della figlia, le dinamiche di adattamento alla vita in Sudafrica di una famiglia di emigrati olandesi di classe media. Attraverso il personaggio della madre si nota il contrasto evidente tra le sue opposte percezioni dell'Olanda e del Sudafrica: la prima percezione è un ricordo di struggente nostalgia, la seconda è un'impossibile accettazione, un tentativo di inserimento miseramente fallito. Il padre cerca di attenuare la disperazione della moglie rendendo concreto un ponte apparentemente impossibile tra i due mondi distanti e inconciliabili, ovvero fabbricando un'antenna, di cui egli stesso si trova a essere una parte insostituibile, per collegare la stazione radio della loro casa in Sudafrica con il programma di musica preferito dalla moglie in Olanda. La musica, la voce e la lingua sono le chiavi di lettura del racconto. Il nederlandese, la lingua perduta senza la quale la madre sta morendo, le giunge come linfa vitale in Sudafrica, attraverso i continenti e attraverso il corpo-antenna del marito, per restituirle l'appartenenza perduta, la voce familiare, la lingua amata, parlata e sentita come propria:

At three o'clock exactly that Sunday, at the moment Radio Nederland came on stream, the child's father stepped outside and raised his two antennae to the sky, the blue veins bulging in his scrawny forearms. At the same moment Mamm switched on the radio [...]. But what success! What magic! At the very same instant the warm clear sound of "Radio Nederland Wereldomroep", those precise words, announced themselves. They had pulsed through the dry air of the Sahara, so the child imagined, and down the Great Rift Valley, and over the Zambesi and the Limpopo rivers, and round the blue arc of the sky above their heads. And finally, she thought, they came beating along the high, braces antennae in her father's hand, and so through his body, and here in the sitting room (Boehmer 2010: 13).

L'antenna diventa così un elemento curativo e il padre antenna una perfetta metafora dell'empatia.

"Off-white" approfondisce la riflessione sull'identità usando la parola 'coloured'. Il racconto segue la riflessione di una bambina che cerca di determinare la propria appartenenza. Le differenze di classe e le dinamiche di aggregazione tra i gruppi bianchi di diversa provenienza sono osservate in modo delicato, e anche ironico, attraverso la lente della bambina. Il racconto è diviso in quadri che presentano episodi importanti per la sua ricerca identitaria: l'incontro con la zia in Olanda, la discussione familiare seguita alla compilazione errata del modulo di appartenenza razziale, la recita scolastica nella quale deve impersonare una dottoressa indiana in un gioco di identità e di lingue che deve indossare e ostentare come una maschera, il confronto con l'amica. In questi scambi di prospettive e di ruoli, la protagonista tenta di adattare alla propria identità la classificazione 'coloured' adducendo

motivazioni che la allettano: “*Coloured*. Which means pied, dappled, as in that English poem they did at school, the one about God and brindled cows” (Boehmer 2010: 26)⁴.

Mentre intraprende la ricerca di autodefinizione, rappresenta altre identità nello spettacolo scolastico che la invitano a considerare punti di vista diversi: come quando si mette nei panni della signora indiana che presta il suo sari bianco per la recita e assiste impassibile alla derisione dell’accento indiano per tutto lo spettacolo: “She sat motionless, arms folded, and must have heard how, out in the hall, an Indian voice was performed to universal white laughter” (Boehmer 2010: 30). O quando deve diventare come un’indiana lei stessa e ripetere la frase storpiata: “*Unfortunately we are not knowing what is wrong with George*” (Boehmer 2010: 28, corsivo nell’originale). Alla fine è l’originale definizione del colore che fornisce alla ragazzina la risposta che cercava. Se Frik e Fanie si identificano come nomi Afrikaner e connotano bianchi poveri che parlano Afrikaans e forse hanno pure un antenato nero, l’auto-definizione della bambina propone un ragionamento nuovo e inedito: “In her mind’s eye it is yellow that she feels and yellow that she stays, part-yellow, off-white, slightly pied. She is deep yellow when she sits beside her best-friend Lila, as now happens less and less often. And she is light yellow, almost white, when she makes sure to stand alongside Rosa da Silva in the classroom line-up, whenever she can, and hold her hand tight” (Boehmer 2010: 32). Se la conclusione può apparire sentimentale, è invece razionale e nitido il percorso dei racconti verso il duplice scopo di mostrare, da un lato, l’applicazione storica precisa e contestuale della segregazione razziale nel Sudafrica dell’apartheid e degli strascichi della discriminazione negli anni della transizione e, dall’altro lato, di esporne la violenza intrinseca, il non senso e la disumanità.

Tra i ritratti di adulti, che spesso prendono forma tramite la tecnica di scrittura modernista del monologo interiore, spicca “For love”, forse il racconto più intenso della raccolta. La storia prende vita come monologo interiore di un uomo ammalato, proprietario di una fattoria. La sofferenza provocata dalla malattia trova quasi refrigerio al pensiero del badante nero che è diventato un amico del cuore. L’ammalato è anziano e i ricordi dei lavori svolti insieme al compagno sono piacevoli, liberatori, ironici e tragici, e costruiscono un’immagine completa e fedele dell’amico. Il racconto è uno splendido ritratto dell’amore e dei diversi modi di amare; e il titolo non fa riferimento a un amore soltanto, ma all’intreccio delle relazioni affettive che legano le persone.

In questo racconto è l’assenza della parola a essere protagonista. Il badante è un uomo di poche parole: “Which is also why he likes this Edward. Without even a word Edward gets down and he climbs into his place, the cupped seat warmed. Plough up the cauliflower field today, plant next week, the two of them know without saying. Edward doesn’t waste words, doesn’t waste his breath to use his voice more than necessary” (Boehmer 2010: 77). Anche con poche parole, i due protagonisti si capiscono e godono della compagnia reciproca. L’uso parco della parola apre un canale speciale di comunicazione e di rispetto: “He offererd

⁴ Il riferimento letterario è alla poesia di G. M. Hopkins “Pied Beauty”, tradotta in italiano da Benedetto Croce nel 1937 con “La bellezza variegata”, da Eugenio Montale nel 1948 con “La bellezza cangiante”, da Beppe Fenoglio nel 1951 con “Bellezza cangiante” e da Viola Papetti nel 2008 con “Bellezza screziata”. Si veda Foti Belligambi (2008). Il verso in traduzione “pezzati come vacche” si trova in Montale (1975: 53).

to talk him through that ballot paper like a Christmas streamer, long as an arm, stupidly coloured, full of Third World guff. Edward let him say his say, then, Thank you boss, but no thank you boss, Edward said. Thank you boss, I know what I'm voting for. Didn't waste his words" (Boehmer 2010: 77-78). La transizione verso la democrazia del nuovo Sudafrica consente a Edward l'affermazione di una identità degna di rispetto, il riscatto sociale, il riconoscimento della dignità umana e la rottura dei confini della segregazione che l'amicizia con il proprietario della fattoria dimostra.

Ma il racconto spinge oltre l'indagine sull'identità razziale e sul potere della parola, mettendole di fronte al dramma del suicidio per amore. Nei racconti i punti di vista personali si dilatano e si complicano nelle relazioni che non sono mai descritte in modo univoco. C'è sempre *altro* cui la parola raccontata e scritta vuole alludere. In "For love" è il silenzio, l'assenza di parole, ciò che non si può dire, che è segreto: quella pausa che da sola parla di umanità condivisa: "Later he said to himself, out loud, and again, This straightforward young man, nice good-sort black, he killed himself for love. As if saying it would make clearer what beggared belief" (Boehmer 2010: 80).

La parola difficile e la lingua straniera, che sono state strumenti di separazione e disuguaglianza nel Sudafrica della segregazione, sono le protagoniste della narrazione in *Sharmilla, and Other Portraits* e sono il filo che cuce i racconti, ove l'estraneità della parola e della lingua si trasforma, invece, in un elemento familiare e comune, un canale di comprensione e di condivisione: un percorso di empatia. La parola definisce identità e appartenenze, ferisce e tradisce come si legge nell'Epilogue, può spiazzare, facendo sentire 'né qui né là', eppure colloca qui e là attraverso la scrittura e la lettura di tanti mondi. Ci si ricollega, nell'ottica degli Studi Postcoloniali e gli Studi Culturali, al potere salvifico della letteratura e alla sua funzione pedagogica per la comprensione della storia e delle storie dell'oggi attraverso uno sguardo critico ed empatico sul tempo passato che consenta di immaginare una visione nuova del futuro.

Con Elleke Boehmer, ci si augura che la letteratura postcoloniale – e i racconti di *Sharmilla, and Other Portraits* – possano aiutare a capire il presente offrendo chiavi interpretative utili attraverso l'atto ermeneutico della lettura (cfr. Gamal 2013). Nove anni dopo la pubblicazione in lingua inglese, *La ragazza che parlava zulu e altri racconti* viene tradotto in lingua italiana con la convinzione che possa attivare processi empatici, di interrelazione e di condivisione (Eco 2003).

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Building Empathy and Intercultural Citizenship through a Virtual Exchange Project

Abstract I: L'articolo esplora possibilità di creare uno spazio che sviluppi l'empatia nell'insegnamento delle lingue e culture straniere. Si basa su studi sull'empatia (Deardoff 2006; Bloom 2016; Guntersdsorfer & Goulbeva 2018), sulle idee di competenza e cittadinanza interculturale (Byram 1997, 2008; Byram *et al.* 2017), e sull'idea di "terzo spazio" come teorizzata da Edward Soja (1996), e mette in evidenza l'importanza delle emozioni nell'educazione interculturale. Se consideriamo il fenomeno del cosiddetto "spatial turn" nella sua dimensione pedagogica, la concettualizzazione proposta da Soja di un "terzo spazio" può essere connessa allo sviluppo di uno spazio di apprendimento alternativo per interazioni interlinguistiche e interculturali, ampliato e delineato da relazioni sociali, pianificato attraverso collaborazioni cross-culturali, e costruito attraverso scambi virtuali. Uno spazio che è costruito sulla base delle esperienze vissute di coloro che lo popolano può favorire l'empatia. L'autrice presenta in sintesi uno scambio virtuale di cittadinanza interculturale tra l'Italia e gli Stati Uniti, dove uno degli obiettivi principali è lo sviluppo dell'empatia e la verbalizzazione della comprensione emotiva da parte degli studenti.

Abstract II: The article explores possibilities of creating a space to develop empathy in teaching foreign languages and cultures. It draws upon studies on empathy (Deardoff 2006; Bloom 2016; Guntersdsorfer & Goulbeva 2018), the ideas of intercultural competence and citizenship (Byram 1997, 2008; Byram *et al.* 2017) and "thirdspace" as theorised by Edward Soja (1996), highlighting the importance of emotions in intercultural education. If we consider the phenomenon of the "spatial turn" in its pedagogical dimension, Soja's conceptualisation of a "thirdspace" can be connected to the development of an alternative learning space for inter-linguistic and intercultural interactions, enhanced and shaped by social relationships, designed through cross-institutional collaborations, and achieved through virtual exchanges. A space that is built in terms of the lived experiences of those who inhabit it can foster empathy. The author presents a virtual exchange project for intercultural citizenship between Italy and the U.S.A. where one of the key objectives is building empathy and allowing the verbalisation of students' emotional understanding.

1. Introduction: should empathy be taught in intercultural education?¹

The article explores possibilities of creating a space to develop empathy through intercultural competence in teaching foreign languages, cultures and literatures. It draws upon studies on empathy (Dearoff 2006; Bloom 2016; Guntersdorfer & Goulbeva 2018), the ideas of intercultural competence and citizenship (Byram 1997, 2008; Byram *et al.* 2017) and of “thirdspace” as theorised by Edward Soja (1996), highlighting the importance of emotions in intercultural education. A telecollaborative project between Italy and the U.S.A., where one of the key objectives is the verbalisation of students’ emotional understanding and feelings, is presented in synthesis. Should empathy be taught in schools and higher education? The opponents offer two principal reasons: empathy cannot be taught; empathy is not related to academic achievement. In truth, there are in fact doubts about whether empathy can be taught²:

against the background of increased global mobility and the need to communicate effectively across cultures, the development of Emotional Intelligence (EI) is of growing importance to those involved in intercultural education. There are important theoretical synergies between EI, which is comprised of components such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills (Goleman 1998), and models of intercultural competence (IC) commonly utilized in intercultural education [...]. In particular, [...] empathy has recently attracted attention from new perspectives (Epley 2015; Bloom 2016; Breithaupt 2017a, 2017b) (Guntersdorfer & Goulbeva 2018: 54).

In all interpersonal interactions, interlocutors must be able to interpret and to understand emotional cues of others while at the same time regulate their own internal experience of emotion and how it is expressed through non-verbal and verbal communication. These processes and abilities are exceptionally important in intercultural communication since the misreading of emotional cues can lead to misunderstandings. Furthermore, this is

¹ For “Intercultural education” I referred to the *UNESCO guidelines for Intercultural Education*, written by the Section of Education for Peace and Human Rights, Division for the Promotion of Quality Education, Education Sector. The introduction opens as follows: “In a world experiencing rapid change, and where cultural, political, economic and social upheaval challenges traditional ways of life, education has a major role to play in promoting social cohesion and peaceful coexistence. Through programmes that encourage dialogue between students of different cultures, beliefs and religions, education can make an important and meaningful contribution to sustainable and tolerant societies. Intercultural Education is a response to the challenge to provide quality education for all. It is framed within a Human Rights perspective as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): ‘Education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial and religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace’” <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000147878> (consulted on 24/08/2019).

² “At the American Association of Teachers in Foreign Languages (ACTFL) conference in 2016, a notable incident occurred when a scholar called-out in a self-confident voice: ‘Well, you cannot teach empathy!’ In the crowded session, which was attended by more than a hundred people addressing the importance of an intercultural approach in foreign language teaching, nobody openly disagreed with this statement” (Guntersdorfer & Golubeva 2018: 58).

true because empathising with others who may have different values and perspectives can be difficult (Breithaupt 2017a: 18-21). Empathy can help to foreground abilities that, in turn, support individuals to manage the emotional challenges of interpersonal relations.

2. Theoretical foundations

It is clearly beyond the scope of this article to attempt a comprehensive theoretical synthesis of empathy and intercultural competence; I will instead try to point out pivotal ideas from work that has addressed empathy within intercultural education.

2a. Empathy: Ivett Guntersdorfer's and Irina Golubeva's studies

In "Emotional Intelligence and Intercultural Competence: Theoretical Questions and Pedagogical Possibilities" (2018) Ivett Guntersdorfer and Irina Golubeva interestingly review work which has focused on empathy³. Besides citing Daniel Goleman's book *Emotional Intelligence* (1995), they refer to the revised meaning of empathy by John D. Mayer and Peter Salovey (1997: 10), who initially defined it (1990: 189):

Emotional Intelligence involves the ability to perceive accurately, appraise and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thoughts; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth.

This conceptualisation is seen as particularly relevant for intercultural education since "it validates emotion as a source of thinking and makes explicit the importance of being able to analyze emotion as a way of deepening understanding of the self and other" (Guntersdorfer & Golubeva 2018: 55). Paul Bloom (2016: 16) defines empathy as "the act of coming to experience the world as you think someone else does". Empathy is viewed as the disposition that enables one to put her/himself in another's place, and consequently be able to understand or judge others' emotions and share the feelings of another person. Michael Byram (1989: 89) states that empathy is more demanding than tolerance in that "it requires understanding, an activity rather than a passive acceptance; it requires change of viewpoint, which has to be worked towards, engaged with"⁴.

Guntersdorfer and Golubeva start their analysis by reflecting on the German word for empathy, *Mit-Erleben* "with-living, co-experience" (Breithaupt 2017b: 15). This concept is echoed in the above-mentioned definition of empathy given by Bloom. The idea

³ Guntersdorfer and Golubeva distinguish between Cognitive empathy (understanding), Emotional empathy (emotional response) and Intercultural empathy (others' perception of events/situations).

⁴ Focusing on the European perspective, Byram refers to the three volumes *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture*, Council of Europe, and indicates the value of empathy, listed among the skills in the model of competences: autonomous learning skills; analytical and critical thinking skills; skills of listening and observing; empathy; flexibility and adaptability; linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills; cooperation skills; conflict-resolution skills (keynote speech at the conference "Educating the Global Citizen. International Perspectives on Foreign Language Teaching in the Digital Age", held in Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich in 25-28 March 2019).

of “with-living, co-experience” has an emotional/affective dimension, which includes “the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thoughts; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge” (Mayer & Salovey 1997: 10). We can deduce that without empathy “the ability to regulate emotions, cope and react appropriately in an intercultural encounter (or in any kind of successful interpersonal interaction) would not be possible” (Guntersdorfer & Golubeva 2018: 57)⁵.

Lisa Hollingsworth, Mary J. Didelot and Judith O. Smith (2003: 139) state that 10% of the hate crimes reported in the US occur within schools, and argue that it is the role of the educator to teach empathy to students because it cannot be assumed that these skills are being addressed within the family setting. Expressing care for another is not an innate ability inherently present in some more than others, but rather a skill that can be taught and nurtured through a supportive educational environment. Helen Riess (2017), in her role as director of the empathy and relational science program at Massachusetts General Hospital, recently developed a series of online courses aimed at training physicians on connecting more effectively with people. According to her research, empathy is a mutable and teachable human competency.

Taking into consideration this research, Guntersdorfer and Golubeva (2018) argue that empathy should be taught since it is a desirable quality in many work-places; schools and university campuses are now much more diverse (ethnically, culturally, economically, socially); empathy is important in developing intercultural competence because it helps taking an ethnorelative view of cultural phenomena (Deardoff 2006):

We believe that it is important for the field of intercultural education to take up [Helen Riess’s] insights to expand the possibilities for systematically incorporating activities and materials to enhance empathy and other aspects of emotional intelligence for intercultural communication [...]. In terms of classroom practice, we believe it is advantageous to address empathy and other aspects of EI without an intercultural focus in the first instance. For example, teachers can help students reflect on the general role of empathy in human emotional functioning and relationship management, such as by drawing attention to how humans experience and perceive emotions (Guntersdorfer & Golubeva 2018: 58).

Nicholas Epley (2015) and other social psychologists affirm that perspective-taking alone is not enough. Instead of “taking-perspectives” (implicitly tracing observed behaviours to intentions), they encourage to consider “getting-perspectives”, meaning the verbalisation and the verification of our perceived cues (Johnson & Bechler 1998; Ames, Benjamin & Brockner 2012; Epley 2015: 180-181). Referring to these studies, Guntersdorfer and Golubeva emphasise the importance of meta-cognitive tasks when addressing empathy in

⁵ Recently, scholars have also explored the “dark side” of empathy, specifically Jesse Prince (2011), Paul Bloom (2016) and Fritz Breithaupt (2017b) warning about assigning only positive attributes to empathy, which can be used for manipulative instrumentalisation in intercultural situations with an uneven distribution of power between the interlocutors. In this respect Bloom writes: “Empathy is like cholesterol with a good type and a bad type” (2016: 16).

the intercultural communication classroom, facilitating opportunities in which students can gain experience in relating emotions and spending more time on personal reflections.

Once a certain amount of awareness has been raised regarding the nature of empathy, students can be encouraged to consider the cultural variability of emotional experience, the challenges of interpreting emotional clues across cultures, and the role that empathy plays in increasing one's attentiveness to the effect of emotion on intercultural communication [...] students can be encouraged to consider how empathy helps individuals with interpreting and relating across cultural boundaries (Byram 1997) and using dialogue around emotional experience to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural contexts (Deardoff 2006) (Guntersdorfer & Golubeva 2018: 59).

Teachers can experiment with creative ways of helping students to become more attuned to the ways in which individuals experience and communicate emotions. "[T]here is a clear role for the teacher to create opportunities for students not only to empathise with individuals from diverse backgrounds but also to be able to formulate one's perceptions and seek to understand emotions in dialogue with others" (Guntersdorfer & Golubeva 2018: 60).

2b. Intercultural competence and intercultural citizenship: Michael Byram

There is a synergy with work conducted by Michael Byram (1997) and Darla K. Deardorff (2006) in relation to empathy. Byram's (1997) notion of "interpreting and relating" underlines that intercultural competence is not a form of static knowledge that resides within each individual, but rather is something that is achieved as interlocutors actively interpret linguistic and non-linguistic messages and draw on cultural knowledge to enhance common ground. Emotional cues are necessarily embodied within linguistic and non-linguistic messages and are therefore a core part of the meaning-making process which requires to be negotiated. "Related to this, Deardoff (2006) emphasises the importance of empathy and taking ethnorelative view of cultural phenomena in developing intercultural competence, which she sees primarily in terms of interacting effectively and appropriately" (Guntersdorfer & Golubeva 2018: 55).

Byram (1997) was one of the first researchers to define intercultural competence. He argued that when people from other languages and/or cultures interact in a social context, they contribute with what they know about their own country, but also with what they know and think of people from other cultures. In this sense, both knowledge and attitude are important and they are affected by the processes of intercultural communication, which, in his words, refer to "the skills of interpretation and establishing relationships between aspects of the two cultures" and "the skills of discovery and interaction" (Byram 1997: 33). In order to organise the intercultural dimension, which consists of sustaining interaction and building communication for the development of intercultural skills, we firstly need to offer students the opportunity to build relationships and develop communicative tools, while at the same time helping them to reflect on different ways of doing things and the ability to accept different views and opinions. Intercultural competence consists of a "set of cognitive,

affective, and behavioural skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts” (Bennett 2008: 16).

An ever-increasing although challenging objective in teaching foreign languages, cultures and literatures is the development of intercultural citizenship, which envisions learners as working actively to deal with world issues (Leask 2015: 17) while tackling them in context specific settings (Porto & Byram 2015: 24). Intercultural Citizenship integrates the pillar of intercultural communicative competence from foreign language education with the emphasis on civic action in the community from citizenship education (Porto 2014).

The concept of “intercultural citizenship” (IC), which was introduced by Byram (2008), is postulated as a learning outcome to guide curriculum designers and teachers in school and higher education. [...]. It is parallel to other concepts such as “global citizenship”, “intercultural competence”, or “cultural awareness”, which are commonly used in education [...] (Wagner & Byram 2017: 1)⁶.

In Byram’s recent intercultural citizenship construct he focuses on the concept of active citizenship, “being involved in the life of one’s community, both local and national” (Wagner & Byram 2017: 3). Intercultural citizenship is instrumental in promoting the development of foreign language speaking citizens who are able to act and interact in international contexts effectively, through active citizenship implemented through civic actions in their own national communities (Porto, Houghton & Byram 2017: 6)⁷. Intercultural citizenship “occurs when people who perceive themselves as having different cultural affiliations from one another interact and communicate, and then analyze and reflect on this experience and act on that reflection by engaging in civic or political activity” (Byram, Golubeva, Hui & Wagner 2017: 9).

2c. *The creation of an alternative learning space from Edward Soja’s ‘thirdspace’: virtual exchange*

The debate on the perception of space has been particularly lively over the last five decades. In 1974 in *La production de l’espace* Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) considered social space, in an attempt to establish the importance of ‘lived’ experiences; he argued that geographical space is fundamentally social. Lefebvre implies that ‘absolute space’ cannot exist because it is colonised by social activity. Every society produces its own space, which is a realm of social relations. In 1989 Edward Soja (1940-2015) referred to Lefebvre, and in his book *Post-modern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* confirmed the importance

⁶ In particular, Byram’s concept of intercultural citizenship entails: learning more about one’s own country by comparison; learning more about ‘otherness’ in one’s own country (especially linguistic/ethnic minorities); becoming involved in activities outside school; making class-to-class links to compare and act on a topic in two or more countries (Byram 2008: 130).

⁷ Wagner’s and Byram’s most recent definition of intercultural citizenship follows: causing/facilitating intercultural citizenship experience, which includes activities of working with others to achieve an agreed end; analysis and reflection on the experience and on the possibility of further social and/or political activity; thereby creating learning that is cognitive, attitudinal, behavioural change in the individual; and a change in self-perception, in relationships with people of different social groups (Porto, Houghton & Byram 2017: 3-4).

of the study of space. He contended that our current environment is, before all else, a social construction of space. Referring to Lefebvre and Michel Foucault (1926-1984), in *Thirdspace* (1996) Soja criticised the two prevailing modes of analysing space, a dominant approach that interpreted the spatiality of our lives primarily in terms of the configuration of material forms, mappable “things in space”, and a more subjective alternative that emphasised mental representations of those material mappable forms. Lefebvre called these two modes “conceived space” (professional and theoretical; cartographers, urban planners, property speculators) and “perceived space” (of everyday social life and commonsensical perception). Lefebvre proposed a third mode which he called ‘lived space’, affirming that the person who is fully human also dwells in a “lived space” of the imagination. Similarly, Foucault noted these two dominant modes of thinking about space, and suggested they were insufficient to understand the simultaneously real and imagined “other” spaces in which we live, in which our individual biographies are played out, in which social relations develop and change, and in which history is made. In a lecture held by Foucault in 1967 on “Des espaces autres”, and in an essay of the same title published in 1984, he described space as an active and heterogeneous medium. What Lefebvre called “lived space”, Foucault called “espaces autres”, “other” spaces, significantly different spaces, a counter-space that exists outside the usual order of things. Soja’s concept of “thirdspace” is derived from Foucault’s and Lefebvre’s notion of a counter-space, Lefebvre’s “lived space” and Foucault’s “espaces autres”. He uses the concept of “thirdspace” to refer to a specific way of thinking about and interpreting socially produced space. It is a way of thinking that sees the spatiality of our lives, the human geographies in which we live, as having the same scope and critical significance as the historical and social dimensions of our lives⁸.

In Foucault’s lecture of 1967 on “Des espaces autres”, where the interest is directed towards space as a “cultural construct” and “social product”, we could trace back the actual origin of the concept of “spatial turn”, a cultural trend over the last few decades which has been responsible for in the reinsertion of space into the social sciences and humanities (Warf & Arias 2009). If we consider the “spatial turn” in its pedagogical dimension, and Foucault’s, Lefebvre’s and Soja’s conceptualisation of a counter-space, we can detect a possible connection between this counter-space and the development of an alternative learning space, enhanced and shaped by social relationships, a “relational counter-space”⁹. The relevance of foreign languages and literatures has increased immensely in the education of critical and collective, local and global citizens; the necessity of expanding learning environments through the conception and allocation of further spaces for inter-linguistic and

⁸ In *Seeking Spatial Justice* (2010) Soja writes: “For at least the past century, thinking about the interrelated historical and social aspects of our lives has tended to be much more important and widely practiced than emphasizing a pertinent critical spatial perspective [...]. In recent years, however, the way we interpret the relation between the social, the historical, and the spatial aspects of our lives has begun to change in significant ways. A new and different approach to thinking about space and spatiality has been emerging in conjunction with what some have described as a spatial turn affecting nearly all the human sciences” (2010: 3).

⁹ The idea of relational counter space has been interestingly discussed by Sabine Knierbein in “Public space as relational counter space: scholarly minefield or epistemological opportunity?” (Tornaghi & Knierbein 2015).

intercultural interactions is now evident. Ways to achieve alternative, meaningful environments in teaching second and foreign languages and cultures can be experimented through the creation of “counter-spaces”, spaces for inter-linguistic and intercultural interactions enhanced and shaped by the social relationships and spatial practices that unfold in and through that space, and which could be designed through cross-institutional collaborations and virtual exchanges between students. A space which is built in terms of the lived experiences of people can foster empathy.

Why virtual exchange? Over the course of the last decade technology appears to have become the primary means through which new spaces of educational interactions are created. Telecollaboration, Online Intercultural Exchanges or Virtual Exchange¹⁰, are terms used to refer to the engagement of groups of learners engaged in online intercultural interactions and collaboration projects with partners from other cultural contexts or geographical locations as an integrated part of their educational curriculum. In recent years, approaches to virtual exchange have evolved in different contexts and different areas of education, and these approaches have had very diverse organisational structures and pedagogical objectives (O’Dowd 2018)¹¹. There is an increasing amount of literature on initiatives related to joint international online learning environments that use synchronous video communication tools to teach a foreign language. The perceived outcomes illustrate positive results both in terms of language acquisition and in terms of learning experience for students. Virtual exchange is widely seen as having a high potential of removing physical and mental boundaries between learners, and offering opportunity for cross-national dialogue. Overall, virtual exchange aims to foster the development of foreign language skills but also of intercultural competence through culture-based activities. Besides promoting language learning, “good” telecollaborative tasks (see Byram, Golubeva, Hui & Wagner 2017) foster the intercultural analysis of the practices and values of the cultures of the groups involved in the virtual exchanges. Robert O’Dowd recently wrote that

although progress might be slow, it is clear that, in a world increasingly characterised by the rise of right-wing extremism, religious fanaticism, and populist political movements, virtual exchange will have an important role to play as educators strive to develop active, informed, and responsible citizens who are tolerant of difference and who are actively engaged in political and democratic processes (2018: 21).

The intercultural citizenship-related dimension of virtual exchange envisions learners as active global agents able to tackle world challenges (Leask 2015: 17). Here, telecollabora-

¹⁰ I will follow Robert O’Dowd’s proposal to use *Virtual Exchange* as an umbrella term, in R. O’Dowd (2018: 3).

¹¹ “The term ‘telecollaboration’ has been used to describe many different types of online exchanges, ranging from loosely guided language practice of the target language (e.g. online conversations in text or oral chat) to elaborately designed project-based collaborative exchanges” (Dooly & O’Dowd 2018: 17). “In recent years, approaches to virtual exchange have evolved in different contexts and different areas of education, and these approaches have had, at times, very diverse organisational structures and pedagogical objectives” (O’Dowd 2018: 1).

tive tasks are expected to foster not only students' foreign language skills and intercultural competence but also learners' engagements with global problems tailored to local contexts: intercultural citizenship education means that learners would be encouraged to act together with others in the world and that those others would be in other countries and speakers of other languages. While engaged in intercultural citizenship-focused virtual exchange, partner groups analyse together topics related to their own societies within an intercultural framework; as a result of the co-participated analysis, each national group plans and carries out a form of civic action in its own community to foster social changes (Porto, Houghton & Byram 2017: 6): "[language] learners [...] would decide on a project of significance in their community, share ideas and plans with each other, critically analyse the reasons/assumptions in their plans by comparison with the plans of the other group, carry out and report to each other their projects" (Byram *et al.* 2017: 26). From an intercultural citizenship perspective, it is expected that virtual exchange tasks will foster transformative processes in the students engaged in virtual exchange: as Liddicoat and Scarino suggest "[t]he goal of learning is to decenter learners from their pre-existing assumptions and practices and to develop an intercultural identity through engagement with an additional culture. The borders between self and other are explored, problematized, and redrawn" (2013: 29). These kinds of projects will allow the development of civic actions in local national communities: "[t]here is a challenge [...] about how to make linguistic-competence oriented courses not only intercultural but also citizenship-oriented" (Porto, Houghton & Byram 2017: 237). Central to intercultural citizenship projects is the opportunity given to students to build relationships, to recognise what they think and what they feel and to verbalise their own and others' thoughts and emotions effectively.

3. A virtual exchange between Italy and the U.S.A.

Based on the recommendations made by O'Dowd and Ware (2009), O'Dowd (2017, 2018), Byram, Golubeva, Hui and Wagner (2017) and Guntersdorfer and Golubeva (2018) about factors that educators should consider when designing and implementing tasks for virtual exchanges, we created an intercultural project between Italy and the U.S.A.¹², which will be presented in synthesis; one of the main objectives is building (intercultural) empathy in teaching foreign languages, cultures and literatures. A transnational, telecollaborative project, namely "Language Forward Initiative", will be developed over three years (Autumn 2018 – Spring 2021) at the University of Virginia. Eleven languages programmes, including Italian, are involved in this initiative and each programme has designed a unique virtual place to develop students' cultural and linguistic fluency. In this context, we designed a foreign language acquisition project based on a virtual exchange between Italian Studies, UVa, and a pre-University institution, an Italian upper-secondary school in Milan. Our project created a virtual space as an integrated part of the educational curriculum, parallel to

¹² The project was designed by Roberta Trapè (School of Languages and Linguistics, University of Melbourne) and Francesca Calamita (Italian Studies, University of Virginia, the coordinator of the research group on the "Language Forward Initiative", Institute of World Languages). It is supported by a Jefferson Trust Award awarded to the Institute of World Languages in Spring 2018.

the space-time of traditional class-tuition, which students inhabit with a great degree of autonomy. With regards specifically to course design, we blended face-to-face foreign language lessons with Skype-mediated digital learning. Thirty North American students studying Italian were partnered for two semesters (Autumn 2018 and Spring 2019) with thirty Italian upper-secondary school studying English to talk in dyads in desktop videoconferencing about selected conversational topics through a synchronous video communication tool (Skype). During the virtual exchange, students worked in dyads and met weekly to talk 15/20 minutes in Italian and 15/20 minutes in English. Dialogical interaction, focused on contemporary Italian/North American cultural topics in authentic, communicative language learning environments, was promoted through specific activities and tasks: information exchange, comparison and analysis, and collaboration and product creation (O'Dowd & Ware 2009: 175-178); opinion exchange, decision making, and problem solving.

The project was divided into six Skype meetings over the course of each semester. The creation of joint international online learning spaces offered students the opportunity to talk to distant native speakers of a target language of a similar age. The learners were put in a scenario which required them to both use and produce their knowledge in a meaningful context; they were encouraged to think in a critical and comparative way, while practicing the target language. The out-of-class technology-mediated activities fostered the development of students' speaking and interactional skills and their fluency in the target language. Moreover, they also helped students to build relationships and develop intercultural communicative competence by improving their ability to articulate cultural similarities and differences between Italy and North America through culture-based activities. Thus the intercultural analysis of the practices and values of the cultures of the groups involved in the virtual exchanges was fostered. To cultivate the intercultural dimension, we helped the students to sustain interaction and build communication, to reflect on different ways of doing things and to be capable of accepting different views and opinions. A disposition for critical thinking allowed students and teachers to reflect on messages and explore differences in view, understanding controversies and debates. A focus on empathy provided opportunities for students to become experienced in describing emotions and spending more time on personal reflections. The foundation of the overall project is that of transporting the student in a virtual relational "counter-space" in which "learners examine phenomena and experience their own cultural situatedness while seeking to enter into the cultural worlds of others" (Scarino 2014: 391) and learning to reflect on their own and others' thoughts and emotions, and being able to verbalise them effectively. In this digital space, students are enabled and encouraged to leave their ordinary learning environment and to enter, on a weekly basis, a new and far more personalised space for cross-cultural and inter-linguistic exchange.

Before the Skype meetings commenced, students were given a list of weekly cultural topics, carefully sequenced, to be discussed during the Virtual Exchange¹³. The topics were chosen to foster students' reflections on culture-specific issues including stereotyping, in-

¹³ In order to integrate face-to-face instructions and online learning effectively, the digital learning project provided UVa and Italian students with the opportunity to converse with distant Italian/North American students about culture-specific topics interrelated with the topics dealt within in-class face-to-face instruction.

tercultural competence, empathy and emotions. A challenging objective for the remaining two academic years (from Autumn 2019 to Spring 2021) is that of the development of intercultural citizenship-focused virtual exchange, where both groups of students plan and carry out civic actions in their local communities. It encourages students to become global citizens ready to act and interact in multilingual and international contexts through active citizenship (Wagner & Byram 2017: 3). This is done by taking students out of their comfort zone and engaging them in real-world tasks and contributions through an intercultural citizenship project of significance in their own communities: after focus groups discussions with students, we have chosen to deal with gender equality and the use of gender-inclusive language. As such, the objectives are: learning beyond the classroom's walls through virtual exchange and contact with local organisations (gender equality and gender-based violence); community engagement; intercultural communicative competence; intercultural active citizenship; solidarity and empathy; motivation and engagement (meaningful learning); linguistic, digital, interpersonal creativity.

