

# *Linguae et*

*Rivista di lingue e culture moderne*

fondata da Roberta Mullini

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Vol. 25  
N. 1 / 2024

Dipartimento di Scienze della Comunicazione,  
Studi Umanistici e Internazionali



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# *Linguae & Rivista di lingue e culture moderne*

fondata da Roberta Mullini

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(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

## CONTENTS

TIZIANA INGRAVALLO Spettralità femminile in <i>The Winter's Tale</i> : raccontare il silenzio, trasformare la memoria	1
NATAŠA RASCHI Sulla traduzione al femminile nel contesto postcoloniale francofono subsahariano, o ancora sul concetto di traduzione come rigenerazione	19
ALCEO LUCIDI Tre grandi traduttori: Poggioli, Traverso e Bo	35
ABBAS BRASHI Literary Translation as Agent of Globalization	53
GIULIANA GARDELLINI The Language of Belonging in Pasquale Verdicchio's <i>This Nothing's Place</i>	79
SAJJAD GHEYTASI Interweaving Identities: Cultural Synthesis and Societal Dynamics in Zadie Smith's <i>Swing Time</i>	105
MARIA STELLA LOMI Trailing Climate Crisis Communication Through VanderMeer's <i>Annihilation</i> and <i>Authority</i>	129

GIOVANNI DARCONZA	
Paul Auster e la scrittura come antidoto al caos del mondo	147
ORIANA PALUSCI	
Alice Munro: il mondo in una short story. Un ricordo	151
Recensioni	157
Note sulle autrici e sugli autori	169

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## Spettralità femminile in *The Winter's Tale*: raccontare il silenzio, trasformare la memoria

### ABSTRACT:

The aim of this essay is to examine the 'spectral' nature of the character of Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* and how this half-living, half-dead female being stands out not as a relic or obsolete remnant of paganism or popular and medieval culture, but as a groundbreaking figure in Shakespeare's theatre. Redefined as a cultural metaphor with ethical, social and political potential, female spectrality becomes enduring beneficial actions and memories.

The 'spectral turn' provides the methodological framework that serves to emphasise the meaningful cultural progression in the history of spectrality displayed in the play. Starting from Derrida's reflection that anything that haunts like a ghost demands justice, or at least a response, this field of analysis intersects with questions of gender. Female spectral subjects, who are marginalized, disavowed and repressed in history as well as in society, are brought to light and made visible.

KEYWORDS: *The Winter's Tale*; spectrality; gender; memory; mourning.

## 1. Introduzione

Per l'indagine di *The Winter's Tale* ci appare un punto di snodo fondamentale ripartire dalla natura multiforme del personaggio di Ermione, in particolare, dalla sua trasformazione spettrale. L'idea di spettralità sposta e amplia lo sguardo di analisi rispetto all'asse tematico della resurrezione o del ritorno del fantasma. Lo spettro di Ermione si impone, infatti, come forza agente, vera potenza trasformativa e funzione strutturante del dramma. Poiché il *romance* di Shakespeare esplora una riflessione articolata sulla spettralità e segna un momento decisivo nella storia della sua progressione culturale, ci sembra indispensabile avvalerci degli strumenti metodologici e interpretativi offerti da una prospettiva critica recentemente in ampia espansione, denominata *hauntology*, secondo il calco originariamente formulato da Jacques Derrida, ma anche definita come *spectral turn* o *spectrology*. È proprio la riflessione di Derrida sviluppata in *Spettri di Marx* (1993) a generare e diffondere un interesse verso la spettralità come strumento di analisi interdisciplinare e a consolidare lo *spectral turn* come ambito critico della teoria culturale contemporanea. Tutt'oggi la spettralità si esplora come influente metafora concettuale che, già nella declinazione fornita da Derrida (1994, 4), impone una politica della memoria, dell'eredità e della transgenerazionalità, poiché profondamente imbevuta di discorsi e di riflessioni sulla perdita, sul trauma, sul lutto e sul recupero. Particolarmente proficua ai fini del nostro ambito di analisi si profila la specificità, enucleata da María del Pilar Blanco e da Esther Peeren (2013, 19), di una "spectropolitics", una politica 'degli' e 'per gli' spettri che facilita l'individuazione di soggetti esposti alla marginalizzazione, alla precarietà, se non al disconoscimento sociale o politico. La figura dello spettro, infatti, si sostanzia nella sua paradossale visibilità invisibile. In tal senso lo *spectral turn* opera una riconcettualizzazione e può ramificarsi esplorando le questioni di genere.

Inoltre, nel recente studio *Spectralities in the Renaissance* (2022), Caroline Callard sottolinea il valore storiografico che hanno acquisito gli studi sui 'fantasmi' per la comprensione del mondo sociale e religioso nel periodo rinascimentale ed evidenzia come proprio in quell'epoca la figura del *ghost* sia associata alla funzione di una pratica di cordoglio grazie alla quale il defunto



diventa un “active person or quasi-person” (4). Gli spettri, cioè, diventano figure e fenomeni della memoria.

## **2. Ritratti femminili: il corpo e l'anima**

Nell'ultimo atto di *The Winter's Tale* si assiste con stupore e meraviglia alla resurrezione di Ermione, morta da ben sedici anni. Nella cappella privata allestita dalla fedele ancella Paulina, la statua raffigurante la regina di Sicilia si tramuta in creatura vivente. Il lieto fine nei *romances* shakespeariani rende possibile e familiare il meraviglioso e, ancor di più, il miracoloso. Ermione, pertanto, può ritornare in vita dopo che suo marito Leonte con il pentimento e la contrizione si è redento dall'averla accusata ingiustamente di adulterio col suo amico Polissene, re di Boemia, in visita presso la corte di Sicilia. Anche la piccola Perdita, abbandonata al suo destino sulle coste della Boemia, perché creduta, appunto, figlia di quel peccato, è ritrovata. Si ricompone una tragedia domestica generata da un folle errore del re Leonte – non credere alla fedeltà della virtuosa Ermione – che ha determinato la morte del piccolo Mamillio, il rampollo della dinastia, svilatosi perché privato dell'amore e delle cure della madre<sup>1</sup> e angosciato dal pensiero del brutale trattamento a cui lei è sottoposta, perché condannata alla prigionia e all'onta di un immeritato processo.

Eppure è ben chiara sin dall'inizio del dramma l'indiscussa autorevolezza morale di Ermione condivisa da tutta la corte. Diversi sono i ritratti di devozione e di stima, reiteratamente e variamente formulati, che le vengono tributati, persino con toni di sacralità (“O my most sacred lady” 1.2.76)<sup>2</sup>. Le qualità ideali e le virtù indiscusse non si limitano, però, a comporre un ritratto statico di eccellenza. La regina di Sicilia, con ogni azione che compie, con ogni parola che proferisce, si fa interprete e promotrice di un amore ideale tra gli uomini. È incarnazione di bene e di Grazia, per cui è invocata come “fair Queen” (1.2.62) e riconosciuta come “the good Queen” (2.3.58,59), “the gracious Queen” (1.2.529). Ermione stessa invoca trionfalmente la Grazia ogni qualvolta riconosce nelle relazioni tra gli uomini l'armonia e la pienezza degli

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<sup>1</sup> Donna C. Woodford (2007, 188) analizza il tema della fantasia di un controllo maschile sulla riproduzione e sull'educazione che nel dramma avviene con l'allontanamento dei fanciulli dall'influenza materna.

<sup>2</sup> Tutti i riferimenti testuali a *The Winter's Tale* sono tratti dall'edizione *The Arden Shakespeare* (2010).

affetti (“Grace to boot!” 1.2.80). Come sottolinea Boitani (2009, 18-19), le donne dei *romances* shakespeariani predicano un Vangelo degli affetti umani più profondi tra marito e moglie, tra padri, madri, e figli.

Il dramma, infatti, prende le mosse sotto gli auspici del buon Camillo, il quale si augura che il legame di amicizia tra i regni di Sicilia e Boemia, rinvigorito dalla ritrovata vicinanza e frequentazione, possa perpetuarsi:

CAMILLO:       Sicilia cannot show himself over-kind to Bohemia. They were trained together in their childhood; and there rooted betwixt them then such an affection, which cannot choose but branch now. Since their more mature dignities and royal necessities made separation of their society, their encounters, though not personal, hath been royally attorneyed with interchange of gifts, letters, loving embassies: that they have seemed to be together, though absent; shook hands as over a vast; and embraced, as it were, from ends of opposed winds. The heavens continue their loves! (1.1.21-31)

Il nobile della corte di Sicilia, mentre dipinge verbalmente la potente immagine delle mani tese nella vastità dei cieli, offre il primo frammento diegetico che, insieme ad altri che seguiranno, va a comporre l'essenza vitale del *tale* celebrato nel dramma, il racconto della Grazia in cui si riannodano faticosamente i fili persi di una ellissi narrativa del “love” e dell’“affection”. Spetta a Ermione proseguire il recupero di quel racconto incitando i protagonisti stessi della storia, Polissene e Leonte, a evocare i momenti fondativi delle proprie relazioni affettive coltivate durante l'infanzia (cfr. 1.2.60-62).

La stretta di mano, centro allegorico del dramma, elegge il corpo e il gesto a espressioni spirituali dell'essere<sup>3</sup>. In *The Winter's Tale* si celebra la parabola dell'unione tra gli uomini e si ritualizza attraverso l'antica iconografia della *dextrarum iunctio*<sup>4</sup>. All'inizio e alla fine del dramma si creano sulla scena pose

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<sup>3</sup> L'insistenza sulla ritualità dei gesti e sulla ritrattistica consolida nel dramma l'idea dell'inseparabilità dello spirituale dal fisico. Se nei primi tre atti, sino a quando Ermione è in vita, emerge che corpo e anima non possono essere considerate entità separate, alla stessa maniera, dopo la morte della regina, anche lo spirituale diviene parte del fisico ed inglobato in esso. Lo spettro in *The Winter's Tale* non ha un'autonoma realtà materiale, né può averla l'anima da cui origina (Blanco and Peeren 2013, 9). La radicalità di rappresentazione e di indagine dello spirituale come ricerca di una via di trasmissione nella posterità è nelle parole di Perdita nel momento in cui si ricongiunge con la madre ritornata in vita: “Lady, Dear queen, that ended when I but began” (5.3.45).

<sup>4</sup> Nell'arte greco-romana la *dextrarum iunctio* è gesto celebrativo dell'unione matrimoniale che sancisce il legame di fedeltà e rispetto tra i coniugi, e anche delle relazioni di amicizia e di

iconicamente raffiguranti 'mani che si uniscono' e ne evocano la polisemia iconografica. La scena conclusiva del dramma diviene, infatti, vera apoteosi di tale narrativa dei gesti in cui si riconciliano tutti i vincoli della Grazia minacciati dall'irriconciliabilità da parte di Leonte dell'azione umanitaria di Ermione che opera per essi e che la stessa regina definisce "good deed" (1.2.97). La finale *dextrarum iunctio* invocata da Perdita sollecita in Ermione il desiderio di ascoltare il racconto che traduca in parole il trionfo visivo di quella ricomposizione miracolosa. La regina si è preservata nel silenzio, nell'assenza e nella sofferenza per godere di quel momento.

HERMIONE: [...] Tell me, mine own,  
Where hast thou been preserved? Where lived? How found  
Thy father's court? For thou shalt hear that I,  
Knowing by Paulina that the oracle  
Gave hope thou wast in being, have preserved  
Myself to see the issue. (5.3.123-128)

In una reazione empatica verso le vicissitudini subite dalla propria madre, Perdita comprende che l'immobilità del corpo marmoreo è dolorosa privazione degli affetti. La contemplazione e la partecipazione a quel dolore è tale che a Leonte sembra che per un influsso magico la statua sottragga a sua figlia ogni vitalità rendendola a sua volta pietra. Contrariamente agli altri astanti che contemplano di quella fissità plastica le fattezze esaltandone la meravigliosa verisimiglianza, la giovane principessa incita la statua a un movimento vitale che possa restituire l'anima, affinché il movimento del corpo possa farsi nuovamente espressione del movimento dello spirito: "Lady, / Dear queen, [...] / Give me that hand of yours to kiss!" (5.3.44-46). E infatti, l'esortazione riporta Ermione alla vita attiva, ricongiungendola col momento in cui quella vita è stata raggelata e tolta<sup>5</sup>, ovvero, quando, nel primo atto del dramma, la regina di Sicilia, in un vero e proprio rituale di celebrazione del rinnovato vincolo di amicizia con il regno di Boemia, offre a Polissene il palmo della mano. Quel gesto diventa fuoco visivo e simbolico di un'altra narrazione degli

protezione, mentre, nelle raffigurazioni funerarie è saluto estremo tra i vivi e i morti. Nell'arte cristiana, in cui la Dea Concordia è sostituita con la figura di Cristo, è visibile la sola mano di Dio che corona gli sposi, o, più in particolare, la raffigurazione di quel gesto ricorre nel matrimonio mistico della Vergine (Pasquinelli 2005, 144-147).

<sup>5</sup> Secondo la definizione di Merlin Coverley la risorgenza spettrale è il ritorno a "those moments when a different path might have been taken, turning points whose premise remains unfulfilled and which continue to offer us hope for the future" (2020, 20).

affetti appena evocata da Leonte, che a sua volta, ricorda e riferisce le parole di Ermione che suggellarono il corteggiamento coronato dal gesto iconico della *dextrarum iunctio inter coniuges*, il legame di fedeltà e amore eterni nel vincolo del matrimonio:

LEONTES: Three crabbed months had soured themselves to death  
Ere I could make thee open thy white hand  
And clap thyself my love: then didst thou utter  
'I am yours for ever'.

HERMIONE: 'Tis Grace indeed.  
Why, lo you now, I have spoke to th'purpose twice:  
The one for ever earned a royal husband;  
Th'other for some while a friend.  
*She gives her hand to Polixenes* (1.2.102-108)

Per l'analisi della dimensione del corporeo e del gestuale in *The Winter's Tale* e sulla scorta del concetto dei 'due corpi' della regina sviluppato da Marie Axton (1977), Maggie Ellen Ray sottolinea l'incapacità di Leonte di cogliere nel gesto del "paddling palms and pinching fingers" (1.2.115) il pieno controllo del doppio corpo, politico e naturale, che la nobile regina estrinseca nella cortese ospitalità verso il re di Boemia (Ray 2018, 255). Infatti, Paulina non manca di rimarcare, dopo la feroce diffamazione, l'indiscussa qualità regale di Ermione. Non solo è la migliore d'Europa; la sua compiuta e immacolata regalità non si confà al potere temporale delle corti europee ("No court in Europe is too good for thee" 2.2.3). Ermione stessa ricorda e rivendica con orgoglio le sue origini regali. Per Leonte, invece, il gesto di Ermione è segno inequivocabile di un corpo naturale compromesso e, pertanto, di una regalità compromessa (Ray 2018, 255). Da quel momento impone che la regina sia contemplata in tutta la debolezza e corruttibilità di un corpo naturale, fisico e femminile, separato dal corpo politico:

LEONTES: Look on her, mark her well: be but about  
To say she is a goodly lady and  
The justice of your hearts will thereto add,  
'Tis pity she's not honest, honourable'. (2.2.65-69)

*The Winter's Tale* mostra, pertanto, la reversibilità culturale nella percezione del corpo femminile che oscilla tra oltraggio sacrilego e venerazione adorante. I

ritratti femminili<sup>6</sup> del corpo e dell'anima – descritti, evocati, mostrati, immaginati – strutturano ogni atto del dramma e le ripetute ostensioni delle pose statiche si soffermano sulle immagini femminili di onestà o innocenza, specie come richiami verso i re-padri i cui occhi non sanno vedere o non sanno leggere quei segni.

Una ferocia iconoclastica, devastante e innaturale, si riversa sui corpi femminili, ancor di più quando si mostrano come forme simboliche di rigenerazione della vita. Ermione appare gravida sulla scena come rappresentazione iconica per eccellenza del miracolo della vita, della nascita, e soprattutto della rinascita: la carne della donna che accoglie il corpo dell'altro. E dunque, la rappresentazione di un corpo materno, di neonata e nel tripudio della giovinezza contrasta l'impeto iconoclastico sedimentatosi con la riforma protestante e ancora vivo nell'Inghilterra della post-Riforma, per di più innestandosi alla caccia alle streghe in una fase di recrudescenza e di approvazione ideologica da parte di Giacomo I, il re di Scozia salito al trono d'Inghilterra nel 1603, attraverso il suo trattato oscurantista, *Daemonologie*<sup>7</sup>, che

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<sup>6</sup> Un riferimento esplicito alla fondamentale valenza della ritrattistica femminile in *The Winter's Tale* è affidato al piccolo Mamillio e ciò avvalorata, peraltro, una vitalità tra il visuale e verbale nel teatro del periodo a dispetto di una supposta aridità di una cultura visiva generata dall'iconoclastia nell'Inghilterra rinascimentale e sostenuta dalla critica fino alle soglie del secolo scorso (Caporicci and Sabatier 2020, 4-5). Infatti, il principe illustra alle sue balie la conoscenza che egli trae dal mondo femminile osservando il volto delle donne ("I learned it out of women's faces" 2.1.12). È un preambolo significativo che predispone l'intero atto al mondo 'visibile' dei corpi. Il ritratto nel teatro shakespeariano fluisce vorticosamente tra il materiale e l'immaginario, e accresce la sua potenzialità diventando concreta manifestazione nello spazio fisico della scena (Elam 2017, 15) come nel caso di questo secondo atto in cui l'evento verbale si salda alla concreta presenza scenica prima di Ermione, affaticata nel fisico per lo stato avanzato di gravidanza, e successivamente di Perdita, mostrata al padre non appena è data alla luce. Spetta alle voci femminili, alle dame della corte e a Paulina, orientare con veri e propri *speaking pictures* l'attenzione dello sguardo sui tratti e sulle fattezze delle presenze femminili sulla scena, oltre che sulle naturali mutazioni che l'incedere del tempo determina sui loro volti e sui loro corpi. Cfr. 2.1.16; 2.1.19-20; 2.3.97-102.

<sup>7</sup> L'opera è del 1597 e in essa Giacomo I non si risparmiava di elencare le punizioni e le torture efficaci da infliggere alle streghe durante i processi. *Daemonologie* è, altresì, la feroce risposta al famoso trattato *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* del 1584 con il quale Reginald Scot aveva tentato di contrastare una pervasiva credenza popolare sulla stregoneria fomentata da leggi severe che il re inasprì ulteriormente nel 1604 introducendo anche la pena di morte.

*The Winter's Tale* esplora, pertanto, il punto di convergenza dell'iconoclastia protestante con la stregoneria. Il teatro, non solo shakespeariano, porta in scena un'idea di idolatria abbastanza ampia associata oltre al Cattolicesimo romano anche alla stregoneria, alle divinità pagane e ai loro oracoli. (cfr. Strier 2015).

peraltro, diventa fonte fondamentale per lo spiritualismo elisabettiano (Ratmoko 2006, 97).

Prima ancora che il corpo ‘morto’ di Ermione si trasformi in figura spettrale, i corpi femminili appaiono nelle fantasie persecutorie del monarca come torturati e sofferenti. Leonte rischia di trasferire irrimediabilmente nell’intima sfera dell’ambito familiare la ferocia di una *revenge tragedy*<sup>8</sup> investendola del lessico e della logica di una vera e propria persecuzione religiosa. Gli atti e le parole di Leonte – a cui farà eco la deriva tirannica dell’altro monarca, Polissene – sono evocativi del contesto della politica religiosa del tempo, e in particolare, degli effetti di una religione diventata Stato. In una vera e propria allegoria delle politiche riformiste e delle sue forme repressive, specie nell’aspetto più dirompente della Riforma incentrato sul rifiuto iconoclastico verso le immagini religiose venerate come oggetti di adorazione, Leonte rifiuta la visione dei corpi femminili, perché non veritiere. Inutili saranno le intercessioni degli uomini di corte per convincere il re dell’integrità morale di Ermione, la “goodly queen” e la “perfect woman”, e indurlo a desistere dal condannarla alla prigionia. Altrettanto vano è il tentativo di Paulina di mostrare Perdita, appena nata, come immagine di innocenza. Il re minaccia di mettere al rogo la stessa Paulina che, con il linguaggio proprio della dissidenza religiosa, si difende e sfida la tirannia che si legittima con l’uso della legge: Leontes: “I’ll ha’thee burned”. Paulina: “I care not. / It is an heretic that makes the fire; / Not she which burns in’t” (2.3.113-15).

Persino l’adorazione che Florizel esprime per Perdita, la presunta pastorella di cui è innamorato, si tramuta agli occhi del re-padre, Polissene, che non condivide l’unione tra i due giovani, come un incantesimo di stregoneria (“thou, fresh piece / Of excellent witchcraft” 4.4.419-20). Il monarca vorrebbe deturpare la bellezza di quel volto scorticandola con spine (“I’ll have thy beauty scratched with briers” 4.4.422). Se la sofferenza cristiana, evocata dall’allegoria delle spine della Passione, investe i corpi femminili come un vero e proprio sacrificio di Cristo, le passioni dei re sono, invece, *perturbationes*, malattie dell’animo. I due monarchi immaginano perversamente la ‘Passione’ femminile come mortificazione del corpo, ottenebrati dalle ombre di passioni insane che

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<sup>8</sup> È lo stesso Leonte, sopraffatto da un’incontrollabile passione, ad invocare il codice pre-legale e medievale di una vendetta immediata ai danni della presunta adultera: “for present vengeance / Take it on her” (2.3.22-23). Procrastina, invece, nell’attesa di un disegno più lucido e calibrato, quella verso il re di Boemia.

turbano la tranquillità personale e domestica. In una generale condanna all'idolatria in cui le vittime sono le figure femminili, l'immaginario storico, pagano e cristiano si sovrappongono.

Il dramma, al tempo stesso, esalta il potere miracoloso e rigenerativo del corpo femminile, vero linguaggio per immagini che trascende le logiche di un potere e di una cultura patriarcale e mette in scena un rinnovato passaggio dall'iconoclastia all'iconologia, dalla distruzione dell'immagine del corpo femminile alla valorizzazione della sua eccellenza. Le raffigurazioni degli ultimi due atti, infatti, ispirati al motivo dell'adorazione, ambiscono a raffigurare sulla scena veri e propri *tableaux vivants*, l'uno con Perdita in un tripudio trionfante di rigenerazione festosa, l'altro con Ermione nella sacralità di una cappella.

Il processo inverso di spoliazione che mistifica il potere regale femminile è celebrato da Florizel che ha adornato la sua amata con gli abiti che convengono all'incarnazione femminile di bellezza e virtù, così precludendo alla regalità che Perdita potrà ristabilire risarcendo il corpo naturale e politico di Ermione. Per il momento la reversibilità del travestimento, la regalità delle vesti senza il corpo politico, genera vagheggiamento e sogno:

PERDITA: I told you what would come of this. Beseech you,  
Of your own state take care. This dream of mine –  
Being now awake, I'll queen it no inch farther,  
But milk my ewes, and weep. (4.4.444-57)

I finali ritratti devozionali spostano ulteriormente l'asse interpretativo della categoria della passione, di cui si esplora nel corso del dramma la metamorfosi di significato nella tradizione culturale occidentale (cfr. Curi 2013) per diventare estasi. L'adorazione prima di Perdita, poi di Ermione, in rituali condivisi da una comunità in cui tutti sembrano sopraffatti dalla grazia dei corpi femminili compongono scene di potente trasporto emotivo in cui la mistica sembra sovrapporsi all'erotica. Il miracoloso, che comunica amore e intensa gioia e che emana da quelle figure, produce stupore, meraviglia senza fine. Nella parabola di un percorso di passione che dal tormento genera l'estasi, secondo la mistica del sacrificio nella religione rinascimentale, risiede la quintessenza del *romance* shakespeariano. Il *tale* si libera dalle sofferenze, ovvero dall'involutione gotica in cui si era arrestato il racconto di paura del fanciullo Mamillio, animato da spettri

e spiriti<sup>9</sup>, che inaspettatamente era mutato in terrore reale con l'apparizione sulla scena di un Leonte ormai fuori di sé (2.1.36-53).

### **3. Lo spirito: dal lutto alla memoria**

Dopo l'ingiusta condanna di adulterio da parte di Leonte e la notizia della morte del figlio Mamillio, Ermione si eclissa dalla scena con un vistoso annichilimento della sua presenza corporea. Lo svenimento annulla simbolicamente da quel momento la performatività del corpo afflitto e sofferente. Prima della finale riapparizione in statua, la regina si dematerializza in spirito e si fa presenza onirica ad Antigone che è appena giunto in Boemia per abbandonare la piccola Perdita, perché considerata il frutto della supposta infedeltà. Ermione si fa sola anima in attesa di una nuova incarnazione che perpetui la sua genealogia regale e si "preserva" come tale, secondo quanto lei stessa riferisce, finché non potrà contemplare il frutto della sua azione ("the issue" 5.3.128). Resta spirito compassionevole, in vita come in morte. Nell'ultima battuta da vivente, poco prima che l'oracolo le dia piena assoluzione, la moglie, la madre, la regina ferita tiene a rimarcare quanto la sua eredità spirituale e culturale la renda estranea a incontrollabili desideri di vendetta. Come figlia, pertanto, erede di una grandiosa discendenza dinastica, invoca lo spirito del padre per farsi essa stessa spirito di pietà.

HERMIONE: The Emperor of Russia was my father.  
O that he were alive, and here beholding,  
His daughter's trial! That he did but see  
The flatness of my misery; yet with eyes  
Of pity not revenge!<sup>10</sup> (3.2.118-22)

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<sup>9</sup> L'episodio, tutto simbolico, che esalta l'arte orale del narrare condivisa tra la madre e un figlio, in questo caso tra Ermione e Mamillio (2.1.1-32), rimarca una rinnovata vitalità nell'Inghilterra protestante di una tradizione popolare di storie di fantasmi, spiriti, spettri e profezie. La ricomparsa di una influenza culturale del magico e del pagano si impone a dispetto del ruolo decisivo che la religione protestante ha esercitato nell'infondere i paradigmi di un pensiero razionale (cfr. Collard 2022, 4). La scena, dunque, evocativa del mondo dell'infanzia, è un punto di snodo fondamentale che mette in luce la prospettiva tematica del dramma che esplora ed espande l'idea di spettralità con una progressione culturale che supera la mera identificazione della spiritualità con la realtà e la fenomenologia del sovrannaturale rinvenibile nelle leggende, nei racconti e nella tradizione popolare.



Ermione riappare, dopo la presunta morte, per donare un nuovo sguardo sul futuro, per dare nuova vita in terra straniera a colei che è stata misconosciuta. Lo 'spettro' femminile del *romance* shakespeariano esercita la propria influenza e fa presa sulle vite dei vivi. Il punto di arrivo della forza agente e invisibile sprigionata dalla spettralità della regina non si limita ad intessere il perdono. L'apparizione predice, infatti, ad Antigono morte sicura poiché, contravvenendo alla sua natura e ignaro del verdetto dell'oracolo, si è fatto, suo malgrado, esecutore dell'insensata e crudele decisione di Leonte di abbandonare la piccola principessa in un luogo remoto ("the thrower-out / Of my poor babe" 3.3.28-29). La condanna ha effetti immediati e il nobile della corte siciliana esce per sempre di scena inseguito da un orso. D'altronde, è lo stesso Antigone a tributare veridicità alla creatura generata dall'infingimento immaginativo di cui si sostanziano i sogni. Egli non esita ad accoglierla come messaggera benigna e divina ricacciando prontamente ogni dubbio su una eventuale natura diabolica. Benché non abbia mai creduto che gli spiriti dei morti possano di nuovo animarsi nel mondo, scioglie ogni indugio e decide di cedere per una volta a quella superstizione risolvendosi a forgiare i suoi ultimi atti di vita secondo l'invocazione e i comandi proferiti dallo spettro di Ermione: "Dreams are toys: / Yet for this once, yea superstitiously, / I will be squared by this" (3.3.38-40).

L'evento del ritorno spettrale da parte della regina, pertanto, non è motivato dal ripiegamento sterile sul dolore, né dalla furia per le prevaricazioni subite. A tale idea di spettralità e alla sua interpretazione sentimentalmente e culturalmente arcaica (Callard 2022) resta ancora invischiato Leonte. Infatti, il re, ormai vedovo, immagina che Ermione possa nuovamente reimpossessarsi delle sue spoglie per vendicarsi della possibile e improvvida scelta di unirsi nuovamente in matrimonio e per incitare, perciò, l'uccisione di colei che immeritatamente potrebbe offuscare il suo ricordo. Spetta a Leonte, dunque, emanciparsi dalle dinamiche della vendetta e dal dominio tragico che da esse

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<sup>10</sup> È un momento dirimente rispetto agli altri drammi shakespeariani, quali *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar* e *Macbeth*, che condividono secondo David Ratmoko "the folkloristic belief in ghosts returning to settle injustice where the law fails to do so" (2006, 86) e ognuno di essi confermerebbe il binomio consueto del teatro elisabettiano in cui le storie di 'fantasmi' si strutturerebbero secondo un plot di 'vendetta'. Ermione ancora in vita fa implodere i luoghi topici della *revenge tragedy* per preparare il suo 'ritorno' spettrale, al contrario, in un dramma della redenzione e della salvezza. Si fa ella stessa portatrice della voce del padre esaltando il rigore e il valore della stirpe cui appartiene. Le sue invettive durante il falso processo sono già rivelazioni delle colpe commesse da Leonte.

scaturisce e di cui contamina la sua immaginazione e le sue passioni. Infatti, Paulina interviene per correggere e preparare un nuovo incontro tra i vivi e i morti.

LEONTES:       Thou speak'st truth.  
No more such wives, therefore no wife: one worse,  
And better used, would make her sainted spirit  
Again possess her corpse, and on this stage,  
Where we offenders move, appear soul-vexed,  
And begin, 'Why to me?'  
PAULINA:       Had she such power,  
She had just cause.  
LEONTES:       She had, and would incense me  
To murder her I married.  
PAULINA:       I should so.  
Were I the ghost that walked, I'd bid you mark  
Her eye, and tell me for what dull part in't  
You chose her; then I'd shriek, that even your ears  
Should rift to hear me; and words that followed  
Should be 'Remember mine'.       (5.1.55-67)

Come spirito parlante, l'apparizione femminile, diversamente dallo spettro più famoso del teatro shakespeariano, predispone gli eventi affinché possano compiersi le parole dell'oracolo. Del momento rivelatore del ritorno sono riferite tutte le condizioni di visibilità dello spettro: a chi appare, dove appare e in quale forma. Lo spettro che fa visita ad Antigone resta, però, un'apparizione 'raccontata'. Solo a conclusione del dramma lo spirito di Ermione raggiungerà le condizioni di visibilità sulla scena, come corpo senza carne né sangue, per sottoporsi sotto gli occhi di tutti alla finale metamorfosi.

ANTIGONUS    Come, poor babe.  
I have heard, but not believed, the spirit o'th'dead  
May walk again: if such thing be, thy mother  
Appeared to me last night; for ne'er was dream  
So like a waking. To me comes a creature,  
Sometimes her head on one side, some another:  
I never saw a vessel of like sorrow,  
So filled and so becoming. In pure white robes,  
Like very sanctity, she did approach  
My cabin where I lay; thrice bowed before me,  
And, gasping to begin some speech, her eyes  
Became two spouts; 'Good Antigonus,

Since fate, against thy better disposition,  
Hath made thy person for the thrower-out  
Of my poor babe, according to thy oath,  
Places remote enough are in Bohemia:  
There weep, and leave it crying; and for the babe  
Is counted lost for ever, Perdita  
I prithee call't' [...]. And so, with shrieks,  
She melted into air. (3.3.14-36)

Nella scena che precede il racconto dell'apparizione, Paulina riferisce della morte della regina ("I say she's dead; I'll swear't. If word nor oath / Prevail not, go and see" 3.2.201-202). Leonte esce di scena per vedere i 'corpi morti' di Ermione e Mamillio. L'annullamento di Ermione come presenza corporea è generativo di un nuovo sviluppo del dramma che non si legittima più nella realtà rappresentata, ma nella silente rielaborazione di ciò che è accaduto<sup>11</sup>. Memorie, ricordo e passato diventano forza motivante e presenza pervasiva per 'ri-creare' un possibile futuro.

LEONTES: Prithee, bring me  
To the dead bodies of my queen and son.  
One grave shall be for both: upon them shall  
The causes of their death appear, unto  
Our shame perpetual. Once a day I'll visit  
The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there  
Shall be my recreation. So long as nature  
Will bear up with this exercise, so long  
I daily vow to use it. Come,  
And lead me to these sorrow. (3.2.233-42)

Nella visione tutta privata dei corpi morti, mai descritta o narrata, inizia il cordoglio del re, l'esercizio intimo di una rinascita coltivata con lacrime di dolore. Paulina decide che l'esperienza luttuosa debba essere avvolta nel silenzio. Si arresta in quel momento quella qualità tutta femminile dell'irruenza linguistica ("Alas, I have showed too much / The rashness of a woman" 3.2.218-19), perché, come ella stessa constata, la verità bruciante delle sue parole ha toccato in profondità il cuore del re; ed oltretutto, dovrà trasformarsi

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Meek (2016, 123) ha evidenziato come molti degli eventi significativi si svolgano *in absentia*, poiché il dramma esplora l'interazione e la complementarità tra la modalità drammatica e narrativa. Nella tensione tra il visuale e il verbale, tra l'immediatezza visiva e gli atti narrativi si struttura, secondo tale interpretazione critica, l'idea centrale del 'credere' a ciò che viene descritto o narrato.

in depositaria di memorie, custode di valori che il tempo, anziché annullare o scalfire, dovrà fare germogliare in una nuova rinascita.

PAULINA: I'll speak of her no more, nor of your children;  
I'll not remember you of my own lord,  
Who is lost too. Take your patience to you,  
And I'll say nothing. (3.2.229-30)

Dopo sedici anni Leonte comprende l'azione continua, silente e influente di Paulina tributandole i giusti onori, poiché è colei che forgia instancabilmente la memoria di Ermione: "Good Paulina, / Who hast the memory of Hermione, / I know, in honour [...] 5.1.49-51). Trascorso il "wide gap" temporale (4.1.7), mutano anche i luoghi deputati alla preservazione della memoria (Sherlock 2008, 4). Alla morte della regina, per volontà di Leonte, viene fatto edificare un monumento celebrativo e funerario che rechi un'epigrafe come *memento* della colpa commessa. Fino a quel momento l'esperienza luttuosa resta scalfita nella fissità della pietra tombale. Paulina provvede, quindi, all'allestimento di una cappella, come spazio privato ma condiviso in un ricordo collettivo perché il lavoro del cordoglio possa davvero far sprigionare lo spirito trasformativo dei morti. Alla preservazione e alla localizzazione delle spoglie (Derrida 1994, 17) subentra la riappropriazione vitalistica del passato generatore di un nuovo futuro.

In *The Winter's Tale* la spettralità esorbita dalla semplice caratterizzazione del personaggio femminile per propagarsi come dimensione di prefigurazione, persistenza e ripetizione, e nell'accezione che offre Derrida della *hauntology*, essa si fa urgenza che schiude un nuovo spazio in cui l'assenza della voce soffocata possa risuonare in altre voci e trovare un nuovo respiro. In un movimento doppio tra ripetizione del passato e anticipazione del futuro connaturato nella presenza spettrale che dissolve le barriere temporali oltre quelle tra i vivi e i morti, il quarto atto, che segue la morte e il dolore della perdita, mette in scena l'estasi e la venerazione per la giovane bellezza appena sbocciata che sprigiona Grazia e nobiltà d'animo. Come in una genealogia 'spettrale', che è riappropriazione spontanea dello spirito del passato, anche nella forma di richiamo intertestuale di *fabulae* mitologiche e cristiane che convogliano tematicamente sulla mutazione miracolosa o meravigliosa dei trapassi inversi dalla morte alla vita, riprende la circolare del sangue nei corpi che si credevano morti. Il sangue rosso che vince sul pallore dell'inverno avvia l'azione della

scena bucolica attraverso la canzone incipitaria di Autolico: “the red blood reigns in the winter's pale” (4.3.4). Il viso di Perdita ne è immediatamente irrorato così come sono trasmesse, e riconoscibili nelle sue fattezze e nei suoi modi, una conoscenza e una eredità regali:

POLIXENES: This is the prettiest low-born lass that ever  
Ran on the greensward: nothing she does or seems  
But smacks of something greater than herself,  
Too noble for this place.

