REVIEWS

Nick Havely,

Apennine Crossings: Travellers on the Edge of Tuscany. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024.

As generous as scholarly, Nick Havely's latest gift to the community of readers is a treasure trove of travelling impressions, quotes and trekking itineraries. Its richness and diversity place it at the crossroads of various literary genres, enabling reviewers to approach it – like a peak – from different sides. I will present it as the latest fruit in a genealogy of mountain writing that includes Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain* (written at the time of WW2, but published only in 1977) and Robert Macfarlane's mountain trilogy, opening with *Mountains of the Mind. A History of a Fascination* (2003).

What Havely's account shares with these beautiful books is an underlying experiential, in-depth connection with mountains, which it combines with a wide-ranging, erudite but always enlivening interest in their cultural perception through the centuries. In other words, this cleverly luring volume puts readers into contact with both the living mountains and the mountains of the mind.

Havely foregrounds his book's central trope right from the title – *Apennine Crossings*, later explaining that this term "has two linked meanings: literally, going over the ridge as all these characters did; and metaphorically, encountering their stories, as I continued to do during and after the journey." (7) This counterpoint mode, this juxtaposing of different melodies, informs the whole volume, unceasingly opening up new vistas. It marks the rhythm of a travelogue that aims at slow motion but always keeps the reader's interest alive through a vibrant network of connections. The author proves so adept at shifting between different times and experiences (as distant and diverging as the medieval wanderings of exiled Dante and the misadventures of WW2 fighters) that the medieval and modern travellers who accompany us along the way turn almost into fellow hikers in our readerly experience.

This trans-historical and transnational polyphony becomes apparent already at the beginning of the book and of the author's westward journey across the Apennines, along the GEA route (Grande Escursione Apenninica), a 425 km long itinerary that was created in the early 1980s along the ridge between the Emilia-Romagna region to the North and Central Italy. Havely's deft time-shift technique becomes apparent when he contrasts the silence he experiences at the Bocca Trabaria pass (between Tuscany and the Marche region, not far from the Adriatic coast) with the "thud and crash of artillery firing" (14) that would have echoed up there in the summer of 1944.

Thus begins a flashback in which the Royal Horse Artillery Regiment is training its fire towards the nearby city of Sansepolcro, when a vague memory starts taking shape in the mind of officer Anthony Clarke. It is indeed in Sansepolcro, as Clarke suddenly realises, that Piero della Francesca's Resurrection of Christ is frescoed in a room of the Palazzo Comunale. Clarke's consequent decision to withhold fire, trusting the locals who claimed there were no more Germans in town, exemplifies the overlapping of tactical and cultural concerns that marked the liberation of Italy.

As this anecdote proves, in Havely's eyes culture is never disconnected from the political, the social and the material. An engaged humanist, he is particularly attentive to this intricacy of (at times conflicting) motives, and ready to avail himself of journals, poetry and other forms of testimony by a variety of witnesses, including WW2 fighters. This adds further poignance to a book that celebrates both the nature of the Apennines and the layers of cultural references and historical events that sedimented onto this mountain range over the centuries.

The book also traces changes in the history of taste, contrasting the attitude of medieval and early modern travellers – for whom crossing the Apennines was mainly an experience of fear, boredom and discomfort – with the enthusiasm of those later travellers who saw these mountains through the lens of new aesthetic paradigms. Richard Colt Hoare's 1791 visit to the Montastery of La Verna epitomises this new sensibility, "a love of those scenes, where nature exhibits her original and undisguised character; scenes which furnish gratification to the eye, and employment to the pencil." (36) This increasing appreciation of the Apennine landscape, in the light of new aesthetic categories, is also apparent in John Chetwod Eustace's description of his 1802 visit to nearby Camaldoli, where "the gloom of forest scenery is softened by an agreeable intermixture of lawn and down, not altogether unlike the varieties of an English park." (52)

All through the book, Havely skilfully contrasts this modern thirst for mountain scenery with the previous dread – not to say horror – of mountains, which often acquired an existential and theological meaning, as shown by Petrarch's ascent of Mont Ventoux or by Thomas Burnet's 1684 *Sacred Theory of the Earth*, where the crossing of the Alps forces the author to question his "ideas about Nature's orderliness" (96), causing a crisis in his ongoing quest for transcendental meaning.

This phobia of mountains reaches a climax in the travelling accounts concerning the road between Bologna and Florence, which a large number of travellers were forced to take in order to reach central Italy, and which posed the twin obstacles of danger and inconvenience. While the 17th- and early 18th-century travellers who crossed the Apennines through the Giogo Pass either gave vent to their complaints or simply kept silent, things started to change at mid 18th-century, when the road was redesigned to cross the mountains at the nearby Futa Pass. This material change combined with a new gothic sensibility, engendering a darkly narrative approach to this stretch of road. The presence of mysterious fires in the vicinity of the aptly named village of Pietra Mala coalesced with a series of criminal events that took place at the turn of the century either in that village or in nearby Covigliaio (as variously reported by travellers), exerting a new fascination. This aura of terror was experienced – and duly reported – with various shades of pleasure by entire generations of 19th century travellers until it turned into a stereotype to be disproved.