This intercultural citizenship virtual exchange consists of two main tasks (in-group and out-group): the former is developed within the group, and the latter through the trans-Atlantic virtual exchange. Both groups of students undertake this two-step task. First, each group of students has to develop and negotiate in class a shared position within the group in class on the issue of gender equality and gender-inclusive language (focus groups; students' written reflections; interview with local organisations and citizens). A task sequence has been structured to invite students to reflect on the chosen topic and to be able to verbalise their own and others' emotions¹⁴; reflective tasks concentrate on developing negotiation skills. As a second step, students have to discuss the topic with their peers across the Atlantic Ocean. At the beginning students are provided with the selected topic and materials, and then are asked to explore them on their University / School platforms (definitions, articles and videos on campaigns for gender equality, and for the use of inclusive language or against it). The task is to analyse the documents uploaded to websites. The topics are presented within the group in class (Self-Reflection 1) and at this point the analysis starts: students debate the different views on gender equality and inclusive language in their countries in small teams within the 'country' group, and again within the whole group. They structure and use ethnographic interviews to investigate the issue in their respective language speaking settings (local organisations, citizens). The next step is that of developing and negotiating a shared analysis and plan actions locally (Self-Reflection 2); the students present in virtual exchange their own group's views on the issue talking in dyads and in a final group-to-group encounter; students subsequently consider the other group's analysis and discuss others' views; they will reflect on others' views (Self-Reflection 3); students create collaborative products (namely: a website; lessons within their own institution and/or in the community; a play) to bring the issue of gender equality and gender-inclusive language into their local communities. This multimodal project allows students to engage critically with Italian and North American media and to become sensitive to the gendered politics of language (Self-Reflec-

¹⁴ The task sequence follows some of the indications suggested by Guntersdorfer and Golubeva (2018).

tion 4). Students will be asked ultimately to evaluate the project, including self-evaluation, and by providing feedback¹⁵.

4. Conclusion

Ideally, this project creates spaces where students' social participation and engagement is stimulated and officially valued, and where international relationships with students living in another country, and links with the local community are formed. It aims to create effective virtual exchanges of international teams, in an effort to address real current social problems in innovative ways. It brings critical issues of today's world to the fore in the teaching of foreign languages, cultures and literatures, and empowers students to actively reflect upon their role in a democratic society. A focus on empathy and solidarity encourages students to recognise their emotions and to express them, activating their ability to regulate emotions, cope, act and interact effectively in intercultural encounters. It makes them aware of how empathy can help them with interpreting and relating across cultures, and by using dialogue around emotional experience to communicate effectively and build relationships in intercultural contexts.

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¹⁵ The project was designed according to the "Blended learning" and "Knowledge-building" approaches. Blended learning can overcome the lecturer-centered lessons creating a learning environment in which the production of knowledge can be shared between the teacher and the learner; this opens up space for the learners to bring into the lesson their own perspective and culture (Gruba & Hinkelman 2012). The idea behind knowledge-building applied to the classroom is that knowledge can be an experience shared by the teacher and the students and it leads to the creation of ideas which can have a "public life", a social utility beyond the classroom. With the knowledge-building approach the final result is obtained through the active and collaborative efforts of the teacher with the students, who have an active role in the learning process and play a fundamental part in it. The aim is to create an environment where the focus is not for the students to learn notions but to create ideas (Bereiter & Scardamalia 2014; Kern & Develotte 2018).

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Nickolas Komninos

Narratives and Critical Literacy in Health Websites for Children

Abstract I: Il presente studio intende analizzare, dal punto di vista delle competenze critiche, le narrazioni all'interno di siti web di tipo *edutainment* che hanno l'obiettivo di informare i bambini sulla salute e il benessere. Queste narrazioni sono costruite da sviluppatori adulti con l'obiettivo di attirare l'interesse dei bambini, promuoverne l'empatia e spingerne la partecipazione.

I risultati sono presentati sottolineando gli aspetti chiave e le strategie pertinenti adottate da bambini per interpretare i testi multimodali, considerando in particolare: le capacità critiche di bambini di diverse età; lo sviluppo di strategie per l'interpretazione del significato; e le strategie adottate per superare la confusione semiotica o la possibilità di errori di interpretazione che potrebbero limitare la promozione di interconnessioni di uguaglianze.

Questo contributo intende aggiungere nuovi dati alla comprensione del ruolo che la narrazione gioca nei siti web creati da adulti per dare informazioni ai bambini; inoltre, intende promuovere lo sviluppo dell'autonomia e della capacità multisemiotica nei bambini. Di conseguenza, lo studio promuove anche l'ecologia comunicativa attraverso diverse generazioni e comunità di pratica. Una migliore costruzione dei testi multimodali da parte degli adulti può portare ad un miglioramento dell'empowerment, della partecipazione e dell'azione sociale nei bambini. Lo studio analizza anche lo sviluppo del metalinguaggio e la consapevolezza dei percorsi di lettura da parte dei bambini, dunque il loro sviluppo critico e digitale. Le linee guida e i best practices sono presentati per favorire l'empowerment del bambino.

Abstract II: This paper deals with the story-telling narratives that are created in *edutainment* websites that inform children about health and well-being, from a critical literacy approach. These story-telling narratives are employed by the website designers to capture the interest of children, to nurture empathy and to encourage participation.

The research results are presented highlighting key points and relevant strategies for text interpretation by the children, considering: the critical literacy of children of different ages; observing the development of strategies for interpretation of meaning; and the strategies adopted to overcome semiotic confusion or possible misinterpretation that could hinder the aims of fostering equitable interconnections.

This paper furthers understanding of the role story-telling plays in websites designed by adults to inform children and aids safe child autonomy and mul-

tiliteracy skills. This fosters communication ecology across generations and communities of practice. Better multimodal text construction that involves both adults and children, rather than just adults, can lead to greater child empowerment, participation and social action. Child metalanguage and child recognition of reading pathways in-line with their digital and critical literacy development is also analysed. Guidelines and best practices for greater child empowerment are also presented.

Introduction

In this paper, the findings and conclusions reached during an Italian nationally financed project called MACE (Multimodal Awareness for Child Empowerment) are presented. It specifically refers to the data dealing with *edutainment* websites that inform children about health and well-being, using a critical literacy approach (Perez Tornero & Varis 2010). It focuses on literacy, skills and competence (Ala-Mutka 2011; Unsworth 2011; Jewitt 2012; Jewitt, Bezemer & O'Halloran 2016) with literacy considered as a social phenomenon (Jones & Hafner 2012) whose levels of competence are connected to levels and strategies of social participation and action and mastering a 'multiplicity of discourses' (Cope & Kalantzis 2014).

The analysis focuses on the critical literacy of children of different ages (Ilomäki, Kantosalo & Lakkala 2010) when dealing with informative or pedagogic multimodal texts observing the development of strategies for interpretation of meaning (Ananiadou & Claro 2009) and the strategies adopted to overcome semiotic confusion or possible misinterpretation.

These observations, analysis and results are aimed at promoting safe child autonomy and multiliteracy skills (Tyner 2014) and fostering communication ecology across generations and communities of practice by contributing to better multimodal text construction paving the way for greater child empowerment through enhanced participation and social action. Metalanguage used by children (Baldry 2011, Baldry & Thibault 2006) is also considered along with how children recognise reading pathways (Hamston 2006), this is done with child digital and critical literacy development in mind.

Guidelines for best practices for greater child empowerment based on these results are also presented. The paper and guidelines contribute to the dissemination of methodological tools for future projects in relation to best practices so as to promote awareness of problematic issues when dealing with multimodal texts created to protect children's well-being and health.

The research questions deal with the investigation of children's perception and strategies for extracting meaning from websites about health and well-being. The main questions are: what is the level of critical thinking and multiliteracy skills of children from 8-13 years old when dealing with multimodal texts in ICT-mediated edutainment websites dealing with health and well-being? How can ICT-mediated texts actually facilitate interconnections, creative skills and interactivity (Baron 2008) in a safe but autonomous way? What is the suitable, age-related, strategy to develop greater child critical awareness of their multi-

literacy and multimodal skills, fundamental in the construction of their identity in a social group?

The Theoretical Framework

Narrative is central to human experience, and a key way that experience is made meaningful. Throughout its development, it has provided a way for shaping children's experience, reflecting how they fit into their society, and helping them construct meaning for themselves. As narrative evolved to find its rightful place in the mix of technology, education, and entertainment within children's print culture, so it is evolving within the rapidly developing digital environment. In *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, the psychologist Polkinghorne discusses how narrative is central to human experience. He says that narrative is the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful (Polkinghorne 1988: 1). He also identifies that narrative has to do with activity rather than object, not the thing but the act (Polkinghorne 1988: 4). Morson and Emerson 1990 report that the critical literary scholar Bakhtin describes narratives as dialogues between people, between cultures, between different times, that they are not only texts but that human participation is integral, so dialogues involve writers and, critically, they involve readers. In the case of the digital environment, they involve users. Each medium, oral tradition, print, radio, film, television, has made its own contribution to the storytelling tradition. Each influences, borrows from, and depends on, the other media traditions. Computers were originally text-based, and much of the information they contain is still text-based; but image, sound, and animation quickly took their place alongside text, and many narrative techniques were borrowed from the television tradition. This concept is well expressed by Bolter (1996): the computer as hypertext, as symbol manipulator, is a writing technology in the tradition of the papyrus roll, the codex, and the printed book. The computer as virtual reality, as graphics engine, as perceptual manipulator, belongs to and extends the tradition of television, film and photography, and even representational painting. When children use a computer, they have before them, combined, all of the storytelling media of the past. This creates for a rich experience. It is part oral tradition, part print tradition, part television tradition, all integrated to create a fascinating whole. It can also create confusion and misinterpretation.

The theoretical basis for the research and analysis revolves around Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), Critical Discourse Studies, Multimodal Awareness and Literacy. MDA, developed from Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), is used to analyse the meaning-making resources in texts which are considered as the synergic co-deployment of a variety of verbal and non-verbal affordances: written language; oral components (including sound and music); film components (rhythm, editing, layout, etc.) (Baldry & Thibault 2006; Bateman 2008; Kress & van Leeuwen 2006 [1996]; Martinec & van Leeuwen 2009; Unsworth 2008; van Leeuwen 1999; Ventola *et al.* 2004).

Halliday places language at the heart of a multi-layered system, where each outer layer influences the next layer. The system works within the context of situation and ultimately the context of culture. When the outer and most influential level of a communication system is the culture within which it occurs. Halliday links contexts of situation to three social

functions of language: enacting speakers' relationships; construing their experience of social activity; and weaving these enactments and construals together as meaningful discourse. Accordingly, contexts of situation vary in these three general dimensions. The dimension concerned with relationships between interactants is known as Tenor; that concerned with their social activity is known as Field; and that concerned with the role of language is known as Mode. Halliday has characterised these three dimensions of a situation as follows: 'Field' refers to what is happening, the nature of the social action that is taking place; what the participants are engaged in; 'Tenor' refers to who is taking part, the nature of the participants, their statuses and roles; what kinds of role relationship are obtained, including permanent and temporary relationships; 'Mode' refers to the role language is playing in the interaction, what the participants are expecting language to do in the situation; the organisation of the text, and its function in the context (Halliday 1985-1989: 12).

Taken together the Tenor, Field and Mode constitute the Register of a text. That is, from the perspective of language, we will now refer to the context of situation of a text as its register. As register varies, so too do the patterns of meanings we find in a text. Because they vary systematically, we refer to Tenor, Field and Mode as register variables. As language realises its social contexts so each dimension of a social context is realised by a particular functional dimension of language. Halliday defines these functional dimensions as the 'metafunctions' of language: enacting relationships as the interpersonal metafunction; construing experience as the ideational metafunction; and organising discourse as the textual metafunction. Relations between register variables and language metafunctions are as follows:

Register

Tenor ('kinds of role relationship')
 Field ('the social action that is taking place')
 Mode ('what part language is playing')

Metafunction

interpersonal 'enacting'
 ideational 'construing'
 textual 'organising'

Critical Discourse Studies and Multimodal Awareness are also research areas stemming from SFL offering interpretation tools which are particularly relevant to the field of media discourse and the investigation of power relations and ideology related to e-community construction and accessibility (Caldas-Coulthard & Iedema 2008; Fairclough 2003; 2006; Wodak & Koller 2008; Lassen *et al.* 2006; van Dijk 2008).

MDA proposes a detailed framework for analysing how meaning is made focussing on the relationship and interaction with society. Systemic Functional Theory considers all communication acts as being multimodal. MDA also considers all communicative acts as being influenced and shaped by the societal and cultural contexts in which they are produced. Therefore, implicitly, they reproduce the values of the societal and cultural contexts that they are a product of, thus disseminating and preserving those cultural and societal values.

In this paper, literacy is considered as *mediated action* (Scollon 2002) and so is linked to the appropriation of tools to accomplish particular social practices. *Critical multimedia literacy* is a crucial element: as Lemke stated "Web pages and Websites are valued today for their integration of text, images, animations, video, voice, music, and sound effects [...] Website authoring is the new literacy of power" (Lemke 2006: 4).

As *literacy* is considered to be a *social phenomenon* and not only a set of cognitive or technical abilities (encoding or decoding spatial layout, organisational structure, pictures, etc.) (Jones & Hafner 2012) so communities of practice (CoP) become instrumental in codifying norms and participation. This means social competence is required to use *multimodal literacy collaboratively* (Rheingold 2012a, 2012b). *Multiliteracies* are considered as new literacies including multimodal awareness in the context of text production and fruition (Cope & Kalantzis 2009a, 2009b, 2014). Cope and Kalantzis (2008: 202) emphasise the power of learning environments that '[o]ffer and encourage multimodal expressions of meaning'. Pre-digital notions of literacy have been further advanced with the advent of digital tools and media developments. This process will inevitably continue and attempting to keep one definition that is applicable to all future contexts would not be possible as it would lose its relevance as new contexts develop. UNESCO suggest that as new situations develop so new levels of information literacy may be needed (Catts & Lau 2008).

It is important to understand (critical) literacy as a basic notion of understanding information and communicating with culturally agreed symbols and patterns is central to all the other types of literacies, including ICT, Internet, information and media literacy. ICT literacy is the narrowest digital concept, it concerns technical know-how and computer and software proficiency; Internet literacy is ICT literacy plus its successful usage in networked media environments; information literacy and media literacy concepts are very similar. However, information literacy is more focussed on the sourcing, arranging and processing of information; media literacy is more focussed on the skills relating to the interpretation, use and creation of media for individual benefit and participation. Critical thinking is central to both information and media literacy as it involves interaction with Communities of Practice.

Digital literacy, as originally defined by Gilster (1997), is the most far ranging notion, incorporating the central characteristics of the other concepts, but also having the added aspect of employing digital tools responsibly and effectively for individual task execution and development. This is actively advantaged by people networks. Information literacy and media literacy cover both digital and non-digital domains. However, their main characteristics are highly pertinent to the digital domain especially in terms of critical thinking.

When dealing with literacy and critical multimodal awareness in children, attempting to stick to one concept definition of literacy for the development of a framework can create more obstacles than it does in providing solutions. What is helpful is the acknowledgment of the fundamental characteristics of all the most central concepts. Martin states that looking for "one literacy to rule them all" is pointless (2006: 18). Bawden (2008) focusses on explaining the notion instead of defining it in relation to other notions. Martin concludes:

A multitude of literacies may be confusing and inconvenient, but it represents the reality of social life, where perspectives and situations vary immensely and are constantly changing. Literacies point to perceptions of need and empowerment in society, and a changing society will inevitably continue to create new ones (2006: 18).

In this paper, media literacy is central to the analysis and can be considered as the skills needed to: access, analyse and evaluate the impact of images, sounds and messages

in contemporary culture; proficiently communicate by means of the media available; increase awareness of messages communicated via this media; aid recognition of the methods adopted by these media to filter perception and opinion, shape culture and have an impact of the individual's decision-making processes; allow for critical analysis development and creative problem-solving skills; media education is a fundamental right akin to freedom of expression and the right to information, and is central to the maintenance of democracy; media literacy is necessary for full and active citizenship (Pérez Tornero 2004).

The ability to use media, to think critically, to assess information and ultimately to participate and communicate in a creative way are skills the individual must develop. There is a hierarchy of skills within media literacy: a pyramid structure with skills development going from bottom to top: from media availability, to media use, to critical understanding to communication. The lower levels need to be mastered before the higher levels. Thus, there is a distinction between skills connected with access and use; skills connected to critical understanding; and skills dealing with communicative production (Perez Tonerero & Varis 2010). These are the abilities necessary to nurture critical skills and also are a foundation for empowered and creative communication. The link has now been made between digital literacy, media literacy, critical thinking, information selection and processing, problem-solving; communication and interaction skills development, civic participation leading to civic responsibility and active citizenship.

Data Gathering Methodology

The aim of the study was to investigate children from the key literacy development age-range of 8-13 years, looking specifically at: 1) critical thinking and multiliteracy skills when dealing with multimodal texts in ICT-mediated edutainment websites; 2) how ICT-mediated texts can actually facilitate interconnections, creative skills and interactivity (Baron 2008); 3) what is the suitable, age-related, strategy to develop greater child critical awareness of their multiliteracy and multimodal skills, fundamental in the construction of their identity in a social group.

With these aims, study groups and research tools (questionnaires and semi-structured interviews) were developed. Over 180 children, from 8 to 13 years old, in three English language schools in North East Italy were involved in the whole project. The part dealing with health and well-being, the results of which are reported here, involved 86 children from one school, the Trieste International School. All these participants had informed written consent of the parents or guardians. The medium of instruction in the school is English with mainly native English speaker teachers, but a majority of the pupils come from non-English backgrounds. The school is the only school in Italy to issue school-leaving certificates which are fully and legally recognised by Italian law, a law that was designed for the school.

Before interviewing and data collection took place, a corpus of websites and educational videos were gathered and studied by the Udine research team. The criteria for selection was that the material was published by official institutional sources *i.e.* governmental agencies, public institutions or private institutions with a public accountability; the material was intended for children 8-13 years old; and that the communicative aims of the material were

specifically described by the institution that published it. A shortlist of possible material was drawn up and discussed with the teachers of the Trieste International School to confirm suitability. Draft questionnaires and semi-structured individual interviews were designed, and then shown to and discussed with the teaching staff of the school, after which they were later refined incorporating the teacher feedback. The definitive questionnaire (see Annex 1) and semi-structured interviews probed for understanding and to identify the strategies the children adopted to decode the multimodal texts. These interviews probed for the critical literacy aspect which dealt with the other possible ways the same thing could have been communicated and what presuppositions were made in the choices of the published material. This then led to questions probing metasemiotic awareness and the description and analysis of the semiotic system that had been employed.

The creation of the research tools applies Lemke's notion to education material for children that any

enumeration of the contexts of use of multimedia texts must include not just those of production and circulation, but also those of the local end-user. A complete social semiotic analysis would therefore add interview reports and on-site field notes and recordings of how people actually make use of and interpret [hypermedia texts] (Lemke 2002: 41).

The questionnaires and semi-structured interviews first focused on the home page and then moved on to the entire website. Emphasis was given to the homepage as it is the highest level of the website hierarchy and is the point of departure through which the children orientate themselves around the entire website. As Djonov says "the homepage can be interpreted as a website's highest-level macro-Theme (Martin 1992) because its function, following website usability research (cf. Krug 2000; Nielsen & Tahir 2002; Pearrow 2000) is to offer users access to the website's main sections and orientate them to the website by allowing them to predict how the website is organised and what information and activities it has to offer" (Djonov 2008: 221).

The observations and results from the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews allowed researchers to compare what meaning children of different ages and levels of media literacy were able to elicit from the homepage, and probed the strategies adopted to reach those meanings. The researchers then compared that first assessment to the meanings elicited by the same children from the website as a whole. The correspondence in assessments by various children could also be considered a gauge of website coherence. The children's interpretation of meaning of the homepage and then the whole website was then assessed as to whether, and to what extent, it matched and satisfied the aims of the website creators that was stated in their mission statements and descriptions of their aims.

After material selection had been made, and the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews finalised, the Udine research team carried out the research. The children were organised into groups according to age, with an equal number of boys and girls in the semi-structured interviews. The other areas of research, which are not reported in this article, focussed on ecology discourse (Bortoluzzi 2017) and citizen's rights (Vasta & Trevisan

2017). These other two research areas of the same project followed the same methodology, but the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were slightly modified for the specific websites and videos used in each school and age group. The questionnaire dealing with the 'Health' material is included in the annexes (Annex 1). A questionnaire was also developed for the teachers to answer. All questionnaires were administered on paper and individually filled in by pen. The health websites chosen for analysis were:

Websites

8-10 year olds: Scrub Club (NSF International Public Health and Safety Organisation); <http://www.scrubclub.org/home.aspx>

10-11 year olds: Body and Mind (Centre for disease Control and Prevention); www.bam.gov

11-13 year olds: Kid's Quest (Centre for disease Control and Prevention); <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/kids/index.html>

The procedure for gathering data was identical for all groups. The schools assigned one hour of class time for each class to participate in the study. In this hour, the pupils were put in groups of two and each pair had access to one computer. The children were then introduced to the relative website homepage, asked to 'study it' without clicking any hyperlink or accessing other pages. They were then asked to fill in the questionnaire relating to the homepage. They were then given the opportunity to explore the whole website and then answer the questions relating to the entire website.

The children were monitored at all times by researchers and teachers who offered advice or further explanation if needed and ensured the children kept to the time limits. Then six children per class, three girls and three boys, were chosen by the teachers as representative of a range of cognitive and literacy competences. These children were individually interviewed by the researchers using the semi-structured interview scripts, recorded in accordance to the European Commission guidelines on ethics in social sciences and humanities research. The aim was to further develop and clarify the written answers. In total, 86 pupil and 6 teacher questionnaires were completed, and 36 interviews were recorded. All the data was transferred by the researchers from the paper and pen questionnaires into LimeSurvey and analysed. LimeSurvey is a free and open source on-line statistical survey web app. As a web server-based software it enables users using a web interface to develop and publish surveys, collect responses, create statistics, and export the resulting data to other applications.

Data Analysis

When the children could only look at the homepages, they were asked the question: "What is the website about?" The results reported in Table 1 show, unsurprisingly, that there was increasing correlation with age, between the interpreted meaning by the children from the homepage and the meaning of the website creators (as stated in the mission statements and 'about' section of the websites). According to these results, there was a marked increase in this correspondence around the age group 9/11 years old. This table reports corresponding and complete answers.

Tab. 1. Corresponding and Complete Interpretation of Homepage.

School grade and age group	Percentage
Gr 3 / 8 years	21.43%
Gr 4 / 9 years	71.44%
Gr 5 / 10 years	17.65%
Gr 6 / 11 years	78.57%
Gr 7 / 12 years	81.25%
Gr 8 / 13 years	90%

This is more evident in Table 2 which reports the results of corresponding complete and corresponding incomplete answers compared to misinterpretation and no answers. The results suggest that interpretation of meaning from complex multimodal texts, in line with web designer's aims, increases with age. That is to say it develops alongside cognitive development, experience and media literacy.

Tab. 2. Corresponding and Incomplete compares to Misinterpretation of Homepage.

School grade and age group	Corresponding but incomplete	Misinterpreted or no answer
Gr 3 / 8 years	35.72%	64.28%
Gr 4 / 9 years	78.57%	21.43%
Gr 5 / 10 years	64.71%	35.29%
Gr 6 / 11 years	85.72%	14.28%
Gr 7 / 12 years	87.50%	12.50%
Gr 8 / 13 years	90.00%	10.00%

Table 3 reports the results to question 2 of the questionnaire "How do you know what it is about". The younger the child, the more emphasis was given to the interactive elements of the homepage (games, moving dynamic images, sound) to extract meaning. To put that another way, verbal resources (the written word) seems to become more important in meaning extraction alongside cognitive development. The results suggest that emphasis on non-pertinent interactive elements on the homepages created confusion and misinterpretation of meaning among younger users and less confusion for the older users. This suggests that different reading paths should be constructed for different age groups with great consideration of the impact the interactive elements will have of the central message, especially for young children.

When interviewing the children, there was a computer placed in front of them with the homepage they had studied on the screen. When asked to further explain the reasons for the first answer ("What is the website about?"), it became clear that their attention was drawn to the moving, flashing images, videos, images with sound effects and banners. The confusion occurred in the younger children as they did not have the critical skills to omit these distracting elements from their interpretation of the central message of the website.

When these elements had little or nothing to do with the central themes of the website they detracted the child's attention and created confusion. There was a lack of cohesion between website content and pertinence of dynamic elements on the homepage, for the younger age groups in this study. We termed this phenomenon 'semiotic noise'. By this we mean the semiotic overload that potentially complicates the decoding of the text.

Tab. 3. Interpretation through integrated semiotic channels, emphasis on interactive elements.

School grade and age group	Percentage
Gr 3 / 8 years	71.43%
Gr 4 / 9 years	42.86%
Gr 5 / 10 years	64.71%
Gr 6 / 11 years	42.86%
Gr 7 / 12 years	37.50%
Gr 8 / 13 years	0.00%

Semiotic noise became more significant the worse the salience balancing became. Salience, in the field of multimodality, refers to the different degrees to which elements attract the viewers' attention. By "salience balancing", we intend the coherence of the verbal and non-verbal cues in these complex multimodal texts to communicate the intended message to the intended age group. To achieve this, the author of the text must have a clear idea of the reading path the reader will choose.

These results suggest that the reading path will depend on the age, cognitive development, critical thinking skills and media literacy of the reader. Although no gauge was created to measure salience balancing, it became apparent when a number of students misinterpreted meaning for the same reasons.

This literacy development in the children meant that at around 9-11 years old they could start to extract meaning, understand organisation and orientate themselves well from interpreting the homepage. It was also observed, and will be discussed more fully later, that the older children with greater media literacy had developed such mastery in this exercise, that they had the confidence to explain where the 'mistakes' were in the homepage design using very advanced metalanguage. They not only recognised the genre but they had the patterns so well codified that they felt they could criticise the website designers. Their metasemiotic awareness was highly developed in this medium. The issue of genre and genre recognition is central to critical thinking and empowerment. However, genre in websites is more complex than in other media contexts as the generic structure potential is much greater as there is the possibility to draw from (and overlap) many different generic traditions: visual, verbal, spoken, written, and so on. Baldry and Thibault look into the issue of genre, in the traditional sense, and consider its applicability to hypertext: they acknowledge that a website will contain its own generic features; however, they postulate that hypertext is a 'hybrid' of *precursor genres* such as verbal text, visual images, and multimodal combinations of these (Baldry &

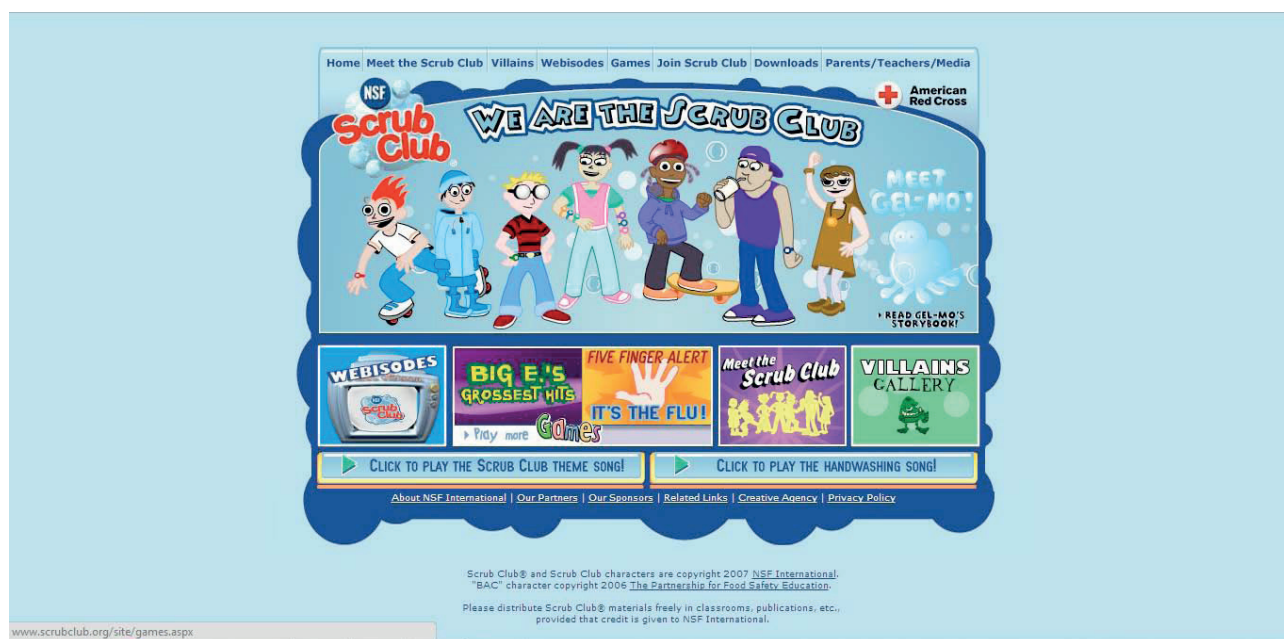


Fig. 1. The Scrub Club Homepage <http://www.scrubclub.org/home.aspx>.

Thibault 2006: 156). Lemke also describes hypermodality as “the conflation of multimodality and hypertextuality. Not only do we have linkages among text units of various scales, but we have linkages among text units, visual elements, and sound units [...]. In hypermedia, there are more kinds of connection than those provided for in print genres” (Lemke 2002: 301).

Djonov states that “Understanding user orientation is an important challenge for hypermedia design, discourse analysis and literary education. The need to address this challenge increases with the steady expansion of today’s most popular and complex hypermedia environment, the World Wide Web (WWW)” (Djonov 2008: 216). Certainly, in the case of websites for children, different criteria need to be considered to keep the focus of the communication clear and thus avoid distraction for children of different age-groups. The main issue is how the attention-grabbing elements are deployed as these attractive elements can also create some confusion for children, especially the younger ones.

Grades 3 and 4 - The Scrub Club

This website <http://www.scrubclub.org/home.aspx> was created by NSF International, an independent, not-for-profit non-governmental organisation, “dedicated to being the leading global provider of public health and safety-based risk management solutions while serving the interests of all stakeholders.” The aim of this website is “to raise awareness about the benefits of handwashing and ultimately improve the health of children and reduce school sick days.” Figure 1 shows the homepage.

From the answers to question 1 on the questionnaire, almost no participants were able to understand, from the homepage alone, that the website was about handwashing. Some participants deduced ‘hygiene’ or ‘cleaning’ because of the word ‘scrub’ and ‘flu’ and the

bubble sounds that are emitted when the mouse is moved over the page. The 2 children (in the same group) that did deduce 'handwashing' were both in the higher age-group and did so by reading the captions that appear when the mouse is held over one of the scrub club members. Even if the primary communicative aims of the website was not understood by the majority of children (92%) from the homepage, most children did understand the general orientation of the message and were interested in exploring the website: meeting the members of the 'Scrub Club'; watching the 'webisodes' or, most popular, 'playing the games'.

This website was partly chosen due to the low lexical content, but it would seem that even with little verbal decoding, the children in grades 3 and 4 were unable to correctly identify with clarity the subject matter of the website, *i.e.* the Field, in Halliday's terms (Halliday 1989). This was partly because the narrative within which the Field was placed overtook the importance of the Field itself. In the digital context, the narrative is the story within which the communicative aims are encapsulated (section 2 provides a deeper discussion of narrative in the digital environment). However, it seems that the primary communicative aims of this edutainment website (handwashing) became secondary to the narrative that they are encapsulated in (the Scrub Club). After spending time using the website, when probed about the Field of the website in the interviews, many children still thought the website was about 'the Scrub Club', when asked what they had learned, many did mention handwashing.

The relationship between the narrative and the Field is very delicate, as it incorporates the compromise between entertainment and education. Comparison with other media edutainment vehicles is useful here. Considering the long-running American education television series, *Sesame Street*, for example, the narrative employed here relies heavily on the *Sesame Street* characters to embed the educational content. The TV series vehicle allows this narrative to be developed over time and allows the communication of multiple educational topics in multiple contexts over a long period of time (as long as the series runs, years in the case of *Sesame Street*), all while the children are being entertained by the *Sesame Street* characters.

However, the genre of web-based edutainment has a much more limited time and scope in comparison to a TV series. It must communicate specific content and has less possibility to be reproduced to communicate other Fields. For this reason, the web-based genre does not have the opportunity to develop the narrative in the same way a TV based series does. In this website, the highly character-based narrative strategy seems to have similarities with the edutainment narrative tradition that comes from television but websites do not allow the development of such characterisation without creating a misdirection of attention for this age group, as the results suggest.

There was also an issue with the density and complexity of the verbal and non-verbal content. The reading path meant that to decipher the Field of the website, there would need to be complex linking between characters on the homepage, the puns within their names, the images of their transformed avatars, the sounds emitted from the cursor and the name 'Scrub Club'. Alternatively, the user would need to click and follow a number of hyperlink

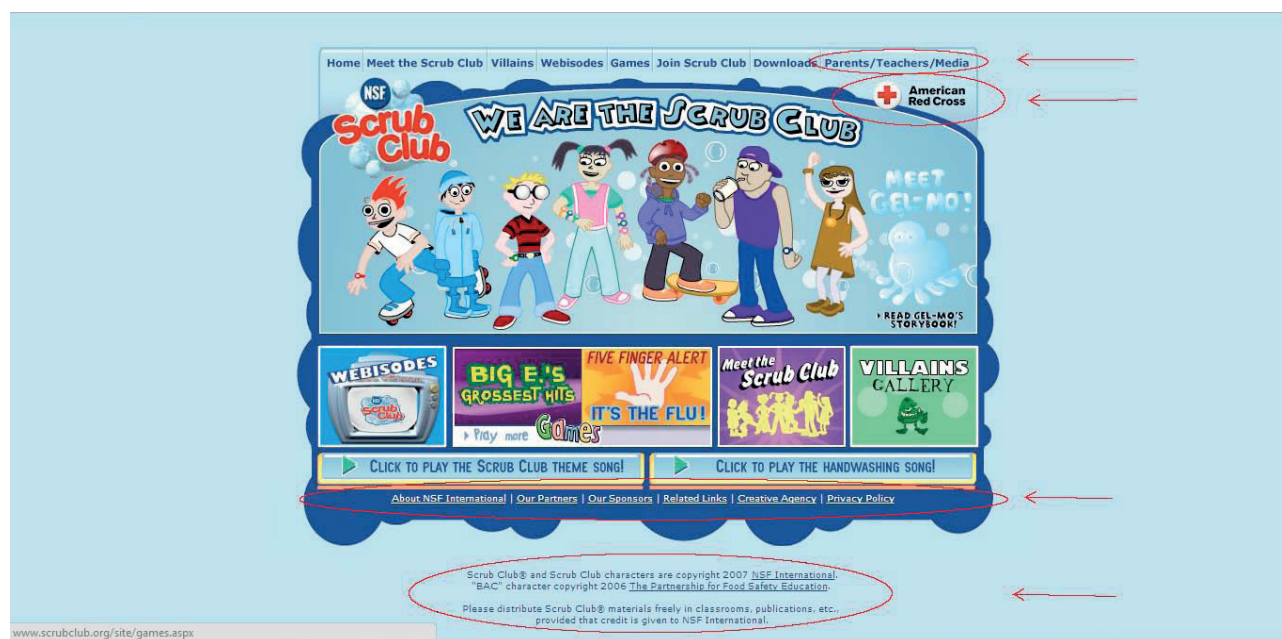


Fig. 2. Adult content on Scrub Club homepage.

pathways to get more information that was embedded in games, videos or interactive activities. This information was consistently secondary to the activity itself and was often lost as the activity was the focus of the children's attention.

If we consider the interaction between verbal and non-verbal elements to transmit Field we can see that, with speech bubble, semiotic conventions of the genre (children's visual narratives) were respected. However, the complexity of both the verbal-text and the multimodal communication was considered unsuitable to transmit Field to this age group (cf. Karatza 2017; forthcoming).

Although this is a website for children, there is also some content for adults (see Fig. 2). When asked about content that was intended for adults, only 21.43% of children observed that there were any elements. The majority believed there was no adult intended content whatsoever. The elements for adults are all static, non-dynamic elements that are placed outside the frame (cf. Vasta & Trevisan 2017), these are indicated by the red arrows in Fig. 2 which include links: for parent and teachers; to information on the NSF organisation that created the website; to information about partners; to information about sponsors and to information about privacy policy.