CAMILLO: He tells her something  
That makes her blood look out. Good sooth, she is  
The queen of curds and cream. (4.4.156-61)

La memoria rivisita il passato come parte di un *continuum* ed esalta le somiglianze tra passato e presente. In tal senso va intesa la rimitologizzazione shakespeariana. La rievocazione del mito di Proserpina da parte di Perdita (4.4. 116-18) durante la festa di primavera è incarnazione, ripetizione, “reviviscenza rigenerante del passato” (Derrida 1994, 140), appropriazione viva e assimilatrice degli spiriti del passato. Si prepara, così, il ritorno in Sicilia di Perdita, il movimento verso il luogo che reca le tracce di un trauma, insieme personale e collettivo, perché espressione di una comune esperienza femminile della sofferenza. Spetta a Florizel, il giovane principe, evocare e introdurre sulla scena il mondo pagano con brevi racconti mitici (4.4.25-30) che si sovrappongono in persistenti e ripetute narrazioni sedimentatesi nello spazio e nel tempo come fossero storie transgenerazionali di un passato condiviso. Le anime delle fanciulle evocate<sup>12</sup>, Proserpina, Europa, Teofane, hanno come loro luoghi di memorie, secondo la definizione di Pierre Nora (1984), le isole. Quegli spazi spettrali densi di passati traumatici e oppressivi raccontano storie di violenze, ratti e privazioni, ovvero, la sofferenza del corpo femminile che il nuovo Apollo, nelle vesti di Florizel, è pronto a risarcire.

L'evento del 'ritorno' compiuto da Perdita è evento di rivelazione poiché porta con sé tracce di memorie permanenti per decifrare l'eredità del passato e generare cambiamenti futuri.

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<sup>12</sup> “La tradizione di tutte le generazioni scomparse grava pesantemente sul cervello dei viventi. [...] Se la morte grava sul cervello vivo dei viventi, e più ancora sul cervello dei rivoluzionari, deve avere qualche densità spettrale” (Derrida 1994, 138-39).

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*Spettralità femminile in The Winter's Tale*

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## Sulla traduzione al femminile nel contesto postcoloniale francofono subsahariano, o ancora sul concetto di traduzione come rigenerazione

### ABSTRACT

Few are the investigations that reveal the African thought on translation, or rather, the African vision of translation. This essay aims at these objectives, as it insists, on the one hand, on translation-oriented criticism in the postcolonial, Francophone, sub-Saharan context and, on the other hand, on three women who, through their works and translations, raise crucial questions and locate Africa in the centre. The issues they tackle are of momentous importance for the development of a knowledge that generates harmony and balance in such a linguistically and aesthetically heterogeneous context.

KEYWORDS: Francophone Africa; sub-Saharan Africa; women and translation; postcolonial context.

[...] plus que d'un déficit d'image,  
c'est de celui d'une pensée et d'une production de ses  
propres métaphores du futur  
que souffre le continent africain. (Sarr 2016, 12)

L'interesse della traduttologia per l'Africa e in Africa non costituisce di per sé un fatto nuovo, se consideriamo quelle mutazioni linguistiche e letterarie che presentano un volto costantemente rinnovato alla prova traduttiva. Rare sono però le riflessioni capaci di restituire il pensiero africano sulla traduzione, o meglio, la visione africana della traduzione. Per fare ciò, il nostro saggio si collocherà all'interno di un più ampio campo d'indagine per insistere, da una parte, sulla critica traduttologica nel contesto postcoloniale francofono subsahariano e, dall'altra, sulle opere di tre donne che, grazie alle loro composizioni e traduzioni, sollevano interrogativi quanto mai necessari alla costruzione di un sapere in grado di generare armonia ed equilibrio in un simile contesto di eterogeneità linguistica e formale<sup>1</sup>.

## 1. Palinsesti traduttologici, o della traduzione come riparazione.

L'etimologia del verbo transitivo “tradurre”, dal prefisso latino *trans-*, “oltre”, e dal verbo *ducĕre* (da *dux*, *ducis*), “portare” e, dunque, “trasportare, trasferire”<sup>2</sup>, viene sintetizzata da Antoine Berman nell'efficace sintagma “mise en rapport” (Berman 1984, 16). Tale operazione apparentemente lineare, si complica però nel caso di opere ascrivibili all'Africa subsahariana per le quali il traduttore viene da sempre presentato come un “passeur dans l'embarras”, secondo la celebre formula di Jean Sevry (Sevry 2000).

Il caso delle autrici francofone che verranno qui presentate (Véronique Tadjo, Werewere Liking e Nash) ci pare stimolante in quanto esse vivono e scrivono in

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<sup>1</sup> Ci sia qui consentito di citare i due saggi con i quali abbiamo inaugurato questa ricerca. Si tratta dell'articolo del 2019 “L'absence d'une présence: du silence à la parole des femmes noires” (*Francofonia* 77: 105-125, numero co-diretto con Bernard Mouralis dal titolo *60 ans après le Deuxième Congrès des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs (Rome, 1959): l'héritage*) e dell'intervento “Women for a Pan-African translation and discourse” presentato il 6 giugno 2022 al convegno internazionale *European Colloquium on Gender & Translation* organizzato da Eleonora Federici, Eliana Maestri e Giulia Giorgi presso l'Università degli Studi di Ferrara (in corso di stampa).

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/ricerca/tradurre/>, ad *vocem* “tradurre” (consultato il 19/12/2023).

spazi multilingui e multiculturali in cui il francese si nutre di mutazioni e incontri. Il tratto saliente delle loro produzioni risiede nel fatto di porre al centro della problematica identitaria una riflessione sulla lingua e “sur la manière dont s’articulent les rapports [entre les] langues / littératures dans des contextes différents” (Gauvin 1997, 11). Il verbo “articuler”, nel senso di “joindre” per “connecter, enchaîner”, apre quesiti importanti sull’atto traduttivo di donne che vivono una situazione di “entre-plusieurs” lingue-culture e lanciano, ciascuna a suo modo, una meravigliosa sfida all’eterolinguismo (Denti 2017), ma questa volta dal cuore del problema in quanto esse siglano i propri risultati traduttivi.

La pluralità linguistica e culturale è il *fil rouge* che sottende questo tipo di produzioni, da cui le difficoltà insite nell’atto del tradurre, come nel gioco degli scacchi caro a Saussure (Saussure 1972, 168), poi ripreso da Eco nella sua *Introduzione agli Esercizi di stile* di Queneau (Eco 1983), perché la traduzione deve non solo “dire” (atto inteso nel senso della dimensione orizzontale), ma “fare”, secondo l’idea esplicitata da Meschonnic (Meschonnic 1999, 17), a indicare la restituzione delle ragioni testuali ed extratestuali, ovvero di quella poliedrica complessità che riconduce alla stratificazione progressiva della polifonia culturale esplicitata dal concetto della “thick translation” di Anthony Appiah (Appiah 1993) e, più in generale, negli studi di Paul Bandia allorché insiste sulla necessità di “accorder à l’éthique de la différence sa juste place dans la théorie et tenir compte des questions de la position traductive (translation position, ethics of location) et du contexte global d’échange culturel” (Bandia 2001, 136-37). E di etica appunto si tratta, intesa come una conoscenza profonda, capace di passare attraverso la “chair des mots” (Rancière 1998) per una resa che sappia “construire des comparables” (Ricœur 2004, 10) e, in ultima analisi, delineare un progetto di più ampio respiro che si spinga “oltre l’Occidente” (Bollettieri Bosinelli *et al.* 2009).

A tale proposito, Paul Bandia ha avanzato il concetto di riparazione pensando la traduzione postcoloniale come risarcimento, recupero, rivendicazione del debito culturale che si è venuto a creare per scrivere quella storia e quelle culture con l’obiettivo di valorizzarne le peculiarità. Riparazione significa allora restituzione della lingua imposta nel senso di sfida alla sua centralità imperiale.

Abbiamo scelto di concentrarci sulle opere di tre donne perché esse lasciano intravedere la creazione di uno spazio liminale che prelude a quella forma di transizione osmotica cara a Édouard Glissant secondo cui “Il n’est frontière qu’on n’outrepasse” (Glissant 2006), meglio esplicitata nella formula seguente:

“Traduire, c’est aussi échanger, diffuser et véhiculer des idées, des histoires d’une région à d’autres du vaste monde comme contribution à son évolution” (Huerdo Moreno *et al.*, 2023, 26).

Ed è questa l’idea che qui interessa, perché il nostro obiettivo è mostrare quel passo decisivo che questi esempi di traduttrici-attiviste arrivano a compiere grazie alla vastità e all’originalità della loro produzione, ma soprattutto al loro *engagement* nel recupero e nella difesa della propria matrice culturale, secondo una doppia dinamica rivolta al sud del mondo e collocata sull’asse comunicativo che collega idealmente quello stesso sud con il nord<sup>3</sup>. Come suggerito da Bernard Mouralis<sup>4</sup>, esse sembrano ripercorrere le due coordinate spaziali più frequentate, il nord e il sud, in modo scientemente rovesciato, per reinterpretarle secondo una direzione univoca che va dal sud al nord del mondo, con un esplicito invito a non attribuire importanza né all’uno né all’altro, ma al movimento e alla forza del suo emergere. In tutto questo, ci sembra di scorgere segnali forieri di modelli di attraversamento altri.

## 2. La traduzione come forza centrifuga nella prosa di Véronique Tadjo

Artista poliedrica, autrice di poesie, romanzi, libri per bambini e ragazzi, pittrice e illustratrice, Véronique Tadjo vanta una produzione attenta ai problemi socio-culturali che affliggono il continente africano inteso nella sua totalità (Tadjo 2017), dal recupero dei miti fondatori al valore delle maschere (Tadjo 2002), dall’importanza degli oggetti d’uso quotidiano (Tadjo 2002 e 2008) alle leggende africane che popolano le tradizioni orali (Tadjo 2005), fedele all’idea della necessaria trasversalità delle discipline e della condivisione dei saperi. Nata a Parigi ma cresciuta in Costa d’Avorio, la scrittrice si è addottorata in letteratura anglofona alla Sorbona di Parigi per poi vivere in paesi diversi, dal Kenya al Sud

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<sup>3</sup> Rebecca Ruth Gould e Kayvan Tahmasebian (2020) sviluppano la nozione di traduttore e interprete come attivista, ovvero portavoce e promotore del cambiamento politico. Aggiungiamo che i casi-studio scelti non rientrano nel volume del 2018 dal titolo *Donne in traduzione*, a cura di Elena Di Giovanni e Serenella Zanotti (Milano: Bompiani).

<sup>4</sup> La matrice che sottende l’intera opera è chiaramente africana come ammette il critico stesso asserendo che la forma del libro è dovuta alla riflessione generata dalla frequentazione dei “textes d’auteurs africains chez lesquels, dans la fiction comme dans l’essai, on peut observer une grande méfiance à l’égard des idées de source, de retour, de racine, d’identité” (Mouralis 2014, 180), nel senso di entità definite in maniera univoca.

Africa, dagli Stati Uniti al Regno Unito, perfettamente a suo agio fra quelle lingue-culture che la abitano da sempre, il baoulé del padre, il francese della madre e l'inglese che ha scelto di imparare.

Focalizzare la problematica traduttiva nel caso di Véronique Tadjò consente di ripensare alle questioni etiche sollevate dal suo sforzo di recuperare l'antico Sapere autoctono per trasferirlo nell'attualità con l'intento di creare connessioni e ponti fra il passato e il presente, in opere che poggiano su fondamenta capaci di superare le definizioni di prosa e poesia, oralità e scrittura, con l'obiettivo di esaltare la ricerca finalizzata all'impegno socio-pedagogico.

Il percorso linguistico che ha portato l'autrice dalla ricerca alla riscrittura dei miti, fino alle coloratissime illustrazioni realizzate con tratto deciso, rivela un talento non comune ed evidenzia una grande cura dei testi. Dall'insieme di questi elementi si riconosce la sua cifra autoriale, la cui originalità consiste nell'evidenziare la necessità di un percorso teso al raggiungimento dell'armonia, la cui unica condizione è che l'uomo si metta in ascolto della natura per riconquistarla (Tadjò *et al.* 2013). Una delle sue ultime opere, *En compagnie des hommes*, si sofferma sui contagi provocati da Ebola che, nel 2014, ha aggredito buona parte dell'ex Africa Occidentale Francese, dalla Guinea alla Sierra Leone, armonizzando le voci di nove personaggi i quali, uno dopo l'altro, raccontano il proprio rapporto con la malattia e con le sue conseguenze. L'ultima voce, quella definitiva, è di Baobab, "arbre premier, arbre éternel, arbre symbole" (Tadjò 2017, 23) che ascolta le parole dei suoi contemporanei e ricorda le confidenze dei loro antenati, soprattutto le discussioni sulla giustizia e la sopravvivenza del villaggio (163).

Scrivere per lei significa recuperare l'antica memoria per reinterpretarla, nel senso di estenderla alle esigenze dell'attualità. Fra i protagonisti, ritroviamo spesso figure della tradizione orale africana, in particolare nel volume dedicato a *Mamy Wata et le monstre*, 1993, o Mummy Water nel mondo anglofono, una sorta di sirena esaltata per i suoi poteri magici di salvezza, di cui Véronique Tadjò crea le illustrazioni e firma le prodezze in francese per poi autotradursi in inglese nella stessa pagina, a significare la condivisione di questo mito e del suo valore sull'intero continente (Tadjò 2000). Oltre all'impegno personale di autrice e disegnatrice, vi è anche lo sforzo della ricerca all'interno della produzione letteraria africana come nel caso della raccolta *Talking Drums*, antologia di poesie anglofone e francofone, pubblicate inizialmente in inglese con la sua traduzione e

le sue rappresentazioni grafiche, per poi riproporle in un progetto di traduzione interamente in italiano per la casa editrice Giannino Stoppiani di Bologna (Tadjo 2000 e 2005). Scrittrice dallo stile personalissimo e intenso, a volte apocalittico, Véronique Tadjo sottolinea la sua decisa appartenenza alla storia africana intesa nella sua totalità (Memel-Foté 1991, 270), come quando ripercorre la leggenda nota fin dal Settecento, della giovanissima regina Abla Pokou che, originaria dell'attuale Ghana, sacrifica il suo unico figlio gettandolo nel fiume Comoé per salvare il suo popolo e giungere in Costa d'Avorio dove fonderà il regno baoulé.

L'autrice sembra ricreare sulla pagina una mirabile avventura non solo attraverso l'amplificazione dello spazio e del tempo, ma anche grazie ai suoi disegni e colori. Se da un lato è vero che si sente il profondo impegno per un viaggio creativo, dall'altro sarebbe riduttivo considerarlo unicamente come uno spostamento, in quanto proprio il viaggio significa mettere le cose in prospettiva e tenere tutte le fila, in un intreccio di voci che evidenziano il movimento da cui emergono. La poliedricità della sua scrittura si riflette nella pluralità della traduzione che si fa interlinguistica (francese e inglese che si fondono e si specchiano nella stessa pagina) e intersemiotica insieme (di testo che si arricchisce grazie alle illustrazioni) per un'arte totale intesa come tessitura, il cui "fil rouge" è riconducibile a una forma di dialogo costante, tanto più necessario in quanto esso abbraccia tutto il continente a indicare così la via di un possibile sviluppo duraturo e pacifico<sup>5</sup>.

### **3. La traduzione come forza centripeta nel teatro di Werewere Liking**

Nelle pièces di Werewere Liking sfilano strumenti, costumi, marionette giganti e scenografie interamente realizzati all'interno della sua micro-realtà panafricana il *Village Ky-Yi*, il cui nome, nella lingua *bassa* del Camerun, significa "sapere ultimo"<sup>6</sup>. Qui trovano da sempre accoglienza artisti provenienti da ogni angolo

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<sup>5</sup> Proprio la ricerca di dialogo insita nell'opera di Véronique Tadjo è stata al centro del convegno internazionale organizzato in suo onore all'Università di Johannesburg dal 23 al 26 novembre 2013 dal titolo *Véronique Tadjo: Literary Postcoloniality, Post-Femminity or Asserted Africanness?* Gli atti sono stati pubblicati nel volume edito nel 2016 da Sarah Davies Cordova e Désiré Kabwe-Segatti, *Écrire, traduire, peindre VÉRONIQUE TADJO Writing, Translating, Painting* (Paris: Présence Africaine).

<sup>6</sup> Originaria del Camerun, paese bilingue, francese e inglese, Werewere Liking giunge ad Abiadjan nel 1985 per dedicarsi inizialmente alla ricerca etnografica sul campo i cui primi risultati sono stati pubblicati nella sua opera del 1987 *Marionnettes du Mali* (Paris: NEA-Arhis).

dell’Africa per dare vita, attraverso la fusione e l’armonizzazione dei loro saperi e delle loro pratiche, a un progetto di arte totale, in una condivisione che raccoglie le tradizioni autoctone per riproporle in chiave moderna.

Di questa autrice di teatro, poesia e prosa, pittrice, cantante e polistrumentista, ricordiamo in particolare due pièces che ci sembrano maggiormente rappresentative nel caso della traduzione. *Un Touareg s’est marié à une Pygmée* (Liking 1992) è un’epopea *mvett* fondata sulla musica che “n’est pas mélodie mais message” (Pacéré 1991, 87) e che si basa su una sorta di arpa-chitarra a cinque corde di fondamentale importanza per la cultura tradizionale africana. Il protagonista, simbolo di ribellione e di nomadismo, parte dal deserto in cerca dell’acqua e percorre i variegati spazi africani attraverso un viaggio musicale che lo spingerà fino al cuore del continente. Ogni nuova tappa prevede l’inserimento di un canto in una diversa lingua regionale, nell’ordine *bété, malinké, fon, bassa, lingala*, che l’autrice ricerca nell’*oralité*, trascrive e inserisce nella *pièce*, in una moltitudine di suoni presenti sulla pagina per rispondere all’esigenza di dare voce a tutti quei popoli nella loro eterogeneità linguistico-culturale, oltre che fisico-spaziale. L’unione perfetta di questa terra “plurielle, [...] multiple, [...] unique” (Liking 1992, 22) si realizza soltanto dopo il superamento delle nove frontiere o “barreaux de ségrégation” (11), sintagma con cui Werewere Liking stigmatizza la parcellizzazione cartografica subita dall’Africa in epoca coloniale. L’unione fra il Tuareg e la Pigmea rimanda a quella del deserto e dell’acqua, della *brousse* e della foresta, lasciando sperare in un finale radioso capace di rifondare l’esistenza dell’intero continente su quei valori di cui esso sa farsi portatore per “jouer sa partition / au concert des nations” (16) e testimoniare così la centralità del dialogo fra realtà distanti. Il confronto si fa sintesi nel finale in cui il Tuareg e la Pigmea simboleggiano la fusione dei contrari con la loro “danse de séduction qui rappelle les distances parcourues par chacun dans la quête de l’autre, le plaisir de l’effort individuel et collectif pour cette réalisation” (39).

La medesima polifonia si manifesta in *Médée. Les risques d’une réputation* (Liking 2006) in cui l’artista riprende le versioni di Euripide, Seneca e Christa Wolf per rielaborarle e aggiungere un convegno di *conteuses* che analizzano il mito, moltiplicando le voci presenti sulla scena e nel testo in apertura e in chiusura della *pièce*. Lo spettacolo allestito al Teatro Baretto di Torino nel 2005 prevedeva sette donne venute da altrettanti paesi il cui incontro si verificava soprattutto a livello espressivo, poiché le loro lingue, rispettivamente il francese, il *guéré* del nord della

Costa d'Avorio, il napoletano e il serbo, riempivano la scena quando Medea scagliava la propria maledizione contro la gente di Corinto che accusava di ogni sventura lei, capro espiatorio perfetto in quanto strega e straniera. Nel testo della sua pièce, stratificata e complessa, perché caratterizzata da un gioco di specchi e rimandi che spaziano dalle relazioni sul mito alle voci del mito stesso, Werewere Liking rilegge la tradizione classica secondo i dettami di quella africana rifiutando sia l'infanticidio che la stigmatizzazione dello straniero. Al plurilinguismo delle attrici consentito su un palco in cui la musica, il canto e la gestualità accompagnavano la comprensione del pubblico, corrisponde nella versione siglata dall'autrice, un canto in *bassa*, lingua delle sue origini, seguita dall'autotraduzione in francese (Liking 2006, 30-4) a chiudere la scena centrale tanto più importante in quanto Medea risponde direttamente ai colpevoli del rifiuto subito. Questa sua parola fulminea e urlata, può scaturire solo dalle profondità della lingua madre che, per questa sua dirompenza in quel preciso momento quanto mai denso di tensione e di *pathos*, è l'unica in grado di emergere davanti al pericolo e di scuotere il destinatario fino a fargli toccare l'apice del suo dolore di donna e di madre.

Dando vita a una produzione tanto complessa, Werewere Liking abbraccia tutto il continente e offre un esempio quanto mai significativo della dimensione multiculturale che la anima, essenzialmente panafricana, soprattutto attraverso l'amplificazione delle lingue e dei linguaggi articolati in modo sinergico. Il segreto delle modalità traduttive qui indagate sembra essere quello di non trascurare alcuna variazione insita in questo mondo polifonico in cui tutto converge verso la conquista di una totalità difficilmente declinabile altrimenti.

#### **4. La traduzione come forza unificatrice nella musica di Nash**

Giovane *rappeuse* originaria della Costa d'Avorio, Nash compone i propri brani musicali unicamente nell'argot giovanile locale denominato *nouchi*, riuscendo così ad imporsi in un milieu prettamente maschile e vantando una carriera di oltre vent'anni di attività. L'artista, nata e cresciuta in uno dei quartieri popolari di Abidjan, dichiara in un'intervista organizzata dalla trasmissione radiofonica *Couleurs Tropicales* di Radio France Internationale nel 2013, il suo amore incondizionato per questa modalità espressiva che è "tout un ensemble: une philosophie, un état d'esprit, une manière de voir les choses" (Lavaine 2013).



Nonostante la realtà linguistica del suo paese sia dominata dal francese<sup>7</sup>, il *nouchi* “a vu le jour au début des années 1980 dans le milieu des jeunes déscolarisés” (Kadi 2013, 1). Il sostantivo, composto da *nou* e *chi*, letteralmente i baffi in *dioula*, cioè adolescente, si riferisce sia alla lingua che ai suoi parlanti, noti come *Nouchis*, ma potrebbe anche trattarsi della *verlanisation* del sintagma francese “chez nous”, nel senso di autoctono (Kiessling et al. 2004, 312), in quanto espressione di una gioventù che si sente smarrita e senza speranza di fronte alla durezza della disoccupazione e della precarietà, oltre che elemento di resistenza alla lingua standard prerogativa dell’*élite* ritenuta responsabile della crisi imperante. Una forma di *métissage linguistique* come il *nouchi* che mescola francese, inglese e lingue autoctone in una vasta eterogeneità, ad esempio nel verbo *enjailler* (piacere) dall’inglese *to enjoy*, nasce dall’innovazione e dalla devianza. Se, almeno inizialmente, esso era considerato peculiarità di coloro che venivano rifiutati dal sistema scolastico, si è poi diffuso fino a coinvolgere l’intera gioventù urbana per la quale “il s’est quelque peu différencié en raison de l’environnement naturel et culturel, de l’influence des parlers locaux, des divers substrats linguistiques et... de la volonté politique” (Aboa Abia 2009, 2).

Il successo di Nash è divenuto inarrestabile proprio grazie al potere moltiplicatore della musica che ha fatto del *nouchi* il proprio “vecteur de dénonciation sociale et de combat” (Kadi 2013, 2) e ha conquistato i diversi ceti della popolazione ivoriana, perfettamente in grado di comprenderlo e di utilizzarlo anche in contesti non marginali. Esso non risponde più alle premesse iniziali, ma consente di stabilire relazioni fra locutori confrontati con esigenze comunicative di varia natura, soprattutto in un quadro socio-politico dominato dall’instabilità, dal potere di Internet e dalla diaspora dei migranti ivoriani per i quali costituisce un elemento di riconoscimento e di condivisione una volta approdati all’estero (Gadet et al. 2015, 95).

Molti cantanti hanno fatto ricorso al *nouchi* nei testi delle loro canzoni, ma nessuno si è mai spinto tanto lontano quanto Nash che ne ha radicalizzato l’uso rendendolo esclusivo per la sua produzione e arrivando persino a tradurre *L’Abidjanaise*, l’inno nazionale ivoriano, in quell’idioma<sup>8</sup>, decidendo così di

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<sup>7</sup> Il francese è la lingua ufficiale della Repubblica di Costa d’Avorio come recita l’articolo 29 dell’ultimo testo costituzionale adottato il 23 luglio 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Il brano, inserito nell’album *Panpanly ivoire* del 2012, si trova disponibile al seguente indirizzo <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcGvJ3C5dWw> (consultato il 13/12/2023).

sublimarne l'uso come lingua veicolare ivoriana. Questa sua scelta di alto valore politico sembra rispondere concretamente al monito di Felwine Sarr che insiste sul valore della musica per i giovani africani in quanto, proprio attraverso questo tramite, “s’exprime un appel à une conscience africaine libre et fière d’elle-même, prenant son destin en main et se mettant au travail pour construire le continent” (Sarr 2016, 95).

## **5. Spunti (non) conclusivi, o della traduzione come rigenerazione**

C'è un “tout se tient” in questa ricerca che, seppure appena iniziata, contempla già vari piani d'analisi secondo i quali abbiamo presentato la traduzione in senso propriamente linguistico, nel passaggio da una lingua a un'altra, da un linguaggio a un altro, e nell'alternarsi delle modalità semantiche per il trasferimento di un discorso di oralità in un discorso di scrittura. Tutte le opere esaminate rivelano una conoscenza “molare” (Eco 2003, 191) dell'intricata rete di relazioni dalla quale muovono, con caratteristiche editoriali e scelte traspositive talvolta molto esplicite in quanto, pur utilizzando strumenti diversi, costruiscono narrazioni che impongono l'allargamento dei confini dello sguardo all'altro, facendo della traduzione un luogo fisico, una tribuna di scambio e una materia di riflessione. Queste opere di incontro e di confronto interdisciplinare diventano sede sperimentale di esperienze di traduzione interlinguistica e intersemiotica, secondo le formule di interpretazione promosse da Jakobson (Jakobson 1994, 56-64), in un lavoro concreto e critico che si concentra, di volta in volta, sull'importanza della scelta legata al contesto culturale, alla disamina del testo e alla sua restituzione.

Dalla presentazione dei tre casi scelti di donne-orchestra il cui operato si distingue per essere di volta in volta policromo, poliedrico e polifonico, emerge un atto traduttivo articolato in ricerca e riflessione, scrittura e riscrittura, traduzione e autotraduzione, capace di produrre un dialogo che amplifica le forme linguistiche e culturali fino a dilatarne i confini, come annunciavano le premesse dalle quali siamo partiti. Traduttrici di lingue e di culture, queste donne si impongono grazie a una “mise en fonctionnement de la langue par un acte individuel d'utilisation” (Benveniste 2008, 80), offrendo un contributo personale per la definizione e moltiplicazione di spazi da sempre caratterizzati da una relazione problematica fra lingua e linguaggi, storia e letteratura, memoria e

identità, perché in essi il passato è un “trou” o una “tabula rasa”, di cui urge raccontare attraverso una parola scevra da qualsiasi forma di diacronia lineare, ma che “commence depuis la première racine et [...] va bourgeonnant sans arrêt jusqu’aux nuages” (Glissant 1964, 170), come suggerisce il rizoma di Édouard Glissant<sup>9</sup>.

Proprio quest’immagine offre una chiave per la rilettura dei progetti di traduzione appena proposti in cui non si tratta solo di riparazione, come sostiene Paul Bandia citato in apertura di questo saggio (Bandia 2008). All’atto riparatorio che non nasconde le tracce di una “réalité trouée” (Samoyault 2020, 230), si associa infatti un processo di rigenerazione reso possibile grazie a quella spinta propulsiva che emerge dall’articolazione di modalità di co-costruzione del testo, oltre che da originali connessioni per una condivisione del significato da parte di destinatari quanto mai eterogenei dal punto di vista linguistico, culturale e generazionale, e custodi di un potenziale in grado di indicare la via per trasformazioni più profonde. Simili produzioni rispondono all’esigenza postcoloniale introdotta da Achille Mbembe quando insiste sul pluralismo culturale ed epistemologico, sul sincretismo antisistemico, sulla sintesi creativa attraverso metodi ibridi che si rivelano fecondi per porre interrogativi altri e determinare così nuovi saperi (Mbembe 2006).

Se è vero che il tempo postcoloniale si caratterizza come momento necessario alla reinvenzione, queste opere sono capaci di guardare al tempo passato e futuro gettando una luce diversa sul rapporto delle autrici con lo spazio, grazie ad un preciso invito a sperimentare modelli di attraversamento inconsueti. Mettendo in prospettiva il modo in cui le tre categorie del cercare, costruire e tradurre vengono articolate da queste donne, ci pare che la questione della dimensione politica, intesa come consapevolezza che si crea attraverso la conoscenza che la letteratura offre di situazioni, problemi e persone – o, se si preferisce, dell’effetto politico prodotto da tali modalità creative –, venga dilatata tramite scelte traduttive che si spingono fino a rigenerare un universo culturale inteso nella sua totalità. Tutto ciò è reso possibile grazie alla loro capacità di dominare l’entropia

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<sup>9</sup> “Quand j’ai abordé la question [de l’identité], je suis parti de la distinction opérée par Deleuze et Guattari, entre la notion de racine unique et la notion de rhizome. Deleuze et Guattari, dans un des chapitres de *Mille Plateaux* [...], soulignent cette différence. Ils l’établissent du point de vue du fonctionnement de la pensée, la pensée de la racine et la pensée du rhizome. La racine unique est celle qui tue autour d’elle alors que le rhizome est la racine qui s’étend à la rencontre d’autres racines. J’ai appliqué cette image au principe d’identité” (Glissant 1996, 59).

per determinare compartecipazione e promuovere quell'etica del tradurre che si materializza in un dialogo costante, necessario a percorrere in lungo e in largo il mondo *éclaté* di matrice africana al fine di ricompattarlo, dandogli ancora vita a partire dalle sue fondamenta.

Quest'idea di rigenerazione può allora rinviare alla linfa vitale apportata dal testo di partenza al testo di arrivo, può farsi affermazione identitaria sotto il profilo psicologico e sotto quello sociologico, ma anche suggerire quel desiderio di recupero insito nella questione etica cui abbiamo accennato all'inizio del nostro lavoro. Lo stesso concetto sta al cuore delle preoccupazioni di Felwine Sarr (Sarr 2016, 60) allorché illustra l'esigenza di analisi, resilienza e rinascita del continente il quale, dopo secoli di colonizzazione, si trova essenzialmente a lottare per risollevare il proprio futuro economico (47-87). Il medesimo pensiero viene espresso anche da Anthony Mangeon nelle conclusioni del volume *L'Afrique au futur. Le renversement des mondes* (Mangeon 2022) in cui sceglie "l'étude d'une thématique, les futurs africains, qui traverse les grandes problématiques du genre trans-fictionnel et de la prospective" (266-67), perché capace di liberarsi del pessimismo postcoloniale se è vero che ogni discorso autenticamente volto al futuro non può essere che ottimista. Per "marquer la fin d'une modernité amnésique" (Nepveu 1988, 202-03) occorre produrre uno spostamento che va dal riconoscere l'altro al costruire, generare, farsi altro, in un'operazione il cui obiettivo è forse meno importante del movimento che viene a crearsi in opere capaci di ridisegnare quell'"*écologie de l'ici*" (209) in cui l'*ici* non è più luogo ma pratica, motivo per il quale la traduzione costituisce da sempre un "phénomène central et hautement signifiant" (218).

E assai significativa ci pare la paziente opera di tessitura al femminile presa in esame, perché capace di ricollocare l'Africa al centro. Queste autrici sembrano rivolgersi al proprio universo culturale con il preciso intento di rovesciare quella prospettiva solitamente ammantata di un'aura negativa, come ricorda Felwine Sarr nell'apertura di *Afrotopia* ("Aborder une pensée portant sur le continent africain est une tâche ardue tant sont tenaces poncifs, clichés, et pseudo-certitudes qui, comme un halo de brume, nimbent sa réalité", Sarr 2016, 9), e offrire così una rinnovata visione del mondo attraverso la riflessione, la pratica e la sperimentazione delle potenzialità offerte dall'atto del tradurre, questa volta realizzato dall'interno.

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## Tre grandi traduttori: Poggioli, Traverso e Bo

### ABSTRACT:

This essay explores the role and the work of the intellectual as translator, looking at three relevant writers and essayists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century based in the city of Florence. I consider three main scholars and protagonists of the cultural debate during the Italian fascist regime, such as Renato Poggioli, a specialist of Russian language and culture, Leone Traverso, a classical and German philologist, and Carlo Bo, a huge expert in the Spanish and French linguistic domains. These eminent scholars are analyzed as translators, trying to define and elaborate the contribution they brought to the complex field of translation studies.

KEYWORDS: translation; translator; Florence; Hermetism; European literature.

## 1. Quale traduzione?

Prima ancora di Umberto Eco, che con il volume *La ricerca della lingua perfetta nella cultura europea* del 1993 raccordava millenni di storia per dimostrare l'impossibilità di una lingua universale, nel 1975 George Steiner (*Dopo Babele*), partendo proprio dal mito biblico dell'ineffabile Torre di Babele (Genesi, 11-13), disquisiva sul tema della dispersione del pensiero umano negli intricati rivoli dei molteplici sistemi linguistici. La disubbidienza degli uomini alla volontà del Dio ieratico di Mosè aveva insomma portato al castigo dell'incomunicabilità<sup>1</sup> (Steiner, 2019 [1975]).

Ancora oggi quella simbologia ancestrale regge se non solo non si è riusciti ad apprestare le dovute garanzie professionali e giuridiche alla figura del traduttore, ma se – come afferma il linguista francese Georges Mounin nell'attacco del suo snello ed essenziale lavoro sulla storia della traduzione – “per lunghi secoli la traduzione è esistita senza nessuna regola” (Mounin 2006 [1966], 1).

Ora, mettere mano a una materia ricca di teorie, correnti, implicazioni teoriche e pratiche complesse è compito sicuramente arduo. Quello che si può dire con certezza è che la traduzione moderna ha definito dei campi di applicazione e delle distinzioni di base che oggi valgono in senso generale ma che sono ben lungi dall'aver risolto la ‘Babele’ delle traduzioni. Di sicuro, l'irrisolta questione degli approcci traduttivi ha arricchito di significati le lingue portandole a contaminarsi tra di loro per una costante trasposizione o trasmissione di segni, espressioni, lemmi (Fabbri 2000, 82).

Bisogna pensare – sempre seguendo il discorso di Eco – che l'Europa, dominata un tempo dalle tre grandi lingue sacre in cui è stata volta la Bibbia – l'ebraico, il greco ed il latino –, le quali avevano dato l'impressione di poter

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<sup>1</sup> Della confusione e commistione delle lingue che avrebbero dato vita alla traduzione come mediazione di senso, parla anche nel volume *Dopo Babele* il semiologo Paolo Fabbri. Sulla scia delle affermazioni di Jacques Derrida – per il quale l'incomunicabilità iniziale degli uomini a seguito della cessazione del linguaggio universale dato da Dio è l'atto di nascita delle lingue e per cui ogni traduzione è diventata necessaria e improbabile (Derrida 1982) – non è più possibile sottrarsi al compito di intercedere per traslare ed interpretare i significati altrui. “C'è una versione ‘nera’ di Babele. Gli uomini hanno perduto l'unità organica, hanno frammentato l'unica, suprema parola. Ma cosa hanno assaporato gli uomini nella differenza biblica? La disparatezza dei linguaggi” (Fabbri 2000, 71).

divenire delle lingue uniche o universali più per motivi teologici e politico-religiosi che propriamente linguistici, ha avuto, prima ancora di una frammentazione in ristretti quadri nazionali, una diaspora di idiomi. Non a caso la torre di Babele comincia ad essere citata a cascata dalle versioni bibliche dell'XI secolo (Eco 2008).

