

# *Linguae &*

## *Rivista di lingue e culture moderne*

fondata da Roberta Mullini

---

Vol. 23  
N. 1 / 2023

Dipartimento di Scienze della Comunicazione,  
Studi Umanistici e Internazionali



1506  
UNIVERSITÀ  
DEGLI STUDI  
DI URBINO  
CARLO BO

UUP  
URBINO  
UNIVERSITY  
PRESS



*Linguæ &  
Rivista di lingue e culture moderne*

fondata da Roberta Mullini

**Direttore Responsabile**

Anna Tonelli, Università degli Studi di Urbino Carlo Bo

**Direttore Scientifico**

Alessandra Calanchi, Università degli Studi di Urbino Carlo Bo

**Redazione**

Margherita Amatulli, Università degli Studi di Urbino Carlo Bo

Alessandra Calanchi, Università degli Studi di Urbino Carlo Bo

Riccardo Donati, Università degli Studi di Salerno

Ian Marten Ivo Klaver, Università degli Studi di Urbino Carlo Bo

Andrea Malaguti, University of Massachusetts Amherst USA

Alessandra Molinari, Università degli Studi di Urbino Carlo Bo

Massimiliano Morini, Università degli Studi di Urbino Carlo Bo

Antonella Negri, Università degli Studi di Urbino Carlo Bo

Luca Renzi, Università degli Studi di Urbino Carlo Bo

Enrica Rossi, Università degli Studi di Urbino Carlo Bo

Antonio Taglialatela, Università degli Studi della Tuscia

**Comitato scientifico**

Maurizio Ascari, Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna

Stefano Beretta, Università degli Studi di Parma

Antonio Bertacca, Università degli Studi di Pisa

Tania Collani, Université de Haute-Alsace

Alessandro Costazza, Università degli Studi di Milano Statale

Chiara Elefante, Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna

Maria Giulia Fabi, Università degli Studi di Ferrara

Cristina Garrigós Gonzalez, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia

Madrid

Andrea Alessandro Gasparini, University of Oslo Library

Marina Guglielmi, Università degli Studi di Cagliari

Maryline Heck, Université François Rabelais Tours

Richard Hillman, Université François Rabelais Tours

Reinhard Johler, Universität Tübingen

Stephen Knight, University of Melbourne

Cesare Mascitelli, Université de Namur

Sonia Massai, King's College London

Aurélie Moioli, Université de Poitiers

Roberta Mullini, formerly Università degli Studi di Urbino Carlo Bo

Maria de Fátima Silva, Universidade de Coimbra

Bart Van Den Bossche, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

Shawn Wong, University of Washington USA

**Direzione e redazione**

Dipartimento di Scienze della Comunicazione, Studi Umanistici e Internazionali  
(DISCUI), Via Saffi 15, 61029 Urbino

Registered by Tribunale di Milano (06/04/2012 n. 185)

Online ISSN 1724-8698 - Print ISSN 2281-8952

Rivista fondata nel 2002

## INDICE

SARA PINI, <i>On the Edge</i> : The visual representation of young protagonists as wanderers	1
STEFANO ROSSI, Evil Feminine and Untamed Nerves: Sensationalism in J. Sheridan Le Fanu's <i>The Rose and the Key</i>	23
CRISTINA GAMBERI, Il dilemma autoriale fra <i>genre</i> e <i>gender</i> . Il caso di "A Sketch of the Past" di Virginia Woolf	39
NASSER ISMAIL, The Book in the Professional and Social Life of Scholars and Literati in the Mamluk Period	63
MARCO AMMAR, Migration Narrative(s) in the Arab Media: A metaphorical framing analysis	87
ANGEL DE LA TORRE SANCHEZ, Poetry and Sustainability: Literary initiatives in Spain and Italy	107
GIUSEPPE TROVATO, Catalogación de las opciones y correspondencias traslativas del operador reformulativo italiano <i>anzi</i> en español mediante la aportación de un corpus bilingüe	121
DAVIDE PASSA, "Reading Is What? Fundamental!": Reversed (im)politeness in <i>RuPaul's Drag Race</i>	143
Recensioni	163
Nota sugli autori e sulle autrici	175
Revisori 2020 e 2021 ed Errata corrigé	179



Sara Pini

Università degli Studi di Bologna  
[sara.pini4@studio.unibo.it](mailto:sara.pini4@studio.unibo.it)

## *On the Edge:* The visual representation of young protagonists as wanderers

### ABSTRACT:

This article shows how the representation of Young Adult literature protagonists in book covers is influenced by the assumption that childhood is an innocent and yearned-for life stage, an idea developed during Romanticism. Adolescence has distinctive characteristics; in particular, it is an in-between stage, projected towards adulthood. Recent book covers for Young Adult novels, such as Ian McQue's artwork for the Scholastic 2018 reissue of the *Mortal Engines* series (2001-2006) by Philip Reeve, and film posters for cinematographic adaptations of Young Adult series, such as those for *Divergent* (2011) and *Tomorrow, When the War Began* (1993), are based on a common visual composition inspired by Friedrich's painting *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818). The depiction of young protagonists on an edge, in the same position as Friedrich's wanderer, evidences how adults' view on adolescence is moulded by Romantic ideas and, simultaneously, it conveys how adolescents feel attracted by adulthood as well as concerned due to their precarious life stage.

KEYWORDS: Book covers; Ian McQue; Philip Reeve; film posters; adolescents.

### **1. The Romantic idea of childhood innocence, adolescents, and growing up**

In an increasingly competitive book market for children and young adults, two paradigms seem to stand out: the long-lasting influence of Romanticism and the growing relevance of book covers as a marketing device. In recent times, critical works such as the volume *Time of Beauty, Time of Fear: The Romantic Legacy in the Literature of Childhood* (edited by James Holt McGrath in 2012) and Deborah Thack-

er's contribution "Imagining the Child" in *Introducing Children's Literature: From Romanticism to Postmodernism* (2002) have continued to fuel the debate regarding Romantic influences on the concept of childhood in books for young people. As Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer reminds us, Romanticism developed as a "countermovement to the Enlightenment" (2008, 183) and the Romantic idea of childhood originated as "a sharp criticism of the utilitarian thinking of the Enlightenment" (*ibid.*), which laid the groundwork for studies generally carried out from pedagogical and philosophical perspectives. As she argues, the Romantic notion of childhood has its roots in the ideas endorsed not only by early Romantics, but also by previous philosophers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (*ibid.*, 184). Locke regarded the child as "wax, to be molded and fashioned as one pleases" (quoted in *ibid.*), whereas Rousseau paved the way for the second branch of thought that developed in parallel with Locke's: children are said to be like plants, they are nearer than adults to the natural state, they "should be perceived as [...] being[s] in [themselves] and not as [...] small adult[s]" (*ibid.*), and their "essential quality" is innocence (*ibid.*, 184-85). The two concepts of childhood as either a primitive state or a blessed stage saw it as circumscribed in time and were at the core of the early Romantics' thoughts on the matter.

Although Rousseau did not claim that children should remain innocent, he firmly believed that their "natural innocence and kindness [are] menaced by social institutions like family, school, church and state" (*ibid.*, 185); therefore, they should be exposed to these 'threats' as late as possible. The socialisation role of institutions is a pervasive idea also in Roberta Seelinger Trites's study on adolescent literature: society urges teenagers to become full members of it on condition that they renounce their potentially disruptive power as beings who can still modify the status quo around them (Trites 2000, 1-20). When compared to children, young adults are undoubtedly in a different position<sup>1</sup>: during adolescence, there is a "struggle for autonomy and increased time spent with peers" (Trentacosta and Izard 2020). The emergence of a more complex emotionality, including the "experience [of] more extreme emotions, both negative and positive", the development of adolescents' skills in "abstract thinking", and their involvement and interest in "abstract and complex social problems" are all basilar in the formation of adolescents' identity towards adulthood (*ibid.*).

---

<sup>1</sup> In this article, 'young adult', 'adolescent', and 'teenager' will be used as synonyms.

Adolescents are in a delicate stage between childhood – Romantic innocence – and adulthood – society and its compromises (Trites 2000, x). They commonly long to become adults because this means being more independent but, at the same time, they may fear this step forward, which will detach them from the ‘safe refuge’ of childhood, a world whose rules they are familiar with. Adolescence signals a passage that, once made, cannot be experienced again in the opposite direction: as Grilli explains, adolescence is “Pétà [...] in cui qualcosa si acquista e qualcosa si perde” (2012, 76). Alongside the acquisition of new knowledge and values, which ultimately make an adolescent become an adult, there is the progressive, partial abandonment of childhood’s assurance: a safe place, which usually coincides with one’s home; the sense of protection and of being important to someone given by parents or other figures performing the same role; the comforting trustworthiness of a small circle of friends. Adulthood is both a distant horizon and an unknown world, which entails different obligations, expectations, and social relationships in the broader encounter with institutions.

In Western countries, this dual process leads to an uncanny situation for adolescents: “[s]ociety forces young people into a liminal space which lies somewhere between childhood and adulthood, but that is essentially distanced from both. It is a period of transition which [...] is obsessively aware of its status as such” (Sainsbury 2014, 209-10). From a young adult’s point of view, they feel divided between competing forces: going on means the end of their childhood and the beginning of their new life as adults, but who knows what this life stage conceals? For the Romantics, childhood was a wished-for state: mankind should return to childhood to build a better future and, on the personal level, adults should crave for retrieving that lost innocence, an idea which is still valid in contemporary times. Therefore, from a grown-up’s perspective, adolescents are on the edge of the sweet land of childhood, with just one step separating them from the ravine of the adult world.

The purpose of this article is to show how book covers of recent Young Adult novels that represent protagonists in the same position as Caspar David Friedrich’s figure in *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818) evidence both how the influence of Romantic ideas is still pervasive and how adolescents feel ‘on an edge’. After reflecting on a few interpretations of Friedrich’s painting and the relevance of book covers in the publishing industry and, more specifically, for Young Adult (YA) literature, the article will draw on literary as well as visual social semiotics studies to analyse Ian McQue’s book covers for the 2018

Scholastic reissue of Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines* series (2001-2006) and the film posters advertising the cinematographic adaptation of two YA novels, *Divergent* (2011) and *Tomorrow, When the War Began* (1993).

## 2. Friedrich's *Wanderer* and adolescence

Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* is one of the most emblematic paintings of early German Romanticism and it is “[c]onsidered a quintessential representation of the sublime” (Haladyn 2016, 61). It depicts a figure that gained huge popularity at that time, the wanderer, a “subject [that] became a characteristic feature of Romantic literature in the first half of the nineteenth century” (Lorant 2008, 122). The theme has its origins in pre-Romanticism: wanderers were the epitome of the disheartened cosmopolitan society that enjoyed its time travelling around Europe. Afterwards, wandering was at the centre of the ‘novel of apprenticeship’, such as Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship Years*, 1795-96), and it was metaphorically understood as going deep into the subject's interiority (ibid., 122-3).

Friedrich's *Wanderer* is firmly standing in dark coat and trousers on the edge of a precipice, his left leg ahead of the other, his hands not visible<sup>2</sup>. He is seemingly staring at an indefinite point in the distance while showing his back to viewers. He is a “*Rückenfigur* [back-figure]” (Gaete 2020, 61; italics in original), whose identity is unknown, despite much speculation about it. According to Haladyn, on a more metaphorical level, the *Wanderer* may be related to the complex socio-cultural and political changes undergoing at the time, especially regarding what being ‘human’ meant and its relations with the ‘rights of man’ as well as the affirmation of the nation-state, where the individual is apart from the masses and at the same time part of them (2016, 56). Conversely, others argue that the painting “conveys meanings that reflect a profound inner state of mind and spirit rather than nationalistic messages” and that the artist poses the *Wanderer* and, in more general terms, the human being as the protagonist of this intense emotional experience, giving artistic shape to the Romantics' propensity to focus on the inner self and emotions (Gaete 2020, 61).

Both interpretations of the *Rückenfigur* as depicting the “emerging modern subject” (Haladyn 2016, 55) or the embodiment of the Romantic propensity to introspection place the individual at the centre of a discovery process of their

---

<sup>2</sup> From now on, ‘Wanderer’ with capital letter will refer to Friedrich's figure.

social position or their own Self. This process might well be considered the contact point between Friedrich's figure and adolescents because adolescence is a turbulent period of transition when the individual Self is struggling to affirm its own existence and uniqueness by finding its place in society and by affirming its differences from others. To do so, adolescents face, experience, and criticise society considering it from their personal standpoint, and all the while they fight to make their individuality part of it. This results in alternating processes: they usually tend to find it difficult to follow established social rules, but they also wish to conform to be part of the social system. A similar process happens when they pursue their interests but, at the same time, they also seek peers sharing their hobbies to count on somebody's friendship while they are trying new experiences. As individuals who generally want to stand out from like-minded peers and society, but also feel part of a community, adolescents are like Haladyn's 'modern subject', elevated above his nationals as a symbol and simultaneously embedded in the majority. Romantic introspection and the "spiritual *Self*" (Gaete 2020, 61; italics in original) portrayed in Friedrich's painting can be considered the equivalent of finding one's own adult identity and one's place within society.

Wandering is strictly linked to "the aesthetic category of the 'sublime', which includes 'terror' as a source of emotional pleasure" (Lorant 2008, 127). In Friedrich's canvas, the Wanderer is on the edge of a rock, looking at a "sublime landscape" with "no clear boundaries [that] suggests the mysterious and inscrutable of life and the world" (Gaete 2020, 61). His position renders what it means to be an adolescent in the contemporary world, that is, being in between two life stages where young people build their own identity while looking upon a broad horizon of possibilities and a pervading fog covers adult compromises and the uncertainty of the future – which will not be as care-free and innocent as adults think that childhood is.

Uncertainty regarding what the future holds is a condition common to all mankind. This feeling connects adults and teenagers and it may explain "the tendency of adult readers to empathize with crisis-riven adolescents" through Julia Kristeva's idea of adolescence (Falconer 2010, 91): in her opinion, this life stage is "an 'open psychic structure' that may be experienced at any stage of life, and not once but repeatedly" (*ibid.*). Indeterminacy can inspire terror and, thus, pleasure deriving from it, as the Romantic sublime expects. However, there is a difference between adults and adolescents fearing this condition: the first have already gone through their biological adolescence, while the latter experience its

terrors and pleasures for the first time. Therefore, their specific life stage is an excellent position from which adolescents can experience feelings of the Romantic sublime and it is equally true that, from a literary perspective, the way adults conceive and represent young people on an edge, still in time to turn back to childhood's safe haven, is an example of how Romantic ideas continue to exert a strong influence in the contemporary era.

### **3. Book covers and Young Adult literature**

Covers have attracted growing attention and investment in publishing houses in recent decades. They have always been and still are a key element in the book market to convince potential buyers to become actual buyers:

[e]ssentially, a book cover works as an advertisement that uses primarily visual means to attract attention to the text and to convey the minimum of essential information (title and author) and possibly other information (publisher's name, advertising copy, blurbs, etc). [...] The cover, in other words, offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. (Sonzogni 2011, 15)

Considering that bookshops have been intensifying the use of online platforms and that the number of titles is rising (Gudinavičius and Šuminas 2017, 430), it is understandable that there is increasing competitiveness among publishers to provide potential readers with the most captivating image that will convince them to buy a book in a time frame that may last a few seconds<sup>3</sup>. Covers are all the more fundamental when it comes to young people, not only because online platforms showing thumbnail-size covers have been acquiring more relevance but also because the specific readership is used to technological devices where images can be scrolled quicker than ever (*ibid.*). Primarily, though, covers can be a tool to help connect adolescents and books considered appropriate for their age, given that it has always been difficult to define Young Adult as a genre and to find a place for it in bookstores, which has not helped readers to locate the stories they were looking for (Yampbell 2005, 350-5).

---

<sup>3</sup> Considering new book releases and the factors influencing readers' preferences, some scholars have proved the "statistically significant impact on readers' interest" of three variables (d'Astous 2006, 135): "the reputation of the author (in the case of books with a technical content), the attractiveness of the book cover, and the reputation of the publisher" (*ibid.*, 145).

Publishers often update covers to respond to the varying tastes of young people (*ibid.*, 358). This means that styles and techniques are different depending on historical times: in the 1970s-80s watercolours depicted a key scene from the novel, between the 1980s-90s cover illustrators used photographs, and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century technology allowed for new materials and finishes to be used. Publishers and artists know what adolescents are looking for – something that feels and looks adult enough without being for a mature readership (*ibid.*). Like their readers, YA novels are on an edge between childhood and adulthood, and covers try to find a balance to attract the intended readers.

Reprinting books with a modernised cover “is a popular and often successful marketing attempt” (*ibid.*, 360); not by chance, reissues frequently tie in with cinematographic adaptations. The book covers analysed in this article were published by Scholastic in conjunction with the release of the *Mortal Engines* film in 2018. Made by Ian McQue, these covers offer a more impressive visual interpretation than the previous artworks that also build on the idea of “tom-boy” heroines (Balkind 2014, 45), which spread after the international success of another YA series, Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games*, featuring a female protagonist who has been conceived as the contemporary evolution of female characters with traditionally male temperaments and energy. Reeve’s *Mortal Engines* was first published in 2001, while *The Hunger Games* hit the market in 2008 and its first cinematographic adaptation was released in 2012. It is easy to connect the dots between the success of *The Hunger Games* and the *Mortal Engines* reissue on occasion of its film release in 2018. The idea of a sturdy-tenacious heroine had attracted throngs of adolescents: already familiar with *The Hunger Games*, adolescent readers searching for similar stories and who were too young to read *Mortal Engines* at the time of its first publication must have been tempted to try Reeve’s writing thanks to a book cover echoing another YA literary success. Unless Scholastic were to offer a new illustration where readers could find something that touched their subconscious, Reeve’s novel might have gone unnoticed because its previous visual interpretations looked more child-oriented and would have been discarded at once by teenagers<sup>4</sup>.

As Sonzogni writes, “the cover implies two types of interactions: between text and image and between text and reader” (2011, 15). Since up to fifty percent of the human brain is employed to decode visual information (Van De Graaf 2021), cover design, composition, and art are relevant means of

---

<sup>4</sup> For some examples of previous covers, see section 4.

communication and interaction also between publishers and readers and, more generally, between adult producers and adolescent readers: covers constitute “a space where both particular texts and collective narratives of childhood and culture might be interrogated” (Hateley 2016, 30)<sup>5</sup>. For Hateley, focusing on the paratextual means pondering over how those narratives are formed and sold to young readers – in other words, it means taking into account the construction of an adult-approved idea of childhood and, in the case studies considered herein, of adolescence. Since “communication in children’s literature is fundamentally asymmetrical [because in] [p]roduction, publication and marketing by authors and publishing houses, [in] the part played by critics, librarians, booksellers and teachers, as intermediaries – at every stage of literary communication we find adults acting for children” (O’Sullivan 2004, 3), covers can be considered another example of how this unequal dialogue unfolds in the book market. They are designed, produced, and proposed by adults to young readers and, as such, they are a further instance of how the latter are influenced and Lockean-‘moulded’ by those who have more power in society. Consequently, cover art is a means through which adults convey messages to adolescents because it shows the grownups’ perspective on the young protagonists. Adults’ point of view is culture-specific (Sonzogni 2011, 15-16); therefore, it may include a Romantic idea of childhood still ongoing within Western societies. In this sense, it is interesting to focus on the representation of young people in book covers because it is supposed to blend marketing drives, adult biases deriving from Romanticism, and aesthetic appeal with readers’ expectations, feelings, and interests, such as protagonists who stand out and are ‘on an edge’, projected towards adulthood after wandering during adolescence.

#### 4. Adolescents on an edge

Wandering cities are those depicted by British author Philip Reeve in his steampunk quartet opening with *Mortal Engines* (2001), which was followed by *Predator’s Gold* (2003), *Infernal Devices* (2005), and *A Darkling Plain* (2006). Later on, Reeve also wrote three prequels, *Fever Crumb* (2009), *A Web of Air* (2010),

---

<sup>5</sup> Although this and the following references to Hateley’s ideas as well as O’Sullivan’s statement concern childhood and children’s literature, they can be considered valid also for adolescence and YA literature because asymmetrical power relations between adults (or institutions) and young people are equally at work (Trites 2000, 54-83).

and *Scrivener's Moon* (2011); recently, a collection of short stories entitled *Night Flights* (2018) has been added to the *Mortal Engines* world. Known in the USA as the ‘Hungry City Chronicles’, this “progressive” series (Watson 2004, 1) tells the adventures of Tom Natsworthy and Hester Shaw, two adolescents living in a distant future where Earth has barely survived the Sixty Minute War, a global conflict that humans fought eventually “destroy[ing] themselves in that terrible flurry of orbit-to-earth atomics and tailored-virus bombs” (Reeve 2018d, 7). After that, the Traction Era began: some major cities in the world installed huge caterpillar tracks and became mobile to hunt farming towns, smaller cities, and static villages. They capture, ‘eat’, and then dismantle their preys to get components, fuel, and working people for their incredibly complex engine rooms.

London is the first Traction City ever and there lives Tom, a Third Class Apprentice Historian, the equivalent of a lower-middle class citizen since its society is rigidly hierarchic and divided into four Guilds. Tom loves London, although he wishes he could become an air-merchant to travel from one settlement to the other. He does not concern himself with the socio-political situation because

[...] he kn[ows] he mustn't feel sorry for [London's preys]: it [is] natural that cities [eat] towns, just as the towns [eat] smaller towns, and smaller towns sna[p] up the miserable static settlements. [This is] Municipal Darwinism, and it [is] the way the world ha[s] worked for hundreds of years [...]. (ibid., 11)

However, London has been forced to move further from her usual hunting area because it already has difficulties in finding a good settlement to devour: Municipal Darwinism has its limits since it does not take into consideration the fact that small towns will end one day.

Hester is an outcast, an orphan girl after her mother was brutally murdered before her eyes when she was a child. During a fight with their assaulter, Hester lost an eye and part of her nose because he hit her with a sword before running away; as a result, she has a “terrible scar r[unning] down her face from forehead to jaw, making it look like a portrait that had been furiously crossed out” (ibid., 28). She has been raised by Shrike, one of the many Resurrected Men, which are “machines that are partly formed from dead humans whose brains have been emptied of memories and feelings” and that have been enhanced by mechanical engineering (Ostry 2004, 233). She detests Traction Cities, but most of all she hates Valentine, her mother’s murderer, and she lives only to seek re-

venge. As the reader will get to know, Valentine is her father and one of the strongest advocates of the Traction Era, secretly involved in reconstructing a lethal weapon from ancient times, MEDUSA, to make London unbeatable. Like Hester, against Municipal Darwinism is also the Anti-Traction League, whose aim is to begin a new, peaceful era by returning to unmoving settlements.

Despite the multiple storylines in the series, its pivots are always two adolescent protagonists: Hester and Tom in *Mortal Engines* and *Predator's Gold*, Wren and Theo Ngoni – Wren being Tom and Hester's daughter – in *Infernal Devices* and *A Darkling Plain*. Reeve's first drafts date back to the 1990s and the initial world was different from what *Mortal Engines* then became because he “was aiming to write a SF novel that was Dickensian in mood and scale” (Reeve 2021b), as the author himself states in his blog.

Over more than twenty years, there have been many covers for reissues, among which the artwork by Ian McQue to which this article refers, “one of the best things that's happened to the series”, as Reeve wrote in another blog post on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of *Mortal Engines* (2021c). Older covers seem aimed more at children than teenagers: to name but a few, the first hardcover UK edition shows the two protagonists on a hot-air balloon and in the lower part there is a Traction City far off, almost undistinguishable (Reeve 2001 - 9780439993456)<sup>6</sup>. This drawing has vivid colours and it does not convey a warlike atmosphere. The same illustration was used for the 2002 paperback edition and again for the fifteenth anniversary paperback reprint (Reeve 2002 - 9780439979436; Reeve 2015 - 9781407152134). The 2012 reissue by Scholastic US focuses on the technological aspects of the series: it is a labyrinth of pipes and gears with a solitary male human figure in a white coat in the centre, who at first gets unnoticed amidst the gigantic engine; another paperback reissue foregrounds the co-protagonist Shrike, thus giving prominence to the science-fiction element of the work (Reeve 2012a - 9780545222112; Reeve 2012b - 9781407131276). In more recent times, there is the 2018 cover that replicates the *Mortal Engines* film poster: it is an extreme close-up of Hera Hilmar, who plays Hester, showing half of her face, with her mouth and nose covered by a red scarf, dark brown-reddish hair, and a determined and angry

---

<sup>6</sup> Despite multiple attempts, Scholastic never replied to my requests for permission to reproduce book covers with Ian McQue's artwork. I am providing the ISBN of the book editions and reissues to which I am referring to enable readers to find covers online more easily.

gaze underlined by her frowned eyebrow and her eye staring at the viewer (Reeve 2018c - 9781407188959).

Reissues presenting film posters as covers are a good way to increase sales by attracting readers who already know the story but wish to collect the newest version as well as enthusiastic viewers who are interested to read the novel for the first time. However, when *Mortal Engines* became a film, Reeve's work had already passed its fifteenth anniversary and it was old if compared to the speed with which successful YA books are adapted into films. This is likely to be the reason why Scholastic started reissuing Reeve's quartet before the release of Christian Rivers' movie, building on the rising expectancy about it by adding the caption "Soon to be a major motion picture" to Ian McQue's masterpiece (Reeve 2018d - 9781407189147).

Bearing Friedrich's painting in mind, even at a glance, it is easy to recognise that McQue's cover for *Mortal Engines* follows the same compositional idea of the 1818 canvas<sup>7</sup>: a (presumably) young person, seen from behind, who is standing in front of a majestic and terrifying scenery that conveys the concept of Romantic sublime. Of course, at Barthesian's denotation level<sup>8</sup>, Friedrich's Wanderer is looking at a boundless natural landscape, while the person in the cover is facing a technologically-improved, urban mountain – London as a Traction City. Unless one has already read the novel – which is not the case for potential readers picking up the volume in a bookshop – the city portrayed can be identified as London only after a while because the Big Ben is not well visible and, even if St Paul's Cathedral stands out on the top, this might be any religious building with Neoclassical, Renaissance, and English Baroque architectural styles. Only by summing the two elements are viewers enabled to recognise the settlement as London. However, this identification is not essential in terms of mood and atmosphere evoked by the cover: it is relevant when considering the degree of closeness to the contents, but it does not add to the sense of threat and imminent fight conveyed by colours and visual features. The city looks like a fortress built on multiple levels, which visually render "London's social stratification [...] based upon exploitation, inequality and overprivilege" (Sambell 2004, 254). Clouds are covering the sky and the predominant colours

<sup>7</sup> In analysing book covers and film posters, Harrison's tables with basic features, processes, and elements of the three metafunctions – representational, interpersonal, and compositional – that work together to create meaning in images are particularly useful (cf. Harrison 2003, 51–58).

<sup>8</sup> For a full description and exemplification of Barthes' denotation and connotation "layers", see van Leeuwen 2011, 4–11.

are white, grey, and black, which are consonant with the general impression of a world in conflict and with little hope because the machinery depicted seems to work towards war rather than building a new Eden and the airships flying around the urban mountain look almost like sentinels.

Separated from London by a bare, lifeless, and snowy section of land, a solitary human being seen from behind is standing on a structure made of wood and metal, tubes and screws, in front of the city, creating a “narrative structure” (Harrison 51) between the two that underlines the two main subjects represented; therefore, the viewer’s attention is drawn to the figure and the city, even though the first is only a small-sized element in the lower section of the cover. The person looks like a female and, after being acquainted with the novel, she is identifiable as Philip Reeve’s protagonist, Hester Shaw, because of her red scarf. She is wearing black trousers and a sweater, dark boots, and a dark long coat with a crossbody bag; she is holding a cylindrical object in her left hand and her hair is messy and fluttering in the wind. Her depiction on the edge of a platform is Friedrich-inspired and every detail makes her representation less congruent with the idea of gracious, angelic feminine beauty and more similar to the ideal of the “tomboy” heroine (Balkind 2014, 45). Readers will find evidence of this in *Infernal Devices* and *A Darkling Plain*, since Hester secretly wishes that she had not had her daughter Wren and finds it increasingly difficult to feel her as part of her life (Reeve 2018b, 31).

The wooden-metallic structure on which she stands may be part of a smaller town facing the monstrous urban mountain because it does not seem connected to the latter<sup>9</sup>. London’s width can be envisaged by the fact that its outer borders are beyond the cover’s material edges, just like the painting’s “sublime landscape” has “no clear boundaries” (Gaete 2020, 61). London is huge, threatening, and oppressive thanks to the use of a vertical angle, commonly “associated with power relationships” (Harrison 54): London is at the top end of the high angle while Hester’s position on the platform is at a lower level, contrary to Friedrich’s canvas where the Wanderer is located higher than, or at least at the same level of, the mountain peaks. In addition to perspective, there are airships flying around London to render its power, as already said: only a few of them are directed towards the city and yet they do not look as if they are making it their war target. Therefore, it seems that London can count on many

---

<sup>9</sup> It becomes clear that it is a town when the reader turns the volume, as McQue’s artwork continues on the back cover.

weapons when compared to the figure's side since Hester's platform is bare, apart from some metallic bars on the left. She is alone to fight the urban mountain towering above her. Nonetheless, her firm pose does not suggest fear while she is staring at London – on the contrary, considering the compositional metafunction of the image (*ibid.*, 55-58), it symbolically represents untamed bravery, a rebellious character, and a strong will.

A slightly less steady pose but equally challenging those defending Municipal Darwinism and Traction Cities is that of the female figure in McQue's illustration for *Predator's Gold* (Reeve 2018f - 9781407189154). Here, a young woman is again portrayed with her back to the viewer: she is wearing a woollen coat and she is venturing a step towards a castle-city in front of her, wrapped up in the fog and depicted once more through a high vertical angle<sup>10</sup>. Colours are lighter and brighter when compared to the previous cover: there are mainly blue and white shades, especially for the sky and the snow in between the human figure and the city, but there are also blacks and greys, and the orange glow of an electric light as the only source of warm colour. The atmosphere is as oppressive as in *Mortal Engines*: airships are flying threateningly towards the figure and the fog makes the castle-city even more mysterious and potentially dangerous. Its grandiosity is underlined both by the female's position and the platform where she is standing: similarly to the first cover, she is at a lower level than the top of the castle; moreover, the metallic structure is old and the hole beneath the platform makes the whole framework precarious. Viewers may feel the power imbalance between the castle-city and the figure 'more real' also thanks to the use of markers all conveying high modality, including full colour drawing, a fully conceived background, and deep perspective (Harrison 58). For the figure's hesitant step and her hand on her face, her pose seems less resolute than Hester's; however, this does not mean that she is less brave: she is facing the unknown castle-city alone in the middle of a snowstorm – which echoes the style of Romantic paintings – and, despite this, she is stepping forward, not backward. Once more, this kind of representation combines a pose inspired by Friedrich's canvas and the idea of a young character facing society, which is represented by the city.

---

<sup>10</sup> The human figure might be Hester again or a new character, Freya Rasmussen, the adolescent ruler of a Traction City in ruin called Anchorage who rescues and hosts Tom and Hester when their airship is attacked by a fanatical division of the Anti-Traction League. As previously said regarding the identification of London, here too the identity of the female figure is not relevant in terms of atmosphere and mood conveyed to potential readers.

Whereas the first two covers portray young females, in *Infernal Devices* and *A Darkling Plain* the subject changes: in the first instance, the Wanderer's position is occupied by another character 'on the edge', Shrike – half man and half robot (Reeve 2018b - 9781407189161). Indeed, Shrike is one of the most evident references to Romanticism in the *Mortal Engines* world because his assembly starts from corpses and, therefore, he can be considered a variation of Mary Shelley's Creature in *Frankenstein* (1818), which is "the first modern science-fiction novel [...] [presenting the] now-typical SF motif of the artificial man" (Yates 2004, 1). In the second case, the human figure portrayed is Tom as an adult rather than as an adolescent, and the composition changes accordingly: he is standing on bare ground, not a platform; the city depicted is seemingly an inoffensive wreck; and there is a new sense of hope given by chromatic shades (Reeve 2018a - 9781407189178). The three prequels and the short stories collection *Night Flights* also have covers drawn by McQue and built following the same basic composition of the main series: a human figure seen from behind standing in the lower part of the illustration with a vast landscape in front of their eyes. In particular, *Night Flights* looks like a patent homage to Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, given that the person is on a rock protruding towards a ravine and the mountain-city is surrounded by a foggy and cloudy scenery (Reeve 2018e - 9781407186740).

Skimming the book covers of other novels by Reeve, it is clear that McQue's Friedrich-inspired artwork was a successful representation, since the same composition was used for other books as well. For example, the image for the 2019 reprint of *Here Lies Arthur*, first published in 2007, was redesigned by McQue following the same pattern, and cover art by other illustrators is inspired by his work, such as David Wyatt's illustration for the 2019 reissue of *Larklight* or the original book covers by Paddy Donnelly for *Utterly Dark and the Face of the Deep* and *Utterly Dark and the Heart of the Wild* (Reeve 2019b - 9781407195995; Reeve 2019a - 978152660661; Reeve 2021a - 9781788452373; Reeve 2022 - 9781788452861). However, this is a trend that goes far beyond Reeve's works, as proved by the film posters of some recent adaptations of YA novels: for example, *Divergent* (2011), adapted in 2014, and *Tomorrow, When the*

*War Began* (1993), adapted in 2010<sup>11</sup>. Film posters are as much relevant as book covers because, as Wilkie-Stibbs writes,

[...] [c]hildren's exposure to other media such as film, television animations, and video, means increasingly that they are likely to encounter the media adaptations of a children's fiction before they encounter the written text and to come to regard it as the 'original' from which to approach and on which to base and 'make sense' of their (later) reading of the written version. (2004, 6)

This is especially true when publishers reprint novels and use poster images as book covers, thus imposing a visual interpretation connected to a cinematographic product, which may be rather different from the original story.

The protagonists' representation in the mentioned posters makes them the epitome of the adolescent as a thematic figure like McQue's cover artwork. They also equally blend the idea of teenagers on the edge of a life stage and adults' view on adolescence influenced by Romantic theories about childhood and adulthood, the latter of which was commonly considered 'corrupted' because it had lost innocence and naivety, two of the main qualities attributed to children. In these posters, colours are extremely relevant. Since colour "forms an integral part of semiotics, non-verbal communication and spatial orientation [and] carries important symbolic and associative messages" which are culture-specific (Aslam 2005, 2), pink, yellow, and orange shades can convey the idea that the protagonists are society's hope for a better future because they are considered warm colours and are associated with fire, sun, and heat (Caivano 1998, 395). In the *Divergent* poster ("Divergent" 2014), the female protagonist becomes the focus of hopefulness because she is illuminated by sunlight, whereas in the *Tomorrow, When the War Began* image the general atmosphere has a diffused sense of hope for the warm sunset colours that overshadow the impact of elements linked to war, like the fires on the left and the helicopters on the right ("Il domani che verrà - The Tomorrow Series", 2010a); not by chance, these are located in the background or towards the margins and, thus, are subservient to the human figure at the centre corresponding to the main nucleus of information (Harrison 57).

---

<sup>11</sup> Another interesting example is the 2016 reissue of *The City of Ember* by Jeanne DuPrau (2016 - 9780375822742). However, Paul Sullivan's artwork for this novel is not discussed in the article because the intended readership is younger, being *Ember* suggested for children who are 8-12 years old, as specified on the back cover, and because the protagonists do not engage in a fight like in the other works considered.

For *Tomorrow, When the War Began*, the Friedrich-inspired poster is not the original one but its Italian version, used by publisher Fazi in 2011 to reissue the Italian translation of the novel (Marsden 2011a - 9788876250804). Curiously enough, a very similar image was employed for the Spanish translation published by Molino the same year (Marsden 2011b - 9788427200760). These representations both convey reassurance, albeit to a different degree than the original poster, which is full of war-related prompts and its warm colours do not convey hopefulness because they are directly associated with the explosion in the upper part of the image ("Il domani che verrà - The Tomorrow Series", 2010b). Considering the Italian poster and cover, the Spanish cover, and the fact that Ian McQue was born in Edinburgh, the visual representations referred to may suggest a culturally-centred preference in the European area for echoing Friedrich's Wanderer in depicting adolescents, most likely due to the cultural influences of German and British Romanticism.

## **5. Conclusion**

Romanticism is still exerting a powerful influence on contemporary society, including adolescent literature. In book covers and film posters such as those analysed in this article, young protagonists are literally portrayed on an edge and this position acquires different meanings. Illustrations like McQue's can win teenagers' approval because they render the feelings usually associated with their life stage: uncertainty, desire to grow and to be part of society, will to stick by one's ideas for a better world, and fear to leave childhood safety behind. However, influenced by Romantic ideas, adults may conceive teenagers as still untouched by the hardships of engaging urban mountains: young protagonists on an edge stand for the last chance they have to turn around and stay safe, protected, untainted; at the same time, they can also embody hope for a better society in the future.

Friedrich-inspired book covers of contemporary YA stories and recent film posters like those for *Divergent* and *Tomorrow, When the War Began* signal that the wanderer as a figure and the Romantic idea of childhood are still strong within Western societies – especially in the European context. Nonetheless, they also render adolescent readers' widespread feeling of being in an in-between, wandering age. In this sense, they both mirror adults' common view on youth while providing a visual recognition of teenagers' concerns.

## References

- Aslam, Mubeen M. 2005. "Are You Selling the Right Colour? A Cross-cultural Review of Colour as a Marketing Cue". In *Developments and Trends in Corporate and Marketing Communications: Plotting the Mindscape of the 21st Century. Proceedings of the 10th International Conference on Corporate and Marketing Communications*. Ed. by Ioanna Papasolomou, 1-14. Nicosia: InterCollege, Marketing Department, School of Business Administration. <https://ro.uow.edu.au/commpapers/1043> (26/04/2023).
- Balkind, Nicola. 2014. *Fan Phenomena: The Hunger Games*. Bristol-Chicago: Intellect Books.
- Caivano, José Luis. 1998. "Color and Semiotics: A Two-way Street." *Color Research and Application* 23 (6), 390-401.
- d'Astous, Alain, Francois Colbert, and Imene Mbarek. 2006. "Factors Influencing Readers' Interest in New Book Releases: An Experimental Study." *Poetics* 34, 134-47. 10.1016/j.poetic.2005.12.001 (14/12/2022).
- DuPrau, Jeanne. 2016 (2003). *The City of Ember*. New York: Yearling.
- Falconer, Rachel. 2010. "Young Adult Fiction and the Crossover Phenomenon." In *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature*. Ed. by David Rudd, 87-99. London: Routledge. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unibo/detail.action?docID=988027> (11/12/2022).
- Gaete, Miguel Angel. 2020. "From Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* to the iCloud: A Comparative Analysis between the Romantic Concept of the Sublime and Cyberspace." *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* 43 (2): 59-70. ProQuest, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/caspar-david-friedrichs-em-wanderer-above-sea-fog/docview/2465482834/se-2> (28/11/2022).
- Grilli, Giorgia. 2012. *Libri nella giungla. Orientarsi nell'editoria per ragazzi*. Roma: Carocci Editore.
- Gudinavičius, Arūnas, and Andrius Šuminas. 2018. "Choosing a Book by Its Cover: Analysis of a Reader's Choice". *Journal of Documentation* 74 (2): 430-46. doi.org/10.1108/JD-09-2016-0111.
- Haladyn, Julian Jason. 2016. "Friedrich's 'Wanderer': Paradox of the Modern Subject." *RACAR: Revue d'Art Canadienne/Canadian Art Review* 41 (1): 47-61. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43855855> (11/12/2022).

- Harrison, Claire. 2003. "Visual Social Semiotics: Understanding How Still Images Make Meaning." *Technical Communication* 50 (1): 46-60. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43090531> (26/04/2023).
- Hateley, Erica. 2016. "Judging Books by Their Covers: Australian Children's Classics in the Twenty-First Century." *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 54 (3): 28-35. doi.org/10.1353/bkb.2016.0098.
- Kümmerling-Meibauer, Bettina. 2008. "Images of Childhood in Romantic Children's Literature." In *Romantic Prose Fiction*. Ed. by Gerald Gillespie, Manfred Engel, and Bernard Dieterle, 183-203. Amsterdam-Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Lorant, André. 2008. "The 'Wanderer' in Romantic Prose Fiction." In *Romantic Prose Fiction*. Ed. by Gerald Gillespie, Manfred Engel, and Bernard Dieterle, 122-38. Amsterdam-Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Marsden, John. 2011a (1993). *Il domani che verrà*. Translated by Chiara Arnone. Roma: Fazi. (9788876250804).
- Marsden, John. 2011b (1993). *Mañana cuando la guerra empieza*. Translated by Daniel Cortés, Eva Girona, Philippe July, and Purificación Meseguer. Barcelona: Molino. (9788427200760).
- McGraván Jr., James Holt (eds). 2012. *Time of Beauty, Time of Fear: The Romantic Legacy in the Literature of Childhood*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- O'Sullivan, Emer. 2004. "Comparative Children's Literature." In *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*. Ed. by Peter Hunt, 1-11. London: Routledge. ProQuest, <https://www.proquest.com/books/14-comparative-childrens-literature-part-i-theory/docview/2137965300/se-2> (10/12/2022).
- Ostry, Elaine. 2004. "Is He Still Human? Are You?: Young Adult Science Fiction in the Posthuman Age." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 28 (2): 222-46. doi.org/10.1353/uni.2004.0024.
- Reeve, Philip. 2001. *Mortal Engines*. London: Scholastic Press. (9780439993456).
- Reeve, Philip. [2001] 2002. *Mortal Engines*. London: Scholastic Press. (9780439979436).
- Reeve, Philip. [2001] 2012a. *Mortal Engines*. New York: Scholastic. (9780545222112).
- Reeve, Philip. [2001] 2012b. *Mortal Engines*. New York: Scholastic. (9781407131276).
- Reeve, Philip. [2001] 2015. *Mortal Engines*. New York: Scholastic. (9781407152134).

- Reeve, Philip. [2006] 2018a. *A Darkling Plain*. New York: Scholastic. (9781407189178).
- Reeve, Philip. [2005] 2018b. *Infernal Devices*. New York: Scholastic. (9781407189161).
- Reeve, Philip. [2001] 2018c. *Mortal Engines*. New York: Scholastic. (9781407188959).
- Reeve, Philip. [2001] 2018d. *Mortal Engines*. New York: Scholastic. (9781407189147).
- Reeve, Philip. 2018e. *Night Flights*. New York: Scholastic. (9781407186740).
- Reeve, Philip. [2003] 2018f. *Predator's Gold*. New York: Scholastic. (9781407189154).
- Reeve, Philip. [2006] 2019a. *Larklight*. London: Bloomsbury. (978152660661).
- Reeve, Philip. [2007] 2019b. *Here Lies Arthur*. New York: Scholastic. (9781407195995).
- Reeve, Philip. 2021a. *Utterly Dark and the Face of the Deep*. Oxford: David Fickling Books. (9781788452373).
- Reeve, Philip. 2021b. “Mortal Engines: Twenty Years On.” Station Zero. <https://philipreeveblog.blogspot.com/2021/11/mortal-engines-twenty-years-on.html> (08/12/2022).
- Reeve, Philip. 2021c. “Twenty Years of Mortal Engines.” Station Zero. <https://philipreeveblog.blogspot.com/2021/11/twenty-years-of-mortal-engines.html> (08/12/2022).
- Reeve, Philip. 2022. *Utterly Dark and the Heart of the Wild*. Oxford: David Fickling Books. (9781788452861).
- Sainsbury, Lisa. 2014. “Childhood, Youth Culture and the Uncanny: Uncanny Nights in Contemporary Fiction for Young People”. In *Modern Children’s Literature: An Introduction*. Ed. by Catherine Butler and Kimberley Reynolds, 202-19. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sambell, Kay. 2004. “Carnivalizing the Future: A New Approach to Theorizing Childhood and Adulthood in Science Fiction for Young Readers.” *The Lion and the Unicorn* 28 (2): 247-67. doi.org/10.1353/uni.2004.0026.
- Sonzogni, Marco. 2011. *Re-covered Rose: A Case Study in Book Cover Design as Intersemiotic Translation*. Amsterdam-Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.unibo.it/lib/unibo/detail.action?docID=806568> (10/12/2022).

- Thacker, Deborah. 2002. "Imagining the Child." In *Introducing Children's Literature: From Romanticism to Postmodernism*. By Deborah Cogan Thacker and Jean Webb, 13-25. London and New York: Routledge.
- Trentacosta, Christopher J., and Carroll E. Izard. 2020. "Emotional development." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.  
<https://www.britannica.com/print/article/2084362> (10/12/2022).
- Trites, Roberta Seelinger. 2000. *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*. Iowa: University of Iowa Press.
- Van De Graaf, Mel. 2021. "How Cover Art Affects Readers' Book Choices." *Bookclub*. <https://www.bookclub.com/blog/how-cover-art-affects-readers-book-choices> (04/11/2022).
- van Leeuwen, Theo. 2011 [2004]. "Semiotics and Iconography." In *The Handbook of Visual Analysis*. Ed. by Theo van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt, 2-42. New York: SAGE Publications Ltd. doi.org/10.4135/9780857020062.
- Watson, Victor. 2004. "Series Fiction." In *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*. Ed. by Peter Hunt, 1-9. London: Routledge. ProQuest <https://www.proquest.com/books/41-series-fiction-part-ii-forms-genres/docview/2137953724/se-2> (11/12/2022).
- Willkie-Stibbs, Christine. 2004. "Intertextuality and the Child Reader." In *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*. Ed. by Peter Hunt, 1-10. London: Routledge. ProQuest, <https://www.proquest.com/books/13-intertextuality-child-reader-part-i-theory/docview/2137954796/se-2> (11.12.2022).
- Yampbell, Cat. 2005. "Judging a Book by Its Cover: Publishing Trends in Young Adult Literature." *The Lion and the Unicorn* (29) 3: 348-72. doi.org/10.1353/uni.2005.0049.
- Yates, Jessica. 2004. "Science Fiction." In *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*. Ed. by Peter Hunt, 1-11. London: Routledge. ProQuest, <https://www.proquest.com/books/40-science-fiction-part-ii-forms-genres/docview/2137941679/se-2> (11/12/2022).

## Visual Media

“Divergent” (2014). *Internet Movie Database* (IMDb). [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1840309/mediaviewer/rm2855260672?ref\\_=ttmi\\_mi\\_typ\\_pos\\_7](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1840309/mediaviewer/rm2855260672?ref_=ttmi_mi_typ_pos_7) (09/12/2022).

“Il domani che verrà - The Tomorrow Series” (2010a). *Internet Movie Database* (IMDb). [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1456941/mediaviewer/rm441219840?ref\\_=ttmi\\_mi\\_typ\\_pos\\_6](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1456941/mediaviewer/rm441219840?ref_=ttmi_mi_typ_pos_6) (09/12/2022).

“Il domani che verrà - The Tomorrow Series” (2010b). *Internet Movie Database* (IMDb). [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1456941/mediaviewer/rm3336143616?ref\\_=ttmi\\_mi\\_typ\\_pos\\_2](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1456941/mediaviewer/rm3336143616?ref_=ttmi_mi_typ_pos_2) (09/12/2022).

Friedrich, Caspar David. *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, 1818. Oil-on-canvas, 94.8 cm × 74.8 cm, Kunsthalle Hamburg, Germany.



Stefano Rossi

Università degli Studi di Padova  
[stefano.rossi.21@phd.unipd.it](mailto:stefano.rossi.21@phd.unipd.it)

## Evil Feminine and Untamed Nerves: Sensationalism in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *The Rose and the Key*

### ABSTRACT:

Starting with a cultural-historical framing of late-Victorian sensation fiction and focusing on deranged and rebellious women that populate sensation narratives, this article explores the figure of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu and his artistic closeness to late-Victorian sensationalism. Having as mainstay Le Fanu's familiarity with late-nineteenth-century psychiatry, this paper pivots around the sensational that permeates Le Fanu's *The Rose and the Key*, a work that never experienced the fame, for instance, of *Uncle Silas* or *Carmilla*. Paying attention to the stormy relationship between Maud and Barbara – daughter and mother – and to the countless secrets guarded by the latter, in this article I look at *The Rose and the Key* as a denunciation of a highly corruptible psychiatric system, much oriented towards repression, especially in the case of women.

KEYWORDS: sensationalism, women, Le Fanu, psychiatry, asylum.