When asked about these overlooked elements in the semi-structured interview, children simply replied that they had not noticed them when answering the questionnaire. In fact, many did not notice the writing outside the frame at all. These children, 78.57%, managed to skip over the elements for adults completely, stating with conviction that there was no content for adults.

When asked what they learned from the website, most children did cite 'the importance of washing your hands' and 82% declared they would go back to the site. Although

out of these 82%, overwhelmingly 72% said they would return because the games were engaging or aroused their emotions and only 14% because it was about an important social issue or for more information on this topic. Very few children were able to retain any specific information relating to the information given on the website, information about bacteria, E. coli, salmonella, campylobacter, or shigella.

Grade 5 and 6 - BAM! Body and Mind

BAM! Body and Mind www.bam.gov is an online destination for children created by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Designed for 9-13-year-old children, BAM! gives them information on healthy lifestyle choices. The site focuses on topics identified as being important by children: such as stress and physical fitness. It employs a child-friendly language, games, quizzes, and other interactive features.

BAM! Body and Mind is also directed to teachers, providing them with interactive and educational activities that are linked to national education standards for science and health set by the National Research Council, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the Joint Committee for National School Health Education Standards.

The results showed that 75.21% of the children correctly identified the Field of the website from the homepage. The answers to question 2 of the questionnaire showed that this was done from decoding the text through verbal content. They understood that the Field of the website was health and wellbeing because it was called 'BAM Body and Mind' with hyperlinks at the top of the page labelled 'diseases', 'food and nutrition', 'physical activity', 'your safety', 'your life', and 'your body'. However, there was still some confusion with 35% interpreting the Field incorrectly in grade 5 and 7% interpreting the Field incorrectly in grade 6. The reason for this misinterpretation was that there was too much information and too many distracting elements (dynamic images, sound that was coherent with peripheral message and not the central message, conflictual modulation of the page, inconsistent colour rhymes) that distracted from the central message. This 'semiotic noise' disturbed the correct identification of the Field for these few children.

In terms of viewer-mediated interaction and its functional potential, the various items on a page can be clustered into autonomous moving items which do not require viewer intervention. These are: (a) *self-activating items* (Baldry & Thibault 2006: 147); (b) *interactive items*, i.e. items that activate when triggered by the viewer using the mouse; and (c) *unresponsive, static, or inactive items*, i.e. items that have no viewer influence.

The dynamic elements often disturbed meaning extraction by being placed in the centre of the webpage or being dedicated a larger area of the screen. These dynamic elements often communicated the narrative of the Field and not the Field itself, hence leading to confusion. To explain this better, the central message of health and wellbeing was embedded in the narrative of a superhero themed section or a section dedicated to games. However, 'The Game Room' and the superhero modelled 'Immune Platoon' led some children to think the website was about games and superheroes and not about health and wellbeing. The narrative of superheroes and games overshadowed or dominated the Field (health and wellbeing) to such an extent that the Field was sometimes missed altogether. The questionnaire revealed that over 50% of both grade 5 and 6 students elicited meaning from integrated semiotic



Fig. 3. BAM Homepage 2015 www.bam.gov.

channels, but that grade 6 students had much better judgment in weighing those resources to come to the correct identification of the Field. Therefore, the metasemiotic awareness in the Grade 6 students was decidedly more developed (cf. Vasta & Trevisan 2017).

The use of colours has become synonymous with texts for children. Consider the use of colour in children's picture books, comics, illustrated books for children, school books that increasingly use non-verbal communication and colour. Colour is often used as a resource to attract attention and to maintain concentration. However, colour is an important semiotic resource and colour rhymes can be employed to show the coactional, cothematic or coaxial links. In the BAM homepage, however, there were no colour rhymes linking items, themes or activities. The colours did not add any more meaning other than simply being colourful for children. This led some children to describe the use of colour as being too intense and it emerged that it actually distracted rather than aided decoding of the verbal texts and page organisation.

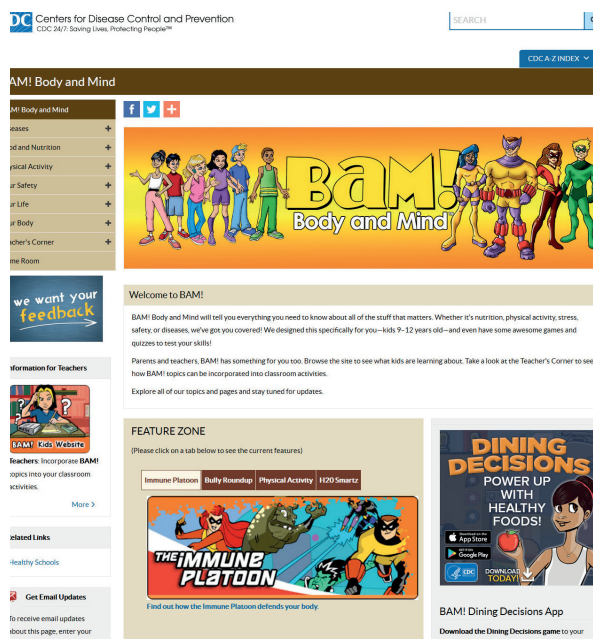


Fig. 4: BAM Homepage 2016.

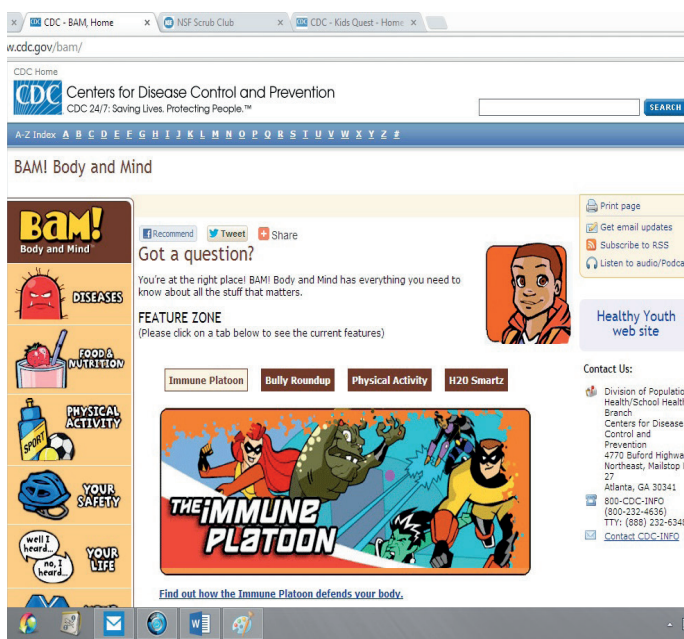


Fig. 5: BAM Homepage 2018.

A diachronic investigation showed that the website has evolved overtime, and the changes reflect the observations made above. Figure 4 and Figure 5 show the homepage in 2016 and 2018.

The website changes over this period show a better deployment of the elements that make up the homepage, which leads to greater coherence, more suitable reading paths for the children this age group. This was achieved through better salience balancing. For example, the dynamic elements like the ‘Immune Platoon’ feature which caused confusion in some children, has been de-emphasised (reduced in size and rendered non-dynamic) and has a less central position. This de-emphasis of the originally dynamic element leads to greater attention being given to the menu on the top-left hand side of the page and the BAM title. This creates a clearer reading path and anchors with links on the left-hand side of page. There is also less semiotic noise with the colour background being replaced with a white background. In addition, icons over the links are placed on left and reduced in size (Figure 4) and then the icons are removed altogether (Figure 5), thus emphasising decoding through the verbal text of the primary communicative aims. Better integrated framing strategies and a more logical modular deployment are adopted. Moreover, there is greater chromatic coherence in communicating importance of salience and not just an overuse of bright colours for children e.g. colour emphasis for content links on left. The web designers have made the homepage more coherent with the pragmatic/schematic super-structure that characterises this emerging mini-genre (Cambria *et al.* 2012).

Grades 7 and 8 - Kid’s Quest

The Kids’ Quest <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/kids/index.html> is an online destination for children created by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an agency

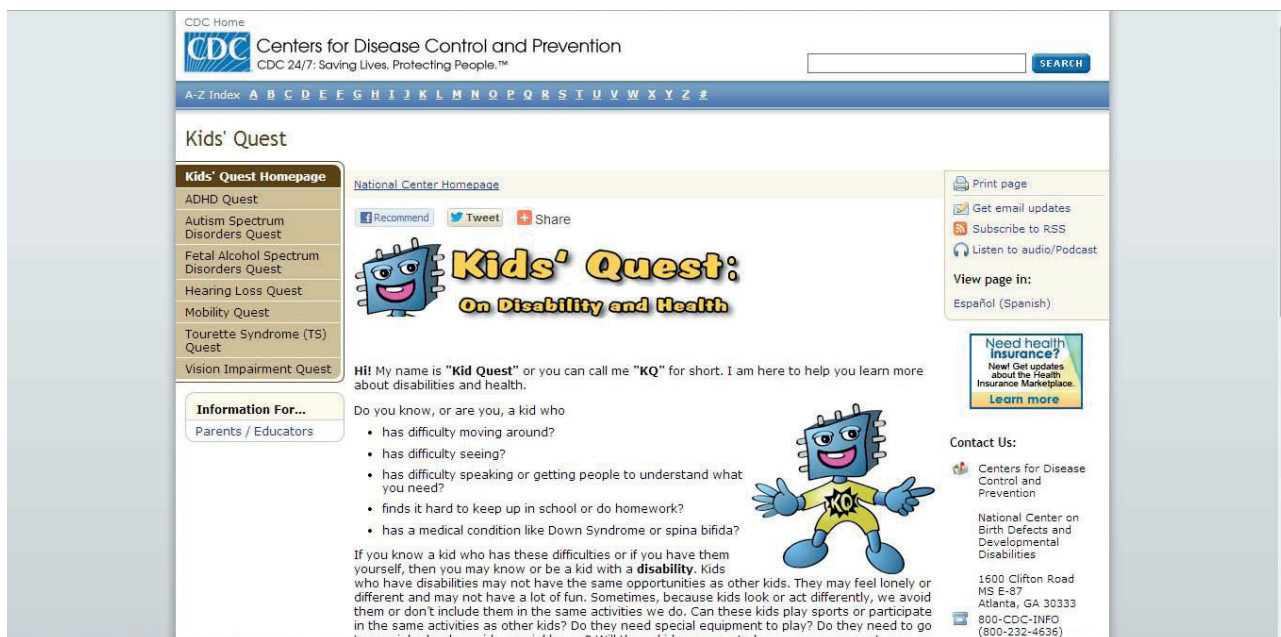


Fig. 6 Kid's Quest homepage <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/kids/index.html>.

of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Although students can do a 'quest' entirely on their own, parents and teachers are suggested they work with children to share ideas, talk about issues raised, and encourage students to reflect about themselves and others. This site is intended to get children to think about people with disabilities and some of the issues related to daily activities, health, and accessibility. Figure 6 shows the homepage.

This homepage has no dynamic elements. It was largely based on written text, which eliminated much of the confusion noted in the other homepages, but was not appreciated by the children due to its lack of 'entertainment' qualities and due to the fact that it did not satisfy their expectations of a website. As will be demonstrated later, by Grade 8 the metasemiotic awareness and genre sensitivity in some students was so elevated that they felt they could criticise the organisation of the homepage for its communication aim (cf. Bortoluzzi 2017). Table 1 shows the transcript of one such instance, a child, LB, who was 13 years old at the time of the interview.

In Example 1, the student LB shows to have already developed a sense of how the textual organisation of elements in a multimodal text should be realised. His answer to question 1 of the questionnaire, showed a complete and corresponding interpretation of the Field. By referring to the attractiveness of the website, s/he is discussing the Tenor, the interpersonal metafunction (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014). However, s/he makes a judgement about the author's choices regarding the textual (Mode) and interpersonal metafunctions (Tenor) and criticises the choices made, offering alternative solutions to achieve the communicative aims and create a suitable reading path in this context of situation and context of culture. LB has developed a clear idea of the patterns that a homepage for this genre should follow as opposed to other pages in the hierarchy of the website. S/he has developed a knowledge of

the context of culture through exposure to communities of practice. Their observations on both the textual and interpersonal metafunction would suggest that s/he has a clear idea of the register for this mini-genre. S/he shows highly developed metasemiotic awareness with great sensitivity to genre and has expectations in the homepage organisation. Moreover, s/he verbalises it and does not just perceive or expect it. What s/he was able to verbalise was also reiterated by the results of the research in reference to the other students who perhaps did not have the same media literacy, metasemiotic awareness or metalanguage to verbalise their analysis as this student.

Tab. 1. LB extract Example 1.

2 mins 38 secs 4 mins 05 secs	LB Like this part 'Getting started' shouldn't be on the bottom, it should be here on the side, or up here... and ere...because when a person sees the site sees immediately this and on the bottom can even be something quickly done like...but these two sections should have been slightly more up like this space is unutilised and this space too maybe even if they had made the text smaller it would have been nicer because where are all the images are here it would have made it more attractive and made nicer to see this starting part on the top or the side on a bar like here which are on many sites like the webquest were like this or they were just a plain site with a background with paragraphs and links or they were like this with sections on the sides. Like on a site for a book 'to kill a mocking bird' it was like there was a sidebar showing what you wanted with: share, chapter 1, chapter 2, and on the right side it was completely like this with description, if you need help,.....
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Table 2. LB extract Example 2.

6 mins 34 secs 7 mins 24 secs	LB The thing I saw was that it was not very ...many kids like animations on sites, this one did not have any of them. It's ok, I know it is difficult to programme an animation from when you scroll on things but kids like a lot these things and they like more not square but more like circular, more bright, more chromatic. But being healthcare site I wouldn't overuse these topics about colour, roundness and animations, more just put these to keeping the viewer on the site thinking 'oh this is nice' and let him continue to read the rest though....
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In Example 2 (see Table 2 LB) understands that there is a potential conflict of registers as an entertaining site for kids is potentially in conflict with an informative site about illness or healthcare. He measures the semantic resources to compensate for this potential conflict, again perhaps in a way that would have been more suitable for children than the website designers had done. It could also be argued that LB is referring to what Baldry and Thibault (2006: 152) define as 'dialogic engagement'. They interpret this in terms of how the potential of the structure of the genre unfolds. Three characteristics of interpersonal engagement are acknowledged: *Appeal*, functional changes in the object to increase the viewer's attention; *Orientation*, the forced positioning of the viewer towards an object, for example, indifferent to the object being an integral element of a scene or if it has potential for action; and *Action*,

the specific purposes achieved via performing specific action on the object (adapted from Baldry & Thibault 2006: 152).

Baldry and Thibault suggest that, in hypertext, reading positions can emerge from the “preferred way of integrating the activities of visual scanning with the potential meaning proposed by the page” (2006: 105). Considering meaning-making potential from dialogical relationships, items on a webpage can fulfil a new function. Dialogic potential can be produced through action or activity; it can also be produced through intertextual relationships. These relationships occur between items on the page. Clear distinction between the interpersonal, textual or compositional resources (used to attract the attention of the viewer) may not always be possible (Knox 2009; see also Kok 2004) *e.g.* the textual function in multimodal texts (compositional) could also be considered the scale balance needed between the visual and verbal elements for the spatial arrangement *i.e.* page-layout (Royce 1998: 43, 46). Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006: 193-194) sustain that within multimodal media, the top of the page is the most important sector and is usually where the most salient information is positioned. These results would suggest that, with digital natives, reading paths emerge through salience balancing, avoiding semiotic overload which potentially complicates the decoding of a text and the skilled deployment of anchors and framing measured to the metasemiotic awareness, media literacy on the part of the user skills of the audience.

Conclusions and Guidelines

The aims of this study were to investigate critical thinking and multiliteracy skills in children from 8-13 years old when dealing with multimodal texts regarding health and well-being in ICT-mediated edutainment websites. An integral part of literacy, in this context, is critical thinking and the need to understand the values of a CoP, community of practice. By nurturing this cultural knowledge in children, especially 8-10 year olds, also through genre awareness, ICT-mediated texts can actually facilitate interconnections, creative skills and interactivity in children. Much of this depends on the suitability and coherence in those texts to deploy the elements in such a way that creates a reading path in line with the child’s meaning making strategies. That is to say to create the measured salience balancing in the websites so as to foster greater critical awareness, greater multiliteracy and multimodal skills in children, which are fundamental in the construction of their identity in a social group.

When creating edutainment websites and especially homepages, designers should weigh the complexity of the integrated semantic resources, otherwise meaning extraction becomes too complex and the communicative aims can be lost in the narrative (see section 4.1 The Scrub Club). When considering the balancing of verbal and non-verbal components on a webpage, designers should bear in mind that younger children tend to overlook the verbal text, only focussing on words which are made particularly salient (see section 4.2 BAM). Therefore, designers should ascribe greater salience and iconicity to the information conveyed verbally. This may be done by reducing semantic noise, de-emphasising the non-primary elements in the text, and thus increasing the salience and iconicity of the verbal text (see sections 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3). This is crucial to aid child understanding of the webpage.

Different modes have different potential effects on learning. What can be done with

image or writing or through interactive activities differs in ways that are significant for learning outcomes. Children often do not read all modes as being meaningful: they rely more on the visual mode at younger ages, *i.e.* (moving) image and colour, to make sense of the representations. They seem to 'trust' the empirical evidence of the visual mode.

Children love interactivity. Interactivity can be anything from fully-fledged games to smaller activities, such as polls, quizzes and community features. Children enjoy making their mark on websites, posting thoughts and artwork, creating riddles for others, and entering contests. Online gaming has been very successful in attracting young audiences, because it offers many different levels of interaction and participation simultaneously. However, there are a number of pitfalls to adding interactivity to websites. The main one is the interface design. Interactive activities are usually more complex than static content presentation and therefore include more features and controls which can obstruct the primary communicative aims through a lack of salience balancing, or through creating semantic noise that distracts the user. In the development web based edutainment websites genre, there has been influence and borrowing in narrative techniques that are more perhaps appropriate to other media, like television for example (see section 4.1). As this genre matures, there is increasingly less borrowing from other media types and more the suitable patterns and reading paths, as can be seen in the comments of the digital native child, LB, in section 4.3.

The functional objects on an internet webpage have been described as *anchors* (Djonov 2005), *clusters* (Baldry & Thibault 2006) and *items* (Kok 2004). For example, Kok conceptualises an *item* as the "instantiation of one semiotic resource, or a combination of instantiations of different ranks of different semiotic resources joining together as a methodologically justifiable whole" (2004: 134), which means that, in Kok's terms, an item could be represented both by a single object or a grouping of objects on the page. This definition of item, however, does not take into account that not all items function in the same way, or as Burbules points out, "imply the same type of semic relation" (1998: 104). Baldry and Thibault (2006), on the other hand, acknowledge that a "hypertext object has an ambivalent status: it is a visual image at the same time that it is more than that" (2006: 146). They refer to the elements that enter into meaningful relationships on a webpage as *clusters*, mainly on the basis of the clustered objects' potential for viewer-mediated interaction (2006: 121). Whether anchors, clusters or items, the perceived meaning and importance needs to be shared by web designers and web users. This can be leveraged by salience balancing (see sections 4.1 and 4.2).

Children, 'digital natives' (Bennet, Matton & Kervin 2008; Li & Ranieri 2010), have demonstrated both semiotic and critical awareness. This is true both regarding multimodal texts and the text/user interaction. Nevertheless, multimodal/multiliteracy strategy awareness in reference to the encoding and decoding of meaning happens in specific contexts and so does not have set or fixed patterns that can be meaningfully described or defined (Flewitt 2013; Gillen & Hall 2013). It would seem that children require collaborative help in developing and nurturing metasemiotic knowledge and a working knowledge of the instruments, processes and strategies required to for new media and ICT-mediated contexts. Pedagogical models that promote empowerment, user agency and autonomy must be developed and applied to this. This will help to bring about the "ownership" of discourses – in Fairclough's

terms (2001: 236) – which comes from being a member of a community of practice, learning the culturally influenced genre patterns, and critical thinking in reference to the information that is exchanged and the people involved in the interaction.

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Annexes

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CHILDREN WEBSITE

NAME.....SURNAME.....
CLASS.....

Look at the homepage for 3 minutes without clicking and then answer the questions on your own:

1. What is the website about?

.....
.....
.....

2. How do you know what it is about?

.....
.....
.....

3. Do you think the website is well organised? (Choose an answer):

<input type="checkbox"/> very good	<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> Not very good	<input type="checkbox"/> bad	<input type="checkbox"/> I do not know
------------------------------------	-------------------------------	--	------------------------------	--

4. What elements most attract your attention? Why?

.....
.....
.....

5. In your opinion, are there aspects which are not for children? 6. If so, which?

.....
.....
.....

7. Are there aspects which let you interact with the site? Which?

.....
.....
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Narrative Empathy in James Bradley's *Clade*: Disability, Ecosickness and Hope

Abstract I: Nel suo romanzo più recente, *Clade* (2015), lo scrittore australiano James Bradley segue i percorsi conflittuali di tre generazioni della famiglia Leith, ritraendo scenari apocalittici sulla scia del cambiamento climatico che sta condizionando profondamente il nostro pianeta. Ciò nonostante, questo articolo sostiene che il romanzo tende a privilegiare una modalità ottativa invece della catastrofe di massa tipica dell'eco-narrativa canonica. A tale fine, si analizzano alcune strategie formali di empatia narrativa, come l'identificazione con i personaggi e la focalizzazione multipla, che favoriscono la partecipazione emotiva del lettore. Le manifestazioni della vulnerabilità che *Clade* traccia rivelano profonde implicazioni empatiche, richiamando un'etica della cura che coinvolge il lettore sul piano affettivo.

Abstract II: In his latest novel *Clade* (2015), Australian author James Bradley portrays apocalyptic scenarios in the aftermath of the ubiquitous climate change that is affecting our planet, while following the human conflicts of three generations of the Leith family. And yet, this article argues that the novel privileges an optative mood instead of the traditional collective catastrophe of canonical eco-fiction. To do so, the article scrutinises some formal strategies of narrative empathy, such as character identification and multiple focalisation, which favour the reader's emotional engagement. In the novel, vulnerable manifestations disclose a profound empathic orientation, addressing an ethics of care that implicates the reader affectively.

James Bradley and the Ethics of Writing

While commenting on the power of literary writing to elicit reactions from the reader, Australian novelist James Bradley asserts that "the book people seem to read is never quite the book you thought you were writing" (Bradley 2015b: n.p.). Although Bradley does not use the word "empathy", his works, by exhibiting the vulnerability of human life and the fragility of our environment, allow for the reader's involvement in the ethical issues embodied in his fiction. The animating topics of *Wrack* (1997), *The Deep Field* (1999) and *The Resurrectionist* (2006) are natural disasters, economic crises, human tensions and technological changes, themes that perfectly embody the interaction between the human and the non-human in the age of the Anthropocene. In certain respects, Bradley's fiction addresses the impact of human life on the planet, providing "a medium to explain, predict, implore and lament" (Trex-

ler 2015: 9) the ethical conundrum of the Anthropocene. Bradley's fourth novel, *Clade* (2015), similarly activates emotional responses in the audience by means of empathic engagements in human vulnerability and environmental catastrophes. On the one hand, the novel portrays apocalyptic scenarios from Antarctica to Oceania in the aftermath of the ubiquitous climate change that is affecting our planet. On the other, the narrative follows three generations of the Leith family from the present to a possibly catastrophic future. In *Clade*, therefore, human vulnerability and ecological decay are a means to arouse empathic responses in readers, by promoting ethical concerns with both human and non-human questions.

As far as the title of the novel is concerned, the word "clade"¹, as Bradley himself puts it, is "a biological term for a group of organisms believed to comprise all the evolutionary descendants of a common ancestor" (Pierce 2015: n.p.). In Bradley's story, the "clade" is represented by Adam Leith, an Australian scientist studying the melting ice caps in Antarctica in the late 1980s. While his name inevitably evokes biblical connections, the narrative chronicles two generations of the Leith family with a consistent use of shifting focalisation and multiple narrators. Divided into ten chapters, which continuously shift the chronological axis of the novel forward, up to the first decade of the third millennium, the novel juxtaposes third-person viewpoints with first-personal accounts. The story opens with Adam's perspective, but the events are narrated in a diegetic structure that breaks temporal linearity, combing the other characters' viewpoints: Ellie, Adam's wife, their daughter Summer, and their grandson Noah. However, *Clade* is also narrated by characters who do not belong to the Leiths, thus interspersing the story of this Australian family with external perspectives. Such a kaleidoscopic narrative frame, which experiments with time, space, form and focalisation, well captures the eerie sensation of living in a world moving "upwards in that cold immensity of space, of time" (Bradley 2015a: 251), thus alerting the reader to the complexity of our contemporaneity.

In this regard, *Clade* is a fit illustration of the issue raised in the present number of this journal because it exposes a double perspective on the use of empathy, understood as a narrative device about both human conflictual states and environmental justice. Bradley's novel dwells on the edge of time, places and human loss: not only does the narrative straddle temporal and spatial boundaries, it also thematises diseases and ecosickness², thus revealing a world in pieces. Seen in this light, Bradley's story can be said to disclose the ethical power of literary writing, bringing to the fore the vision, supported by scholars like Martha Nussbaum, that literature may be instrumental in expanding human understanding. According to the American philosopher, creative writing, specifically novels, contributes to the

¹ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "clade" finds its roots in the Greek word *klados* ("branch") and it designates "[a] group of organisms believed to comprise all the evolutionary descendants of a common ancestor" (n.p.).

² This article takes the term "ecosickness", as conceptualised by Heather Houser in *Ecosickness in Contemporary U.S. Fiction: Environment and Affect*, as the starting point of the ecological reflections in Bradley's novel. In Houser's approach, ecosickness narratives, such as Leslie Mamon Silko and Marge Piercy's writings where somatic and ecological vulnerabilities are intertwined, "attest that crises of bodily and planetary endangerment are also affective crises" (Houser 2016: 222), thus hinting at parallels between human fragility, ecological apocalypse and emotions.

cultivation of human beings. Narrative empathy, or “literary imagination” as Nussbaum calls it, is “an essential ingredient of an ethical stance that asks us to concern ourselves with the good of other people whose lives are distant from our own” (Nussbaum 1995: xvi).

Interestingly, narrative empathy grants readers insights into vulnerable manifestations, reminding them that there is “a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect” (Keen 2007: 4) induced by reading, viewing or hearing about another’s condition. In *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), however, Suzanne Keen questions the general assumption that reading literature might automatically expand the reader’s empathy, claiming that “scant evidence exists for active connections among novel reading, experiences of narrative empathy, and altruistic action” (xiv). Whereas empathy, its etymological roots coming from the German word *Einfühlung* (“feeling into”), involves “being emotionally affected by someone else’s emotions and experiences” and “making inferences about another’s mental states” (Coplan and Goldie 2011: 4), narrative empathy entails “a complex imaginative process involving both cognition and emotion” (Coplan 2004: 143). Not only does the notion of “narrative empathy” seem a viable formal solution, it also works as a literary device for measuring the impact of a book on the reader. Against this theoretical backdrop, *Clade* conveys empathy by displaying techniques of “strategic empathizing” (Keen 2007): the novel’s chief interest lies in depicting the exposure to disability, ecosickness and hope and, to this end, Bradley attempts, in Keen’s words, “to direct an emotional transaction through a fictional work aimed at a particular audience, not necessarily including every reader who happens upon the text” (142)³.

This article explores the reader’s possible empathic responses to *Clade*. Bradley’s evocation of human vulnerability and ecological fragility stems from his view of the mutual transformations between human and nature in the age of the Anthropocene. As he claims, “we inhabit a world in which we ourselves are being altered, not just by technology and social transformation, but by the shifting terms of our engagement with what we would once have called the natural world” (Bradley 2015b: n.p.), thus highlighting empathic and metamorphic connections between the human and the non-human. In a novel where climate change, birds’ extinction, generational conflicts, economic crises, cancer, storms, autism, infertility, epidemic viruses and biopolitical issues converge, the emotional and cognitive impact is an ineluctable consequence. The article will proceed by first tracking the devices of narrative empathy, namely character identification and multiple focalisation, which are subject to Bradley’s treatment of human vulnerability. Then, it will be shown that ecosickness raises important emotional responses by means of strategic empathizing techniques which attempt to foster the reader’s engagement. Finally, it will be argued that despite its tone of anxiety, *Clade* privileges an optative mood instead of the traditional collective catastrophe staged in cli-fi literature. What makes Bradley’s *Familienroman* deviate from canonical eco-fiction is that it shows the potentialities of vulnerability by promoting a strong ethical orientation.

³ For Keen, empathic responses are also shaped by the moment when one reads a text. As she argues, “[t]he capacity of novels to invoke readers’ empathy may change over time” (Keen 2007: 136).

The Lures of Vulnerability: Disability and Generational Conflicts

Definitions of vulnerability position the phenomenon in an interdisciplinary field comprising health, economics, ecology and ethics. Vulnerability presents itself in a variety of forms, a wide range of options well synthesised in Marianne Hirsch's open letter to the MLA in 2014, in which she defines our age as one dominated by vulnerability, with regard to "studies of the environment, social ecology, political economy, medicine, and developmental psychology as terms that help address the predisposition of people and systems to injury" (Hirsch 2014: n.p.). Jean-Michel Ganteau similarly describes vulnerability as "a paradigm of the contemporary condition and of contemporary culture" (Ganteau 2015: 4). Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy of alterity, Ganteau sees vulnerability as entailing an "ethical gesture" which tends to create empathic connections between self and other.

In *Clade*, forms of vulnerability constantly appear, affecting the characters physically and mentally. The convergence of negative situations may be said to direct the reader's attention to vulnerabilities, recalling Keen's contention that "empathetic responses to fictional characters and situations occur more readily for negative emotions" (Keen 2007: xii). A clear example of vulnerability can be found in the very first chapter, "Solstice", where vulnerability takes the shape of disability. Adam Leith, who is collecting data for his scientific research in Antarctica, learns that his wife Ellie is eventually pregnant. While studying the changing nature of the place, "using fossilized plants and traces of ancient pollen to chart the transformation of the landscape" (Bradley 2015a: 19), Adam indulges in recollections of the past, revisiting, in a long flashback, the troubles with the impossibility of having children. The motif of infertility is disclosed indirectly through connections with the image of Antarctica "that exists without reference to the human" (20) because of the infinite presence of the ice. Moreover, Antarctica is presented as a bare landscape in that it is associated with a moment of the year, the summer solstice, perceived as a symbol "of loss" (4), marking the transition from light "into the dark" (4). From the very initial pages, then, the reader of *Clade* is confronted with an inextricable relationship between human disability and environmental decay. The link established between the Leiths' troublesome childbearing and the melting of the Antarctic permafrost, where "the ice sheets were destabilising, their deterioration outpacing even the most pessimistic models" (11), aligns readers not only with the precariousness of human life, but also with the delicate question of climate change. Interestingly, the reader learns, through Adam's thoughts in indirect speech, that Ellie herself, who is an artist, shares a fascination with precariousness. Adam does allude to Ellie's project on Alzheimer's and "the erasure of the past" (39), by recalling her statues showing "the faces of the sufferers" (39) and videos filming "people shouting and weeping" (40). The reader cannot but realise that a range of negative feelings affects both Adam and Ellie, involving them emotionally, and suggesting, as Adam himself muses, "some desire to escape the present" (40).

What can be observed in the two characters is that, to put it with Keen's words, "a character's negative affective states, such as those provoked by undergoing prosecution, suffering, grieving and experiencing painful obstacles, make a reader's empathizing more likely" (Keen 2007: 71). In these situations, the character identification is accomplished thanks to the author's formal solutions. As Keen explains, a "narrated monologue has a strong effect

on readers' responses" (96), a narrative strategy that seems to favour the reader's identification with the character. If identifications are accompanied by a "spontaneous emotional sharing" (73), the use of indirect speech may provide empathic responses since it "catches the feelings embedded in the fictional characters" (136). In *Clade*, the exposure to physical disability, with the emotional and cognitive crises it brings about, is performed through free indirect speech, a solution allowing for the eruption of empathy towards the characters' manifestations of vulnerability.

This is suggested in the portrayal of Summer's problematic youth. Albeit born in a sunny season, as her name suggests, Adam and Ellie's daughter is instead a character with a bleak and cold personality. Her "shifting vulnerability" (Bradley 2015a: 62) is symptomatic of a wounded subjectivity as her step-grandmother, Maddie, observes: the old woman "cannot but feel there is an edge to Summer's manner, a sharpness to her judgments that is unsettling" (62). Surprisingly, Maddie, who still mourns the death of her first husband, consumed by cancer some years before, seems to empathise with her young step-granddaughter, in an attempt to imagine Summer's thoughts. In this example, Maddie is recalling her own complicated pregnancy, but suddenly the narrative switches to her step-granddaughter Summer since Maddie knows that Ellie had had difficulties in giving birth. Thus, Bradley's use of indirect discourse allows the reader to access Summer's mind via Maddie, an entry that otherwise would not be possible owing to Summer's silence. Behind this sharing of emotions between Maddie and Summer may lie an empathic approach that Peter Goldie defines "in-his-shoes perspective shifting" (Goldie 2011: 302), a condition that occurs when "consciously and intentionally shifting your perspective in order to imagine being the other person" (302). Not only are empathic connections, therefore, aroused in the reader, they are also elicited among the characters, a point that Bradley intensifies through a multifocal narrative perspective which facilitates this "in-his-shoes" approach.

Notably, the consistent use of multi-perspectivity also materialises through the change of narrative voices, with the alternation of third and first-person perspectives. In chapter seven, symbolically titled "A Journal of the Plague Year", scenes of ecological disaster are depicted, as it will be discussed in the next section of the article. Here, the narrative voice is that of Li Lijuan, a Chinese boy living in Australia, who recounts in the first person, using the narrative format of the personal diary, the terrible events of a third millennium viral infection. The teenager agrees to replace his mother, who temporarily returns to China, in the assistance to Noah, a boy "on the spectrum" (Bradley 2015a: 189), suffering from autism. Among the various losses the chapter records, namely the death of many people afflicted by the virus and a pervading feeling of obsession with infected people whom are killed in the streets because they are considered potential infectors, the narrator also alludes to Noah's mother, Summer, declaring that she "had just vanished" (210). When we meet Noah, through Li Lijuan's eyes, we learn about his problematic life and that he is half-Indian, thus gathering information about Summer's partner who, however, is never featured in the novel. It is no coincidence that the characters readers are more likely to empathise with are those, like Noah and Li Lijuan, who live without care, abandoned by their mothers and in search of affection. By using a narrative focalisation unrelated to the Leiths, Bradley ampli-

fies the reader's empathic response towards Noah. The fact that the reader is deprived of this crucial piece of information, and should be given access to Noah only pages and years after the last moment when Summer appears in the discourse-level, is indicative of the "manipulative" (Keen 2007: 134) nature of narrative empathy.

Shifting perspectives and multiple focalisation are among the narrative elements that, for Keen, "have been supposed to contribute to readers' empathy" (93), an authorial strategy that Bradley well condenses in the novel. Through Li Lijuan's eyes, who is sixteen like Noah but a stranger to him, Bradley eventually delves into Noah's disease. As already argued above, disability intensifies the empathic orientation in the novel. While people suffering from autism are generally considered, as Keen explains (6), as lacking empathy, Noah's affliction favours Li Lijuan's relational care and search of intimacy. The Chinese boy reads about autism, learning that it is not a simple condition since it may impact on language, feelings and information processing and, in the throes of a difficult "in-his-shoes" approach, he imagines how hard it must be "to live in a world filled with signs and signals you don't understand, with people who do baffling things and expect you to react in particular ways" (Bradley 2015a: 214). This shows that empathy does not entail alleviating one's grief or suffering; rather, it implies knowledge of the mental state of the other. Li Lijuan's reflections corroborate Bradley's strategy of arousing empathy both into characters and readers by means of nuanced perspectives, while the use of ellipses allows for the creation of a distance that tends to complicate the overflow of an "easy empathy". The elliptical organisation of the novel, with information reconstructed at a later stage, not only indicates the haunting presence of the past that leaks into the present; it rather complicates the reader's spontaneous distribution of empathy insomuch that it "pushes the limits of our understanding in reaching out to those with whom we might not otherwise wish contact or association" (Leake 2014: 176).

