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Edited by: **Peter Vassallo**

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The *Journal of Anglo-Italian Studies* is a interdisciplinary Journal published annually by the Institute of Anglo-Italian Studies of the University of Malta. It is devoted to current research in the history of cultural relations between England and Italy from 1300 to the present.

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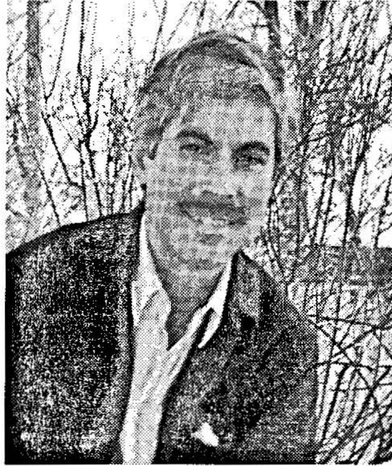
In Memoriam
Gregory L. Lucente
1948–1997



This special double issue of the *Journal of Anglo-Italian Studies* is dedicated to the memory of Gregory L. Lucente, Professor of Italian and Comparative Literature at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. A distinguished scholar, Greg Lucente was the author of *The Narrative of Realism and Myth* (1981), and *Beautiful Fables: Self-Consciousness in Italian Literature from Manzoni to Calvino* (1986), and the recent *Crosspaths: Literary Theory and Criticism in Italy and the United States* (1997), published posthumously by Stanford. He was also a member of the Advisory Editorial Board of the Journal.

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Dante in Inghilterra

Piero Boitani

La vicenda della presenza di Dante in Inghilterra si potrebbe appropriatamente definire una storia d'amore. Né la cultura francese, né quelle iberiche, né quelle germaniche – per non parlare delle slave e delle scandinave – hanno con il più grande fra i poeti italiani un rapporto altrettanto antico ed intenso, e in verità complesso e controverso, quanto quello che appunto comunemente si intende con l'espressione *love story*.

La storia inizia forse nel 1372–1373, quando il maggior scrittore inglese dell'epoca, Geoffrey Chaucer, si recò, su incarico regio, a Genova e Firenze, città quest'ultima dove proprio nella primavera del 1373 dovevano fervere le iniziative e i contatti che portarono Giovanni Boccaccio a iniziare, l'anno successivo, le prime *lecturae Dantis* pubbliche. Il culto del Boccaccio per Dante era comunque noto in tutti gli ambienti intellettuali d'Italia, e Chaucer non può non essersi sentito stimolato alla lettura – o rilettura – del poeta fiorentino dall'enormità del progetto, che per la prima volta avrebbe visto un autore volgare commentato e discusso in una serie di lezioni paragonabili soltanto a quelle tradizionali sulla Bibbia e sui Padri.

Naturalmente, la storia potrebbe avere avuto inizio qualche anno prima, quando a un Chaucer che probabilmente conosceva già l'italiano per via dei contatti mercantili paterni o degli scambi

diplomatici fra la corte inglese e quelle della penisola, fu consegnata una copia della *Commedia* o un manoscritto miscellaneo di scritti danteschi. Si può comunque dire che del principio di questa vicenda d'amore abbiamo una registrazione, effettuata dallo stesso scrittore inglese, appropriatamente misteriosa, quasi romanzesca, avvolta in un'atmosfera onirica. È infatti nella *House of Fame,* un poemetto che narra un sogno avuto da Geoffrey il 10 dicembre di un anno non specificato (presumibilmente sul finire del settimo decennio del Trecento), che Dante viene per la prima volta nominato e usato.

Egli non è consacrato nella grande sala del Palazzo di Fama, dove la dea mostruosa, ambigua e arbitraria che vi domina è circondata dalle Muse e dagli scrittori del passato classico, ebraico e medievale, ma compare invece, assieme a Virgilio e Claudiano, verso la fine del riassunto dell'"Eneide" ovidizzata nel Libro I, come un grande esperto di "tutti i tormenti dell'Inferno". Tuttavia, non è solo dall'*Inferno,* bensì anche dal *Purgatorio* e dal *Paradiso* che i prestiti chauceriani dalla *Commedia* provengono nella *House of Fame.* L'aquila che piomba dal cielo per trasportare Geoffrey al Castello della Fama deriva dal canto IX del *Purgatorio,* e l'invocazione ad Apollo nel Libro III è modellata su quella del canto I del *Paradiso.* Chaucer mostra però di avere con il poeta italiano un rapporto d'amore che si potrebbe definire edipico, e che certo si rivela tale attraverso l'esibizione ironica ed autoconsapevole di una forte "angoscia dell'influenza". Quando l'aquila propone l'ardito volo attraverso lo spazio verso le "notizie d'amore", Geoffrey, impaurito, pensa che Giove stia per "stellificarlo" e, dentro di sé, confessa di non essere né Enoch, né Elia, né Romolo, né Ganimede, riprendendo con umorismo le parole di Dante a Virgilio, "Io non Enea, io non Paulo sono." Più tardi, quando i due sono ormai così in alto da poter contemplare la vicina Galassia e la lontanissima Terra, Geoffrey si chiede se si trovi lassù "in corpo o in spirito", riecheggiando le famose parole di Paolo nella Seconda Epistola ai Corinzi, e tagliando ancora una volta con ironia le affermazioni di Dante (da quel brano di Paolo appunto derivate) nel canto I del *Paradiso:* "Nel ciel che più de la sua luce prende / fu' io, e vidi cose che ridire / né sa né può chi di là su discende".

Insomma, Chaucer teme e prende in giro il poeta-protagonista della *Commedia*: grande maestro di Inferno (e anche di Cielo, come

obliquamente ribadirà l'apertura della *Legend of Good Women*), troppo sublime narratore di esperienze mistiche, e comunque di "segrete cose" nelle quali egli, che si presenta sempre come lettore appassionato e curioso, ma anche ottuso e limitato, non vuole entrare. E tuttavia, è anche irresistibilmente attratto dalle sue capacità descrittive, icastiche e sintetiche: nel *Parliament of Fowls*, il momento del crepuscolo è reso con la traduzione della celebre terzina di *Inferno* II ("lo giorno se n'andava, e l'aere bruno . . .", subito ridimensionata dalla precisazione che la mancanza di luce conduce il protagonista del poemetto ad infilarsi la camicia da notte anziché ad affrontare la guerra dantesca del cammino e della pietate), e la doppia iscrizione sull'ingresso del giardino erotico-edenico ricalca quella dell'Inferno . . . "Thorgh me men gon", "Per me si va".

Chaucer è però disposto a riconoscere all'autore della *Commedia* (e del *Convivio*) una qualità fondamentale. Dante si era celebrato, nel *De vulgari eloquentia*, come poeta della *virtus* morale, della *rectitudo*: Chaucer ne cita diverse volte le opinioni sulla "gentilezza", cioè sulla nobiltà (che deve essere d'animo e non di casato, e neppure acquistata per mezzo della ricchezza), mettendole persino in bocca a quello straordinario personaggio pre-falstaffiano che è la Comare di Bath, e giungendo ad affermare, in quella *Legend of Good Women* ove riporta la *sententia* di Pier delle Vigne sull'invidia delle corti, che Dante è "il *saggio* poeta di Firenze".

Vi sono poi momenti in cui Chaucer sembra non saper resistere al fascino di Dante, all'amore per lui e per la sua poesia più religiosamente tesa. I primi tre Libri del *Troilus and Criseyde* appaiono (assai più dei tre della *House of Fame*) un Inferno, Purgatorio e Paradiso dell'amore, e alla fine del poema l'autore si presenta perciò, in maniera obliqua, come "sesto fra contanto senno". I giochi intertestuali che Chaucer compie sulla *Commedia* nel *Troilus* sono straordinari e perversi: la preghiera di San Bernardo alla Vergine diviene implorazione di Troilo alle divinità dell'amore perché gli concedano il piacere fisico di Criseida; eppure tutta la vicenda è incorniciata da similitudini dantesche (i "fioretti" di *Inferno* I e le foglie autunnali di *Inferno* III), che le conferiscono aura lirica e spessore drammatico senza precedenti, e dominata da un'idea di Dio come Amore che muove il tutto e a cui tutto dovrebbe muovere, nell'ispirare la quale Dante ha certamente avuto il suo peso. Il

poema termina infatti con il coro dei sapienti nel Cielo del Sole da *Paradiso* XIV: "Quell'uno e due e tre che sempre vive . . .", "Thow oon, and two, and thre, eterne on lyve . . .". Negli stessi *Racconti di Canterbury*, la preghiera di Bernardo alla Vergine nel canto XXXIII del *Paradiso* viene imitata, certo con intento serio, nei Prologhi alle narrazioni pie della Prioressa e della Seconda Monaca. E, per dare solo un esempio, rimane in lui memoria profonda della più alta voce dantesca. Ecco, nel Prologo della Comare di Bath, tornare trasformata l'eco del momento culminante della *Commedia*.

> . . . and bookes many on,
> And alle thise were bounden *in o volume.*
> And every nyght and day was his *custume* . . .
>
> Nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna,
> legato con amore *in un volume,*
> ciò che per l'universo si squaderna:
> sustanze e accidenti e lor *costume.*

Una sola volta nella sua carriera Chaucer osò misurarsi direttamente con Dante, quando fra le tante storie del *Racconto del Monaco* volle inserire quella di Ugolino. Alla quale cambiò decisamente i connotati, trasformando il Conte, traditore tradito in *Inferno* XXXIII, in semplice vittima dell'arcivescovo Ruggieri, e volgendo il registro dominante della narrazione dall'incontenibile orrore trasgressivo di Cocito e della Muda al pathos tremendo, da campo di concentramento, della sua torre. Proprio al termine di quella storia, che come vedremo avrà in Inghilterra una fortuna straordinaria, Chaucer riconobbe però una volta per tutte la grandezza e, si può ben dire, l'onnipotenza e l'infallibilità narrative di Dante, rimandando a lui i lettori che di Ugolino volessero versione più ampia e diversa: al "*grande poeta* d'Italia che si chiama Dante, perché tutto egli sa disegnare, punto per punto, né fallisce in una sola parola".

Il rapporto di Chaucer con Dante è in un certo senso una parabola, una prefigurazione di quello che l'intera cultura inglese intrattiene con il nostro: una relazione, si diceva, amorosa, fatta di fascino, timore, avvicinamento, presa di distanza, riconoscimento, adorazione. Non per nulla Chaucer fu, e fu riconosciuto, "padre"

della tradizione letteraria inglese.Unico nel suo tempo (non si conosce influenza simile fra i suoi contemporanei, dei quali solo l'amico John Gower narra un breve aneddoto su Dante; né fra i suoi immediati successori, dei quali solo John Lydgate ne ammette l'importanza, chiamando il predecessore "Dante in Inglissh"), Chaucer sembra indicare ai posteri le vie diverse di un dantismo plurisecolare.

La prima è quella della presa di distanza e persino dell'oblio. Chaucer aveva usato, per il *Troilus* e per i *Racconti di Canterbury*, alcune opere del Boccaccio: *Filostrato, Teseida, Filocolo, De casibus virorum illustrium, De claris mulieribus*, forse anche qualcosa del *Decameron*. Nel *Troilus and Criseyde* aveva impiegato un sonetto del Petrarca, e quello stesso Petrarca aveva poi incoronato nel Prologo al *Racconto dello Studente di Oxford* (tratto dalla versione petrarchesca in latino della novella di Griselda nel *Decameron*) come "poeta laureato", il primo dell'Europa moderna. Come se avesse ascoltato Chaucer, la letteratura inglese del Quattrocento, e soprattuto del Cinquecento (come del resto quella italiana e di tutto il Continente), segue Boccaccio e Petrarca piuttosto che Dante.

Ci si può chiedere se, nel farlo, fosse cosciente di due aspetti concomitanti, e cioè di quanto, da una parte, la via intrapresa dal Boccaccio e in particolare dal Petrarca fosse alternativa a quella dantesca, e di quanto, dall'altra, sia il Boccaccio che il Petrarca fossero – l'uno esplicitamente e appassionatamente, l'altro in preda alla "angoscia dell'influenza" – debitori del padre. Certo è che se il duca Humphrey di Gloucester, patrono di Lydgate e di tanti umanisti italiani ed inglesi, donò ad Oxford, nel 1443, una copia della *Commedia* corredata di commento latino, l'umanesimo britannico non seguì l'esempio di quello italiano sull via dell'esaltazione e dell'esegesi di Dante.

Quanto avranno sospettato i petrarchisti inglesi, Wyatt, Surrey, e tutti i loro successori, del nascosto contrappunto del nuovo maestro italiano sulla lirica e sul poema danteschi? Avrà capito Edmund Spenser, grande ammiratore dell'Ariosto e del Tasso, quali ricami soprattutto il secondo aveva operato, nella *Gerusalemme Liberata*, sui versi, le rime, gli episodi della *Commedia*? E cosa sapeva Shakespeare, il quale ben conosceva Chaucer, Gower e, direttamente o indirettamente, Boccaccio, del "grande poeta d'Italia"? L'autore di

Romeo e Giulietta avrà mai gettato uno sguardo sull'invettiva contro la serva Italia di *Purgatorio* VI, in cui si esorta l'imperatore tedesco Alberto a venire a vedere le lotte furibonde di Montecchi e Cappelletti?

La domanda potrebbe apparire del tutto oziosa, mero frutto delle morbose fantasie di un letterato postmoderno, al quale piacerebbe assistere all'incontro, e forse alla conflagrazione, fra i due maggiori geni dell'Europa moderna e medievale. Ma si pensi che il protestante John Foxe fece stampare la *Monarchia* e la citò nel suo *Book of Martyrs* (1563), e che John Jewel affermò nella *Apologie of the Church of England* (1567) che Dante aveva chiamato la Chiesa di Roma "the whore of Babylon". Per decreto di Elisabetta I, ogni chiesa anglicana doveva possedere una copia delle due opere, e dunque ogni fedel suddito di Sua Maestà poteva in teoria aver nozione di Dante, e di un Dante precursore della Riforma. Si aggiunga, poi, che John Florio, la cui traduzione dei *Saggi* di Montaigne Shakespeare certamente usò, e il cui dizionario italiano e inglese, *The World of Wordes* (1598), ebbe vasta diffusione all'epoca, dichiara nell'Epistola dedicatoria di quest'opera, paragonando i Trecentisti italiani, che "Boccaccio è abbastanza difficile, ma comprensibile; Petrarca più difficile, ma spiegato; Dante più difficile di tutti, ma commentato". Può darsi che frasi come questa abbiano spaventato i contemporanei di Shakespeare più di quanto gli slanci mistici e l'onnipotenza dantesca non avessero terrorizzato Chaucer. Ben Jonson, che non sembra autore particolarmente timoroso nei confronti di chicchessia, confessa in *Volpone* che "Dante è duro, e pochi lo capiscono".

Paura, incomprensione, oblio: la *love story* dell'Inghilterra con Dante conosce nel Rinascimento una fase di stanchezza, di abbandono. Il pendolo riprende a oscillare nella direzione inaugurata da Chaucer con la generazione e il secolo successivi, nei quali un altro dei padri fondatori della poesia inglese, Milton, si misura con Dante in maniera seria ed approfondita. Ottimo praticante dell'italiano, lettore onnivoro, possessore di un *Convivio*, conoscitore della *Monarchia* e della *Vita Nuova*, Milton cita la *Commedia* nell'edizione, e con il commento, di Daniello. Per il poeta puritano, Dante è precursore dell'antipapismo, come testimonia la sua traduzione in autoconsapevole *blank verse* inglese della terzina su Costantino da *Inferno* XIX, in *Of Reformation touching Church Discipline:*

Ahi Costantin, di quanto mal fu matre,
non la tua conversion, ma quella dote
che da te prese il primo ricco patre!

Ah Constantine, of how much ill was cause,
Not thy conversion, but those rich domaines
That the first wealthy Pope received of thee.

Milton, però, conosce e comprende Dante troppo bene per limitarsi a considerarlo, acriticamente e antistoricamente, come un semplice antenato della Riforma. Egli ne sfrutta, certo, e con abilità, la polemica contro la corruzione della Chiesa. In *Lycidas*, per esempio, il suo San Pietro pronuncia due versi derivati dall'invettiva di Beatrice contro i predicatori che, invece di parlare del Vangelo, s'ingegnano a fabbricare, per dar lustro a se stessi, le loro proprie invenzioni (*Paradiso* XXIX, 107–8), sicché

The hungry Sheep look up, and are not fed,
But swoln with wind, and the rank mist they draw.

Nella mente del poeta, però, non viene mai meno la memoria della poesia in quanto tale. Nello stesso *Lycidas* – un'elegia che molto deve alla canzone italiana e sembra seguire le istruzioni per tale forma dettate da Dante nel *De vulgari eloquentia*, e che, soprattuto, canta, in proiezione autoreferenziale, il naufragio e la rinascita di un amico studioso e poeta – Milton invita i pastori a non piangere più, perché il suo eroe "non è morto, benché sia affondato sotto al suolo d'acqua: / cosí affonda la stella del giorno nel letto dell'oceano, / eppure subito risolleva il capo ripiegato". È difficile credere che Milton non abbia in mente e, coscientemente o meno, non contrapponga la sorte del suo Edward King e quella dell'Ulisse dantesco, che vede le stelle dell'emisfero settentrionale scomparire "sotto 'l marin suolo" ("beneath the watery floor" è l'equivalente miltoniano), e che è affondato da quell'"altrui" il quale, nella veste evangelica di "colui che camminò sulle onde", fa risorgere e salire al cielo il cristiano Lycidas.

Del resto, un richiamo al Casella dantesco chiude il suo tredicesimo Sonetto, e Milton dichiara nella *Apology for Smectymnus* tutta la sua ammirazione per i pensieri "puri e sublimi" con i quali Dante ha

celebrato Beatrice (e Petrarca, Laura). Cosa avrà provato un lettore e un poeta del genere nel comporre quella umana tragedia e divina epica che è il *Paradiso perduto*? Come comportarsi nei confronti dell'unico predecessore che aveva descritto l'Inferno e il Paradiso Terrestre e Celeste? Bisognava, certo, ignorarlo: perché troppo cattolico, troppo tardo, troppo crudo e concreto. Si doveva invece ritornare alle fonti primigenie, a Genesi e alla lunga tradizione apocrifa ed esegetica della Bibbia, al suono solenne e al paludato fraseggiare dei classici greci e latini, a una più pura solennità. E tuttavia, a prescindere dal confronto (che certo Milton stesso deve aver fatto, e che occorrerebbe compiere in occasione più distesa della presente, ma nel quale mi azzarderei a dire che egli abbia battuto Dante nella soverchiante modernità della figura di Satana, pareggiato con lui nelle descrizioni dell'Inferno e del Paradiso Terrestre, e da lui sia stato sonoramente sconfitto nel parlare di Dio e della sua luce), si dovrà pur notare come nello stesso *Paradiso perduto* riaffiori di tanto in tanto l'eco della *Commedia*, sia pure, alla maniera chauceriana, tagliata ed adattata ad altro fine. È il caso del saluto tributato da Peccato a Morte nel Libro II, chiaramente modellato su quello di Dante a Virgilio:

> Thou art my Father, thou my Author, thou
> My being gav'st me . . .

> Tu se' lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore,
> tu se' solo colui . . .

Ma forse il debito maggiore di Milton nei confronti del Dante della *Commedia* è, assai più difficile da stabilire, quello che ha contribuito alla creazione di Satana stesso: non perché egli derivi dal Lucifero dantesco, né perché la trasformazione di Satana in serpente nel Libro IX sia ispirata alle metamorfosi del canto XXV dell'*Inferno* (benché queste siano indubbiamente presenti), ma perché la smisurata trasgressività di Satana appare in un certo senso come la somma e il concentrato, filtrati attraverso il Satana del Tasso e lo Iago di Shakespeare, delle figure titaniche che popolano l'*Inferno*, e soprattutto gli ultimi canti – da Farinata e Capaneo, e poi in particolare da Vanni Fucci a Ulisse, da Guido da Montefeltro a Ugolino. In ogni caso, un lettore moderno non potrà ormai che

leggere quei personaggi danteschi alla luce del poema miltoniano: il che prova una volta per tutte la teoria secondo la quale esiste una "influenza" del poeta posteriore sui propri predecessori.

Una volta passato attraverso la sensibilità di Milton, Dante poteva intraprendere, nella cultura inglese, una via diversa dalla precedente: non solo era ora maggiormente conosciuto, come testimonia il ricorrere del suo nome nelle opere del poeta-drammaturgo-critico John Dryden, ma ne veniva a poco a poco sempre di più apprezzata, nel nuovo clima estetico seguito all'Augustanesimo, proprio la qualità sublime. Già nel 1756, nel suo *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, Joseph Warton definisce la *Commedia* "sublime e originale". Sarà, dopo poco, la linea di tutto il Romanticismo inglese, da Coleridge a Shelley, da Hazlitt a Macaulay.

A questa nuova considerazione contribuiscono in maniera determinate le traduzioni – da quella del solo *Inferno* di William Rogers (1782), a quella completa di Henry Boyd (1802), a quella, decisiva, di Henry Francis Cary (1814) – e la pittura. Già un impressionante ritratto del Conte Ugolimo dipinto da Sir Joshua Reynolds aveva, secondo la geniale intuizione chauceriana, turbato il sonno degli inglesi. Seguirono le illustrazioni di Flaxman (1790–1797) e poi quelle, furibonde e fantastiche, di Blake (1818–). L'opera saggistica e divulgatrice del Foscolo, esule in Inghilterra, fece il resto.

La traduzione di Cary, un grande classico dell'arte traspositiva, schiude a Dante nuovi orizzonti: ormai, la *Commedia* penetra a fondo nell'immaginario inglese, e ha inizio quella che man mano diviene una vera e propria "dantolatria". Pochi esempi in crescendo saranno sufficienti ad illustrare questa grande passione. Nella composizione che apre le *Lyrical Ballads*, inaugurando così il Romanticismo inglese, e cioè nella *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge introduce, segnalando a margine "da Dante", una similitudine dell'*Inferno* (XXI, 25–30), che fa comprendere al lettore il luogo – l'Inferno, appunto – dal quale il Vecchio Marinaio finalmente esce per compiere la propria avventura terrena; e nel gorgo, come quella dell'Ulisse dantesco, affonda infine l'imbarcazione del protagonista della *Ballata*. Nei suoi *Memorials of a Tour in Italy*, Wordsworth stesso si identifica con Dante il patriota, contemplando e sedendosi sul cosiddetto "sasso di Dante" presso il

Duomo di Firenze. Byron compone addirittura una *Prophecy of Dante*, ma il *Corsaro* sarebbe incomprensibile senza le epigrafi dantesche che ne aprono ogni canto, e il *Prisoner of Chillon* senza l'episodio di Ugolino. Shelley, che con Medwin aveva collaborato a una traduzione dello stesso episodio (Chaucer aveva dunque visto giusto), traduce anche la canzone *Voi che intendendo il terzo ciel movete*, mette sullo stesso piano Dante e Milton nella *Defence of Poetry*, usa la *Vita nuova* nell'*Epipsychidion*, sfrutta Dante e Cavalcanti nel *Prometheus Unbound*, e imposta l'intero *Triumph of Life*, a partire dalla straordinaria resa della terza rima (l'unico tentativo precedente era stato, ancora una volta, di Chaucer), sul *Purgatorio* e sul *Paradiso*. Keats, che percorre la Scozia a piedi leggendo Cary, evoca Paolo e Francesca nel sognante Sonetto *As Hermes once took to his feathers light*. E infine Leigh Hunt scrive, sull'eroina di *Inferno* V, l'intera *Story of Rimini*.

Da questo momento in poi, non sorprenderà più trovare Dante nel cuore stesso degli inglesi colti. Se i Browning tengono un ritratto del poeta appeso alle pareti della loro casa fiorentina (e Robert costruisce un *Sordello* attorno e contro la figura di Dante), Gladstone, il grande primo ministro vittoriano, traduce brani da tutte e tre le cantiche della *Commedia* (incluso, ancora una volta, l'Ugolino) e confessa di avere appresso "alla scuola di Dante" una gran parte della preparazione mentale necessaria alla politica. È dalla profezia di Tiresia nel Libro XI dell'*Odissea* e, soprattutto, dal canto XXVI dell'*Inferno* che Tennyson inventa il suo *Ulysses*, un monologo drammatico-lirico che proietta l'eroe omerico-dantesco verso l'esplorazione senza fine, il nulla e la morte, compiendo il folle volo dell'Ulisse di Dante "beyond the sunset" ("di retro al sol"), incontro a un "newer world" ("nova terra"). Dante si ritrova così, per mano inglese, profeta della modernità: il suo Ulisse diviene un antesignano del Satana di Milton (con le cui parole il monologo di immaginario occidentale, il posto preminente che gli compete accanto a quelli di Ugolino e Francesca.

Nel frattempo, un altro aspetto dell'opera dantesca era divenuto di moda in Inghilterra, quello legato alla *Vita nuova* e al culto di Beatrice, esplorato e propagandanto dalle traduzioni, dai dipinti e dai componimenti poetici di Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Se la sua *House of Life*, in sonetti, è profondamente ispirata all'opera dantesca, nessun

inglese del secolo XIX o, se è per questo, del successivo, ha mai potuto dimenticare il suo quadro sul "Saluto di Beatrice".

Nella seconda metà dell'Ottocento nasce anche in Inghilterra lo studio scientifico ed accademico – storico, filologico e critico – dell'opera dantesca: segno che questa ha ormai acquisito canonicità di classico al pari della Bibbia e degli scrittori greci e latini (come in Italia fin dall'epoca del Boccaccio), nonché dei maggiori autori inglesi. Le edizioni e gli *Studies in Dante* e *Dante in English Literature* di Paget Toynbee, insieme alla Oxford Dante Society (1876), sono monumenti ancor oggi rilevanti del dantismo inglese, fiorente nel nostro secolo con i lavori di Colin Hardie, Kenelm Foster, Patrick Boyde, Peter Dronke e della generazione a loro successiva. Si moltiplicano anche le traduzioni, da quella dei Temple Classics a cavallo fra i due secoli, a quelle di Lawrence Binyon e G.L. Bickersteth (1945 e 1955), alla popolarissima versione di Dorothy Sayers (1962), e oltre a C.H. Sisson (1980) e Tom Phillips (1985).

Si potrebbe forse porre termine qui a una recensione della presenza di Dante in Inghilterra. Occorre tuttavia ricordare due fatti non completamente separabili l'uno dall'altro, e cioè che da una parte Dante rientra nella cultura inglese del Novecento dall'America, e dall'altra che l'Inghilterra è ormai, grazie al suo antico impero, all'espansione politica economica culturale degli Stati Uniti, e dunque grazie alla sua lingua, un pianeta. Se è impossibile parlare di Dante in Inghilterra nel XX secolo senza menzionare gli espatriati statunitensi Ezra Pound a soprattutto T.S. Eliot, sarà difficile trascurare gli irlandesi Yeats, Joyce, Beckett e Heaney, o scrittori americani come Robert Lowell e il nero LeRoi Jones (il suo *The System of Dante's Hell* è del 1963), e lo stesso dantismo accademico che fiorisce sull'altra sponda dell'Atlantico.

Se Pound ha efficacemente difeso le ragioni della poesia dantesca, il suo uso della medesima, ad esempio nei *Cantos* ispirati alla struttura stessa della *Commedia,* è troppo frammentario per permettere ai contemporanei la costruzione di un'immagine "mitica" del poeta italiano. Chi invece ha dato nuovo vigore alla presenza di Dante nella cultura di lingua inglese è T.S. Eliot. Tutta la sua carriera poetica, da *Prufrock* alla *Terra desolata,* dal *Mercoledì delle Ceneri* ai *Quattro quartetti,* è profondamente segnata dall'amore per la *Commedia,* a cominciare dalle epigrafi che Eliot appone alle sue

composizioni e che molto spesso provengono dal poema dantesco. Citazioni emblematiche da Dante definiscono situazioni e significati della poesia eliotiana (per esempio, la celebre immagine della folla sul London Bridge, "ch'i' non avrei creduto / che morte tanta n'avesse disfatta", fa comprendere al lettore che la terra desolata è un inferno di ignavi), che si vale anche di riprese di interi episodi (quello di Ulisse, cancellato poi da Pound, nella *Waste Land*, e quello di Brunetto nell'ultimo dei *Four Quartets, Little Gidding*), nonché di scene che alludono al tema della poesia, della paternità letteraria e della purificazione (la presenza dell'Arnaut Daniel di *Purgatorio* XXVI è costante).

Ma Dante viene anche presentato da Eliot come il maggior classico della Cristianità, il più universale degli scrittori, il maestro di stile rigoroso e conciso, il poeta che più di tutti sa incarnare il pensiero nella parola e nell'immagine: e sono questi aspetti del fiorentino che i saggi danteschi di Eliot (e più di tutti il suo *Dante* del 1929) incidono per sempre nella memoria della cultura inglese del Novecento. Infine, non andrà dimenticato l'uso personale che di Dante fa Eliot (quello appunto che l'autore della *Commedia* si augurava): compagno di una ricerca propriamente metafisica, egli diviene anche esempio di conversione religiosa, modello di vita nuova e di passaggio dall'Inferno al Purgatorio, con finale proiezione (nei *Quartetti*) paradisiaca.

L'idea di Dante come "chief imagination of Christendom", che ha lasciato il suo volto inciso sulla memoria collettiva dell'Occidente, era già stata dell'irlandese Yeats, che la consacrò in *Ego Dominus Tuus*. Della stessa idea partecipa, da ribelle qual è, anche Joyce, che nel *Ritratto di artista da giovane* condanna "l'apparato refrigerante spirituale-eroico inventato e brevettato per tutti i paesi da Dante Alighieri", ma che in quello stesso *Ritratto* fa compiere al protagonista Stephen un itinerario che lo conduce verso la visione culminante del *Paradiso* e quindi all rivolta e all'esilio. Per molti versi, Joyce usa la *Commedia* al modo di un Chaucer moderno, più spregiudicato ed esplicito del suo predecessore medievale, ma con la stessa serietà e il medesimo contrappunto ironico. Nell'*Ulisse*, dove Leopold Bloom, appena tornato a casa dalla sua odissea attraverso Dublino, sogna un ultimo viaggio simile a quello dell'Ulisse dantesco, l'eco del poema è pervasiva, dal motivo dell'esilio all'inizio (da *Paradiso*

XVII), al ricordo di Francesca, al "cul fatto trombetta", fino alla visione del mare e del cielo di Gibilterra che Molly Bloom, come Dante dalle soglie dell'Empireo, contempla proprio nell'ultima pagina del libro. Nella stessa *Finnegans Wake*, che crea un mondo fatto ad immagine e somiglianza del linguaggio, vengono raccolte e pervertite con gusto parecchie "dantellising peaches" (compreso il "passo su Galilleotto" che da *Inferno* V si proietta su Cristo il Galileo e sullo scienziato del Seicento), e si raccomanda a un certo punto di "skim over *Through Hell with the Papes*... by the divine comic Denti Alligator".

Nelle letterature di lingua inglese, Dante è dunque continuamente *in fieri*, oggetto d'amore rispettoso o irriverente, linfa vitale di trasformazioni ormai planetarie. Seamus Heaney, premio Nobel 1995, conclude *Field Work*, del 1979, con una versione di Ugolino – ancora lui! – e inserisce una traduzione di *Inferno* III in *Seeing Things*, del 1991. La presenza di Dante nella sua poesia è una volta di più determinante, soprattutto in quella *Station Island* che è racconto di un "pellegrinaggio" al Purgatorio di San Patrizio in Irlanda, e dove figura il ricordo di una visione beatifico-erotica adolescenziale di una schiena femminile che risolleva le "forze appassite" del poeta "As little flowers that were all bowed and shut / By the night chills rise on their stems and open / As soon as they have felt the touch of sunlight": "quali fioretti dal notturno gelo / chinati e chiusi, poi che 'l sol l'imbianca, / si drizzan tutti aperti in loro stelo".

Ancora più stupefacente, forse, l'impronta dantesca in Derek Walcott, Nobel nel 1992, che inizia la propria carriera affermando di aver trovato il "leopardo" (la "lonza") dell'ispirazione "in the middle of the journey through my life" (a diciotto anni!); che narra l'intero *Omeros* in terza rima dantesca di esametri omerici; e che apre la sua ultima collezione di versi, *The Bounty* (1997) con lo "In sua volontà è nostra pace" di Piccarda. La famosa terzina di *Paradiso* III prosegue, si ricorderà, con i versi: "ell'è quel mare al qual tutto si move / ciò ch'ella cria e che natura face". Si potrebbe dire, in conclusione, che l'abbondanza, la "bounty" divina e naturale che Walcott, con Dante, canta nel libro, si muove ormai verso il "mare" dei Caraibi.

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Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* – from Boccaccio to Heresy

A.M. Schembri

The *Knight's Tale*[1] is generally considered to be one of the most baffling of Chaucer's Tales.[2] The beauty of this on-going pageant is beyond dispute. However, Chaucer might have also intended the symmetry and spectacle to distract attention from controversial elements in the Tale.

Chaucer's main interest in the *Teseide* was undoubtedly Chivalry.[3] Chaucer relates this more intimately to 14th century concerns. For although Chaucer makes Arcite on his death-bed trippingly recite the knightly qualities as idealised[4] by the age (2789f.), Chaucer is more interested in giving a dispassionate picture of knighthood. Chaucer drastically prunes the love element in the original, excises the classical and the mythical, and tones down the effusions of

1. All quotations and line-references are from R. Morris and W.W. Skeat (eds): *The Knightes Tale*, Oxford, 1949; and Giuseppe Antonello (ed.) *La Teseida di Giovanni Boccaccio*, Venice, 1838.
2. See Charles Muscatine: "Form, Texture, and Meaning in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*". *PMLA*, lxv, 1950, p. 711.
3. See Piero Boitani: *Chaucer and Boccaccio*, Oxford, 1977, p. 156. Chaucer seems to have taken Boccaccio's professed aim very literally.

> Ma tu, O libro primo a lor cantare XI. lxxxiv
> Di Marte fai gli affanni sostenuti . . .

sentiment throughout. Chaucer tries to put knighthood in its proper perspective, and he does not fail to underline the fact that the malefic Mars extends his influence also to the smith, the butcher, the barber (2125) and other far less attractive professions.

Chaucer does not disguise the barbarity and savagery inherent in medieval knighthood. Chaucer had just returned from Italy which was, in his time, a conglamoration of states warring for hegemony. The mercenary condottieri from the early Werners to the contemporaneous Hawkwoods left a trail of blood, rape, and destruction right across the Peninsula. Petrarch voices his heartache in his "Italia Mia". Also, the situation in England, to say the least, was turbulent. "Woe to you, O land whose King is a child . . .", Dante quotes from the *Ecclesiastes*.[5] And although Chaucer dutifully deletes this phrase while following his main source in the *Tale of Melibeus*,[6] England "that was wont to conquer others / Hath made a shameful conquest of herself". Chaucer's vision of knighthood comes out clearly through the animal imagery, the fabliau language, the restructuring of Boccaccio's Lycurge and the creation of his counterpart Emetreus, Theseus's provisions to stem unnecessary bloodshed,[7] the unedifying mêlée which unceremonuosly destroys Palamon's hopes,[8] and the darkness of medieval warfare with:

4. See Gervase Mathew: *The Court of Richard II*, London, 1968, p. 114–18.
5. See G. Busnelli and G. Vandelli (eds): *Dante Alighieri: Il Convivio*, Firenze, 1964, Book IV, vi. 19.
6. See F.N. Robinson (ed.): *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, London, 1957, p. 741.
7. The Italian Teseo also commands:

Le lance più nocive lascerete VII. xii
which Chaucer adopts and amplifies in 2543f.

The more romantic Teseo can still believe that

amore è la cagion VII. vii
. . . di cotal quistione . . .
Dunque amorosa dee questa battaglia VII. viii
Esser, se ben discerno, e non odiosa . . .

Also, Teseo

notava VIII. xc
L'opere di ciascun (cavaliere) e 'l suo ferire;
A chi la morte per onore cercava,
E chi teneva per gloria il morire.

Chaucer's Theseus is more down-to-earth.

8. In Boccaccio it is Cromis, the mythical horse who drags down Palamone (VIII.

The careyne in the busk, with throte y-corve: 2013
A thousand slayn, and nat of qualm y-strove;
The tiraunt, with the prey by force y-raft;
The toun destroyed, ther was no-thing laft.

Chaucer's "yonge knightes proude"[9] (2598) have murderous instincts.

It seems paradoxical that Chaucer should choose a story which depicts pagans as paragons of Chivalry for his Knight when Christiandom was being threatened by Muslim predominance in Africa and causing considerable alarm in Europe. Moreover, this is a tale told by a non-pareille knight who would or should have dedicated the greater part of his active life to the service of the Cross. The Christian knight in the words of Isidore of Seville was "vivri caelo sapientam et fortitudinem". Now, with Jerusalem in the hands of the Infidel was it not more appropriate for the Knight on the pilgrimage to tell a tale of Christian heroism and saintliness – presumed attributes of Christian Knighthood as understood by the Gregorian Reform? It seems to me that Chaucer's choice was conditioned by a sense of caution. He must certainly have felt freer to manipulate a pagan rather than a Christian cosmology.

This leads to the vital question – the metaphysics of the Tale. Even after one takes into account the pieties, superstitions, and

cxx). In Chaucer Palamon is unceremonously bundled away when he was already engaged by Arcite, and Emetreus

made his swerd depe in his flesh to byte: 2640
And by the force of twenty is he take
Unyolden, and ydrawe unto the stake.

Arcite's victory does not reflect the high ideals of Chivalry.

9. Boccaccio is more sentimental throughout. Chaucer has no place for

Eaco . . . VI. xv.
Bianco e vermiglio e chiaro nel visaggio
Più che non fu giammai rosa di maggio.

or

Peritoo, che dalla madre VI. xli
Ancor le guance senza pelo avea . . .
. . . nel viso splendea
Bianco, vermiglio, e con le luci ladre
Chi rimirava con amor prendea.

popular attitudes[10] shared by orthodox and heretic, one can still detect a strong element of Catharism in Chaucer's Tale. This heresy was by far the greatest and most persistent threat to the established Church in the Middle Ages. However, this Cathari element exists only in the main body of the Tale, that is that part which deals with Chivalry, and which comes to an end with the death of Arcite. A comparison with the *Teseide*, undoubtedly Chaucer's main source, and an appraisal of the deft changes, sly omissions, and unwarranted additions helps us to understand Chaucer's real intentions. It is not only the omissions which understandably are substantial, but even the additions are rather lengthy. These surely must have been of considerable importance to Chaucer, bent as he was to compress the voluminous *Teseide* into a tale which could be comfortably told by the Knight on a pilgrimage to Canterbury with "wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye" (Pro 24) all ready to tell their Tales of "sentence" or "solace" (Pro. 798).

Although in England practically all heresy derived from the native Lollardry, Chaucer must have certainly become acquainted with surviving pockets of die-hard Cathars especially on his visits to Italy. According to Raniero Sacconi, the more moderate sect of Concorezzo, "diffusi sunt fere totam Lombariam".[11] It is true that by the time of Chaucer's mission to Milan the heresy had been practically suffocated; but the heretics must have certainly gone underground since the last recorded case is in 1402.[12] The heresy had infiltrated the Church, the Courts, the monastries, the Orders, and had spread among the common people for well over three centuries.

That Chaucer might have linked the heresy with Chivalry comes out from the fact that after the death of Arcite, which as we said before, concludes the tale of Chivalry proper, there is nothing that explicitly recalls the heresy. Moreover, Theseus's speech, in the latter part of the Tale which preludes Emily's marriage to Palamon, seems to be an attempt on the part of Chaucer to appease potential critics by realigning the metaphysics of the Tale with orthodox Christian thinking.

10. See R.I. Moore: "The Origins of Medieval Heresy", *History*, Vol. lv, No. 185, Feb 1970, p. 24.
11. Felice Tocco: *Storia dell'Eresia nel Medioevo*, Genoa, 1989, p. 75 note.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
See Gordon Leff: *Heresy in the Middle Ages*, New York, 1967, Vol. I, p. 30.

Once Chaucer was interested in Chivalry, he must have certainly remembered the Knight Templars who were officially dissolved in 1312 without a conclusive verdict of guilt or innocence ever being pronounced.[13] And it might have been precisely the heavy and strange charges against them which have suggested to Chaucer a heretical backcloth to his Tale.

All heresies up to the 12th Century at least were labelled Manichaen, and seriously suspected of gnosticism[14] for much longer. There certainly had been a lot of contact and association between the Order of the Templars and the Cathars.[15]

Even if the Templars had been suppressed and dispersed, their memory was universally revered. This admiration was openly expressed by the Teutonic Knights who welcomed many English Knights-at-arms on their so-called crusades far up in the north-east of Europe, out of arm's reach of Rome. These "crusades" were particularly atrocious[16] and never enjoyed ecclesiastical sanction. Yet our Knight,[17]

> Ful ofte tyme he hadde the bord bigonne Pro 52
> Aboven alle naciouns in Pruce,
> In Lettow hadde he reysed and in Ruce,
> No cristen man so ofte of his degree.

13. See M. Baignet, R. Leigh, and H. Lincoln: *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, Ealing, 1992, p. 73.
14. "Through the influx of Cathari recruits, they (the Templars) were now exposed to Gnostic dualism as well – if indeed, they had ever been strangers to it". *ibid*. p. 70. And Montague Summers concludes that the Templers were "clearly a society of Gnostic heretics closely connected with the Bogomiles". *The History of Witchcraft*, London, 1994, p. 26.
15. See M. Baignet, *et al.*: *op. cit.*, p. 69f.
16. "The Teutonic campaigns were extremly murderous and destructive and after the conversion of the Lithuanians in 1386, they became extremely difficult to justify". Anthony Luttrell: "Chaucer's Knight and the Mediterranean", *Library of Mediterranean History*, Mireva Publication, Malta, Vol. I, p. 154.
17. Our Knight also hires his sword to the pagan (Pro 64f.). This was not unusual in Chaucer's time and conditionally sanctioned by John of Salisbury himself. See D.W. Robertson, Jr.: "The Probable Date and Purpose of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*", *Chaucer Review*, 1989, p. 434.

It is believed that the Cathari heresy originated in Bulgaria, and a Bulgari state was established in Thrace in the seventh century which practically dominated the area until the Ottoman Turks overran Thrace between 1361 and 1453. Way back in 869 the Council of Constantinople was constrained to interdict the Thracians (and Macedonians) for their attachment to their old cult. Schmidt thinks that the Thracians embracing montheism, converted their old gods into one potent devil, and arrived at the conclusion that two principles shared the government of the world.[18] In the light of the events taking place in Thrace in the time of Chaucer, Thrace would have assumed much greater importance than ever before. From the literary point of view, Chaucer seems to have discovered Thrace in Boethius in connection with the wind Boreas (*Boece* I, m3, 11). Again, in his translation of Boethius's *De Consolatione* Chaucer reminds us that Orpheus is "the poete of Trace" (IV, m12, 4). In the *House of Fame*, Chaucer calls "Eolus the god of wynde" king of Thrace (3.699), undoubtedly influenced by the *Roman de la Rose* (18008) and Boethius's caves of wind.

In the *Knight's Tale* Chaucer seems to be using Thrace to give the Tale a heretical base. Certainly, Boccaccio relates Mars to Thrace, when he tells us that Mars incites Theseus to new exploits:

> (Marte) In cotal guisa in Tracia ritornando I.xv
> Si fè sentire al cruciato Teseo,
> In lui di sè un fier caldo lasciando . . .

Surprisingly, Chaucer does not use this at all. However, he subsequently brings up Thrace with little if any textual justification. Arcita invokes his god Mars:

> O forte Iddio, che ne' regni nevosi VII.xxiv
> Bistoni servi le tue sacre case . . .

Chaucer's Arcite forgets all about "bistoni" and instead inserts Thrace:

18. See Felice Tocco: *op. cit.*, p. 110–11.

O stronge god, that in the regne colde 2374
Of Trace honoured art and lord y-holde, . . .

Chaucer seems to exploit

Ne campi tracii sotto I cieli iberni VII. xxx

to justify his preference for the "gret temple of mars in Trace"[19] (1973) to that of Athens which is found in Boccaccio. But it is rather difficult to understand why Chaucer should bring in Thrace when adapting Boccaccio's beautiful simile:

Qual per lo bosco il cinghial rovinoso VII. cxix
Poi ch'ha di dietro a sè sentiti I cani,
Le setole levate . . .

In Chaucer this becomes:

Right as the hunter in the regne of Trace[20]
That stondeth at the gappe with a spere,
Whan hunted is the leon or the bere . . .

This is particularly important because this refers to Palamon, while it is Arcite as the protégé of Mars who should have connections with Thrace. Also, "Il re Licurgo" who gets an honourable mention on Arcita's side in Boccaccio (VI. xvi) is de-sentimentalised and recast by Chaucer, and surprisingly joins Palamon as his companion:

Ther maistow seen coming with Palamoun 2128
Licurge him-self, the grete king of Trace . . .

Chaucer seems bent on giving a fair distribution of Thrace to the two cousins.

19. See Piero Boitani: *op. cit.*, p. 82–3.
20. Bethel speaks of a possible partial influence of *Inferno* xiii 112. See Howard H. Schless: *Chaucer and Dante: A Revaluation*, Oklahoma, 1984, p. 173.
There is no mention of Thrace in Dante either.

Catharism is dualistic in that it presupposes two Gods – the God of Light and the God of Darkness. The Cathars of the sect of Concorezzo maintained:

> Deos ex nihilo creavit agnelos et quatuor elementa . . . diabolus de licentia Dei formavit omnia visibilia.[21]

Chaucer adopts Boccaccio's Giove as the good God. Then he elects a bad God, an exceptional malefic to rule the physical world and the flesh. It is important to note that the Knight never relates evil or death, even remotely, to Jupiter in the Tale of Chivalry proper. For example Boccaccio explains Palamon's fall in terms of traditional, orthodox belief:

> Signori, e' non è nuovo la credenza, IX.lii
> La quale alcuni afferman che sia vera,
> Cioè che la divina providenza
> Quando creò il mondo, con sincera
> Vista conobbe il fin d'ogni semenza
> Razionale e bruta che 'n quell'era;
> E con decreto eterno disse stesse
> Quel che di ciò in sè veduto avesse.

Not so in Chaucer. The Knight exonorates the God of Light completely by making Theseus say with an apologetic shrug:

> For falling nis nat but an aventure . . . 2722

We are first alerted to the iniquity of Saturn when Palamon cries out early in the tale:

> But I moot ben in prisoun through Saturne. 1328

This is important because Boccaccio never brings Saturn in at all. It is true that Chaucer does not provide Saturn with a temple. But neither has Jupiter. Certainly, Chaucer accords more line to Saturn

21. Felice Tocco: *op. cit.*, p. 75 note.

than to Jupiter. Chaucer follows Boccaccio in making both Mars and Venus[22] give favourable answers to the prayers of their protégés. When Arcite is victorious the situation in heaven becomes critical,[23] and with all the good will of Jupiter:[24]

> right anon swich strife ther is bigonne 2436
> For thilke graunting in the hevene above,
> Betwixe Venus, the goddesse of Love,
> And Mars the strierne god armypotente,
> That Jupiter was bisy it to stente:
> Til that the pale Saturne the colde . . .
> Of al this strife he gan remedie fynde. 2453

In Boccaccio this "strife" does not really exist and the situation is amicably resolved without the intervention of a superior god. Now, that Mars has fulfilled his promise to Arcite and seeing Venus in a frenzy:

> Alla quale Marte fatto grazioso, IX. iii
> Amica, disse, ciò che dice è 'l vero;
> Fà ormai il tuo piacere intero.

And so Venus goes directly to Pluto:

> Ed al re nero aveva palesato IX. iv
> I suoi disii, perchè da quelli uscite
> Eran più Furie con alti mandati.

Chaucer translates:

22. As in Boccaccio, Chaucer describes the attributes of Venus and Mars which are typical of their planetary influence since the Fall. Mars is the same old malefic, and Venus the irrational love turning the mind to physical or worldly delights.

23. In Boccaccio the problem is solved before the tournament even takes place:
ma trovata VII lxvii
Da lor (Venere e Marte) fu via con maestrevol arte
Di far contenti i preghi d'ogni parte.

24. Since the Fall "the benevolence of the Sun and Jupiter is now counteracted by the malevolence of Saturn and Mars". B.G. Koonce: *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame*, Princeton, 1966 p. 60.

Out of the ground a furie infernal stente 2684
From Pluto sent at requeste of Saturne.

Saturn's request is obviously a command, since he had already assured Venus of his power and disposition to accommodate matters (2470 f.).

By subverting Mars's victory and coming to the succour of Venus,[25] enlisting the services of Mercury, and "requesting" Pluto,[26] Saturn places himself definitely above all these gods. He is, at least, on a par with Jupiter, since Saturn can resolve what Jupiter ineffectually "bisy it to stente" (2442). Besides reminding us of the seniority of Saturn as a god, Chaucer underlines the fact that Saturn has the largest orbit of all the planets including that of Jupiter himself. Chaucer rolls the god and the planet into one, and Saturn tells us that he "Hath more power than woot any man" (2455). Saturn substantiates his ascendancy with a dismal list of disasters which he provokes. He sums up by declaring that his "loking is the fader of pestilence" (2469) – pestilence being the plague against which medieval medicine was helpless, and which put the efficacy of penance and prayer[27] into serious doubt. Saturn conforms to the popular belief among the Cathars, that the God of Darkness was more powerful than the God of Light.

Never is Saturn portrayed as being in any way subordinate to Jupiter, and his evil procedes from himself alone, and it governs the evil of Pluto and the Fury.

25. Venus "floating naked in the sea brings to mind the ubiquitous medieval account of her libidinous origin from Saturn, whose genitals were cut off and cast into the sea by Jove". *ibid.*, p. 92.

26. Pluto was the son of Saturn and Ops. There was no love lost between Theseus and Pluto who had once tied Theseus to a huge stone when Theseus descended into the Infernal Regions to carry off Proserpine. Hercules later frees Theseus but not without painful consequences.

27. "Wherever we look in the Middle Ages in the period of the plagues, we see signs of (this) paradoxical doubt and over-heated faith". John Gardner: *The Life and Times of Chaucer*, 1977, London, p. 74.

"al dio del male si debba attribuire maggior potenza a quella del bene". Felice Tocco: *op. cit.*, p. 78.

"for sometimes the Devil has more power than God".

Le Roy Ladurie: *Montaillou*, Penguin, 1980, p. 342.

If Theseus represents Jupiter, Aegeus somehow stands for Saturn. This reflects the son-father relationship and also satisfies Chaucer's endeavours towards artistic symmetry by making each of the major characters of the Tale relate to a major deity. Chaucer's Aegeus retains his wisdom, but is appropriately relieved of the role of officiating in Arcite's funeral. in the Italian:

> (Egeo) . . . raccolse — XI. lviii
> Le ceneri da capo prima spente,
> Con molto vino, e di terra tolse
> Ed in una urna d'oro umilemente
> Le mise, e quella in cari drappi involse
> E nel tempio di Marte fè guardare
> Fin ch'altro loco le potesse dare.

Neither is Chaucer's Aegeus as sorrowing as in the Teseide:

> ed ancora d'Egeo — XII.vi
> Il quale la bianca barba per dolore
> Tutta bagnata aveva per Arcita . . .

There is nothing white in Chaucer's Aegeus.

In Boccaccio it is Theseus who speaks of the inevitability of death and the determination of evil:

> Così come nessun che mai non visse — XII.vi
> Non morì mai, così si può vedere
> Che alcun non visse mai che non morisse:
> E noi ch'ora viviam, quando piacere
> Sarà di Quel che 'l mondo circonscrisse,
> Perciò morremo;

Chaucer gives this a more fatalistic resonance. And, what is more important, Chaucer transfers this stanza to Aegeus instead. In Chaucer's Tale of Chivalry, death is the province of Saturn and not of Him who circumscribes the world:

"Right as ther dyed nevere man" quod he (Aegeus) 2842
"That he ne lyved in erthe in som degree", he seyde,
"In al this world, that som tyme he ne dyde.
This world nys but a thrughfare ful of wo,
And we ben pilgrimes, passynge to and fro,
Deth is an ende to every worldly sore."

There is no reference in the Italian to our being "pilgrimes, passynge to and fro", which seems to imply that we take the road from birth to death more than once. If this is so, it certainly re-inforces the Cathari thesis as the Cathars believed in re-incarnation, to which we shall return later.

Medicine in Boccaccio is represented by Epidauro who tells Teseo:

Arcita è morto veramente X. xii
Nè luogo ci ha di medico valore,
Giove potrebbe in vita solamente
Servarlo, se volesse, ch'è maggiore
Che la natura, e puote adoperare
Assai più che la natura non può fare.

With Saturn's role in the Tale, Jupiter cannot intervene. So in Chaucer there is no reference to Jupiter, and much less to his over-riding power on Nature. Chaucer reduces this passage to a simple matter-of-fact acceptance of the impotence of nature:[28]

Nature hath no dominacioun 2758
And certeinly, ther Nature wol not wirche,
Farewel physik! go ber the man to chirch!

Arcite's first agony, that is before he desperately leaves for Athens is rather strange. Boccaccio's Arcita has "la sua pelle . . . quasi nera"

28. In the *Parlement of Foulys*, Nature comes very close to Theseus's "First Mover":
Nature, (the) vicayre o the almyghty Lord, 379
That hot, cold, heuy, lyght, moyst & dreye
Hath knyt with euene noumberis of accord . . .
D.S. Brewer (ed.) London, 1962, p. 82.

(IV. xxvii), while Chaucer's "His hewe falwe and pale and asshen colds" (1364) which obviously reflects "the paly Saturne the colde" (2441). Arcite seems to be persecuted by Saturn until Arcite's body is "brent to asshen colde" (2957). But when we realise that Chaucer deliberately changes Arcite's complexion to black during the second and final agony, we suspect that Chaucer's Arcite was resisting Saturn well, which might be the reason why Mercury, the messenger of the gods, visits Arcite, and in the same treacherous mood when he slew Argus (1390).

What might also be a clue is the word "endure" which Chaucer repeats twice (1382, 1404) in the space of twenty lines. Even though the Knight conveniently imputes Arcite's impending death to "the loveres maladye" (1373), it seems quite clear that Arcite is being starved out – "His slep, his mete, his drynke, is hym biraft" (1361) – as was not infrequent with the Cathars. For when a dying person would have achieved a state of justification to merit the eternal reward, if he happened to have a turn for the better, the Cathars would prefer death to recovery and practise the "endura". Mercury with sybillic ambiguity promises the English Arcite love and death:

> To Athenes shaltow wende 1390
> Ther is thee shapen of thy wo an ende.