### 1. *Wicked Literature and Late-Victorian Womanhood*

Beginning in the 1860s, a series of outrageous novels flooded British literary market and intruded into Victorian domesticity, struck terror into the mind of readers and reinforced *fin-de-siècle* anxieties over women and their alleged inability to tame instincts. To borrow from Maurizio Ascari, at the peak of its fame, sensationalism “enjoyed a vast success in terms of sales, enthraling the reading public, but was also at the heart of a heated critical debate” (2007, 110). Indeed, in

1862, in an article appeared in the *Quarterly Review*, the English philosopher Henry Longueville Mansel (1820-1871), Professor of Ecclesiastic History and Moral Philosophy at Oxford University, criticised that emerging genre and observed that

[...] a class of literature has grown around us, usurping in many respects, intentionally or unintentionally, a portion of the preacher's office, playing no inconsiderable part in moulding the minds and forming the habits and tastes of its generation. [...] The sensation novel, be it mere trash or something worse, is usually a tale [...] which aims at electrifying the nerves of the reader. (cit. in Regan 2001, 45-47)

Born out of the cascade of Darwinian pages about natural selection and struggle for existence published in the late 1850s, the ever-increasing number of asylums built across the island, alienating industrialisation, and rampant dread of hereditary degeneration, sensationalism placed at the heart of its thrilling plots “a new kind of heroine, one who could put her hostility toward men into violent action” (Showalter 1977, 160). Shaking the pillars of a society that viewed women as subjects who “could never hope to stand on a level of social and professional equality with men” (Eagle Russett 1989, 30), sensationalists voiced “female anger, frustration, and sexual energy more directly than had been done previously” (Showalter 1977, 160) and portrayed a world “in which secrets are the rule rather than the exception” (Hughes 1980, 190). Understood in this context as a response to a cultural and clinical milieu obsessed with psychosis, human degeneration and deranged feminine, “sensation fiction engages in an intense focus on the domestic space of marital house – the desired goal of the domestic heroine – which becomes [...] the locus of passion, deception, violence and crime” (Pykett 1992, 74).

Not unfrequently written by women, sensation novels, as Elaine Showalter correctly points out, “made a powerful appeal to the female audience” by expressing “a wide range of suppressed female emotions, and by tapping and satisfying fantasies of protest and escape” (1977, 159). The protagonists of sensation narratives are most often women who, contemptuous of male authority, rebel against phallocentrism and prove disrespectful of social and marital rules. And it was in the revolutionary message underlying those new narratives that Mansel’s and many others’ concerns were rooted. Mansel believed that women – wives, mothers, and daughters – who enjoyed spending

their time reading sensation novels could draw from those hyper-stimulating plots and end up destroying conventional moralities.

In this regard, Tara Macdonald notices that, in sensation narratives, women could find worlds that were reminiscent of their own: “they somehow inhabited those text. Implied in such anxieties about sensational reading was the notion that women readers would in fact *become* the characters they read about” (2007, 132). Calling to my mind Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *The Day-Dream* (1880), a portrayal of a woman who is lost in her thoughts allegedly inspired by the book she has on her lap, Macdonald maintains that “abandoning oneself to the world of the novel comes dangerously close to losing one’s identity” (*ibid.*, 135). For some women, reading sensation narratives could mean being strayed far from the path that society and families had set for them. Those gruesome narratives could undermine domestic balances by instilling subversive ideas into the minds of countless daughters and wives, whose fathers and husbands had groomed to be complaisant ‘angels in the house’, silently devoted to looking after men, bearing, taking care of children, cleaning, and cooking.

Besides Mansel, Margaret Oliphant Wilson (1829-1897) did not fail to express her concerns about the *diablerie* of various types that sensation plots were disseminating among mid-century Victorians. While praising Collins’ *The Woman in White*, the novel that, in 1860, inaugurated sensationalism, Oliphant felt that a frenzied rebellion against nature was at work. She observed that sensationalism was imbued with horror, mystery, black arts and mad psychology, and “the result is no doubt a class of books abounding in sensation; but the effect is invariably attained by violent and illegitimate means” (cit. in Regan 2001, 41). Oliphant thought that, as long as sensationalism benefited from madness, murders, crimes, unleashed violence and outrageous characters, the effects on (mainly female) readership were perilous. She argued that, “in the interest of art, it is necessary to protest against”; “nothing can be more wrong and fatal than to present the flames of vice as a purifying fiery ordeal, through which the penitent is to come elevated and sublimed” (*ibid.*, 43).

The female protagonists of sensation novels, Emily Allen argues, “take bullets and poison, commit bigamy and murder, lie, steal, cheat, go mad, turn detective, and disappear” (2011, 404): the domestic angel becomes a she-devil. Unstable psyches, revenge, discordance, deceptions, domestic violence, and crime constituted key ingredients of mid-Victorian sensation fiction. As

pointed out by Walter Besant (1836-1901), founder of the Society of Authors in 1884,

[...] the so-called sensational novels [...] show the downward progress of a character only weak at first, reckless at last. [...] In this class of novel we have, it is true, plenty of incident; but we have [...] all the sorrow and suffering that surround the fall of a man from his high estate of self-respect. [...] The problem of suffering and sorrow is that which lies at the root of all novels: it forms the interest and pathos of every life. (cit. in McNees 2006, 187-88)

Among the many incidents that, according to Besant, can occur in sensation novels is crime, i.e. the climax of the protagonist's psychological pain and regressive metamorphosis. And, as long as foolish, brutal, and aforethought crime was presented to readers as an irresistible impulse of daily life, they had to get used to it and find possible ways to excuse it: in this context, psychosis and its disruptive consequences on one's self-control became the ideal justification for murder. Exploiting the allure of domestic secrets, sensation writers cast light on a growing mid-Victorian obsession with criminality, mental pathology and its alleged transmissibility, specially from mothers to daughters. Sensation narratives confirmed that a worrying process of decay was underway, the cause of which was mainly attributed to the female counterpart of Victorian society, accused of handing down the seeds of folly to the offspring, the future of the country. As Pamela K. Gilbert has argued, "madness, hereditary and otherwise, features as a significant plot point for novels throughout the period". Interested in "extreme medical and mental states", sensation novels repeatedly thematised "the dangers of nervous disease" (2007, 185).

Regarded as a powerful evidence of the alleged innate insanity of women, a murder of unspeakable brutality opened the 1860s: Constance Kent (1844-1944), a sixteen-year-old girl from the village of Road in Somerset, was accused of killing her three-year-old stepbrother, found in the garden with his throat slit. Spreading like wildfire, the news swiftly reached every corner of the country, strengthening an already widespread belief that, behind every angelic visage, a hideous monster might lurk. Inspired by the several crime reports of their days and psychiatric investigations, sensational writers filled their novels with mysterious women and unstable minds, with "shocking violent outrage", "unspeakable violence", "murderous assaults", and "crime of dreadful depravity" (Rowbotham and Stevenson 2016, 140). As Winifred Hughes has remarked,

“evil or antisocial action is no longer the direct result and expression of evil character”, “but derives from combinations of circumstances, weakness, insanity, impulse, ‘sensation’ at its most basic” (1980, 58).

Notable examples of late-Victorian sensation novels are *The Woman in White* (1860) – mentioned before – and *The Legacy of Cain* (1888) by Wilkie Collins, *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and *Aurora Floyd* (1863) by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *East Lynne* (1861) and *St. Martin's Eve* (1866) by Ellen (Mrs. Henry) Wood. Other sensationalists are also worth mentioning: Rhoda Broughton, Amelia B. Edwards, Florence Marryat, Marie Louise Ramée (known as ‘Ouida’), Charles Reade, and Charlotte Riddell. In this paper, nevertheless, I intend to explore the controversial figure of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, defined in the early 1930s by Stewart M. Ellis “a supreme author of stories and novels of murder and mystery” (1931, 173), whose partial neglect by scholarship, as Anna Maria Jones has written, “is of long standing and seems, often, to hinge on his not being Wilkie Collins” (2011, 270). Even though the line between Gothic and sensationalism is very often blurry, “most of the scholarship on Le Fanu, even that which reads him in conjunction with other sensation novelists, has tended to place him in the former rather than the latter category” (*ibid.*, 271).

## 2. Le Fanu's Closeness to Late-Victorian Sensationalism

Aware of the worries that sensationalism had been spreading in society since the beginning of the 1860s and terrified of the repercussions that those concerns could have on his works, in his “Preliminary Word” to *Uncle Silas* (1864), Le Fanu remarked that he despised the current of sensationalism. Although he produced works that displayed several of the characteristics that are typical of sensation novels, he “vehemently objected to them being classified as such” (Jones 2011, 270), as he felt that the label ‘sensation novel’ could severely detract from the quality of his novels. He wrote:

The author trusts that the Press, to whose masterly criticism and generous encouragement he and other humble labourers in the art owe so much, will insist upon the limitation of that degrading term to the peculiar type of fiction which it was originally intended to indicate, and prevent, as they may, its being made to include the legitimate school of tragic English romance, which has been ennobled, and in great measure founded, by the genius of Sir Walter Scott. (Le Fanu 2000, 4)

Nonetheless, time would tell a different story. In spite of his avowed reluctance towards sensation novels, Le Fanu drew heavily from that new genre. A great deal of his works can be looked at as deft pastiches of Gothic and sensation fiction, literary genres that sew the narrative fabric in a similar way. Lyn Pykett has observed that mid-Victorian sensation novels, like “gothic romances, were concerned with terror, mystery, suspense, secrecy, deception, and disguise, and they frequently [...] involved the persecution and incarceration of the heroine” (2001, 203-04). On this issue, Patrick Brantlinger has argued that “some sensation novels are indistinguishable from Gothic romances” (1982, 8) and that late-Victorian sensationalism brought Gothic trope up to date by mingling it “with the conventions of realism as to make its events seem possible if not exactly probable” (*ibid.*, 9). The most obvious disjunction between Gothic and sensation fiction lies in the predilection of the latter for domestic settings. While Gothic narratives, such as Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, Lewis’ *The Monk*, or Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer*, “explore the deepest recesses of human psychology, always stressing the macabre, the unusual and the fantastic” (Carter and McRae 2001, 244), sensation novels prefer prying into Victorian houses and probing into private lives of their inhabitants. To put it another way, sensationalism substituted gothic mysteries with domestic tragedies, turning domesticity into a key component of its plots.

### **3. The ‘Sensational’ Underlying *The Rose and the Key***

Bearing this in mind, in this paper I revisit Le Fanu’s proximity to the aesthetics of sensationalism, emphasise his considerable knowledge of the mid-Victorian psychiatric system, his undoubted familiarity with the treatment of female insanity, and foreground the ‘sensational’ that features *The Rose and the Key*, a novel that is overshadowed by more critically acclaimed works by Le Fanu, such as *Carmilla*, *In a Glass Darkly*, and *Uncle Silas*.

Born in Dublin in 1814, Le Fanu spent most of his youth studying at a military school. Educated according to the rigid precepts of the Church of Ireland, he did not take long to manifest an innate passion for writing stories. In 1844, at the age of thirty, he married Susan Bennett, a nervous, religion-obsessed and anxiety-ridden woman, a troubled soul who, in the grip of recurrent panic attacks, died in 1858, at the age of thirty-four, leaving her husband with two daughters and two sons: “her loss was an irreparable grief” to Le Fanu (Ellis 1931, 156). The mental derangement of his beloved Susan

represented for Le Fanu a first-hand experience of the plague of hysteria, a sort of bitter confirmation of the rumours that, in those years, claimed that women were – by nature – incapable of controlling their minds and nerves. And it was this vast knowledge of Le Fanu of psychoses, asylums, and medical discourses on women and insanity that spilled over into his writings later on: *The Rose and the Key* – an extremely suspenseful novel – is an excellent example in this context.

Published weekly from January to September 1871 in Charles Dickens' *All the Year Round*, *The Rose and the Key* presents almost all the principal characteristics of a typical sensation novel. Indeed, if the main elements of sensation narratives are vengeful, criminal and violent femininity, psychiatric hospitals and dark minds, *The Rose and the Key* is a sensation novel in its own right, even though crime and criminals – central to sensation novels – are missing in Le Fanu's novel. Yet, even though there is no crime in *The Rose and the Key*, the greedy and duplicitous Barbara Vernon, the main character besides her daughter Maud, harbours murderous intentions towards the latter, “the source of half of” her nervousness (Le Fanu 1982, 428).

The first pages of *The Rose and the Key* resemble the initial chapters of Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, where Braddon resorts to the image of a storm as an omen of a family tragedy, a portent of an impending apocalypse: “the ivy rustled against the glass with the same ominous shiver as that which agitated every leaf in the garden, prophetic of the storm that was to come” (2012, 64). In much the same way, in *The Rose and the Key*, the young heiress, Maud Vernon, watches a distant tempest that looms on the horizon, a turbulence which embodies her “presentiment that some misfortune impends” (Le Fanu 1982, 23). The darkness falling on the Welsh countryside mirrors the gloomy premonitions of Maud, who is tormented by the shadowy presence of a one-eyed man, an evangelical called Elihu Lizard, “an ill-looking, canting man” instructed to follow her, “collect information, and make notes of everything” (*ibid.*, 380) to gain evidence of Maud's alleged insanity. Alongside Lizard, the young heiress has to deal with her gruff mother: whenever Maud attempts to enter into dialogue with Barbara, they always end up quarrelling and “Maud's heart swells with bitterness” (*ibid.*, 60).

Emulating sensation narratives that preceded it, *The Rose and the Key* does not neglect to address the issue of marriage. In effect, in the novel Le Fanu explores the institution of marriage and its implications from the perspective

of Barbara. Surrounding herself with psychiatrists that, in cahoots with her, are poised to certify Maud to prevent her from marrying, Barbara informs readers that the marriage of her daughter would result in her loss of power over the Vernons' fortune. Portrayed as a mysterious woman harbouring a diabolical monster in herself, Barbara – like Silas in *Uncle Silas* – is corroded by the terror of being deprived of her treasure: “she heard the pulse of the artery in her temple drum on her pillow; and her heart beat harder than a heart at ease is wont to throb” (*ibid.*, 239).

Well informed of the many cases in which, in those years, fathers and husbands (yet not exclusively) used asylums as prisons for troublesome and rebellious daughters and wives, Le Fanu depicts the ruthlessness of a mother who, helped by corrupt alienists and wishing to gain economic advancement from the removal of Maud from society, plans to conceal her daughter within the walls of a psychiatric hospital:

[...] in the corner of the deep and dark cell she occupies, there stands, as it were, an evil spirit, and there ripples in and fills her ears, with ebb and flow, the vengeful swell, but too familiar to her soul, of another psalm – a psalm of curses. [...] Had she abused the Word of God; and was the spirit she had evoked her master now? (*ibid.*, 97-98)

Corroborating what Hughes argues, that sensation fictions “reveal a recurrent preoccupation with the loss or duplication of identity” (Hughes 1980, 21), the more Barbara Vernon perceives Maud as a threat, the more she descends into madness. Nevertheless, even though Barbara’s *doppelgänger* is increasingly evident, she deftly maintains the guise of a classy woman in control of her instincts: “with a womanly weakness she walked to the mirror close by, and looked into it, and perhaps was satisfied that traces of this agitation were not very striking” (Le Fanu 1982, 120). Resembling Miss Havisham in Dickens’ *Great Expectations*, the diabolical matriarchy of *The Rose and the Key*, despite her wealthy position in society, is an instance of ‘fallen woman’, “bearer of corruption and disease” (Pykett 1992, 154). “As a rule, the brain does not lead. It is the instrument and the slave of desire. [...] It is the desire that governs the will, and the will the intellect” (Le Fanu 1982, 193), and Barbara “has a strong will”, “she has the appearance of coldness, and she is secretly passionate and violent” (*ibid.*, 126). Akin to “prostitutes, unmarried women who engage in sexual relations with men, victims of seduction, adulteresses, as well as

variously delinquent lower-class women" (Anderson 1993, 2), in the eyes of readers Barbara is a woman spoiling Victorian 'purity'.

Having built her existence on numerous secrets that sour her feelings, Barbara not only has a double personality and a strong dislike for her daughter, but she also has a covert son, Elwyn Howard, who is attracted to Maud, and both are wholly unaware of their kinship. The incestuous relationship and the plausible eventuality of a marriage between the two consume Barbara, who crumbles under the burden of her internal conflicts. Pictures of a tragedy take shape and Barbara's devotion to God is no longer of use. For although Lady Vernon has a strong belief in God, her prayers fail to give her relief and she surrenders to the Evil:

[...] a woman of her strong will, pride, and ability, could not be very long incapacitated, and in a little time she resolved upon several things. She shut the big Bible, that still lay open, with an angry clap. 'I have asked for help, and it is denied to me,' she said fiercely to herself, with an odd mixture of faith and profanation. (Le Fanu 1982, 199)

Le Fanu confronts his readers with a woman consumed by resentment and anger. Much like fears of human decay were corroding Victorians from within, Barbara's psychic integrity is undermined by irrepressible forces of hatred towards her daughter.

For years she had things to vex her. She had more; secret afflictions and dreadful recollections, of which but one person now living, expect herself, knew nothing. For years she had been silently, though unconsciously, battling with remorse. She was battling with the same fiend now. But was not Satan writhing under her heel? [...] What were these internal questionings, doubtings, and upbraidings, but the malignant sophistries of the Evil One accusing the just? (ibid., 257)

Engulfed in an endless spiral of lies and deceit that she has concocted over the years, the sinister matriarch teams up with some professionals working in the field of psychiatry: as Pamela K. Gilbert claims, "by the 1860s, doctors are everywhere in the fiction, but their uncanny ability to read symptoms and unearth secrets, as well as their drive to knowledge for their own sake, begins to have a darker side" (2007, 187). First of all, Barbara can count on the help of Dr Antomarchi, the forbidding and austere administrator of a psychiatric hospital, a stern man that can inspect his patients' minds, penetrate their

fathomless depths, and understand their secret codes. He is “a marble-featured man, with strange eyes, and black, square beard” (Le Fanu 1982, 297). Dr Antomarchi is an extremely powerful mesmerist, a satanic man that runs an asylum called ‘Glarewoods’. No stranger to the mesmeric shows that in the late-Victorian age spread across Britain and Ireland, Le Fanu portrays Dr Antomarchi as a brilliant mesmerist who can infiltrate and manipulate women’s psyches like clay in the hands of a skilful potter. And, in this case, it is Maud’s mind that Dr Antomarchi is called upon to mould.

Persuaded that she is going on a courtesy visit to Lady Mardyke’s luxurious mansion, Maud finds herself imprisoned in what turns out to be nothing but the *trompe l’oeil* of Lady Mardyke’s residence. Maud soon realises that she has been tricked by her perfidious mother and relegated to Dr Antomarchi’s asylum, a ‘horrible place’ with “lots of hands and eyes everywhere; and good locks, and safe windows, and high walls” (*ibid.*, 366). Confined in this inhospitable place, Barbara experiences fears that, through Le Fanu’s pen, become almost palpable on the reader’s part.

She heard other men’s voices, now in low and vehement dialogue, and sounds of shuffling feet, of gasping, tugging, and panting, as if a determined struggle were going on; once or twice a low laugh was heard; and then came a yell loud and long, which seemed passing further and further away, and was soon lost quite in the distance; a door clapped, and the place was silent. (*ibid.*, 303)

Le Fanu catapults us into Antomarchi’s psychiatric hospital and offers a minute description of Maud’s feelings. Maud “sat down trembling, and then got up, pressing her hands to her temples, with a terrible look of helplessness” (*ibid.*, 347). Helpless victim of her mother and of Antomarchi’s mistreatment, Miss Vernon realises that her stay at Glarewoods would drive her mad: “I shall go mad. I can’t stay here! I’ll not eat or drink – I’ll find a way, some way, a short way. Oh, mamma! You’ll be sorry, then. [...] I can’t be imprisoned here. I’m not a slave” (*ibid.*, 346). Nevertheless, in spite of her burning anger, Maud soon understands that she has to renounce her hostility, accept her imprisonment and adopt what Alison Milbank has called a “passive conformity” (1992, 168) to the ironclad rules of Dr Antomarchi, who cautions her:

It is my duty to treat you with what skill I possess; it is yours to submit; and submit you shall. I have heard of your language, of your violence, of your covert menace of forcing to escape, or committing self-destruction. Sufficient precautions are taken in this establishment to render that crime impracticable.

There are people confined here whose desire to commit suicide amounts to a lust. They hope for nothing else, they dream of nothing else [...] Violence here, leads necessary to repression; customary, in the most trifling particulars, to increased restraint; and angry language, as tending in certain nervous states to produce corresponding action, necessarily to a treatment dispensed with before, that is intensely disagreeable. This, you understand, is not punishment; it is precaution, and a process, though painful, strictly of a sanatory kind. (Le Fanu 1982, 353)

And it is precisely at this point of the narrative that Le Fanu starts shedding light on the atrocities performed in a great deal of Victorian asylums at the expense of many patients. By probing the blurry line between psychiatric treatment for curative aims and psychiatric treatment for punitive purposes, Le Fanu confronts us with the ruthless cruelty of Dr Antomarchi, a torturer of his defenceless patients, who are forced into atrocious harassment and continuous punishments.

Exploiting the widespread fascination among his contemporaries with asylums, in *The Rose and the Key* Le Fanu displays his knowledge of the ways in which the insane were often treated in psychiatric hospitals, a universe largely spectacularised by popular culture and the press, to which Le Fanu himself “for a long period devoted his energies” (Ellis 1931, 156). Focusing on Dr Antomarchi and the treatment that the latter imposes on the Duchess of Falconbury, Le Fanu offers a rich window on the methods most frequently employed in late-Victorian asylums to soothe women’s nerves: the shower-bath. In the nineteenth century, cold showers or baths were not simply used for cleansing and cleaning patients: hydrotherapy was an excellent way to cool down hot minds. In Victorian asylums, patients could be subjected to prolonged jets or immersions in water, which had the power to convert the patient’s delirious outbursts into paralysing fears of drowning. As stressed by Foucault, “from the end of the seventeenth century onwards, the cure by baths was [...] the most common form of treatment for insanity” (2006, 314): a cold shower-bath had a “psychological effect of a disagreeable surprise”, in the sense that it “broke the chain of thoughts and changed the nature of feelings” of the delirious self; cold showers, not unlike cold baths, ended up becoming a “usual punishment meted out by the simple police tribunal that permanently sat in the asylums” (*ibid.*, 501).

Foucault’s assertions are fully confirmed by the following extracts, where Le Fanu describes a sort of attempt on the part of the asylum personnel to drown

the Duchess during a bath at Glarewoods. Offering his readers scenes of unutterable inhumanity, Le Fanu presents the helplessness of the Duchess who is treated as if she were a criminal to be punished for her unforgivable crimes.

Poor thing! her grace was in a sorry plight, strapped down in the iron chair, and, spite of all her writhings and tuggings, unable to alter her position by a hair's-breadth, or even to jolt one leg of the heavy chair the smallest fraction of an inch off the ground. [...] For a time the fury of the patient seemed to increase. It is was not long. In Maud's ears, the monotonous down-pour grew louder and louder, as minute after minute passed. The yells became sobs, and the sobs subsided. And still the rush of water thundered on. 'Oh! my God! She's drowning!' cried Maud. [...] After a time there was a little sob; and after an interval another, and then a great sigh, and then again another and another, long-drawn as that with which life departs. There must be the agonies of drowning in all this; worse than common drowning, drowning by a slower suffocation, and with a consciousness horribly protracted. And now there is the greater agony of recovery. The doctor had returned to the side of the poor duchess, who was now breathing or rather sighing, heavily, and staring vaguely before her. (Le Fanu 1982, 356-58)

To make the novel more faithful to the world of his female readers, after recounting the torture to which the Duchess is victim, Le Fanu pauses the narrative and offers an overview of mid-Victorian psychiatry and of the legislative apparatus intended to regulate the lives of patients in psychiatric institutions. Stressing that "the peculiar use of the shower-bath in the treatment of insane is no fiction" (Le Fanu 1982, 359) and referring to the Commissions in Lunacy – instituted by the *Lunatic Asylums Act* of 1845, – Le Fanu turns his novel into an occasion of social denunciation by pointing out that:

[...] the Commissioners in Lunacy preferred an indictment against the medical superintendent of an English asylum, for having, as they alleged, caused the death of a pauper patient, by subjecting him to a continuous shower-bath of *thirty minutes'* duration, and for having administered to him, soon after his removal from the bath, and whilst in a state of vital depression, a dose of white-coloured mixture, alleged to have contained two grains of tartar emetic. The physician in this case resembled Antomarchi in no respect, except in being a man of attainments and experience. [...] His theory was this, that in the awfully depressing malady of madness, if a patient is 'violent,' 'noisy,' 'excited,' and 'destructive,' 'quiet' and 'docility' are legitimately to be induced by 'overpowering' him, and 'prostrating the system,' by a continuous shower-bath of monstrous duration, followed up on his release from the bath by a nauseating emetic, still further to exhaust an already prostate system. This practice is no longer countenanced by the faculty. (*ibid.*)

Evil Feminine and Untamed Nerves:  
Sensationalism in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *The Rose and the Key*

This narrative break serves Le Fanu to move away – at least for a few lines – from his role as a novelist and recover his past days as a journalist, a sharp columnist who, in *The Rose and the Key*, is busy inspecting the late-Victorian psychiatric system in order to bring to light its darkest sides and its cruellest procedures. The novel thus turns out to be a clear-cut critique on Le Fanu's part of the dreadful treatments that patients in asylums had to endure on a daily basis and a bitter realisation that, for many of them, psychiatric hospitals had become for many nothing but dead-end prisons. As argued by Milbank, in *The Rose and the Key*, Le Fanu shows a society that “does not merely shut its awkward women in madhouses but is itself one giant system of repression and control” (1992, 167). Besides dealing with the ease with which late-Victorian alienists could be bribed, Le Fanu forcefully comments on the inability of the Commissioners of Lunacy to oversee asylums and verify the mental derangement of the exorbitant number of patients locked up in psychiatric institutions throughout the country. Dazed because of hypnosis, Maud is in fact unable to provide clear answers to the questions of the Commissioners, and her disarray can only but reinforce the (phoney) diagnosis of psychic instability. Looking at Maud's plight through a feminist lens and emphasising that the accusation of madness often invalidated any attempt on the part of the accused to prove its actual untruthfulness, Le Fanu depicts the young heiress of Vernon's family as an icon of the numerous inconvenient women that, victims of evil relatives, were compelled to spend the rest of their lives within the walls of a Victorian asylum: as Gilbert observed, “the only thing more frightening [...] than being mad was being diagnosed and treated for it” (2007, 190).

Visited by Dr Damian, a *deus ex machina*, Maud is eventually freed from the label of madness: there is no trace of psychic fragility in her. “Trembling, Lady Vernon sat down. There is always a ‘devil’s advocate’ to pervert the motives and distort the conduct of the saints, and hers had just been with her” (Le Fanu 1982, 391). Rejected by her daughter, Lady Vernon has ultimately to come to terms with her filthy consciousness:

The great and faultless Lady Vernon is by this time cooling and stiffening rapidly, on the sofa, a shawl over her feet, her head propped with the pillow, and something under her chin to close her mouth. [...] The tints on her cheeks fade naturally into the proper hue of death [...]. Her large grey eyes are now, one at least, quite shut; there is a little glitter perceptible under the lashes of the other. This solitary lady, with one great and untold affection among the

living, one passionate affection among the dead, is more alone than ever now.  
(*ibid.*, 429)

Recalling what Brantlinger has remarked, that the best sensation novels are novels with a secret, *The Rose and the Key* is a novel that abounds in family secrets and mysteries and presents itself as a paradigm of the sensation mania that spread in mid-Victorian society. Although in *Uncle Silas* Le Fanu attempted to distance himself from sensationalism by evoking an older tradition attributable to Walter Scott, a few years later, in *The Rose and the Key*, Le Fanu rode on the fame of sensation novels and exploited their ability to capture readers' attention. I contend that *The Rose and the Key* makes clear that Le Fanu could boast an enviable literary versatility and a remarkable capacity to weave secrets, mystery, insanity, fiction and reality, to the point of creating narratives that could catch the attention also of those readers who "would have no liking for the ordinary sensation novel" (Ellis 1931, 178).

In conclusion, I agree with Ellis who, in the early-1930s, suggested that in *The Rose and the Key* Le Fanu "in certain measure resembles the methods of his great sensational and contemporary rival who wrote *The Woman in White*" (1931, 171). *The Rose and the Key* reveals that J. Sheridan Le Fanu was a skilful sensationalist and an outstanding explorer of his characters' minds and innermost secrets. I suggest that what Tatiana Kontou has rightly observed regarding *Uncle Silas* – that "the novel contradicted the author's romance intentions by becoming one of his most sensation tales" (2007, 143), – can also be claimed for *The Rose and the Key*, a novel that, through a composite interplay of projections from fiction and late-Victorian reality, offers itself as an exemplary sensation novel and as a harsh critique of a faulty and highly corruptible psychiatric system.

Evil Feminine and Untamed Nerves:  
Sensationalism in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *The Rose and the Key*

## References

- Allen, Emily. 2011. "Gender and Sensation". In *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*. Ed. by Pamela K. Gilbert, 401-13. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Anderson, Amanda. 1993. *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces. The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Ascari, Maurizio. 2007. *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction: Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Braddon, Mary Elizabeth. 2012 [1862]. *Lady Audley's Secret*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. 1982. "What is 'Sensational' About the 'Sensation Novel'?". *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 37 (1): 1-28.
- Carter, Ronald, and John McRae. 2001. *The Routledge History of Literature in English, Britain and Ireland*. New York: Routledge.
- Pykett, Lyn. 2001. "Sensation and the Fantastic in the Victorian Novel". In *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*. Ed. by Deirdre David, 192-211. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Eagle Russett, Cynthia. 1989. *Sexual Science. The Victorian Construction of Womanhood*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Ellis, Stewart Marsh. 1931. *Wilkie Collins, Le Fanu and Others*. London: Constable & Co Ltd.
- Foucault, Michel. 2006 [1961]. *History of Madness*. New York: Routledge. [English translation by Jean Khalfa and Jonathan Murphy].
- Gilbert, Pamela K. 2007. "Sensation Fiction and the Medical Context". In *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*. Ed. by Andrew Mangham, 182-95. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hughes, Winifred. 1980. *The Maniac in the Cellar. Sensation Novels of the 1860s*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Jones, Anna Maria. 2011. "Sheridan Le Fanu". In *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*. Ed. by Pamela K. Gilbert, 269-80. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Kontou, Tatiana. 2007. "Sensation Fiction, Spiritualism and the Supernatural". In *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*. Ed. by Andrew Mangham, 141-53. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Le Fanu, Joseph Sheridan. 1982 [1861]. *The Rose and the Key*. New York: Dover Publications Inc.

- Le Fanu, Joseph Sheridan. 2001 [1864]. *Uncle Silas*. London and New York: Penguin Classics.
- Macdonald, Tara. 2007. "Sensation Fiction, Gender and Identity". In *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*. Ed. by Andrew Mangham, 127-40. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McNees, Eleanor (ed.). 2006. *The Development of the Novel, Volume II, The Nineteenth-Century Novel*. Mountfield: Helm Information Ltd.
- Milbank, Alison. 1992. *Daughters of the House. Modes of the Gothic in Victorian Fiction*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pykett, Lyn. 1992. *The 'Improper' Feminine. The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Regan, Stephen (ed.). 2001. *The Nineteenth Century Novel. A Critical Reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Rowbotham, Judith, and Kim Stevenson (eds). 2016. *Behaving Badly: Social Panic and Moral Outrage – Victorian and Modern Parallels*. New York: Routledge.
- Showalter, Elaine. 1977. *A Literature of Their Own. British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. London: Virago Press.

Cristina Gamberi

Università degli Studi di Bologna  
[cristina.gamberi2@unibo.it](mailto:cristina.gamberi2@unibo.it)

## Il dilemma autoriale fra *genre* e *gender*. Il caso di “A Sketch of the Past” di Virginia Woolf

### ABSTRACT:

*The authorial dilemma between genre and gender: the case of “A Sketch of the Past” by Virginia Woolf*  
The present article proposes a fresh reading of “A Sketch of the Past”, the unfinished autobiographical piece written between 1939 and 1940 by Virginia Woolf. By retracing the genealogy of Woolf’s main texts through which the reflection on female authorship in relation to the autobiographical genre is articulated, the analysis aims to highlight how its meta-reflective quality and its strong experimental component contribute to turn “A Sketch of the Past” in one of the most mature literary outcomes in life writing. By inheriting the restless dissatisfaction with the tools available, and by experimenting with strategies and practices, the piece represents an unprecedented inner self-exploration, where Woolf revises the notion of modernist intimacy. Finally, my hypothesis is that the material conditions in which the piece was written, and the history of its posthumous publication have contributed to free Woolf from social and familial pressures and the invisible censors she was surrounded.

KEYWORDS: Virginia Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past”, autobiography, gender, genre.

### 1. Virginia Woolf e il dilemma dell’autobiografia

In una lettera datata 24 dicembre 1940, Virginia Woolf condivide con la compaesana e amica Ethel Smyth una acuta quanto illuminante considerazione sul difficile legame che intercorre fra scrittura autobiografica e soggetto scrivente, indicando come la voce femminile non disponga ancora di generi discorsivi che le

permettano di restituire la propria esperienza, a differenza di quanto accade alle voci maschili che possono attingere a schemi letterari consolidati e autorevoli:

I was thinking the other night that there's never been a woman's autobiography. Nothing to compare with Rousseau. Chastity and modesty I suppose has been the reason. Now why shouldn't you be not only the first woman to write an opera, but equally the first to tell the truth about herself? But the great artist is the only person to tell the truth. I should like an analysis of your sex life as Rousseau did his. More introspection. More intimacy. (Woolf 1975-1980, 453)

È a partire dall'affermazione paradossale secondo cui non sono ancora state scritte autobiografie di donne – affermazione ancora più irriverente se si tiene conto che viene rivolta a una autrice prolifico come Ethel Smith che ha già pubblicato numerosi volumi autobiografici – che Virginia Woolf sancisce l'intrinseca differenza che intercorre fra la scrittura autobiografica maschile, qui esemplificata da *Les Confessions* di Jean-Jacques Rousseau, e lo scrivere fedelmente la vita di una donna. Quest'ultima, sembra suggerire Woolf, non si può infatti dare attraverso i convenzionali canoni maschili laddove a entrare in gioco sono quei legami imposti dai dettami sociali, invisibili quanto interiorizzati, che rispondono ai nomi di “chastity” e “modesty”, e che costituiscono un ostacolo alla piena rappresentazione del sé femminile sulla scena pubblica.

L'aporia che consegna all'amica Smith costituisce in realtà l'esito di un lungo quanto articolato percorso di riflessione sullo statuto dell'autobiografia che accompagna la scrittrice per tutta la sua carriera letteraria. Alcuni studiosi non hanno esitato a definire questa attenzione di Woolf una vera e propria “abiding obsession with autobiography” (Albright 1984, 1). Che si tratti di osessione non esente da una certa ambivalenza e resistenza lo si vedrà nelle pagine successive, ma è indubbio che il tentativo di Woolf di scrivere quelle che chiamò in vario modo le sue memorie o la storia della sua vita o l'autobiografia o la storia della sua famiglia divenne un progetto che durò tutta la vita, dall'infanzia alla giovinezza fino alla maturità, e che non solo rimase incompiuto alla sua morte, ma ebbe un carattere discontinuo (Zwerdling 2003). Questi elementi trovano l'esito più compiuto e maturo nella stesura di “A Sketch of the Past”, un'opera composta tra l'aprile del 1939 e il novembre 1940 durante gli ultimi anni di vita della scrittrice, che vede la luce solo nel 1976 all'interno di *Moments of Being. Unpublished Autobiographical Writings of Virginia Woolf*, il volume curato da Jeanne Schulkind che raccoglie altri quattro brani autobiografici

Il dilemma autoriale fra *genre* e *gender*.  
Il caso di “A Sketch of the Past” di Virginia Woolf

postumi redatti in un ampio arco di tempo, compreso fra il 1908 e il 1940. A questa prima edizione, si aggiunge la scoperta di una versione che comprende oltre venti pagine rispetto al testo originale, ora conservate presso la British Library, e che sono pubblicate nella seconda edizione significativamente rivista del 1985 (Woolf 1985; Zwerdling 2003).

Lo scritto nasce con l'intenzione di raccogliere le memorie della scrittrice in circostanze apparentemente estemporanee. Questo “sheaf of notes” dal carattere provvisorio, come lei stessa lo descrive, viene composto in forma di diario in attimi sottratti alla scrittura di opere ritenute più importanti ed è caratterizzato da un tono e un registro informali (Woolf 1985, 100). Malgrado ciò, “A Sketch of the Past” rimane un testo estremamente coerente nella sua complessità, che porta il segno di una grande maturità stilistica: rispetto ai precedenti esercizi autobiografici, infatti, la scrittura di queste memorie “provides a sharp contrast [...] So confident is she now, so much a master of her material” (Woolf 1985, 16). Secondo Hermione Lee, è questo testo a rappresentare “the true history” sull'infanzia e giovinezza di Woolf, dove la scrittrice sembra riuscire laddove non erano arrivati i suoi precedenti tentativi autobiografici, sia a causa delle inibizioni introiettate durante la formazione, sia perché le era mancata quella maturità per comprendere sotto vari punti di vista ciò che le era accaduto: “the ‘Sketch of the Past’ has the depth and experience of her whole writing life behind it, and is able to make a profound, detailed analysis of how she writes about herself” (Lee 1999, 19).

Il testo si rivela ancora più articolato se letto alla luce dell'incessante intreccio fra pratica autobiografica e scrittura saggistica. In dialogo con la genealogia di saggi che raccolgono le riflessioni su una serie di problemi di fondo che emergono più volte in numerosi suoi scritti, “A Sketch of the Past” eredita l'inquieta insoddisfazione di Woolf per gli strumenti a sua disposizione e il suo persistente desiderio di revisione metodologica. Per Laura Marcus, più che catturare la persona a cui sono successe le cose,

“A Sketch of the Past” set out to explore rather than answer this question. Her concern in the memoir is primarily with those intense experiences that she feels made her a writer: the vividness of her first memories; her powerful early responses to the rhythms of language; her capacity for receiving ‘shocks’ and for transmuting them into the stuff of art. (Marcus 1994, 4)

Anche per Gabrielle McIntire, il testo deve la sua importanza proprio perché riflette sullo statuto stesso del genere autobiografico: “[it] is hardly a

simple rendering of a linear personal history, and at stake in its opening pages is the very status and value of the genre” (McIntire 2018, 148). La centralità di “A Sketch of the Past” risiede quindi nella sua spiccata qualità meta-riflessiva: analizza le proprie procedure del ricordo, mentre registra le memorie stesse. Al contempo eredita i dilemmi sulla forma autobiografica e lavora su di essi sperimentando strategie e pratiche che permettono alla scrittrice una inedita auto-esplorazione interiore.

L’obiettivo di questo articolo è dunque di esplorare la convergenza di tre elementi cruciali. Il primo elemento guarda a “A Sketch of the Past” come l’esito dove confluiscano gli interrogativi formulati in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) legati alla posizione locutoria e alla storia dell’Io autobiografico, laddove per Woolf l’Io autobiografico è prima di tutto una voce autoriale maschile della tradizione canonica che, nel momento in cui narra una storia di vita lineare e coerente, cela la complessità identitaria delle donne (Sullam 2016). Lo scritto rivela infatti una qualità sperimentale in cui il soggetto delle memorie non si esaurisce in una unica posizione locutoria e non è riconducibile a un Io – che sembra essersi eclissato – ma viene sostituito attraverso l’orchestrazione di un dialogo polifonico in cui la voce della scrittrice professionista si intreccia a quella della donna che sta ricordando e a quella della bambina oggetto dei ricordi. Il secondo elemento mette in luce come in “A Sketch of the Past” trovino eco le preoccupazioni riconducibili alle possibilità stessa di rappresentare l’interiorità in relazione agli eventi della vita, che già avevano attraversato la riflessione di Woolf in “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown” (1924) – originariamente pubblicato su *The Criterion* con il titolo “Character in Fiction” – e in “The New Biography” (1927). Infine, il terzo aspetto riguarda la complessa interrogazione del soggetto che scrive dal punto di vista del *gender* in relazione alla sfera pubblica, ovvero la possibilità di narrativizzare la soggettività femminile e l’interiorità, questione cruciale per la scrittrice – e per tutto il modernismo – che sarà destinata ad avere un impatto duraturo a partire dalla pubblicazione postuma del testo (Woolfe 2011). Nelle pagine in cui Woolf racconta dell’abuso infantile subito dall’*half-brother* e ripercorre le memorie riferite al padre non solo emergono chiaramente ciò che Michèle Barrett ha definito “the material conditions which have structured women’s consciousness”, ma entrano in gioco anche quei legami imposti da dettami sociali, invisibili quanto interiorizzati, che rispondono ai nomi di “castità” e “modestia”, che costituiscono un ostacolo alla piena rappresentazione del sé femminile sulla scena pubblica e che Woolf aveva esplorato nella figura

dell'*Angel of the House* in “Professions for Women” del 1931 (Barrett 1979, 36). Si vuole qui avanzare l’ipotesi paradossale che siano proprio i limiti formali e le condizioni materiali in cui quest’opera è stata scritta a rappresentarne l’eccezionalità, contribuendo a farne un testo spartiacque nella rappresentazione del soggetto scrivente dal punto di vista del *gender*.

## 2. Eredità e resistenza a un genere famigliare

Virginia Woolf was critically engaged all her life in the problem of writing lives and, in particular, the problem of writing women’s lives. An important modernist writer of fiction, she also questioned from a feminist perspective traditional accounts of the subject and prefigured and even helped to influence present day debates about writing and sexual difference. (Anderson 2001, 92)

A sostenere che il problema della scrittura di vita attraversi criticamente tutta la riflessione e pratica letteraria di Woolf è la critica letteraria Linda Anderson che ne rintraccia la genesi negli anni formativi del suo apprendistato collocandola *in primis* all’interno delle coordinate famigliari. Gli Stephens avevano infatti scritto memorie per generazioni con l’obiettivo di preservare “the family legacy for posterity. Some were private documents, others intended for publication. The tradition began long before Woolf was born and persisted after her death” (Zwerdling 2003, 168). Ma è soprattutto in qualità di figlia di Sir Leslie Stephen che Woolf è esposta fin da giovanissima alla scrittura di vita, come ha illustrato Beth Rigel Daugherty nel suo approfondito lavoro sul rapporto fra Woolf e il padre Stephen, offrendo una analisi del rapporto tra i due (Daugherty 1999). Il padre è infatti il redattore dell’opera monumentale in 63 volumi intitolata *Dictionary of National Biography* (1885-1900), nonché del *Cornhill Magazine* all’interno del quale inizia la lunga serie di biografie e studi letterari raccolti in *Hours in a Library* (1874-1879) e *Studies of a Biographer* (1898-1902), a cui si aggiungono le quattro biografie curate all’interno della serie *The English Men of Letters* e dedicate a *Samuel Johnson* (1878), *Alexander Pope* (1880), *Jonathan Swift* (1882) e *George Eliot* (1902). Si tratta di una scrittura biografica che diventa anche autobiografica quando Stephen compone il *Mausoleum Book*, un testo personale di memorie indirizzato ai propri figli e composto nel 1895 dopo la morte della seconda moglie Julia, la madre di Virginia.

Come rilevano inoltre rispettivamente gli studi di Beth Rigel Daugherty e Kathrine C. Hill, l’educazione ricevuta principalmente a casa, al 22 di Hyde Park

Gate, dai genitori Leslie e Julia Stephen, permette alla giovane Virginia di accedere alla vasta biblioteca del padre scrittore che incoraggia la figlia a esercitarsi nello scrivere saggi storici, ma anche poesia e romanzi, ponendole frequentemente domande di stimolo che la aiutano a sviluppare un approccio critico che le sarebbe servito negli anni successivi come critica e saggista (Daugherty 1999; Hill 1981). Tuttavia, come sottolinea Daugherty, “while given the liberty to read what she liked, the books available in her father’s collection introduced her to a largely male world of letters and contained very few works by women” (Daugherty 2022, 30-1). Se è dunque attraverso l’influenza letteraria della famiglia e del padre che la scrittrice entra in contatto con la lettura e scrittura di vita, questo aspetto la porta tuttavia ad affinare una certa resistenza a molti dei suoi presupposti e valori (Anderson 2001; McIntire 2008). Secondo Alex Zwerdling, una difficoltà che Woolf si trova ad affrontare è quella dell’atteggiamento di reverenza, ingrediente centrale nella memorialistica, in particolare laddove la sua assenza contraddice l’ingiunzione tradizionale secondo cui *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*: “Virginia Woolf learned about the danger of reverence from her father’s memoir, its tendency to turn flesh and blood into a marmoreal object” (Zwerdling 2003, 171).

È dunque una relazione problematica quella della scrittrice con gli aspetti formali della tradizione canonica della scrittura autobiografica, in cui la riflessione sull’intersezione fra *genre* e *gender* ricopre un ruolo determinante. Nello spazio biografico e auto-biografico confluiscono sia le aspirazioni maschili sia la storica esclusione delle donne dalla scena letteraria, sia le difficoltà di auto-rappresentarsi delle donne di fronte allo sguardo e giudizio pubblico. Questa ambivalenza si ritrova anche nella pratica di scrittura: da una parte Woolf tiene assiduamente dei diari fin dall’infanzia e riporta più volte l’intenzione di affidare alla scrittura le proprie “memorie”, come testimoniano numerosi passaggi (le note scritte il 20 gennaio 1919; il 15 settembre del 1924; l’8 febbraio del 1926; e il 3 febbraio del 1927); tuttavia la scrittrice non arriva mai a tentare una vera e propria “autobiografia”. Si può rilevare che nonostante la propensione a registrare il passato in autobiografie romanzzate – si pensi in particolare a *To the Lighthouse*, in biografie come *Orlando: A Biography* o *Flush: A Biography*, e *Roger Fry: A Biography*, ognuna delle quali evidenzia il suo genere attraverso il sottotitolo – Woolf sembra comporre brani autobiografici e memorie solo a partire da una richiesta esterna.

Lo testimonia il brano “Reminiscences” (1908) che Woolf compone otto anni prima della pubblicazione del primo romanzo *The Voyage Out* e appartiene

Il dilemma autoriale fra *genre* e *gender*.  
Il caso di "A Sketch of the Past" di Virginia Woolf

dunque al periodo di apprendistato in cui, come sottolinea Jeanne Schulkind nella prefazione al volume *Moments of Being*, la giovane scrittrice si assegna regolarmente esercizi letterari che spesso assumono la forma di brevi saggi descrittivi da mostrare solo a pochi intimi. Si può dunque supporre che si tratti di componimenti pensati per suscitare reazioni e giudizi, nonché il divertimento di un pubblico ristretto di famigliari. Per questo, "Reminiscences" emula la tradizione familiare, rivolgendosi al primo figlio della sorella Vanessa, Julian, e prendendo in prestito dal testo paterno sia le scene che il linguaggio.

La scrittura autobiografica che nasce a partire da una richiesta esterna è all'origine anche di altri tre significativi scritti composti tra il 1920 e il 1936 per il Memoir Club, un gruppo di amici di lunga data: "22 Hyde Park Gate", "Old Bloomsbury" e "Am I a Snob?". Il Memoir Club – di cui fecero parte M. Forster, Duncan Grant, David Garnett, Maynard Keynes, Roger Fry, Saxon-Sydney Turner, Lytton Strachey, Vanessa e Clive Bell, Molly e Desmond MacCarthy, Adrian Stephen, e Leonard e Virginia Woolf – era nato riunendosi a intervalli irregolari per leggere ciascuno un capitolo di quella che sarebbe diventata un'autobiografia completa. Sebbene l'obiettivo si rivelò troppo ambizioso, è interessare sottolineare come inizialmente Woolf viva gli incontri del Memoir Club come un'occasione indesiderata e persino dolorosa a causa della esposizione di sé, come riporta la scrittrice nel suo diario il 18 marzo del 1920:

Leonard was objective & triumphant; I subjective & most unpleasantly discomfited. I dont [sic] know when I've felt so chastened & out of humour with myself – a partner I generally respect & admire. "Oh but why did I read this egotistic sentimental trash?" That was my cry, & the result of my sharp sense of the silence succeeding my chapter. It started with loud laughter; this was soon quenched; & then I couldn't help figuring a kind of uncomfortable boredom on the part of the males; to whose genial cheerful sense my revelations were at once mawkish & distasteful. What possessed me to lay bare my soul! (Woolf 1980, vol. II, 26)

L'interesse del brano risiede proprio nell'emergere di una consapevolezza sulla problematicità di una forma letteraria contraddistinta dall'imprescindibile esposizione allo sguardo pubblico e al tempo stesso da condizionamenti culturali invisibili che precludono, o per lo meno inceppano, la possibilità stessa per una donna di raccontare la propria vita. Le parole di Woolf raccontano del pericolo di testimoniare ad altri le rivelazioni più intime; parlano del senso di

profonda vulnerabilità quando si fa ingresso nel terreno della rivelazione pubblica; lasciano emergere il disagio di fronte allo shock delle “risate sguaiate” e della “noia” del genere maschile quando a parlare di sé è una donna. La reazione di Woolf sembra quella di rimproverarsi per il sentimentalismo, l’egocentrismo e l’essersi messa troppo a nudo, interiorizzando così le critiche esterne. È proprio questa esposizione nel rendere pubblici i propri pensieri privati a preoccupare la scrittrice, come testimonia un passaggio significativo del diario in cui Woolf appunta la propria reticenza a impegnarsi nell’autobiografia: “Also I’m uneasy at taking this role in the public eye afraid of autobiography” (Woolf 1980, vol. V, 141). Ed è questo il tema che la scrittrice andrà rielaborando nelle decadi successive sottolineando come la dimensione di genere giochi un ruolo determinante nella scrittura autobiografica femminile.