There are moments in *Clade* when Summer's fragility elicits empathy because of her complicated youth in the aftermath of her parents' separation and of her being a single mother with an autistic son. And yet, if apparently Summer's role can be that of a victim, the multifocal perspectives and the elliptical discourse-level contribute to subvert the direction of an "easy empathy", promoting instead a deeper understanding of her complex personality. According to Eric Leake, "[d]ifficult empathy fosters the development of more expansive identities that incorporate the best and worst of people" (184). In other terms, when readers find out that Summer has first left Australia for moving to England, where she leaves in a remote rural mansion with Noah, concealing him to both Adam and Ellie, and that she later abandons her child without any explanations, they are invited to see things differently. Her father Adam, for instance, comes to blame himself and his wife for the tensions of their final years of marriage, in the awareness that "the presence in early childhood of chemicals associated with stress can alter the brain's chemistry for life" (Bradley 2015a: 114). Furthermore, in the penultimate chapter, where the point of view is that of an omniscient extradiegetic narrator capable of getting to grips with the temporal disarray of the narrative, Noah's recollections of his last hours spent with Summer, during a storm that flooded England, become more clear: although Summer is seen as a victimiser, the absence of his mother is "like

a hollow at the centre of him, the feeling so huge, so overwhelming, he was afraid to give into it" (275-276). What seems to be recorded in these thoughts is Noah's vulnerability, some form of fragility also intensified by his awareness of autism, knowing enough about "the differences between his brain and those of most people" (266). Bradley's formal choices reveal a narrative form preoccupied with the evocation of feelings: by scattering the plot with multiple focalisers, the novelist establishes connections, while also defying the reader's easy distribution of empathy.

Clearly, the novel aims at exposing the production of empathy, drawing on the lures of negative feelings. The combination of multiple focalisation, different narrative voices and the suspense generated in the gaps between the discourse-level and the story-level of the narrative can contribute to the evocation of empathic responses. The fact that there is not a dominant narrative viewpoint orients readers along a more complex and nuanced empathic path, leaving them with various options. While it is easy to empathise with Noah, we might also show emotional involvement with Summer, despite the mistakes she makes as both a daughter and a mother. Moreover, as it will be argued in the following pages, the reader might also adopt the perspective of the wounded planet as it is portrayed in a condition of ecological apocalypse.

Environmental Apocalypse, Melancholia and Solidarity

Clade opens in Antarctica, an environment characterised by "icebergs and then by fields of drifting ice, their surfaces sculpted by wind and waves" (20). As already mentioned, the place is filtered through Adam's scientific eyes, a viewpoint that connects the barren landscape with the infertility that is afflicting his marriage with Ellie. Adam cannot but perceive the wounds of the landscape, since he remarks that "the ice has retreated further than ever, exposing rock and stone buried for millions of years" (21). The metamorphic process of the natural scenario is a reminder to both Adam and the reader of the ecological implications within the broader discourse of climate change, an ethical issue arousing empathy and engagement. Antarctica represents a tangible example of Bradley's vision of the planet as being "on a collision course with disaster" (18), though, albeit the apocalyptic tones, the novel opens itself to hope: as Adam wonders, "the world will go on [...] what else is there to do, except hang on, and hope?" (22-23).

Cli-fi literature frequently relies on apocalypse and disaster, alerting readers to the dangers of a future marked by catastrophes. According to Greg Garrard, the rhetoric of the apocalypse is always "proleptic" in that it describes what "has yet to come into being" (Garrard 2004: 94). The tragic consequence embedded in environmental apocalypse is an ethical one, its mission entailing the necessity of taking responsibility for our future. Whereas it is true that the apocalypse is a major trope in contemporary literature, its ethical scope is "not about anticipating the end of the world, but about attempting to avert it by persuasive means" (107-108). In *Clade*, a wide range of pressing environmental matters are recorded. In chapter three, for instance, a calamitous flood occurs while Adam is in England to visit Summer and Noah. As his grandson's name suggests, in line with the biblical episode of Noah's Ark, Adam and his descendants are spared death during a tremendous storm leaving behind a disastrous scenario where "trees lie tumbled and bent, branches and leaves spread across

the open ground [...] great pools of water cover the road and the footpath" (Bradley 2015a: 122). Here, as in other strands of the novel, ecological mayhem is described as an ordinary situation. Adam, therefore, is not only a scientist investigating climate change, he is also a witness and a survivor to death and destruction. What the reader should note is that Bradley does transpose the rhetoric of apocalypse from man to nature, modelling *Clade* as an instance of what Garrard calls "comic apocalypse", because it does not succumb to self-destructive impulses; rather, its temporality is "open-ended and episodic" (Garrard 2004: 87) and empathy and solidarity act as palliative measures against violence and destruction. In the novel, therefore, human agency is not tragically framed by death as its exclusive climax; it instead revolves around an ethical struggle between light and darkness, disability and hope, death and survival. Despite apocalyptic rhetoric, life prevails, becoming a catalyst for empathic engagements in a novel where disasters impinge darkly on the flora and the fauna of the planet.

Bradley may be said to create parallels among the natural world, his characters, who display empathic concerns with the wounds of the planet, and the reader, who can be seen to empathise with both the pains of the characters and the ecological threats, developing a kind of civic engagement which chimes with Nussbaum's stance. Empathy thus plays a central role in Bradley's story, owing to the feeling of responsibility it tries to elicit. Specifically, the type of empathy that Bradley seems to invoke is akin to "broadcast strategic empathy" (Keen 2007: 142; emphasis in the original) which "calls upon every reader to feel with members of a group, by emphasizing our common vulnerabilities and hopes"⁴. In the novel, this emphasis on hope underscores the limitations of apocalyptic rhetoric, disclosing, instead, human capacity for mercy and redemption. While facing a world in decay, the readers of *Clade* become aware of their position as environmental caretakers, figuring the ecological mission as an ethical one. And yet, despite the feeling of empathy and hope, images of ecological disaster haunt Bradley's narrative. In chapter two, for instance, the reader learns that the climate negotiations in Bangkok "have reached an impasse yet again" (Bradley 2015a: 35), while sudden bird die-offs, the change of the South Asian monsoon, crops failures, food shortages and starvation impact negatively on the economy and on the ecosystem. Among the various environmental wounds depicted in the novel, the extinction of bees, known as accelerated colony collapse disorder (ACCD), and a viral epidemic disease, the acute viral respiratory syndrome (AVRS), come at the top of the list.

The novel provides ample evidence to sustain a universalistic reading of empathy. A good example of this empathic dimension is offered in the chapter where the critical collapse of the bees is narrated. The focal perspective here is that of Ellie. In the aftermath of her separation from Adam, she casually happens on a field with a hive and discovers that its beekeeper, Amir, is an illegal Pakistani immigrant. However, and more importantly, she is also fascinated by the sense of energy conveyed by the swarm of bees. She then starts to

⁴ Keen distinguishes other two types of "strategic empathy". On the one hand, she argues that "bounded strategic empathy" occurs "within an ingroup, stemming from experiences of mutuality and leading to feeling with familiar others" (Keen 2007: 12; emphasis in the original). On the other, Keen introduces "ambassadorial strategic empathy" as addressing "chosen others with the aim of cultivating their empathy for the in-group, often to a specific end" (Keen 2007: 12; emphasis in the original).

read about these insects, discovering that the first signs of honey production date back to the Mesolithic times, while she also gathers information about the present extinction of the bees. Unlike Adam, who investigates natural phenomena scientifically, Ellie is an artist in search of new creative resources. Specifically, Ellie displays a certain interest in the long existence of the bees and in their conception of time, wondering whether they “understand of the past, of the future, of the deep well of their history [...] of passing away and out of time” (177). Notably, her exposure to loss manifests the typical traits of Freudian melancholia, “causing a splitting of the ego such that one part identifies itself with the abandoned object” (Freud 1953: 249). A similar sense of disconnection is exhibited by her inability to establish correlations with linear time. She instead dwells in what Julia Kristeva calls the “truncated time” of melancholia that “does not pass by, the before/after notion does not rule it” (Kristeva 1989: 60). This disarrayed temporality clashes with the long-lasting presence of the bees in the geological archives of history. While Ellie seems to be stuck in the present, the bees exhibit a resilient nature, “shifting and changing and evolving as the world altered around them” (Bradley 2015a: 177). Genetically engineered plants, inflections and spontaneous events seem to be the contributing factors of their collapse, a violation of the ecosystem that in Ellie’s thoughts comes to similarly trigger the eventual collapse of human existence, “causing it to crash as well” (167). Ellie symbolically establishes links of vulnerability between human precariousness and ecological decay: feelings of loss and pain torment Ellie, who is the most melancholic character for her inability to work through traumatic experiences. In her view, for example, Amir’s illegal condition epitomises the mass migration wave of displaced people “in need of assistance” (167) because of climatic changes. Ellie’s melancholic mood amplifies the novel’s adoption of “broadcast strategic empathy” by calling upon an assortment of universal negative situations through which she feels a closer bond to certain delicate conditions, such as human migrations and animal extinctions.

Interestingly, environmental apocalypse moves the reader from observation to emotional involvement. *Clade* may be said to well represent the ethical responsibility of ecosickness fiction, namely the tendency to “ventriloquize and broadcast others’ voices” (Houser 2016: 126). The description of the AVRS mass infection provides a further example of Bradley’s broadcasting empathy. As alluded before, chapter seven is narrated by Li Lijuan, while the title bears an intratextual reference to Daniel Defoe’s *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1772). As in Defoe’s novel, the young Chinese boy writes a first-person account of the tragic pandemic to convey the stream-of-consciousness of a teenager facing a dramatic escalation of death, in which he cannot decide “whether to be afraid or not” (Bradley 2015a: 195), Bradley calls forth compassion and empathy, not only with Li Lijuan, who eventually loses his mother, but with the whole planet. As Li Lijuan registers in his diary, “cities are burning, death rates are way up, and there’s still no sign of a cure” (214), but among the various things that he lists as “saved”, the reader finds “seeds, elephants, dolphins and each other” (207; emphasis in the original). This last remark attests to the ethics of care Bradley’s novel conveys, whose value lies in its ability to make readers share “perception and responsiveness” (Nussbaum 1990: 44) of the other’s vulnerability. Despite the typical “sickness imaginary” (Houser 2016: 4) of apocalyptic fiction, *Clade* ultimately enacts moral solidarity. While the Chinese boy is

a stranger to Noah, the threat of the AVRS fuels connection, fostering a feeling of intersubjective understanding. Thus, Bradley makes use of “broadcast strategic empathy” to remind readers of our common vulnerabilities and to invite them to feel members of the same group, proposing environmental consciousness as a catalyst for imagining an alternative future.

Coda: from Empathy to Hope

If Bradley’s novel animates narrative empathy by means of multifocal perspectives, juxtaposition of narrative voices and “broadcast strategic empathy”, the reader is positioned in a narrative space that presents both human fragilities and environmental wounds. And yet, rather than conceiving the world as succumbing to anxiety and despair, *Clade* hints at causes of cautious optimism. In chapter eight, through a new narrative perspective, the novel endorses hope, by opening up to the future. The narrative voice here is that of Dylan, a programmer of sims, these being avatars of dead people in the biopolitical attempt “to recreate those who have been lost” (Bradley 2015a: 222). Dylan’s challenge is then an arduous one in that it tends to combine the past with the future. Dylan, whom the reader later discovers is Noah’s partner, dwells on the border between death and life, past and future, suggesting an empathic approach that invites all the mourners of the AVRS pandemic, as well as the reader, to look ahead: “[w]hat’s done is done, what matters now is finding some way to pick up the pieces and carry on” (222). Whereas such an attitude may seem simplistic, Dylan well embodies the novel’s tendency to foster hope in the awareness of all the fragilities the story thematises. As the omniscient narrator observes by the very end of the novel, “what of the future? [...] the world will change once more [...] [p]erhaps there will still be humans then [...] perhaps some of them will have spread outward, to the stars” (281). What is suggested here is an invitation to the reader to figure out a possible future. In Noah’s perspective, in particular, this means to establish connections with distant times and places. Significantly, Noah becomes an astronomer who studies the stars “to search for signal from alien cultures” (260). While he fails to understand human language, viewing it as “atomised, arbitrary, a collection of sounds the meanings of which might as well be accidental” (281), astronomy becomes a vehicle for imagining “a future that may be wonderful or terrible or a thousand things in between” (297).

It comes as no surprise that disability and ecosickness appear compatible with the articulation of hope. The coexistence of these contrasting stances allows for change, transforming, as Frederick Buell explains, vulnerabilities into “a way of life” (Buell 2003: 183). Paradoxically, apocalyptic rhetoric has become part of our daily life, straddling the border between the threat of the end of the world and feelings of survival and resilience. For Buell, contemporary fiction promotes attention to the present ecological crisis in terms of “environmental mourning” (265), because of the juxtaposition of nature as “deeply and irreversibly wounded” (265), on the one hand, and the urgency to find “a way of comprehending loss without numbing feeling or dwelling only in anger and grief” (266), on the other. When shifted from the level of the individual to that of the collective, the category of sickness, both for humans and nature, leads to the broader question of empathy. The empathic response *Clade* arouses ensues from painful experiences. Rather than a genuine or spontaneous reaction, the novel employs empathy as an ethical imperative, requiring the characters and

the reader to commit themselves, using the novel as a vehicle which “helps determine the nature of the way we see the world, the questions we ask, and perhaps most importantly, the stories we tell” (Bradley 2015b: n.p.). Narrative empathy, to conclude, emerges at the core of vulnerability, unveiling an ethical orientation and illuminating what it means to be human. Along such lines, empathy becomes a tool for refracting diseases and ecosickness in *Clade*, suggesting an ethics of care through which we “are prepared to care where we previously were not” (Coplan & Goldie 2011: xxvii).

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Martina Zamparo

“Albion beheld thy beauty”. Vala, Jerusalem and Blake’s Holistic Approach to the Cosmos

Abstract I: Alla luce dell’attuale rilevanza degli studi blakeani e con particolare attenzione ai personaggi di Vala e Jerusalem, questo studio si propone di discutere l’atteggiamento controverso dell’autore nei confronti del mondo naturale e della dimensione femminile. Il ruolo di Vala come crudele dea della Natura sembra poter essere rivalutato se interpretato alla luce del simbolismo legato alla divinità egiziana Iside, a sua volta associato al *topos* dello svelamento, così come alla metafora della tessitura. Considerando, inoltre, le figure femminili di Thel e Lyca, questo saggio intende dimostrare come l’originale rapporto tra parola e immagine che caratterizza i *plates* blakeani contribuisca a promuovere la necessità di un’interazione empatica tra le dimensioni umana, naturale e divina: una relazione di *inter-in-dipendenza* tra uomo e cosmo che, sul modello degli antichi Misteri, può essere compresa esclusivamente attraverso un percorso iniziatico di rivelazione.

Abstract II: Moving from the current relevance of Blakean studies and focusing on the two female characters of Vala and Jerusalem, this essay discusses the author’s still debated approach towards nature and femininity. Vala’s role as a terrifying goddess of Nature can be reassessed if read in the light of the symbolism of the Egyptian deity Isis, in its turn associated with the *topos* of the veil and with the weaving imagery. Also considering the figures of Thel and Lyca, this study is an attempt to demonstrate that Blake’s revolutionary use of the written and visual media celebrates the necessity of an empathic identification between the Human, the Natural, and the Divine: on the model of ancient Mysteries, this relationship of *inter-in-dependence* between microcosm and macrocosm can be comprehended only through initiatory revelation.

Introduction

Northrop Frye concludes his introduction to *A Collection of Critical Essays* (1966), a volume that is still indispensable to every Blakean scholar, by praising the universality of the British poet’s Art¹: “It is the peculiar quality of a definitive poet”, Frye observes (1966: 6), “that he always seems to have a special relevance to the preoccupations of one’s own age, whatever

¹ In using the term *Art*, rather than *art*, I am following Morris Eaves’ statement that William Blake epitomises “nineteenth-century dreams not of arts but of Art” (Eaves 1993: 237).

they are". Underlining the striking topicality of Blake's artistic achievements with regard to twentieth-century culture, Frye (1966: 6-7) expects Blakean art to be equally relevant to readers of the following centuries: "whatever the cultural interests of the year 2000 may be, it will be discovered in that year that Blake had them particularly in mind, and wrote his poems primarily to illustrate them". Frye's prediction has undoubtedly been fulfilled as well as Blake's hope that his work would be "a Memento in time to come [...] to speak to future generations by a Sublime Allegory" (Keynes 1972: 825)². Almost completely ignored in his lifetime, Blake is now internationally regarded as one of England's most innovative poets, painters, and printmakers, as it is also testified by the exhibition "William Blake: the Artist" that has recently opened at the Tate Britain of London. The event's main purpose, as its curators announce, is to highlight how the author's artistic innovations, his personal struggles in a period of political terror and oppression, and his social commitment have possibly never been more worth perusing³. It is also worth noting that considerable attention was devoted to Blake, as both poet and visual artist, during the two conferences on Romanticism that were held in Nottingham and Manchester in July and August 2019: multiple panel discussions about the British artist were organised at the University of Nottingham by the British Association for Romantic Studies, as well as in Manchester, at the International Conference on Romanticism, which I personally attended.

One of the reasons behind the steady growth of interest in Blake that has characterised literary criticism from the mid-twentieth century onwards is the way the author engaged in the social, cultural, and political issues of his time by employing "the Divine Arts of Imagination" (J, "To the Christians", K. 716-717) in a nonconformist way. His revolutionary engraving technique, known as "relief etching", is aimed at escaping any form of artistic and institutional slavery, as the author himself proclaims in *Jerusalem*: "I must create a system, or be enslav'd by another man's. My business is not to reason and compare. My business is to create" (J, 10: 20-21, K. 629). "Every Christian", Blake remarks, should "engage himself openly & publicly before all the World in some Mental pursuit for the Building up of Jerusalem" (J, "To the Christians", K. 717), thus reiterating a concept already expressed in the preface to the poem *Milton*:

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green & pleasant Land (M, K. 481).

Considering that Blake's aesthetic values are profoundly rooted in his "social vision"

² Hereafter all quotations from Keynes (1972) will be marked as K. followed by the page number. The abbreviations employed for the titles of Blake's works are the following: ARO (*All Religions Are One*); BT (*The Book of Thel*); DC (*A Descriptive Catalogue*); E (*Europe, a Prophecy*); FZ (*Vala, or The Four Zoas*); J (*Jerusalem*); M (*Milton*); MHH (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*); NNR (*There Is No Natural Religion*); VLJ (*A Vision of the Last Judgment*).

³ See "William Blake: the Artist", Tate Britain, London: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/william-blake-artist> (consulted on 19/04/2019).

(Ferber 1985), it is not surprising that Jerusalem is one of the key symbols of his mythological and philosophical system as well as the title of his last prophetic book, usually regarded as a *summa* of his thought. As both a woman and a city, Jerusalem is “the Holy City of Peace, which is the perfect society”, the “inspiration of all mankind”, the “Divine Vision in every individual”, and a personification of “Liberty” (Damon 1988: 206). In contrast with Jerusalem is the ambiguous and polysemous character of Vala, who epitomizes, instead, man’s “loss of Vision” (Beer 1969: 110). Vala, “builded by the Reasoning power in Man” (*J*, 44 [39]: 40, K. 675), personifies the realm of external, objective nature as separate from both the divine and the human dimensions. Since at the core of Blake’s inclusive Art is the belief that “Without contraries is no progression”, however, Jerusalem and Vala, as well as all opposite categories, should not be regarded as mutually exclusive, but, rather, as “necessary to Human Existence”⁴. As it has been claimed, “Blake’s critique of culture is never apart from aesthetics” (Adams 1986: 436) and, therefore, a perusal of his artistic principles is essential in order to shed further light on the complex relationship between Vala and Jerusalem within the author’s holistic philosophy.

“Redeem the Contraries”. Blake’s Inclusive Art

Blake’s Illuminated Books, which combine the visual and the written dimensions in a unique, and at times disquieting, way, aim precisely at arousing “the faculties to act”⁵. At the core of the author’s philosophy is the belief that man has fallen into a state of “Division”, both material and spiritual, a condition in which “Man is by his own Nature the Enemy of Man” (*J*, 43 [38]: 52, K. 673). The “fall into Division” (*FZ*, l. 21, K. 264) is consequent upon the separation of the so-called Zoas, the “Four Mighty Ones” who lived in “a Perfect Unity” in the body of the Universal Man Albion⁶. Anticipating Jung’s fourfold analysis of human personality⁷, Blake associates the Zoas with the four main aspects of man, *i.e.* body (Tharmas), reason (Urizen), emotions (Luvah), and imagination (Urthona) (Damon 1988: 458). This prelapsarian state of harmony was turned into discord when “The Four Zoas clouded rage” (*J*, 74: 1, K. 714) and, each one trying to usurp their equals’ position, “their Wheels in poisonous / And deadly stupor turn’d against each other” (*J*, 74: 5-6, K. 714). Notwithstanding the evident complexity of Blake’s mythology, the idea underlying his macrotext is that the separation of the Four Mighty Ones has resulted in the condition of mental warfare typical of the “World of Generation”. Blind to the fact that in their eternal state “Contraries Mutually Exist” (*J*, 17: 33, K. 639), in his fallen dimension man perceives reality in terms of opposite and conflictual categories that he can hardly reconcile.

⁴ “Without contraries is no progression. Attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate are necessary to human existence” (*MHH*, pl. 3, K. 149).

⁵ “The wisest of the Ancients consider’d what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction, because it rouzes the faculties to act” (To Dr. Trusler, 23 August 1799, K. 793).

⁶ “Four Mighty Ones are in every Man; a Perfect Unity / Cannot Exist but from the Universal Brotherhood of / Eden” (*FZ*, ll. 9-11, K. 264).

⁷ In his groundbreaking book *Psychological Types or The Study of Individuation* (1923), Carl Gustav Jung identifies four main functions of consciousness: thinking, feeling, sensation and intuition.

Overtly challenging the Classical tradition of *ut pictura poesis*, i.e. the Horatian theory according to which poetry and painting are “sister arts” (Lee 1967: 3), Blake’s illuminated technique serves an explicit “hermeneutic function, in that the contrariety of poem and picture entices the reader to supply the missing connections” (Mitchell 1978: 33). It is precisely the dialectical relationship between word and image that, while reflecting the division of the fallen world, also highlights the possibility to retrieve that “place where Contraries are equally true” (J, 48: 14, K. 677). In the *Songs* as well as in the epic poems, the illustrations accompany the author’s lines by enlightening but also contradicting them, in a relation that implies cooperation and autonomy at the same time and that evidently transcends the limiting tenet according to which “painting is mute poetry, poetry a speaking picture” (Lee 1967: 3)⁸. With the purpose of avoiding any attempt to reduce the multiple facets of reality to single interpretations, Blake does not intend the relationship between the written and the visual dimensions as one of static equilibrium, but, rather, as a dynamic exchange or, in Mitchell’s words (1978: 4), as an “energetic rivalry, a dialogue or dialectic between two vigorously independent modes of expression”. As a result of the creative encounter of two autonomous expressive media, then, Blake’s composite Art evidently longs for the establishment of a world in which “contraries exist productively in dynamic tension” (Lee 1983: 133). Line and colour, far from simply denoting two aesthetic categories, actually function as a metaphor for all opposites. Moving from Lessing’s assumption that poetry and painting belong to the temporal and the spatial dimensions respectively⁹, Blake identifies time and space and, therefore, word and image, with the masculine and the feminine: “Time and Space are real beings, a Male and a Female. Time is a Man, Space is a Woman” (VLJ, K. 614). Influenced by the association word-soul and image-body typical of Renaissance emblem books and by Lessing’s coeval theories on the sister arts, Blake conceives of his composite Art as the fruit of a “dynamic relation of alterity” (Colebrook 2000: 6) between line and colour, soul and body, time and space, man and woman. His own works are the product of the fruitful partnership with his wife Catherine: the two closely collaborated in the act of artistic creation, Blake etching the lines and drawings and Catherine colouring the prints¹⁰.

Since both pictorial and verbal signs contribute, in all their diversity, to the overall significance of a given work and neither the visual nor the written dimension dominates over the other one, it is fairly evident that Blake’s Illuminated Art mirrors the author’s inclusive approach towards all religious, mythological, and cultural traditions, an attitude

⁸ See also Barkan 2013.

⁹ In his celebrated treatise *Laocoon. An Essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766), the eighteenth-century German thinker Gotthold Ephraim Lessing objects to the tradition known as *ut pictura poesis* and, referring to the sculptural group of the *Laocoon*, maintains that poetry, which gives expression to progressive actions, is a temporal medium, whereas painting and sculpture, being static forms of art, belong to the spatial domain and should, thus, relinquish all representations of time. Blake’s *Laocoön* engraving (1826) testifies to his indebtedness to Lessing’s innovative theories on the relationship between poetry and the visual arts.

¹⁰ The exhibition “William Blake: the Artist” at the Tate Britain is also intended to uncover Catherine Boucher Blake’s role as “a hugely important creative force” in her husband’s life, thus possibly shedding further light on the author’s still highly debated approach towards the female dimension. See <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2019/apr/04/tates-william-blake-show-celebrates-wifes-creative-influence> (consulted on 19/04/2019).

that is clearly expressed in the early treatise *All Religions Are One*. The poet actually defines all dichotomies as “cultural constructs” (Hutchings 2002: 19), generated by the Reasoning Power in man and consequent upon the separation of the Zoas. It is the dominion of reason over imaginative insight that leads humanity to distinguish everything into the false categories of Good and Evil, thus creating what Blake calls “Abstracts” and “Negations”: “They take the Two Contraries which are call’d Qualities, with which / Every Substance is clothed: they name them Good & Evil; / From them they make an Abstract, which is a Negation” (*J*, 10: 9-11, K. 629). The “Reasoning Power”, as the author explains a few lines below, is “An Abstract objecting power that Negatives every thing. / This is the Spectre of Man” (*J*, 10: 13-15, K. 629). In differentiating “Negations” from “Contraries”, Blake firmly concludes that “The Negation must be destroy’d to redeem the Contraries” since the former is “the Spectre, the Reasoning Power in Man” (*M*, 40: 34, K. 533). The latter causes man to lose “any feeling of kinship with others” (Lincoln 1995: 259) and gives rise to “the self-centered Selfhood” (Damon 1988: 381). Completely “unable to sympathize with any other person” and to acknowledge the necessary coexistence of all opposites, in both artistic and philosophical terms, man has gradually become a victim of that “selfish ‘superiority complex’ which is determined to be the God of the universe” (Damon 1988: 381). In the song *On Another’s Sorrow*, however, Blake clearly highlights the need to recover an attitude of empathy towards all living things: wondering whether it would be possible to “see another’s woe, / And not be in sorrow too” (ll. 1-2, K. 122) or to “Hear the small bird’s grief and care, / [...] And not sit beside the nest” (ll. 15; 17), the author comes to the conclusion that “Never, never can it be” (l. 24).

By showing that all contraries, while retaining their individuality, are, in fact, part of a totality, Blakean Art is endowed with a wider social and cultural significance that, as it has been pointed out, promotes “unity in diversity” (Adams 1986: 436). Somehow anticipating the holistic approach to the cosmos endorsed by the theologian and historian of religions Raimon Panikkar, Blake’s works display an unsurpassed example of *inter-in-dependence* between word and image, poetry and painting, time and space, man and woman, soul and body, spirit and matter. Panikkar (2010: 278) coins the term “inter-in-dependence” to describe the law of reality according to which we are all “correlated and interconnected, but each independent in an interdependent way”. In like manner, at the core of the British author’s philosophy and Art is the belief in the “interrelation of all living things” (Lefcowitz 1974: 123-124), as it is well expressed in the celebrated line “Everything that lives is Holy” (*MHH*, pl. 26, K. 160). Advocating the “sanctity of all life” (Damon 1988: 133) by a process of empathy, Blake’s Art is intended to awaken man’s ability to *see* “not with but through the eye”¹¹, thus overcoming the restrictive state of the “Single vision” (To Butts, 22 Nov. 1802, K. 818) and acknowledging that “Every thing that lives / Lives not alone, nor for itself” (*BT*, 3: 26-27, K. 129). Serving the double purpose of highlighting the division of the generated world and, at the same, the *inter-in-dependence* and mutuality of all opposites, the contrariety of poetry and picture that characterizes Blake’s plates also reflects, I believe, the “free

¹¹ “We are led to Believe a Lie / When we see [With *del.*] not Thro’ the Eye” (*Auguries of Innocence*, ll. 125-126. K. 433).

connection" that, according to Panikkar (2010: 277), governs the very "Rhythm of Being". As will be discussed below, one of the consequences of what Blake defines as man's "single Vision" is the dichotomy between soul and body, or spirit and matter, an issue the author addresses through the female characters of Vala and Jerusalem: the two women symbolise respectively the earthly, 'natural' world and the spiritual dimension.

"Nature is Imagination itself". Man, Nature, and God

Vala, whose name is the original title of Blake's epic on the Fall of humanity, a poem now usually referred to as *The Four Zoas*, is undoubtedly the most debated character of the Blakean macrotext. As a personification of Nature, Vala has all the controversial attributes of female goddesses of the Earth and still elicits opposite interpretations. If some scholars argue that she embodies the author's anti-naturalism and misogyny¹², others, conversely, consider her as the result of "limited male vision" (Lincoln 1995: 24). According to this reading, Vala's most threatening features epitomise Blake's criticism of a mechanistic and utilitarian society that deprives man of the possibility to enjoy a creative, spiritual union with the cosmos. Her "dynamic and energetic poetry" represents, in Hutchings's words (2002: 187-88), an "implicit critique of patriarchal science and established gender roles". Testifying to the fact that in much of Blake's writing "nature and femininity are closely related" (Hutchings 2002: 17), Vala symbolises "nature as passively feminine" (Hutchings 2002: 21) on the model of the female character of Earth in the song *Earth's Answer*. In the short lyric, a female voice addresses the Bard, the poet speaking in the previous poem, and denounces the state of imprisonment she is forced in, thus highlighting woman's as well as nature's "enslaved condition under patriarchy" (Hutchings 2002: 188).

In embodying both alienated femininity and objectified nature¹³, Vala is the so-called "shadowy female" (*E*, pl. 1, K. 238): in the state of division consequent upon the separation of the Zoas, the shadowy female is the "Woman Old" who, as suggested in Blake's poem *The Mental Traveller*, is the primary cause of man's loss of eternity (see Bouwer-McNally 1978-79). The Biblical and Neoplatonic theme of man's "falling in the powers of the females" (Raine 1963: 364) recurs also in *Jerusalem*, when Albion, entranced by Vala, falls asleep upon her bosom, thus sinking into the slumber of earthly life: "Embalm'd in Vala's bosom / In an Eternal Death" (*J*, 23: 9-10, K. 646). Since in its primeval state "Humanity knows not of Sex" (*J*, 30 [44]: 33, K. 656), however, Female Emanations become evil and selfish when they are separated from their male counterparts and acquire a will of their own: "Her shadowy form now separate; [...]. Two wills they had, two intellects, & not as in times of old" (*FZ*, ll.

¹² Mellor (1982-83: 148), among others, highlights "Blake's consistently sexist portrayal of women". See also Mellor (1993). Colebrook (2000) and Bruder (2006), on the contrary, maintain that Blake's negative depiction of the "Female Will" (see Damon 1988: 447) is, in fact, aimed at criticising gender stereotypes. See also Bruder (1997). A more recent and controversial work expanding the boundaries of Blake criticism concerning issues of gender and sex is Bruder-Connolly (2013). As far as Blake's seeming anti-natural approach is concerned, Hutchings (2002) argues that the British author's criticism is not directed at nature *per se*, but, rather, at the way humans interact with and exploit the natural world.

¹³ Colebrook (2000: 9) argues that "Blake uses the concept of the 'feminine' as a metaphor for alienated otherness in general".



Fig. 1. W. Blake, *Jerusalem*, 1804-1820, pl. 28.

204, 206, K. 285). In like manner, Vala assumes “a cruel and destructive separate existence” (Raine 1968: 209, vol. 1) when she divides herself from her shadow Jerusalem. As a matter of fact, the two female characters once formed an indivisible whole (Fig. 1): “He [Albion] found Jerusalem upon the River of his City, soft repos’d / In the arms of Vala, assimilating in one with Vala” (*J*, 19: 40-41, K. 642)¹⁴.

Albion himself loved Vala and, in revering her beauty, he attested to the original harmony between the human, the natural, and the divine worlds:

Albion beheld thy beauty,
 [...].
 The Veil shone with thy brightness in the eyes of Albion
 Because it inclos’d pity & love, because we lov’d one-another.

¹⁴ Plate 28 of Blake’s last epic, picturing two female characters embracing each other, possibly celebrates the archetypal union between Vala and Jerusalem as it existed in ancient times. However, in his prophetic books, Blake regularly employs the device known as “syncopation”, *i.e.* “placing designs at a physical and metaphoric distance from their best textual reference” (Mitchell 1978: 193), thus making it difficult for scholars to trace a logical and exact connection between lines and pictures.

Albion lov'd thee: he rent thy Veil: he embrac'd thee: he lov'd thee!
(*J*, 20: 32, 34-36, K. 643).

As Jerusalem dolefully recalls, that was “a time of love”, a condition that has been replaced by a state where the earthly, natural dimension must necessarily be *negated* in favour of the spiritual one: “Then was a time of love. O why is it passed away!” (*J*, 20: 41, K. 643).

One of the “negations” Blake most abhors is certainly the one entailing the separation of spirit and matter, or body and soul (Adams 1986: 433). Albeit temporarily enclosed within a physical body, man is potentially infinite and, as a consequence, he has no body distinct from his soul: this delusive belief, the author remarks in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, “is to be expunged; this I shall do by printing in the infernal methods, by corrosives” (*MHH*, pl. 14, K. 154). Since spirit and matter are necessary to each other, the so-called “Vegetable Glass of Nature” (*VLJ*, K. 605) is a reflection of the divine realm, in the same way as Vala is a shadow of Jerusalem. Profoundly indebted to the German philosopher and mystic Jacob Böhme and to the alchemical and Hermetic Renaissance traditions, Blake sees man as a microcosm, *i.e.* a mirror of “that which is above”¹⁵. As Böhme (1651: 77) remarks in his *Signatura rerum*, “the whole outward visible World with all its Being is a Signature, or Figure of the inward spiritual World; whatsoever is Internally, and howsoever its operation is, so likewise it hath its Character externally”. Constantly advocating “a synthesis of the natural and human” (Lefcowitz 1974: 123), Blake himself maintains that Nature, “tho’ it appears Without”, is, in fact, an integral part of man, who originally bore in his “own Bosom” both Heaven and Earth:

For all are Men in Eternity, Rivers, Mountains, Cities, Villages,
All are Human, & when you enter into their Bosoms you walk
In Heavens & Earths, as in your own Bosom you bear your Heaven
And Earth & all you behold; tho’ it appears Without, it is Within (*J*, 71: 15-18, K. 709).

Further attesting to the timeless significance of Blakean Art, the poet’s celebration of the prelapsarian interaction between man, Nature, and God, introduces, in essence, the cosmotheandric vision of reality expounded by Panikkar (2010). According to the latter’s holistic approach, the “Divine, the Human, and the Cosmic are correlated and interconnected” (Panikkar 2010: 277). However, as the Spanish theologian remarks a few words below (278), this principle “cannot be com-prehended by reason” and is unintelligible to “an exclusively rational mind”¹⁶. Employing the metaphor of musical response, Panikkar (277-278) observes that, the relation between man and the cosmos being one of *inter-in-dependence*, “[e]ach

¹⁵ The first principle of the *Tabula Smaragdina*, the sacred text of alchemists attributed to the legendary Hermes Trismegistus, celebrates the identity of microcosm and macrocosm: “True it is, without falsehood, certain and most true. That which is above is like to that which is below, and that which is below is like to that which is above, to accomplish the miracles of one thing” (Linden 2003: 28).