Aegeus, as we quoted above, later tells us "Deth is an ende to every worldly sore" (2847). This incidentally is also Chaucer's addition, and very much in line with Cathari thinking.

Arcite's second agony is quite different from the first. Saturn calls on his son Pluto. Although Chaucer had referred to Pluto's "derk regioune" on two previous occasions (2082, 2292), Chaucer plays down Boccaccio's "gli oscuri regni dell'ardente Dite" (IX. iv) and the "re nero", and he further lops off the theatrical description of Boccaccio's "furie infernal" (2684) which startles Arcite's horse and is the immediate cause of the tragedy. So, Chaucer sacrifices Erinia's description, even though he must have been surely attracted by the grim spectacle:

> li qua' lambenti IX. v
> Le sulfuree fiamme, che uscita

Di bocca, cadeano puzzolenti
Più fiera la facieno; e questa Dea
Di serpi scuriata in man tenea.

Pluto was the father of the Eumenides who sat next to Prosperine on Pluto's throne of sulphur. Pluto's colour is black and only black animals were sacrificed to this god. Although Chaucer must have also thought of Pluto as the Devil who features in Dante[29] (I. vii. I), and the forces of evil are very well represented in the Tale, Hell or the idea of Hell in the Christian or pagan sense is totally suppressed. The Cathars believed in universal salvation through a process of re-incarnation.

When Arcite is as "black . . . as any cole or crowe" (2693) he is not only stricken by Saturn, but by the joint forces of darkness – Saturn, Pluto and the Fury – a most unholy trinity. All this is starkly in contrast with the Italian who like the English Arcite in his first agony, remains consistently "pallido" to the very end:

il pallido viso pienamente IX. xiii
Con acqua fredda li gli fu bagnato,
Onde sì risente subitamente.

And Arcita is still very pale in the following book when the end is imminent and Emilia

pose il viso suo su quel d'Arcita X. lxxxiii
Pallido già per la morte vicina.

Chaucer's Theseus expresses great grief at Arcite's fall but it never occures to him to visit Arcite on his death-bed. Neither does Arcite express any wish to see Theseus as in the original:

29. Chaucer would have remembered Pluto, Dante's devil-guardian of the fourth circle of the *Inferno* with his eloquent gibberish:
Papè Satan, Papè Satan aleppe . . . I. vii. i
Probably Chaucer was mystified with these words like anybody else. But he would have certainly detected a familiar heretical ring, which might have reminded him of the position of the Cathars regarding the Papacy. ROMA was the inversion of AMOR, the true Christ.

Perchè volle di sè ciò che potesse X. xvi
Deporre, sol che al buon Teseo piacesse . . .

that is:

a Palamone tutta mia sorte (Emilia) X. xxi
Ti prego doni, appresso la mia morte.

In Chaucer this recommendation to Teseo becomes the basis of Arcite's prayer to the heroine herself (2793 f).

The absence of Theseus at such a delicate stage of the Tale is rather difficult to justify. However, if we accept the Cathari connection, Theseus would emerge as a representative of the God of Light, a sort of super-parfait.[30] Arcite's blackness is a sure sign that he is irrevocably possessed by the Forces of Darkness, and therefore there is no place for Theseus while Arcite is still alive.

In Boccaccio one can feel the definiteness of death and that separation is total and final. Arcita says:

E giuroti per quel mondo dolente X. xliii
A quale io vado senza ritornata.

The English Palamon had already expressed his doubts about this "mondo dolente":

Man after his deeth moot wepe and peyne, 1320
Though in this world he have care and wo:
With-outen doute it may stonden so.
The answere of this I lete to divynis,
But wel I woot, that in this world gret pyne is.

30. Duk Theseus was at a window set, 2528
Arrayed as he were a god in trone.
This comparison of Theseus with divinity reminds us, even if remotely, of "Prades Travernier . . . a parfait . . . (who) let his daughter workship him, according to the Cathar rite".
Le Roy Ladurie: *op. cit.*, p. 42.

And, Chaucer's Arcite promises to serve his beloved even after death:

> But I bequethe the service of my goost 2768
> To yow aboven every creature
> Sin that my lif ne may no longer dure.

This can be easily construed as lovers' hyperbole. However, it must be noted that Arcite pledges the service of his spirit not exclusively but especially to Emily. This seems to be an intimation on Arcite's part that his spirit was not meant to leave this world.

If Chaucer clinically describes the process of Arcite's death, Boccaccio seems to be more interested in the moment of death and beyond:

> Quando verrà il doloroso caso X. xli
> Ch'io lascerò la vita e i tristi pianti
> Gli occhi, e la bocca e l'anelante naso,
> Pregoti che mi chiudi, e facci ch'io
> Tosto trapassi d'Acheronte il rio.

The English Arcite does not show any such concern, and there is no reference to "Acheronte", or anything that might refer us to the here-after, anywhere in the English Tale. Besides, the *Knight's Tale* completely lacks the religious intensity of Arcita's prayer:

> Dunque trà neri spiriti non deggio X. xcviii
> Pietoso Iddio, a quel ch'io creda, andare,
> E del ciel non son degno, ed io non cheggio,
> . . . m'è sol caro in Eliso di stare:
> Di ciò ti prego, e di ciò ti richieggio,
> Se esser può che tu mel deggi fare:
> So che 'l farai, se così se' pio
> Come suogli esser, venerando Iddio.

Arcite's lack of concern for the after-life is further highlighted by Chaucer's deliberate suppression of Arcita's apotheosis in Boccaccio

(XI. 1 f). Chaucer replaces this with an ambiguous declaration; and the whole passage seems to lack that seriousness and respect appropriate to the situation:

> His spirit chaunged hous and went ther 2809
> As I cam nevere, I can nat tellen wher.
> Therfor I stinte, I nam no divynistre,
> Of soules fynde I nat in this registre,
> Ne me ne liste thilke opinioune s to telle
> Of hem, though they wryten wher they dwelle.

When the Knight says that Arcite's spirit has changed house I think that the Knight simply means what he says, that is Arcite's spirit has moved to another body. Immediately he says this, Chaucer tries to cover up by feigning ignorance and indifference. Curry exploring other influences on Chaucer says that Chaucer is concerned with "the live question as to whether, after death ... (the) spirit immediately houses itself in another body of some description".[31] For the Cathars the body and soul[32] are the work of the God of Darkness and therefore both are perishable. The spirit is created by the God of Light and is destined to join the realm of the pure spirits, but not before it has justified itself through re-incarnation if, and as many times as, necessary. In the *Knight's Tale* the spirit, as we have already said, moves to another body, while the soul, which according to Cathari belief is made of blood, is appropriately entrusted to Mars (2815) and not to Mercury the traditional ferrier of souls. In the original Arcita's soul goes up to the eighth sphere and

> quindi se ne gio XI. iii
> Nel loco a cui Mercurio la sortio.

31. W.C. Curry: *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences*, London, 1960, p. 109.
32. Felice Tocco (p. 76 note) quotes Alanus who says in *Adversus hereticos et Waldenses:* "the soul dies with the body ... Moses says that the soul is in the blood, and it can be seen that when the blood dies, the soul dies".
Chaucer must have preferred Mars to guide Arcite's soul because of the widespread belief among the heretics that the soul was made of blood (see Le Roi Ladurie, *op. cit.*, p. 321) and consequently Mars was a much more fitting candidate for the purpose.

Chaucer's pragmatic stance regarding the destiny of Arcite's spirit is in itself an affront to orthodox thinking, since Chaucer departs from Arcite's case to a more universal application (2814–2815). Chaucer must have been thinking of the Inquisition. The Knight says that he is not a "divynistre" which I understand Chaucer to mean prosecutor or accuser.[33] Chaucer is saying that he refuses to pronounce himself or even to inquire about Arcite's soul since the old story he relates does not deal with souls and their destiny as one might find in ecclesiastical registers.[34] And he further adds gratuitously that he has no faith in those who profess to know where souls dwell after death.

One cannot disregard the general sterility which pervades Chaucer's poem. Emily stands for sterility, and this is an important departure from the original. It is true that the Italian Emilia is a votary of Diana. One might even argue that when Teseo proposes that she should marry Palamone she replies:

> Far' ormai del poter degl'Iddei, XII. xlii
> Che mi lasciassi a Diana pur servire,
> E ne' suoi templi vivere e morire.

33. The Knight tells us that he is no "divynestre" (2810). This might mean that he cannot divine – he is no seer. One other possible interpretation is that he is no divine in the sense of priest. But it must also be noted that in all his extant works Chaucer uses "divynestre" this once only. In his *Boece* (V. Pr. iii) Chaucer says of the seer: "Devynygne of Tyresie the divynour". In the *Troilus*, Cassandra is referred to: "Thou wenest ben a gret divineresse!" (V. 1522). In the *Knight's Tale* itself, Palamon pondering about the "man after his deeth moot wepe and pleyne" (1319) leaves the solution to "divynis" – priests.
Cicero in his letter to Quintillian uses "divinitatio" in the sense of selecting a prosecutor (see *Cassell's New Latin Dictionary*: Norwich, 1959, p. 199). We come across "recusatione divinatricis" when the accused of heresy before the tribunal of the Inquisition, at his first examination, was asked for the names of any enemies of whom he might know the cause of the enmity (*Encyclopedia Brittanica*, "Inquisition" vol. xii, 1937, p. 318).

34. Again, Chaucer uses "Registre" this once only. Dante uses it as a verb in *Inferno* xxix 5–7. In Dante the word seems to carry the connotation of awe and retribution:
Già per lo fondo, dove la ministra
Dell'alto Sire, infallibil giustizia
Punisce i falsatori che qui registra.

But the English heroine is very different from the Italian. There is ample evidence of Emilia's zest for life, her awakening love, a touch of coquetry, and a general willingness to marry. She would, she says "a giunonica legge sottostare" (VII. lxxxiii), so long as "E quel ch'ei piace a me convien di fare". Nowhere does she demonstrate Emily's stubborn determination:

> Noghte to be a wyf and be with childe 2310
> Noghte wol I knowe compaigne of man . . .
> Syn thou (Diana) are mayde and keeper of us all 2328
> My maydenhede thou kepe and wel conserve.

Chaucer reduces Emily to an idea, a goal. However, he makes up for this by providing her goddess with a full description of her temple. By giving more prominence to Diana, Chaucer heightens the idea of sterility and, incidentally, sexual restraint.[35]

One of the most serious charges against the Cathars was their resistance to procreation. Giving birth was considered by the heretics as promoting the world of the flesh and of the God of Darkness. In Chaucer we do not find the symbolic marriage of the moribund Arcita to Emilia (IX. lxxxii). Nor do we find Arcita's insistence on Emilia to marry Palamone for the sake of progeny:

35. Chaucer seems to extend this idea of sexual inhibition also to Theseus. The Italian

> Teseo con Emilia d'Athene V. lxxvii
> Uscii con molti in compagnia di fuora
> E qual di loro uccello, e qual can tiene . . .

becomes in Chaucer:

For in his (Theseus's) hunting he hath swich delit 1679
That it is al his Ioye and appetyt
To ben hymself the grete hertes bane,
For after Mars he serveth now Diane.

Chaucer seems to imply that Theseus dedicates himself to hunting and fighting to the exclusion of all other passions.

In Chaucer, Theseus does not pass any sly remarks which are complementary to Emily and rather derogatory to the followers of Diana:

> La forma tua (Emilia) non è atta a Diana XII. xliii
> Servir nè templi nè 'n selva montana.

It is true that at this stage all the gods with the exception of Jupiter had disappeared from the scene in the *Knight's Tale*.

A ricrear la nostra fama oscura X. xliv
Per lo dolente seme ch'è già spento.

The most the English Arcite concedes:

And if ever ye shul been a wyf, 2796
Forget nat Palamon, the gentel man.

For the Cathars: "Matrimonium carnale fuit semper mortale peccatum".[36]

Arcite's funeral rites are basically ceremonial and restore the natural and social order.[37] It is with the death of Arcite that the tale really comes to an end. Chaucer now turns to Jupiter[38] as the First Mover, and orthodoxy. Saturn and his forces disappear altogether and the vicissitudes of man on earth are explained in Boethian terms.[39]

However, Chaucer could not ignore the fact that the *Teseide* was co-titled *Le Nozze di Emilia*. Chaucer introduces a conspicuous interval which breaks the natural flow of the narrative. The Knight tries to make up for this by artificially introducing the ending:

But shortly to the point than wol I wende, 2965
And maken of my longe tale an ende.

The marriage of Emily to Palamon is a political expedient. It is exactly as Palamon had earlier foreseen (1288–1289). Emily is to marry to consolidate "som tretee" (1287). Of course, the irony of the whole thing is that there is a reversal of Fortune, and it is Palamon she is now to marry for this purpose.

36. Felice Tocco: *op. cit.*, p. 90.
37. See Piero Boitani: *op. cit.*, p. 161.
38. "... Jupiter, the 'well-willing planet' whose attributes of love and benevolence identify him with the Christian deity". B.G. Koonce: *op. cit.*, p. 66.
39. It is "God in his wisdom (who) brings about things, even death; therefore the death of Arcite should not be lamented". Chaucer follows Boethius to whom Chaucer is indebted for the greater part of Theseus's final speech.
See Bernard L. Jefferson: *Chaucer and the Consolation of Boethius*, Princeton, 1917, p. 435.

Notwithstanding the fact that Chaucer changes the cosmological tack completely, and leaves the scene only to Theseus and Jupiter, Chaucer retouches his sources[40] sometimes to the point of ambiguity, in order to render the change less abrupt.

To conclude, a close comparison of the *Knight's Tale* with the *Teseide* highlights the Cathari element in Chaucer's Tale. This becomes evident when we consider the cosmological dualism, downright determinism throughout and especially as expressed by Aegeus, the celebration of sterility, the pervading power of evil, re-incarnation however cryptically expressed, and overtones of Inquisitorial language. Chaucer's aims are further understood through the use of certain words which act as markers like "temple" which occures some eighteen times in the Tale and might recall those Knights who bore that name, "parfait" in the Prologue, "endure" repeated twice in twenty lines, and above all "Thrace" which features four times sometimes with no textual justification.

40. When Chaucer adapts four stanzas from Boccaccio (XII. vii–x) on transcience for his twenty lines beginning "Lo the oak, that hath so long a norrishing" (2158 f) Chaucer again completely ignores "pur arrivare/ad Acheronte" (XII. x) which concludes the destiny of man and these stanzas.
In *Boece* IV, m vi, 50–60, Boethius discusses how all things have their beginning in God: "For elles ne myghten they nat lasten yif thi ne comen nat eftsones ayein, by love retorned, to the cause that hath yeven hem beinge (that is to seyn, to God)". In Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* this process of beginning from, supported by, and returning to God is cryptically reduced:

> The which (Jupiter) is prince and cause of all thyng 3036
> Converting all un-to his propre welle
> From which it is deryved.

This converting to and deriving from God's well can also be taken to mean, or at least does not exclude, some form of recycling. Theseus's speech: "The first moever of the cause above" (2987) begins in *Boece* III, m ix: "O thow Fadir, sowere and creator of hevene and erthes". The Knight's "First Mover" does in no way contradict the co-eternity of matter, nor exclude completely the Cathari Devil's part, even if with God's permission, in forming all visible things. The Cathars of Concorezzo accepted that the God of Light had created the four elements. It is true that the Knight soon corrects any such false impression by saying that one would be a fool to doubt that everything "deryveth from his (God's) hool." (3006).
Theseus's real reason behind the marriage between Palamon and Emily is purely political (2973 f.). This has hardly anyting to do with Boethius's divine love which confers harmony to creation and "ioygned with an holly bond/and knytteth

The marriage[41] of Palamon and Emily is to a large extent an appendage which also serves as a declaration of orthodoxy to ward off uncomfortable criticism.

It is not the aim of this paper to venture reasons for Chaucer's choices and changes. That Chaucer elected to be realistic regarding the actual state of Chivalry shows that he meant business. If Chaucer linked the Knight "of chivalry flour" (3059) with heresy,[42] he was well within the bounds reality. It is also true that many English knights including Chaucer's own friend and patron, John of Gaunt, saw the Pope as a foreign prince with French sympathies and a threat to national aspirations.[43] Chaucer might have wanted to demonstrate that Christian heroism was not necessarily dependent on orthodoxy and Rome. Chaucer's concern with the realities of Knighthood might have disposed him to consider the paradoxical fate of the Knight Templars, and in his own times the open defiance of the Hooded Knights and their resistance to the Sacrament. Chaucer

sacrement of maryages of chaste looues . . ." Theseus proposes the marriage of Palamon and Emily as the highest manifestation of joy:

I (Theseus) rede that we make, of sorwes two, 3071
O parfyt, ioye, lasting evere-mo.

Although these changes do in no way constitute any form of unorthodoxy, they seem to be dictated by a desire not to turn from a heretical to a traditional Christian philosophy too abruptly, and therefore render the change more noticeable.

41. In Boccaccio the marriage of Palamone and Emilia is held in the Temple of Venus (XII. xlviii). Boccaccio's suggestive lines regarding the consummation of the marriage:

Ver'è che per le offerte, che n'andaro XII. lxxvii
Poi la mattina à templi, s'argomenta
Che Venere, anzi che 'l di fosse chiaro,
Sette volte raccesa, e tante spenta
Fosse nel fonte amoroso, ove raro
Buon pescator non util si diventa . . .

is timidly rendered by Chaucer:

Palamon is alle wele, 3101
Living in blisse, in richesse, and in hele . . .

42. See Roger S. Loomis: "Was Chaucer a Laodecian?" in Richard Schoek and Jerome Taylor (eds): *Chaucer Criticism*, vol. i, Notre Dame, 1970, p. 300.

43. Chaucer was of Gaunt's party and impatient with Church and Churchmen. With the Great Schism of 1378 the unhappiness regarding the Church becomes more widespread as the stringency of the 1390 and 1393 Statutes of Provisors and Paemunire evidence.

might have come to the conclusion that heresy was at least as compatible with Chivalry as orthodoxy itself. What is absolutely astonishing is that Chaucer managed to graft all this on to his original source without disturbing Boccaccio's plot in any way.

Who are the Philistines? The "unsearchable dispose" of tragedy from Della Valle's Mary Queen of Scots to Milton's Samson*

John Gatt-Rutter

This paper discusses the relationship between Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, first published in 1671 and probably written shortly before that, and a tragedy on Mary Stuart written by the Piedmontese Federigo Della Valle. The first known version of this play, *Maria la Reina*, was completed by the end of 1590, within less than four years of the execution of that unhappy queen. It was much revised by the time of final publication under the title of *La Reina di Scozia* , in 1527, shortly before the author's death.[1]

Am I playing hunt the influence? Well, yes and no. With a writer of Milton's stature and autonomy there is no question of singling

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1. Federico Della Valle, *La Reina di Scotia, Tragedia di Federigo Della Valle al Sommo Pontefice et Sig. nostro Urbano VIII*, In Milano, Per gli Heredi di Melchior Malatesta, Stampatori Regij e Ducali, 1628. Text used: *LaReina di Scozia*, in Federico Della Valle, *Tragedie* (ed. Andrea Gareffi), Milan: Mursia, 1988, pp. 217–97. Line references to this edition are used here. The spelling of the author's first name was uncertain during his own lifetime.

out any specific influence. I need hardly labour Milton's admiration for things Italian, especially in literature, and especially for the Italian achievement in producing a modern literary culture that could stand comparison with that of classical Greece or Rome – an achievement which he took as his own model in attempting to do analogous things in his own English tongue. His year-long Grand Tour of Italy in 1638–1639 is witness to the importance to him of the Italian example. Yet to identify specific debts owed by Milton to individual Italian writers is a delicate business. F.T. Prince has shown the influence of Tasso's theorizing and of Della Casa's stylistic practice on Milton's poetic voice and mode, and, more diffusely, of the prosody of Italian tragic choruses – from Trissino and Tasso to Guarini and Andreini – on those of *Samson Agonistes.*[2] Milton, of course, in his preface, "Of that sort of dramatic poem which is called tragedy," acknowledges his debt to Italian as well as Athenian tragedians, first with regard to his use of the Chorus, then more generally "[i]n the modelling . . . of this poem," in which (in implicit opposition to the English or the French) "the ancients and Italians are rather followed, as of much more authority and fame."[3]

What then of the obscure Della Valle, virtually unheard of until rediscovered by Benedetto Croce three centuries after he wrote the first version of his tragedy on Mary Stuart, and only since then dressed out as the most considerable Italian tragic poet before the quite unlike Metastasio and Alfieri in the eighteenth century?[4] Did Milton know his work?

I really have nothing to report by way of hard fact. I have ransacked Milton bibliographies and the indexes of Milton's own works and life records, as well as critical works on him, and have picked up

2. Prince, F.T., *The Italian element in Milton's verse,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954, revd. 1962, repr. 1969. John Arthos *Milton and the Italian Cities,* London: Bowes and Bowes, 1962, links *Samson Agonistes* to the *melodramma* (i.e., musical drama) genre developed by Monteverdi, but also sees close verbal correspondences between Milton's work and Girolamo Bartolommei's martyr tragedy *Polietto* , published in 1632 and again in 1655 (cf. pp.146–54 and 192–99).

3. Edition quoted: *John Milton* (The Oxford Authors), ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. Cf. p. 672.

4. A fairly recent review of Della Valle criticism is Laura Sanguineti White, "Federico Della Valle e la critica. Rassegna," *Lettere Italiane,* 1990: 136–45.

only one clue: the index of P.J. Klemp's bibliography[5] lists a mention of Della Valle on p. 248, which turns out not to be on p. 248 or on any other page I tried. Page 248, however, contains the entry on Prince's book, and it was in that that I eventually tracked down the following footnote:

> The tragedies of Federigo Della Valle (1560?–1628), published in 1627–1628, use Tasso's and Guarini's free form of chorus. The example from *Ester*, given in *The Oxford Book of Italian Verse* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 242–44, shows a certain affinity with Milton's choruses.[6]

Prince, having looked so far afield, would have done well to look just a little bit further. However, his interest was in Milton's poetic diction; mine is in genre. More particularly, I am interested in the paradigm of religious tragedy as practised both by Della Valle and by Milton; and also in its attendant politics in relation to Stuart monarchs who lost their heads, and in the broader context of religious strife in the British Isles and across Europe from the Reformation to the Age of Reason. Prince's footnote implies the possibility that Milton may have come across Della Valle's works. Despite the Piedmontese writer's obscurity, Milton's avowed interest in the Italian prescript for tragedy may well have been particularly aroused by an Italian tragedy on Mary Stuart.[7] Since Milton was in Italy less

5. Klemp, P.J., *The essential Milton: an annotated bibliography of major modern studies*, Boston: G.K. Hall, 1989.

6. Prince, *op. cit.*, p. 153, n. 2.

7. Milton's so-called "Trinity MS" lists a large number of English and half a dozen Scottish subjects for tragedy. None of these relates to the Stuarts. Nevertheless, the redoubtable Scottish humanist George Buchanan, at first tutor to Mary Stuart, later her fierce critic, was one of Milton's main sources on Scottish history. Buchanan (1506–1582) enjoyed Europe-wide esteem particularly as author of the Latin Biblical tragedy *Jephthes, sive Votum* (first published in Paris in 1554), a critique of tyranny. Another, the *Baptistes, sive Calumnia,* (1534, first published in 1577) he had justified to the Portuguese Inquisition, as a pro-Catholic work dramatizing the martyrdom of Thomas More at the hands of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. Milton was surmised to be the translator of the English version of the *Baptistes*. Cf. Sandra Kerman, "George Buchanan and the genre of *Samson Agonistes*," *Language and Style*, 19.1 (1986): 21–5 — see esp. p. 24; René Galland, "Milton et Buchanan," *Révue Anglo-Américaine*, XIII (1936): 326–33; J.T.T. Brown, "An English Translation of George Buchanan's *Baptistes* Attributed to John Milton," in D.A. Millar (ed.), *Quatercentenary Studies: George*

than a dozen years after the publication of Della Valle's play, chronology tends to favour such a hypothesis. At the same time, the partisan subject-matter might explain why – if Milton did read *La Reina di Scozia* – he, like other readers, preferred to keep quiet about it.

So I think there are pretty good external reasons for surmising that Milton read Della Valle's *La Reina di Scozia*. The internal reasons for thinking that he learnt from Della Valle, in my view, are even stronger. It is a matter of the politics of genre. Pitching the genre we call tragedy in terms of true religion against false religion dictates a structural paradigm which is intrinsically paradoxical, since every religion is predicated upon its own truth and upon the falsity of the rival religion. This is the very logic of religious strife, and the heart of militant religious tragedy. It is this paradox and this self-annihilating logic that the writers of agonistic or martyrological religious tragedy have to grapple with, and, in their different degree, I include among them Della Valle and Milton. If Milton didn't read Della Valle's Mary Stuart tragedy – and it is not necessary to my argument to presume that he did – then he should have. *La Reina di Scozia* gets stuck in the very dilemma that *Samson Agonistes* perplexingly eludes. This is the focus of my paper.

The homologies between these two plays are strikingly greater than the surface unlikeness of their subjects – the sophisticated Franco-Scottish queen and the muscular and hairy Hebrew folk-hero – might suggest. These homologies are certainly and strikingly greater than those between *Samson Agonistes* and any other play on the Samson theme.[8]

Formally, both Della Valle's and Milton's plays are strictly neo-classical in observing the unities of time, place and action, in their

Buchanan. A Memorial, 1506-1906, Edinburgh, 1907: 61–172; I. D. McFarlane, *Buchanan*, London: Duckworth, 1981; also Arthos, *op. cit.*, pp. 136–39.

8. On Samson plays, cf. Watson Kirkconnell, *That invincible Samson —The theme of* Samson Agonistes *in world literature with translations of the major analogues*, Univ. of Toronto Press, 1964. Joost van den Vondel's *Samson, of Heilige Wraeck, Treurspiel* (1660) translated by Kirkconnell as *Samson, or Holy Revenge* (pp. 77–142), which is generally considered the closest predecessor and analogue to Milton's play, resembles it much less than does *La Reina di Scozia* either in terms of the theological issues (inscrutable Providence, the distinction between carnal and spiritual notions of hope and freedom) or in terms of intimacy, of the articulation of the drama within the protagonist's mind, rather than as a public confrontation between God and Dagon (the latter of which, with his minions, is prominent as antagonist in Vondel's play).

use of the chorus, and in other formal conventions, though Della Valle is closer to Euripides, while Milton is closer to Sophocles, and altogether much closer to the spirit of classical Greek tragedy. I propose to concentrate, however, on thematic and semiotic structure rather than on literary form and stylization. In these terms the role of the chorus – Mary's ladies-in-waiting on the one hand, Samson's fellows from the tribe of Dan on the other – is similar in being generally more conventional in religious outlook than are the respective protagonists. Both choruses couch their hopes for liberation in earthly rather than spiritual or heavenly terms. The two protagonists conversely move from wishing for death as a release from their anguish towards embracing it as a witness to their faith. The neo-classical tragic genre serves to concentrate the real action inwards into a drama of personal experience within the protagonist's mind – or, one should perhaps say, soul – thus privileging individuality as the site of religious process.

It is the imprisonment ending in the death of the protagonist that provides the generative structural paradigm common to both plays. Mary's nearly twenty years of imprisonment is the analogue, by its intolerable duration, to Samson's blindness, which intensifies his physical imprisonment by turning his body itself into a prison: "Which shall I first bewail," exclaims the Chorus of Danites, "Thy bondage or lost sight,/ Prison within prison/ Inseparably dark?" [*SA* 151-4]. Samson himself, in his first speech, dwells for over forty lines (67–109) on his blindness, which makes of him "Myself, my sepulchre, a moving grave" [102].

I have used the resounding phrase "generative structural paradigm". Now let me explain briefly what I mean by it. The paradigm involves the dialectic between hope and despair first at a mundane level, then at a religious level, that is, with regard to salvation, or liberation in absolute as opposed to temporal terms. This in turn leads to the very heart of both plays – a questioning of God himself, who has apparently allowed his own cause to be defeated and his true believers and faithful champions – respectively, the Catholic queen and the Hebrew "judge" – to be delivered into the hands of his enemies. The culmination of both plays is the realization that the very absoluteness of earthly defeat and death is itself a divine epiphany – whether through Mary's martyrdom for

her faith or through Samson's self-immolation which brings about the destruction of the Philistines.

Where Milton's play is perplexingly different from Della Valle's is in its resistance to a single straightforward interpretation. Della Valle's Mary and her Chamberlain and the Chorus of her Ladies-in-Waiting consistently and insistently arrive at a Catholic view of her as a martyr. In *Samson Agonistes,* we cannot be sure that the conclusions drawn by the Chorus of Danites in the play, and Samson's father Manoa, can be so straightforwardly accepted. Has Samson really vindicated himself? Is he really the providential instrument of racial and divine vengeance? Samson within the play does not fully declare his motives or the meaning he attaches to his final act (though the "Argument" prefaced by Milton to his tragedy supports the Danites' view of a providential design[9]). Several Milton scholars – most signally Wittreich – have questioned whether Milton's text underwrites the regeneration of Samson and the simplistic justification of God's ways acclaimed by the Hebrews in Milton's tragedy. There may be an extra-textual irony at work, tacitly inviting us to see Samson's final act of vengeful violence as the sign of an outworn dispensation superseded by Christ's testament of love. To the extent that this may be the sense of the resolution of *Samson Agonistes,* it may be seen to ensue logically from a reading of Della Valle's tragedy from a Protestant point of view, in which Mary's Catholic martyrdom carries not a positive but a negative sign, and appears as her final tragic error. Both sides of the religious divide – Catholic or Protestant – can claim redeeming martyrdom, either side might be wrong. The paradigm ends in paradox.

Let me now flesh out this paradigm a little. The extremity of captivity which the two protagonists variously endure generates an illusory hope of release or escape. In *La Reina di Scozia* this hope is pinned on the chances of military action – un uprising, or the invasion of England – by Mary's Catholic allies, and is shared by the protagonist herself as well as her attendants, only to be harshly dashed, and finally sublimated in the Queen's discovery of her

9. This states that Samson attends the festival for the Philistine God Dagon having been "at length persuaded inwardly that this was from God," and that his self-destruction was "by accident" (rather than deliberate suicide): Orgel and Goldberg (eds), *John Milton,* p. 672.

vocation for martyrdom as the real liberation, the real victory.[10] In Milton's play, it is the well-intentioned Manoa, the dubious Dalila and the inscrutable Philistine Officer who offer Samson prospects of ransom, release or pardon. These he rejects in a series of reactions which progress from despairing self-abasement to a mounting renewal of confidence in divine support.[11]

In both plays, each protagonist endures a moment of total despair entailing a sense of abandonment by God. The view of *Samson Agonistes* as a tragedy of despair has been proposed by Don Cameron Allen, but this is to focus on an undoubtedly important theological and moral theme in the play at the cost of losing sight of its part in the overall dramatic paradigm. My contention is that in both plays the tragic *hamartia* or error is the protagonist's blindness – contrasted to literal blindness in Samson's case – regarding spiritual hope of redemption or liberation as opposed to worldly freedom and well-being. *Anagnorisis*, the moment of truth, is precisely this recognition of the spiritual, of the transcendance of the self in and by the divine. The implicitly suicidal death-wish expressed by both protagonists is thus transformed and fulfilled as a sacrifical act. Samson appears to choose it freely. Mary appears to have it forced on her, but she too chooses, being given the option of renouncing her Catholicism in order to have her life spared. (Her Lady of the Chamber hints rather obscurely at this early in the piece: "l'aspra tua nemica / offre

10. The motif of Mary Stuart's hopes of freedom is introduced in the first Act by the Cameriera: "rimembrerò fra le memorie acerbe / le tue dolci speranze . . ." [94], who also refers to a promised joint invasion of England by Scots and Spaniards to rescue Mary: "'l male / è per giungere al[ ]fin . . ." [104], and to the (imagined) loyalty and devotion of her son, King James VI of Scotland: "promette / il suo sangue e la vita / per sacrificio e prezzo / de la tua libertà, quando la cruda, / che qui ti tien rinchiusa, / non ti renda al tuo regno et ai tuoi Scoti / libera e sciolta per accordo o pace, / la qual forse or si tratta od è conchiusa. / Così sperar debbiam." [111–119]. She also reminds Mary of the (deceptive) hopes of being conditionally released by Elizabeth: ". . . l'aspra tua nemica / offre condizioni, onde tu possa / liberarti, se vuoi, che se son dure, / e le ricusi tu, vagliano almeno / per speranza di ben fra tanti mali. / Di nulla si disperi / chi aver può cosa, in cui refugio speri." [155–61] It is these two hopes which articulate the tragedy in terms of suspense through the first four acts. Thus the scene with the Servo [400-500] renews both hopes of Mary's release by Elizabeth and of a threat against Elizabeth by James, which the Cameriera sums up as "duo care novelle / fonti di duo speranze." [499] Line 518 ("Movi dall'auree stelle . . . ") ushers in a long lyrical invocation to hope by the Chorus, climaxing: "A te parlo, o

condizïoni, onde tu possa / liberarti, se vuoi, che se son dure / e le ricusi tu" [155-8]; the long confrontation between Mary and Elizabeth's Counsellor [823–945] hinges on this point and is central to the play; Mary herself asserts it on the scaffold in her final profession of faith: "vera / cagion de la mia morte è l'esser io / fedele al mio Signor" [2260–2262]).[12] In each case, a final providential design is unexpectedly discovered to have exactly coincided with the unforeseen, but freely chosen, deaths of the protagonists. With even more radical irony, the words, wishes and deeds of all parties, friends and enemies, unwittingly fulfil this providential design which works through free human volition. The Philistines bring about their own downfall at the very moment when they think they are celebrating their final triumph. Divine predestination is equated with individual and collective freewill.

The questioning, and the eventual recognition and vindication, of divine providence is textually much more prominent in Milton's play than in Della Valle's. Detailed quotation shows how insistent it is right through the play, from the first episode to the last, and

speranza" [524]. Another scene of over a hundred lines is entirely centred on the issue of hope: Mary asks herself, "Spero, lassa! o non spero?" [674]; the Chorus, remarking " È cosa sì commune la speranza" [704], muses "E se la speme ha luogo / fra le cose ch'han titolo di bene, / di bene anco si priva, / chi di speme si priva" [713–16], to which the Cameriera responds: "A me par, se la speme / è aspettazion di bene, / più si conviene a l'infelice. . . / . . . / . . . la speme del misero esser debbe / del felice la tema" [732-41], the Queen intervening with reflections of her own: "Volar può la speranza / . . ." [723–31] and with the question: "Vuoi tu dunque ch'io speri?" [742], which leads to further protracted elaborations on the theme (Mary: "Speri l'alma al voler de l'altrui voglia, / s'al mio voler non puote! Io spero, o donne!" [762–63]) and on the fantasies which it fosters. In Della Valle's play, the theme is all too explicit, necessarily so in default of any other possibility of dramatic action or concern. Between lines 1050 and 1139, the Queen's attendants return to the theme of hope and its accompanying fantasies of freedom and majesty, though the Queen herself now hints at a different sort of salvation: ". . . Io la salute spero, / non già qual tu la speri" [1050–51]. The dramatic irony flowing from the distinct meanings given to freedom is played out from line 1357 onwards, where the letter brought by the Earl of Pembroke is greeted by the Chorus as ". . . O cara carta, / che libertà ci apporti! . . .". The Queen slips back into this worldly understanding of liberation: " . . . È caro e dolce / il principio; e se tal è 'l mezzo e 'l fine, / libere sarem tosto" [1362–64], only to be quickly and cruelly undeceived by the Earl of Cumberland: "la via per liberarti è dura via, / ma pur utile e dritta. – Si discioglia / dal collo quella testa, e l'alma voli

John Steadman has also shown the consistent irony with which all characters in the play unwittingly predict what is going to happen, though not how.[13] It is undoubtedly, to my mind, the theme of the play, the key to its controlling or generative paradigm that I have sketched out.[14] In *La Reina di Scozia*, though less explicitly pervasive, it is still the controlling paradigm.[15] The Catholic world could no more fathom or come to terms with a providence that allowed the execution of a Catholic monarch than the English Calvinists could come to terms with the downfall of their Commonwealth and the restoration of a Catholic monarch – incidentally, a direct descendant of the first.

And this brings us to the Philistines, clearly posited as the Other – a tribal and a religious Other.[16] But which Other? Kirkconnell shows that during the long period of religious strife between Catholic and Protestant in Europe, Samson plays were written by both sides.[17] Analogous considerations apply to other plays about Biblical heroes and heroines.[18] The great Scottish humanist George Buchanan once conveniently claimed he had cast the John the Baptist of his *Baptistes* as Sir Thomas More, beheaded by Henry VIII as Herod at the behest

/ poi dove deve, e 'n libertà se 'n vada" [1369–1373]. The Queen spells out the irony: "Tale strada s'insegna / a la mia libertade!" [1409–1410], of which the religious sense is completed in her final farewell to her attendants: "O figlie, a Dio, / a rivederci altrove, / in più libera stanza e più serena, / a rivederci in cielo!" [1585–1588].

11. In contrast to Della Valle's play, in Milton's the theme of hope or despair of liberation is much less explicit and insistent, but more strongly welded into the dramatic action, since the visits by Manoa and Dalila, as well as Samson's appearance in Dagon's temple, are all clearly predicated on the chance of securing his release. Hope and liberation for Samson himself relate more to his present physical and previous moral blindness than to his captivity as such, though it is the latter that more immediately concerns the Chorus of Danites and his would-be liberators. His initial despair is emphatic enough: "O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon, / Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse / Without all hope of day!" [80–2], and is echoed by the Chorus: "As one past hope, abandoned. . ." [120]. Samson reiterates his despair to Manoa in theologically explicit terms: "Nor am I in the list of them that hope; / Hopeless are all my evils, all remediless" [647–51]. With Dalila, he makes the inversion between different understandings of liberty quite clear: "This jail I count the house of liberty / To thine whose doors my feet shall never enter" [949–50]. Reacting to Harapha's taunts, he shows himself to have overcome his despair: ". . . these evils I deserve and more, / Acknowledge them from God inflicted on me / Justly, yet despair not of his final pardon." [1169–1171] While Manoa and the

of his Herodias, Ann Boleyn, while Milton himself considered writing a *Baptistes* whose religious signification would presumably have been reversed.[19] Della Valle wrote implicitly Catholic tragedies on Esther and Judith, but the same subjects could have served a Protestant equally well. This specularity subverts Della Valle's *La Reina di Scozia* from within, as Elizabeth's councillors level against Mary exactly the same charges of false religion, oppressive cruelty and immorality as she levels against Elizabeth.[20] Here lies the paradox within the paradigm of sectarian tragedy: its reversibility, a paradox which Della Valle, ardent Catholic though he was, was tragedian enough to write into his play. The genre, in other words, consistently equalizes two rival absolutes, pitting one against the other in a contest whose only possible outcome is undecidability. This is one conclusion that can be drawn from Christopher [d. 1593] Marlowe's unfinished play on *The massacre at Paris* of St Bartholomew's day, where the revoltingly bloodthirsty massacre of Protestants by Catholics is followed by equally revolting and bloodthirsty massacres or murders of Catholics by Protestants.

Chorus, until just before the very end, still set their hopes on a mundane deliverace: Manoa – "... what hope I have / With good success to work his liberty" [1453–1434]; Chorus – "Thy hopes are not ill-founded nor seem vain / Of his delivery" [1504–1505]; Manoa – "... O all my hope's defeated / To free him hence! but death who sets all free / ... / What windy joy this day had I conceived / Hopeful of his delivery" [1571–1575].

12. John Guillory offers a richly suggestive historicist reading of "vocation" in *Samson Agonistes* as a convergence between Calvinism and the bourgeois value given to money, opposing this to the monarchic principle. (See his "The Father's House: *Samson Agonistes* in its Historical Moment," in M. Nyqvist and M.W. Ferguson, eds, *Re-Membering Milton: Essays on the Texts and Tradition*, New York and London: Methuen, 1987; reprinted in Annabel Patterson, ed., *John Milton*, Harlow: Longman, 1992, pp. 202–25.) We can see Milton's Samson as matching Della Valle's Mary Stuart antithetically in this. The etymological sense of redemption as "buying back" or "ransom" is prominent in Christian Atonement doctrine, and underpins the logic of martyrdom. Samson's "vocation" manifests itself in the rejection of compromising monetary exchange and the surrender of life as absolute earnest of "pay-ment." The royal absolutism of Mary's Catholicism, by contrast, has manifested itself in the surrender of her own life and throne in absolute earnest of both royalty and (inseparable from it) heavenly apotheosis. The discourse of monetary exchange in Milton's play, embodying the mercantilist ideology, is devalued, where the discourse of divine right in Della Valle's is strenuously asserted and rhetorically vindicated.

The Philistines in *Samson Agonistes* could therefore represent either a Catholic or a Protestant Other, in a specular relationship. Milton's Philistines, with their idol Dagon and their aristocratic order, approximate to High Church Anglicans and Catholics, as seen by one with Milton's Calvinist sympathies. Yet several critics have pointed out that nothing in *Samson Agonistes* presents them as being any worse than the normal run of humanity, and certainly not as being so bad as to merit the wholesale extermination that Samson in the name of his God inflicts on them. Indeed, Milton also writes the specular reversibility of sectarian tragedy into his play. He has Dalila, not all that speciously, and no more speciously than Samson himself, compare her betrayal of Samson to Jael's murder of Sisera, while his Harapha, not unjustifiably, brands Samson a common criminal and a rebel.[21]

Arnold Stein interestingly contends that "Philistia is institutionalized morality", but this could apply to any established system, and also opens up the dialectic of anarchic immorality – barely distinguishable from Samson's own stance. There are really only two things that damn the Philistines, and they are both reversible in the dramatic economy, as they are on the historical stage of the wars of religion. The first is that they worship Dagon rather than the God of the Hebrews. The second is that they hold

13. John Steadman, *Milton and the paradoxes of Renaissance heroism*, Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1987, pp. 243–45.

14. In his opening speech Samson questions the providential design that destined him to liberate Israel: "O wherefore was my birth from heaven foretold... ? / ... / Why... ? / ... / Promise was that I / Should Israel from Philistian yoke deliver / ... / Yet stay, let me not rashly call in doubt / Divine prediction; what if all foretold / had been fulfilled but through mine own default... ? / ... / But peace, I must not quarrel with the will / Of highest dispensation, which herein / Haply had ends above my reach to know ." [23-62] The Chorus reacts to Samson's and its own doubts by vindicating the inscrutable rightness of divine providence: "Tax not divine disposal..." [210]. From line 292 ("Just are the ways of God, / And justifiable to men ...") five Choral stanzas are devoted to this theme. Manoa reopens the questioning: "O wherefore did God grant me my request...?" [356]; "For this did the angel twice descend?" [361], and it is Samson himself who corrects him ("Appoint not heavenly disposition, Father" [373]), to notable effect (Manoa — "With cause this hope relieves thee, and these words / I as a prophecy receive: for God, / Nothing more certain, will not long defer / To vindicate the glory of his name" [472–75]. The play thus presents an anguished debate about faith in providence. This is further tested by Harapha

the Hebrews in bondage (though not, it appears, in very oppressive bondage – bondage with ease, Samson lets slip [271]).

Samson Agonistes can be read as a Christian tragedy – though it is strictly confined within pre-Christian Biblical terms – precisely because it is the work of a Christian author writing in a Christian society, however divided.[22] Just as a Christian reading Athenian tragedy is bound to see it as the expression of a world unilluminated by the Christian revelation, so *Samson Agonistes* may be read in the same way from the point of view of *Paradise Regained*, as a pendant to which Milton had it first published – and Wittreich and others have pointed this out.[23]

This means that the characters in the play – as in any play – are trapped in an irony, subject to the gods outside the text – the author and the reader. Their actions and words are subject to ironic readings, and this is where Milton captures the paradox of his tragic paradigm by suspending his play within an interpretative void.[24] The author and reader can no more read the intentions of an inscrutable deity than can Samson and his fellow Danites. Samson can claim that his impulses are from God, but we cannot know that to be true unless we presume the same of everyone who sincerely believes the same.

("Presume not on thy God ... "[1156]). The final catastrophe is all too readily welcomed by the Hebrews as providential: Chorus — "O dearly bought revenge, yet glorious! / Living or dying thou hast fulfilled / The work for which thou wast foretold" [1660–62], leading to a veritable panegyric on the subject: 1st Semi-Chorus — "They only set on sport and play / Unweetingly importuned / Their own destruction to come speedy upon them. / So fond are mortal men / Fall'n into wrath divine, / As their own ruin on themselves to invite, / Insensate left, or to sense reprobate, / And with blindness internal struck ... " [1679–]; and the final Chorus: "All is best, though we oft doubt, / What the unsearchable dispose / Of highest wisdom brings about, / And ever best found in the close. / Oft he seems to hide his face, / But unexpectedly returns / ... whence Gaza mourns / And all that band them to resist / His uncontrollable intent ... " [1745–].

15. From the first line of the play, the unpredictability of human affairs is addressed through an ambiguity between an inscrutable providence and an erratic fortune in Mary's phrase "volubil giro" ("fickle turn"), which is further elaborated: "Ma, s'è pur ver che con incerta norma / e con vario costume, / or doloroso, or lieto, / volve lo stato umano [,] / possente ascosa mano, / com'esser può che dopo 'l lungo corso / di vent'anni infelici [,] al fine non giunga, / o non si muti almeno, / la miseria o la vita? "[24–32]. It is Mary's Cameriera (her Lady of the Chamber and nursemaid) who directs her more decisively to a religious view: "... forse ordisce / providenza divina

The Chorus and Manoa claim to have understood the providential scheme, but their emphasis on revenge,[25] and Manoa's rejoicing that "Samson hath quit himself like Samson", are easy prey to ironic readings through the eyes of Christian loving-kindness. Where Della Valle's *La Reina di Scozia* is caught in the paradox generated by the paradigm of sectarian tragedy, transcending propaganda by falling into reversibility, Milton's *Samson Agonistes* precisely spells the end of the agonistic Christian tragedy. Whether he owes this to Della Valle or simply to his understanding of the intrinsic logic of tragedy, its essential pluralism and resistance to absolutes, doesn't really matter. I find it interesting as one of the theorems of the genre called tragedy working itself out through its most serious practitioners.

a lei la pena /. . . / E quinci libertà veggio promessa / sicura e certa a te, che ben la merti, / dopo sì lunga prigionia e sì dura" [133–41]. She presses the point: "mancherà forse a le celesti menti / la fede a le promesse? [153–54], and turns it towards hope (cf. footnote 10 above). Mary reacts despairingly, and with unconscious irony and aptness: "Mia vittoria sarà la sepoltura!" [178], and with a moment of theological despair ("per me il cielo / cessa or, credo, da l'opre e fermo stassi" [244-5] which is promptly corrected (Cameriera – "Torni, / torni 'l tuo saggio cor dove star suole, / dove tu 'l riponesti! / In mano, in grembo a Dio tu 'l riponesti, / ch'è vivissima speme, / or, perché scende o cade / in disperati abissi?" Mary — "Riconosco l'errore, / e già ne piange il core" [248–56]). Later, a whole Chorus [355-399] is devoted to the theme of divine omnipotence and mercy (*pietà*), while in the final act it is the Maggiordomo, Mary's Chamberlain, who majestically invokes the impenetrable mysteries of God's designs [1593–1618]: "Che poss'io dir? Se non che i tuoi giudìci / e le leggi, con cui l'opre governi, / sono altissimi abissi, / al cui sacro profondo / virtù nostra non giunge, / e stolta cade, se poggiarvi tenta." [1611–1616]

16. Eid A. Dahiyat, "The portrait of the *Philistines* in John Milton's *Samson Agonistes*", *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, 14 (1982): 293–303, for this reason regards Milton's play as projecting a pre-Christian value-system.

17. Cf. footnote 8 above.

18. Fr. Panigarola, *Lettera pastorale sugli heretici in Piemonte* (Milano 1592) [Braidense ZCC.V.16/1] p. 4, left face: "Il popolo Christiano, e Catholico hoggi non è dubio, che nella accettazione, e amicitia di Dio risponde a quello che era già il popolo Ebreo: del quale chi vuol sapere, come, e per quali ragione hora permettesse Dio, che di guerra fusse afflitto, & hora di vittoria trionfante, legga la informatione che ne diede Achior ad Holoferne nel quinto del libro di Giudith con quelle parole "Non fuit qui insultaret populo isti . . . dedit eis Deus Coeli resistendi"."

19. See footnote 7 above.

20. Elizabeth's Counsellor (Beel) accuses Mary of "falsa opinïon" [843], not explicitly

religious, proclaims the English throne as "la vera autorità del sacro culto" against "Roma empia e fallace" [871–72]. Mary's Cameriera had previously invoked the punishment of divine providence "a la rubella / e falsa opinïon, al falso culto / d'empia religïon nemica al cielo." [136–38]. These imputations are levelled by each side at the other several times over in the course of the play.

21. Dalila observes that Samson had been represented to her as an "irreligious / Dishonourer of Dagon" [860–61], and eventually, rounding on Samson, gives a paradigmatic definition of reversibility: "Fame if not double-faced is double-mouthed / And with contrary blast proclaims most deeds," and suggests she will be as honoured by the Philistines as Jael by the Hebrews [971–96], while Harapha denounces Samson as "A murderer, a revolter, and a robber" [1180].

22. Roberto Mercuri, relating *La Reina di Scozia* to Jesuit tragedy, refers to a Jesuit rewriting of Aristotelian theory on tragedy, T. Galluzzi's *Rinnovazione dell"antica tragedia* (Rome, 1633). Galluzzi theorizes the martyr tragedy with a saintly hero or heroine to whom no *hamartia* can be imputed. This, of course, does not sit comfortably with the Christian tenet that the only possible sinless hero is Christ himself, but it also subverts the sense of insoluble conflict which by any definition must be central to tragedy. Milton's Samson satisfies both theology and tragedy in this respect. Galluzzi's work appeared too late to represent more than a possible convergence with the import of Della Valle's three tragedies, but in nice time to be noticed by Milton on his Italian tour and, presumably, dismissed as inadequate. See R. Mercuri, "*La Reina di Scozia* di Federico Della Valle e la forma della tragedia gesuitica," *Caliban* (Rome), 4 (1979), pp. 141–61).

23. Peter Vassallo has drawn attention to the all too perfect closure enunciated by the final Chorus, in unison with Manoa (verbal communication). This leads to the passively contemplative catharsis of "calm of mind, all passion spent." *Samson Agonistes* leaves us suspended between apparent authorial intention and undecidability.

24. Cf. Stanley Fish's well-known remark on Milton's play that, "Rather than representing some doctrine or truth," it "represents the difficulty (not to say the folly) of extracting doctrine from the diverse and multidirectional materials of a decentred world, that is, of a world in which God has so removed his ways from human sight that we are left to our own interpretive conjectures." "Spectacle and Evidence in *Samson Agonistes*," *Critical Inquiry*, 9 (1989): 556–86; cf. p. 580, n. 18. Derek N.C. Wood, "Intertextuality, indirection, and indeterminacy in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*," *English Studies in Canada*, 18.3 (1992): 261–72, is a detailed elaboration of Fish's observation, in line with Joseph A. Wittreich's *Interpreting "Samson Agonistes"*, Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1986.

25. Della Valle's Mary rejects revenge: "Amiche mie, il soccorso / e la vendetta sia pregar perdono" [1496–1497]; "vendetta, io non la chiamo, / né la chiede quel sangue, ch'ora spargo" [2100–2101]. Manoa grimly approves of what he sees as Samson's: "A dreadful way thy took'st to thy revenge" [1591]; "Samson hath quit himself / Like Samson, and heroically hath finished / A life heroic, on his enemies / Fully revenged" [1709–12]. The Chorus follows suit with enthusiasm: "O dearly bought revenge, yet glorious! / Living or dying thou hast fulfilled / The work for which thou wast foretold." [1660–1662].

"Acciocché ognuno le possa intendere"

*The use of Italian as a lingua franca on the Barbary Coast of the seventeenth century. Evidence from the English**

J. Cremona

(Few changes have been made to the original texts in the transcriptions given in the body of the paper and in the appendices: the use of capital letters has been modernised, a minimum of punctuation has been added for the sake of clarity, the less obvious abbreviations have been expanded, consonantal *u* has been transcribed as *v* and vocalic *v* as *u*. It is frequently difficult to distinguish between *e* and *o* and *a* and *o*, especially at word endings, so that it would be rash to draw conclusions on constructions whose ungrammaticality depends on a reading of these letters.)

1. The use of Italian on the Barbary Coast in the seventeenth century

1.1 For some two years now, I have been searching for and studying documents showing that Italian was widely used as <u>the</u> vehicular language (the *lingua veicolare*) between Moslems and Christians in the Turkish empire during the seventeenth century and also, perhaps

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more significantly, between speakers belonging to the various European nationalities with apparently no language in common. This was clearly the case in the North African Regencies of the Barbary Coast, centered in Tripoli, Tunis and Algiers. In this paper, I shall be concentrating largely on Tunis.

Tunis in the seventeenth century was an extraordinary cosmopolitan city, bustling with activity, and attracting comparatively large numbers of European merchants. It also held a considerable number of Christian slaves captured by Tunisian corsairs and trying to put together enough money to pay the ransom that would gain them their freedom (some ten thousand have been calculated for the city at any given time). I have no space to write more about Tunis and its people during this period, but much has been written on the many aspects of its life in the seventeenth century and I would refer the reader to such specialist writing (Grandchamp 1920–1932: the introductions to its several volumes; Sebag 1989).

1.2 In the phrase "the use of Italian as a lingua franca on the Barbary Coast" we should be careful not to confuse my use of the expression "lingua franca" with the *Lingua Franca* proper, the Mediterranean Lingua Franca, much in evidence during this period in spoken exchanges between Moslems and Christians. The Mediterranean Lingua Franca was essentially a spoken pidgin, with a grammatical apparatus reduced to an absolute minimum, as in all pidgins. It was only written down when European travellers wished to give examples of it in thier reminiscences (e.g., for Algiers, the samples given by Fray Diego de Haedo in Haedo 1612, f° 120 v° or f° 129 v°), although a small anonymous description of it was published in Marseilles in 1830 for the use of French troops in Algeria (Anon. 1830). Made up samples of Lingua Franca were used, generally for comic effect, by writers such as Molière and Goldoni as a stereotype of the speech of Turks and Moors when communicating with western Europeans.

1.3 The Italian of the documents I am presenting here, far from being a pidgin, is a more or less imperfect form of Tuscanized chancery Italian, imperfect because it was being used by non-Italians

who were seldom well schooled in the language (especially when it came to verb usage), but also by Italian dialect speakers with uncertain knowledge of the accepted literary forms. Depending upon who was writing or dictating the text, the language shows abundant traces of the influence of other languages, particularly French, but also Spanish, Catalan and, of course, the various dialects of Italy.