### **3. Interrogazione di un genere dal punto di vista del *gender***

Ne è una dimostrazione il saggio pubblicato postumo “Professions for Women” – versione scritta del discorso tenuto il 21 gennaio del 1931 di fronte alla National Society for Women Service – in cui si esamina il conflittuale sentimento di auto-coscienza censurata che deve operare la donna scrittrice: “I discovered that if I were going to review books I should need to do battle with a certain phantom” (Woolf 1986-2011, 642). Oltre alla necessità di uccidere quel fantasma vittoriano noto come *l'Angel of the House* – passo necessario ma non sufficiente per diventare un’artista – Woolf ricostruisce il complesso gioco di forze che agisce nelle donne che scrivono la loro vita, i diversi tipi di censura che devono affrontare, la difficoltà di negoziare la propria autorialità, la capacità di cui hanno bisogno per resistere ai giudizi critici basati su presupposti ideologici su ciò che è appropriato per una donna scrittrice e su ciò che non deve scrivere. In altre parole, scrivere in modo autobiografico significa affrontare la femminilità della sfera pubblica, una relazione d'amore con la convenzionalità.

È possibile identificare un altro momento significativo di questa genealogia circa la forma e gli interrogativi che assillano la sua arte in *A Room of One Own* (1929), uno scritto che secondo Laura Marcus tematizza e drammatizza “women’s exclusion – from education, the professions, the public sphere. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf represents the structures of inclusion and exclusion as fundamental to patriarchal society and its treatment of women: ‘I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse perhaps to

Il dilemma autoriale fra *genre* e *gender*.  
Il caso di “A Sketch of the Past” di Virginia Woolf

be locked in” (Marcus 2010, 150). Se nella storia immaginaria di Judith, la sorella di Shakespeare che desidera essere poeta ma si suicida dopo aver scoperto di essere incinta del figlio del direttore del teatro che l’aveva sedotta, trova eco l’ipotesi femminista sul silenzio delle donne e sul processo di svalutazione, rimozione e repressione dei loro doni, nella sezione del saggio dedicata alla mente androgina, l’autorialità della tradizione è interpellata specificatamente in relazione al soggetto autobiografico. Qui Woolf dà ironicamente corpo alla prima persona del racconto autobiografico, paragonando la lettera del pronome “I” a una sbarra dritta e scura che proietta un’ombra nello spazio testuale. Questo “Io”, che nutrito da secoli di studio e buon cibo domina la narrazione autobiografica con coerenza e stabilità, è infatti un Io tutto declinato al maschile che non lascia intravvedere cosa si cela nel paesaggio circostante: si tratta di un albero o una donna?

A shadow seemed to lie across the page. It was a straight dark bar, a shadow shaped something like the letter “I.” One began dodging this way and that to catch a glimpse of the landscape behind it. Whether it was indeed a tree or a woman walking I was not quite sure. Back one was always hailed to the letter “I.” One began to be tired of “I.” Not but what this “I” was a most respectable “I”; honest and logical; as hard as a nut, and polished for centuries by good teaching and good feeding. I respect and I admire that “I” from the bottom of my heart. But – here I turned a page or two, looking for something or other – the worst of it is that in the shadow of the letter “I” all is shapeless as mist. (Woolf 2008, 130)

La lettura di Woolf si muove dunque lungo una linea interpretativa che oggi si definirebbe di genere, dove si disvela quanto il racconto in prima persona sia l’espressione storica che il soggetto maschile ha costruito per auto-rappresentarsi con coerenza e linearità, ma anche per celebrarsi. Questa auto-rappresentazione cela inoltre la storica esclusione delle donne ad opera di una cultura patriarcale. Nello stesso saggio, e sempre con lo sguardo ironico che la contraddistingue, Woolf imputa infatti l’ossessione autobiografica degli uomini al loro desiderio di difendersi dalle richieste del movimento suffragista: “The Suffrage campaign was no doubt to blame. It must have roused in men an extraordinary desire for self-assertion” (Woolf 2008, 134). L’Io a cui Woolf sembra riferirsi sembra dunque anticipare quell’Io unico, unitario, libero, che parla “la legge del genere” e costituisce il soggetto autobiografico ufficialmente sancito (Derrida 1980, 57). Secondo la studiosa Elsa Höglberg,

Woolf is denouncing here the aggressive, “unmitigated masculinity” of her contemporaries from the British novelist who, like Mr A, writes in protest against the suffrage movement and other political gains by women in the public sphere, to the fascist poet (134). The complicity of this ‘I’ with a patriarchal, militaristic and imperialist civilisation sustained by “the instinct for possession, the rage for acquisition which drives [the patriarchs] to desire other people’s fields and goods perpetually; to make frontiers and flags; battleships and poison gas” (AROO 49–50) – a destructive and self-destructive civilisation constituted by violence and perpetual war – was to be more fully analysed in *Three Guineas* (1938). (Högberg 2020, 3)

L’ambiguità che genera il confronto con la storia del racconto autobiografico è costituita anche dalla difficoltà stessa di rappresentare il soggetto femminile. Woolf infatti non solo connette il genere autobiografico con una cultura e un modello patriarcale di stampo vittoriano, ma sembra anche suggerire come sia la forma stessa del genere letterario a precludere la possibilità di vedere e far entrare nell’orizzonte dello sguardo la soggettività femminile a causa della sua intrinseca molteplicità. In altre parole, Woolf non solo introduce una critica fallo-logocentrica con l’obiettivo di de-costruire le strategie narrative per smascherare il mandato maschile, ma rivela anche un certo scetticismo nei confronti della visione unitaria del soggetto ereditata dall’umanesimo a cui sembra fare da controcanto una nozione complessa di soggettività umana, richiamata nel brano sopraccitato dall’informità della nebbia. Come indica la studiosa Toril Moi, infatti, Woolf “reveals a deeply sceptical attitude to the male-humanist concept of an essential human identity”. La scrittrice propone dunque una sorta di soggettività kristeviana dove “le sujet est en procès”, la soggettività non è fissa ma è costantemente messa in discussione (Moi 1985, 9; Kristeva 1977, 55).

È nella produzione saggistica dedicata alla biografia, su cui Woolf aveva a lungo lavorato interrogandosi criticamente sulle modalità di rappresentazione dell’interiorità, che è possibile trovare alcune parziali risposte che verranno poi riprese in “A Sketch of the Past”: come dare conto della fluidità e molteplicità della soggettività eludendo la presenza fittizia di un narratore in prima persona? La lettura del saggio *Mr Bennett e Mrs Brown* (1924) permette di navigare attraverso la difficoltà e il dilemma di rappresentare l’interiorità del personaggio. L’interrogazione di Woolf circa l’onniscienza narrativa equivale a una messa in discussione del rapporto tra narratore e personaggio, osservatore e osservato, che secondo Woolf si articola nel romanzo realista prevalentemente come rapporto gerarchico e verticale, mentre nella sua scrittura modernista viene

Il dilemma autoriale fra *genre* e *gender*.  
Il caso di “A Sketch of the Past” di Virginia Woolf

trasformato in un incontro orizzontale tra due persone. Ciò che la scrittrice trova eticamente e politicamente problematico nel concentrarsi sui dettagli esterni piuttosto che su quelli psicologici nei romanzi di Arnold Bennett e H. G. Wells è la pretesa di questi scrittori di padroneggiare l'arte di scrivere personaggi di fantasia senza considerare le difficoltà che comporta la rappresentazione dell'interiorità. In “Character in Fiction” del 1924 l'autrice suggerisce come la creazione di personaggi “real, true, and convincing” da parte della romanziere sia un compito eticamente difficile: la vita interiore di coloro che incontriamo resiste alla conoscenza e alla descrizione, ma la sfida modernista consiste proprio nel riuscire a catturare il materiale e l'immateriale, il granito e l'arcobaleno, come lei stessa definisce la verità dei fatti e la personalità (Woolf 1986-2011, vol. 3, 421).

Il confronto con la tradizione vittoriana e la svolta costituita da Lytton Strachey e Harold Nicolson con *Eminent Victorians* e *Some People* sono infatti al centro della riflessione di Woolf che nel breve saggio “The New Biography” del 1927 indaga la possibilità di rappresentare la verità e la personalità del personaggio coniugando aderenza alla realtà e ricorso alla finzione letteraria. “The biographic “art” è presentata come “queer amalgamation of dream and reality, that perpetual marriage of granite and rainbow” (Woolf 1960, 155). L'essenza della biografia è plasmata da una miscela di granito dei fatti e di arcobaleno della personalità e per questo il biografo (e la biografa) non sono semplici cronisti di fatti, ma devono essere anche artisti dotati di potere sul proprio soggetto grazie alla combinazione di finzione e realtà.

Questa articolata genealogia è utile per comprendere come Woolf arrivi a scrivere le proprie memorie con un modello di scrittura di vita che re-visiona il discorso letterario e che rappresenta anche un tentativo di narrativizzare la soggettività femminile e l'intimità laddove il racconto di alcuni aspetti legati all'esperienza di donna, come ad esempio il corpo e la sessualità, sono ancora oggetto di scrutinio sociale. Ridiscutendo i limiti della concezione dell'intimità e dell'introspezione ereditati dall'epoca Vittoriana e che lei, così come per altre figure di Bloomsbury a lei coeve, avvertivano come un modello sempre più da superare, Woolf è anche in grado di esprimere il proprio impegno etico: “literary Bloomsbury made intimacy central to its work, interrogating its meaning and imagining models – both positive and negative – of intimate relations. [...] For Bloomsbury and its satellites, an examination of inwardness

means an examination of intimacy: they bring to life the ways in which inwardness is not manifested *in vacuo*" (Wolfe 2011, 3).

#### 4. “A Sketch of the Past”

La scelta sin dal titolo del termine “sketch” sembra suggerire *in primis* il desiderio di fornire un abbozzo dei propri ricordi prediligendo la convergenza fra parole e immagini e cancellando la distinzione tra scrittura e visione. Lo schizzo indica infatti l'avvicinamento fra la forma linguistica e la capacità di rappresentazione pittorica, elementi che per Woolf assumono un'importanza centrale nel rapporto tra scrittura e memoria. In questo senso, “A Sketch of the Past” offre uno spazio inedito per la creazione di immagini che dipendono dalla memoria e da essa assumono la struttura dei contenuti. È interessante notare come il termine “sketch” ritorni più volte negli scritti di Woolf, superando i confini del genere che di solito tengono separati la narrativa e i romanzi dai saggi e dalla critica, il saggio e la critica dalla biografia e dall'autobiografia.

It can be Lily Briscoe's painting in *To the Lighthouse* (1927), the period tableaux of *Orlando* (1928), the pictures of horror from the Spanish Civil War in *Three Guineas* or the scenes from the pageant of *Between the Acts*. But the sketch is also the method of apprehending and communicating history deployed by Woolf in her *Common Reader* articles and her essays on literary figures. Omnipresent and all-pervasive, the sketch achieves for Woolf that coincidence of method and style that marks such diverse and heterogeneous works as integral parts of an oeuvre. (Gaultieri 2000, 94)

E anche se “sketch” appare in diverse forme, si può ipotizzare come nel complesso svolga la funzione dell'equivalente visivo del testo in cui si trova, una sorta di riflesso allo specchio che concentra la narrazione attraverso un'immagine.

Il termine “sketch” denota inoltre il senso di una scrittura provvisoria, di note che nascono in modo estemporaneo, in una forma non compiuta e marginale. Come per altri scritti autobiografici di Woolf, il raccogliere le proprie memorie sembra nascere da una occasione. È infatti la sorella Vanessa Bell che incita Virginia a iniziare a scrivere le proprie memorie prima di diventare troppo vecchia per ricordare tutto:

Two days ago – Sunday 16th April 1939 to be precise – Nessa said that if I did not start writing my memoirs I should soon be too old. I should be eighty five,

Il dilemma autoriale fra *genre* e *gender*.  
Il caso di “A Sketch of the Past” di Virginia Woolf

and should have forgotten – witness the unhappy case of Lady Strachey.  
(Woolf 1985, 64)

L'*incipit* di queste memorie è dunque affidato a un evento esterno, una battuta quasi fortuita, che sembra estrapolata da una conversazione quotidiana ed informale. La scrittura è già scandita dal procedere cronologico delle date come in un diario che, come si vedrà, non sarà tuttavia tenuto con regolarità. Sono quindi elementi che nella loro eterogeneità conferiscono al testo un tono particolarmente intimo e colloquiale.

L'aspetto (in)formale è rafforzato dalla voce della stessa Woolf che dichiara come l'atto di scrivere queste memorie sia collocato tra altri scritti considerati più importanti. Sono note che nascono per fungere da sollievo e come digressione dal lavoro vero e proprio, la scrittura di *Roger Fry*, la biografia dedicata al pittore scomparso (1940). Nella prima pagina del suo resoconto personale, Woolf sembra volersi giustificare dell'atto stesso dello scrivere di sé spiegando come “[A]s it happens that I am sick of writing Roger's life, perhaps I will spend two or three mornings making a sketch” (Woolf 1985, 64). E definisce il proprio scrivere come “holiday” rispetto allo sforzo di ricreare sulla pagina la vita di Roger: “The drudgery of making a coherent life of Roger has once more become intolerable, and so I turn for a few days respite to May 1895” (ibid. 75, 85). Scrivere la propria narrazione del ricordo sembra dunque fornirle conforto per aver dovuto (ri)costruire il passato di un'altra persona.

In una voce successiva datata 8 giugno 1940, Woolf ricorda l'aver messo da parte lo schizzo per quasi un anno: è dal luglio del 1939 che la scrittrice non scrive più e sembra dimenticarsi delle proprie note, rischiando persino di gettare nel cestino quel “sheaf of notes” che fortuitamente ritrova insieme alle bozze su Roger Fry in un incidente curiosamente ambivalente. In questa *entry*, Woolf torna nuovamente sul tema della scrittura autobiografica e della funzione che questa ha svolto in relazione all'attività di scrittura più ufficiale: “it was to refresh myself from that antlike meticulous labour [of writing Fry's biography] that I determined to look for these pages” (Woolf 1985, 100). Infine, verso quello che è il termine delle memorie, Woolf appunta: “My book [Fry's biography] is out; and jaded and distracted I return to this free page” (ibid. 115).

In realtà, la composizione della biografia dell'amico si rivela essere un processo complesso e in parte frustrante. Woolf si trova di fronte a una serie di

pressioni da parte della famiglia e della cerchia di amici su cosa sia appropriato includere nel ritratto di Fry, finendo per essere

“an experiment in self-suppression” (LOVW, 6:456, 31 December 1940), by which she meant that the twin pressures of including the mass of primary documents and of excluding what might give offense ended by silencing her voice. Having agreed to write it, she was bound to finish. But she desperately needed a retreat, a text of her own. (Zwerdling 2003, 180)

In altre parole, nell'impossibilità di restituire un ritratto sincero e completo di Fry che sarebbe stato disapprovato dal ristretto pubblico che l'aveva richiesto, Woolf attinge all'onestà e sincerità per redigere le proprie memorie rivolgendole senza censura a un pubblico individuale, quello di se stessa. Si tratta dunque di una scrittura intermittente, provvisoria, aperta, che sembra assolvere una esigenza personale e professionale molto specifica. E contemporaneamente è un resoconto autobiografico e una critica alle convenzioni della scrittura di vita. Nell'evocare il passato attraverso lo schizzo, il titolo del testo delinea una vera e propria poetica della memoria in relazione alla formazione del soggetto. Se al centro di “A Sketch of the Past” c'è la narrativizzazione della soggettività, questo testo poggia sul paradosso radicale fra l'apparente informalità che caratterizza il tono delle memorie e una attenta quanto meticolosa interrogazione della struttura e della forma dove confluiscono le aporie del genere in relazione alla posizione delle donne. È proprio questa enfasi sulla difficoltà di articolare la propria esperienza all'interno del discorso letterario della tradizione che apre “A Sketch of the Past”:

There are several difficulties. In the first place, the enormous number of things I can remember; in the second, the number of different ways in which memoirs can be written. As a great memoir reader, I know many different ways. (Woolf 1985, 64)

Ancora una volta Woolf non si esime dall'esplorare la problematicità della posizione locutoria del soggetto delle memorie ed esplicita le perplessità sulle forme e i limiti della scrittura autobiografica già espresse nei saggi “Professions for Women” e *A Room of One's Own*. Come si è visto, Woolf aveva già tracciato in questi saggi i problemi sulla forma del racconto di vita interrogandosi su come dare conto della complessità del soggetto che ricorda. Anche in queste memorie si pone lo stesso interrogativo: come superare l'*empasse* rappresentato

Il dilemma autoriale fra *genre* e *gender*.  
Il caso di “A Sketch of the Past” di Virginia Woolf

da quell’Io consegnato dalla tradizione – che come si è sottolineato è declinato al maschile secondo dei parametri identitari dell’unicità e coerenza e del suo ruolo pubblico? A ciò si aggiunge anche l’insoddisfazione per i propri metodi, e per quelli della maggior parte degli scritti di memorie, su come rappresentare il soggetto: l’incapacità di immaginare il soggetto che spesso finisce per non essere davvero colto nella sua interiorità è infatti il principale difetto che Woolf imputa al genere delle memorie. Ma come dare conto di questa complessità, senza necessariamente ricorrere all’Io?

Per molti studi, questo testo costituisce un esempio di rappresentazione di un soggetto impalpabile ed elusivo, indicando implicitamente che la risposta agli interrogativi precedenti sia proprio la frammentarietà. Secondo la studiosa Shari Benstock, la forma discontinua adottata da Woolf è riconducibile ad una frammentazione identitaria che caratterizza la scrittura di vita di Woolf basata su una concezione di soggetto non unitario:

[...] these discontinuities are striking. They suggest that the entire project is poised over an abyss of selflessness, or, to put it differently, that the entire project is posed on the question of the self and its relation to language and storytelling strategies. (Benstock 1988, 22)

Anche per Daniel Albright, il progetto autobiografico di Woolf si poggia su una soggettività impalpabile, che esclude l’autrice:

Yet in this great autobiographical project one often feels that something is missing, and that the missing thing is Virginia Woolf. It is as if this vast self-attentiveness existed as much for camouflage and deception as for revelation. In the autobiographical writings, as in the novels, the reader is drenched in impalpable subjectivity, in which the subject is not a definite body or face but a watery medium. It is a kind of autobiography which seems, in mysterious ways, to exclude the author. (Albright 1984, 2)

Tuttavia, a ben vedere, si potrebbe ipotizzare che dietro la frammentarietà si celo un vero e proprio tentativo di sperimentazione in cui il soggetto delle memorie non si esaurisce in una unica posizione locutoria e non è riconducibile a un Io – che sembra essersi eclissato. A esso subentra l’orchestrazione di un dialogo polifonico in cui la voce della scrittrice professionista si intreccia a quella della donna che sta ricordando e a quella della bambina oggetto dei ricordi. Succede nella descrizione del primo ricordo dove l’Io sembra rifratto attraverso differenti *personae*.

I begin: the first memory. This was of red and purple flowers on a black ground-my mother's dress; and she was sitting either in a train or in an omnibus, and I was on her lap. I therefore saw the flowers she was wearing very close; and can still see purple and red and blue, I think, against the black; they must have been anemones, I suppose. Perhaps we were going to St Ives; more probably, for from the light it must have been evening, we were coming back to London. (Woolf 1985, 76)

La presenza fantasmatica della bambina è evocata attraverso un ricordo che è caratterizzato dalla visione telescopica propria dell'infanzia e dalla qualità frammentaria e non lineare di un istante rievocato come se fosse fuori dal tempo, restituendo la complessità di un episodio che Freud avrebbe classificato come “inessenziale”, ma che tuttavia funziona come indice fondante e formativo dello sviluppo psichico. Non è un caso, se il primo ricordo di vita è riconducibile alla madre, figura centrale in questo scritto, che è evocata attraverso un doppio distanziamento metonimico e un’immagine (il disegno dei “flowers” e poi del suo “dress”). Il ricordo è qualificato attraverso “I think”, “I suppose” e “Perhaps” per indicare una consapevolezza circa l’instabilità della memoria iniziale, mentre l’aggiunta del nome specifico dei fiori va chiaramente a indicare come questo sia stato aggiunto dopo la formazione del ricordo, forse nell’atto stesso di scriverlo: “they must have been anemones”. In questo passaggio iniziale Woolf sembra anche riprendere le considerazioni sull’intreccio fra verità e finzione presenti nel saggio “The New Biography” laddove non ha timore ad ammettere la qualità in parte finzionale delle sue stesse memorie che, se da una parte sembra minare alle fondamenta stesse di tutto il progetto e processo autobiografico, dall’altro richiama alla necessità di ricorrere al potere dell’arte per rievocare la vita del soggetto che si racconta.

Un passaggio successivo sembra confermare questa drammatizzazione suggerita dalla voce della scrittrice professionista, che consiste nell’inserire nel tessuto del testo la donna che è nel momento in cui sta scrivendo.

2nd May ... I write the date, because I think that I have discovered a possible form for these notes. That is, to make them include the present-at least enough of the present to serve as platform to stand upon. It would be interesting to make the two people, I now, I then, come out in contrast. And further, this past is much affected by the present moment. What I write today I should not write in a year's time. (Woolf 1985, 75)

Si assiste dunque a un continuo ripensamento delle strategie per raccontare le proprie memorie, attraverso la creazione di distanza e avvicinamenti che

permettono alla molteplicità identitaria di poter prendere parola e ricostruire il passato, ironizzando e riscrivendo le forme canoniche delle memorie.

## 5. Scrivere l'intimità

“A Sketch of the Past” ancora oggi costituisce uno spazio privilegiato per indagare ciò che Toril Moi aveva definito “the textual/sexual politics” di Virginia Woolf, ovvero la capacità di rendere visibile la propria visione politica attraverso scelte estetiche e poetiche, dove materia testuale e forma sono l'esito di una sempre più lucida visione sociale e politica che si va raffinando nel corso dei decenni e che emerge nei romanzi così come nei saggi (Moi 1985). Anche secondo Laura Marcus la produzione narrativa e quella saggistica di Woolf sono permeate da comuni strategie e intenti: “Nor can a strict line be drawn between her overtly feminist, ‘polemical’ works and her fiction. Her novels take up the images and imaginings of her pamphlets and essays; her ‘non-fiction’ uses strategies more often associated with fictional narrative” (2010, 150).

Queste memorie tracciano implicitamente un forte legame fra la dimensione personale e quella pubblica, rendendo leggibile il significato di intimità, come suggeriscono gli studi di Jessica Berman “Ethical Folds: Ethics, Aesthetics, Woolf” del 2004 e il volume *Virginia Woolf and the Ethics of Intimacy* di Elsa Höglberg del 2020, che dimostrano in modo convincente come la scrittura dell'intimità e dell'interiorità si configuri come un processo estetico, ma anche etico, attraverso “Woolf’s aesthetic configuration of interiority was a way of expressing ethical and political commitments” (Berman 2004; Höglberg 2020, 5). “A Sketch of the Past” narrativizza l'articolazione della soggettività femminile all'interno di uno spazio autobiografico che permette alla scrittrice di indagare la complessità dei legami familiari e raccontare le proprie esperienze sul corpo, esperienze sottaciute e socialmente non autorizzate, che all'epoca in cui Woolf le scrisse, sarebbero state narrazioni difficilmente dicibili sull'esperienza femminile.

Lo testimonia in modo emblematico il racconto di quello che è descritto come il primo contatto fisico a sfondo sessuale, ma che in realtà è la ricostruzione dell'abuso subito dall'*half-brother* Gerald Duckworth di dodici anni più grande:

I can remember the feel of his hand going under my clothes; going firmly and steadily lower and lower. I remember how I hoped that he would stop; how I

stiffened and wriggled as his hand approached my private parts. But it did not stop. His hand explored my private parts too. I remember resenting, disliking it —what is the word for so dumb and mixed a feeling? It must have been strong, since I still recall it. [...] I must have been ashamed or afraid of my own body. (Woolf 1985, 68–69)

La circostanza viene rievocata con una precisa esattezza, senza però che cause, circostanze ed effetti siano chiamati in causa. Nonostante ciò, Woolf sembra identificare questo momento come un evento fondativo giacché poche righe dopo aggiunge una considerazione sulla difficoltà di raccontare la personalità del soggetto a cui sono successi i fatti.

[...] [t]he problem that I touched on the first page; why it is so difficult to give any account of the person to whom things happen. The person is evidently immensely complicated. Witness the incident of the looking-glass. Though I have done my best to explain why I was ashamed of looking at my own face I have only been able to discover some possible reasons; there may be others; I do not suppose that I have got at the truth; yet this is a simple incident; and it happened to me personally; and I have no motive for lying about it. In spite of all this, people write what they call 'lives' of other people; that is, they collect a number of events, and leave the person to whom it happened unknown. (Woolf 1985, 68–69)

A differenza di quanto è stato proposto in altri studi (fra cui deSalvo 1989), qui non si vuole tentare di offrire una lettura della narrativa di Woolf a partire da questo primo trauma sessuale, né tantomeno si vuole indagare la questione relativa alla sessualità della scrittrice. Soffermandosi su questo ricordo, Woolf sembra suggerire due questioni: la prima è relativa a come le biografie ufficiali che si basano solo su fatti esteriori, spesso trascurino eventi apparentemente insignificanti che hanno invece un effetto duraturo sulla vita delle persone. Il definirlo “a simple incident” non toglie che lei stessa lo riconosca come un momento, nonché un ricordo, spartiacque della propria esistenza. Eppure, si tratta di un evento che una autobiografia tradizionale non includerebbe nel racconto di vita perché ritenuto poco rilevante, insignificante, troppo personale.

E proprio a quest’ultimo aspetto si lega la seconda considerazione, ovvero come esperienze ritenute insignificanti che segnano la vita di una donna, siano in realtà difficilmente confessabili perché rientrano nell’ambito in cui l’intimità si incontra con la dimensione prescrittiva del *gender*. In questo senso il racconto dell’abuso subito è da considerarsi come significativo perché rende visibile e leggibile la complessa relazione fra la dimensione prescrittiva del *gender* e le

Il dilemma autoriale fra *genre* e *gender*.  
Il caso di “A Sketch of the Past” di Virginia Woolf

condizioni letterarie che delimitano il genere autobiografico come luogo letterario storicamente deputato alla rappresentazione pubblica dell’Io. Se lo spazio della scrittura del sé costituisce un luogo dove poter riportare un evento che ha segnato la relazione con il proprio corpo, un evento che ha generato un senso di vergogna e sensazioni negative e di disagio, lo è a patto di riconoscere come per le donne questi temi siano inevitabilmente collegati anche alle pressioni dello scrutinio sociale, in cui identità di genere, corpo, sessualità e affetti sono plasmati all’interno di un campo non privo di tensioni.

Lo dimostra il confronto fra il brano appena citato e quanto Woolf scrive in relazione all’ambigua figura di George Duckworth in uno dei resoconti autobiografici destinati al Memoir Club dove la minaccia sessuale del *half-brother* viene sì esposta, ma con un tono beffardo che ne cela i dettagli e gioca consapevolmente con le ambiguità della parola “lover”: “Yes, the old ladies of Kensington and Belgravia never knew that George Duckworth was not only father and mother, brother and sister to those poor Stephen girls; he was their lover also” (Woolf 1985, 177). Le memorie della scrittrice destinate al pubblico selezionato della cerchia di Bloomsbury sembrano infatti seguire delle regole non scritte secondo cui il profondo coinvolgimento personale rischia di essere percepito come sentimentalismo e sdolcinezza, mentre il fare leva su una costruzione letteraria che sappia scioccare, intrattenere e criticare dei bersagli satirici socialmente autorizzati appare come l’unica strategia vincente. Nonostante il gruppo sia permeato da una pervasiva retorica della liberazione, l’esperienza erotica ma più in particolare la violenza subita – in questo caso di una donna che fa parte della cerchia di amici – rimangono inevitabilmente un argomento tabù nelle memorie di Bloomsbury.

La scoperta della versione successiva del manoscritto (ora conservata alla British Library e pubblicata nella seconda edizione significativamente rivista di *Moments of Being* del 1985) aggiunge inoltre venti pagine al testo originale inizialmente pubblicato, dove compare una descrizione del padre che nessun memoriale familiare degli Stephen di qualsiasi generazione avrebbe permesso. In “A Sketch of the Past” la scrittrice ritorna sul proprio dolore dopo la morte della madre e sulla propria rabbia impotente contro il comportamento tirannico del padre. In particolare, ne racconta le sfuriate che ogni settimana avevano luogo contro Vanessa, rea di non aver saputo gestire la casa in modo economico ed efficiente come aveva fatto la madre; ne descrive gli scatti d’ira, i maltrattamenti alla sorella, per poi dare voce alla propria furia repressa

rompendo finalmente il silenzio: “For not a word of what I felt – that unbounded contempt for him and of pity for Nessa – could be expressed. [...] If instead of words he had used a whip, the brutality could have been no greater” (Woolf 1985, 144-45). Secondo Laura Marcus, la centralità della relazione padre-figlia negli scritti di Woolf, che si trova anche in *Three Guineas*, è un tentativo di rappresentazione del patriarcato che non dimostra solo l’ossessione per la propria educazione vittoriana ma ha anche l’effetto di rivelare “the profound influence of the past on the present, and the ways in which each generation continues to live out and by the values, defences and world-views of the generation, or even generations, preceding its own. In this sense, we can never be fully present in and at our own times” (2010, 149).

In questa seconda versione, Woolf dedica anche lunghi passaggi in cui la figura paterna è l’esito ma anche il motore di un intero sistema di socializzazione che include il culto vittoriano del genio maschile che ne legittima il comportamento eccentrico, la ritualizzazione del lutto, il potere del *pater familias* e la costruzione della maschilità. In altre parole, Woolf descrive il funzionamento di quella che lei stessa definisce “that great patriarchal machine” che di fatto rappresentava un sistema premiale per i figli maschi ma escludente per le figlie femmine (Woolf 1985, 153). Qui è nuovamente interessante notare la capacità della scrittrice di rendere intellegibile il funzionamento di dinamiche sociali calandole nella concretezza e nel cuore della vita familiare, ovvero nel salotto:

The patriarchal society of the Victorian age was in full swing in our drawing room. It had of course many different parts. Vanessa and I were not called upon to take part in some of those acts. We were only asked to admire and applaud when our male relations went through the different figures of the intellectual game. [...] They played it with great skill. Most of our male relations were adept at that game. They knew the rules, and attached extraordinary importance to those who won the game. (ibid. 1985, 153)

Sebbene il desiderio di Woolf di cambiare le regole della scrittura autobiografica sia stato reale quanto urgente, la natura stessa delle occasioni che hanno fornito la cornice per i suoi precedenti scritti ha reso di fatto impossibile la possibilità di esplorare il soggetto delle memorie. Sia che si tratti dei volti degli amici in attesa di essere divertiti e intrattenuti sia che si tratti degli sguardi dei propri familiari, lo scrutinio sociale ha agito come forma di controllo e auto-censura nel racconto autobiografico della scrittrice. Questi ultimi passaggi citati di “A Sketch of the Past” indicano invece come Woolf sembra essersi

Il dilemma autoriale fra *genre* e *gender*.  
Il caso di “A Sketch of the Past” di Virginia Woolf

finalmente liberata dal vincolo dello scrutinio altrui avviando un processo di incessante autocoscienza dove si rivolge solo a se stessa, dove l'unico pubblico è lei stessa, o i suoi numerosi sé, e nessun altro. In altre parole, la scrittura autobiografica di Woolf sembra ostinatamente sostare su quella sottile linea di demarcazione fra pubblico e privato che ha agito da potente paradigma nella definizione dei ruoli dominanti di genere. Non è infatti possibile eludere le procedure di restrizione, pudore, elusione e silenzio – consapevoli e non, invisibili quanto interiorizzate – che sono imposte dai dettami sociali e rispondono ai nomi di *chastity* e *modesty* delimitando il confine di ciò che è ammissibile nella rappresentazione del sé femminile sulla scena pubblica. Modestia e castità, ma anche reverenza nei confronti delle generazioni precedenti e desiderio di compiacere un pubblico ristretto di amici intellettuali.

A ben vedere, si potrebbe avanzare l'ipotesi paradossale che siano proprio i limiti formali e le condizioni materiali in cui quest'opera è stata scritta a rappresentarne l'eccezionalità. Sono infatti le condizioni in cui il testo è stato scritto che, se da una parte sembrano costituirne la sua debolezza – incompiutezza, frammentarietà, informalità *in primis* – ne rappresentano di fatto la sua vera forza. “A Sketch of the Past” è un testo che non è destinato a essere pubblico né a essere pubblicato, è rivolto solo a se stessa e ciò consente a Woolf di non esercitare sulla propria scrittura una prima forma di censura, creando le condizioni per ridefinire i confini (leciti) della propria intimità. La consapevolezza del non dover pubblicare ciò che si sta scrivendo sembra sostenere la libertà per la scrittrice di sperimentare e testare. Queste note – che nascono come una formazione provvisoria e come scrittura estemporanea collocata tra altri scritti più importanti – celano al contrario la possibilità di aprire uno spazio dove fare emergere memorie laceranti del passato, che riescono finalmente a venire alla luce. Il contesto familiare e il tono informale con cui vengono redatte lasciano tuttavia emergere la complessa eredità che porta l'impronta di una genealogia complessa dove convergono gli interrogativi sulle forme di scrittura dell'Io.

In “A Sketch of the Past” la poetica e la politica testuale di Woolf segnano una linea di demarcazione nella scrittura di vita del XX secolo. La pubblicazione del volume nel 1976, trentacinque anni dopo il suicidio di Woolf, coincide con un momento di grande espansione del movimento femminile contemporaneo e con la sfiducia nei confronti di una tradizione letteraria dominante. L'opera viene accolta dalla riflessione femminista

perché sembra offrire una potente alternativa alla storia ufficiale e perché ridiscute i presupposti di ciò che dovrebbe essere considerato più significativo nella scrittura autobiografica. La pubblicazione di quest'opera è stata infatti un momento spartiacque per inaugurare un nuovo paradigma di teorie che spostando sempre più l'attenzione verso le questioni relative all'auto-rappresentazione e alla soggettività, alla verità e alla confessione, hanno ridefinito l'autorialità femminile all'interno e all'esterno del testo (Moi 1985; Costello 1991; Felman 1993; Smith 1993).

## Bibliografia

- Albright, Daniel. 1984. "Virginia Woolf as Autobiographer". *Kenyon Review* 6 (4): 1-17.
- Anderson, Linda. 2011. *Autobiography*. New York - London: Routledge.
- Barrett, Michèle (ed.). 1979. *Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing*. London: Women's Press.
- Benstock, Shari. 1988, *The Private Self. Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*. London: Routledge.
- Berman, Jessica. 2004. "Ethical Folds: Ethics, Aesthetics, Woolf". *Modern Fiction Studies*. 50 (1): 151-72.
- Costello, Jeanne. 1991. "Taking the 'Woman' Out of Women's Autobiography: The Perils and Potentials of Theorizing Female Subjectivities". *Diacritics* 21: 124-34.
- Daugherty, Beth Rigel. 1999. "Learning Virginia Woolf: Of Leslie, Libraries and Letters". In *Virginia Woolf and Communities: Selected Papers from the Eighth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*. Eds Jeanette McVicker and Laura Davism, 10-17. New York: Pace University Press.
- Daugherty, Beth Rigel. 2022. *Virginia Woolf's Apprenticeship: Becoming an Essayist*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1980. "The Law of Genre". *Glyph* 7: 202–29.
- DeSalvo, Louise. 1989. *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on her Life and Work*. London: Women's Press.
- Felman, Shoshana. 1993. *What Does a Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Gualtieri, Elena. 2000. *Virginia Woolf's Essays: Sketching the Past*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Il dilemma autoriale fra *genre* e *gender*.  
Il caso di "A Sketch of the Past" di Virginia Woolf

- Hill, C. Katherine. 1981. "Virginia Woolf and Leslie Stephen: History and Literary Revolution". In *PMLA*, 96(3): 351-62.
- Högberg, Elsa. 2020. *Virginia Woolf and the Ethics of Intimacy*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1977. *Prologue*. Paris: Seuil.
- Jelinek, Estelle. 1980. *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press.
- Lee, Hermione. 1999. *Virginia Woolf*. New York: Vintage.
- Lee, Hermione. 2009. *Biography: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Marcus, Laura. 1994. *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.
- Marcus, Laura. 2010. "Woolf's Feminism and Feminism's Woolf". In *The Cambridge companion to Virginia Woolf*. Ed. by Susan Sellers, 142-79. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McIntire, Gabrielle. 2018. *Modernism, Memory, and Desire. T.S Eliot and Virginia Woolf*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moi, Toril. 1985. *Sexual/Textual Politics. Feminist Literary Theory*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Stanford Friedman, Susan. 1992. "Virginia Woolf's Pedagogical Scenes of Reading: The Voyage Out, The Common Reader, and Her Common Readers". *Modern Fiction Studies*, 38(1): 101-25.
- Stanford Friedman, Susan. 2016. "A Room of One's Own in the World: The Pre-life and After-life of Shakespeare's Sister". In *A Companion to Virginia Woolf*. Ed. by Jessica Berman, 189-202. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.
- Smith, Sidonie. 1993. *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Sullam, Sara. 2016. *Tra i generi: Virginia Woolf e il romanzo*. Milano: Mimesis.
- Woolf, Virginia. 1960. *Granite and Rainbow*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Woolf, Virginia. 1975-80. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. Eds Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, London: Hogarth. 6 vols.
- Woolf, Virginia. 1980 [1920]. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Ed. by Anne Olivier Bell. New York: Harcourt. 5 vols.

- Woolf, Virginia. 1985. *Moments of Being: Autobiographical Writings*. Ed. by Jeanne Schulkind, New York: Harcourt.
- Woolf, Virginia. 1986-2011. *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*. Eds Andrew McNeillie (vols. 1-4) and Stuart N. Clarke (vols. 5-6), Hogarth. 6 vols.
- Woolf, Virginia. 2008 [1929]. *A Room of One's Own*. Ed. by Morag Shiach, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wolfe, Jesse. 2011. *Bloomsbury, Modernism, and the Reinvention of Intimacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zwerdling, Alex. 2003. "Mastering the Memoir: Woolf and the Family Legacy." *Modernism/modernity*, 10 (1): 165-88.

Nasser Ismail

Università degli Studi di Genova  
[nasser@unige.it](mailto:nasser@unige.it)

## The Book in the Professional and Social Life of Scholars and Literati in the Mamluk Period

### ABSTRACT:

The availability of book materials in conjunction with a considerable increase in the number of schools, as well as the enlargement of the class of ‘*ulama*’ devoted to research, aspiring to an academic-bureaucratic career and eager for prestige and recognition, contributed to a greater articulation of the professional and social identity of the Mamluk scholar. This article aims to shed light on how the consolidation of the culture of the book and its related practices may have played a significant role not only in defining the intellectual and social identity of the Mamluk scholar and of his professional profile, but also in influencing the dynamics of cohesion and competition among the members of this group.

KEYWORDS: Mamluk, book, bibliophile, ‘ulamā’, libraries.

### 1. Introduction

Although the spoken word dominated the intellectuals’ frame of mind in the classical Arab-Islamic world and orality was regarded as the most authentic channel of communication (Gheretti 2006, 71), J. Pedersen noted in his essay on the importance of the book in the Arab tradition that “in no other religion does the book play such role as it does in Islam” (1984, 12). Other scholars are of the same opinion and perceive Islam as a “text-based/focused culture” (Bloom 2001, 93). They attribute the building of the largest civilisation of the book in the pre-industrial world to the literatures which developed in the Islamic world starting

from the seventh century (Lancioni 2003, 233). In the introduction to his volume *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands*, K. Hirschler stated that “Societies within the Islamic world, especially those in the belt stretching from al Andalus in the west to Persia in the east, belonged in the medieval era to the world’s most bookish societies” (2011, 1). These definitions can be traced back to an increasingly central role taken on by the written text in the transmission of knowledge in Arab-Islamic culture in particular during and after the twelfth century (Toorawa 2005, 9; Petry 1993, 324; Gully 2008, 50). This has led H. Touati, in his essay on libraries and collections especially around the ninth and tenth centuries, to describe Islamic culture among those in medieval times as the most devoured by the passion for collecting books (2006, 17). As demonstrated by Behrens-Abouseif (2018, 17) in her study dedicated to the production of the book and to the organisation of libraries and book markets in the Mamluk era, the importance of the book continued to flourish and consolidate, increasing its influence on cultural life in general in those centuries. The historian Ibn Tagribirdī’s (d. 874/1470) (1992, XV, 212) still current observation regarding a particularly coarse and uneducated amir “*lam ara-hu mundū ‘umr-ī masaka kīlāb’ān li-yaqrā’ā-hu* (I’ve never seen him with a book in his hand to read) emblematically summarises this vision of the Mamluk “bookish society” and underlines the indispensable value of the book in the personal, cultural and social life of even those belonging to the contemporary foreign military class.

This article aims to investigate how the spread of the culture of the book in the Mamluk period introduced significant changes in the professional and social life of the class of scholars and writers who were particularly interested in this sector as producers and users. It will also attempt to analyse how the consolidation of this culture and its related practices may have contributed not only to defining more clearly the intellectual and social identity of the Mamluk scholar and of his professional profile, but also to the dynamics of cohesion and competition among the members of this group.

## 2. The debate on orality and writing in the Mamluk period

In the Mamluk period, the age-old diatribe on the superiority of either the oral or the written mode seemed to have subsided, at least in the traditional disciplines, and no longer reappeared in strictly dichotomous terms (al-Ḥaṭīb al-

Bağdādī 2008, 17-147; Bloom 2001, 94-99; Cook 1997, 437-91; Schoeler 2006, 28-43; Hirschler 2011, 12-17; Gruendler 2020, 7-12).

Most of the belletristic literature dating back to the thirteenth-fifteenth centuries is limited to reporting a few references and in particular some excerpts from al-Ǧāḥiẓ's (d. 255/868-9) famous discourse on the virtues of the book (Skarżyńska-Bocheńska 1969, 118-122; Gheretti 1994, 67-76; Hirschler 2011, 21-22), as well as to recalling the firmly recognised practical benefits of the written word. After underlining the well-known merits of writing for all religious, administrative, educational and relational fields, al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333) (2004, VII, 1-4) tried to delimit the domains of the two learning mediums: oral memorisation (*hifz*) and the consultation/reading of texts (*nazār/qirā'a*). The first modality suited texts of a sacred-religious, poetic and oratory nature, namely: the Qur'ān, the sayings of the Prophet, the speeches of his Companions and of the eloquent men, as well as poetry, which thanks to their mnemonic features were easy for rote learning. In addition to their importance from a religious, cultural and argumentative point of view, these texts also enabled secretaries and intellectuals in general to maintain and enhance the linguistic and stylistic skills needed for the drafting tasks entrusted to them. The second domain, instead, included linguistic/grammatical, historiographic, epistolographic, aphoristic-sapiential and theological-juridical branches whose corpus was being constantly renewed. Consequently, texts had to be read and examined rather than memorized, which meant the scholar was always stimulated to carry out his research and to deepen his knowledge free from the limits of rote learning (30-31). Kamāl al-Dīn al-Damīrī (d. 808/1405) (III, 199) supported reasons similar to those of al-Ǧāḥiẓ (2005) and adopted al-Qurṭubī's idea (d. 671/1273). According to this view, the merit of writing in the preservation of sacred texts, of the knowledge of Greek philosophers and the early Muslim scholars, as well as in ensuring the proper functioning of the sacred and the profane was undeniably to be considered of great importance. Reiterating the traditional position taken by other secretaries in favour of writing (Gully 2008, 50-53), al-Qalqaṣandī (d. 821/1418) (1916, III, 7) summarised thus his opinion: "al-ḥaṭṭ asḍal min al-lafẓ li-anna l-lafẓ yufhim al-hādir wa-l-ḥaṭṭ yufhim al-hādir wa-l-ġā'ib" (the written word is better than the spoken word because the second is learned only by those who listen to it in presence, whereas the first is learned with those who are present and absent). It was in all probability - and paradoxically - Ḥalīl b. Aybak (d. 764/1363) (2000, XXI, 74-75), a prolific writer, secretary and scholar, among the few who still

found it difficult to place complete trust in the use of graphic support. After presenting the dispute that took place in the Fatimid era between ‘Alī b. Rīḍwān al-Miṣrī (d. 453/1061?) and Ibn Buṭlān (d. 458/1066?) on the two modes of knowledge transmission, al-Safadī sided with the Iraqi doctor in privileging direct learning from a master and recalled some famous errors caused by the defective writing of Arabic in previous centuries (al-Miṣrī 1986, 61-62).

With regards to the theological and juridical disciplines, the compromise reached in the first four centuries broadly outlined the operational and functional areas of these two codes and almost (practically) envisaged the distinction between the public and private domains of scholarly life: “writing, in this view, may be tolerated and even approved in the private storage of Tradition, but should not be allowed to feature in its public transmission” (Cook 1997, 476). In the Mamluk period, however, this compromise seems in part revised. The task of preserving knowledge, of guaranteeing its omnitemporality and omnispatiality, in addition to stimulating analysis and theoretical speculation was now assigned to writing. On the other hand, oral-aural communication was further confirmed as the best and most authoritative practice for teaching, debating and testifying in legal proceedings (Berkey 1992, 24-31; Id. 2002, 228; Messick 1993, 204-06; Chamberlain 1994, 133-51).

The Mamluk jurist ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Buhārī (d. 730/1329-30) (2009, III, 74-75) went further and ensured the resolution of the controversy in favour of writing even within a discipline such as *al-hadīt*, which was traditionally known for its need for memorisation, recognising the written text’s higher reliability in transmission. Although Ibn Ḥaldūn (d. 808/1406) (2005, II, 312) judged oral expression as superior, he fully acknowledged the epistemological merits of writing “It enables people to become acquainted with science, learning, with the books of the ancients, and with the sciences and information written down by them”. Ibn Ḥaḡar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1449) briefly mentioned in *Fath al-bārī* (I, 251) how the controversy over the compilation of the Prophet’s tradition originated and reassured his readers that “thanks be to God, written verbalization and theoretical speculation on the discipline of *hadīt* has consolidated and exponentially developed, producing great benefits”. The famous scholar, known as al-Hāfiẓ, a typical name given to the great memorisers and transmitters, even believed that there was no substantial difference between reciting the Qur’ān by heart or reading it directly from a text, reserving in fact to the latter modality greater reliability against any errors or alterations of the sacred book (*ibid.*, IX, 67; see also Hirschler 2011, 21-22). Learning by rote

under the guidance of a recognised master, however, remained indispensable, first and foremost when the learner intended to pursue the career of professor (al-Nuwayrī 2004, VII, 31)<sup>1</sup>. This hybrid attitude, aware of the complementary roles of the written and the oral and characteristic of the Mamluk period, finds its best representative in the jurist Badr al-Dīn b. Ġamā'a (d. 733/1333). He strongly advised his disciples to purchase the necessary texts for their learning rather than copying or borrowing them. He was also, at the same time, among those who most insisted on the irreplaceable nature of orality and direct contact with professors in the transmission/learning of knowledge (Ibn Ġamā'a 2012, 97; Berkey 1992, 26-29).

### 3. The book in academic and professional life

In the centuries prior to the Mamluk period, the scarce availability of writing materials, for economic and technical reasons, led to a natural economisation of its use with the consequent limitation of the number of volumes published in the various disciplines. Relying on few or often only single copies containing possible transcription errors and with risks of manipulation could not alone guarantee the survival of the written content. On the other hand, given that as a rule the transmission of knowledge took place orally in lectures and meetings and the memorisation of the text constituted, in this perspective, necessary and fundamental proof of complete mastery of the subject, writing was considered entirely ancillary as well as excessively expensive and precarious (Toorawa 2005, 7-12; Gheretti 2006, 73). As various studies have shown, there was a constant development of the paper industry starting from the eighth century in the Arab-Islamic world which reached its peak in the twelfth-fifteenth centuries (Sayyid 1997, 27-31; Bloom 2001, 81-82). At the same time, there was a large spread of education, a greater enhancement in the production of manuscripts and a considerable improvement of the defective script of Arabic (Déroche 2004, 75; Hirschler 2011, 18-19). All these novelties, in addition to the growing chancery and administrative needs of the vast and complex bureaucratic apparatus of the Mamluk sultanate, stimulated "a transition in medieval Islamic times from a culture based on memory and gesture to one grounded in the written record" and a consequent

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, Ibn Taġribirdī (1992, XV, 244) criticised the jurist Šams al-Dīn al-Qayātī's (d. 850/1446) way of teaching through the reading of a text, since it was the one used by non-Arabic speaking teachers with little expressive and persuasive ability.

“efflorescence of books and written culture incomparably more brilliant than was known anywhere in Europe” (Bloom 2001, 91, 93-94).