As Havely moves westward along the Great Apennine Excursion, new cultural connections materialise, as shown by his beautiful chapter on the Garfagnana region and poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. The Shelleys' love for the spa resort of Bagni di Lucca is well known, but what a smaller percentage of readers may be aware of is the debated question of whether Shelley actually undertook a poetic pilgrimage to the nearby shrine of San Pellegrino in Alpe between 12th and 13th August 1820, as indicated by Mary Shelley in her journal. The question becomes of wider interest since it was this trip that ostensibly inspired the writing of "The Witch of Atlas", but reaching the shrine in the space of a day was not an easy feat to accomplish.

The connection between hiking, reading and writing comes to the fore with utter felicity in this chapter, which shows Havely literally following in the foosteps of Shelley in order to prove that he may have reached San Pellegrino in Alpe on foot thanks to a path that subsequently dropped out of use and was forgotten… The material dimension of hiking combines here with poetry when Havely's own descriptions of the Apennine woods symbiotically resonate with lines from "The Witch of Atlas", ultimately inviting readers to rediscover both Shelley's poem and the Garfagnana valleys in the light of this happy literary conjunction.

As is hopefully apparent from my comments, Havely's book is a pleasure to read, but reading it also amounts to a philosophical experience, like hiking, when the mind reaches a quieter state and opens up to a different kind of thinking. In the author's words, *Apennine Crossings* "affirms the value of slow encounters with remote landscapes" (9-10). It is about looking around oneself and noticing and describing, which can translate precisely into a burgeoning form of poetry, as previously hinted. The book also amounts to a meta-narrative reflection on the act of story-telling, enriching the experience of hiking in the here and now with a trans-temporal stream of lives and gazes, translating the present into a kind of augmented reality. These cultivated narrative digressions are moreover matched by a number of material detours, some of which are part and parcel of the Great Apennine Excursion while others are entirely unexpected.

As Havely clarifies, *Apennine Crossings* includes "several accounts of travellers (including myself) getting lost." (9) In the kind of pilgrimage he describes what matters is not reaching the ultimate destination, but rather the quality of the journey. Getting lost, as every true traveller knows, results at best in an act of serendipity, at worst in an adventure, the skirting of danger, the ordeal of fatigue and distress we would have never opted for willingly. These experiences become in turn a source of anecdotes that surprise and delight, often in a comic vein, as when a desperate author resorts to the trick of showing passing cars a 50,000 lire banknote in the attempt to obtain a much-needed lift...

I could go on describing the many beauties of *Apennine Crossings*, which resonate deeply with my own life-long experiences of the Apennines, but I will let readers discover the book by themselves. I cannot conclude these remarks, however, without addressing heartfelt thanks to Nick Havely, whose passion for these mountains combines with a number of other qualities, starting from a welcome combination of cosmopolitanism and localism.

While collecting travelling impressions and related forms of Apennine experience, Havely moves freely across a variety of boundaries, tracing connections between the experiences of medieval and modern Italian poets (from Dante to Dino Campana), British, American and continental travellers, Risorgimento fighters and WW2 soldiers who are often portrayed in their relations with the local population, from partisans to peasants… Yet, his attention to individuals and places in their singularity is never flagging. Each person and each place is worth his firm gaze, his authorial concentration, which stems from a lifetime of reading and studying and hiking. This unfailing interest, this form of deep-set respect for the singularity of every being and place and time is one of the great lessons of this book, which has much to teach us in an age of TikTok videos and other forms of shallow entertainment.

Apennine Crossings is vibrant with energy. It stems from concentration and demands concentration, but a quiet and meaningful concentration, the kind of concentration people used to find in the past, while we now often unconsciously pursue forms of improductive tension. I would like to think there is a connection between Havely's imaginative focus and the application the locals instinctively practised while building a stone and wooden barn or even the absorption of a nest-building bird. We still need to seek this intensity in the accomplishing of an effort, as hiking teaches us. We also need to revere our being rooted in nature if we wish to avoid getting lost, this time in the unproductive maze to which the easy paths of consumerism lead.

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Fabio Ciambella,

Teaching English as a Second Language with Shakespeare. Elements in Shakespeare and Pedagogy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024.

In the video abstract mentioned on the unnumbered page previous to the "Contents" section of Fabio Ciambella's *Teaching English as a Second Language with Shakespeare*, readers are invited to watch the author while briefly summarising why he wrote this book and the purpose of it, beside outlining the structure of his text (at www.Cambridge.org/ESPG_Ciambella). The main reason he stresses is the teaching of pragmatics in an English as a Second Language (ESL) class by using Shakespeare plays to improve students' language skills (reading, writing and speaking mainly, in this case). This might surprise the reader, since we know that Shakespearean language, being five hundred years old, is not completely addressable even by native speakers, not to mention foreign people. But here the main tool Ciambella introduces, the teaching and consequent awareness of pragmatics, seems on the one hand to reduce this secular gap and on the other to help the complex understanding of Shakespearean language 'in action' (that is, in its pragmatic context) and its 'translation' into our contemporary language use.