2. The French Consulate in Tunis

2.1 Nearly all my evidence in this paper comes from the registers of the French Consulate in Tunis, now kept at the Archives of the *Ministère des Étrangères* in Nantes. The French had opened a consulate in the city in the late sixteenth century, created by letters patent in 1577 (Grandchamp 1920–1933, Vol. 1, ix–x). This consulate rapidly became the centre for commercial and legal transactions among Europeans residing or visiting the Regency, be they consuls, merchants, sea-captains, slaves captured at sea, or renegades. Many transactions between Turks and Moors on the one hand and Europeans on the other were also registered at the consulate. To these we should add those transactions involving Europeans and Jews, whether the Jews were local, so to speak, of old Tunisian stock, or recent newcomers from Leghorn, one of the chief commercial centres in the Mediterranean of this period.

2.2 There are some 15,000 documents relating to the seventeenth century in the registers of the Tunis French consulate, all excellently calendared by a French historian, Pierre Grandchamp, in the 1920s and 30s in a 10-volume work entitled *La France en Tunisie*. (Grandchamp 1920–1933). Of these 15,000 documents, about two thirds are in Italian and only one third in French. Those in French involve for the most part transactions in which both parties are French. When a non-Frenchman became involved, the language used for the transaction generally tended to be Italian: for instance, a contract dated 1604 between a Greek from Chios and a Turk from Lemnos involving an exchange of slaves (Archives . . . Tunisie, III, f° 139 r°; see Cremona, forthcoming), or one dated 1652 between an Englishman and a Frenchman about the sale of a tartan (Archives . . . Tunisie, XV, f° 683 r°; see below, Appendix B). There are some

exceptions to this account of the use of Italian, but they are insignificant: for a fuller account, I would refer the reader to an earlier study where I go into the matter as to who wrote in what language and for what purpose in some detail (Cremona, forthcoming).

The documents in the registers of the French consulate in Tunis consist for the most part of transcripts of original documents, but transcripts that are usually signed by the signatories to the original acts and their witnesses. Sometimes, as in the case of James Chetwood's will, great care is taken to certify that the transcript is a faithful copy of the original (Archives . . . Tunisie, XXIII, f° 513 r° – 514 r°; see below, Appendix E). Original and transcript appear to be in any case the work of the same hand, either the French consul or, more usually, his head of chancery.

2.3 Consuls and heads of chancery were obviously French, although in the first decade or two of the consulate's life many appear to have been of Corsican origin. Their knowledge of Italian varied a good deal from person to person, though some knowledge of Italian must have been indispensable for the post of head of chancery. Consuls were generally merchants who had been elevated to the consulship but who simultaneously carried on their trade. Heads of chancery, on the other hand, often appear to have been slaves earning money towards their ransom (Grandchamp 1920–1933, I, xiii, n.3). Heads of chancery (*chanceliers or cancellieri*) seem to have been highly regarded by the merchant community judging by the roles they were asked to play, as one can deduce from some of the consular documents. This is why I prefer to refer to them as "heads of chancery" rather than "chancery clerks". Here is how an English consul in Tunis, William Cook, refers to the French head of chancery, Denis Delagarde, when registering a protest against a fellow Englishman, Captain John Barker:

> [3 May 1628 '. . . ho richiesto il mag[nifi]co Cancelliero del consulato della natione fran[ces]a in questo regno di Tunisi che come persona autentica et publica vi intima presenta et notifica questo mio secondo protesto . . .' *[signed]* Guill[er]mo Cooch
> (Archives Tunisie, X, f° 33 v°)

Very occasionally, a head of the French chancery had no Italian: no documents in Italian appear in the registers for the six months during which *Chancelier* De Bayon was in office; with only one exception, all the acts during his period of service (27 March–24 September 1612) are in French (Grandchamp 1920–1933, III, 26–51).

3. The English consulate in Tunis

3.1 Two other European consulates were opened in Tunis following agreements between Tunisian authorities and European governments: the English and the Flemish. It is not easy to give a date for the opening of the English consulate or to establish an accurate list of the first consuls or even to establish the entitlement to office of the first English consuls named in the French registers. The French Tunisian registers contain documents dating back to 1623 referring to an English consul, William Cook, but in a later document, dated 1625, Cook is described as a subrogato or substitute to the French consul (Grandchamp 1920–1933, IV, xx). A.M. Broadley, *Times* correspondent and historian of relations between Tunis and Europe, wrote at the end of the nineteenth century that the first holder of the English consular post was Thomas Campion, *circa* 1640 to 1661 (Broadley 1882, II, Appendix F, 345).

The English and Flemish consulates appear to have played a much less important role than the French consulate in the international commercial life of the city, as we shall see. There is also, in the French documents, the mention of a consul for Genoa, Pierre de Santi, in 1674 (Grandchamp 1922–1933, VII, 237).

3.2 Despite of the presence of an English consulate, English consuls, merchants and sea-captains used the French chancery to draw up and register the documents they needed until late in the century. These documents are invariably in Italian. For instance, on 9 December 1653, Robert Browne, an English merchant, gives a power of attorney to his brother, Thomas Browne, English consul in Tunis. The act is registered in the French consulate and is, as usual, in Italian (Archives . . . Tunisie, XV, f° 833 v°; see below Appendix C). This use of the French chancery by an English consul in mid-seventeenth century is somewhat puzzling. Presumably, and this is Grandchamp's opinion, this was because the consulate did not have

a chancery or head of chancery of its own, at least for some years (Grandchamp 1920–1933, V, xii). In volume 5 of the copy of Grandhcamp's work that is housed in Bodley's Library at Oxford, there is a handwritten note pencilled at the bottom of the page in which Grandchamp's opinion is expressed. The note says: "Not necessarily so. The Acts herein recorded are certain in which the Consul himself is a party so it would be quite natural for the transaction to be attested by one of his colleagues." This note was written by J.M. Morehead, British consul in Tunis in 1927, who owned the book before it went to the Foreign Office Library (whence, quite recently, to the Bodleian). But Morehead's explanation does not cover the very many examples where no English consul is, in fact, involved: see, for instance, the 1652 contract of sale of a tartan given in Appendix B.

3.3 The fact that these French consular acts concerning English residents in Tunis were drawn in Italian and not in French seems to indicate that the persons concerned, consuls and merchants, as we have seen, were more at home in Italian than in French. Otherwise, we would have expected some of the documents to have been drawn up in the language that would have been used had two French parties been involved, in other words in French. It is just as likely, however, that the French consular acts were written in Italian because Italian had a wider currency than French at that time in North Africa.

4. The English Consular Registers

The earliest British consular register from Tunis at the Public Record Office at Kew was started almost a century after its French counterpart and covers the years 1675 to 1713 (PRO:FO 339/11). The existence of this register shows that the English consulate at Tunis possesses a chancery and a head of chancery by 1675. Many of the entries are in English, of course, but there are also many in Italian; the proportions between the two languages appears to be about the same as in the case of the French registers. There are in addition a number of entries in French. This register has unfortunately not yet been calendared.

The main difference between the English and French registers

resides in the quantity of documents they contain: in rough terms, the period covered by the first half of the one British register occupies no less than six very substantial French registers. The activity of the French consulate was clearly of a different order to that of the British consulate, and the prestige enjoyed by the two was proportionate to this activity. A document dated 1683 shows that the heads of the French chancery tended, with some justification, to consider themselves to be heads of chancery for all western European nations. The writer is Guillaume Fache:

> [18.11.1683] L'anno del Sig[re] mille sei cento ottanta tre a di diece otto del mese di nob. Geronimo Fougon, q[u]ond[am] Pietro, di Sestri de Levante, Riviera di Genova, d'anni 46 in circa es comparse in persona dinanzi me cancelliere p[er] tutti lgij [=gli] nationi franche stabilite in questa citta & regno di Tunisi . . .
>
> Archives . . . Tunisie, XX, f° 112r°

In a letter dated 28.2.1701, two Tunisian Jews, Eliau Saporta and Isache Latat, declare that they would not accept a notice of protest made to them by the head of chancery of the English consul, Benedetto Piccioli, a Venetian, for they recognized no chancery in Tunis other than the French chancery (Grandchamp 1920–1933, VIII, xv). In this context, we should note that the French Tunisian consular registers contain many acts involving Englishmen after 1675, i.e. after the creation of a British chancery and consular register in Tunis.

The heads of the British consular chancery in Tunis are mainly English (Giovanni Peters (1675), Giuseppe Punter (1682), Giovanni Waldeck (1703), but there is one French name (Luigi Sabain). Two Italians are mentioned in documents preserved in the French registers: Agostino Costa, a Genoese, under the consulship of James Chetwood (1699) and Bendetto Piccioli, a Venetian, under John Goddard (1701).

5. The British Consulate in Tripoli

The Public Records Office also possesses registers for Tripoli (Tripoli di Barberia), the first of which covers the years 1675 to 1685, also, to my knowledge, not calendared (PRO: FO 161/20). In this first register the mix of languages, English, Italian and French, appears to be

much the same as for the first British Tunis register, with Italian as the most frequently used language. This Tripoli register contains some 200 folios and devotes substantially more space to the decade it covers, 1675–1685, than the Tunis register. This seems to indicate that the role played by the British consulate in Tripoli was relatively more important than the one played by its sister agency in Tunis.

This is how the installation of one of the British consuls at Tripoli, Thomas Baker, is recorded in the register of the British consulate:

> Nel nome del omnipotente e Signor Iddio Libro de Reggistri della Cancellaria dell'Ill^{mo}Sig Thomas Bacher per l'Invit[t]iss^{mo} et Potentiss^{mo} Rè della Grande Bertagna; et Difensor della Fede Carlo 2do Console nella città et regno in Tripoli di Barbaria. L'anno 1679 adi 17 aprille giorno del suo possesso in detta carica.
> (PRO: FO 161/20, p.184)

6. John Barker's evidence

The status of Italian in 17th-century Tunis is well illustrated by the documentation relating to a dispute which took place in 1628 between two partners in a business deal, the English consul, William Cook, and an English sea-captain, John Barker, master of *The Golden Cockerel*. The story is a long and complex one and I do not propose to attempt to relate it here. At one point in the dispute, after several protests and summonses, all recorded at length in Italian in the French Tunis consular register X, Captain Barker, despairing of coming to an arrangement with his consul and partner, requests the French consul to appoint an official translator to turn the English of the contract he and Cook had made before their dispute arose into Italian "so that all may understand it" and decide which of them was right. The folio containing the request is unfortunately (and uncharacteristically) in a poor condition so that there are a number of uncertain readings, but the substance of the request is clear. The signatory is Charles Holiday, Capt. Barker's "writer" or clerk (*scrivano*), as in all other communications from Capt. Barker recorded in the Tunisian register. Charles Holiday spells his own and his master's name *à l'anglaise*; he is the only Englishman that I have noted in these documents who did not italianize his first name when appending his signature. The request is followed by an

unsigned statement, presumably by the French consul, that an English merchant had been appointed translator, and by a second statement by the consul's Turkish messenger stating that a copy of the request had been delivered to Cook personally. The syntax of the first few lines is far from clear; it is likely that one line at least was skipped in copying the original *supplica* into the consular register.

[10.5.1628] 1 / Ill[ustrussi]mo Sig[no]r Consule per la natione fran[cez]a in questo regno dy Tunisy 2 / [il](1) Capp[ita]n Gio Barquer Capp[ita]no del vasello Il Gallo Doratto dy natione 3 / ingleza diszendo che una suplica presentata a V.S. de la parte da 4 / S[igno]r Guillermo Coco Consule in questo reigno per la detta natione [sendendo 5 / a le fine](1) che il suplicante portasse(2) a la vostra cancellaria le 6 / mie scritture privatte che noj avemo insieme et encore le sue 7 / pollice di carico per dettj scritture fare translatare in lingua 8 / italliana accio che ognuno le possa entendere et fare vedere il dretto 9 / delle nostre differenze a chi [le tene](1) per decretto dy V.S. abbiate 10 / ordinatto che il suplicante portarebbe detti scritture in la vostra 11 / cancellarye per questo suplica a detta vostra Sig[no]ria ordinare che vostro 12 / cancelliere recebba [*sic*] dettj scriture & nominare uno mercante o talle 13 / persona che piassera(3) a V.S. nominare per fare detta translatatione 14 / et fare dare assignatione a detto Sig[n]or Coco a venire o mandare a 15 / vedere farla in la vostra detta cancellaria, per esendo fatta (4) 16 / detta translatatione passiamo [*sic*] sy sera(5) di bisogna remettere le nostre 17 / differente [*sic*] a una rotta dj mercante, il qual suplica a V.S. che farette 18 / giusticia; presentata agli diese di maggio mille sei cento vintj 19 / otto
[*signed*] p[e]r Charles Holiday p[e]r ordine del Cappitano Gio Barker

20 / Ha fatto la remisione delle scritture in cancelleria e deputtamo il 21 / Sig[n]or Paolo Hug[he](1) mercante engleze per translalatare [*sic*] et sia 22 / datta asignatione al detto Sig[n]or Coco Consule per la natione inglez[a] 23 / a Tunisj, a diese di maggio mille sey cento vintj otto [*no signature follows*]

24 / Yo Ragepe(6) janicero & sacagi(7) del Consule dj la natione fran[cez]a in questo regno 25 / di Tunisj abbio significatto detta suplica al detto Sig[no]r Coco Consule per la natione 26 / ingleza parlando a la suo persone & l'abbio datto copia(8), anno & giorno [come] supra 27 / et mi sono sottosignatto [*no signature follows*]

(Archives . . . Tunisie, X, f° 39r°)

(1) The reading is not clear. (2) ha portato? (3) piacerà? (4) una volta fatta (5) se ci sarà (6) Ragib? (7) sacagi = interpreter (8) e gliene ho dato copia.

It would be hard to find a neater contemporary testimonial to the role played by Italian in the North Africa of the time.

Appendices

Here is a sample of the types of text found in the Tunisian consular archives involving English residents in Tunis, with brief notes on some aspects of the language. None of the texts have been transcribed by Grandchamp except the last. For the typographical modifications introduced in the texts, see the note at the beginning of the paper.

A. 5 MARCH 1640

Payment of the ransom of a French Knight of Malta, Gabriel de Chambes Boisbaudrant (Archives ... Tunisie, Register XIII, f° 120; Grandchamp 1920-1933, V, 158).

[f° 120 r°] 1 / Quittancia p[e]^{r} Sr Guill[er]^{mo} VVedos(1) 2 / Consolo de la natione ingleza contra 3 / il Sig^{re} Cav[a]lliero de Boisbaudrant

4/ L'anno mile sej cento quaranta a dj cinque de marso 5/ e comparso personalmente innante de me, Cancelero 6/ stablitto p[e]^{r} la nassione franceza in questa citta et regnio 7/ de Tunisi il M[agnifi]^{co} Ill^{re} Sig^{re} fra Gabriel de Chambes 8/ Boisbaudrant Cavalliero de la Sacra R[eligio]^{ne} Hierosolimitana 9/ et Com[mendato]^{re} delle Com[mand]^{erie} de Ballasse et de Lisle Bouchart, 10/ il quale, de la sua libera spontanea volunta et p[e]^{r} ogni 11/ meglior modo, titulo o nome, a confessatto come confessa 12/ p[e]^{r} la presente de havere havutto et receputto dal (m^{co}) 13/ Mag[nifi]^{13}/ Mag[nifi]^{co} Sig^{re} Guiglermo Woodhouse, Consolo p[e]^{r} la natione 14/ ingleza in questa citta e regnio de Tunisi, la suma 15/ de piastre d'espagnia n° tre millia quatro cento cinquanta 16/ dj otto realj castiglianj l'una p[e]^{r} valuta de libre dieci millia 17/ et cinque recevutti in Marsiglia per il seg^{re} Jaime Childe, 18/ ingleze, dal Mag[nifi]^{co} Sig^{re} Pietro Baron, mercante et borgheze 19 / da d[ett]^{a} citta de Marsiglia, come pare per quitancia da d[ett]^{o} Childe, 20/ fato per mano dj notaro reggio a dj undeci genero ultimo 21/ passatto, havendo d[ett]^{o} Childe ricevutto d[ett]^{a} suma di libre dieci 22/ mile cinque per virtu della procura dal d[ett]^{o} Sig^{re} Com[mendato]^{re} 23/ passatta in

questa cancelaria sotto glj xx^{a} decembre mile ^{24}/ sej cento trenta nove et di quella d[ett]^{a} suma de piastre tré ^{25}/ mila quatro cento cinquanta il Sig^{re} Com[mendato]^{re} ricevuttu dal ^{26}/ d[ett]^{o} Sig^{re} Consolo se ne tene per contento et bene pagato ^{27}/ promettendo quittarne tanto in nome suo che qualsjvoglia **[f° 120 v^{o}]^{1}**/ altra persona dit[t]j Sig^{ri} Childe et Consolo p[e]^{r} la p[resen]te scritta ^{2}/ a sua richiesta da me Cancelario ratifficando d[ett]^{o} Sig^{re} Com[mendato]^{re} la ^{3}/ supd[ett]^{a} quitancia fatta p[e]^{r} d[ett]^{o} Childe a d[ett]^{o} Sig^{re} Baron et p[e]^{r} ^{4}/ osservancia dj quanto sopra, d[ett]^{o} Sig^{re} Comm[endato]^{re} se obliga tutti / glj soj bene mob[ili] inmob[ili] p[rese]nte et futturj sottomettendosj ^{6}/ al forj tribunalle de qual ce[(2)] voglia giusticia tanta ecc[lesiastic]^{a} ^{7}/ quanto seculare renunciando et giurando; fatto et publicatto ^{8}/ in questa cancelaria del consolatto de Tunisj in presencia ^{9}/ del Sig^{re} Gioseppe Longo cicilliano et Gioan Gros de ^{10}/ Marsiglia, testimonij requisi[t] et signatti cum d[et]^{ti} Sig^{re} Com.^{re}

[*signed*:] f gabriel de chambes boisdaudrant
Io Gioseppe Longo presentj
Jean Gros

(1) = William Woodhouse. (2) = si.

Note the Spanish form of Childe's first name (l. 17) and the Spanish/ Catalan/ North Italian-looking form *genero* "January" (l. 20); also the ungrammatical use of *da* (ll. 19, 22), frequent in these texts.

B. 12 JANUARY 1652

An English merchant, Thomas Browne, sells a tartan ship to Thomas Houiguin, another English merchant. The French consul, a witness to the deal, was François Francillon (Archives ... Tunisie, Register XV, f° 683. Grandchamp 1920–1933, VI, 25).

[f° 683 r°]^{1}/ Venditione d'una tartana fra il [S]^{re} Thomaso ^{2}/ Broune e Thomaso Houiguin

^{3}/ L'anno mille seicento cinquanta due il duodecimo ^{4}/ di gennaio inanzi a me, Cancelier stabilito per la ^{5}/ natione francese in questa citta e regno di Tunisi ^{6}/ sottoscritto et a testimonii poi chiamati, e comparso ^{7}/ ne[(1)] persona S^{re} Thomaso Broun mercante inglese ^{8}/ residente a Tunisi il quale, di suo grato[(2)] e spontanea ^{9}/ volonta senza violenza, confessa havere vendutto ^{10}/ a S^{re} Thomaso Houiguin inglese, presente et accettante, ^{11}/ una tartana chiamata St Thomaso Bon[aventu]^{re} ^{12}/ che e hora nella Goletta con tutti i fornimenti ^{13}/ che si trovano e donde ci[(3)] e fatto inventoria, la quale ^{14}/ venditione ci[(3)] fa per la somma di mille pezzi di ^{15}/ otto reali che

il detto Thomaso Houiguin promette [16]/ e si obliga pagare dentro due mese, o otto giorni [17]/ poiche(4) sara arrmatto a Marsilla, piu presto arriua(5) [18]/ a Sre Roberto Broun fratello del detto Sre Thomaso [19]/ e(6) altro a loro ordine, promettendo guardare il [20]/ sopra e, per l'osservanza, obliga il detto Houiguin [21]/ sa [*sic*] persona e beni ad ogni giustitia, il che ha giurato; **[f° 683 v°]** [1]/ fatto e publicato in nostra cancellaria nella [2]/ presenza de Sri Michel Reboulet, Jacobo [3]/ de Latour e Francois Francillon, testimonii, & ha il detto Houiguin dichiarato non saper scrivere.

[*signed*] Thomas Browne
M Reboullet
francillon
huguier Chanc[elier]
De la tour

(1) = in (en?). (2) = grado. (3))) + SI> (4) = dopo che. (5) il primo che arrivi. (6) = o?.

Note the spelling *ci* for *si* (ll. 13 and 14) and French *sa* for *la sua*. (l. 21).

C. 9 DECEMBER 1653

Power of attorney given by Robert Browne, an English merchant, to his brother Thomas Browne, now the English consul at Tunis. The French consul, François Francillon, is again a witness. Note the frequent crossings out, showing that the text has been copied; all the signatures, however, are real signatures (Archives . . . Tunisie, Register XV, f° 833-34. Grandchamp 1920-1933, VI, 70).

[f° 833 v°] [1]/ Procura del Sre Roberto Broñe in favore del [2]/ Sre Thomaso Bronne:

[3]/ L'anno mille sej cento cinqta tre, il nono giorno di dicembre [4]/ innanzi a me &c, e comparso in persona il Sigre Roberto Bronne, [5]/ mercante ingleze, il quale di suo grato et spontanea volontta ha [6]/ fatto et constitujto suo procuratore g[e]n[er]ale et senza diroga[ti]one [7]/ Illmo Sigre Thomaso Bronne, Console della natione ingleze in questa **[f° 834 r°]** [1]/ cita et regno di Tunisi, ~~abse~~ suo fratello, absente come p[rese]nte ~~abs~~ [2]/ Per al ~~suo~~ nome del detto constituente e in sua absenza ~~far dire~~ 3/ negotiare et gerere tutti ~~il~~ li nigozij suoj con qualche si voglia gente 4/ e in qualche si voglia luogo; p[...]ere(1), opporre, constituire, procurarre 5/ p[er] il bisogno, passare(2) contratti, et instaurare et tuttj altrj attj necessarij 6/ promettendo havere grato tutto che

sara fatto dal detto Illmo Sig^{re} 7/ nel detto nome e rilevarlo d'ogni carjco di procura et pena d'ogni 8/ spese et interessj, e per l'osservanza obliga sua persona e beni 9/ a giusticia, cio che ha giurato. Fatto et publicato nella cancelleria n[ost]ra in 10/ p[rese]n[z]a de S^{ri} Fran[ces]^{co} Ycard et Fran[ces]^{co} Francillione, liqualj con detto S^{re} constituente in p[ers]ona sotto scritti

[signed] Roberto Browne

[...](3) ycard

francillione

J Boisson Chan[celi]^{er}

(1) The reading is not clear. (2) pattare? (3) An initial letter that looks more like an *m* or *n* than an *f*.

Note *gerere* (f° 834, 1.3), a probable gallicism (Fr gérer), although *gerere* is attested in a Pisan document of the fourteenth century (Cortelazzo & Zolli 1979-1988, s.v. gerente)

D. 18 AUGUST 1677

Report of a raid by Majorcan corsairs on an English ship given by Francis Baker, consul for "His Majesty of Great Britain" and two English merchants. This document was drawn up in the house of the British consul by the French head of chancery, Caullet (Archives ... Tunisie, Registre XIX, p. 167–68. Grandchamp, 1920–1933, VII, 288).

[p 167] 1/ Attestatione del Illmo Sig^{r} Fran[ces]^{co} Bacher 2 / Console inglese e mercanti

3/ L'anno del Sig^{re} mille sei cento settanta sette, a di 4/ diece otto del mese di agosto avante di me can[cellie]^{re} sotto 5/ scritto stabilito per la natione francese in questa citta 6/ & regno de Tunisi, est [*sic*] comparso in sua persona l'Illmo 7/ Sig^{re} Fran[ces]^{co} Bacher, Console per Sua Maiesta de la Grand 8/ Bretagna in questa d[et]^{ta} citta & regno de Tunisi con li SSig^{ri} 9/ Fran[ces]^{co} ~~Benjamino~~ Barrington & Beniamino Steele 10/ merchanti inglesi liqualli, di loro grato spontanea 11/ volonta & con il giuramento prestato in talj casj requiesti,(1) 12/certificano e attestano essere la pura verita; come il 13/ Moro nominato Haggi Salem Gibelle est [*sic*] domestico 14/ di lungo tempo nella casa consolare del sud[det]^{to} Illmo 15/Console inglese & che l'imbarcarono per sopracarico 16/ sopra la nostra nave nominata Il Mercurio, Capp[ita]^{no} 17/ Henri Hiard, inglese, & li consignassimo(2) il fondo di 18/ nostro compto proprio in questo viagio che sono andati 19/ fare nel porto d'Astoro nella costa di ponente de questa 20/ Barbaria p[er] in d[et]^{to} porto

caricare la susd[et]^{ta} nostra nave 21/ de formento, come anche per servire d'interprete per 22/ non haver nissuno sopra la susd[et]^{ta} nosta nave che 23/ intendece(3) la lengua morescha, il che havendo 24/ seguito(4), li avanso la soma de pezze sei cento navanta 25/ cinque da otto reali, Mesico & Siviglia, del susd[et]^{to} nostro 26/ fondo liquallj denari il susd[et]^{to} Haggi Salem Gibelle 27/ sopracarico si teneva dentro un baulo con le sue 28/ rope, quando a l'inproviso vise(5) venire due nave a la 29/ volta del d[et]^{to} porto d'Astoro; per suspetto si salvo in terra; 30/ li due nave sono maliorchinj corsari, liquallj, b[en]che 31 la susd[et]^{ta} nostra nave avesse alborato la bandiera inglese, 32/ con tutto accio la volsero visitarla & havendo 33/ trouatto dentro il cofre la susd[et]^{ta} soma de p[ezz]^{e} 695 di sopra, [s]e ne 34/ volsero apatronire benche il susd[et]^{to} Capp[ita]^{no} Henri Hiard de 35/ la nostra d[et]^{ta} nave li remostrasse che gli denari herano 36/ nostri, come meglio si vede per l'escritura che d[ett]^{i} corsari 37/ magliochinj dessero al sus $^{d[ett]o}$ Capp[ita]^{no} Henri Hiard [. . .](6) 38/ della verita hanno sotto scritto le presenze; fatto [. . .](6) 39/ publicatto nella casa del susd[et]^{to} Illmo Sig^{r} Console ingl [. . .](6) 40/ in Tunisj

[*signed*] Fra[ces]^{co} Bacher Consolo
Fran[ces]^{co} Barrington
Benj[amin]^{o} Steele
Caullet canc[ellie]^{re}

(1) *en tel cas requis* appears in a later document, one written in French. (2) = abbiamo (avessimo?) consegnato. (3) = intendesse. (4) = eseguito? (5) = vide. (6) The manuscript is damaged at this point.

Note the duplication of the clitic pronoun *la* in l. 32. Gallicisms are numerous: *est* for *è* (ll. 6 and 13), *gran* (l. 7), *requiesti* (l. 11), *lungo temp?* (l. 14), *cofre* (l. 33, but *baulo* in l. 27), and, probably, *si salvò* from Fr *se sauver* (l. 29). *Rope* (l. 28) appears to be a hispanism.

E. 30 SEPTEMBER 1699

The will of James Chetwood, consul for Great Britain, made in Bizerta on 4 August 1699 and registered at the French consulate in Tunis on 30 September 1699, by which date Chetwood had died. It was taken down by a Genoese, Agostino Costa, head of chancery at the British consulate. The language shows clearly that it was taken down by an Italian. Note the care taken by the French head of chancery in his final statement to assure the reader that the consulate transcription is indeed a faithful copy of the original (f° 514 r°, ll. 10–13), although some of the spellings are unlikely to

have been Costa's. This text is fully punctuated and accented; because of this, I have left both punctuation and accentuation untouched. Grandchamp 1922–1933 (VIII, xv–xvi) gives a faithful transcription of the text (Archives . . . Tunisie, Register XXIII, ff 513–14. Grandchamp 1922-1933, VIII, 308).

[f° 513 r°][1]/ Inregistratione del testamento dell'Illmo Sig^{re} defunto Giacomo Chetwood[2]/ Console per Sua Maesta Britannica in questo regno di Tunisi, fatto in Bizerta [e]/ alli 4: d'agosto 1699:

[4]/ segue il tenore del sopradetto testamento.

[5]/ Nel nome del Sig^{re} Iddio sia sempre, essendo vero che non vi sia cosa veruna più certa [6]/ della morte ne più incerto dell'hora della medemma, e questo considerato dall'Illmo Sig^{re} [7]/ Giacomo Chetwood q[uon]^{dam} Valentino inglese, Console al presente per Sua Maesta Britannica [8]/ nel regno di Tunis e suo dominio, sano (per la Dio gratia) di senso, loquella, intelletto, e [9]/ cognitione, se bene gravamente amalato del corpo; desiderando ogni qual volta si [10]/ compiaccia, S. D. M. chiamarlo a se, lasciar li suoi affari disposti, per ciò di sua spontanea [11]/ voluntà, et in ogni meglior modo, ha deliberato di fare il presente nuncupatiuo [12]/ Testamento, come in apresso.§

[13]/ Primiaramente raccomandata l'anima sua in mano dell'altissimo Creatore, dichiara [14]/ che li suoi beni, o sia azenda, consistono in la somma di pezzi reali da otto correnti venti [15]/ in venti due milla circa, come comparira dalli conti de suoi libri, quali dichiara e vuole [16]/ siano distribuiti nella maniera seguente cioè: §

[17]/ P^{mo}. Lascia in donativo una terza parte dell'intiero e total prodotto di sua azenda, alla sig^{ra} [18]/ Phebe Hayes[(1)] gentildonna fanciulla in Inghilterra, qual terza parte, ordina le sia [19]/ puntualmente pagata de primi denari che si extrahano da suoi beni.

[20]/ 2°. Lascia la sesta parte di tutta sudetta sua azenda al Sig^{r} Knightley[(1)] Chetwood suo nipote[21]/ con un'anello con pietra di diamante di valuta, di pezzi quatro cento r[eali] da 8: [22]/ un orologgio d'oro, con un calesso novo, con due cavallj, come anco tutta l'argentaria di [23]/ sua casa.

[24]/ 3°. Item lascia à suoi dui fratelli in Irlanda pezzi cinque cento r. da 8: effettivi in dono [25]/ per ogni uno di loro per suoi servitori.

[26]/ 4°. Item lascia al Sig^{r} Giuseppe Chin (King)[(2)] in Londra pezzi cento r. da 8: in dono.

[27]/ 5°. Item lascia a SS^{ri} Francesco Berrintone, e Bengimino Stile presst(3) Londra, [28]/ per le sue donne, pezzi cento e cinquanta per uno.

[29]/ 6°. Item ~~lascia~~ al Sig^{r} Giovanni Goddard executore del presente testamento lascia [30]/ pezzi cinque cento r^{li} da 8.

[31]/ 7°. Item lascia al Sig^{r} Henrico Serre, purche non torni Turco pezzi tre cento r. da 8.

[32]/ 8°. Item lascia alla Sig^{ra} Evrania Goodwyn(1), un anello di valutta di pezzi quatro cento [33]/ in cinque cento r. da 8: per il suo marittaggio.

[34]/ 9°. Item lascia a me Agostino Costa suo Cancelliere e stipulatore del presente [35]/ testamento pezzi tre centro r. da 8: con speranza che debba aggiutare il sudetto [36]/ Sig^{r} Giovanni Goddard, nell'eseguire il presente testamento.

[37]/ 10°. Item lascia a Baba'Agj suo servitore vecchio, per sua bona servitù e cura [38]/ nella presente malattia pezzi cinque cento r. da 8:

[f° 513 v°][1]/11°. Item lascia a Giovanni suo cameriero pezzi trenta r. da 8:, e più tutti li vestiti [2]/ che non(4) saranno giudicati del tutto buoni e novi dal detto Sig^{re} Goddard.

[3]/ 12°. Item ~~lascia~~ al Sig^{re} suo fratello maggiore in Inghilterra lascia pezzi ducento [4]/ r. da 8: per il coruccio.

[5]/ 13°. Item lascia al Cap^{no} Roberto Briths (Bridg[e]s)(5) pezzi quatro cento r^{li} da 8: et in caso che [6]/ sij morto, si disponera di questi con unirli al legato de poveri di Dublin, come si[7]/ dira in apresso al Cap[ito]^{lo} 18. 14°. Item lascia al Sig^{re} Tomaso Goodwyn(1) pezzo cento r. da 8: per il corruccio.

[9]/ 15°. Item lascia ad Agi Mamet torcimano della natione ingleza per suo buono serviggio [10]/ pezzi cinquanta r^{li} da 8.

[11]/ 16°. Item lascia al Sig^{gr} Giorgio Reynous(6) pezzi cinquanta per suo corruccio.

[12]/ 17°. Item dell'ottensilii, mobili et attrezzi di caza ordina che restino per uzo del [13]/ (del) sopradetto Sig^{re} Giovanni Goddard per quel tempo che stara in Tunis [14]/ con che dovendo partirsi debba venderli, e farne buono la valuta [15]/ nel conto dell'azenda.

[16]/ 18°. Item tutto qello che sopravanzera, vuole che sij rimesso in mano del [17]/ Sig^{re} suo fratello Bengimino Chetwood della Cità di Doblin in Irlanda [18]/ con che debba dispensarli in elemosine a poveri di detto luogo, et opere [19]/ pie, come meglio le parera, et in caso che non sopravanzassa la somma [20]/ di pezzi mille r. da 8: li due primi instituiti heredi legatarii debbano [21]/ compire la sudetta somma di pz^{i} 1.000.

[22]/ 19°. Item per ultimo instituisce e dichiara esecutore del presente suo testam^{to} [23]/ il sopradetto Sig^{re} Giovanni Goddard, pregandolo accettar questo carrico, et [24]/ in caso de sua morte primo d'haver terminato l'esecutione totale del [25]/ presente lascia al medemo la facoltà di eligere a questo effetto una [26]/ personna di sua sodisfattione et idonea in suo luogo.

[27]/ Rogato e stipulato il presente in Bizerta questo giorno di martedi li [28]/ quatro del mese d'agosto, da me Agostino Costa Cancelliere della natione [29]/ inghleza nel regno di Tunis e suo dominio, l'anno mille sei cento [30]/ novanta nove, nella camera del sudetto Illmo (Sig^{re})[(7)] Console, et in fede [31]/ Agostino Costa Can^{re} cossi sottoscritto nell'originale.

[32]/ @ d[et]^{to} giorno doppo scritto il presente testamento.

[33]/ 20°. Item per codicille ordina il d[et]^{to} Sig^{re} Console che il prezzo o sia valuta [34]/ d'uno anello di pezzi quatro cento in cinque cento per la Sig^{ra} Evrania [35]/ Goodwyn[(1)] non se li debbano più dare, come constava nel capitolo 8vo: e che [36]/ detti denari s'impieghino per elemosine, come nel cap[ito]^{lo} 18: Sud[ett]^{o} Agostino Costa [37]/ Can[cellie]^{re} cossi scritto nell'originale, e più basso Giac[o]^{mo} Chetwood, cossi anche [38]/ sotto scritto nel medesimo originale, il quale va[(8)] sigillato d'un sig[i[^{llo} in cera d'Esp[agn]^{a} [39]/ rossa.

[f° 514 r°][1]/ E nel segondo foglio del medemo originale se trova anche scritto quello che segue.

[2]/ 1699; @ 4. agosto in Bizerta 99:

[3]/ R. 1699: Io sottoscritto ho visto sigillare e firmare il presente testamento dal Illmo [4]/ Sig^{re} Giacomo Chetwood Console inglese di sua propria mano, e suo solito sigillo [5]/ et in fede. Giorgio Reynolds, et Joan Van Niewenhias, ~~ains~~[(2)] cossi sottoscritti n(')ell'orig[ina]^{le}.

[6]/ 1699: – A d[et]^{to}

[7]/ Io sottoscritto Cancelliere della natione inglese nel regno di Tunisi e suo dominio ho visto [8]/ firmare li due soprascritti testimonii alla mia presenza, et in fede, [9]/ Agostino Costa Can[ellie]re cossi sottoscritto nel medesimo originale e f° di carta

[10]/ Le testament cy dessus et ez autres parts transcrfit a esté par nous Chancellier de [11]/ la nation françoise en cette ville et royaume de Tunis soussigné, registré de mot a [12]/ mot sur l'original a nous remis par le Sr Jean Goddard de la ville de Londres depda(9) [13]/ en cette ville = executeur testamentaire nommé par ledit testament, pour servir [14]/ et valoir ainsi qu'il appartiendra, apres toutesfois que les SSrs Giorgio Reynolds march[and] [15]/ anglois dudit Londres, et Joan van Niewhias de la ville de Bruxelles en Flandres, [16]/ residans aussi en cette ville, nous ont eu dit(10) et déclaré auoir veu signer et [17]/ sceller ledit testament par le defunt Sr Giacomo Chetwood de son seing et propres [18]/ mains, et de son cachet ordinaire en cire d'Espaigne rouge, comme aussi l'avoir [19]/ veu écrire et signer par ledit Sr Agostino Costa genois son Chancelier, et [20]/ l'avoir eux mesme signé comme témoins; En foy dequoy lesdits SSrs Giorgio [21]/ Reynolds, et ledit Joan Van Niewhius, ont signé avec led. Sr Jean Goddard et(11) avec nous dit Chancellier [22]/ a la presente enregistration faitte au dit Tunis le trentième septembre [23]/ mil six cens quatre vingts dix neuf ./.

[*signed*] Chaulan, chaner
Gio: Goddard
Giorgio Reynolds
Jan Van nieweh [. . .](12)

(1) The *y* is spelt *ij*. (2) *King* is interlined above *Chin*.. (3) [di] pres[en]t[e]? The two merchants are Francis Barrington and Benjamin Steele of Appendix D. (4) *non* is interlined. (5) *Bridges* is interlined above *Births*. (6) = Reynolds. (7) *Sigre* is interlined above *console*. (8) The reading of *va* is not clear. (9) *depda* is written over something which is illegible; Grandchamp reads *de pt*, i.e. *de présent*. (10) Note the "passé surcomposé". (11) The previous five words are inserted at the end of the text. (12) The end of the Flemish name is not easily legible.

Note that the English involved tend to italianize their first names, as shown by their signatures, but not the Flemish witness.

"The Niobe of Nations"

Lord Byron: *Childe Harold*

A Romantic View of Italy, 1815–1840

Roderick Cavaliero

From the end of the seventeenth century Italy was visited by nearly every British writer of note. Some, like Walter Scott, spent only a few months there, other like Byron, the Shelleys, Leigh Hunt and Browning lived there for several years. John Keats went there to die. With the exception of the last they left the record of their experience in poetry and prose. They were all classically educated, they all came to visit a land which they acknowledged as one of the principal sources of their culture, and their principal object was to bask in the sunlit glory of its past. They were visiting a land called "Italia", home of classical ruins, great art, literature and landscape, a land with no present or future, a land without people. Its inhabitants, when they obtruded on their notice, were treated dismissively. It was as if they were being punished for the betrayal of their glorious Roman and Renaissance past. Italy, as such, was, in Metternich's patronising phrase, a geographical expression. Napoleon Bonaparte had called himself, for a time, King of Italy, implying that there was such a nation to be king of, but by Italy he meant the land between the Alps and Volturno. The Holy Alliance, after his fall, was

determined to restore "Italia" to its patchwork of "signorie" and to keep it that way.

For a hundred years, young men came to Italy for the Grand Tour, with a tutor to ensure that they understood what they saw and to help them spend their abundant money wisely. By the end of the eighteenth century, it had begun to acquire a bad name. In 1816, John Polidori, an Edinburgh graduate from Soho, expert at the age of 19 in somnambulism and mesmerism, and parent of *The Vampyre* that has never been far, in one form or another, from our television screens, makes Aubrey, the hero of his gothic novel, wishing to accompany Lord Ruthven abroad, inform his guardians that "it was time for him to perform the tour, which for many generations had been thought necessary to enable the young to take some rapid steps in the career of vice". For Lord Ruthven, read Lord Byron. Polidori could only fulfil his desire to travel by attaching himself to the poet as his medical adviser, and his comment on the Grand Tour may have had a whiff of sour grapes.[1]

With the end of the Napoleonic wars, the British, denied the pleasures of continental travel for so many years, began once more to pour across the channel, but the Grand Tour, as such, was over. The shuffling of works of art to and from Paris, Rome, Milan and Florence at the hands of Bonaparte's cultural commissars had alerted governments to the value of their art treasures.[2] If one now hoped to furnish his dwelling with relics from the classical past, he might be lucky enough to pick up a shard or a misappropriated limb, but he did better to commission a classical copy from the spawn of Canova's studio. Among these was the Liverpudlian John Gibson, who specialised in androgynous males and blushing maidens, carved from rosy marble, with one of whom, *La Venere Tinta,* he fell in love. With the first stirrings of the Hellenic resistance to Turkish rule,

1. The quotation comes from the first pages of *The Vampyre,* that entertainment written in 1816, which Byron disliked, and which started the competition in the Villa Diodati for a spine-chiller, the genesis of *Frankenstein.*

2. That latter day Louis XIV, Napoleon Bonaparte had tried to fulfil Colbert's wish that the French "devons fairs en sorte d'avoir . . . tout ce qu'il y a de beau en Italie." The pillaging of Italian museums was so thorough that in 1798 a popular canzonetta assured the world that "Rome n'est plus dans Rome, / Elle est tout a Paris." F. Haskell & N. Penny, *L'Antico nella Storia del Gusto,* Turin, 1984, pp. 46, 132.

moreover, a whole new quarry of pure Greek sculpture, not decadent late imperial copies, began to divert serious collectors to Greece. Treasure-hunting in Italy was now frowned upon by the authorities.

The wars, too, had provided occupation for the foot-loose and over-endowed sprigs of landed families, who had undertaken the Grand Tour so that they could learn how to convert their rolling acres into a landscape out of Poussin in the heart of darkest Yorkshire. In the 22 years since 1793, they had sailed before the mast from Rio de Janeiro to Canton, they had cleared Egypt and Syria of the French, fought every inch from Torres Vedras to Toulouse, they had subdued Mysoreans and Marathas, and chased bandits round the heart of ancient India, they had carried the British flag beyond the capital of the Great Mughal to the five rivers of the Panjab. They had even had a crack at the impossible task of providing Sicily with good government.[3] The Grand Tour, with a tutor, a sort of academic field trip to round off an education stuffed with studies of Livy, Horace and Virgil, was rather *vieux jeu*.

The tourists, too, had changed. In 1818 Mary Shelley found the English at Bagni di Lucca "crowded here to the almost entire exclusion (of) Italians", adding with a frisson of disgust, "the walks are filled with English nurserymaids".[4] Dr Johnson may have held in 1776 that "a man who has not been in Italy is always conscious of an inferiority",[5] but now it included his wife, children and nurserymaid. Twenty years later, the tourists were still out in force. "Rome is full of English", Macaulay wrote to Lord Lansdowne on 19 December 1838. "We could furnish exceedingly respectable Houses of Lords and Commons. There are at present twice as many coroneted carriages in Piazza di Spagna as in St James's parish".[6]

3. The second son of the Duke of Portland, former governor of Madras and future governor-general of India had been appointed envoy to King Ferdinand and commander-in-chief of British forces in Sicily and was effectively governor of that island from 1811–1818. He was recalled by Castlereagh when after the fall of Napoleon he recommended liberal constitutions for a Genoese republic, Milan and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. J. Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck: the Making of a Liberal Imperialist, 1774–1839*, Brighton, 1974.

4. Mary Shelley to Maria Gisborne, 2 July 1818, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, "A Part of the Elect"*, vol. 1, ed. Betty Bennett, Baltimore, 1980, p. 74.

5. Boswell, *Life*, Oxford 1933, vol. 2, p. 24.

6. G.O. Trevelyan, *The Life & Letters of Lord Macaulay*, World's Classics, Oxford, 1932 ed., vol. 1, p. 466.

Grand Tourists had not taken their wives and children on the Grand Tour, much less their nurserymaids. Post-bellum families, especially wives and sisters, now wished to share the experience of travel. Ned Williams, Shelley's sailing friend, knew a naval captain who spent £1100 worth of prize money showing his two sisters Italy . . . "a rough English sailor who while the young ladies say – What a charming picture – really that statue if one knew what it meant would be very pretty – stands with one of them on each arm with his thumbs in his pockets whistling and looking another way".[7] The brothels round the Piazza di Spagna, the foreign quarter of Rome, with their Venuses all licensed for business by the Cardinal Vicar, lost the valuable custom that single men and their tutors used to bring them.

In the preceding century, most British residents in Europe, unless artists, scholars or diplomatists, were fleeing from the debtor's prison or religious intolerance. Now they were fleeing a wide variety of things. Byron was a refugee from a starchy wife and the intolerable stuffiness of London society, the Shelleys were fleeing a devouring parent and poverty. Leigh Hunt fled from poverty and prison. Browning from the Barretts. Though the new vogue for sojourning in Italy owed something to the novels of Ann Radcliffe, whose heroines experienced such delicious terrors in Italy, more often families were escaping from the fogs and rain of an English winter, the terrible increase in pulmonary tuberculosis from industrialisation causing something like panic among the parents of delicate children.[8]

High domestic costs at a time of depression in England also made Italy a cheaper place in which to live. Percy Bysshe and Mary Shelley were able to live in Italy for four years on an exiguous income, with servants, dependants, and, latterly a boat. Byron could contemplate putting up both Leigh Hunt and parents and seven children in the ground floor of his Pisan palazzo without a dent in his expenditure. The Blessington-D'Orsay caravan could occupy one of the finest palazzi in Vomero, Naples, its owner decamping

7. Mary Shelley to Claire Clairmont, *Letters*, vol. i, p. 180. The naval officer was Captain Bowen.

8. In 1851 when reasonable records began sufferers of pulmonary tuberculosis in England numbered 2579 per million lives. The onset of the industrial revolution began to create conditions out of which those who could choose, chose to spend the winter.

to a much inferior one, for the rent of a cottage in England. Mass tourism may have begun, but the attraction was not just cheap hotels (or palazzi) in the sun, the mindless browning of the legs that has vulgarised, when it has not ruined, the coastline of the Mediterranean. The visitors were still drawn to see *qu'est qu'il y a de beau en Italie.*

Let us, briefly, compare the changing attitudes to visitors to "Italia", separated by decades from each other. In 1701, whereso'ver Joseph Addison turned his ravished eyes

> Gay gilded scenes and shining prospects rise,
> Poetic fields still encompass me around
> And still I seem to tread on classic ground.[9]

By 1780, William Beckford remembered his classical education enough to go, "full of the spirit of Aeschylus, to the Olympic theatre (in Vicenza) and vent(ed) my evil temper in reciting some of the most tremendous verses of his furies".[10] Having got the classics out of his system he returned to his journal where, for page after page, he described the passing countryside as if he were annotating Richard Wilson. By December 1823, checking up on the ancients was not Marguerite Blessington's purpose in being in Italy. "When one is basking in the general warmth of this sunny clime ... it is impossible, even in despite of patriotism, not to admit that Italy is a preferable winter residence".[11] Though an inveterate sight-seer she was not in Italy to improve herself. "The besetting sin of this place has taken possession of me. ... Oh, the dolce far niente of an Italian life! Who can resist its influence. Not I – at least".[12]

Grand Touring had been serious business, whoring apart, and tutors tended to behave like tour guides before Thomas Cook invented them. There was a lot to fit in. Mostly, as for Addison, it was classical sites, but the opera was a draw and some made cautious anthropological forays into the Catholic church. William Beckford joined the melancholy sinners prostrate before the sanctuary of St

9. *A Letter from Italy, to the Right Honourable Lord Halifax,* London, 1703, p. 51.
10. Elizabeth Mavor: *The Grand Tour of William Beckford,* Harmondsworth 1986, p. 73, 10 September 1780.
11. Neapolitan Journals, December 1823 in Edith Clay, *Lady Blessington at Naples,* London, 1979, p. 78.
12. *Ibid.,* 12 August 1823, p. 57.

Anthony of Padua. In case his old drawing master should begin to fear for his faith, he added that it gave him a good opportunity to study the bas-reliefs by Sansovino on the saint's tomb. The Blessingtons had come to enjoy themselves in their curious *menage á trois,* but Marguerite Blessington was the only one to comment on the Italians who inhabited her "Italia", and that in a rather patronising way. Her letters home described a feckless and self-indulgent people "To live is here (Naples) so positive an enjoyment that the usual motives and incentives to study and usefulness are forgotten, in the enervating and dreamy enjoyment to which the climate gives birth".[13]

Italy was now to be visited for pleasure as well as for instruction. Mary Shelley, when she came to leave Italy in 1823, was heart-broken to leave a country to which, despite the loss of her husband and two of her children, she was "attached from a thousand reasons". "I love Italy – its sky canopies the tombs of my lost treasures – its sun – its vegetation – the solitude I can here enjoy – the easy life one can lead – my habits now of five years growth – all and everything endears Italy to me beyond expression. The thought of leaving it fills me with powerful tumults".[14] But not the people. Mary had never found the locals simpatici. "The Italians (in Naples) are so very disagreeable . . . there is no life here. They seem to act as if they had all died fifty years ago and now went about their work like the ghostly sailors of Coleridge's enchanted ship – except indeed when they cheat!"[15] "The people (of Pisa) were wild and hateful", if not so hateful as their neighbours at Lerici who "are like wild savages".[16] Italy was "un Paradiso abitato dai diavoli".

Marguerite Blessington, being of a more sanguine temperament, found the Neapolitans anything but ghostly. they abandoned themselves (to activity) with the gaiety of children broken loose from school.[17] At least children were a step-up from savages. But, by and large, the English, as they were universally known, did not mix much with the natives. There were now so many of them, they were no longer dependent on the cardinals' *conversazioni* in Rome, the Grand

13. *Ibid.*, 4 August 1823, p. 48.
14. To Thomas Jefferson Hogg, Albaro near Genoa, 28 February 1823, *Letters,* i, pp. 317–18.
15. To Maria Gisborne from Naples, 22 January 1819, *ibid.*, p. 85.
16. To Maria Gisborne from Pisa 15 August 1822, *ibid.*, pp. 244, 249.
17. *Neapolitan Journals,* 23 July 1823, Clay, p. 34.

Ducal soirees in Florence, or even princely open house in Naples. They had not much enjoyed them. Claire Clairmont described one *conversazione*, "where there is a Cardinal and many unfortunate Englishmen who, after having crossed their legs and said nothing the whole evening, rose all at once, made their bows and filed off".[18] They had enough fellow visitors to form a society of their own. Moreover, twenty years of beating Boney, of conquering India, of ruling the sea, had converted the landowner who loved his acres, palladianized his house and capability browned his estate, who rode to hounds in his farmer's rig and was a good fellow, into a remote, glacially superior pro-consul with jacket too tight and neckband too high. Squire Weston had given way to Mr Darcy. Darcys were choosy about their friends. The Italian aristocracy was poor, monoglot and often strange, while ordinary foreigners in general were still either comic or dishonest.

For what still tempted visitors were the climate, the cheapness, the beauty, the past. Its present was of little interest to those who flocked to Italy in the wake of the Napoleonic wars. Its past was still strongly identified with the average reader's stock of fictional villains, like Ann Radcliffe's Schedoni and Montoni, but to that stock, in the years from 1816, were added some real-life Italians, like Francesca da Rimini, Torquato Tasso, the Cenci, the two Foscari, Marino Faliero, Cola da Rienzo, and Joanna of Naples. Their stories had first appeared in the spate of works on Italy which followed Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* and, though some of them are only known today to operamanes, they were at the time hot items from the pens of James Leigh Hunt, Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Bulwar Lytton and Walter Savage Landor.[19]

18. *The Journals of Claire Clairmont*, ed. M.K. Stocking, 27 March 1819, p. 103.

19. C.P. Brand, *Italy and the English Romantics*, Cambridge, 1957, pp. 189–90. The published dates were: *Rimini* by James Leigh Hunt 1816, *The Lament for Tasso* by Byron 1817, *The Cenci*, 1819, *Marino Faliero* and *The Two Foscari* 1821, Mary Shelley, *Valperga*, 1823, *Rienzi* by Bulwer Lytton 1835, *Giovanna of Naples* by Walter Savage Landor, 1839. It is strange that Scott did not join his galere. Perhaps his Scotland was an "Italia" in itself. Scott certainly belonged to the "stiletto school". Compare: "But in Italy the secret stiletto was the weapon of revenge and the murder of one was avenged by the assassination of another until the list of expiatory murders ran high," (Mary Shelley, *Valperga*, 1923 edition, London, vol. 1, p. 86) with "Like a cowardly Italian, he had recourse to his fatal stiletto to murder the man whom he dared not met in manly encounter." W. Scott, *The Two Drovers*, in *Chronicles of the Canongate*, 1827, Oxford World's Classics ed. 1934, p. 155.

For their readers, as they trundled across Europe in their high sided carriages, coming to roost in the Piazza di Spagna in Rome or the Riviera di Chiaia in Naples, they were required reading. To that list we can add Masaniello, the subject of no less than two plays in London, before Auber's *La Muette de Portici* was sung in London in 1829 and provided the largest repertoire of drawing room numbers. Felicia Hemans, known today by one line of her most famous poem, *The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck,* wrote a play, *The Vespers of Palermo,* which was produced in Edinburgh in 1824, with the surprising assistance of Sir Walter Scott, who liked the ageing blue-stocking. Significantly, the subject matter of all these works was tyranny and revolt against tyranny, – family, clerical, sexual and political.

After her unexpected success with *Frankenstein,* Mary Shelley decided to write her next novel about an historical Italian. The Shelley's crossed the Mont Cenis pass into Italy on 30 March 1818. Mary was 21, already something of a celebrity. As they intended to stay in Italy for some time they embarked on a reading programme which would leave most contemporary students gasping. To obtain command of the language, Mary started to read Richardson's *Pamela* in an Italian translation, following it by *Clarissa.* Those who have read both these prolix novels in English will recognise the Himalayan task. In addition, in the course of the year, she polished off Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso,* Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata,* Alfieri's tragedies and autobiography, Dante's *Inferno,* the tragedies of Monti, not to mention *Tristram Shandy,* Gibbon's *Decline & Fall,* 2 volumes of Montaigne, Pope's Homer, the plays of Moliere, Corneille and Ben Johnson and the Aeneid in Latin. In 1819 she had polished off *The Decameron,* the rest of the *Divine Comedy,* Sismondi's *Italian Republics* as well as a punishing programme of other English and European classics. Sismondi introduced her to Niccolo Tegrini's *Life of Castruccio Castracano,* written in 1496, the mine from which she was to hew *Valperga.*[20]

Castruccio Castracano was a Lucchese, one of the ambitious and unprincipled adventurers who kept the Guelph-Ghibelline wars alive in the 14th century. The novel traces the rise of a warlord, a

20. Mery Shelley, *Journals, 1814–1844,* ed. P.R. Freldman & D. Scott-Kilvert, vol. i, pp. 266, 347.

consummate field commander, as unprincipled as he was skilful, who brought down the Bavarian elector, Lewis, to collect his iron crown from Milan and have himself crowned in the Vatican, despite Papal anathemas, by schismatic bishops. Castracano's price for this bit of imperial meddling was to be the tyranny of Tuscany but in 1328 he died suddenly, and Florence was saved.