The exponential increase in the number of authors and readers among the lower and middle social groups such as traders, artisans, ordinary people and even the military, is also due to this explosion of the book industry. These new producers and users previously had greater difficulty in accessing culture through the official educational institutions, which normally required a long-term, full-time commitment and a stable stay in an urban centre of some importance without however offering any particular career guarantees for lacklustre graduates. The sources report (al-Safadī 1998, IV, 443-44; Id., 2000, III, 58-59), in congratulatory tones, the news of a tailor from the city of Mahalla in the Nile Delta who, thanks to his craft profession, managed to purchase a great number of books and reach a certain level of linguistic and grammatical knowledge that allowed him to establish friendships with prominent figures, such as Bahā’ al-Dīn al-Nahḥās (d. 698/1299) and Aṭīr al-Dīn Abū Ḥayyān al-Ğarnāṭī (d. 745/1344). Sugar workers, button makers, pearl piercers, sellers of cotton, daggers, silk and headgears, besides traders of various kinds and farmers could profitably continue to enhance their knowledge outside of schools (al-Sahāwī n.d., IX, 37; IV, 163, 256; II, 126, 256; V, 190; I, 195; VIII, 127. See also Behrens-Abouseif 2011, 375-95). In addition to the various non-formal educational channels (private gatherings in mosques and at home) that the cultural life of the time offered (Berkey 1992, 85-90), the great availability of book material, that could be loaned in public and private libraries or purchased, certainly contributed to a more democratic spread of knowledge, even in scientific and literary disciplines that did not strictly make up the curriculum studiorum of religious institutions.

The affordability of books for a large swath of society (Shatzmiller 2015, 7-8) was probably the most crucial innovation that contributed to the consolidation of education and culture until the introduction of printing on a larger scale in the nineteenth century. The abundance of books in the Mamluk era, the substantial overcoming of mistrust towards the reliability of the written form and the relative improvement of the economic conditions, in particular of the lower and middle classes (scholars, bureaucrats, artisans and shopkeepers) naturally gave rise to a long chain of “distinctive transformation of cultural practices” and exerted significant impact on the “cultural and social settings that were inclined towards using the written word” (Lapidus 2008, 16-25, 32-38; Hirschler 2011, 3, 17). They also brought about notable changes that affected

the professional profile along with the intellectual and social identity of the ‘ulamā’, and of the educated in general, who were increasingly stimulated or obliged to use book materials in their studies, their teaching and research activities, as well as in communication and aesthetics (on this topic in the Abbasid period, see Gruendler 2020).

With respect to professional, academic and intellectual qualities, in the Mamluk period the recommendations that invited the scholars to engage in publicistic and research activities inherent to the discipline to which they were devoted became more insistent. Among the essential duties of the fully qualified scholar, Muhyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī (d. 776/1277) (1980, I, 56-57) and Badr al-Dīn b. Ğamā'a (2012, 59-60) listed the commitment to study and inquiry (*katrat al-taftīš wa-l-muṭāla‘a, wa-l-tanqīb wa-l-murāga‘a*) together with the editorial and publication tasks (*al-iṣṭigāl bi-l-taṣnīf wa-l-ğam‘ wa-l-ta‘līf*). The jurist Taġ al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) (2019, 38) proposed arguments along the same lines as those advanced by al-Ḩaṭīb al-Baġdādī (d. 463/1071) and attributed to “*taṣnīf*” (classification or composition) the primacy of preserving and transmitting knowledge from generation to generation, as well as guaranteeing that authors would be remembered in the future (al-Ḩaṭīb al-Baġdādī 2008, 155; al-Saḥāwī 2017, 123; al-Durūbī 1989, I, 396; Schoeler 2009, 68-81).

Al-Zarkašī (d. 794/1392) (2016, II, 164) considered *taṣnīf* a communal obligation without which the community would have lost all its wealth of knowledge. In two short treatises, al-Suyūtī (d. 911/1505) showed interest in the rules of composing and borrowing of books (*al-Ta‘rīf bi-ādāb al-ta‘līf* and *Badr al-maġħūd fī ḥizānat Maḥmūd*). This prolific and versatile scholar proudly recalled in his autobiography that he had begun writing at the age of seventeen and that by the time he wrote his historical text *Husn al-Muḥāḍara* (ca. 899/1493), he had completed three hundred works, providing a long list of his numerous publications (1967, I, 338-39). al-Saḥāwī (2005, III, 330-31) in turn reserved considerable space to the discussion of the different approaches and editorial typologies in the discipline of *ḥadīt*, outlining the malleable boundaries between *ta‘līf/taṣnīf/tahrīg/intiqā‘* and assigning to the first method greater importance for being more exhaustive and analytical (See also Gheretti 2015, 25-26).

As we have already seen, Ibn Ḥaġar al-‘Asqalānī (2001, I, 251) hinted at the merit of the book as having favoured the development of research and theoretical speculation, reiterating, in a more concrete way, the same ideas expressed a few centuries before by al-Ḩaṭīb al-Baġdādī. It was precisely to celebrate the completion of the monumental twenty-volume commentary by

Ibn Ḥaḡar on *Sahīḥ al-Buḥārī* that two memorable presentation ceremonies were held in 842/1438 in two consecutive days with the participation of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Ġaqmaq (d. 847/1444), the sultan's son, of numerous other amirs and of the entire scientific and religious community (al-Maqrīzī 1997, VII, 396; see also al-Biqā‘ī 2001, I, 125-132; al-Šayraғī 2010, IV, 62-64). The drafting of the work had lasted about twenty-five years and many of Ibn Ḥaḡar's students who had taken part in it were generously compensated by the guests of excellence invited to the ceremonies. The first presentation consisted of the reading of a short passage from the concluding part of the commentary, followed by the recitation of multiple commendatory poems in praise of the work and its author, and ended with a huge, luxurious banquet costing the exorbitant sum of five hundred dīnārs. The high number of people and scholars attending made it an “extraordinary and almost unprecedented event in Egypt” with the first presentation being held in an open rural area near the Nile north of Cairo surrounded by a camp and a market set up specially for the public (*ibid.*). This ceremonial feast reveals, on the one hand, the great professional and social value of the author and of the discipline of *ḥadīṭ* in the Mamluk period and, on the other, the acknowledged position of the “book”, in its narrow and broad meaning, in schools and in intellectual life as a whole during the fifteenth century.

Teachers' recruitment letters, the teaching certificates and the endowment deeds of the Mamluk schools consulted do not explicitly mention the activities in the modern sense of publication and the scientific dissemination among the requisite qualifications that the candidate or the figure appointed to professorships or other religious offices were expected to possess (al-Qalqašandī 1916, XI, 227-47; XIV, 322-27; Ibrāhīm 1966, 147-48; Berkey 1992, 76-77; al-‘Anāqira 2015, 227-34, 256-62). Rather, the treatises on education in religious disciplines pointed out the reputation of the teacher, his in-depth knowledge of the scientific tradition of the subject and his intellectual, character and relationship qualities (Berkey 1992, 22-23). Yet, we can perceive that a virtuous scholar, in that period, was increasingly expected to engage in investigative activities and should be the author of recognised publications possibly disseminated and adopted by other colleagues: “*intafa‘a bi-hi l-talaba*” (which the students benefitted from) (al-‘Asqalānī 1993, I, 239; II, 82); “*wa-i‘tamada-hu kull man fī zamani-hi faḍlān ‘amman ba‘da-hu*” (all his contemporaries and those who came later adopted it) (al-Saḥāwī n.d., III, 20); “*intafa‘a bi-hi l-nās wa-tanāfasū fī taḥṣīli-hi*” (many benefitted from his work and vied for it)

(ibid., I, 203); “*iṣtahara wa-tadāwala-hu l-nās kitābat<sup>an</sup> wa-qirā’at<sup>an</sup>, wa-qarāda-hu l-a’imma*” (his book has had so much fame and circulation, has been widely copied, read and praised by the most renowned masters) (ibid., IX, 94; see also al-Saḥāwī n.d., VII, 40; X, 261; al-Suyūṭī 1975, 155). Al-Suyūṭī (1975, 155-59; al-Durūbī 1989, I, 397) dwelled on this aspect in his autobiography and in his *maqāmāt* to highlight the great and unprecedented echo that his own texts aroused throughout the region, in Egypt, and even in India and Africa, exacerbating the feelings of jealousy of some Egyptian ‘*ulamā*’ towards him.

This competence gradually became closely linked to the profile of the scholar as it would allow him to be part of the influential class of *mu’allifīn*, that is, among the active producers and transmitters of knowledge: “*wa-ṣannafa taṣānīf kaṭīra intārat fī hayāti-hi wa-ba’da mawti-hi*” (He wrote many books that spread while he was still alive and even after) (al-‘Asqalānī 1993, II, 427; See also *al-Saḥāwī* n.d., III, 122; VIII, 23; X, 134). Therefore, the insufficient scientific productivity of those belonging to this social group was emphasised in order to express academic displeasure or to motivate the scholar’s inability to cover teaching positions (*al-Saḥāwī* n.d., III, 252; 4, 100). The limited circulation of a certain text was still reported with the intention of highlighting the negative effects on students and on the entire scientific community: “*wa-lākin lam yuṣannī šay’<sup>an</sup> wa-lā intafa’ā bi-hi aḥad min al-talaba*” (He did not write any text and no student could benefit from his knowledge) (al-‘Asqalānī 1993, III, 163; see also *al-Isnawī* 1987, II, 194; *al-Saḥāwī* n.d., I, 301; V, 71).

The book in religious disciplines and even in other literary and rhetorical fields rarely had the task of reflecting the personality of its author or of proposing original reflections, rather it presented in most cases handed down traditions (Pedersen 1984, 20; Petry 1993, 324-325). Nevertheless, in the Mamluk period, due to the massive production of texts and the real difficulty of offering traditional themes still not well arranged or commented, the awareness of a need to propose a content which was thought of as innovative by authoritative experts grew significantly (Rosenthal 1947, 63-64): “*bi-mā lam yusbaq ilà taṣnīfī-hi*” (unprecedented texts) (*al-Nawawī* 1980, I, 57); “*ma ‘dūm qad uḥturi*” (creatio ex novo) (al-Ğarnāṭī 1998, I, 11); “*min banāt aṣkār-ī [...]. Lam aġid-hu fī kitāb*” (ideas of my own invention that are not found in any other book) (al-Subkī 2003, I, 30); “*lam yu’allaf la-hu nażīr*” (a text unique in its genre) (al-Suyūṭī 1975, 105). In an interesting passage, the Egyptian copyist, money-changer and historian Ibn al-Şayrafī (d. 900/1495) (2002, 181) reported with great pride the amazement and admiration expressed by Ibn Taġrībirdī when he

saw his book entitled *al-Ǧawhariyya* on the prophet's biography and which showed remarkable novelty and refinement.

The idea that there was a close link between erudite, original research rich in unique notions and the possession of rare bibliographical sources that were difficult for other colleagues to access emerged more and more from the recognition of the value of innovation. Consequently, scholars' "texts hunting" constituted a necessary practice in order to be able to boast the scientific credit of rigorous and interesting writings: "*wa tuḍkar bi-dālika bayna l-‘ulamā’ wa-l-muhaṣṣilīn ilà āhir al-dahr*" (thanks [to the compilation of books] you will be mentioned among the '*ulamā'* and scholars until the end of time) (al-Sahāwī 2005, III, 330-331; see also al-Sahāwī n.d., V, 227). Ibn Manzūr (d. 711/1311) (1881, 2-3) recalled having searched for Šaraf al-Dīn al-Tifašī's (d. 651/1253) volume *Faṣl al-hiṭāb fī madārik al-hawāss al-ḥams* for more than fifty years so to claim credit for having discovered and epitomised it. His work *Niṭār al-azhār fī l-layl wa-l-nahār* could be published only after he had asked a friend to intercede with the unwilling holder of the only copy of the manuscript. Ğamāl al-Dīn al-Isnawī (d. 772/1370) (2009, I, 94-95) attributed the originality and relevance of his work on Šāfi‘ī law to an ancient, precious and difficult-to-find bibliographical source for contemporary scholars. Al-Suyūtī (1975, 138) claimed to have written eighteen original works thanks to the consultation of texts which had been unread by most of his contemporary and past '*ulama'*. Al-Sahāwī (n.d., IX, 119) complained that his colleague Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ḥaydarī (d. 894/1489), from Ibn Ḥaġar al-‘Asqalānī's circle, was withholding books (*Tārīħ Baġdād* and *Tārīħ Garnāṭa*) that he had borrowed from a public library to compile a biographical dictionary on Šāfi‘ī scholars but also prevent the well-known biographer from undertaking the same task. Ibn Ḥaldūn (2005, III, 208-2012) expressed his disappointment for the endless production of sometimes "repetitive and useless" commentaries and compendia in the various disciplines because this excessive proliferation and fragmentation of publications would only hinder and prolong students' education. These exaggerated complaints about the abundance of texts written by young or unskilled people were due in Badr al-Dīn b. Ğamā'a's opinion (2012, 60), however, to jealousy and the fierce competition among the '*ulamā'* (Rosenthal 2003, 1069-1071, 1081, 1085).

#### 4. The paradigm of the virtuous bibliophile scholar

In addition to the skills in research, debate and scientific dissemination, the profile of the virtuous scholar that was taking shape was moving towards a refined model of the versatile intellectual with exquisitely literary and bibliophile inclinations. Bibliophilia was a very strong trend in the Abbasid period, mainly among members of the aristocracy and the ‘*ulama*’ with a high socio-cultural level and it was often associated with a considerable interest in culture and the accumulation of knowledge (Touati 2006, 22; Gruendler 2020, 141-43). However, the feverish activity of collecting books in the Mamluk period took on the connotations of a universal phenomenon of vast cultural and social significance, so much so that we can speak of a real collective cult of the book. This assumption is confirmed by the unquestionably higher number of private collections belonging to contemporary middle-ranking people (Ibrāhīm 1963, 22-41; Behrens-Abouseif 2018, 47-48). As the fifteenth century approached, a period that marked the apex of the flourishing of the book industry and trade in the Mamluk sultanate, indications of this passion in the profile of the literati and the ‘*ulama*’ became decidedly more frequent. This can be explained by the assiduous recourse to certain clichés and phrases in the biographical dictionaries of the fifteenth century that would prove the new dimension of a personal or elitist vocation which turned into a sort of social practice. In this context, examples reveal the rich variety of expressions used above all by al-Sahāwī to remind his readers of this deeply rooted custom amongst ‘*ulama*’, literati and even ordinary people of the time: “*ğammā ‘a li-kutub*” (a great book collector) (n.d., II, 299; see also al-Sahāwī n.d., III, 75; X, 199; al-Şafadī 2000, II, 108; XV, 211); “*iqtanā min sā‘ir al-kutub šay‘an katīr an*” (he bought many books of all kinds) (I, 115; II, 31); see also al-Şafadī 1998, III, 532; al-Maqrīzī 1991, I, 619); “*mustaktir min al-kutub*” (he was a great book collector) (I, 224, 231, 320, 379); “*hawz li-nafā‘is al-kutub*” (he owned many valuable books) (III, 128), “*kāna katīr al-kutub*” (he had many books) (IV, 176); “*al-i-tinā’ bi-tahṣīl al-kutub*” (he was interested in possessing books) (II, 299; VI, 250); “*iğtama‘ la-hu min al-kutub mā lam yakun fī waqtī-hi*” (no one else in his time owned such number of books as him) (IX, 282)<sup>2</sup>. In support of this analysis, we can compare the relatively small number of bibliophiles not belonging to the Ayyubid or Mamluk ruling class living in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries

<sup>2</sup> See also “*haşṣala ȝumlatan min al-kutub*” (he owned a great deal of books) (al-Şafadī 1998, III, 408).

and mentioned by al-Şafadī in his monumental work *al-Wāfi* (about fifteen cases in all in the Mamluk period) or by other fourteenth-century biographers<sup>3</sup>, with the several dozen of cases reported by al-Saḥāwī in *al-Daw'* (more than seventy) which focused solely on the preeminent people of the fifteenth century.

Similarly to what Touati (2006, 35-40) wrote about book lovers in the Abbasid period (see also Makdisi 1990, 70-76), al-Saḥāwī and more sporadically other contemporary authors duly described the intense relationship that bound the intellectuals to their, especially with metaphorical terms and phrases that often refer to a semantic field of a psycho-affective, moral and social nature. In fact, the same language was also frequently used in the sources of the period to define the relationships of loyalty, solidarity and esteem that existed between friends and colleagues and which acted as a relational glue. In this perspective, the book often ended up being represented as an object of profound idealisation, infatuation and even physical desire, while the act of reading was comparable to an erotic activity (Ibn al-Ğawziyya 1983, 69-70; Rosenthal 2007, 241-242; Touati 2006, 19, 35): “*hawā mufrit*” (excessive passion) (al-Şafadī 2000, XVIII, 202); “*lā yuhibb min al-dunyā illā siwā-hā*” (the only thing he loves in life) (Ibid., XXII, 210); “*hawas mufrit fī taḥṣīl al-kutub*” (excessive mania in collecting books) (al-Dahabī 2000, XLV, 68); “*ħubb*” (love) (al-Asqalānī 1993, II, 140, 184); “*šaqaf*” (ardour) (Ibid., III, 244); “*muğrā bi-ğam’ al-kutub*” (seduced by book collecting) (al-Maqrīzī 1991, I, 710); “*muğram bi-l-kutub*” (infatuated with books) (al-Saḥāwī n.d., II, 299); “*mūla’ bi-ğam’ al-kutub*” (passionate book collector) (X, 281); “*dā nahma fī taḥṣīl al-kutub*” (avid book collector) (IV, 276); “*raġba fī iqtiñā’ al-kutub*” (a great desire to collect books) (V, 266).<sup>4</sup>

In the absence of primary sources that dealt with the subject, the descriptions of the biographical profile that usually accompanied the well-known cliché “*ğammā’/a li-l-kutub*”, albeit brief and often repetitive, could shed some light on the social-cultural context underpinning the widespread bibliophile passion, in particular during the fifteenth century. Among the most common associations with this and other similar expressions, we find predictably those that emphasised the collector’s sincere vocation for study and knowledge which induced many of the scholars of the period to appreciate the written word and to become more interested in the possession of texts,

<sup>3</sup> The same goes for *Fawāt al-wafayāt* by al-Kutubī and *al-Wafayāt* by Ibn Rāfi‘.

<sup>4</sup> See also: “*yugālī fī-hā*” (excessive interest in books) (al-Safadī 2000, XVI, 124); “*giwāyatuhū fī-hā*” (strong attraction to books) (al-Maqrīzī 1991, VIII, 232); “*himma ‘āliyya fī taḥṣīl al-kutub*” (great enthusiasm into collecting books) (al-Saḥāwī n.d., II, 299).

particularly “canonical”, of the most important disciplines at that time, such as *fīqh* and *hadrīl* (see al-Sahāwī n.d., VII, 9; V, p. 133; al-‘Asqalānī 1969, II, 158). No one was apparently immune from the book fever and not even avarice was able to dissuade some from “chasing” books. It seems that the love of knowledge helped some to overcome their greed to the extent of arousing the amazement of friends and acquaintances (al-Şafadī 1998, IV, 622). Not even poverty deterred those affected by the bibliophile passion: the renowned jurist Ibn Daqīq al-‘Id (d. 702/1302) was prevented from holding some offices because his compulsive desire to read and own books drove him into debt (*ibid.*, II, 235); see also al-Maqrīzī 1991, VI, 381; al-Sahāwī n.d., V, pp. 230-31). Badr al-Dīn b. Ğamā‘a (2012, 126), clearly encouraged by the abundance of books and the low cost of paper, strongly advised his students not to be satisfied with copying or borrowing the texts of the various disciplines but to buy them instead (Canova 2012, 242). From this perspective, we can understand the social prestige conferred on those who owned a large number of books as it was an important indicator of truly belonging to the world of culture and knowledge<sup>5</sup>.

After the adolescent years devoted to frivolity and fun, in other words to vice and superficiality according to the pedagogical perspective of the period, biographers saw in the rediscovered interest in books a transition to a new phase of life in the name of study as well as of psychological and intellectual maturity: “*al-i’rād ‘an al-lahw wa-l-lağw ǧumlat<sup>an</sup> wa-l-ragba al-tāmma fī taḥṣīl al-kutub*” (he completely renounced play and frivolity, and showed a deep desire to collect texts) (al-Sahāwī n.d., X, 227); “*wa-kāna fī ibtidā’ amri-hi tā’iš<sup>an</sup> ȝumma tawaqqar wa-ahabba ȝam’ al-kutub*” (at the beginning of his life he was unleashed, he then became sensible and loved collecting books) (*ibid.*, II, 299; see also al-Sahāwī n.d., IV, 82; X, 274). The bibliophile passion also marked an awareness of the role of the individual in society, a rediscovery of faith and a profound philanthropy and indulgence towards other human beings: “*wa-ni’mā l-rağul sukūn<sup>an</sup> wa-‘aql<sup>an</sup> wa-fadl<sup>an</sup> wa-ragbat<sup>an</sup> fī l-hayr wa-taḥṣīl al-kutub*” (what a reserved, judicious, virtuous man, eager to do good and collect books!) (*ibid.*, IV, 84); “*wa-ahabba ȝam’ al-kutub wa-kāna yukrim al-ġurabā’ wa-yubālīg fī l-ihsān fī-him*” (he loved collecting books, was generous with strangers and treated them extraordinarily well) (*ibid.*, II, 299; see also *ibid.*, III, 128; V, 214; VI, 109; “*wa-yuṣāhib al-ṣulahā’ wa-yaqtanī l-kutub wa-yaf’al al-hayr*” (he accompanied

---

<sup>5</sup> Recommendations that invited scholars and even ordinary people to collect books in every field of knowledge were frequent already in the eleventh century. Cf. al-Ḥaṭīb al-Bağdādī 2008, 176-178; al-Sahāwī n.d., IV, 176; Rosenthal 2003, 1072-1074.

godly people, collected books and did good to others) (al-'Asqalānī 1993, IV, 421).

Books were perceived as a philanthropic act not only by those who wrote them, but equally by those who acquired, preserved and handed them down. A special relationship was born between the collector and his own books, not only a spiritual and intellectual one, but a true symbiosis that according to many was to be maintained even at the end of the person's life. Each individual was expected to carefully guard their library to be donated after their death, thus helping others to achieve knowledge and at the same time giving themselves a renewable posthumous reward with each reading (al-Sahāwī n.d., X, 201). Hence the old, but undoubtedly more widespread custom in the Mamluk era, of bequeathing one's books to schools or mosques or, as in many other cases, to a special friend who was appointed to look after them as a sign of loyalty to the memory of the testator and of respect for his commitment to knowledge (III, 17; IV, 305. On this practice, see Touati 2006, 47-48; Behrens-Abouseif 2018, 34-42). After the death of scholars with needy heirs or little interest in keeping the books of their loved ones, public sales were organised that drew large numbers of colleagues and collectors eager to preserve a memory or find a rare text (II, 117; V, 162; see also Haarmann 1984; Touati 2006, 41-43). Among the frequent visitors to these auctions, which unfortunately took place more often following the repeated waves of plague (Ismail 2021, 15-16). we know of the jurist and expert of *ḥadīt* Ibn al-Mulaqqin (d. 804/1401), who lost his mental health after seeing his books and others borrowed from the schools he worked for destroyed in a fire. For this reason, he was later forced to be confined in his home by his children (VI, 100).

Buying books left by people of high scientific, religious and social importance acquired a meaning that unquestionably surpassed the actual price of the text. As Chamberlain (1994, 108) has pointed out, "dependence and loyalty between shaykhs and their disciples, and among shaykhs themselves, were the basis of the *a'yan*'s social networks". Similar to some social practices (*mulāzama*, *ziyāra*, *taraddud*, *suhba*, *iğtimā'*, *mağālis*) which took place in a dynamic community made up of masters, disciples, friends and colleagues, there were other meaningful ones after a member's death which included participation in funeral processions and the preservation of the person's memory (e.g. in the multiple and repetitive biographical dictionaries). In the same way, the handing down of books from one deceased member of the group to another appears to have strengthened a sense of belonging and

cohesion among the ‘ulama’ and in some way to have promoted generational turnover. Competitive auctions were organised to enhance the valuable inheritance of the deceased and guarantee possibly higher income to the heirs, as in the chancellor and jurist Kamāl al-Dīn b. al-Bārizī’s case (d. 856/1452) (*wa-lam yaḥluf ba’da-hu fī mağmū’i-hi miṭlu-hu, wa-ḥaṣala l-taḡālī fī kutubi-hi ḥattā bī’at bi-aġlā l-atmān* - after his death there was no one similar in quality and the books he had left behind were sold at the highest prices) and that of the well-known poet Šams al-Dīn al-Nawāġī (d. 859/1455) (*wa-taḡālā l-nās fī kutubi-hi* - people paid very high prices to buy his book legacy) (al-Saḥāwī n.d., IX, 239; VII, 232; see also al-Saḥāwī n.d., VI, 152; X, 90, 237, 258; al-Ṣafadī 1998, IV, 368; al-Šayrafi 2002, p. 455). The high esteem held for Ibn Ḥağar by his disciples led the amir Taḡrībirmiš al-Mu’ayyadī (d. 852 /1448) to hope that his own death would not be before that of his teacher and friend, with the hope of receiving this handover even at the cost of incurring debt (III, 34). This personal and professional desire led some disciples to follow their masters on their long journeys abroad in order to be able to receive this honour if the inevitable fate should happen (VI, 18).

Moreover, many shared the collector’s passion without, nevertheless, being strictly interested in knowledge. The “conspicuous consumption” of sought-after goods, as Thorstein Veblen (2007, 61) tried to demonstrate, was an important means of respectability, integrity and reputation especially in urban environments where mobility and human contact between individuals belonging to different classes were frequent. In the Mamluk period, amirs, trading bureaucrats, and wealthy people tended to stress their position and social status through typical consumer behaviours. From this point of view, we can observe the reiterated biographical references framing the collection of books as a natural consequence and manifestation of a person’s economic well-being, together with other material goods which were considered important for qualitative differentiation, such as food, drinks and items of conspicuous consumption: “he bought precious books, properties and went beyond in the enjoyment and consumption of different kinds of food, drinks and the most desirable things”; “he bought many rare books, precious clothing and furniture” (al-Saḥāwī n.d., II, 100; IX, 33). Badr al-Dīn b. Ğamā'a warned his disciples and readers against the behaviour of these “accumulators” of books and “impostors” (2012, 126).

The social distinction of the Mamluk amirs was primarily linked to their belligerent qualities and responsibilities in times of war. As time passed, some

of them became more aware of the need to earn other forms of social recognition as refined men by pursuing mystical, literary and cultural interests (on the cultural and bibliophile tendencies among some Mamluk amirs, see Haarmann 1988, 93-94; Behrens-Abouseif 2018, 18-19). Again, in Veblen's words, on the "leisure class" we may grasp this sense of book collecting developed by some of the members of the military oligarchy who refused to be considered "simply the successful, aggressive male, the man of strength, resource, and intrepidity", like many of their social group (2007, 53). They wanted to avoid appearing as in Ibn Tağrībirdī's emblematic description of amir Tağrībirmiš, viceroy of Aleppo, (d. 842/1439): "he has little religion which adds to his lack of intellect and taste and to a harsh temperament. He is devoid of all knowledge and art, and I have never seen him with a book in his hand to read" (1992, XV, 212). They also strived to "cultivate their own tastes and [had to be able to] discriminate with some nicety between the noble and the ignoble among consumable goods" (*ibid.*). For this reason, amir Arğūn al-Nāṣirī (d. 731/1331), paradoxically known both for his avarice and his unbridled passion for collecting books, as soon as he learned of the amir Qiğlīs al-Silāhdār's death (d. 731/1330), another famous warrior and collector, he sent his delegate with two thousand dīnārs to Cairo to buy as many volumes as possible left by his colleague (al-Şafadī 2000, VIII, 232). The bibliophile trend among amirs whose past and heritage lacked recognition and originality could also constitute an attempt to participate in deeply cultural practices shared among the educated and cultured indigenous class in order to legitimise their leadership and assert their own belonging to the collective Arab-Islamic legacy. However, collecting was certainly not sufficient at that time to affirm the distinct social status of those belonging to the higher rank of the "leisure class", namely the foreign military elite. Therefore, the inclination of some amirs to acquire expensive copies of the Qur'ān (*al-maṣāḥif al-‘āliya al-ġāliya*) in their own transcription or written by the most famous copyists (e.g. Sultan Baybars al-Ġāšnakīr d. 709/1310, the amirs Šayħū al-Sāqī d. 752/1351 and Baktāš al-Mankūrsī d. 757/1356) can be construed as the effort to remedy the growing democratisation of book ownership (*ibid.*, X, 218; XVI, 124; *Id.*, 1998, I, 700; Ibrāhīm 1963, 38). We could add, to this category, both the aesthetic collectors who also viewed the book as an object of art and who were constantly looking for precious volumes often referred to as "*nafīsa*", as well as people who loved certain texts and fervently collected their various editions and the autographed manuscripts (al-Şafadī 1998, V, 534; al-‘Asqalānī 1969, I, 355).

The bond between the scholar and his own books could also lead to psychological and moral dependence in addition to some vices frequently stigmatised by biographers. Furthermore, the widely spread bibliophile passion and the strong competition among scholars for positions or for simple scientific prestige meant that some unpleasant features of bibliomaniacs arose and inevitably influenced relations between the members of the group. Al-Sahāwī cited some bibliocleptomaniacs loathed by their own colleagues for breaching the book borrowing rules. This matter was addressed in detail and several times in various treatises of the period (see for example al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baġdādī 1996, I, 369-382; al-Sam‘ānī 1993, 598-608; Ibn Ġamā'a 2012, 126-28), since this improper behaviour undermined the values of the group and the respective social and professional ethics. Many people did not lend their books, nor did they allow anyone to use or even see them; others, more avid, went so far as to publicly express their desire to throw their collection overboard on the verge of death in order to prevent anyone else from enjoying it (al-Sahāwī n.d., I, 13; III, 254; vol. IV, 166, 293). Some, consumed by the irrepressible passion of possession, misappropriated library books through loans that were never returned or were denied, books of friends who had passed away, or forcibly obliged owners to give the manuscripts to them. The great jurist and chancellor Muhibb al-Dīn b. al-Šihna (d. 890/1485) almost ended up leading the black list made by colleagues and librarians as the emblem of the best-known serial bibliocleptomaniac of that period. By taking advantage of his high socio-professional position in the Mamluk bureaucracy, he had a mania for not returning borrowed books, unless forced by more powerful people in the hierarchy (*ibid.*, IX, 301; see also Behrens-Abouseif 2018, 45-46). Similarly, al-Badr b. al-Qaṭṭān managed to illegally seize as many as five hundred volumes from the library of his deceased master ‘Alam al-Dīn al-Bulqīnī (d. 868/1464), as well as others from Ibn Ḥaġar’s estate, causing the anger of the latter’s son who had to intervene to save his father’s assets (IX, 250). For this reason, some explicitly forbade in the endowment deed the possibility of lending books to high-ranking people both in the circle of power and in the bureaucracy (Ibrāhīm 1962, 66). This group would also include the ‘*ulamā’* with a profound experience of the book world who were able to skillfully falsify the signatures of well-known authors and sell non-original, incomplete or damaged books as autographed copies, or to rent them at a very high cost to other needy colleagues and students who could not afford to buy them (al-Sahāwī n.d., IX, 148; cf. Touati 2006, 193-198).

In the light of the cost of books, the perishable nature of the material, competition, social differentiation, as well as the severe restrictions imposed by public libraries on external loans, it is clear why being generous and willing to lend one's own volumes (*samh bi-‘āriyat al-kutub*) held such an important social and ethical value in this Republic of Letters. It was a highly appreciated personal attribute of the erudite gentleman in the Mamluk era and duly reported by biographers as a demonstration of openness, empathy and altruism, fundamental for the unity of the group (*Ibid.*, III, 150, 228, 313). It was to this generous and fruitful sharing of books between colleagues and friends that al-Şafadī (1998, II, 706; III, 50, 500, 510) dedicated various correspondence exchanges in poetry and prose that highlight this deeply bonding practice. Ibn Ḥağar al-‘Asqalānī stands out among all the personalities who were remembered for generosity, a virtue that was in stark contrast with the selfishness driven by ruthless competitive rivalry. Al-Sahāwī reserved ample space in *al-Ǧawāhir* (III, 1018-21) to various anecdotes in which Ibn Ḥağar willingly lent his volumes to other scholars, including bitter rivals such as Badr al-Dīn al-‘Aynī (d. 855/1451), to people intending to travel for long periods or to common students who ran the risk of not carrying out their research because of biblioleptomaniacs like Abū Ḥāmid al-Qudsī (d. 888/1483).

On the bibliophile trend and on the respective rituals, which, as we have shown, seem to have flourished in those centuries sources however report the contrasting voice of Abū Ḥayyān al-Ǧarnāṭī. The exceptional linguist, grammarian and exegete, particularly known for his avarice, explicitly deplored the commercialisation of the book and its high cost, as well as the ostentatious attitude of collectors willing to spend fortunes to purchase books which were available for free in public libraries, thus refraining from helping colleagues or people in need instead: “he used to say to those who bought books: May God give you some common sense that can help you to live! I can borrow all the books I want from the *waqf* libraries. But if I wanted someone to lend me a few dirhams, I wouldn’t find anyone willing to do so” (al-Şafadī 1998, V, 334-35). The jurist Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkašī was seemingly of the same opinion. He was a regular visitor to the Cairo book market where he used to spend his days in the shops, reading, taking notes and copying texts for his research and lessons without ever buying anything (al-‘Asqalānī 1993, III, 398).

## 5. Conclusions

The partial and gradual shift from reliance on oral discourse and memory to a comparable reliance on the written record brought about important changes in medieval Islamic culture (Bloom 2001, 123). Thanks to a fortunate combination of economic, technical and socio-cultural conditions, the spread of the culture of the book favoured the emergence of new “reading and teaching practices” which required a more articulated organisation in book production, of libraries and markets for the sale of these items, which by then had become indispensable for a wider range of consumers with extremely varied personal and professional interests. The availability of book materials in conjunction with the consolidation of schools and the enlargement of the class of *'ulamā'* devoted to research, aspiring to an academic-bureaucratic career and eager for prestige and recognition, contributed to a greater articulation of the professional and social identity of the Mamluk scholar. The importance of academic inquiry and publishing was affirmed as a distinctive element necessary for differentiation within the scientific community. The importance attributed to written material and, above all, to rare and difficult-to-access texts, grew, as they represented an indispensable source for rigorous and original research in a saturated market with an endless amount of repetitive works. We have also noticed a trend towards a major cultural and relational refinement and an aesthetic sensitivity of the scholar of religious disciplines. The jurist, the *hadī* expert and the intellectual in general were expected to be gentlemen with a profound inclination to knowledge in its broadest sense, to literary and calligraphic art, to the accumulation of books, to leisure and, finally, professional, social and generational relationships. The new conventions and paradigms were developed into a series of practices that strengthened the visible and invisible links between the members of the community as well as the feelings of loyalty and belonging and, paradoxically, those of competition and rivalry, too.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

- al-‘Asqalānī, Ibn Ḥaḡar. 1969. *Inbā’ al-ǵumr bi-anbā’ al-‘umr*. Ed. by Ḥasan Ḥabašī, al-Qāhira: al-Mağlis al-A‘lā li-l-Śu’ūn al-Islāmiyya, 4 vols.
- al-‘Asqalānī, Ibn Ḥaḡar. 1993. *al-Durar al-kāmina fī a'yān al-mi'a al-tāmina*. Bayrūt: Dār al-Ǧīl, 4 vols.
- al-‘Asqalānī, Ibn Ḥaḡar. 2001. *Fatḥ al-bārī*. Ed. by ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Bāz et al., Bayrūt: Dār al-fikr, 13 vols.
- al-Biqā‘ī, Ibrāhīm b. Ḥasan. 2001. ‘Unwān al-zamān bi-tarāğim al-ṣuyūḥ wa-l-aqrān’. Ed. by Ḥasan Ḥabašī, al-Qāhira: Dār al-Kutub wa-l-Watā’iq al-Qawmiyya, 5 vol.
- al-Buhārī, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Ahmad. 2009. *Kaṣf al-asrār. Šarḥ uṣūl al-Bazdawī*. Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 4 vols.
- al-Dahabī, Šams al-Dīn. 2000. *Tārīḥ al-Islām wa-wafayāt al-maṣāḥīr wa-l-a'lām*. Ed. by ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām al-Tadmurī, Bayrūt: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 53 vols.
- al-Damīrī, Kamāl al-Dīn. 2005. *Hayāt al-ḥayawān al-kubrā*. Ed. by Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ, Dimašq: Dār al-Bašā’ir, 4 vols.
- al-Ğarnātī, Abū Ḥayyān. 1998. *al-Tadyīl wa-l-takmīl fī šarḥ kitāb al-tashīl*. Ed. by Ḥasan Hindāwī, Dimašq: Dār al-Qalam, 14 vols.
- al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baġdādī. 1996. *al-Ğāmi‘ li-aḥlāq al-rāwī wa-ādāb al-sāmi‘*. Ed. by Muḥammad ‘Ağāğ al- al-Ḥaṭīb, Bayrūt: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 2 vols.
- al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baġdādī. 2008. *Taqyīd al-‘ilm*. Ed. by Sa‘d ‘Abd al-Ğaffār, al-Qāhira: Dār al-Istiqaṭāma.
- Ibn Ğamā‘a, Badr al-Dīn. 2012. *Tađkirat al-sāmi‘ wa-l-mutakallim fī adab al-‘ālim wa-l-muta‘allim*. Ed. by Muḥammad b. Mahdī al-‘Ağamī, Bayrūt: Dār al-Bašā’ir al-Islāmiyya.
- Ibn Ḥaldūn, ‘Abd al-Rahmān. 2005. *al-Muqaddima*. Ed. by ‘Abd al-Salām al-Šaddādī, Casablanca: Bayt al-‘Ulūm wa-l-Funūn wa-l-Ādāb, 5 vols.
- Ibn Mukarram, Ğamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad. 1298 [1881]. *Niṭār al-azhār fī al-layl wa-l-nahār*. al-Quṣṭanṭīniyya: Dār al-Ğawā’ib.
- Ibn al-Qayyim al-Ğawziyya. 1983. *Rawḍat al-muhibbīn wa-nuzhat al-muštāqīn*. Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya.
- Ibn Rāfi‘ al-Salāmī, Taqī al-Dīn. 1982. *al-Wafayāt*. Eds. Ṣāliḥ Mahdī ‘Abbās et al., Bayrūt: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 2 vols.
- Ibn Taġrībirdī, Ğamāl al-Dīn. 1992. *al-Nuğūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira*. Ed. by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Šams al-Dīn, Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 16 vols.
- al-Isnawī, Ğamāl al-Dīn. 1987. *Tabaqāt al-ṣāfi‘iyya*. Ed. by Kamāl Yūsuf al-Hūt, Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2 vols.
- al-Isnawī, Ğamāl al-Dīn. 2009. *al-Muhiyyāt fī šarḥ al-Rawḍa wa-l-Rāfi‘ī*. Ed. by Abū al-Faḍl al-Dīmyātī, Bayrūt: Dār Ibn Hazm, 10 vols.

- al-Kutubī, Ibn Šakir. 1974. *Fawāt al-wafayāt*. Ed. by Ihsān ‘Abbās, Bayrūt: Dār Ṣādir, 5 vols.
- al-Maqrīzī, Taqī al-Dīn. 1991. *Kitāb al-muqaffā al-kabīr*. Ed. by Muḥammad al-Ya‘lāwī, Bayrūt: Dār al-Ğarb al-Islāmī, 8 vols.
- al-Maqrīzī, Taqī al-Dīn. 1997. *al-Sulūk li-ma‘rifat duwal al-mulūk*. Ed. by Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Atā, Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 8 vols.
- al-Miṣrī, ‘Alī b. Rīḍwān. 1986. *al-Kitāb al-nāfi‘ fī kayfīyat ta‘līm ḥinā‘at al-ṭibb*. Ed. by Kamāl al-Samarra‘ī, Bağdād: Matba‘at Čāmī‘at Bağdād.
- al-Nawawī, Muhyī al-Dīn. 1980. *Kitāb al-maġmū‘*. Ṣarḥ al-muhaddab li-l-Širāzī. Ed. by Muḥammad Naġīb al-Muṭī‘ī, Čidda: Maktabat al-Iṛšād, 23 vols.
- al-Nuwayrī, Šihāb al-Dīn. 2004. *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*. Eds Mufid Qumayha et al., Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 33 vols.
- al-Qalqašandī, Abū al-‘Abbās. 1916. *Şubh al-a‘ṣā fī ḥinā‘at al-inšā*. al-Qāhira: Dār al-Kutub al-Sultāniyya, 14 vols.
- al-Safadī, Ḥalīl b. Aybak. 1998. *A‘yān al-‘aṣr wa-a‘wān al-naṣr*. Eds ‘Alī Abū Zayd et al., Dimašq: Dār al-Fikr, 6 vols.
- al-Safadī, Ḥalīl b. Aybak. 2000. *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt*. Eds Aḥmad al-Arnā‘ūt et al., al-Qāhira: Dār Ihyā‘ al-Turāt al-‘Arabi, 29 vols.
- al-Ṣahāwī, Šams al-Dīn. n.d. *al-Daw’ al-lāmi‘ li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsi‘*. Bayrūt: Dār al-ġīl, 12 vols.
- al-Ṣahāwī, Šams al-Dīn. 1999. *al-Ğawāhir wa-l-durār fī tarġamat šayḥ al-Islām Ibn Haġar*. Ed. by Ibrāhīm ‘Abd al-Maġid, Bayrūt: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 3 vols.
- al-Ṣahāwī, Šams al-Dīn. 1426/2005. *Fath al-muġīt bi-ṣarḥ alfiyyat al-hadīt*. Eds ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Ḥudayr et al., al-Riyād: Maktabat Dār al-Minhāġ, 5 vols.
- al-Ṣahāwī, Šams al-Dīn. 2017. *al-I‘lān bi-l-tawbīh li-man ḍamma ahl al-tawrīh*. Ed. by Sālim al-Zafīrī, al-Riyād: Dār al-Šumay‘ī li-l-Naṣr.
- al-Sam‘ānī, ‘Abd al-Karīm. 1993. *Adab al-Imlā‘ wa-l-istimlā‘*. Ed. by Aḥmad Muḥammad, Čidda: Matba‘at al-Maḥmūdiyya.
- al-Sayrafī, ‘Alī b. Dāwūd. 2002. *Inbā‘ al-haṣr bi-anbā‘ al-‘aṣr*. Ed. by Ḥasan Ḥabašī, al-Qāhira: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmma li-l-Kitāb.
- al-Sayrafī, ‘Alī b. Dāwūd. 2010. *Nuzhat al-nuṣūs wa-l-abdān fī tawārīh al-zamān*. Ed. by Ḥasan Ḥabašī, al-Qāhira: Dār al-Kutub wa-l-Wāqī‘at al-Qawmiyya, 4 vols.
- al-Subkī, Bahā‘ al-Dīn. 2003. *‘Arūs al-afrāh fī ṣarḥ talḥīṣ al-miftāh*. Ed. by ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Hindāwī, Bayrūt: al-Maktaba al-‘Aṣriyya, 2 vols.
- al-Subkī, Tāḡ al-Dīn. 2019. *Man‘ al-mawāni‘ an ḡam‘ al-ğawāmi‘ fī uṣūl al-fiqh*. Ed. by Muḥammad al-‘Azāzī, Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya.
- al-Suyūtī, Ḡalāl al-Dīn. 1967. *Husn al-muḥādara fī tārīh Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira*. Ed. by Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, al-Qāhira: Dār Ihyā‘ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya, 2 vol.
- al-Suyūtī, Ḡalāl al-Dīn, 1975. *al-Taħadduť bi-ni‘mat Allāh*. Ed. by E. M. Sartain, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

al-Zarkašī, Badr al-Dīn. 2016. *al-Manṭūr fī al-qawā‘id*. Ed. by Muḥammad Ḥassan Ismā‘īl, Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2 vols.

## Secondary Sources

- al-‘Anāqira, Muḥammad. 2015. *al-Madāris fi Miṣr fī ‘aṣr dawlat al-mamālik*. al-Qāhira, al-Mağlis al-A‘lā li-l-Taqāfa.
- Behrens-Abouseif, Doris. 2011. “Craftsmen, Upstarts and Sufis in the Late Mamluk Period”. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 74: 375-95.
- Behrens-Abouseif, Doris. 2018. *The Book in Mamluk Egypt and Syria (1250-1517): Scribes, Libraries and Market*. Leiden: Brill.
- Berkey, Jonathan P. 1992. *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Berkey, Jonathan P. 2002. *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bloom, Jonathan. 2001. *Paper Before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World*. London: Yale University Press.
- Canova, Giovanni. 2012. “Libri e artigiani del libro: le raccomandazioni dei giuristi musulmani (XIV Secolo)”. *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 12: 235-63.
- Chamberlain, Michael. 1994. *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus 1190–350*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cook, Michael. 1997. “The Opponents of the Writing of Tradition in Early Islam”. *Arabica* 44(4): 437-530.
- Déroche, François. 2004. *Le livre manuscrit arabe: Préludes à une histoire*. Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France.
- al-Durūbī, Samīr Maḥmūd (ed. by) 1989. *Šarḥ maqāmāt Čalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī*. Bayrūt: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 2 vol.
- Gheretti, Antonella. 1994. “L’utilità della scrittura e la lode del libro: testimonianze di alcuni scrittori arabi medievali”. *Annali di Ca’ Foscari* 33(3): 67-76.
- Gheretti, Antonella. 2006. “Parola parlata: convenzioni e tecniche di resa nella narrativa araba classica”. *Annali di Ca’ Foscari* xlv(2): 71-92.
- Gheretti, Antonella. 2015. “A Pre-modern Anthologist at Work: The Case of Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Waṭwāṭ (d. 718/1318)”. in *Concepts of Authorship in Pre-Modern Arabic Texts*. Eds. Lale Behzadi and Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, 23-45. Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press.
- Gruendler, Beatrice. 2020. *The Rise of the Arabic Book*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Gully, Adrian. 2008. *Culture of Letter-Writing in Pre-Modern Islamic Society*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Haarmann, Ulrich. 1984. “The library of a Fourteenth Century Jerusalem Scholar”. *Der Islam* 61: 327-33.

The Book in the Professional and Social Life of Scholars and Literati in the Mamluk Period

- Haarmann, Ulrich. 1988. "Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage. Mamluks and their Sons in the Intellectual Life of Fourteenth Century Egypt and Syria". *Journal of semitic studies* 33: 81-114.
- Hirschler, Konrad. 2011. *Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Ibrāhīm, ‘Abd al-Laṭīf. 1962. *al-Maktaba al-mamlūkiyya*. al-Qāhira: Kulliyat al-Ādāb-Āgāmi‘at al-Qāhira.
- Ibrāhīm, ‘Abd al-Laṭīf. 1963. *Maktaba fī waṭīqa: dirāsa li-l-maktaba wa-našr li-l-waṭīqa*. al-Qāhira: Kulliyat al-Ādāb-Āgāmi‘at al-Qāhira.
- Ibrāhīm, ‘Abd al-Laṭīf. 1966. "Naṣṣān ḡadīdān min waṭīqat al-amīr Ṣarġatmiš". *Maġallat Kulliyat al-Ādāb-Āgāmi‘at al-Qāhira* 28: 121-58.
- Ismail, Nasser. 2021. "Riflessioni sulle ripercussioni della peste in ambito burocratico, accademico e culturale durante il periodo mamelucco". *Rivista di Studi Indo-Mediterranei* XI (2021): 1-24.
- Lancioni, Giuliano. 2003. "Oralità e scrittura, apporti esterni, concettualizzazioni innovative", in *Lo spazio letterario del Medioevo. 3. Le culture circostanti. II. La cultura arabo-islamica*. A cura di Biancamaria Scarcia Amoretti, 233-58. Roma: Salerno Editrice.
- Lapidus, Ira M. 2008. *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Makdisi, George. 1990. *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West: With Special Reference to Scholasticism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Messick, Brinkley. 1993. *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Pedersen, Johannes. 1984. *The Arabic Book*. Transl. Geoffrey French. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Petry, Carl F. 1993. "Scholastic Stasis in Medieval Islam Reconsidered: Mamluk Patronage in Cairo". *Poetics Today* 14(2): 323-48.
- Rosenthal, Franz. 1947. "The Technique and Approach of Muslim Scholarship". *Analecta Orientalia* 24: 1-74.
- Rosenthal, Franz. 2003. "'Of Making Many Books There Is No End:' The Classical Muslim View". In Id., *Man versus Society in Medieval Islam*. Ed. by Dimitri Gutas, 1066-87. Brill, Leiden.
- Rosenthal, Franz. 2007. *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*. Leiden: Brill.
- Sayyid, Ayman Fu’ād. 1997. *al-Kitāb al-‘arabī al-maḥtūṭ wa-‘ilm al-maḥtūṭāt*. al-Qāhira: al-Dār al-Miṣriyya al-Lubnāniyya.
- Schoeler, Gregor. 2006. *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*. Transl. Uwe Vagelpohl. Ed. by James E. Montgomery. London: Routledge.
- Schoeler, Gregor. 2009. *The Genesis of Literature in Islam: From the Aural to the Read*. Transl. Shawkat M. Toorawa. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

- Shatzmiller, Maya. 2015. "An Early Knowledge Economy: The Adoption of Paper, Human Capital and Economic Change in the Medieval Islamic Middle East, 700–1300 AD". *Centre for Global Economic History Working Papers Series* 64: 1-32.
- Skarżyńska-Bocheńska, Krystyna. 1969. "Les opinions d'al-Ğāhīz sur l'écrivain et l'oeuvre littéraire". *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 32: 105-22.
- Toorawa, Shawkat. 2005. *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr and Arabic Writerly Culture: A Ninth-Century Bookman in Baghdad*. London: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Touati, Houari. 2006. *Biblioteche di saggezza. Libro e collezionismo nell'Islam*. Milano: Sylvestre Bonnard.
- Veblen, Thorstein. 2007. *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Marco Ammar

Università degli Studi di Genova  
[marco.ammar@unige.it](mailto:marco.ammar@unige.it)

## Migration Narrative(s) in the Arab Media: A metaphorical framing analysis

### ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, migration across the Mediterranean has progressively gained attention in the European political forum and in news media, where metaphorical language has constantly marked the narrative strategies used to frame migrants as a threat to social security in host countries. As an integral part of this scenario, news production in the Arab world has always provided a detailed coverage of migration-related issues, although strongly influenced by the translation process of the foreign material it relies on. Through the lens of metaphorical framing analysis, this paper seeks to understand whether the Arab media discourse challenges the European dominant narrative on migration, or if it rather contributes to its reproduction.