Con l'instaurazione delle lingue volgari e la dissoluzione dell'unità dell'Impero Romano d'Occidente, iniziano a nascere le prime figure di traduttori e diplomatici in grado di mediare tra potenze diverse. Il primo testo è – non a caso – *Les Serments de Strasbourg* dell'862 d.c. con cui i due figli di Ludovico il Pio (a sua volta figlio legittimo di Carlo Magno), Carlo il Calvo e Ludovico il Germanico, si giuravano reciproca fedeltà nella sistemazione e divisione del regno carolingio in disfacimento, proclamando i solenni atti di natura politica l'uno nella rispettiva lingua volgare dell'altro: per Carlo l'alto-tedesco antico (o germanico) mentre per Ludovico il proto-francese (o lingua romanza).

Ancora nel XIX secolo troviamo in Russia – nazione dove, per la grande varietà sociolinguistica, il problema della traduzione è particolarmente avvertito – gruppi di specialisti a servizio degli Zar che assurgono alla funzione di dignitari di Stato, con l'incarico di interloquire con altri funzionari di altre nazioni e soprattutto di trasporre e fare conoscere opere letterarie di autori russi.

Nel Novecento, pur facendo tesoro delle teorie avanzate nel corso dei secoli, si è cercato di trovare un punto d'incontro tra le cosiddette “belle infedeli” che, nella libertà delle interpretazioni, si sono rivelate troppo sbilanciate verso la comprensione del lettore, ossia verso la dimensione culturale del suo tempo, e le traduzioni che, pur nell'impiego delle strutture formali della lingua di arrivo, hanno conservato il tono e l'espressività della lingua di partenza. Ad ogni modo, anche il XX secolo “non ha ancora dato quella teoria scientifica della traduzione di cui ormai si sente il bisogno: non ha ridotto ad unità tutta questa materia tanto ricca.” (Mounin 2006 [1965], 66).

Il problema risulta particolarmente avvertito anche da un grande sociologo della cultura come Walter Benjamin, il quale ben sottolinea come la traduzione sia un'operazione di costruzione di significati stratificatasi nel tempo e frutto del confronto tra lingue e culture differenti. Secondo Benjamin il fine di un'opera letteraria e la sua intellegibilità si precisano ulteriormente e meglio

nella pratica traduttiva. La traduzione come trasposizione non è altro, in effetti, che la produttiva congiunzione di due sistemi linguistici e comunicativi i quali, al pari delle società, si accrescono nel tempo. “Anzi, mentre la parola del poeta sopravvive nella sua lingua, anche la più grande delle traduzioni è destinata a entrare (e a essere assorbita) nello sviluppo della lingua, e a perire nel suo rinnovamento” (Benjamin 2008 [1923], 504). Essendo le lingue in incessante evoluzione, aperte a continui interscambi e a imprevedibili contaminazioni, esse attraverso la traduzione finiscono, non solo per arricchirsi e potenziarsi di senso, ma anche per trasformarsi. “La traduzione è così lontana dall’essere la sorda equazione di due lingue morte, che – fra tutte le forme – proprio a essa tocca come compito specifico di avvertire e tenere presente quella maturità postuma della parola straniera, e i dolori di gestazione della propria” (Ibid.). Compito del traduttore è anche quello di sapere canalizzare tali mutazioni e di vitalizzare, così facendo, la lingua ad quem (la lingua madre verso cui si traduce). Benjamin cita, non a caso, alcuni grandi traduttori in lingua tedesca dei secoli passati che hanno contribuito alla diffusione e modernizzazione del loro idioma nazionale, spezzando i “limiti annosi della propria lingua” (Ivi, 509)<sup>2</sup>. La

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<sup>2</sup>Tra questi grandi innovatori, capaci di estendere gli orizzonti del tedesco, vi sono Lutero, Voß, Hölderlin, George. A proposito di Lutero, è interessante notare la maniera in cui il teologo protestante mette mano alla restituzione delle sacre scritture, in particolare il Nuovo Testamento, il cosiddetto “September Testament” (“Testamento di Settembre”), pubblicato nel 1522, come primo atto di un lungo lavoro che porterà alla traduzione integrale della Bibbia nel 1534. Nel 1531, nel quadro di una così intensa e fervente attività di recupero dei testi sacri, esce la Lettera del tradurre: una lunga dissertazione, illustrazione e difesa pro domo sua delle ragioni dell’accurato lavoro esegetico, filologico e linguistico di Lutero contro la schiera dei suoi detrattori. Tradurre da una lingua in un’altra, per Lutero, non è sufficiente nella misura in cui le parole non riescono a fare luce sui significati che esse veicolano, i quali, dopo essere stati adeguatamente accolti nella lingua di origine, debbono essere altrettanto efficacemente trasmessi nella lingua di arrivo. “Arbitro del successo non sarà nient’altro che la chiarezza del nuovo testo ottenuto” (Bonfatti 1998, 15). Lo sforzo prodotto nell’inseguire le possibilità offerte dalle lingue in quanto sistemi aperti e affini, e per questo contaminabili, rientra nelle considerazioni sulla traduzione tanto di Martin Lutero quanto di Walter Benjamin. “Nel tradurre mi sono adoperato per rendere in un tedesco puro e chiaro. [...] E fin troppo spesso ci è capitato di cercare e ricercare una parola due, tre, quattro settimane, talvolta senza trovarla proprio” (Lutero 1998 [1531], 53). Una parte delle argomentazioni della Lettera del tradurre vertono, dunque, non senza accesi toni di sarcasmo, sulle difficoltà incontrate nel rendere la lettura dei testi il più possibile agevole e fruibile pur tra le difficoltà e le insidie incontrate. “Quale arte e quale fatica sia tradurre, io l’ho provato davvero; per questo non tollero che mi si giudichi e mi si biasimi da parte di asini, asini papisti o asini quadrupedi, che non vi si sono cimentati affatto” (Ivi, 61). Nel suo romanzo *La vita agra*, Bianciardi, traduttore a sua volta, si ricollega alla tradizione di questi dotti premoderni i quali “facevano le cose per farle, e trasportando da lingue ignote il pensiero in lingua nota, intendevano renderle intelleggibili a’ più” (Bianciardi 2013 [1962], 125).

traduzione può arricchire un'opera e restituire tanto dignità e pregnanza al testo fonte, senza tradirne lo spirito, quanto adeguarsi alle esigenze comunicative e le implicazioni di senso della lingua di arrivo, tenendo assieme le aspettative della fedeltà letterale al testo, laddove possibile ed ipotizzabile, con quelle della chiarezza e della comprensione. Anzi, cercando di non annullare dei due elementi le differenze e le cifre stilistiche, semiotiche, culturali ed etnologiche (Terracini 1983, Venuti 1999 [1994]). “Giacché il problema del tradurre è in realtà il problema stesso dello scrivere e il traduttore ne sta al centro, forse ancor più dell'autore” (Fruttero e Lucentini 2007 [2003], 60).

## **2. Il traduttore nella Firenze degli anni Trenta**

Firenze, sin dalla fine dell'Ottocento, in concomitanza anche con il suo ruolo di capitale d'Italia dal 1865 al 1871, assume una funzione predominante, soprattutto in seno alle 'Patrie Lettere', e assurge al ruolo di città fondamentale nell'ambito della cultura italiana. Assieme a Milano, ma in maniera molto più incisiva, diviene il crocevia di movimenti di idee e di scambi intellettuali. Tali contaminazioni si devono indubbiamente all'influenza dei caffè, come luoghi di confronto, e alle riviste dell'epoca, al centro del grande dibattito, non solo culturale ma anche politico e sociale, in atto nel paese. A detta di Carlo Bo, in quei tempi, “le riviste erano espressioni di piccoli gruppi, erano una specie di lettera circolare che si mandava agli amici delle altre città e che trovava poi casualmente nei vari centri della provincia una rispondenza, una risonanza” (Bo 1986, 179). Esse contribuiscono a mutare il contesto culturale della nazione, sorretto dai continui richiami all'ordine e alla tradizione, sostenuto dall'ottusa retorica e l'asfissiante propaganda politica del regime fascista. Nascono nuovi 'fogli' in grado di fuoriuscire con intraprendenza e coraggio dalle coordinate di pensiero imposte dalla ideologia imperante: *Letteratura*, *Solaria*, *Il Frontespizio*, *Campo di Marte* e, prima ancora, *Il Leonardo* e *La Voce*, destinato a diventare uno dei maggiori periodici del Novecento. Con l'inizio dell'età contemporanea, anzi, Firenze si impone come città di respiro europeo, in stretto contatto con i cambiamenti, le tensioni, i rivolgimenti intellettuali in atto nel vecchio continente. Vi si inseriscono polemisti, filosofi e scrittori del calibro di Prezzolini, Soffici, Papini che forniscono un importante contributo alla modernizzazione del panorama letterario italiano.

Quest'opera fondamentale viene portata avanti, tra gli anni Trenta e Quaranta del XX secolo, da una nuova schiera di autori, impropriamente definita 'ermetica', in quanto molto eterogenea al suo interno e non facilmente etichettabile, di cui faranno parte anche Renato Poggioli, Leone Traverso e Carlo Bo. In buona sostanza, viene maturando nel contesto fiorentino, ricco di riviste, di caffè letterari (emblematico il caso delle "Giubbe Rosse"), di librerie formidabili come la "Seeber", una nuova ed eclettica figura di letterato – legata alla comune matrice europea riconducibile alla tradizione tracciata dal Simbolismo francese – che vede riunite le comuni ascendenze dello scrittore, del saggista e del traduttore. Attraverso una sorta di tacito lavoro d'insieme, uomini di cultura come Poggioli, Traverso e Bo, assieme ad amici e sodali del calibro di Berti, Bigongiari, Gatto, Landolfi, Luzi, Macrì, avevano finito per dividersi, in un'immaginaria geografia spirituale e culturale, il territorio delle scoperte letterarie.

Questa schiera di letterati a tutto tondo apre di fatto l'Italia – minata da provincialismi e retrograde prese di posizione – agli inediti scenari della cultura europea. "Grazie agli stimoli di un gusto diverso, grazie alla partecipazione di un'intera famiglia si rifiutava il concetto tutto casalingo di una letteratura a dimensione nazionale" e si aprono le porte ad un enorme lavoro di esegesi critica e creazione poetico-letteraria attraverso la traduzione di numerosi autori, rendendo Firenze "un nuovo centro ideale nell'ambito della cultura europea che stava per arrivare alla conclusione della sua prima stagione, Firenze come filtro e come ultimo appuntamento della cultura che stava per soccombere sotto gli orrori e il disordine della nuova guerra" (Bo 1994, 194-95).

La traduzione segue il percorso di un quotidiano esercizio di lettura e di riflessione critica assumendo i contorni di una pratica naturalmente connaturata alla reciproca stima ed al sentimento di amicizia e collaborazione che legava tutti questi bei nomi della cultura italiana. Datasi una letteratura intesa – a detta di Bo – come condizione altamente morale ed ontologica, non poteva essere diversamente.

Nelle frequentazioni assidue che si susseguono al caffè "San Marco", nei pressi della Facoltà di Lettere e, successivamente, presso la direzione dell'editrice Vallecchi di Firenze, nella storica sede di Via dei Mille, matura la formazione di almeno un paio di generazioni di scrittori che fa delle parole uno strumento di attiva opposizione all'ufficialità del dogma totalitario fascista.

Renato Poggioli, uno dei decani del gruppo, dà un contributo fondamentale alla disciplina della slavistica: appartiene, in ordine di tempo, alla seconda generazione di studiosi di lingua e cultura russa dopo i 'pionieri' Ettore Lo Gatto e Giovanni Maver. Leone Traverso, finissimo filologo e brillante accademico, riprende prima i grandi tragici greci (Euripide, Eschilo, Sofocle) e poi gli autori tedeschi dell'Otto e Novecento (Rilke su tutti), mentre Carlo Bo apre il campo alle traduzioni di alcuni grandi poeti spagnoli (tra cui Garcia Lorca, di cui diventa uno dei primi traduttori in Italia) e degli amati francesi (in particolare Maritain e Bernanos).

Esperti nel campo delle letterature comparate, esteti finissimi, docenti di chiara fama, profondi conoscitori delle lingue, queste tre figure di intellettuali legano al vasto retroterra storico-critico una rara capacità di resa stilistica delle opere tradotte. Tutto nasce da un'estesa formazione umanistica che permette loro di muoversi su registri linguistici e generi tra loro molto diversi. Compilatori di antologie, a questi uomini di cultura si deve una visione allargata della letteratura, centrata sugli aspetti della creazione artistica, dell'interpretazione critica, della ricerca filologica, della trasposizione di testi spesso liberati dalle costrizioni di senso. Il tutto all'interno di un discorso coerente dove le varie parti si tengono assieme come nella concezione della lingua in quanto insieme coerente di segni postulata da Ferdinand de Saussure (Barthes 1974 [1964]). La scelta degli autori, la loro presentazione, la selezione degli scritti sono spesso dettate non da mere rivisitazioni storico-sociologiche fini a se stesse, ma dalle ragioni profonde – soprattutto spirituali – che muovono un determinato scrittore verso un certo tipo di letteratura (Pautasso 1994).

### **3. Poggioli e la tradizione lirica russa**

Poggioli appartiene alla migliore stagione fiorentina fin qui tratteggiata. Un autentico trascinatore per tutti coloro che in quel contesto si cimentarono con le letterature straniere (proprio a partire da Traverso e Bo). Lo stesso Bo ne ricorderà la ricchezza di approcci in termini di stimoli, innovazioni, freschezza e sguardo. Per Poggioli la letteratura, e la cultura più in generale, resta un libero esercizio di coscienza e conoscenza scevra da ogni condizionamento ideologico.

Poggioli è stato, dunque, per gli scrittori dell'Ermetismo (corrente letteraria sviluppatasi in maniera spontanea e senza un manifesto estetico riconoscibile) e per tutto un gruppo di studiosi legati agli ambienti culturali fiorentini un riconosciuto maestro e un anticipatore di un rivoluzionario metodo di traduzione. Non un professionista della traduzione ma un autore che, con estro, creatività e libertà di spirito, al netto di tecnicismi o regole imposte, traduceva altri autori.

È evidente che per portare a termine quest'operazione ci volevano dei mediatori e oggi non saremmo qui a tentare la storia di quella cultura se a nostro fianco non avessimo avuto Poggioli, Vittorini, Traverso, Macrì e ancora... Di quale mediazione si trattava? Mettiamo intanto in luce un fatto, tutti erano legati da ambizioni di scrittori. Non erano degli specialisti e anche quando più tardi sembrò che si adeguassero a quella misura non lo furono mai fino in fondo. [...] Erano scrittori o apprendisti scrittori e nell'opera di traduttori stavano bene attenti a mettere in risalto questa loro volontà di ricreazione. I mediatori volevano essere piuttosto degli interpreti e anche quando sembrava che si limitassero ad operare delle pure trasfusioni, in verità non perdevano di vista quella che era una comune nozione di letteratura in senso assoluto. (Bo 1994, 187)

L'atteggiamento intellettuale di Poggioli, non legato a scuole di pensiero, lo porterà a scontrarsi con gli ambienti accademici, in cui si inserisce sin da giovanissimo date le sue doti precoci. Si laurea nel 1929 a Firenze in Lettere con una tesi su Aleksandr Blok (uno dei suoi autori prediletti assieme a Sergej Esenin) e passa subito ad insegnare: a Firenze, nel biennio 1933-34, come incaricato di Slavistica, successivamente a Vilnius (1935-36) e Varsavia (1936-38), come lettore di italiano, dopo essere stato segretario dell'Istituto Italiano di Cultura a Praga nel 1935.

Nel 1938 decide di trasferirsi negli Stati Uniti d'America, assieme alla famiglia, per via del deteriorarsi del contesto politico italiano. Ad Harvard è nominato direttore del Dipartimento di Slavistica nel 1951 e dal 1952 ordinario di Letterature Compare. Nonostante i dissapori con il grande linguista Roman Jakobson e le accuse di maccartismo, Poggioli imprime alle ricerche e traduzioni in lingua russa e agli studi sulla teoria della letteratura anglo-americana una direzione nuova.



Risalta immediatamente la ricchezza culturale del ricercatore e la capacità di muoversi negli ambiti più diversi della letteratura e della traduzione, saltando agilmente da Blok a Valéry senza schemi metodologici imposti. (Bo 1994)<sup>3</sup>.

Per queste ragioni, non passa certo sotto silenzio, nel 1949, la pubblicazione di una sua silloge di poeti russi moderni e contemporanei (cento liriche in tutto) con il titolo *Il fiore del verso russo*. L'antologia restituisce la vastità di interessi di Renato Poggioli e la profondità del suo metodo critico. Imponente è già di per sé l'introduzione storico-letteraria, oltre al rigoroso apparato di notazioni, riferimenti, glosse, dove Poggioli procede non per epoche ma per autori, soffermandosi più sui testi che sui contesti sociali e culturali<sup>4</sup>.

L'inquadramento critico-letterario di autori e produzioni funge da bussola al traduttore – asserisce Poggioli nel poscritto della raccolta – per armonizzare la restituzione delle poesie – principalmente da Blok ed Esenin – stabilendo al contempo una linea di condotta e un elemento di equilibrio tra rigore e creatività. Un canovaccio, insomma, che evitasse abusi, sconfinamenti o eccessi nelle selezioni operate e rendesse il traduttore il 'giusto' intermediatore culturale.

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<sup>3</sup> Le sue traduzioni – a differenza di Traverso che curava maggiormente gli aspetti formali e strutturali da rigoroso filologo classico e germanista – erano affidate a delle doti di reinvenzione della lingua nel passaggio da un sistema all'altro, fino a farne – in un approccio più vicino a quello di Bo – un capolavoro di stile, un raffinato, ben cesellato 'oggetto' d'arte e, più in generale, un atto di liberazione delle sue energie intellettuali e spirituali, cosicché "le traduzioni si trasformavano in pretesti, in richiami, in provocazioni" (Bo 1994, 189).

<sup>4</sup> L'opera raccorda tre precedenti volumi di traduzioni che *Il fiore del verso russo* sistematizza in un complessivo quadro storico-critico: *La violetta notturna* (1933), *Liriche e frammenti di Sergio Esenin* (1940) e *Poemetti e liriche di Alessandro Blok* (1941, 1947). Si tratta di antologie progettate e redatte in periodi diversi che Poggioli rielabora – aggiungendo nuove liriche precedentemente apparse in varie riviste, tra le quali "*Italia letteraria, Letteratura, Orto, Rivista di letterature slave, Solarid*" (Poggioli 2009 [1949], 601) – arricchendole di un nutrito apparato di note e commenti. "Le annotazioni accompagnano il lettore attraverso l'introduzione, l'antologia e l'appendice. È in riferimento all'introduzione, o ai capitoli e paragrafi rispettivi, che esse danno informazioni bibliografiche generali sull'argomento, e brevi notizie bibliografiche rispetto ai poeti di cui si fa menzione storica o critica, ma che non sono rappresentati da alcuna versione. [...] Le annotazioni contengono inoltre, in traduzione italiana, documenti letterari e biografici di particolare importanza, quali ad esempio manifesti e giudizi sulle varie scuole o movimenti, o testimonianze d'alto interesse psicologico, personale e umano" (Ivi, 602).

Il fine del nostro quadro non è stato quello della contemplazione: perché lo storico e il critico (non meno che lo scoliasta delle annotazioni) non hanno lavorato che in funzione del traduttore. Ciò vale non solo per l'intento positivo, per quanto ausiliare, dell'inquadramento dei poeti tradotti nella serie di valori estetici e temporali, ma anche per il compito negativo e correttivo di stabilire una prospettiva più equilibrata e più giusta di quella fatalmente arbitraria della scelta del traduttore. Il quale spesso può avere scelto troppo poco, poco bene o molto male; può avere peccato di indulgenza verso un poeta o una poesia la cui presenza è forse immeritevole, o di severità verso un nome o un titolo di cui non è certo giustificabile in sede critica l'omissione. (Poggioli 2009 [1949], 603)

Il grande interesse per le letterature europee e la cura posta nel lavoro di sistemazione del letterato-traduttore, che non sopravanza i testi ma ne restituisce l'opportuno grado di espressività, fanno di Renato Poggioli un punto di riferimento per quel gruppo di intellettuali fiorentini che attraverso il confronto con la lettura come esercizio quotidiano di discernimento critico e i contesti culturali europei cercavano di far uscire l'Italia dall'ufficialità della propaganda politica.

#### **4. Traverso, un accademico di grande respiro**

Studente provetto al liceo "Tito Livio" di Padova, Leone Traverso si appassiona inizialmente ai grandi autori greci e latini. La sua attività di traduttore inizia in effetti prestissimo e, delle tre figure trattate in questa sede, è quello che maggiormente si lega a tale 'mestiere'. Peregrinando per le università di mezza Europa, compiendo viaggi a Vienna nel 1932 e a Berlino nel 1935, affina gli strumenti linguistici che gli serviranno per orientare il campo di indagine dei suoi studi e per focalizzarsi – ridando loro nuova linfa – sui grandi autori della letteratura tedesca otto-novecentesca.

Risulta decisivo, come per Poggioli e per Bo, il suo arrivo a Firenze, presso la Facoltà di Lettere, dove ha modo di fare esperienza del patrimonio di stimoli ed indirizzi culturali che provenivano da questa città. La conoscenza con il grande filologo classico Giorgio Pasquali – suo riconosciuto maestro – lo sprona a continuare nel cammino intrapreso di grande saggista, fine esegeta e, appunto, brillante traduttore.

Dalle *Elegie duinesi* di Rilke – memorabili per rigore e felicità di restituzione di “un’alta opera di poesia e saggezza” (Traverso 1959 [1923], 11)<sup>5</sup> – all’intera produzione di Von Hofmannsthal e Von Kleist, alle liriche di Hölderlin, sconfinando nella letteratura anglosassone con Yeats e Pound, Traverso offre l’esempio di un lavoro meticoloso, condotto da intellettuale di grande levatura che fece del rigoroso esercizio di scandaglio filologico e dell’incessante lavoro sulla lingua un elemento centrale della sua attività di traduttore.

Leone Traverso era nato traduttore o per essere più precisi è nato traduttore e lo è rimasto per tutta la sua vita. Quando è morto aveva in animo di tradurre Celan, sarebbe stata l’ultima sua prova, l’ultimo documento di una lunga passione cominciata negli anni del liceo. Perché bisogna dire subito che la sua vocazione naturale si è irrobustita e definita nel corso degli studi: a mano a mano che il suo orizzonte culturale si allargava, il desiderio di comunicare le sue versioni, le sue interpretazioni – sempre dirette e legate ai testi – cresceva (Bo 2000, 236).

Per le sue esperienze di studioso della parola, critico appassionato, fine linguista legato alla classicità – una formazione che lo accompagnerà per tutta la vita anche quando deciderà di abbracciare le letterature europee – Traverso è già di per sé un traduttore, un attento rielaboratore di culture e di linguaggi. Fa della traduzione, dunque, una pratica sistematica, forse a differenza di Poggioli e Bo più versati nel campo della saggistica e della pubblicistica (Bo 1994, 192).

Ha avuto come fari, in questo suo irriducibile bisogno di ri-creazione e rilancio delle civiltà europee, la letteratura universale e la poesia, quest’ultima da intendersi non tanto come genere letterario a sé stante, di cui indagare lo statuto epistemologico ed i profili stilistici ed estetici, ma come tensione etica e spirituale verso l’autenticità e la dignità dell’uomo ed un nuovo, possibile umanesimo. È come se la tensione e il rigore del suo sforzo di traduzione, che andavano dispiegandosi nel consapevole e sorvegliato uso degli strumenti tecnici, rispondesse sempre ad una insospettata forza creativa ravvisabile nella grande tradizione lirica europea. Ne traggono spunto così le sue trasposizioni che si trovano potenziate dalle innumerevoli capacità di germinazione espressiva della parola letteraria.

Come per Bo e Poggioli il traduttore è in stretta dipendenza e – potremmo dire – in rapporto di diretta filiazione con il lettore e con lo scrittore all’interno

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<sup>5</sup> “Il tuo Rilke è un lavoro tra i più puri, ad un livello costante di rara nobiltà. [...] Spero che il tuo libro abbia maggior fortuna dello splendido Hölderlin (che resta, senza possibile paragone, il più perfetto Hölderlin mai tradotto in Italia.)” (Campo 2007, 89).

di quel complesso e diversificato movimento letterario noto, appunto, come Ermetismo<sup>6</sup>.

## 5. Bo, l'avanguardista traduttore

Nei suoi settori di applicazione – la francesistica e l'ispanistica – Carlo Bo passa al vaglio numerosi autori, tanto in recensioni presso riviste e in volume, quanto in un'intensa attività di saggista e traduttore (Bogliolo 2019) che lo occupano soprattutto negli anni della sua giovinezza, quando si muove ancora tra Firenze e Urbino (dove comincia ad insegnare). Prima ancora di diventare ordinario di Lingua e Letteratura Francese nel 1945 presso l'ateneo feltresco, grazie anche alla qualità e vastità delle sue ricerche (*Rivière, Mallarmé, Otto Studi, Diario aperto e chiuso*), il critico ligure a Firenze, assieme a Poggioli, funge in effetti da punto di riferimento di un'intera società letteraria, considerate la sua particolare capacità di lavoro e una spiccata sensibilità letteraria.

Il primo autore a passare sotto la lente di ingrandimento di Bo è quel Jacques Maritain da lui approfondito a vario titolo nel corso di oltre quarant'anni di attenti studi (Bo 1981)<sup>7</sup>. In effetti, traduce la monografia di

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<sup>6</sup> “In partenza l'Ermetismo è stato un desiderio, un'aspirazione non meglio definita di giovani i quali furono portati dalle cose a gettare lo scandaglio altrove e, in particolare, a chiedere alle altre letterature ciò che la nostra non era in grado di offrirgli” (Bo 1994, 198). Questa particolare corrente della letteratura italiana, attraversata da più di una generazione di letterati, critici, traduttori, accademici ha avuto il merito di avvertire il clima di provincialismo in cui versava la cultura del nostro Paese. Pur se confinata in un decennio – tra la metà degli anni Trenta e la metà degli anni Quaranta del Novecento – e progressivamente marginalizzata, contribuì a rivitalizzare il paesaggio fermo della Letteratura italiana mettendolo in contatto con gli autori e le novità del panorama europeo e nordamericano (si veda anche il caso delle traduzioni di Pavese da Melville e dell'antologia di scrittori americani di Vittorini del 1941). “L'Ermetismo in tal modo prendeva coscienza di tutto ciò che mancava nell'ambito della cultura del momento. Né lo potevano soddisfare le vecchie strutture che non solo appartenevano al passato ma tendevano a consolidare una forma di ricerca che agli occhi dei più giovani non aveva più molto senso” (Ivi, 203). Insomma, l'Ermetismo è stato il tentativo, rimasto forse irripetuto, di restituire alla letteratura, anche e soprattutto attraverso lo strumento della traduzione – non vista come insieme di operazioni tecniche ma come rielaborazione creativa di senso –, una dignità ed una forma identitaria non barattabili con i compromessi delle contingenze storiche.

<sup>7</sup> Serie di saggi ed articoli, raccolti da Giancarlo Galazzi nel 1981, che ripercorrono quarant'anni di riflessioni di Carlo Bo su Jacques Maritain. Bo era riuscito nell'intento di restituire la modernità del pensiero del filosofo francese, il quale, servendosi delle lenti interpretative della scuola tomistica di Tommaso d'Aquino, era ispirato da una profonda spiritualità cristiana, messo alla ricerca delle 'verità' del proprio tempo.

Maritain su Tommaso d'Aquino<sup>8</sup>, il padre della Chiesa a cui il filosofo francese ispirerà l'intero corso del suo sistema di pensiero. A questa iniziale e riuscita prova, seguono traduzioni ed antologie ricomprese per la maggior parte nel periodo tra le due guerre. Memorabile per l'esteso campo dei riferimenti culturali e letterarie, le letture critiche controcorrente e l'impianto saggistico che la sorreggono, resta la selezione antologica dei poeti surrealisti del 1944 (Bo 1944) e successivamente la raccolta dei poeti francesi del 1952 (Bo 1952).

Ad ogni modo, l'impresa di Bo, nella sua attività di avanguardista-traduttore, è caratterizzata anche dal grande e raffinato lavoro di restituzione dell'opera di Federico García Lorca, il poeta spagnolo fucilato durante la Guerra Civile nel 1936 dai franchisti per le sue idee socialiste. La raccolta tradotta da Bo risale al 1940 e, con il fascismo in casa e la dittatura franchista appena instaurata, portare avanti un autore di quel peso (politico oltre che letterario) è fatto di per sé carico di incognite. Bo ci riesce, pressoché in solitaria, da antesignano, con le armi delle sole parole, costruendo quello che ancora resta un capolavoro di stile. L'editore che coraggiosamente decide di pubblicare le poesie dell'andaluso è la Guanda di Parma, all'interno della prestigiosa collana "La Fenice" diretta da Attilio Bertolucci, che poteva vantare titoli e autori di primaria importanza: George, Blok, Donne, Hopkins, Jimenez<sup>9</sup>.

Nella fertile semina degli anni Quaranta fanno seguito il *Platero y yo* di Juan Ramón Jiménez del 1943, pubblicato dall'amico Enrico Vallecchi, l'*Azorín* di José Ortega y Gasset e l'*Agonia del cristianesimo* di Miguel de Unamuno, fondamentale per la scoperta italiana del letterato spagnolo destituito dall'incarico di Rettore dell'Università di Salamanca nel 1914 a causa delle posizioni politiche (sarà tra i fautori della costituzione della Seconda Repubblica Spagnola nel 1931). Nel novero della letteratura francese, va doverosamente menzionata la traduzione del romanzo di Georges Bernanos *Il signor Ouine*.

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<sup>8</sup> L'opera, apparsa nel 1937, dà l'avvio ad una serie di traduzioni che interessarono in particolare il suo periodo più fecondo, ossia quello degli anni Quaranta, con gli autori spagnoli da Carlo Bo maggiormente trattati anche in sede saggistica: Lorca, Unamuno, Jiménez, Ortega y Gasset.

<sup>9</sup> Si tratta del primo confronto da traduttore di Carlo Bo con la poesia. Del volume, in cui è presente una selezione di oltre sessanta liriche, il critico ligure cura anche l'introduzione dove mette in evidenza il potere evocatorio della poesia di Lorca, non solo negli aspetti più apparenti e fisici della quotidianità, ma soprattutto nella sua dimensione di stimolo rispetto a fondamentali interrogativi etici. "Proprio l'ultimo Lorca ci dà questa sensazione netta di aumento spirituale e forse restiamo illusi dalla forza vitale della sua voce che ha ordinato ogni movimento dei suoi giorni" (Bo 1952 [1940], 21).

Bernanos, proprio per le tinte ‘dostoevskiane’ delle sue prose, e per il senso irrisolto della sua sofferta religiosità, diviene ben presto uno dei capisaldi delle indagini da francesista di Carlo Bo assieme a Mallarmé, Rivière, Gide, Mauriac, Claudel, Eluard (Bo 1949).

In Bo non è possibile praticare una cesura tra il docente, il critico militante e il traduttore. Sono tutte facce di una stessa medaglia, tenute assieme dall’opera ininterrotta del lettore e dello studioso. Lo dimostrano la ricca attività pubblicistica – portata avanti per oltre mezzo secolo dalle tribune più svariate come testate nazionali, riviste, settimanali – l’altrettanto pedissequa attività saggistica – prefazioni, curatele, raccolte, articoli, commenti e glosse – e le traduzioni di autori francesi, ma soprattutto spagnoli, di cui cura anche gli apparati storico-critici alla maniera di Poggioli (Macri 1986, Botti 2013)<sup>10</sup>. Rispetto agli altri due interpreti considerati, Carlo Bo è quello che si spinge probabilmente più avanti nella sintesi tra la fervente attività esegetica e le sistemazioni del linguista in una circolarità di pensiero ed intenzioni che ne connota fortemente la cifra intellettuale.

Le attività di traduzione di Bo, un bibliofilo dotato di una memoria enciclopedica, così come le sue ricerche di francesistica, ispanistica ed italianistica, in cui spiccano tre autori capitali del calibro di Eluard, Jimenez e Ungaretti<sup>11</sup>, hanno ispirato, anche in forza del suo magistero accademico, numerosi altri traduttori, soprattutto di area francese, come, ad esempio, l’amico di una vita Mario Luzi ed uno dei suoi più stretti collaboratori, destinato a

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<sup>10</sup> Per Oreste Macri, Carlo Bo è il vero pioniere dell’ispanismo nel nostro paese. La spinta a trattare gli scrittori iberici, in particolare i poeti tardo ottocenteschi e quelli della generazione collocata tra i due conflitti bellici mondiali, si deve alla Guerra civile spagnola del 1936 e all’assassinio di García Lorca per mano dei franchisti. “Bo produsse velocemente i saggi sui maggiori poeti delle generazioni del modernismo-novantotto e del ’25, cioè, della generazione di Guillén, Lorca, Salinas, Alberti ecc., che raccolse nei citati *Lirici spagnoli*,” per divenire ben presto “antesignano e battistrada” di tutta una tradizione di studi ricollegabile, assieme a Macri, a Vittorio Bodini e a Francesco Tentori, il quale, oltre ad essere stato un grande traduttore, dà vita alla “prima antologia della poesia ispanoamericana, d’ispirazione ermetica” (Macri 1986, 82-83). È opportuno rimarcare, infine, come l’interesse per la lingua e la letteratura spagnola nel quadro del movimento ermetico ebbe delle connotazioni anche politiche. Come molti altri cattolici – Mounier, Maritain, Sturzo – pure Carlo Bo finì per porsi la questione e “la necessità di un disimpegno della Chiesa dalla solidarietà con i militari ribelli e la ragione di una soluzione negoziata del conflitto.” (Botti 2013, 32).

<sup>11</sup> “In ‘Che cosa è stato Juan Ramon’ (in *L’Eredità di Leopardi*, ripreso nel presente volume, pp. 1104-20) Bo ha confessato a distanza di anni che il poeta spagnolo era stato uno dei vertici del suo triangolo poetico, gli altri due erano Eluard e Ungaretti” (Pautasso 1994, 1072).

succedergli come Rettore dell'Università di Urbino, Giovanni Bogliolo. Ancora oggi il suo lavoro di traduttore – segnalato dallo stesso Bogliolo in un libro di memorie su Bo dove i due dialogano assieme sulla nascita dell'interesse per gli autori francesi e spagnoli passati in rassegna dal critico ligure<sup>12</sup> – brilla in quanto a stile e precisione nella forma.

## **6. Conclusioni**

Il presente articolo ha voluto descrivere e confrontare la complessa opera intellettuale, in quanto saggisti, critici letterari, traduttori, di tre protagonisti del panorama letterario italiano del Novecento. Pur provenendo da formazioni culturali diverse, essi contribuirono ad avvicinare l'Italia alle grandi correnti culturali e letterarie europee che, originando dai sommovimenti artistici e di pensiero di fine Ottocento e primonovecenteschi – si veda il Simbolismo francese e il vasto panorama delle avanguardie storiche con in testa il Surrealismo –, provocarono un risveglio negli interessi di studio e conseguentemente nelle traduzioni di autori contemporanei.

Firenze costituì il polo di attrazione di tutte queste molteplici tendenze di cui, ognuno a loro modo e con differenti approcci traduttivi, Poggioli, Traverso e Bo – assieme a diversi altri interpreti come Oreste Macrì, Tommaso Landolfi, Mario Luzi, Sergio Baldi, Rodolfo Paoli –, si fecero portatori. Nel loro lascito fruttuoso di scoperte innovative vi è l'essenza di una civiltà letteraria che non voleva sentirsi sottoposta ai soffocanti dettami ideologici e politici del contesto storico italiano.