Mary Shelley's Castruccio rejects the prospect of happiness as lord of Valperga, in consort with the suggestively named Euthanasia, for the lure of power. His character so deteriorates as the novel develops that even the besotted Euthanasia renounces him and joins in a conspiracy to remove him. The plot is betrayed, Euthanasia is exiled and drowns. No happy ending here. Mary had suffered too much in the writing of it, for she had lost everything but her one surviving son. Today it is forgotten, though Muriel Spark compares *Valperga* favourably with George Eliot's *Romola*.[21]

Valperga, however, though it has many of the features of a Radcliffean Gothic novel, recognises for the first time that Italy is peopled by Italians who have an agenda for their own future. Euthanasia's "young thoughts darted into futurity, to the hopes of freedom for Italy, of revived learning and the right of peace for all the world".[22] On another occasion, one of her characters despises the Florentines, whose "watchword is that echo of fools and laughing stock of the wise – liberty".[23] Liberty, freedom. The Radcliffean image that John Keats characterised as one of caverns, grottos, waterfalls, woods, immense rocks, tremendous sounds and solitude, a caricature of "Italia", began to give way to one of Italy, a land reduced to servitude by its fatal gift of beauty, unable to "awe the robbers back, who press / To shed (her) blood, and drink the tears of (her) distress".[24] From the onset of the dark ages Italy had been trampled over by foreigners, Germans, Normans, Angevins, French and Spaniards, its republics had fallen into the hands of despots, doges, popes and Bourbons. Now the Germans, or rather Metternich's Austrians, were back in strength. Austrians held the Milanese and Veneto, Habsburg princes ruled Tuscany and Parma,

21. M. Spark, *Mary Shelley*, London 1993, p. 150.
22. *Valperga*, London 1823, vol. 1, p. 30.
23. *Ibid.* vol. 1, p. 119.
24. Preface to Canto IV.

the republic of Genoa was in the iron grip of the King of Sardinia, the Bourbons of Naples had seen off William Bentinck with his talk of constitutions and Rome, and Rome, the Niobe of Nations, was still ruled by an ancient hierarch.

Canto iv of Childe Harold which appeared in 1818 had started the change. "My dear Hobhouse", Byron wrote on 2 January in that year, "that man must be wilfully blind or ignorantly heedless, who is not struck with the extraordinary capacity of this people, . . . the facility of their acquisitions, the fire of their genius, their sense of beauty, and amidst all the disadvantages of repeated revolutions, the desolation of battles and the despair of ages, their still unquenched "longing after immortality" – the immortality of independence".[25]

The diapason of that rolling sentence echoed Lord William Bentinck's clarion call to the Sicilians: "Warriors of Italy, you are asked to assert your rights and your liberty".[26] It recalled Wordworth's unforgetable lament on the extinction of the Venetian republic (1802) and it drowned Shelley's complaint to Thomas Love Peacock, eight months later, of the avarice, cowardice, superstition, ignorance, passionless of the Italians which he observed after a few days in the city from which Byron had launched his letter to Hobhouse.[27] Could the image of "Italia" – the land of art – yield to that of Italy – a united nation? But in 1820, a revolution in Naples frightened King Ferdinand into giving the Neapolitans the liberal constitution of Spain which had enjoyed a brief life in 1812. Shelley, writing as if from Pompeii, the "city disinterred", symbol of resurrection, hailed this "youngest giant birth, . . . arrayed in Wisdom's mail" waving its lightning lance in mirth. "Nor let thy high heart fail, / Though from their hundred gates the leagued Oppressors / With hurried legions move".[28]

Alas the warning was in vain. The high heart of the young giant broke in terror before the disciplined legions of Austria, sent in by the Holy Alliance as a peace-keeping, revolution-busting force. In

25. To John Hamilton Reynolds, Teignmouth, 14 March 1818, *Letters*, ed. S. Colvin, London 1928, p. 83. *Childe Harold*, canto iv stanza 42.
26. Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, xxix, p. 728, quoted by Brand, p. 197.
27. October 1818, quoted by Brand, p. 200.
28. P.B. Shelley, *Ode to Naples*, strophe II, 1820.

Turin, the same constitution, introduced by the regent Carlo Alberto, was snuffed out by Austrian mercenaries on the field of Novara. Lord John Russell who had, in 1819, deplored the fact that the country of Virgil and Tasso should be whipped into obedience by Bohemian corporals, now saw those whips turned to scorpions.[29] It did look as if "Italia, the Italy of the Shelleys, could never sustain the Italy of Byron and Bentinck. It was always going to be let down by the innate defects of meridional people, dedicated to dolce far niente when not dishonest, craven and superstitious, a subject people, very far from ready for constitutional rule, Europe's Indians. For in the far away sub-continent, British officials, who expected India one day to replace the United States as the jewel of the imperial crown, believed that its inhabitants had been too deboshed by centuries of despotism and oppression by Brahmanism, to have the stamina or character for representational government.[30]

The growing evangelical belief that calamity occurred to those who deserved it, and that poverty was a punishment for immorality or fecklessness, was quick to attribute the defeat of constitutional zealots by advanced and disciplined armies as the deserved chastisement of an unworthy people. Mary Shelley had no doubts. Italy's oppression was all her own, partly for the sins of past generations, partly for follies of their own. She doubted whether the Italians could profit by independence, even if they won it, "being too demoralised and degenerate after years of petty tyranny".[31] There were Italians who thought so too. For Massimo d'Azeglio, future prime minister of the kingdom of Sardinia, the worst of Italy's enemies were not Teutons but Italians. "The Italians have wanted to make a new Italy, but themselves remain the old Italians, with all the worthlessness and moral poverty that have been their undoing for ages past".[32]

29. Letter to Lord Holland on Foreign Policy, 1819, quoted by Brand, p. 201.
30. Macaulay's word to describe Papal government, in his letter to Lord Lansdowne, see note 5 above.
31. *Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842 and 1843*, London, 2 vols, 1844, vol. 2, pp. 260–61. See also J. Pemble: *The Mediterranean Passion: Victorians & Edwardians in the South*, Oxford 1987, p. 135. Mary Shelley had, however, revised her poor opinion of Italian manners during this return visit after 20 years. *Rambles*, ii, p. 106.
32. *I Mei Ricordi*, (Things I Remember), trans. E.R. Vincent, Oxford, 1966, author's preface, p. xv.

And these failures coincided with an unexpected shift of interest in Britain away from Italy in the late thirties. The young queen had married a German prince; Coleridge, who had helped to popularise Cary's version of *La Divina Commedia* among his countrymen, had lost himself in the bye-ways of German philosophy, on which he now gave his weekly lectures, his early enthusiasm for Dante overtaken by the discovery of Schiller and Goethe. Byron and Shelley, and Felicia Hemans, were dead; Leigh Hunt was in his anecdotage, writing his autobiography. Bulwer Lytton had blazed a Teutonic trail with his *Pilgrims of the Rhine* (1833) though he still had *The Last Days of Pompeii* and *Zanoni* to write. Even Mary Shelley was rambling round Germany. The Rhine, Pumpernickel and the German Spas began to prove as exciting (and cleaner) to tourists than the Tiber, the Papal States and Bagni di Lucca. Germany was every bit as much a patchwork of ancient signorie as Italy, and each had its history too. Moreover the Germans were a northern people whom, the latter-day prophets believed, God had designated to rule the world. You could not say of Germany, though Thackeray tried, what Elizabeth Barrett Browning said of Italy, that "the roots of thought here ... seem dead in the ground. It is as well that they have great memories – nothing else lives".[33] It was fortunate that she consented to live in Italy with Robert. The thought of Bishop Wulfram ordering his Tomb in St Adalbert's Church, and the interior monologues of Eleazar of Worms, reminds of what we could have lost.[34] *Paracelsus*, a.k.a. Theophrastus Philip Aurelius Bompast von Horenheim, was warning enough.

Yet, as Leigh Hunt admitted, "we have the best part of Italy in books, and this we can enjoy in England". The Italophiles had been too cerebral. Despite the presence of 200 English families in Florence, Tuscan censorship and English indifference defeated his dream of producing a digest of the best English periodicals.[35] Italy had suddenly gone off the intellectual boil and the British cultural eye was shifting to northern Europe. From 1837 there was only one

33. *The Letters of E.B. Browning*, ed. Kenyon, vol. 1, p. 310, quoted by Pemble, p. 229.
34. Eleazer of Worms, 1165–1238, Jewish mystic and pietist born at Mainz, who exposed the Kabbalah, the esoteric manner of theosophical contemplation, to non-Jewish readers. G. Scholem, *Ursprung und Anfange der Kabbalah*, Cologne 1962.
35. J. Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography*, Oxford, World's Classics ed., 1928, pp. 448–49.

voice in England which ceaselessly tried to draw them back to political present of Italy. Giuseppe Mazzini, as a boy in Genoa, had read every volume by Walter Scott, and copied out poems by Milton, Pope and Shelley. Burns and Wordsworth he saw as liberating influences, unshackling the mind from the tyranny of classicism. Byron and Foscolo were the angel voices of a Young Italy. He was shocked on arrival in London to find that the common image of his homeland was still that of Mrs Radcliffe and of his countrymen that of Casanova.[36] The image of "Italia" had hardly changed.

Taken up by the Carlyles, retained to choose Italian books for the new London Library which Carlyle and Dickens had just started and to which he could never afford to belong, Mazzini kept the cause alive in London. Leigh Hunt, faithful to Byron, was still ready to profess that "Italy is a wonderful nation, always at the head of the world in some respect, great or small, and equally full of life. Division among its children is its bane; and Mazzini's was the best note that has been struck in its favour in modern times".[37]

In 1836 that future paladin of Italian freedom, Garibaldi,[38] wrote to Mazzini from Brazil, suggesting he set up a government in exile and gave him letters of marque to operate two privateers from Rio de Janeiro to prey on Austrian and Sardinian vessels in South American waters. [Some 35 Sardinian and 14 Austrian ships called at Rio de Janeiro every year.35] Soon three vessels, *Mazzini, Giovine Italia* and *Giovine Europa* were flying the Italian tricolore as they cruised in international waters. In 1834, Camillo Cavour was learning to appreciate real liberty in London. When the triumvirate emerged from the shadows to lead their various bids for Italian liberty, they were able to pluck at that sympathetic chord, struck by Bentinck, Byron, the Shelleys, Lytton, and, yes, even Felicia Hemans, in the years after Waterloo.

36. D. Mack Smith, *Mazzini*, Newhaven 1994, pp. 3, 25.
37. *Autobiography*, p. 474.
38. J. Ridley, *Garibaldi*, London 1994, p. 45.

Britain and the Italian Risorgimento

Denis Mack Smith

Towards the end of his life, Gladstone recalled the risorgimento as "among the greatest marvels of our time".[1] The evangelical leader, Lord Shaftesbury, had a strong anti-papalist motive for thinking it "the most wonderful, the most honourable and the most unexpected manifestation of courage, virtue and self-control the world has ever seen".[2] Other contemporaries however, deplored it. Many Catholics continued to believe that the Pope's temporal power as sovereign of Rome was necessary for their spiritual welfare and were appalled to see him dethroned by the armed forces of anticlericalism. Queen Victoria and Disraeli had different but serious doubts about a united Italy, and Lord Acton called the risorgimento a triumph of unscrupulous statesmanship which had tainted a noble idea by resort to illiberal means.

Notwithstanding these political differences, Italy was a country of predilection for the British political class and electorate, most of whom had an education that was weighted heavily towards the history and literature of ancient Rome. Nor was this interest merely in the past as it had been for an earlier generation who travelled on the Grand Tour. Shelley, Byron and Keats were far more familiar

1. W.E. Gladstone, *Gleanings of Past Years 1851–1877*, London, 1879, 4/195.
2. *Cavour e L'Inghilterra: Carteggio con V.E. d'Azeglio, Bologna*, 1933, 3/123 (12 Sept. 1860).

with the Italian language and literature than with French or German. Among other writers and artists who welcomed the new renaissance of Italy were Dickens, Tennyson, Wordsworth, Landor, Clough, Thackeray, J.S. Mill, Samuel Rogers, George Eliot, Meredith, the Brownings, Swinburne, Carlyle, Harriet Martineau, Turner, Whistler, Samuel Smiles, Leigh Hunt, Froude, Bulwer Lytton – some of whom contributed money to help Garibaldi and sat on Mazzini's committees. The Italian patriotic movement gained from this, but even more useful was the important fact that politicians in London knew much more about Italy than about Germany or the United States. No other issue in foreign policy attracted so much sympathy as the "Italian question".

Charles James Fox, Lord Holland, and Earl Grey of the Reform Bill spoke Italian and wrote it passably. So, later, did a succession of prime ministers in office for over thirty years of Queen Victoria's reign, and this was another remarkable fact that was not without importance in politics.

Much of this sympathy was disinterested and came from a genuine affection for things Italian. But official policy must be governed by national interest, and Britain's bias in favour of liberty and constitutional reform for other countries was not entirely unselfish. Self-interest as well as idealism explains her readiness to back national independence in Greece, Belgium, Portugal and the South American republics. At first there was not much advocacy of Italian political unification, and this is not surprising since before the 1830s almost no Italians thought unification possible or even desirable. The Italian language was unknown to the vast majority of them. Loyalties inside Italy were to each region rather than to any notional nation, and every outside observer could see that Mazzini's patriotic insurrections had the support of only a few. Count Cavour, too, who as chief minister of Piedmont after 1852 was the foremost politician in the Italian peninsula, wrote as late as 1856 that the prospect of unification was nonsensical[3], and his authoritative predecessor Cesare Balbo called it a mad idea of "schoolboys, fifth-rate poets and stump orators".[4] But an increasing number of politicians in London, as well as advocating internal

3. *Ibid.* 1/463 (12 April 1856).

4. C. Balbo, *Delle Speranze d'Italia*, Capolago, 1844, 21.

constitutional freedoms inside Italy, had pragmatic reasons for favouring something that was as important, namely the independence of this country from French and Austrian armies of occupation. As for territorial unification, only in the 1850s when more Italians began to turn towards this apparently remote possibility did such a revolutionary objective find many supporters in England.

One primary consideration in London was the paramount need to avoid another European war such as had ravaged the continent in the time of the first Napoleon and created the most extensive tyranny experienced for centuries. Another consideration was the encouragement of timely political reforms so as to lessen the risk of violent revolution, because revolutions had incalculable results and carried the risk of leading to a war in which the rest of Europe might become involved. Only if the balance of strategic power was broken and peace endangered would more positive and active intervention seem desirable. Britain was singular in having nothing to gain from a European war and a great deal to lose, provided at least that a continental equilibrium of power continued to guarantee her security. Only when Italy presented a danger of revolution and war did explicit action become advisable so as to limit this risk; though, even then, official intervention rarely moved beyond the level of warnings and advice.

One basic premise of foreign policy was that Austria had been Britain's major ally in defeating Napoleon, and support for Austria seemed to be the only means of preventing either a revival of French imperialism or a Russian advance into the Balkans. This dual threat from France and Russia explains why the Austrian empire was allowed by the Congress of Vienna to remain in control of Lombardy and Venice.

Nevertheless one important point of difference remained between Austria and the British: Metternich believed that liberal reforms would encourage revolution, whereas Lord Palmerston assumed the opposite and even the conservative Castlereagh in 1815 had been anxious for the Austrians to adopt a more relaxed and liberal policy towards their Italian subjects.[5]

5. C.K. Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh 1815–1822*, London, 1925, 108.

Other differences of opinion existed inside Britain itself. Lord Bentinck, who became virtual governor of Sicily in 1811, gave this island an independent constitution, and then encouraged Tuscans, Genoese and Lombards to rebel against Napoleon so as to create a less divided Italy. Bentinck was ahead of his time in believing 'that the national will must sooner or later triumph' and then an Italian nation would become "a powerful barrier both against Austria and France".[6] Castlereagh, however, was a realist more interested in bolstering Austria than encouraging Italian liberation and nationality. Italy in 1815 was therefore allowed to remain divided into seven sovereign states with only minor territorial changes. But one future prime minister, Lord John Russell, agreed with Bentinck and protested at the time that the Treaty of Vienna was underwriting a restoration of reactionary governments without consideration of popular wishes, and he warned that this might harm British interests by acting as an incitement to revolution.[7] Nevertheless one substantial change was instigated by Britain in 1815 when she advocated the annexation to Piedmont of the Former republic of Genoa so as to create a strong buffer state between France and Austria; and at one point the tentative suggestion was made in London to include Lombardy in this enlarged subalpine kingdom. Some Italians remembered that, a century earlier, Britain had made possible the Piedmontese annexation of Sardinia which formally converted a minor duchy into a kingdom.[8] So began the process by which this north-western region of Italy emerged later in the 19th century as a nucleus of national unity.

Popular wishes inside Italy are not ascertainable. We know that many Genoese resented being transferred to an authoritarian regime in Piedmont and may among the educated classes of Milan resented being governed from Vienna. Yet in each region the bulk of rural society and often the city proletariat showed that, passively or actively, they preferred throne and altar to the small groups of

6. John Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck: the Making of a Liberal Imperialist*, London, 1974, 167.
7. Lord John Russell, *A Letter to the Rt. Hon. Lord Holland on Foreign Politics*, London, 1831 (written in 1819), iii–iv, 28.
8. *Camera dei Deputati: discussioni*, 20 July 1862, p. 3456 (Durando, the foreign minister); Nello Rosselli, *Saggi sul Risorgimento e Altri Scritti*, Turin, 1946, 29, 32.

intellectuals and dissidents who favoured independence and constitutional reform. Russell was nevertheless proved correct when local risings took place after 1820 and were put down by Austrian troops. Successive British governments were obliged to accept this repressive Austrian action, but did so only after protesting against interference in the internal affairs of independent states. After 1831 further gratuitous advice was sent from London to King Charles Albert of Piedmont to treat his political prisoners with greater leniency, though the advice was not accepted. An attempt was also made to encourage political reforms in Rome where the Pope's government was widely criticised as the most inefficient and corrupt in Europe: the message sent was that "governments are instituted for the benefit of nations, not nations for the benefit of governments".[9] But the suggestion that the papacy should introduce liberal constitutional changes was not received with enthusiasm at the Vatican.

Any move towards constitutional government received almost automatic support in England, not least because constitutional assemblies were likely to be a prophylactic against revolution. Independence from foreign intervention was also desirable, but was at first given a lower priority since, being an objective of Mazzini and the democrats, it carried the risk of war and revolution. Giuseppe Mazzini, the chief ideologue of Italian patriotism, was also a social revolutionary who challenged every vested interest in the Italian peninsula. According to Gioberti and Cavour, both of them prime ministers of Piedmont who ideally would have preferred an Italy free from foreign occupation, Mazzini was their most dangerous enemy, more dangerous indeed than any threat to Italian independence from France or Austria.[10] Despite a demand from Piedmont for his extradition to face a death sentence in Piedmont, Mazzini was allowed to live in England after 1837 and remained there for nearly all of his adult life, making it a base from which to organise a succession of abortive insurrections in every region of

9. Emilia Morelli, in *Relazioni tra Inghilterra e Toscana nel Risorgimento*, Lucca, 1953, 161–67.
10. *Gioberti-Massari Carteggio (1838–1852)*, ed. G. Balsamo-Crivelli, Turin, 1920, 273; *Cavour e l'Inghilterra*, 2.177; *Il Carteggio Cavour-Nigra dal 1858 al 1861*, Bologna, 1926, 1/55.

Italy. This republican revolutionary believed in Italian independence and unification, and did more than anyone to bring these goals to the attention of the outside world. But he caused dissention by his suspicion of constitutional and parliamentary government. Nor was this suspicion entirely without reason, because Italian parliaments represented a minuscule class of electors who had no interest in Italian unity and who, like Cavour himself, feared national independence if it meant revolution or a success for their democratic opponents.

Mazzini's views were at first written off as utopian but were given immense publicity in England by an event that took place in 1844. After discovering that his letters were being mysteriously opened, he received evidence from a friendly official that this was by order of Lord Aberdeen at the Foreign Office. Later it emerged from two parliamentary commissions of enquiry that this surveillance was at first carried out illegally without official warrant, and public opinion was further startled to discover that it had taken place at the request of Metternich in Vienna; also that the correspondence of some members of parliament and foreign ambassadors was being intercepted and read by the Foreign Office with no regard to parliamentary privilege or diplomatic immunity.

Aberdeen denied that any compromising information was passed to Austria, but this was untrue, and furthermore the Austrians informed the Pope and the King of Naples of what Aberdeen told them. Mazzini cannot have broken any British law because he was never prosecuted, but he assumed, probably wrongly, that information provided by the British government was later responsible for the execution of some of his friends in southern Italy.

It would be hard to overestimate the importance of this episode in drawing the Italian question to the notice of politicians and public opinion in Britain. Few people hitherto had heard of Mazzini, but parliamentary debates on the matter now took up as much as 559 columns of Hansard. According to Macaulay it was "utterly abhorrent to the public feeling" that the proud record of asylum for foreign exiles was being broken. The Solicitor General admitted that this prolonged parliamentary discussion was "one of the most disagreeable and painful he had ever heard within the walls of the

House", and Aberdeen deeply regretted what he had done, since "this Mazzini affair has been the most unpleasant in which I have ever been engaged".[11]

Previous governments in London had encouraged revolutions against Bonaparte when it suited British interests, but now the British seemed to be secretly backing the abuse of arbitrary power against people struggling for freedom. Several members of parliament came forward to testify their personal knowledge of Mazzini's "high intellect and pure and unspotted morality". When the Home Secretary, after confessing that he now heard of Mazzini's name for the first time, accused him without any evidence of being an assassin, Carlyle, whose political views were far removed from Mazzini's but who knew him well, wrote to the *Times* in his defence, saying that this lonely exile was "a man of genius and virtue, a man of sterling veracity, humanity and nobleness of mind".[12]

Palmerston and Russell were the two politicians who felt most strongly that European peace and quiet might be best served by radical change in the way Italy was governed. Palmerston was in office for over forty years, being foreign minister in 1846–1851 and prime minister for almost all the decisive decade 1855–1865; while Russell was prime minister for the years 1846–1852 and foreign minister from 1859 to 1865. Both continued to accept that British interests required a strong Austrian empire north of the Alps, but their support for Metternich weakened after 1846 when the Austrians, in breach of the Vienna settlement, annexed the free republic of Cracow and occupied the papal town of Ferrara. If this Austrian defiance of a European congress were condoned, Mazzini would be able to argue that the sanction of legitimism and treaty-rights could no longer be plausibly invoked as a safe guard of European peace against a democratic revolution. The conservative *Times*, very unusually, protested at Austria's 'outrageous policy' against Italian "independence and nationality".[13] With the Queen's consent a British fleet was therefore sent to Italy to encourage liberal reforms and avert further Austrian "aggression". Cobden, no revolutionary, made

11. *Hansard* vol. LXXV, columns 1274–275 (24 June 1844); *Ibid*. vol. LXXVII, col. 967 (21 Feb. 1845); *The Times*, 22 Aug. 1907.
12. *The Times*, 19 June 1844; *Hansard* vol. LXXIX, col. 206 (4 April 1845).
13. *The Times*, 12 Feb. and 13 July 1847.

a triumphal tour of the Italian peninsula in the Spring of 1847 and spoke publicly in favour of "nationality and union".[14] Lord Minto, a cabinet minister, was sent there in response to a personal appeal by Pope Pius IX and urged Italian governments to form a customs' union under British protection "so that Italy would become a great nation standing on its own feet".[15] Palmerston instructed Minto to encourage "national and unified sentiment",[16] and this official envoy was still in Italy when, responding to popular pressure, constitutions were granted in the next few weeks by the rulers of Naples, Tuscany and Piedmont.

In March 1848 the citizens of Milan drove out their Austrian garrison in a remarkable revolution, and Charles Albert declared war to assist them. He did so against British advice, but Palmerston, once war had begun, hoped that Metternich would take this chance to surrender Lombardy, and even hinted that England might join France against the Austrians if hostilities were allowed to develop into a general war.[17] Austria, he wrote, might well become a threat to European peace so long as her harsh and authoritarian policy encouraged revolution in Lombardy and Venice. Europe needed her as a Great Power but "Austria will be much better out of Italy than in it", and he was ready to offer mediation in the hope that Piedmont might annex not just Lombardy, but also Venice, Parma, Modena, perhaps even Bologna.[18] Disraeli took a different view and criticised 'the sentimental principle of nationality' which was leading England to interfere in matters that did not concern her. Gladstone was another who still could not welcome "the purely abstract idea of Italian nationality" or Charles Albert's act of "aggression". And the Prince Consort was now sufficiently alarmed to tell the Austrians in a private letter that he was on their side against the British prime minister and his "heartless, obstinate and revengeful" colleagues. The Queen and Prince Albert

14. Antonio Boselli, in *Il Risorgimento Italiano*, Turin, May 1914, 442.
15. Eugenio Artom, in *Atti del XXVII Congresso del Risorgimento*, Milan, 1948, 69.
16. *Gran Bretagna e Italia nei Documenti della Missione Minto*, ed. F. Curato, Rome, 1970, 1/128.
17. Nicomede Bianchi, *Storia Documentata della diplomazia Europea in Italia dall'Anno 1814 all'Anno 1861*, Turin, 1869, 5/406, 409; A.J.P. Taylor, *The Italian Problem in European Diplomacy*, 1847–1849, Manchester, 1934, 64.
18. *Gran Bretagna e . . . la Missione Minto*, cit., 2/170–71; Evelyn Ashley, *The Life of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston*, London, 1876, 1/102.

delighted when Radetzky defeated the Piedmontese at Custoza, which was a proper punishment for their "most unjust and unscrupulous attack on Austria".[19]

Towards the end of 1848, after Pius IX was turned out of Rome by another revolution, a Roman republic was set up, and soon afterwards four armies from France, Austria, Naples and Spain were sent to crush its volunteer defence force. In 1849 the desperate resistance of the Roman republic under Garibaldi and Mazzini was watched with enthusiasm and earned the reluctant admiration of even the *Times*.[20] After French troops restored papal authority, the conviction was reinforced that Italy would remain a danger so long as French soldiers stayed in Rome to guard the Pope and while Austrian troops still held Lombardy. Palmerston deeply regretted the presence of the French in Rome and warned Pius that his temporal power – "the worst and most anomalous government in the civilised world", or "the real plague-spot of Italy" as it was called by the conservative Lord Derby – was doomed unless the papacy carried out promises of reform made in 1831 and 1847;[21] but to no avail. Apprehension was all the greater when, in December 1849, Louis Napoleon became president of France and two years later revived for himself his uncle's ominous title of emperor. By that time only in Piedmont did constitutional government survive in Italy, where Cavour tried to introduce some of the parliamentary practices he had studied in person at Westminster. Over the rest of Italy, British influence declined as autocratic governments recovered their former authority.

In 1851 another event had a striking impact on public opinion in Britain. Gladstone happened to be in Naples when one of his Italian friends was arbitrarily imprisoned by the Bourbon King Ferdinand II, and two pamphlets he then wrote about the horrifying state of Neapolitan justice and prisons rank among the finest polemical writing in the English language. The first pamphlet went through

19. *Hansard* vol. CI, col. 147 (Disraeli, 16 Aug. 1848); Gladstone, introduction to Luigi Carlo Farini, *The Roman State from 1815 to 1850*, Lodnon, 1851, 1/ix; Frank Eyck, *The Prince Consort*, London, 1959, 114-15, 118.

20. *The Quarterly Review*, June 1849, 238; *Ibid*. Sept. 1849, 598-99; *The Times*, 11 May and 5 July 1849.

21. *Hansard*, vol. CVI, col. 739 (22 June 1849); *Ibid*. vol. CLII, col. 45; Ashley, *Life of Palmerston*, 1/126–27.

fourteen editions and Palmerston sent copies to British embassies abroad for widespread circulation throughout Europe. It described the Bourbon government as being "an outrage upon religion, upon civilisation, upon humanity, and upon decency": its words about 'the negation of God erected into a system of government', a phrase Gladstone heard from a Neapolitan acquaintance, eventually entered the Oxford book of quotations. There is some irony in the fact that Lord Vernon wrote in similar vein about the prisons in the liberal Piedmontese Kingdom, but his report received no comparable publicity, a fact that may possibly have influenced the direction taken by the risorgimento. Gladstone, incidentally, was still a tory, which meant that no longer were whigs and radicals at Westminister the only advocates of radical political change in Italy.

No other British or Italian politician has ever known more than Gladstone about the culture and history of the other country, and this was another significant fact that influenced the course of events. Among prime ministers in Piedmont, only Massimo d'Azeglio knew as much about the rest of Italy. Gladstone not only spoke Italian with some fluency – as did Palmerston, Russell, Derby and Lord Malmesbury – but could write poems in Italian and translated portions of Dante, Manzoni and Farini. The books he took on his Italian travels included writings by Alfièri, Foscolo, Ariosto, Goldoni, Boccaccio and Rosmini. He had a detailed, first-hand knowledge of Sicily at a time when northern politicians never visited that island. In 1855 he even encouraged an act of piracy to smuggle Poerio and Settembrini out of their Neapolitan prison and, almost incredibly, obtained secret-service money from the British government to fit out a vessel for Garibaldi to effect their escape. The director of the British museum was one of those who intended to be part of this buccaneer expedition and obtained leave of absence for this purpose from the museum's trustees.[22] When the ship foundered off the coast at Yarmouth the enterprise came to nothing, but from now onwards Gladstone believed that Britain had a right to act by more "forcible intervention" in Italy.[23]

22. G.B. Henderson, *Crimean War Diplomacy and other Historical essays*, Glasgow, 1947, 239; *The Edinburgh Review*, April 1881, 491–93.

23. Derek Beales, *England and Italy 1859–1860*, London, 1961, 27 (Gladstone's letter to Lacaita, 25 Oct. 1856).

In 1856, when a peace congress met at Paris after the Crimean war, Lord Clarendon the foreign minister spoke against the presence of foreign armies in Italy and in favour of political reforms. This was the first time that such matters had been formally placed before the attention of a European congress, and it was done by someone who, like Gladstone and Cobden, was very far from being a radical revolutionary. After his speech had been incorporated in the protocols of the congress, Clarendon could claim to possess a formal endorsement in international law to act more positively on behalf of Italian patriotism. But Cavour failed to exploit this important fact. Misreading Clarendon's intention, the Piedmontese minister inexplicably convinced himself that the British were ready to fight against their ally Austria in order to win Lombardy for Piedmont. There was much good will in London, but such sympathy could only be dissipated by an attempt to drag England into a war where Piedmontese but not British interests were involved. When, too late, Cavour realised his mistake, he tried to recover lost ground by a further uncharacteristic error when he secretly intrigued with the tory opposition at Westminister to promote a vote of censure against Palmerston's government. Quite apart from the impropriety of this action, he quite failed to appreciate that the tories were stronger supporters of Austria than the whigs. His clumsy intervention effectively antagonised both political parties at a time when he urgently needed their help.

At the end of 1858 Cavour was incautious enough to inform one British diplomat[24] that he was still bent on provoking another European war against Austria for what he used to call the aggrandisement of Piedmont. Once again he failed to understand that British politicians, despite wanting Austria to withdraw from Italy, were absolutely opposed to using armed force except as a very last resort, especially in a war that France was likely to exploit for extending her northern frontier into Belgium, to the Rhine and to the Alps. Palmerston began to fear that the Piedmontese might end by forcing him into fighting on the Austrian side because, however much he sympathised with Italy, his overriding interest was to counter French aggressiveness and retain Austria as a

24. *The Times*, 25 Sept. 1883 (Lord Ampthill).

necessary factor in the equilibrium of Europe. As the British ambassador Lord Cowley commented, "I wish that I could believe that Sardinia had as much the real good of Italy at heart as she certainly has her own aggrandisement".[25]

Cavour was fortunate that neither the extent of his ambitions nor his choice of revolutionary means were fully appreciated in London. In April 1859 he secretly sent a large consignment of arms to assist a possible insurrection against Austria in the Balkans. In private he talked of 'setting fire to the four corners of the world' and of being ready to fight against Britain if necessary. He spoke of making a military alliance with Tsarist Russia for this purpose and also allying with the United States which – as he had fancifully planned some years earlier – might be used to threaten the British with the loss of Canada and the West Indies.[26] Luckily these extraordinary remarks were not known outside Turin, but in London Cavour's policy looked unrealistically provocative; apart from which it would "endanger the liberties of Piedmont, who might find too late that she had been no more than the pioneer and advanced guard of France, and that in grasping at the shadow of power she had sacrificed the substance of liberty".[27] Nor, when Cavour's desperate appeal for volunteers in Italy met a poor response, was it clear that the rest of Italy had much enthusiasm for the expansion of Piedmont. 'Surely twenty millions of human beings who considered themselves maltreated would furnish mote than a few thousand recruits', was Cowley's comment.[28]

By persistence and a good deal of luck, Cavour got his war in 1859, and a large French army won the two battles of Magenta and Solferino on his behalf. Although he strangely continued to believe that the tories in Britain were more likely than the whigs to endorse his warlike plans and might even want to participate in the fighting,[29]

25. Public Record Office (PRO), F.O. 519/225 (24 Jan. 1859).

26. Giuseppe Massari, *Diario dalle Cento Voci 1858–1860*, ed. Emilia Morelli, Rocca San Casciano, 1959, 140, 142, 147–79, 161; 17 Oct. 1859, Benzi to Daborminda, *Ministero degli Esteri: Affari Politici Vari 1815-61; Tutti gli Scritti di Camillo Cavour*, ed. C. Pischedda and G. Talamo, Turin 1976, 3/1150 (1 April 1848).

27. Lord Clarendon, in House of Lords debate, 18 April 1859, col. 1847.

28. 28 Mar. 1859, Cowley to Malmesbury, F.O. 519/9.

29. 20 July 1859, Hudson, *Russell Papers*, PRO 30/22/66.

he was unexpectedly helped when in June 1859 the tory government of Derby gave way to the more pro-Italian trio of Palmerston, Russell and Gladstone. The views of these three men were not identical. Russell, the foreign minister, hoped that Piedmont might now win Lombardy. Gladstone at least agreed in wanting a larger kingdom of northern Italy at the expense of Austria, but it should not be too large since that "might be prejudicial to the internal equilibrium of Italy itself over which the House of Savoy might seek to domineer". Much more positive and adventurous was the prime minister, Palmerston, who once again as in 1848 hoped that Piedmont might be able to acquire Venice, Parma, Modena, and possibly Tuscany.[30]

Such opinions had at first little practical relevance, because the main burden of the war had been carried by the French army and Napoleon III wanted only a loose federal union of Italian states, a federation of which both Austria and the Pope would be members. This was strongly opposed in London, because a clear majority of the other Italian states would be ranged against any extension of liberal constitutional principles. Palmerston helped to foil the project and continued to believe "that on general principles, the larger and stronger Piedmont could be made, the better it would be for the happiness of the people united to it and for the peace of Europe as depending on the tranquillity of Italy".[31] Gladstone more or less agreed and thought that, although the aggrandisement of Piedmont might hitherto have seemed dangerous, now it would avert something worse;[32] and this was a very substantial admission. The Queen demurred at the advice of her new ministers, upon which they threatened to resign and leave her with the difficult task of finding an alternative government. A brusque note from the palace explained with feigned regret that "the Queen wishes that she could join with Lord Palmerston in rejoicing at the unity of Italy".[33] but Russell impertinently pointed out that she held her own throne by virtue of a rebellion against the Stuarts in 1688, and the peoples

30. *Il Problema Veneto e l'Europa 1859–1866: Inghilterra*, Venice, 1966, ed. N. Blakiston, 2/12 (28 June 1859, Palmerston); *British Library Mss.* 44748, ff. 93–8 (Gladstone); Beales, cit. 94–7.

31. 18 August 1859, Palmerston to Russell, *Russell Papers*, 30/22/20.

32. 22 August 1859, *Russell Papers*, 30/22/19.

33. 3 Jan. 1860, *Royal Archives Windsor*, J. 32.25.

of Italy ought surely to be allowed a similar right to regulate their own internal affairs against foreign military occupation. Foreign occupation "for upwards of forty years has been the misfortune of Italy and the danger of Europe".[34] When the year 1860 opened, the *Times*, which so far had thought Italian unity "a crude and impractible abstraction without a particle of support from history or reason", accepted it as a possibility if it truly represented popular wishes and if it could be obtained as a clear manifestation of popular wishes. The prime minister and foreign minister even wondered about using the threat of a possible war against Austria to make her withdraw north of the Alps.[35] They must have been aware that such a course of action would hardly appeal to the rest of the cabinet. But in any case Cavour had other ideas, calculating that his best hope for further annexations in Italy lay not in British support but in a renewal of his alliance with France. For this purpose he secretly agreed to cede Savoy and Nice to Napoleon; and unfortunately the politicians in London already knew this before he promised them that he would under no circumstances contemplate any such thing.[36] His offer to surrender national territory was, as he admitted, unconstitutional. It was furthermore against international law since it meant breaking a provision in the treaty of 1815 which gave an international guarantee of permanent neutrality to parts of Savoy. He can have had no doubt that this extension of the French frontier to the Alps would antagonise the British. But he took another calculated risk in deciding that he had less to gain from Palmerston than from a belligerent and expansionist France.

By 1 May, Russell was hoping that Cavour would fall from power as being "too French and too tricky".[37] But one week later the whole situation changed dramatically when Garibaldi, furious at the cession to France of his birthplace in Nice, defied the Piedmontese minister and set out with a thousand volunteers to assist a popular revolution in Sicily against the government of the Neapolitan Bourbons. Until this moment, Russell's opinion was that the union of all Italy might

34. G. P. Gooch, *The Late Correspondence of Lord John Russell*, London, 1925, 2/254–55; *Foreign Office Confidential Print, 10 Sept. 1859*, 93 (16 Aug. 1859, Russell to Cowley).
35. *The Times*, 22 March 1859; *Ibid.* 8 October 1859; Gooch, 2/250; Ashley, 2/174–80.
36. 3 and 10 Feb. 1860, Hudson to Russell, F.O. 67/255.
37. 1 May 1860, Russell to Palmerston, *Palmerston Papers*.

"make a despotism instead of a free government, an unwieldy power instead of a compact one".[38] But recent events persuaded him not to discountenance an attempt to free Sicily from the cruel and dangerous authoritarianism of King Ferdinand.[39] What Garibaldi then did by his conquest of southern Italy was to show that Italian unification would not necessarily mean Cavour's subservience to French imperialism, nor would it mean another European war; it need not be a dynastic conquest by Piedmont, but might well be a spontaneous movement for self-determination and therefore much more acceptable to liberal, anti-French sentiment in England. While Cavour was now seen in London as unscrupulous and untrustworthy, Garibaldi was patently honest, a proclaimed enemy of Cavour and Napoleon, someone unique among politicians in being immune to the temptations of power or personal wealth, and who agreed with Mazzini in wanting the liberation of Italy from both France and Austria.

The enthusiasm in England for the filibustering venture of Garibaldi's famous thousand helped to win backing for Italy at this critical moment and became a significant fact in the final success of the risorgimento. G.M. Trevelyan later described its leader as having "the most romantic life that history records".[40] A.J. P. Taylor thought him "the most wholly admirable man in modern history".[41] As a result of his achievement he was given the unusual accolade of being made a freeman of the City of London at a time when politicians in Italy still considered him a dangerous radical and semi-outlaw.

Palmerston, Russell and Gladstone were all proud to invite this revolutionary general to lunch or dinner at a time when no minister in Italy could conceivably have thought of doing so. Money to help him arrived from Darwin, Florence Nightingale, the Duke of Wellington, Lady Byron, Lady Palmerston, Mrs. Gladstone and a host of others. A week after the expedition set sail, the British prime minister could say that there could now be no objection to the union of all Italy. Palmerston and Russell continued to believe that, because

38. 25 Aug. 1859, Russell to Corbett, *Russell Papers*, 30/22/109.
39. 11 Aug. 1859, Russell to Elliot, *ibid.* 30/22/111.
40. G.M. Trevelyan, *Garibaldi's Defence of the Roman Republic*, London, 1907, 23.
41. A. J. P. Taylor, *The Observer*, 17 Oct 1965; *The Listener*, 21 July 1977.

of the differences between north and south, Italy might be stronger and better governed as two separate states, but this was an opinion of Italians to accept or reject.[42]

Much had changed in the forty-five years since 1815. Italian patriotism had not been strong enough in 1815 to present a major problem for British foreign policy. After 1830, Mazzini had made it a problem, but one best put on one side so long as it posed a possible danger to European peace. By 1860, however, it could on the contrary be seen as a useful component of a European equilibrium and hence deserved every encouragement.

No Englishman sailed with Garibaldi's thousand though may defied British law and joined him a few weeks later. A British naval detachment happened to be ashore at Marsala when the expedition landed there, and this coincidence inadvertently gave the two unarmed transport vessels several hours to land their men before the Neapolitan ships off-shore dared to risk blowing them out of the water:[43] this episode reminded Garibaldi of how, when he commanded the Uruguayan fleet in 1842, a British naval squadron under Commodore Purvis had placed itself so as to prevent hostile fire by the Irish Admiral Brown who commanded the Argentine forces on his flagship the "General Belgrano".[44] Garibaldi's extraordinary attack on Palermo was then helped by other British naval officers and by the *Times'* correspondent who gave him information about the city's defences, and the British naval commander at Palermo made no secret of his sympathies when he formally protested at the Neapolitan bombardment of this city. More importantly, the British government refused a request to join the French in offering mediation, and then rejected another French suggestion for joint action to stop Garibaldi's landing on the mainland of Calabria. Minor assistance was also forthcoming from other British officials, including consuls in Eastern Sicily and naval ratings on leave who helped the invading force to build bridges and move artillery. When a victorious Garibaldi entered the town of

42. 17 May 1860, Palmerston to Russell, *Russell Papers*, 30/22/21; 23 July 1860, Russell to Elliot, F.O. 165/132.
43. 14 May 1860, Marryat to Admiral Fanshawe, F.O. 165/135.
44. Giuseppe Garibaldi, *Memorie* (Edizione Nazionale degli Scritti), Rocca San Casciano, 1932, 2/164–5.

Naples he was accompanied not only by the Cornishman Colonel Peard, who had been used to impersonate him during the advance, but by Palmerston's private secretary, as well as Edwin James, M.P. and the Public Orator of Cambridge University.

These were minor matters but they accurately reflect widespread enthusiasm in England and Scotland for the conquest of southern Italy. British policy opposed revolutions whenever they might create more difficulties than they solved, but this particular revolution appeared to have huge popular support and carried no threat to British interests or the balance of power. The proprietor of the *Times* wrote of Garibaldi that it was doubtful whether "in all history there has been such another instance of the right man in the right place".[45]

More substantial help was given a few weeks later in September 1860 when Cavour invaded the papal states, because this invasion diminished the fear of a Franco-Piedmontese alliance. France and other countries protested and withdrew their ambassadors form Turin, but Russell gave what Cavour called an "immense service" to Italy by publicly welcoming the success of this revolutionary action. When a new Kingdom of Italy was at last proclaimed to exist in 1861, Britain was the first to recognise it, followed with some reluctance by France. Even more remarkable, the hope was even expressed in London that the kingdom would be able by negotiation of purchase to acquire Venice and Rome in the course of 1861, so rounding off national unity. Various newspapers in England and Scotland even hoped that Garibaldi would finish the process by means of further revolutionary action.[46]

Cavour was the one Italian politician with the skill and experience to bring about this final success for Mazzini's dream, but his tragic death in June 1861 left Italy incomplete. In the last months of his life he also calculated once again that he had more to gain from French arms than pacifist British diplomacy, and possibly this gamble might have succeeded had he lived longer. He secretly hoped that, as in

45. *The History of the Times*, London, 1939, 2/291 (14 Sept. 1860, John Walter to Delane).

46. M.B. Urban, *British Opinion and Policy on the Unification of Italy 1856–1861*, Scottdale, 1938, 507–08; *Cavour e l'Inghilterra*, 3/131, 136, 188; *Further Correspondence Relating to the Affairs of Italy: December 1859 to June 1860*, London, 1861, 5–6 (1 Jan. 1860, Russell to Fane).

1859, he could precipitate another European war and a series of revolutions "from Dalmatia to the Baltic". This meant adopting much of Mazzini's policy, but it was something he now needed for what he called "reasons of internal policy": winning Venice by force of arms would "facilitate the fusion of northern with southern Italy" and perhaps be one step towards recovering for the "latin races" their former predominant position in the Mediterranean.[47] But in such a war he knew that the bulk of the fighting would again be left to the French, in return for which he was ready to incur British disapprobation by supporting Napoleon's extension of France's northern frontier. Again he prepared for hostilities by sending more cases of arms to assist a revolution in the Balkans, and when this was discovered he untruthfully pretended that the guns had been sent by Garibaldi – though they were clearly marked as coming from his own arsenal in Turin.

Spreading mischievous stories against Garibaldi was part of Cavour's policy because he needed to recapture the risorgimento from the radical democrats who momentarily challenged the hegemony of Piedmont, and British sympathy for this popular hero was something that he therefore needed to erode. In a moment of panic he talked of being ready to "exterminate to the last man" Garibaldi's volunteer army in Naples if it refused to submit.[48] Nor could he fully appreciate advice which came from Britain that the need for consensus required him "to treat Garibaldi as an ally and not as an enemy". Palmerston made the interesting suggestion that Garibaldi, who was a seaman before he became a soldier, be put in charge of the Italian fleet.[49] But Cavour stood firm against any concession to this popular hero except an offer of money that was rejected with disdain. As a loyal Piedmontese, Cavour also insisted that his own region of northern Italy must "annex" the rest of the peninsula – rather than accept Garibaldi's carefully- worded plebiscites in Sicily and Naples that voted to join a new Kingdom of Italy as equal partners. This was yet another calculated risk, which would please the Piedmontese even if it

47. 23 Aug. 1860, Abraham Tourte quoting Cavour, *Swiss Archives* Bern, E. 2300/1; Luigi Chiala, *La Politica Segreta di Napoleone III e di Cavour in Italia e in Ungheria*, Turin, 1895, 158; *Carteggi di Cavour: La Liberazione del Mezzogiorno*, Bologna, 1954, 5/516–20.
48. *La Liberazione del Mezzogiorno*, 3.64 (8 Oct. 1860, Cavour to Farini).
49. *Cavour e l'Inghilterra*, 3/159 (17 Nov. 1860).

offended other Italians and damaged British confidence in his good sense.

Not surprisingly there was much impatience in London as the fear of Cavour's secret belligerence was compounded by this uncompromising attitude to the man who had just conquered half of Italy for King Victor Emanuel. Queen Victoria's view was that "if we are a little determined with this really bad, unscrupulous Sardinian government and show them that we will not encourage or countenance further piratical and filibustering proceedings, they will desist, the queen doubts not".[50] Palmerston could nevertheless reply with confidence that a united Italy would now help to safeguard British interests and the peace of Europe: "the stronger that kingdom becomes, the better able it will be to resist political coercion". Though the British prime minister hoped that Rome would join the rest of Italy in the next few months, he also hoped that Florence not Rome would become the national capital since traditions inherited from the papal administration would otherwise be a corrupting influence and hard to eradicate. Presciently his foreign minister realised that "it will be difficult to amalgamate the southern Italians: the northerners must lead them and they may not like to be led".[51] Here was another problem that Cavour, and perhaps Cavour alone, might have been able to resolve once he realised that his dream of another war had to be postponed. But British hopes were dashed: the acquisition of Venice and Rome, like the pacification of the south, were left over for a future generation to achieve.

Britain never engaged in war to help the risorgimento, unlike Napoleon III and Bismarck who both used it effectively as an instrument in their own national policy. But the sympathy and influential support she contributed were necessary components in the way that events developed, and any advice given was never peremptory or intrusive. Cavour, like Crispi later, hoped for even more positive and practical help from the British and was resentful when it was not forthcoming. Yet Britain alone in Europe was never seriously regarded as a likely enemy of the new united Italy. Until

50. 11 Dec. 1860, Queen Victoria to Russell, *Russell Papers*, 30/22/14.

51. 10 Jan. 1861, Palmerston to Queen Victoria, *The Letters of queen Victoria 1837–1861*, ed. C.A. Benson and Viscount Esher, London, 1908, 3/545–46; 11 Oct. 1860, Russell to Hudson, *Russell Papers*, 30/22/109.

Mussolini arrived on the scene sixty years later, all Italian foreign ministers could take for granted that there existed a "special relationship" in the Mediterranean that enabled them under British naval protection to act as a Great Power on the mainland of Europe; a fact which enormously simplified the difficulties and dangers and expense of their foreign policy.

Further minor resentment in this later period was sometimes directed against British historians of the risorgimento. Trevelyan and Bolton King did more than any Italian writers to show the outside world that the making of a united Italy had been heroic, liberal and idealistic, but the Italian prime minister Luzzatti took offence and thought that British admiration fell short of what was required. Luzzatti wrote to the *Times* in 1911 to demand a public apology for a far from unsympathetic account in the Cambridge Modern History and for what he called "an anthology of malevolent lies" by Dr G.P. Gooch. An article in the authoritative *Corriere della Sera* was even headed "The University of Cambridge against Italy". When the next Italian premier was asked to open the archives to put the record straight, he felt it prudent to reply that the time had not yet come to let 'beautiful legends' be discredited by historical criticism.[52] Legends, it is true, may be sometimes useful in boosting national morale, but they can be dangerous as an instrument of national policy. Fascist historiography could sometimes get away with pretending that the British deserved punishment for having opposed the risorgimento for being a challenge to their imperial interests. Britain was even said by fascist historians to have cruelly persecuted Mazzini, even though England alone in Europe gave hospitality to this outlawed refugee. The British government was also said to have tried to sabotage Garibaldi's expedition to Sicily and then brought Cavour to an early grave by giving insufficient help to the more conservative patriots. Today, now that the archives are open, we are nearer the truth, and no one has lost by it.

52. *The Times*, 16 and 18 Nov. 1911; *Corriere della Sera*, 26 Oct. and 7 Nov. 1911; Giolitti in the Italian Senate: *discussioni* for 4 June 1912,

Ivanhoe
Dal Romanzo al Pasticcio

Abraham Borg

Ivanhoe è il romanzo scottiano per eccellenza e quello che ebbe maggior successo di pubblico in Italia nei primi decenni dell'Ottocento. Lecito dunque pensare che un lavoro così popolare, come altre opere dello Scott, potesse infiammare la fantasia e l'ingegno di artisti italiani fra cui svetta il nome di Gioacchino Rossini. Il binomio Rossini-Scott rivela degli interessanti parallelismi: tutti e due furono "autori" fecondissimi, e la loro carriera prese subito un ritmo frenetico; i loro lavori divennero così popolari da renderli ottimi profeti in patria, e la loro fama si estese all'estero con molte e fortunate presenze delle loro opere che suscitarono un enorme entusiasmo specialmente, come appena accennato, nella prima metà dell'Ottocento.

La precocità del genio rossiniano spiega il suo immediato successo come compositore di opere in un momento in cui il teatro musicale italiano attraversava una crisi dopo il ritiro o la morte degli ultimi grandi napoletani. In questo periodo il melodramma italiano fu quasi tutto rossiniano: in Mayr come in Donizetti, in Bellini come nel primo Verdi. Di stampo rossiniano pure erano le opere di quella miriade di autori minori, oggi quasi tutti relagati soltanto alla storia, con l'eccezione di quei pochi che, come Saverio Mecadante, si rivelarono compositori di notevole statura. L'influenza del

compositore pesarese è riscontrabile, almeno in parte, anche in Auber e Meyerbeer. All'estero, specialmente in Francia, Rossini ricevette delle accoglienze strepitose – notissimo il libretto di Eugène Scribe e Edmond Mazères per un vaudville che ebbe molto successo, *Rossini à Paris ou le grand diner*, nel quale venne ricordato e parodiato il grande banchetto che fu preparato in onore della venuta del musicita a Parigi.[1] Susseguentemente gli vennero offerti gli incarichi di *Directeur de la musique et de la scène du Théâtre Italien* (1824), e *Premier Compositeur du Roi* e *Inspecteur général du chant en France* (1826).[2]

La musica di Rossini cominciò ad essere eseguita in Francia intorno al 1813 e la sua prima opera a Parigi fu *L'italiana in Algeri* nel 1817. Nella seconda decade dell'Ottocento molti spartiti rossiniani furono pubblicati dagli editori parigini dando luogo ad una vera e propria "rossinimania" che non tardò a dividere l'opinione di uomini di cultura, compositori, poeti, letterati, pittori, e, ovviamente, critici musicali. Purtroppo accadeva spesso che questi editori sottoponessero i lavori del pesarese a tagli arbitrari ed alla introduzione di pezzi presi da altri musicisti deturpando il lavoro originale. A Rossini fu riservata un'ammirazione incondizionata da alcuni dei più grandi spiriti contemporanei – Stendhal, Goethe, Balzac, Delacroix, Shopenhauer, Adam, Auber e Leopardi, per fare qualche nome[3] – ma furono espresse anche delle riserve da parte di musicisti come Schumann, Wagner, Berlioz, ed altri che si accodarono a questa schiera, che furono molto critici dell'arte di Rossini e addirittura scortesi nei suoi confronti, giudicando la sua musica come l'espressione di uno spirito superficiale ed edonistico a cui mancava un senso drammatico e profondo, un Rossini insomma

1. R. Osborne, *Rossini*, London, 1986, p. 61: "The grandest event of his stay [in Paris] took place at the Restaurant du Veau Qui Tette on Sunday, 16 November [1823]. There were over 150 guests drawn from the cream of Parisian society. . . . It was, according to one newspaper, [*La Gazette de France*] 'a colossal picnic' dominated by all manner of visual, gastronomic, and musical manifestations of Rossiniana. The event was brilliantly mocked a fortnight later by a one-act vaudville performed at the Théâtre du Gymnase-Dramatique to a text by Scribe and Mazères."