¹⁶ As Panikkar maintains, “*Inter-in-dependence* [...] may appear as a quandary to a merely rational mind: either dependence or independence, but not both. Yet we are not trespassing the principle of non-contradiction when defending the inter-in-dependence of the three dimensions of the real” (2010: 277).

hearer has an inter-in-dependent reaction" since "[w]e are free agents and yet mutually connected". In a way close to Panikkar, Blake asserts that only "the man of imagination" can truly experience an empathic identification with the cosmos, since "In the eyes of others" Nature is "all ridicule and deformity":

The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing which stands in the way. Some see nature all ridicule and deformity, and by these I shall not regulate my proportions; and some scarce see nature at all. But to the eyes of the man of imagination, nature is imagination itself. As a man is, So he Sees (To Dr. Trusler, 23 August 1799, K. 793).

As Blake himself remarks, "As a man is, So he Sees"¹⁷, thus suggesting that it is according to one's spiritual state that the distance between Jerusalem and Vala, *i.e.* spirit and matter, or macrocosm and microcosm, becomes greater or less (Raine 1968: 209, vol. 1). After the separation of the Zoas, mankind has lost the vision of "the Human Form Divine" (*A Divine Image*, l. 3, K. 221) and "the Starry Heavens are fled from the mighty limbs of Albion" (*J*, "To the Jews", K. 649). The spiritually *blind* man, unable to perceive the bond between spirit and matter, inevitably sees Vala as a threatening and cruel Goddess of Nature: "Vala, The Goddess Virgin-Mother. / She is our Mother! Nature!" (*J*, 18: 29-30, K. 640). As attested by Eliade (1965: 172-173), however, in all ancient and primitive cultures that which is called *nature* is the product of a gradual secularization of the cosmos. The so-called *homo religiosus* always acknowledges the existence of an absolute, sacred reality that, while transcending this material existence, also manifests in it and sanctifies all its living things (Eliade 1965: 171). Ancient poets, as Blake notices in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, conceived of the present world as a mirror of the macrocosm and, therefore, "animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses":

The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could perceive (*MHH*, pl. 11, K. 153).

It was when "Priesthood" began and "a system was formed" that "Poetic tales" were finally replaced by delusive "forms of worship" and "men forgot All deities reside in the human breast"¹⁸.

¹⁷ Blake was well acquainted with George Berkeley's doctrine according to which *esse est percipi (aut percipere)*, *i.e.* "to be is to be perceived (or to perceive)". The Irish philosopher maintains that the physical world, being a collection of "ideas" or sensible qualities, is mind-dependent and that the source of our sensory ideas is the infinite mind of God, the "Author of Nature". In one of his annotations to Berkeley's *Siris*, Blake observes that "Forms must be apprehended by Sense or the Eye of Imagination. Man is all Imagination. God is Man & exists in us & we in him" ("Annotations to Berkeley's *Siris*", K. 775).

¹⁸ "Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of, & enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects: thus began Priesthood; Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales. [...] Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast" (*MHH*, pl. 11, K. 153).

In a way consistent with his belief in Albion's eventual release from "the mind-forg'd manacles" (*London*, l. 8, K. 216), Blake suggests that the "human form divine" can be retrieved by "every man, of every clime" through the constant exercise of "Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love" (*The Divine Image*, ll. 11, 13, 1, K. 117). However, as Mellor observes (1971: 596), this is not only "a mode of vision": "it is also a fact, the given object of perception" since "[t]he human form *is* divine: it is God as He exists on earth; it is infinite". By recovering the ability to see "the mutuality of all entities inhabiting Blake's divine cosmos" (Hutchings 2002: 218), man will ultimately regard Nature not as an end in itself but, rather, as the "signature" of the world above and, therefore, as infinite. Drawing attention to the eco-critical and holistic perspective inherent to Blake's works, Hutchings (2002: 206-207) remarks that his poetry gives voice to "the philosophical devaluation, physical domination, and ultimate desolation of the Earth, its ecosystems, and its living creatures, both human and non-human". As will be discussed below, Vala is the character that, recalling the Egyptian goddess Isis, most evidently epitomizes Blake's critique of man's dominating and Promethean attitude towards Nature.

"He rent thy Veil". Vala and Isis

According to ancient and Classical traditions, "the worship of a divinely animated cosmos" has usually been conveyed through the symbolism of Isis (Assmann 1997: 143), the Egyptian Goddess of Mother Earth and a universal female principle (Grimal 1951: 238). The latter, traditionally identified with the inscription *una quae es omnia*, i.e. "You one, who are all", has come to symbolise the manifestation in the present world of "the invisible source of everything" (Assmann 1997: 88). Especially significant to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature and iconography and, in particular, to the German Romantic poets Novalis, Schlegel, and Schiller¹⁹, Isis is also essential to a proper understanding of Vala, who has inherited all the ambiguous attributes of her mythological predecessor. The features of several female deities belonging to different cults and geographical areas have actually been attributed to Isis throughout history. As attested by an Egyptian hymn dating from the first century B. C., Persephone, Demeter, Athena, Artemis, Leto, and Aphrodite are only a few of the goddesses whose symbolism has variously merged with that of Isis (Assmann 1997: 49). Apuleius clearly highlights the latter's polysemous features in the eleventh book of the *Metamorphoses*, when the Egyptian goddess reveals to the protagonist Lucius that she is "adored by the whole world in varied forms [...] and with many diverse names" (*Apu. Met.* XI. 5, tr. Griffiths: 75). Most interestingly, considering that Isis is a female deity "transcending all cultural differences" (Assmann 1997: 49), a perusal of her rich imagery is also of primary importance to shed further light on Blake's habit of merging different traditions in a new, 'illuminated' way.

¹⁹ As Hadot (2006: 262) points out, "[a]t the end of the eighteenth century, [...] the motif of Isis/Nature was to invade literature and philosophy and bring about a radical change in attitude with regard to nature". In contrast with the scientific approach to the cosmos that characterized the previous century, an aesthetic attitude to nature, that introduced an emotional, sentimental, and irrational element into the relation between mankind and nature, started to appear in the writings of Goethe, Schiller, Schlegel, and of German Romantics (see Hadot 2006: 263).



Fig. 2. W. Blake, *Jerusalem*, 1804-1820, pl. 51.

Recalling the Old Norse prophetess and priestess *völva*, a character Blake possibly knew thanks to Cottle's (1797) and Gray's translations of Norse myths²⁰, the very name Vala alludes to the word "veil" and, consequently, to the "mythology of the veiled goddess" (Raine 1968: 177, vol. 2). The iconography related to Nature's veil derives from the belief that "Nature loves to hide", a concept well expressed by Heraclitus' popular aphorism written in honour of Artemis of Ephesus (Hadot 2006: 1). Artemis and Isis, who have been conflated since antiquity (Hadot 2006: 236), are usually depicted with multiple breasts, a crown, and a veil, and a *peplum*, "a womanish pall [...] embroidered all over" (Cudworth 1845: 578, vol. 1), is also associated with Athena. Vala herself appears in plate 51 from *Jerusalem* with two of the attributes common to both Athena and Isis, *i.e.* a veil and a crown (Fig. 2).

Plutarch and Proclus report an inscription once placed at the Egyptian temple of Athena-Isis at Saïs that evidently focuses on the metaphor of the veil: "I am all that has been,

²⁰ On Blake's acquaintance with Norse poetry via Thomas Gray, see Sklar (2011: 130) and O' Donoghue (2014).

that is, and that shall be; no mortal has yet raised my veil" (Hadot 2006: 265). As Hadot attests (2006: 265), Athena and Isis descend, in fact, from Neith, who was also renowned for her veil or *peplum*. Either in the form of Neith, Athena, Artemis, or Isis, then, the image of Nature as a veiled Goddess is typical of several mythological traditions and has given rise to an ambiguity that has drawn the attention of poets and visual artists: Nature both hides herself from man and also *veils* herself in everything, thus becoming visible only to those who can *see* beyond her veil. Assimilating "in literal similarity and reversal with 'live' and 'evil'", moreover, the term "veil" highlights the contradictory attributes that are inherent to all Goddesses of Mother Earth (Hilton 1983: 2): in the words of Beer (1969: 110), Vala "represents a similar ambiguity in Nature".

The image of the veil and the *topos* of the unveiling of Nature have traditionally symbolized man's relationship with the cosmos (Hadot 2006). As already said, Albion could once rend Nature's veil: "Albion lov'd thee: he rent thy Veil: he embrac'd thee: he lov'd thee! (J, 20: 36, K. 643). On the contrary, in the fallen world, Nature's mantle becomes the delusory vision of scientific materialism. According to Hadot, two approaches can be identified throughout the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Modern periods, *i.e.* a Promethean and an Orphic one. If "Promethean man demands the right of domination over nature" (Hadot 2006: 95), the Orphic attitude, by contrast, implies a creative union with the cosmos that comes through initiatory gnosis, "after the model of the mysteries of Eleusis"²¹. The initiation into the secrets of Mother Earth is the primary aim of all ancient Mysteries (Eliade 1965, 1994), among which are precisely the Greek Eleusinian celebrations, whose rituals re-enacted the myth of Demeter and Persephone. That Blake was well acquainted with the tradition of the Eleusinian rites and with the imagery related to the two goddesses of grain and agriculture is testified by the songs *The Little Girl Lost* and *The Little Girl Found*. The protagonist of Blake's poems, Lyca, is usually identified with Persephone: divesting herself of her "slender dress"²², *i.e.* abandoning her human form, Blake's heroine enters a cave, emblem of the telluric womb, where she symbolically *dies*, thus retracing the descent into the underworld accomplished by her mythological prototype (Raine 1968: 130, vol. 1). In the same way as Persephone's descent into Hades's reign is followed by her eventual rebirth in springtime, so Lyca is *found* by her weeping parents only after being *lost* in the "desart wild"²³. As scholars have pointed out, Lyca's path of loss and recovery is also reminiscent of the Neoplatonic doctrine of the human soul's descent into and ascent from the generated world. It is very likely through the influence of the philosopher and translator Thomas Taylor that Blake conflated the imagery of the Eleusinian Mysteries with the soteriological theories of the Neoplatonists Plotinus and Porphyry (Zamparo 2015). In the latter's treatise *De Antro*

²¹ "Orpheus thus penetrates the secrets of nature not through violence but thorough melody, rhythm, and harmony. Whereas the Promethean attitude is inspired by audacity, boundless curiosity, the will to power, and the search for utility, the Orphic attitude, by contrast, is inspired by respect in the face of mystery and disinterestedness" (Hadot 2006: 96).

²² "While the lioness / Loos'd her slender dress, / And naked they convey'd / To caves the sleeping maid" (*The Little Girl Lost*, ll. 49-52, K. 113).

²³ "Lost in desart wild / Is your little child" (*The Little Girl Lost*, ll. 21-22, K. 112).

Nympharum, which Blake himself engraved, the cosmos is described as a cave having two gates, “one prepared for the descent of men, the other for the ascent of gods” (Porph. *Antr.* 3: transl. Taylor 1788: 299). Porphyry’s work, which takes the form of a commentary on an obscure passage in Homer’s *Odyssey*, thus suggests that the created world is both a *grave* and a *womb*: it is, in Blake’s own words, “The Habitation of the Spectres of the Dead, & the Place / Of Redemption & of awakening again into Eternity” (*J*, 59: 8-9, K. 691). The idea of the threshold that has to be overcome in order to be spiritually reborn is clearly at the core of *Jerusalem*, whose frontispiece shows the artist and blacksmith Los while entering the cave-grave of mortal existence and, therefore, undertaking the “passage through / Eternal Death” and the eventual “awakening to Eternal Life” (*J*, 4: 1-2, K. 622).

As the symbolism of all ancient Mysteries well demonstrates, then, rending nature’s veil implies a *descensus ad inferos* on the model of both Lyca and Persephone. The initiatory journey into the womb of Mother Earth, traditionally perceived as dangerous and threatening, is variously represented as the entry into a cave, into the belly of a monster, into a telluric womb, or into a hut (Eliade 1994: xiv). Overcoming the secular, *natural* state of man, *i.e.* of the one who is spiritually *blind* and ignores the sacred origin of all life, always corresponds to some kind of death followed by a new birth (Eliade 1965: 162). Wondering whether it would be wise to raise Nature’s mantle, behind which unknown dangers dwell, Schiller actually claims that “knowledge is but death”:

Is it wise to raise the veil
Where terror, threatening, dwells?
Life is naught but error,
And knowledge is but death
(*Kassandra*, 1802, ll. 57-60)²⁴.

In his erudite study *The Veil of Isis*, Hadot argues that what is most frightening about the unveiling of Goddess Nature is the growing awareness of the principle underlying earthly existence: the mystery of metamorphosis and the coexistence of life and death. Both Lyca and Persephone are required to symbolically *die* in order to attain a new life, thus following the natural cycle of birth, decay, death, and rebirth, a never-ending process which Blake constantly praises: “As one age falls, another rises; different to mortal sight but to immortals always the same” (*DC*, K. 567). Heraclitus’ popular aphorism on the Goddess of Saïs, usually translated as “Nature loves to hide”, conveys, in fact, a much more profound truth: “By this literary form, he also wanted to provide a glimpse of what, for him, is the law of all reality: the battle among contraries, and the perpetual metamorphosis that results from this eternal combat between opposing forces” (Hadot 2006: 2). “Reality is such”, Hadot continues (2006: 10), “that within each thing there are two aspects that destroy each other mutually. For instance, death is life and life is death”. If carefully perused, then, Heraclitus’s enigmatic saying on Athena-Isis “expresses astonishment before the mystery of metamorphosis and of the deep identity of life and death” (Hadot 2006: 11-12).

²⁴ The English translation of Schiller’s lines is from Hadot (2006: 271).

There is a character in Blake's macrotext who epitomizes man's fears before the image of an unveiled Nature: the female protagonist of *The Book of Thel*. In contrast to Lyca and Persephone, Thel refuses to descend into the underworld, which in Blake's imaginative system is the so-called state of Experience, *i.e.* "the world of the soul which has 'died', or 'lapsed'" (Raine 1968: 129, vol. 1): "The eternal gates' terrific porter lifted the northern bar: / Thel enter'd in & saw the secrets of the land unknown" (*BT*, 6:1-2, K. 130). Unable to bear the sight of "the secrets of the land unknown", the girl flees to her world of illusory innocence: "The Virgin started from her seat, & with a shriek / Fled back unhinder'd till she came to the vales of Har" (*BT*, 6: 21-22, K. 130). As Lefcowitz argues (1974: 123-124), Thel's inability to perform the necessary descent into Nature's womb is consequent upon an "[i]nadequate perception of the need for natural identity, which must serve as the first step toward eventual fusion of self and other under the aegis of the imagination". Failing to comprehend that physical death is but a prelude to rebirth, the young lady compares herself to a vanishing cloud and does not accept "the inevitability of her own death" (Lefcowitz 1974: 123-124): "Thel is like a faint cloud kindled at the rising sun: / I vanish from my pearly throne, and who shall find my place?" (*BT*, 2:11-12, K. 128). Vala, on the contrary, "is able to sacrifice her selfhood to the point where natural identification is possible" (Lefcowitz 1974: 123-124). At first concerned about the inescapable law of mutability that underlies all earthly processes²⁵, she is immediately comforted by the Zoa Luvah, invisibly hovering over her "in bright clouds" (*FZ*, l. 385, K. 367): "Yon sun shall wax old & decay, but thou shalt ever flourish. / The fruit shall ripen & fall down, & the flowers consume away, / But thou shalt still survive; arise, O dry thy dewy tears" (*FZ*, ll. 419-421, K. 368). Aware that she "will ultimately be able to transcend mere generation" (Lefcowitz 1974: 123-134) by accepting and revering the mysteries of Mother Earth, Vala is finally willing to merge with the natural elements around her:

Hah! shall I survive? Whence came that sweet & comforting voice?
 [...].
 I am not here alone: my flocks, you are my brethren;
 And you birds that sing & adorn the sky, you are my sisters.
 I sing, & you reply to my song; I rejoice, & you are glad
 (*FZ*, ll. 422, 443-445, K. 368).

In *The Book of Thel* Blake demonstrates how the physical body, which is "potentially redemptive" (Paley 1973: 127), might, instead, constitute "that pitying urge for protection that can give rise to the selfhood" (Lincoln 1995: 74). As "a woven object", the human "garment" is related in Blake's works to the "weaving theme" (Paley 1973: 120) and, therefore, to the female dimension. In ancient and Classical traditions, "to wield a spindle held deep ideological, philosophical, as well as practical meanings" and female spinners "were especially revered for their cosmic associations with life and death" (Taylor 2018: 26; 28). The

²⁵ "Alas! am I but as a flower? then will I sit me down, / Then will I weep, then I'll complain & sigh for immortality, / And chide my maker, thee O Sun, that raisedst me to fall" (*FZ*, ll. 410-412, K. 368).

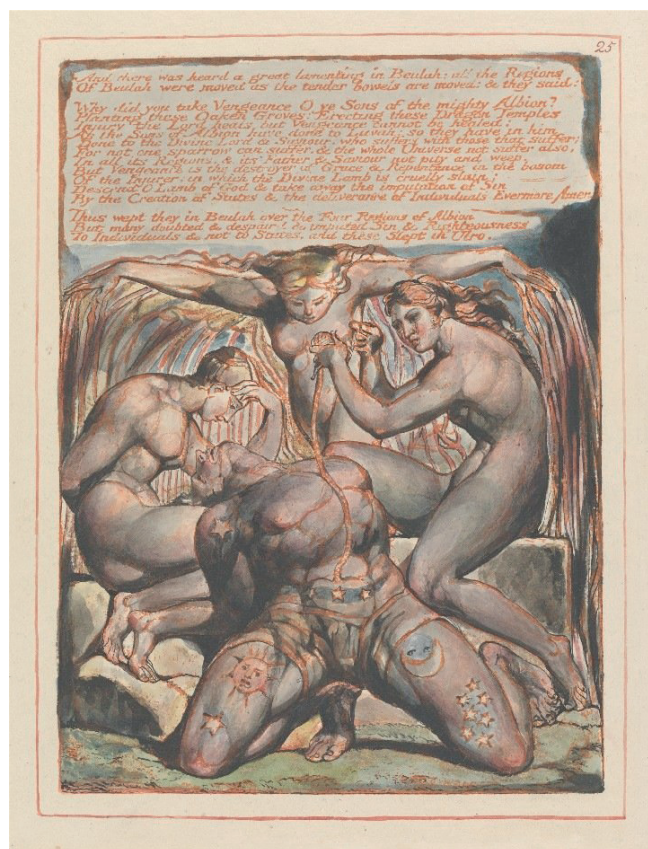


Fig. 3. W. Blake, *Jerusalem*, 1804-1820, pl. 25.

activities of spinning and weaving, in their turn connected with creation (Taylor 2018: 27), were part of the imagery of all Goddesses of Nature: Neith and Isis were believed to have intertwined the whole created universe on their *peplum*, in the same way as Vala's "beautiful net of gold and silver", a cloth that she had "woven with art" (J. 20: 30-31, K. 643), is the veil upon which the splendid variety of the cosmos originally shone with brightness in Albion's eyes. As attested by Porphyry, Persephone herself, "who presides over every thing generated from seed, is represented weaving a web" (Porph. *Antr.* 14: transl. Taylor 1788: 305).

Given the significant associations between the imagery of weaving, creation, and the iconography of Nature Goddesses, plate 25 from *Jerusalem* is worth focusing on (Fig. 3). The illustration, which closes the first part of the poem, shows the Cosmic Man Albion while being eviscerated by the three female characters Vala, Rahab, and Tirzah during a Druid sacrifice. On Albion's left side is Tirzah, who is winding the latter's bowels into a ball in her hand, whereas Rahab is standing on his right in a melancholic posture. Hovering over the three characters and covering them with her mantle is Vala. It is fairly evident that Blake's women recall the Greek *Moirae*, also known to Roman culture as *Parcae*, i.e. the Classical Fates who presided over the destiny of men and heroes by deciding upon one's lifespan and decreeing the time of a person's death (Taylor 2018: 28-29). However, if considering that the term *Parcae* derives from the Latin verb *parire*, i.e. "to give birth to", it is clear that these divine spinners, with their "bittersweet symbols" of the wool and spindle, were also harbingers of new life (Taylor 2018: 29).

Weaving is likewise "an ambivalent activity" in Blake's macrotext: it "provides a model of divine creation, one which might allow the material world to be seen as a temporary, protective covering for humanity, but which actually makes it seem like a form of bondage, the product of a sinister goddess of fate" (Lincoln 1995: 74-75). As far as plate 25 from *Jerusalem* is concerned, it is not clear whether Vala is ominously hiding or, rather, benevolently protecting Albion with her fibrous veil (Romero 2010: 140). Despite her enigmatic features, a key to interpret the Goddess's ambiguous attitude is offered by the myth of Isis and Osiris as it is described by Plutarch. Beer (1969: 109) points out that the story of Isis, Osiris, and Typhon actually "provides a perfect parallel with the lost Man, dimly remembered

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and yearned after by the four Zoas, but now existing only in destructive heat". The myth recounts that Isis, who stands for "the healing principle in nature", is "constantly and patiently seeking to find pieces and restore her lost husband" Osiris, who has been mutilated by Typhon, "the evil destructive principle in nature" (Beer 2007: 106). Interestingly enough, in order to regenerate her husband, Isis asks the help of the Mesopotamian goddess of weaving Tayet (Taylor 2018: 27). The story of the "moon-goddess who is trying to re-create [Osiris]" (Beer 1969: 109) can thus support a positive reading of Vala. In Plutarch's words, Isis "signifies *knowledge*" and, opposing her adversary Typhon, "collects, compiles and delivers [that *holy doctrine*] to those who aspire after the most perfect participation of the divine nature" (Plut. *De Iside* 2: transl. Squire 1744: 2). If read in this light, Vala is not entrapping Albion, but, rather, she is fostering the latter's spiritual awakening: since the Latin word *velum* also means "tent" (Romero 2010: 140), it can be asserted that Vala's veil functions as the hut, *i.e.* the threatening passage, that in all initiatory Mysteries leads to rebirth. In view of the fact that the access to spirituality is always expressed through the imagery of death followed by regeneration (Eliade 1965: 162), even Rahab's role acquires a peculiar significance. Her melancholic posture, which recalls a work of art much appreciated by Blake, *i.e.* Dürer's engraving *Melencolia I* (Romero 2010: 141), stands for the phase of darkness and suffering that is traditionally a prelude to inner renewal: according to alchemical and Hermetic sources, which Blake was highly familiar with, every initiatory death corresponds to internal melancholy (Brann 1985: 126). In the attempt to retrieve "the Human Form Divine", Valas-Isis, both "queen of the dead" and "of heavenly beings" (Apu. *Met.* XI. 5, tr. Griffiths 1975: 75), is guiding the lost man Albion to a full identification with the sacred dimension, thus helping him to overcome his exclusively material, *natural*, and selfish existence. Moreover, as testified by the fact that the sun and moon, "the Starry Heavens", are again visible on Albion's "mighty limbs" (J, "To the Jews", K. 649), it can be assumed that the Goddess is "reconciling Man's inward nature with the inward nature of the universe" (Beer 1969: 110), thus showing that, in Panikkar's words, "All is inter-related" (2010: 278). It follows that Vala's mantle does not *veil* the sacred origin of all life, but, rather, *reveals* to Blake's Universal Man the true essence of humanity. In this "enlightened state", as Raine remarks quoting Blake's own words (1968: 186, vol. 2), "nature is not rejected but seen for what it is: 'One Continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination'".

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Jhumpa Lahiri's Narratives of Self-Translation as Dynamic Encounters with the Other

Abstract I: Questo saggio descrive come alcune narrazioni che affrontano le modalità relazionali di costituzione di soggettività ibride possano incorporare processi (auto)traduttivi. *In altre parole*, l'opera autobiografica di Jhumpa Lahiri che affronta la relazione dell'autrice con l'italiano come lingua straniera e come lingua della sua più recente produzione letteraria, è qui analizzato come un testo che mette in atto i processi di apprendimento e auto-ridefinizione di un parlante non nativo. Sebbene Lahiri descriva la sua narrativa come uno spazio apparentemente intimo di esilio ed isolamento, questo saggio dimostra che essa è invece caratterizzata da una consapevolezza della natura transpersonale e relazionale della soggettività, oltre che dal desiderio di esplorare le lingue come luoghi di esilio e connessione con l'Altro. Inoltre, dimostrando che la lingua è essa stessa un luogo di alterità, Lahiri affronta la comunicazione interlinguistica e interculturale come forme di mutua comprensione e rispetto reciproco.

Abstract II: This essay deals with how translational processes may be incorporated in narratives concerned with the relational modes in which hybrid subjectivities may come into being. *In altre parole*, Jhumpa Lahiri's autobiographical work which addresses the author's relationship to Italian as a foreign language, as well as her choice of Italian as the language of her most recent literary production, is analysed as a text which does not only represent, but also stages the processes through which a second language is learnt and contributes in redefining the self-perception of the speaker. Although Lahiri describes her fiction as an apparently intimate space of isolation and exile, in this essay I argue that it is overdetermined by an awareness of the transpersonal, relational nature of subjectivity, as well as by the desire to explore languages as sites of both exile and reconnection. Also, by showing that language is, itself, a place of alterity, she challenges notions of selfhood and otherness, and engages with interlinguistic and intercultural communication as forms of mutual understanding and respect.

Unlike my parents, I translate not so much to survive in the world around me
as to create and illuminate a nonexistent one. Fiction is the foreign land of my choosing,
the place where I strive to convey and preserve the meaningful.
And whether I write as an American or an Indian,
about things American or Indian or otherwise, one thing remains constant:
I translate, therefore I am (Lahiri 2002: 120).

The rephrasing of the Cartesian *cogito* which the Indian-American Pulitzer Prize winner Jhumpa Lahiri proposed in the brief passage quoted above is the starting point of my reflection on how translational processes may be incorporated in narratives concerned with the relational modes in which hybrid subjectivities may come into being. Lahiri's "I translate, therefore I am" (Lahiri 2002: 120) suggests that translation is what makes a thinking, dynamic subject immediately aware and certain of his or her existence within a cross-cultural, multi-lingual world. Self-awareness, in other words, is presented not as the outcome of a solipsistic reflection, but rather as a result of linguistic exchanges involving a continuous relationship with the Other, or better with multiple Others. Moreover, self-awareness emerges as strictly connected with the understanding of differences, the necessity of moving across languages and cultures, and the capacity of giving a linguistic shape to the space of cultural inbetweenness which overdetermines composite cultural contexts. Lahiri's proposition is rooted in her autobiographical experience as the American-raised daughter of first-generation, Bengali-speaking immigrants, but it goes beyond that. As Lahiri herself points out, it also defines her writing, which in the passage above she describes as a space where to "convey and preserve the meaningful" (Lahiri 2002: 120). Although she describes her fiction as an apparently intimate space of isolation and exile ("the foreign land of my choosing", as she calls it in the passage above), in this essay I argue that it is characterized by insights into the transpersonal, relational nature of subjectivity, as well as by the desire to explore languages as sites of both exile and reconnection.

Elena Di Giovanni, the Italian translator of the essay from which the above-quoted passage is taken, observes that Lahiri's "I translate, therefore I am" is to be understood in the light of a tendency to consider translation not only as a finite linguistic act, but rather as a broader, unfinished cultural process which is part of the daily experience of migrant subjects, but also, in a larger sense, of societies which are becoming ever more multicultural and multilingual. Di Giovanni describes Lahiri's engagement with translation as a "humanization of translational processes" (2009: 474; my translation). Her narratives are, in fact, able to show how a continuous practice of linguistic negotiations characterizes the everyday experience of those living in the interstitial spaces between cultures, as well as to represent the struggles and anxieties which inevitably accompany it. As Lahiri notes, in her short stories collection *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) which gained her the Pulitzer Prize – but also, I would argue, in her other English-language works, *The Namesake* (2003), *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), and *The Lowland* (2013) – all her characters are translators, who, as she claims, "must make sense of the foreign in order to survive" (2002: 119). In addition, language is the fundamental issue at stake in the continuous negotiations which they carry out, and as such, as Lahiri puts it, it is itself "an element of drama" (2002: 120): it is lost and

mourned, found and re-created; it is part of the characters' efforts of self-preservation, or it allows them to configure new possibilities for existence. As they translate themselves from Bengali to English, or from English to Bengali, they also re-position themselves into their world, and they redefine their intersubjective limits.

Although the whole of Jhumpa Lahiri's production deals with what Di Giovanni calls the "humanization of translational processes" in this essay I focus specifically on *In altre parole* (2015), the book that marked a turning point in the literary career of a writer who, after establishing herself as one of the most successful English-speaking writers of her generation, elected Italian as her new literary language. Lahiri's first autobiographical work addresses the same issues that she explored in her short stories and novels: the search for identity, cultural alienation and the complex negotiations of belonging. Although the similarity of themes shows the deep interconnection between the Indian-American writer's fictional and non-fictional writings, in this essay I argue that *In altre parole* occupies a special place in her literary production on account of its highly self-reflexive nature. *In altre parole* describes Lahiri's personal development and growing awareness of her translinguistic and transcultural subjectivity not just by selecting and presenting actions and events from a more or less distant past that have significantly affected her present, but also by focusing on the linguistic media in which her life-experience is embedded. In *In altre parole*, language 'is' the message. By translating her English-Bengali experience into a language which is apparently distant and unrelated to her, she performs a series of acts of self-translation which allow the reader to get some insights into the ways migrant identities are shaped within the linguistic codes in which their experience unfolds. By showing that language itself is a place of alterity, she challenges notions of selfhood and otherness, and engages with interlinguistic and intercultural communication as forms of mutual understanding and respect.

In the following sections, I first discuss *In altre parole* as a narrative of "self-translation", *i.e.* as a text in which the author redefines her own translinguistic self by moving towards spaces of Otherness. I focus on the philosophical approaches to the language which emerge from the book and discuss how Lahiri's literary exploration and construction of the self is in fact an acknowledgement of the relationality that is inscribed in culture, literature, and the linguistic medium. Secondly, by contextualising Lahiri's work within postcolonial discourses on the exilic conditions of migrant subjects, I focus on the politics of language and self-translation emerging from the text, addressing the question of how *In altre parole* may be read in terms of engagement towards a better understanding and acceptance of difference.

***In altre parole*: A Narrative of Transcultural Self-translation**

As Falceri, Gentes and Manterola remind us, the practice of self-translation, which involves bilingual authors writing a text into a source language and translating it themselves into a target language, has gained increasing interest among researchers ever since the beginning of the 21st century (2017: vii). Spagnuolo also shows that it is the self-reflexive dimension of self-translation – *i.e.* the fact that it challenges traditional notions of translation theory, such as originality or the dichotomy of author and translator – which makes it a most compelling field of investigation (2017: 68). Moreover, she adds, self-translations allow us to get insights

into how bilingual selves are negotiated within the boundaries of the language they speak, or rather, as I will argue in the following paragraphs, by which they are spoken. Differently put, an analysis of self-translated texts allows us to understand how subjects do not just simply express themselves in different ways according to the languages they speak, but also how they mediate their own identity according to the language in which their writings and their speech acts are produced.

In this perspective, literature emerges as a privileged site for the study of self-translation because it provides access to a knowledge of language as a living, shared experience, and as a practice embedded in social relationships, political struggles, historical conjunctures, and cultural contexts. Language is the site in which human experiences take form, along the dialectics of the private and the public, the collective and the individual. The Marxist philosopher Jean-Jacques Lecercle provides a linguistic interpretation of Althusser's theory of interpellation, arguing that language addresses the pre-ideological individuals and produces them as subjects. "Language is the site of subjectivation through interpellation", claims Lecercle by drawing on Althusserian terminology (2006: 128), thus implying that in order to become able to interact with the society they live in, subjects negotiate their positions within an external, material and shared linguistic medium. In his essays on Marxism and philosophy of Language (Cf. Lecercle 2003, 2004, 2006a, 2006b), he shows that literary texts stage the mutual articulations and redefinitions of personal and collective dialectics, and allow us to perceive the ways in which individuals are captured by the always-already collective experience of language, and included or excluded by the regimes and structures of subjectification that inform their epoch.

Lecercle's theories on language and subjectivation are central to my analysis of the self-translational processes at work in Jhumpa Lahiri's *In altre parole* for two main reasons. Firstly, since Lecercle insists on the fact that language is a material and historicised phenomenon, he also endorses the philosophical premise of the expulsion of the centrality of the individual subject in favour of a collective, transformative conception of subjectivity whose agency is externalised. Differently put, as languages are sites of alterities – no single subject can fully claim to "own" or "master" them because languages are the product of extended social interactions – subjectivity always comes into being through a relation with Otherness. Secondly, Lecercle's claim that languages are indissolubly linked to cultures and cultural values does not imply that languages are impermeable to (ex)changes and individual contributions. In contrast with fetishised conceptions of language and linguistic standards that are often connected to the global diffusion of English as a lingua franca, languages are described by Lecercle as unstable systems in a continuous state of variation, prone to being transformed through the single performances of speakers, vernacular appropriations, or external influences. Self-translations may be considered as acts of displacement, in which spaces of cultural, linguistic and subjective hybridisation may come into being, thus challenging monolingual paradigms and promoting transcultural interaction. Self-translations, as a matter of fact, may enact strategies of counter-interpellation, in which individuals provisionally appropriate and modify the language-system through acts of creation which are rooted in the compositeness of their linguistic awareness.

While Jhumpa Lahiri's *In altre parole* cannot be addressed as an example of self-translation in a conventional sense (the author did not first write it in English and then translate it into Italian or vice versa), I argue that it would not be accurate to call it a narrative *about* self-translation either. It is, in its full right, a narrative *of* self-translation, in which the author *performs* the deep personal transformations generated by her progressive familiarisation with a new language. She does not only tell the story of how she started to speak Italian, but she also enacts processes that the reader may detect first-hand in the ways her style accommodates to Italian, becoming simpler and at time more dissonant. "In italiano scrivo senza stile, in modo primitivo. Sono sempre in dubbio. Ho soltanto l'intenzione, insieme ad una fede cieca ma sincera, di essere capita e di capire me stessa", declares Lahiri (2016: 58). Although Lahiri's style is characterized by parataxis and simple lexical choices also in English, in her Italian writings her use of short sentences may strike the reader as rather unusual, as if she felt the need to stop and make constant breaks. Lexical choices are often the object of her writing. Whenever she uses a less common Italian word, she comments on how she encountered it, memorised it, or made it part of her experience. Also, she discusses the processes of editing and revision that the book itself has undergone, acknowledging the help of friends, teachers and editors, allowing the reader to have a diachronic impression of the evolution of the work. Besides, she dwells on the difficulties and frustrations which mark her experience as a learner of a foreign language. She shows, for example, how her teachers and friends usually correct her when she uses forms that are not perceived as idiomatic by native speakers, or when she uses the *imperfetto* in a way that is not grammatically appropriate. She often analyses the new words she learns, and elaborates on their imperfect renditions, or in some cases even untranslatability, into the English language.

The process of self-translation undertaken in *In altre parole* is characterized by the need of constantly creating new cognitive tools through which Lahiri tries to make sense of the reality around her in a language that she perceives as foreign. The book's rich imagery and metaphors contribute significantly to the unfolding of the autobiographical narrative. For example, chapters often carry out extended metaphors through which she describes aspects of her language learning process: "L'adolescente peloso" ("The Hairy Teenager"), in which Lahiri compares English and Italian to two children, the former being like a jealous teenager son, and the latter a baby needful of a mother's care; "Il triangolo" ("The Triangle"), in which she uses an extended spatial metaphor to describe her relationship to the three languages in which her life unfolds, "Il muro" ("The Wall"), in which she talks about her foreignness. Lahiri deploys a concrete language, which is easily accessible to apprentices of foreign languages, to simultaneously interpret the world around her and linguistically re-mediate and redefine her position within the foreign language in which she tries to write.

The same functions could be ascribed to the two short stories originally composed in Italian contained in the book (see chapters "Lo scambio" and "Penombra"), through which Lahiri resorts to the literary genre which gave her fame and constructs a story within the story. What is more, Lahiri contextualises and comments the two short narratives, elaborating on the conditions in which they were first conceived, and on how their meaning progressively became clear to her in the course of her language-learning process. The au-

thor abandons her authorial position, to become a reader herself and engage in the game of interpretation of her own texts. She reads the stories as allegorical representations of her relationship to writing and to language, thus showing that they could be approached as *mise-en-abyme* of her biographical experience.