Le considerazioni metodologiche svolte all'inizio dell'articolo sono servite, oltre che a prendere atto della complessità di ogni traduzione e delle diverse tendenze teoriche a cui nel tempo è stata sottoposta, anche a porre sotto la giusta prospettiva le modalità interpretative adottate dai particolari traduttori analizzati.

La traduzione non è mai stata una semplice trasposizione di senso e di parole sinonimiche ma – come ci hanno bene dimostrato questi traduttori-

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<sup>12</sup> “Il punto di partenza è sempre la «Nouvelle Revue Française», mi pare fosse il Secondo manifesto di Breton, poi quella mostra di Londra [a proposito della genesi dell'Antologia sui poeti surrealisti, *ndr*]. [...] Poi c'è stato il periodo spagnolo, ma è tutto collegato. Anche questo, infatti, è di derivazione francese: Lorca l'ho conosciuto attraverso un gruppo di poesie che mi pare Jean Prévoist aveva tradotto per «Mesures».” (Bo, 23-24).

scrittori e come indica anche Umberto Eco – un passaggio o una traslazione tra testi: “la traduzione, ed è principio ormai ovvio in traduttologia, non avviene tra sistemi bensì tra testi” (Eco 2016 [2003], 37)<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Eco parla esplicitamente delle difficoltà insite nel volgere un complesso di significati uno all’altro per via di “tutte quelle operazioni che chiamiamo parafrasi, definizione, spiegazione, riformulazione, per non parlare delle pretese di sostituzioni semiotiche” (Eco 2016 [2003], 9) che si sovrappongono nella mente del traduttore. “La frase che stiamo considerando è un testo, e per capir un testo – e a maggior ragione tradurlo – bisogna fare un’ipotesi sul mondo possibile che esso rappresenta” (Ivi, 45), procedendo per assestamenti, assimilazioni, congetture (in sostanza innescando una negoziazione) e individuando “l’accezione o il senso più probabile e ragionevole e rilevante in quel contesto e in quel mondo possibile” (Ibid.).



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## Literary Translation as Agent of Globalization

### ABSTRACT

Literature is artistic expression through the medium of language. It provides a lens into a particular place and time, and illuminates the values and practices of a certain culture. Its translations need to reconstruct the original accurately. Globalization, or essentially country interconnectedness and the spread of information around the globe, has been a factor in connecting people throughout history. Today's spread of information at the speed of fiberoptics globalizes, connecting cultures, and has resulted in an ever-increasing need for translations. Globalization relies upon translation to occur – in order for people to connect, they need to be able to communicate, and the primary mode of communication is a common language. Thus, translators are placed squarely in the middle of the globalization equation, and their translation decisions become acts of globalization, for better or for worse. As agents of globalization, they carry tremendous onus to contribute to globalization responsibly. This article presents translation's key elements and considerations in the field, looks at the role translation plays within globalization, and contemplates the translator's responsibility as an agent of globalization, arguing that foreignization techniques further healthy globalization while domestication choices promote ethnocentrism and warped constructions of source culture and writer.

KEYWORDS: globalization, literary translation, communication, domestication, foreignization.

## **1. Introduction**

Globalization is essentially country interconnectedness and the spread of information around the globe and has been a factor in cultural development throughout history. However, the exponential pace of technological development in the 20th and 21st centuries has given globalization a new meaning and a new forum (Bielsa 2005a; Li 2020; Yazici 2008). The spread of information, connecting cultures, accelerates the globalization phenomenon and has resulted in an ever-increasing need for translations.

Globalization relies upon translation to occur – in order for people to connect, they need to be able to communicate, and the primary mode of communication is a common language. Translation is however not a straightforward process. The beauty of a translated literary text lies in the influence and creative design stemming from the source text's artistic features combined with the translator's knack in recreating that beauty in a different language. Translation is thus an art in some ways, as literature is artistry with language, and provides a lens into a particular place and time, and literary works reflect the values and ideology of a culture.

Theories of the translator's methods and duties are numerous and rigorously debated (Toury 1998; Nord 1991; Levý 2011), but most agree that a literary text should be translated to retain not only its original meaning, but also its impacts on the target audience. Thus, part of a translator's responsibility rests with introducing the text to the target culture in ways that represent the source text's linguistic features in every possible way while simultaneously retaining sensitivity to the target audience's anticipated response.

In this article, the challenges to translation brought on by a literary landscape in light of modern globalization will be analyzed. Even as translators merely translate a novel from one language to another, they become agents of globalization, their translation decisions furthering globalization either overtly, with accurate representations of source cultural elements in the translations, or subversively and more distorted through smoothed, culturally appropriate renditions of source cultural elements.

This article focuses on translation within the context of globalization and tries to address two important research questions, namely, what role does translation play within globalization?; and what is the translator's responsibility as an agent of globalization?

## **2. Literary Translation**

### *2.1 The Role of Literary Translators*

Before addressing the challenges of literary translation in the context of globalization, it is important to review the general role of literary translators.

In translation, the concept of “equivalence”, which is an exact linguistic translation of the source language into the target language, retaining form and function, is considered essential. Translators should select the nearest natural equivalents of words and phrases (Ranua 2009). The term is often used in association with the terms “fidelity” or “faithfulness” (Haque 2012; Lin 2015; Toury 1998).

Instant translation is needed to access the instantly free-flowing information around the globe. Technology leaders have not overlooked this demand and in most cases, these instant translations are performed by software that can translate text and messages in real time. Translation has now become instantaneous, which perhaps minimizes its visibility (Bielsa 2005a). The advent of translation technology in the early 1990s has produced an unanticipated aspect of the science-versus-art debate. Technology has increased the quality and speed of translation even as new translation difficulties arise that require innovation to solve (Doherty 2016). It should be noted, too, that such translations are equivalent, or as equivalent as is possible within the computing capabilities, but they are essentially “quick and dirty” translations. A computer might quickly translate a literary work word-for-word but would be unable to understand or communicate the beauty inherent in its words or its more deeply embedded esoteric concepts into another language.

Because technical linguistic equivalence often produces nonsense in translation, some researchers do not believe rigid faithfulness to the source

language text as essential as producing a target language text that similarly resonates with readers in the target language culture (Ranua 2009). Interpretation needs to comply with a sentence's intended function, not with its exact words, and therefore rigid linguistic equivalency loses some importance.

Translations occur at the Gestalt level (Jiang 2008). The translator must read the source material, mentally actualize it, then consider linguistic ways to reconstruct this actualization in the target language. The translator works on a case-by-case, line-by-line, idea-by-idea basis (Levý 2011), and indeed, the translator's voice often comes through in addition to the original author's (Hermans 1996).

Translators act as conduits and should eliminate self-expression from their work. Using creativity and imagination, translators must also intentionally keep their opinions and beliefs out of their linguistic renderings. Translators also need a keen understanding of techniques used in literature and language to convey more meaning than inherent in the words alone. Irony, understatement, metaphor, symbolism, sarcasm, and implication need to be effectively recreated from source to target text (Haque 2012), demanding a sophisticated awareness of both cultures in order to achieve precision with that reproduction.

A translation should occupy the same status as any original work of art in the target culture since the translator is striving for 'an' original, a piece that garners a reception equivalent to the original in the new audience's culture and language (Gazaz 2016). Translation is not only constant and of vital importance to promote intercultural understanding, but also the driving force behind mediating how cultural differences are expressed, homogenized, or appreciated (Bielsa 2005b; Iteogu 2014).

In moving source material to a target language, translators face literary problems of which ordinary readers may be seldom aware. Idioms, metaphors, clichés, similes, puns, allusions, onomatopoeias, implications, sarcasm, jokes, rhymes, wordplay, dialects and accents, or purposeful mistakes are some, but not all, of the devices in literary works used to bolster the storyline and the pleasurable experience of reading the material – and translating such things from one language to another is a task of considerable difficulty. Even proper names are not always easily translated.

Translation is sentence-by-sentence in form and seeks beauty in substance because if translation is not beautiful, it will not be read, rendering the very point of its existence a failure (Zhang 2020). Fidelity of a translation does not require a natural copy of the source text, but the conveyance of all the source text's ideas, in whatever form is required, to result in the audience coming away with the same impression from the target text that they would have had in reading the source text (Levý 2011). In this view, fidelity and beauty are essentially one in the same.

## *2.2 Domestication versus Foreignization*

It is known that globalization makes it easier than ever to access a foreign culture via its literary works. In this regard at least, it is a positive phenomenon. Domestication and foreignization are two strategies that offer both linguistic and cultural guidance and are important in globalization considerations of literary translation and they must be used wisely to enhance the benefits of globalization.

When translators confront a phenomenon in the source language/culture that does not commonly exist in the target language/culture, they have to decide how they will represent that phenomenon to the target culture. They use some combination of domestication or foreignization tactics. Domestication is "an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bringing the author back home," while foreignization is "an ethnodeviant pressure on those (cultural) values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad" (Venuti 1995, 20). Hence, domestication means that the text is conformed to the norms of the target language and culture, removing it from its original cultural meaning and smoothing it with the new culture. This produces a seamless linguistic and cultural read, without explicit invasion of foreign concepts. On the other hand, foreignization means that source text is kept in its source conceptualization and explained, either directly or through context, to the target audience (Hosseini 2016). This permits the source language and by extension its culture to overtly influence the target language and culture with foreign concepts. Domestication and foreignization relate to the extent to which a translated text assimilates a

source language text to the target language and culture or explains source terms (Venuti 1998).

Foreignization techniques further healthy globalization. Because foreignization spreads foreign words and concepts directly into other languages and cultures, it is a key element of globalization (Iteogu 2014). In any work of literature, items of cultural and historical importance will not perfectly translate. Foreignization imports the cultural element into the target language and, if necessary, explains it. One example of a culture-specific phrase concerns the concept of “Valentine’s Day”. To move it from source text (English) to target text (Persian) requires that the day be named in Persian and then, perhaps by a footnote, explained. In this way, the knowledge of Valentine’s Day as a phenomenon of the English-speaking culture thus becomes familiar and integrated into the Persian-speaking culture (FallahshahraK and Salmani 2013).

Does this new foreign knowledge influence the target culture? Does it change it? Translators should consider this “unknown” factor carefully, at the risk of allowing an already dominated culture to be further oppressed (FallahshahraK and Salmani 2013). With the freedom of information instantly accessible 24/7 via the internet and machine translations, cultural globalization is occurring – people of all cultures are becoming increasingly familiar with cultural behaviors of many other cultures, particularly those of the West as that’s what dominates cyberspace. Such familiarity reduces unknowns of foreignness, easing the discomfort with those unknowns and resulting in greater intercultural familiarity and acceptance. Because of these lax cultural barriers, people are less put off by foreignness, in turn allowing translators today more freedom than ever before to incorporate foreignization (Iteogu 2014).

One of the most well-known leaders of foreignization is Venuti (1995), who stated unequivocally that the goal of foreignization is the development of a particular translation theory and practice to counter the tendency of the target language’s dominance and to emphasize the differences between the original and the version in terms of language and culture. Foreignization lays more emphasis on the linguistic and stylistic features of the original text, but the downside is that the target text translated in these ways may not be very clear and coherent in



language and the content may not be easy to understand for the target readers, so they may feel a bit strange when reading the translation (Wang 2014).

Nida and Taber (1993), on the other hand, are leading proponents of domestication. They advanced the idea of “the most natural equivalent,” and placed the target reader in the lead based on the perspective of society and culture. They believe that the rendition in the translation should be entirely natural and that the source language's behavioral mode should be integrated into the cultural context of the intended readers (Nida and Taber 1993). Such a translational idea also downplays the idea that the target audience must accept the source language's behavioral mode in order to comprehend the source message (Wang 2014). The upside is that domestication cares more about the target audience, but, because of the smooth sentences and the familiar expressions and cultural phenomena, sometimes the target readers may not be aware of the fact that they are actually reading a translated text from another culture (Ye 1991). Also, there is the danger that the reader would not get access to some foreign elements of the original text which might enhance the reading experience and the intercultural exchange.

There are examples of translations applying the two translation strategies (i.e., domestication and foreignization) of the same text, where both translations were successful. For example, the two English translations of the Chinese novel *Hong Lou Meng* (*A Dream of the Red Chamber*) by Cáo Xuěqín contain many cultural aspects. The first translation by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang used the foreignizing strategy in translating this classic Chinese novel in order to introduce Chinese culture to English readers as much as possible (Wang 2014). They translated the title as *A Dream of Red Mansions*, while another translator, David Hawkes, used the domesticating translation strategy in order to appeal to the likes of Western readers and give them a sense of delight through easy reading. According to Wang (2014), Hawkes translated the title of the novel as “The Story of the Stone” which is another name of *Hong Lou Meng* for the sake of avoiding “red” which is often associated with “blood and killing” in Western culture. Both translated versions were successful and there is no way of telling which one is better.

The modern trend of economic globalization has dramatically accelerated the interaction and blending of various nations and peoples. According to Wang (2014), the means of cultural contact between various groups of people are diversifying, and people are starting to observe and accept cultures from other countries with an open mind as opposed to a closed one. As a result, certain literary translations nowadays can fully foreignize topics that once required domestication, which is logical given how quickly culture is changing.

However, there are some sensitive issues when it comes to a blind use of foreignization. According to Iteogu (2014), while foreignization permits texts to retain credibility and teach something about cultural backgrounds, it is also typically done to the distinct advantage of Western ideals. For example, a scathing review of foreignization's negative influences can be found in an examination of the Arabic translation of Joanne K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, redolent with occult references (Hawel and Swayih 2018). Occult activities and magic are, worldwide, culturally condemned activities, particularly under religious guidelines. However, the extent of their taboo varies across cultures, rendering a book series glorifying magic and the occult extra challenging to translate in heavily religious cultures where that taboo is strong. Translations of this English book into Arabic simply foreignize the various spells, potions, and occult figures and practices into the target language – they are well explained as English concepts rather than smoothly incorporated into the Arabic translation to reflect Arabic values. This allows these concepts to retain their foreign-ness, and readers to learn about these concepts as foreign concepts from the foreign-written material. In turn, this knowledge and understanding creates a gateway for English cultural values and aspects to seep into and influence Arabic culture – even in ways that conflict with deeply held Arabic cultural values. On the other hand, these researchers argue that domestication of the occult aspects would have still allowed some of the positive aspects of the books (heroism, friendship) to be recognized, but would have eliminated the presence of perceived negative influences on the minds of Arabic readers and in turn, the Arabic culture (Hawel and Swayih 2018) – it would have kept the Arabic culture entirely safe and protected from the outside world within its bubble where magic is forbidden, despite what the remainder of the world is reading when it opens this cover.

Because no attempts were made to domesticate what is deeply offensive to the Arabic culture in translations of *Harry Potter*, these scholars deduce that the translators were likely following Westernized norms of translation without respect to or respect for the target culture and audience (Hawel and Swayih 2018). The implication here is that either these translators chose not to domesticate these elements since the entire premise of the book is magic, not friendship, and translating a book about magic while removing the magic would not be an actual translation at all but result in an entirely new work, or, in the viewpoint of these translators, this Western language, English, has a greater right to establish the norms of translation and ignore the values of other cultures in those translations. According to Hawel and Swayih (2018), under this latter view, foreignization is not merely a dismissal of a 'weaker' language but actually poses a threat to a culture. Conversely, the domestication strategy eliminates the source culture's chance at influence, at least in theory, because foreign concepts are changed and assuaged into accepted social systems in the target language, keeping those foreign influences at bay. For example, Persian literature forbids the mention of alcoholic beverages; therefore, an English text mentioning any alcoholic drinks is changed: "beer" becomes "soda" (Fallahshahrak and Salmani 2013). The symptoms of drunkenness resulting from drinking too much soda might pose issues for narrative fidelity, but such are the rules, and Persian readers are left to figure out what's actually happening on their own. Domestication is considered the solution for translation problems that go against the rules of the target language. Some scholars argue that domestication is a preferable solution when the transfer of a foreign concept is literally offensive or dangerous (Hawel and Swayih 2018), though, this begs the question of whether such books should be translated at all or left in their original for foreign readers to grapple with.

Foreignization leads to the mixing of not only languages but also cultures, since languages represent their cultures, and like most other facets of globalization, the issue of its value or threat is debated. Introducing foreign words into languages promotes tolerance and familiarity (Hosseini 2016), but foreignization can lead to language pollution, forcing languages to bend to the values of literary superpowers (Yazici 2008). Foreignization, the explanation of one culture to another, leads to more fluency and more successful translation, but

comes with a price. Notwithstanding, whether and the extent to which domestication furthers the imperialistic agenda of globalization or complicates globalization with cultural misinformation, perhaps through more subversive avenues, remains an empirical question.

### **3. Globalization**

#### *3.1 Background*

Globalization is the sharing of information across cultures – a phenomenon which frequently requires translation. It is the merging of cultural knowledge. Globalization causes two major societal changes: it overcomes barriers, and centralizes knowledge and information (Bielsa 2005a). While these may seem like positive outcomes, the cost of such benefits is bemoaned by those who see globalization as an end to the importance, heritage, tradition, and dignity of separate cultures.

Some scholarship implies a Eurocentric view of globalization, recycling the massive cliché that world history began with the rise of the West. Conventional points in globalization's history, 1500 and 1800, reflect old-fashioned Eurocentric history. There are three major perspectives on when globalization began. The first includes a short timeframe, beginning in 1970 and characterized by production and transport technologies, marketing, and cultural flows. The second is a medium timeframe, which began either in the sixteenth century with modernity or in the nineteenth century with the world market and modern capitalism. The third offers the long timeframe, positioning globalization as beginning in 3000 BCE with growing connectivity and forms of social cooperation. The short timeframe implies a Western phenomenon, and the medium reaffirms Eurocentrism and the modern globalization onset in Europe. Such views are more than Eurocentric; they are also centrist in asserting the existence of a single central world system (Nederveen-Pieterse 2012).

These Eurocentric views of globalization are not global, ignoring or minimizing non-Western globalization contributions; this does not match the

record and carries little logic in times when more meaningful readings of world history are multicentric (Nederveen-Pieterse 2012).

Indeed, the Islamic world offers a successful example of archaic globalization, providing an antecedent for modern globalization. International economic exchanges, migrations, and global ideologies within and without state structures are not the sole preserve of late twentieth or early twenty-first century. The Islamic world illustrated the subsistence, interaction and engagement of the local mixing with the universal in the political, economic, and cultural spheres many eons ago (Bennison 2002).

Another successful non-Eurocentric example is China, a world super power. China was for a very long time against globalization, but in the last decades it has grown in an extraordinary way, benefiting immensely from globalization which has increased gross domestic product, stimulated trade and investment, and supported China's steady and healthy economy growth (Liang 2007).

Thus, globalization is not a Eurocentric phenomenon, as there are other cultures in the world (e.g., the Islamic world, China) which are leading their own globalization, each in different ways and they must be taken into account along with Western globalization.

### *3.2 Theories of Globalization*

Globalization is a double-edged sword: As the world becomes more connected and intercultural barriers disappear, globalization may also be criticized for creating uniformity and smothering unique cultural identities. These doom prophets are correct to an extent, but at the same time, the more streamlined the general culture becomes, the more humans crave and seek out authenticity and novelty. Furthermore, globalization gives rise to new, previously impossible subcultures formed by shared interests and goals rather than by traditional local identities (Dimova and Gillen 2017).

### *3.2.1 Three Theories of Globalization*

Globalization is generally thought of in three different, though sometimes overlapping, theories: the Hyperglobalist Approach, the Skeptical Approach, and the Transformational Approach (Munar 2007; Parjanadze 2009; Călinică and Ioan 2015). The Hyperglobalist Approach posits that globalization is the next linear step in social change. It will eventually encompass the world to the extent that geography becomes obsolete, and national governments will have no power. After a time, the world would be one hybridized culture. While this one-world scenario offers possible benefits to developing and lesser-known countries, because globalization emanates from the West, it also thrusts the consumerism of Western society onto them and can lead to exploitation of those less-powerful parts of the world (Munar 2007; Parjanadze 2009).

The Skeptical Approach would say that globalization is an illusion. Despite technology, progress, and ease of movement, nothing has truly changed. In terms of literature, for example, an African nation's publication infrastructure cannot possibly be compared to that of the United States, and beyond that, its population may not have widespread literacy or even the money to buy books if they wished to (Grabovszki 1999). There is no globalization in that situation, for once more, the underdeveloped country remains separate.

Finally, the Transformational Approach proposes not a compromise between these two viewpoints but rather, a request for refraining from extremes. Globalization will not come to dominate the world, but it certainly exists and is causing change (Munar 2007). Globalization links new areas of the world; it is encompassing the world, but not conquering the world. Globalization is a concept full of contradiction. Transformational theory is a call for nation-states to become more active on a global level, taking advantage of the opportunities presented for increased interaction at the risk of being left behind if they fail to do so (Călinică and Ioan 2015). Such "transformation" is only a slightly more positive way to look at the Skeptical Approach, that inequality is the norm and transformation has yet to occur (Martell 2007).

### *3.2.2 Potentials for Literary Translation with Globalization*

Languages allow communication across cultures, and knowing foreign languages allows us to expand our thoughts and share information globally. Without sharing language, globalization is practically impossible. Literature is the text-based artistic expression of a culture, and literary translation, as old as literature itself, is considered one of the first ways in which globalization occurred (Li 2020; Yazici 2008). Literature published on the internet could be said to immediately be “world literature” because it is not confined to a nation (Grabovszki 1999), and the technological ability to publish online continues to spread. Thus, the volume of texts and their availability is greater than ever before.

Through today’s globalization, new cultures arise and hybrid cultures are formed. The more one learns of other cultures, the more one values their own. Most importantly, though, is the idea that globalization is an ongoing process that will never be finished. Therefore, (i) dilemmas created by globalization can also be solved by globalization, i.e., they are learning experiences, and can be corrected; (ii) successes between cultures can be imitated and inspiring; and (iii) any efforts toward intercultural understanding are steps in the right direction (Parjanadze 2009). Translation studies should not seek to resist globalization but should instead try to influence it in the best direction, because it is through translation, even when it is invisible, that real communication can be achieved and negativity avoided (Harutyunyan 2015). It is also through poor translation that promotes misunderstandings that global problems ensue.

Even scholars who lament the damage that globalization is causing to literature resolve that there is real positive potential in globalization if integration rather than assimilation is achieved (Yazici 2008). On a local level, people are hungry for knowledge about other cultures. They want to be moved to the source and perceive the dimensions of the world. Toward that end, translated poetry from underdeveloped nations will promote unity through its diversity (Yazici 2008). This would seem to be yet another invitation for translation studies and activities to be encouraged in those lesser-developed areas.

The sharing of literature across cultures via translation or any other means can be viewed as similarly transformational. Literature will continue to change

and evolve, and the theories of translation will evolve along with it, as they always have. Similarly, globalized translations may lead to greater understanding of other cultures while increasing appreciation for one's own.

### *3.3 English as Lingua Franca*

Ever since people of different cultures and languages began mixing, they required a common language. A lingua franca is a language used for communication by non-native speakers (Meierkord and Knapp 2002), its classification lying with its function alone (Samarin 1987). Any language can be used as a lingua franca. It is not selected by its number of speakers, manner of use, nor comprehension quality (Samarin 1987). Through time, the world's choice of its primary lingua franca has shifted, with English emerging in this role in modern times. As lingua francas remain in use only while they are perceived as beneficial and useful and then discarded, English is not predicted to remain the world's primary lingua franca (Ostler 2010).

Of the world's approximate 7.8 billion inhabitants, about 1.35 billion speak English (Szmigiera 2021). English was an official language of 55 sovereign states and 27 non-sovereign entities in 2019 and is often declared the official language for politics and commerce the world around. English is spoken in 146 countries, and UNESCO (2020) reports English is the most-spoken language in the world. Over half of English native speakers live in the United States. English has so many non-native speakers as opposed to native speakers (four to one and rising) that its diversification is increasing, and its native speakers are losing their influence over their mother tongue (House 2010). As of 2015, internet usage has only increased the dominance of English. While internet users are 28% English-speaking, the available content on the Internet is 56% English – no other language even approaches that percentage, with German and Russian tying in second place at a mere 6% content each (IWS 2015; Gvelesiani 2012).

Just as would occur with any lingua franca, global English is credited with creeping into other tongues as those speakers adopt the structure, expressions and grammatical rules of English (Cronin 2003) and incorporate them into their communication. Like any language, English comes not just with a lexicon but



with a culture attached to it, and the dominance of Western cultures over the rest of the world is already considered an alarming facet of globalization. The use of English as the primary lingua franca reinforces that dominance. Critics of Western dominance argue that literary translation is just another example of this trend. The majority of translations are from English into other languages; comparatively fewer translations are accepted into English publication (UNESCO 2020), and through the pervasive nature of English-culture literature, American culture in particular continues to be absorbed into other cultures, often at the expense of their own traditions. So, in this way, too, Western culture dominates other cultures.

Despite fears that English will take over the globe, reality does not support this as a legitimate threat. Speakers of English as a lingua franca are not giving up their native tongues or forced to use English at the expense of their own language. They use English as an advantage and mark a definite distinction between English as a lingua franca and their own native languages. The two languages do not compete, but rather supplement and enhance each other (House 2010). Thus, regarding lingua franca, the Transformational Approach might be more appropriate to be considered.

### *3.4 Modern Globalization as a Western Phenomenon*

#### *3.4.1 Western Dominance*

According to Banerjee et al. (2009), few scholars question the naturalness or implied superiority of the West in their models of economic development and those links to globalization, nor have they much explored the imperial formations of globalization. Western thought in globalized arenas of science, popular culture, politics, and trade enjoy dominant, almost imperialistic positions as the West notably, often intentionally, and with a fair degree of success imposes its values on non-Western cultures. Imperial ideology is “Western” in its thinking. For a variety of reasons, Anglo-Saxonism retains cultural dominance in the global era (Parjanadze 2009).

Grabovszki (1999), for example, considered that written literature is, in itself, a Eurocentric idea. A prominent example of this is that throughout the world, corners exist where oral literature remains an extremely important tradition and literacy is not highly prioritized, but these cultures are not typically found in Central Europe. Partly because of who is writing it, literature tends toward a Western bias, based on the dominant ideology of individualism and free-market liberalism. Not much data or theory exists based on non-Western values where life opportunities are still very constrained by family background, family networks and values, broader structural influences such as religion or law, and structural inequalities in education and financial and social status (Edgar 2004). For the West, these are antiquated concepts intentionally abandoned in favor of more progressive Westernized values, perhaps partly explaining the West's comparatively lower interest in translated literature from more traditional cultures. Since the West is the bastion of literature, it stands to reason that Western ideals permeate most literature. Those books get translated into multiple languages, Western concepts receive foreignization treatment in those translations, and in this way, the West and its ideals and values permeate non-Western cultures.

### *3.4.2 Translation and West-Dominant Globalization*

With both globalization and the bastion of literature centered in the West, the two phenomena work together iteratively, each reinforcing the other's Western dominance. Globalization means bringing people from disparate cultures together into a common understanding. Translation is a requirement to export/import that common understanding.

Globalization does not have to be an act of pure Western dominance; it can also present opportunities for less dominant cultures. In a milieu where Westernized viewpoints and translations dominate, less-translated languages have the opportunity to rectify this and should not assume that such boundaries are indefatigable (Aboul-Ela 2001). If a culture's publishing industry believes itself to be underrepresented, then translators of that language should collaborate toward the common goal of moving the world's awareness of their culture beyond

stereotype. Risks will lead to rewards (Kelley 2014) and the Transformational Approach is better to be considered when evaluating the globalization phenomenon.

Globalization needs a lingua franca and translation in order to occur. Translation, whether intentionally or unintentionally, is in itself an act of globalizing – it allows information to cross borders and become accessible to other cultures. It is logical that the two phenomena dominate from roughly the same global locale as they progress hand-in-hand, inextricably intertwined. Globalization requires translation; translation intrinsically globalizes (everything).

Naturally, books are written by authors all over the world, and some get translated into other languages, crossing cultural divides. Unfortunately, though, this translation opportunity is not equal to authors everywhere but privileges Western writing. UNESCO's (2020) cultural diversity study found that 75% of all books are translated from three languages, with 55% coming from English, and global translation is dominated by about twenty languages, mostly European. American publishing has the “three percent problem” (Post 2011), referring to the perception that only approximately 3% of the literary fiction and poetry books published in the United States are translations. It seems that Americans are quite provincial in their literary preferences. Conversely, Europeans are more broad-minded with their literature, with translations accounting for 30 to 60% of their published books (UNESCO 2020). Further illustrating the pervasiveness of Western dominance through literary translation, while almost 10,000 works have been translated from English to Persian, only about 2,800 texts have been translated from Persian to English (Modarresi et al. 2017). Even machine translations themselves reinforce Western dominance, as the very technology upon which machine translation relies is hegemonic in its construction and furthers hegemonic power relations (Olohan 2017).

Other scholars agree with the point of Westernized thought – basically, English – dominating the process of translation, but then go on to ask whether translation still helps dominated cultures (i.e., those on the receiving end of the majority of translations) gain exposure in the Westernized world (Fallahshahrak and Salmani 2013). So, Iran receives far more translations from English into Persian than vice versa, and Iran is therefore more likely to be influenced by the

translations that become a part of available literature in that country than English speakers are likely to be influenced by Persian culture. Notwithstanding, Persian culture is still making a showing in the English-speaking market. Thus, most importantly, nationalities and cultures coming closer to each other as a byproduct of translation is reason for optimism, despite unbalanced scales.

#### **4. Discussion and Conclusion: Literary Theory and Globalization Theory**

As the most effective communication tool, language is essential for globalization to occur. Because not everyone speaks the same *lingua franca*, globalization cannot occur without translation. Thus, translators occupy the position of primary agents and drivers of globalization, placing a tremendous responsibility on translators to re-present cultures accurately for readers in new cultures. This also gives translators tremendous power, as they alone decide how much of the source culture the target culture gets to see and experience, and how much of the source culture is washed away under domestication tactics, rendered invisible to foreign readers.

The domestication versus foreignization concept within literary translation may pose a more critical component of globalization than may appear at first glance. People are hungry for knowledge from other cultures and integration is prized over assimilation (Yazici 2008), yet domestication within translations assimilates (Venuti 1995), rendering that foreignness all but invisible, though domestication still enjoys great traction in translations. This technique lies at odds with the larger translation and cultural goals because domestication by its very nature represents and promotes assimilation since foreign concepts in a source text are assimilated to align with domestic concepts for the target audience.

At the same time, foreignization is blamed for “dismissing” “weaker” languages and posing a threat to the target culture by introducing foreign concepts from the source culture (Fallahshahrak and Salmani 2013). Such a harsh view of foreignization remains on the surface of translations’ influences and ignores the critical role of foreignization in the larger picture of healthy and responsible globalization. Firstly, these authors assume that foreignization means

stronger languages simply dismiss and override the needs of weaker languages – a problematic view for a few reasons. They overlook the fact that translators are as free to translate from weaker languages into stronger languages as they are to translate from stronger into weaker languages. In this view of translational reciprocity rather than one-sidedness, it is not possible for stronger languages to be blamed for running over weaker languages. Rather, it is an opportunity for weaker languages to strengthen themselves on the world stage by showcasing their own cultural uniqueness through translating with the tool of foreignization, educating the rest of the world on their culture. These authors also contend that the too-foreign aspects of literary texts should be altered in translation to match the values of the target culture, and to do less is to disrespect the target culture through dismissing its values. It may be true that foreignization tactics do not have much concern for values of the target culture, but to inaccurately represent source concepts in other languages completely dismisses the author's voice and completely dismisses these elements of the source culture, pretending they do not exist at all. Foreignization may dismiss values of target culture, but domestication dismisses values of source culture and writers, a graver offense for a translated work. Foreignization also integrates while domestication assimilates, with integration more desirable to further healthy globalization (Yazici 2008).

Secondly, is not the very essence of globalization a threat to the uniqueness of all cultures involved in the globalization? Globalization means sharing understandings across cultural divides and along with that comes expanding of the mind, meaning loss of a bit of cultural uniqueness. In a globalized world, cultures borrow greatness from each other, and even the greatest world powers receive influence from weaker nations: consider India's practice of yoga and Brazil's jiu jitsu, now mainstream in most of the world, where 20 years ago they were well-kept national secrets. A critical component of globalization is expanding understandings of the variety of the world's cultures. In this way, global citizens develop understanding, compassion, and intercultural sensitivity for members of other cultures. How can culture B develop any level of understanding at all of culture A if all of culture A's idiosyncrasies are changed to not disagree with culture B's values, avoiding any risk of influence into culture B at all? Such a level of not understanding other cultures, because translators took it

upon themselves to determine that culture B did not need the influence of culture A, thwarts healthy progress and indeed, healthy globalization itself. Globalization will continue – that is a fact. Do we not owe it to all who wish to participate in globalization to provide fully accurate translations, replete with idiosyncratic cultural views and references, even when they clash with target cultural values, in order to accurately represent cultures to readers from other places? The *Harry Potter* books turned into a global phenomenon with major theme park rides and blockbuster movies as well as book translations. Translating the *Harry Potter* series into Arabic with domestication values as some research has promoted (Hawel and Swayih 2018) would be very unjust to all who read the series in Arabic, as they would have no clue what the rest of the world is talking about with all that magic. In this way, domestication isolates, insulates, and excludes this Arabic culture (in ignorance) from the rest of the world rather than bringing the Arabic world into the global fold with common understandings of this global *Harry Potter* phenomenon. Even worse, word would have gotten out that the Arabic *Harry Potter* has no magic in it, helping construct a global perception of the Arabic world as intentionally isolated, insulated, and ignorant from global phenomena. Whether we like it or not, literature is a powerful globalization agent, and translators are the agents for at least this branch of globalization. Opting for domestication over foreignization is nothing but disservice to everyone involved.

Further, foreignization is often credited as an agent of globalization because it explicitly represents cultural values to other cultures. Domestication is considered a “safer” strategy for the target culture because it covers up foreignness in translated texts. However, domestication constructs an inaccurate view of the source culture since its idiosyncrasies are subsumed into the target culture, promoting ethnocentrism rather than expanding awareness. The deep disservice domestication does to the essence of an original text extends that deep disservice to both source and target cultures, as target cultures now have impressions of source cultures being much more similar to their own than they actually are, which can prove a dangerous presumption and does not lead to intercultural sensitivity but rather its opposite, nationalism, as people are led to believe that people in other parts of the world think as they do, reinforcing their

own national values and strengthening ethnocentrism. With domestication, we have inaccurate representations of source cultures embedded into target cultures through their literature, and ethnocentrism promoted through foreign literature representations. Domestication strategies “protect” target cultures from ideological invasion, but at the same time, such “protection” keeps the target culture ignorant of true foreign values and promotes distorted views of source cultures – both dangerous to healthy globalization and intercultural sensitivity.

Moreover, readers turn to a different culture’s literature to be transported in time and place into a different land all together. In essence, the translator constructs the source culture for presentation to the target culture, and domestication strategies result in a warped construct of the source culture. Domestication strategies deprive foreign readers of the glimpse inside of a source culture that literature provides, in turn keeping the readers ignorant of foreign values and ways of thinking even as they are trying to expand their cultural knowledge through reading foreign literature. In domestication strategies, the translator holds the power to individually determine which aspects of the source culture the new audience gets to see and which it does not. The translator takes it upon themselves to decide how much foreign influence is enough or too much, and the extent to which foreign concepts are permitted to provoke target audiences. The rub here is that much literature intends to provoke, even in its home culture. Art is provocative. Through provocation, representing the unsettling and even disturbing, writers get through to their audiences and offer their cultural and societal statements. For some, this is the essence of literature and the entire purpose of writing it. Then to have some translator come along and self-determine that their foreign audience will not like the provocation, the disturbance, carries a deep disservice to the original work.