2. A. Kendall, *Gioacchio Rossini, The Reluctant Hero*, London, 1992, p. 133.

3. Adolphe Adam considerava Rossini il "genio musicale più completo che sia mai esistito".

depositario di un'arte tutta genialità esuberante e senza controllo. Già dal dicembre del 1829, il *New Monthly Magazine*[4] pubblicava un lungo articolo, dove veniva presentato un giudizio sul suo stile musicale ma si faceva anche riferimento alla sua "indolence",[5] chiedendo fino a quando potesse durare la "Rossinomania" [sic].[6] Si tratta dello stereotipo che divenne corrente alla fine del secolo quando, dal vasto repertorio del musicista pesarese, rimasero soltanto *Il barbiere di Siviglia* e il *Giullaume Tell*. Giustizia venne poi fatta nel nostro secolo con una rivalutazione dell'opera rossiniana che ha rimosso i pregiudizi dell'estetica tardo-romantica e che ha portato ad un vero ed inarrestabile Rossini-rinascimento, come testimonia l'importanza che ha assunto il Rossini Opera Festival di Pesaro, con la fortunata ripresa di molte delle opere che erano finite nel dimenticatoio. Certamente Rossini non aiutò la sua causa presso i suoi denigratori quando cominciò ad autoriciclarsi, a riutilizzare brani musicali precedentemente composti per la stesura di nuove partiture che potevano sembrare soltanto uno sforzo al "taglia e incolla", atto soltanto alla realizzazione di *collages* di nuovi brani musicali ad altri già preesistenti per onorare commissioni incombenti. Ma era più che lecito che egli cercasse di sfruttare al meglio pezzi musicali che non aveva valorizzato abbastanza nei lavori precedenti. In questo filone di "semicentoni" si collocano alcune delle sue opere più interessanti: *Elisabetta Regina d'Inghilterra* (1815), *La gazzetta* (1816), *Eduardo e Cristina* (1819), *Adina* (1826) e *Le comte Ory* (1828). Dei veri

4. *New Monthly Magazine*, n. 108, dicembre 1829. L'articolo si estese fino ai numeri 109 e 110 di gennaio e febbraio del 1830.

5. A questa critica rispose l'Abate Carlo Varese, imitatore dello Scott, nella sua premessa al romanzo *Preziosa di Sanluri*, "Di Rossini e di W. Scott, messi a confronto come genii d'indole identica e del romanzo in generale", Milano, 1832, pp. 4–6, indicando lo scozzese l'equivalente del pesarese musicista, due grandi, somiglianti in pregi e difetti.

6. A. Kendall, *Gioacchino Rossini*, *op. cit.*, pp. 135–136: ". . . not everyone greeted the work with such rapture. Berlioz . . . laid fairly and squarely at Rossini's door the responsibility for first having introduced noisy orchestration into France. . . . Writing in his *Memoires* of this period (1827), Berlioz accused Rossini of melodic cynicism, and contempt for dramatic expression and good sense, which, together with endless repetition of a single form of cadence, the eternal crescendo (which he found puerile), and the use of the bass drum irritated him so much. . . . He maintained that on more than one occasion he had contemplated blowing up the Théâtre-Italien."

e propri centoni o *pasticci* sono invece le due opere che possiamo chiamare scottiane, *Ivanhoè* (1826) e *Robert Bruce* (1846), dove dei brani mutuati da vecchie opere rossiniane vennero adattati a nuovi libretti, tutti e due in lingua francese in questo caso.

Scott era lo scrittore più stimato del momento ed era particolarmente amato dai francesi fin dalla traduzione in francese del *Guy Mannering* nel 1816. Nel giro di pochissimi anni la sua fama era diventata tale che veniva considerato addirittura l'alfiere del romanticismo e molti dei suoi romanzi furono tradotti e presentati in forma drammatica nei migliori teatri francesi. La sua popolarità era tale che il *Journal des débats* dell'8 maggio 1820 sentenziò: "Walter Scott est décidément l'auteur à la mode". In lui veniva ammirata la sua capacità pittorica: Balzac trovava che "il primo paesaggio in *Ivanhoe* indicasse un talento per la pittura";[7] per Saint-Beuve, collega di Hugo, Scott era "il pittore immortale";[8] e Dumas affermò che "Scott dipinse luoghi, personaggi, usanze e comportamenti sociali".[9] È lecito dunque aspettare che questa "Scottmania" dovesse invadere anche il campo della pittura tanto che troviamo la prima riferenza allo scrittore scozzese negli annotamenti di Delacroix già nel 1823. Allora il pittore francese aveva fatto il suo primo dipinto, un

> sujet tiré d'*Ivanhoé*, roman de Walter-Scott. Ivanhoé blessé et malade se fait rendre compte par la jeune juive de l'attaque que l'on fait du château ou il est renfermé.

Delacroix continuò a dipingere soggetti da Scott e fra il 1846 e il 1860 dipinse almeno quattro quadri dall'*Ivanhoe*. Bellissime sono le litografie di Francesco Hayez stampati a Milano nella Litografia Vassalli nel 1828.

Rossini venne a contatto con un lavoro di Scott nel 1819 quando si trovava a Napoli per un nuovo lavoro da rappresentarsi al San Carlo di Napoli. Pare che il suggerimento di musicare una traduzione francese del poemetto *The Lady of the Lake* (1810) gli arrivasse da un giovane musicista francese, Desiré-Alexandre Batton (1798–1855),

7. Lettera a Mme Hanska, 20–22 gennaio 1838.
8. Il necrologio di Scott, *Le Globe*, 27 settembre 1832.
9. *Souvenirs de 1830 à 1842, viii.*

allievo di Cherubini e vincitore del Prix de Rome, nonché grande ammiratore del pesarese.[10] I romanzi dello Scott, ambientati nelle fosche lande nordiche, in un determinato periodo storico, spesso in età medievale, e in un'atmosfera che sta fra l'epico e il fiabesco, esercitavano un indubbio fascino perché introducevano il lettore in un ambito protoromantico. Questo nuovo genere letterario trovava il suo serbatoio inesauribile di trame nella Storia, sostituendo le mitologie e gli episodi biblici o dalla classicità greco-romana con storie più vicine ai momenti salienti della storia moderna, con l'occhio rivolto anche al mondo cavalleresco medievale. Sono storie che propongono

> le ricostruzioni ambientali di un passato che acquista pure una sua esoticità "temporale", da distanza; il gusto antiquariale;... l'area più fertile di questo nuovo genere, la novella e il romanzo storico, è l'Inghilterra, ... i "gotici", Byron, Walter Scott, in modi diversi ma complimentari, si offrono come modelli europei di una nuova poetica e di una nuova sensibilità.[11]

Dalla letteratura e la pittura questo mondo stava per passare alla musica. *La donna del lago* divenne così la ventinovesima opera composta da Rossini, e quella che introdusse Walter Scott nel teatro musicale italiano ed europeo. Rossini, come si vedrà, diede l'avvio alla Scott-mania nel melodramma ma lui ritornò ai romanzi dello scozzese soltanto per creare i due *pasticci* appena citati. Il libretto de *La donna del lago* fu affidato a Tottola che ebbe il buon senso di pubblicare una prefazione nella quale auspicava che lo Scott avrebbe preso di buon grado i tagli e cambiamenti fatti nei confronti dell'originale, un'indubbia attestazione della notorietà di cui Scott godeva anche in Italia. La prima de *La donna del lago* al San Carlo di Napoli il 24 settembre 1819 fu quasi un fiasco ma le recite successive sancirono il suo trionfo e la sua rapida diffusione in Italia ed in Europa dove, a cinque anni dalla prima, venne rappresentata a Dresda, Monaco, Lisbona, Vienna, Malta, Budapest, Barcellona, San Pietroburgo, Parigi, Graz, Londra ed Amsterdam.[12] A proposito de

10. A. Kendall, *Gioacchino Rossini, op. cit.*, p. 93.
11. F. Portinari, *Pari siamo! Io la lingua, egli ha il pugnale*, EDT/Musica, Torino, 1981, p. 92.
12. C. Osborne, *The Bel Canto Operas*, London, 1994, p. 94.

La donna del lago esiste una preziosa testimonianza di Giacomo Leopardi in una sua lettera del 22 gennaio 1823 al fratello Carlo:

> Abbiamo in [al Teatro] Argentina, *La donna del lago*, la qual musica eseguita da voci sorprendenti è cosa stupenda e potrei piangere anch'io, se il dono delle lacrime non mi fosse stato sospeso, giacché m'avvedo pure di non averlo perduto affatto. Bensì è intollerabile e mortale la lunghezza dello spettacolo, che dura sei ore, e qui non s'usa d'uscire dal palco proprio".[13]

Lo "scottismo" fece presto a prendere il volo. Da quel momento i lavori dello Scott, nonché le loro imitazioni, divennero l'ispirazione per moltissime opere tanto che nel 1840 si potevano contare più di venticinque melodrammi lirici scottiani musicati dai vari Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Pacini, Coccia, Pavesi, Mazzucato, Lucilla, Pisani ed altri, ed opere di musicisti tedeschi, francesi ed inglesi come Flotow, Marschner, Nicolai, Bizet, Auber, Adam e Bishop.[14] È doveroso qui aggiungere che fra questa nutrita schiera si trovano anche due musicisti maltesi, Alessandro Curmi[15] e Francesco

13. G. Leopardi, *Lettere*, F. Flora (ed.), Milano, 1949, p. 393.
14. Un'indicazione della popolarità di Scott in Italia, specialmente nell'Ottocento, viene dal considerevole numero di libretti che furono ricavati dai suoi romanzi. Andrea Leone Tottola, Gaetano Barbieri, Domenico Gilardoni, Gaetano Rossi, Gerolamo Maria Marini, Carlo Pepoli, Salvatore Cammarano, Felice Romani, Francesco Maria Piave, per citare alcuni dei librettisti più noti. I musicisti che furono presi dalla Scott-mania includono alcuni la cui stella si spense in breve tempo. Dunque accanto a Gioacchino Rossini con *La donna del lago* (1819), *Ivanhoè* (1826), e *Robert Bruce* (1846), Vincenzo Bellini, *Il pirata* (1827) e *I puritani di Scozia* (1835), e Gaetano Donizetti, *Elisabetta al castello di Kenilworth* (1829) e *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835), troviamo Giovanni Pacini con *Wallace, l'eroe scozzese* (1820), *It talismano* ossia *La terza crociata in Palestina* (1829), *Il connestabile di Chester* ovvero *I fidanzati* (1829), *Ivanhoè* (1832), *Allen Cameron* (1848) ricavato, quest'ultimo, da Piave addirittura da un presunto inedito scottiano, *Malvina di Scozia*, su libretto di Cammarano e *Maria, Regina d'Inghilterra*, Carlo Coccia, *Edoardo in Iscozia* e *Maria Stuarda*, Stefano Pavesi, *La dama bianca d'Avenello* (1829), Alberto Mazzucato, *La fidanzata di Lammermoor* (1834), Domenico Lucilla, *La bella fanciulla di Perth* (1877), Federico Ricci, *Le prigioni di Edimburgo* (1838), Otto Nicolai, *Il Templario* (1840), Bartolomeo Pisani, *Rebecca* (1865) su libretto di Piave, Pietro Tonassi e Pietro Callavo, *Il castello di Woodstock* (1839), G. Winter, *Matilde di Scozia* (1852), Achille Peri, *I fidanzati* (1856), Geremia Piazzano, *Carlo il temerario* (1865), e Michele Carafa, *Le nozze di Lammermoor*(1829).
15. Alessandro Curmi nacque a Valletta nel 1801 e morì a Napoli nel 1857. Iniziò i

Schira,[16] che composero rispettivamente *Rob Roy* (1832) e *Kenilworth* (1848). Di tutte queste opere quella che riscosse il maggior successo fu il capolavoro donizettiano *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835), basata su *The Bride of Lammermoor*. Come osserva molto bene Folco Portinari, in una cultura come quella italiana del primo Ottocento dove mancava il romanzo storico, questa mancanza venne sopperita dal melodramma e dal libretto per musica.[17]

È interessante notare che i romanzi e la biografia di Scott rivelano che lui aveva una predilezione per la letteratura e la cultura italiana. Questa ammirazione si nutriva delle traduzioni dell'*Orlando Furioso* e della *Gerusalemme Liberata* che lo affascinavano per il loro contenuto epico-cavalleresco e che lo convinsero che la letteratura italiana "contained a fund of romantic lore".[18] Questo lo indusse a prendere lezioni d'italiano a scuola dove mostrò un grande interesse per "Dante, Boiardo, Pulci and other eminent Italian authors".[19] Notevole

suoi studi a Malta e poi a Napoli dove esordì con l'opera *Gustavo d'Orxa* nel 1827 su testo di Domenico Gilardoni. Tre anni dopo presentò l'*Aristodemo* al Teatro Pergola di Firenze. Le sue peregrinazioni lo riportarono a Malta dove, seguendo la voga del tempo, compose e fece rappresentare il *Rob Roy* al teatro Manoel nel 1832. Sempre nello stesso teatro andò in scena nel 1843 *Il proscritto di Messina*. Tornò al San Carlo di Napoli con l'opera *Elodia d'Herstall* nel 1842. Recatosi a Londra presentò tre opere al Royal Opera House a Covent Garden – *La Rosière* (1844), *La reine de fate* (1844), e *Lodoiska* (1845). A Parigi compose una *Suite* per orchestra, *La rivoluzione*, che fu presentata al *Théâtre des Italiens* nel 1849. Ritornò a Malta verso il 1853 ma partì alla volta di Napoli nel 1857 ed ivi morì nell'aprile di quell'anno.

16. Francesco Schira (Valletta, 21 agosto 1809 – Londra, 15 ottobre 1883), studiò composizione al Conservatorio di Milano e esordì alla Scala nel 1832 con il melodramma *Elena e Malvina* su testo di Felice Romani. Si trasferì in Portogallo e venne nominato Maestro direttore al Teatro San Carlo di Lisbona dove rimase per circa sei anni. Qui compose e rappresentò le opere *Il trionfo della musica* (1835), *I cavalieri di Valenza* o *Isabella di Lara* (1836), e *Il fanatico per la musica* (1836). Passò poi in Francia e Inghilterra dove fu nominato Direttore del Drury Lane Theatre e poi del Royal Opera House a Covent Garden. Compose opere, cantate, duetti, e arie e si dedicò anche all'insegnamento del canto. Nel 1848 compose *Kenilworth* per il Drury Lane ma per la morte dell'impresario l'opera non venne rappresentata. Altre opere londinesi sono *Mina* (1849), *Therèse, the Orphan of Geneva* (1851), *Nicolò de' Lapi* (1863), e *The Earring* (1873). Presentò con notevole successo due opere – *Selvaggia* e *Lia* – al Teatro La Fenice di Venezia rispettivamente per la stagione del Carnevale del 1875 e del 1876.

17. F. Portinari, *Pari siamo, op. cit.*, p. 67.

18. J.G. Lockhart, *The life of Sir Walter Scott*, Everyman's Library, London, 1957, p. 35.

19. *Ibid.*

fu il suo interesse anche per il teatro italiano, a cominciare dalle commedie umanistico-rinascimentali dell'Ariosto, il Bibbiena, e Machiavelli, alla Commedia dell'arte e la riforma goldoniana. Al Boiardo, l'Ariosto e il Tasso egli attribuì il suo interesse per le novelle e il romanzo storico, e nelle loro opere trovò l'ispirazione per alcuni dei suoi romanzi.[20] Nonostante questa predilezione per la letteratura italiana egli non si dimostrò immune ai *clichès* contro gli italiani tanto da dichiarare che, benché essi ricevessero le forme e le istituzioni della cavalleria, furono "in a considerable degree strangers to its spirit". Infatti nei suoi romanzi i personaggi italiani rimangono dei tipi; prevale la ormai vecchia ma sempre "popolare" immagine dell'italiano machiavellico, intrigante, infido, avaro, e praticante di magia.[21] Si tratta degli stessi *leitmotif* che avevano accompagnato la "presenza" del Machiavelli in Inghilterra nel Cinquecento e che diedero corpo alla figura del malvagio machiavellico nella *Revenge Tragedy* inglese del tardo Cinquecento e primo Seicento. La conoscenza che Scott aveva della cultura e letteràtura italiana trovò ampio spazio nei suoi romanzi; i riferimenti abbondano tanto da diventare parte del tessuto dei suoi lavori.[22] Sull'arte dell'Ariosto e la tecnica narrativa usata nell'*Orlando* – il cambiamento di scena, l'uso della digressione, il riprendere i fili del discorso – egli modellò consciamente la sua arte.[23]

20. Se le Crociate sono il tema principale dell'*Orlando Furioso* e della *Gerusalemme Liberata* esse sono pure un tema centrale per *The Talisman, Count Robert of Paris, Ivanhoe, Anne of Geierstein* per citare gli esempi più ovvi.
21. Due esempi di personaggi "italiani" sono il Marchese di Montserrat ne *The Talisman* e Campo Basso ne *Quentin Durward* e *Anne of Geierstein*. Montserrat viene descritto come "proud, ambitious, unscrupulous and politic."
22. R.D.S. Jack, "Scott and Italy" in *Scott, Bicentenary Essays*, A. Bell (Ed.), Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, 1978, p. 289: "Italian culture generally, as well as Italian literature, is a force in the novels of Scott. In some instances it serves to accentuate authenticity, in others it highlights one aspect of a character's personality, in others it reflects passing fashions at home or abroad, in others it merely adds a touch of mystery. Above all it strengthens the essentially international background against which Scott was often to set Scottish actions and customs."
23. Nel sedicesimo capitolo de *The Heart of Midlothian* Scott scrive: "Like the digressive poet Ariosto, I find myself under the necessity of connecting the branches of my story by taking up the adventures of another of the characters, and bringing them down to the point at which we have left those of Jennie Deans."

Scott e il mondo che lui dipingeva nei suoi romanzi godevano l'incontrastato favore del pubblico e di gran parte della critica che si rivolgeva ai lettori con vere e proprie esortazioni a leggere i romanzi dello scozzese: "... leggete Walter-Scott, leggete *Ivanhoe*, *Kenilworth*, l'*Abate*, che questa è vera storia".[24] Persino il giovane Giuseppe Mazzini, convinto dell'importante funzione politica che il romanzo storico poteva svolgere nell'ambito del Risorgimento italiano, esortava "gli Italiani a consacrarsi con ardore a questo genere" e indicava lo Scott come il romanziere da imitare.[25]

Non tutti però condividevano questo entusiasmo incondizionato per Scott. Già nel 1823 F.Pezzi faceva riferimento alla eccessiva popolarità dei romanzi dello scozzese:

> ... e il torrente minaccia tal piena, che si può credere che d'or innanzi non si parlerà, non si mangerà, non si dormirà che alla *Solitario*, l'*Ivanhoe*, il *Kenilworth*.[26]

Anche Niccolò Tommaseo, benché ammirasse Scott, nel 1830 aveva scritto un articolo dal titolo "Del romanzo storico" su *Antologia*, dove, senza menzionare lo scrittore scozzese, dichiarava che la moda del romanzo storico italiano

> non è né individuale né nazionale, non è né ispirata né spontanea: è copia, è contraffazione di quella di un grande straniero.[27]

La recensione fatta a *La donna bianca d'Avenello* (1830) di Stefano Pavesi, opera basata su *The Monastery* e data al teatro della Canobbiana di Milano il 13 novembre 1839, è abbastanza polemica non soltanto nei confronti dell'opera, che pur ottenne un buon successo, bensì nei confronti della moda dello "scottismo":

24. "Walter-Scott, articolo tratto da altro del sig. Felice Rodin", in *Nuovo Ricoglitore*, Milano, 1825, Anno I, parte II, p. 697.
25. *Indicatore Genovese*, Genova, maggio 1828, riprodotto in G. Mazzini, *Scritti editi e inediti*, Imola, 1906, p. 380.
26. F. Pezzi, in *Lo spettatore Lombardo*, Milano, 1823, VI, parte 2ª, pp. 77 e segg.
27. *Antologia*, Firenze 1830, tomo 39, fasc. III, pp. 40–63.

> Il dramma è un miscuglio di commedia e di romanzo, trattato e versificato in modo alquanto e più che alquanto strano, di maniera che il buon Pavesi non ha fatto poco a salvarsi. . . . Non ne parleremo con la grande antipatia che abbiamo già da qualche tempo a tutta la genia di montanari scozzesi in commedie, tragedie, opere e balli e, sia permesso dirlo, anche in romanzi.[28]

L'attacco è qui rivolto ai cattivi imitatori del romanzo storico perché

> non bene trattato potrà riuscire, se così piace, più pernicioso d'ogni altro genere di romanzo.[29]

Luigi Romanelli, fecondissimo librettista, nella prefazione al tomo VIII dei suoi *Melodrammi* aveva condannato

> il barbaro uso di trarre argomenti dai romanzi e drammi oltremontani . . . [che] sono divenuti da parecchi anni altrettanto ricche miniere ai poeti per mendicare in essi situazioni drammatiche.[30]

Lo "scottismo" era diventato così di moda che coinvolse, oltre alla letteratura e la pittura, anche l'opera lirica e la coreografia.

> Chi potrà dire quanti degli innumerevoli Pirati, che corsero le nostre scene di quei giorni si debbono far risalire allo Scott? Accanto ad essi sorgevano non meno numerosi, i Corsari, figli illegittimi di Lord Byron. E taccio delle mode femminili, e non femminili, di cui resta l'eco nei giornali.[31]

Il mondo melanconico e cupo di Scott, avvolto nella nebbia del nord e nella mitologia, lo rendeva il soggetto ideale per la rappresentazione melodrammatica e molti dei suoi eroi e eroine, in persona o sotto mentite spoglie, hanno calcato le tavole del palcoscenico. È difficile che la riduzione in melodrammi di storie

28. *L'Eco*, Milano, novembre 1839, n. 137.
29. *Ibid.*, fasc. I, p. 135.
30. F. Portinari, *Pari siamo! op. cit.*, p. 271.
31. L. Fassò, "Intorno alla fortuna di Walter Scott in Italia", in *Atti della R. Accademia delle Scienze di Torino*, vol. XLI, 1906, ora in vol. Misc. *Saggi e ricerche di storia letteraria (da Dante a Manzoni)*, Milano, 1947.

basate su romanzi e drammi in prosa che avevano già ottentuto una certa notorietà potesse migliorare il lavoro originale, soprattutto se si trattava di lavori concisi. Qualche rara eccezione però è possibile trovare, anche nei lavori dello scozzese che concisi sicuramente non sono. Per citare Gary Schmidgall, la storia della *Bride of Lammermoor*, per esempio, "is far more compelling as an opera than in its original narrative form",[32] e Charles Osborne trova che "[one of] the qualities which distinguish *Lucia di Lammermoor* from even the finest of Donizetti's pre-Lucia operas are its tautness of construction".[33] La ragione sta nel numero dei tagli e delle trasformazioni che il librettista Salvatore Cammarano operò sull'originale, eliminando tutto il materiale estraneo alla trama principale, come le descrizioni dettagliate dei protagonisti nei momenti più drammatici del racconto, preferendo di dare maggior risalto alle azioni e reazioni nel suo tentativo di rappresentare il dramma umano che ha il suo epilogo in una tragedia immane. Il romanzo, ispirato d'altronde da un fatto realmente accaduto nel 1668, fu pubblicato nel 1819. La prima traduzione italiana, quella di Gaetano Barbieri, apparve a Milano nel 1824. Come si è detto, la popolarità di Scott era tale che ancor prima dell'opera di Donizetti nel settembre del 1835, erano stati rappresentati tre melodrammi sullo stesso argomento: *Le nozze di Lammermoor* di Michele Carafa (1832),[34] *Bruden fra Lammermoor* di Ivar Frederik Bredal (1832) e *La fidanzata di Lammermoor* di Alberto Mazzucato (1834).

L'idea di ripresentare in un unico spettacolo le due celebrità del momento – Rossini e Scott – maturò in Frédéric du Petit-Méré, il direttore del *Théâtre de l'Odéon* di Parigi, allora quarto teatro per importanza, preceduto dall'*Opéra, il Théâtre Italien* e l'*Opéra Comique*. Come si è visto l'accoppiata di queste due celebrità del momento era già stata sperimentata con successo al San Carlo di Napoli con *La donna del lago* (1819). Sulla scia di quel fortunato esperimento – *La dame au lac* venne data all'Odéon nell'ottobre del 1825 – e dell'enorme

32. G. Schmidgall, *Literature as Opera*, New York, 1977, p. 137.

33. C. Osborne, *The Bel Canto Operas*, Methuen, London, 1994, p. 242.

34. A proposito di questo melodramma *L'Eco* di Milano n. 159 del 1829 commentava così la rappresentazione parigina: "L'argomento non è di cattiva scelta, v'ha azione, movimento e passioni, e siccome è preso dal conosciutissimo romanzo di Scott che ha lo stesso titolo, non occorre che ve ne parli."

successo di pubblico che stavano riscuotendo opere di una precisa ambientazione storica britannica, come l'*Elisabetta Regina d'Ighilterra* (1815) dello stesso Rossini, opera-centone dove il musicista si servì dell'autoimprestito di interi brani presi da altre opere che vennero aggiunti a dei pezzi nuovi, l'*Odéon* cercava di fare il colpo, il suo "*coup de théâtre*", e sfruttare l'occasione favorevole con quello che veniva considerato il romanzo più bello del momento, appunto *Ivanhoe*, tradotto in francese nel 1820 con il titolo *Ivanhoé ou le Retour d'un Croisé*.[35] Come nella tradizione di quel teatro, si doveva trattare di un pasticcio, questa volta fatto di musiche già eseguite, prese interamente dal repertorio rossiniano. Il compito di mettere assieme questo collage musicale toccò al musicista napoletano Antonio Pacini,[36] stabilitosi a Parigi come uno dei più importanti editori musicali. Si è spesso pensato che Rossini si fosse lavato le mani dall'impresa e che avesse lasciato la scelta dei brani musicali nelle mani dell'arrangiatore. Come si vedrà, grazie agli studi eseguiti da Reto Müller sulle fonti dell'*Ivanhoé*, abilmente commentate ed elencate da Fiamma Nicolodi nel suo interessantissimo studio *Un pastiche di Rossini: Ivanhoé e il Medioevo reinventato*,[37] Pacini non sarebbe stato in grado di svolgere un lavoro di si fine cucitura se non avesse avuto la piena partecipazione di colui che quella musica l'aveva creata. La musica dell'*Ivanhoé*[38] – riproposta in Italia per la prima volta il 29 luglio 1992 al Teatro dei Rinnovati di Siena in forma di concerto, e trasmessa alla radio qualche giorno dopo – proviene quasi sempre da partiture "serie" che corrispondono all'elemento drammatico in

35. Pubblicato nel 1819 *Ivanhoe* è stato sempre considerato dagli italiani come il capolavoro dello Scott.

36. Sempre di Rossini, Pacini pubblicò *Gorgheggi e solfeggi per soprano* a Parigi nel 1827.

37. F. Nicolodi, "Un *pastiche* di Rossini: *Ivanhoé* e il medioevo reinventato", in *Settimana Musicale Sensese*, Fondazione Accademia Musicale Chigiana, 1992, pp. 135–156. Lo schema delle fonti dell'*Ivanhoé* e riportato alle pp. 148–156. Per la trama del melodramma rossiniano viene seguito "Il testo del narratore" a cura di Giannina Sgatti Aliberti, pp. 194–200. Nella versione italiana riproposta nel 1992 (vedi nota 38) venne inclusa la parte del narratore.

38. L'opera venne riproposta in Italia per la prima volta il 29 luglio 1992 in forma di concerto al Teatro dei Rinnovati di Siena, e trasmessa alla radio qualche giorno dopo. I miei commenti sull'esecuzione musicale si riferiscono anche alla registrazione della suddetta trasmissione.

atto e allo stato d'animo dei personaggi in identiche circostanze: *Semiramide, Bianca e Faliero, Armida, Maometto II, Sigismondo, Mosé* ed altre. Solo in qualche rara occasione egli ricorre alla musica di un dramma giocoso come *La Cenerentola*, dove l'elemento comico serve per assecondare ed imitare la mimica caricaturale. I poeti Èmile Déschamps[39] e Gabriel-Gustave de Wailly furono incaricati di ricavarne un libretto, articolato in tre atti, con dei pezzi chiusi che si alternano con altri parlati. La conversione in libretto di un lavoro così mastodontico presentava non poche difficoltà. Il romanzo scottiano, come si sa, offre un'impressionante panoramica di personaggi - sono infatti circa sessantuno, Sassoni, Normanni ed Ebrei, escluse le comparse, fra protagonisti ed altri di minor importanza, alcuni dei quali, in un momento o un altro, emettono qualche frase per poi tacere per sempre.[40] Il libretto restringe i personaggi a sette, (più due comparse) adeguandosi così ai canoni della riduzione in forma librettistica per un melodramma di un romanzo o di un dramma in prosa, ma stravolge quasi completamente il romanzo - creando un "pasticcio" nel *pasticcio* - riducendo la trama all'osso. Vengono eliminati sì i vari Gurth, Wamba, Locksley (Robin Hood), Athelstane, l'eremita (Frate Tuck), Ulrica, il Priore Aymer, Maurice de Bracy, Waldemar Fitzurse, Reginald Front-de Boeuf e tanti altri, ma spariscono anche Lady Rowena, il Cavaliere Nero (Riccardo Cuor di Leone), e il Principe Giovanni, che nello svolgersi della vicenda hanno un ruolo tutt'altro che secondario; gli episodi analoghi vengono condensati mentre alcuni vengono spostati nel tempo. I personaggi dunque diventano i seguenti: Léila, figlia di Ismaël, (soprano), Ivanhoé, cavaliere sassone, (tenore), Cédric il Sassone, suo padre, (basso), Brian de Boisguilbert, cavaliere normanno, (basso), Albert de Malvoisin, cavaliere normanno, (tenore), Lucas de Beaumanoir, comandante dell'esercito normanno, (baritono), Ismaël, musulmano, mercante d'argento e tesoriere del re di Francia, (basso), un araldo e un cavaliere. È un elenco che presenta due anomalie vistose rispetto al romanzo scottiano, Léila e Ismaël, musulmani, che sostituiscono gli ebrei Isaac di York, usuraio, e sua figlia Rebecca.

39. Èmile Deschamps tradusse molte opere di Shakespeare dando luogo, nel giro di pochi anni, ad una vera e propria febbre shakespeariana. Egli collaborò con Eugene Scribe nella stesura del libretto de *Les Huguenots* di Meyerbeer.

40. Si tratta di trenta, ventisei e cinque rispettivamente.

Questo cambiamento arbitrario, di cui non si capisce la necessità se non quella, alquanto discutible, di non voler urtare la suscettibilità dei banchieri parigini,[41] non poté non dare luogo a discussioni e dissensi, fra cui quella dell'autorevole *Journal des débats* che criticava l'assurdità del cambiamento e dichiarava la sua incapacità di trovare nella storia musulmana alcun modello del mercante d'argento o della donna-eroina.[42] L'introduzione dei personaggi ebraici era originata da un suggerimento casuale da parte di James Skene,[43] l'amico di Scott, ma lui l'aveva pure usata per criticare il mondo cavalleresco mettendo a nudo le realtà del sistema feudale, la ferocia e l'avarizia dei Normanni, il brutale antisemitismo sia dei Normanni che dei Sassoni, nonché l'imbarbarimento degli Inglesi, denunciati dalla ragazza alla fine della storia, come un popolo feroce e litigioso.[44] La lealtà che Rebecca mostra nei confronti di suo padre e la devozione del vecchio verso sua figlia sono in netto contrasto con l'attitudine dei cristiani, a cominciare da Cédric, che ha diseredato suo figlio, il Principe John, che complotta per assassinare suo fratello Richard, e Front-de-Boeuf che ha persino ucciso il padre. Un'altra stranezza è quella di fare di Ismaël il tesoriere del re di Francia che, pare, stesse

41. F. Nicolodi, "Un *pastiche* di Rossini", *op. cit.*, p. 143. Da notare che l'ammiratissimo romanzo di Scott non aveva sollevato la reazione di nessuno.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
43. J.G. Lockhart, *The life of Sir Walter Scott, op. cit.*, p. 368: "The introduction of the charming Jewess and her father originated, I find, in a conversation that Scott held with his friend Skene during the severest season of his bodily sufferings in the early part of this year. 'Mr Skene,' says the gentleman's wife, 'sitting by his bedside, and trying to amuse him as well as he could in the intervals of his pain, happened to get on the subject of the Jews, as he had observed them when he spent some time in Germany in his youth. Their situation had naturally made a strong impression; for in those days they retained their own dress and manners entire, and were treated with considerable austerity by their Christian neighbours, being still locked up at night in their own quarter by great gates; and Mr Skene, partly in seriousness, but partly from the mere wish to turn his mind at the moment from something that might occupy and divert it, suggested that a group of Jews would be an interesting feature if he could contrive to bring them into his next novel.' Upon the appearance of *Ivanhoe*, he reminded Mr Skene of this conversation, and said, 'You will find this book owes not a little to your German reminiscences.'"
44. "... but the people of England are a fierce race, quarelling ever with their neighbours or among themselves, and ready to plunge the sword into the bowels of each other."

complottando per invadere l'Inghilterra. La trama si scosta maggiormente da quella scottiana perché è a questo re che Léila tenta di mandare un messaggio chiedendo aiuto per liberarsi dalle grinfie di Boisguilbert. Risulta che la missiva viene intercettata dai Normanni e la ragazza viene tacciata di spionaggio, la sua missione quella di formare un'alleanza tra Sassoni e Francesi contro di loro. Vengono a mancare così sia l'elemento gotico che quello religioso; la giovane non è più la strega che con le sue pratiche magiche ha guarito i moribondi ed incantato e deviato il valoroso templaro ma una spia al soldo del nemico; dell'ordine dei templari non si parla affatto e dunque Boisguilbert non è più un cavaliere che viene meno ai suoi voti di templaro e la cui bigotteria viene smascherata dalla ragazza che, convinta della sua fede, si appella al Dio dei giusti. Manca poi uno dei personaggi chiave del romanzo: Rowena.

Come si è detto il melodramma è in tre atti e apre con una sinfonia che Rossini aveva composto per la *Semiramide*,[45] un pezzo di collaudato successo che dà l'atmosfera giusta all'opera. L'azione del primo atto, articolato in dieci scene, si svolge nella sala gotica del castello di Cédric il Sassone. Mentre fuori infuria il temporale, introdotto qui dalla stessa musica utilizzata per il temporale de *La Cenerentola*,[46] – dal melodramma tragico passiamo al dramma giocoso - due viandanti musulmani, Ismaël e Léila, cercano riparo nel castello. Il terzetto e coro "Seigneur, dans votre demeure par pitié recevez-nous" proviene dal primo atto, scena quarta, della stessa opera, il quartetto "Un tantin di carità", e rispetta, nella identica richiesta di soccorso, l'atmosfera che si cerca di creare, a conferma che il collage è il lavoro di un intimo conoscitore dei brani musicali. Sempre da *La Cenerentola* è riciclata la musica delle prossime due scene. I vassalli sassoni respingono la richiesta dei due musulmani, "Vaine prière". Troppo diversa la loro fede religiosa. Solo un pellegrino gli mostra simpatia e li invita a stare vicino a lui. Cédric chiede ai suoi ospiti di desistere ricordandogli che la tregua con la Francia sta per scadere e

45. *Semiramide*, melodramma tragico in due atti di Gaetano Rossi, presentato per la prima volta di Teatro La Fenice di Venezia il 3 febbraio 1823.

46. *La Cenerentola*, dramma giocoso in due atti di Jacopo Ferretti, Teatro Valle, Roma, 25 gennaio 1817. La sinfonia era già stata utilizzata ne *La Gazzetta*, opera buffa in due atti di Giuseppe Palomba e Andrea Leone Tottola, Teatro dei Fiorentini, Napoli, 26 settembre 1816.

aggiunge che l'arrivo degli stranieri gli ha fatto ricordare l'uccisione di Olrico, ultimo discendente del re sassone Alfredo, ed il rapimento della piccola Edith, sua figlia, da parte dei musulmani. Egli si rivolge al pellegrino e cerca di avere notizie di suo figlio Ivanhoé che era partito per la Terra Santa al seguito del normanno Riccardo, Cuor di Leone. Ismaël racconta che loro avevano cercato asilo nella magione sassone perché inseguiti dal cavaliere normanno Boisguilbert che si era infatuato di Léila. La sua aria, "Boisguilbert, dont la vengeance" è quella comica di Don Magnifico "Sia qualunque delle figlie", una delle pochissime istanze in cui Rossini si ripiega su musica composta per sortire tutt'altro effetto, ma che qui è sapientemente utilizzata per caricaturare la paura di Ismaël. Non per nulla che i Sassoni commentano: "Le poltron se meurt d'effroi". Il lord sassone dà disposizioni affinché si faccia buona guardia dall'arrivo dei Normanni e tutti escono lasciando Ismaël ed il pellegrino soli. Questi fa capire al musulmano di sapere che lo stesso Ismaël è al servizio del re di Francia, venuto in Inghilterra per arricchirsi. Gli fa ricordare che tempo addietro, in Palestina, aveva scacciato un cavliere ferito che proprio sua figlia aveva curato. È solo per rispetto di Léila, cui il pellegrino aveva giurato di difendere, che adesso Ismaël non viene cacciato dal castello. Siamo nella scena quarta e l'aria con cui il pellegrino ricorda le sue peripezie in Terra Santa, "Blessé sur la terre etrangère" è quella di Contareno, "Figlia mia se forza al core" in *Bianca e Faliero*.[47] In effetti il pellegrino e il crociato ferito non sono altro che la stessa persona, cioé Ivanhoé. Ismaël si ritira mentre Cédric, che è ritornato a interpellare il pellegrino nella speranza di avere notizie di suo figlio, apprende che Ivanhoé si era distinto nelle armi, e che aveva vinto anche Boisguilbert. Il colloquio viene interrotto dal suono di un corno. Si tratta di un assolo fino a quel momento inedito, e che, come il recitativo che apre la scena settima, "Boisguilbert vous propose", affidato all'araldo, oggi si trova fra alcune musiche rossiniane autografe conservate a Londra, un'ulteriore conferma della piena partecipazione di Rossini accanto al suo arrangiatore Pacini al collage del suo materiale musicale.[48]

47. *Bianca e Faliero*, melodramma in due atti di Felice Romani, Teatro alla Scala, Milano, 26 dicembre 1819.
48. Cfr. F. Nicolodi, "Un *pastiche* di Rossini", *op. cit.*, p. 145.

Boisguilbert è arrivato a reclamare Léila. Il quartetto (Pellegrino, Léila, Ismaël, Cédric) e coro che apre la scena sesta – "Ah! Point d'alarmes" – è l'"Or che farò" del primo atto dell'*Armida*,[49] opera, che, dopo il sopraccitato recitativo autografo dell'araldo, è anche la fonte per la musica della settima scena dove Ivanhoé si rivela a suo padre e promette di difendere la ragazza. I Sassoni si apprestano a difendere il castello e Ismaël invoca la protezione di Maometto su Ivanhoé ma le donne del castello supplicano Léila di partire per allontanare l'ira del normanno. Con l'ironia che lo distingueva, per questa scena ottava Rossini non poteva che rivolgersi al suo *Maometto II* ![50] Ormai i difensori sono in fuga, Ivanhoé è ferito e la ragazza viene rapita da Boisguilbert. Le fonti delle ultime due concitatissime scene, la nona e la decima, sono l'*Aureliano in Palmira*,[51] *La gazza ladra*,[52] e l'*Armida*,[53] un lavoro di cucitura così intricato che, come ben dimostra Fiamma Nicolodi, solo un intimo conoscitore delle partiture era in grado di realizzare.

Fin qui il primo atto. Se dovessimo fare il confronto con il romanzo – al momento in cui la fanciulla cade prigioniera di Boisguilbert – potremmo constatare che il libretto è giunto a poco meno della metà del racconto. Solo che le divergenze, a parte quelle già elencate, sono tante. In Scott l'ultimo discendente dei reali sassoni è Athelstane,

49. *Armida*, opera seria in tre atti di Giovanni Federico Schmidt, Teatro San Carlo, Napoli, 11 novembre 1817.

50. Atto I, scena viii, "Quel tumulte! Ah! Pourquoi ces alarmes". è la "Sventurata! fuggir sol ti resta" del Atto II, scena vi del *Maometto II*, dramma in due atti di Cesare della Valle, Teatro San Carlo, Napoli, 3 dicembre 1820.

51. Il finale che apre con il grido disperato di Léila "Hélas! O douleur! O jour funeste!" proviene dal primo atto, "Senti ahimè!" dell'*Aureliano in Palmira*, dramma serio in due atti di Gian Francesco Romanelli, Teatro alla Scala, Milano, 26 dicembre 1813. La sinfonia venne poi riciclata ne l'*Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra* (1815) e ne *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (1816). Come è stato già detto, questa partitura, come quella della *Torvaldo e Dorliska*, venne pubblicata da Ricordi soltanto nel 1855 e non era reperibile prima. Risulta difficile capire come Pacini abbia potuto "arrangiare" senza la guida del maestro. Cfr. F. Nicolodi, *op cit.*, p. 144.

52. A *La gazza ladra*, melodramma in due atti di Giovanni Gherardini, Teatro alla Scala, Milano, 31 maggio 1817, appartiene il quartetto con coro "O sort infidéle", riciclato dal quintetto dell'Atto II "Che abisso di pene."

53. La terza parte del finale, la stretta "Tremblez jeune téméraire", con Boisguilbert, Ivanhoé, Léila, Ismaël, e coro proviene dalla stretta finale del Atto I dell'*Armida*, "Amica la sorte".

un essere insipido e ridicolo a cui Cédric spera di dare in sposa la sua pupilla Rowena. La Edith scottiana è la madre di questa specie di pretendente al trono e non la fanciulla rapita su cui insistono i librettisti. Inoltre, nel romanzo, Rebecca, suo padre e Ivanhoé vengono fatti prigionieri dai Normanni camuffati da banditi di Locksley (Robin Hood) mentre si accodano all'entourage di Cédric nella foresta, dopo aver assistito al torneo di Ashby dove si era distinto Ivanhoé battendo tutti i cavalieri normanni prima di rimanere ferito. Tutto il gruppo, inclusi Cédric, Rowena e Athelstane, viene poi portato al castello di Front-de-Boeuf dove cominciano subito le discussioni tra i cavalieri sul ricco bottino. L'assalto al castello c'è, ma si tratta del castello normanno e non di quello del lord sassone, e viene fatto da Robin Hood e i suoi, sotto la direzione di Riccardo Cuor di Leone, per liberare gli ostaggi sassoni ed ebrei!

L'azione del secondo atto, anch'esso diviso in dieci scene, si svolge nel castello di Saint-Edmond, dove Léila è tenuta prigioniera. Lei si dispera di poter fuggire ma dalla finestra di uno dei torrioni scorge suo padre e ne attira l'attenzione: forse lui potrà avvisare Ivanhoé e chiedere il suo aiuto; il giovane sassone, di cui lei è innamorata, potrebbe far pervenire un messaggio al Re Filippo di Francia per informarlo della sua situazione. L'aria che esprime questi sentimenti di infelicità, "Ah! Mon âme en vain espére", è presa dal secondo atto del *Sigismondo* [54] "Alma rea! Il più infelice". Il suo sogno viene interrotto dall'entrata di Boisguilbert che tenta di farle violenza ma lei minaccia di gettarsi dalla torre. Rossini qui si affida al duetto del primo atto di *Torvaldo e Dorliska,*[55] "Ella... oh ciel!" – che nell'*Ivanhoé* diventa "Que vois-je? O ciel". L'arrivo di Malvoisin mette fine ai progetti del normanno che viene anche rimproverato di aver attaccato la casa di Cédric nel momento in cui i Normanni stanno cercando di allearsi con i Sassoni contro la Francia. Inoltre lo informa che la lettera di Léila al re francese è stata intercettata: ella è dunque una spia incaricata di coalizzare Sassoni e Francesi contro i Normanni. Il

54. *Sigismondo,* dramma in due atti di Giuseppe Foppa, Teatro La Fenice, 26 dicembre 1814, Atto II, scena xvi. Due brani di questa opera furono riutilizzati ne *Il barbiere di Siviglia.*

55. *Torvaldo e Dorliska,* dramma semiserio in due atti di Cesare Sterbini, Teatro Valle, Roma, 26 dicembre 1815, Atto I, scena vii. Anche questa opera, come l'*Aureliano in Palmira,* venue pubblicata da Ricordi soltanto nel 1855 e non era disponibile prima.

terzetto "Souffrance cruelle" che chiude questa quinta scena è prestato dal grande ensemble "Mi manca la voce" dell'atto terzo del *Mosé*.[56] L'arrivo di Beaumanoir, generale dell'armata normanna, scuote Boisguilbert all'azione. Egli ama la ragazza e si pente di aver tentato di farle violenza; è pronto a salvarla a costo del disonore e la invita a fuggire con lui. Ma lei lo respinge e allora le suggerisce di sottoporsi al giudizio di Dio e lui sarà il suo campione. Sempre dal terzo atto del *Mosé* arriva la musica per la sesta scena dove la ragazza vien portata via per essere giudicata dal tribunale presieduto da Beaumanoir: "Suivez-nous, le Conseil vous demande".[57] Intanto i cavalieri normanni esprimono il loro disprezzo verso la razza infedele, "Race infidèl", che è il Coro del giudizio "Tremate o popoli" dal secondo atto de *La gazza ladra*.[58] Quando viene condannata al rogo Léila si sente annichilita. "Quel coup m'accable", è un bel terzetto con Boisguilbert, Malvoisin e il coro che ci riporta alla *Semiramide*.[59] Poi, memore del consiglio datole dal cavaliere normanno, la ragazza getta il suo guanto e si affida al giudizio di Dio. La scena decima apre con l'inaspettato arrivo di Ismaël tra lo stupore dei cavalieri normanni. Il "Que vois-je?" di Malvoisin, un quartetto e coro, è la stretta del finale del primo atto del *Mosé*, l'ottetto e coro, "Padre, Signor".[60] L'impiego di brani da partiture diverse in un finale così concitato è un'ulteriore indicazione della presenza di Rossini nella creazione del *pastiche*. Beaumanoir porge quel guanto a Boisguilbert indicandolo come il campione dei Normanni contro l'infedele musulmana. Con questo concertato che invoca sia il Dio della clemenza che la vendetta e la morte dell'infedele si chiude il secondo atto che, tenendo conto delle incongruenze già indicate, è abbastanza vicino al racconto scottiano negli episodi del movimentato incontro tra Boisguilbert e Léila, la minaccia di suicidio, l'incontro di Boisguilbert con Malvoisin, il suo tentativo di salvare la fanciulla e la condanna a morte di quest'ultima.

56. *Mosé*, o *Moïse et Pharaon*, grand opéra in quattro atti di Luigi Balocchi e Victor-Joseph-Etienne de Jouy, traduzione italiana di Calisto Bassi, Perugia, 4 febbraio 1829, Atto III, scena iii.
57. *Mosé*, Atto III, scena iii, quartetto e coro, "Fiera guerra mi sento nel seno".
58. Si tratta del Atto II, scena ix, Coro del giudizio.
59. *Semiramide*, Atto I, scena viii, quintetto e coro, "Qual mesto gemito".
60. Si tratta della scena vii.

Non si capisce bene perché la ragazza chieda a Ivanhoé di procurarsi l'aiuto del re Filippo di Francia. Cambia poco il fatto che invece di essere considerata una strega la si pensi una spia. Spia lei, traditore Ivanhoé. Alla luce dell'agnizione alla fine del melodramma è un controsenso.

L'azione del terzo atto, che consta di quindici brevissime scene, si svolge davanti al castello di Saint-Edmond dove dovrebbero scontrarsi Boisguilbert e il campione di Léila. L'*entr'acte* di questo atto è preso dal primo atto della *Semiramide*.[61] Malvoisin dà ordini affinché venga impedito l'accesso a Ismaël e ai Sassoni. I soldati normanni si dispongono per eseguire gli ordini: "Faisons silence; Le voyez-vous?" Questo è il coro dei Saraceni dal secondo atto del *Tancredi*, "Regna il terror nella città".[62] Intanto Ivanhoé, ferito e senza armi, è riuscito ad evadere la sorveglianza di suo padre ed è giunto al castello dov'è tenuta prigioniera la ragazza. Dall'incontro con il mercante arabo viene a sapere della terribile condanna inflitta a Léila. Sarà lui il suo campione ed Ismaël gli procurerà le armi con cui si presenterà al combattimento. Malvoisin tenta di convincere Boisguilbert a desistere dal suo intento di combattere per la ragazza che lo ha perfino respinto per amore di un sassone, ma il normanno, accecato dall'amore e dai rimorsi, vuole difendere la ragazza costi quel che costi. Questa scena, la settima, con il suo recitativo "Combat terrible! Ah! Que résoudre?" e l'aria "Mon amour te plongea dans l'abîme", è un ritorno alla *Semiramide*, al recitativo del delirio, "Ah che miro" e l'aria "Deh ti ferma, ti placa, perdona".[63] Dalla stessa opera attinge Rossini per la scena ottava, dove risultano vane le esortazioni dei Normanni affinché Boisguilbert difenda la loro causa: "Venez! Commandeur. Sauvez-nous, commandeur, et combattez pour nous". Léila viene accompagnata al supplizio al suono di una marcia funebre, mentre un coro di donne piange il suo triste destino: "Dieu signale ta clémence". La fonte qui è il coro del secondo atto, scena settima, della *Bianca e Faliero*, "Oh qual notte di squallore". Invano Boisguilbert cerca di convincere la ragazza di accettarlo

61. È il coro festivo "Belo si celebri, Belo si onori", Atto I, scena ii.

62. *Tancredi*, melodramma eroico in due atti di Gaetano Rossi, presentato per la prima volta al Teatro La Fenice di Venezia, il 6 febbraio 1813. Si tratta di un coro dall'Atto II scena xvi.

63. *Semiramide*, Atto II, scena ix.

come il suo campione; lei lo respinge e mentre viene portata via dalle guardie sopraggiunge Ivanhoé che offre di essere lui il suo campione. La comparsa del giovane sassone viene salutata da una fanfara che non è altro che il famoso passo doppio del *Guillaume Tell*, opera composta nel 1829, tre anni dopo l'*Ivanhoé*. È lecito dunque dedurre che si tratti di un pezzo musicale di cui l'arrangiatore Pacini non poteva essere a conoscenza e che Rossini avesse collaborato attivamente alla scelta dei brani per il suo pasticcio.[64] A Boisguilbert non resta altro che battersi in nome dei Normanni. Nel frattempo Ismaël rivela a Cédric che Léila non è altri che Edith, figlia di Olrico, discendente del re Alfredo il Sassone, e che dopo il rapimento, era stata affidata a lui. Ivanhoé batte Boisguilbert e salva la ragazza. Cédric benedice la loro unione e, tra il tripudio generale, Ivanhoé esorta Sassoni e Normanni a sentirsi soltanto Inglesi e prepararsi ad affrontare il nemico comune. Questo finale, che comincia dalla fine della dodicesima scena, è una versione alquanto rimaneggiata del finale del primo atto di *Torvaldo e Dorliska* e porta a termine il lavoro di cucitura di Rossini.

L'atto è abbastanza breve e con l'agnizione finale risolve il problema del tema amoroso. Questo però non è Scott. Nel romanzo, Rebecca, dopo aver constatato l'impossibilità del suo amore per Ivanhoé, decide di mettersi da parte, lasciare l'Inghilterra e dedicarsi a opere di carità. È quanto rivela a Rowena proprio nelle ultime pagine del romanzo. Già, Lady Rowena! Figura centrale nel racconto scottiano che nella versione librettistica manca completamente. Del tutto gratuita poi è l'eliminazione dei Templari. Nel romanzo vengono criticate non solo l'ipocresia e l'indisciplina di molti di questi cavalieri ma anche l'arroganza di un ordine religioso che non riconosce ubbidienza a nessuna, neanche all'autorità legittima del re. È quanto succede nello scontro tra Riccardo Cuor di Leone e Lucas de Beaumanoir, Granmaestro dell'Ordine e non, come nel libretto, comandante dell'esercito normanno. Altro che i sentimenti di amore fraterno e di unità contro un nemico comune. Non si capisce poi perché il melodramma finisca con quel *tutti fortissimo* nell'esortazione finale contro la Francia. Se Rebecca ed Isaac diventano Léila e Ismaël per non urtare la sensibilità dei banchieri

64. Cfr. F. Nicolodi, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

francesi, cosa doveva essere la reazione del pubblico parigino che gremiva l'Odéon al grido:

Vengeance! Amis, courons aux armes!
Punissons-les de nos alarmes!
Marchons, guerriers, nous reviendrons vainqueurs!

Scott, che assistette ad una replica dell'*Ivanhoé* all'Odéon il 31 ottobre del 1826, lasciò un breve commento di quell'episodio nel suo diario:

> In the evening at the Odéon, where we saw *Ivanhoe*. It was superbly got up, the Norman soldiers wearing pointed helmets and what resembled much hauberks of mail, which looked very well. The number of attendants, and the skill with which they moved and grouped on the stage, were well worthy of notice. It was an opera, and of course the story greatly mangled, and the dialogue in a great part nonsense. Yet it was strange to hear anything like the words which I (then in agony of pain with spasms in my stomach) dictated to William Laidlaw at Abbotsford, now recited in a foreign tongue, and for the amusement of a strange people. I little thought to have survived the completing of the novel.[65]

Commento lapidario ma prezioso tenuto conto che Scott produsse quasi tutto l'*Ivanhoe* recitando le parti dei protagonisti.[66] Stranamente non fa nessun accenno a Rossini o alla sua musica. L'occhio sempre attento ai dettagli sembra apprezzare l'allestimento scenico ma quanto alla versione librettistica ed ad alcuni dialoghi lo scozzese non poté che constatare che era stato creato un "pasticcio" nel *pasticcio*.

65. *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott, 1825–32*, David Douglas, Edinburgh, 1891, p. 289.
66. J.G. Lockhart, *The Life of Sir Walter Scott*, *op. cit.*, p. 355. "But when the dialogue of peculiar animation was in progress, spirit seemed to triumph altogether over matter – he arose from his couch and walked up and down the room, raising and lowering his voice, and as it were acting the parts."