The above-mentioned recurrence of spatial metaphor can also be interpreted in terms of self-positioning *sensu* Stuart Hall. Differently put, the metaphors are aimed at making the position of enunciation clear, so that the author is enabled to clarify “the critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute ‘what we really are’; or rather – since history has intervened – ‘what we have become’” (Hall 1994: 225; italics in the original text). By elaborating on spatial metaphors, Lahiri does not only clarify the singularity of her own experience, but also reconfigures it in terms that may provide her with new expressive means to make her transculturality intelligible and communicable. This is particularly evident in the above-mentioned chapter titled “Il triangolo”, in which the geometrical metaphor of a triangle allows her to comment on how learning to speak and to write in a third language allows her to repeat the familiar experience of linguistic alienation which is connected to her immigrant background: “Dove mi porta, questo nuovo tragitto [towards Italian, editor’s note]? Dove finisce la fuga e quando? Dopo essere fuggita, cosa farò? In realtà non è una fuga nel senso stretto della parola. Pur fuggendo mi accorgo che sia l’inglese sia il bengalese mi affiancano. Così come in un triangolo, un punto conduce inevitabilmente all’altro” (Lahiri 2016: 152). In this chapter she recounts that, as a child, she was forbidden to speak English at home, and that her first encounter with English happened at school, where, nevertheless, it was impossible to speak Bengali. In order to be accepted in the places in which her life unfolded, she had to temporarily suppress a part of herself, and even felt ashamed of her impossibility to completely fit in. Italian allows her to take a distance from both languages, and also to develop a new self-awareness from a different point of view. The triangle thus represents the possibility of connecting the three linguistic dimensions of her life in a way that allows free movement, border-crossing, and the traversing of other spaces. It stands for an identity which refuses to be static and monoglossic, but that is always ready to be redefined by new encounters with the Other. Her translational experiences allow alterity (which, as my previous reference to Lecercle’s philosophy of language shows, is already inscribed within the nature of languages, and in Lahiri’s case is directly linked to her foreignness) to emerge as a new point of view from which language may be discovered afresh, and be endowed with new, relational meanings.

The reference to the triangle as a space of connection and transformation is accompanied by passages in which Lahiri’s self-positioning is attained by the recognition of the distance between the languages and cultural spheres in which she lives. I therefore read the following passage as a refusal to let differences be “watered down” or unproblematically recomposed:

Eppure questo mio progetto in italiano mi rende consapevole delle distanze immani tra le lingue. Una lingua straniera può significare una separazione totale. Può rappresentare, ancora oggi, la ferocia della nostra ignoranza. Per scrivere in un’altra lingua, per penetrarne il cuore, nessuna tecnologia aiuta. Non si può accelerare il processo,

non si può abbreviarlo. L'andamento è lento, zoppicante. Più capisco la lingua, più si ingarbuglia. Più mi avvicino, più si allontana. Ancora oggi il distacco fra me e l'italiano rimane insuperabile. Ho impiegato quasi metà della mia vita per fare due passi. Per arrivare solo qui (Lahiri 2016: 90).

By claiming her foreignness, and commenting on how slow, hobbling and complex learning a language is, Lahiri fully acknowledges that the process of self-translation is never fully complete, and that it is always tentative and provisional. A few lines below, in the same chapter, she adds: “[s]e fosse possibile colmare la distanza fra me e l’italiano, smetterei di scrivere in questa lingua” (Lahiri 2016: 94). This statement implies that her creativity emerges out of an attempt, or rather a struggle to get closer to the Other, without subsuming it under the categories of the self. Differently put, Lahiri’s yearning for Italian is strictly connected with its elusiveness, *i.e.* by the impossibility of feeling completely at home which generates a never-ending search for new complexities.

In spite of her awareness that overcoming the distance between herself and Italian is an impossible task, Lahiri shows that it is possible to approach a foreign language, albeit in a slow, deficient manner, by means of mediation. As she discusses her experience of finding her imperfect voice in Italian, she also focuses on the contribution made by Others to her progress, thus positioning herself within a composite network of utterances. A language, she shows, is not an abstract system, but it is connected with the way it is experienced by multiple speakers. By this token, she tells of how not-so-friendly interactions with strangers and examples of cultural shocks force her to question her self-image and her modes of relating with the new cultural context. Also, she alternates descriptions of her more impersonal interactions with tools such as dictionaries and manuals with accounts of the conversations, suggestions, corrections with which her editors, publishers, friends and teacher could provide, also (as mentioned above) in the process of composing and publishing *In altre parole*. Finally, she deals with the mediation of other works and artists in her experience as a writer, acknowledging her debt to Ovid, Matisse, Pavese, Nabokov, Ginzburg, Fuentes, and many others. Her list includes Italian and non-Italian artists. In the process of self-translation, mediation cannot be restricted to a monolingual dimension. The author becomes aware of her role by comparing herself with writers and artists who have undergone similar processes and experiences.

As a conclusive remark of this section which has focused on Lahiri’s *In altre parole* as a narrative of self-translation, I would like to add that I read Lahiri’s reluctance to translate her own texts from Italian into English as symptomatic of the irreversibility of the processes of self-definition which she performs in the book. What she rejects is not self-translation but rather back-translation, *i.e.* the process of reconvertng a translated text into the source language. As a consequence, the creative procedure of writing into a foreign language is connected with the undertaking of a path of becoming, which does not allow Lahiri to rethink the Italian text in English or even Bengali. Translation is not a mechanical procedure, but a deeply human endeavour. This is what she implies in the following passage taken from the chapter titled “L’adolescente peloso”:

Credo che tradurre sia il modo più profondo, più intimo di leggere qualcosa. Una traduzione è un bellissimo incontro dinamico fra due lingue, due testi, due scrittori. Implica uno sdoppiamento, un rinnovamento. Nel passato amavo tradurre dal latino, dal greco, dal bengalese. È stato un modo di avvicinarmi alle diverse lingue, di sentirmi legata ad autori lontanissimi da me, nello spazio e nel tempo. Tradurre me stessa, da una lingua in cui sono ancora un'apprendista, non è la stessa cosa. Dopo aver faticato per realizzare il testo in italiano mi sento appena sbarcata, stanca ma entusiasta. Voglio fermarmi, orientarmi. Il rientro, prematuro, mi fa male. Sembra una disfatta, un regresso. Sembra distruttivo anziché creativo, quasi un suicidio (Lahiri 2016: 120).

Had Lahiri translated her own book, perhaps, the translation would have certainly rivalled with the original text, and it would have probably nullified her efforts in writing in Italian. The task of translating *In altre parole* into English was entrusted to Ann Goldstein, editor at the New Yorker and translator, among others, of Elena Ferrante, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Giacomo Leopardi and Alessandro Baricco. Lahiri deals with the reasons why she did not translate the book herself in the "Author's note" to the English edition, in which she claims that, in order to be more honest, her translation had to pass through the filter of someone else's linguistic sensibility (Lahiri 2016, xiii-xiv). Alterity, paradoxically, is the only condition through which the text may "come home" in English, the language which, over time, replaced the Bengali she had learnt from her parents as a child, and became her (second) native language.

The politics of Self-translation in Jhumpa Lahiri's *In altre parole*

"Com'è possibile sentirmi esiliata da una lingua che non è la mia? Che non conosco?", asks Lahiri while musing on the paradox of her choice to write her autobiographical piece in a language that is not her own (2016: 20). The question brings into play one of the most interesting tropes in post-colonial theory, *i.e.* the idea that language may be a site of exile for subjects who experience the diglossic conditions brought about by a history of colonial imposition, uprooting, and migration. Exile, which in *In altre parole* figures as the rift between her Bengali and her English identity, is a territory of non-belonging stretching between the impossibility of identifying either with an old or a new homeland. Yet, in *In altre parole*, exile emerges also as a cure to personal alienation, and becomes a way to embrace Otherness. Her choice of Italian as an arbitrary site of self-exile allows her to move beyond the conflicts of her bilingualism, and to open up to new forms of alterity.

"Reading Jhumpa Lahiri reinforces one's belief in a universal humanism where the difference among peoples is not so vast as to be unbridgeable and the distinctiveness of diverse perspectives not so irreconcilable as to create unpleasant hostilities", claims Rajini Skrikanth, thus voicing one of the most widespread criticisms against her narratives (2012: 51). Her short stories and fiction, in other words, have been accused of shying away from spelling out the politics of class and race, and of representing difference in a toned-down, even desirable way. Although she engages with the hybridity of migrant subjectivities, her work seems to lack the militancy which is usually associated with post-colonial art. Her rather heterogeneous representations of Asian-American immigrants seem more inscribable

in the paradigm of ‘diversity’ – “a category of comparative ethics, aesthetics, or ethnology” as Bhabha puts it (1994: 52) – rather than “difference” as “a process of signification through which statements of culture or on culture differentiate, discriminate, and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability, and capacity” (Bhabha 1994: 52). Susan Muchshima Moynihan, though she partly agrees with the criticisms phrased above, adds nonetheless that “[u]sing the lens of affect, however, allows us to see how even the most intimate relationship between characters to unacknowledged histories of contact in their irony and contradiction” (2012: 112).

In this essay, I have analysed a work in which the intimate alienation Lahiri claims both to retreat in and give voice to in her writing (2002: 120) is addressed from a very private, personal point of view. In *In altre parole* an autobiographical persona is engaged in writing and translating itself into a foreign language. “Perché scrivo?”, Lahiri asks herself. “Per indagare il mistero dell’esistenza. Per tollerare me stessa. Per avvicinare tutto ciò che si trova al di fuori di me” (Lahiri 2016: 86). The private dimension in which her narratives unfold might indeed at first sight seem a way to escape the political, or to analyse humanity in the light of common, personal experiences which are shared through cultures: births, deaths, weddings, and so on. Nevertheless, the more intimate Lahiri’s voice becomes in her personal effort of self-translation, the more evident it becomes that the private is, in fact, the collective and the inter-subjective, and both are inextricably linked with the political and the conflictual. Translating the self becomes a way of building bonds of community, in which alterity, aporias and struggles are inevitably bound to surface. The author, in the light of this, advocates for a message of care for the other, respect and solidarity: “Cosa significa una parola? E una vita? Mi pare, alla fine, la stessa cosa. Come una parola può avere tante dimensioni, tante sfumature, una tale complessità, così una persona, una vita. La lingua è lo specchio, la metafora principale. Perché in fondo il significato di una parola, così come quello di una persona, è qualcosa di smisurato, di ineffabile” (2016: 86).

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Risorse e ambienti digitali per l'apprendimento linguistico autonomo e tra pari

Abstract I: Questo articolo si propone di analizzare come l'apprendimento autonomo e tra pari delle lingue straniere possono essere coadiuvati da supporti digitali del *Web 2.0*. In primo luogo, si delineano le teorie alla base di questi due tipologie d'apprendimento, e in seguito si analizzano le risorse e gli ambienti digitali del *Web 2.0* che possono favorire l'apprendimento della lingua 2, nel caso specifico, l'inglese. L'ambiente digitale *LearnWeb*, sviluppato dal Centro di Ricerca L3S di Hannover, viene presentato come caso studio di ambiente in cui gli/le apprendenti possono sviluppare autonomia e modalità di apprendimento attraverso la collaborazione tra pari.

Abstract II: This article aims at analysing applications of autonomous and peer language learning in higher education in the digital era. First the theoretical framework of these two approaches to learning will be presented, secondly, we will investigate how *Web 2.0* technologies and resources can contribute to supporting and enhancing second language learning, and more particularly English acquisition. Then we analyse the *LearnWeb* platform, developed at the L3S Research Center of Leibniz University in Hanover, as a digital learning environment which allows learners to share and select reliable and authentic materials and resources, promoting autonomy, peer-learning and peer-tutoring.

Introduzione

In un mondo globalizzato come quello attuale, in cui le lingue, e, soprattutto la lingua inglese, acquisiscono sempre maggior importanza, e in un'era in cui la tecnologia, i dispositivi digitali e gli ambienti virtuali assumono un ruolo sempre più centrale anche nel settore dell'educazione, le potenzialità di questi cambiamenti divengono sempre più rilevanti, soprattutto in un contesto di apprendimento delle lingue a livello universitario. Questo articolo si focalizza dunque sull'utilizzo degli ambienti digitali per favorire l'apprendimento autonomo e tra pari dell'inglese accademico.

Nella seconda sezione verranno presentati i principi e le dinamiche di apprendimento autonomo e tra pari per migliorare l'apprendimento linguistico, mentre nella sezione successiva (sezione 3) si esploreranno alcune modalità di applicazione di apprendimento autonomo e collaborativo tra pari favorito ed ampliato dall'uso e dalla navigazione in ambienti digitali 2.0 e oltre. Nella sezione conclusiva sarà presentata la piattaforma e-learning *LearnWeb* (sezione 4) individuata come ambiente collaborativo e di supporto all'apprendimento linguistico autonomo.

Il concetto di autonomia nell'ambito dell'apprendimento linguistico fu promosso negli anni Settanta dal *Council of Europe's Modern Languages Project*¹, attraverso il "Progetto Lingue Moderne" (1971-1981) del Consiglio d'Europa. L'attenzione nei confronti dell'autonomia dell'apprendente² iniziò a diramarsi in un momento storico di grandi cambiamenti ideologici, in cui, come reazione nei confronti del comportamentismo, emerse l'importanza ed il valore delle esperienze personali e della libertà personale. In campo educativo, questa svolta portò con sé l'avvento di teorie orientate verso la centralità del ruolo dell'apprendente, in cui la figura dello studente iniziava ad avere una funzione sempre più attiva nelle decisioni che riguardavano il proprio percorso formativo (Gremmo & Riley 1995: 152). Inoltre, nell'ambito dell'apprendimento linguistico, si andava affermando un nuovo approccio nei confronti dell'apprendimento linguistico, l'approccio comunicativo, in cui veniva enfatizzata la funzione comunicativa del linguaggio ed analizzati e presi in considerazione i bisogni individuali e sociali dell'apprendente.

Tutto ciò portò ad un interesse sempre crescente nei confronti dell'autonomia in ambito educativo. Partendo dalla definizione di autonomia data da Holec nel 1981: "the ability to take charge of one's own learning"³ (Holec 1981: 3), vari studiosi nell'ambito dell'apprendimento linguistico hanno definito questo concetto da prospettive diverse: psicologiche, educative, sociali, politiche, e così via. Nelle molteplici definizioni ed interpretazioni viene comunque sempre enfatizzata la centralità della posizione dell'apprendente, descritto come agente attivo e responsabile del proprio percorso d'apprendimento, e cosciente della possibilità di scegliere modalità di studio, obiettivi e risorse educative che possano risultare efficaci per il proprio studio ed apprendimento. A questo proposito Benson propone un modello per descrivere l'apprendimento autonomo e che si basa sul controllo esercitato dall'apprendente in aree diverse. Egli identifica tre livelli sui quali l'apprendente deve esercitare il proprio controllo: *learning management*, il controllo gestionale degli obiettivi e delle modalità di apprendimento, *cognitive processes*, il controllo dei processi psicologici che influenzano l'apprendimento, e *learning content*, il controllo di ciò che andrà ad apprendere (Benson 2001: 48-50). L'apprendente, dunque, posto al centro del proprio processo d'apprendimento, si assume la responsabilità di influenzarne e a volta di determinarne gli obiettivi, i contenuti, i metodi e le tecniche e, successivamente, di auto-valutarsi.

In relazione a questa presa di coscienza dell'assoluta centralità del discente nel suo processo di apprendimento linguistico, si inserisce anche il concetto di apprendimento tra pari (*peer learning*), ovvero una tipologia di apprendimento basata sul principio che la conoscenza si diffonda in maniera più rapida ed ottimale tra apprendenti (*peers*) che condividono età, esperienze di apprendimento, livello educativo e problematiche comuni. Detto anche *mutual* o *interdependent learning*, questa modalità può essere applicabile sia in un contesto di apprendimento informale che formale e consente di risolvere progetti e quesiti linguistici anche apparentemente banali lavorando in un team o in coppia (Boud *et al.* 2014; Falchikov 2001).

¹ Consiglio d'Europa, 1971-1981, Strasburgo.

² Per convenzione e semplicità discorsiva, nel presente articolo si utilizzerà il genere maschile per la figura dell'apprendente e il genere femminile per la figura dell'insegnante.

³ "L'abilità di prendere il controllo del proprio processo d'apprendimento" (nostra traduzione).

Il *peer tutoring*, derivante dal *peer learning*, si differenzia per il solo fatto che prevede la figura di un tutor di riferimento, dotato di maggior conoscenza e competenza rispetto ad un *tutee*, al quale il tutor offre aiuto, supporto emotivo e motivazionale nell'individuare strategie e nozioni utili al *tutee*; i due collaborano in un'atmosfera aperta e di libera comunicazione (Colvin & Ashman 2010; Cain 2009).

Anche l'apprendimento tra pari (*peer learning* o *peer tutoring* a seconda dei soggetti coinvolti) si fonda principalmente sulla psicologia umanistica, sulla teoria dell'interazionismo sociale e sull'approccio cooperativo, queste teorie promuovono la centralità dell'apprendente e dunque prendono in considerazione interiorità ed emozioni, incoraggiando ad un atteggiamento di cooperazione con i colleghi in un clima interattivo e comunicativo che incoraggi ed agevoli l'autovalutazione e lo sviluppo di pensiero critico. Lev Vygotskij (1978) teorico di psicologia dell'educazione, ritiene di grande rilevanza nell'ambito dell'apprendimento linguistico il fenomeno della mediazione, ovvero del trasferimento di conoscenza tra individui in possesso di maggior conoscenza verso individui con minor conoscenza permettendo di passare ad un livello di conoscenza successivo, incrementando la zona di sviluppo prossimale (Richard & Rodgers 2014; Williams & Burden 1997). L'atteggiamento collaborativo che contraddistingue il *peer learning* ha origine nei primi anni del Novecento e si diffonde come approccio negli anni Sessanta-Settanta, promuovendo una tipologia di apprendimento e insegnamento incentrata sullo studio in piccoli gruppi di lavoro mirati a ottimizzare l'apprendimento di ciascun componente del gruppo (Johnson *et al.* 2014).

Nella sezione che segue, i due concetti e approcci fondamentali di questo studio saranno presentati come mezzo di miglioramento della competenza linguistica.

Apprendimento autonomo e tra pari nell'apprendimento linguistico

Questa sezione presenta e discute i potenziali vantaggi e svantaggi dell'apprendimento autonomo e tra pari per scopi di apprendimento linguistico.

Se inizialmente le realizzazioni pratiche dell'apprendimento autonomo in ambito linguistico erano strettamente legate all'apprendimento al di fuori del contesto scolastico, come per esempio i *self-access centres*, successivamente esse si sono utilizzate anche all'interno del contesto scolastico. La ricerca ha dimostrato che gli studenti sono più propensi ad apprendere ciò che per loro è più interessante e coinvolgente (Benson 2001; Menegale 2009). Si è dunque cercato di promuovere un ruolo attivo e partecipativo per gli apprendenti all'interno della classe, rendendoli maggiormente responsabili delle decisioni riguardo il contenuto e le modalità d'apprendimento, incoraggiandoli, favorendo la riflessione e l'autovalutazione e fornendo loro materiali e strategie per coniugare l'apprendimento in classe con quello fuori dalla classe.

Per favorire lo sviluppo e la realizzazione dell'autonomia negli apprendenti è inoltre necessaria una attenta analisi degli aspetti psicologici e socioculturali (personalità, motivazione e identità) e delle differenze individuali che caratterizzano i diversi apprendenti e i loro stili d'apprendimento, fattori determinanti nel corso del lungo processo di apprendimento di una lingua straniera. A tal proposito Benson pone l'attenzione sulle differenze che caratterizzano l'apprendimento autonomo sia di individui diversi, sia di uno stesso indi-

viduo in fasi differenti: “autonomy is a multidimensional capacity that will take different forms for different individuals, and even for the same individual in different contexts or at different times”⁴ (Benson 2001: 47).

Gli aspetti psicologici ed educativi riguardanti la motivazione, la personalità e l'autonomia nell'ambito dell'acquisizione linguistica sono stati negli ultimi anni oggetto di studio e ricerca approfondita; tra essi si è riconosciuto il ruolo cruciale della motivazione. La ricerca ha infatti dimostrato un aumento della motivazione in contesti di apprendimento autonomo in cui lo studente prende parte in modo attivo e responsabile al proprio percorso d'apprendimento, compiendo scelte importanti riguardo metodi, obiettivi e materiali (Benson 2001; Deci & Ryan 2000). Per quanto riguarda gli aspetti socioculturali, si sono riscontrati vari benefici derivanti dal miglioramento dell'apprendimento autonomo, quali, per esempio, una maggiore libertà di espressione della propria identità attraverso la lingua straniera tramite la condivisione delle proprie esperienze; l'autonomia, dunque, motiva e coinvolge maggiormente gli studenti nell'apprendimento linguistico (Ushioda 2011).

Come già accennato, l'apprendimento autonomo favorisce inoltre lo sviluppo degli stili e strategie d'apprendimento più adatti alle caratteristiche individuali dell'apprendente. In contesti di apprendimento autonomo, diverse strategie d'apprendimento sono praticate, messe in atto e testate, tramite varie attività. Gli apprendenti sono quindi guidati ed incoraggiati non solo a prendere consapevolezza delle strategie che già utilizzano, ma anche a scegliere quelle più efficaci per il loro percorso d'apprendimento linguistico (Richards & Rodgers 2014: 336).

Il raggiungimento dell'autonomia è diventato dunque nel tempo uno degli obiettivi principali in molti contesti di apprendimento linguistico. Le insegnanti sono sempre più propense a promuoverne lo sviluppo sia all'interno sia all'esterno della classe. In questi contesti scolastici l'insegnante passa da un ruolo d'istruttrice, unica depositaria del sapere, a un ruolo di “*facilitatrice*”, di guida. Ha il compito di aiutare gli studenti nelle scelte riguardo al proprio percorso d'apprendimento linguistico, li incoraggia a prendere decisioni in merito a ciò che apprendono, a diventare consapevoli dei propri stili e a sviluppare strategie utili ed efficaci. Apprendere in modo autonomo non significa infatti apprendere in solitudine, senza alcun supporto da parte di un'insegnante o tutor o senza il coinvolgimento degli altri apprendenti nel proprio percorso d'apprendimento. In anni recenti la ricerca ha identificato l'autonomia nell'ambito dell'apprendimento delle lingue straniere come costruito sociale (Murray 2014). La collaborazione e la dimensione sociale sono dunque due aspetti molto importanti nello sviluppo dell'autonomia nell'ambito dell'apprendimento linguistico, ed esse possono essere realizzate tramite il *peer learning*.

A caratterizzare il *peer learning* in un contesto di studio linguistico accademico vi sono i seguenti aspetti fondamentali (Boud *et al.* 2014: 8; Topping *et al.* 2017):

- Lavoro con gli altri in una comunità di apprendimento, condividendo esperienze, conoscenze e competenze;
- Sviluppo di pensiero critico, formulando e condividendo domande costruttive per la comunità di apprendimento, che risulta aperta alla riflessione;

⁴ “L'autonomia è una capacità multidimensionale che assumerà forme diverse per individui diversi, ma anche per lo stesso individuo in contesti o momenti diversi” (nostra traduzione).

- Sviluppo di capacità di autogestione, di gestione delle dinamiche di gruppo e di organizzazione secondo le scadenze;
- Sviluppo di capacità di autovalutazione e di valutazione tra pari tramite il feedback reciproco.

Secondo gli studi di Dörnyei (2001) le relazioni sociali con i pari incentivano la motivazione e la percezione di sé dell'apprendente, creando un clima più coeso ed incoraggiante:

Basically, cooperation is a definite 'plus'. Studies from all over the world are unanimous in claiming that students in cooperative environments have more positive attitudes towards learning and develop higher self-esteem and self-confidence than in other classroom structures (Dörnyei 2001: 100)⁵.

Ulteriori studi (Falchikov 2001; Cottrell 2001) sottolineano i diversi benefici emergenti dalla partecipazione ad attività di *peer learning* nello studio di una lingua straniera, quali l'influenza positiva sull'orientamento, negli atteggiamenti e nella motivazione dell'individuo. Il dialogo tra pari infatti ha un forte impatto sull'apprendimento della L2, in quanto, non essendo un processo giudicatorio, ispira e indirizza verso il pensiero creativo e all'arricchimento reciproco tra studenti che collaborano strettamente mantenendo a lungo l'impegno, sviluppando rispetto per le diversità emergenti all'interno dei gruppi, ed ampliando la conoscenza linguistica. L'apprendimento collaborativo agevola anche il superamento delle difficoltà che quotidianamente uno studente incontra, come le insicurezze e lacune nelle quattro abilità (*Reading, Listening, Writing, Speaking*) nel caso dello studente di Lingue Straniere, o l'incapacità nella gestione del tempo e delle scadenze, la scarsa motivazione personale, le difficoltà nel trasferire nozioni studiate in altri contesti e condividerle con i colleghi. La figura dei colleghi può rappresentare dunque un'ulteriore fonte di motivazione ed organizzazione.

Esplorando invece quelli che possono essere i limiti legati al *peer learning*, emergono problemi derivanti dalla selezione e composizione del gruppo o coppia, se essa non avviene volontariamente ma secondo la scelta dell'insegnante, oppure ci possono essere influenze relative agli stereotipi di genere (per esempio le studentesse sono incaricate di ruoli segretariali, ovvero occuparsi di prendere gli appunti mentre gli studenti dominano il gruppo), problematiche relative ai luoghi di provenienza degli apprendenti, di cultura, religione e differenze nel livello di sapere ed esperienze. Potrebbero nascere ostacoli di controllo del processo qualora vi fossero apprendenti che non si assumono responsabilità e incarichi all'interno del gruppo, ma approfittano del lavoro altrui, come potrebbero emergere anche episodi di leadership positiva o eccessiva (Falchikov 2001; Boud *et al.* 2014; Topping *et al.* 2017).

Con il termine *Peer Tutoring* si descrive invece un'attività da svolgersi in un contesto informale in completa autonomia, durante la quale collaborano un tutor ed un *tutee*. Il tutor

⁵ "In sostanza, la cooperazione è un vero e proprio 'plus'. Studi provenienti da tutto il mondo sono unanimi nell'affermare che gli studenti in ambienti cooperativi hanno un atteggiamento più positivo verso l'apprendimento e sviluppano una maggiore autostima e fiducia in se stessi rispetto ad altri ambienti formali" (nostra traduzione).

è una figura senza qualifica professionale di insegnante, ma individuato da quest'ultima come apprendente dotato di capacità affini e capace pertanto di assistere altri apprendenti bisognosi di aiuto nello studio. A differenza del rapporto insegnante-studente, oltre al livello di conoscenze ed esperienze che differisce, vi è il fattore della vicinanza, che, nel caso della relazione tutor-*tutee*, è maggiore e dunque consente una tipologia di comunicazione più confidenziale e informale (Lin 2015: 91-92; Richards & Schmidt 2011).

Uno studio di Thompson *et al.* (2010: 306) identifica e riassume in questo elenco le abilità e competenze emergenti dal *peer tutoring* e ne conferma le positive ripercussioni a livello cognitivo:

- (1) Consulting and counselling: listening; questioning; clarification; exemplification; summarising; informing; challenging; giving feedback – re: aspirations, goals, methods, processes, systems, effects, reality checking, hidden agendas, unforeseen outcomes.
- (2) Socio-emotional support: personal interest; empathy; encouragement; support; praise; sustain confidence/morale; model steps to achievement; model coping; socialisation into new culture.
- (3) Goal-setting and problem-solving: identification and clarification of opportunities and problems, goals and timescales; brainstorm, consider, select, facilitate onward actions; evaluate problem solution and goal attainment (Thompson *et al.* 2010: 306)⁶.

Concludendo la panoramica su *peer learning* e *peer tutoring* va considerato l'aspetto fondamentale del *feedback* reciproco in lingua. Durante queste tipologie di attività, un passaggio molto importante è quello dell'espressione e ricezione di feedback e giudizi sull'operato, che permettono di ottenere una prima valutazione per poi passare a quella ufficiale e successiva dell'insegnante. Gli studenti risultano coinvolti in un processo di critica riflessiva e costruttiva sul lavoro o su una presentazione orale del collega, durante i quali sono tenuti ad analizzare, chiarire e correggersi vicendevolmente, utilizzando possibilmente la lingua target, identificando aree di bisogno di miglioramento e apportando suggerimenti migliorativi (Mulder *et al.* 2014: 158). Il feedback sarà di carattere positivo, formativo e non critico, obiettivo e sincero non giudicatorio e sentenziale.

Nella sezione che segue vedremo come modalità dell'apprendimento autonomo e tra pari possano essere favoriti se coniugati alla dimensione tecnologica dell'apprendimento.

⁶ (1) Consulenza e consiglio: ascolto; domande; spiegazioni; esemplificazione; riassunto; informazione; sfida; dare feedback: aspirazioni, obiettivi, metodi, processi, sistemi, effetti, verifica della realtà, agende nascoste, risultati imprevisti.

(2) Sostegno socio-emotivo: interesse personale; empatia; incoraggiamento; sostegno; lode; sostegno alla fiducia/morale; passi verso la realizzazione del modello; adattamento del modello; socializzazione in una nuova cultura.

(3) Definizione degli obiettivi e risoluzione dei problemi: identificazione e chiarimento di opportunità e problemi, obiettivi e tempi; brainstorming, prendere in considerazione, selezionare, facilitare le azioni future; valutare la soluzione dei problemi e il raggiungimento degli obiettivi (nostra traduzione).

Nuove tecnologie nell'apprendimento autonomo e tra pari

In questa sezione si analizza il ruolo delle nuove tecnologie in ambito educativo per favorire l'apprendimento linguistico autonomo e tra pari. Una breve descrizione di ambienti digitali del *Web 2.0* quali *blog, forum, wikis, podcast, social networks* e *apps*, permette di evidenziare il loro utilizzo come risorse e supporti per facilitare l'apprendimento autonomo e tra pari delle lingue straniere.

In ambito educativo le tecnologie sono da sempre associate all'apprendimento autonomo, essendo state spesso create per la pratica e l'esercizio linguistico degli apprendenti sia in contesti di studio individuale, sia in contesti di apprendimento collaborativo (Benson 2011: 17). In particolare, le nuove tecnologie del *Web 2.0*, caratterizzate dall'interazione, comunicazione, condivisione e collaborazione, facilitano l'utilizzo di approcci centrati sulla figura dell'apprendente anche in contesti esterni alla classe. L'apprendente diventa creatore e manipolatore di contenuti, e prende di fatto il controllo del proprio processo d'apprendimento, diventando, in questo modo, meno dipendente dall'apprendimento svolto all'interno della classe e dagli approcci e metodi delle insegnanti (Richard & Rodgers 2014: 339).

Le tecnologie digitali offrono infatti molte opportunità di contatto diretto con la lingua target, e una maggiore esposizione ad essa grazie alla reperibilità di esempi autentici dell'uso della lingua e alla possibilità di interagire più facilmente con altri parlanti tramite le comunità online, ovvero i *social media*: la loro caratteristica sociale permette infatti agli apprendenti di comunicare e interagire con persone provenienti da tutto il mondo, pertanto utilizzando la lingua seconda o straniera come lingua franca.

Utilizzate come supporto in contesti di apprendimento autonomo sia all'interno sia all'esterno della classe, le tecnologie digitali contribuiscono inoltre all'utilizzo e sviluppo di diversi stili d'apprendimento, consentendo agli apprendenti di utilizzare strategie e modalità di apprendimento compatibili con le loro preferenze, di focalizzarsi su abilità linguistiche specifiche in base al proprio livello di conoscenze e di scegliere autonomamente come e cosa apprendere. Gli apprendenti sono in questo modo più motivati, grazie alle modalità interattive, alle risorse attuali e coinvolgenti che vengono offerte loro, e all'ambiente in cui si trovano a lavorare e ad apprendere, che risulta meno ansioso e stressante della classe (Richard & Rodgers 2014).

La tecnologia si è evoluta verso la mobilità dell'utente ed è sempre più semplice per gli apprendenti accedere ovunque e in tempo reale a contenuti per l'apprendimento in rete. Questa possibilità risulta un ulteriore incentivo alla motivazione dell'apprendente, più predisposto alla ricerca di argomenti per approfondire le proprie conoscenze. In ambito linguistico si parla di CALL e MALL, rispettivamente *Computer Assisted Language Learning* e *Mobile Assisted Language Learning*, in un contesto di *Web 2.0* e oltre, il cui principio è proprio quello della condivisione e collaborazione che contraddistinguono i concetti di *peer learning, peer tutoring* e *peer feedback*.

Al giorno d'oggi è presente nel Web una grande varietà di ambienti digitali che possono essere utilizzati sia in contesti di apprendimento autonomo, sia in contesti di *peer learning* e *peer tutoring*; tra essi i più analizzati dalla ricerca nell'ambito dell'apprendimento linguistico sono *blog, forum, wiki, podcast, social network*, e, nel contesto specifico di smartphone e tablet: le applicazioni mobili.

I *blog* sono una sorta di diari online, ambienti in cui gli utenti possono condividere opinioni ed idee, caricare risorse e materiali personali. Rappresentano un ambiente educativo comunicativo e collaborativo, dove gli apprendenti possono interagire facilmente con altri studenti, insegnanti e altri parlanti della lingua target, migliorando le abilità di scrittura e lettura. Nel contesto dell'apprendimento linguistico autonomo, sono utilizzati come strumento per promuovere l'auto-riflessione, la collaborazione e la condivisione di vari tipi di feedback (Lee 2010; Vurdien 2013).

I *forum* sono la parte comunicativa ed interattiva di siti e piattaforme virtuali, un luogo in cui gli utenti possono discutere sulle funzionalità e sulle proposte del sito stesso, e condividere quesiti con altri utenti che vi navigano. Su siti di carattere accademico, anche la comunicazione in lingua avrà un livello accademico e può rappresentare una fonte di miglioramento delle capacità linguistiche (Stanley 2013: 51-52; Jee 2011: 166-167).

I *wikis* sono strumenti dove è possibile co-produrre testi in maniera dinamica. Gli studenti possono essere coinvolti, ad esempio, in un *wiki* per la realizzazione di un progetto che preveda la scelta di un argomento di interesse condiviso, la condivisione all'interno del *wiki* dell'organizzazione del processo di apprendimento e delle fasi della ricerca, la discussione e lo scambio di feedback, per realizzare infine un prodotto da pubblicare (Paramaxi & Zaphiris 2017: 710; Cushion & Townsend 2018: 10; Cho & Lim 2017: 53). Grazie alla forma di conservazione dei contenuti, i *wikis* possono essere utilizzati come portfolio per progetti di gruppo, permettendo all'insegnante di poter monitorare l'avanzamento delle attività. I *wikis* possono infine essere visti come piattaforma per la scrittura multi-autoriale (come nel caso di *Wikipedia*), in quanto le loro pagine vengono modificate da più persone alla volta, a differenza dei blog che invece sono creati dal un singolo autore e condivisi con il pubblico (Walker & White 2013).

I *podcast* sono file audio o video catalogati nel web all'interno di applicazioni o siti; essi possono anche essere scaricati ed ascoltati offline in qualsiasi momento ed in qualsiasi luogo tramite vari dispositivi. Spesso facilmente reperibili, risultano essere molto efficaci se offrono un'opportuna esposizione alla lingua target e alla cultura dell'area in cui è parlata (Russell-Aguilar 2007: 489). Possono essere selezionati in lingua, e questo permette lo sviluppo e l'allenamento della competenza di ascolto. Gli apprendenti hanno inoltre la possibilità di creare file audio sia in modo autonomo sia in collaborazione con i pari, unendo così l'ascolto collaborativo all'esercitazione dell'esposizione orale.