Transformational globalization theory asserts that globalization is a double-edged sword, which both promotes the integration of cultures while also increasing cultural stratification. Indeed, foreignization and domestication translation decisions may play a much larger role in such integration versus stratification than previously credited. Also, the best way to combat fears of the West taking over is for the non-West to translate more of their literature into Western languages, remaining visible on the global stage rather than spiraling into

the darkness of invisibility where they are easily trampled upon. Much of the world speaks English, so focusing on the USA market and its “3% problem” as a reason for not translating into English is misdirected. The world needs increased translations from minor languages into English and other major languages, allowing reciprocity in the globalization process rather than a staid march into stronger Western dominance. Smaller cultures will only become invisible if they do not shine light on themselves, and translating their literature for the global stage helps keep that light burning. Doing nothing while complaining the world is not fair is never a popular tactic.

Being transformational, globalization is able to use its stumbling blocks as lessons and views the process as merely steps along a process that may never be complete. Transformational theory allows us to accept that the process of globalized translation is imperfect, but reminds us it is better for mistakes to be made in efforts than for no efforts to be made at all.

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## The Language of Belonging in Pasquale Verdicchio's *This Nothing's Place*

ABSTRACT:

The aim of this essay is to carry out a stylistic analysis of the language used in a choice of the poems included in the collection *This Nothing's Place* by Pasquale Verdicchio, paying particular attention to instances of memory, time and space, which strongly contribute to a re-definition of the poet's identity through a sense of belonging. Verdicchio's poetic identity, being strongly influenced by his condition of migrant, finds its expression in a 'mind style' which reflects his concerns for these very issues, by means of a number of foregrounding devices: recurrence of lexemes conducive to the same semantic field, repetition and parallelism of syntactic structures. If the poet seems to find his appropriate dimension in a space of spaceless and timeless memory and imagination, this dimension of fluidity finds its stylistic representation in his extensive use of free verse and his limited use of punctuation.

KEYWORDS: Verdicchio, *This Nothing's Place*, language, sense of belonging, space.

The currents of import  
spring from

another space  
another ground

where digging is  
unnecessary

all we can do is  
look

in each other's  
direction.

Pasquale Verdicchio, "Savary", *This Nothing's Place* (2008, 50)

## 1. Introduction

A huge amount of words connected with the cultural and emotional process of emigration and the so-called 'hyphenated identities' have been spent by academics and scholars while trying to define and pigeonhole Pasquale Verdicchio's poems under a single, identifying label. Italian-American (or, Italian American) has been the most likely container for his production, given the fact that Verdicchio was born in Naples, emigrated to Canada in his teens and was one of the founders of the Association of Italian Canadian Writers. He subsequently moved to the U.S., where he has spent most of his life teaching at the University of San Diego, California.

The first question we ought to deal with is the issue of identity. Verdicchio's is elusive and can only be defined by subtractions: he is not Neapolitan, he is not Italian, he is not Canadian or American. Moreover, he cannot be defined by a comprehensive, hyphenated identity, in that he does not feel to be built up by a sum of cultural layers. Rather, his identity could be approached through the idea of fluidity, where the diverse cultures merge in uneven proportions, depending on the different experiences he is going through. As Iain Chambers points out, drawing on the concept of "flexible citizenship" elaborated by Aiiwa Ong, "[i]dentities are articulated across the hyphen, the transition, the bridge or passage between, rather than firmly located in any one culture, place or

position. [...] This interrogates the understanding of culture as a site of belonging with the idea of culture as a process of transition and becoming” (Chambers 1996, 53).

The question of identity is closely linked to that of emigration. How does emigration change the emigrant and, in which ways could these changes be realized and given voice? Emigration is not only a physical and geographical movement, but also a dynamic quality of the emigrant's mind, which questions any idea of fixity and belonging.

Emigration, as it often occurs to either transnational or transcontinental destinations, also poses the question of language. Will the ‘new’ language be able to become an effective vehicle of expression for the “nomadic trajectory” of the emigrant? Verdicchio's choice is, writing in the new idiom:

[...] having chosen English as his vehicle of expression (it could just as easily have been his mother tongue), Verdicchio has repeatedly challenged its syntactical rules and expanded its vocabulary by cross-pollinating it, as it were, with Italian sounds and forms. (Buonomo 2021, 212)

Soon after becoming proficient in English, Verdicchio started his ongoing experience with creative language, with the aim of seeking for an adequate means of expression for his changing condition. As Antonio D'Alfonso observes, “[t]here was no lost paradise behind him. He began at zero. His writings are presented like the first words uttered by a child: everywhere new horizons appeared” (D'Alfonso 2020, 10). Verdicchio's “new horizons” pertain both to language itself and to his apprehension of reality. The former, the idiom of his college and academic training, has been assimilated, but only to be misused, deconstructed and hybridized. The latter occurs from a perspective of absence, where the poetic voice is lost in space and time, thus perceiving the world through destructured and destructuring images which live out of commonly accepted logical connections. D'Alfonso writes that “his essential rupture consisted of realizing he was a person without a home anywhere. Inescapably, Pasquale identified with writers who deconstructed their working instrument: language” (*ibid.*).

A feeling of ‘spacelessness’ and timelessness haunt the whole of Verdicchio's poetic work and becomes particularly cogent in *This Nothing's Place*. As Buonomo aptly observes, “given Verdicchio's multicultural identity and experience (Neapolitan/Italian/Californian/North American), his ‘place’ may

be equally elusive and hard to identify, and yet what these recent poems convey, more so than the ones which preceded them, is his need to connect with a ‘strip of land’ of his own, made up of his heritage, memories, and art” (Buonomo 2015, 180).

Connecting with a “strip of land”, seeking for a virtual place of belonging, seems to be the main cypher of this collection. It does not necessarily correspond to real space, in that images emerge spontaneously from his mind, thus merging real with imaginary memories devoid of any space-time dimension. What is more, these images refer not only to physical *lieux de la mémoire*, but also to people, mostly belonging to his family, with whom he was or has been tied by strong bonds: the geography of their relationships, just as the geography of their bodies, aptly creates a “strip of land”, an intimate space of remembrance through which passes the assertion of his identity.

The aim of this essay is to carry out a stylistic analysis of the language used in a choice of the poems included in the collection *This Nothing's Place*, paying particular attention to instances of memory and space, which strongly contribute to a re-definition of Verdicchio's identity through a sense of belonging. To this purpose, it will be useful to draw on the concept of ‘mind style’, coined by the linguist Roger Fowler in his 1977 essay *Linguistics and the Novel*, where he defines it as “any distinctive linguistic representation of an individual mental self” (103), which is “created through the writer using cumulatively consistent structural options, agreeing in cutting the presented world to one pattern or another which give rise to an impression of a world-view” (76). Fowler acknowledges his debt to Halliday's paper “Linguistic Function and Literary Style” (1971), where Halliday writes that language has both an experiential and an ideational function, the former having to do with “natural meanings”, the latter with “social meanings”:

Language serves for the expression of content: it has a representational, or, as I would prefer to call it, an ideational function [...] the speaker or writer embodies in language his experience of the phenomena of the real world; and this includes his experience of the internal world of his own consciousness: his reaction, cognitions, and perceptions, and also his linguistic acts of speaking and understanding. (332)

The ideational structure of a text is, therefore, a representation of the world-view of an author (but also of a narrator or a character), which Fowler calls ‘mind style’. Fowler expands on this concept in Chapter 11 of his later



essay *Linguistic Criticism* (1996), where he illustrates ideational structuring through three types of linguistic features, namely vocabulary, transitivity and syntactic structures. Again, he borrows the concept of transitivity from Halliday, which he defines as

[...] a small set of presumably universal categories which characterize different kinds of event and process, different types of participants in these events, and the varying circumstances of place and time within which events occur. (Fowler 1996, 220)

Leech and Short devote an entire chapter of *Style in Fiction. A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose* (2007) to the discussion of mind style. In the wake of Halliday and Fowler, they underline the importance of a close linguistic analysis in terms of semantics, grammar and lexis, to be able to engage with a more subjective interpretive analysis, inasmuch as the style of an author reflects his world-view:

If the choices that build up this view of things are repeatedly used by a writer in a number of works then they become part of what critics regard as his typical 'style'. In other words, it is not just his preference for certain kinds of linguistic expression which is typical, but also the mind style which this represents. (157-58)

'Mind style' is therefore a reflection of a personality by means of linguistic markers that define that individual world-view. These linguistic markers are more easily observable in characters who are, for some reason, deviant from the norm. As a matter of fact, Halliday focuses on Lok, the Neanderthal man in Golding's *The Inheritors*, while Leech and Short analyse the perception of the world through the eyes of the cognitively impaired Benjy in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. Seemingly, subsequent studies have focused on deviant linguistic features pertaining to the representation of deviant existential situations: the mentally ill Bromden in Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Semino and Swindlehurst 1996); the protagonist of Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Christopher, who, being affected by the Asperger syndrome, gets in trouble when it comes to decipher other people's use of metaphors (Semino 2007); Joe Rose, in Ian McEwan's *Enduring Love*, and how he progressively develops a kind of "post-traumatic mind style" after a balloon accident (Montoro 2011).

On the other hand, Linda Pillière expresses a different point of view in her

essay “Mind Style: Deviance from the Norm ?” (2013). Later critics, she maintains, have too frequently focused on abnormal individual mind styles, while neglecting other significant factors:

[...] by focusing on mind styles that reflect limited cognitive skills, the concept of mind style has become far more limited than its original authors intended, and perhaps attracted fewer supporters than it actually deserves. From this two other hypotheses follow. Firstly, that the idea of deviance that is considered in most of the subsequent work on mind style is but one kind of deviance. Secondly, that the abnormal mind styles studied automatically lead to a focus on the individual, thus limiting the wider-reaching importance of the concept. (3)

Pillièrè analyses the language used by the butler Stevens in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day*: although Stevens is mentally and cognitively sane, he is obsessed by his professional identity and by the idea that his behaviour perfectly meets its requirements.

Whether mind style is studied in relation to characters, authors or narrators, the idea is that a peculiar existential situation, be it blatantly deviant or not, finds a corresponding deviant linguistic form. Verdicchio’s complex cultural identity and his use of language make no exception.

## **2. *This Nothing’s Place***

The collection *This Nothing’s Place* appeared in 2008, after eight years of poetic silence. The title of the previous collection, *The House Is Past*, as well as this one share the idea of space. In the former, space is identified with the lexical item “house”, which is linked to “past” through a relationship of identity. In *This Nothing’s Place*, the lexeme “place” is linked to the lexeme “nothing” by means of a possessive case: far from implying identity, it manifests a dynamic tension, which moves backwards from “place” to “nothing”, thus foregrounding a process of progressive engulfment of the dimension of space into its very denial. As Buonomo observes, Verdicchio’s collection *This Nothing’s Place* “owes its intriguing title to a passage in Canadian writer and painter Emily Carr’s book *Klee Wyck* (1941). Recalling a walk she took on Vancouver Island’s West coast, Carr tells how, while treading “a strip of land that belonged to nothing... neither to sea nor to land,” she found her way blocked by a “fallen tree [that] lay crosswise in this ‘nothing’s place’” (180).

This quotation contains at least two relevant features: first of all, the

reference to Canada. When Verdicchio's family decided to emigrate in the late Sixties, they settled in Vancouver, B.C. As a teenager and a young man, he spent his life there and his parents continued to live there after he had left to continue his academic studies. Even after settling down in San Diego, he has continued to visit his family in Vancouver every summer. Later in his life, he bought a house at Savary Island, a small island located Northwest of Vancouver, which is evidence of his emotional attachment to this area of Canada.

Secondly, the image of the "fallen tree", lying "crosswise" in that savage environment, suggests attraction for non-anthropized natural landscapes, and a reference to a Christological image of suffering. The death of his father represented a moment of crisis. His staying next to him during the last weeks of his life gave him the opportunity to reflect upon his family bonds, his cultures and languages and, ultimately, upon his identity and his sense of belonging. *This Nothing's Place* is the product of this reflection.

*This Nothing's Place* is composed of a first section, which bears the name of the collection itself, and a second section, entitled simply "Father", which apparently stands out as an appendix. The first section includes 26 poems of various length. A considerable number of their titles makes reference, either directly or indirectly, to the semantic field of place: "At Home Here", "This House", "At Bo", "Pyramids", "Volcano", "On Edge", "The Way Home", "The Tombs", "Three for Claude Beausoleil in Bologna", "The Sacred Lane/La Sacra Corsia", "Savary", "Exile" and "The Desert Alone". The second section, "Father", is made up of three movements, whose titles revolve around the idea of death, followed by a Postscript.

### **3. Geographies of Places and Bodies**

As previously mentioned, *The House Is Past* is the title of the previous collection of poems, where "house" and "past" are connected by a relationship of identity. The title of the second poem collected in *This Nothing's Place* is "At Home Here", where the idea of "home" is vague and dynamic and seems to be closer to a feeling than to an actual idea of place.

AT HOME HERE

Not this going on day trips

a habit to break  
through with some thought or other  
it is just around the corner  
related incidents would suggest  
the very old and very young  
susceptible new strains develop  
these maladies  
are all enveloping  
large and no one in charge  
of what might happen  
people try to survive  
property of someone else's attempts  
but ready for anything  
and where I am not here  
when there is another place  
appear or someone else  
and when I am at home here. (Verdicchio 2008, 10-11)

The poem starts with the negative particle “Not”, which negates the idea of motion (“going”) and opens the sequence of rambling thoughts that

characterises this piece. The preposition “through” (l. 3) works as a hinge between l. 2 and l. 3 and makes possible the *enjambement* between the two, thus creating a relationship of exclusion between “day” and “some thought or other”. Though there is no punctuation, the poem could be divided into two parts: ll. 1-10 and ll. 11-18. Line 10 opens and closes with the alliterative lexemes “large” and “charge”, providing a frame for the negative compound “no one”, which refers back to the starting word “Not”. The alliteration that links “large” and “charge” could be considered as an instance of chiming which, as Geoffrey Leech observes, is “the device of (in Empson’s words) connecting ‘two words by similarity of sound so that you are made to think of their possible connections.’” (Leech 1969, 95) Far from being brought together by the common destiny of “maladies [...] all enveloping large”, everyone rejects the possibility of taking care of the consequences (“no one in charge”), if not in an individualistic perspective.

If the first part can be connoted as the *pars destruens*, the second one is the *pars construens*, where the use of the pronouns “what” (l. 11), “where” (l. 15) and “when” (ll. 16 and 18) provide a parallelism of structure, which represents a deviation from the previous lines. The devices of repetition and alliteration highlight the final meditation of the poet concerning the idea of space. Again, the point of departure is a negation (“where I am not here”, l. 15). Leech and Short, while analysing a passage from Henry James, observe that

[i]n commenting on James’s use of negation, Watt raises the philosophical point that ‘there are no negatives in nature, but only in the human consciousness’. We may go further, and affirm that a negative is used, generally speaking, when there is a need to deny some expectation (in the mind of author, reader, character) that the positive is true. In other words, a negative cancels the expectation of its positive. (Leech and Short 2007, 83)

As a matter of fact, the space Verdicchio refers to by the end of the poem does not seem to be a question of physical or geographical presence, but rather a question of imagination (“appear”, l. 17) or of proximity to a fellow human being (“or someone else”, l. 17). Ultimately, it is an emotional perception (“and when I am at home here”, l. 18), which has nothing to do with geographical space or the place of origin.

In “This House”, which follows “At Home Here” in the order of the collection, the enchainment of the different images is provided by instances of

parallelism of structure and a wide use of lexical repetition and alliteration.

THIS HOUSE

If this house were to stand  
for the stamp that accompanies  
the edge of its inhabitation

on the lawn of mouth to mouth  
on the hedge of resonance  
in the waning light  
that is made of such things

if we were to stand  
for all that distance  
has come to mean

for the slight of the everyday  
and the nothing that is residence  
then the order of the word  
would coincide with hidden names

and today would spin  
onto itself to reveal  
the said of like mouths. (Verdicchio 2008, 12)

The poem opens with a hypothetical clause, which is paralleled by the same sentence repeated, with the only change of the subject (“this house” in l. 1 and “we” in l. 8). The long sentence going from l. 1 to l. 7 is made up of both a hypothetical clause and a defining relative clause, but lacks its main clause. L. 8 opens with the parallel hypothetical clause, followed by another relative clause (“all that distance has come to mean”, ll. 9-10). The two parallel structures come to a meeting point at l. 13, where they start sharing the main clauses (“then the order of the word/would coincide with hidden names” and “today would spin onto itself”, ll. 13-16). The punctuation is completely absent and the cohesion in the text is ensured by the markers “if” (ll. 1 and 8), “then” (l. 13) and “and” (l. 15). The binary rhythm which is set up in the first part of the poem is counter-balanced by the coordinated couple of main clauses, which ideally brings together the two different planes evoked by the hypothetical

clauses, that is, geographical space and an intimate perception of distance. As Leech maintains, parallelism is an instance of “foregrounded regularity” (Leech 1969, 62-5), which is made even more significant when the syntactic repetition is reinforced by alliteration, as it happens here with the voiceless fricative /s/ in “stand”, “stamp”, “distance”, “slight” and the voiced labial-velar /w/ in “were”, “lawn”, “waning”, “would”, “word” and “with”. The fourth stanza, which seems to be the ideal point of arrival of the argument, contains the simile “the nothing that is residence”, thus suggesting the denial of a physical perception of distance and origin in favour of a perspective which has to do with emotional and cultural legacy. The function of this stanza is highlighted by the concentration of three /w/ alliterations and the marker “then”.

The deconstruction of physical space is foregrounded in other poems included in this collection and, in particular, in “The Way Home”, “Savary” and “Exile”. In “The Way Home”, the trajectory that brings home is not only in one direction, but it is built “[i]n the corridor of dialogue/[...] where the astray might be/from one continent back/and this is what home was”. The physical and mental roaming through places and continents is underlined by the brisk rhythm of the couplets and, again, by the syntactic parallelism in four of them.

#### THE WAY HOME

In the corridor of dialogue  
a turn may be mine

to retrace a doubt  
against the back of a chair

hard spine and a jump  
where the astray might be

from one continent back  
and this is what home was

because it has been pushed back  
And it becomes where home is

with a different name

but a familiar call

the misstep a shift  
and take up residence

in a past city a past life  
a momentary distraction or not

you take advantage of it  
and find comfort in it

the shortest way home. (Verdicchio 2008, 20)

The coordinating conjunction “and” is anticipated at l. 5 before the noun “jump”, which provides a link between the geographical level and the level of emotion and memories, connected to the idea of actual residence both in the past and in the present. “And” is then repeated in the fourth, fifth, seventh and ninth couplets, to underline the poet’s wandering between past and present, actual and emotional residence.

The idea of an atopic “house” is brought further in the poem “Savary”, inspired by the already mentioned small island in the Strait of Georgia, not far from Vancouver, where Verdicchio often spends part of his Summer. This island is still wild, little anthropised and serves as a perfect place to experience inhabitation in a “nothing’s place”. Here are the first two movements of the poem:

SAVARY

I am on  
an island

I see islands  
clear

or as muted shapes  
through haze

and water so flat



*The Language of Belonging in Pasquale Verdicchio's 'This Nothing's Place*

to walk across

seems possible  
here we are

surrounded  
by ourselves

the sea  
and the house

residence  
in pieces of ourselves.

\*

This place  
has become my mouth

the light swarms  
through the forest

to the beach  
under the guise of words.

Days are longer  
than we know

and the nights are  
trees and wind.

Stars and satellites orbit us  
oblige us into sight.

My children ask  
about the silence

their eyes search for it

their mouths hang open

in expectation.

Nothing announces night. (2008, 47-48)

In the first part, the reader meets with the bafflement of any expectations. The poetic “I” states his being on an island, where his sight is clear (l. 4), but can also be confused by the presence of haze, which distorts his perception of the other islands. Water is there, though it does not seem to be real water, since it seems possible to walk on it. “[H]ere we are”, at l. 10, serves as a turning point and provides a syntactic and lexical parallelism with l. 1: in both cases, there are personal pronouns, the verb “to be” and a place determiner. The latter could be considered as an instance of “internal deviation”. As Leech and Short observe:

The recognition that a text may set up its own secondary norms leads to a further conclusion, that features of language within that text may depart from the norms of the text itself: that is, they may ‘stand out’ against the background of what the text has led us to expect. This is the phenomenon of internal deviation [...]. Internal deviation explains the prominence [...] of an ordinary, even banal piece of language which seems to gain its impact from the context in which it is found. (Leech and Short, 44)

As a matter of fact, the focus is moved from the natural and geographical space to the space of relationship and insight: he and his family actually surround each other, their residence being not so much in the sea and the house, but “in pieces of ourselves”.

The first couplet of the second part provides an identification between the poet and the place: “This place / has become my mouth”. Any border between place and insight is lost: light is disguised as words, days and nights depend on his inner perception of them, silence wraps both their inner and outer space. The change of approach which is brought about in this movement is emphasised by a further internal deviation. This time, it has to do with sentence length and the presence of punctuation. Sentence flow without any limits in all parts, with the exception of this second part and of the last one, where the five last couplets are separated by a full stop. In this second movement, sentences are short and go from one to six lines, thus signalling, by this very change of

rhythm, a twist in the poet's approach.

In "Exile", Verdicchio deals once more with the concepts of identity, place, immigration and memory by adopting again an inward approach.

EXILE

What remains of exile  
if not a long drawn-out breath  
in which life expands  
and continuous motion.

We are but a ridiculous number  
whose reality unites across oceans  
and deserts boundless territories  
and confined lives.

There will be no survivors  
in the war of identity  
we will be the only ones  
to recognize ourselves  
to keep our reciprocal memory  
of distance alive  
to witness other times  
other habits other ancestries.

What remains of exile  
if not our absence  
and our denial. (Verdicchio 2008, 53)

Emigration, which is considered as an exile, is viewed in terms of a dynamic situation, "in which life expands". The non-defining place determiner "boundless territories" (l. 7), just like "oceans" and "deserts", displaces the focus from physical space to a metaphysical search, which might expand life experience of the exile's "confined lives" (l. 8). The first and last stanzas provide a frame for the poem, which is underlined by the syntactic and lexical parallelism of their first sentences and of the structure "if not" at the beginning of the second line. The legacy of exile is "absence" and "denial": defining what is home is impossible and the "memory of distance" of the exile is the only point of reference to "witness other times / other habits other

ancestries” (ll. 15-6). Again, the repetition of “other” foregrounds the three words which synthesise the idea of distance. None of them is semantically linked to the idea of place.

Although physical geography, in its traditional meaning, is present in *This Nothing's Place*, the poet appears to be more interested in a geography of memory, body and insight. This is what happens in “Savary”, as we saw, where the poet and his family are “surrounded by [them]selves” and residence is “in pieces of [them]selves”; but it is also the case in the final part of the same poem, where “all [they] can do is look /in each other's /direction”.

In “Your Sleep” the sleeping body of one of his beloved is observed and analysed as if it were a map.

YOUR SLEEP

Your sleep

reminds me

of the turns some take

on their way

to selfishness.

The drooping jaw

the slack arm

and your mouth

almost drooling

at the thought of

eternal self-absorption. (2008, 51)

Sleep, as the poetic “I” states, is a way to selfishness, because the individual is living in a world which is completely detached from space and time. In the second part, starting at l. 6, the sleeping body seems to be longing for eternal meditation, if not death. And “selfishness”, the last word of the first part of the poem, is echoed by “eternal self-absorption”, the final syntagm of the poem.

The first and the second to last poem in *This Nothing's Place* bear the same title, “M”, the first letter of the name of Verdicchio's daughter. In the first composition, the world is apprehended through M's eyes. Space is read through “a coloured headband” and “a smile half-hidden / behind a self-conscious hand”.

M

The light of May and your pupils  
collect the world.  
All that is left is  
a coloured headband  
and a smile half-hidden  
behind a self-conscious hand.

The silence of your body  
accompanies me  
across the landscape  
of comings and goings;  
then you ask  
about the space  
that has opened in me  
and I can only answer  
with a gesture that means you. (2008, 9)

The poet reads the world through the syntax of M's body and its silence is his companion in his wandering. But when she finally asks about space, it is all about the space that has opened in him, which coincides with M herself. The two lexemes “landscape” and “space” find their true dimension in M's body and in the poet's insight. Silence becomes a metaphor for absence: being a migrant, the poet himself embodies an absence both in the present homeland and in the past, original homeland. As Demetrio Yocum points out, “the poet is consumed in the separation from the lost homeland and *articulates its absence.*”

But this does not prevent him/her from inhabiting

[...] a new 'home', and his/her being and be-coming, by inscribing the self in poetic discourse: writing as the suspended space of the re-turn to selfhood through the dialogic and interrogative encounter in language of the subject with an internal/external other; writing as the territory of loss and memory, as the site of an imaginary and unfulfilled journey home. (Yocum 1996, 221-22)

In the second composition, Mara is seen as an energetic element that contaminates the landscape as she passes.

M

Mara gives fire  
to the fields  
as she walks through  
to the beach  
in her hot pink skirt. (Verdicchio 2008, 55)

The three odd lines are directly referred to Mara, while the remaining two even lines make reference to two physical places, "fields" and "beach". The even lines are emphasised by a parallelism of structure, since "fields" represent Earth and "beach" stands for Water. The four natural elements are completed by "fire" (l. 1) and by Air, which is indirectly evoked by M's bracing walk to the beach. Fire, the central element, which gives both energy and hope, is referred back in the last line, where M's skirt is qualified as "hot". Mara comprises all natural elements and, to the poet, her body is the key to a new appraisal of a geography of space.

The closing poem of the collection, "The Desert Alone", provides a long meditation on the relationship between body and soul, space, time and the illusoriness of our certitudes. The first part comes to be particularly relevant to our approach:

THE DESERT ALONE

Over time  
our bodies become  
perfect strangers.  
Living together  
a habit of movement

*The Language of Belonging in Pasquale Verdicchio's This Nothing's Place*

action and reaction,  
life little more than  
an itch to scratch  
then forgotten.

After years of proprietorship  
body parts lose their distance  
are absorbed, taken for granted.  
We lose touch  
with that arm  
sight of that foot.

Pieces of ourselves  
drift along  
life's tectonic plates  
our physical body  
hardly able to break through  
the ground of personality  
erased memory  
and no map to position it  
aside from what is marked  
by our full attention.

Sitting  
mostly through pain  
then fine  
the usual progression  
and an illustration  
of the first truth  
that is noble  
the practice  
guides out of it  
unnoticed  
the body  
turns  
from being me  
to my being  
no body. (2008, 56-57)

While time passes by, the unity between mind and body is lost. We lose awareness of our body parts, because we take them for granted, just as we are hardly conscious of our actions and movements. Fragments of ourselves are

caught in the current of being without a purpose and are not able to emerge to the level of consciousness. Memory is wiped out and there is “no map to position it”. In the second line of the third stanza there is a blank space before “mostly through pain”. This sudden deviation in the layout provides a space for meditation upon life, which opens to the cyclical nature of life (“pain / then fine”). The five last lines of the stanza are foregrounded by the steady recurrence of parallelism and repetition: “the body” is echoed by “no body”, “from being me” by “to my being”, which hint at a progressive (“unnoticed”) depersonalisation and anonymisation of the individual.

The following stanzas focus on fragments of a meditation on life, time and space inspired by the “desert fathers” teachings. Space is to be recognised, but only to “let it be [...] for it to dissipate / as much as it needs / to expand as it needs / to expand beyond all limits / of place or origin” (ll. 80-85). The idea of expansion is underlined by repetition and comes to be the real signified, beyond any idea of geographical or identitarian specification. It is not by chance that the meditation occurs in the desert, the “nothing’s place” *par excellence*.

As for time, it is an illusory category we have built “to prevent everything / from happening simultaneously” (ll. 105-06). But if we let time go, we will discover that “there is more sense outside of it” (l. 103). Time might expand out of the dimensions of past, present and future, to create meaningful correspondences. The desert fathers’ indication is to “develop a meditation that is like water”, which might at once comprehend and deny space and time in its progression to wisdom.

#### 4. Belonging

We mentioned that the first section of *This Nothing’s Place* is made up of 26 poems, but we are now able to detail the structure more accurately. The first and the penultimate poems bear the same title and provide an outer frame for the twenty-three “inner” pieces, which fluctuate between a geographical search for belonging and a search for belonging which finds its correlative in his beloved’s bodies. Mara’s poems enshrine this second pole, by suggesting a reading of the world through her own physicality. The last poem, “The Desert Alone”, works both as a synthesis and as a culmination of the themes outlined in the previous poems. Verdicchio’s search for identity and origins gets farther



and farther from a physical and geographical perspective to open to a wider and higher dimension of inclusiveness. He is not rooted in a specific time or place, but his search attains a desert, a “nothing’s place”, which is the apex of his atopic sense of belonging.

“The Desert Alone” also provides a transition to the second part, “Father”, an intimate meditation in poetic prose which revolves around his appraisal of his father’s illness and death. “First Death”, the first movement, finds the poet taking care of his dying father in hospital. His mind roams in the past, recalling memories of his family life, of the different cities he inhabited, together with the emotions they aroused in him. The premises hint at a journey without purpose or direction:

This is not a beginning, and there can be no end. Our stories cross in an odd manner to confuse any idea of direction and goal. Thirty-three years after your transatlantic crossing and three years older than you were then, I turn around and find myself back in Italy between spaces of habitation. (2008, 65)

Italy, San Diego, Vancouver, “a city that seeps into your body like the humidity of its long rains. I left it happily a while back and I have missed it ever since.” (2008, 67). But his family has always remained there and now his stay there is like going back to the origin of his geographical movement and to the source of his sense of belonging: “[n]ow I was back in Vancouver on a visit different from any other, a visit that required an accounting of all our lives.” (2008, 68). Verdicchio does not focus on the outer features of the city but on his father’s physicality “I have been taking photographs. I don’t know why. What am I attempting to capture?” (2008, 71) His father’s body seems to be a map to be analysed in depth, to find marks of his roots:

The lines of his brow deep and always present, from as far back as I can remember, are testimony to the pensieri, the thoughts that are his life baggage. [...] The pattern of the moles around his neck, shoulders and arms are the ones I recognized in myself when I entered my forties. Looking at a photo of my son Giuliano [...], I notice a similar pattern on his shoulder. Those moles are a map of our history, a sort of chart of descendancy, a pattern of familiarity and affiliation. (2008, 76)

Now that his father is on the point of leaving him for good, Verdicchio is desperately trying to introject a map of his body:

My whole life I have been told that I resemble my mother. [...] Only in my forties did I begin to notice how my body was the body of my father. [...] And when I did begin to find my father, it was not in my facial features but in the shape and carry of my body, my arms, my back, my shoulders. [...] I resemble you in the shape a body takes with age. (2008, 77)

At the end of the first movement, his last gesture is running his hands over his father's, only to feel the "smoothness" of formerly strong and rough hands, which has become an "identifying absence" (2008, 79). The focus on his father's body comes to represent the lot of the migrant, who is doomed to remain naked and "stripped of history":

All migrants leave their past behind, although some try to pack it into bundles and boxes – but on the journey something seeps out of the treasured mementoes and old photographs, until even their owners fail to recognise them, because it is the fate of the migrant to be stripped of history, to stand naked amidst the scorn of strangers upon whom they see the rich clothing, the brocades of continuity and the eyebrows of belonging. (Salman Rushdie 1984, 63-64)

"Final Death", the second movement, opens with the poet wearing his father's wristwatch. The sentence "I am wearing your watch" which starts the first paragraph is repeated at the beginning of the second one. The batteries died some years before he retrieves it from his father's drawer. Time has stopped. His arm is his father's arm. Time has run out for his father. Again, he tries to take more pictures of his father, this time with his panoramic camera, in the attempt "to get close to you and including myself. I am struggling with the idea of how to embrace your corporeal space." (Verdicchio 2008, 82-3)

The last movement, "Dreams After Death", gives an account of a series of dreamlike visions, which involve, either directly or in an allegorical way, his father, his relatives and his children. Space and time are discarded and the sole geography of belonging left resides in his father's body:

I feel my arm around my father's small shoulders. I draw close to him. I smell the familiarity of his clean white shirt over the body of work and effort. I can feel the warmth of his body and every little topographical feature of it. This dream traces the geography of his being. (2008, 87)

In the "Postscript", Verdicchio relates his journey to Naples to ideally bring his father back to his native city after his death. He carries along a number of commemorative cards but he realises that everything has changed and "[n]ow

our building is a congestion of offices, health spas and a privileged crust of high income inhabitants.” (2008, 93) There is no point in leaving “him” there, since any marks of belonging have been wiped out by time and displacement. “My last thought was to leave you at the station. But as the train pulled out of the Napoli Centrale, I found myself holding your photograph, glad to be carrying you off with me.” (2008, 94).

## **5. Conclusion**

*This Nothing's Place* brings Verdicchio's poetic reflection one step further with respect to the previous collection. The first section of the collection, by including diverse pieces where the images evoking places and bodies are recurrent, prepares the backdrop for the final section, “Father”, where his father's body comes to be a metaphor for his legacy. The two “M” poems provide a frame which suggests an appraisal of reality through the reading of Mara's body. The two sections are linked by “The Desert Alone”, where the metaphor of the desert both comprehends and denies real and imaginary perspectives.

The emigrant, the “exile”, far from giving expression to his nostalgia for a specific place of origin and not being anchored in space and time, questions the issue of identity itself by discovering a place of belonging in a space of spaceless and timeless memory and imagination. Verdicchio's poetic identity, being strongly defined by his existential condition of “exile”, finds its stylistic representation in a number of corresponding linguistic strategies, which build up his ‘mind style’. From a lexical point of view, in the poems more closely linked to the ‘geographies of places’, namely, “At Home Here”, “This House”, “The Way Home”, “Savary” and “Exile”, there is a recurrence of lexemes directly connected with the semantic field of space: “place”, “here”, “distance”, “residence”, “continent”, “city”, “home”, “island”, “forest”, “beach”, “motion”, “exile”, “oceans”, “deserts” and “territories”. In the poems which focus on the ‘geographies of bodies’, namely, “Your Sleep”, the two “M” poems, “The Desert Alone” and the whole of the “Father” section, a minor incidence of spatial lexemes and syntagms (“landscape”, “fields”, “walks”, “beach”, “tectonic plates”, “map”, “direction” and “spaces of habitation”) meets with an increase in lexemes and syntagms connected with body parts:

“physical body”, “moles” as “maps of our history” and “corporeal space”. Devices such as internal deviation, repetition of lexemes and parallelism of structure foreground the language connected with the idea of space.

Being an exile also means questioning the concept of time and memory. The latter, which should connect the dimension of the past to the present, is vague and fragmentary and proceeds by vision and subtraction. Time is signalled by the recurrence of lexemes such as “past”, “days”, “nights” and “times”. Memory and its subtraction is formally expressed by lexemes which are conducive to the semantic field of absence: “nothing”, “no one”, “denial”, “silence” and “no body”. Moreover, from a syntactic point of view, a repetition of negative structures can be traced in some of his poems: “Not this”, “I am not here”, “Nothing announces night”, “if not a long drawn-out breath”, “if not our absence” and “no map to position it”.

To conclude, the geographies and maps his poems hint at are not only related to physical places but to spaces of emotion which intertwine in a dimension of fluidity. The latter is stylistically suggested by an extended use of free verse and a limited use of punctuation. It is to this very dimension that Verdicchio feels to belong and his mind style reflects his apprehension of the world in terms of space, time, memory and vision.

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## Interweaving Identities: Cultural Synthesis and Societal Dynamics in Zadie Smith's *Swing Time*

### ABSTRACT

Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* masterfully engages with global encounters through intricate literary techniques, transcending biases. The novel's interplay of form and content reveals interactive processes inherent in approaching texts as social events. This analytical lens unveils narrative layers and underlying societal currents that shape character dynamics and interactions. The novel's narrative strategy serves as a canvas for weaving diverse cultural threads, challenging conventional narratives. *Swing Time* deftly interweaves elements from a wide spectrum of identities, skillfully bridging the disjointed segments of the protagonist's multifaceted journey. This narrative technique effectively fuses cultural and historical symbols, enabling a synthesis that redefines historical understanding. In navigating global influence, the novel offers a nuanced interpretation of hegemony, intertwining historical epochs and events into a comprehensive framework. In the context of globalization, Smith's intertextual references weave dance history into the narrative, transcending boundaries of race and time, fostering empathy and unity. *Swing Time* challenges norms through multifaceted aesthetic values, prompting introspection and advocating for an equitable society. The present study analyzes the novel's exploration of identity, empathy, and the transformative power of art in shaping a more inclusive world. Through its intricate narrative, *Swing Time* effectively crafts a rich tapestry of interwoven identities, thereby deepening our understanding of the text and the intricate societal currents it engages with. The novel's discourse transcends mere entertainment, provoking readers to reflect on the interconnectedness of narratives across time and space.