Rispetti and Sonnets: the Anglo-Italian Context of Augusta Webster's Later Poetry (1881–1893)

Petra Bianchi

Images and pictures, thoughts and dreams of Italy rise everywhere from the pages of the nineteenth century. A renewed interest in Italy developed through the greater part of the Victorian period, and many major English poets and novelists of the time wrote at least one important work with an Italian subject or setting. George Eliot's *Romola* (1863) and Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book* (1868) are prominent examples, but there are legions of less famous works with Italian themes and settings. Many of these works focused specifically on political issues and fervently supported Italy's republican and nationalist ideals which were striving to free the country from the oppression of a foreign power – ironically, since Britain was at the time at the height of its own powers as a colonizing nation. Yet the British government supported Italy's move towards Unification and welcomed a large number of political refugees who were in favour of the nationalist cause, such as Giuseppe Mazzini, Ugo Foscolo and Gabriele Rossetti. Arthur Hugh Clough's "Amours de Voyages" (1849), Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Casa Guidi Windows" (1851) and A. C. Swinburne's "A Song for Italy" (1867) all involve themselves in the Italian cause.[1]

1. See G.M. Trevelyan, *English Songs of Italian Freedom* (London, 1911) for more examples of poetry supporting Italian unification.

Although this special interest in Italy gradually began to recede after the Unification in 1870, it continued, in various forms and guises, well into the twentieth century. In 1911, the historian G.M. Trevelyan, while remarking that the English interest in Italy had lessened in recent years, confirmed that this interest was still remarkably strong after the turn of the century:

> Sixty years ago, Italy dominated men's thoughts, through the world of art and letters, even more than she does today. The opera was Italian, not German. Italian, not German was learnt as the second foreign language. English ladies read modern and medieval Italian literature. English gentlemen were brought up even more exclusively than to-day on the classics; and classical scholars, as compared to those of our own time, were more interested in Rome, and less in Greece; [. . .] If foreign travel was less common than to-day, it was more concentrated upon Italy, and the charm of her landscapes and cities became associated in sympathetic English minds with the cause of the inhabitants of the country.[2]

The Italian influence which had been so strong in the early part of the century continued to flourish even though there was no longer any cause to write passionately about nationalistic ideals or the oppression of the Italian nation by foreign rulers. In this essay I focus on some verse of the poet Augusta Webster, which provides an example of the way in which the Italian influence was absorbed and then converted into something belonging specifically to Victorian England. Writers who employ the image of Italy in their works can be broadly divided into two categories – those who are interested in the "Englishman in Italy" and who use Italy as a backdrop to explore their own English identity, and those who are interested in Italy itself and who attempt to imitate or translate Italian forms or characteristics in their work.[3] The poems by Webster that I have chosen to analyse can be placed into the second category.

In 1881, Webster published a volume of poetry entitled *A Book of Rhyme* which was her first major collection in eleven years. This volume includes a sequence of poems entitled *Marjory,* which she

2. *Ibid.*, p. xxiv.
3. Reed Way Dasenbrock, *Imitating the Italians: Wyatt, Spenser, Synge, Pound, Joyce* (John Hopkins, Baltimore & c.: 1991), p. 2.

here described as "English *stornelli*". This sequence consists of thirty eight-line poems divided under the four subtitles "Spring", "Summer", "Autumn" and "Winter", which deal with the different stages in the life of two lovers in terms of the four seasons. These poems are deceptively simple. Webster was attempting to translate a Tuscan form of rural poetry into English verse.

In her later volume *Selections from the Poetry of Augusta Webster* (1893), Webster reproduced these poems under the description of *rispetti* rather than the earlier term *stornelli*. A review of *A Book of Rhyme* which appeard in the *Athenaeum*[4], written by her good friend Theodore Watts-Dunton, may have played a part in this change of terminology.

The review rightly points out that the eight-line stanza that Webster is using is far closer to the Italian *rispetto* than the *stornello*. Traditionally, the *stornello* consists of a short poem with an epigrammatic nature, usually beginning with a descriptive phrase related to some aspect of nature, such the name of a flower, and continuing with one thought in a line or two. These poems began as the improvisations of illiterate peasants, sung as they worked in the fields or meadows. In his poem "Fra Lippo Lippi" (1855), Robert Browning had included some humourous *stornelli* in English, such as "Flower of the broom. / Take away love, and our earth is a tomb!", and "Flower of the quince, / I let Lisa go, and what good in life since?", or "Flower o' the rose, / If I've been merry, what matter who knows?", all written in a light-hearted vein in keeping with Fra Lippo Lippi's character and his drunken state. The structure of the poems, however, is indeed based on the traditional *stornello*, with the flower evoked in the first line of the poem being rhymed with in the final line. This simple structure is reflected in the diverse names with which the *stornello* is referred to in different parts of Italy, such as *ritornello*, *fiore*, and *cuire*, the latter being a word for "flower" in Sicilian dialect. The poems which Webster called *stornelli* in her volume of 1881 have nothing of this epigrammatic nature. They are all eight lines long, following the rhyme scheme ababccdd, and are much closer to the *rispetto* than the *stornello*.

The Italian *rispetto* was originally a Tuscan eight-line poem

4. *Athenaeum* 72 (1881), pp. 229–230.

sung by peasants, and is identical to the poems called *strambotti*, which strictly speaking refer to literary imitations of the popular rispetti. Similar poems are also found in the northern Italian states, where they are called *villotte*, and in Sicily another form is referred to as *canzune*. The areas of Italy in which these rural poems have the strongest traditions are Sicily, where they are said to have originated, and Tuscany. The structure of the traditional Tuscan *rispetto* is based on the principle of the octave stanza, and consists of four lines following the rhyme scheme abab and another two or four lines following the rhyme scheme ccdd, these last four lines being referred to as the *ripresa*. The following is an example from one version of a *rispetto* called "The Jessamine Window":

IL GELSUMINO ALLA FINESTRA

La casa del mio amor sta in un bel piano
Rimpietto alla mia par un giardino.
Appie dell'uscio c'e un bel melagrano
Alla finestra ci ha un gelsumino.
Piglia quel gelsumin, mettilo al fresco;
Canta pur su, che ti rispondo a questo.
Piglia quel gelsumin, mettilo al sole;
Canta pur su, che ti rispondo, amore.[5]

In 1886 the poet William Sharp edited an anthology of nineteenth-century English sonnets, which included Augusta Webster's sonnet "The Brook Rhine".[6] In the introduction to the volume, Sharp traces the history of the sonnet and finds that its origins lie in the Italian

5. There on the plain a little house I see,
And in that house my lady lives herself;
Beside the door a green pomegranate tree,
A jessamine blooming on the window shelf.
Come, love, and set thy jessamine in the air:
Sing, I can hear thee at thy window there.
Come, love, and set thy jessamine in the sun,
Sing, I will answer when the song is done.

I have taken both the Italian version of the *rispetto* and its English translation from John Ruskin's *Roadside Songs of Tuscany* (1884–1885), in *The Works of Ruskin*, eds. E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn (London, 1907), Vol. 32, pp. 142–43.

6. William Sharp, *Sonnets of this Century* (London, 1886).

rispetto. He describes the sonnet as being originally recited with sound, "that is, with a musical accompaniment, probably a short poem of the *rispetto* kind, sung to the strains of lute or mandolin", and also postulates the theory that the sonnet may be derived from the Greek epigram, with the *stornello* being its Italian equivalent, "that fleeting bar of verbal melody, which in its narrow compass of two lines stands in perhaps even closer relationship to the ancient epigram than the *rispetto* to the modern sonnet". He finally traces the ancestry of the sonnet by saying that "most likely [...] it was either of Provencal or Sicilian birth, gradually forming or being moulded into a certain recongized type, very probably not uninfluenced by the Greek epigrams with which the more cultivated of the poet-musicians ("sonnetteers") were probably in some degree acquainted, and by the *stornelli* which every contadino sang as he pruned his olive trees or tended his vines". Sharp's interest in the form and lineage of poetry forms part of a larger wave of interest in poetic form which flourished in the nineteenth century.

Given that a clear link exists between the *rispetto*, the *stornello*, and the *sonnetto* or sonnet, it is interesting that shortly after completing her sequence of *stornelli* or *rispetti*, Webster, who was also very interested in poetic form, began writing the sonnet sequence *Mother and Daughter*. Sonnet sequences, or cycles, had become very popular by the time Webster began hers in the 1880s. Well-known sequences were Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850), George Meredith's *Modern Love* (1862), Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *The House of Life* (1870; 1881) and Christina Rossetti's *Monna Innominata* (1881). This renewed interest in the sonnet was at least partly due to the fashionable interest in the Italian Renaissance: which flourished in Victorian period, as the sonnet is the form of poetry most closely associated with that era of Italian history in the English perception of it. The sonnet sequences now being written were not exact replicas of their Italian models, but instead offered new interpretations and adaptations of the form.

One important deviation from the original Petrarchan sonnet was in subject matter. Traditionally, the sonnet was used to express a particular kind of love, a yearning and often unfulfilled desire for the beloved. During the nineteenth century, the sonnet came to embrace a variety of different themes, among them the disintegration of a

marriage as in the poems of George Meredith, the viewpoint of a courted medieval woman as in in those of Christina Rossetti, general observations on life and love as in the case of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and, to return to Augusta Webster's sequence, the different shades of the love of a mother for her daughter.

There is a clear line of influence stretching down from Elizabeth Barrett Browning, through to Christina Rossetti, and on to Augusta Webster. The influence of *Sonnets from the Portuguese* on Christina Rossetti's *Monna Innominata* sequence has often been pointed out. Barrett Browning partly followed the tradition of the sonnet sequence by writing about love, but subverted the usual gender roles by writing from the point of view of a woman. Here the woman is still the object of a man's desire, but is herself also desiring, thereby assuming a double role. As Dorothy Mermin has pointed out, this "is not a reversal of roles, but a doubling of them. There are *two* poets in the poem, and *two* poets' beloveds, and its project is the utopian one of replacing hierarchy by equality".[7] Similarly, Christina Rossetti also has a woman as speaker in her sonnet sequence, this time expressing the woman's point of view within the framework of the courtly tradition of unfulfilled love. Both Barrett Browning and Rossetti use the formal conventions of the Petrarchan sonnet to place a very personal experience within a wide poetic framework, using the genre to give weight and authority to their experiences and thereby allowing them to stand beside the work of male poets rather than marginalising them into a purely feminine sphere. Both sequences contain a significant number of literary allusions, mainly invoking Petrarch and Dante. By placing their poems squarely within the tradition of the sonnet, they are however also emphasizing the differences between their sequences and those of their male forebears.

After Rossetti had completed and published her sonnets in July 1881, Webster sent her a copy of *A Book of Rhyme*, which had appeared a few months earlier. Rossetti duly sent Webster a copy of *A Pageant and Other Poems* in return, which included not only *Monna Innominata* but also the less well-known sonnet sequences *Later Life*, *The Thread of Life*, and *Behold a Shaking*.[8] While wintering in Italy with her

7. Dorothy Mermin, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Origins of a New Poetry* (Chicago, 1989), p. 130.
8. William Michael Rossetti (ed.), *The Family Letters of Christina Rossetti* (London, 1908), p. 97.

daughter later that year, Webster began her own sequence of sonnets. Yet although this move clearly tied in well with the interest she had already developed in her adaptation of the *rispetto*, Webster was dissatisfied with her work in this genre and never completed or published it during her own lifetime.

Webster's sonnet sequence follows the example of Barrett Browning and Rossetti by having a woman as the speaker in her poems. Her theme is that of the love between a mother and her daughter, and although a father is also marginally present his role is relegated to the periphery of the sphere of action, appearing only twice in the twenty-seven sonnets. Webster moves beyond the conventional love sonnet by focusing on maternal love, showing that there are different kinds of love apart from romantic love which are important in a woman's life. It could be argued that Christina Rossetti had already opened the pathway for this shift by exploring the complex shades of a very personal religious love in her poetry. One important difference between the sequences of Barrett Browning and Rossetti and that of Webster is that *Mother and Daughter* is not sprinkled with literary allusions. It may be that Webster no longer felt the same need to give a sense of weight to her work as she was now not breaking new ground by writing a sonnet sequence, but instead following on in what could already be regarded as a tradition of women sonnetteers. Webster did, however, make extensive use of classical allusions in other aspects of her work in which she was pioneering a female foothold in a male tradition, such as in her plays. Poetry dealing with maternal love was already commonplace and had been widely written by many female poets of Webster's generation and the one preceding it, including Barrett Browning herself who wrote several poems dealing with the theme of motherhood.[9] Christina Rossetti, who was herself never a mother, deals with the theme of motherhood from a different angle; her volume *A Pageant and Other Poems*, for example, is dedicated to her own mother in a prefacing sonnet.

Webster's thirty rispetti are clearly modelled on a sonnet sequence. Like the sonnet, the traditional *rispetto* was written or sung as a sign of the devotion of a lover to his lady. The aim was not only to declare love, but also to entice the woman to love, with

9. Sandra M. Donaldson, "Motherhood's Advent in Power: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Poems about Motherhood", *Victorian Poetry* 18 (1980), pp. 51–60.

the ultimate aim being happiness found in a matrimonial union and not a form of illicit love.[10] Webster's poems do not follow the traditional pattern of being supplications to a lover, but they do carry on in the general spirit of the poetry by writing about the joining of two lives in marriage. The literary historian J.A. Symonds described this "spirit" in Tuscan rural poetry as "the elevation of feeling and perfect breeding which Manzoni has so well delineated in the loves of Renzo and Lucia" and which he claimed is "traditional among Italian country folk". Webster herself would almost certainly have been familiar with Manzoni's famous *Promessi Sposi* (1842)[11], and the title of the novel itself indicates a sanctification of marriage. In his collection of Tuscan poetry, Giuseppe Tigri made the same point, stating that the lover writing *rispetti* writes:

> perche la scelta delle proprie affezioni gli deriva unicamente dal cuore, per l'ordinario e bramoso, con l'unione santificata dal matrimonio, di continuarle per tutta la vita. Di qui quelli entusiastici e gentili concetti de giovani innamorati verso le elette donne, che vorrebbero pure esaltare, sopra tutto cio che di bello si offre loro d'intorno. Di qui e che da lunge le salutano con lettere le piu poetiche; presenti poi, onorano con espansioni di gioia pura e modesta, e d'un affetto capace dei piu gran sacrifizi; in fine con quella bonarieta, con quel core aperto e nobile a un tempo, com'e del far loro, e che il Manzoni ha saputo tanto bene ritrarre in Renzo e Lucia, i poveri montanini di Lecco.[12]

Both *rispetti* and *stornelli* use images from nature to describe love,

10. J.A. Symonds, "The Popular Songs of Tuscany", *The Fortnightly Review* 14 (1873), p. 600–601.
11. The protagonist of Webster's "Sister Annunciata" (1866) is probably based on the character of "Signora" Gertrude in Manzoni's novel.
12. ... because he chooses his emotions only from the heart, whether the desire is strong or not, and aims towards the sanctified union of marriage, to be continued for the rest of his life. This is the source of all those enraptured and tender poems by young men for their chosen loves, which only aim to enhance their feelings, especially their beautiful aspects. This is the source of the most poetic letters which they send from a distance; and once they are themselves present, they honour their loves with pure and modest joy, and an affection capable of the greatest sacrifice; and finally with that good and simple nature, with that open and noble heart of times gone by, which Manzoni depicted so well in his rendering of Renzo and Lucia, the poor mountain-folk of Lecco. (My translation).
Giuseppe Tigri, *Canti Popolari Toscani* (Firenze, 1856), p. xi.

and the mood of the poems is that of the spontaneity and sincerity typically associated with the countryside. Webster follows this pattern by first describing the lives of two lovers in terms of the four seasons, and then further dividing each stage according to different events of nature happening at each period.

One of Webster's favourite images in the sequence is that of a river, and this also recurs in many other of her poems. She begins with a little rivulet which makes its way down into a bubbling brook, and which moves on to become a fully grown river, joining up with another river. During the winter the river is frozen over, and eventually it flows out into the sea. This image recurs frequently in Webster's poetry, and is particularly well represented in her sonnet "The Brook Rhine".

This example from Webster's *rispetti* will serve to show the structure and general mood of the poems:

THE FLOWING TIDE

The slow green wave comes curling from the bay
  And leaps in spray along the sunny marge,
And steals a little more and more away,
  And drowns the dulse,[13] and lifts the stranded barge.
Leave me, strong tide, my smooth and yellow shore;
But the clear waters deepen more and more:
  Leave me my pathway of the sands, strong tide;
  Yet are the waves more fair than all they hide.

In her play *The Sentence* (1887), Webster included two further *rispetti*. The play is set in classical Rome and here the poems are sung by fisher folk mending their nets on the beach. These songs are imbued with significantly more of the traditional character of the *rispetto* than Webster's *Marjory* sequence which was evidently composed as a literary piece to be read rather than sung to music in a spontaneous way in the manner of traditional Tuscan rural poetry. As they sit on the beach, the fishermen use the images of the sun above and the torn nets in their hands, composing two love poems which are a homage from a lover to his lady. The *ripresa*, or four concluding lines of the poems, indicate how close indeed the structure of the *rispetto* is to that of the Petrarchan sonnet, which is made up of two parts, an octave and a sestet. This was

13. Dulse – an edible seaweed, having bright red, deeply divided fronds (OED).

precisely the type of sonnet which was being revived in the nineteenth century, as opposed to the Shakespearian or Miltonic sonnet which had been so popular in the preceding centuries. In 1881, Theodore Watts Dunton wrote his very influential sonnet "The Sonnet's Voice (a metrical lesson by the sea shore)",[14] which presented the idea of the sonnet as being made up of two parts which are linked together like the flow and ebb of a wave. According to this model, the octave of the sonnet presents a thought and the sestet goes on to make a comment upon some aspect of this thought. Thus the relationship between the octave and the sestet results in a structural tension which is essential to the nature of this kind of sonnet. This model following a "flow and ebb" of thought was strictly observed by many of the nineteenth-century sonneteers such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti.[15] In an article on poetry which Watts Dunton wrote for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*,[16] he confirmed that Rossetti had "accepted the wave theory".

In her sonnet sequence *Mother and Daughter*, Webster also followed the model described by her friend Watts Dunton. She makes a clear distinction between octave and sestet, following an abbaabba rhyme scheme in the octave, and various rhyme schemes such as ccdeed, cddece, or cdeced, in the sestet.

Although Webster's work was only known to a limited audience, among those who knew her work her attempt to adapt the *rispetto* to English verse proved very successful, and the poems were given generous praise by their reviewers. The *Westminster Review* described them as "a series of wonderful picture verses, *huitains*, containing each a little study, carved like a gem by a skilful master hand".[17] Soon other poets who were familiar with Webster's work were following her example. Mary Robinson published some *rispetti*, *stornelli*, and *strambotti*[18] and in 1882 William Sharp also tried his hand at Italian

14. Originally printed in *The Athenaeum* 72 (1881), and reprinted in many subsequent collections of poetry.
15. Joan Rees, *The Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Modes of Self-Expression* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 163–64.
16. This article first featured in the 1884 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and was then reprinted in the two subsequent editions. Watts Dunton also wrote an article on the sonnet for *Chamber's Encyclopedia* in 1891.
17. *Westminster Review* 60 (1881), pp. 563–64.
18. See, for example, *Athenaeum* 73 (1882), pp. 229–30, and Robinson's *The New Arcadia and Other Poems* (London, 1884).

rural poetry, calling his poems "Transcripts from Nature".[19] The critic J.A. Symonds was also writing extensively about all forms of Italian rural poetry[20], and a few years later John Ruskin included several *rispetti* in his *Roadside Songs of Tuscany* (1884–1885). Another collection of rural poetry was published by Alma Strettel in 1887,[21] and this also included some musical scores to show how the poetry should be sung. Interest in this kind of poetry had progressed so far by then that Strettel felt compelled to apologize for once again explaining what the different forms of Italian rural poetry were in the introduction to the volume, saying "The Italian folk-songs [. . .] have so often been written about, that little remains to be said of them". Clearly, a pattern of mutual influences was at work here, which was developing independently from the interest being shown in the sonnet at the time.

Indeed while the short vogue which the *rispetto* enjoyed between the 1860s and 1880s might partly stem from its structural relationship to the sonnet, the history of the *rispetto* also has its own separate link to the Renaissance, through the work of the poet Angelo Poliziano.

A series of Tuscan *rispetti* was first written down formally by the eminent Tuscan Renaissance poet Angelo Poliziano (1454–1494), who was attached to the court of Lorenzo de Medici ("il Magnifico"). Although most of Poliziano's verse was written in Latin, he composed several series of *rispetti* in the vernacular, some of them as single poems (*rispetti spicciolati*) and others as sequences (*rispetti continuati*). These poems all dealt with a theme of love, each exploring one thought or image, and written in eight lines following the same rhyme scheme ababccdd used by Augusta Webster. These vernacular poems by Poliziano were generally not given much attention until in 1863 the well-known scholar Giosue Carducci, who was then still only twenty-eight, published an edition of Poliziano's rural poems together with an introduction which was so well-received that it established his reputation as a critic.[22] Augusta Webster travelled to

19. William Sharp, *The Human Inheritance and Other Poems* (London, 1882), pp. 134–49.

20. J.A. Symonds, *The Renaissance in Italy* (London, 1881), pp. 263–73.

21. Alma Strettel, *Spanish and Italian Folk Songs* (London, 1887).

22. Giosue Carducci, *Angelo Poliziano: Le Stanze, L'Orfeo e le Rime* (Firenze, 1863). See Orlo Williams, *Giosue Carducci* (London, 1914).

Italy in 1864 following her marriage in December 1863, and it may be that she came across Carducci's volume during this trip, as it is known that her interest in Italian rural poetry developed while in Italy.

Very little of Poliziano's verse was then available in English. At the turn of the nineteenth century a critical work partly dealing with Poliziano's poetry had been published in England by William P. Greswell,[23] however it only concentrated on the then far more respected and better-known poems of Poliziano composed in Latin and his traslations from the classical languages, and completely ignored his vernacular poetry. However several Italian critics were at the time writing about Italian rural poetry and it may be that Webster was also familiar with some of these works.[24] A collection of rural verse had already been published by Niccolo Tommaseo in 1841, and was later followed by similar works edited by Giuseppe Tigri in 1869 and Giuseppe Pitre in 1870.

All of these works were known in England. J.A. Symonds, for example, who was a great admirer of Poliziano and translated several of his *rispetti* into English, certainly relied heavily on both Carducci's edition of Poliziano's vernacular verse, and also on Tigri's 1869 collection of poems, which contains examples of over 1,000 rispetti and almost 500 *stornelli*. Ruskin was also familiar with Tigri's volume and mentions it in his *Roadside Songs of Tuscany*. And Giuseppe Pitre's *Canti Popolari Siciliani* was reviewed and highly praised in the *Saturday Review*.[25]

In October 1872, Symonds wrote to his friend Henry Sidgwick and said "I am at present translating specimens of Poliziano's Italian poetry which seems to me most exquisite – of a wonderful quality, blending the antique and romantic; pure outline with sensual fullness."[26] In August of the following year, Symonds published an

23. Rev. W. Parr Greswell, *Memoirs of Angelus Politianus, Actius Sincerus Sannazarius, Petrus Bembus, Hieronymus Fracastorius, Marcus Antonius Flaminius and The Amattheti: Translations from their Poetical Works: and Notes and Observations* (Manchester, 1801).

24. Niccolo Tommaseo, *Canti Popolari Toscani* (Venezia, 1841), Giuseppe Tigri, *Canti Popolari Toscani* (Firenze, 1869); Giuseppe Pitre, *Canti Popolari Siciliani* and *Studi di Poesia Popolare* (Palermo, 1870–1872).

25. *Saturday Review* 3 (1872), pp. 610–11.

26. John Addington Symonds, *Letters and Papers*, ed. by Horatio F. Brown (London, 1923), pp. 51–52.

essay entitled "Poliziano's Italian Poetry" in the same journal in November.[27] Webster may have been familiar with the work of Symonds, and the fact that they had a common friend in Henry Sidgwick would seem to encourage this idea. Symonds was a great admirer of Poliziano, and thought he was one of the most learned and eminent Italian poets of the Renaissance. He translated several of his works, including at least one long *rispetto continuato* and several detached ones (*spicciolati*).

Webster's *rispetti* not only follow a rhyme scheme identical to that of Poliziano, but also make use of very similar imagery. In many of his vernacular poems, Poliziano often made use of the seasons in order to describe the different phases of life. J.A. Symonds notices this point and describes Poliziano's main refrain as "Gather y rose-buds while ye may! It is spring-time now and youth. Winter and old age are coming."[28] But while for Webster old age also has its beauty and consolations, Poliziano constantly urges that one should make the most of spring and youth, and later all is bleak. I quote the following example from one of his *canzune* translated by Symonds:

> Now art thou in thy beauty's blooming hour;
>   Thy youth is yet in pure perfection's prime:
> Make it thy pride to yield thy fragile flower,
>   Or look to find it paled by envious time:
> For none to stay the flight of years hath power
>   And who culls roses caught by frosty rime?
> Give therefore to thy lover, give, for they
> Too late repent who act not while they may.
>
> Time flies: and lo! thou let'st it idly fly:
>   There is not in the world a thing more dear:
> And if thou wait to see sweet May pass by,
>   Where find'st thou roses in the latter year?
> He never can, who lets occasion die:
> But by the forelock take the flying hour,
> Ere change begins, and clouds above thee lower.

27. J.A. Symonds, "Poliziano's Italian Poetry", *Fortnightly Review* 14 (1873), pp. 163–188; and Symonds, "Popular Songs of Tuscany", *Fortnightly Review* 14 (1873), pp. 596–613.
28. Symonds, "Poliziano's Italian Poetry", p. 186.

Compare this *rispetto* by Webster, in which she attempts to recognize the beauty of old age:

THE FROZEN RIVER

Dead stream beneath the icy silent blocks
  That motionless stand soddening into grime,
Thy fretted falls hang numb, frost pens the locks;
  Dead river, when shall be thy waking time?
"Not dead;" the river spoke and answered me,
"My burdened current, hidden, finds the sea."
  "Not dead, not dead;" my heart replied at length,
  "The frozen river holds a hidden strength."

Although some of Poliziano's *rispetti* were written as a series (*rispetti continuati*), they did not form a complete cycle in the manner of Webster's *Marjory* sequence. As mentioned above, she seems to have modelled how own sequence on the traditional sonnet cycle, and it is a "cycle" in the literal sense as it deals with the four seasons which at the end of the poem begin again with spring at the end of winter, emphasizing the cyclical aspect of nature. Although the two lovers in the poem die and therefore cannot be part of nature's spring any longer, yet they also find a "new spring in God". This emphasis on the cyclical aspect of nature recurs frequently in nineteenth century poetry, as can be seen in the popularity of the Demeter and Persephone myth which depicts the regeneration of nature each year.

The question remains as to why Webster first chose to describe her poems as *stornelli* and then changed their title to *rispetti*. In fact her poems lie between the two forms. While following the structure of the *rispetto*, the content of the poems seems to lie closer to that of the traditional *stornello*, which evokes images from nature and then makes an observation on life or love. As we have seen, *rispetti* – like sonnets – traditionally acted as supplications to a lover, and the closely related *strambotto* even took on the form of a letter to the lover.

Webster's flexibility in her choice of terminology is however not unusual to this type of poetry and can be seen, for example, in the verse of the Italian poet Francesco Dall'Ongaro (1808–1873) who at that time had begun composing a series of poems which he called *stornelli* and which were in truth imitations of Tuscan *rispetti*. In these poems he did not follow the epigrammatic form of the traditional

stornello, instead making them longer and often following the same eight or ten line rhyme scheme of the *rispetto.* One important innovative aspect of Dall'Ongaro's poems was that he gave his verse a political content, whereas both the traditional *stornello* and *rispetto* always dealt with a theme of love. Although rare, it must be noted that he was not the first to use such verse politically, as at least one other group of *canzune* dealing with a political theme was also well-known, one which dealt with the so-called "Sicilian Vespers". It is possible that these *canzune* gave Dall'Ongaro the idea to deal with political themes in his *stornelli.*

Dall'Ongaro began his *stornelli* in the 1840s, eventually writing a sequence which traced the events leading to the Italian Risorgimento between 1847 and 1870. These poems were extremely popular at the time, especially one called *"Il Brigidino"* which was reputed to have been quoted by Garibaldi himself at Montevideo before leaving for Italy, and was later also set to music by Giuseppe Verdi.[29] Another famous *stornello* by Dall'Ongaro is that beginning *"Chi dice che il Mazzini e in Alemagna"*, which shows the great veneration that Dall'Ongaro felt for Giuseppe Mazzini, especially in the closing lines *"Mazzini e in ogni luogo ove si trema/ che giunga al traditor l'ora suprema,/ Mazzini e in ogni luogo ove si spera/ versare il sangue per l'Italia intera"*, lines which also demonstrate his use of the rhyme scheme ccdd in the final two couplets of the poem, or the *ripresa.* These *stornelli* in imitation of the traditional *rispetti* may have provded an example for Webster to extend her use of the term *stornelli* to her own eight-line poems.

Dall'Ongaro was innovative and aggressive, fired by his patriotic feelings and his love and admiration for Mazzini and Garibaldi. His decision to use rural forms of poetry was itself a political decision, adopting the poetry of the countryside was a way of identifying himself and the movement for a united Italy as one of the Italian

29. Verdi wrote this song, entitled *"Il Brigidin"* (The Rosette) in 1863. Charles Osborne in *The Complete Operas of Verdi* (London, 1969; 1997), pp. 460–61, gives the information that Verdi wrote this song "for the soprano Isabella Galetti-Gianoli to sing at a concert in Parma, but the lady quarrelled with her impresario and did not appear at the concert. The song appeared in an Italian magazine *Scenario* (Rome) in February, 1941". Osborne also lists a *stornello* which Verdi set to music in 1869, entitled *"Tu dici che non m'ami"*.

popolo.[30] The importance of language and literature was of course also recognised and given due weight by Giuseppe Mazzini. In the words of his biographer Bolton King, "when he came to language and literature [he] recognised what potent factors they had been in the making of nations. The importance of language was sufficiently obvious. Literature had sometimes, as in the case of his own Italy, remained the one surviving sign of nationality, when all else was lost."[31] When in England, Mazzini read Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies* and was impressed, which resulted in him urging the collection of Italian folk songs, as described by Denis Mack Smith, "before they disappeared, because they were a vital part of the national heritage".[32]

Augusta Webster and the other British authors who participated in the vogue for Italian rural poetry between the 1860s and 1880s did not have an overt political content or even underlying agenda in their adaptations. Yet the close and often passionate interest which the Italian Risorgimento inspired in England makes it unsurprising that a few English writers strayed down the same paths being followed by Italian writers who were politically motivated.

Yet it is significant that this wave of interest in England began after the fervour of Unification had subsided, at a time when English writers needed to find new points on which to focus their interest in Italy. The interest shown in rural poetry is indeed also linked to other trends and beliefs which were current during this period. For example, the Victorian obsession with the past made Italy seem particularly fascinating to English travellers, who liked to interpret what J.A. Symonds termed "the permanence of rustic manners"[33] in Italy as a symbol that Italy was still very much in touch with its historical past. This was contrasted to England, which was seen as having been dislocated from its past by nineteenth-century industrialisation. Travellers to Italy frequently commented upon the quaint manners and dress of rustic Italians, and also Ruskin thought that not only Italy but the whole European continent was more in touch with its

30. Margherita Trabaudi Foscarini, *Francesco Dall'Ongaro* (Firenze, 1925) pp. 167–68 and 181–82; for more background, also see Piero de Tommaso, *Il Racconto Campagnolo dell'Ottocento Italiano* (Ravenna, 1973).
31. Bolton King, *Mazzini* (London, 1902), p. 299.
32. Denis Mack Smith, *Mazzini* (London, 1994), p. 26.
33. J.A. Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets*, ii (London, 1902), pp. 254–55.

past than England, declaring that "on the Continent, the lines are unbroken between the past and the present".[34]

It is also important to remember that although a journey to Italy had formed part of the English cultural education for a very long time, travel abroad first began to be reasonably comfortable and less dangerous in the late eighteenth century, and only became truly widespread during the nineteenth. Although Italy had always held an important place in English literature prior to 1800, this often filtered down through literary influences rather than through direct experience of the country. Consequently, Italy usually featured either as a stereotyped backdrop, as in the Gothic novel or the Elizabethan play, or served to provide a literary form to follow or reject methodically. It was only during the nineteenth century that poets and novelists began to take a serious interest in the customs, geography, and rual way of life of the Italian peninsula, which previously had been limited to general remarks on the beauty of the architecture or the landscape. The interest in rural poetry shown by Webster and others is thus a combination of this new trend to focus on Italy itself, combined with the more traditional attention to Italian literary forms which had been a part of English literature for so long. Adding this to the current interest in the Renaissance, Augusta Webster's focus on the rural poetry of an Italian Renaissance poet such as Angelo Poliziano can be seen as doubly fitting into the mood and thought of Victorian England.

There is no real English equivalent for the type of Italian rural poetry of the *rispetto* and the *stornello*. Theodore Watts-Dunton speculated that the Welsh *triban* may be the closest thing, but this was in any case not a form which reached the breadth of popularity enjoyed by the Italian poems in their own country. J.A. Symonds, who had tried his hand at translating *rispetti*, believed that it was impossible to do even that, as a translator of this kind of verse is faced with the difficulty of rendering "the freshness of the phrases, the spontaneity of their sentiments, and the melody of their unstudied cadences".[35] While perhaps not quite catching the spontaneity and

34. John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ii, eds. E.T. Cook & Alexander Wedderburn (London, 1903–12), pp. 11–12.
35. J.A. Symonds, "Popular Songs of Tuscany", pp. 602–03

freshness of their Italian counterparts, yet the poems by Webster and others showed that it *was* possible to adapt these Italian rural poems into English and develop them in an original and successful way.

The Italian Heritage in the Poetry of Christina Rossetti

Valeria Tinkler-Villani

In an early study of Christina Rossetti published in 1897, Mackenzie Bell, a good friend of the Rossettis, states that "It is not possible to accentuate overmuch the influence on Christina Rossetti of her Italian lineage, her early surroundings, and the fact that ... her mind was steeped with Italian literature".[1] Thus from very early on, the Italian heritage has always been acknowledged. Yet it has received hardly any close study, even in recent years, when we have seen considerable critical attention devoted to Christina Rossetti. The "lineage" derives partly from her mother Frances Polidori, who was half Italian, and mainly from her father, Gabriele Rossetti, the exile from the kingdom of Naples whose adventurous escape from political persecution saw him find sanctuary first in Malta before her moved on to England. He is still famous, or notorious, for his works on Dante.

Christina Rossetti's indebtedness to her father is an area which could be the topic of an article, but not this one. I shall, however, here and there refer to such indebtedness. In fact, when I speak of Italian heritage I refer in particular to the legacy left by the Rossetti's

1. Henry Thomas Mackenzie Bell, *Christina Rossetti: A Biographical and Critical Study*, London, 1898, 319.

father: first, the Italian language, and secondly, Italian literature, in particular a knowledge and great interest in Dante. The children all spoke English with their mother, but Italian with their father. That the Italian language is an important part of the heritage of the young Rossettis is clear. It gave special status to all four – Dante Gabriel, Maria, William Michael and Christina – enabling them to translate, use, and discuss writers such as Dante and Petrarch with a special authority. As far as Christina Rossetti is concerned, it is not generally known that she wrote about 50 poems in Italian; nor that she read in manuscript and corrected Charles Cayley's translation of the *Divine Comedy*, published in 1851.

William Michael Rossetti has left to us vivid vignettes of his family, the children listening to the endless political discussions of the Italian exiles gathered around their father:

> My mind's eye presents a curious group, although it seemed natural enough at the time. My father and three or four foreigners engaged in animated talk on the affairs of Europe, from the point of view of patriotic aspiration, . . . with frequent and fervent recitations of poetry intervening;[2]

This recurrent family activity must have had a remarkable effect on the children; but in spite of the affectionate tone with which William Michael describes in retrospect this childhood memory, we know that the father was a crippling and feared presence in many ways. His sometimes fantastic work on Dante had supporters, but much more numerous were its critics, who disgraced him and covered his work in ridicule. Umberto Eco has recently looked at the material, and in an article published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1990, Eco has shown how, indeed, Rossetti twisted the evidence from the text of the *Commedia* to fit his theory, and he states that Rossetti faked footnotes. In any case, the financial difficulties and the disgrace which crushed him as a result of all this must have been very heavy to bear. Some of the young Rossettis seem to have tried to exorcise their father's shadow, after his death, by producing their own work on Dante and, in the case of both

2. William Michael Rossetti, Introduction to *The Pre-Raphaelite Diaries and Letters*, ed. William Michael Rossetti, 3 vols, Farnborough, 1971, Vol. I, pp. 54–55.

Maria and William Michael, dedicating their works to him. Christina Rossetti is a very different case: all of her books but two were dedicated to her mother. Also, Rossetti kept a collection of 21 poems in Italian entitled *Il Rosseggiar dell'Oriente* in the secrecy of her desk, and it was published in *The Poetical Works of Christina Rossetti* by William Michael only after her death (in fact, in 1904); Dolores Rosenblum remarks on this that it is an indication of the fact that Rossetti "wanted to be known unequivocally as an English poet".[3]

In the light of this ambivalent position of closeness and distance from her father and her Italian heritage, what place does Italy and the Italian language and literature adopt in Christina Rossetti's work?

Italian critics have been very scathing of Rossetti's poetry in Italian. In a study published in 1983, Pasquale Maffeo translates into Italian a number of English poems by Rossetti, producing a very interesting version; he seems less sensitive, however, to the nature of her Italian poetry of which he states, in his introduction, that "la dizione risulta tutta d'imprestito, desunta da sedimenti di letture, inerte nei calchi che mal si piegano alle flessioni del passo sintattico che invece la vuole fresca e cedevole, viva carne su classiche giunture".[4] The fact that maybe Rossetti did not want to write poetry which was "fresh and pliant, live flesh on classical sinews" seems not to have occurred to the critic. He also mentions as a criticism the fact that the title *Il Rosseggiar dell'Oriente* "would not have displeased Carducci" ("non sarebbe spiaciuto al Carducci", p. 15) – yes, currently Carducci's poetry is not our taste, but it was held in high esteem in the 1860s – in fact, even in the early 1960s – so that to compare Christina poetry to Carducci should be a compliment. He further quotes from a critic who had published an article in the magazine *Il Marzocco* under the pseudonym of Th. Neal writing in similar terms of Christina Rossetti's Italian poetry, and who had also stated: "One would think that the Author of these lines did not speak the language of her father, whereas we know that she did" ["Quasi si potrebbe pensare che l'autrice di questi versi non abbia parlato la lingua paterna, come invece sappiamo

3. *Christina Rossetti: The Poetry of Endurance*, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Ill., 1986, 51.
4. *Il Tempo e l'Eterno*, trans., introd. and notes by Pasquale Maffeo, Chieti, 1983, p. 14.

che fece"]. The point I would like to establish here is precisely the nature of this "lingua paterna" which influenced Rossetti – this father tongue: What were the snatches of poetry which William Michael mentions? Well, they were likely to be mainly patriotic songs for which Gabriele Pasquale Rossetti was famous throughout Italy and even in England, an example being a song which begins

> Sei pur bella cogli astri sul crine
> Che scintillan qual vivi zaffiri.[5]

Other works of Gabriele in poetry in the first years of his exile were libretti for Italian operas, which titles such as *La Schiava in Bagdad, Il Corsaro, or Medora e Corrado, cantata melodrammatica basata sul Corsaro di Byron;* the diction was verbose, operatic, histrionic. But his example for lyric poetry was Metastasio, who was also read by Christina Rossetti in her childhood. There is some indebtedness to Metastasio in her rhythms, as I have shown in a previous article of mine; but her diction is far more clipped and contracted than what I have read from her father's, and her lines scan with great variety. Does Italian and Italy then belong to Christina's childhood, to her father's circle and her own early readings? And are they in later life a source of images to support more or less nostalgic references or a looking back to the past? This is what Jan Marsh has stated about Christina's use of Italy as a place. Italy is "symbolic of the sweet security of infancy";[6] place, that is, assumes the function of a symbol, and its significance is determined by its chronological position in the life of the poet. This is probably partly true; but I would argue that Italy is, rather, in Christina's own words in a poem, "the country half my own" throughout Christina's life.

In the English poems written about Italy on the occasion of Christina Rossetti's only visit to Italy, this country becomes "sister-land of Paradise" ("En Route"); it is the land "blessed" because it "warms [my] heart", and when "our swallows fly back to ... the sweet south". This south is not so much one's lost childhood, or a

5. Quoted in Felicita Jurlano, *Christina Georgina Rossetti: The True Story*, n.p., n.d. [after 1978], p. 15). Jurlano further states that such a song "was known also to the English admirers of Italian letters."
6. Jan Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography*, London, 1994, p. 339.

lost Eden, as a figure of a Paradise – but a Paradise which exists, a place which one can long for, now; it simply "lies out of reach". England, on the other hand, is "the North/where I was born, bred, look to die": the difference between these two poles, the South and the North, becomes an opposition between a near-paradisal state and the location of everyday, real life. England is the place where the persona has to come back "to do my day's work in its day" (Italia, Io Ti Saluto") – the contingent world, the here and now.[7]

As for the idea of Englishness we see that in the poem entitled "Enrica" the persona creates an opposition between Englishwomen, whose appearance is "trim, correct" and whose spirit is "deep at our deepest, strong and free", and the Italian lady Enrica, who is "less trammelled by lore of school" and "courteous by nature, not by rule". But we also come to discover that the opposition is only a matter of surface, for Enrica is "warm-hearted and of cordial face", and the Englishwomen are "warm-hearted but of semblance cold".

Rather than a biographical identity displaced and distanced in time, relegated to her childhood, I argue for an Italian identity displaced in terms of location within the self. The mass of her poetry suggests that Christina saw such an Italian identity, or an Italian identity as image or symbol in poetry, to reside precisely in that deepest core of one's self – in what Christina almost obsessively in her Italian poetry called her "cuore" – the heart. This already appears in her English poems. In one, addressing Italy she says "Take my heart . . . Dear land, take my tears"; but this is even more clear in her Italian poems in which the heart is the central, most recurring image.

In the Italian poetry (and here I have to rely on what I have argued and shown in my previous article)[8] this image can refer at one and the same time to her inner self, to her beloved, and to Christ's love – a kind of trinity, three separate figures which co-exist and become merged in the image of the heart. Also, the "cuore"

7. For the text of all the poems quoted I rely on *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti*, ed. R.W. Crump, 3 vols, Baton Rouge and London, 1979–1990.

8. Valeria Tinkler-Villani, "Christina Rossetti's Italian Poems", in *Beauty and the Beast: Christina Rossetti, Walter Pater, R.L. Stevenson and their Contemporaries*, eds. Peter Liebregts and Wim Tigges, Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1996.

becomes the location, the stage on which the drama of the persona's secular and religious attachments are played out one against the other. The heart of the poetry, the core of the poetry, is "Cor Mio".

Also at the heart of her poetry we find a figure whose pervasive presence must be partly due to her father's studies – the figure of Dante. Again it is one of her Italian poems that gives us a clue as to her relationship to Dante's poetry:

> Cor mio a cui si volge l'altro mio core
> Qual calamita al polo, e non ti trova,
> La nascita della mia vita nuova
> Con pianto fu, con grida e con dolore.
>
> [My heart, to which my other heart turns
> Like magnet to the pole, and does not find you
> The birth of my new life
> Was with weeping, with cries and with pain.]
> (poem 19 of Il Rosseggiar, "Amico e più che amico mio")

The almost recondite meaning of the two hearts in line one is further complicated by the quasi-metaphysical image of the magnet and the pole, which is in turn undermined by the impossible event of a magnet turning to a pole and not finding it. In this universe bereft of any fixed point, lacking any North or South, Rossetti's persona compares the first inception of her Vita Nuova with that of Dante. In that work, Dante described his persona as experiencing plenty of weeping (see Chapter XXXI of the *Vita Nuova*) and plenty of pain – even physical pain (see chapter XXIII). But these are later moments; the beginning of the *Vita Nuova*, the first apparition of Beatrice, filled Dante with bliss: *"Apparuit iam beatitudo vestra"*, we read in section II.[9] After all, that is the very meaning of Beatrice's name, as Dante Gabriel stressed in his translation: Beatrice is the bringer of beatitude.[10] These lines also support my view of the

9. "Now your source of joy has been revealed", *Dante: la Vita Nuova*, trans. Barbara Reynolds, Penguin, 1969, rpt 1978, p. 30.

10. This is true, however, of religious beatitude, for in worldly and physical terms Dante's *Vita Nuova* began in joy, and continued in grief. Rossetti inverts this course; in the poem just quoted, the persona goes on to say:

closeness of Christina Rossetti's poetry to that of Dante's early work. In section III of Dante's *Vita Nuova* the narrator is granted a vision; he sees the God of Love, and he is holding in one hand the beloved, and in the other hand an object:

> And he who held her held also in his hand a thing that was burning in flames; and he said to me, *Vide cor tuum*.[11]

It was probably from Dante's *Vita Nuova* that Rossetti drew some of her images, such as the image of the heart as separate from her body, as well as the complicated manner in which this image is combined with that of the beloved and of God. That trinity I mentioned is taken directly from the *Vita Nuova*.

But Rossetti puts those images to a very different use from Dante's. In Rossetti's Italian poetry her beloved is not the bringer of beatitude, as Beatrice was. Rather than depend on her beloved for taking her, through love, to a heavenly vision in the platonic system Dante and other poets adapted to the medieval convention of love poetry, it is the speaker of the poems herself that will guide the male beloved to Christ and God. Rossetti's Italian sequence, what Maffeo calls her "canzoniere minimo", thus inverts the roles of the conventional medieval course of secular to divine love.

It is with these clues concerning Dante's *Vita Nuova* and concerning Italy drawn from Italian poems and poems about Italy that I want to approach a final text of Rossetti's – her sonnet sequence bearing an Italian title – *Monna Innominata*.

This title refers first to the many "unnamed ladies" who came before Beatrice and Laura, and who were sung by "a school of less conspicuous poets" than Petrarch and Dante, but in a similar manner. It also refers to the unnamed lady who is imagined to be the writer of the sequence of sonnets in front of us. It is a sequence of 14 sonnets. Much research, scholarship and critical attention has been devoted to this sequence in recent years, and, with varying emphases

Ma l'aspro duolo fummi precursore
Di speranza gentil . . .

[But the harsh pain was the forerunner
of sweet hope . . .]

11. La *Vita Nuova*, trans. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, London, 1910, p. 28.

and from different angles, most critics agree that what Rossetti is doing is setting up a critique of the love conventions as developed by Dante and Petrarch. As Anthony Harrison puts it, in *Monna Innominata*

> Rossetti . . . subverts the post-Dantean values and expectations of her genre while defiantly resisting the conventional role of silent object and overturning the gender relations usually accepted in Petrarchan sonnet sequences.[12]

I agree with this critic, and with other critics who all insist on Rossetti's subversion of the expectations of desire created by the love-lyric and even by Dante's vision of Beatrice. But this is only part of the story. To this, I would like to add two further points. The first is a general point: that it was in her Italian poems that Christina Rossetti developed the strategies and the very ideas connected with such subversion. The second point is specifically concerned with the *Monna Innominata* sequence, and that is that the Italian title should alert the reader to the various and crucial roles played by the use of the Italian language within the subversive tendencies of the sequence.

An integral part of this sequence, I would argue, are the preface, and the epigrams. Rossetti herself refused permission to print only part of this sequence in an American anthology,[13] and I find it very strange that in his Italian translation of the sequence Maffeo should have left out both the preface and the epigrams. The latter – the epigrams – are probably the aspect of the sequence which first catches our eye. Each sonnet has one epigram from Dante, and one from Petrarch. There have been studies on the epigrams. William Whitla has focused on the contents of the epigrams, and has produced a very scholarly analysis of provenance, links, possible interpretations and various other aspects of the epigrams, and I am convinced that even the most complicated inter-linking patterns he suggests were, indeed, intended by the Author.[14] But it seems strange no-one should have mentioned the simple fact that they are in Italian.

12. See in particular the chapter entitled "Intertextually: Dante, Petrarch and Christina Rossetti", in Anthony Harrison, *Christina Rossetti In Context*, Brighton, 1988, p. 155.
13. See *The Rossetti-MacMillan Letters*, ed. Lona Mosk Packer, Berkeley, 1963, p. 154.
14. "Questioning the Convention: Monna Innominata", in *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*, ed. David A. Kent, Ithaca and London, 1987.

Now clearly most epigrams originally written in a language different from that of the text itself were kept, in the nineteenth century, in the original language. But the case is slightly different here. For each sonnet of 14 lines is prefaced by 2 lines in Italian – this creates a contrast, a continuous shifting of mediums. We cannot avoid seeing even with our naked eye that what is going on is a dialogue between the speaker of the sonnets – a woman speaking/ writing in English (and I say writing because it is clear the speaker is the writer of the poetry), and Dante and Petrarca, writing their poetry, in Italian.

This is not dissimilar to a strategy Dante used in the *Vita Nuova*. This was one of the very first works written in the vernacular, also thanks to the encouragement of Guido Cavalcanti. Early in this work the narrator sees the God of Love who speaks to the lover first in Latin, then in the vernacular; as Charles Singleton says,

> The shift from Latin to the vernacular on the part of the God of Love when he utters these last words is in itself a part of the total revelation made by the vision. For only the words in Latin are of the nature of an oracle, and by being put in that language they are set apart and raised to a proper dignity. When Love changes to Italian one feels that somehow he has stepped down to the level of the poet and of everyday affairs. Thus, like the number nine, the Latin too is a sign.[15]

Similarly, the continuous shifting from Italian into English is a stepping down from the high medieval Love convention of Dante and Petrarca to the level of the possibilities of love in the nineteenth century, in England. The shift of language is a "a sign".

Another such sign is the repetition of the naming of Dante and Petrarca. this is an almost incantatory repetition which also acts as an instrument of meaning. For, in opposition to the title and the poets it refers to, Dante and Petrarca are two poets "continuamente nominati", and therefore set up a contrast with the present-day, English world of the unnamed lady writer.

The Italian title attracts our attention to naming and non naming as a sign. Dante and Petrarch are continuously named in the

15. Charles Singleton, *An Essay on the* Vita Nuova, Baltimore and London, 1949, rpt. 1977, p. 17.

epigrams; Laura and Beatrice are name both at in the very first words, and in the very last words of the preface. What we are told in the preface is that these women have become unreal and impersonal, and what we understand is that this happens in spite of the fact that we know their names. This is the paradox of Beatrice and Laura. Because they have "world-wide fame", they do not fully exist in a real place and a specific time – in Italy in the late middle ages – but merely, as the preface puts it, "in that land, and in that period". A number of critics have puzzled on this unnecessarily cryptic phrase, but it is, I would say, part of Rossetti's system of signs here. It reasserts the opposition between the revered convention and present-day England. Rossetti is using the idea of Italy here in a manner similar to the way she had used it in the poetry: opposed to the idealized, generalized world of Dante and Petrarch, England is "our day's work in its day", the here and now, the real, contingent world.

The preface closes on a cryptic reference to "The Great Poetess", who also remains unnamed, although since we are told she is the Author of sonnets from the Portuguese, we know her to be Barret Browning. One of the purposes of this reference, I would say, is to add to the themes of love and honour, specifically mentioned in the preface, the idea of marriage – and these have been defined as the three central concerns of the late Victorians. Moreover, it gives Rossetti a chance to stress the importance of real circumstances in writing love sonnets – that is, the fact that Barret Browning is writing out of her love for her husband, and out of her happiness. In doing this, Rossetti is doing in terms of the England of the nineteenth century, precisely what Dante had done with the *Vita Nuova*: for there Dante himself tried, as Barbara Reynolds puts it, to "depart from or extend the conventions":

> It was in the gradually increasing admittance of reality into the enclosed garden of poetic convention that Dante made his most original and creative discoveries.[16]

16. Introduction to Dante, *La Vita Nuova*, trans. Barbara Reynolds, Penguin, 1969 rpt. 1978, pp. 16, 17.

Dante managed to break with the static, idealised earlier medieval poetic conventions, and create love poetry which seemed drawn directly from personal experience. By stressing the importance of drawing "not from fancy but from feeling", and by using all the other signs I have mentioned, based on her use of Italian, Rossetti felt, I would argue, that she was attempting to do the same for England and for her own day.

As some critics have pointed out, Rossetti's "monna innominata" sings of a male beloved who remains totally unnamed and indeed quite undescribed; he is all but absent, and is not the source of inspiration. She sings of moments in a love story analogous to the moments in the conventional, medieval love story, but experienced in a very different way; for example, where Dante and Petrarch celebrated the first sight of the beloved, her first word, her first greeting, Rossetti's second sonnet is dedicated to the regret that the persona cannot remember a single thing of such a first encounter. Moreover, the sonnet sequence moves steadily in time to portray the lover in her old age – and, instead of being the beginning of a career of poetry, as Beatrice had started Dante off in the *Vita Nuova* enabling him to move to the *Commedia,* "monna innominata"'s love ends in silence. The final words of the sequence are "Silence of love that cannot sing again".

But I would argue that though she might be subverting the nature of Dante's conventions, she is performing exactly the same function for her own day, and using the very same techniques. Rossetti sings of a love story which is more true to the experience of a woman in nineteenth-century England; she re-writes Dante's and Petrarch's conventional love story and makes it new.

The medieval convention of love poetry was surely one of the poetic traditions which the late nineteenth century most worried about. It formed the touchstone against which not only the Pre-Raphaelites, but other poets such as Tennyson and Swinburne measured the present, and such poets became deeply involved in exploring its validity in their day; what Rossetti does, therefore, goes straight to the heart of the poetic issues of her time. It is in her Italian poetry, and through her use of Dante that she develops the strategies to do this.

Scenari italiani per un poema inglese: *The Ring and the Book* di Robert Browning

Mariagrazia Bellorini

Henry James nel suo celebre saggio su The *Ring and the Book* non trattiene l'entusiasmo per la straordinaria capacità di Browning nel proporre nel poema una perfetta atmosfera della società italiana degli anni, sul finire del diciassettesimo secolo, in cui si svolgono i fatti narrati. Nell'analizzare il rapporto tutto particolare tra Browning e le fonti documentali dell'opera, James variamente e ripetutamente sottolinea la straordinaria "energy of appropriation" esercitata dal poeta nei riguardi della sua materia grezza: azione, agenti, immagini si fondono dinamicamente, mentre: "Another force pushes its way through the waste and rules the scene . . . that breath of Browning's own particular matchless Italy which takes us full in the face and remains from the first the felt rich coloured air in which we live".