I *social network* rappresentano al meglio l'idea di rete sociale di condivisione di informazioni, video, materiale educazionale e storie. Grazie all'interazione con altri utenti tramite commenti e chat, i social network promuovono l'apprendimento collaborativo e incentivano la motivazione e l'interesse degli apprendenti nei confronti dell'apprendimento linguistico. Essi offrono infatti ambienti d'apprendimento autentici in cui gli apprendenti possono comunicare mediante la lingua target, sviluppando inoltre competenze socio-pragmatiche.

Le applicazioni mobili sono dispositivi del *Web 2.0* accessibili ovunque tramite rete dati o Wi-Fi e possono aiutare a migliorare ed agevolare le abilità linguistiche. Si possono utilizzare per leggere i giornali, ascoltare musica e podcast o guardare video nella lingua

target; alcune svolgono la funzione di dizionari online, altre forniscono esercizi grammaticali o permettono di comunicare con parlanti provenienti da varie parti del mondo. Le nuove funzionalità del *Web 2.0* permettono anche di organizzare progetti di gruppo, quali file multimediali o documenti condivisi, modificabili e revisionabili dai colleghi, in cui tutti i membri partecipano in egual misura per raggiungere la stessa preparazione (Barton & Klint 2011: 329-330; Atkins 2010: 236-243). Esistono molte applicazioni a questo scopo, anche se resta favorito l'utilizzo dei siti web per progetti più articolati, in quanto alcune funzionalità vengono perse. Utilizzare l'applicazione *Google Docs* ad esempio, come un wiki, permette di creare e condividere con i colleghi dei documenti (*Word, Excel, PowerPoint*) in rete. Il suo utilizzo è appunto preferibile tramite sito web, perché ad esempio la funzionalità di "Revisione" e quindi di inserzione dei commenti a porzione di testo, non è visibile dallo smartphone, ed è una funzionalità molto utile ed interessante nelle dinamiche tra tutor e *tutee*.

I supporti digitali sopra descritti forniscono un quadro generale dello stato attuale delle tecnologie più utilizzate nell'ambito dell'apprendimento linguistico e dei loro vantaggi e benefici nei contesti di apprendimento autonomo e tra pari. Tuttavia, al giorno d'oggi la situazione è sempre in continuo sviluppo e cambiamento, data la velocità di evoluzione delle tecnologie digitali.

Nella sezione seguente si parlerà del caso studio della piattaforma *LearnWeb* e della selezione e condivisione di risorse utili (*blog, wikis, podcast, apps, forums, websites*) per il suo potenziamento secondo una prospettiva di apprendimento autonomo e tra pari.

Il caso studio *LearnWeb*

Gli ambienti del *Web 2.0*, grazie alle loro caratteristiche sociali ed interattive, si sono diffusi in ambito educativo come luoghi di condivisione di conoscenze e risorse in collaborazione con altri utenti. In questa ampia categoria, si inserisce la piattaforma di apprendimento *LearnWeb* in quanto luogo di condivisione di materiali accademici per l'apprendimento linguistico. Verranno presentati gli ambienti CELL e YELL/TELL e le loro recenti evoluzioni realizzate tramite la collaborazione tra l'Ateneo di Udine e il Centro di Ricerca L3S⁷ presso l'Università Leibniz di Hannover.

La piattaforma *LearnWeb* è stata creata e sviluppata dal centro di ricerca L3S Research Center, quale comunità virtuale con funzionalità avanzate per la condivisione e l'organizzazione di risorse multimediali *open-access* in un ambiente collaborativo con le potenzialità di un *social network*. *LearnWeb* integra infatti i sistemi esistenti del *Web 2.0* maggiormente utilizzati tipici dei *social media*, e presenta dunque funzionalità quali la condivisione, la classificazione delle risorse, la possibilità di commenti e inserimento di tag, in una prospettiva di *lifelong learning* (Marenzi 2014: 63-65). Lo sviluppo della piattaforma *LearnWeb* è caratterizzato da un approccio in cui i ricercatori e sviluppatori collaborano con scenari reali, per valutare e migliorare le funzionalità del sistema (Marenzi 2014: 81). A questo scopo, a partire dal 2010, il team di *LearnWeb* ha instaurato collaborazioni con diversi scenari educativi europei ed ha sviluppato svariati progetti nell'ambito dell'apprendimento della lingua inglese e di

⁷ <https://www.l3s.de> (consultato il 29/05/2019).

altre lingue a più livelli; è infatti motore di ricerca per *task* strutturati, per la ricerca di risorse multimediali, luogo di discussione e interazione, e di approfondimento di attività specifiche di corsi di interpretariato e così via.

Nel 2012 ha inizio il progetto YELL/TELL in collaborazione con l'Università degli Studi di Udine. Grazie a questa collaborazione, *LearnWeb* diventa una vera e propria comunità online in cui insegnanti in formazione, in servizio, e formatrici per insegnanti possono condividere risorse ed esperienze lavorative nell'ambito dell'insegnamento della seconda lingua o lingua straniera nella scuola dell'infanzia e/o alle elementari. In questo scenario, la piattaforma viene intesa come ambiente virtuale per la condivisione di idee tramite il forum, viene utilizzata come motore di ricerca per l'esplorazione delle risorse presenti nel Web e come spazio di archiviazione del materiale per l'apprendimento e l'insegnamento a carattere multimodale e multimediale, promuovendo in questo modo l'apprendimento e l'insegnamento tra pari (Bortoluzzi & Marenzi 2013; 2017). Di recente lo spazio virtuale di YELL/TELL ha assunto nuove funzionalità ed è stato utilizzato anche per altri scopi educativi, ovvero come archivio digitale delle risorse bibliografiche impiegate dalle tesiste della laurea triennale e magistrale in Lingue e Letterature di Udine. Il gruppo *Research Group* raccoglie infatti materiale bibliografico in termini di pubblicazioni accademiche e scientifiche utilizzate per la stesura degli elaborati finali⁸. Le risorse sono categorizzate secondo specifiche classificazioni e possono essere selezionate più facilmente tramite dei filtri presenti nell'interfaccia (Hwang *et al.* 2017).

L'ambiente digitale collaborativo CELL (Communicating in English for Language Learning) è una comunità online in cui vengono condivise idee e materiali per facilitare e promuovere l'apprendimento della lingua inglese. CELL è stato creato nel 2012 e viene utilizzato dagli studenti dei corsi di laurea in Lingue e Letterature Straniere (Triennale) e Lingue e Letterature Europee ed Extraeuropee (Magistrale) dell'Università degli Studi di Udine per postare e condividere risorse. Al suo interno dispone di cartelle in cui vengono caricati materiali creati dagli studenti e caricati dai docenti durante vari corsi di lingua inglese, gruppi contenenti i *task* che gli apprendenti sono tenuti a svolgere in vista della valutazione all'esame, e gruppi in cui vengono condivise delle risorse per l'approfondimento linguistico. In questo ambiente digitale è stato ultimamente aggiornato il gruppo *Improving my English*, nel quale sono state selezionate e condivise risorse di varia natura, in termini di link a siti o applicazioni, per approfondire le conoscenze linguistiche nelle quattro macro-abilità della lingua inglese (ascolto, parlato, scrittura, lettura) secondo le prospettive di apprendimento linguistico autonomo e con tutor. Gli apprendenti possono infatti trovare all'interno recenti *podcast*, link a dizionari, a siti in cui fare conversazione o in cui migliorare le quattro macro-abilità, e molto altro. Tutte le risorse selezionate e condivise sono *open access* e possono essere utilizzate dagli studenti di lingue che necessitano di supporti accessibili, flessibili e personalizzabili in base alle proprie esigenze, bisogni e obiettivi, sia nel corso della loro carriera universitaria sia in seguito, in una prospettiva di *lifelong learning*.

La scelta delle risorse inserite è nata alla luce delle necessità emerse durante la stesura

⁸ Per un eventuale approfondimento sul tema si rimanda a Boato (2018) e Salvador (2018).

delle tesi di laurea di Boato (2018) e Salvador (2018) a cui si rimanda per un eventuale approfondimento sul tema, ed in seguito ad una comune esperienza di tutorato (*peer tutoring*); le risorse sono infatti raggruppate secondo i due macro-argomenti delle tesi ed in questo articolo (apprendimento autonomo e tra pari).

Gli studenti (non solo dell'ateneo udinese) possono accedere a queste risorse per facilitare il loro *out-of-class learning* e rendere la loro esperienza di apprendimento più ricca e completa. A tal proposito sono stati tenuti dei workshop e delle presentazioni per promuovere il lavoro svolto durante le lezioni dei corsi di lingua inglese dell'ateneo udinese.

Nell'estate 2018 lo strumento digitale *Hypothes.is*⁹ è stato integrato alla piattaforma *LearnWeb*. Questa piattaforma *open source* è stata utilizzata dagli apprendenti del terzo anno di Lingue e Letterature e del secondo anno della magistrale di Lingue e Letterature Europee ed Extraeuropee dell'Università degli Studi di Udine, all'interno di un progetto pilota svolto nel corso del semestre invernale 2018-2019, per effettuare analisi testuale e pragmatica in maniera collaborativa di pagine Web. Questo strumento permette infatti di selezionare porzioni di testo, annotarle con commenti o tag che possono essere visualizzati ogni qualvolta si rientra nella pagina e consente il confronto ed il feedback con i colleghi che condividono il gruppo¹⁰.

Concludendo, in seguito a questi aggiornamenti recenti, la piattaforma *LearnWeb* si conferma un ambiente digitale e accademico in cui gli studenti possono accedere per trovare risorse di qualità, che non si riuscirebbero a reperire facilmente e velocemente navigando nel generico Web.

Conclusioni

In questo articolo¹¹ si sono presentate e discusse le tematiche dell'apprendimento linguistico autonomo e tra pari e attraverso la figura di una tutor accademica coniugando gli argomenti alla prospettiva di apprendimento digitale, mediato da computer e da dispositivi mobili.

L'obiettivo principale è presentare in che modo l'apprendimento autonomo e tra pari favoriscano l'apprendimento linguistico anche a livello universitario, come essi si integrino alle tecnologie digitali e risultino ancor più efficaci e motivanti. Infine, le recenti innovazioni dell'ambiente digitale per l'apprendimento *LearnWeb* sono state presentate secondo una prospettiva di apprendimento autonomo e tra pari. Le comunità online YELL/TELL e CELL (che fanno parte di *LearnWeb*) offrono sempre nuove risorse online di qualità, in termini di siti e applicazioni ad accesso libero, che possono agevolare e migliorare l'interazione linguistica tra pari e lo studio autonomo.

Le emergenti possibilità legate all'apprendimento mobile e mediato da computer sono

⁹ <https://web.hypothes.is/> (consultato il 29/05/2019).

¹⁰ Bortoluzzi, Marenzi, Boato, Salvador. 2019. *Collaborative multimodal analysis of websites for university language students*, Convegno "Specialised Discourse and Multimedia: Linguistic features and translation issues", 14-16 febbraio 2019, Lecce.

¹¹ La realizzazione di questo articolo è stata resa possibile grazie all'esperienza di ricerca all'estero presso il Centro di Ricerca L3S, luogo di ideazione e realizzazione della piattaforma *LearnWeb*, individuata come caso studio.

un aspetto integrante dell'esperienza universitaria degli apprendenti di oggi, soprattutto per mediare e favorire l'apprendimento della lingua seconda o straniera, poiché rappresentano una forma di apprendimento personalizzato, unico, contestualizzato e diffuso. Poiché la tecnologia permette di comunicare e ricercare forme di intrattenimento secondo gli interessi personali, gli apprendenti hanno modo di entrare in contatto con materiale autentico in lingua in maniera attiva, partecipativa e creativa (Henderson *et al.* 2017). Questo carattere di apprendimento personalizzato va inteso come aggiuntivo all'apprendimento abituale e caratteristico dell'apprendente. Come riassume Ma Qing (2017: 201): "Mobile technologies may serve as an amplifier or catalyst to push learners to pursue their personalised learning".

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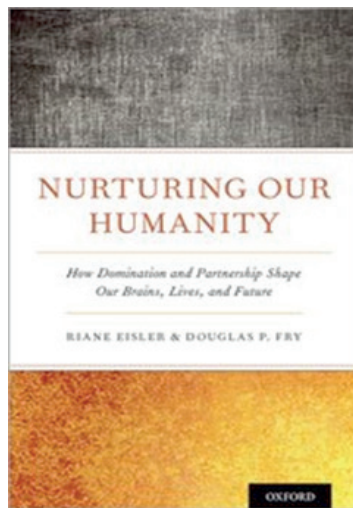
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Coral Ann Howells

Nurturing Our Humanity: How Domination and Partnership Shape Our Brains, Lives, and Future

Riane Eisler & Douglas P. Fry. 2019. Nurturing Our Humanity: How Domination and Partnership Shape Our Brains, Lives, and Future. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 360 pp., £ 22.99, ISBN 978-0-19-093572-6



<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/nurturing-our-humanity-9780190935726?cc=au&lang=en&>

What does it mean to be human? And how can we construct a sustainable world where we might all flourish? This book addresses these universal questions at our particular historical moment of anxiety and uncertainty about the future, offering a counter-narrative to the outburst of dystopias over the past few decades. The gist of the book might be summed up in its subtitle: “How Domination and Partnership Shape Our Brains, Lives, and Future”. Co-written by the enormously influential President of the Center for Partnership Studies and the anthropologist Douglas P. Fry, Chair of the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of North Carolina, it makes a persuasive case for adopting a new narrative about human beings and human possibilities. It contains a message of hope for the future, a future which is dependent on the choices we make now.

This new narrative is built on the foundations established by Eisler in *The Chalice and The Blade: Our History, Our Future* (1987), supplemented by Fry's ground-breaking work in *The Human Potential for Peace* (2006). Out of these studies in cultural transformation, the authors have developed an innovative analytical tool, the Biocultural Partnership-Domination Lens, which synthesises research from neuroscience, psychology, anthropology, gender studies, economics, and the arts. They explain it as "the need for a biocultural paradigm that combines recent and classic findings into a new framework for better understanding how our brains interact with our environments, especially with our cultural environments as mediated by families, education, politics, economics and other social institutions" (33). In other words, this new framework combines gene-environment interaction with the *partnership*-domination continuum along which human societies can be organised.

The *partnership* paradigm promotes the values of equalitarianism¹, gender equality, mutual respect, compassion and co-operation, while at the other end of the scale domination systems are hierarchical, authoritarian, masculinist and unequal, maintaining order by coercion, fear, and violence. This is a crude summary of these paradigms, within which practices vary across cultures and across time. The advantage of this model is that it reveals patterns in what otherwise may seem "random and disconnected, pointing ways of achieving systemic and sustainable change", inaugurating a fundamental shift in thinking about society. Is this another form of utopianism? No; the authors avoid this by recognising that "the *domination system* and the *partnership system* are social configurations that transcend conventional classifications such as religious v. secular, Eastern v. Western, or right v. left" (147). No society is entirely one or the other, "but the degree to which a culture orients to one or the other shapes beliefs, social structures, and how the human brain develops" (148).

Across twelve chapters which range from "Evolution, Ideology, and Human Nature", "Contracting and Expanding Consciousness", to "Love, Violence, and Socialization in Partnership and Domination Environments", ending with "The Real Culture Wars" and "A New Beginning", the authors insistently challenge traditional models which assume that aggression and violence are central to what it means to be human, arguing that "For a large-brained species like ours, there is a vast spectrum of behavioral capacities"(84) and that we are equipped for both destructiveness and creativity. That is where the nurturance (or suppression) of affective capacities assumes central importance in this argument, for "the quality of nurturance directly affects the structure of the brain" (52). Though there is no single focus in this wideranging study, there is repeated emphasis on child development, illustrated with positive and negative examples from many cultures, highlighting the importance of environmental influences on behaviour as the human qualities of love, empathy, and the power of choice are encouraged or suppressed. Closely related is the analysis and deconstruction of gender stereotypes, supported by evidence from the sciences and the humanities, with attention to male-female relationships and the position of women in different societies, once again arguing for social and gender equality. Their conclusions might be

¹ "Egalitarianism" differs from the term "equalitarianism" as it traditionally described equality only between men and men (as in the works of Locke, Rousseau, and other "rights of man" philosophers, as well as modern history).

summed up in the words of Canadian human rights activist Sally Armstrong, who declared, “When women get even a bit of education, the whole of society improves. When they get a bit of health care, everyone lives longer”.

Curiously for such an extensively researched study, there are blind spots relating to LGBTQ issues, to ethnic minority rights, and the global climate emergency, which suggest that this Biocultural Partnership-Domination Lens is, as the authors acknowledge, “still under construction and awaits input and testing” (33). Yet there is so much in this book to refresh our hopes for cultural transformation away from traditions of domination towards new models of partnership. Finally, the book reaches beyond its ending, for “Each Ending is a New Beginning” as Antonella Riem reminds us, with the innovative online resource education programmes and the “Safe Conversations” Webinar in September this year, all sponsored by the Center for Partnership Studies. “Give Peace a Chance” is the message at the heart of this book.

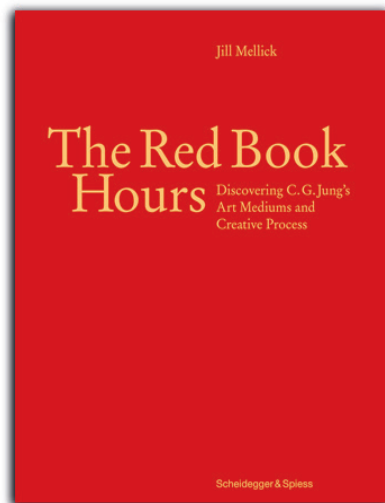
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Marco D'Agostini

Jill Mellick's *The Red Book Hours: A Creative Dialogue with Carl Gustav Jung's Work*

Jill Mellick. 2018. The Red Book Hours: Discovering C. G. Jung's Art Mediums and Creative Process. Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, pp. 452, pp. 545 colour and pp. 22 b/w illustrations, € 97.00, ISBN 978-3-85881-816-4



https://www.scheidegger-spiess.ch/index.php?lang=en&page=books&view=co&booktype=order_1_releasedate&subject=1&artist=all&author=all&pd=ss&book=986

Introduction

In her *The Red Book Hours*, the Jungian psychologist, scholar and multimedia artist Jill Mellick presents a remarkable and inspiring analysis of one of Carl Gustav Jung's most important works: *The Red Book* (Jung 2009), a sixteen-year-long documentation of his own self-analysis - from 1914 to 1930. Jung wanted to understand himself more thoroughly and familiarise himself more profoundly with the various facets of his personality, creatively transposing and instilling them in his texts and images. This was also to function as a sort of blueprint and pathway for his own patients in their journey towards Self-individuation, to find a more harmonious relationship with their Self.

Jill Mellick's innovative and challenging purpose for her own *Red Book*, pursued with determination and intense critical study and work, is to reproduce and imaginatively replicate Jung's method for studying and discussing his *Red Book*, categorizing his procedures, understanding the importance he gave to the place, tools and materials he chose for working. Similarly, Mellick's *Red Book* consists of magnifications of Jung's imagery and symbols, archival and contemporary photographs, archival architectural blueprints, and construction drawings, through which she closely follows each step of Jung's approach to conception and composition from different artistic, technical and methodological points of view. Mellick identifies a series of themes at the basis of Jung's *Red Book*, which emerge in her own text and foreground aspects related to Jung's techniques and tools, and the context he chose as the background and foundation for his psychoanalytical research. She also uses images, sections of Jung's paintings, images from microscopic analyses of paints and pigments, chemical charts, and so on, in order to give shape and clarity to their meanings. Other archival and contemporary photographs display the contexts in which Jung used to work, including landscapes, houses, working spaces, such as the Bollingen tower, his worktable and standing desk, his library and the natural surroundings in which he lived.

Following Jung's footsteps, Mellick deals first of all with the workings of his (and her own) creative process. Starting from the unconscious as a source for inspiration, Mellick shows how Jung's work was characterised by a stratification of elements aimed at giving life to an original contribution stemming from inner work that brought his visions, words and symbols to the surface. The creative process of transformation takes place (both for Jung and Mellick) in a series of passages and moments, in a state of space-time suspension, or a 'willing suspension of disbelief', as Samuel Taylor Coleridge puts it, where images surface from the unconscious, acquire a physical dimension and become tangible and coloured signs, emblems, images and words on a sheet of paper or on any other form of technical support used.

Another important aspect Mellick refers to is the contexts in which Jung carried out his main activities, for throughout his life he tried to find, create and preserve places where his vital energy could flow freely as a dynamic form of creativity:

Throughout his life, Jung devoted unusually high energy, resources, and time to securing and creating physical and architectural, visual and auditory environments that were harmonious with his inner needs and inner environment [...] (Mellick 2018: 71).

The third focal theme in Mellick's critical study, also in terms of the number of pages she devotes to it, concerns the technical aspects of creation and execution, the tools and materials Jung used in composing his *Red Book*. Mellick's artistic gifts are perfectly appropriate to describe with subtlety and clarity, even to the general reader, Jung's use of materials, colours, different painting and writing techniques, and his style of composition in 'layers' and 'cells'. It is an accurate examination, as if under the microscope, that allows the reader to understand Jung's work in depth and with focussed awareness.

Other pivotal elements in Mellick's book are the therapeutic, educational and artistic aspects she believes to be a significant part of Jung's *Red Book*. Through the determination and strength characterising his personality, Jung always maintained that the images of his book

were not to be considered as a form of art. He asserted he did not have any artistic aims and thought that the symbolism of his drawings was an aspect that eluded any conscious artistic intention. He used his *Red Book* as a source of inspiration for his psychoanalytic sessions and when he received his patients (usually in his library) he kept the book open so that they could observe his work, the method and the commitment with which he conducted his own psychoanalysis. For therapeutic aims, Jung gave his patients instructions on how to work with their own active imagination, in the same way; to hold inner dialogues and illustrate their fantasies, thus creating their own personal *Red Book*. This is also what Jill Mellick knowingly does.

The Creative Process

Jung's creative process began through 'descending' into his own unconscious. The image used and reported in his book, *Memories, dreams, reflections* (1963) is precisely that of a descent of a thousand and more steps in order to reach the edge of a cosmic abyss:

In order to seize hold of the fantasies, I frequently imagined a steep descent. I even made several attempts to get to the very bottom. The first time I reached, as it were, a depth of about a thousand feet; the next time I found myself at the edge of the cosmic abyss (Jung 1963: 181).

The abyss is a sea inhabited by thousands of symbols, monsters, fantastic images, from which Jung drew and then reproduced sketches on the scrolls his manuscript. In his case, the creative process is induced by a precise desire for personal self-knowledge of his inner world. As proof of this intention, Jung specifies the entrance rituals, which were similar to a game of the descending steps he used to play when he was a child. After these first sketches of *mandalas*, Jung began to consider the process of translating emotions into images as a way to explore his neuroses his neurosis. Central to his creative process is the mythopoeic function of the mind, which he found while analysing in detail his imagination and fantasies. During this inner journey, Jung understood how symbolism is the key to reaching the unconscious and its figurative form of vision (*mythopoiesis*). Thus it cannot be considered real 'art' (whatever that means) but a primordial form of *ex-expression* (*to press out*), in which the author is moved by a sort of 'alien' and uncontrollable impulse, where one is aware of being subordinate to what is happening in his work and feels like an 'observer' of what is happening, as if he were another person¹.

Mellick carefully exposes these ideas and shows the difference between the 'classic' creative process and that of Jung. The artist is seen responding to an unconscious insight operating from an inner world that is translated into images, artefacts, words, music, sometimes descending from an ecstatic inner state. Jung, however, wants to study the process

¹ In the introduction to *The Red Book*, Sonu Shamdasani argues that in Jung's essay "Analytical Psychology and Poetic Art" (1922) the psychology formulated a distinction between two types of literary productions: those coming from precise and conscious intentions of their author and those that impose themselves on him without the intervention of conscience. In the second case we speak of symbolic works that originate from the collective unconscious, where the creative process consists in the unconscious activation of an archetypal image – e.g. Zarathustra by Nietzsche and Faust by Goethe – (Jung 2009: 212).

itself from a psychoanalytical point of view and pursues his artistic activity with specific therapeutic and self-therapeutic purposes. Shaman-like, he intentionally goes increasingly deeper into his unconscious in order to recover images that he later will transfer in his works.

According to Jung, the creative process is a stream of consciousness in which it is not possible to grasp what is happening. Only afterwards, in a more conscious state, is it possible to discern and examine oneself from outside, and understand the images created, linking them to a possible meaning. Therefore, the images in his *Red Book* are an aesthetic elaboration of inner fantasies. Jung understood, from the beginning of his research, that figurative language was the best to represent inner psychic states. Mellick draws the reader's attention to how Jung succeeds in identifying four distinct phases in his creative process: 1) preparation and immersion; 2) incubation; 3) insight; 4) evaluation. Through this path of self-discovery, a decisive aspect is determined by the space-time suspension that a person usually experiences, where it is possible to feel deep joy during the very 'descent' process if one stays away from any life distractions and involvement.

Contexts and Places for Jung's Creative Process

An important section of Jill Mellick's analysis focuses on the spaces in which Jung carried out his work. Mellick researched and travelled extensively in order to fulfil this: at the Jung house in Kusnacht, a town located on the right bank of Lake Zürich, she was able to absorb the atmosphere and observe the context in which the Swiss psychiatrist worked. Again, at the Bollingen tower, she personally visited the refuge created by Jung himself on the shores of Lake Zürich. As Mellick shows, the physical, architectural, audial, visual, intellectual and emotional context that surrounded Jung was fundamental for his creative spirit. Throughout his life, the psychiatrist pursued the idea of creating and maintaining harmonious relationships with the places he chose to inhabit so that would allow him to best achieve his search for his own psyche and accomplish his inner journey. Mellick illustrates how these comforting spaces had precise characteristics that also mirrored Jung's own feelings. Firstly, they needed to be close to 'masses' of water. This aspect is foregrounded also in *Memories, dreams, reflections* and in the documentary titled *Dal Profondo dell'anima* (Weick 1993). Jung always felt the need to live near the water, which he considered a vital element and a powerful symbol. Another key feature was the need to practice his profession and write in isolated and tiny places that were in direct contrast to his fascination with great and open spaces (Lake Zürich is surrounded, in fact, by the vastness of the Alps). To fulfil his need for an indispensable 'generative' solitude, Jung built the tower of Bollingen, the physical matrix of his creativity. He ornamented its interior spaces with symbolic, decorative and familiar paintings. He also supervised the design and construction of his house in Kusnacht, so that it would be built in the right location to obtain perfect natural lighting. It was in its library and inner study where he received patients and worked on *The Red Book*. This inner room of the library was a sort of 'heart' of the place, where he could completely isolate himself.

Mellick describes in detail and with care the tools and the material components of the 'setting' in which Jung realised his work and, in particular, his standing desk: which he

considered and used as a preview for his subsequent analysis of the techniques, materials, colours and tools he was using for the composition of his manuscript. Jung's standing desk, designed and built by himself, was a structure more than a meter high where he could draw and compose while standing.

Technique and Materials

The most significant part of Mellick's *Red Book* relates to Jung's techniques and processing methods in the composition of his work. Here Mellick demonstrates her remarkable ability for technical analysis due to her personal background as an artist. Together with her activity in psychoanalysis, Mellick is an experimenting artist working with different materials for the composition of her paintings, using, for instance, acrylic, watercolour, and pastels. Her artistic work can now be seen and appreciated through her personal website (www.jillmellick.com). In the section titled "Art" Mellick displays watercolours, paintings, photographs and forms. The detailing of her sketches demonstrates her ability in constructing and discerning symbols and characteristics from real life. She is particularly interested in landscapes, portraits and geometrical forms. She mirrors Jung's legacy also in her professional background, which follows at least two main fields of inquiry and research: the psychological and the artistic, which often mix and interplay, giving her the right sensitivity and depth of feeling in her study of Jung's techniques, colours and shapes.

Preparation and Colours

In order to sketch drawings and calligraphy for *The Red Book*, Jung nurtured his ability to transfer visions into images since his youth. With dedication, care and patience, he trained for many years to improve his technique and talent in the use and choice of material. Towards the end of his medical studies, for about a year he devoted himself to painting, sketching scenarios and landscapes in a figurative style, with a technique that shortly became very refined. Moreover, Jung remained in contact with the artistic milieu of his times and was also "fascinated by the works of Leonardo Da Vinci, Rubens, Fra' Angelico and in general by ancient and Renaissance art" (Jung 2009: 196).

In the section she devotes to Jung's use of colour, Mellick displays the actual pigments he was producing and the techniques he used for drawing on parchment and vellum. She carries out a thorough scientific inquiry of the pigments, classifying them according to their chemical and molecular composition. Furthermore, presenting the images from the microscope, she carries us into their minuscule and infinitesimal nature.

Describing the chemical composition of colours and materials and revealing their origin, value and use in one or more contexts (at the Kusnacht library or even in Bollingen), Mellick allows us to discover what lies behind Jung's symbols and their representations. Showing to the reader Jung's primary elements in their ultimate essential and smallest features, Mellick gives us an intuitive vision and scientific understanding of the most basic and simplest gradation of those substances, in the process of 'returning to the one':

Analysis of the composition of each of these minuscule paint particles from *The Red Book* reveals an even clearer picture. Elemental and molecular analysis established

that almost every one of these particles, carefully obtained from random gutters of the book, contains one or more of the pigments from Bollingen (Mellick 2018: 179).

Mellick not only describes in detail Jung's use of colour, but, more importantly, discusses their toxicity. Indeed, the chemical analysis of *The Red Book* has found traces of uranium, arsenic, mercury, cobalt, chromium, barium and lead. Working in a studio with poor ventilation, Jung must have inhaled and absorbed most of them; this was also aggravated by his smoking a pipe which he refilled with colour-stained hands. According to Mellick, it is possible that the use of these pigments caused anxiety, irritability and altered his mental balance:

Jung did nothing by halves. The call of the muses of the lower world was a call Jung was compelled to heed – at all costs. The potential costs to his health were as serious as the journey to his psyche. Yet he did not waver in his commitment to strap his robust body and strong psyche to the mast of his psychic ship so that he, like Odysseus, could listen to the Siren song and survive to tell the tale (Mellick 2018: 219).

Realisation

Mellick insightfully reveals Jung's artistic process and techniques in order to realise his drawings and the drafts of his *Red Book*: layering, outlining, patterns, tiling and calligraphy. Jung drew the lines and the shapes he wanted to paint with a pencil and he composed the text in black. As the work progressed, he used less pencil and drew directly with the colours that were painted with *gouache* (a water-based paint that is different from tempera). The colours were applied with a *layering technique*, a progressive stratification of colours applied at different moments. In applying colour over colour, the image emerged from the page with a certain chromatic complexity with the effective presence of nuances and gradations, obtained by the so-called pooling (*i.e.* variations of the concentration of pigments in different areas):

Jung uses layering expertly to achieve particular effects, including one less often used: increasing a hue's intensity by adding another layer of the same color. This reduces the risk of oversaturating the paint mixture with pigment and results in less craquelure. He also uses layering to indicate light source (Mellick 2018: 219).

Mellick clearly explains how this layering technique, combined with the renowned perseverance with which Jung performed all manual work, certainly favoured his need for concentration and isolation in order to achieve his work. These repetitive and meticulous processes allowed him to experience a total immersion and consequent isolation from the 'background noises' of everyday life. Mellick explains how, having completed the main shapes with pencils and colours, Jung used to outline the contours of his images in order to achieve different lighting effects. The outline of the contours provided a 'mosaic' result similar to an Art Nouveau style. During this second phase, Jung worked with patience, discipline and hand-eye coordination, achieving a state of 'inner absorption', which is very close

to Hindu or Zen meditation. In connection with this inner unconscious inspiration, Mellick focuses on how Jung also worked on patterns of compositions connected to landscapes, *mandalas*, figures from geology, botany and zoology. Themes that later became models he used to recall to his mind different archetypes: they were either internal individual or collective representational motifs. Mellick then argues about Jung's use of the symbolic element, which takes us back to his idea on the 'individuation process'. In composing these symbols on the page, Jung used the *tiling* technique, *i.e.* he worked following small cells (tiles) that he would later join in the final image.

The last element examined by Mellick is calligraphy. Working on the text, as if he were a calligrapher or a miniaturist, Jung designed each letter slowly, line by line, and decorated it with a rich set of illustrations, figurative initials, frames, borders and other ornamental motifs. Each capital letter was based on a different style, often inspired by medieval manuscripts. If at first these illustrations are in direct connection with the text, they later acquire a more symbolic character, thus going beyond their appearance of mere calligraphic exercise and showing the power of his active imagination at work. Mellick underlines the fact that Jung considered calligraphy as a meticulous method to acquire a discipline both of body and mind, a contemplative practice that showed his deepening artistic process, which fully absorbed him in the creation of his inestimable work of art.

A Therapeutic and Educational Practice

One cannot know or think s/he can cure others if one does not know and heal oneself first. As Mellick's *Red Book Hours* itself shows, to be able to create and/or follow the intimate and complex processes of the mind and Self, like heroes and heroines of ancient myths and fables, one needs to undertake an inner search, a journey towards his/her unconscious in order to reveal one's innermost animating forces. In writing *The Red Book*, Jung underwent an important journey of self-analysis. During this period of creativity, Jung experienced a special emotional connection with his work that he described with these words: "The inner images keep me from getting lost in personal retrospection" (Jung 1963: 320).

From this we derive that Jung has an almost physiological need to reproduce images and visions on parchment or vellum, in order to describe the parallel world that he was facing and experiencing in his life. However, this therapeutic experience did not only concern himself: he used his *Red Book* as a useful instrument to inspire his patients during their psychoanalytic sessions, and later, to encourage them to experiment with the same process, through their own drawings and paintings (but also in other creative forms and ways) in a therapeutic flow that would allow them to free their unconscious and bring light to its archetypes.

His own model became the example for his patients, as Tina Keller, one of his patient from 1912, reports:

It happened that he showed me what he had done and commented upon it. The care and precision with which he worked to create those images and the text testified the value of his commitment. The teacher was demonstrating to the student that psychic development requires time and effort (Jung 2009: 205).

His *Red Book* started as a practice, carried out for personal purposes, and later, when shared with patients, became a model of self-therapy and education, a mutual “collective experiment” (Jung 2009: 205) that reveals the therapeutic and educational value of his work, creatively and artistically interpreted in Mellick’s beautiful and original *Red Book Hours*.

Beyond Art

Jung did not want his manuscript to be defined as a work of art, even if he employed colours, nibs and different artistic techniques. As Mellick’s analysis clearly reveals, his work went much deeper and achieved much more than a ‘simple’ aesthetic or artistic artefact. His attempt at producing a long-lasting creation has also left a remarkable sign of his inner world as well as a profound mark in both his patients and readers. The mapping of his personal world became a pathway made of images and symbols belonging to the ‘collective unconscious’, where anyone could recognise himself or herself. While the compensatory aspect of the unconscious is always present, its symbolising function manifests itself only when we are ready to recognise it as such. Moreover, if in the artistic production the creative insight takes place spontaneously, Jung helped us in its recognition and recovery from the creative force of its symbols. The reconciliation between a rational truth and an intuitive and imaginative one can be realised in the symbol, because it naturally contains both aspects. In this regard, Mellick argues:

Whether or not Jung’s work was “art”, it is enough for the purpose of this exploration to accept that Jung didn’t consider himself (or any patient engaged in a similar process) “an artist”. Neither did he consider the processes in which he immersed himself “artistic”. Jung used art materials and art techniques for his own purposes (Mellick 2018: 36).

Jill Mellick points out that, unlike any artist, Jung was not interested in the appeal his *Red Book* could have on others (Jung 2009: 220). His own figurative representations and those of his patients were not to be considered artistic works but rather true emanations of the spirit. In experimenting with images, the individual discovered and came close to his/her personal myth, thus approaching an archetypal form of understanding. Therefore, the book’s ultimate aim was to transform our worldview in accordance with the active contents of the unconscious. Hence, Jung felt the need to decipher the conceptions brought up from the unconscious, with its literary and symbolic form, translating them into a language compatible with a contemporary perspective.