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KEYWORDS: Global Encounters, Identity Synthesis, Societal Dynamics, Cultural Resonance, Swing Time

“For the world was run by lizards in human form”

(Smith 2016, 80)

## 1. Introduction

In *Swing Time*, Zadie Smith deftly weaves together the intertwining stories of the unnamed narrator and her childhood friend, Tracey. Their shared love for dance initially binds them, yet their paths diverge as they confront the complexities of race, class, and ambition. As the narrator navigates her journey from their London neighborhood to the glitzy world of celebrity, she grapples with questions of authenticity, belonging, and the price of success. Alongside her personal quest, Smith masterfully explores broader societal issues, from the legacy of colonialism to the commodification of culture. Through richly drawn characters and lyrical prose, *Swing Time* offers a compelling examination of the forces that shape individual lives and collective destinies in our ever-evolving world.

Zadie Smith’s utilization of writing techniques in composing *Swing Time* culminates in a dynamic interplay of diverse global encounters and diverse arts i.e. dance. These encounters serve as the bedrock for the distinct perspective she aims to impart to each individual, transcending any affiliational biases. Delving deeply into the dual lenses of both form and content within *Swing Time* can pave the way for a more profound engagement, declaring that “part of what is implied in approaching texts as elements of social events is that we are not only concerned by texts as such, but also with the interactive processes of meaning-making” (Fairclough 2003, 10). This analytical approach not only unravels the intricate layers of the narrative but also sheds light on the underlying societal and cultural undercurrents that shape the characters and their interactions. Consequently, examining *Swing Time* through these paradigms not only enriches our understanding of the text but also provides a broader context for exploring the nuances of identity, multiculturalism, and the human experience.

Right from its inception, *Swing Time* emerges as a culturally rich narrative that masterfully interweaves elements from a diverse spectrum of identities. This intricate weaving stems from a careful fusion of the protagonist's multifaceted background, encompassing her mixed heritage. “Smith’s novel



advances earlier concerns ... about culture and race, similarly addressing the epistemological uncertainty of identity politics and familial relationships” (McMann 2012, 616). This narrative technique operates as a conduit for the creation of vivid imagery, effectively bridging the disparate segments of the narrator’s personal odyssey. In this sense, the novel not only welcomes a broad array of cultural and historical symbols but also wields them as potent tools for synthesis. This synthesis, in turn, becomes the driving force behind the emergence of an entirely novel perspective, capable of reshaping our understanding of history. Through this lens, the novel transforms our comprehension of collective existence and redefines how we interpret our shared interactions with the world. In essence, *Swing Time* functions as a canvas onto which various cultural threads are intricately woven, culminating in a coherent and enlightening tapestry. This tapestry challenges conventional historical and identity narratives, inviting readers to engage with a more expansive and nuanced perspective on individual and collective stories. The narrative strategy of the novel extends beyond mere entertainment, serving as a profound instrument for fostering critical contemplation. Moreover, it facilitates an ongoing discourse between the past, present, and future, encouraging readers to delve into a continuous dialogue that transcends temporal boundaries. Herein, what Smith carries out “is an attempt to disrupt the narratives forged to define the dominant culture, to hybridize the discourse, to reconfigure the concept of all cultural identities as fluid and heterogeneous” (Williams 1999, 4).

In Zadie Smith’s novel *Swing Time*, intertextuality serves as a dynamic mechanism for constructing a narrative that transcends conventional divisions. Through its intricate interweaving of historical dance and art, Smith’s work resonates across generational and cultural spectra, fostering a transformative journey for readers. This journey involves reimagining established frameworks and embracing a more inclusive and empathetic outlook on the world—an outlook that emerges as a testament to the enduring power of artistic expression. By foregrounding intertextuality in our exploration, we delve into how *Swing Time* pays homage to the profound legacy of the Harlem Renaissance, celebrates the cultural and artistic expressions of African Americans, and provides a powerful exposé of contemporary racial tensions. Through its multifaceted prism of intertextual references, *Swing Time* challenges

established norms, prompts introspection, and advocates for a society rooted in unity and equity.

## **2. Exploring Cultural Resurgence, Identity, and Global Citizenship**

As the narrating voice astutely notes, “I am reading about the Sankofa. You know what that is? It’s a bird; it looks back over itself, like this. From Africa. It looks backwards, at the past and it learns from what’s gone before. Some people never learn” (*Swing Time*, 30). This reference to the Sankofa bird introduces the concept of retroactive learning and becomes emblematic of the novel’s core ethos. By anchoring the narrative in this African symbol, *Swing Time* pays homage to the wisdom embedded in history and underscores the importance of looking back to inform our understanding of the present and future. In doing so, the novel echoes the sentiments of a literary-cultural criticism, emphasizing the significance of cultural memory and historical consciousness in shaping contemporary perspectives. In this sense, Williams’ framework invites critical analysis of texts, considering their relationship to the dominant ideology, their engagement with residual elements, and their potential to contribute to emergent cultural and social change (Williams 1976, 97). These residual elements from the past, intricately woven into cultures, offer a lens through which we can gain a realistic comprehension of the present-day landscape. Notably, the narrative serves as an educational tool, embodying pedagogical intent.

The metaphorical incorporation of “The Sankofa... From Africa” operates akin to navigating a hypertext reference, guided by the tenets of Transnationalism and Intersectionality. Transnationalism highlights the interconnectedness of cultures and experiences across geographic borders, while intersectionality acknowledges how race, gender, class, and other identities interweave to shape these experiences. This emblematic portrayal holds profound resonance for the intricate tapestry of Black Diasporas, which are “indeed associated with trauma, separation and dislocation” (Siccardi 2020, 215), encapsulating their intricate voyage in pursuit of meaning and identity that emphasizes and acknowledges geographical and cultural boundaries. This analogy presents a compelling call to action, urging the cultivation of an innovative pedagogy rooted in cultural literacy that transcends individual and

communal interactions – an intersectional approach that acknowledges the interconnectedness of various forms of identity. In this regard, Cuder-Dominguez states that “Smith’s point is that everything and everyone is inextricably bound together by historical ties that stretch far beyond one or two generations” (Cuder-Dominguez 2004, 183). Through the concept of rememory (Morrison 1987, 135), the act of looking back initiates a dialogue with the past, creating a reciprocal exchange that allows for a profound contextualization of our contemporary cultural trajectory.

Herein, the Akan wisdom word, with its intricate components, symbolizes the essence of reclaiming a profound connection to one’s heritage, transcending geographical and temporal boundaries. This notion, seamlessly integrated into *Swing Time*, beckons readers to embark on a journey of reclamation and redefinition. In this context, it is noteworthy to acknowledge the observation that *Swing Time* encapsulates “African American history of oral narratives... revealing much through the spoken word but even more through the symbol” (Gayson 2000, 2). As the narrative unfolds, the symbiotic relationship between rememory, cultural resurgence, and personal reclamation takes center stage, enriching the narrative tapestry and redefining how we engage with both the past and the present. *Swing Time* emerges as a literary embodiment of the Transnationalism concept, facilitating connections beyond national borders, while the act of looking back becomes a transformative catalyst: “Smith demonstrates that younger, transcultural women experience more acute feelings of fragmentation, houses and physical spaces offering hardly any rooting” (Siccardi 2020, 220). It shapes our perceptions, deepens our understanding of histories, and forges a more comprehensive sense of self and community.

*Swing Time* reclaims the age-old art of storytelling along with its accompanying symbolic structure. Yet, even as it gazes back at the African roots, the narrative extends beyond, incorporating an expedition into the continent driven by the aspirations of an outreach development endeavor. The protagonist and Aimee, a globally famous Australian pop star known for her cultural influence and charitable projects, embark on the ambitious venture of establishing an aid project in the Gambia. This venture unveils yet another layer of symbolic significance, intertwining with the essence of the Sankofa concept. However, Aimee’s initiative is fraught with complications and controversies, as

it touches on themes of cultural exploitation and cultural appropriation. The Sankofa is embodied through active engagement, as it takes the form of a mission aimed at combating poverty and fostering progress. The narrative's resonance with the Sankofa is strikingly evident, mirroring the quest for a return to ancestral origins, but now it takes place on the terrain of addressing social inequalities while grappling with the ethical implications of cultural interactions.

For a cultural scheme to provide an effective model of identity, it must be presupposed... that identity is culturally rooted, causally determined and ultimately invariable... After all, it is patently absurd, and inhumane, to expect identity to kow-tow meekly to the call of one culture to the exclusion of another. (Sell 2006, 35)

This fusion of purposeful action and historical reflection signifies a profound transformation. It is not just a tale of personal development, but an exploration of the intersection between individual agency and communal progress—a narrative thread that transcends time and resonates with the soul of the Sankofa concept. In essence, *Swing Time* channels the essence of the Sankofa through a modern lens, binding past, present, and future aspirations within its intricate narrative tapestry.

Significantly, the narrative unveils a profound symbolic yearning for the acquisition and comprehension of one's historical roots – residual elements, a sentiment embodied by the protagonist's mother within the novel. She personifies this desire as both a black woman and a feminist, immersing readers into the intricate political landscape of Thatcherite Britain. Subtle allusions within the text hint at the influence of conservative policies, as echoed in the evocative line: “If all the Saturdays of 1982 can be thought of as one day, I met Tracey at ten a.m. on that Saturday, walking through the sandy gravel of a churchyard, each holding our mother's hand” (*Swing Time*, 9). This line resonates with conservative policies of the time, particularly those under Margaret Thatcher's government, which emphasized traditional family values, individual responsibility, and a return to a more disciplined societal framework. The imagery of walking through a churchyard and the focus on familial bonds subtly reflect the era's sociopolitical climate, where conservative rhetoric often idealized a nostalgic past and promoted stability through traditional structures. This symbolic motif resonates deeply, serving as a conduit for exploring the

### *Interweaving Identities*

intricate tapestry of identity, history, and politics. Within this literary framework, the mentioned line provides a subtle yet impactful touchstone. It encapsulates the essence of time, merging multiple Saturdays into a singular day, symbolizing the broader amalgamation of experiences, events, and policies. In this sense, the narrative intertwines the personal and the political, fostering a multidimensional understanding of history. It not only invites readers to comprehend the characters' struggles and journeys but also prompts them to contemplate the intricate web of political decisions that echoed through society:

Mother was a feminist. She wore her hair in half-inch Afro, her skull was perfectly shaped, she never wore make-up and dressed us both as plainly as possible. Hair is not essential when you like Nefertiti. She'd need no make-up or products or jewellery or expensive clothes, and in this way her financial circumstances, her politics, and her aesthetics were all perfectly –conveniently matched. (*Swing Time*, 9-10)

Should this resonate as a reflection of the closure of the welfare system prevalent during the Thatcher era and the subsequent imposition of austerity measures on specific households, the narrator, in her adolescence, beckons us to examine the other predicament. She does so by juxtaposing her own situation alongside that of Tracey and her mother, thereby initiating a comparative exploration. If we consider the narrator's mother from the perspective of her strongly resonant ideological stance, which profoundly influences her life decisions and principles, her convictions become apparent. As the narrator, now an adult and an assistant to Aimee, the Australian pop star, progresses, this perspective is somewhat validated:

there might be any practical divergence between my mother's situation and her own did not seem to occur to Aimee, and this was one of my earliest lessons in her way of viewing difference between people, which were never structural or economic but always essentially differences of personality. (*Swing Time*, 111)

As though aiming to blend the cultural boundaries between her Jamaican mother, embodying what Paul Gilroy refers to as “the intellectual endeavor to press original African time into the service of their attempts to come to terms with diaspora space and its dynamics of differentiation” (Gilroy 1993, 197), and Aimee, who seemingly represents the emerging global unity transcending all

colors and disparities, yet whose actions often reveal a pattern of capitalistic exploitation of these very differences, the narrator characterizes Aimee as:

The palest Australian I ever saw – sometimes without make-up on she did not look like she was from a warm planet at all, and she took steps to keep it that way, protecting herself from the sun all times. There was something alien in her, a person who belongs to a tribe of one. (*Swing Time*, 97)

The aspiration to amalgamate diverse attributes to highlight human value can be identified in Aimee and the mother, representing the quintessential embodiment of humanity, a utopian essence that Aimee carries as if she belongs to “a tribe of one” (*Swing Time*, 97). However, it is within the narrator herself, rather than Aimee, where the most profound indications of cultural transcendence manifest in its most comprehensive form—a voluntary detachment from conventional affiliations, given that we are essentially global citizens shaped by numerous influences. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the “exposure to English values” and the absence of the native culture have left many immigrant women, including the protagonist's mother, with no images of themselves in the post-global West (Upstone 2009, 154). The surreal conversation between them underscores this issue from all angles, representing a reflective response from a second-generation immigrant grappling with the complex implications of British nationality and ancestry:

I noticed she did not have an Australian accent not any more but neither was quite American or quite British, it was global: it was New York and Paris and Moscow and LA and London combined. Of course now lots of people speak this way but Aimee's version was the first time I heard it. (*Swing Time*, 95)

Her voice resonates like that of a global citizen, almost indiscernible in terms of a singular and fixed cultural origin. It beckons to be discovered beyond the confines of conventional boundaries. The framework of globalized identities that *Swing Time* introduces derives its foundations from the real-world complexities of contemporary concerns, which Zadie Smith also portrays through Aimee's initiatives aimed at reaching out. In *Swing Time*, a meaningful platform emerges for collaboration and worldwide unity spanning continents and diverse cultural perceptions. As the narrator reflects upon her role as both observer and pivotal figure in this newfound existence, the novel becomes a stage for probing this new life she unexpectedly uncovers:

### *Interweaving Identities*

If I had come of an age at an essentially buoyant moment in the history of England, a period in which money had new meaning and uses and the “freebie” had become a form of social principle, unheard of in my neighbourhood and yet normal elsewhere. “Freebism”: the practice of giving free things to people no need of them. (*Swing Time*, 88)

The aspiration for a purposeful existence and the drive to connect with other communities contribute significantly to the narrator’s inclination to disapprove of “most things with a cold streak of defensive pride” (*Swing Time*, 89), leading her to form a distinct political perspective that diverges from Zoe’s, her supervisor in the charitable organization where she works. Zoe, who represents a more conventional and perhaps pragmatic approach to their philanthropic work, often clashes with the narrator’s idealistic and critical views. This dynamic highlights the tension between different ideologies and approaches to social issues within the narrative. *Swing Time* reveres Aimee as a symbol of social equity, a notion that Smith underscores:

The songs no one heard, the words, she wrote- banal aphorism, usually (“The Arc of the Moral Universe is Long it Bends towards Justice.”) – no one but me ever read. Only in that chat room did she seem to be in the world, though it was such a bizarre world, filled only with the echoing voices of people who had apparently agreed with each other. (*Swing Time*, 92-93)

This positions the narrator as a fortunate collaborator in Aimee’s endeavors for African outreach. Moreover, functioning as a custodian of history and art, the narrator undertakes the task of connecting her own experiences with a historical timeline of dance, tracing its evolution from the 1930s to the contemporary era. Paul Gilroy’s insights into black expressive cultures provide a crucial framework for understanding the complexities of cultural identity and heritage in the novel. He argues that cultural traditions are not transmitted as fixed essences but rather are constantly reshaped through breaks and interruptions. As Gilroy states,

The syncretic complexity of black expressive cultures alone supplies powerful reasons for resisting the idea that untouched, pristine Africinity resides inside these forms, working a powerful magic of alterity in order to trigger the reception of absolute identity.

Following the lead established by Leroi Jones, I believe it is possible to approach music as a changing rather unchanging same. Today, this involves the difficult task

of striving to comprehend the reproduction of cultural traditions not in the unproblematic transmission of a fixed essence through time but in the breaks and interruptions that the invocation of tradition may itself be a distinct, though covert, response to the destabilising flux of the postcontemporary world. (Gilroy, 101)

This perspective, emphasizing the dynamic and evolving nature of cultural identity, highlights that traditions are continually reinterpreted and reinvented in response to contemporary challenges, resonating with the artist's dedication to social justice. This commitment finds its embodiment in Aimee, epitomized by her alternate name "Alias Truthteller Legon" (*Swing Time*, 92). This phase of the narrator's journey mirrors a significant chapter in the history of racial concerns in the United States.

For the world was run by lizards in human form: the Rockefellers were lizards, and the Kennedys, and almost everybody at Goldman Sachs, and William Hearst had been a lizard, and Ronald Reagan and Napoleon—it was a global lizard plot. (*Swing Time*, 80)

This remarkably critical viewpoint regarding global influence and economic structures provides a distinct left-leaning interpretation of the world, offering insight into hegemony by intricately interconnecting various historical epochs and political events, thereby constructing a comprehensive framework (*Swing Time* 94). If the underlying predicament of the world revolves around the supremacy of the liberal system across time, spanning from the era of Napoleon to the contemporary period, *Swing Time* consequently aims at confronting and challenging the various corrupt systems that have consistently molded the present state of the world.

### **3. Narrative as Bridge: Exploring how the narrative constructs bridges between cultural divides**

In the contemporary landscape, "Africa" remains a strategic resource for Western constructs, often utilized to establish a counterpoint that validates and defines Western identity. However, within the context of globalization, novel economic and cultural appropriations have emerged, encompassing both benevolent and malevolent aspects. Under the pervasive influence of



globalization, “Africa” has evolved to accommodate the neo-imperialist influences of both Eastern and Western powers:

The concept of cultural purity with its concomitant intolerance is thus rendered obsolete and restricted to the most recalcitrant modernist positions for which homogeneity and uniformity are the rule. Hierarchies and binary oppositions are avoided by the postmodern conceptualization which sustains heterogeneity and relativity to beat ritual naturalization of difference. (Acquarone 2008, 216)

Zadie Smith subtly references these contemporary phenomena by placing her narrator in a fictional African nation, where she serves as an assistant to Aimee's philanthropic initiatives. In *Swing Time*, the protagonist embarks on a visit to a former slave port with the hope of uncovering a profound realization about her identity. However, “oppressed because of her gender, race, and class, the narrator is deprived of a self that could tell a coherent story. She has no self, no name, no voice; she only exists as a shadow of others” (Quabeck, 2018: 462). The once haunting slave port has undergone a transformation into a tourist destination, catering to the interests of African Americans, Australians, and Europeans. This repurposing has stripped the site of its potential for spiritual enlightenment, rendering it a superficial and gaudy commercial attraction. The narrator instead looks for what is felt not collected:

The kind of information I was looking for, which I felt I needed to shore myself up, I dug out instead from an old, stolen library book – The History of Dance. I read about steps passed down over centuries, through generations. A different kind of history from my mother's, the kind that is barely written down – that is felt. (*Swing Time*, 100–01).

Herein, all through the text of the novel, the pervasive presence of power knows no borders, saturating every aspect of existence. This power's enduring and extensive nature resists being confined to a single point of memory, such as the old slave port. Rather than viewing it as merely another memorial to suffering, the narrative recognizes the complexity and breadth of its influence.

All paths lead back there, my mother had always told me, but now that I was here, in this storied corner of the continent, I experience it not as an exceptional place but as an example of a general rule. Power had preyed on weakness here: all kinds of power – local, racial, tribal, royal, national, global, economic – on all kinds of weakness, stopping at nothing, not even at the smallest girl child. But power does that everywhere. The world is saturated in blood. (316)

The narrator actively seeks an alternative historical viewpoint distinct from the perspective that shapes her mother's limited political activism. Zadie Smith has expressed her intention to delve into her own and her narrator's experience of "double consciousness" in *Swing Time*, a concept coined by Du Bois that maintains its relevance for a new era (Du Bois 1994). This exploration is achieved by the narrator through retrospection on the past, especially its interactions with the history of dance—an ever-evolving phenomenon transcending Africa, Europe, and America. The narrator's quest for identity, which leads to moments of revelation, is refracted through a mature comprehension of the world. Consequently, the narrator transforms into a conduit for comprehending history's intricacies.

The protagonist, whose name remains undisclosed, embarks on a profound quest concerning the intricacies of black identity. However, this journey lacks agency and is subjected to the capriciousness of historical circumstances, leading her to be figuratively "pulled this way and that" (Ellison 462). The pivotal realization for Smith's character arrives when her involuntary association with Aimee culminates, marking the conclusion of her servitude. This juncture prompts her to engage in mature introspection, which invites an extended evaluation of the protagonist's internal conflicts, contributing to the multifaceted portrayal of her development.

Smith effectively integrates and customizes the concept of double consciousness, to resonate with her portrayal of the protagonist's inherent dual identity due to her biracial background. The narrator's mother, driven by an aspiration for "uplift," undertakes the responsibility of equipping her daughter to navigate the complexities of a world marked by racial distinctions. This is reflected in her discontentment towards the sexually charged dancing exhibited by Tracey and her daughter in front of their childhood peers. The mother's concern extends to the potential interpretation of such a performance within the context of their white middle-class social environment, emphasizing her vigilance in preparing her daughter for the nuanced dynamics of race and class. Zadie Smith's perspective can be characterized as a "trans-historical transnationalism," a framework through which dance operates as a conduit for timeless and cross-cultural interactions:

The ersatz dance step—four steps backward, one step forward—describes the neoliberal subjects' relationship to diminishing access to wealth and wellbeing by

### *Interweaving Identities*

literalizing the economic metaphor of the ladder (which one ascends or descends linearly) and also as a dance step (which becomes even more potent a metaphor in her more recent novel *Swing Time*. (Arnett 2018, 2)

These connections span diverse historical contexts, traversing continents from Africa to the harrowing Middle Passage, and extending from the era of the Harlem Renaissance to the modern iconography of Michael Jackson. Smith confirms the impact of different traditions on her identity, with an “audacious hope that a man born and raised between opposing dogmas [...] could not help but be aware of the extreme contingency of culture” (Smith 2009, 149). This interplay of dance also encapsulates the intricate nuances of cultural and artistic appropriation. For Smith's protagonist, whose identity is shaped by her mixed racial heritage, a moment of revelation surfaces during her adult years. Specifically, her recognition that Fred Astaire, in the film *Swing Time*, enacts a tap routine while wearing blackface serves as a poignant illustration of American appropriation of black culture, an act rooted in the minstrelsy tradition that emerged during the nineteenth century. This revelation underscores the profound complexities inherent in cultural exchange and exploitation. In this sense, McClure through his discussion on the texts written by Don DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon, Toni Morrison, N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, and Michael Ondaatje proposes the “identification of a body of “postsecular fiction” whose characteristics include ... a commitment to progressive, liberal values” (McClure 2007, 3).

In *Swing Time*, the protagonist's perspective is rooted in the conviction that physical agility and elegance surpass all other modes of portrayal, encompassing both literary and historical dimensions. This newfound awareness profoundly disrupts her previously held, illusory perception of her own subjectivity, revealing her as a passive “object” serving the agendas of others (*Swing Time* 427). This recognition mirrors her role as a subordinate embellishment to Aimee, embodying the emblematic image of cosmetic diversity employed to address “underrepresentation” within Aimee’s expansive corporate domain (*Swing Time* 426).

Within the narrative framework created by Smith, the protagonist assumes the role of a mirroring doppelgänger to various artistic forms of expression. Despite her absence of a discernible ‘voice’, her unique interpretative prowess allows her to unveil the profound emotional truths encapsulated within a song

(*Swing Time* 25). This portrayal emphasizes her function as a mediator, existing as a conduit for truth without agency or intent. Only as the narrative nears its conclusion does she acknowledge the wisdom inherent in her mother's politicized consciousness. Returning to Tracey with a spirit of forgiveness and responsibility, she acts upon her mother's dying wish, demonstrating her newfound agency. This journey of self-discovery and reconciliation culminates in her commitment to aiding Tracey, motivated by the desire to shield her vulnerable children from the pitfalls of the past and prevent its recurrence. This transformation showcases the protagonist's evolving sense of purpose and responsibility, rooted in the lessons gleaned from her complex journey.

As the narrative unfolds, a glimmer of hope emerges for the protagonist, centered on the profound realization that the formative experiences of childhood intricately shape individuals into who they are. This awareness underscores the need to confront and transcend the traumas that linger, serving as barriers to healing. A sense of redemption is found through the act of extending care to others, shifting the focus away from oneself. In the narrative crafted by Smith, this transformation signifies the protagonist's liberation from her role as a mere functionary, an expendable appendage within Aimee's realm.

This pivotal moment marks her resolute departure from the confines of Aimee's world. Instead, she takes a decisive stride towards embracing her connection with Tracey and the children who genuinely require her assistance. This transformation reflects a shift in her priorities, where the focus shifts from serving a powerful figure to providing crucial support to those in need. Through this evolution, the protagonist embodies the potential for personal growth, healing, and ultimately, redemption, signifying a hopeful trajectory for her character within the narrative's complex tapestry. Within the narrative of *Swing Time*, the protagonist navigates a world in which the concept of motherhood becomes inextricably entwined with racial dynamics. Notably, Zadie Smith, who herself has previously explored themes of motherhood in her acclaimed novels such as *White Teeth* and *On Beauty*, adopts a nuanced approach in *Swing Time*. Here, she addresses the intersection of motherhood, sexuality, and racialization within a historical framework.

In this exploration, Smith employs an inclusive perspective that resists exploitative narratives associated with race, nationality, and gender. Remarkably, she accomplishes this feat without resorting to the oversimplified discourses of

the post-black or the postracial. Instead, Smith skillfully unveils the intricate layers of identity construction within a global milieu. Through *Swing Time*, she crafts a narrative that is both an act of relinquishment and reclamation. Within this narrative framework, the central character grapples with her personal history, an essential step towards replacing the individualism emblematic of the millennial era with a nurturing ethos aligned with fostering the upcoming generation. Smith's narrative tactfully dissects the complexities surrounding motherhood, race, and identity, offering readers a thought-provoking analysis that transcends conventional narratives of post-racialism and reveals the multifaceted dimensions of identity formation in our interconnected world.

*Swing Time* aspires to forge a novel realm of reality upon the remnants of antiquated and conceivably fading truths. The manifold array of voices exposing racial biases subtly parodies the postmodern inclination to reject absolute truths, thereby highlighting prejudiced discourses and rhetoric of self-absorbed cultural representation that wield transformative power over global dynamics and interpersonal human connections. Through a strategic repositioning of the sensitive nodes within racist discourse, Zadie Smith presents an exceptional opening to disrupt analogous discourses that traditionally serve as demarcations between diverse cultures. Moreover, she accentuates the distinct competing cultural entities within the global realm of identity: "Smith's characters are busy in the attempt to determine their sense of self and find an identity beyond religious, gendered, political, or racial categories, and the narrator of *Swing Time* is no exception" (Quabeck 2018, 468). This shift effectively transforms archaic dichotomies into novel connections or even orchestrates an innovative narrative that mirrors the contemporary geopolitical landscape, ultimately subverting established norms. This narrative strategy allows Smith to penetrate the core of ingrained societal assumptions and cultural prejudices, unearthing the potential for a renewed awareness and inclusive understanding that extends beyond prevailing divisions. The synthesis of divergent voices within the text thus becomes an instrument of destabilization, challenging established narratives and fostering a nuanced dialogue that contributes to reshaping the discourse on race, identity, and the complex interplay of cultures in a rapidly evolving world. The narrator grapples with "emplotted narratives" that will "never succeed in bringing concord to

identities which are diachronically heterogeneous [...] in a haphazard universe of constant flux” (Sell 2006, 38).

If the essence of the multicultural novel lies in the pursuit of establishing social and cultural concordance, the nuanced manner in which reality is addressed in British novels since 1980 imparts upon them a political significance that goes beyond engendering heightened conflict. Instead, it introduces a novel approach for resolving societal predicaments within an environment where the cohabitation of disparate cultural entities can no longer be evaded. The literary landscape of British novels post-1980 unveils a strategic departure from overt confrontations, opting for a subtler engagement with reality that transcends surface-level conflicts. This nuanced approach offers a distinct avenue for addressing the complexities arising from the coalescence of diverse cultural frameworks: “Smith demonstrates that although in past times ethnic identity could be signified and maintained by cultural markers such as dress, food, specific cultural traditions or even language, today these distinctions are nebulous” (Walters 2005, 317). Rather than igniting exacerbated turmoil, these narratives contribute to forging innovative resolutions to the social crises that emerge when varying cultural bodies intersect. The contemporary British novel thus emerges as a vehicle for constructive exploration and dialogue, seeking to bridge gaps, dismantle barriers, and foster coexistence amidst cultural diversity. This shift in narrative strategy reflects the evolving societal landscape, underscoring the imperative to move beyond polarized stances and instead navigate uncharted pathways towards inclusive harmony.

*Swing Time* adeptly engages with the underlying cultural crises that are molding our contemporary world, utilizing hypo-textual references to serve as a poignant parody of the process of decontextualization followed by a subsequent reconceptualization of race and ethnicity on a global scale. Considering the inauguration of this novel kind of ethnicity, “rerooting would be foregrounded in the western cultural map; immigrants’ bodies could no longer be historicized, bodily stereotypes would no longer be considered sights of disgust... and nomadism and miscegenation [would] appear as figures of virtue” (Taheri 2018, 3). Smith’s narrative strategy effectively dismantles and reconfigures prevailing notions, subtly delineating the world into fresh perspectives and sensibilities. It is important to note that while the narrative

does not completely obliterate established stereotypes and biases, it navigates the delicate balance between acknowledging their existence and redefining them. In doing so, Smith astutely disrupts the latent and emerging dimensions of cultural conflicts, instigating a transformative process of reimagining temporal dynamics and modes of communal coexistence. This engagement transcends a mere revisionist exercise; rather, it serves as a foundation for constructing a renewed societal 'time' and a harmonious way of shared existence. Dominic Head states that – regarding *White Teeth* – “we are all hybrid post-colonials, biologically as well as culturally and the pursuit of pure ethnic origins is a pointless objective” (Head 2003, 114). *Swing Time*'s narrative trajectory, following a path already explored by the writer in her previous works such as *White Teeth* and *On Beauty*, signifies an active intervention that calls for a reconsideration of the trajectory of cultural interactions, allowing for the simultaneous coexistence of past and present while forging a trajectory towards a more inclusive and harmonious future.

Smith's divergence from perpetuating conventional racial symmetries is epitomized in her theoretical alignment of chaos theory and postmodernism. Considering what Hayles suggests, as “the postmodern turn toward fragmentation, rupture and discontinuity” (Hayles 1991, 11), Zadie Smith alludes to the resonance between her refusal to adhere to established racial norms and broader theoretical commonalities shared by these disciplines. Just as chaos theory challenges deterministic models, postmodernism disrupts established narratives. Smith's act of refusing racial replication aligns with similar suspicions of globalization voiced by influential theorists spanning Jacques Derrida (*Signature*) to Frederic Jameson (*Postmodernism*) and Jean François Lyotard (*The Postmodern Condition*), as well as Lucy Irigaray (*The Sex*). This intellectual lineage underscores the emphasis on iterative techniques and recursive looping as strategies to disrupt and destabilize systems, fostering unforeseen conclusions. In aligning her narrative approach with these theoretical paradigms, Smith not only subverts racial norms but also aligns herself with a larger intellectual tradition. This strategic fusion, woven into the narrative fabric of her work, resonates with a broader intellectual impulse to challenge established paradigms and stimulate critical engagement.

Functioning as an empirical embodiment of the multicultural ethos she aims to construct within her literary works, *Swing Time* stands as a richly layered

narrative. This intricate tapestry leads readers on a journey that traverses contemporary sensibilities and intercultural connections via humanitarian initiatives aimed at transcending geopolitical boundaries. These endeavors are seamlessly interwoven with references to the History of Dance, an emblematic allegory that symbolizes the fusion of cultures. Through this narrative construction, Zadie Smith crafts a dynamic portrayal that invites readers to gaze upon both mainstream and marginalized cultural contexts. The boundaries of difference are artfully blurred, revealing an underlying essence of universal truth—a resonance of empathy and friendship that transcends geographical and cultural confines, fostering a collective yearning for an improved global sphere. In “Dance Lessons for Writers,” Smith delves into the parallels between writing and dance, exploring how rhythm, movement, and choreography inform the creative process (Smith, 2016). By drawing inspiration from Smith’s reflections, we can deepen our understanding of *Swing Time*’s thematic resonance and narrative structure. Just as dancers meticulously choreograph their movements to convey emotion and meaning, Smith intricately orchestrates the interplay of characters, themes, and symbols in her novel, infusing each page with a rhythmic energy that mirrors the fluidity of dance. Moreover, Smith’s essay prompts us to consider the embodied nature of storytelling, highlighting the physicality and sensory experience inherent in both dance and literature.

Central to *Swing Time*’s distinctiveness is the absence of overtly violent scenes. This absence assumes a pivotal role in conferring upon the novel a unique attribute—the ability to project an alternative world, characterized by its emphasis on interpersonal affection and compassion. By eschewing violent portrayals, Smith engenders a distinctive narrative atmosphere that underscores her narrative’s core aspiration: the cultivation of a world rooted in love and mutual understanding. In doing so, she echoes her overarching thematic pursuit of a harmonious and complex coexistence across diverse identities. This stylistic choice not only contributes to the novel’s individuality but also reinforces its underlying message—the transformative power of love in shaping a world that transcends divisions. Through *Swing Time*’s narrative intricacies and its nuanced portrayal of cultural exchange, Smith skillfully imbues her literary work with a profound call for empathy, connection, and the cultivation of a world steeped in compassion.



Notably, intertextuality emerges as the cornerstone of *Swing Time*'s narrative prowess, bestowing upon it a robust and multifaceted artistic essence. This intricate network of textual references engenders a hybrid artistic resonance, which, in turn, nurtures a distinct sense of coherence within the narrative fabric. Particularly noteworthy is the historical underpinning of dance, a lineage that extends beyond the confines of race and temporal gaps. This lineage serves as an intricate tapestry, enabling the construction of a profound unity whose web of influence has the potential to serve as a source of inspiration for the younger generation, fostering a paradigmatic shift in their perception of the world. Within this framework of thought, Smith eloquently underscores the imperative of reexamining prevailing hegemonic structures—those formative in shaping the contours of the modern world—through the lens of art. This concept is encapsulated in her narrating voice: “The stuff, like Billie Holiday? Or Sarah Vaughan, Bessie Smith, Nina. Real singers. I mean, not that – I mean I feel like it” (*Swing Time*, 97).

Evidently, *Swing Time* harnesses the power of intertextual intersections to establish a multidimensional foundation upon which its narrative unfolds. This strategic interweaving of references from diverse sources enriches the text with layers of depth and resonance, fostering a sense of interconnectedness that reverberates across the narrative spectrum. A pivotal illustration of this dynamic interplay lies in the narrative's exploration of dance history. This exploration underscores the transcendence of traditional demarcations such as race and temporal context, underpinning a lineage that resonates across generations: “for Smith, tradition, like religion, is an opiate that obscures reality, keeping its user ever in a drug-induced fog” (Gustar 2010, 340). By engaging with dance's historical evolution, Smith masterfully crafts a narrative that bridges cultural divides, highlighting the harmonious convergence of human experiences and aspirations through the medium of artistic expression.

Moreover, this resonant interplay of intertextuality encapsulates a transformative potential, particularly for the burgeoning generation. The unity woven through references to dance's historical lineage nurtures a shared cultural heritage that has the capacity to reshape the lenses through which the young perceive the world. By embracing the narrative's tapestry of intertextual influences, the youth can access a broader, more inclusive perspective that transcends the limitations of traditional boundaries. As Smith advocates, the

reinterpretation of established paradigms through the prism of art carries the potential to evoke profound realizations, resonating with the power of authentic voices like Billie Holiday, Sarah Vaughan, Bessie Smith, and Nina Simone.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Concludingly, *Swing Time* harnesses intertextuality as a dynamic mechanism for constructing a narrative that transcends conventional divisions. Through its intricate interweaving of historical dance and art, Smith's work not only resonates across generational and cultural spectra but also fosters a transformative journey for readers. This journey involves reimagining established frameworks and embracing a more inclusive and empathetic outlook on the world—an outlook that emerges as a testament to the enduring power of artistic expression.