A riprova di quanto sia unico, nella produzione poetica e narrativa inglese, il risultato così ottentuto, James propone un confronto con l'Italia che George Eliot crea in Romola: a parità di cultura, di curiosità intelletuale, di sensibilità morale, l'una "leaves the air about as clear, about as white, and withal about as cold, as before she had benevolently entered it", mentre Browning "stirs up to my vision, a perfect cloud of golden dust" e, – James conclude – "this

straight saturation of our author's, this prime assimilation of the elements for which the name of Italy stands, is a single splendid case".[1]

I critici contemporanei di Browning non avevano dato particolare rilievo a questo aspetto del poema, attratti piuttosto dalla galleria di ritratti di personaggi, visti in continuità con i precedenti monologhi drammatici; solo Carlyle aveva notato "the curiously minute picture of Italian society"[2] che l'opera offriva. L'anno successivo al saggio di James, nel 1913, Frederick Treves dedicò uno studio monografico a *The Country in The Ring and the Book*.[3] Con accuratezza Treves raccontò di nuovo l'intera storia, con lo scopo di identificare nella realtà tutti i luoghi citati nel poema, fornendo una cospicua documentazione iconografica e fotografica degli stessi con un risultato peraltro modesto, quando non pedante: parafrasando James nel suo confronto fra Browning e George Eliot, il lavoro del Treves arriva al più a costituire una specie di relazione tra il narrativo e il sentimentale, che lascia l'aria chiara, bianco, "cold", come viene detto della Eliot di *Romola*: nulla di quella particolare temperie che magicamente Browning coglie e comunica nella misure pur evasive del verso.È stato detto che il lettore-pellegrino nel paesaggio dell'opera amata, va incontro a delusioni, poichè il voler materializzare l'emozione in un punto topografico, ingrigisce la fantasia: così avvieni con l'opera del Treves.

È sulla nuvola di polvere dorata evocata da James che vorremmo allora soffermarci, su "the golden air" nella quale Browning si muove da dominatore, distillandola e trasudandola, – è sempre James ad esprimersi in questi termini –, divenendo nei confronti di tale materia non solo una luce come Shelley, non un suono come Swinburne, ma unico fra questi suoi contemporanei, "a temperature".Vorremmo altresì suggerire i possibili parametri artistici sottesi all riproduzione dall'interno dell'atmosfera peculiare della società, del mondo, della realtà italiana nella quale viene a

1. Henry James, "The Novel in the Ring and the Book" (1912), *Literary Criticism*, 2 vol., Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 1984, pp. 791–811; H. James, *W.W. Story and His Friends from Letters, Diaries, and Recollections*, London 1903, pp. 225–27.
2. H. Allingham, D. Radford eds., *William Allingham: A Diary*, London 1908, p. 194.
3. F. Treves, *The Country of the Ring and the Book*, Cassell and C., London, New York 1913.

contestualizzarsi la complessa vicenda dei Franceschini e dei Comparini con la sua tragica conclusione.

Il complesso impianto narrativo e drammatico di *The Ring and the Book*, insieme con l'innovazione del rapporto tra organizzazione della forma e organizzazione del senso, da Browning introdotta con il monologo drammatico, fa si che anche lo spazio diventi elemento necessario alla piena caratterizzazione del personaggio stesso, con il quale esso si pone in relazione integrativa, offrendone ulteriori indirette chiavi di comprensione. La presenza della fonte storica documentale – il celebre *Old Yellow Book* – impone, d'altro canto, spazi ben precisi e in prevalenza urbani che oggettivamente scandiscono la diegesi del poema. Infine la struttura temporale, su livelli plurimi, condiziona la comparsa delle ambientazioni spaziali in concatenazione retrospettiva: semplificando possiamo parlare dello spazio della vicenda personale del poeta–narratore, e dello spazio della storia narrata.[4]

Nel primo libro, l'autore, ormai nella sua casa londinese, rivive il momento del ritrovamento dello *Old Yellow Book* nel mercato di San Lorenzo in Firenze; e della eccitante ed eccitata lettura da parte sua dei documenti in esso raccolti; evoca l'urgere in lui dell'impulso creativo per ridare vita alla storia in essi adombrata.[5]

Il primo *setting* italiano è pertanto, come ci vien detto, il mercato di San Lorenzo e nel ricrearlo Browning attinge certamente alla sua quotidiana frequentazione della città, alla memoria iconica dove la sua sensibilissima capacità percettiva ha accumulato infiniti dettagli;

4. Mariagrazia Bellorini, *Ritratti in scena. Una lettura di* The Ring and the Book *di Robert Browning*, Adriatica Bari, 1992. In questo studio si era già affrontata una prima sommaria analisi del paesaggio browninghiano.

5. Browning visitò Firenze una prima volta nell'inverno 1844; vi si stabilì in seguito con Elizabeth facendo di casa Guidi la loro dimora per tredici anni, dal 1847 al 1861, quando col la morte di lei Robert chiuse la casa fiorentina é ritornò definitivamente a Londra. Nel giugno 1860 egli aveva acquistato nel mercato di San Lorenzo un fascicolo di documenti relativi ad un processo svoltosi a Roma nel lontano 1698, contro un nobile aretino, Guido Franceschini, che aveva ucciso la moglie e i suoceri, adducendo a sua attenuante la formula di delitto d'onore. Il fascicolo venne denominato dal poeta *The Old Yellow Book*. La storia del rinvenimento è raccontata dal poeta nel primo libro di *The Ring and the Book*. Si veda anche: C. W. Hodell, *The Old Yellow Book, Source of Browning's The Ring and the Book*, Carnegie Inst. of Washington, Washington D.C. 1908.

ma come vedremo, altri elementi concorrono a rendere unica la sua trascrizione del luogo nel contesto poetico. La didascalia temporale, un caldo giorno di metà giugno 1860, introduce al solido impianto architettonico della piazza, che, "... crammed with booths,/Buzzing and blaze, noon-tide and market-time" (1,43–44), si identifca grazie a tre elementi che ne delimitano la spazio di fondo: la statua equestre di Giovanni dalle Bande Nere, palazzo Riccardi, la chiesa di San Lorenzo, coordinate sufficienti al riconoscimento del luogo dove si compie l'azione di ritrovamento (*ill.*1)[6]. Il fulcro della scena appena abbozzata per il momento, è "This book", un semplice deittico che avrà il suo completamento sintattico a venticinque versi di distanza, durante i quali – per così dire – siamo costretti a spostare lo sguardo dalle strutture architettoniche di fondo ai settori inferiori del quadro che si sta formando e ai primi pianti, per individuare l'oggetto su cui l'attentzione è stata così bruscamente richiamata dall'artista:

> "Mongst odds and ends of ravage, picture-frames
> White through the worn gilt, mirror-scones chipped,
> Bronze angel–heads once knobs attached to chests
> .... these
> I picked this book from.
>
> (I,50–75)

Su un gradone del palazzo i rigattieri hanno esposto la loro merce: cornici che hanno perso la doratura, specchi sbeccati, pomi di bronzo a testa d'angelo, disegni a carboncino, studi di nudo, pietre dure lavorate e grezze, busti di terracotta, brandelli di arazzo offerti come scendiletto, un fascio di incisioni a seppia fissato da un vaso perchè il vento non le sparga per la piazza. Infine mettiamo a fuoco, fra tante cianfrusaglie, una fila di libri e "this book", il libro (I,75–83).

Con l'acquisto del fascicolo anonimo e meno appariscente, che da quel momento diventerà*The Old Yellow Book*, l'azione a livello narrativo è compiuta. La creazione d'ambiente che l'ha inquadrata è però realizzata solo parzialmente, poichè un settore della piazza è

6. La illustrazione riproduce il quadro attribuito a Giovanni Signorini, *Piazza di San Lorenzo nel 1830*, per gentile concessione della direzione del Museo di Firenze com'era.

rimasto escluso dal punto di prospettiva facente perno sul libro. A livello narrativo questo sarebbe del tutto la realistica vivacità, l'intensità di quella via italiana di cui il poema deve essere espressione. Egli porta a compimento coerente l'unità spaziale ricorrendo ad una forma di preterizione pittorico-visuale. Immerso ormai nella lettura del suo tesoro ("my prize" I,93) egli non vede, proprio per questa concentrazione nella lettura, tutto ciò che la piazza offre ancora all'osservatore: un tutto che viene enumerato come *non visto*, diligentemente, con rinnovata varietà di forme e di colori. Così ad un livello più basso rispetto alla statua del condottiero mediceo, assistiamo ad un ritmico muoversi di figure, intorno alla fontana la cui acqua offre frescura nella calura del mezzogiorno, fanciulle la attingono con brocche di rame, mostrando caviglie scoperte tra ondeggiare di sottane, venditori di verdura vi rinfrescano la loro merce:

> While clinked the cans of copper, as stooped and rose
> Thick–ankled girls who brimmed them, and made place
> For marketmen glad to pitch basket down,
> Dip a broad melon–leaf that holds the wet,
> And whisk their faded fresh.
>
> (I,94–100)

È il quotidiano, il popolare, nella sua armonia naturale di forme, colori, suoni, sensazioni che sollecitano insieme l'occhio del pittore e la parola del poeta in un nucleo compiuto di significato. Poi riprendiamo a seguire la figura, immersa nella lettura, che si allontana: il movimento si comunica ora nella sfumata imprecisione degli oggetti che delimitano lo spazio che deve ancora essere percorso. Il lettore procede fra pile di manufatti in paglia, ferri vecchi, attrezzi agricoli, telai di letto, cassetti spalancati, file di lampade in ottone, abiti usati esposti al sole . . . un mondo ad esclusivo beneficio di altri osservatori, e al quale egli rimane indifferente "None of them took my eye from off my prize" (I,109). Lo vediamo infine uscire di scena, sul fondo della piazza verso via Tornabuoni, palazzo Strozzi, ponte S. Trinita, casa Guidi, quasi una mappa della parte della città che egli ha fatto sua.

Il trapasso è dall'esterno accaldato, colorato, affollato, rumoroso, all'interno dell'abitazione con caratteri opposti e complementari, a

integrare il contesto italiano del fatale incontro tra il poeta e il materiale storico. Frescura, penombra, silenzio:

> . . . I stood at home again
> In Casa Guidi by Felice Church
> Under the doorway where the black begins
> With the first stone-slab of the staircase cold.
>
> (I,113–116).

Tanto ricca era stata la ricostruzione del mercato, tanto sobrio è quella di casa Guidi. Oltre la soglia Browning definisce un altro spazio, là dove porta a termine la lettura del suo libro. La scena è costituita da pochi essenziali elementi dei quali il fulcro è di nuovo il libro:

> The book was shut and done with and laid by
> On the cream-coloured massive agate, broad
> 'Neath the two cherubs in tarnished frame
> O' the mirror, tall thence to the ceiling-top.
>
> (I,472–75).

Le robe vecchie di Piazza San Lorenzo si sono qui ricomposte nell'armonia di un interno, lo connotano come tipicamente italiano, anzi fiorentino come precisa Barbara Melchiori.[7] Altrettanto connotato è l'ultimo passaggio, – dopo che egli si è riconosciuto come poet-narratore nel riflesso dello specchio –, ad uno spazio contiguo alla sala, il terrazzo, trasformato in palcoscenico sul quale agiranno in seguito gli attori da lui evocati. Di nuovo assistiamo alla creazione di un frammento di Italia; elgi percorre il pavimento a losanghe appena spruzzato d'acqua fresca; quinta di scena è la chiesa di San Felice, nello scorcio delle vetrate illuminate dall'interno da dove proviene il canto delle Domenicane,[8] limpide voci per una notte estiva (I,482–85). Fra le piante sul terrazzo compaiono e scompaiono le lucciole; nella strada sottostante, illuminata da fasci di luce che scendono tra le nuvole del tramonto, passano gruppi di

7. B. Melchiori, *Browning's Poetry of Reticence*, Oliver and Boyd Ltd., Edinburgh 1968, pp. 4–6.
8. A. Busignani, R. Bencini, *Le Chiese di Firenze, Quartiere di Santo Spirito*, Sansoni Firenze, 1974, pp. 145–154.

persone chiaccherando: la indefinibile sensazione di appagamento, di flusso vitale, la sottile emozione estetica di una calda serata estiva in una città italiana, – egli respira "the beauty and fearfulness of the night" (1,525) –, viene rivissuta dal poeta come esperienza intensa, che assume una valenza universale, grazie alla peculiare scelta dei particolari visivi, organizzati con il concorso di una sua sensibilità pittorica alla partizione dello spazio nella azione simultanea di suono, senso, immagine.

Le modalità di articolazione poetica della sequenze del rinvenimento, della lettura e della eleborazione dei vecchi documenti del caso Franceschini, sono concepite come grande complessa introduzione al mondo in cui i fatti si svolsero; una immersione completa in quel peculiare mondo italiano che non ci abbandonerà e al quale non potremo sottrarci per tutta la durata dell'opera. La grande scena d'insieme all'aperto, l'interno del palazzo e il terrazzo di casa Guidi, percepito come luogo interlocutorio tra l'individualità poetica e il mondo, traggono certamente la loro forza evocatrice dall'essere parte di una realtà così concreta e viva quale Firenze era nella esperienza di Browning. Il procedimento attraverso cui veniamo introdotti a questo luogo è però molto più o molto diverso da una elencazione, da una presentazione fotografica, da una descrizione funzionale, e quindi secondaria, al ritrovamento del libro. Su uno schema realistico si innesta una libera organizzazione di intuizioni visivo-pittoriche che operano per analogia, facendoci partecipi anche delle inesattezze topografiche che il poeta si permette: egli trasforma la piazza di S. Lorenzo dilatando a vasta superfice espositoria un ridottissimo muretto a sbalzo sul fianco di palazzo Riccardi, concentra ogni tipo di merce nel mercato che in realtà è sempre stato solo di abbigliamento; sovrapponendo quindi citazioni iconiche forse dal mercato Vecchio, dove difatto si trovavano i rigattieri e i robivecchi.[9] Egli ancora amplifica e fa crescere fino al soffitto quello che era una piccola specchiera dorata sopra il camino, in una sala stipata di pezzi d'arredamento tipicamente ottocenteschi, non particolarmente rinascimentale o fiorentina, quindi (*ill.*2).[10] Eppure

9. G. Fanelli, *Firenze*, Laterza, Bari 1991, p. 259.
10. Ph. Kelley, A.B. Coley eds, *The Browning Collections: A Reconstraction with other Memorabilia*, Wedgestone Press, New York 1984, H 14, dove vengono catalogati gli oggetti dell'arredamento. La specchiera sopra il camivo (H 401) è così descritta: "Large, carved wood guilt frame of scroll design with 2 amorini at sides each suporting 2 candle branches". Il salotto di casa Guidi è riprodotto da un quadro ad olio di G. Mignaty.

l'insieme di tutti questi elementi riesce a creare il correlativo, come dice James, di molto se non tutto ciò per cui il nome d'Italia sta per lo straniero: la parola poetica assume magnificata efficacia evocativa nell'originale fondersi con le prospettive pittoriche ed offre la possibilità di sperimentare uno di quei preziosi momenti di intuizione, di illuminazione di una significanza profonda che supera e sospende per un attimo l'oggettivo, limitato procedere del conoscere empirico.

Con parametri di valutazione simili si possono analizzare gli spazi della narrazione del secondo livello: muovendo immaginativamente da Firenze il poeta-narratore evoca il percorso circolare delle sequenze diegetiche del dramma, imperniato sulle tre località pricipali: Arezzo, Castelnuovo, Roma. Di questi Arezzo, è legato emblematicamente alla opposizione metaforica strutturale bene / male, che in questo caso assimila anche l'organizzazione dello spazio urbano; mentre Castelnuovo è riscattato da paesaggio pittoresco di repertorio, attraverso la trasfigurazione iconico-metaforica imposta dal poeta all'intera vicenda. Roma diviene invece la struttura spaziale dominante: è il luogo dei monologanti, gli attori cui il-poeta-narratore demanda la reinvenzione del dramma, perchè esso qui si conclude con il processo e la condanna del Franceschini.

Siamo all'inivio dell'anno 1698 e la città è colta in un momento di ecitazione particolare per l'efferato caso di triplice omicidio e per la conseguente causa guidiziaria che divide gli animi della popolazione. I diversi speakers, siano osservatori o protagonisti, secondo la tecnica del monologo drammatico, danno vita a una sorta di microcosmo, scenari parziali, indicazioni che ogni monologante apporta sui luoghi nei quali si svolsero gli avvenimenti, costruendo in questo modo attraverso un processo ad accumulo, la collocazione storico-topografica più estesa in*The Ring and the Book*. Abbiamo delle scene collettive d'insieme, grandiose, dominanti, ma abbiamo contemporaneamente bozzetti, allusioni, citazioni, che in una sottile ma sempre più tenace rete di tratti caratterizzanti dello spazio, assorbono il lettore in quella *temperature* romana individuata da James. Si crea, su linee apparentemente casuali, una struttura spaziale organica che soteniene la veridicità di personaggi ed azioni, che vuole essere efficace, fedele riproduzione di un mondo distante quasi due secoli, del quale il poeta intuisce il pulsare su ritmi non dissimili da quelli che egli ha direttamente conosciuto e fatto suoi.

Speculare alla scena del mercato fiorentino, troviamo una scena di massa in apertura del monologo di Half-Rome, il primo degli *speakers* romani. Costui, con il suo interlocutore, indugia presso la chiesa di San Lorenzo in Lucina, dove sono esposti i cadaveri dei Comparini uccisi da Guido Franceschini. Le coordinate suffcienti ad individuare il luogo sono state anticipate dal poeta narratore nella sua presentazione del monologante: "So they lounge / Midway the mouth of the street, on Corso side / "Twixt palace Fiano and palace Ruspoli . . ." (I, 874–76). Preparato la scenario di fondo, tocca ora a Half-Rome dare forma allo spazio con gli elementi che egli ritiene utili alla sua strategia argomentativa. Appostato in un angolo tranquillo riparato, tra i due palazzi, Fiano e Ruspoli, e l'imbocco del Corso, egli ricompone una visione d'insieme di quella Roma di cui egli è in parte rappresentante ed interprete, visualizza con estrema chiarezza il contesto sociale e storico delle sequenze romane che seguiranno, tradisce, senza volerlo, lo stereotipo popolaresco della devozione fanatica, della curiosità becera e crudele, della facile emotività collettiva di fronte ad una situazione così eccitante, carica di passione e di violenza.

Siamo all'imbrunire del giorno successivo agli omicidi e i corpi dei due Comparini – Pompilia non è ancora deceduta – sono rimasti esposti ai piedi dell'altare di San Lorenzo per l'intera giornata, oggetto della morbosa curiosità della folla che continua ad affluire all'intero della chiesa. Half-Rome ha già compiuto la sua visita ma, vittima come i suoi concittadini della irresistibile attrazione che il macabro spettacolo esercita, è ancora sul luogo e offre all'altro, che sembra appena guinto, un aggiornamento sulla situazione, ricreando per lui uno spaccato dell'interno della chiesa:

> People climbed up the columns, fought for spikes
> O' the chapel rail to perch themselves upon,
> Jumped over and so broke the wooden work
> painted like porphyry to deceive the eye;
> . . . The organ-loft was crammed,
> Women were fainting, no few fights ensued,
> In short it was a show repaid your pains
>
> (II,88–110).

Vivacissimo ritratto della folla, che continuera anche verso l'esterno, e che comunque scandisce lo spazio evocato, organizzata

com'è in gruppi anedottici di figurine: chi si arrampica sulle colonne, chi si abbarbica alle concellate, chi salta oltre la balaustra di finto marmo; gremiscono la balconata dell'organo, svengono, si azzuffano. Con forte incisività oleografica lo *speaker* mette a fuoco il fulcro del quadro, i cadaveri esposti racchiusi entro un cerchio di ceri, presso i quali sfilano coloro che a spintoni hanno raggiunto l'altare, e davanti allo spettacolo assumono atteggiamenti grotteschi: occhi levati al cielo, frettolosi segni di croce. Altra zona di concentrazione è là dove la luce rossastra e fumosa delle candele lascia intravvedere l'arrivo di un personaggio di rango cui si fa incontro il curato della chiesa (II,159), con un distino coagularsi di forme a scandire lo spazio.

Se facciamo una verifica sulle strutture architettoniche della chiesa reale (*ill.*3)[11], dobbiamo costatare quanto concorra alla finale evocazione dello spirito del luogo, non tanto un oggettivo adeguamento ad esse, quanto il ricorso del poeta al suo *musée immaginaire*, alla memoria iconica ove si trovano le matrici del suo immaginario poetico,[12] un museo ricco certo di repertori iconografici di scene di popolo raccolto in occasioni speciali – funerali, incoronazioni, miracoli, esecuzioni, e così via – o in affreschi, in arazzi, in quadri di maniera, prospettive o *trompe l'oil*. Nel S. Lorenzo romano, contrariamente alle indicazioni del locutore browninghiano, non ci sono infatti navate laterali, i cancelli cui si allude sono probabilmente quelli esterni nel chiostro di accesso; non ci sono balaustre di finto marmo, né galleria per l'organo. Curiosamente durante la stesura del poema, Browning si era rivolto all'amico pittore Leighton, che si trovava ancora a Roma, per avere precise informazioni sull'interno di San Lorenzo:[13] informazioni di cui non tenne conto evidentemente, e creò gli spazi interni della chiesa, –

11. L. Huetter, E. Lavagnino, *S. Lorenzo in Lucina*, Danesi Editore, Roma s.d., p. 36. Sull'altare maggiore della chiesa si trova la tela della *Crocifissione* di Guido Reni, pittore più volte citato in *The Ring and the Book*, cf. Mariagrazia Bellorini, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

12. Jean H. Hagstrum, *The Sisters Arts: From Neoclassic to Romantic*, in S.G. Nichols e R.B. Vowels eds., *Comparatists at Work*, Toronto London 1968, pp. 169–194: "Pictorialists poets tend themselves to be painters, or to associate with painters, or to visit museums, or to collect engravings – in short, to use all possible means to create what André Malraux has called a personal *musée imaginaire*, which can be carried around in the head".

13. Mrs. Sutherland Orr, *Life and Letters of Robert Browning*. G. Bell and Sons, London 1891, p. 284.

anche quando l'azione vi tornerà nella sequenza del matrimonio clandestino –, seguendo una sua visione interiore nella scelta di quegli elementi che, riorganizzati arbitrariamente, trasmettessero l'intuizione globale di significato, di vitalità dinamica tipicamente italiana, come già avvenuto per il mercato di San Lorenzo a Firenze.

L'altro cittadino romano, The Other Half-Rome, (anche questo un nome emblematico), si trova in una zona di Roma poco distante, più staccata, anche temporalmente, dall'urgere degli avvenimenti; sono passati due giorni dall'omicidio, il nevischio di quella tragica notte si è sciolto, il sole è tornato sui tetti della città. È ancora il poeta-narratore a creare la scena per questo secondo locutore:

> Another sample-speech I' the market-place
> O' the Barberini by the Capucins;
> Where the old Triton at his fountain-sport,
> Bernini's creature plated to the paps,
> Puffs up steel sleet which breaks to diamond dust,
> A spray of sparkles snorted from his conch,
> High over the caritellas, out of the way
> O' the motley merchandizing multitude...
>
> (I,896–907)

La descrizione è tutta incentrata sulla scultura del Bernini il cui sviluppo verticale si continua nella conchiglia, e poi getto d'acqua che da essa viene proiettato, con giochi di rifrazioni e di suoni che si riproducono nelle incalzanti variazioni allitterative del verso. Solo in un secondo momento lo sguardo scivola lungo la scultura per scoprire ai piedi della fontana le "caritellas" – le carrozzelle –, e poi l'esistenza di un mercato, appena abbozzato in un sol verso nelle sue forme e colori essenziali, osservato dall'alto, "out of the way" (*ill* 4).

Il quadro si chiude su elementi di cornice: le tegole rosse dei tetti, il lieve trasudare di umidità della neve sciolta, Roma felicemente adagiata nella luce dorata del sole:

> Our murder has been done three days ago,
> The frost is over and gone, the south wind laughs,
> And to the very tiles of each red roof
> A' smoke in the sunshine, Rome lies gold and glad...
>
> (I,904–907)

La tecnica scenografica è qui diversa: non il grande affresco d'insieme, che colga e trasmetta l'animo popolare, ma un bozzetto che colga l'essenziale dello spirito, del fascino della città universale, eterna nella sua serena indifferenza. Tenuto conto della lezione di organizzazione spaziale dell'arte pittorica, attraverso gli infiniti esempi di organizzazione dello spazio pittorico forniti dal suo museo mentale e dalla pratica stessa di pittore sia pur dilettante, Browning raccoglie in unità integrale tutti e soli quegli elementi di vita reale che possano segnare con un carattere unico il racconto, distillandone e assimilandone il significato attraverso l'atto di intuizione cognitiva, che si afferma e si comunica, vitale e preportente, nella sintesi del verso poetico.

Lungo tutto lo svilupparsi del poema nei suoi ventunmila versi circa, il ritratto di Roma si integra con sequenze più brevi ove vengono evocati luoghi caratteristici della città, caratterizzati dalla prsenza della gente, del popolo romano. Esso è sempre presente nell'immaginario inconscio dei locutori, puntualizzandone le varie sequenze narrative: le fontane della lavandaie (*ill. 5*), presso la cisterna del Citorio (IV,155–76); la bottega della venditrice di parrucche a piazza Colonna (IV, 440–42); gli oziosi che a gruppi sostano in chiacchere presso la Barcaccia (III,391–93); la miseria delle case popolari dove vive la madre naturale di Pompilia (IV,148–63); gli improvvisatori (XI,1823–31) (*ill.*6). Con straordinaria vivacità iconcia Guido ricostruisce la serenata (*ill.*7), che Pompilia forse si attenderebbe da un marito innamorato:

> So the Pompilia, child, girl, wife, in one
> Wanted the beating pulse, the rolling eye,
> The frantic gesture, the devotion due
> From Thyrsis to Nearea! Guido's love –
> Why not provençal roses in his shoe,
> Plume to his cap, and trio of guitars
> At casement, with a bravo close beside?
>
> (V,669–675)

Quel gran conoscitore di Roma che è Tertium Quid trova perfetto correlativo della vicenda Franceshini-Comparini nel quotidiano spettacolo delle marionette di Piazza Navona (*ill.*8):

You've seen the puppets, of Place Navona, play, –
Punch and his mate, – how threats pass, blows are dealt,
And a crisis comes: the crowd or clap or hiss
Accordingly as disposed for man or wife –
When down the actors duck awhile perdue,
Donning what novel rag-and-feather trim
Best suits the next adventure, new effect:
And, – by the time the mob is on the move,
With something like a judgement *pro* and *con*, –
There's a whistle, up again the actors pop
In t' other tatter with fresh-tinseled staves,
To re-engage in one last worst fight more
Shall show, what you thought tragedy was farce.

(IV,1282–94).

Dato il periodo dell'anno in cui si svolge il processo, i primi mesi dell'anno 1698, la ricostruzione della vita quotidiana di Roma trae consistenza anche dai continui riferimenti al Carnevale in corso: feste popolari, cortei di maschere, giochi svolti per le vie della città ad intesificarne il carattere festaiolo, esuberante, nel rispetto di valori semplici ed essenziali coralmente esternati.

Il punto di vista dal quale guardiamo le scene romane nel poema di Browning è sostanzialmente quello piccolo-borghese e popolano, il contesto sociale dei protagonisti stessi della storia. Spazi organizzati non su modelli della tradizione classica, accademica, aulica, ma piuttosto, si potrebbe azzardare, sul genere della bambocciata.[14] Genere che, nato come interessante episodio del realismo seicentesco, passò attraverso la visione edulcorata delle tradizione pittorica italiana, per arrivare alle scene di vita popolare e trasteverina di Bartolomeo Pinelli, il popolarissimo incisore di primo ottocento.[15]

14. G. Briganti, *Il mito della Finestra aperta*, in AA.VV. *I Bamboccianti, Pittori della vita quotidiana a Roma nel '600*, Bozzi Roma, 1983, pp. 1–36. Andrea Locatelli (1695–1741) il suo allievo Poalo Monaldi (1725–1779) e Giovanni Paolo Pannini (1691–1765) vi vengono indicati come comtinuatori italiani del genere, che va adattandosi via via a diversi spessori culturali nel giro di quasi tre secoli, e ha nel Pinelli uno degli ultimi epigoni.

15. Bartolomeo Pinelli nacque a Roma nel 1781, nel popolare quartiere di Trastevere. Figlio d'arte fu scultore ed incisore; collaborò per un periodo con il vedutista svizzero Franz Keiserman. Sensible al fascino della vita popolare come depositaria

La sua vastissima produzione grafica ripropone in continuazione con sensibilità originale, quegli aspetti peculiari della vita popolare romana, che con sorprendente anologia Browning privilegia per trasmettere al lettore i tratti caratterizzanti la "inner life" della città: osservazione che sembra trovare conforto quando si provveda ad accostare, come abbiamo qui cercato di fare, versi del poeta inglese e incisioni dell'artista romano. Questi era probabilmente noto a Browning, anche se possiamo affidarci solo a congetture: ad esempio l'amico di Browning, l'artista americano William Westmore Story, cita il Pinelli nel suo *Roba di Roma*, un appassionato quanto minuto ritratto della città e dei suoi abitanti, del quale Browning corresse le bozze nel 1863,[16] nel periodo cioè trascorso tra il rinvenimento dello *Old Yellow Book* (1860), e l'inizio della composizione di *The Ring and the Book* (1864).

Il contesto religioso cattolico soccorre ovviamente spesso il poeta nella sua creazione di una peculiarità italiana. Arcangeli fa un vivace riferimento alla serie di celebrazioni liturgiche cui i fedeli partecipano il giorno di Natale (VIII,1080–85); The Other Half-Rome vede la folla, fra cui Violante, sfilare in San Pietro per ottenere l'indulgenza plenaria in occasione del giubileo (III,566–572). La tragica conclusione della vita di Guido tocca l'apice di drammaticità narrativa e figurativa quando la processione della Confraternita della Morte si presenta alla porta della prigione per accompagnarlo al patibolo, scenario

di tradizioni e valori del passato, si affermò soprattutto nel genere illustrativo di costumi e vedute della città e della campagna romana. Curò con attenzione tutta originale gli sfondi su cui i personaggi si muovono, arricchendoli di episodi e di briose scenette che risultavano così vive a causa della straordinaria abilità disegnativa dell'artista. V. Mariani, *Bartolomeo Pinelli*, Istituto Italiano Arti grafiche, Bergamo 1931; R. Pacini, *B. Pinelli e la Roma del suo tempo*, Treves Milano 1935. Per le illustrazini riportate nel testo si veda: B. Pinelli, *Costumi di Roma incisi 1831*, Roma, Ristampa della Regia Calcografia, s.d.

16. Nello Story troviamo una descrizione simle della fontana d piazza Barberini, troviamo una precisa registrazione della attività delle lavandaie piuttosto che della practica e delle modalità della serenata; una esauriente presentazione di Piazza del Popolo, piuttosto che dello spettacolo dei burattini in Piazza Navona, del gioco della lotteria o delle pasquinate, dei tratti peculiari di questi romani o italiani, presentati con un buon grado di comprensione e di simpatia. La coincidenza delle date o la conoscenza fra i due artisti, nulla può togliere all'originalità della sintesi che ancora una volta Browning ci offre grazie alla sua capacità di trasfigurare l'esperienza diretta in moduli immaginativi ed espressivi organici e vitali. cfr. W.W. Story, *Roba di Roma*, Chapman and Hall, London (1864) 1876.

funebre creato dal poeta narratore (I,1307–17), ed enfatizzato nella percezione terrorizzata di Guido stesso (XI,2412–25).

Con il corteo che porta i condannati dalla Prigione Nuova al patibolo in Piazza del Popolo, abbiamo l'ultima visione della città, quasi una antica planimetria del centro di Roma, – con la prigione ad un estremo della scena rappresentata e la piazza dell'esecuzione dall'altro –, sulla quale seguiamo il tracciato del corteo che attraversa l'intero spazio scenico:

> Then the procession started, took the way
> From the New Prison by the Pilgrim's Street,
> The Street of the Governo, Pasquin's Street,
> . . . .
> The Place Navona, the Pantheon's Place,
> Place of the Column, last the Corso's length,
> And so debouched thence at Mannaia's foot
> In the Place of the People . . .
>
> (XII,138–46)

Qui, in tribune apposite, siedono gli spettatori di rango,[17] che impazienti vengono via via aggiornati su ciò che avviene al passaggio del corteo: la spazio immaginato dall'artista si riempie così di movimento; nuclei episodici e narrativi si distribuiscono lungo le linee radiali della processione di carri che diviene il fulcro di organizzazione dell'intera scena e della sequenza poetica che ne è l'espressione:

> We had the titillation as we sat
> Assembled, (quality in conclave, ha?)
> Of, minute after minute, some report
> How the slow show was winding in its way
> Now did a car run over, kill a man,
> Just opposite a pork-shop numbered Twelve:
> And bitter were the outcries of the mob
> Agaist the Pope: for that he forbids
> The Lottery, why, twelve were Tern Quatern!

17. Fra questi spettatori si trova il visitatore veneziano che avrebbe lasciato, in una sua lettera da Roma, la descrizione dell'esecuzione cui ha assistito dal palco. La lettera è una in invenzione di Browning, non fa parte dei documenti dello *Old Yellow Book* (XII, 113–17).

Now did a begger by Saint Agnes, lame
From his youth up, recover use of leg,
Through prayer of Guido as he glaced that way.
So that the crowd near crammed his hat with coin.

(XII,150–62)

La folla romana è ancora una volta protagonista con le sue peculiarità – le pasquinate, la lotteria, la religiosità superstiziosa, il miracolo grottesco –, la sua generosità e il suo fatalismo. E vieni così a completarsi il ritratto della città stessa, nella integrazione di immagini reali e immagini della memoria, nella organica manipolazione di infiniti dettagli significanti, unendo il verbale e il figurativo, modi diversi e altrettanto appassionanti di raccontare il mondo, di inventare e far rivivere la vita.

Quanto alle modalità secondo cui ciò avviene, Browning, non sappiamo quanto ironicamente, demanda all'avvocato Bottini, – forse uno dei monologanti meno affidabili del gruppo per il contradditorio e ambiguo sviluppo del suo argomentare, – una elegante dissertazione sulla teoria compositiva dell'opera pittorica, che si estende emblematicamente a qualsiasi forma d'arte, e che riprende una sottesa ininterrotta filessione del poeta sulla poesia.[18] Dice dunque Bottini che il bravo pittore cui viene commissionata una tela a soggetto, (nella fattispecie una Fuga in Egitto), non procede ad un collage degli innumerevoli studi e schizzi – particolari anatomici delle più minute parti del corpo umano e del mondo sensibile – che la sua osservazione ha accumulato nel tempo. Egli deve piuttosto allontanarsi da tutto ciò:

. . . and preferably buries him and broods
On the inner spectrum, filtered through the eye
His brain–deposit, bred of many a drop
E pluribus unum: and the wiser he!

(IX,87–91)

Ed è più saggio perchè il soddisfacente risultato finale sarà "less distinct, part by part, but in the whole/Truer to the subject, – the main central truth/And soul of the picture . . ." (IX,99–101).

18. Gordon W. Thompson, "A Spirit Birth conceived of Flesh: Browning's Concept of Art in *The Ring and the Book*", *Tennesse Studies in Literature, XIV*, 1969, pp. 75–86.

Si è detto che l'Italia è il paese che più frequentemente sottopone il visitatore straniero ad una esperienza analoga a quella generata dalla contemplazione dell'opera d'arte: si produrrebbe in lui un senso di intensificazione di vita, cui egli soggiace appagato.[19] Browning che è stato, fin dall'inizio, artista fra i più sensibili a tale esaltante esperienza, ora nel creare il particolare scenario di *The Ring and the Book*, sembra voler andare oltre ed assumere al riguardo il ruolo agente creatore: vuole creare egli stesso le condizioni che determinano tale intensificazione di esperienza immaginativa. Supera l'ipotetico pittore di Bottini e progressivamente integra le serie coordinate, da un lato, – parola poetica/tempo della descrizione/moto, e dall'altro, – immagine pittorica/spazio organico/stasi –, in interrelazione dinamica, conquistando quella sintesi fra le arti cui egli aspirava da tempo.[20] E noi abbiamo l'illusione sia pur fuggevole della tridimensionalità della scena, del suo reale esistere. L'illusione che è il mezzo cui l'arte può legittimamente ricorrere nel suo peculiare farsi strumento di conoscenza, conferendo all'artista la libertà di creare *makebiliefs* (I,455–56), i correlativi di una realtà non altrimenti dicibile.[21] Così Firenze, Roma, la "matchless Italy" di Browning, aldilà di qualsiasi realismo fotografico, sono create in modo da indurre nel lettore la più acuta attività percettiva e da renderlo capace di cogliere intuitivamente, per un attimo, la verità di quella, altrimenti indefinibile, "perfect cloud of golden dust", "the felt rich coloured air in which we live".

19. cf. B. Berenson, *Estetica, Etica e storia nelle arti della rappresentazione visiva*, Firenze Electa, 1948, p. 219; M.Praz, "Ciò che gli stranieri vedono nell'Italia", in *La casa della fama*, R. Ricciardi, Milano Napoli, 1952, pp. 149–172.

20. L. Ormond, "Browning and Painting", in I. Armstrong ed., *Robert Browningt*, Bell and Sons London 1974, pp. 184–85. L'aspirazione alla sintesi fra poesia e pittura, per Browning le due arti fondanti per la teoria artistica della creatività, era stata espressa, contemporaneamente al senso della propria inadeguatezza, nella lirica introduttiva a *Men and Women* (1855), "One Word More".

21. William O. Raymond, *The Infinite Moment and Other Essays in Robert Browning*, Toronto 1950, pp. 145–46: " 'Art may tell a truth obliquely' (XII, 855–56), and therefore has an advantage over reason. By breaking up the white light into prismatic colours adapted to man's feeble vision, it approximates truth, even comprising an element of illusion".

Illustration 1 *G. Signorini, **Piazza San Lorenzo**,* Firenze 1830 ca.

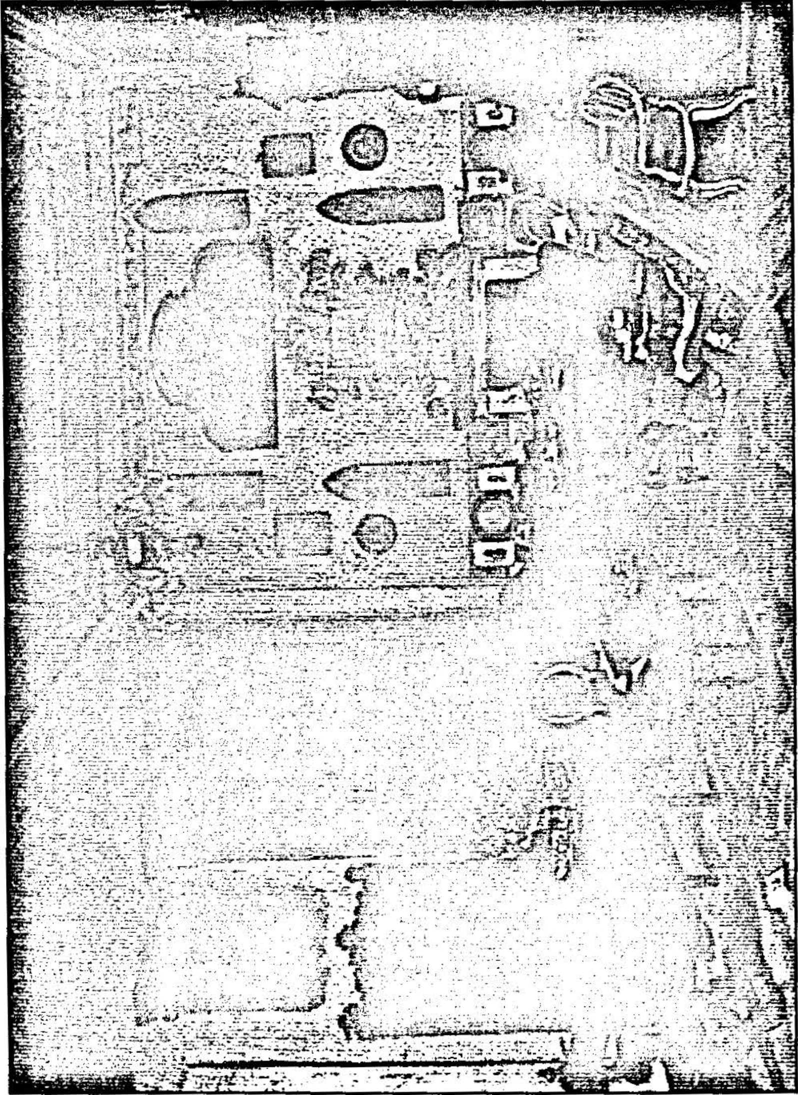

Illustration 2 *G. Mignarty*, ***Salone di Casa Guidi***, Firenze 1861 ca.

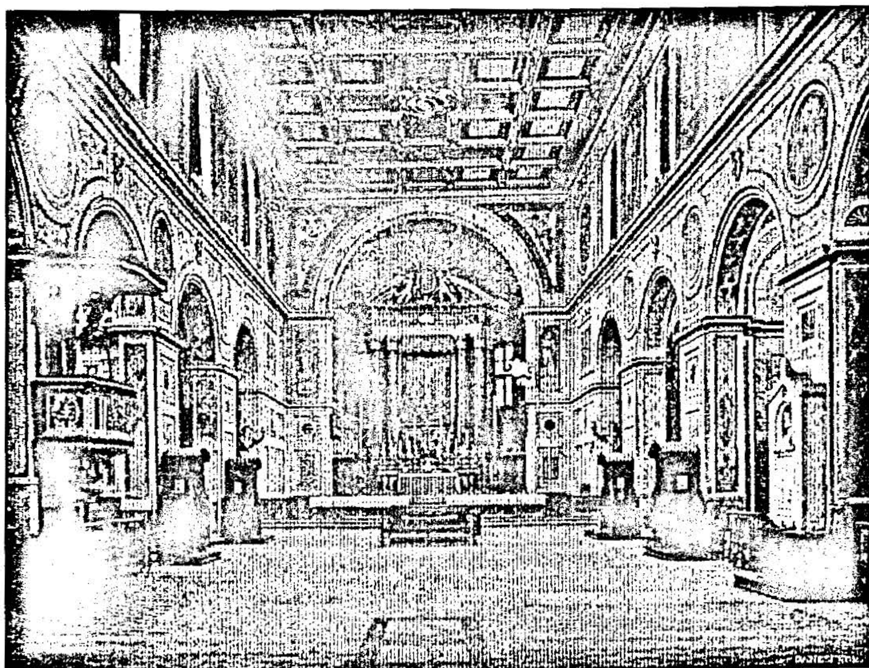

Illustration 3 ***San Lorenzo in Lucina, interno***, Roma.

Illustration 4 *B. Pinelli, Maschere del Carnevale presso la Piazza Barberini.*

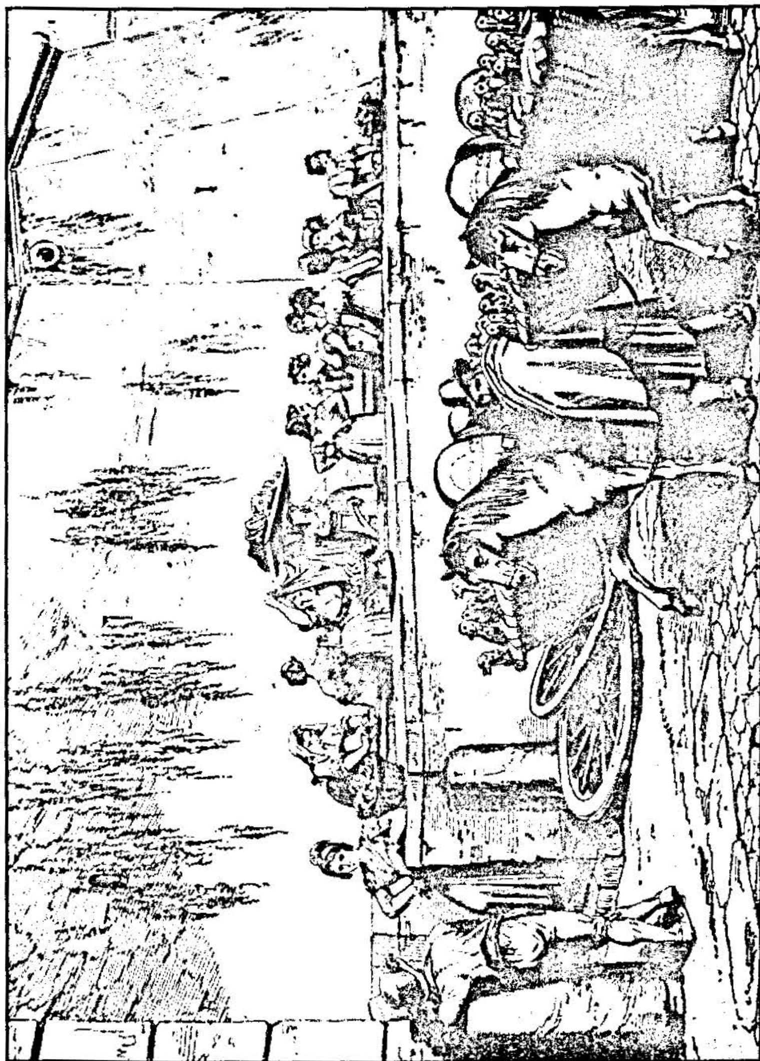

Illustration 5 *B. Pinelli, Lavatoio pubblico alle falde del Quirinale.*

Illustration 6 *B. Pinelli, Il Poeta improvisatore a Testaccio.*

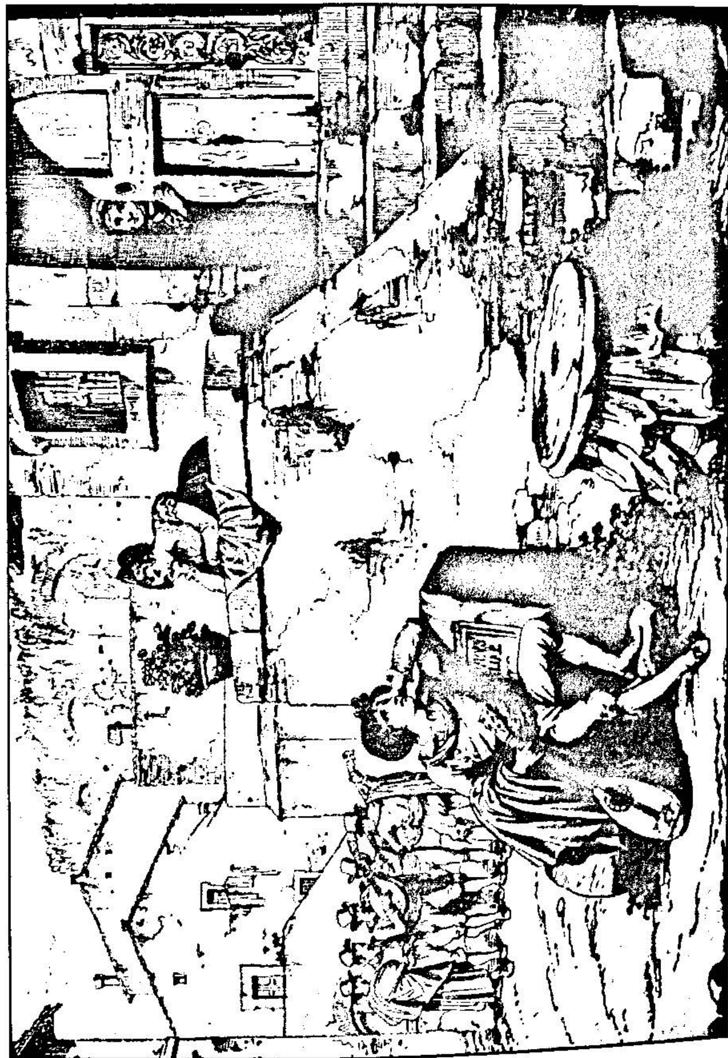

Illustration 7 *B. Pinelli, Serenata alla Piazza delle Carrette.*

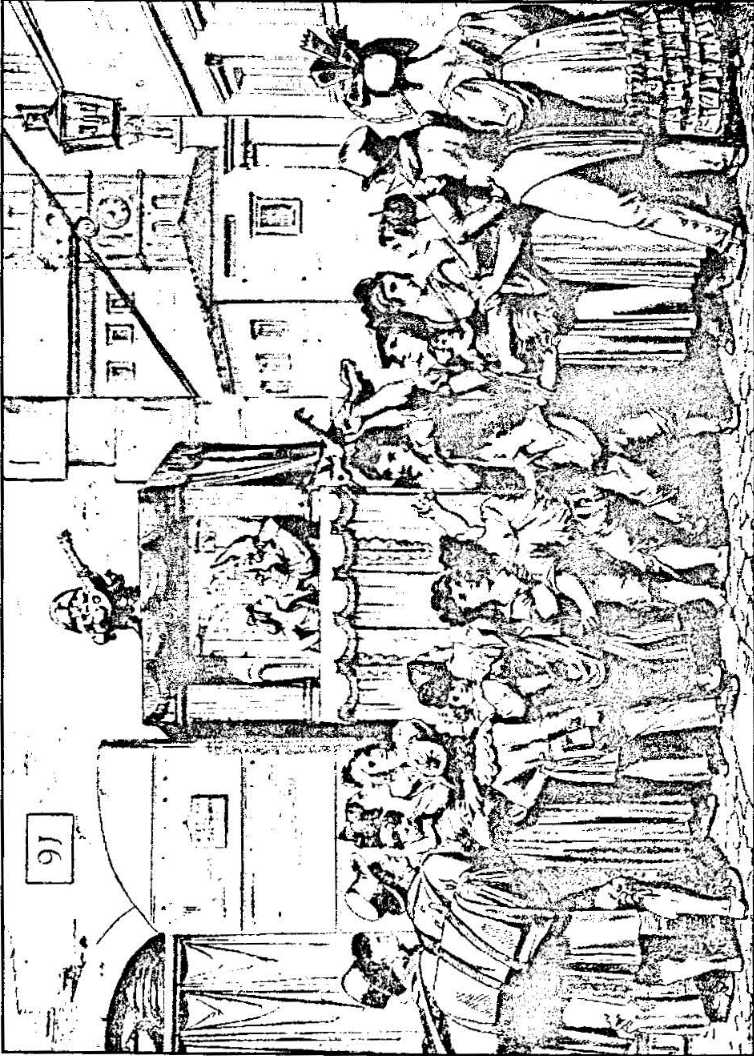

Illustration 8 *B. Pinelli, **Burattini.***

Vernon Lee and Mantua

Rita Severi

In this paper I will not deal with Vernon Lee and Italy, as I had intended to do in the first place, because this implies a generalized study of her whole life and writings, and so, counting on your understanding of my willingness to be fair to such a scrupulous Italianist, I'll try to demonstrate how just one city, Mantua, became, even through her efforts, a symbolic place for the Decadent and fin de siècle imagination.

In her diaries, Vernon Lee remembers two visits to Mantua, the first in June 1896 and the second in the same month in 1898.[1] But her acquaintance with the city of the Gonzagas dates back to an earlier period. In the last essay of *Euphorion*, her remarkable book on the Italian Renaissance, published in 1884, she concludes with a Mantuan example to illustrate how the concept of "symmetria prisca" was shattered by the Mannerist canon, how the elegant lines of Raphael were contorted by the violent brush strokes of Giulio Romano. "The antique perfected the art of the Renaissance, it did not corrupt it. The art of the Renaissance fell indeed into shameful degradation soon after the period of its triumphant union with the antique; and Raphael's grand gods and goddesses, his exquisite Eros and radiant Psyche of the Farnesina, are indeed succeeded but

1. P. Ginn, *Vernon Lee. Violet Paget, 1856–1935*, London, Oxford University Press, 1964, pp. 174–75.

too soon by the Olympus of Giulio Romano, an Olympus of harlots and acrobats, who smirk and moth and wriggle and sprawl ignobly on the walls and ceilings of the dismantled palace which crumbles away among the stunted willows, the stagnant pools, and rank grass of the marshes of Mantua".[2] It is quite evident here that the writer has been on location and has been so deeply impressed by the dilapidation of the Palazzo Te, by its immense ruin, by the mannerisms of Giulio Romano, to make her envision the architectural site as a living symbol of the decadence of the Renaissance.

In the 1899 collection of travel essays, entitled, *Genius Loci. Notes on Places,* Vernon Lee dedicates a chapter to "The Lakes of Mantua" which ends with this startling description: "After seeing the Castello and the Corte Nuova one naturally thinks it one's duty to go and see the little Palazzo Te, just outside the town. Inconceivable frescoes, colossal, sprawling gods and goddesses, all chalk and brick dust, enough to make Rafael, who was responsible for them through his abominable pupils, turn for ever in his coffin. Damp-stained stuccoes and grass-grown courtyards, and no sound save the noisy cicalas sawing on the plane-trees. How utterly forsaken of gods and men is all this Gonzaga splendour! But all round, luxuriant green grass, and English-looking streams winding flush among great willows".[3]

She then goes on to mention the Galleria sold to Charles I in 1627,[4] the delightful frescoes of Andrea Mantegna, the exquisite closet of Isabella d'Este, the labyrinth carved in the gilded ceiling of one lovely room and the horror of the claustrophobic dwarfs' apartments. As she guides her readers on a tour of the Palazzo, she cannot refrain from marvelling at the secular decay, at the devastation of the symbols of a golden past and, at the same time, at the expression of "another sort of romance", which the whole site

2. V. Lee, *Euphorion being Studies of the Antique and the Medieval in the Renaissance,* London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1884, p. 214.

3. V. Lee, *The Lakes of Mantua,* in *Genius Loci. Notes on Places,* London, Grant Richards, 1899, pp. 163–70. The quotation is from p. 164.