KEYWORDS: Arab media; migration; conceptual metaphor; framing; critical discourse analysis.

A compelling narrative fosters an illusion of inevitability  
Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011, 168)

## 1. Introduzione

### 1.1 Historical background

In recent years, what is usually referred to as illegal or irregular migration has grown to the point that it has become a priority on the European Union's political agenda. Despite the restrictive policies adopted since the mid 1980s to control external borders, the arrival of so-called economic migrants – that is, people seeking an improved standard of living – has witnessed an increasing trend

(Castles *et al.* 2014), mainly driven by high unemployment rates in origin countries, and encouraged by the socio-economic stability and geographical nearness of the old continent.

Over the last decade, however, migration across the Mediterranean has escalated dramatically: the uprisings that erupted throughout the Arab world in 2010-11, and which offered promising signs of social change and peaceful democratization, eventually spiralled into armed conflicts, resulting in a major humanitarian crisis (Boulby and Christie 2018).

In 2015, the Syrian crisis escalated into a violent sectarian struggle, generating an exodus of over 4 million citizens, who were forced to flee their homes and take desperate measures for survival. While most displaced people were relocated in neighbouring countries, many families embarked on hazardous journeys, heading for the Northern shores of the Mediterranean. According to IOM, by the end of December 2015, 3,771 people had lost their lives trying to cross the sea, and over one million migrants/refugees had arrived in Europe ([iom.int](http://iom.int)). Due to an unprecedented number of first-time asylum requests, the refugee crisis took centre stage in the European political debate, fuelling, in many cases, right-wing populism and xenophobia.

Migration has also been a major concern for most states in the MENA region, where local authorities are bound by cooperation agreements with the European Union, requesting them to keep human mobility under control. However, owing to inadequate human and material resources, they often fail to prevent human trafficking rings from exploiting irregular migration towards Europe. All Arab African countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea are not only departure hubs, but they are also transit or even destination countries for Sub-Saharan migrants. Morocco, in particular, which has an estimated diaspora of 5 million citizens over the world, is for many sub-Saharan Africans either the journey's end or simply a transit area on their way to the Spanish shores.

Some of these countries host large refugee populations. A special case is represented by Lebanon which became, in a relatively short period of time, the Arab country with the highest number of refugees per capita (1 refugee every 5 nationals<sup>1</sup>). When the Syrian crisis began, Lebanon kept its borders with Syria open, allowing crowds of Syrian citizens to chaotically enter its territory

---

<sup>1</sup> Lebanon was already hosting 208,000 Palestinian refugees and 78,000 migrants from other nationalities, before over 1,5 million Syrian officially registered refugees entered the country, [\(23/04/2023\)](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east/lebanon_en).

(Kikano *et al.* 2021). Such an apparently lenient attitude was rather the result of institutional inertia. In 2014 the Lebanese government closed border crossing points and introduced a new set of rules, which restricted legal residency to real estate owners and to those who could successfully regularise their status through a Lebanese sponsor (Saghieh 2015). Not only did these measures strongly discourage other Syrians from seeking protection in Lebanon, but they implicitly conferred an illegal status upon anyone who had already entered the country but was unable to meet these requirements. Besides, in order to escape all obligations associated with the internationally acknowledged status of *refugee*, Lebanese authorities have always avoided using this label with Syrians, and rather categorised them as *guests*, *displaced* or more cynically as *de facto refugees*. In May 2015, and in line with the new rules, the government directed the UNHCR to stop registering Syrians as refugees, claiming that they would not be considered as such under the new residency policy. Lebanon has also found a way to circumvent the legal obstacle of the *non-refoulement* principle of international law, by issuing deportation orders and informing refugees that they must leave the country (Janmyr M. 2016). Furthermore, unlike Jordan and Turkey, Lebanon prohibited the establishment of official refugee camps, for national security reasons. Municipalities were tacitly appointed to the task of administering the informal settlements that were established, and that of dealing with humanitarian agencies, leaving much of the initiative to local mayors and political leaders.

On the whole, much of the action taken to address the crisis has shrunken the space of legality and produced marginalisation and precariousness with the ultimate goal of pushing refugees to leave.

## 1.2 Research question

Migration-related issues have constantly captured the attention of academics and media outlets alike. The predominant narrative strategies used by European news discourse, framed migration as a threat to social security through a misleading representation of the phenomenon, expressed or implied by means of evaluative and connotative language. Metaphors, in particular, have largely contributed to the general acceptance of these ideologically driven plots which portray migrants as natural calamities, invaders, terrorists or criminals, and arguably played a major role in the electoral success experienced by a

number of far-right European political parties over the past few years, as well as in the outcome of the UK's Brexit referendum.

Public discourse on migration has also been the focus of scholarly attention. Within the framework of critical discourse studies, much research was devoted to European news coverage, highlighting the negative attitude that a constant exposure to the news narrative may trigger (Eberl *et al.* 2018). However, most research concentrates on European media outlets. Arab media and news websites are far less investigated. Yet, Arab countries are directly involved in this scenario and, as we have seen, migration in the MENA region is a multifaceted problem. As part of a wider research project, conducted on migration discourse in the Arab press (Ammar and Murgia 2022), this paper seeks to explore whether, and to which extent, the metaphorical representation of migrants and refugees in Arabic digital media reflects the complexity and many-sidedness of human experience. The hegemony of English as a global language has deeply affected news translation; this is quite evident from the figurative language that media Arabic is constantly borrowing. Through the lens of metaphorical framing analysis, the aim of this paper is to assess whether the Arab media discourse challenges the European dominant narrative on migration, or if it rather contributes to its reproduction and re-instantiation.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

Informed by the broader theoretical framework of Critical Discourse Studies, the present article adopts an integrated approach to metaphorical framing in news discourse and cognition. Since the so-called cognitive revolution, scientific research has constantly provided evidence that metaphor – far from being merely a matter of language – is deeply embedded in our way of thinking (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Fauconnier and Turner 2002, Kövecses 2010). We can think of conceptual metaphor as a cognitive device that makes certain fields of knowledge accessible by mapping abstract notions (target domains) onto concrete ones (source domains), enabling us to understand the abstract through something grounded in our experience. Each conceptual metaphor is, then, realized in everyday language through conventionalized expressions. Therefore, metaphors have a dramatic impact on our perception of the world, as well as on the way we order and structure our knowledge. Because language and discourse are so closely interwoven, metaphors also play a pivotal role in discursive practices that shape our systems of values and beliefs

as well as our social relationships, thus contributing to transforming society (Doering 2003). In this sense, metaphor has far-reaching implications for how we set problems, bringing into existence new perspectives on the world, new ways of looking at things (Schön 1993). This particular perspective that metaphors establish on a topic, is often referred to as *frame*, whereas the process of using language in order to set such a perspective is usually defined as *framing*. To be sure, *frame* and *framing* are still debated notions lacking a univocal and accepted definition in the scientific community. Following Fillmore, some authors employ the word frame as a synonym for cognitive schema, while some others use the same term in reference to a pattern of language use (Ritchie 2013). For the purpose of this investigation, I will assume the broader definition of *framing* given by Entman:

Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (1993, 53)

Hence, *framing* is a discursive process by which certain features of a given subject are highlighted at the expense of others. *Frames* are, so to speak, defined by what they highlight as well as by what they omit, thus making some bits of information more noticeable or memorable to the receiver, who will likely perceive them as more meaningful, and consequently process and store them in his memory. More importantly, *frames* can affect the way a problem is presented, ergo exerting significant influence over the identification of causes, entailing moral judgements and propounding suggestions or strategies for possible solutions.

Metaphorical framing in news discourse has an even greater cognitive potential due to its cumulative and continuous nature. Recent research has shown that conventionalized metaphors used to frame migrants and migration today, are based on inherited tropes, implying that a coherent view has uninterruptedly been disseminated over the last two centuries (Taylor 2021). In fact, the systematic use of metaphorical frames across media texts strengthens the persuasiveness of the message they convey, to the point of creating a narrative, or a “myth”, in the sense proposed by Charteris-Black: “Myths are explanatory narratives for anything that requires an explanation and therefore purport to be a set of truths. [...] Myth engages the hearer through a narrative

that embodies a set of beliefs expressing aspects of the unconscious (2009, 100).

The vast majority of tropes used in news discourse conceptualize migrants as a threat for social security, either by drawing on dehumanizing stereotypes that portray them as floods, waves, natural disasters (Musolff 2015), pollutants and parasites (Cisneros 2008), or by likening them to invaders and criminals (O'Brien 2003). In all cases, these metaphors serve the purpose of reinforcing both conscious and subliminal fears, while providing argumentative support and moral grounds for taking actions against them (Nilsen 2017). The social community and the nation are construed accordingly, either as a vulnerable physical body or as a confined space with walls separating insiders from outsiders. Nevertheless, immigrants may also be represented as objects or commodities, especially when considered in terms of labour force.

One further theoretical issue to be addressed in the specific context of Arab news discourse, is the impact of translation on Media Arabic. Empirical evidence and qualitative research suggest that recent developments in the Arabic language can be attributed to the fact that news production relies heavily on foreign material (Abdalla 2018). Some scholars claim that the all-pervasive adoption of English idiomatic expressions and specialized terminologies is resulting in a phenomenon of concealed linguistic and epistemic shift. The persistent imitation of foreign language forms has produced some sort of cultural dissonance, to which metaphors are no exception. In most cases, literal translation is believed to cause an incongruity between the source and target versions of news stories, thus reframing the narrative in such a way as to elicit specific responses from the receivers (Darwish 2009).

### 3. Methodology

The corpus for this study consists of 52 articles (31,008 words) accessed from the following online media sources: *hespress.com* (Morocco), *alchourouk.com* (Tunisia), *akhhbarlibya24.net* (Libya), *youn7.com* (Egypt), *al-akhbar.com* and *annahar.com* (Lebanon). Digital platforms were selected based on their popularity, according to a survey conducted by *alexa.com* in 2016<sup>2</sup>. Data was

---

<sup>2</sup> As of May 1, 2022, the company is no longer operating. However, all consulted digital platforms are still among the most prominent and influential media sources in the region. In particular, according to *SimilarWeb* statistics, *hespress.com* and *youn7.com* are the most visited news websites in their respective countries, <https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/> (23/04/2023).

collected through searches, using the generic keywords “migration” (*hīgra*), “migrant” (*muhāġir*), “asylum” (*luğū*) and “refugee” (*lāġi*). All articles were written in Arabic and published in 2015, when the Syrian crisis reached its climax. Since this paper does not address the issue of genre or text-type, both reporting and commentary articles were included for the study.

Metaphor Identification was carried out by applying the four-step MIP procedure (Pragglejaz 2007). After reading each article for general understanding, lexical units were manually highlighted in the text; their contextual meaning was then analysed and assessed against any existing more basic or concrete meaning in use. According to MIP a lexical unit is considered to be metaphorically used when its contextual meaning differs from its basic meaning, but can be understood in comparison with it: for instance, the word “flow” (*tadaffuq*) used in reference to migrants as in the expression “flow of migrants” (*tadaffuq al-muhāġirīn*), can be contrasted with (but understood through) its basic meaning of “flowing movement in a stream”. The online monolingual dictionary almaany.com and the bilingual dictionary Arabic-English by Hans Wehr were taken as reference for this purpose.

245 items met the above criteria and were successively tagged, according to subjacent conceptual metaphors. Now, these conceptual metaphors can be classified in a variety of different ways: a major distinction can be drawn between those that assign migrants human agency (INVADERS, CRIMINALS) and those that don't (LIQUID, PRESSURE, DISEASE). But since different metaphorical expressions can evoke the same scenario, serving similar argumentative functions, linguistic expressions were grouped conveniently into eight different categories, based on the type of narrative they frame. All expressions associated with *military jargon* were gathered together because they conceptualize migrants as invaders or enemies. Liquid metaphors such as waves, floods and flows were paired with earthquakes and fires under a single label, for all of them frame *natural disasters*. While part of the larger category of dehumanizing metaphors, these expressions that conceptualize migrants as germs or parasites were set apart under the label *disease*, for they construe host societies as physical bodies. *Pressure* and *container* metaphors were analysed separately, too: although they both construe the nation as a confined space, they provide slightly different perspectives, for the former focuses on the force exerted on the container's wall, whereas the latter focuses on the container itself. Metaphoric expressions conceiving migrants in terms of labour force or economic resources were labelled as *commodities*. A significant number of

recurring utterances, which seem to highlight the risks connected with irregular migration across the sea, were grouped under the label *dissuasion*. All remaining metaphoric expressions were recorded as *other*. Finally, relative frequencies expressed as a percentage rounded to the second decimal place, were calculated for each category and separately for each media source.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1 Emigration

While the news items chosen for this study offer heterogeneous perspectives on the subject of migration, media outlets seem to share a set of language conventions. This is quite evident from the recurring expressions which liken migration across the Mediterranean to a journey unavoidably ending with death, as shown in the following excerpt:

1- *Wa-l-qāṣidūn li-l-ğanūb al-isbānī yufaddilūn qawārib al-mawt li-bulūg ḥulmi-him al-ūrūbī / And those heading to the Spanish South prefer the boats of death in order to reach their European dream (bespress.com Sep 4)*

Phrases such as the boats of death (*qawārib al-mawt*), migration to death (*al-hiğra fī l-mawt*), a trip to the unknown (*rihla ilà l-mağħūl*), the Mediterranean graveyard (*maqbarat al-mutawassit*), the European dream (*al-hulm al-ūrūbī*) were found in several articles across all selected media outlets, with the sole exception of *youn7.com*. Although they are mostly loan translations, these pervasive tropes – which I have called *dissuasion metaphors* – share the same argumentative force, for they all aim at discouraging people from embarking by sea. The word ‘death’ recurring as a second term in the annexation replaces the actual destination of the journey. Europe is framed as an unattainable dream or even a mirage, whereas the sea itself is conceptualized as a huge cemetery. The highest values of relative frequency for this type of metaphors were found in *akħbarlibya24.net* (31,25%) and *bespress.com* (29,72%), consistently reflecting the difficulties that Morocco and Libya experience in preventing irregular migration on the Western and Central routes of the Mediterranean.

Metaphorical language, framing migration as a natural disaster and migrants as waves or floods, is also widespread and evenly distributed among media platforms, though *youn7.com* turned out to have the highest relative frequency (75%). LIQUID metaphors, in particular, are characterized by a high degree of conventionality: this feature, coupled with the morphological structure of the

Arabic language, provides their linguistic instances with lexical richness and adaptivity. Other than the word ‘wave’ (*mawğā*), the verbal roots ‘overflow’ (*fāḍa*), ‘leak’ (*sāla*), ‘drown’ (*garaqa*), ‘pour out’ (*tadaffaqa*), ‘flood’ (*gamara*) are commonly used in reference to migration discourse, also in their nominalized and participial forms. Here’s an example:

2- *Qālat al-ṣurṭa inna-hā «garaqat» amām a'dād al-lāgi 'in alladīn tadaffaqū fī nihāyat al-usbū'* / The police said they drowned beneath the numerous refugees pouring out over the weekend (*yousm7.com* Oct 26)

Despite their conventionality, metaphors framing natural disasters have a powerful dehumanizing effect operating at the subliminal level, a point I will return to in the final section. In like manner, DISEASE metaphors remove human qualities from refugees and migrants, and conceptualize them as infectious bacteria or pollutants; hosting societies or countries are, then, implicitly construed as disabled bodies in need of assistance, legitimizing any action taken as a remedy. These metaphors are sometimes instantiated by words like ‘infection’ (*adwā*) or ‘stroke’ (*ṣadma*), though they are more often realized by means of verbs such as ‘treat’ (*ālağa*) or ‘suffer’ (*ānā*). Excerpts 3 and 4 show how some of these terms are used in context:

3- *Wa-l-kull ya'lam anna mu'ālağat hādihi al-żāhira laysa 'alā šawāṭi' Zuwāra aw mudun al-šāṭi'* / Everyone knows that the cure for this phenomenon is not on the shores of Zuwarah or the other coastal towns (*alchourouk.com* Sep 29)

4- *Wa-lā yanfaṣil 'an dālika tasāru' intišār 'adwā al-hiğra* / Inseparable from this is the accelerated spread of the disease of migration (*al-akhbar.com* July 14)

PRESSURE, CONTAINER and WAR metaphors contribute in different ways to the construal of possibly the most persuasive myth circulating in news discourse. In such narrative, migrants keep the semantic feature of ‘human’; yet, they are not portrayed as individuals, but rather as hordes of invaders or criminals on the verge of wreaking havoc on the intended host country. This latter, is implicitly or explicitly decoded as an enclosed space whose walls are about to fall down, under the external pressure exerted by these armies of enemies. What sets this representation apart from other frames, is the active role and volition assigned to migrants, which is taken as a justification for promoting action against them as self-defense. That is the narrative that most

compellingly affected public opinion in the Brexit referendum, and which also left its legacy in the Arab media discourse, where the lexical repertoire, belonging to the semantic field of war, offers a wide range of choices. Migrants' agency is manifested in verbs like 'conquer' (*gazā*), 'invade' (*iġtāha* or *taġġa*), 'assault' (*iqtahama*), 'plunder' (*iktasaha*), 'besiege' (*ħaṣara*), whereas defensive action is usually instantiated by the roots 'defend' (*ħāmà*), 'struggle' (*ħāraba* or *kāfha*), 'resist' (*taṣadda*). WAR and CONTAINER metaphors can sometimes overlap in phrases such as 'border defense' (*himāyat al-ħudūd*) or 'erect a wall' (*aqāma al-ġidār*). The analysis suggests that *akħbarlibya24.net* resorts to this type of narrative far more than any platform, with a relative frequency of 46,87%:

5- *Al-ġihāt al-mas'ūla fi madīnat Bingāzīt a'lanat qillat imkāniyyāti-hā wa-ġihāzijjati-hā li-muħārabat hādihi al-żāhira /* The responsible authorities in Benghazi admitted their lack of capabilities and equipment to combat this phenomenon (*akħbarlibya24.net* Aug 9)

OBJECT metaphors are also fairly frequent throughout the corpus. However, *hespress.com* is the only news outlet specifically interested in the Arab diaspora. This is proved by the fact that it dedicates significant space to the causes and effects of brain drain on the region, reflecting on emigrants in terms of commodities or economic resources, and often resorting to metaphorical or rather metonymical expressions such as 'brain migration' (*hiġrat al-admiġa*), 'migrating skills' (*al-kafā'at al-muħāġira*), 'qualified human resources' (*al-mawārid al-bašariyya al-mu'ahħala*):

6- *Hiġrat al-admiġa naħwa Īrūbā tuwāzīħā hiġra uħrà ahadat fi l-irtifā' wa hiya hiġrat al-ṭalaba /* The brain drain towards Europe is paralleled by another drain that is on the rise, which is students' migration (*hespress.com* Apr 28)

It is worth noticing that cultural metaphors are virtually absent from the corpus, the only exception being a couple of occurrences of the phrase 'season of migration' (*mawsim al-hiġra*), which is a clear reference to the classic postcolonial novel *Season of Migration to the North* by Tayeb Salih. The unabridged title of the Salih's novel also appears in the title of a rather sarcastic article published on *alħourouk.com*:

7- *Mawsim al-hiġra il-l-samāl» ġarīmat al- 'aṣr... /* Season of Migration to the North the crime of the century... (*alħourouk.com* Aug 26)

#### 4.2 Immigration

The same metaphorical language used to frame emigration in the Arab media is still pervasive in framing discourse on immigration. Although *hespress.com* and *akbarlibya24.net* do actually devote some space to reporting on inbound migrants, this subsection will deal exclusively with Syrian refugees in Lebanon. As a matter of fact, the escalation of the Syrian crisis in 2015 had a far greater impact on Lebanon than on any other country in the region. Local media were deeply engaged in covering the events, without sparing the Lebanese Government's due criticism for its handling of a crisis that worsened an already precarious socio-economic situation. On the contents level, the extensive coverage of *annahar.com* and *al-akhbar.com* adopts a rather sympathetic attitude towards both refugees and Lebanese citizens, while disapproving of the state's mismanagement of the case. Yet, metaphorical language seems to foster a narrative, where Lebanon is construed as a container/building or as a physical body (Goatly 2007, Ritchie 2013). The first narrative entails the idea that national security depends on a full control of the inflow and outflow of people and goods across its boundaries/walls, whereas the latter assumes that external agents may cause physical disease. Consistently, Syrian migrants are represented by means of LIQUID or INVASION metaphors, as demonstrated in the next few excerpts, taken from an article published by *annahar.com* on January 5th:

8- *Al-Ḥamrā mā 'ādat lubnāniyya... al-tawassu' al-sūrī ġayyara huwiyyata-hā* / Al-Hamra is no longer Lebanese... the Syrian expansion changed its identity

9- *Al-Ḥamrā ṣārat al-yawm sawdā* / Today, al-Hamra has turned “black”

10- *Al-Ḥamrā al-yawm taftaqid ahla-hā [...] Al-dimūgrāfiyya taġayyarat fī l-Ḥamrā, taġà al-sūriyyūn 'alà l-mašhad* / Al-Hamra today yearns for its people [...] Demography has changed in al-Hamra, after Syrians, invaded the scene

11- *Al-sūriyyūn iħtallū al-balad* / Syrians occupied the country

12- *Al-lubnāniyyūn yaġibūn 'an al-mašhad fimā al-sāha hāliya li-l-lägi 'in al-sūriyyūn alladīn fäd 'adadu-hum fī Lubnān* / The Lebanese are absent from the scene, while the arena is free for Syrian refugees whose number has overflowed in Lebanon

The whole piece is a report on the demographic impact that Syrian migrations has had on the central district of al-Hamra in Beirut. Most lexical items, belonging to the military jargon, conceptualize refugees as invaders, and

point to a concern for potential miscegenation between Lebanese and Syrians. This is quite evident in excerpt 8, and further reinforced in excerpt 9, which is a racist pun insinuating that al-Hamra (literally ‘the red one’) has turned ‘black’ due to the massive presence of Syrian immigrants, who are generally perceived as having a darker complexion. In excerpt 10 the district itself is personified as someone yearning for its Lebanese inhabitants; Syrian citizens are – so to speak – the unwanted content of al-Hamra/the container. Finally, excerpt 12 represents Syrian refugees as a liquid overflowing inside the nation/container, that is Lebanon. A similar perspective is provided by the news item published by *al-akhbar.com* on February 11:

13- *Li-hādihi «al-halṭa al-sukkāniyya» ta'īrāt wa-in 'ikāsāt 'adīda fī ẓill gīyāb siyāsāt sukkāniyya taqūm 'alā mabda' al-indimāg / This population mixture may have many effects and repercussions in the absence of population policies based on the principle of integration*

14- *Yu'akkid Hamdān anna al-'unsuriyya sa-tazdād wa-sa-tatāda 'af zāhirat al-tahmīš al-iġtimā'i fī l-ahyā' al-faqira haytu sa-tartafī' mu'addalāt al-tasawwul wa-l-ittiġgar bi-l-bašar, mā ya-nī fi liyyan annanā amām muġtamā' mutasaġġir / Hamdan assures that racism and social marginalization will increase in poor areas, whereas the rate of scrounging and human trafficking will rise; we are truly in front of an exploded society*

Concerns are not limited to identity issues, but they are also directed to the potential demographic unbalances and social disorder that the presence of Syrian refugees might bring about. The Lebanese social community is viewed as a homogenous physical body in precarious health conditions, whose survival is jeopardized by the massive arrival of migrants, who are – by inference – construed as pathogenic agents.

This anxiety is even more obvious in the article published by *al-akhbar.com* on April 9th, about the local community of al-Qaa (a border-town north-east of the Bekaa Valley), feeling anxiety and distress after the governor announced the intention of establishing the first official refugee camp for Syrians on a plot of land provided by the municipality. Despite the explicit criticism expressed against the state’s handling of the issue, refugees are referred to by means of a DISEASE metaphor:

15- *'Alat al-aşwāt al-muntaqida li-l-dawla ḡarrā' 'adam wad'i-hā siyāsāt li-l-ta'āmul ma'a al-ṣadma allatī darabat al-balad / Critical voices arose against the state for not putting in place policies to deal with the stroke that hit the country*

The PRESSURE metaphor, as already mentioned above, is yet another trope commonly used to dehumanize refugees. In the detailed account on the demographic changes that affected Jordan and Lebanon over the past thirty years, *al-akħbar.com* conceptualizes Syrians as natural forces (waves and pressure), while implicitly evoking the container metaphor. This news item was published on May 25:

16- *La-qad ḥalaqa al-ṣirā' al-sūrī taħaddiyāt inmā' iyya hā' ila li-l-buldān al-muġħidwira, laysa faqat bi-sabab al-mawġħid al-dahma min al-bašar allaqiñ yanšudūn malād āmin min al-'unf al-damawī / The Syrian conflict has created enormous challenges for neighbouring countries, not only because of the huge waves of people seeking refuge from bloody violence*

17- *Bi-l-nisbat ilà Lubnān, hādha al-daq̄t yumkin an yušakkil haṭaran 'alà wuġudihi / For Lebanon, this pressure may constitute a threat to its existence*

A rather compelling narrative is fostered by a combination of LIQUID, CONTAINER and DISEASE metaphors in the news item published by *annahar.com* on March 12:

18- *Harā' it tawzī'āt al-lāgi' īn: Lubnān muħayyam kabīr / Refugee distribution maps: Lebanon is a big camp*

19- *Lubnān [...] muhaddad bi-l-inhiyār inna tadaffuq malyūn lāgi' mas 'ūliyya dahma fī ayy balad, fa-kayfa bi-Lubnān dawla saġira tu'āni min su'ūbāt dāħiliyya? inna-hu la-ta'īr mudhil / Lebanon is threatened with collapse: «The influx of a million refugees is a huge responsibility in any country. So how about Lebanon, a small country that suffers from internal difficulties? Its impact is amazing»*

20 - *Wa-hiya mu'tayāt wādiha min al-harā' it allatī našarat-hā al-mufawwaḍiyya al-'ulyā wa-allatī tubayin dāħimat tadaffuqāt al-nāzihīn wa-intišāri-him al-sarī' fit kāmil al-arādīt al-lubnāniyya / Data in the maps published by the High Commissioner clearly show the huge flow of displaced people and their rapid spread throughout the Lebanese territory*

Here Lebanon is construed both as a container and as a physical body. From a cognitive perspective, stating that Lebanon is a big camp entails that the whole of its territory is crowded with refugees, which is clearly a dramatization of reality. The quoted speech in excerpt 19, instead, suggests that the country is an aching body, threatened with extinction by a massive influx of refugees. It is worthwhile pointing out that quoted speech – just like statistics – should not necessarily be considered a way for keeping a neutral stance, but is often used as a strategy for enhancing credibility. In excerpt 20, the data drawn from

United Nations documents, adds to the information reliability, thus making the scenario of a huge flow of migrants spreading like a disease across the country, more plausible to the reader.

## 5. Discussion and final remarks

Metaphorical language analysis suggests a general tendency towards the reproduction of frames that reverberate the narrative circulating in European news discourse. All the media outlets under consideration make use, in varying degrees, of the same tropes that have been self-perpetuating in Western rhetoric over the last two centuries. Migrants and refugees are ordinarily represented by means of metaphors that strip them of their human features, prompting similar cognitive responses: whether associated with natural forces or with military invasions, human mobility is perceived as a menace to national security and to the biological integrity of host societies.

Content analysis, on the other hand, reveals a far more nuanced, complex and pragmatic discourse. Some of the articles published on North-African digital platforms are permeated by overt criticism of the European attitude towards migration. For example, in the item issued by *alhourouk.com* on August 7th, the EU approach to the crisis is deemed as simplistic and inhuman, and its 'lame policies' (*al-siyāsāt al-'arqā*) are judged as short sighted and driven by the logic of exclusion. Similarly, in the Lebanese context, both *annahar.com* and *al-akhbar.com* have a strong stance against the government's handling of the Syrian crisis, and are rather sympathetic towards refugees, thoroughly accounting for the trying conditions they experience. Moroccan *hespress.com* provides a lucid picture of the repercussions of skilled emigration on national economy, while addressing the issue of integration for sub-Saharan immigrants. Yet, all these articles are replete with conventional metaphors that do not challenge at all the dominant European perspective.

There are conflicting narratives emerging from the overall text analysis: articulated accounts of experienced realities are blurred by the cognitive frames that metaphorical expressions activate. Such inconsistency may be attributed to the constraints that influence translation-mediated news production in the Arab world. Ali Darwish (2009) provides evidence that verbatim translation into Arabic of English metaphors, determines – in most cases – a dissonance between epistemic knowledge and linguistic patterns, resulting in a misalignment between source and target versions of news stories. However, in

the long run, due to their propositional form, metaphors tend to restore a consonance between the epistemic and linguistic realities. In this sense, culturally dissonant metaphors can creep into a target language and reframe social semiotics, thus redefining cognitive patterns and world views. This soft imposition of new mental structures is an expression of the asymmetric interaction that characterizes media imperialism, a key branch of cultural imperialism (Phillipson 1992).

Now, it could be argued that the vast majority of metaphors, which crepted into Arab media discourse, are highly conventionalized linguistic expressions and do not reflect the stance of the writer or the news outlet considered. Nonetheless, we should remember that human cognition and language processing mostly occurs at the unconscious level (Kihlstrom 1987), and that any written text – like a news report – enjoys a certain semantic autonomy, which matters more than what the author meant to say (Kitis and Milapides 1997). Hence, these imported metaphors can take on a life of their own in the host linguistic environment, and reframe social reality in such a way as to define new cognitive patterns. By this I do not imply that the reframing effect will systematically alter the audience cognition: prior individual experience and social context also play a crucial role in media text decoding process, possibly leading to very different receptions (Graber 1988, Gamson *et al.* 1992, Entman 1993). As for conventionality, it should be pointed out that the language use of common metaphors suggests that readers are encouraged to accept them without any deliberate reflection (El Refaie 2001); conventional metaphors do not require the recipient's interpretative act, precisely because they are deeply entrenched in the collective unconscious (Arcimaviciene and Baglama 2018), and because the system of values they promote has become widely accepted among the community (Charteris Balck 2009).

Regardless of the epistemic dissonance that translation induces, most of the metaphorical language used in the articles examined, can potentially redefine social cognition and strengthen both individual and collective subliminal fear. In the case of the Syrian crisis, the construal of Lebanon as a physical body suffering from an infection caused by external bacteria, reinforces the narrative that refugees are a menace to the biological integrity of the country, thus engendering some sort of 'miscegenophobia'. Dehumanising and invasion metaphors can also reframe the public debate around migration in such a way as to entail that migrants are a threat to the community. Not only will this hinder social integration, but it will also legitimize taking action against

them, as a means of public protection (O'Brien 2003). As already suggested by Lakoff and Johnson in 1980, metaphors can be self-fulfilling prophecies: once a metaphor has redefined a social reality, it can provide guides for future actions that will fit the metaphor and eventually reinforce its power.

## References

- Abdalla, Mohamed Siddig. 2018. *The Influence of Translation on the Arabic Language*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Ammar, Marco, Pamela Murgia. 2022. "Shaping the migrant: Semantic strategies to portray inward and outward migrants as social actors in the Arab press". *Discourse and Communication*, 1-19.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2F17504813221099192>
- Arcimaviciene, Liudmila, Sercan Hamza Baglama. 2018. "Migration, Metaphor and Myth in Media Representations: The Ideological Dichotomy of Them and Us". *SAGE Open April-June 2018*: 1-13.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F2158244018768657>
- Boulby, Marion, Kenneth Christie (eds.). 2018. *Migration, Refugees and Human Security in the Mediterranean and MENA*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Castles, Stephen, Hein de Haas and Mark J. Miller (eds.). 2014. *The Age of Migration*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Charteris-Black, Jonathan. 2009. "Metaphor and Political Communication", in Musolff, Andreas, Zinken Jörg (eds.) *Metaphor and Discourse*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Cisneros, J. David. 2008. "Contaminated Communities: the Metaphor of Immigrant as Pollutant in Media Representation of Migration". *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 11 (4): 569-601.
- Darwish, Ali. 2009. *Translation and News Making: A Study of Contemporary Arabic Television*. PhD Thesis submitted at the Creative Industries Faculty. Queensland University of Technology.
- Doering, Martin. 2003. "The Politics of Nature: Constructing German Reunification During the Great Oder Flood of 1997". *Environment and History*, 9: 195-214.
- Eberl, Jakob-Moritz, Christine E. Meltzer, Tobias Heidenreich, Beatrice Herrero, Nora Theorin, Fabienne Lind, Rosa Berganza, Hajo G. Boomgarden, Christian Schemer & Jesper Strömbäck. 2018. "The European media discourse on immigration and its effects: a literature review". *Annals of the International Communication Association* 42 (6): 207-23.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2018.1497452>
- El Refaie, Elizabeth. 2001. "Metaphors we discriminate by: Naturalized themes in Austrian newspaper articles about asylum seekers". *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 5 (3): 352-71.

- Entman, Robert M. 1993. "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm". *Journal of Communication* 42 (4): 51-58.
- Fauconnier, Gilles, Mark Turner. 2002. *The Way We Think*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gamson, William A., David Croteau, William Hoynes, Theodore Sasson. 1992. "Media Images and the Social Construction of Reality". *Annual Review of Sociology* 18: 373-93.
- Goatly, Andrew. 2007. *Washing the Brain: Metaphor and Hidden Ideology*. Amsterdam: Benjamin Publishing Company.
- Graber, Doris A. 1988. *Processing the News: How People Tame the Information Tide*. New York: Longman.
- Janmyr, Maja. 2016. "Precarity in Exile: The Legal Status of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon". *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 35: 58-78.
- Kihlstrom, John F. 1987. "The Cognitive Unconscious". *Science* (New Series) 237 (4821): 1445-1452.
- Kitis, Eliza, Michalis Milapides. 1997. "Read it and believe it: How metaphor constructs ideology in news discourse. A case study". *Journal of Pragmatics*, 28: 557-590.
- Kikano, Faten, Gabriel Fauveaud, Gonzalo Lizarralde. 2021. "Policies of Exclusion: the Case of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 34 (1): 422-52.
- Kövecses, Zoltán. 2010. *Metaphor A Practical Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lakoff, George, Mark Johnson. 1980. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Musolff, Andreas. 2015. "Dehumanizing metaphors in UK immigrant debates in press and online media". *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict* 3 (1): 41-56.
- Nilsen, Catrine Bang. 2017. "Usages argumentatifs de la métaphore et représentation des immigrés dans la presse francophone", in *Métafore et Argumentation*, eds Marc Bonhomme, Anne-Marie Paillet, and Philippe Wahl, 355-71. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- O'Brien, Gerald V. 2003. "Indigestible Food, Conquering Hordes and Waste Materials: Metaphors of Immigrants and the Early Immigration Restriction Debate in the United States". *Metaphor and Symbol* 18 (1): 33-47.
- Phillipson, Robert. 1992. *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Pragglejaz Group. 2007. "MIP: A Method for Identifying Metaphorically Used Words in Discourse". *Metaphor and Symbol*, 22 (1): 1-39. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10926480709336752>
- Ritchie, L. David. 2013. *Metaphor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Saghieh, Nizar. 2015. "Manufacturing vulnerability in Lebanon: Legal Policies as Efficient Tools of Discrimination". *The Legal Agenda*, 19.
- Schön, Donald A. 1993. "Generative metaphor: a perspective on problem-setting in social policy". *Metaphor and thought*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, Charlotte. 2021. "Metaphors of migration over time". *Discourse and Society*, 32 (4): 463-81.



Ángel de la Torre Sánchez

Università degli Studi di Urbino Carlo Bo  
[angel.delatorresanchez@uniurb.it](mailto:angel.delatorresanchez@uniurb.it)

## Poesia e sostenibilità. Iniziative letterarie in Spagna e Italia

ABSTRACT:

*Poetry and sustainability: literary initiatives in Spain and in Italy*

Sustainability and climate change permeate all fields of society. There have been, both in Italy and in Spain, numerous poets whose work revolved around the topic of nature and its abuse at the hands of humans. The goal of this article is to shed light on different initiatives that have developed both in Spain and in Italy to understand their value within society and the literary world. To this purpose the beginning of the article offers a definition of *ecopoetry*, a term coined to describe this type of poetry and introduces several poets whose works are directly linked to ecology. Finally, the article studies two recent initiatives, “Poetas por el Clima”, founded in the city of Cordoba (Spain) and “Festival Europeo della Poesia Ambientale”, held in Rome and compares them to understand the influence they have had in their respective territories of influence.

KEYWORDS: *ecopoetry*; sustainability; Spanish poetry; Italian poetry; literary initiatives.

Garbage has to be the poem of our time because  
garbage is spiritual, believable enough  
to get our attention, getting in the way, piling  
up, stinking, turning brooks brownish and  
creamy white: what else deflects us from the errors of our  
illusionary ways  
A. R. Ammons (2013, 204)

## 1. Introduzione: poesia e impegno ecologico

La poesia di A. R. Ammons sopracitata serve come pretesto per introdurre l'argomento sul quale si basa l'articolo, a cui io aggiungerò un punto di domanda, ovvero, “la spazzatura dev'essere la poesia del nostro tempo”? In merito a ciò, Leonard Scigaj, professore dell'Università di Virginia Tech e autore di *Sustainable Poetry*, uno dei saggi più influenti per quanto riguarda il binomio poesia e sostenibilità, racconta l'episodio in cui sostò durante le vacanze sul Lago Ontario, vicino alle cascate del Niagara. Lì vide un cartello in cui c'era scritto “No Swimming” (Scigaj 1999, xii). L'autore si chiese come poteva essere inquinato un lago così vasto, dove molti avevano delle barche e altri passavano le giornate sulle sue rive insieme alle loro famiglie. Quando, dopo le vacanze, tornò al suo posto di lavoro presso l'Università di Virginia Tech, ebbe l'idea di creare il primo corso in cui si univa letteratura ed ecologia, nel 1995. In questo corso, si mostrava agli studenti, all'inizio di ogni anno accademico, frammenti di un documentario in cui si spiegava come più di 200 bambini le cui madri avevano mangiato pesce pescato nel lago avevano subito malformazioni all'utero e, di conseguenza, i bambini avevano livelli anormali di ritentiva.

Il motivo per il quale iniziò tale corso fu quello di studiare l'impatto che i disastri ambientali hanno sulla creazione poetica. Queste furono le basi che portarono Scigaj a studiare il fenomeno dell'*ecopoetry*, con l'obiettivo di esplorare nuovi modi di sviluppare una posizione di teoria poetica verso i disastri ambientali che caratterizzano l'epoca attuale, afflitta da gravi eventi come le inondazioni che hanno colpito il Pakistan nel 2022, dove un terzo del paese è sotto l'acqua a causa di disastri aggravati dal cambiamento climatico, per citarne solo uno.

D'altra parte, l'idea della poesia come impegno civile è stata molto controversa nel XX secolo. Sia in Italia sia in Spagna ci sono stati movimenti poetici o poeti individuali a cui la critica ha attribuito questo epiteto. Si pensi, in Italia, a poeti come Ungaretti, molto influenzato dalle esperienze vissute nella Grande Guerra (Gennaro 2016) o Montale e Pasolini, i quali, con la loro poesia dedicata alle esperienze legate alla Seconda Guerra Mondiale e altre problematiche sociali del dopoguerra (Butcher e Moroni 2004), hanno, inoltre, avuto grande influenza nella poesia spagnola recente (Lefevre 2014), o alla *poesía social*, in Spagna, che ebbe inizio durante la Guerra Civile e il primo dopoguerra come un modo per evidenziare le difficoltà della popolazione

(Mombelli e Savio 2021). Nonostante questa divisione che, storicamente, si è creata tra poesia impegnata e altri tipi di poesia, gli ecopoeti considerano, come sosteneva Salman Rushdie, che la politica e la letteratura sono unite inestricabilmente e, perciò, la passività serve soltanto agli interessi dello status quo (Rushdie 1984).

Inoltre, secondo Scigaj (1999, 5), la natura, il contesto necessario per qualsiasi atto estetico, è stata saccheggiata, il che ha portato i poeti a dover “fermarsi” prima di comporre delle poesie che presentino la natura come benigna e come uno sfondo affidabile per la ricerca umana di una voce autentica. Non è possibile, in poche parole, concepire la natura come un idillio bucolico, alla maniera di Francesco Petrarca, Giovanni Boccaccio o Fernando de Herrera e Garcilaso de la Vega (Schwartz 2001; Cristóbal López 2008; Monti 2020) per citare alcuni autori di rilievo nella tradizione letteraria spagnola e italiana. Tuttavia, nel XXI secolo, la natura deve avere una voce propria, separata o almeno allo stesso livello della voce umana.

Alla luce di questi eventi, l'obiettivo di questo articolo è mostrare alcune iniziative che vanno oltre lo studio teorico del concetto di ecopoesia e la confezione di antologie per evidenziare lo sviluppo del genere oltre la pubblicazione di testi. In questo senso, negli ultimi anni si sono sviluppati dei movimenti poetici che hanno dato luce a iniziative concrete che vincolano l'impegno sociale verso l'ecologia con la poesia. In questo articolo si introdurranno due iniziative concrete che hanno avuto inizio nel 2020. In primo luogo, la piattaforma “Poetas por el Clima”, fondata a Cordova (Spagna) e, in secondo luogo, il “Festival Europeo di Poesia Ambientale”, tenutosi per la prima volta a Roma (Italia), insieme a altre iniziative precedenti che hanno spianato la strada per la realizzazione del suddetto festival.

## 2. Ecopoesia: una nuova prospettiva

La poesia che si occupa della connessione umana con la natura ha avuto una esplosione negli ultimi cinquant'anni in diverse aree linguistiche. Ad esempio, nelle regioni anglofone, spiccano poeti come A.R. Ammons o W.S. Merwin, la cui poesia ha una coscienza ecologica evidente. In entrambi i casi, i poeti hanno vinto premi di grande importanza. Nel primo caso, Ammons vinse il “National Book Award” nel 1993 con il suo libro *Garbage* (1993). Nel secondo caso, Merwin vinse diversi premi di rilievo come il “Premio Tanning” della “Academy of American Poets” e il Premio “Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest”. Da

quel momento, in ambito anglofono, è apparsa un'ondata di antologie e libri di poesia che impiegano esplicitamente la parola o usano l'idea come principio guida. Tra questi autori, troviamo poeti vincitori di importanti premi come il “Pulitzer Prize” o il “T.S. Eliot Prize” come i britannici Alice Oswald e Mario Petrucci, lo scozzese John Burnside e lo statunitense Forrest Gander.

In ambito ispanofono, è inevitabile citare poeti come i messicani Homero Aridjis e Octavio Paz, il nicaraguengo Ernesto Cardenal o i cileni Pablo Neruda e Nicanor Parra (Forns-Broggi 1998). Nella poesia di tutti questi autori c'è una palese coscienza ecologica, anche se trattata in diversa maniera. Il caso di Aridjis è di particolare interesse, dato che, oltre alla sua attività poetica, è stato un'attivista per il clima di grande rilievo. Ad esempio, nel 1985 fondò il “Grupo de los Cien”, un'associazione di artisti ed intellettuali di tutto il mondo il cui obiettivo era la protezione ecologica e la difesa della biodiversità in America Latina. Per quanto riguarda la sua opera poetica, secondo gli esperti, non è mai desistito dai propri propositi sin dagli anni '60 fino agli ultimi libri di poesia (Binns 2004). Nella poesia di Octavio Paz, invece, è possibile intravedere in libri come *Árbol adentro* (1987) la poetizzazione dell'inquinamento in Città del Messico (Forns-Broggi 1998), un problema che ancora oggi genera enormi difficoltà. La poesia di Ernesto Cardenal, d'altro canto, si caratterizza per il canto dell'insensibilità capitalista e i disastri ecologici sin dagli anni '60, il che ha motivato alcuni autori a considerarlo uno dei primi rappresentanti dell'ecopoesia (White 2014). Per quanto riguarda Nicanor Parra, un suo libro spicca particolarmente in questo ambito, *Ecopoemas*, pubblicato nel 1982, dove sviluppa una poesia di prospettiva palesemente ecologista. Pablo Neruda, invece, include la coscienza ecologica nella sua poesia nei suoi ultimi anni di produzione poetica, in particolare nel libro *Fin de mundo*, del 1969, che presenta una profonda preoccupazione per il destino degli esseri umani, oppressi da un'atmosfera irrespirabile e circondati da segni di distruzione imminente (Bellini, 1973).

In Italia è di particolare interesse il caso di Andrea Zanzotto, considerato uno dei poeti italiani più emblematici della seconda metà del XX secolo. Nella sua poesia, la coscienza ecologica è uno degli elementi che percorre tutta l'opera. Per dirla con le sue parole, “fin dall'inizio, c'è stata un'identificazione tra il mio ambiente dove parlo e il me che parla” (cit. in Tassoni 2018, 30). Nella poesia di Giorgio Caproni, un altro poeta considerato tra i più importanti del XX secolo, traspare altresì la rappresentazione della natura. L'itinerario poetico di Caproni, che parte da scene lirico-naturalistiche, finisce per offrire “una

rappresentazione di ecosistemi ibridi caratterizzati dall'accostamento di elementi naturali e antropici in un perturbante scenario postapocalittico nel quale la storia si sostanzia di resti e detriti” (Valdinoci 2018, 23). Un altro poeta nel quale la coscienza ecologica ha avuto particolare impatto è il già citato Pasolini. Nel suo caso, come sostiene Volpi (2018), la preoccupazione si concentra sull’impatto che il degrado ecologico e lo sviluppo smisurato hanno avuto sul tessuto urbano. Si legge, nei versi del “Pianto della scavatrice”, “La luce / del futuro non cessa un solo istante / di ferirci” (Pasolini 2003, 833). In epoche più recenti sono emersi altri poeti, tra i quali si trovano Tiziano Fratus, con opere come *Poesie creaturali. Un bosco in versi* (2019), e Maria Ivana Trevisana Bach, autrice di *Eco-poesie nello spazio/tempo* (2005a) e firmataria del *Manifesto di Ecopoiesia Italiana* (2005b), su cui ritorneremo. Inoltre, nel 2017 venne pubblicata un’antologia bilingue italiano-inglese dedicata all’ultima ecopoesia sotto il titolo di *Intatto/Intacto*, nella quale c’era una raccolta di poesie di Massimo D’Arcangelo (in Elvey et al., 2017).

Come conseguenza di ciò, negli ultimi anni sono emerse numerose ricerche dedicate all’ecopoesia e ai poeti legati a questo movimento. Ad esempio, nel volume sopracitato di Scigaj (1999) si studiano autori come A.R. Ammons, W.S. Merwin, Wendel Berry e Gary Snyder, considerati tra i poeti statunitensi più importanti insieme a Louise Glück, Adrienne Rich o Mary Oliver, tra gli altri.

In ambito ispanoamericano, ci sono numerosi studi dedicati all’ecopoesia (Binns 2004; Marrero Henríquez 2010) e alla sua importanza in autori fondamentali come Juana Castro, Juan Carlos Mestre, Jorge Riechmann (Gala 2020), Nicanor Parra, Ernesto Cardenal o Gioconda Belli (Campos López 2018). A ogni modo, il legame tra poesia e ecologia non è affatto recente, come segnalano alcuni autori. È palese, secondo Gala (2021), l’oblio da parte dei critici letterari verso il ruolo della natura nella poesia del XX secolo, considerata semplicemente come uno scenario di fondo, a differenza dell’importanza che si è data alla prospettiva antropocentrica. Nonostante ciò, la poesia in lingua spagnola offre esempi di consapevolezza ecologica che risalgono agli inizi del XX secolo, come Federico García Lorca e il suo *Poeta en Nueva York*, scritto durante un viaggio negli Stati Uniti tra 1929 e 1930, dove già si intravedono i disastri causati dal capitalismo nelle città e i loro abitanti, fino ad arrivare a poeti più recenti come Erika Martínez, che include nei suoi libri, come in *Color carne* (2009), riflessioni ecofemministe legate all’idea della donna come soggetto corporeo inserito nella natura che la circonda.