*Swing Time* pays homage to the profound legacy of the Harlem Renaissance, a pivotal movement that played a significant role in the struggle for black emancipation in the United States. This celebration serves as a poignant reminder of the movement's symbolic resonance as a call for national unity, transcending the agonies inflicted by history both within the United States and on a global scale. Through its narrative tapestry, *Swing Time* provides a stark portrayal of the enduring ravages of racial conflicts that continue to pervade contemporary society. Moreover, the novel operates as a multifaceted prism, refracting an array of aesthetic values that challenge and question the imperative of amalgamating diverse voices that vehemently contest racism as a prevailing political structure.

Rooted in the cultural and artistic expressions of African Americans during the 20th century, *Swing Time* offers a poignant response to the systemic injustices perpetuated against black individuals. By celebrating this legacy, *Swing Time* underscores its pivotal contribution to the struggle for black emancipation, amplifying its symbolic role as a beacon of hope for a nation plagued by historical turmoil. This commemoration, however, goes beyond national boundaries, extending its influence to the global stage, as it underscores the universality of the quest for unity and justice despite historical scars.

The novel's portrayal of racial conflicts resonates as a stark reminder of the ongoing struggles that persist in contemporary times. Through its narrative canvas, *Swing Time* unfurls a powerful exposé of the continuing racial tensions that afflict societies across the world, demonstrating the enduring relevance of its themes. This depiction serves as an indictment of the persisting prejudices and systemic inequalities that demand continued dialogue and action for transformation.

Furthermore, *Swing Time* operates as a multifaceted prism, refracting diverse aesthetic values that challenge established norms and compel reevaluation. Within this prism lies a pivotal interrogation of the imperative to amalgamate voices that stand in staunch opposition to racism as a pervasive political construct. By weaving together an intricate narrative fabric that encompasses an array of perspectives, *Swing Time* pushes readers to consider the nuances and complexities of racial narratives. The novel, thus, transcends a mere critique of racism, evolving into a dynamic discourse that seeks to uncover shared human experiences, prompt introspection, and ultimately advocate for a society rooted in unity and equity.

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## Trailing Climate Crisis Communication Through VanderMeer's *Annihilation* and *Authority*

### ABSTRACT:

This article intends to read Jeff VanderMeer's *Annihilation* and *Authority*, the first two installments of his *Southern Reach* trilogy (2014), through the philosophical perspectives of Lee McIntyre, Per Espen Stoknes, and Donna Haraway.

Following the path traced by information throughout the novels, in terms of divulgation, processing, and storytelling, it will become clear how VanderMeer successfully manages to recreate the mechanisms of post-truth climate crisis communication in a setting that perfectly mirrors the transitional nature of our world in current times of crisis, making his depiction even more realistic by allowing the emotive/psychological consequences on humanity to transpire through the text.

VanderMeer's narrative connects readers to climate change reality and shifts perspectives by placing the story within Haraway's Terrapolis and the interconnected realms of her multispecies Chthulucene. These novels exemplify Stoknes' motivating "better stories" for climate action.

KEYWORDS: VanderMeer; post-truth; McIntyre; Stoknes; Haraway; climate crisis.

In 2014, Jeff VanderMeer's eco-sci-fi trilogy *Southern Reach* earned him the title "the Weird Thoreau"<sup>1</sup> from *The New Yorker*, making waves in the literary world. Composed by the novels *Annihilation*, *Authority*, and *Acceptance*, the trilogy found appreciation beyond that of sci-fi and weird fiction genre aficionados, with its unconventional approach in portraying a scientific expedition into a mutating environment. Set in the US (possibly Florida<sup>2</sup>), the trilogy revolves around Area X, a mysterious region transformed by an unknown event. Enclosed in a dome, this region is cut off from the world, severing all communications. Remaining faithful to the weird horror genre—VanderMeer's go-to—the novels succeed in illustrating the mechanisms of information disclosure and storytelling in current times of climate crisis, while highlighting at the same time the necessity to move beyond the human/nature divide. Together, the two novels trace a journey towards the acceptance of a multispecies reality: discarding the concept of human exceptionalism, they can be linked to Donna Haraway's philosophy of 'staying with the trouble' that ties the human to the non-human through alternative ways of coexistence that exclude hierarchical or exploitative relationships. In doing so, with their promoting constructive change, VanderMeer's *Annihilation* and *Authority* can be identified as an example of positive storytelling for Per Espen Stoknes.

The first book, *Annihilation*, follows the twelfth<sup>3</sup> expedition into Area X's dome through the journal-like perspective of a nameless psychologist. Sent there to study the land and discover its secrets, she is contaminated by the weird environment through fungal spores she inhales while collecting samples. This event opens her eyes to the deception of her team's leader, the psychologist, who, under orders from the Southern Reach facility (the research center),

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<sup>1</sup> In his article "60 in 60: #37—Henry David Thoreau's Where I Lived, and What I Lived For (Penguin's Great Ideas)," Jeff VanderMeer concludes that "Thoreau's meditations, philosophical arguments, and explication of the world through the details of its natural spaces makes a powerful argument to contemporary readers in the context of a polluted world already beginning to be punished by the effects of global warming;" which is essentially what VanderMeer manages to do with his Southern Reach trilogy.

<sup>2</sup> VanderMeer, Jeff. "The Annihilation of Florida: An Overlooked National Tragedy," *Current Affairs*, vol. 35, March-April 2022, 05/18/2022. <<https://www.currentaffairs.org/2022/05/the-annihilation-of-florida-an-overlooked-national-tragedy>>

<sup>3</sup> In the first book the reader believes that she is part of the twelfth expedition, but during the course of the second novel of the trilogy it becomes clear, thanks to Control's newly appointed role in the Southern Reach facility, that it is actually the thirty-eighth (VanderMeer, *Authority*, 114).



hypnotizes and influences the entire team so as to make them ‘read’<sup>4</sup> and perceive the territory a certain way, not allowing them to notice its weirdest and most uncanny aspects. The Tower/Tunnel incident exemplifies this manipulation; the rest of the team views the structure as a tunnel heading underground, while the psychologist describes it as a tower, regardless of its descending structure. Moreover, if the other researchers think its walls are made of stone and shells, for the psychologist those walls have a flesh-like appearance and seem to be moving, as if the structure was breathing. The biologist is to question all she was told prior to her mission, unable to reconcile those facts with her own findings during the exploration. Soon she begins to understand and feel Area X’s consciousness as her own, becoming part of it. In the end, thanks to the contamination, she evolves/adapts into a new state of being she refers to as Ghost Bird.

Stylistically, the novel’s narration is quick-paced with lush descriptions of Area X’s “pristine wilderness”<sup>5</sup>. It captivates with beauty while unsettling readers due to the narrator’s admitted unreliability<sup>6</sup>. In contrast, the second novel, *Authority*, advances slowly, with the pace eventually becoming frenetic in the final sections (“Hauntings” and “Afterlife”). It is characterized by an information overflow for both the protagonist and the reader. The story follows the day-to-day journey of Control (aka John Rodriguez<sup>7</sup>), former Central agent<sup>8</sup> and new director of the Southern Reach facility. Tasked with managing the aftermath of the ‘twelfth’ expedition, he mirrors the biologist’s

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<sup>4</sup> During the exploration, the researchers will encounter some organic text on the wall of a mysterious structure that some will see as a tower and others as a tunnel. The text will eventually reveal itself to be a blend of the notes in the abandoned journals of the participants from the previous expeditions, with the consciousness of Area X’s creature—the Crawler.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout the books the environment of Area X is repeatedly referred to as ‘pristine wilderness,’ especially in the second novel. This pristine wilderness is used as a symbol for the author to emphasize the distance between the human and the non-human.

<sup>6</sup> “I have not been entirely honest thus far” (VanderMeer, *Annihilation*, 57).

<sup>7</sup> His real name is John Rodriguez, but he calls himself “Control”, a nickname he was given by his grandfather. Considering his path through the novel (always marionetted by external forces—i.e., his mother, the Voice, his grandfather, Grace), the choice to keep that nickname could be read as a hint regarding what he is striving for throughout his life: control. Only at the end of the second book will he go back to referring to himself as John, dropping the façade and accepting the reality of his having been passively manipulated.

<sup>8</sup> Central is a powerful governmental organization that coordinates operatives against national security threats. It is also in charge of the Southern Reach facility. However, the research center still holds autonomy in the specifics of its operations.

pursuit of Area X's secrets. Amidst the facility's decay, he attempts to navigate overwhelming data, including past expedition accounts, his own insights, and interviews with Ghost Bird.

All around him facts are discovered, hidden, diluted, distorted, and fabricated. Control realizes he can rely on himself only, but this notion falters as he experiences blackouts and memory loss. Gradually, he comprehends his own manipulation: he thus proceeds to unveil the facility and Area X's true nature, abandoning all pretences.

When considering the first two parts of the trilogy together, a comprehensive view of information manipulation emerges within and outside Area X. In the first book, readers witness a psychological manipulation of the biologist on a personal level. Her superiors withhold or fabricate information from past expeditions, while the provided equipment is inadequate despite being described as vital.

We had no cell or satellite phones, no computers, no camcorders, no complex measuring instruments except for those strange black boxes hanging from our belts. (VanderMeer, *Annihilation*, 9)

“What do the black boxes measure?” “Nothing. They don't measure anything. It's just a psychological ploy to keep the expedition calm: no red light, no danger.” (VanderMeer, *Authority*, 131)

The expedition's leader (the psychologist) employs hypnosis to manipulate the biologist's perception, thus distorting her findings. Additionally, the biologist's contamination blurs her own thoughts and memories with those of the Crawler, erasing any distinction between them.

The second book unveils an expanded manipulation pattern beyond the biologist's scope. Information tampering is systemic and multi-layered: Central hides Southern Reach's activities; the facility withholds information and fabricates evidence from expeditions; employees keep silent in the fear of leaking classified data; the psychologist, Cynthia, uses hypnosis and avoids digitalizing unauthorized evidence from Area X; Control learns he is manipulated even by his own mother.

By studying these two texts simultaneously and following information as a recurring motif throughout the narrative, it becomes possible to establish connections with research dedicated to information and its narration. Overall,

the two novels can be read as a close representation of the climate crisis communication atmosphere, portraying the methods of information manipulation, as well as highlighting the shortcomings of an objective approach in promoting climate action.

According to Lee McIntyre's analysis in his book *Post-Truth* (2018), the concept of post-truth can be understood as a type of ideological dominance, where its creators aim to persuade individuals to believe in something regardless of the presence of solid evidence (McIntyre, 18). In such context, emotions hold more significance than facts, playing a central role in how a message is received. McIntyre traces the origins of the post-truth phenomenon back to the 1950s, when the tobacco industry worked to discredit the connection between smoking cigarettes and cancer. Rather than competing against each other to produce a "safer cigarette", these companies joined forces to undermine scientific evidence, fueling doubt by presenting an alternative narrative. This initial instance set the stage for the current proliferation of disinformation, including the spreading of fake news and denial of scientific findings related to climate change (McIntyre, 18). Previously, the fact that human activities were driving the climate crisis was well known and acknowledged.<sup>9</sup> However, oil corporations adopted a similar approach to their tobacco industry predecessors, casting doubt on scientific findings and successfully instilling skepticism within the public. The author stresses the importance of recognizing that disinformation is not random, but rather a deliberate manipulative action led by individuals who have vested interests, typically financial, political, or ideological. The strategy involves identifying and funding "experts" who support their desired narrative, persuading the media to present multiple perspectives and allowing the fabricated alternative story to circulate through PR stunts and political maneuvers. These efforts generate an atmosphere of deep confusion that becomes fertile ground for questioning scientific data.

This is exactly what happens with information in VanderMeer's *Annihilation* and *Authority*. Firstly, expedition participants are hand-picked, valued not for their competences but rather for their capacity to be manipulated and influenced, on the basis of their beliefs and attitudes. In both novels, readers

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<sup>9</sup> So much so that, in 2000, the idea of a geological epoch called the "Anthropocene" was introduced because of the recognized extent of human activity's influence on the environment.

witness the interviews Cynthia (the psychologist and former director) has with prospect expedition participants. While in the first book the reader experiences them through the biologist's perspective, the second novel holds the transcripts that include the psychologist's own thoughts on the candidates.

In the note, [...] the director called the surveyor "someone with a strong sense of reality, a good, bracing foil to the others." The linguist discarded in the border prep area she called "useful but not essential; possibly a dangerous addition, a sympathetic but narrow character who might deflect attention." Sympathetic to whom? Deflect attention from what? And was this deflection desirable or ...? The anthropologist was referred to by her first name, [...] "Hildi will be on board, will understand." He stared at that note for a while. On board with what? Understand what? [...] The note on the biologist was the most extensive and caused Control to vibrate with additional questions. [...] Not a very good biologist. In a traditional sense. Empathic more toward environments than people. Forgets the reasons she went, who is paying her salary. But becomes embedded to an extraordinary extent. Would know Area X better than I do from almost the first moment sets foot there. Experience with similar settings. Self-sufficient. Unburdened. Connection through her husband. What would she be in Area X? A signal? A flare? Or invisible? Exploit [?]. (VanderMeer, Authority, 156-57)

After reading her notes, Control immediately has the feeling that "the director had been casting a play or movie" and that those could be "notes for actors" (156-57) rather than evaluations of researchers for a delicate mission. This causes skepticism regarding the legitimacy of the expedition and brings into question the true motives behind it, having him wonder if it was all just a ruse.

Secondly, just as cherry-picking information is the *modus operandi* of communication in a post-truth predicament, the same can be found in VanderMeer's novels: only facts that are deemed essential to fulfill Central's or the research center's goals are shared, while everything else is either redacted or discarded.

Before the twelfth expedition starts, researchers possess limited information about Area X. They know it is a transitional environment where biology has been corrupted, and their mission is to unravel its mysteries to "defeat the corruption" and safeguard humanity from its looming threat. Remarkably, they are not even provided with specific details about the tools

they will be equipped with<sup>10</sup>. To bolster their sense of purpose, the researchers are fed with a captivatingly fabricated narrative about the first expedition, consisting of tales of bravery and resilience designed to inspire the current team (167). This strategy of enforcing a false narrative shares similarities with the “deliberate”<sup>11</sup> use of fake news, as described by McIntyre, concocted to influence public opinion towards climate change denial and similar political agendas (McIntyre, 73). However, in VanderMeer’s scenario, the biologist stands out as an anomaly among her fellow expedition experts. Her motivation for venturing into Area X differs from others because her husband had been part of the previous expedition. The psychologist’s interview notes reveal that she was chosen precisely for her inability to maintain an objective perspective in her research, and because of the director’s curiosity about her potential accomplishments in Area X’s hostile environment.

In the second section of *Authority*, “Rites”, Control states that “sometimes you [have] to keep things from people just so they [won’t] do the first thing that [comes] into their heads” (VanderMeer, *Authority*, 85). He says this when he notices an ant crawling on the back of a woman’s neck and decides to remove the insect without alerting her, for she would kill it if she knew of its presence. If on the one hand this situation can be read as proof of Control’s respect for life, regardless of its shape, on the other, one could compare it to a declaration of his approval of the secretive and manipulatory operations carried out by Central and the Southern Reach facility. Control is in fact remarkably familiar with their way of ‘running things’ (he even knows of the mental conditioning—although he is not aware of the extent of that used on him). His passive acceptance and inaction in front of such corrupt mechanisms, regardless of his being (secretly) opposed to them, can be read as a symbol of cognitive dissonance. The same cognitive dissonance felt by those who, despite being well informed of the present globally critical situation of the present, avoid taking action to face the climate crisis, remaining stuck in their own denial. The Norwegian psychologist Per Espen Stoknes, in his *What We Think About When We Try Not To Think About Global Warming* (2015), discusses how to approach

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<sup>10</sup> They were given black boxes that beeped when danger was near, but they were not told what the devices measured.

<sup>11</sup> As McIntyre specifies, “it is the intention to mislead—rather than the mere falsehood of its content—that makes fake news fake” (McIntyre, 73). In this sense, they are different from mere lies.

people to achieve maximum engagement in climate action, identifying ‘five Ds’ (Distance, Doom, Dissonance, Denial, iDentity) as the causes of inaction, and ‘five Ss’ (Social, Support, Simpler actions, Signals, better Stories) as solutions to them. He defines cognitive dissonance as a “situation in which there are conflicting feelings, thoughts, and behaviors [...] an uncomfortable inner tension [that] only dissolves when one or another of the components changes and harmony is restored” (Stoknes, 91).

He describes denial as the act of remaining silent and pretending to be unaware, avoiding the fear and guilt that would come from acknowledging that information (116). This attitude causes an “inner splitting;” it is like ‘leading a double life’ (41); quite a fitting image for Control, given his covert past.

After multiple expeditions and a massive data collection, the researchers were plunged into confusion instead of achieving clarity—naming each mission with repetitive and progressive codes, like X.11.D, X.11.J, X.11.K, X.12A, which only added to the climate of uncertainty and skepticism. Episodes like the one that sees Control compare the science division to a cabinet of curiosities full of barely touched and dated evidence (VanderMeer, Authority, 125), or the one that has the biologist stumbling upon a neglected pile of decaying research journals during the twelfth expedition, highlight the irrelevance of scientific evidence in the facility’s eyes, consequently bringing into question the true motives behind the expeditions themselves. This whole attitude towards scientific evidence—treating it as if completely irrelevant—might be read as a symbol for the detachment between scientists and “ordinary people” (Stoknes, 85) as illustrated in Stoknes’ text. In the context of climate crisis-related facts, there is little consideration for their social impact. Facts are shared as ‘dry’ knowledge in academic papers, for “a narrow academic target audience” (84), without engaging the reader. As a result, the information becomes irrelevant as it fails to evoke a reaction. Another passage that emphasizes this idea is the following:

“Incomplete data,” Whitby said. “Too incomplete to be sure. But most returnees tell us they just don’t think to bring them back. They don’t believe it’s important, or don’t feel the need to. Feeling is the important part. You lose the need or impetus to divulge, to communicate, a bit like astronauts lose muscle mass. Most of the journals seem to turn up in the lighthouse anyway, though. It hasn’t been a priority for a while, but when we did ask later expeditions to retrieve them, usually they

didn't even try. You lose the impetus or something else intercedes, becomes more crucial and you don't even realize it. Until it's too late." (VanderMeer, *Authority*, 66)

The lost 'impetus' Whitby speaks of is the lost social potential that Stoknes addresses. The image of the pile of journals that end up in the lighthouse suggests that they are deemed important by someone in Area X, someone that is "reading them for the Southern Reach" (60).

Only in the chapter "Gambit" of *Authority* does Control realize the mental suggestion he faced and discover that Cynthia (the former director) is still alive. This prompts him to confront Grace (the assistant director), the only one who did not believe in the former director's death. She reveals that all missions were only attempts to "make Area X react" (260-62).

Two thousand white rabbits herded toward an invisible door. A plant that didn't want to die. Impossible video footage. More theories than there were fish in the sea. Was his house in order? (VanderMeer, *Authority*, 212)

In VanderMeer, the 'state of confusion' is not used directly to discredit scientific facts; rather, it masks the true nature of a set of operations. Hoping to "overload" the system with their bodies (55), the experts in the research groups are just as relevant as the white rabbits pushed into Area X. It was thus crucial for the center to instill in its employees a powerful sense of prideful purpose in its employees, so that, even if confronted with the truth, they could still believe in the 'mission.'

McIntyre states that, in times of post-truth, belief is no longer just about facts and evidence, but it is connected to people's identity, values, and trust. Accepting something as true or false positions the individual in society—using the metaphor he uses—it places them on a "team" (McIntyre, 77). This connection to identity—or rather iDentity—is also found in Stoknes' text when he speaks about the barriers to climate action.

We look for information that confirms our existing values and notions and filter away what challenges them. [...] Cultural identity overrides the facts. If new information requires us to change our selves, then the information is likely to lose. We experience resistance to calls for change in self-identity. (Stoknes, 117)

In Area X, the narrative traces a very clear ontological dividing line between humans and non-humans: employees are pushed towards believing in the narratives imposed on them because the 'line' between them and the 'enemy'

(the ‘other’ in Area X) is well defined and fueled by fear and distance<sup>12</sup>. Especially in *Annihilation*, the occlusion that is placed upon members of the research team can be read as ‘forcibly placing all of them on the facility’s team’ (on humanity’s team). The following excerpts are a fitting example of the manipulation taking place in Area X and in the Southern Reach facility.

she abruptly stood and said three words: “Consolidation of authority.” Immediately the surveyor and the anthropologist beside me went slack, their eyes unfocused. I was shocked, but I mimicked them, hoping that the psychologist had not noticed the lag. I felt no compulsion whatsoever, but clearly, we had been preprogrammed to enter a hypnotic state in response to those words, uttered by the psychologist. (VanderMeer, *Annihilation*, 34)

This demonstrates the power of manipulation through words and authority. The psychologist’s seemingly innocuous statement triggers a drastic response in the surveyor and anthropologist, indicating that they had been “preprogrammed to enter a hypnotic state.” It highlights how easily individuals can be influenced and controlled through carefully chosen phrases, emphasizing the post-truth aspect of deliberately shaping perceptions.

Her demeanor more assertive than just a moment before, the psychologist said, “You will retain a memory of having discussed several options about the tunnel. You will find that you ultimately agreed with me about the best course of action, and that you felt quite confident about this course of action. You will experience a sensation of calm whenever you think about this decision, and you will remain calm once back inside the tunnel, although you will react to any stimuli as per your training. You will not take undue risks. (VanderMeer, *Annihilation*, 35)

This portion shows the intentional dissemination of disinformation. The psychologist forces false memories and beliefs on the team members, manipulating their thoughts and emotions to align with her own agenda. The emphasis on feeling calm and confident in a decision they never truly made reinforces the post-truth nature of distorting reality to control and influence others.

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<sup>12</sup> Even the ‘trivial’ episode that sees Control wear a full hazmat suit to enter the science division (the place holding all evidence gathered on Area X) – despite the air being “pure” and the room having never “shown any irregularities”(VanderMeer, *Authority*, 125) – is an example of the barrier that the facility wants to erect between human and non-human in the mind of its employees.



You will continue to see a structure that is made of coquina and stone. You will trust your colleagues completely and feel a continued sense of fellowship with them. When you emerge from the structure, any time you see a bird in flight it will trigger a strong feeling that you are doing the right thing, that you are in the right place. When I snap my fingers, you will have no memory of this conversation, but will follow my directives. You will feel very tired, and you will want to retire to your tents to get a good night's sleep before tomorrow's activities. You will not dream. You will not have nightmares." (VanderMeer, *Annihilation*, 35)

This last part of the dialogue shows the moment in which the dividing line between the human and the 'other' is traced. The psychologist implants specific beliefs and responses in the team members, distorting their reality and reinforcing their trust in her authority. She forces them to unsee the liveliness of the environment surrounding them, while reinforcing their sense of trust and righteousness towards the team. The erasure of their memory of the conversation and the control over their emotions and actions reflect the post-truth dynamic of deliberately altering perceptions and suppressing critical thinking. All employees are therefore precluded from engaging with the non-human in Area X by being made unable to even detect its presence. The compulsion is enforced with the excuse of preventing the explorers from being traumatized by the horrors of Area X (VanderMeer, *Authority*, 136). The hypnosis does nothing but tamper with gathered evidence and isolate those upon which it is used. It contributes to unleashing the previously mentioned confusion, protecting the status quo of the facility and the narrative that has Area X and the center as opposite factions in a conflict. This situation can be considered as a mirror of our real climate crisis when comparing it with the 'blocking' efforts of powerful politics and corporations that aim to discredit the imminence of the current climate emergency, hindering counteractive actions. Overall, this quote highlights the profound influence of post-truth tactics and the dissemination of disinformation. The psychologist's use of authority, manipulation of thoughts and emotions, and the creation of false narratives, all contribute to ushering in a 'divided' world where truth is distorted, and individuals are guided by fabricated beliefs and notions.

In McIntyre's opinion, the only way to overcome post-truth manipulation is understanding its mechanism. Both the biologist and Control will only manage to overcome the compulsion, uncover the deception, and 'solve Area X's mystery' by engaging in a relationship with the non-human, also altering their

identities. The biologist accidentally inhales fungal spores that fuse her own consciousness with that of Area X, thus compromising her scientific objectivity. Throughout *Annihilation* she repeatedly affirms that scientists are “trained to observe natural phenomena and the results of human activity” (VanderMeer, *Annihilation*, 70), implying the necessity of a distance to be kept from what they observe. Her perspective tested by a pair of otters that were watching her ‘back,’ “threaten[ing] to disrupt the act of repression that objectivity require[d]” (Carroll, 77). Only through the contamination by Area X will the biologist open her eyes to the lies of her superiors, as well as to the futility of maintaining an objective point of view towards something that concerns one so intimately. Her identity will change altogether: from the end of the first novel onwards, she will no longer identify with the biologist and will become Ghost Bird, effectively declaring herself as part of the entity she was employed to study (and defeat).

Control’s ‘awakening’ takes a different course. He is not contaminated as the biologist, but his ‘enlightenment’ is brought by his own investigation, in which evidence does not seem to lead anywhere until his mother tells him that Area X has already infiltrated the facility: the compound has been acting as its incubator. Pushed by Whitby to approach his research as if studying a terroir, he will finally ‘see the full picture’ merging the human and non-human planes.

Terroir is a “wine term” introduced in *Authority* by Whitby and which indicates “the specific characteristics of a place—the geography, geology, and climate” (VanderMeer, *Authority*, 130). Siobhan Carroll explains how the word indicates a land that is controlled and colonized, but in VanderMeer’s novels the opposite happens: Area X and the “environmental knowledge” (Carroll, 80) it holds have extended to the world outside its border. There is therefore no longer a distinction between the area and the research facility, between the “in” and “out” of the border: they are the same. VanderMeer’s fiction is the tale of a “system [that is] being altered by climate change, in ways that in turn fundamentally alter the identities—human and non-human—tied to place” (Carroll, 81).

Both the biologist/Ghost Bird and Control manage to overcome the human/other dichotomy, as well as the nature - culture/society chiasm, inscribing themselves in the ‘equation’ they are trying to solve. Their paths could be read as journeys of environmental awakening, in which they manage

to overcome Stoknes' obstacles by questioning their own ontological status and extricating themselves from the stagnant and toxic social/communication patterns McIntyre explains.

In her determination to stick to an objective approach for her analysis of Area X, the biologist embodies the stubbornness, or rather the hubris, of humanity that willingly attempts to detach itself from Anthropocene issues despite being inscribed in them; it represents a refusal of the "human role in environmental change" and an obstacle to "humanity's ability to address environmental crisis" (77). Stoknes calls this phenomenon "distance", i.e. that feeling that causes humans to perceive climate change as something remote, not immediately visible, that does not hit "me or my kin" (Stoknes, 115). His use of the term "kin" refers to genealogy, biology, and ancestry. However, Donna Haraway proposes an alternative meaning for 'making kin' in her work *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016). She explains making kin as creating "inventive connections" (Haraway, 1), eventually proposing cooperation between humans and non-humans. She criticizes both the Anthropocene and Capitalocene for their cynicism, defeatism, and for making confident predictions that are seemingly bound to become true. Instead, she presents her readers with the concept of the Chthulucene, a time characterized by ongoing stories and practices involving multiple species coming together. In this era, the world is still uncertain, and there is potential for change and growth. She emphasizes that humans are not the sole significant participants in this narrative (55-56). In her text she explains methods of making kin through String Figures (SF)<sup>13</sup>. Inspired by Navajo string games, these figures represent creative ways of building and sharing a 'web' of stories and thoughts across species, building communities based on collaboration, on response-ability (the ability to respond and react), with the aim to move past 'us vs. them' narratives. These figures are made of tentacular thoughts, that surpass the limits of human perception by being non-anthropomorphic and not mainly visual: they feel and try (31). Haraway proposes a blueprint for a multispecies eco-justice, based on shared storytelling. In VanderMeer, the pile of abandoned and decaying journals found by the biologist in *Annihilation* could be read as a representation of her theory.

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<sup>13</sup> SF stands for multiple concepts: science fiction, speculative fabulation, string figures, speculative feminism, science fact, so far.

The journals and other materials formed a moldering pile about twelve feet high and sixteen feet wide that in places near the bottom had clearly turned to compost, the paper rotting away. Beetles and silverfish tended to those archives, and tiny black cockroaches with always moving antennae. Toward the base, and spilling out at the edges, I saw the remains of photographs and dozens of ruined cassette tapes mixed in with the mulch of pages. There, too, I saw evidence of rats. I would have to lower myself down into the midden by means of the ladder nailed to the lip of the trapdoor and trudge through a collapsing garbage hill of disintegrating pulp to uncover anything at all. The scene obliquely embodied the scrap of writing I had encountered on the Tower wall: ... the seeds of the dead to share with the worms that gather in the darkness and surround the world with the power of their lives. (VanderMeer, *Annihilation*, 113)

Firstly, a journal is something extremely personal, in which people pour their thoughts and feelings: each one of those stacked up notebooks therefore equals to an identity. Analyzing their contents, the biologist recognizes excerpts of the writings on the Tower/Tunnell's walls<sup>14</sup>, highlighting their hybrid origin and identifying them as the outcome of the former researchers' recounts, united to Area X's consciousness, as if the written traces of the explorers had been 'uploaded' to it and they had become one. Those journals are acts of 'remembrance' and 'com-memoration' (Haraway, 2016, 24) as they are proof of a shared existence. Each journal is a tentacular narration that starts as something human about the non-human, and then becomes something more. This ontological concept resembles that of the Children of Compost: in telling the story of the Camilles, Haraway presents the image of a "baby", an "infant" (133-34)—which, for the 'human not-yet-Chthulucene-bound reader, is a very familiar 'human' image—and gradually proceeds to accompany her readers through the definition of the 'humustity' of her compost children, ultimately addressing their sympoietic biology.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the pile is a place, an

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<sup>14</sup> "Where lies the strangling fruit that came from the hand of the sinner, I shall bring forth the seeds of the dead to share with the worms that ..." (VanderMeer, *Annihilation*, 25).

<sup>15</sup> Sympoiesis, opposite of autopoiesis, means "making-with." It describes the 'entanglements' of critter existence. "Critters interpenetrate one another, loop around and through one another, eat each another, get indigestion, and partially digest and partially assimilate one another, and thereby establish sympoietic arrangements that are otherwise known as cells, organisms, and ecological assemblages." (Haraway, 2016, 58) Camilles are children with both human and non-human attributes (the non-human attributes come from an endangered species) that build symbiotic relationships with other species. They represent a way of making kin that foregoes ancestry and genealogy, an idea of rehabilitating the world in Communities of Compost, with humans living in symbiosis with other species—syms—and others that do not—no syms.

ecosystem; alive, diverse, storied. It represents the compost Haraway speaks of the act of sympoiesis, her Terrapolis.

Terrapolis is a fictional integral equation, a speculative fabulation. Terrapolis is n-dimensional niche space for multispecies becoming-with. Terrapolis is open, worldly, indeterminate, and polytemporal. Terrapolis is a chimera of materials, languages, histories. Terrapolis is for companion species, cum panis, with bread, at table together—not “posthuman” but “com-post.” Terrapolis is in place; Terrapolis makes space for unexpected companions. Terrapolis is an equation for guman, for humus, for soil, for ongoing risky infection, for epidemics of promising trouble, for permaculture. Terrapolis is the SF game of response-ability. Companion species are engaged in the old art of terraforming; they are the players in the SF equation that describes Terrapolis. (Haraway, 11-12)

This description applies not only to the journal/compost pile, but to the entirety of Area X. In the introduction to her book, she states that “staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings” (1). This same scenario is expressed throughout VanderMeer’s two novels (and entirety of the trilogy). Area X, while spoken of in present terms, is ‘polytemporal’. It is an ‘infectuous’ ‘chimera’ in its continuous ontological terraforming transformation, in which a ‘game of string figures’ is ‘played’ between all the companion species that cross paths in it, rendering it a fertile land for new multispecies storytelling. *Annihilation* and *Authority* reflect Haraway’s ideas on identity and meet Stoknes’s criteria for effective storytelling – personal, vivid, and dramatic. This makes them powerful examples of “ecological restoration” stories that motivate climate action. However, while he intends ‘restoration’ as the returning of a ‘wilderness’ that “swings back” from “the extinction cliff” (187), in VanderMeer the word should be intended as ‘replacement’ of a structure, or rather, of a mind construct: that of human exceptionalism. It is interesting to note that while other scholars might view VanderMeer’s works as tales of destruction and devastation in which “nothing comes back” rather than of ‘regeneration,’ the element of the human “reconsideration of itself” is ever present (Deurwaarder, 2018).

*Annihilation* and *Authority* mix the extreme realism of contemporary ecological concerns with the weird and the whimsical, creating a model that transcends literary categorization altogether. VanderMeer’s success is measured

on the basis of the layered meanings of his narrative. Firstly, he creates Area X as a territory in transition, going through instabilities comparable to those present in our own world, transitioning and mutating because of the human-made crisis afflicting our world. Then, as demonstrated through McIntyre and Stoknes's theories, the novels hold a perfect duplicate of the fact-divulgement mechanisms of post-truth communication characteristic of the climate crisis (disinformation through fake news and science denialism)<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, he allows the turmoil of the psychological atmosphere of 'life in times of climate crisis' to transpire, familiarizing readers with the same feelings that hinder engagement in climate action. By emphasizing the importance of subjectivity and emotion in perception and then giving voice to the non-human in every human (managing to forgo human exceptionalism), he succeeds in inscribing his story in Haraway's Chthulucene, ultimately reframing and providing a "new [way] of envisioning climate change, bring[ing] the message all the way to our own doorstep, feet, and lungs" (Stoknes, 82). Importantly, the mental distance between humans and the crisis is gradually removed.

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<sup>16</sup> An example of disinformation through fake news and science denialism could be seen in the 2009 'email leak', which saw thousands of emails from the Climatic Research Unit, at the University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom, leaked online and used by climate skeptics as 'evidence' that scientists were manipulating climate data to make global warming seem more threatening. These emails were edited and taken out of context, creating false narratives and beliefs that were fueled and spread by the media. This caused public confusion and mistrust regarding the validity of climate change research. Even though the investigations conducted by the interested university and by the Parliament itself found non proof of data manipulation, still, the damage was done. 'Climategate,' as this event was named, illustrates how disinformation campaigns can exploit information to cast doubt on the validity of scientific research. Just like in VanderMeer's two novels, for Climategate, an intentionally misinformative narrative was constructed and spread, manipulating public perception on climate change (just like the Southern Reach facility did for Area X).

*Trailing Climate Crisis Communication*

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## Paul Auster e la scrittura come antidoto al caos del mondo

### ABSTRACT

This invited short note offers a reflection on the interplay between illusion and reality in the postmodernist fiction of Paul Auster (1947-2024). The rich literary and writing activity of this acclaimed American author is here interpreted as a way to order the chaos of existence.

KEYWORDS: Paul Auster; postmodernism; illusion/reality.

Il 30 aprile si è spento, dopo una lunga e logorante malattia, Paul Auster, uno dei grandi protagonisti del postmodernismo nordamericano, unitamente a figure come Pynchon, Vonnegut e De Lillo. Nato in seno a una famiglia ebrea di origini polacche, Auster si laurea alla Columbia University nel 1970. Dopo un'infanzia e una giovinezza difficili, decide di trasferirsi a Parigi dove si guadagna da vivere come traduttore. Ritornato negli Stati Uniti nel 1974, dopo vari lavori e tentativi andati male, si dedica alla scrittura, arrivando a pubblicare poesie, saggi, opere teatrali (seguendo il modello del teatro dell'assurdo di Beckett, ma con scarsa fortuna) e infine romanzi, oltre a continuare la sua attività di traduttore dal francese.