The didactic purposes of the volume (which is issued in the series "Cambridge Elements. Elements in Shakespeare and Pedagogy) are immediately clear when the author stresses the presence in the book of lesson plans directed to high school and university ESL teachers. These plans are structured in teaching and learning phases that should accompany the class work. Of course, teachers adopting this approach should already be conversant with the major principles of pragmatics (from speech acts to interaction strategies concerning both politeness vs impoliteness attitudes), or – at least – ready to study and learn them. Without these, the book – which in itself is a guide to practicing pragmatics teaching – might risk being difficult to grasp. One aspect which is mentioned in the volume, but not so much stressed as it should be, is the fact that, working on early modern plays, teachers (and consequently students) have to be aware of the role of diachrony in their work, that is, that they need to be aware that the results of Historical Pragmatics research are applied to the chosen text, be it *Richard III* in Chapter 1 for an overview of the speech acts used by the protagonist, or *Romeo and Juliet* in Chapter 2 in order to recognise the presence and value of discourse markers in a dialogic encounter, or *The Taming of the Shrew* in Chapter 3, where one of the many rough exchanges in the comedy is explored in search of (im)politeness situations.

The lesson plans provided are differentiated between those for high school and for university learners, respectively, this because Ciambella well distinguishes between the didactic approaches to, and the results achievable/expectable from, the different students' age and level groups. Evidently the author takes advantage of his own teaching experience and scholarly competence, since in each chapter including lesson plans the volume also offers summaries of the main aspects of pragmatics, so as to refresh users' knowledge of them.

But why choose Shakespeare for an ESL course?, the reader might wonder. As said above, the author, accepting the principle of contemporary Historical Pragmatics which considers plays as very adequate text types to study the language of the past, applies the interesting tenets of this theoretical stance to Shakespeare plays, achieving workable results. One of them, possibly the most relevant in the ESL domain, is the last phase of each lesson plan, when students are asked to render Shakespearean pragmatics into contemporary speech acts, or discourse markers, or (im)politeness linguistic attitudes.

For example, the third (and last) chapter – devoted to the study of "(Im)polite Shakespeare in *The Taming of the Shrew*" – stresses the fact that "*swearwords and taboo expressions* […] are noteworthy socio-pragmatic phenomena to deserve attention by both teachers and students […] as any other speech acts" (p. 62), since they may be "an index of authenticity" of a dialogue (p. 63). Therefore, after analysing the standpoints of scholars pro- and against teaching such expressions, and the theory of (im)politeness according to the latest pragmaticians (Jonathan Culpeper especially), Ciambella investigates *The Taming of the Shrew*, 4.1.91-138, i.e. a dialogue between Petruchio, some of his serving men and Katherina, in order to stress the gender and power relationships among the various characters who fight for the discursive floor. The phases of the lesson plan in this chapter include a first step during which the text must be understood by the students (analogously to the structure of the other working chapters), then a second step which leads secondary school learners to "write alternative versions of the insults provided, toning them down", and university students to "write down a list of indictments against Petruchio by paraphrasing the insults he uttered against his servants" (p. 79). The third and most creative step consists, for secondary students, in launching a "TikTok challenge" during which impolite (and modernized) language is pleeped in order to hide taboo phrases and words, whereas their university colleagues set up a modern courtroom with "Katherina, Grumio, [where] all the servants will play the prosecution, while Petruchio plays the defence" (p. 80). All this aims at making students active users of English and cognisant of the subtleties of the language (also to avoid unpleasant and offensive situations).

Ciambella also introduces contemporary technology into the teaching he proposes, and stresses how the Shakespeare language transmuted into modern words and pragmatically equivalent exchanges (which does not mean simply 'translated') helps students not only understand Shakespeare, but also become aware of the finer nuances of a language, be it old or contemporary. Because, in the end, they will know that learning a second language does not only imply grammar, syntax, pronunciation etc., but also the full understanding of the human relationships conveyed by word usage, and – especially – that speaking a language is "to do things" with that language: blandishing or offending, feeling concern and compassion or disgust and opposition…

The methodology proposed by Fabio Ciambella is certainly transdisciplinary, involving linguistics, pragmatics, Shakespeare and cultural studies, language teaching, and therefore it is an exacting approach, but the results may really be rewarding, leading students to a major awareness that the acquisition of a second language is a tool to grasp and manage human relationships. After all, pragmatics helps people make the best of them.

The volume is very well-read (all sources mentioned find their place in the nineteen pages of the "References" section at the end) and is enriched with a Glossary containing simple definitions of unusual or difficult terms used in the book. What is 'missing' (of course this is not a fault of the book, and I hope it will be compensated for in the near future) is the reaction of ESL teachers to Ciambella's didactic suggestions: teachers introducing the methodology proposed by the author of this book will be its best and truest reviewers, because they will have experienced the impact it can have on their teaching and on students' learning achievements.

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