In Italia, vi sono alcuni studi di grande importanza dedicati al legame tra letteratura, in senso lato, e l'ecologia (Scaffai 2017; Pugno 2018), alcuni dei quali fanno risalire l'ecopoesia a Grazia Deledda (Misra 2017). Nonostante ciò, sono ancora di scarsa quantità i saggi dedicati alla presenza dell'ecologia nella poesia italiana. Inoltre, per motivi evidenti, Andrea Zanzotto è stato uno degli autori più studiati (Boffi 2021). D'altro canto, nel 2018, la rivista di poesia comparata *Semicerchio*, pubblicata dal Centro di Studi Comparati dell'Università di Siena dedicò un monografico, con il coordinamento di Scaffai, all'*ecopoetry*, con il sottotitolo di “poesia del degrado ambientale” (2018a). Secondo Scaffai, appunto, “i valori sonori del verso e la possibilità di accostare in modo inatteso le immagini fanno dell'*ecopoetry* una forma espressiva ideale per rappresentare l’ambiente e riflettere sulle urgenze ecologiche” (2018b, 4). Inoltre, il degrado, “una volta che entra a far parte del discorso poetico, una volta che ne impiega o ne forza i codici, rimette in discussione i presupposti dell’intera cultura che li ha prodotti” (*ibid.*). Altresì, i temi del paesaggio e dell’ambiente sono stati considerati essenziali per i poeti del Novecento studiati nel monografico. Secondo questi poeti, l’ecologia “ha assunto la funzione di una formula o di una metafora attraverso cui esemplificare e descrivere anche dinamiche di tipo storico o antropologico-sociale”; e gli autori che “hanno assistito, e variamente reagito, al passaggio dalla società rurale a quella industriale del secondo dopoguerra interpretano quelle dinamiche come alterazioni di un ecosistema naturale, storico e culturale” (Scaffai 2018b, 4).

### 3. Ecopoesia: definizione e caratteristiche

L’opera di molti poeti negli ultimi anni, come si è dimostrato, si è interessata alle problematiche ambientali. Tuttavia, la critica ha ignorato questa direzione. In parte, questa mancanza di attenzione verso l’ecopoesia è dovuta al fatto che l’ambiente almeno fino a qualche anno fa non era considerato un soggetto teorico sufficientemente interessante dal punto di vista critico (Scigaj 1999, 8). La natura, per la critica, è sempre stata, con parole di Scigaj, “l’altro” che gli esseri umani dovevano soggettivizzare e personificare per essere in grado di capirla. Invece, da quello che si evince dalla bibliografia, la poesia pubblicata negli ultimi cinquant’anni dimostra tutt’altro.

Evidentemente, non tutta la poesia che include la natura può essere considerata ecopoesia. Le caratteristiche che definiscono questo tipo di poesia sono fondamentalmente quattro, secondo la critica (Buell 1995; Scigaj 1999;

Gala 2020). In primo luogo, “l’ambiente non umano” non può funzionare soltanto come un retroscena o un’inquadratura. Deve, bensì, mantenere una presenza che possa suggerire che la storia umana è embricata nella storia naturale. Questo argomento, secondo Scigaj (1999, 10), dimostra che in questo tipo di poesia prevale una visione biocentrica dove gli umani sono una tra tante le specie in interazione con altri organismi che creano la storia naturale. In secondo luogo, è necessario capire che l’interesse umano non è l’unico interesse legittimo, il che suggerisce uno spostamento dal pensiero antropocentrico verso l’etica ambientale, dato che, in questa maniera, il poeta permette ad altri essere viventi, oltre agli umani, di avere vita e storie proprie. In terzo luogo, il critico segnala che l’etica ambientale è una componente necessaria di un testo, dato che “human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation” (Buell 1995, 8). In ultimo luogo, si propone un senso dell’ambiente come un processo piuttosto che come una costante.

In questo senso, gli scrittori ambientalisti enfatizzano la relazione tra le dimensioni etiche che gli umani trovano nella natura e nella prassi ambientalista. Perciò, gli ecopoeti presentano la natura nelle loro poesie come un’alterità separata ma, al contempo, uguale, ad altri elementi poetici. Come sostiene Scigaj, dal punto di vista teorico questi poeti sono in contrasto con le idee di Derrida e del post-strutturalismo europeo sebbene alcuni di loro abbiano iniziato a pubblicare ben prima della popolarizzazione di queste teorie. Questi poeti, pertanto, rifiutano l’idea di Derrida sulla mancanza di significato totale di un concetto così come il principio wittgensteiniano presente nel *Tractatus*: “i limiti del mio linguaggio sono i limiti del mio mondo” (Wittgenstein 2002, 68).

Il linguaggio è considerato, da questi poeti, uno strumento che il poeta rinnova costantemente per articolare la propria esperienza nella natura. Difendono, per tanto, che ogni esperienza è mediata dal linguaggio. Una poesia, per tanto, riflette quello che, inizialmente, era una esperienza non verbale della realtà. Il poeta, quindi, esegue il suo lavoro stirando o dislocando il linguaggio sedimentato in un linguaggio che permetta la riflessione più precisa della percezione originaria iniziata dagli stimoli degli eventi nel mondo naturale. Il linguaggio, secondo loro, è la conquista più importante della nostra specie, in quanto offre agli esseri umani l’articolazione più flessibile della nostra esperienza, ma non raggiunge mai l’esperienza nella sua totale intimità.

### 3.1. Iniziative ecopoetiche in Italia

“E per te questa terra non è / che un mite minuto satellite / che ben sa dove si dirige”. Questi versi di Andrea Zanzotto sono stati scelti dal “Festival Europeo della Poesia Ambientale” per presentare l’edizione del 2022. Non è una coincidenza che abbiano deciso di mettere in risalto questi versi e questo poeta. Zanzotto è considerato uno dei poeti più importanti della seconda metà del XX secolo, ma anche uno dei poeti che presentano una maggiore affinità con le questioni ambientale nella sua poesia.

Questa iniziativa riprende un’idea concepita agli inizi degli anni 2000 dalla poetessa Maria Ivana Trevisana Bach, che pubblicò un *Manifesto di Ecopoesia Italiana* nel 2005. Questo manifesto, firmato da diversi poeti, aveva come obiettivo quello di definire il concetto di ecopoesia, di offrire una panoramica delle considerazioni che l’hanno portata a ideare questo manifesto, che permetta agli artisti “di cimentarsi in un tipo di poesia che liberi, apertamente e senza pudori, l’emozione repressa per utilizzarla quale forza motrice per realizzare gli obiettivi suggeriti dai nuovi valori” (Trevisana Bach 2005b, s.n.p.). Tra questi nuovi valori troviamo la salvaguardia dell’ambiente come valore ineluttabile del XXI secolo, la caduta dell’idea di natura come risorsa inesauribile e, per tanto, la crisi della visione antropocentrica dell’Uomo come padrone senza limite. Questo manifesto, anche se presenta una visione molto simile a quella che difendono tanti altri autori nelle loro opere, posteriormente non ebbe molto successo. Sono passati più di 15 anni e il manifesto “has generated neither a cohesive movement nor an easily-traceable new genre” (Cannamela 2020, 302).

In questo senso, il “Festival Europeo della Poesia Ambientale” riprende alcune delle idee concepite da Trevisana Bach nel suo manifesto e le porta davanti al grande pubblico. Questo festival è nato nel maggio 2022 su iniziativa di due riviste: *Insula Europea*, rivista culturale on-line, fondata da Carlo Pulsoni, accademico della letteratura, ed Enrico Pulsoni, architetto e scenografo, insieme a *Saperambiente*, una testata d’informazione culturale per la sostenibilità diretta dal giornalista Marco Fratoddi. La fondazione del festival coinvolse 18 poeti, tra i quali nove italiani, e si inquadrò “in un reading centrato sul valore della bellezza, della diversità biologica e culturale, della natura come patrimonio dell’interiorità, oltre che della collettività” [...] “per lanciare al mondo un messaggio di riconversione autentica verso modelli di convivenza coerenti con i bisogni del Pianeta, la nostra casa comune” (Festival Europeo della Poesia Ambientale 2022, s.p.). Il festival, che ha vinto diversi premi, è realizzato con il

contributo di Roma Culture e si radica in tre luoghi emblematici della città: la Biblioteca Quarticciolo, il Teatro Quarticciolo e il Museo dell’Altro e dell’Altrove.

Finora sono state celebrate tre edizioni del festival tra 2020 e 2021 e la quarta avrà luogo a novembre 2022. I programmi delle diverse edizioni proponevano letture letterarie con poeti rinomati nell’ambito dell’ecopoesia provenienti dall’Italia e da altri paesi, così come letture da parte di giovani poeti ed eventi poetici rivolti ai bambini. Inoltre, sono stati svolti diversi eventi dedicati alla figura di Andrea Zanzotto sotto il titolo “Logos Zanzotto”. In questi incontri, attraverso testimonianze, letture e interviste, si realizzava un viaggio nell’universo espressivo del poeta, figura chiave per la attuale poesia ambientale. Oltre ai suddetti eventi poetici, all’interno di questo festival si sono tenuti incontri di difesa dell’ambiente intitolati “Climate Speaks”, concepito come “una gara fra i “millennials” che presenteranno poesie, brevi speech e prose poetiche create individualmente o per piccoli gruppi al fine di lanciare un ulteriore messaggio ai governi e all’opinione pubblica perché s’intraprenda una transizione autentica, rapida e sostanziale verso la sostenibilità”.

### *3.2. Iniziative ecopoetiche in Spagna*

Le iniziative poetiche legate al clima sono state leggermente più tardive rispetto ad altri paesi. Tuttavia, l’iniziativa che si presenterà ha avuto un forte impatto sia mediatico che letterario. Questa iniziativa, denominata “Poetas por el Clima”, fu fondata a Cordova il 10 ottobre 2020 principalmente da José García Obrero, poeta catalano domiciliato a Cordoba di grande rilievo a livello nazionale. Pubblicarono un manifesto nel quale difendevano la necessità di un cambiamento per far fronte all’emergenza climatica. Sotto il loro punto di vista, era arrivata “la hora de que la ciudadanía, así como los colectivos y agentes sociales, económicos, políticos, sindicales e instituciones públicas presentes en la ciudad [Cordova], demos un paso adelante y nos impliquemos en la lucha por la reducción de las emisiones de gases de efecto invernadero” (Poetas por el Clima 2022a, s.p.).

Al fine di contribuire a questo processo di creazione di consapevolezza, diverse persone che hanno in comune la passione per la poesia crearono “Poetas por el Clima”. Inizialmente, l’iniziativa aveva l’intenzione di essere un punto di ritrovo nel quale inglobare il maggior numero possibile di persone con il fine di contribuire agli obiettivi sopracitati, specialmente preoccupante in una città come Cordova, nella quale si raggiungono temperature estive tra le più alte

d'Europa. La seconda azione del gruppo, dopo la redazione del manifesto, fu la creazione di una lista alla quale i poeti, inizialmente di Cordova, ma posteriormente ampliato ad altre province della Spagna, potevano aderire. Inizialmente, 44 poeti firmarono il manifesto di fondazione. Attualmente, il gruppo vanta 92 adesioni, delle quali 82 sono poeti cordovani, tra giovani e consacrati.

In seguito, dopo la pausa forzata dalla pandemia, le attività del collettivo sono aumentate. Dopo la più che positiva accoglienza che la creazione aveva avuto nella società cordovana, il collettivo decise di fare una presentazione pubblica nella quale, “además de la lectura de poemas y del manifiesto, usáramos el propio espacio como elemento reivindicativo” (*Poetas por el Clima* 2022b, 7). Il gruppo, perciò, iniziò un percorso di letture online all'interno dell'"Aula di Naturaleza" dell'Università di Cordova, il che si unì alla pubblicazione periodica di audiopoesie registrate da parte dei poeti appartenenti.

Nel 2022 il gruppo ha deciso di continuare con le attività in due versanti: attraverso la pubblicazione di un'antologia e attraverso la creazione di un premio letterario. L'antologia, pubblicata il 23 aprile 2022 nella “Colección Manantial”, appartante al Comune di Priego de Córdoba, un paese appartenente alla provincia di Cordova, si apre con due testi in prosa. Il primo, firmato da Joaquín Araújo, importante divulgatore dell'ambito dell'ecologia con più di 80 libri pubblicati e, il secondo, a modo di manifesto, firmato dal collettivo. Nel primo che si apre con due citazioni di due grandissimi spagnoli, Jorge Guillén (“¿Qué hay en el aire que no sea yo?”) e Antonio Gamoneda (“Hay úlceras en la pureza”), Araújo spiega il contesto ecologico globale nel quale nasce l'antologia. Nel secondo, invece, si fa una cronistoria del gruppo e delle sue attività. A continuazione, susseguono 38 poesie inviate dai membri del collettivo attinenti alla tematica in cui è coinvolto il gruppo. Tra queste, ci sono poesie inedite e poesie pubblicate, di diversi stili, ma tutte che hanno come tema principale l'ambiente e la sua difesa: “Ir anillo a anillo de la corteza al centro. / Convertirse en árbol para entender / el temor a las llamas y al azote del aire...” (José García Obrero, cit.in *Poetas por el Clima* 2022b, 19); “Lesionar astillando incisivos tus llamados torcidos derechos, / descosiendo genética, empozoñando freáticas [...] / [...] sobornar manantiales, neurálgicos patógenos [...] / [...] qué horadación sindiós de los acuíferos, / carcoma de los huesos del ecosistema nuestro” (Jorge Díaz Martínez, cit.in *Poetas por el Clima* 2022b, 30).

Tra le ultime iniziative che ha intrapreso il collettivo c'è la creazione di un premio letterario, intitolato "Salvar la casa", promosso dal Comune di Cordova e pubblicato dalla casa editrice canaria Baile del Sol, molto rinomata nell'ambito poetico spagnolo che ha la particolarità, rispetto ad altri premi letterari, che nella giuria ci saranno "miembros de reconocido prestigio en el ámbito literario", oltre a "de probada sensibilidad ecologista" (*Poetas por el Clima* 2022c).

#### 4. Conclusioni

Nel presente articolo si è cercato di dimostrare l'importanza del genere dell'ecopoesia in Italia e in Spagna. Questo genere, di grande diffusione in ambito anglosassone, ha ricevuto maggiore interesse critico e creativo in questi due paesi negli ultimi anni a causa della crescente consapevolezza verso l'emergenza climatica. Questa diffusione ha portato a una maggiore attenzione da parte della critica, che aveva tralasciato la tematica ambientale in poesia in quanto non considerata un soggetto nello stesso piano di importanza rispetto ad altri più affermati. Pertanto, l'obiettivo dell'articolo è stato quello di studiare le iniziative poetiche legate all'ecopoesia che sono emerse in Italia e in Spagna negli ultimi anni.

Nella tradizione poetica spagnola e italiana del XX secolo ci sono stati poeti preoccupati per la natura e le conseguenze che il suo degrado ha nella società. Tuttavia, negli ultimi 30 anni è emersa una consapevolezza più evidente e sono state pubblicate, sia in Italia che in Spagna, opere che hanno reso evidente questa crescente preoccupazione. Come conseguenza di ciò, oltre alle pubblicazioni, sono emersi dei movimenti che hanno portati avanti delle iniziative poetiche che vanno oltre la scrittura e tentano di diffondere sia le questioni ambientali che colpiscono il globo sia le scritture derivate di esse. Tra queste, in Italiaabbiamo evidenziato il *Manifesto di Ecopoesia Italiana*, diffuso nel 2005 e il "Festival Europeo della Poesia Ambientale", nato nel 2020. D'altra parte, in Spagna, emerse un collettivo di poeti che nel 2020 fondò l'associazione "Poetas por el Clima", con sede nella città di Cordova e alla quale hanno aderito più di 80 poeti. Attraverso questo movimento si diffondono creazioni poetiche legate alla tematica ecologista, si pubblicano libri ed antologie e si fanno reading letterari.

È possibile concludere affermando che il genere ecopoetico gode di buona salute in Italia e in Spagna. Negli anni a venire e, sicuramente, a causa del continuo degrado ambientale del quale non si vede mezzo di

uscita, le preoccupazioni dei poeti per questo argomento faranno aumentare le pubblicazioni. Come si è dimostrato, ci sono numerosi poeti giovani che stanno creando poesia di forte coscienza ecologica, sia in Italia sia in Spagna.

## Bibliografia

- Ammons, Archie Randolph. 2013. *Basura y otros poemas*. Barcelona: Lumen.
- Bellini, Giuseppe. 1973. “Fin de Mundo: Neruda Entre la Angustia y la Esperanza”. *Revista Iberoamericana*, 39(82), 293-300.
- Binns, Niall. 2004. *¿Callejón sin salida? La crisis ecológica en la poesía hispanoamericana*. Zaragoza: Prensas universitarias de Zaragoza.
- Boffi, Guido. 2021. “Postpaesaggio, scempio ambientale, catastrofe climatica: la parrhesia di Andrea Zanzotto, in memoria”. *Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica*, CXIII, 4, 1047-68.
- Buell, Lawrence. 1995. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Butcher, John, and Mario Moroni (eds). 2004. *From Eugenio Montale to Amelia Rosselli: Italian Poetry in the Sixties and Seventies*. Leicester: Troubador Publishing.
- Campos López, Ronald. 2018. “Estudios sobre la ecopoesía hispánica contemporánea: Hacia un estado de la cuestión”. *Artifara*, 1(18), 169-204.
- Cannamela, Danila. 2020. “Italian Ecopoetry, or the Art of Reading through Negativity”. *MLN*, 135(1), 302-26.
- Cristóbal López, Vicente. 2008. “Las églogas de Virgilio como modelo de un género”. In *La poesía del siglo de Oro. Géneros y modelos*, 23-56. Sevilla: Editorial Universidad de Sevilla.
- Elvey, Anne, Massimo D’Arcangelo, e Helen Moore. 2017. *Intatto-Intact: Ecopoiesis-Ecopoetry*. Milano: La vita felice.
- Festival Europeo della Poesia Ambientale. 2022. “Chi siamo”.  
<https://www.festivalpoesiambientale.eu/chi-siamo/> (02/12/2022)
- Forns-Broggi, Roberto. 1998. “¿Cuáles son los dones que la naturaleza regala a la poesía latinoamericana?”, *Hispanic Journal*, XIX (2), 209-38.
- Fratus, Tiziano. 2019. *Poesie creaturali. Un bosco in versi*. Milano: Edizioni della Libreria della Natura.
- Gala, S. Candelas. 2020. *Ecopoéticas: voces de la tierra en ocho poetas de la España actual*. Salamanca: Ediciones de la Universidad de Salamanca.

- Gala, S. Candelas. 2021. “Ecopoéticas y ecopoemas en la España actual: una revaluación de la textualidad”. *Letras Hispánas* 17, 180-95.
- Gennaro, Rosario. 2016. “La Grande Guerra e l’italianità: il discorso nazionale di Giuseppe Ungaretti”. *Forum Italicum*, 50 (1), 69-86. London: SAGE Publications.
- Lefèvre, Matteo. 2014. “‘Equivalenza linguistica’ o ‘equivalenza ideologica?’ Note sulla traduzione della poesía social nell’Italia degli anni ’60 (il caso Goytisolo)”. In *Frontiere: soglie e interazioni. I linguaggi ispanici nella tradizione e nella contemporaneità*. A cura di M.V. Calvi, A. Cancellier, E. Liverani, 223-36. Trento: Università degli Studi di Trento (Labirinti), vol. II – Lingua.
- Marrero Henríquez, José Manuel. 2010. “Ecocrítica e hispanismo”. In *Ecocríticas. Literatura y medio ambiente*. A cura di Carmen Flys Junquera, José Manuel Marrero Henríquez y Julia Barella Vigal, 193-217. Madrid-Frankfurt-Orlando: Iberoamericana-Vervuert.
- Misra, Chittaranjan. 2017. “Ecopoetics of Grazia Deledda: A Study through Reeds in the Wind”. In *Re-Thinking Environment Literature, Ethics and Praxis*. Eds Ram Narayan Panda, Sukhbir Singh Deepshikha Routray Munira Salim, 176-84. New Delhi: Authorspress.
- Mombelli, Davide, e Davide Savio. 2021. *La poesía española del siglo XX en Italia* (Vol. 1). Madrid: Editorial Verbum.
- Monti, Carla Maria. 2020. “Petrarca e la natura”. In *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Albasitensis*. Brill: Leiden (Ned), 24-44.
- Pasolini, Pier Paolo. 2003. *Tutte le poesie*, Vol. 1. Milano: Mondadori.
- Poetas por el Clima. 2022a. “Manifiesto”.  
<https://www.poetasporclima.org/index.php/manifiesto/> (02/12/2022)
- Poetas por el Clima. 2022b. *Antología. Poetas por el Clima*. Priego de Córdoba: Excmo. Ayuntamiento de Priego.
- Poetas por el Clima. 2022c. “Bases del I Certamen de Poesía Salvar la Casa”.  
<https://www.poetasporclima.org/index.php/2022/08/03/i-certamen-de-ecopoesia-salvar-la-casa/> (02/12/2022)
- Pugno, Laura. 2018. *In territorio selvaggio. Corpo, romanzo, comunità*. Milano: Nottetempo.
- Rushdie, Salman. 1984. “Outside the whale”. *Granta*.  
<https://granta.com/outside-the-whale/> (27/11/2022).
- Scaffai, Niccolò. 2017. *Letteratura e ecologia. Forme e temi di una relazione narrativa*, Roma: Carocci.

- Scuffai, Niccolò. 2018a. “Ecopoetry. Poesia del degrado ambientale”. *Semicerchio. Rivista di Poesia Comparata*, LVIII-LIX, 3-86.
- Scuffai, Niccolò. 2018b. “Poesia ed ecologia: una premessa”. *Semicerchio. Rivista di Poesia Comparata*, LVIII-LIX, 3-5.
- Scigaj, Leonard. 1999. *Sustainable Poetry. Four American EcoPoets*. Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky.
- Schwartz, Lía. 2001. “Herrera, poeta bucólico, y sus predecesores italianos”, In Encarnación Sánchez García, Anna Cerbo y Clara Borrelli (eds.), *Spagna e Italia attraverso la letteratura del secondo cinquecento. Atti del colloquio internazionale I.U.O.* (Napoli 21-23 ottobre 1999), Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, pp. 475-500.
- Tassoni, Luigi. 2018. “Zanzotto dal simulacro all’oikos”. *Semicerchio. Rivista di Poesia Comparata*, LVIII-LIX, 30-35.
- Trevisani Bach, Maria Ivana. 2005a. *Ecopoesie nello spazio-Tempo*. Roma: Serarcangeli.
- Trevisana Bach, Maria Ivana. 2005b. *Manifesto di Ecopoesia Italiana*. Agoravox. <https://www.agoravox.it/Manifesto-di-Ecopoesia-italiana.html> (02/12/2022).
- Valdinoci, Francesca. 2018. “Giorgio Caproni: un itinerario ‘fra terra e storia nel paese guasto’”. *Semicerchio. Rivista di Poesia Comparata*, LVIII-LIX, 23-29.
- Volpi, Alberto. 2018. “Dal cuore del miracolo. Poeti italiani di fronte al boom”. *Semicerchio. Rivista di Poesia Comparata*, LVIII-LIX, 17-22.
- White, Steven. 2014. *El consumo de lo que somos. Muestra de poesía ecológica hispánica contemporánea*. Madrid: Amargord.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 2002 [1921]. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London: Routledge.

Giuseppe Trovato

Università degli Studi Ca' Foscari Venezia  
[giuseppe.trovato@unive.it](mailto:giuseppe.trovato@unive.it)

## Catalogación de las opciones y correspondencias traslativas del operador reformulativo italiano *anzi* en español mediante la aportación de un corpus bilingüe

### ABSTRACT:

*Cataloguing the possibilities and translation options of the Italian reformulative marker *anzi* in Spanish by means of a bilingual corpus*

This paper aims to analyse and catalogue the different possibilities and translation options of the Italian reformulative marker '*anzi*' in Spanish by means of a bilingual corpus. The linguistic item addressed can represent a challenge for the translator regardless of the proximity between Spanish and Italian. Our objective is to demonstrate that the morphosyntactic behaviour can considerably vary between Spanish and Italian when it comes to translating specific linguistic elements. By means of a bilingual corpus, we will analyse the strategies that can be adopted in Spanish in order to render the Italian marker '*anzi*'. We will draw the conclusion that the concept of symmetry between Spanish and Italian is not to be considered as the rule in the translation process.

KEYWORDS: discourse markers; translation; cognate languages Spanish-Italian; translation options; bilingual corpus.

## 1. Introducción

En los últimos tiempos, los estudios de traducción vienen experimentando un auge renovado gracias, entre otras, a aportaciones procedentes de nuevos ámbitos de interés científico. En este sentido, los estudios asistidos por corpus se configuran como una nueva frontera que cabe explorar con más profundidad, ya que puede desplegar interesantes potencialidades de cara a desarrollos futuros en el ámbito de la lingüística y la traducción.

En la estela de lo que acabamos de señalar, el campo de estudio de los marcadores discursivos / *segnavi discorsivi*<sup>1</sup> analizados, entre otras cuestiones, desde el prisma de la actividad traductora ha venido afianzándose cada vez más, pues la perspectiva comparativa entre los dos idiomas implicados en el acto traslativo ofrece la posibilidad de llevar a cabo un análisis escrupuloso y pormenorizado, tanto desde un punto de vista puramente semántico, como desde la vertiente de la eficacia comunicativa y pragmática (Fernández Loya 2006).

Ahora bien, la manera en que cada lengua recurre a estas unidades lingüísticas invariables que cumplen la función de señalar las relaciones que se establecen entre dos o más segmentos textuales no es comparable, ni siquiera al abordar lenguas pertenecientes a la misma familia, como en el caso de la románica. De hecho, el origen común no garantiza la linealidad en términos de translación interlingüística. En este sentido, la relación entre el español y el italiano se sitúa precisamente en el marco de las reflexiones que acabamos de formular. La proximidad lingüística no debería crear la falsa ilusión de que se produce una equivalencia directa y transparente entre un marcador discursivo italiano y uno español y viceversa. Dado que los marcadores no ejercen ninguna función sintáctica, sino que constituyen enlaces supraoracionales que facilitan la cohesión textual y la interpretación de los enunciados<sup>2</sup>, será una operación a

---

<sup>1</sup> En el campo de la lingüística italiana, Carla Bazzanella ha aportado quizás la contribución más significativa al estudio de este fenómeno lingüístico. Véase, a este respecto, su aportación titulada “I segnali discorsivi” en el marco de la *Grande grammatica italiana di consultazione* (1995) obra cuidada por Lorenzo Renzi, Giampaolo Salvi y Anna Cardinaletti.

<sup>2</sup> Como veremos a continuación, la etiqueta de “marcador discursivo” –introducida por la contribución pionera de Martín Zorraquino y Portolés Lázaro (1999)– ha sido objeto de debate científico entre los estudiosos y ha sufrido varios procesos de evolución terminológica que han llevado, entre otras, a la adopción de términos como: conectores, enlaces supraoracionales, operadores de la conversación (Fuentes Rodríguez 2018).

veces muy ardua hallar una equivalencia funcional atinada en la lengua hacia la que se traduce.

Al hilo de lo mencionado, en el presente artículo se plantea el tratamiento traductor de lo que en la gramática y lexicografía italiana recibe la etiqueta terminológica de adverbio y conjunción adversativa: *anzi* (Dardano y Trifone 2014; Sabatini e Coletti 2006).

Pues bien, los avances en campo lingüístico y pragmático apuntan a nuevas taxonomías y catalogaciones de los marcadores discursivos y conectores (Fuentes Rodríguez 2018). Se trata, concretamente, de los operadores de la conversación que se configuran como partículas discursivas invariables aptas para orientar el flujo de la conversación, marcar los turnos de palabra y manifestar determinadas posturas. Dichos elementos no se configuran como una clase funcional ni formal (Brinton 2010), ya que pueden llegar a desplegar un amplio abanico de funciones (Loureda y Acín 2010).

En el caso que nos ocupa, pretendemos estudiar desde una óptica contrastiva y traductológica el operador italiano *anzì*, que cumple específicamente la función de reformular lo mencionado en enunciados anteriores. En realidad, si tomamos en cuenta la pareja de lenguas español-italiano, no contamos con un número elevado de estudios que aborden desde un prisma contrastivo y traductológico el tratamiento de unidades lingüísticas que pueden clasificarse bajo la denominación de adverbios, conjunciones e interjecciones, es decir, elementos que remiten al macro-ámbito de los marcadores u operadores de la conversación<sup>3</sup>. A este respecto, merece la pena mencionar los trabajos llevados a cabo a propósito de *mica* y *magari* por Falcinelli (2008, 2015), Flores Acuña a propósito de *insomma* (2003) y los operadores de reformulación más en general (2009), Trovato a propósito de *infatti / difatti* (2020), *mica* (2021) y *magari* (2022).

Con el fin de explorar las posibilidades traslativas de este elemento lingüístico, nuestra tarea será la de confeccionar un corpus bilingüe (italiano > español), conformado tanto por novelas traducidas como por productos audiovisuales subtitulados y doblados hacia el español, con el fin ofrecer una visión integradora del fenómeno abordado. Una vez creado el corpus, se localizarán los equivalentes traductológicos y se llevará a cabo una labor de sistematización y catalogación de las opciones de traducción, con miras a un

---

<sup>3</sup> Para tener una panorámica general acerca de los marcadores del discurso y la cortesía verbal, véase Landone (2009). La misma autora se ha ocupado asimismo de la adquisición de los marcadores discursivos mediante la adopción de un enfoque heurístico (2021).

análisis contrastivo de tipo cualitativo con datos cuantitativos, que ponga de relieve las simetrías y disimetrías potenciales entre italiano y español en lo que a la traducción de este operador reformulativo se refiere.

## 2. El operador reformulativo *anzi*: breve delimitación teórico-conceptual y valores funcionales y semánticos

Desde un punto de vista etimológico, la unidad lingüística italiana *anzi* procede del latín *ante* o *antea* en posición prevocálica y cuenta con una dimensión temporal (antes) y también espacial (ante / delante de). Considerada como adverbio, resulta sinónimo de *invece*, *all'opposto*, *al contrario* (en cambio, por el contrario, todo lo contrario). En la *Nuova Grammatica della lingua italiana* de Dardano y Trifone (1997, 375), *anzi* es colocado en la categoría de las conjunciones coordinadas adversativas, ya que tiene el propósito de señalar una contraposición.

Para exemplificar lo susodicho, veamos qué definición encontramos en un diccionario acreditado de la lengua italiana como por ejemplo el Treccani:

prep. e avv. [lat. *ante* o *antea*, in posizione prevocalica]. – 1. prep. a. letter. Avanti, prima di: s'adopra Di fornir l'opra anzi il chiarir dell'alba (Leopardi); si conserva nell'uso, ma non com., nelle locuz. anzi sera, anzi notte, anzi tempo (v. anzitempo), nell'avv. anzitutto (v.), nell'agg. anzidetto (v.). Seguito da che, forma cong. temporale: non so s'io mi sperì Vederla anzi ch'io mora (Petrarca); più comunem. unito, nella cong. anziché, prima che, invece di, piuttosto di: preferisce giocare anziché studiare; le tue parole, anziché rabbonirlo, l'hanno inasprito. Rimane staccato nella locuz. pedantesca o scherz. anzi che no (raro anzichenò, anzichenno), piuttosto, alquanto: è testardo anzi che no. b. ant. Davanti: Pirro, Che i padri uccide anzi gli altari (Caro); e fig., in confronto a, al paragone di: Né tanto scoglio in mar ... s'inalza ... Ch'anzi lui non paresse un picciol colle (T. Tasso). 2. avv. a. Prima; quasi esclusivam. nella locuz. poc'anzi, poco prima, poco fa. b. Invece, all'opposto, al contrario; si usa per correggere un'affermazione già precedentemente negata: non è sciocco, anzi la sa molto lunga; non mi disturbi affatto, anzi mi fai piacere. Anche da solo, in espressioni ellittiche: non è avaro, anzi! c. O meglio, o piuttosto, per modificare quanto s'è già detto: ti manderò a dire qualcosa, anzi ti telefonerò in serata. E con lo stesso sign., ma per introdurre un'espressione rafforzativa: hai agito male, anzi malissimo.

Ahora bien, una disertación muy pormenorizada en torno a la evolución histórica y modalización de *anzi* la encontramos en Bazzanella, cuya contribución se plantea:

[...] delineare alcuni aspetti generali di riflessione relativamente alla modalizzazione di ante in latino, ed ai cambiamenti semantici di anzi dall’italiano antico all’italiano moderno, problematica che si inserisce nella ‘deriva modale’ nei segnali discorsivi. Mentre *anzi* nel fiorentino del Trecento, oltre ai valori tipici del latino ante (spaziale, temporale, di comparazione), sviluppa una varietà di tratti modali, in italiano moderno sopravvive solo la caratterizzazione modale di anzi. (2003, 124)

La estudiosa habla de “deriva modal”, porque a lo largo de los siglos esta partícula ha venido modificándose en sus usos y en el italiano moderno es posible afirmar que las funciones de *anzi* remiten principalmente a dos valores semánticos: (i) de corrección / rectificación y (ii) de refuerzo argumentativo (Sainz González 2014, 155). A continuación, proponemos algunos ejemplos a modo de ilustración:

- (i) *Ho bisogno di 15 euro, anzi 20*  
Necesito 15 euros; mejor dicho, 20

*Sono sudamericani, anzi argentini*  
Son sudamericanos; mejor dicho, argentinos

*Oggi è il 4 novembre, anzi il 5*  
Hoy es el 4 de noviembre; en realidad el 5

- (ii) *Sono cari, anzi carissimi*  
Son caros; mejor dicho, carísimos

*Lo scorso mese sono stato male, anzi malissimo*  
El mes pasado estuve mal; mejor dicho, muy mal

*Hai lavorato bene. Anzi, hai migliorato le cose*  
Has trabajado bien. Es más, has mejorado las cosas

*Marta parla bene spagnolo, anzi benissimo*  
Marta habla bien español; es más, muy bien<sup>4</sup>

A partir de los ejemplos proporcionados, puede apreciarse que las opciones útiles para verter al español *anzi*, son variadas y, aunque cambie el valor

---

<sup>4</sup> Los ejemplos aportados corren a cargo del autor del presente artículo.

semántico en italiano, es posible que en español se opte por un único equivalente de traducción. Esta circunstancia podría provocar alguna duda o problemática de carácter traductológico, ya que el traductor podría verse desorientado a la hora de decantarse por una opción u otra. Si el profesional de la mediación interlingüística es bien consciente de los valores semánticos de *anzi* y sabe cómo y en qué contextos comunicativos emplearlos, como paso previo, es aconsejable recurrir a un buen diccionario bilingüe, cuya función primordial es la de guiarlo en la elección más pertinente. De todos modos, hay que tener en cuenta que el diccionario bilingüe no es la panacea para la solución de la totalidad de los problemas de traducción. En varios casos, la identificación de un equivalente de traducción correcto depende de una variedad de factores relacionados con el texto y el co-texto, así como con la variación lingüística, sea esta diastrática, diatópica y diafásica. En el párrafo sucesivo, profundizaremos en la contribución que brinda la lexicografía bilingüe a la hora de abordar el operador reformulativo objeto de nuestro estudio.

### **3. *Anzi* en la lexicografía bilingüe español-italiano según el tamaño, la sincronía y la diacronía**

La ayuda de los repertorios lexicográficos, ya sea monolingües que bilingües, se erige siempre en una operación válida en la actividad traductora. Por esta razón, conviene detenerse en qué correspondencias lexicográficas se presentan en algunos de los diccionarios bilingües más utilizados a día de hoy. Para nuestro estudio hemos optado por:

- diccionarios de gran tamaño que –dicho sea de paso, cuentan con ediciones y actualizaciones muy recientes: Garzanti (2018), Tam (2021), Zanichelli (2020);
- diccionarios medianos: Collins (2005), Herder (2011), Rusconi (2020), Vallardi (2018);
- diccionarios pequeños: Giunti (2021), Rusconi (2005);
- diccionarios “antiguos”: Ambruzzi (1949), Martínez Amador (1979)

Veamos, a continuación, los resultados del rastreo lexicográfico<sup>5</sup>:

---

<sup>5</sup> Para la presentación del rastreo lexicográfico, hemos elegido un criterio cronológico, presentando desde el diccionario más reciente hasta el más antiguo.

Tam (2021)	[cong.] <b>1 (aversativo)</b> más bien, mejor dicho • <i>non era arrabbiato, anzi era triste</i> : no estaba enfadado, más bien triste <b>2 (o meglio)</b> es más, mejor • <i>ti chiamerò, anzi verrò a trovarci</i> : te llamaré, es más vendré a verte. FRAS <b>anzi che no</b> : más bien.
Zanichelli (2020)	A cong. <b>1 (al contrario)</b> <b>es más, todo lo contrario, más bien</b> : <i>non mi dispiace, a. la cosa mi fa veramente piacere</i> no me molesta, es más me apetece mucho; <i>non è un uomo attivo, a. è proprio pigro</i> no es un hombre activo, más bien es un vago <b>2 [ellittico] al contrario, todo lo contrario</b> : <i>non è per niente antipatico, a!</i> no es para nada antipático: ¡al contrario! <b>3 (o meglio) mejor (dicho)</b> : <i>ti aviserò quando sarà pronto, a. te lo porterò io stesso</i> te llamaré cuando esté listo, mejor dicho, te lo llevaré yo mismo <b>4 [con valor rafforzativo] es más</b> : <i>torno presto, a. prestissimo</i> vuelvo pronto, es más prontísimo
Garzanti (2018)	cong. <b>1 (invece)</b> al contrario, más bien: <i>non ero in ritardo, anzi ero arrivato in anticipo</i> , no iba con retraso, al contrario había llegado con antelación; “ <i>Disturbo?</i> ” “ <i>Anzi!</i> ”, “ <i>¿Molesto?</i> ” “ <i>Al contrario!</i> ”; <i>non sono triste, anzi sono contenta</i> , no estoy triste, más bien estoy contenta <b>2 (o meglio, o piuttosto)</b> o mejor, o más bien: <i>ti telefonerò, anzi verrò</i> , te llamo o mejor voy a tu casa <b>3 (con valor rafforzativo)</b> es más: <i>era un amico, anzi un fratello</i> , era un amigo, es más un hermano.

*Tabla 1*  
*Equivalentes de traducción en los diccionarios de gran tamaño*

Rusconi (2020)	<b>1 (aversativo)</b> más bien, más aún, mejor dicho: <i>non era triste, ~ era felice</i> , no estaba triste, más bien feliz <b>2 (o meglio)</b> es más, mejor, más bien: <i>ti chiamerò, anzi verrò di persona</i> , te llamaré es más vendré en persona     ~ <i>che</i> , en vez de; ~ <i>che no</i> , más bien.
Vallardi (2018)	cong. <b>1 (al contrario)</b> al contrario: “ <i>disturbo?</i> ” “ <i>no, -!</i> ”, “ <i>¿molesto?</i> ” “ <i>no, al contrario</i> ” <b>2 (o meglio, o piuttosto)</b> o más bien, o mejor: <i>gli scrivo, -, gli telefono</i> , le escribo, o mejor, le llamo por teléfono; <i>un amico, -, un fratello</i> , un amigo, o más bien, un hermano <b>3 (rafforzativo)</b> es más, o más bien: <i>è brutto, - orribile</i> , es feo, es más, horrible;

	<i>verrò presto, — prestissimo</i> , vendré pronto, o mejor, prontísimo.
Herder (2011)	<i>conj</i> en lugar de, más bien, es más
Collins (2005)	CONG ( <i>al contrario</i> ) más bien, al contrario; ( <i>o meglio</i> ) es más

*Tabla 2*  
*Equivalentes de traducción en los diccionarios medianos*

Giunti (2012)	<i>cong.</i> antes, más bien, mejor, al contrario
Rusconi (2005)	<i>cong. 1 (aversativo)</i> más bien, más aún, mejor dicho <b>2 (o meglio)</b> es más, mejor, más bien.

*Tabla 3*  
*Equivalentes de traducción en los diccionarios pequeños*

Martínez Amador (1979)	<i>adv.</i> y <i>conj.</i> antes, más bien, mejor; al contrario: <i>anzi che no</i> , antes que no; <i>anzi tempo</i> , antes de tiempo, prematuramente; <i>anzi, prego</i> , no hay de que (dar gracias)
Ambruzzi (1949)	<i>conj.</i> antes, más bien, al contrario, mejor: <b><i>tu non mi annoi, anzi mi rallegrì</i></b> , tú no me aburres, antes etc. me alegras   <b><i>fai bene, anzi benone</i></b> , haces bien, mejor dicho requetebién   <b><i>è bella anzi che no</i></b> , es bonita antes que no   <b><i>è vanitoso anzi che no</i></b> , es más bien vanidoso   <b><i>vorrei anzi la morte che la schiavitù</i></b> , la muerte quisiera antes que la esclavitud    <i>prep.</i> <b><i>anzi tempo</i></b> , antes de tiempo   <b><i>non è dolce, anzi acidetto</i></b> , no es dulce, sino acídulo   <b><i>Disturbo? — No, anzi!</i></b> , ¿Molesto? — No, al contrario.

*Tabla 4*  
*Equivalentes de traducción en los diccionarios más antiguos*

El rastreo lexicográfico que acabamos de realizar nos permite apreciar una amplia gama de equivalentes que posibilitan expresar en lengua española el operador italiano *anzi*. Los vamos a sistematizar con el fin de poner de relieve la variedad y variabilidad traductológica:

1	<i>Antes</i>
2	<i>Más bien</i>
3	<i>Mejor</i>

4	<i>Mejor dicho</i>
5	<i>Es más</i>
6	<i>O mejor</i>
7	<i>Al contrario</i>
8	<i>Todo lo contrario</i>
9	<i>O más bien</i>
10	<i>Más aún</i>
11	<i>En lugar de</i>

*Tabla 5*  
*Sistematización de los equivalentes de traducción de *anzi**

Son once en total los equivalentes de traducción identificados y que supuestamente permitirían expresar en castellano los valores y funciones del operador reformulativo italiano *anzi*. Es interesante notar que no todas las herramientas lexicográficas ofrecen ejemplos de uso. Los diccionarios de gran tamaño brindan varios ejemplos y el más copioso entre todos es el Zanichelli. Entre los medianos, solo el Rusconi y el Vallardi lo hacen. En cuanto a los diccionarios pequeños, por obvias razones y por su carácter de utilidad práctica, cabe observar que no se han confeccionado con la idea de dar ejemplos de uso. Entre los dos antiguos consultados, solo el Ambruzzi, es decir, el más antiguo, ofrece una buena casuística de ejemplos.

Centrándonos ahora en los equivalentes que se repiten en más de un diccionario, podemos observar qué tratamiento reciben en el *Diccionario de partículas discursivas del español* (2008), importante obra de consulta coordinada por Antonio Briz, Salvador Pons Bordería y José Portolés, así como en el *Diccionario de conectores y operadores del español* (2018) de Catalina Fuentes Rodríguez. Por ejemplo, la equivalencia mediante *más bien* remite a la rectificación de una información previa presentando una formulación discursiva más apropiada de dicha información, fenómeno en línea con lo planteado por Garcés Gómez (2005, 49) a propósito de una dinámica de reformulación no parafrástica.

Por lo que se refiere a *mejor dicho*, en el diccionario de Briz *et al.* encontramos la siguiente definición: “destaca el miembro del discurso como una corrección y aclaración de lo dicho anteriormente, a modo de inciso. Es una corrección y una aclaración que el hablante hace de lo dicho con anterioridad”. Se trata, en este caso, de un marcador que Martín Zorraquino y Portolés Lázaro (1999, 4126) clasifican como “reformulador rectificativo”, ya que intenta mejorar la transmisión del mensaje que se pretende comunicar. En la misma línea se sitúa

la caracterización ofrecida por Fuentes Rodríguez (2018, 216): “conector reformulativo de corrección”. Carrera Díaz (2012, 190) argumenta que esta locución sirve para realizar una corrección en sentido abierto que puede concretarse mediante (i) una adición intensificativa, (ii) una corrección, (iii) una aclaración o precisación.

Los casos en los que se adopta *al contrario* o *todo lo contrario* remiten a una formulación incorrecta que necesita ser rectificada. En la obra Briz *et al.* se hace hincapié no solo en la contrariedad, sino también en la refutación con lo expresado en el discurso anterior. En la *Nueva gramática de la lengua española* (NGLE 2009-2010, 597) se halla como etiqueta la de “conector discursivo adverbial” de tipo adversativo y/o contraargumentativo. Por su parte, Fuentes Rodríguez (2018, 40 y 347) califica ambos elementos como operadores modal-argumentativos y, en el caso de *todo lo contrario*, comenta que se trata de un elemento todavía no del todo grammaticalizado. Podemos afirmar que en este caso el sentido de *anži* sería de carácter contraargumentativo (Sainz 2014, 164). En especial, *todo lo contrario* indica una oposición contundente entre dos contenidos (Carrera Díaz 2012, 191).

#### 4. Corpus de análisis y metodología

Con el fin de comprobar qué tratamiento recibe el reformulador italiano *anži* a lo largo del proceso de traducción, como mencionamos en las notas introductorias, nos valdremos de un corpus bilingüe compuesto por textos originales italianos y los correspondientes textos traducidos al español. A este respecto, queremos puntualizar que no solo hemos tenido en cuenta textos enmarcados en el ámbito de la prosa, sino también textos pertenecientes al campo de la comunicación audiovisual, por ser un sector bastante reciente y muy fértil en el plano de la investigación de perfil lingüístico-traductológico.

En términos metodológicos, hemos decidido adoptar una metodología de tipo híbrido que apunta a aglutinar la perspectiva de investigación cualitativa con la cuantitativa (Alcántara-Plá 2020). El estudio cuantitativo se ha llevado a cabo mediante el programa *Sketch Engine*, que permite efectuar varios procesos automáticos al objeto de conseguir datos significativos para el análisis del operador reformulativo que nos ocupa. En efecto, a través de la función *Keyword* del programa ha sido posible observar de manera ágil la frecuencia de aparición, así como todos los casos detectados.

Ahora bien, por lo que se refiere a la traducción italiano > español de novelas, señalamos a continuación las que hemos escogido con el número correspondiente de casos de *anzi* identificados:

Información sobre la novela	Número de casos de <i>anzi</i>
<i>Io uccido</i> (Yo mato), Giorgio Faletti, 2005	33
<i>Giovane sposa</i> (La esposa joven), Alessandro Baricco, 2015	18
<i>Oceano mare</i> , (Océano mar), Alessandro Baricco, 1993	6
<i>L'amica geniale</i> (La amiga estupenda), Elena Ferrante, 2011	38
<i>Tre metri sopra il cielo</i> (A tres metros sobre el cielo), Federico Moccia, 2004	21
<i>Il Visconte dimezzato</i> (El Vizconde demediado), Italo Calvino, 1952	4
Total	120

*Tabla 6*  
*Novelas que conforman el corpus bilingüe*

En lo que atañe a la traducción audiovisual, nos hemos decantado por los siguientes productos<sup>6</sup>:

Información sobre los productos audiovisuales	Número de casos de <i>anzi</i>
Película: <i>L'incredibile storia dell'Isola delle rose</i> (La increíble historia de la Isla de las rosas), 2020	3
Serie de televisión: <i>Luna nera</i> , 2020	1
Película: <i>Sotto il sole di Riccione</i> , 2020	3
Película: <i>La vita davanti a sé</i> , 2020	0
Serie de televisión: <i>Curon</i> , 2020	4
Película: <i>Il Divin Codino</i> , 2021	1
Total	12
Total novelas + productos audiovisuales	132

*Tabla 7*  
*Productos audiovisuales que conforman el corpus bilingüe*

<sup>6</sup> Los productos audiovisuales que conforman el corpus bilingüe se han extraído de la conocida plataforma Netflix. Las transcripciones, tanto de la versión original como de la subtitulada, han corrido a cargo del autor de este artículo.

Puede apreciarse fácilmente que, en los productos audiovisuales analizados, la presencia de *anzi* es anecdótica y muy reducida con respecto a las novelas tomadas en consideración. Es más, por ejemplo, en la película *La vita davanti a sé* no se ha detectado ninguna ocurrencia. Las conocidas limitaciones espacio-temporales típicas de la subtitulación (Díaz Cintas 2008, 68), así como la tendencia natural a los fenómenos de la síntesis y reducción (Diadòri 2012, 226) podrían configurarse como los elementos que determinan la presencia muy limitada del operador *anzi*.

#### *4.1 Catalogación de las opciones y correspondencias traslativas identificadas en el corpus bilingüe*

Antes de presentar una muestra representativa de las opciones traductivas identificadas en el corpus analizado, vamos a facilitar los datos obtenidos de cara a la labor de catalogación de las opciones y correspondencias traslativas del operador *anzi*. Como hemos visto anteriormente, son 132 en total las ocurrencias halladas a lo largo del corpus bilingüe. A continuación, vamos a proporcionar una sistematización de los resultados obtenidos con vistas a examinar las diferentes opciones de traducción, según un criterio de frecuencia de aparición:

Opción de traducción	Número de casos
Mejor dicho	33
Es más	30
Supresión de <i>anzi</i> en traducción	14
Al contrario	12
Más bien	10
Todo lo contrario	8
Mejor	6
En realidad	5
Más que	4
O más bien	2
Más aún	2
Incluso	2
Además	1
Hasta	1
Deja	1
O mejor	1

*Tabla 8*  
*Catalogación de las correspondencias traslativas*

Como se puede observar en la tabla, son en total 16 las correspondencias traslativas que se han detectado a partir del corpus analizado. Queda patente que las opciones más recurrentes son “mejor dicho” y “es más”. Asimismo, es significativo el dato relativo a los casos en los que el operador reformulativo estudiado queda suprimido a raíz del proceso traductor. Los casos más cuantiosos se hallan en las películas y series de televisión, debido con mucha probabilidad a las limitaciones espacio-temporales típicas de los productos audiovisuales (Díaz Cintas 2008, 58). No obstante, hemos constatado la ausencia de su traducción también en algunas novelas. Son interesantes los casos de alternancia entre “mejor” y “o mejor”; “más bien” y “o más bien”. La presencia de la conjunción disyuntiva marca sin duda un matiz semántico particular.