Divenuto nel tempo uno dei grandi cantori della New York postmoderna, Auster si mostra fin da giovane come un lettore onnivoro. Gli autori che maggiormente hanno influito sulla sua scrittura e sul suo immaginario sono certamente i grandi classici americani dell'Ottocento, come Poe, Melville, Hawthorne (e in particolare *Wakefield*, nel desiderio di alcuni personaggi di segregarsi dalla società umana), i trascendentalisti americani dell'Ottocento come Thoreau (*Walden*) ed Emerson, Samuel Beckett, Jorge Luis Borges e Cervantes, tra gli altri.

Dopo un primo libro di memorie dal titolo *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), Auster raggiunge la fama con la celebre trilogia di "detective stories", composta da *City of Glass* (1985), *Ghosts* (1986) e *The Locked Room* (1986), successivamente riunite in un solo volume con il titolo *The New York Trilogy* (1987). Fin dall'inizio i lettori di Auster si rendono conto che i suoi non sono gialli convenzionali, organizzati attorno a un mistero da risolvere seguendo una serie di indizi. Il protagonista del primo romanzo della trilogia non è nemmeno un vero *detective*, bensì uno scrittore che pubblica gialli sotto lo pseudonimo di William Wilson, e che a causa di una telefonata al numero sbagliato, si finge un investigatore per risolvere un caso. Auster scardina la struttura del giallo classico, per affrontare temi esistenziali, come la perdita di identità dell'individuo nella metropoli-labirinto, creando in tal senso originali esempi di ibridazione postmoderna. La struttura poliziesca dell'intreccio, il caso e le coincidenze, la ricerca di un'identità da parte di personaggi smarriti in un mondo labirintico di cui sfugge il senso ultimo, il tema del doppio e degli specchi, la solitudine e la ricerca della felicità diventano temi dominanti nell'opera di Auster, che finisce per mettere in crisi il genere stesso del poliziesco, adottando l'indagine del detective come metafora del caos che ci circonda. Il delitto iniziale (quando esiste) diventa solo un pretesto per dare il via all'indagine, che assurge ben presto a metafora della relatività del conoscere e della precarietà di ogni equilibrio raggiunto nell'esistenza, pesantemente governato dal caso e le coincidenze. Nelle mani di Auster il giallo si tramuta così in una forma privilegiata per esplorare la poesia della vita postmoderna, con i suoi limiti e le sue contraddizioni.

I personaggi di Auster arrivano ad un certo punto della loro indagine a dubitare del mondo e del sistema in quanto artificioso, fittizio. Ogni equilibrio raggiunto non è altro che una situazione instabile; ciò che domina, ancora una volta, è il caos. Per ricercare l'ultima scintilla di umanità essi non hanno altra

scelta che abbandonarsi al disordine imperante. Ogni tentativo di trovare un senso, camminando per le vie labirintiche della città o viaggiando per la nazione, si rivela inutile. È dentro di noi che la vera indagine deve avvenire, non fuori. Per questo motivo il *private-eye* (o investigatore) si tramuta gradualmente in *private-I*, un personaggio che indaga su se stesso, scavando nella propria intimità, alla ricerca, incessante e mai conclusa, della propria identità.

Nel 1995 Auster si dedica al mondo del cinema, scrivendo la sceneggiatura e co-dirigendo i film *Smoke* (con Harvey Keitel e William Hurt, vincitore dell'Independent Spirit Award) e *Blue in the Face*. In particolar modo nel primo ritornano molti dei temi cari all'autore, dal momento che il protagonista è uno scrittore (come in gran parte dei suoi romanzi) e il film è strutturato in "capitoli", con tanto di titoli che appaiono in sovraimpressione scanditi dal ticchettio fuori campo di una macchina da scrivere. Forte dell'esperienza maturata nel cinema come sceneggiatore, Paul Auster si cimenta in *The Book of Illusions* (2003) nell'impresa di proiettare i film di un misterioso attore, Hector Mann, sullo schermo dell'immaginazione del lettore con il semplice uso della parola. In un certo senso egli opera in maniera opposta rispetto a ciò che aveva fatto nella scena finale di *Smoke*, dove il racconto di Natale del personaggio interpretato da Harvey Keitel ci viene narrato poeticamente attraverso le immagini prive di dialogo (in una sequenza di film muto). Nel romanzo invece le parole del narratore acquistano un'incredibile "visualità", tanto da diventare dei veri e propri cortometraggi inseriti nel romanzo. Speculando sulla vita passata e sui doppi (anche cinematografici) di Mann, il narratore del romanzo non fa che speculare sulla propria esistenza. Non è un caso che il verbo stesso "speculare" rimandi alla parola specchio: e non sono specchi anche il libro e lo schermo di una sala cinematografica? I romanzi di Paul Auster diventano abili giochi di specchi e di riflessi, di fughe, vagabondaggi e incontri inattesi, sottolineando le fragilità del mondo in cui viviamo, e ribadendo l'importanza della scrittura (non a caso nei suoi scritti appaiono sovente dei taccuini) come metodo per arrivare a una realtà più profonda, come immagine di ordine da contrapporre al caos del mondo, o per citare Calvino, come una sfida al labirinto, un ponte che lo scrittore costruisce sul vuoto.

Ciò che resta maggiormente impresso dopo aver letto l'opera di Auster è la forte dicotomia tra vita e arte. "Perché e per chi esiste l'opera d'arte?", sembra chiedersi l'autore. Forse l'idea della morte in un mondo in continuo mutamento

diventa sopportabile se c'è un doppio che, dopo questa vita, ce ne assicura una seconda. Il doppio nasce come difesa da una temuta fine eterna e dall'oblio. Le due modalità possibili che ha l'uomo per crearsi dei doppi è attraverso la procreazione o l'arte. Nel corso della sua vita l'autore Paul Auster ha perso in tragiche circostanze il figlio Daniel, morto prematuramente per overdose. Ma gli è rimasta l'arte. E oggi che lo scrittore si è spento, il suo spirito rivive nei molteplici personaggi tormentati che nel corso degli anni ha riversato nelle pagine dei suoi romanzi. Ogni personaggio, come diceva Pirandello, è un'idea, e come tale vive per sempre. Può morire l'autore, ma il personaggio vivrà in eterno.

Ogni romanzo di Auster è un abile gioco illusionistico. Lo scrittore americano sa che il modo migliore per abbracciare in un solo sguardo le varie parti che costituiscono il tutto è quello di costruire specchi che riflettono le parti che si celano alla vista. Tra i riflessi dei riflessi, realtà e illusione si compenetrano diventando indistinguibili ma, come spesso accade per ogni gioco ben riuscito, l'illusione può finire per produrre un effetto di realtà curiosamente intensificato. E non consiste proprio in questo il potere magico dell'immaginazione?

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## Alice Munro: il mondo in una short story. Un ricordo

### ABSTRACT

In this invited short note, Oriana Palusci (President of the Italian Association of Canadian Studies) provides an overview of the life, work and reception of Alice Munro (1931-2024), the Canadian Nobel Laureate renowned for her short stories that encapsulate the world.

KEYWORDS: Alice Munro; Canadian Nobel Laureate; short stories.

Fin dal 1968, l'anno della pubblicazione della sua prima raccolta di racconti (*Dance of the Happy Shades*), Alice Munro si è affermata come una voce raffinata e versatile della letteratura anglo-canadese, da lei arricchita soprattutto attraverso lo strumento della *short story*. La raccolta le valse l'acclamato Governor General's Award. All'anagrafe Alice Ann Laidlaw, Munro — dal cognome del primo marito — aveva esordito come narratrice già ai tempi in cui frequentava la University of Western Ontario, a London, Ontario. In seguito, le sue short story cominciarono ad apparire in riviste canadesi come la *Tamarack*

*Review*, *Chatelaine*, il *Montrealer* e il *Canadian Forum*, e, a partire dal 1977, nelle pagine del prestigioso *New Yorker*.

Per Munro la short story, che può coprire poche pagine o svilupparsi fino alle dimensioni di un romanzo breve, è in grado di indagare, talvolta includendo echi e sfumature autobiografiche, il microcosmo canadese dell'Ontario provinciale e rurale, abitato da una popolazione marginale, di solito bianca, colta mentre è alle prese con una quotidianità apparentemente banale. La zona dello Huron County, nell'Ontario, sulle coste del vastissimo Lago Huron, a circa 200 km. a sud-ovest di Toronto, dove Munro ha passato la sua infanzia e dove è tornata a vivere nel 1972, è stata da lei delineata nitidamente sulla mappa letteraria canadese, attraverso i paesi fittizi di Jubilee o Hanratty. Prima di lei, un'operazione simile era stata compiuta in Canada da un'altra grande scrittrice, Margaret Laurence, di cinque anni più anziana di Alice, morta prematuramente nel 1987, a cui dobbiamo l'invenzione della cittadina di Manawaka (la nativa Neepawa nel Manitoba), resa famosa a partire dal romanzo *The Stone Angel* (1964).

L'esistenza dei personaggi di Munro viene spesso squarciata da episodi di violenza o da tragici eventi fortuiti, le cui vittime sono soprattutto le donne. Il senso dell'imprevedibilità dell'esistenza percorre molti dei suoi racconti: una coppia di intellettuali relativamente felice è devastata dalla subdola comparsa dell'Alzheimer ("The Bear Came Over the Mountain"); in "In Sight of the Lake" la scrittrice scava nel dramma della demenza senile, affidando la voce narrante ad un'anziana signora confusa e disorientata; un incidente automobilistico tronca sul nascere un'appassionata relazione affettiva ("Passion"); una donna insignificante consuma un'esistenza desolata per andare a trovare in carcere il marito che ha ucciso i tre figli della coppia ("Dimensions"). La morte e la malattia incombono da una raccolta all'altra, segnando l'esistenza di figure femminili che si sacrificano per accudire parenti ammalati: in "The Peace of Utrecht", Maddy, una delle due sorelle, è rimasta accanto alla madre malata di Parkinson, mentre, l'altra, l'io narrante, che le ha abbandonate, ha grossi sensi di colpa; in "Tricks", Joanne, gravemente malata di asma, perciò costretta in casa, sembra soffocare la sorella minore Robin, che, tuttavia, una volta al mese si reca a Stratford (Ontario) per assistere a un'opera di Shakespeare nell'annuale festival teatrale. Nel racconto si innesca una situazione potenzialmente capace di modificare tutta l'esistenza di Robin: in

modo del tutto fortuito la giovane incontra un orologiaio montenegrino che accorre in suo aiuto, dopo che ella ha smarrito la borsa. Ma come accade spesso nei racconti di Munro, la sorte tira brutti scherzi. L'attesa, le fantasticherie, i desideri, la solitudine: tutto viene messo in scena nel tempo della narrazione, dove, ironicamente, nessuno degli orologi che sono nel negozio del giovane indica l'ora giusta per Robin.

Inoltre, i racconti di Munro sono popolati da bambini e bambine che devono ancora scoprire il mondo e, soprattutto, il rapporto con gli adulti, come accade a Del Jordan nella raccolta *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971). Spesso fanno la loro comparsa gli animali, che assumono un efficace ruolo simbolico. Si pensi all'allevamento di volpi argentate, nel già citato *Lives of Girls and Women*, ai cavalli, ai cani, ai pennuti come i tacchini o le galline. In "Runaway", il racconto che dà il titolo alla raccolta del 2004, un maneggio idilliaco di cavalli in aperta campagna acquista tonalità minacciose quando scompare improvvisamente la capretta Flora, la mascotte dei cavalli, a cui Carla, la protagonista, è affezionata. La sorte della capretta si rispecchia in quella di Clara. Sono entrambe in fuga, ed entrambe destinate a una brutta fine.

Senza mai arrivare alla struttura rigida di un romanzo, senza mai abbandonare la dimensione di un discorso fatto di indizi, spezzoni, riferimenti che occorre mettere insieme con cura e pazienza, i racconti di Munro possono anche sviluppare percorsi che ruotano attorno a uno stesso personaggio, alla storia di una famiglia, agli avvenimenti quotidiani di una comunità, come accade nelle raccolte: *Lives of Girls and Women, Who Do You Think You Are* (1978), o, più recentemente in *The View From Castle Rock* (2006). Forse possiamo parlare di "romanzi ad episodi" formati da racconti autonomi e collegati. Un caso a parte è rappresentato dalla figura di Juliet nei racconti "Chance," "Soon," and "Silence" (3 dei 7 racconti inclusi in *Runaway*). Juliet vive tre momenti diversi della sua esistenza passando dalla giovinezza e ai rapporti con la madre Sara, all'esperienza sentimentale, fino alla inesplicabile frattura con la figlia Penelope. Questo trittico riflette sulla genealogia delle donne –nonna, madre, figlia – costruita attraverso echi, schemi, allusioni, ripetizioni, in cui eventi passati e presenti si intrecciano, spesso con esiti sorprendenti. Julieta, l'adattamento cinematografico di Pedro Amodovar, uscito nel 2016, pur consistendo in una trasposizione che sposta il setting amato da Munro per ambientarlo nei luoghi prediletti dal regista spagnolo, interpreta splendidamente gli sbalzi temporali e le questioni di genere che sviluppano l'azione del trittico di Munro. Un altro film, che risale a un decennio prima, ispirato alle opere di Munro, è senza dubbio degno di nota: *Away From Her* (2006) della regista canadese Sarah Polley, basato sul già citato "The Bear Came Over the Mountain", inserito nella raccolta *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* (2001).

Nella penultima raccolta *A View from Castle Rock* si accentua nella scrittrice l'esigenza di recuperare — sempre in modo frammentario e apparentemente discontinuo — narrazioni storiche e autobiografiche in un itinerario che ricostruisce, a partire dal XVIII secolo, le vicende del ramo paterno della famiglia che migra da una Scozia rurale ricca di superstizioni e di leggende all'America del Nord. Nella seconda parte del volume, Alice ripercorre episodi che riguardano lei stessa e i suoi genitori. Il filo della memoria personale viene ripreso e approfondito nell'ultima raccolta *Dear Life* (2011), dove la scrittrice canadese si confronta con la rappresentazione di una Alice che è divenuta personaggio a conclusione della sua carriera artistica.

Considerata erede della grande tradizione della short story che si estende dal russo Cechov alla neozelandese Mansfield, e che si trasferisce negli Stati Uniti con Kate Chopin, Flannery O'Connor, Katherine Anne Porter, Munro si immerge nel cuore della civiltà anglo-canadese con un linguaggio nitido e volutamente distaccato, illuminato da momenti epifanici e dal senso di delusione che caratterizza la vita di molte sue protagoniste. Insignita del Premio Nobel della letteratura nel 2013, la narratrice dell'Ontario esalta l'aspetto più interiore del “sogno canadese” e del suo fallimento, rispetto alla prosa più tumultuosa, a tratti strabordante, ed eclettica di Margaret Atwood, di otto anni più giovane di lei.

La morte di Alice Munro, avvenuta il 13 maggio 2024, preceduta dal lungo silenzio della malattia, segna il tramonto di una riflessione sulla condizione della vita delle donne, in cui sembrano prevalere ancora accettazione del destino, sofferenze private e subalternità di genere. Ciononostante, la ricchezza del linguaggio della short story munroviana apre nuovi spazi a lettori/lettrici, certo non solo canadesi, mostrando una profondità a volte insospettabile, una visione del mondo tanto più acuminata quanto essa è capace di cogliere il senso della vita nelle vicende di figure femminili minime, eppure, grazie a Munro, in grado di farsi interpreti della condizione contemporanea.

La consapevolezza artistica di Munro si manifesta quando la scrittrice, sempre insoddisfatta delle sue creature letterarie, redige varie versioni di alcuni racconti, operando cambiamenti ora minimi, ora sostanziali. Ad esempio, esistono ben otto versioni del racconto “Powers”, che chiude la raccolta *Runaway*. Munro è scrupolosa, inflessibile; inserisce un dettaglio, una parola chiave, un'immagine, un evento che chiude e schiude la sua trama, rendendo la



storia volutamente banale, eppure ambigua e complessa, depositando uno strato verbale sopra all'altro, un testo sopra all'altro. È come un chirurgo che opera un procedimento anatomico della short story. Spazio, tempo, voce, plot, climax sono cuciti sapientemente assieme in un'architettura che ha senso solo dopo aver esaminato ogni singolo dettaglio. Così i diversi strati dei suoi testi si aprono a una miriade di letture. Le trame mai lineari, con sbalzi temporali e cambiamenti del punto di vista, abbondano di riferimenti e citazioni, non sempre visibili immediatamente, all'opera, ai drammi teatrali, alla letteratura, alle arti visive, alla fotografia, al cinema. Le 14 raccolte di racconti e i vari volumi delle *Selected Stories*, che coprono l'arco di oltre cinquant'anni, hanno donato ai lettori e alle lettrici narrazioni che non vanno lette in un'unica seduta circoscritta come ribadiva Poe, per sostenere la superiorità del racconto sul romanzo, ma vanno centellate e assaporate, perché ogni circostanza minuta è di vitale importanza.

Per quanto riguarda la fortuna italiana di Munro, la scrittrice è stata ospitata, negli anni '90, grazie alla lungimiranza di Laura LePetit, nelle collane della Tartaruga, in cui è stata pubblicata la raccolta *La danza delle ombre felici* nel 1994, con la mia postfazione. Munro ha ottenuto un notevole successo soprattutto quando Einaudi è diventata l'unica casa editrice italiana di riferimento della scrittrice, affidata alle validissime traduzioni di Susanna Basso. Nell'ambito della canadesistica italiana, Munro è stata al centro del Convegno internazionale "Alice Munro and the Anatomy of the Short Story", tenuto il 2-4 ottobre 2014 presso l'Università di Napoli 'L'Orientale'. Gli Atti del Convegno sono stati pubblicati dalla Cambridge Scholars nel 2017.



RECENSIONI

Maria Gabriella Canfarelli,

*Provi di lingua matri*. Mascalucia: Edizioni Novecento, 2019.

La raccolta *Provi di lingua matri* di Maria Gabriella Canfarelli invita il lettore, attraverso il dialetto, a riconoscere un mondo ormai lontano. Un mondo che è tuttavia fondativo della complessiva personalità poetica dell'autrice catanese.

Il testo in lingua dialettale o meglio neo-volgare – come si usa dire oggi da poeti e critici impegnati in questo settore – si iscrive nel percorso artistico della Canfarelli quale esperienza unica e originale in quanto la poetessa aveva già pubblicato alcune raccolte poetiche nondimeno in lingua italiana ed altre se ne sarebbero aggiunte in seguito.

Ma come s'è detto più sopra, quel suo lavoro in dialetto è stato fondamentale per lei. Tanto che i curatori del volume *Dalle carte dell'isola. Libro della poesia neo-volgare siciliana* (2021), Gualtiero De Santi e Renato Pennisi, impressa per i tipi della Collana Poetica della Nuova Carabba, hanno ritenuto di doverla accogliere accanto ad autori di lunga tenuta e più riconosciuta fama antologizzando le composizioni nelle quali la sperimentazione linguistica poteva orientare il lettore verso una “forma di poesia sensibile e reale” (p. 186) importante in questo tipo di scrittura. “Il mito delle radici primordiali,” – scrive

appunto Gualtiero De Santi – “che appartiene a tanti poeti del nostro tempo, mantiene la propria forma nelle linee cadenzali di trasmissione nel dialetto e in una visione agonistica e conflittuale dei legami sociali e interpersonali” (p. 185).

La musicalità della parola presente nei versi di Cantarelli crea un tempo iniziale che consente di entrare in empatia con l'autrice. Le sillabe cullano chi legge nella dolcezza delle parole che descrivono infanzia ed adolescenza. La voce della poetessa è somigliante a un sibilo del vento che il lettore deve saper cogliere e ascoltare perché egli diventi l'interlocutore di queste storie ambientate in Sicilia. Una delle quali racconta come la lingua, che si impara a scuola, sia distante dal linguaggio della vita quotidiana. “Quann'èru nica, / sicca 'nte robbi, ca ci puteva / natari comu'n pisci, / m'abbuffuniavi arrirennu / picchè parravu taliànu. Fossi / ppi t'addumannavi cu era / dda figghia ca jeva a scola / e s'inznigava a lèggi e scriviri / e nenti sapeva da vita” (p. 14)<sup>1</sup>.

I versi fanno emergere le emozioni che lei sente dentro di sé, specchio dei sentimenti che affiorano attraverso flash narrativi che compongono un autoritratto della scrittrice, nella cui lingua si conserva una memoria che si fa nitida grazie al pensiero e allo sguardo continuo sul passato; ciò che favorisce la formazione di immagini che danno vita al verso.

La parola materializza le idee e i ricordi dei personaggi cari alla poetessa come la madre e la nonna. Ma, particolarmente, nella prolungata soggettività con cui lei dialoga con il mondo esterno, compare a volte la figura della Madre che le parla in dialetto. Le parole materne sono impresse nella mente e sono trasferite su fogli di carta per raccontare una situazione di vita.

Maria Gabriella Confarelli descrive per accumuli emotivi, sovrapposizioni di immagini, utilizzando specifiche costruzioni linguistiche: “Provu, nun pozzu fari autru / ca pruvati a pigghiarilli / che manu 'noto funnu, / annijati 'nto scruru, spirduti / - appoi taliari” (p. 16)<sup>2</sup>. Frasi che si ripetono, come elementi ossessivi, per sottolineare l'importanza della memoria. Inoltre, la poetessa

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<sup>1</sup> “Quant'ero piccina, / secca nei vestiti, che ci potevo / nuotare come un pesce, / mi schernivi ridendo / perché parlavo italiano. Forse / per questo non ci capivamo / forse ti chiedevi chi era / quella figlia che andava a scuola / e imparava a leggere e scrivere / e niente sapeva della vita” (p. 15).

<sup>2</sup> “Provo, altro non posso fare / che provare a prenderle / con le mani sul fondo, / annegate nel buio, disperse / - poi guardare” (p. 16).

sembra immersa nella solitudine che è esternata per divenire una condizione per scrivere.

Si tratta di un dialogo intimo e psicologico, che lei sa raggiungere grazie alla “guarigione dell’anima”. Poche parole nate dalle suggestioni della natura che infondono in lei un senso d’appagamento poi trasferito nei tornanti della poesia e in quelle esercitazioni di lingua madre che la spingeranno al dialetto, attraverso composizioni accompagnate da tioletti che introducono l’argomento.

La riflessione della poetessa è in forma di frammento e viene inquadrata all’interno di un arco temporale dove il lettore ritrova i diversi momenti della giornata. Parole e ricordi viaggiano sulla stessa lunghezza d’onda. Inoltre, gli oggetti della casa e la natura creano la memoria involontaria che stimola l’autrice in quel suo dialogo continuo con sé e con il mondo circostante.

Le molte e puntuali percezioni sono ordinate da riflessioni, da accostamenti di immagini e da ricordi che si mescolano ai momenti più recenti. La nominazione degli oggetti crea una sorta di mappa degli ambienti della casa dove l’autrice è vissuta da bambina. Così Canfarelli rivive infinite volte quei momenti impressi nella sua memoria: “Parru u dialettu / ppi fàrimi sèntiri / picchi s’accapu a vuci, sugnu vacati / cascia di lignu / ca un voli altri jorna / appinnuti ‘nto filu, / nun nni voli sapìri” (p. 17)<sup>3</sup>. L’io narrante – perché anche di questo si parla – acquista un insolito spessore temporale e psicologico, in un racconto che si distingue dal personaggio di un romanzo in quanto prevede solo la coscienza intima di sé e del proprio valore.

Il mondo descritto dalla Canfarelli è sempre denso di emozioni che sovrastano il pensiero logico dell’autrice. Così la poetessa si chiede se il turbinio delle emozioni debba essere stemperato dalla ragione. Nella quotidianità, si presentano situazioni che interrompono il dialogo interiore con la parola. L’aurea poetica è allora immaginata come condizione di vita sublunare – dove le nuvole rappresentano la creatività: di “chiddi ca spaccunu u cori / e u dannu nun si viri. I me’, che manu nzirradi / can un u volunu fari passari” (p. 18).

Come si riesce a cogliere da questo passaggio, la scrittura descrive il processo creativo con cui lei arriva alla parola in versi. Attraverso la visione onirica, espressione di una natura sensibile, Canfarelli introduce nel racconto

<sup>3</sup> “Parlo il dialetto / per farmi sentire / perché la voce è finita / sono vuoto / baule di legno / che non vuole altri giorni / appesi sul filo, / non ne vuole sapere” (p. 17).

elementi soggettivi per chiarire il suo rapporto con il mondo dell'arte: "Chiangi, jetti ruluri e schigghiunu / i to' anni picciriddi / tuppuliuunu / co sangu 'nte manu, foggia / ca trema e voli l'abburu" (p. 19)<sup>4</sup>.

C'è infine, nelle parole di Canfarelli, una sacralità immanente al mondo che viene descritto. Ma occorre dire che la parola sacra è paragonata alla parola materna, primordiale e popolare come se nella cultura della casa e dell'esistenza quotidiana si rinvenisse e rivedesse la luce divina che illumina gli spazi domestici.

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<sup>4</sup> "[...] di quelli che spaccano il cuore/e il danno non si vede. / I miei, con le mani serrate / che non vogliono farlo passare" (p. 18).

Maria Minnis,

*Tarot for the Hard Work. An Archetypal Journey to Confront Racism and inspire Collective Healing.* Newbury Port, MA: Weiser Books, 2024.

*Tarot for the Hard Work* is a provocative exploration of the Major Arcana. Maria Minnis lives in Los Angeles, where she runs a community program called the “Antiracist Tarot Society”. Her aim is to cultivate a more equitable and empathetic planet, and to this end she proposes Tarot as a tool to combat and dismantle racism in all its forms.

The striking innovation of this book is its multifaceted nature. It is not just a breaking news in terms of Tarology: on the contrary, it is above all a powerful essay against stereotypes, discriminatory attitudes, and racism. And a precious guide for everybody. No cards appear – no drawings, nor photos, nor magic formulas – but all the Major Arcana are introduced one by one and thoroughly analyzed. And the bibliography is an amazing list of essays and books about ethnicity, oppression, othering, disability, decolonization, sex criminalization, black womanhood, and social justice. Something you do not usually find on the shelves of card-reading books. The reason? This book – in its author’s words – is “a tool for passionately demolishing structural oppression” besides being a “tool of self-discovery” (pp. xiii, 1). According to the author, it is fundamental (today more than ever) to fight against internalized racism. For this reason, she includes tragic episodes of racism in the various sections of the book, alternating the archetypal figures of traditional Tarot with the real persons we are or would like to become – whether white or black.

The text opens with the Fool (0), “a trouble-maker, a risk-taker, someone who doesn’t [...] have the answers” (p. 7). The Fool defies the status quo and welcomes the unknown like a child. Still more – the Fool is ready to be a stranger in a strange land, which includes listening to others’ narratives of oppression and respecting the victims. The Magician (1) follows: this person is skilled in planning actions, in visualizing a completely equitable society, and in creating magic because they believe real change is possible. The next one is the High Priestess (2), who disseminates knowledge in the name of collective healing. This character, just like the Empress (3), is traditionally female, but

Minnis is extremely accurate in treating all figures according to a non-binary paradigm. The Empress – whatever their gender may be – is both a protector and a fighter and is particularly sensitive to the interconnectedness of all things. Similarly, the Emperor (4) is not necessarily a male. It is just a leader who cares for the collectivity and can give shape to creative ideas. Utopistic as it may sound, this is a leadership without patriarchy.

The Hierophant (5) – an uncommon definition that refers to someone who can understand and explain sacred things – is at once student and teacher, a nonconformist able to keep archives and to help us develop faith in learning and growth. The card of the Lovers (6) does not only celebrate love, but the difference between people, and though it traditionally shows a young man and a young woman, it “can actually queer the idea of love” (p. 71). This card is also called “Choice”. The next one, the Chariot (7), tells us that excessive baggage can decelerate and overcomplicate our journey. We must choose from many roads. To do so we need Strength (8), by which we shall be able to face such big planetary problems as – for example – climate change.

The Hermit (9) represents further reinforcement and purification through introspection, symbolized by a lantern that shines not only on himself, but on the whole community. The Wheel of Fortune (10) “is reminiscent of the universe’s unpredictability” and “embodies the reality that everything changes” (p. 114). It invites us to take advantage of new opportunities, motivates us when there are difficulties, and helps combat fear, anxiety, and self-doubt. The next card, Justice (11), advocates for fairness, integrity, and honesty. It admits oppression and symbolizes the necessity of remedying the harm done. Racism, capitalism, and hegemony must be fought and deconstructed. The Hanged One (12) means that sometimes we need to look at the world from a radically different perspective. We must be flexible enough to change our worldwide view. A dramatic example is violence against the Black. Death (13) follows, but it can just mean the necessity of a radical clearing; it is “an alarm-clock, a call to awaken” (p. 150), a change that is a bridge to something better.

Temperance (14) is also called the “art card”: Temperance and the Magician are both alchemists, and in particular the former combines, extracts, and balances elements. It also encourages social change and reinforces values and ideas. The Devil (15) wants power and gratification, but sometimes this card



orders us to try harder – e.g. have we really become (thanks to Temperance) good anti-racists? The Tower (16) asks us an even more crucial question: do we want to return to the Devil's chain or prefer the Star? Sometimes one must destroy (i.e. break a friendship, leave a job, move to another city) to move on. "Tower moments include the crisis of realization and the responsibility of repair [...] When the Tower falls, there's no going back" (pp. 185-86). The Star (17) rises from the Tower's ashes: "Our past biases and adverse behaviors no longer obscure our innate shine. [...] The Star is a reminder that we are on the right path, even if the road is dimly lit" (p. 195). Thanks to the Star we appreciate that everything is interconnected. The Moon (18) or 'night card' fully reveals our inner selves before we return to the outer world. It also reminds us that we live under the same moon as our ancestors. Also, the Moon helps marginalized people to fight oppression and gives comfort to troubled souls. The Moon shines more brightly on those who have 'diverted' from the 'norm'. It speaks to our subconscious and our primal feelings.

The Sun (19) reminds us that all life on the planet depends on its light. The Sun builds, supports, and sustains systems and decision, be they individual or collective. It gives way to Judgement (20), which announces that it's time to begin a new stage of life. This does not mean to repudiate our past – we did our best. But this is a time of reflection and self-evaluation: "Judgement meets us at a crossroads and reminds us of our volition. We can choose to stay or to move toward a more liberated world" (p. 233). The World (21) concludes the cycle: all endings are also new starts. We must remember that we are part of something bigger.

All chapters include exercises, meditation, and a page where to write one's experiences with, and reactions to, privilege, implicit bias, cross-cultural interactions, and so on. What we can learn from this text is that beside literary theory, cultural studies, sociology, and anthropology, there exists a dimension which is sometimes neglected, but participates in the debates and hot topics of our time. Prejudices, racism, oppression, inequality can be tackled with many instruments, among which even popular wisdom can find its place. Tarot has undoubtedly a cultural and historical relevance as an ancient method of divination. However, by dealing with ethnicity, gender issues, and climate change, it can also become an unconventional, up-to-date political tool. This

*Recensioni*

book, as we have seen, certainly goes beyond mere cartomancy and reveals the major issues we are called to deal with as human beings and citizens.

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Enrica Rossi,

*New Perspectives for Language Education: From Global English to Global Citizenship.*  
Genzano di Roma: Aracne, 2024.

In her book *New Perspectives for Language Education: From Global English to Global Citizenship*, Enrica Rossi investigates with a keen and perceptive eye the intricate connections between the global dominance of the English language, globalization, and the need for sustainable and fair language education that nurtures Global Citizenship. The work employs the UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) framework and aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to illustrate how integrating sustainable education with language teaching can effectively promote intercultural understanding and global citizenship.

As such, at a time when perhaps too many educators are concentrating solely on the challenges of new technology, in particular AI, this book comes as a welcome reminder of the potential that language teachers and educators in general have to work alongside their students to bring about positive changes that affect the world beyond the classroom. The idea of preparing learners not merely to pass tests but to become citizens, not just of their own country, but of the world, the planet, is gaining traction among teachers, educators, and policy makers but many may be confused about how to translate such ideas into action.

It is clear that Rossi is both passionate about her goals, but has thought hard about how to achieve them. This book can be recommended to anyone who is looking for ways to turn good intentions into good, decisive actions. In other words, this work is not merely an idealistic manifesto of the role that language education might play in a better world someday, somehow, but is also pragmatic, offering a wealth of practical strategies that a teacher may start to use the very same day to implement the SDGs and global citizenship values into their classroom. From Community-Based Language Learning (CBL) to Gamification, Rossi discusses a vast array of tools that educators can use to make their teaching more impactful and relevant to the global challenges of today.

*New Perspectives for Language Education: From Global English to Global Citizenship* is a well-written and concise work. It is well informed and authoritative, while at the same time being open and inclusive, engaging even. It offers a comprehensive, up-to-date, and insightful examination of the interplay between the global spread of the English language, the forces of globalization, and their collective impact on language education, while also looking at the positive ways in which language teaching may promote sustainable development and the idea of Global Citizenship.

As a whole, the book is organised around three stages, each building upon the last to create a robust framework for understanding the evolution of English as a global language and its implications for education. Phase one evaluates the development of the English language, tracing its roots from colonial expansion to its current status as a lingua franca. Phase two analyses the impact of global English on language education, while phase three proposes a framework that supports ELT pedagogies that may promote Global Citizenship Education (GCED) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

There are five chapters, many of which provide interesting material that could be used with advanced language learners or students studying Academic English for specific purposes in subjects related to international politics, international development or international cooperation, to name but three.

The first chapter looks at the historical roots of English as a global language, analysing the sociolinguistic dynamics and geopolitical factors that have transformed it from a language spoken in a cluster of small islands in the north west Atlantic into a global means of communication. Chapter 2 gives a tour d'horizon of the contemporary landscape of English language usage, addressing who speaks English today and the implications of this for language education. It emphasizes the importance of promoting fair language education, fostering intercultural communication and competence, and integrating sustainable development goals into language curricula. In Chapter 3, there is a thought-provoking discussion on the role of education in achieving sustainable development, particularly in the context of the United Nations 2030 Agenda. It discusses aligning education with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and explores practical strategies for incorporating SDGs into foreign language

curricula and research. Chapter 4 looks in depth at the concept of global citizenship education, highlighting its significance in promoting social responsibility, intercultural understanding, and active engagement with global issues. Finally, Chapter 5 provides practical guidance for designing teaching units for university students, with a specific focus on integrating the SDGs and global citizenship principles into the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Rossi's suggestions have been forged by real world classroom experience and her expertise as a language educator and as scholarly researcher are very much in evidence in this part.

As a whole, this book addresses the critical nexus between the global spread of the English language, the phenomenon of globalization, and the imperative for sustainable and fair language education. Rossi's work is not merely an academic examination but a call to action for educators and policymakers to rethink language education in the context of global citizenship and sustainable development. Her approach is both interdisciplinary and forward-thinking, drawing on linguistics, sociology, international relations, pedagogy, and education to provide a holistic view of the complex interaction between language spread, a world that is rapidly becoming globalized, and language teaching. Her discussion is focused on the present and the future yet rich in historical context; her aims are idealistic, but her approach pragmatic.

One of the most compelling aspects of this book is its emphasis on the role of language education in nurturing and fostering global citizenship. Rossi argues convincingly that language educators have a unique opportunity to cultivate a sense of global responsibility and intercultural competence among their students. The integration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into language education is presented as a means to achieve this, with practical suggestions for innovative teaching methodologies that engage students in meaningful learning experiences.

In conclusion, *New Perspectives for Language Education: From Global English to Global Citizenship* is an essential read for anyone involved in language education who is interested in how their role in the classroom can have an impact on the world beyond, and on how they and their students can be given a voice in the global debates that will shape all of our futures.

## *Recensioni*

Rossi's work is a testament to the power of education to shape a more sustainable and equitable world. It is a call to action for educators to embrace their role as agents of change, using the English language not only as the bulldozer for globalisation (as it is often portrayed) but as a vehicle for promoting global understanding, respect, and responsibility. This book is highly recommended for its comprehensive analysis, practical applications, and its vision for a future where language education is a catalyst for global and inclusive citizenship.

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*Real and Fictional North America: The Flourishing of New Men*, 2019; “Green Studies for the Red Planet? A lesson from the past”, in R. Ferrari e L. Giovannelli, eds, *A Green Thought in a Green Shade*, 2020.

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Urbino University Press

ISSN 1724-8698