Conclusions

Jill Mellick’s outstanding, profound and generous work reveals and discloses for us some of the secrets of Jung’s *Red Book*. Her work is an original text that helps us to better understand a complex and stratified manuscript. It can be considered an important intellectual instrument for psychoanalysts, psychotherapists and scholars of related disciplines and also a precious source of inspiration for artists. Mellick’s aesthetic and methodological analysis delves into Jung’s unconscious world, thus allowing psychiatrists and psychoanalysts to come closer to Jung’s thought, personality and self-therapeutic method. Although Jung re-

peatedly said that the figurative contents of the book are not to be considered art but rather seen as symbols of his self-therapy, it is nevertheless clear that the techniques, the creative process and even the final result have the beauty and quality of artistic creative expressions.

Because Mellick's *Red Book Hours* parallels Jung's ideas of the unconscious as an unbound repository of symbolic wealth and meaning, she refrains from giving a final and reassuring meaning to the reader:

Dreams, overanalysed, explained, and subsumed in the service of clarity and application, dry up their wellspring of psychic nourishment. [...] So, too, a researcher into another's creative process and experience should remain acutely aware of treading softly [...]. If I have done my work well, my inquiry will leave a mystery richer for the exploration, and still as elusive (Mellick 2018: 23).

It is precisely through this mystery and the elusiveness of Jung's (and Mellick's) symbolic works that the attentive reader is led to a deeper unconscious dimension by fixing the gaze on those images and representations, establishing a connection with her/his 'authentic being', a feeling we could experience when observing a fresco or listening to a symphony with closed eyes.

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I sensi del testo. Scrittura, riscrittura e traduzione (Giuseppe Sofò)

Giuseppe Sofò. 2018. I sensi del testo. Scrittura, riscrittura e traduzione. Anzio (RM): Novalogos, pp. 183, € 16,00, ISBN 978-88-973-3981-6



<http://www.novalogos.it/prod.php?id=104>

Il ruolo della traduzione nella configurazione delle identità culturali, in particolar modo all'interno del discorso letterario europeo, è stato tradizionalmente considerato ancillare al testo 'originale', nel doppio senso di innovativo e generativo. Ciò almeno fino al cosiddetto *translation turn*, che dagli anni '90 ha investito gli studi culturali soprattutto a partire da quella riflessione postcoloniale il cui ribaltamento delle gerarchie tra centro e margine, egemonico e subalterno, ha messo in discussione i luoghi dell'autorità, compreso il testo letterario e l'idea di 'canone' che ne deriva.

Il sensi del testo. Scrittura, riscrittura e traduzione offre un'ampia panoramica di questo dibattito, anche se questo non è il suo obiettivo primario. Rifuggendo un approccio di tipo storico (e quindi necessariamente teleologico), l'argomentazione si muove piuttosto per concetti e associazioni, tratteggiando così una costellazione di interventi critici per costituire una foucaultiana 'scatola degli attrezzi' atta ad esplorare non il singolo testo, ma la letteratura come "organismo vivente" (7). È per questo motivo che il volume rinuncia program-

maticamente alla sicurezza (ma anche, quindi, al limite) dei casi studio per confrontarsi con l'idea del testo, e in particolare del testo scritto, come oggetto e soggetto di infiniti atti interpretativi, di cui la traduzione è sia elemento specifico sia ampia metafora del modo in cui gli esseri umani fanno senso del mondo.

Non a caso già nel sottotitolo alla traduzione si affiancano la scrittura e la riscrittura: questi tre elementi vengono infatti considerati di pari dignità in quello che Sofo definisce il sistema o meglio, sulla scorta di Itamar Even-Zohar, il "polisistema" (15) letterario. Questo concetto permette di pensare alla 'letteratura' sia al plurale, nell'inevitabile varietà di forme, collocazioni spazio-temporali, e soprattutto lingue, ma anche al singolare, come un sistema integrato in cui ogni testo è in relazione profonda con gli altri. All'inevitabile riferimento alla *Weltliteratur* e alle letterature comparate di stampo morettiano, tuttavia, l'autore affianca un forte impianto postcoloniale, che permette di registrare la fondamentale ineguaglianza dei rapporti configurati all'interno di tale sistema: e ciò permette di riconoscere il sistema letterario come parte di quel campo di battaglia – non solo culturale – di cui parla Edward Said, uno dei punti di riferimento del panorama metodologico del volume.

A Said si affiancano i grandi 'classici' del pensiero postcoloniale, da Glissant a Walcott, ma è evidente lo sforzo (peraltro riuscito) di Sofo per non limitare l'ambito della propria riflessione alle testualità che emergono dal momento e dalla collocazione geografica postcoloniale. Al contrario, questa visione assurge a paradigma metodologico: Moretti, Even-Zohar, o Manganelli, ma anche Leopardi e Tirso da Molina, affiancano le voci più saldamente collocate nel contemporaneo postcoloniale come Bhabha, Spivak, o Trivedi; così, teorie emerse in luoghi, tempi e lingue diverse vengono messe in dialogo per configurare una metodologia in grado di apprezzare il testo letterario come inevitabilmente innestato nel movimento di idee e persone. Ed è da questa configurazione che la traduzione emerge come cifra inevitabile nella creazione di "spazi letterari" (18) mai conclusi e sempre in movimento.

La migrazione dei testi, innervata nell'etimologia di *tra-ducere*, punta anche al dato politico di questa cornice metodologica, un progetto culturale che vede nel riconoscimento dell'interdipendenza reciproca la base necessaria per una società meno settaria ed escludente. E non a caso all'inevitabile riferimento latino si affiancano altre lingue e tradizioni per impedire la possibilità dell'instaurarsi di un qualsiasi paradigma egemonico: così l'atto traduttivo viene definito attraverso il sanscrito *anuvada*, 'dire dopo' (60); l'arabo *isfar*, 'svelamento' che condivide la radice con *safar*, il viaggio (129); o il giapponese del *kintsugi*, l'arte di riparare la ceramica con oro e argento (135), metafora che già Walcott utilizza per parlare della fertile frammentazione linguistica e culturale dei Caraibi: un affresco dettagliato e complesso, che offre a chi legge l'idea di un sistema letterario fluido e cosmopolita.

Tuttavia, la ricognizione dei movimenti teorici e critici degli ultimi trent'anni offre anche l'occasione per una valutazione non necessariamente celebrativa dei risultati ottenuti: al contrario, "il grande e importantissimo lavoro sulla poetica della migrazione svolto dagli studi postcoloniali e dagli autori degli spazi letterari postcoloniali è [...] ancora troppo distante da un'influenza profonda sulle politiche della migrazione" (70). E se il volume resta molto centrato sullo specifico letterario, senza pretendere di offrire soluzioni socio-politiche, è evidente che la spinta utopica di questo progetto è anche profondamente politica nel

ribaltare le gerarchie acquisite e registrare quelle che, con un'espressione mutuata da Manganelli, Sofo definisce "parole clandestine" (30). Non un'acritica celebrazione della poetica del margine, quindi, ma un confronto armato con ogni tentativo di cooptazione da parte di nazionalismi o sovranismi contemporanei.

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Elisa Forlin

Rassegna bibliografica: didattica innovativa per l'insegnamento delle letterature di lingua inglese nella scuola secondaria di secondo grado

La presente recensione riguarda alcune serie di manuali di letteratura in inglese per apprendenti di madrelingua italiana della scuola secondaria di secondo grado che sono frutto dell'esperienza editoriale del gruppo di B. De Luca, U. Grillo, P. Pace e S. Ranzoli. Questi manuali hanno segnato una svolta significativa nella didattica della letteratura nella scuola italiana.

L'esperienza editoriale di B. De Luca, U. Grillo, P. Pace e S. Ranzoli inizia con la pubblicazione di due diverse edizioni di manuali di letteratura inglese, *Language in Literature* (1982), in un ambiente culturale vivace e in cui il dibattito sull'apprendimento linguistico attraverso le letterature risente delle influenze degli studi di esperti come Brumfit, Carter, Widdowson, Leech e Short. Le due edizioni constano entrambe di due volumi e si differenziano per alcune caratteristiche. In generale, ciascuna autrice si è occupata di una sezione e, dunque, di un genere letterario: Barbara Cauzzo De Luca si è occupata di *Fiction*, Umberta Grillo di *Non-Fiction*, Silvana Ranzoli di *Poetry* e Paola Pace di *Drama*. Ciascuna sezione consente di acquisire specifiche competenze linguistico-strutturali per l'analisi di testi letterari di vario genere, a partire da passi tratti della letteratura in inglese, completi di documentazione di approfondimento che comprende strumenti di analisi molto significativi per discenti e docenti. Inoltre, nella seconda parte del testo, le autrici definiscono un quadro teorico della letteratura inglese dell'Ottocento e del Novecento e le sezioni sono arricchite dalla presenza di documenti, che contribuiscono all'inquadramento sociale e storico-politico del periodo letterario di riferimento, e di blocchi di esercizi-guida alla lettura dei testi. Il libro ha carattere innovativo per l'attenzione agli studi sulla stilistica che sottendono il lavoro e che negli anni Ottanta si stavano diffondendo, ma che ancora non erano entrati a far parte della formazione insegnante.

La riflessione innovativa delle autrici sulla didattica del testo letterario in inglese L2 procede con la pubblicazione in due volumi di *Views of Literature* (1993). L'obiettivo dei due testi è quello di avvicinare gli studenti e le studentesse allo studio della letteratura anglofona in un'ottica di equilibrio fra la tradizione metodologica ed editoriale italiana e l'innovazione anglosassone caratteristica di quegli anni (stilistica, analisi del discorso, dei generi, della ricezione del pubblico). Una delle novità principali dei nuovi manuali è un impianto testuale solido e ricco, unito ad una suddivisione per generi che, seppur presente nei testi precedenti, viene trattata in maniera più ampia, dettagliata e approfondita. Ulteriori novità riguardano l'introduzione della multimedialità a supporto dell'apprendimento letterario attraverso materiali audio-visivi e un'attenzione particolare nello sviluppo dell'abilità di scrittura attraverso attività legate alla comprensione del testo, alla lingua o al genere scelto dall'autore o dall'autrice del passo, con attività sulle convenzioni delle tipologie testuali presentate.

Il primo volume è suddiviso in cinque sezioni: *Fiction, Poetry, Drama, The Context e The Films*. Le prime tre sezioni sono organizzate secondo due livelli di difficoltà e presentano le principali caratteristiche di ciascun genere letterario attraverso l'analisi di varie tipologie testuali. Nel primo livello di difficoltà è possibile trovare testi meno complessi, scelti per rispondere alle conoscenze linguistiche dei discenti. Nel secondo livello è possibile trovare testi più classici e complessi appartenenti al canone della letteratura inglese e americana del XIX e XX secolo. La quarta sezione introduce allo studio del contesto storico relativo alle letterature anglofone che verrà approfondito nel secondo volume. La quinta e ultima sezione è dedicata ad attività strutturate sull'adattamento cinematografico di opere letterarie con l'obiettivo di fornire gli strumenti base necessari al confronto fra letterature e cinema che avvia a una lettura di media e generi diversi. In una lettera introduttiva al primo volume e rivolta direttamente agli studenti e alle studentesse che ne usufruiscono, appare evidente l'attenzione delle autrici nei confronti degli/delle apprendenti e delle loro esigenze legate all'apprendimento linguistico attraverso le letterature straniere: l'ottica metodologica li colloca al centro del processo acquisizionale.

Il secondo volume è strutturato secondo modalità differenti, seppur in una prospettiva di ampliamento e approfondimento. Il volume è composto di otto sezioni, ciascuna delle quali corrisponde ad un periodo storico-letterario della letteratura inglese: dal Medioevo alla seconda metà del Novecento. Ogni sezione prevede una struttura di base ricorrente: "I testi letterari", "Le attività", "Le biografie", "Le domande", "Il test" e una parte conclusiva che consente di schematizzare le caratteristiche principali di ciascun contesto storico e periodo letterario. Diversa dalle altre è la sezione finale del libro *The Films* che si ricollega alla rilevanza offerta a media diversi del volume precedente. Questi due volumi rappresentano una straordinaria novità editoriale e didattica i cui aspetti innovativi forti hanno avuto un impatto sull'editoria dei libri di testo dagli anni Novanta in poi: la centralità del/la discente, l'attenzione alla lingua della letteratura e i suoi generi, l'utilizzo della letteratura per fare raffronti con la vita presente, l'interdisciplinarietà, l'attenzione a discipline artistiche collegate alla letteratura quali cinema, teatro, musica, ecc., la riflessione sulla ricezione del pubblico dei testi letterari. In particolare, questi manuali basati sulla ricerca teorica che si sviluppava in quegli anni non solo sono stati fondamentali per l'uso scolastico, ma hanno anche permesso agli/alle insegnanti di fare formazione (iniziale e in itinere) attraverso i testi adottati per la classe. Il successo e la qualità di questi volumi hanno influenzato le pubblicazioni successive. Da *Views of Literature* in poi, i testi di letteratura inglese per le scuole secondarie non hanno potuto non confrontarsi con le metodologie e la base teorica innovativa di questo lavoro. Si può davvero dire che *Views of Literature* ha fatto scuola a discenti, insegnanti, formatori/formatrici e autori/autrici di testi scolastici.

A seguito delle novità metodologiche e contenutistiche di questi volumi, le stesse autrici hanno proseguito con una serie innovativa di manuali di letteratura inglese intitolata *Literature and Beyond. Film Music and Art* (1997). Si tratta di quattro volumi distinti in cui l'approccio metodologico per generi è molto simile a quello adottato in *Views of Literature* (1993) ma con un'attenzione particolare e sempre maggiore nei confronti della multimedia e al raccordo fra letteratura e discipline artistiche.

Fra le novità più rilevanti che continuano il percorso iniziato con i precedenti lavori troviamo l'interdisciplinarietà con le letterature italiana, greco-latina e la storia. Le autrici hanno creato occasioni di apprendimento multidisciplinare che mettono a confronto e in un dialogo crescente l'universo letterario con il cinema, la musica e l'arte. Una delle specificità del volume riguarda rubriche e schede di approfondimento *Check and Learn*, *Study Skill*, *Summing Up*, *Test Yourself* e *Cross-curricular card*. In particolare, la rubrica *Check and Learn* sintetizza concetti appresi nel corso di ciascuna unità di apprendimento e consente a studenti e studentesse di consolidare e correggere in autonomia quanto appreso. I volumi cronologici inoltre contengono attività originali per la revisione sistematica dei contenuti appresi, danno spazio all'autovalutazione, all'interdisciplinarietà, alle abilità di studio e alla personalizzazione dello studio oltre che all'analisi del contesto storico, sociale e culturale attraverso documenti scritti e multimediali.

Grillo conclude la collaborazione con il gruppo con il volume *Fast Lane* (1999) (versione in un unico volume dei manuali del 1997). A completamento della raccolta, viene pubblicato nel 2000 il volume *Literature and Beyond. American Writers and Themes* (2000) in cui si dà voce ai temi della letteratura post-coloniale, con particolare riferimento agli autori e alle autrici americani/e e alle loro opere.

Nei primi anni Duemila, il gruppo di autrici accoglie D. J. Ellis. De Luca, Ellis, Pace e Ranzoli pubblicano un nuovo importante lavoro, *Books and Bookmarks. A Modular Approach to Literature* (2001), in cinque volumi, ciascuno dei quali è diviso in moduli: 1A *The Text*; 1B *Milestones in Literature*; 1C *Two Approaches to Text*; 2A *Mapping the 19th Century*; 2B *Reading the 20th Century*. Questo corso di letteratura è ricco di riferimenti interdisciplinari e multimediali che facilitano l'apprendimento in autonomia e consentono ai/alle docenti di progettare unità didattiche specifiche per il loro contesto scolastico e di classe. Una risorsa innovativa per la programmazione è il *Programme Planner* suddiviso in tre sezioni distinte: *Authors*, *Topics* e *Study Aids* (De Luca et al., 2001: xii-xv). Si tratta di un insieme di strumenti e risorse per la programmazione di percorsi letterari adatti alle esigenze dei gruppi di apprendenti e riassunti in una tabella presente in tutte le guide per docenti. I percorsi sono strutturati in base a tre variabili fondamentali: l'argomento, l'autore/autrice e il modulo; ciò significa che, a seconda dell'approccio scelto, cambiano i contenuti e le modalità dell'apprendimento. Dunque, oltre a fornire un repertorio ricco e interessante di autori/autrici e opere della letteratura anglofona, i volumi di *Books and Bookmarks* e le relative guide coadiuvano i/le docenti nella programmazione della didattica della letteratura in lingua straniera, ma anche gli/le apprendenti nella progettazione di percorsi letterari e linguistici efficaci e personalizzati in autonomia. Fra gli aspetti maggiormente innovativi di questo corso, troviamo le attività e le risorse che si focalizzano sulle competenze di studio dei testi e contesti collegati alle risorse che promuovono l'autovalutazione e la valutazione formativa e finale delle competenze. Le competenze linguistiche, testuali e multimodali sono esplicitate attraverso descrittori chiari nelle varie unità di apprendimento ed esercitate attraverso attività originali e mirate alla comprensione complessa di testi e contesti.

Nel 2003, le autrici pubblicano una monografia dedicata alla storia della letteratura inglese: *Books and Bookmarks. The Context. A Historical and Literary Companion* (2003) a cura

di De Luca e Pace. Si tratta di un manuale che ripercorre la storia della letteratura inglese dal Medioevo fino alla fine degli anni Novanta del secolo scorso, unito ad alcuni percorsi di autoverifica e valutazione degli apprendimenti.

Le ultime pubblicazioni del gruppo di autrici risalgono a *Literature in Time* (2005), un'edizione compatta in un unico volume, e a *Words that Speak* (2006), un'edizione in due volumi. Nel primo caso, si tratta di un'antologia di testi tratti dalla storia della letteratura inglese secondo un ordine cronologico dalle origini ai giorni nostri. Come di consueto, le autrici danno priorità a strumenti multimediali e interdisciplinari che agevolino il più possibile l'autonomia di apprendimento, in un volume compatto e agile. Nel secondo caso, si tratta di due volumi che comprendono una parte propedeutica ai generi letterari e uno studio teorico sulla storia della letteratura in lingua inglese dalle origini fino ai giorni nostri, unito ad un apparato iconografico di supporto e approfondimento. Nella parte conclusiva, le autrici suggeriscono attività di potenziamento delle competenze linguistico-lessicali degli/delle apprendenti, al fine d'incoraggiarne l'autonomia. Con questi ultimi due volumi si conclude la collaborazione editoriale di De Luca, Ellis, Pace e Ranzoli. Tuttavia, le pubblicazioni delle singole autrici continuano anche negli anni successivi.

Literature for Life (2010) è un lavoro di Ellis in collaborazione con T. Brett, K. Hughes e G. Watkins pubblicato in due volumi con due configurazioni editoriali differenti. Il primo volume *Understanding the Author's Craft* (2010) fornisce gli strumenti necessari alla lettura, comprensione e analisi di diverse tipologie testuali. I testi proposti sono suddivisi per aree tematiche e si dà notevole spazio al confronto fra le letterature inglesi e la letteratura italiana, con collegamenti all'arte visiva. L'organizzazione del secondo volume varia: la configurazione editoriale A prevede un unico volume, *The Literary Heritage, Modern and Contemporary Texts, Study Skills and Exam Preparation* (2010), mentre la configurazione B prevede due volumi, *The Literary Heritage* e *Modern and Contemporary Texts* (2010), con l'aggiunta di un manuale compensativo, *Study Skills and Exam Preparation* (2010), per l'approfondimento delle competenze di lettura e scrittura in ambito letterario e la preparazione delle prove di lingua dell'Esame di Stato. In entrambi i casi, i testi letterari sono disposti in ordine cronologico. Inoltre, i volumi sono accompagnati da materiale digitale di approfondimento ed esercizi di autovalutazione. Segue un'edizione ridotta, *Literature for Life Light* (2012), accompagnata da cinque volumi opzionali per indirizzi scolastici specifici: *Texts for Young Classicists*, *Texts for Young Scientists* (2012), *Texts for Young Artists* (2012), *Texts for Young Linguists* (2012), *Texts for Young Social Scientists* (2012). Questa scelta anticipa il lavoro editoriale degli ultimi anni orientata verso la manualistica letteraria inglese specializzata e rivolta a ciascun indirizzo di studi delle scuole italiane.

Nascono così le cinque edizioni di *White Spaces – Culture, literature and languages* (2017), frutto della collaborazione fra Ellis e De Luca e rivolte a studenti e studentesse dei licei italiani d'indirizzo scientifico (edizione blu), classico (edizione rossa), linguistico (edizione verde), artistico (edizione gialla) e delle scienze umane (edizione arancione) con un approccio culturale e interculturale attraverso una grande varietà di risorse cartacee e digitali: testi, immagini, video, presentazioni in PowerPoint, documentari e interviste sono stati realizzati appositamente a supporto di questi manuali. Questi volumi risentono chiaramente dell'in-

fluenza dei testi pubblicati sin dagli anni Ottanta e si adattano alle esigenze della riforma ministeriale italiana dei Licei, ma anche dei principi della didattica inclusiva.

Ciascun volume è organizzato in unità di apprendimento che presentano al loro interno una struttura ripetuta. La prima sezione dell'unità di apprendimento, *Introducing the Age*, riguarda tre modalità differenti di studio del contesto storico-culturale "con un approccio visuale coinvolgente, utile per la didattica inclusiva e le intelligenze multiple" (Ellis 2017: 4)". Tali modalità sono rappresentate da tre rubriche: *The Past in the Present*, *In Their Own Words* e *The Cultural Context*. La prima aiuta gli/le apprendenti a sviluppare una consapevolezza rispetto al mondo che li/le circonda, attraverso il riconoscimento di testimonianze del passato nel mondo presente. Essa consente di utilizzare le competenze linguistiche attraverso descrizioni, confronti, discussioni, riflessioni sulle esperienze personali degli studenti e delle studentesse. La seconda rubrica racconta gli avvenimenti storico-culturali attraverso testimonianze dirette e la voce di chi ha vissuto quei momenti. La terza e ultima rubrica elenca gli eventi maggiormente significativi in ordine cronologico.

La seconda sezione dell'unità di apprendimento, *Key Authors and Texts*, riguarda gli autori, le autrici e le opere della letteratura in inglese "analizzati con attenzione ai diversi tipi di competenze chiave, disciplinari, linguistiche e trasversali" (Ellis 2017: 5). La storia letteraria viene approfondita in modo interattivo (con supporti digitali e online) attraverso documentari nei riquadri *Docu-pic*, i testi antologici sono accompagnati da video di vario genere (ad esempio, spezzoni filmici, videolezioni e documentari); la prospettiva è la didattica capovolta (*Flipped Classroom*). Nella metodologia di classe capovolta rientrano inoltre le rubriche di *Teach Me Teresa*, una serie di videolezioni realizzate in collaborazione con un'attrice e docente.

La terza sezione dell'unità di apprendimento, *Culture Boxes and European Culture*, riguarda l'analisi comparatistica fra testi letterari e produzioni artistiche in genere appartenenti a lingue e culture non in inglese. Attraverso schede di approfondimento, è possibile operare confronti significativi fra opere letterarie e artistiche in varie lingue, incluso l'italiano.

La quarta sezione, *Culture for*, include cinque itinerari letterari dedicati ai diversi indirizzi liceali attraverso un approccio tematico che collega curricula scolastici e argomenti di rilevanza attuale: *Culture for Scientists*, *Culture for Classicists*, *Culture for Linguists*, *Culture for Artists* e *Culture for Social Scientists*. "Per le diverse epoche storiche si individuano i temi rilevanti per ogni indirizzo di Liceo e li si affronta con testi letterari e non letterari, di cultura più generale, mettendo in luce il collegamento con problematiche attuali e sviluppando il lessico specifico" (Ellis 2017: 7).

All'interno di ogni unità di apprendimento si trova una quinta e ultima sezione dedicata alle attività, il *Workbook*, organizzate in "schede per imparare a ripassare e per sviluppare le competenze relative ai diversi tipi di linguaggio: il linguaggio per lo studio (*study skills*), per analizzare la letteratura, le opere artistiche e cinematografiche e la lingua per gli esami (Esame di Stato e certificazioni First)" (Ellis 2017: 6).

Un anno dopo la pubblicazione di *White Spaces* (2017), Ellis pubblica l'edizione in un unico volume *Making Space for Culture. White Spaces Compact Edition* (2018) in collaborazione con De Luca.

L'analisi dei volumi pubblicati dal *team* editoriale di B. De Luca, U. Grillo, P. Pace e S. Ranzoli e di quelli posteriori di D. J. Ellis mette in luce lo straordinario livello di innovazione nella didattica della letteratura dagli anni Ottanta ad oggi. La novità più rilevante riguarda il ruolo centrale attribuito ai/alle discenti che divengono il fulcro della progettazione didattica soprattutto nella letteratura in lingua straniera. Sin dall'inizio, si è sottolineata l'importanza di promuovere in studenti e studentesse gradi di autonomia sempre più elevati basati sull'autoconsapevolezza e l'autovalutazione dei propri apprendimenti. I volumi offrono agli/alle insegnanti strumenti per la valutazione delle competenze linguistiche, testuali e di contenuto attraverso descrittori precisi e flessibili. Ulteriori elementi d'innovazione riguardano l'attenzione ai generi letterari, alla multimedialità, all'interdisciplinarietà e alla riflessione sulla lingua finalizzati allo sviluppo cognitivo ed emotivo degli/delle apprendenti. A partire da tali elementi di novità è possibile ripensare la didattica delle letterature in lingua straniera, in particolare dell'inglese, considerando i/le discenti nelle loro caratteristiche cognitive ed emotive.

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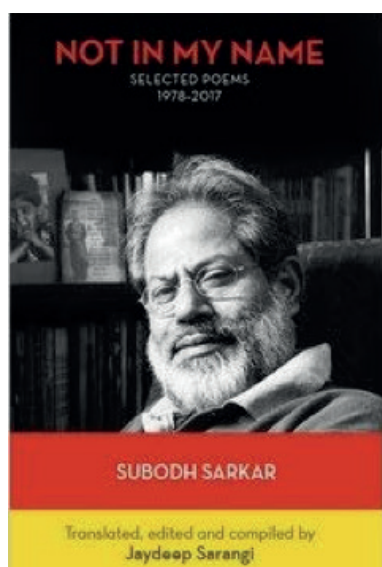
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Amit Shankar Saha

Not in My Name: Selected Poems 1978-2017 (Subodh Sarkar)

Subodh Sarkar. 2018. Not in My Name: Selected Poems 1978-2017. English trans., ed. Jaydeep Sarangi. New Delhi: Authorspress, pp. 220, INR 395, ISBN 9789386722256



http://www.authorspressbooks.com/book_detail.php?preference=1367

Quoting poems of Rabindranath Tagore, in his book *An Acre of Green Grass*, Buddhadeb Bose writes about the difficulties of translating poems from Bengali into English. He writes that often a language may give in to be translated when it is in the prose form but the difficulty to do so in poetry form is always greater. This is especially so in the case of a language like Bengali which is sonorous and has certain words which are repeated to convey a sense. Also the source language may have certain expressions that will have no equivalence in the target language. While translating poetry the translator also has to keep a keen ear for sound – the rhyme and rhythm of a poem. So, to take up a task of translating the poems of Sahitya Akademi Award winning Bengali poet Subodh Sarkar was no mean challenge but Jaydeep Sarangi successfully took it up and produced a fine collection of English translation of Sarkar’s selected poems written between 1978 and 2017 titled *Not in My Name* published

by Authorspress, Delhi. But to be true, not all the translated poems in the volume are by Sarangi. Although he is the principal translator and compiler and editor of the book, other translators of the poems in this volume are Fakrul Alam, Swapan Chattopdhyay, Carolyn Brown, Sanjukta Dasgupta, Ashesh K. Chatterjee, Subho Chatterjee, Kalyan Dasgupta, Sharmila Ray and Subodh Sarkar himself, all of whose translations have earlier appeared in *Route Map 25*. The book also consists of an essay "Poetics of Resistance: Locating Subodh Sarkar's Poetry of Power" by Koushiki Dasgupta, and a conversation between Subodh Sarkar and Jaydeep Sarangi.

In the foreword to the volume Professor Sanjukta Dasgupta writes that Subodh Sarkar's poems are "pleasantly translator friendly as the minimal use of ethnic literary idioms, metaphors and a scholarly vocabulary, deliberately avoided give the poems a free flow, like everyday colloquial speech that Robert Frost, the American poet had described as the 'spoken rhythm' in poetry" (10). In fact she points out at the onset a special quality of Sarkar's poems due to which I believe they yield easily to English translations. Dasgupta writes:

In an interview Subodh had stressed that many of his poems were anecdotal, but just because they tell a story is no reason why one should regard them as falling short of the poetic. After all the story-poem since the beginning of the oral tradition and even during the early time of scripting and publishing, prioritized the telling of an anecdote, in a particular style, with particular use of rhetoric and prosody. The epic poem tells a complex story that has universal significance, the poems that do not have an epical scale however can also have a significance that bridges the home and the world, addressing the macro and the micro real politick, in a holistic and aesthetic crystallization of ideas and imagination (7-8).

It is this anecdotal quality of Sarkar's poems that yields them successfully to translation into English. In fact one of Sarkar's poems titled "Story" translated by Jaydeep Sarangi speaks for itself where he acknowledges the anecdotal nature of his poems thus the poem itself can be used to augment the argument further:

Young poets exclaim: Why are you telling a story?
Who has not written a story? Isn't 'Banalata Sen' a story?
Such levels of adjustment are not decent for a poet
I claim, stories are there, throughout our lives, stories will be there (48).

In his translator's note Sarangi writes that most "of his poems are collage of ideas effortlessly streaming from lived moments of creative zeal [...]. He reminded me the literary, social and political tradition of Pablo Neruda, Nicanor Parra, Roberto Bolaño and other leading Chilean poets" (13). Perhaps it is this Latin American tradition of writing poetry that influenced Sarkar more than anything else and which gave him the anecdotal quality of his verse writing. So, writing within the tradition of Bengali poetry but with the influence of literary traditions of far off shores Sarkar makes a kind of poetry that is accessible and meaningful not only in Bengali but equally in its translations in other languages including Eng-

lish. That is why Sarkar says in one of his poems that a poem is for everyone. Sarangi writes that the plan to translate Sarkar's poems came to him in one of their frequent meetings in Kolkata and he first selected fifty of Sarkar's poems from the volume *Srestha Kavita* for the purpose. He started following a pattern and later some more new poems were translated by him on Sarkar's suggestion. Sarangi also acknowledges that some of the poems in the collection "I found not easy for translation because of Bangla idioms which are culture and language specific. I made drafts and then revised at least for three four times to remain faithful to the text" (16). The realization for a translator that no translation is complete and final is crucial because poetry is about possibilities and that is what Sarangi points out importantly.

If we analyze Subodh Sarkar's poetry then it is quite clear that his poetry can be classified into two phases – the Mallika Sengupta phase and the socio-political phase. Subodh Sarkar was a lover and the advent of Subodh Sarkar and Mallika Sengupta in the Bengali poetry scene in the late 1970s was nothing less than phenomenal. The kind of poetry he wrote in this phase is distinctly different from the kind of poetry he writes now. Obviously, when we say this as a general statement we say this with exceptions. Subodh Sarkar lost Mallika Sengupta after twenty-five years of marriage. Take a poem like "Blind" translated by Sarangi:

If does a blind see
 I can see.
 If does a deaf hear
 I can hear.
 I open up the casket of my life
 I open up
 I open up
 &
 I continue to unlock two locks of your hair all my life (36).

It is both anecdotal as well as cryptic but the mystery is not in the language which is easily accessible and not a code to be deciphered in terms of *langue* and *parole*. There is definitely transcendence from the narrative to the abstract but this abstraction is done at the level of thought itself without any use of cultural idiom or linguistic symbolism. It is this ease of conveying certain ethos of life at the level of thought that marks Subodh Sarkar's poetry. It is not that he never uses symbolism. Take the poem "Something Happens" which employs the symbolism of the boat, the cloud, the womb and others culturally significant objects but these symbols are not obtrusively used and do not become impediments to the understanding of the poem. If there is any complexity in the poem it is at the level of thought itself. Let me quote the entire poem translated by Jaydeep Sarangi here:

Why do I feel strange when I come near your body?
 What happens?
 Like lightning, cloud gathers, a boat comes of the womb of cloud
 And the boat starts descending on the earth.

I moved out of your bode for several miles
 Even then I feel like something
 What happens?
 How can I describe that, everything cannot be put in words?
 Like lightning, cloud gathers, a boat comes of the womb of cloud...
 And the boat starts descending on the earth (80).

Even when he is intensely personal he is not abstruse. A few lines from the poem “Mourning and Honeymoon” translated by Sarangi will make it clear how Subodh Sarkar’s poetry has a clarity of thought, simplicity in expression and yet convey a depth that is essential for good poetry. He has mastered the art:

We, the father and the son have lost a river
 We are unable to find a home
 The room we knew as kitchen
 Is now a drop of tear? Papers that we thought as rubbish
 Are Life Insurance (99, ll. 13-17).

The question that may arise naturally is whether it is the translator who is able to convey the thoughts in a simple manner which was not so in the original tongue. So, a few poems that are translated by other translators should also be taken as examples to prove the point. Let us take a Fakrul Alam translation from *Route Map 25*. This stanza from “How to be a Good Communist” conveys in all its simplicity a satirical truth that can be understood in any language:

Listen to birds sing – too many slogans
 Have clogged your left ear!
 Lower your Voice when you sing –
 You can make sense even if you speak softly.
 Don’t worry about taking care of thousands of young men.
 Time for you to take care of your own young one! (111, ll. 8-13).

Another poem which can be compared with Sarangi’s translation is the one translated by Swapan Chattopdhyay, “Blind”, which conveys much the same without losing the original Bengali essence. It is very interesting reading the two translations together because I believe the Bengali original has certain idioms peculiar to the language and will not yield to translation easily. Perhaps the readers will be the best judge but there is no complaining in having multiple versions of the same poem in translation:

If a blind can see
 so can I
 If a deaf does hear
 So do I
 Now I am letting down your hair.

I'm letting it down
All my life (139).

It is a great advantage for Subodh Sarkar that most of his translators are themselves poets in their own right and thus they have the poetic temperament and understanding. Sarkar writes for the society and speaks for the people and raises issues of women, censorship, political callousness, and mocks the classes. He has a voice that is more attuned to the oral tradition than to being astute. But that does not mean he is simplistic and matters only at the surface. These lines from the poem "Mr. Sorrow" translated by Sharmila Ray deliver a profound depth of expression:

At times a girl comes and stands in my room
whether she is a tree or a sky-woman I cannot understand
She shows me a miniscule tablet and says:
eat it up, sorrow will vanish (164, ll. 6-9).

No doubt, that Subodh Sarkar is a poet who excels in reciting his poems and perhaps writes his poems with that intention too. He is a quintessential scop, a typical oral poet who will leave the audience wondering with what he says. Sanjukta Dasgupta translates a very colloquial poem "Hey You, Shut Up, Saala" and it ends thus:

Our mother
Is not a mother
Our Son
Is not a son
As if when we die it will not be called death (188, ll. 108-112).

But the discussion on Sarkar's poems in English translation cannot be complete if we don't take at least a few lines translated by Subodh Sarkar himself. Here is the middle two lines from the poem "Not in My Name" which becomes the pivot of the poem:

I will never again be in Delhi to buy [a] new shirt.
Delhi, my selam (202, ll. 8-9).

One does not need any knowledge of languages or linguistics to feel the pathos in these two lines. A poet is also someone who reacts to the injustices in society through his or her words and that is what Sarkar is doing here. Subodh Sarkar is a poet who needs to be heard because he has a voice and for those who cannot understand Bengali a translation of his works into English was much needed. It is this necessity that produced this fine book. This book will help poets from around the world experience his poetry better – poetry of the common people and of a poet who has the self-effacing temerity to say as translated by Sarangi:

I used to worry about poetry earlier, not now
Let me say a big word through my small mouth:
A poem should remain a poem at the end
[...]
I have realised, I am not a poet.
I am a cockroach ("Petty Words through a Petty Mouth", 71, ll. 119-127).

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