También se dan casos en los que se adoptan opciones de traducción con carácter individual que no quedan contempladas en ninguno de los diccionarios bilingües consultados: *incluso, además, hasta, deja*. Se trata de un fenómeno interesante del que hablaremos en las conclusiones.

#### *4.2 Presentación de la muestra traductológica*

- Vogliamo fare di questa stanza un posto per i nostalgici della nebbia? Londra o morte? <b>Anzi</b> , no, Londra e morte? ( <i>Io ucciso</i> )	-¿Quieres convertir este despacho en un lugar de encuentro para los nostálgicos de la niebla? ¿Londres o muerte? <b>O mejor:</b> Londres y muerte?
Pierrot lo ascoltava per niente impaurito. <b>Anzi</b> , pareva che quell'avventura notturna fuori programma ( <i>Io ucciso</i> )	Pierrot le escuchaba sin miedo, y <b>hasta</b> parecía orgulloso de aquella aventura nocturna fuera de programa
Senti, ho un problema. <b>Anzi</b> , ho un problema in più, per essere esatti. ( <i>Io ucciso</i> )	Escucha, ha habido un problema... <b>Mejor dicho</b> , tengo un problema más, para ser exactos.
L'insuccesso della sera precedente, la nuova vittima, <b>anzi</b> , le nuove vittime ( <i>Io ucciso</i> )	Tras el fracaso de la noche anterior, con una nueva víctima <b>-mejor dicho</b> , dos nuevas víctimas
Non hai rovinato proprio nulla, Nicolas. <b>Anzi</b> . Non è che ho avuto molta compagnia ( <i>Io ucciso</i> )	No has estropeado nada, Nicolás. <b>Al contrario</b> . En los últimos tiempos no me ha sobrado la compañía
Faceva “ciao ciao” con la manina. <b>Anzi</b> , con i capezzoli. ( <i>Io ucciso</i> )	“hola, qué tal” con las manitas. <b>Mejor dicho</b> , con los pezones.
Non aveva fretta. Si gustava, <b>anzi</b> , il piacere dell'attesa ( <i>Oceano mare</i> )	No tenía prisa. <b>Es más</b> , disfrutaba del placer de la espera

<p>È una storia assolutamente verosimile, <b>anzi</b>, se ci penso bene, l'avevo perfino già sentita (<i>Oceano mare</i>)</p>	<p>Es una historia absolutamente verosímil, <b>es más</b>, pensándolo bien, ya la había oido</p>
<p>Il problema è questo, che ho tante strade intorno e nessuna dentro, <b>anzi</b> a voler essere precisi, nessuna dentro e quattro intorno (<i>Oceano mare</i>)</p>	<p>El problema es este, que tengo muchos caminos a mí alrededor y ninguno dentro, <b>es más</b>, para ser más precisos, ninguno dentro y cuatro a mi alrededor.</p>
<p>A onor del vero, non si era fidanzato con grande entusiasmo, <b>anzi</b>. Questo va detto (<i>Oceano mare</i>)</p>	<p>En honor a la verdad, no se había prometido con gran entusiasmo, <b>todo lo contrario</b></p>
<p>Lila non obbedì e non parve nemmeno spaventarsi, <b>anzi</b> continuò a lanciare in giro pezzi di carta bagnati nell'inchiostro (<i>L'amica geniale</i>)</p>	<p>Lila no obedeció y ni siquiera pareció asustarse, <b>al contrario</b>, siguió lanzando por doquier pedacitos de papel secante empapados en tinta</p>
<p>Era questo che all'epoca la lasciava perplessa e <b>anzi</b> a volte la innervosiva (<i>L'amica geniale</i>)</p>	<p>Era eso lo que por entonces la dejaba perpleja e <b>incluso</b> a veces la ponía nerviosa</p>
<p>Già in prima elementare era al di là di ogni possibile competizione. La maestra <b>anzi</b> diceva che con un po' d'impegno sarebbe stata pronta a dare subito l'esame di seconda e a meno di sette anni andare in terza (<i>L'amica geniale</i>)</p>	<p>Ya en primer curso de primaria estaba más allá de toda competición posible. <b>Más aún</b>, la maestra decía que si se empeñaba un poco muy pronto podría examinarse de segundo y, con menos de siete años, pasar a tercero</p>
<p>Nunzia Cerullo fece qualche tentativo poco convinto, ma il padre non volle neanche discutere e <b>anzi</b> diede uno schiaffo a Rino che gli aveva detto che sbagliava (<i>L'amica geniale</i>)</p>	<p>Nunzia Cerullo lo intentó con poca convicción, pero el padre ni siquiera quiso hablar del asunto, y <b>además</b>, le dio una bofetada a Rino, que le había dicho que se equivocaba</p>
<p>Lei decise di farlo ugualmente e io le andai dietro. <b>Anzi</b>, fu in quell'occasione che mi convinsi che niente potesse fermarla e che <b>anzi</b> ogni sua disobbedienza avesse sbocchi che per la meraviglia toglievano il fiato (<i>L'amica geniale</i>)</p>	<p>Ella decidió hacerlo de todos modos y yo la seguí. <b>Es más</b>, fue en esa ocasión cuando me convencí de que nada podía detenerla, y de que todas sus desobedientias tenían unos desenlaces tan maravillosos que dejaban sin aliento (<b>supresión</b>)</p>
<p>Ci rimasi male quando me lo portò perché lo leggessi, ma non dissi niente, <b>anzi</b> trattenni la delusione e le feci molte feste (<i>L'amica geniale</i>)</p>	<p>Me llevé un disgusto cuando me la trajo para que la leyera, pero no dije nada, <b>al contrario</b>, me tragué la decepción y la elogué mucho</p>

<p>Carmela mi era sempre più antipatica, ma facevo finta di essere sua amica almeno quanto lo ero di Lila, <b>anzi</b>, in qualche circostanza lasciavo credere addirittura di tenere più a lei (<i>L'amica geniale</i>)</p>	<p>Carmela me resultaba cada vez más antipática, pero fingía ser tan amiga de ella como de Lila, <b>es más</b>, en algunas circunstancias daba a entender incluso que la apreciaba más a ella</p>
<p>Andrea neanche ti guarderà in faccia. <b>Anzi</b>, lo farà, ma con tutto quell'eye liner non ti riconoscerà e se ne andrà con Giulia. (<i>Tre metri sopra il cielo</i>)</p>	<p>Andrea ni siquiera te mirará a la cara. <b>Es más</b>, lo hará, pero con todo ese negro en los ojos no te reconocerá y se irá con Giulia</p>
<p>Ma poi mi piace anche fare la pace... <b>Anzi</b> mi piace soprattutto quello (<i>Tre metri sopra il cielo</i>)</p>	<p>Pero luego me gusta también hacer las paces... Sobre todo eso (<b>supresión</b>)</p>
<p>Mi sei completamente indifferente, anzi direi che mi annoi leggermente, per essere precisa (<i>Tre metri sopra il cielo</i>)</p>	<p>Me resultas completamente indiferente, <b>es más</b>, diría que me aburres un poco, para ser más exacta</p>
<p>Sicuramente l'ha messa in giro un occhialuto vigliacco, uno che ha paura di fare a stecche, <b>anzi</b>, che proprio per questo porta gli occhiali e racconta cazzate (<i>Tre metri sopra il cielo</i>)</p>	<p>Sin duda la habrá hecho circular uno de esos gallinas que las usan, uno al que le asustan las peleas, <b>o más bien</b>, que justo por eso lleva gafas y cuenta gilipolleces</p>
<p>Io starei così anche tutta la notte, <b>anzi</b>, magari andrei avanti, approfondirei, che ne so, troverei altre posizioni (<i>Tre metri sopra il cielo</i>)</p>	<p>Joven, y no me quedaría así toda la noche, <b>es más</b>, tal vez iría más allá, profundizaría, qué sé yo, probaría otras posiciones!</p>
<p>Già, oltretutto come mai andate in giro senza divise? Non siete due di quelle idiote della Falconieri? <b>Anzi</b>, battonieri (<i>Tre metri sopra il cielo</i>)</p>	<p>Ya, sobre todo, ¿cómo es que vais sin uniforme? ¿No sois dos de esas idiotas del Falconieri? O, <b>mejor dicho</b>, dos de esas furcias</p>
<p>Sì, ho capito. Invece è rimasto benissimo. <b>Anzi</b> mi è sembrato felice. Vedi che ti eri sbagliata. (<i>Tre metri sopra il cielo</i>)</p>	<p>Sí, ya lo he entendido. En cambio, no le ha sentado nada mal. A mí me parecía <b>incluso</b> contento. ¿Ves cómo te habías equivocado?</p>
<p>Ma di che mi preoccupò? Al massimo rischia lei. <b>Anzi</b>, non mi devo neanche innervosire. (<i>Tre metri sopra il cielo</i>)</p>	<p>¿De qué me preocupó? Al límite, la que se arriesga es ella. <b>Es más</b>, ni siquiera me tengo que poner nerviosa</p>
<p>Il mantello di mio zio ondeggiò, e il vento lo gonfiava, lo tendeva come</p>	<p>La capa de mi tío ondeó, y el viento la hinchaba, la tensaba como una vela, y se</p>

<p>una vela e si sarebbe detto che gli attraversasse il corpo, <b>anzi</b>, che questo corpo non ci fosse affatto, e il mantello fosse vuoto come quello d'un fantasma (<i>Il Visconte dimezzato</i>)</p>	<p>habría dicho que le atravesaba el cuerpo, <b>mejor</b>, que este cuerpo no existía, y la capa estaba vacía como la de un fantasma</p>
<p>“Delle altre non mi interessa. Le potete uccidere tutte. <b>Anzi</b>, le dovete uccidere tutte, ma lei mi serve viva” (<i>Luna nera</i>)</p>	<p>“Puedes matarlas a todas. <b>Es más</b>, debes hacerlo, pero a ella la quiero viva”.</p>
<p>“No, no, no, non è che non m' interessa, <b>anzi</b> no, a me... Era solo una domanda” (<i>Sotto il sole di Riccione</i>)</p>	<p>“No, no, no. No es que no me interese, era solo una pregunta” (<b>supresión</b>)</p>
<p>“Sei stata molto carina a riportarmi le chiavi, però... <b>Anzi</b>, se mi ridai la camicia perché è l'unica pulita” (<i>Sotto il sole di Riccione</i>)</p>	<p>“Has sido muy amable por traerme las llaves, pero... dame la camisa porque es la única que tengo limpia así que...” (<b>supresión</b>)</p>
<p>“Mamma, te la tua parte l'hai già fatta, <b>anzi</b>, ne hai fatte due perché hai fatto anche quella di papà e sei stata bravissima” (<i>Sotto il sole di Riccione</i>)</p>	<p>“Mamá ya has hecho tu parte, <b>en realidad</b> dos partes porque te has ocupado de la de papa y lo has hecho genial”</p>
<p>“Mmh, mmh. <b>Anzi</b>, ti ci metto anche il mio indirizzo, così, se tu vuoi, qualche volta puoi passare da casa mia” (<i>Il Divin Codino</i>)</p>	<p>“Mmh, mmh. <b>Deja</b>, voy a ponerte mi dirección, así, si quieras, cuando quieras te pasas por mi casa”</p>
<p>“No, perché dici così? <b>Anzi</b>, invita anche tuo fratello. Mi farebbe piacere” (<i>Curon</i>)</p>	<p>“No, ¿por qué lo dices? Díselo también a tu hermano. Me gustaría mucho”. (<b>supresión</b>)</p>
<p>“Io e lui siamo come fratelli, <b>anzi</b> di più. Io conosco meglio lui di Giulio, per dirti” (<i>Curon</i>)</p>	<p>“Somos como hermanos, <b>más que</b> eso. Lo conozco mejor que a Giulio”.</p>
<p>“Guarda che se ti piace la f***a io non ho problemi. <b>Anzi</b>, finalmente abbiamo qualcosa in comune” (<i>Curon</i>)</p>	<p>“Oye, que si te gustan los c***s me da igual. <b>Es más</b>, porque tendremos algo en común”.</p>
<p>“E non ci possiamo fare niente. Anch'io sono niente. <b>Anzi</b>, hanno ragione loro” (<i>Curon</i>)</p>	<p>“Y no podemos hacer nada. Yo tampoco soy nada. <b>En realidad</b>, tienen razón”</p>

Tabla 9  
Muestra traductológica

## 5. Comentario y reflexiones conclusivas

Para dar cuenta de la variedad traductológica en lo que atañe al tratamiento de *anzi* en español, acabamos de proporcionar una muestra representativa en la que quedan contempladas las diecisésis correspondencias de traducción del operador estudiado. La casuística es interesante porque pone de relieve los retos que plantea el proceso de traducción, con especial referencia a parejas de lenguas tipológicamente afines, como son el español y el italiano.

Para abordar satisfactoriamente el fenómeno lingüístico objeto de nuestro estudio, el recurso a un corpus bilingüe nos ha parecido la opción más viable y pertinente, sobre todo, con miras a agilizar el cotejo interlingüístico. Además, el material lingüístico analizado queda acreditado por tratarse de textos “oficiales”, sometidos a rigurosos procesos de traducción profesional.

Es posible afirmar que, en principio, las opciones traductológicas adoptadas para verter al castellano el operador de la conversación *anzi*, están en consonancia con las equivalencias proporcionadas por numerosos repertorios lexicográficos bilingües. De hecho, la mayoría de los equivalentes de traducción identificados quedan asimismo registrados en varios de los diccionarios consultados. Está claro que hay excepciones, como en los casos de “*incluso*”, “*además*”, “*hasta*”, “*deja*”, “*en realidad*” que no remiten automática y directamente a los valores semánticos señalados en el segundo párrafo de este artículo. Por ejemplo, el equivalente mediante “*deja*” podría incluso ocasionar alguna duda, ya que se trata de una segunda persona del imperativo singular; o también, la locución adverbial “*en realidad*”, que funciona generalmente como sinónimo de “*efectivamente, sin duda*”, adquiere una colocación adecuada en el marco conversacional en el que se halla. Las mismas reflexiones valen para los casos de alternancia entre “*mejor*”, “*o mejor*”, “*más bien*”, “*o más bien*”, determinados en buena medida por la sensibilidad y la individualidad de quien traduce.

Una consideración aparte merecen los diferentes casos de cancelación del elemento lingüístico en la versión traducida. Si bien es cierto que la supresión puede configurarse como una técnica de traducción, cabe observar, por ejemplo, que su uso en la traducción audiovisual queda determinado por la necesidad de comprimir las unidades lingüísticas. Por lo que se refiere, en cambio, a las novelas, los pocos casos de eliminación podrían justificarse como elecciones personales del traductor.

Por todo lo anterior, queda meridianamente claro que la actividad traductora está plagada tanto de obstáculos como de posibilidades, ya que

ofrece interesantes oportunidades de recreación textual, siempre y cuando no se traicionen las intenciones comunicativo-pragmáticas del original. La presencia natural de unidades lingüísticas que se configuran como conectores y operadores conversacionales puede ser fuente de problemas de orden traductológico si no se conoce a fondo la naturaleza semántica y, sobre todo, la vertiente pragmático-procedimental de estos elementos, susceptibles de cumplir múltiples funciones dentro del entramado textual.

Como hemos venido observando a lo largo de estas páginas, el tratamiento de los marcadores del discurso desde el campo de la traducción conlleva en general la ausencia de linealidad entre la lengua A y la lengua B y, en este sentido, la afinidad lingüística no es necesariamente un elemento facilitador. Además, los diccionarios bilingües pueden ofrecer una contribución importante, pero no van en la dirección de disipar la totalidad de las dudas del traductor. Por estas razones, es fundamental ser capaces de echar mano de todos los recursos lingüístico-pragmáticos que cada idioma pone a disposición de sus usuarios para articular con eficacia comunicativa cualquier tipo de texto.

Ahora bien, como suele ocurrir con los trabajos de investigación, cabe observar algunas limitaciones del estudio. Una primera tiene que ver con la amplitud del corpus analizado. Como hemos visto, el corpus bilingüe queda conformado por seis novelas y seis productos audiovisuales. Se puede considerar que el corpus es lo suficientemente representativo del fenómeno lingüístico abordado. Sin embargo, no es un corpus especialmente extenso, de ahí que la creación de un corpus más amplio pueda suponer una presencia más elevada de casos de *anži*, así como un abanico más variado de posibilidades de traducción hacia el español.

Otro posible límite del presente estudio radica en que hemos tomado en consideración solo la dimensión del español peninsular, sin tener en cuenta productos literarios o audiovisuales que remitan a la variante hispanoamericana. En este sentido, los marcadores de variación lingüística característicos de esta(s) variante(s) podrían haber arrojado resultados diferentes a raíz del proceso traductor. Ante este escenario, nos proponemos realizar de cara al futuro un estudio que tenga en cuenta los dos límites que acabamos de traer a colación.

## Referencias bibliográficas

- Alcántara-Plá, Manuel. 2020. “Metodología híbrida para al análisis del discurso digital. El ejemplo de ‘democracia’ en Twitter”, *Cuadernos Aispi* 16: 25-44. <https://doi.org/10.14672/2.2020.1696>.
- Bazzanella, Carla. 1995. “I segnali discorsivi”. En *Grande grammatica italiana di consultazione*, III, cap. 5. A cura di Lorenzo Renzi, Giampaolo Salvi e Anna Cardinaletti, 226-57. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Bazzanella, Carla. 2003. “Dal latino *ante* all’italiano *anzi*: la deriva modal”. In *Colloquia absentium. Studi sulla comunicazione epistolare in Cicerone*. A cura di Alessandro Garcea, 123-40. Turín: Rosenberg & Sellier.
- Brinton, Laurel J. 2010. “Discourse Markers”. In *Historical Pragmatics*. Eds Andreas H. Jucker and Irma Taavitsainen, 285-314. Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter.
- Briz Gómez, Antonio. José, Portolés. Salvador, Pons. (coords.) 2008. *Diccionario de partículas discursivas del español (DPDE)*. Disponible en: <http://www.dpde.es/#/>.
- Carrera Díaz, Manuel. 2012. *Grammatica spagnola*. Bari: Laterza.
- Dardano, Maurizio, e Pietro Trifone. 1997. *La Nuova Grammatica della lingua italiana*. Milano: Zanichelli.
- Diadori, Pierangela. 2012. *Teoria e tecnica della traduzione. Strategie, testi e contesti*. Milano: Mondadori Education.
- Díaz Cintas, Jorge. 2008. *The Didactics of Audiovisual Translation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Falcinelli, Alessandro. 2008. “‘Mica’ es fácil de aprenderlo: instrucciones de uso del adverbio italiano. *Culture (Annale del Dipartimento di Lingue e Culture Contemporanee della Facoltà di Scienze Politiche dell’Università degli Studi di Milano)* 21: 197-215.
- Falcinelli, Alessandro. 2015. “Modalidad epistémica y adverbios de duda: el caso de ‘magari’ en italiano”, *Linguae &. Rivista di Lingue e Culture Moderne*. 14(2): 29-46.
- Fernández Loya, Carmelo. 2006. “La traducción y el análisis contrastivo de los marcadores del discurso: los casos de *infatti* y *en efecto*”. In *Scrittura e conflitto*. Antonella Cancellier, Maria Caterina Ruta e Laura Silvestri. *Actas del XXI Congreso Aispi* (Catania-Ragusa 16-18 mayo), vol. 2, 99-114. Roma: Ed. Aispi.

- Flores Acuña, Estefanía. 2003. “La traducción de los marcadores del discurso en italiano y en español: el caso de *insomma*”, *Trans* 7, 34-45.
- Flores Acuña, Estefanía. 2009. “La reformulación del discurso en español en comparación con el italiano. Estudio contrastivo de los marcadores de reformulación”. En *La reformulación del discurso en español en comparación con otras lenguas (catalán, francés, italiano, inglés, alemán, islandés)*. Dir. María Pilar Garcés Gómez. Madrid: Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Boletín Oficial del Estado, Colección Monografías, 58.
- Fuentes Rodríguez, Catalina. 2018. *Diccionario de conectores y operadores del español*. Madrid: ArcoLibros.
- Garcés Gómez, María Pilar. 2005. “Reformulación y marcadores de reformulación”. En *Estudios sobre lo metalingüístico (en español)*. Eds Manuel Casado Velarde, Ruiz González e Óscar Loureda, 47-63. Frankfurt: Peter Lang,
- Garcés Gómez, María Pilar. (dir.) 2009. *La reformulación del discurso en español en comparación con otras lenguas (catalán, francés, italiano, inglés, alemán, islandés)*. Madrid: Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Boletín Oficial del Estado, Colección Monografías, 58.
- Landone, Elena. 2009. *Los marcadores del discurso y la cortesía verbal en español*. Berna: Peter Lang.
- Landone, Elena. 2021. “Un enfoque heurístico para la adquisición de los marcadores del discurso en español”, *Círculo de lingüística aplicada a la comunicación* 87: 185-94. <https://doi.org/10.5209/clac.74311>.
- Loureda, Óscar y Acín, Esperanza. (coords.) 2010. *Los estudios sobre marcadores del discurso en español, hoy*. Madrid: ArcoLibros.
- Martín Zorraquino, María Antonia, y José Portolés Lázaro . 1999. “Los marcadores del discurso”. En *Gramática descriptiva de la lengua española. entre la oración y el discurso*. Vol. 3, cap. 63. Eds Ignacio Bosque y Violeta Demonte, 4051-213. Madrid: Espasa Calpe.
- Portolés Lázaro, José. 1998. *Marcadores del discurso*. Barcelona: Ariel.
- Real Academia Española. 2009-2011. *Nueva gramática de la lengua española*. Madrid: Espasa Libros.
- Renzi, Lorenzo, Giampaolo Salvi e Anna Cardinaletti. 2001. *Grande grammatica italiana di consultazione*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Sabatini, Francesco, e Vittorio Coletti. 2006. *Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*. Milano: Rizzoli Larousse.
- Sainz, Eugenia. 2014. “El reformulador italiano *anzi* y sus formas equivalentes en español”. En *De la estructura de la frase al tejido del discurso. Estudios contrastivos*

*español / italiano*. Eds María Eugenia Sainz González, René Lenarduzzi, Alida Ares Ares, María Martínez Atienza, Gonzalo Jiménez Pascual, 143-77. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Trovato, Giuseppe. 2020. “Acerca de la traducción al español de los operadores argumentativos *infatti* / *disfatti* mediante obras lexicográficas monolingües y bilingües en sincronía y diacronía y su aparición en la prosa actual traducida al español”. En *Italiano y español. Estudios de traducción, lingüística contrastiva y didáctica*. Eds Alicia María López Márquez y Fernando Molina Castillo, 401-17. Berna: Peter Lang.

Trovato, Giuseppe. 2021. “Un acercamiento en torno a las posibilidades de expresión en español de un adverbio italiano marcado en diatopía: análisis lexicográfico y traductológico de *mica*”, *Lingue e linguaggi*. 46: 333-44.

Trovato, Giuseppe. 2022. “El tratamiento de la interjección italiana con modalidad epistémica *magari* en el español peninsular a través del doblaje filmico: una aproximación lingüística, lexicográfica y traductológica”, *Artifara*. 22 (1): 431-45.

### Diccionarios bilingües

AA.VV. 2018. *Dizionario Maxi Spagnolo. Spagnolo-Italiano • Italiano-Spagnolo*. Milán: Antonio Vallardi Editore.

VV.AA. 2018. *Grande Dizionario di Spagnolo. Spagnolo-Italiano Italiano-Spagnolo*. Lavis: Garzanti Linguistica.

AA.VV. 2005. *Dizionario Spagnolo. Spagnolo-Italiano, Italiano-Spagnolo*. Lavis: Legoprint.

Ambruzzi, Lucio. 1949. *Nuovo Dizionario Spagnolo-Italiano e Italiano- Spagnolo*. Turín: Paravia.

Arqués, Rossend y Padoan, Adriana. 2020. *Il Grande dizionario di Spagnolo. Dizionario Spagnolo-Italiano / Italiano-Español*. Bolonia: Zanichelli.

Giordano, Anna y Calvo Rigual, Cesáreo 2011. *Dizionario Italiano-Spagnolo Español-Italiano*. Barcelona: Herder.

Knight, Lorna y Clari, Michela. 2005. *Collins concise dizionario spagnolo (spagnolo-italiano / italiano-spagnolo)*. Milán: Boroli.

Martínez Amador, Emilio. 1979. *Diccionario Italiano-Español, Español-Italiano*. Barcelona: Sopena.

Miglioli, Enrico. 2012. *Dizionario spagnolo-italiano, italiano-spagnolo (dizionariopocket)*. Florencia: Giunti Editore.

Catalogación de las opciones y correspondencias traslativas del operador . . .

Pompeo, Ignazio. (coord.). 2020. *Dizionario Spagnolo. Spagnolo-Italiano. Italiano-Spagnolo*. Santarcangelo di Romagna: Rusconi Libri.

Tam, Laura. 2021. *Grande Dizionario di Spagnolo. Spagnolo-Italiano / Italiano-Spagnolo* (4<sup>a</sup> ed.). Milán: Hoepli.

### **Webgrafía**

Dizionario Treccani <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/>

Davide Passa

Università degli Studi Roma Sapienza  
[davidepassa@live.it](mailto:davidepassa@live.it)

## “Reading Is What? Fundamental!”: Reversed (im)politeness in *RuPaul’s Drag Race*

### ABSTRACT:

Reading is a drag term that refers to the common practice among drag queens of “confronting someone with witty and creative language that serves to cut or put someone down” (Jones 2007: 83). Linguistically, it can be considered a form of impoliteness aimed at attacking the addressee’s positive self-image (Brown and Levinson 1987; Culpeper 1996 and 2011). Nevertheless, this study is based on the assumption that drag impoliteness does not divide but unites members of the drag community by establishing “ambivalent solidarity” (Harvey 1998) and entertaining audiences. A small corpus containing transcripts of the reading mini-challenges in *RuPaul’s Drag Race* (2009-ongoing) will be examined quantitatively and qualitatively, either manually or using #LancsBox, a new generation software for the analysis of digitalised texts developed at Lancaster University. Impoliteness among drag queens is thus not to be seen negatively, as the (im)politeness system – similarly to other linguistic features of drag lingo – is reversed in comparison to what happens in the heteronormative society. The better a drag queen is at inventing impolite expressions, the more successful and respected she will be. It should be borne in mind that this study investigates a fictional representation of drag lingo, and that impoliteness, as used in telecinematic discourse, serves other purposes when compared to reality (Dynel 2017; Lorenzo-Dus 2009). Therefore, any generalisation should be made carefully.

KEYWORDS: impoliteness theory; drag queens; sociolinguistics; queer studies; fictional language.

## 1. Introduction

*RuPaul's Drag Race* (2009-ongoing, hereafter RPDR) is a Netflix reality television series hosted by drag mother RuPaul Charles, in which a group of drag queens compete for the title of “America’s Next Drag Superstar.” The show has become a popular phenomenon, which shows mainstream audiences the dynamics of 20<sup>th</sup> century drag ball culture – though a sanitised version, considering the nature of the show – where rival drag houses competed for trophies and prizes. While RPDR is a *reality* programme, it is actually a fictional representation of drag culture where everything is scripted and very little is kept to improvisation and naturalness. The language analysed in this study is a fictional reproduction of natural drag lingo, and any generalisation should be made very carefully. Ferguson (1998) defines the study of fictional languages as ficto-linguistics, i.e. the study of languages that occur in fiction rather than in society. Fictional language differs from natural language in that it “has been scripted, written and rewritten, censored, polished, rehearsed, and performed. Even when lines are improvised on set, they have been spoken by impersonators, judged, approved, and allowed to remain” (Kozloff 2000, 18).

Nevertheless, the show portrays many rituals of drag culture in the style of the documentary film *Paris Is Burning* (1990), such as lip-sync battles and the linguistic phenomenon of reading, which refer to the practice of “confronting someone with witty and creative language that serves to cut or put someone down” (Jones 2007, 83). Dynel has analysed the use of impoliteness in telecinematic discourse, and has claimed that on television “impoliteness is shown to serve entertainment, being performed primarily for the viewer’s pleasure and even humour experience” (2017, 360) and quotes Lorenzo-Dus’s (2009) definition of impoliteness on television as “incivility-as-spectacle”, a strategy used to give the show dynamism and engage the audience.

### 1.1 Aim and methodology

This article intends to investigate the linguistic phenomenon of reading in RPDR. It examines a small sample (4298 words) including the transcripts of the original dialogues from Season 2 to Season 13 (2010-2021), containing reading instances; Season 1 was not included in the sample because reading challenges were introduced only in Season 2. Reading challenges are the most popular mini-challenges in the show. In every season there is one episode that revolves

around drag reading; in this episode, the contestants have to show their reading skills and be as irreverent and impolite as possible. The data were obtained by watching the episodes containing the reading challenges and transcribing all the passages included in them. They were manually transcribed in different Word files, each file corresponding to one episode so as to allow comparisons with #Lancsbox. The tools included in the software that will be used in this study are KWIC and Words, since this research will be based on the analysis of positive keywords – i.e., words that occur more often in the specialised sample than in the reference corpus – and their relative frequency per 10k tokens. The use of positive keywords sheds light on what the content of fictional drag reading is, whereas their relative frequency tells a lot about what elements of drag reading as it is portrayed in RPDR are predominant. Besides, seen the relatively smallness of the sample, it will also be interpreted and analysed manually, thus also considering elements that only a human being can notice.

This study lies in the field of Language and Sexuality Studies, and the framework that will be taken into account is (im)politeness theory (Culpeper 1996 and 2011). While research on impoliteness among queer people has been abundant (Murray 1979; Heisterkamp and Alberts 2000; Perez 2011, among others), research on impoliteness within a drag context is relatively scarce, with McKinnon being one of the few linguists to study impoliteness among drag queens, claiming that reading is aimed, among other things, to “building a thick skin for each other to face a hostile environment from LGBT and non-LGBT people” (2017, 90).

## 2. Drag lingo

In the light of the performative turn introduced by Butler with her pioneering research *Gender Trouble* (1990), the concept of gender has been theorised outside of the rigid binary system of women and men, in that gender is a social construct that people perform ceaselessly. Drag queens and their lingo are a fierce critic towards the fixed heteronormative binary system, as the features that are commonly attached to men’s and women’s languages are intermingled in a quite unique way. Barrett (2017) is of the opinion that oppressed groups, such as drag queens, appropriate and re-signify the language of the heteronormative culture to create their own secret lingo. The use of the “prestigious”, heteronormative form does not mean that drag queens want to align themselves with the groups that use that kind of language; on the

contrary, they want to mock them. Drag lingo, therefore, has allowed drag queens to develop their own identity and create subcultural communities where they feel accepted and understood.

Reading has much to say about drag queens, and is quite representative of their controversial nature. Drag queens are not only men who wear feminine clothes and exaggerate feminine behaviour; they are primarily men – but not necessarily, since *RPDR* has also hosted male-to-female transsexual people – performing a parody of heteronormative gender binarism. Oostrik (2014) claims that the femininity of drag queens is a performance of an exaggerated representation of gender that ridicules restrictive gender roles and sexual identification. Indeed, drag queens intend the performance of femininity as an ironic and political critique of the rigidity of heteronormative gender roles, which are based on the “assumption that everyone is heterosexual and the recognition that all social institutions [...] are built around a heterosexual model of male/female social relations” (Nagel 2003, 49-50). Anything that deviates from perceived heteronormative norms is considered a deviation, and dragqueenism is a socially engaged art that satirises heteronormative social conventions. Drag queens are usually mentioned in Gender Studies as they clearly embody the difference existing between biological sex and cultural gender, the former being fixed and determined by an individual’s genitalia, the latter being a “free-floating artifice” (Butler 1990, 10) that is determined by the repeated actions of an individual. Gender is performative, and language is an instrument through which people perform their gender identities.

My claim is that reading is one of the ways drag queens have at their disposal to construct their gender identity through language. The lingo created by drag queens reflects their gender fluidity and is one of the means that they have to create their collective identity. Drag queens are members of a speech community, a group whose members are “in habitual contact with each other by means of language, either by a common language or by shared ways of interpreting linguistic behaviour where different languages are in use in an area” (Swann *et al.* 2004, 293). Drag lingo creates a sense of drag “sorority” in which they can identify and support each other. It is an expression of the “umbrella” linguistic variety known as camp talk (see also Harvey 1998; 2000; 2002; Bronksi 1984; Core 1984) which is characterised by the co-occurrence of linguistically contradictory features, as a way to mock heteronormative gender binarism. Barrett (1995) claims that drag queens convey their queerness “by

skilfully switching between a number of linguistic styles and forms that stereotypically tend to denote other identities” (cit. in Kulick 2000, 25). Indeed, drag lingo is extremely creative, and this creativity reflects drag queens’ “ability to play with language, create inside jokes, catchphrases, and neologisms. [...] They create their own vocabulary, one that sets them apart from mainstream English language users” (Libby 2014, 52). Creativity is also evident in the term “reading” itself, which is a standard noun that has been appropriated and creatively reconceptualised to mean something new in drag lingo.

### **3. Drag *reading***

Linguistically, reading is a kind of insult and can therefore be considered a form of impoliteness. Following Brown and Levinson’s argument (1987), linguistic impoliteness originates from Face Threatening Acts (FTAs). People have an identity face that they try to preserve and promote in their social relationships. Impoliteness originates when at least one FTA is used to attack people’s face. In Culpeper’s framework, negative impoliteness is defined as “the use of strategies designed to [...] scorn or ridicule, be contemptuous, do not treat the other seriously, belittle the other, invade the other’s space, explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect” (2011, 41). Insults, as in the case of drag reading, are instances of negative impoliteness in that they threaten people’s desire to be valued and recognized. An FTA occurs when this desire is not respected, and the speaker does not care about the positive self-image of the addressee. Culpeper adds that impoliteness only occurs when the speaker intentionally communicates the face attack, and the hearer perceives the FTA as intentionally face-attacking. The term identity face, furthermore, encompasses both the quality and the social face that people have, the former referring to people’s personal characteristics (e.g. drag queens’ physical appearance or personality), the latter referring to how individuals deal with the characteristics of social groups (e.g. drag queens’ professionalism).

Minority groups, however, may also use impoliteness for other purposes, such as “ambivalent solidarity” (Harvey 1998, 301-03), which is fundamental to the construction of a shared identity, as both the sender and the receiver of the FTA are mutually affected by it. Culpeper asserts that, generally, mock impoliteness “takes place between equals, typically friends, and is reciprocal” (2011, 215). This is particularly true of non-heteronormative people, who may use homophobic insults towards other non-heteronormative people as a form

of cultural reappropriation of heteronormative derogatory terms and of mock impoliteness, equally highlighting both speaker's vulnerability to the same threat. This is the case of drag queens, who, as members of the LGBTQI+ community, may use negative impoliteness for completely different purposes when compared to other members of the heteronormative society. The intention behind drag impoliteness is reversed, since they do not wish to discredit the addressee *tout court*, but in so doing they construct a sense of belonging to the same drag community. Moreover, the use of impoliteness among drag queens is not to be seen negatively, as the (im)politeness system is reversed, and the better a drag queen is at inventing impolite expressions, the more successful and respected she will be. The inversion of the (im)politeness system is in line with the controversial nature of drag queens, which is epitomised by the gender identities that they perform, and the linguistic features that they use. If we consider – erroneously – drag queens as authentic representation of femininity, then the use of reading is at odds with the linguistic features of women's language, as were discussed by Lakoff (1975); however, drag queens do not intend the performance of femininity authentically, and the use of direct and insulting expressions epitomises their desire to subvert rules of gender.

Reading, however, is not to be considered a kind of genuine impoliteness, since it should not be taken seriously by the addressee. Unlike genuine impoliteness, mock impoliteness<sup>1</sup> is positively evaluated by the participants in the conversation. Mock impoliteness involves the positive evaluation of an insult directed at a target as supportive of interpersonal relationships; it is impoliteness that remains on the surface, since it is understood that it is not intended to cause offence. The contestants in the RPDR expect to be *read* by their rivals, and especially when reading is delivered in the context of a mini-challenge, they do not consider it offensive as they are required to be as *shadier*<sup>2</sup> as possible to win the challenge. Haugh and Bousfield claim that “such threats to person and relationship(s) with others can also be treated as ‘allowable’ if participants orient to the offence as being relationship supportive [...] and also as being in line with the interactional practice in which the participants are currently engaged” (2012, 1103). In addition to building in-group solidarity,

---

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed analysis of mock impoliteness, see Leech 1983; Culpeper 1996, 2011; Bernal 2008; Haugh and Bousfield 2012.

<sup>2</sup> The drag adjective *shady* means disrespectful.

mock impoliteness is also used as a practice in which the addressee is insulted for the entertainment of the others (Culpeper 2011). In S5E7, Michelle Visage explains that “when reading, some people can take it personally [...] if it’s not funny. But if it’s funny, you’re almost forgiven. It’s, like, given a pass.” Drag queens are performers and for their performances to be successful they have to be entertaining, irreverent and funny; their greatest fear in the reading mini-challenge and in other challenges (e.g. Snatch Game maxi challenge, where the contestants have to impersonate famous people) is to not be able to make RuPaul, the judges and the other contestants laugh. When reading is not delivered successfully, an awkward and uncomfortable silence descends on the studio, often highlighted by the sound of crickets in the background.

#### 4. Language and Sexuality Studies & Corpus Linguistics

The language to be examined in this study is contained in a small, specialised<sup>3</sup> sample of 4298 tokens. The data comprised in a specialised sample is compared with OANC reference corpus, which is a larger corpus that is chosen because it has some similarities with the sample under scrutiny. Research on corpus linguistics<sup>4</sup> and sexuality is relatively sparse. Motschenbacher (2018) and Baker and Brookes (2021) provide brief overviews of the ways corpus linguists has studied sexuality. Motschenbacher (2018) claims that the use of this methodology in language and sexuality studies is still limited, and he also denounces the fact that previous corpus linguistic studies on language and sexuality have focused on the discursive construction of sexual identities rather than on the language in use to index the speaker’s sexuality; in other words, they lament the fact that corpus linguistics has more often than not been interested in describing how language is used to speak about non-heterosexual people (Bolton 1995; Baker 2005; Bachmann 2011; Morrish and Sauntson 2011; Baker and Love 2015; Baker and Brookes 2021) rather than describing the way language is actually – and allegedly – used by non-heterosexual people to communicate (King 2009 and 2015; Caskey 2011; Bogetić 2013).

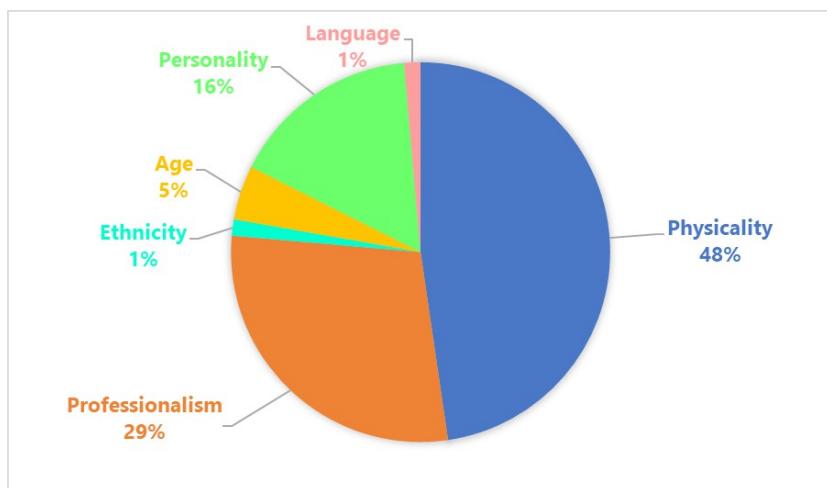
---

<sup>3</sup> This is a specialised (or purpose-built) sample because it is only representative of the linguistic variety spoken by a particular social group, at a particular time and place (Hunston 2002).

<sup>4</sup> For detailed accounts of the field, see Hunston (2002), McEnery *et al.* (2006), McEnery and Ardie (2012) and Biber and Randy (2015).

## 5. Analysis

As *Figure 1* shows, a careful examination of the dialogues has revealed that drag reading in RPDR can be organised into six major categories depending on the content of the insults; physical appearance, professionalism and personality seem to predominate. These macro-categories have been established by analysing the texts manually and noticing common trends in them.



*Figura 1.*  
Reading in RPDR

The following sections will discuss more extensively each of the categories visualised in *Figure 1*, and will provide some examples to get a clearer idea of how drag reading works.

### 5.1 Physicality

Physicality is the reading category that appears more frequently in the show (48%), representing almost half of the reading instances in RPDR. This is based on taking a physical element of a drag queen and exaggerating it in order to make it entertaining. Physical reading is mainly based on aspects of the body that are considered negative for a drag queen, such as excessive weight and

masculinity. The more feminine a drag queen looks, the *fishier*<sup>5</sup> she will be considered. This kind of insult also includes drag queens’ white teeth, which is apparently of great importance among the contestants, as many readings throughout the seasons focus on the contestants’ smiles. Teeth are important because drag queens are above all lip-sync performers, and during their performances they tend to show their teeth a lot as a way to be more expressive and dramatic. Some of the physical reading referring to drag queens’ teeth are listed below:

- (a) Smile for me. Don’t smile. (S2E7)
- (b) Miss Tyra, was your barbecue cancelled? Your grill is fucked up. (S2E7)
- (c) Jiggly, here’s my dentist’s card. Use it. (S4E7)
- (d) Rob-bie Turn-ter! I know you’re a big fan of classic movies and television. May I recommend one of my favourite classic TV shows? “Flipper.” (S8E6)
- (e) Asia O’Hara, you get your tights from Amazon, you get some of your outfits from Amazon, and apparently they sell teeth, too. (S10E7)

The previous examples focus either on the low quality of dental veneers (d, e) or on the crooked teeth that the contestants have (a, b, c). It is interesting to notice the reference to the cartoon Flipper, as well as the reference to Amazon, which is in line with the recurring references to pop culture, typical of drag lingo. This may be in line with citationality, which is one of the features of camp talk – and drag lingo may be included in this umbrella term – according to Harvey (1998; 2000; 2002).

Botulin is another common trend in physical reading, since many drag queens seek help from cosmetic surgery to get a feminine backside, increase the volume of their lips, cheekbones or just to refresh their look, often with dubious results, as is shown in the following examples:

- (f) Honey, just go jumping in the ocean. You won’t drown. Silicone floats. (S3E8)
- (g) Willam, honey, your face is made out of marble. Shit don’t move. (S4E7)
- (h) Jiggly Caliente, B.M.W., Body Made Wrong. (S4E7)
- (i) Detox, is Amanda Lepore your mother? ‘Cause there’s a lot of silicone going on there. (S5E7)
- (j) Detox, you’re so seductive, but unfortunately, it’s illegal to do it with you because most of your parts are under 18 years of age. (S5E7).

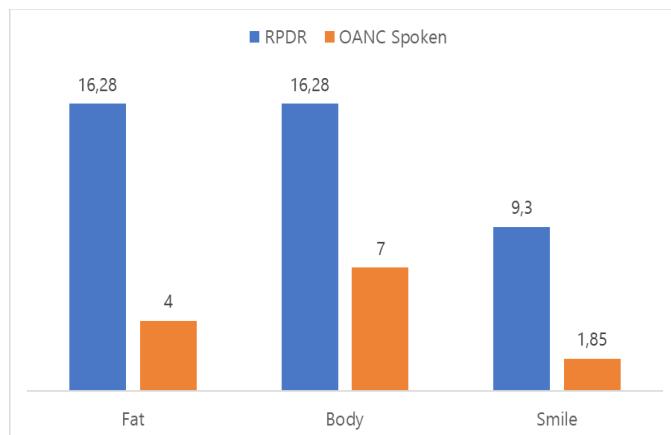
---

<sup>5</sup> *Fish* is a drag term for “feminine.”

These few examples show how entertaining drag reading can be, turning extremely impolite statements into something funny. If they are not entertaining, though, reading can turn from mock into genuine impoliteness.

This is perhaps the most immediate and least refined kind of reading, since it is merely based on the physical appearance of a drag queen.

*Figure 2* includes the data obtained from comparing the specialised sample and the reference corpus with the Words tool included in #LancsBox. *Figure 2* is a visualisation of three of the most recurrent positive keywords in the sample. The high relative frequency (per 10k tokens) of the keywords “fat,” “body” and “smile” may be a signal of the fact that most of the impolite language used in the reading mini-challenge in RPDR is body-based.



*Figura 2.*  
Keywords and relative frequency in RPDR.

With the only aim of providing a few instances of this kind of reading, it is worth remembering drag queen Jujubee (S2E7) who, referring to Tyra Sanchez's teeth exclaims “Miss Tyara, was your barbecue cancelled? Your grill is fucked up;” Alaska Thunderfuck (S5E7), when referring to Detox Icunt, who is remembered for her abuse of Botulin, exclaims “Detox, you’re so seductive, but unfortunately it’s illegal to do it with you because most of your parts are under 18 years of age,” hinting at the fact that many parts of her body have been subject to cosmetic surgery.

Figure 3, furthermore, is based on the data obtained by crossing the occurrences of physical reading and their distribution in the sample; it shows that since 2009, when the show was launched in the USA, there has been a tendency towards gradually reducing – with its ups and downs – the instances of reading based on physical appearance, which may be due to the fact that body shaming is becoming a sensitive topic of discussion in the last years. Even though body shaming in the show is delivered as a form of mock impoliteness, it may still promote a negative response to the body in the global society, thus its gradual disappearance from the show. Furthermore, “if reading is masterful insult, then reading a queen for her size [...] is seen as boring, insulting and deeply inadequate” (O’Halloran 2017, 220), as insulting somebody on the basis of their physical appearance is too immediate and simple.

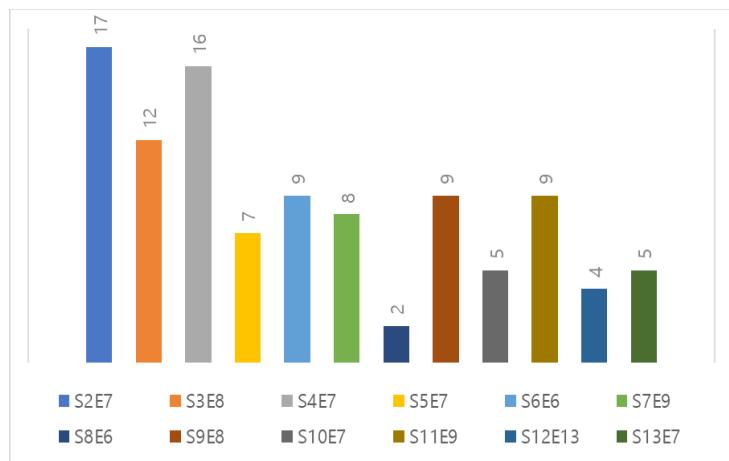
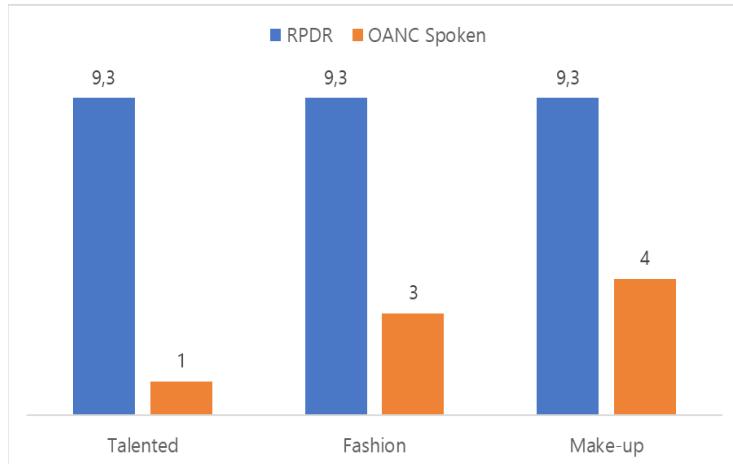


Figura 3.  
Physical reading

## 5.2 Professionalism

29% of the reading instances in RPDR are based on the professional skills of the contestants. Professionalism includes mainly the stage clothes a contestant has or is able to sew, the ability to walk down the catwalk and to make-up (or *to beat*, as drag queens say); references are also made to previous mini and maxi challenges where the contestants proved to be particularly unsuccessful, thus becoming the object of scorn. Figure 4 shows that three positive keywords in the sample refer to professionalism; they are “talented,”

“fashion” and “make-up,” which are considerably more recurring in the specialised sample than in *OANC Spoken*.



*Figura 4.*  
Keywords and relative frequency

Some of the instances including reading based on professionalism are the following:

- (a) For someone who calls themselves a top, you sure do like being on the bottom. (S5E7)
- (b) Jinkx Monsoon, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, you’re great at the challenges, but on the runway, you’re a bust (S5E7)

Reading (a) is based on the double meaning of the words “top” and “bottom,” which among queer people are used to refer to, respectively, someone who likes giving anal intercourse to other men, and its opposite. What the contestant is referring to is that for as much as her colleague likes to define her sexual role as active, she seems actually to enjoy being on the bottom of the charts as one of the worst contestants in the season. Reading (b) is a semi-quotation of the *Book of Common Prayer* to create the rhyme dust-bust.

### 5.3 Personality

This category comprises all the instances of reading addressed towards the contestants’ real and drag personalities. They mainly allude to silliness, excessive loquacity, narcissism and promiscuity. These are all characteristics that can be

commonly found in RPDR, since the drag queens in the show are required to be as loud and extravagant as possible in the interest of their visibility, but also of the programme and entertainment. Joslyn Fox in S6E6 addresses Adore Delano by saying “you know you’re from the West Coast because it’s a four-hour delay before you finally get a joke;” Adore Delano is often mocked for her slow-wittedness, which is often associated to the stereotype of the Valley girl from L.A. In the same season, Darienne Lake refers to Ben De La Crème by saying “you remind me of a Russian doll – full of yourself,” which refers to her egocentrism; in S11E9, Brooke Lynn Hytes addresses Plastique Tiara by declaring “I’m looking for a new apartment. How much are you charging for the vacant space between your ears?,” which is another creative instance of reading based on someone’s silliness. These are just a few examples of the many instances of reading based on drag queens’ personalities.

#### 5.4 Other

Quite a significant number of reading instances are based on the age (5%) of the contestants. They are used to insult drag queens who are considered either too old or too young to be in the show. This is the case of Robbie Tuner (S8E6) who claims “Naomi, I’m gonna give you some advice, darling. No one’s gonna take you seriously if you were born after Windows 95 came out,” to which Naomi replies “Robbie Tuner, we know you’re a vintage queen, but do you have to smell like mothballs, too?” An extremely little number of insults is based on ethnicity and language (1% each). Racial commentaries are addressed mainly towards Black, Latino and Asian contestants, as is the case of Tyra Sanchez (S2E7) who addresses the Laotian American drag queen Jujubee by saying “we have an under-grown orangutan,” which would make the audience’s flesh creep if it were pronounced today, twelve years after. One reading is addressed towards two white drag queens, who are insulted for not being able to twerk like Black people; this is the case of Denali (S13E7) who addresses Olivia Lux in order to read two other drag queens, “Olivia, your teeth are whiter than Utica and Gottmik trying to twerk to disco,” which hints at the Caucasian ethnicity of the two contestants and their inability to twerk as Black drag queens do. This insult is delivered by a white drag queen towards two other white drag queens, thus establishing “ambivalent solidarity.”

Discrimination on the basis of linguistic skills is another very common trend in RPDR, as drag queens are expected to be extremely quick and smart in the language they use. Foreign drag queens or anglophone drag queens speaking

non-standard varieties of American English are often put down by the other contestants and penalised in many challenges in the show. The instances of reading based on language are certainly many more in the show, but if we consider the reading mini-challenge only, they represent only 1% of the reading instances. They are mainly addressed towards Yara Sofia (S3), who is from Puerto Rico, Nicky Doll (S12), who is a French drag queen, and Adore Delano (S6) and Gottmik (S13E7), who are from Los Angeles. It is interesting to notice that the Valleyspeak – i.e. the sociolect used mainly in California – is generally associated to dumbness, as it has often been used to portray silly girls in sitcoms, also known as Valley Girls. Denali (S13E7) addresses Gottmik by saying “Gottmik, you are so L.A., even your farts have a vocal fry,” mentioning the typical nasal sound and breathiness of Valleyspeak.

## 6. Conclusions

The title of this article is a motto repeated by RuPaul and her daughters when “opening the library” for the reading mini-challenge to begin. Reading is fundamental in the drag community in its etymological sense: it is one of the foundations of the community itself, in that it has always been a common practice among drag queens, a way to create a sense of belonging in a subcultural world that is becoming gradually more mainstream thanks to audiovisual products like *RPDR* and *Pose* (2018-ongoing). For the first time and with a considerable success all over the world, these series bring the dynamics of the drag ball room culture to the attention of the mainstream audiences. Reading is an interesting phenomenon for sociolinguists, as it can be categorised as impoliteness, but it actually is not. Reading uses the same strategies of impoliteness, but its effect is not that of creating distance between the parties, nor that of attacking the addressee’s face. Similarly to other characteristics of drag queens, such as their gender identities and linguistic features, impoliteness is reversed. The gender that drag queens perform is the opposite of the gender that heteronormativity would attach to them. Following Butler’s argument, fluidity implies that gender is not a consequence of sex and vice-versa. For instance, if a person was born with male genitalia, it does not necessarily follow that this person will behave, wear clothes, style his/her hair, and talk like a man. The linear association of sex and gender is promoted by heteronormativity, which is based on the “assumption that everyone is heterosexual and the recognition that all social institutions [...] are built around

a heterosexual model of male/female social relations” (Nagel 2003, 49–50). Heteronormativity implies that all people can be classified into the binary system male-female, and that heterosexuality is the only acceptable sexuality. To use Peppermint’s (*RPDR*, S9) statement, “the entire point of drag is to give the middle finger to rules of gender.” This is reflected in some drag linguistic features, such as gender inversion – i.e. the use of female gender markers like pronouns, adjectives and vocatives to refer to men – but also the intermingling of linguistic features that are commonly associated to women with others associated more to men.

Reading follows this same line, in that it takes impoliteness as it occurs in the heteronormative society and turns it into its opposite, i.e. something positively evaluated, something that one has to aspire to rather than avoid. Of all the reading instances in the reading mini-challenges in *RPDR* (S2-S13), three categories occur more significantly than the others, i.e. reading based on drag queens’ physical aspect, professionalism and personality. Following the previous distinction between quality and social face, it is interesting to notice that although physical aspect and personality may be categorised as quality face in that they refer to personal aspects, they seem to be actually addressed towards drag queens’ social face. If we consider dragqueenism as performance, then every aspect of drag queens should be referred to their social face, that is their face as members of a community of drag performers. Mock insults delivered against drag queens’ ugliness, weight, or other physical aspects that are commonly seen negatively, but also negative sides of their personalities, have an inevitable negative impact also on their professional lives. This study has sought to find common trends in the sample and categorise the reading instances on the basis of positive keywords and relative frequency, as well as the dispersion on the sample.

Interestingly, every aspect of a drag rival is potentially something that can be criticised in the reading mini-challenge. It could be the drag queens’ teeth, which are either too yellow or too white, or their lips, which are either too thin or too full, or their bodies, which are either too slim or (to use a politically incorrect adjective) too fat. They are either too young or too old, too discreet or too loud, too white to twerk like a *real* black woman. This is because the most skilled drag queens always know how to read their competitors, and they have the ability to focus on a single feature of a drag queen and exasperate it so that it becomes the basis of their mocking insults. If it is true that the sample is characterised by a significant presence of readings based on physicality (see also

the positive keywords in the sample compared to the *OANC Spoken* reference corpus in *Figure 2*), then it is also true that their distribution in the sample gradually decreases over the years, as can be seen in *Figure 3*, in line with the increased attention paid to body shaming on TV. A further common characteristic of the reading instances in the sample is the denigration of unnaturalness, which is a paradox if one considers dragqueenism as an unnatural exaggeration of femininity. Unnaturalness underlies every aspect of drag art, be it physicality (e.g. exaggerated cosmetic surgery), personality (e.g. flamboyant behaviour for visibility) or professionalism (e.g. excessive make-up). After all, the use of reading in RPDR is subject to telecinematic requirements, for it is a means of attracting the audience's attention and entertaining them. Mock impoliteness in the form of drag reading becomes a spectacle, a necessary ingredient to captivate the audience.

## References

- Bachmann, Ingo. 2011. "Civil Partnership – 'gay marriage in all but name'. A Corpus-driven Analysis of Discourses of Same-Sex Relationships in the UK Parliament." *Corpora* 6 (1): 77-105.
- Baker, Paul. 2005. *Public Discourses of Gay Men*. London: Routledge.
- Baker, Paul, and G. Brookes. 2021. "Lovely Nurses, Rude Receptionists, and Patronising Doctors: Determining the Impact of Gender Stereotyping on Patient Feedback." In *The Routledge Handbook of Language, Gender, and Sexuality*. Eds J. Angouri, J. and J. Baxter, 559-71. London and New York: Routledge.
- Baker, Paul, and R. Love. 2015. "The Hate that Dare not Speak its Name?" *Journal of Language, Aggression, and Conflict* 3 (1): 57-86.
- Baker, Paul, and R. Love. 2018. "Corpus Linguistics and Sexuality." In Hall, K. and Barrett, R. Eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Sexuality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Barrett, Rusty. 1995. "The Markedness Model and Style Switching: Evidence from African American drag queens." *Texas Linguistic Forum* 34: 40-52.
- Barrett, Rusty. 2017. *From Drag Queens to Leathermen: Language, Gender, and Gay Male Subcultures*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bernal, Maria. 2008. "Do Insults Always Insult? Genuine impoliteness versus non-genuine impoliteness in colloquial Spanish." *Pragmatics* 18 (4): 775-802.
- Biber, Douglas, and R. Randi. 2015. *The Cambridge Handbook of English Corpus Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Bogetić, Ksenija. 2013. “Normal Straight Gays: Lexical collocations and ideologies of masculinity in personal ads of Serbian gay teenagers.” *Gender and Language* 7 (3), 333-67.
- Bolton, Ralph. 1995. “Sex Talk: Bodies and behaviors in gay erotica.” In *Beyond the Lavender Lexicon: Authenticity, Imagination, and Appropriation in Lesbian and Gay Languages*. Ed. by W. Leap, 173-206. Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach.
- Bronski, Michael. 1984. *Culture Clash: The Making of Gay Sensibility*. Boston: South End Press.
- Brown, Penelope, and Stephen C. Levinson (eds). 1987. *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Taylor & Francis.
- Cameron, Deborah, and Don Kulick (eds). 2006. *The Language and Sexuality Reader*. London, Routledge.
- Caskey, David. 2011. *Speak Like a Wo(man): A Corpus Linguistic and Discourse Analysis of Gendered Speech*. Unpublished MA thesis, Western Carolina University.
- Core, Philip. 1984. *Camp: The Lie That Tells The Truth*. New York: Delilah Books.
- Culpeper, Jonathan. 1996. “Towards an Anatomy of Impoliteness.” *Journal of Pragmatics* 25: 349-67.
- Culpeper, Jonathan. 2011. *Impoliteness. Using Language To Cause Offence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dynel, Marta. 2017. “(Im)politeness and Telecinematic Discourse.” In *Pragmatics of Fiction*. Eds M. Locher and A. Jucker, 455-88. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Ferguson, Susan L. 1998. “Drawing Fictional Lines: Dialect and Narrative in the Victorian Novel.” *Style* 2: 1- 17.
- Harvey, Keith. 1998. “Translating Camp Talk. Gay Identities and Cultural Transfer.” *The Translator* 4 (2): 295-320.
- Harvey, Keith. 2000. “Describing Camp Talk: Language/Pragmatics/Politics.” *Language and Literature* 9 (3): 240-60.
- Harvey, Keith. 2002. “Camp Talk and Citationality: A queer take on authentic and represented utterance.” *Journal of Pragmatics* 34: 1145-65.
- Haugh, Michael, and Derek Bousfield. 2012. “Mock Impoliteness, Jocular Mockery and Jocular Abuse in Australian and British English.” *Journal of Pragmatics* 44: 109-114.

- Heisterkamp, Brian L., and Jess K. Alberts. 2000. "Control and Desire: Identity formation through teasing among gay men and lesbians." *Communication Studies* 51 (4): 388–403.
- Hunston, Susan. 2002. *Corpora in Applied Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Jones, Richard G. 2007. "Drag Queens, Drama Queens and Friends: Drama and performance as a solidarity-building function in a gay male friendship circle." *Kaleidoscope* 6: 61-84.
- King, Brian W. 2009. "Building and Analysing Corpora of Computer-mediated Communication." In *Contemporary Corpus Linguistics*. Ed. by Paul Baker, 301-20. London: Continuum.
- King, Brian W. 2015. "Investigating Digital Sex Talk Practices: A reflection on corpus-assisted discourse analysis." In *Discourse and Digital Practices: Doing Discourse Analysis in the Digital Age*. Eds R. H. Jones *et al.*, 130-43. London: Routledge.
- Kozloff, Sarah. 2000. *Overbearing Film Dialogue*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Kulick, Don. 2000. "Gay and Lesbian Language." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 29: 243-85.
- Lakoff, Robin. 1975. *Language and Woman's Place*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Leap, William L. (ed.). 1995. *Beyond the Lavender Lexicon: Authenticity, Imagination, and Appropriation in Lesbian and Gay Languages*. Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach.
- Leech, Geoffrey. 1983. *Principles of Pragmatics*. London: Longman.
- Legman, Gershon. 2006 [1941]. "The Language of Homosexuality: An American glossary." In *The Language and Sexuality Reader*. Eds Deborah Cameron and D. Kulick, 19-32. London: Routledge.
- Libby, Anthony. 2014. "Dragging with an Accent: Linguistic stereotypes, language barriers and translationalism." In *The Makeup of RuPaul's Drag Race Essays on the Queen of Reality Shows*. Ed. by J. Deams, 49-66. Jefferson: McFarland & Company.
- Lorenzo-Dus, Nuria. 2009. *Television Discourse: Analysing language in the media*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- McEnery, Tony, and Andrew Hardie. 2012. *Corpus Linguistics: Method, theory and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McEnery, Tony, Richard Xiao, and Yukio Tono. 2006. *Corpus-based Language Studies*. London: Routledge.

- McKinnon, Sean. 2017. “Building a Thick Skin for Each Other”: The use of ‘reading’ as an interactional practice of mock impoliteness in drag queen backstage talk.” *Journal of Language and Sexuality* 6 (1): 90-127.
- Morrish, Liz, and Helen Sauntson. 2011. “Gender, Desire and Identity in a Corpus of Lesbian Erotica.” In *Queering Paradigms II. Interrogating Agendas*. Eds B. Scherer and M. Ball, 63-81. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Motschenbacher, Heiko. 2018. “Corpus Linguistics in Language and Sexuality studies: Taking stock and future directions.” *Journal of Language and Sexuality* 7 (2): 145-74.
- Murray, Stephen O. 1979. “The Art of Gay Insulting.” *Anthropological Linguistics* 21 (5): 211–23.
- Nagel, Joane. 2003. *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- O’Halloran, Kate. 2017. “RuPaul’s Drag Race and the Reconceptualisation of Queer Communities and Publics.” In *RuPaul’s Drag Race and the Shifting Visibility of Drag Culture*. Ed. by N. Brennan, 213-28. New York: Springer International Publishing.
- Oostrik, Sven 2014. *Doing Drag: From subordinate queers to fabulous queens drag as an empowerment strategy for gay men*. Master thesis, Utrecht University.
- Perez, Justin. 2011. “Word Play, Ritual Insult, and Volleyball in Peru.” *Journal of Homosexuality* 58: 834-47.
- Swann, Joan *et al.* 2004. *A Dictionary of Sociolinguistics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.



## RECENSIONI

Almo Farina and Peng Li,  
*Methods in Ecoacoustics. The acoustic complexity indices*, Berlin, Springer 2021.

As the authors (prof. Farina from Urbino, Italy and prof. Li from Boston, Mass.) write in the incipit of their Introduction, “sound is information”. What could be simpler and at the same time more meaningful than this? We know that our society, our studies, our whole life is shaped by information, from genetic code up to jobs, relationships, politics, leisure, and so on. But what has sound to do with it? Is not sound something connected to harmony (music) or nuisance (noise pollution)? Yes, of course it is, but this is just a part of the story.

In this fascinating book, the authors explore the new frontiers of Ecoacoustics, a recent ecological discipline that aims to investigate the role of sounds in the ecological processes from individual animal species, to population and communities. Sounds are not only rich of information, but are crucial for us to interpret complex ecological dynamics and to explain the adaptations of species to a changing world. In an age whose main preoccupation is – or ought to be – the restoration of acceptable (climatological as well as socio-economical) conditions for men to be able to inhabit this planet, Ecoacoustics may help scholars and citizens to give a new value to sound as a masterful semiotic tool to communicate in any kind of environment (be it rural or urban, Northern or Southern, in real life or in its representations) as well as an ecological indicator of the relationships between habitats, individuals, and communities.

The task that awaits us is not an easy one. First of all, we should leave class, gender, nationalities and ethnicities off, and start to think about acoustic communities – something which is defined as the collection of “soniferous” species acoustically active in space and time. I am aware that Farina is thinking of birds – he has organized a “sanctuary” in Tuscany where he records them day and night – and possibly whales, but Ecoacoustics can also apply to human beings and by doing so we have the opportunity to erase all our bias and think of ourselves as *animals* just for once. This at least is the key I recommend in reading this book. In any case, men are involved in two different ways – not only as animals, but as habitat offenders (no wonder the main noise has anthropogenic origin).

As the authors admit, Ecoacoustic is not a totally new discipline but has been developed favored by robust theoretical bases that have considered the ontological aspects of soundscape and their components. Let me say that soundscape studies have helped not only sciences but also humanities in becoming increasing aware of the importance of sound in literature, since through written descriptions of soundscapes (1) we have access to times where no recordings existed, (2) we can interpret noises, silences, and voices from a gender or ethnic perspective, and (3) we can better contextualize texts and attempt deeper analyses.

Anyway, the focus of the book mainly concerns the biological and ecological processes, and to such an extent a new word is introduced: SonoScape, with the aim to describe new ecoacoustic processes and validate functional models of the role of sound in ecological dynamics.

Chapter 1 contains some useful glimpses into a world which may not be so familiar to us – a world made of acoustic communities, vibroscapes, niches, all of which create a “sonic mosaic”. The authors then distinguish between intentional and unintentional sounds, describe the different organs of vocalization, and introduce a few interesting theories regarding soniferous species and their adaptation to the environment. They also distinguish between soundscapes, sonoscapes, and sonotopes; sonotopes and soundtopes; sonic and acoustic signature; sounds and noises.

Chapter 2 is devoted to Acoustic Complexity Indices, which are useful to measure the so called Ecoacoustic Events – that is, aggregations of sonic information that are meaningful for a species or for an ecological process.

After some mathematical equations, we are introduced to the term *sonic signature*, by which the authors indicate an aggregated value that describes the temporal or the spectral distribution of sonic information. Another important section regards the exploration of sound through investigation and research of recurrent patterns – a process which is called Coding Soundscape Information. Since a sequence of acoustic codes has ecoacoustic significance, the authors explain the consequences of this research, which involves fractals, diversity, dissimilarities.

The following Chapter is probably easier for experts, since it deals with technical devices, software applications, interfaces, parameters, and data management. Chapter 5, however, offers a good range of Exercises that any reader and scholar can afford and enjoy.

In conclusion, this book is a valuable instrument for a better understanding of ourselves and the habitat we live in. Also, it is of course an important assessment of methodology, theory, and practice. This is a discipline we shall hear of more and more often, and my hope is that it will also influence our way of reading, telling, writing stories, and listening to each other and to the places we live in.

Alessandra Calanchi  
[alessandra.calanchi@uniurb.it](mailto:alessandra.calanchi@uniurb.it)

Michela Compagnoni,

*I mostri di Shakespeare. Figure del deforme e dell'informe.* Roma, Carrocci 2022.

Nel 1972 suscitò molto interesse il volume *The Stranger in Shakespeare* (trad. it. 1979) dello scrittore e critico americano Leslie Fiedler, per il suo approccio che anticipava la critica femminista e postcoloniale, in senso lato gli Studi culturali. Al centro dell'indagine c'era la figura dell'Altro (il diverso per genere, religione, etnia e appartenenza culturale) a confronto con il mondo elisabettiano delle opere di Shakespeare. Il lavoro di Michela Compagnoni, che pur non cita Fiedler, sonda alcuni dei personaggi affrontati dallo studioso americano e persegue, in fondo, la ricerca del come il drammaturgo affronti la loro costruzione per presentarli come Altri, diversi, e, secondo il titolo, 'mostri'.

A questo proposito serve richiamare alla mente l'uso abbastanza recente in italiano del verbo "mostrificare", che il *Vocabolario Treccani* fa risalire al primo decennio del 2000, col significato di "trasformare in mostro, considerare un mostro", e del sostantivo derivato "mostrificazione" (spesso usato da Compagnoni, ma che il *Vocabolario* non comprende, mentre vi si trova "mostrificatore", col significato spregiativo di "fabbricatore di mostri"). Nel caso specifico, quindi, ma non necessariamente in senso spregiativo, Shakespeare è il 'mostrificatore' di cui si parla, colui che – nei suoi drammi – ha creato 'mostri', non personaggi con due teste o fauci animalesche, ma personaggi di cui mette in luce tratti caratteriali, più che fisici, appunto 'informi' e 'deformi', come spiega il sottotitolo di Compagnoni, o figure che vengono trasformate in 'mostri' dagli eventi di cui sono protagonisti.

Questo studio, vincitore dell'AIA/Carrocci Doctoral Dissertation Prize 2021 (il riconoscimento che ogni anno l'Associazione Italiana di Anglistica riserva alla migliore tesi di dottorato in collaborazione con la casa editrice Carrocci), si avvale di un'ampia serie di letture e di una raffinata e costante attenzione agli aspetti lessicali dei testi shakespeariani, prendendo in considerazione i seguenti personaggi e drammi che ospitano, appunto, "figure del deforme e

dell’informe”: Richard III (nell’omonimo testo, ma non solo), Caliban in *The Tempest*, Macbeth e Lady Macbeth, Othello e Iago, rispettivamente in *Macbeth* e *Othello*, Poor Tom (il travestimento di Edgar) in *King Lear*. Per ognuno l’approccio mira a mettere in luce le caratteristiche ‘mostruose’ che i personaggi manifestano, dalla deformazione fisica di Richard e (forse) di Caliban a quella verbale di Poor Tom, dalla degenerazione del ruolo dello sguardo indotta da Iago alla distruzione dell’ordine simbolico operata da Macbeth.

Ognuno di questi personaggi è portatore di forme ibride che “sfug[ono] alle griglie interpretative dell’ideologia dominante” (p. 11), là dove per ‘ideologia’ si intendano sia l’episteme culturale epocale, sia la scienza, con interessanti squarci sulla fisiognomica e la teoria degli umori, la curiosità anatomica e gli inizi delle conquiste coloniali. Tutto il mondo *early modern* viene preso come pietra di paragone delle creazioni shakespeariane, personaggi fluidi che si muovono tra i generi (ad es. Lady Macbeth), tra le specie e le classi sociali (Caliban, prima dominatore dell’isola, poi schiavo di Prospero, uomo o pesce, quasi sempre comunque “monster”, la parola che non a caso – da un mio personale computo – figura ben 46 volte in *The Tempest*, primo tra i termini portatori di senso nel testo, dopo la serie delle parole funzionali quali pronomi, preposizioni e ausiliari).

La cultura inglese tra tardo Medio Evo e Rinascimento viene tenuta a sfondo delle letture offerte dall’Autrice in questo denso lavoro, in cui la nascita della scienza medica è sempre presa in considerazione. La medicina coeva potrebbe spiegare, infatti, alcune manifestazioni dell’informe (come la *mola*, “massa informe per eccellenza” nella cultura coeva, grumo informe di carne non nata, ricordo di una maternità incompiuta, forse di origine malefica; cfr. pp. 39-46), quel “lump of foul deformity” (*Richard III*, 1.2.57) con cui Lady Anne apostrofa Richard nella famosa scena in cui egli la corteggia e alla fine convince a sposarlo. Un corpo che, come dichiara in *Henry VI, Part 3*, 3.2.192 (testo con cui Compagnoni dialoga costantemente trattando di Richard), è capace di “Change shapes with Proteus”, corpo – e animo, a dir il vero – multiforme, quindi senza una forma propria e per questo “informe”.

L’analisi è molto persuasiva nel dimostrare che la “in-formità” non riguarda solo l’esterno dell’uomo, anzi al contrario intacca l’interiorità. È il caso di Macbeth e di Lady Macbeth che, infrangendo l’ordine ed equilibrio rappresentati dal potere di re Duncan, attraverso il regicidio squarciano e sconvolgono non sole le relazioni sociali, ma anche i rapporti più strettamente familiari, con Macbeth che, dopo l’incontro con la moglie, dal forte guerriero

lodato all'inizio del primo atto diviene "too full o'th' milk of human kindness" (1.2.17), e per questo "ricolmo di un fluido in eccesso che rappresenta per metonimia tutta la gamma di impure secrezioni corporee femminili che, rendendolo gentile e docile, lo indeboliscono effeminandolo." (p. 95). Lady Macbeth, per contro, invoca gli spiriti chiedendo loro di "fare di lei un mostro capace di colmare con la sua efferatezza il vuoto di maschilità lasciato da Macbeth (1.5.40-48)" (p. 98). Il genere femminile della Lady viene, quindi, deformato, 'mostrificato', ma anche il corpo di Duncan, vittima del regicidio, viene trasformato: il suo cadavere non è visibile in scena e Macduff, che va a vederlo, non può far altro che esclamare "O horror, horror, horror!" (2.3.63) di fronte a chi ha perso ogni segno di regalità, a un corpo profanato di cui "Confusion now hath made his masterpiece" (2.3.66), un ibrido dolorosamente e tragicamente informe e deformi. Del resto, le stesse parole ossimoriche delle streghe in 1.1 – "When the battle's lost and won.", v. 4 e "Foul is fair, and fair is foul", v. 12 – già preannunciano qualcosa e il suo contrario, quindi qualcosa di mutevole, indefinito, fluido e ibrido.

Oltre alla mostruosità ancora legata in qualche modo al corpo, come nei casi di Caliban e di Richard III, e a quella mentale e comportamentale espressa dai Macbeth, il volume analizza due aspetti informi/deformi ancora meno palesi: quello connesso alla distorsione della vista, in *Othello*, e quello emergente dal discorso di Poor Tom, dopo che Edgar si è travestito da pazzo per sfuggire all'ira del padre Gloucester in *King Lear*.

È l'occhio del Moro che la parola subdola di Iago perverte, così che Othello 'veda' ma non possa capire sino in fondo, anzi, deformi quanto vede: l'esempio più immediato è la 'mostrificazione' che Iago pone in atto quando convince Othello a nascondersi per assistere al suo incontro con Cassio in quello che un tempo io stessa definii un "eavesdropping indotto" (4.1; l'ascolto di soppiatto messo in scena da un 'regista' con 'attori' manipolati). Nel "rapporto tra vista e conoscenza" (p. 115) Iago fa sì che il Moro, che pur vede, non conosca, e – al contrario – deformi la possibile conoscenza in obnubilata falsa certezza. E, di nuovo, non è un caso che *monster* e *monstrous* occorrano 13 volte nella tragedia, a denotare non solo la gelosia – il notorio "green-eyed monster" (3.3.168) – ma anche la così-creduta-da-Othello relazione tra Cassio e Desdemona ("O monstrous! Monstrous!" esclama il Moro al racconto che Iago gli fa di un presunto sogno erotico di Cassio; 3.3.428).

Se l'insidiosa parola di Iago deforma la realtà sino a toglierle la forma vera e far tragicamente emergere l'informe in *Othello*, quella di Poor Tom/Edgar – pur altrettanto retoricamente ricca – non persegue finalità distruttive. Essa non vuole ‘togliere forma’ alla realtà, ma, al contrario, donarle una forma nuova, quella della verità. Per far questo, però, Poor Tom utilizza gli stilemi del discorso dei folli, di coloro che l’Europa *early modern* racchiude nei manicomì. Shakespeare costruisce una più che plausibile imitazione del disordine discorsivo dei reclusi nell’ospedale londinese di Bedlam, i *fools natural*, e fa sì che il discorso di Edgar venga ‘mostrificato’ nella sua versione ‘bedlamita’. (Come indica Compagnoni nella prima nota al capitolo su *King Lear*, p. 129, in questa tragedia *monster* viene addirittura introdotto – per la prima volta in inglese, secondo l’*Oxford English Dictionary* – come uso verbale, vale a dire proprio come “rendere mostro”, l’equivalente del neologismo italiano “mostrificare”.) E così Poor Tom, che parla in prosa quando invece Edgar usa sempre il pentametro giambico, impiega una parlata dalla “peculiare struttura ibrida, frutto di fonti e ambiti discorsivi differenti, una disorientante eteroglossia che deforma il linguaggio normativo e lo espone nella sua provvisorietà e arbitrarietà” (p. 147), tanto che “[...] la follia mostruosa di Edgar/Tom dipende dunque dalla deformazione delle strutture del suo linguaggio” (p. 147).

Nel chiudere questa presentazione della lettura di Compagnoni, della cui ricca complessità il recensore non riesce a dare completamente conto, occorre dire che l’Autrice più volte sottolinea di non aver preso in considerazione i possibili aspetti spettacolari dei testi studiati, perciò il lettore, anche se forse ne sente un po’ la mancanza, non deve cercare qui accenni alle messinscene teatrali e alle rese filmiche più o meno celebri. Ma come dimenticare il *Macbeth* con Judy Dench e Ian McKellen con la regia di Trevor Nunn per la Royal Shakespeare Company (1976), o l’adattamento filmico *Richard III* con protagonista McKellen, con regia di Richard Loncraine (1995), o l’hallucinato *Macbeth Horror Suite* di Carmelo Bene (1983 e 1996)? E tanti altri spettacoli, ovviamente. Tuttavia, proprio la puntuale analisi portata avanti nel volume potrebbe o far ricordare alcune passate rappresentazioni o stimolarne di nuove, seguendo la sottolineatura della ‘mostrificazione’ operata da Shakespeare di molti suoi personaggi o di certi loro aspetti (e dei momenti drammatici in cui vivono). A questo proposito basti pensare a Viola che, in *Twelfth Night*, di definisce “poor monster” (2.2.34) perché si riconosce figura ibrida, donna nella realtà e uomo nel travestimento, o – nella stessa commedia – ad Antonio che, non riconosciuto da ‘Sebastian’ (gemello di Viola) solo perché in realtà è di

fronte a Viola travestita da ragazzo, tristemente esclama “None can be called deformed but the unkind” (3.4.365), dove la mostruosità e l’informe vengono colti nell’animo e non più in fattezze esterne.

Roberta Mullini  
[roberta.mullini@uniurb.it](mailto:roberta.mullini@uniurb.it)

Sara Giommi,

*Quel che resta del Vietnam. Trauma e letteratura femminile.* Ventura Edizioni, Senigallia 2022.

Nel suo libro *Quel che resta del Vietnam* Sara Giommi affronta il tema del trauma femminile durante la guerra del Vietnam. L'autrice ha voluto fare luce sul ruolo che le donne hanno avuto negli anni del conflitto, sia come volontarie direttamente sul campo sia in qualità di familiari dei veterani; un ruolo che per molto tempo è rimasto nell'ombra, ma che ha profondamente segnato la vita e la psiche di queste donne, generando traumi e disturbi come il PTSD.

Esperienze sconvolgenti come quelle della guerra provocano un forte disorientamento e squilibri psichici che rendono estremamente difficile il ritorno ad una vita normale. Un sintomo particolarmente debilitante è il ricordo degli eventi traumatici, infatti un articolo pubblicato su *Nature* spiega: “Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is characterized by emotional hypermnesia. PTSD patients experience recurrent and intrusive recollection of traumatic memories characterized by intense fear responses in ordinary, safe situations (i.e. emotional hypermnesia), while having difficulties retrieving exhaustive narrative (i.e. declarative) memories of their trauma, as certain aspects of the context are missing.”<sup>1</sup> Incubi, reminiscenze e flashback sono così vividi che la persona rivive quelle esperienze come se fossero reali e questo genera un senso di allerta, ansia e insicurezza anche negli ambienti domestici.

Allo stesso tempo la memoria è frammentata e la mancanza di contestualizzazione dei ricordi traumatici rende ancora più difficile scindere la realtà dall'immaginazione e impedisce di concentrarsi sul presente. Ne è un esempio il protagonista del racconto *Big Bertha Stories* di Bobbie Ann Mason, analizzato da Sara Giommi nel suo libro, il cui protagonista, un veterano di nome Donald, soffre di PTSD e i suoi ricordi sono così intrusivi da influire sulle sue scelte lavorative e soprattutto sul rapporto col figlio. Come spiega l'autrice, “il lavoro che svolge nelle miniere diventa null'altro che la

---

<sup>1</sup> Al Abed, A.S., Ducourneau, E.G., Bouarab, C. et al. Preventing and treating PTSD-like memory by trauma contextualization. *Nat Commun* 11, 4220 (2020). [10.1038/s41467-020-18002-w](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-020-18002-w)

riproduzione in piccola scala della distruzione al territorio vietnamita” (p. 158) e un mezzo per espiare le sue colpe. Inoltre, Donald proietta nelle storie che racconta al piccolo Rodney i combattimenti e le cruente esperienze della guerra, ma questa ricostruzione frammentaria non fa altro che acuire il suo disturbo, con conseguenze disastrose sul benessere della sua famiglia.

Un aspetto centrale che permette di rielaborare il trauma è, dunque, quello di recuperare la memoria di quegli eventi e ricontestualizzarli. Un primo passo importante è quello di condividere con altri le proprie esperienze in un contesto sicuro e sereno. È proprio per questo che i fondatori del *Red Badge Project* si sono posti l'obbiettivo di creare un ambiente in cui i veterani abbiano la sicurezza di sentirsi ascoltati e possano ricostruire la propria identità attraverso lo storytelling. “Con il suo carattere intimo e riflessivo, la scrittura viene vista come la principale alleata di questi reduci, i quali, a volte, tralasciano la fase del racconto orale e passano direttamente alla scrittura” (p. 183), attraverso la quale trovano un'opportunità per analizzare la propria storia e, soprattutto, rielaborarla a livello emotivo. Anche Donald di *Big Bertha Stories* riuscirà a riconnettersi alla realtà proprio condividendo con la moglie i suoi ricordi e il senso di colpa che lo aveva condannato ad una profonda solitudine interiore e prenderà coscienza del bisogno di un aiuto esterno per tornare ad una vita normale.

Ma come è possibile ricordare o parlare di un trauma se la sua stessa esistenza è messa in dubbio? Quando viene negato il diritto a soffrire perché non a tutti è riconosciuta la stessa terribile esperienza della guerra? Questo è proprio ciò che è successo alle donne di ritorno dal Vietnam che, come molti uomini veterani, portavano dentro di sé ferite profonde e dolorose, ma che dovettero nasconderle perché non potevano pretendere di aver condiviso gli stessi traumi dei soldati in prima linea. Anche se la maggioranza di loro servì come infermiera negli ospedali di campo, questo non assicurava maggior sicurezza, soprattutto in un conflitto di guerriglia come quello in Vietnam, né tantomeno risparmiava loro la cruenta realtà della morte. Questo è confermato dal fatto che anche alcune donne veterane svilupparono il PTSD, come illustrato da recenti studi: “The prevalence of PTSD for the Vietnam cohort was higher than previously documented. Vietnam service significantly increased the odds of PTSD relative to US service; this effect appears to be associated with wartime exposures, especially sexual discrimination or harassment and job

performance pressures. Results suggest long-lasting mental health effects of Vietnam-era service among women veterans.”<sup>2</sup> È da notare che, in alcuni casi, al trauma della guerra si sovrappose anche quello della discriminazione o di molestie sessuali. Eppure, quando tornarono in patria non furono accolte né riconosciute come veterane. Si ritrovarono catapultate a casa, nella difficile impresa di ricostruirsi una vita, lacerate interiormente ma senza la possibilità di ricevere aiuto.

Solamente negli anni ’80 si riconobbe che anche le donne soffrono di PTSD, un disturbo che fino ad allora era considerato prerogativa esclusiva dei soldati, e a fine decennio venne anche fondata la Vietnam Women’s Memorial Foundation, un’organizzazione no-profit che offre supporto alle veterane e cerca di far conoscere al pubblico le loro storie. Questo progetto ha permesso a molte donne di ricostruire le loro memorie attraverso la scrittura e la condivisione, così “through their poems, songs and stories, the healing of women veterans has begun”.<sup>3</sup> Grazie alla determinazione di Diane Carlson Evans, fondatrice dell’organizzazione, le veterane hanno trovato un modo per mettersi in connessione e sono riuscite a trovare il coraggio per riguardare al passato e parlare delle loro esperienze senza vergogna.

La storia delle donne veterane in Vietnam dimostra quanto sia importante dare voce al dolore e, soprattutto, a chi è stata negata la possibilità di farlo. Il libro di Sara Giommi ha dato spazio e attenzione ad un capitolo della storia americana poco conosciuto in Italia e ha proposto di rileggerlo attraverso una sensibilità tutta femminile. Il suo lavoro conferma il valore delle opere e gli studi sul trauma, che ci permettono di avere una percezione più profonda della società del passato e rivelano il ruolo della memoria nella formazione dell’identità individuale e culturale<sup>4</sup>.

Laura Tombari  
[l.tombari4@campus.uniurb.it](mailto:l.tombari4@campus.uniurb.it)

---

<sup>2</sup> Magruder K, Serpi T, Kimerling R, et al. “Prevalence of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Vietnam-Era Women Veterans: The Health of Vietnam-Era Women’s Study (HealthVIEWS)”. *JAMA Psychiatry*. 2015;72(11):1127–1134.

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2453293>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.vietnamwomensmemorial.org/history.php>

<sup>4</sup> <https://literariness.org/2018/12/19/trauma-studies/>



## NOTA SUGLI AUTORI E SULLE AUTRICI

MARCO AMMAR è professore a contratto di lingua e letteratura araba presso l'Università degli Studi di Genova. Ha conseguito il dottorato di ricerca in Relazioni Internazionali presso l'Università di Cagliari. La sua ricerca attuale si concentra principalmente sull'analisi critica del discorso. È membro del *Centro Interuniversitario di Ricerca sulle Metafore* e membro nel *Grupo de Investigación en Discurso y Protesta Social*, affiliato al *Center of Discourse Studies* di Barcellona, che studia la copertura mediatica delle proteste sociali in tutto il mondo.

ALESSANDRA CALANCHI è docente di Letteratura e Cultura Angloamericana e direttrice della Summer School in Studi Britannici e Agloamericani Sergio Guerra presso l'Università degli Studi di Urbino Carlo Bo. Studiosa di *crime fiction*, è socia onoraria dell'Accademia Italiana di Scienze Forensi. Si occupa inoltre di *soundscape studies*, nell'ambito dei quali è co-fondatrice del Sound Studies Forum e co-curatrice della collana *Soundscapes* per Galaad Edizioni. È autrice di numerosi saggi e volumi, nonché traduttrice.

CRISTINA GAMBERI è assegnista di ricerca presso l'Università degli Studi Bologna, dove si occupa di *Women's and Gender Studies* e linguaggio inclusivo. È stata *Visiting Fellow* presso le università di Utrecht (NL), Hull, Warwick e Norwich (UK) e ha conseguito il titolo di dottora di ricerca in Studi di genere presso l'Università Federico II. Svolge le sue ricerche nell'ambito della letteratura di lingua inglese del novecento e contemporanea e nei *gender studies*. In particolare, ha pubblicato su letteratura delle donne; critica femminista; autobiografia; *children literature*; fiaba e riscrittura. I suoi lavori sono stati pubblicati su riviste nazionali e internazionali e ha all'attivo numerosi volumi e saggi.

NASSER ISMAIL è professore associato di Lingua e letteratura araba presso il Dipartimento di Lingue e Culture moderne dell'Università degli Studi di Genova. Le sue attività di ricerca interessano il campo della lingua, della letteratura e della cultura arabo-islamica premoderna e moderna, con particolare

riguardo allo studio e all’analisi dei fenomeni letterari e culturali del periodo mamelucco in Egitto.

ROBERTA MULLINI, già professore ordinario, ha insegnato Letteratura inglese nelle università di Bologna, Siena, Messina, Pescara e Urbino. Ha pubblicato libri e saggi in Italia e all’estero, prevalentemente su dramma e teatro della prima età moderna, ma pure sul romanzo e la poesia del Novecento. Si ricordano i volumi *Corrittore di parole. Il fool nel teatro di Shakespeare* (1983), *Il fool in Shakespeare* (1997), *Il demone della forma. Attorno ai romanzi* di David Lodge (2001), *Parlare per non farsi sentire. L’al parte nei drammi di Shakespeare* (2018), *Più del bronzo. Voci della poesia inglese della Grande Guerra* (2018). *Healing Words. The Printed Handbills of Early Modern London Quacks* (2015) studia il linguaggio medico dei ciarlatani nella stampa pubblicitaria di fine Seicento. Ha anche diretto spettacoli studenteschi in lingua inglese. Ha fondato questa rivista nel 2002 e ne è stata direttore responsabile sino al 2021.

DAVIDE PASSA è dottorando in Studi in Letterature, Lingua e Traduzione Inglese (curriculum linguistico-traduttivo) presso l’Università di Roma Sapienza, in cotutela con l’Università della Slesia in Katowice. È cultore della materia in Lingua e traduzione inglese. Ha pubblicato articoli sull’uso di socioletti in testi di finzione e la loro resa in traduzione, con particolare attenzione al *gayspeak* e la *drag lingo*. La sua tesi dottorale verte sulla caratterizzazione di uomini omosessuali di finzione nel dramma britannico del ventesimo secolo. I suoi interessi principali sono la sociolinguistica, gli studi traduttivi (audiovisivi), gli studi sulla lingua e la sessualità, la linguistica dei corpora. Insegna inoltre Lingua e cultura inglese presso le scuole secondarie di secondo grado.

SARA PINI è tutor didattica presso il Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Culture Moderne (LILEC) dell’Università degli Studi di Bologna. Ha ottenuto un dottorato di ricerca in *World Literature* e studi postcoloniali nello stesso Ateneo a giugno 2022, dopo aver conseguito la laurea magistrale in Letterature Moderne, Comparate e Postcoloniali. La sua area principale di ricerca è la letteratura *young adult* in lingua inglese, inclusa quella del Regno Unito, ma i suoi interessi abbracciano la letteratura inglese dal XIX secolo alla contemporaneità, le letterature anglofone e gli approcci interdisciplinari con altri media e la psicologia. Presso il Dipartimento di Filologia Classica e Italianistica collabora

inoltre al programma di Dottorato in Patrimonio culturale nell'ecosistema digitale.

STEFANO ROSSI è dottorando presso l'Università degli Studi di Padova. Negli ultimi tre anni si è occupato della letteratura di Samuel Beckett e della trilogia di Wilfred R. Bion, *A Memoir of the Future*, concentrandosi sulle rappresentazioni del tempo passato, presente e futuro negli scritti dei due autori. I suoi attuali interessi di ricerca comprendono le *medical humanities*, gli studi sul trauma e sulla disabilità, la neuroetica, la fenomenologia del tempo, le rappresentazioni della psicopatologia nella letteratura anglofona. Ha scritto sulla pornografia tardo-vittoriana, sulla femminilità violenta e sulla degenerazione nella narrativa tardo-vittoriana, sulla percezione del tempo e sulla sensibilità distorta negli stati psicopatologici.

ÁNGEL DE LA TORRE SÁNCHEZ è laureato in Filologia presso l'Università degli Studi di Granada, Master in Insegnamento dello spagnolo per stranieri presso l'Università Pablo Olavide e Dottore di ricerca in Linguistica applicata presso l'Università di Murcia. I suoi ambiti di ricerca si concentrano sull'insegnamento dello spagnolo, la letteratura e le tecnologie. Ha pubblicato diverse ricerche, l'ultima delle quali è *Literatura y tecnología: La poesía digital en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras* (Editorial Comares, 2022). Svolge la sua attività didattica in Italia, presso l'Università degli Studi di Macerata e presso l'Università degli Studi di Urbino Carlo Bo.

LAURA TOMBARI è studentessa dell'Università degli Studi di Urbino. Nata nel 91, vive a Pesaro. Da sempre amante di lingue, libri e viaggi, ha frequentato il liceo linguistico e da anni lavora in un centro per ragazzi dove offre supporto allo studio e ai compiti. La pandemia è stata l'opportunità per riprendere in mano le sue passioni e iscriversi al corso di laurea triennale di Lingue e culture moderne.

GIUSEPPE TROVATO è professore associato di lingua spagnola e traduzione presso l'Università Ca' Foscari Venezia. I suoi principali ambiti di interesse scientifico si collocano nel campo della linguistica spagnola e contrastiva (spagnolo-italiano), la traduzione, la fraseologia contrastiva e la lessicografia. Collabora con gruppi di ricerca internazionali negli ambiti citati e ha impartito lezioni in varie università italiane e straniere.



## REVISORI 2020 E 2021

### Revisori 1-2020

Luca Ambrogiani (cultore della materia Università degli Studi di Urbino)  
Gioia Angeletti (Università degli Studi di Parma)  
Serena Baiesi (Università degli Studi di Bologna)  
Lisanna Calvi (Università degli Studi di Verona)  
Sebastiano Caroni (poeta e sociologo)  
Carla Dente (Università degli Studi di Pisa)  
Fiorenzo Fantaccini (Università degli Studi di Firenze)  
Laura Giovannelli (Università degli Studi di Pisa)  
Sergio Guerra (Università degli Studi di Urbino)  
Fiorenzo Iuliano (Università degli Studi di Cagliari)  
James Krasner (University of Hampshire, UK)  
Andrea Laquidara (cultore della materia Università degli Studi di Urbino)  
Paola Loreto (Università degli Studi Milano Statale)  
Alessandra Marzola (Università degli Studi di Bergamo)  
Gigliola Nocera (Università degli Studi di Catania)  
Leandro Pisano (cultore della materia Università degli Studi di Urbino)  
Gino Scatasta (Università degli Studi di Bologna)  
Antonio Taglialatela (Università degli Studi della Tuscia Viterbo)  
Romana Zacchi (Università degli Studi di Bologna)

### Revisori 2-2020

Marco Anmar (Università degli Studi di Genova)  
Maurizia Calusio (Università degli Studi Milano Cattolica)  
Lisanna Calvi (Università degli Studi di Verona)  
Giovanna Carloni (Università degli Studi di Urbino)  
Bianca Del Villano (Università degli Studi di Napoli)  
Guido Mattia Gallerani (Università degli Studi di Bologna)  
Bronwen Hughes (Università degli Studi di Napoli Parthenope)  
Fiorenzo Iuliano (Università degli Studi di Cagliari)  
Angela Langone (Università degli Studi di Cagliari)

Elisabetta Lonati (Università degli Studi Milano Statale)  
Andrea Malaguti (University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA)  
Irina Marchesini (Università degli Studi di Bologna)  
Stella Mattioli (University of Virginia, USA)  
Giuliano Mion (Università degli Studi di Cagliari)  
Maria Elisa Montironi (Università degli Studi di Urbino)  
Iolanda Plescia (Università degli Studi Roma Sapienza)  
Federica Rusciadelli (Università degli Studi di Urbino)  
Alice Spencer (Università degli Studi di Torino)  
Francesca Daniela Virdis (Università degli Studi di Cagliari)

#### Revisori 1-2021

Luca Ambrogiani (cultore della materia Università degli Studi di Urbino)  
Maurizia Calusio (Università degli Studi Milano Cattolica)  
Roberto Carnero (Università degli Studi di Bologna)  
Michael Dallapiazza (Università degli Studi di Bologna)  
Giovanni Darconza (Università degli Studi di Urbino)  
Carlotta Farese (Università degli Studi Bologna)  
Giuseppe Ghini (Università degli Studi di Urbino)  
Giovanni Luciani (Università degli Studi Roma Sapienza)  
Irina Marchesini (Università degli Studi di Bologna)  
Michela Toppano (Université de Provence, FR)  
Federica Zullo (Università degli Studi di Urbino)

#### Revisori 2-2021

Sebastiano Caroni (poeta e sociologo)  
Fabio Ciambella (Università degli Studi Roma Sapienza)  
Bonita Cleri (Università degli Studi di Urbino)  
Michele Danieli (Università degli Studi di Bologna)  
Massimo Eusebio (Università degli Studi di Urbino)  
Michele Fadda (Università degli Studi di Bologna)  
Dominic F. G. Holdaway (Università degli Studi di Urbino)  
Maria Elisa Montironi (Università degli Studi di Urbino)  
Mario Pagano (Università degli Studi di Catania)  
Maria Gabriella Pediconi (Università degli Studi di Urbino)  
Iolanda Plescia (Università degli Studi Roma Sapienza)  
Stefano Resconi (Università degli Studi Milano Statale)  
Tiziana Schirone (Università degli Studi di Urbino)

Stefano Serafini (Università degli Studi di Padova)

## ERRATA CORRIGE

Segnaliamo un refuso nell'articolo di Beatrice Seligardi pubblicato nel numero 2/2022 della rivista, dal titolo 'I/eye'. Sconfinamenti e poetiche della dissolvenza nei saggi lirici di Anne Carson e Antonella Anedda, A p. 41 si fa riferimento al film di Antonioni *Storia di un amore*, ma il titolo corretto è *Cronaca di un amore*. Ce ne scusiamo.





Urbino University Press

ISSN 1724-8698