4. On the sale, see A. Luzio, *La Galleria dei Gonzaga venduta all'Inghilterra nel 1627–1628. Documenti degli archivi di Mantova e Londra, raccoli e illustrati,* Milano, Cogliati, 1913 and D. Howarth, *"Mantua Peeces": Charles I and the Gonzaga Collections* in *Splendours of the Gonzaga,* Catalogue of the London Exhibition, 4 November 1981–1931 January 1982, Victoria and Albert Museum, ed. by D. Chambers and J. Martineau, London-Cinisello B. (Milano), Amilcare Pizzi, 1981, pp. 95–100.

inspires – a romantic trance abruptly broken by the loud croaks of the frogs. In the winter of 1899 she presumably started composing her only dramatic work, *Ariadne in Mantua*,[5] which she probably completed in 1900–1901, because from a letter she wrote to her companion Kit Anstruther-Thompson in October 1900, she relates that in her recent trip to England she read the play to her friends the Ponsobys and to the musician Ethel Smyth, who judged it the very best thing she had ever written. In *Ariadne in Mantua* the privileged setting is the Palazzo Ducale in Piazza Sordello, surrounded by water, which, during her 1896 and 1898 visits, had struck her fancy, had actually haunted her imagination, as she tells us in the preface to the tragedy, because at first sight she felt what can be called a Wordsworthian intimation, a thorough knowledge of the place and what had happened there. It was what she called an "involuntary vision" for the "suggestiveness" of the architectural mass and for the strange "unheard melody" which weaved its music in her innermost ear and which she later recognized as an air by Caccini mingled with the notes of the "Lament of Ariadne" by Monteverdi. Just like Palazzo Te, also surrounded by water, Palazzo Ducale in Vernon Lee's time was almost abandoned, a complex structure of damp brick walls and towers and domes, that seemed about to perish and to be engulfed by the lakes. But she is so captivated by this picture of a crumbling world, that she tells us "For all the decaying Palaces I have ever seen in Italy this place of Mantua is the most utterly decayed. At first you have no other impression. But little by little, as you tramp through what seem miles of solemn emptiness, you find that more than any similar place it has gone to your brain".[6] In *Ariadne in Mantua*, the very picture of decay of the Renaissance enhances and coherently blends in with the Decadent imagination of the playwright. Like in so many European writers of the time, Hofmannsthal, Wilde, Pater, D'Annunzio, Bourget, just to mention a few acquaintances of Vernon Lee, the fin de siècle

5. Vernon Lee, *Ariadne in Mantua-Arianna a Mantova*, bilingual edition by R. Severi, Verona-Gazoldo degli Ippoliti, Cierre-Postumia- Fondazione Marcegaglia, 1996. I will always refer to this edition which includes an introduction: *Vernon Lee and Italy*, pp. 10–52 and up-dated bibliography and notes. See also P. Gunn, *Vernon Lee*, cit., p. 174.
6. V. Lee, *The Lakes of Mantua*, cit., p. 160.

often looks back to the Renaissance producing "immagini incrociate",[7] the artistic flair and luxury of the great Italian courts experienced with the decadent sensuality and emotions of "la Belle Epoque". Mantua, so forlorn and mouldering, but on the whole, "the most magnificent and fantastic thing left behind by the Italy of Shakespeare"[8] exerts a strong appeal on the Decadent imagination and acquires in the Nineties the allure of a city of romance.

In the Public Record Office of Mantua are stored the registers with the signatures of the visitors to Palazzo Ducale. In the first register that records the visits in the years 1894–1908,[9] along with those of many Italians, recur also the names of hoards of English, French, Germans, Russian, North and South American unknown travellers, but also some eminent foreign men of letters. On May 5, 1894 Herbert Horne and Arthur Symons signed the register, then on April 20, 1895, Mr and Mrs Edith Wharton and, again, on December 17 Herbert Horne returned apparently alone (and he returned again on October 12, 1907 and on April 21, 1908). The von Bülows, friends of Vernon Lee, were in Mantua on September 4, 1896; Maurice Barrès signed the register on October 13, 1896. Paul Kristeller was probably researching in Mantua on November 2, 1894 and again on October 21, 1897. Maurice Hewlett was in the Palazzo on May 8, 1899; Adelaide Ristori, the great actress, was on the premises on June 20 and the critic on Anglo-Italian relations, Lewis Einstein, was there on November 9th; Heinrich Mann on April 26, 1900; Roger Fry on October 6, 1902 and the parents of Vernon Lee's companion, Kit Anstruther-Thomson signed the book on October 20, 1902. In 1904, on June 20th, Lady Eden was in Mantua. On August 31, 1904, Gertrude Stein's juvenile loves Mabel Hayes and May Bookstaver visited the Palazzo. On May 25, 1907 Gabriele D'Annunzio left his bold signature and on October 27 Henri de Regnier timidly signed his name. On February 21, 1909, Israel Zangwill, the English polemist, playwright and novelist was in Mantua with his wife Edith.[10] From

7. L. Ritter Santini, *Le immagini incrociate*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1986, in particular, pp. 13–120.
8. V. Lee, *The Lakes of Mantua*, cit. p. 160.
9. Registro dei visitatori del Palazzo Ducale, 1894-gennaio 1908, in Archivio di Stato di Mantova (ASMn), Archivio della Scalcheria, busta 281.
10. *Ibidem*, busta 282.

this list we see that Vernon Lee's signature is missing for both 1896 and 1898 and, since the records have been saved only starting from 1894, it is impossible to really prove her presence in Mantua by consulting the public documentary sources.[11]

The list is, in any case, very significant in order to understand the influence of such a writer as Vernon Lee and the importance of the city of Mantua for the literary and artistic minds of the period. The register in these years records the names of writers who are either closely acquainted to Vernon Lee and who admire her work such as Edith Wharton, Herbert Horne, Arthur Symons and Gabriele D'Annunzio or simply attracted to her prose and her style like Israel Zangwill. It is a fact that Edith Wharton and Vernon Lee were very friendly in the mid-Nineties, so much as that Lee's half-brother, Eugene Lee Hamilton went to live at Edith's house at Land's End in Rhode Island in 1896.[12] The American acknowledges Vernon Lee's cultural achievements and pays tribute to her unfailing support when her first novel, *The Valley of Decision*, was published in 1902, with a dedication to Paul and Minnie Bourget, who had often been her travelling companions in Italy.[13] *The Valley of Decision* is a

11. Other important visitors in those years were: E. Rostand (April 23, 1910); the Italian writers: Massimo Bontempelli (June 7, 1909); Lorenzo Stecchetti (April 23, 1910); Antonio Delfini (January 29, 1930) and Virgilio Brocchi (May 10, 1933); the French painters: Paul Signac (May 5, 1908) and André Derain (May 7, 1931); the art historians: a close friend of V. Lee's, B. Berenson (June 23, 1905, June 12, 1922, November 10, 1924 and November 6, 1926), von Passavant (April 24, 1908), E. Kurz (April 1, 1910), R. Wittkower (January 4, 1924 and February 21, 1928), G. Bing (November 17, 1927) with A. Warburg (June 18, 1929), F. Saxl (August 30, 1930), C. Gnudi (November 6, 1930 and April 7, 1932), P. Toesca (September 19, 1931), E. Gombrich (Ma 23, 1932 and June 9, 1932) and the American millionaire Pierpoint Morgan (April 23, 1910). See Registro dei visitatori del Palazzo Ducale, in ASMn, Registro della Scalcheria, buste 282–283.

12. P. Gunn, *Vernon Lee*, cit., p. 162.

13. E. Wharton, *The Valley of Decision*, London, John Murray, 1902. All quotations derive from this edition. See also E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, New York, D. Appleton-Century Co., 1934, pp. 128–129. On the genesis of the novel cf. S. Benstock, *No Gift from Chance. A Biography of Edith Wharton*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1995, pp. 120–126.

For a critical approach, cf. G. Balestra, *Il Settecento italiano di Edith Wharton*, in *Il Passaggiere italiano. Saggi sulle letterature di lingua inglese in onore di Sergio Rossi*, a cura di R.S. Crivelli e L. Sampietro, Roma, Bulzoni, 1994, pp. 471–487.

historical novel and also a Bildungsroman set at the time of the Napoleonic Repubblica Cisalpina (1797) in which the formation of the young hero, Odo Valsecca, is meticulously described, from his secluded infancy to his enlightened education, acquired from some of the liveliest spirits of the age, to his determination, as Duke of Pianura, to establish a democratic rule over his subjects. The Dukedom of Pianura has an extension that comprises the old territory of Lombardy and, according to Wharton's geographical acumen, counts a capital, which combines the topography and monuments of two Italian cities: Mantua and Parma. As Vernon Lee, an expert on eighteenth century Italy, wrote in the preface she had prepared for a planned, but never realized Italian translation of the novel, Edith Wharton's: "book is concerned with a strangely neglected aspect of the Italian eighteenth century. It is the intimate biography of a typical and fictional character: a minor Lombardian nobleman. We follow the spiritual and secular progress of this small provincial aristocrat, related to an illustrious Renaissance family, from his neglected childhood, through his travels, his loves, his friendships, his reading, right up to the day when his humanitarian and liberal dreams are horribly shattered.... Oddone Valsecca, duke of Pianura, disciple of the Encyclopedists, friend of Filangieri and Pimentel, who studied in the same academy as Vittorio Alfieri, sacrificed his personal independence, his free development as an individual, was even ready to sacrifice the only great love of his life in order to reign over a small state and reform it".[14] In this short essay, Vernon Lee does not pry into the real identity of Pianura, but even a superficial reading of the novel discloses how Mantua, and, in particular, its Palazzo Gonzaga had captivated Edith Wharton's imagination, perhaps since the time of the 1895 visit.

"Like most dwellings of this kind in Italy, – we read in *The Valley of Decision*[15] – the palace of Pianura resembled one of those shells which reveal by their outer convolutions the gradual development

14. V. Lee, *Edith Wharton's Valley of Decision: A Rediscovered Contemporary Critique*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton*, ed. by M. Bell, Cambridge, Cambridge University press, 1995, pp. 199–200. See also *Edith Wharton, The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. by J. W. Tuttleton, K. O. Laver, M. P. Murray, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 51–65: *The Valley of Decision*.
15. E. Wharton, *The Valley of Decision*, cit., pp. 237–38.

of the creature housed within. For three or four generations after Bracciaforte, the terrible founder of the line, had made himself master of the republic, his descendants had clung to the old brick fortres or *roccâ*. . . . The palace had now passed for one of the wonders of Italy. The Duke's guest, the witty and learned Aretino, celebrated it in verse, his friend Cardinal Bembo in prose; Correggio painted the walls of one room, Giulio Romano the ceiling of another".

Her acknowledged sources for the novel are varied and numerous: from Charles Norton to John Inglesant to Pater and Vernon Lee for her *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (1880), *Euphorion* (1884) and *The Countess of Albany* (1884), as well as Ruskin and her friend Paul Bourget and many others. What is most striking is that in her memoirs, *A Backward Glance*, published in 1934, she confesses that her writing started like a lyrical ecstasy[16] which, after Vernon Lee's aria in the palace in Mantua, identifies both writers as disciples of Walter Pater, striving at the moment of transforming their images into words, towards the condition of music.[17]

Which is a condition that the Italian poet, playwright and novelist Gabriele D'Annunzio experienced and modulated in his finely orcestrated style. As I have mentioned, he visited the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua in 1907, at the time in which he was busy composing *Forse che sì forse che no*, the novel published in 1910, in which the action takes place partly in Mantua, partly in Volterra. In the random notes of his journal he jotted: "Mantova. Il Palazzo Ducale-Desolazione-il labirinto 'Forse che sì forse che no' Le stanze di Isabella-'Nec spe nec metu'".[18]

The novel opens with the lovers Paolo and Isabella, an airplane pilot and his beautiful fiancée, launching their car at a terrific speed towards the Mantua "reggia". They abandon their modern, Futurist world behind themselves as soon as they enter the palace.

"La lor felicità terribile non più si tendeva a mordere il dolore ma ad ascoltare il grido della bellezza dilaniata e derelitta. Pareti e volte decrepite; vecchie tele sfondate; tavole e seggiole sgangherate dalle

16. E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, cit., pp. 114–15.
17. W. Pater, *The School of Giorgione*, in *The Renaissance. Studies in Art and Poetry* (1873), London, Macmillan, 1935, p. 124.
18. G. D'Annunzio, *Taccuini*, a cura di E. Bianchetti e R. Forcella, Milano, Mondadori, 1976, p. 491.

gambe d'oro misere; tappezzerie lacere accanto a intonachi che si scrostavano, a mattoni che si sgretolavano; vasti letti pomposi riflessi da specchi foschi; impalcature alzate a reggere i soffitti; e l'odore della muffa risecca e l'odore della calcina fresca; e pel vano d'una finestra due torri rosse nel cielo ... e appeso un lampadario a gocciole di cristallo, e obliqua una striscia di sole sul pavimento... e ancora lampadarii in fila, guasti, pencolanti, simili a fragili scheletri congelati. O desolazione, desolazione senza bellezza! . . . E le stanze si moltiplicavano; e la bellezza s'avvicendava con la ruina, e la ruina era più bella della bellezza".[19]

The narrator then goes on to describe the golden maze that glorified the feats of Vincenzo Gonzaga against the Turks and, as the two protagonists pass from room to room, they are made to reminisce about the artistic past of the Gonzagas: Isabella Gonzaga, her music chamber, the singers that entertained the court with polyphonic arias, and, then, the lakes, outside the windows, and the noisy Mantuan frogs in concerto. the whole description is so familiar (down to the croaking frogs), in this first chapter of *Forse che sì forse che no*, because we realize that it sounds like a re-arrangement or a medley of motifs taken from Vernon Lee's account of the castle, but it is also a very skilfull intertextual borrowing from the stage directions and from the dialogues of her play, *Ariadne in Mantua*.

In order to shed some light on this case of literary influence, chronology comes to our aid. On May 25, 1907, D'Annunzio visits the Palazzo and makes some telegraphic notes in his journal. Apparently he already knew what he wanted to see. Of course, he could have read both of Lee's works in English. But probably this was not the case, nor was it necessary, because the Italian translation of the play appeared in the April issue of a magazine he knew well, "La Nuova Antologia". Besides, the translation was the work of a common friend of Vernon Lee, Edith Wharton and D'Annunzio, the countess Angelica Rasponi delle Teste.[20] Is it possible that

19. G. D'Annunzio, *Forse che sì forse che no*, in *Prose di Romanzi*, ed. diretta da E. Raimondi, a cura di N. Lorenzini, Milano, Mondadori, 1989, p. 536 and p. 538. At p. 539 the concert of the frogs is mentioned: "e traudito fu il gracidio delle rane nel cielo nell'acqua in un solo ardore indistinto".

20. G. D'Annunzio, *Libro Segreto* (1935), a cura di P. Gibellini, Milano, Mondadori, 1995, p. 198 in which Vernon Lee is remembered as a staunch pacifist and p. 218,

D'Annunzio in the first chapter of *Forse che sì forse che no* is paying a silent homage to his friend Vernon Lee? Perhaps, since the writers and the very competent translator all shared the same view that Mantua was the perfect backdrop to the Decadent play of words and images. In those years a plan to restore the palace to its original splendour was drawn up by the engineer Achille Patricolo, who, during his first inspection declared that it was a ruin, an enormous, inconceivable ruin, almost a necropolis.[21] The visitors in the first decade of our century visited the collapsing Palazzo in a state of siege and its very precariousness made it even more precious to their eyes.

Israel Zangwill, who arrived in the city of Virgil, in 1909, reflects in his *Italian Fantasies*:

"Befitting was it at Mantua to feel so poignantly the lachrymae rerum . . . the ancient Ducal Palace of the Gonzagas in the Piazza Sordello had the pathos of the unexpected. Nothing in its exterior suggested ruin and desolation, nay the scaffolding across the façade spoke rather of restoration and repair. . . it was not till I had walked for many minutes through an endless series of dilapidated chambers and mutilated magnificences-propped-up ceilings and walled-up windows and rotting floors, and marble and gold and rich-dyed woods and gorgeous ceilings, and mouldering tapestries and paintings, and musty grandeurs multiplied in specked mirrors, and faded hangings and forlorn frescoes, and chandeliers without candles, and fly-blown gilding and broken furniture and beautiful furniture and whitewash and blackened plaster and bare brick and a vast unpeopled void-that there began to grow upon my soul the sense of a colossal tragedy of ruin, a monstrous and melancholy desolation, an heroic grandeur of disarray, a veritable poem of decay and destruction. Not the Alhambra itself is so dumbly

where he mentions "il coro estivo delle rane di Mantova quando Isabella Inghirami era per convertire in arme corta il motto estense "Forse che sì forse che no". Since D'Annunzio went to Mantua in spring he shouldn't have heard any frogs, unless they were the ones Vernon Lee listened to, presumably, during her June visits.

The Italian translation of *Ariadne in Mantua* by Angelica Rasponi was published in "La Nuova Antologia" a. 12, fasc. 7/, 1 aprile 1907, pp. 394–418, so that by the time D'Annunzio visited Palazzo Ducale in Mantua on May 25, 1907, he had had ample time to read and assess the importance and relevance of the play for his new novel.

21. Cf. R. Signorini, *Mantova nel Forse che sì forse che no*, in *D'Annunzio moderno? "Forse che sì forse che no"*, a cura di L. Granatella, Roma, Bulzoni, 1990, pp. 35–126.

eloquent of the passing of the Magnificent Ones. Babylon is fallen, is fallen".[22] It's a jammed passage: the whole catalogue that Vernon Lee listed in her essay in *The Genius Loci* is here reiterated in a taxonomy of decadent décor along with the main idea of the palace as a living oxymoron, a magnificent ruin. Certainly Zangwill makes the most of *amplificatio*. But, as he winds his way through the many halls, with "a sense of passing through a fantastic dream-world" and comes to the gilded ceiling with the inscription that reads "Forse che sì forse che no", he starts viewing his surroundings with the eyes of the characters of D'Annunzio. And he disapproves. The preacher ousts the dreamer. The measureless words of the maze become a petty issue, he tells us, because D'Annunzio has only one problem in mind: "Will a woman yield to her lover, or will vertue resist him?" "And so – he concludes –the mighty Mantuan ruin which has known so many desolations receives its last humiliation, and passes into literature as a background for lust".[23]

Vernon Lee always complained that she had few readers, but, evidently, she had some imitators. As far as 1925 the strains of her Mantuan essay are still audible.

"I have seen many ruins and of every period. Stonehenge and Ansedonia, Ostia and medieval Ninfa . . . , Bolsover and the gruesome modern ruins in Northern France. I have seen great cities dead or in decay: Pisa, Bruges and the newly murdered Vienna. But over none, it seemed to me, did there brood so profound a melancholy as over Mantua; none seemed so dead or so utterly bereft of glory; nowhere was desolation so pregnant with the memory of splendour, the silence nowhere so richly musical with echoes. There are a thousand rooms in the labyrinthine Reggia in Mantua – Gothic rooms, rooms of the renaissance, baroque rooms, rooms rich with the absurd pretentious decorations of the first empire, huge presence chambers and closets and the horribly exquisite apartments of the dwarfs – a thousand rooms, and their walls enclose an emptiness that is the monumental ghost of departed

22. I. Zangwill, *Italian Fantasies*, London, Heinemann, 1910, p. 214.
23. I. Zangwill, *Italian Fantasies*, cit., p. 223.

plenitude. It is through Mallarmé's *creux néant musicien* that one walks in Mantua".[24]

It was in that same year – 1925 – that the Author of this description of Mantua, Aldous Huxley, wrote to Vernon Lee, who called him "my clever young friend",[25] to express his appreciation for her travel books. If Vernon Lee really believed, like she declared in a letter to Maurice Baring, that "There is no Posterity",[26] then she should not have linked her name to Mantua.

24. A. Huxley, *Sabbioneta*, in *Along the Road. Notes and Essays of a Tourist* (1925), London, Triad/Paladin Books, 1985, p. 71.
25. P. Gunn, *Vernon Lee*, cit. p. 210.
26. *Ibidem*, p. 210.

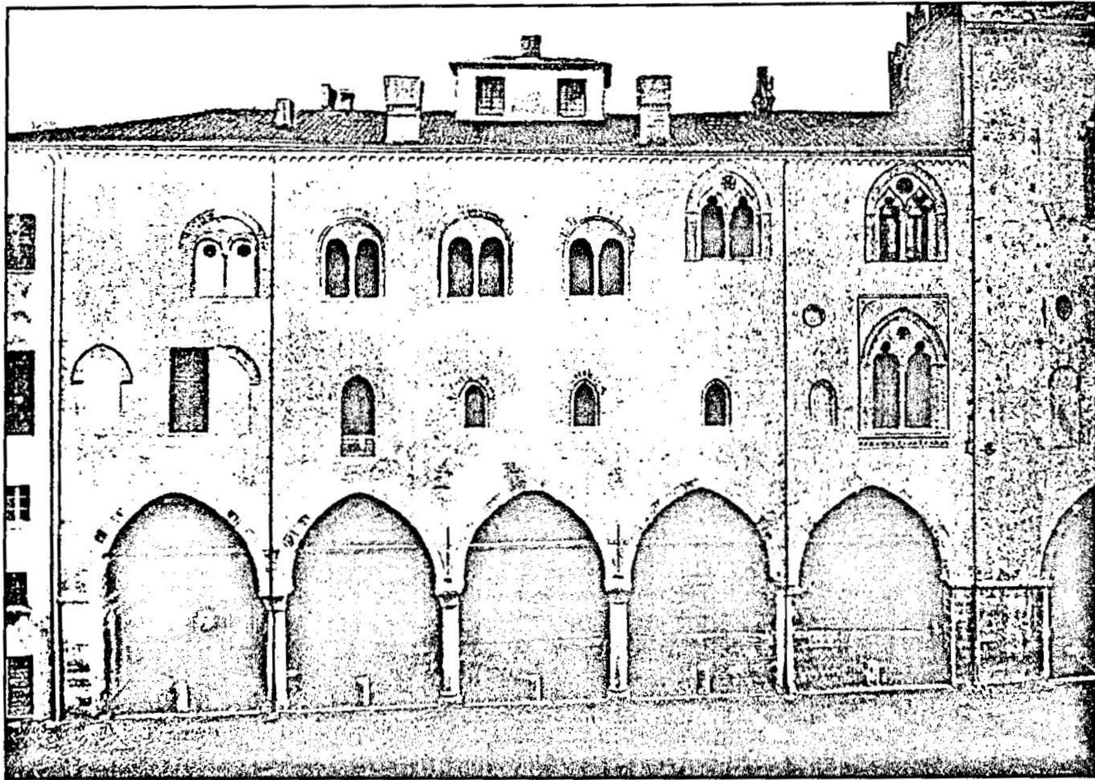

Illustration 1 *Mantova, façade of Palazzo Ducale at the beginning of its restoration (from A. Patricolo, Guida del Palazzo Ducale di Mantova, Mantova 1908).*

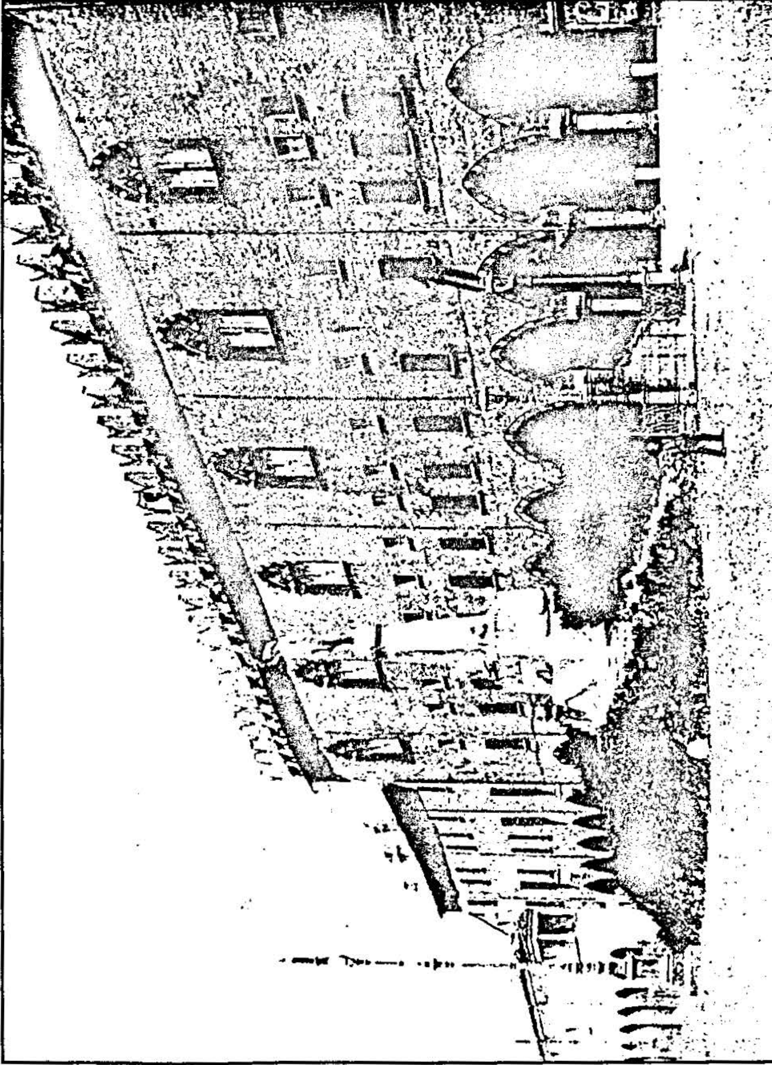

Illustration 2 *Mantova, Façade of Palazzo Ducale during its restoration – (from A. Patricolo, Guida del Palazzo Ducale di Mantova, Mantova, 1908).*

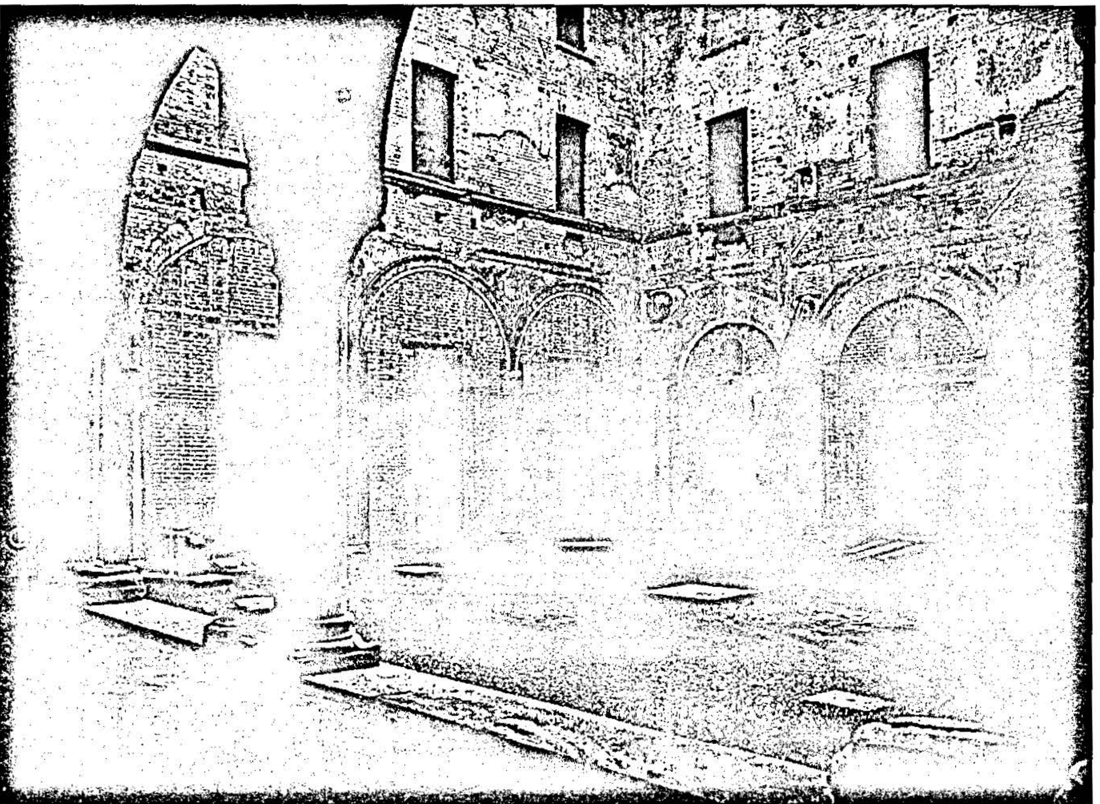

Illustration 3 *Mantova, Palazzo Ducale – Interior before restoration (Foto Giovetti, Mantova).*

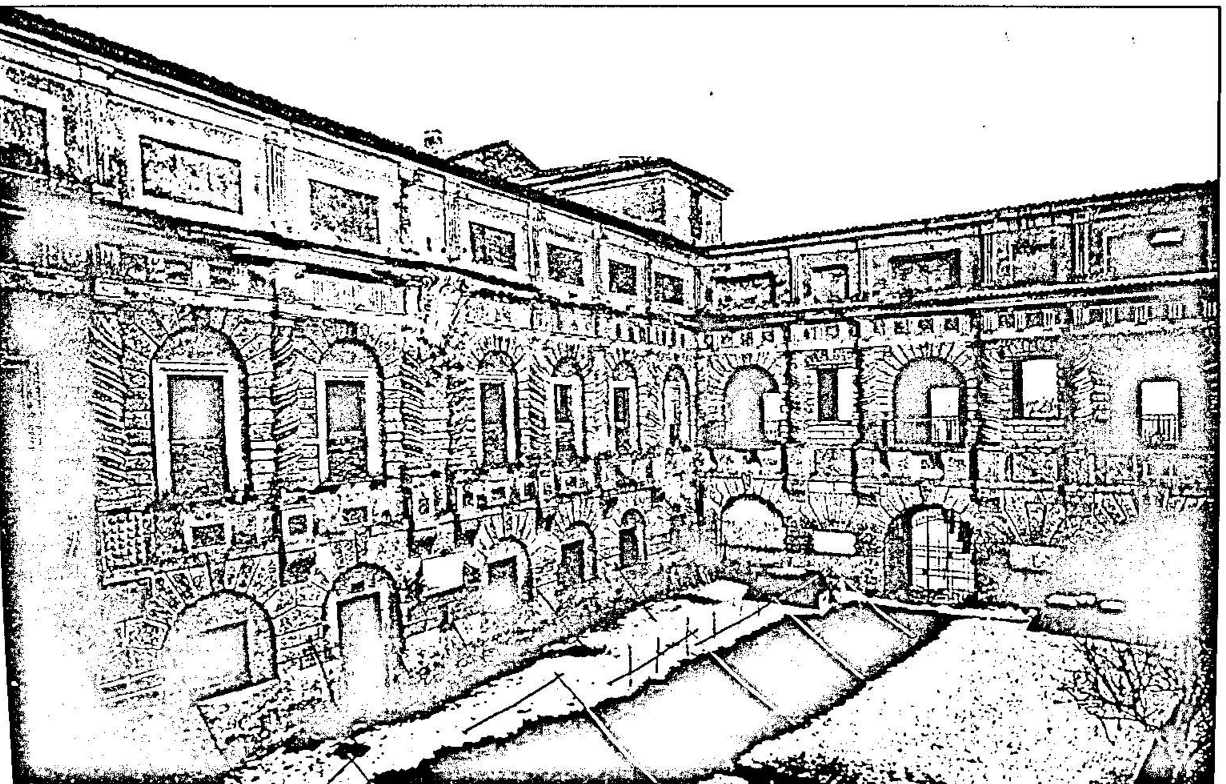

Illustration 4 *Mantova, Equestrian Court, Palazzo Ducale (from A. Patricolo, cit).*

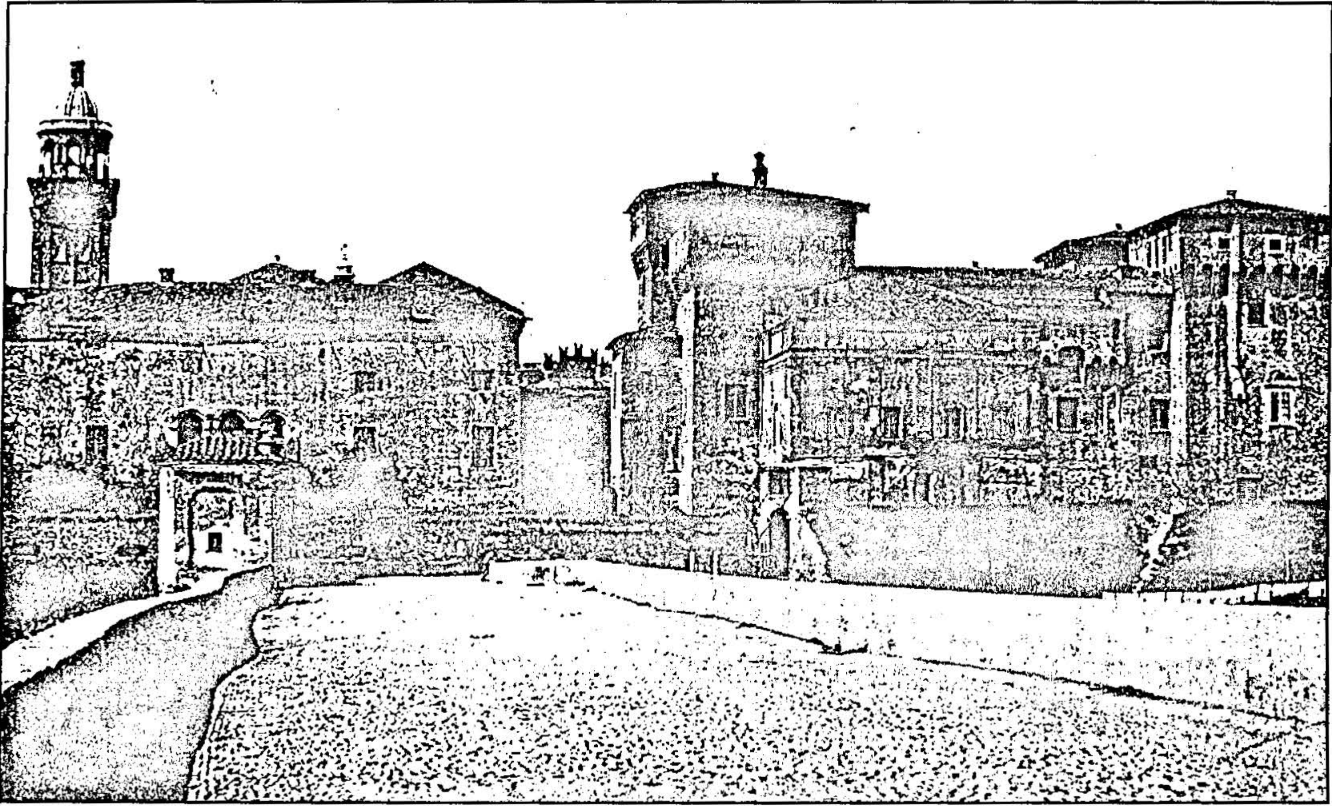

Illustration 5 *The view of Palazzo Ducale, Mantova, that Vernon Lee remembered.*

Num. d'ordine	DATA	CASATO E NOME DEI VISITATORI	NUMERO delle persone	ANNOTAZIONI Patria

Illustration 6 *Signatures of H. Horne and A. Symons, May 5, 1894. (From Registro dei visitatori del Palazzo Ducale, 1894 – gennaio 1908, ASMW. Archivio della scalcheria, busta 281).*

Num. d'ordine	DATA	CASATO E NOME DEI VISITATORI	NUMERO delle persone	ANNOTAZIONI

Illustration 7 *Mr. & Mrs. Wharton and their friend Egerton Winthrop, April 20, 1895 (from Registro dei visitatori del Palazzo Ducale cit. j).*

DATA		CASATO E NOME DEI VISITATORI	NUMERO delle persone	ANNOTAZIONI Patria
10 ottobre	902	[illegible]		Padova
[illegible]		[illegible] Wollemann		Padova
		Ida Levi Minzi		Padova
		Dr Heinrich Friedjung		Vienna
11 Ottobre	1902	Leopoldo [illegible]		Roma
20 ottobre	1902	[illegible]		Bozzolo
"		[illegible]		London
→		Col & Mrs Anstruther Thomson		London
		[illegible] Clerici		Milano
21 ott.	1902	[illegible]		Milano
21		Miss Cameron		Scotland
22	"	Ferrari Cav. Carlo		
	"	Prof. G. [illegible]		[illegible] Milano
22 Ott.	1902	Dott. Dante Antonio [illegible]		Firenze
22 Ott	902	[illegible]		Rivarolo [illegible]
22 Ott.		Hermann Ebert		München
23	"	Lucien S. [illegible]		Paris
23	"	[illegible]		Verona
		Marianna Motella		Verona
		Rag. Guido Motella		Verona
23		Boretti		Parma
		L. Calcon		Adria

Illustration 8 *Col. & Mrs Ansthruter Thomson, October 20, 1902 (from Registro dei visitatori del Palazzo Ducale, cit.).*

Num. d'ordine	DATA	CASATO E NOME DEI VISITATORI	NUMERO delle persone	ANNOTAZIONI
	17 Giugno 1905	[illegible]	2	Bologna
	20 giugno "	[illegible]	3	Milano
	21 Giugno	[illegible] Pinamonti	[illegible]	[illegible]
	21 Giugno	[illegible]		Firenze
	22 Juni 1905	Liesl Hammerschlag		Frankfurt
	23 giugno	B. Berenson		Firenze
		M. L. Berenson		
	24 Giugno	[illegible]		Roma
		R. Weeden Cooke		
	23 Giugno	Adolfo Laurenti Scultore		Roma
	9 Giugno	[illegible]		[illegible]
	"	[illegible]		
		[illegible] Healy		Irlanda
		[illegible]		[illegible]
	26 Giugno	[illegible]		
	"	Domenica [illegible]		Gorizia
	27 Giugno	[illegible]		
	"	[illegible]		[illegible]
	" "	Ruth R. [illegible]		U.S.A.
	28 Giugno 1905	[illegible]	2	Firenze

Illustration 9 *B. Berenson & M.L. Berenson, June 23, 1905 (from Registro dei visitatori del Palazzo Ducale, cit.).*

Num. d'ordine	DATA	CASATO E NOME DEI VISITATORI	NUMERO delle persone	ANNOTAZIONI
		Jos. Schulz		Praga
	21 Maggio	consigliere del governo [illegible]		Colmar
		Cirillo Hotowy		Vienna
22		[illegible]		Merano
23		H. Cecilia [illegible]		
		Margaret Stowers		Anghilterra
		H. W. W. McAnally		Londra
24		Mary Sheepshanks		Londra
25		[illegible]		Venezia
		[illegible]		Mantova
25	maggio	Gabriele d'Annunzio		Roma
25		[illegible]		Firenze
26		Bozzi Giuseppe		Brescia
		Bozzi Ada		idem
"		Antonio Bianchi		Reggio Emilia
		Bonni Romeo		
26	Maggio 07	Antonio Bertolini		Venezia
		Anna Landsberg		München
26	maggio 07	Casanova Felice		Mantova
27		Dott. Giorgio Rossomandi		Pirano Istria

Illustration 10 *Gabriele d'Annunzio, May 25, 1907 (from Registro dei visitatori del Palazzo Ducale, cit.)*

Num. d'ordine	DATA	CASATO E NOME dei visitatori	NUMERO delle persone	PROVENIENZA
	1909 15	[illegible]		Verona
	18-2-1909	Avv. Ugo [illegible]		Bergamo
	18.2.1909	[illegible]	24	[illegible]
	18.2.1909	[illegible]		Monaco
	"	[illegible]		Ferrara
	19-2-1909	[illegible]	4	[illegible]
	20-2-1909	Trentini Attilio		Verona
	20-2-"	[illegible]		id
	"	[illegible]		id
	20	[illegible]		Roma
	21-2-09	Gobbi Casimiro		Volta Mant.
	21-2-09	[illegible] Carlo	N.5	[illegible]
	21-2-09	I Zangwill		Inghilterra
	21-2-09	Editha Zangwill		"
	"	[illegible]		Napoli
	"	Anna de [illegible]		Milano
	22	[illegible]		Torino
	23/2/09	Prof. Antonietta Vaccari		
	"	Prof. D. Benedetti		
	"	[illegible] Benedetti		
	23 febbraio 1909	[illegible]		Venezia

Illustration 11 *I. Zangwill & Edith Zangwill, Febraury 21, 1909– (from Registro dei visitatori del Palazzo Ducale cit., busta 282).*

Healing Agents
in Novels by Alessandro Manzoni and Charles Kingsley

Allan C. Christensen

In accord with their impression that every age has its *Zeitgeist*, many nineteenth-century Europeans describe that of their own times as diseased. There is the characteristic *mal de siècle*, diagnosed so influentially at the start of the century in Chateaubriand's *René*. Various strains and mutations of the disease appear thereafter, and in the middle of the century Matthew Arnold observes a pervasive sense of breakdown as a principal symptom. In "The Scholar-Gipsy" he thus addresses nostalgically the legendary Oxford scholar that had lived in the healthy seventeenth century:

> O born in days when wits were fresh and clear,
> And life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames;
> Before this strange disease of modern life,
> With its sick hurry, its divided aims,
> Its heads o'ertaxed, its palsied hearts, was rife.

The "disease of modern life" involves especially the "divided aims" whereby one part of the personality condemns and undermines another part, producing guilt and an inability to act with conviction. The fragmentation is not the result of the normal

aging process that causes all organisms to lose their efficiency but rather of a contagion coming from the cultural environment. The scholar-gipsy is thus warned to avoid all contact with the nineteenth century: "fly our paths, our feverish contact fly!/ For strong the infection of our mental strife . . .".

Theoretically flight from the infection of the historical moment might yet be possible. Arnold believed that Goethe had regained his own health in this manner, and according to "Memorial Verses" Goethe had gone on to become himself the "Physician of the iron age". Having "looked on Europe's dying hour/ Of fitful dream and feverish power", he had prescribed for others the escapist remedy: *"Art still has truth, take refuge there!"* In its devotion to health, beauty and serenity, Goethe's art offered an alternative to the morbid fascination with guilt, suffering and death that supposedly characterized much of Romanticism. The impression of Goethe as the triumphant exponent of the aesthetic life, to be seen in its opposition to the condition of disease, became a myth in this period. So Kingsley too referred frequently in his novel *Two Years Ago* to Goethe, as when the prospect of an epidemic of cholera horrifies the poet called Elsley Vavasour: "Elsley had a dread more nervous than really coward of infectious diseases: and he had also (and prided himself, too, on having) all Göthe's [sic] dislike of anything terrible or horrible, of sickness, disease, wounds, death, anything which jarred with that 'beautiful' which was his idol" (X).[1]

Two Years Ago, published in 1857, and the other novel that I wish to discuss – Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* of 1827 – nevertheless condemn the Goethean reluctance to contemplate ugliness and to bear sickness oneself. Rather than escaping to a timeless dimension of nature or art, the protagonists remain within their historical moment and risk its physical and mental contagions. In the case of *I promessi sposi* too, that historical moment may be that of the sick nineteenth century rather than that of its seventeenth-century setting (the supposedly healthy century of Arnold's Scholar-Gipsy).[2] Indeed Goethe himself,

1. References in text are to chapters in Charles Kingsley, *Two Years Ago* (New York: R.F. Fenno, 1990).
2. Recent studies, particularly by Guido Baldi, Robert S. Dombroski and Augusto Simonini, have unanimously "historicized" *I promessi sposi* as an expression of the age in which it was written, as Mirto Golo Stone has usefully shown in "Contro la

who was among the earliest and the most enthusiastic admirers of the novel, believed that it had little to do finally with the seventeenth century. He hoped that an eventual German translator would omit the passages of purely seventeenth-century historical information.[3]

As narratives of nineteenth-century disease and mental strife then, the novels seem especially to deal with the weakening of faith in the power of spirit to impose its value upon civilization. In the various power struggles involving spiritual and physical forces, the danger is that the doubts of spirit about its own efficacy may dismally leave the field to a clash between purely material forces. Yet the physically weaker or spiritual side, which is often represented by the female protagonists, also possesses peculiar strengths. It is interesting to observe even the sense in which the victimization of the women becomes the paradoxical source of their power. The two heroines – Lucia in *I promessi sposi* and Grace Harvey in *Two Years Ago* – endure three sorts of aggression. Besides the menace of contagious diseases, these are the aggressions of brutal physical force and of psychological threats that impose upon them a sense of guilt and self-division. Both the bodies and the minds or souls of the heroines thus figure among the principal sites of conflict in which the spirit must prove its mettle.[4]

In *I promessi* sposi the exponents of brutal physical force are Don

modernità e la cultura borghese: *I promessi sposi* e l'ascesa del romanzo italiano", *MLN*, CVII, 1 (1992). 114-16. Stone's own point, however, is that the novel expresses not the bourgeois culture of the early nineteenth century, as has generally been thought, but an anti-bourgeois tendency that was also characteristic of that moment in Lombardy. In contrast with such views, Carol Lazzaro-Weis believes that it "is a characteristic of the historical novel in general", including *I promessi sposi* to deal not so much with the particularities of some historical moment as with the "universal and timeless human emotions" that may operate in all periods of history ("The Providential Trap: Some Remarks on Fictional Strategies in *I promessi sposi*", *Stanford Italian Review*, IV (1984), 103). Ruth Newton and Naomi Lebowitz also emphasize the degree to which *I promessi sposi* is a novel about the human spirit in "the turmoil of history"; the idea of history is more important, however, than the particular turmoils of any precise moment (*Dickens, Manzoni, Zola, and James: The Impossible Romance* [Columbia and London: Univ. of Missouri P., 1990], pp. 24-26, 40-44).

3. Peter Johann Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens, 1823-1832*, ed. Eduard Castle (Berlin, etc.: Deutsches Verlagshaus Bong & Co., 1916), I, 209-10 [Conversation of 23 July 1827].

4. Such heroines may be referred to the category of the "salvational agent", in the phrase of Newton and Lebowitz, who associate Lucia, for example, with Dickens's

Rodrigo and his bravos who, along with many similar bands, successfully defy the representatives of legally constituted authority. Their power is opposed, however, by certain religious orders and in particular by fra Cristoforo and the Cappuccini, who have established an intricate network of cooperation and loyalties that may be termed, somewhat irreverently, a counter-mafia. When Don Rodrigo plots to defeat Lucia's friends so that he can take physical possession of her, fra Cristoforo thus organizes a counterplot, the success of which should not surprise readers:

> Chi domandasse come fra Cristoforo avesse così subito a sua disposizione que' mezzi di trasporto, per acqua e per terra, farebbe vedere di non conoscere qual fosse il potere d'un cappuccino tenuto in concetto di santo. (VIII)[5]

Eventually, though, the substantial power of Cristoforo's saintliness is foiled; Don Rodrigo secures the abduction of Lucia, who becomes the prisoner of the mysterious character called *l'innominato*. Still she is not reduced to impotence, for the conflict now moves from the physical to the psychological plane. To her captor, who is specifically hard-hearted and apparently incapable of feelings of guilt, she pleads in the name of God ("in nome di Dio"). The unnamed man seems at first to reject this appeal as the unfair tactic so characteristic of the weak:

> – Dio, Dio, – interruppe l'innominato: – sempre Dio: coloro che non possono difendersi da sé, se non hanno la forza, sempre han questo Dio da mettere in campo, come se gli avessero parlato. Cosa pretendete con codesta vostra parola? Di farmi . . . – e lasciò la frase a mezzo. (XXI)

That night the interrupted battle continues silently upon an internal "campo". An impression not so much of God himself as of Lucia, who has called on God, terrifies the innominato and produces the guilt and remorse for his past life that lead to his conversion.

Esther Summerson and James's Milly Theale as "the passive vessel who has nothing to do but has [in words of Percy Lubbock] 'to be with great intensity'" (*op. cit.*, pp. 71–74).

5. References in text are to chapters in Alessandro Manzoni, *I promessi sposi* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1949).

Although the awe-struck populace considers the event a miracle, it should be noted that Manzoni's narrator does not.[6] The result derives from the power within Lucia's weakness – a weakness that has uttered its "forza", as the innominato confesses, "con codesta vostra parola".

Lucia exacts upon herself, however, a price for her as yet unrecognized victory by assuming in her turn a condition of self-division. In another action of that momentous night that confirms the power of words, she pronounces aloud the terms of a solemn pact with the Blessed Virgin:

> O Vergine santissima! . . . Fatemi uscire da questo pericolo, fatemi tornar salva con mia madre, Madre del Signore; e fo voto a voi di rimaner vergine; rinunzio per sempre a quel mio poveretto, per non esser mai d'altri che vostra. (XXI)

Of course she will continue to desire her "poveretto" and regret, guiltily now, that she has sacrificed him for the sake of the Virgin and of her own safety. Her forceful words, though overheard by no one, cannot be revoked. For a time she drops out of sight as the plague attacks her and she wishes to die.

More than showing the operations of God or the Blessed Virgin themselves, the narrative demonstrates the ability of human subjects to construct with their words a liberating or punishing providential agency. Indeed right from the opening episodes involving the marriage ritual, words are used, or prevented from being used, performatively so as to constitute one of the main weapons in the human power struggles.[7] We may briefly notice two other episodes. To balance the chapter in which the supposedly weak Lucia defeats

6. Annette Leddy distinguishes between two Manzonian narrators, a Catholic one and a more convincing and reliable one interested in psychological realism. It is this latter narrator that emphasizes the non-miraculous aspect of the conversion of the *innominato*, portraying it accurately as "the coming to consciousness of a repressed Catholic consciousness" ("The Conversion of Manzoni's L'Innominato; Or, The Repressed Catholic Consciousness of a Criminal", *Carte Italiane: A Journal of Italian Studies*, II [1980–1981], 29.)

7. Words sometimes succeed and sometimes fail to produce the desired results. Interesting failures are the innumerable published *gride* with which the governors of Lombardy seek to counteract the power of the lawless *bravi* (I) and the efforts to

her powerful, but perhaps significantly nameless, captor, there is the intense verbal duel in which the Cardinal Federigo Borromeo fails to wound Don Abbondio. Despite the cardinal's implicit pyschological violence, the priest will confess no guilt for having refused to pronounce the ritual terms of the marriage ceremony, and he remains, in a perverse sense, healthily un-self-divided. The outcome is reversed, though, in the confrontation in the lazaretto between fra Cristoforo and Renzo. When Renzo expresses vindictive satisfaction about the approaching death of the hateful Don Rodrigo, fra Cristoforo eloquently urges forgiveness of the enemy. The salvation of both Don Rodrigo and Renzo depends upon the victim's purging himself of the guilty animosity with which the tyrant has contaminated him. The act of forgiveness can constitute the true revenge of the weak victim upon the strong tyrant. So Renzo must pronounce his own formal commitment, blessing Don Rodrigo as part of a pact that secures a blessing in return: "Benedicilo", commands fra Cristoforo, "e sei benedetto". But while now one of the blessed, Renzo also becomes, in his surprisingly genuine concern for the welfare of Don Rodrigo, another sufferer of self-division: "Chi avrebbe mai detto a Renzo, qualche ora prima", asks the narrator, "che ... il suo cuor sarebbe stato diviso tra Lucia e Don Rodrigo?" (XXXVI)

In striking, with apparently amoral indifference, both Lucia and Don Rodrigo, the plague has created a dilemma for Renzo. From the plague, the event that best exemplifies the objective meaninglessness of phenomena, he must learn that God does not intervene with moral directness in historical events. Only the unreliable and vindictive Don Abbondio, who has absurdly escaped the infection, defines the plague as an appropriate divine punishment for human

counteract the plague by calling it at first "non peste, assolutamente no", then "febbri pestilenziali", then "non vera peste ... non peste proprio", and finally "peste senza dubbio" (XXXI). In discussing such passages, Gregory L. Lucente emphasizes the degree to which the entire novel is about the use and the abuse of language ("The Uses and Ends of Discourse in *I promessi sposi*: Manzoni's Narrator, His Characters, and Their Author", *MLN*, CI [1986], 51–87. Whereas I am interested in the performative ability of Manzoni's language to construct truths, however, Lucente believes that the novel concerns pre-existent truths which must be recognized and reestablished. The characters learn to use language correctly, he maintains, only insofar as they are able to make it restore and (re)present such truths.

wickedness. The narrator has pointed out, instead, that the infection has arrived in Lombardy with the undisciplined, plundering military forces of the emperor. So the plague is associated with the power of brutal physical force, to which civilization can oppose the freedom of a moral response. In such events the human spirit locates opportunities to demonstrate its charity.[8]

Whether Lucia should live or die, indeed, Renzo will have an opportunity to reaffirm his commitment to unselfish Christian morality. His blessing of Don Rodrigo, as fra Cristoforo warns, has not obliged God to save Lucia, and Renzo must consider himself blessed "qualunque sia l'esito" of his search for Lucia. When he happily finds that Lucia has recovered, despite her despairing wish to die, fra Cristoforo can then read into the event a justification for absolving her from her foolish vow. Although God himself remains silent and unpredictable, his Church claims the delegated authority to speak for him by interpreting events after they have happened and to impose or remove moral bonds: "Credete voi", fra Cristoforo asks Lucia just before releasing her, "che Dio ha data alla sua Chiesa l'autorità di rimettere e di ritenere, secondo che torni in maggior bene, i debiti e gli obblighi che gli uomini possono aver contratti con Lui?" (XXXVI).[9]

The rite of absolution restores purity of heart to Lucia since the desire for her *poveretto* no longer conflicts with her loyalty to the Virgin. Words have thus determined the stages of her illness and recovery – first the words that have imposed guilt and obligations

8. Francesco Di Ciaccia defines the sense in which the plague is not a necessary or divinely appointed event and can never be considered a blessing in disguise: the Catholicism of Manzoni is "una religione che accetti ed affronti *coraggiosamente* il male, ma che non lo recuperi come bene. . . . La peste non è necessaria a nessuno – a tutti *può* essere utile qualunque cosa – e a chiunque può *non* giovare nessuna occasione" (*La parola e il silenzio: Peste carestia ed eros nel romanzo manzoniano* [Pisa: Giardini, 1987], pp. 42-43).

9. John Gatt-Rutter deals interestingly with the question of God's silence or God's "voice" in the novel ("When the Killing Had to Stop: Manzoni's Paradigm of Christian Conversion", *The Italianist*, X [1990], 17-18). He notices that whatever "the voice of God" is it is not posited in this novel "as pure presence or essence in the abstract individual conscience. . . but is concretely embedded in the social institution of the Church" (p. 24). Manzoni offers "a Pascalian representation of a God who can be intuited but not observed within his creation" (p. 33).

and then the other words that have released from guilt. Especially with the performative language of religious discourse, Manzoni's narrative has transposed the conflict to a verbal plane. Here the spirit can construct a moral order to defeat chance and the brutality of physical force.

In turning to the schoolmistress Grace Harvey of *Two Years Ago*, we find another heroine who must parry threats from a brutal environment. Mischievous boys pelt her and her pupils with pebbles in the episode that introduces her, and later she must resist an attempted rape. Her physical toughness also withstands the tempestuous sea when she rescues the shipwrecked man that becomes the hero of the story. But more importantly than physical prowess, she possesses a physical charisma, perhaps even superior to Lucia's, that abashes opponents. She exercises "an almost mesmeric influence on every one in the little town" called Aberalva where it is believed "that she had only to will" something for it to happen. Sympathy for suffering sinners also associates her with Jesus:

> Her exquisite sensibility, it was whispered, made her feel every bodily suffering she witnessed, as acutely as the sufferer's self. . . . Her deep melancholy was believed to be caused by some dark fate – by some agonizing sympathy with evil-doers; and it was sometimes said in Aberalva, "Don't do that, for poor Grace's sake. She bears the sins of all the parish". (II)

Deriving not from God but from her own agonizing presence, her power bespeaks a will that does not even need words. She is challenged, however, by the equally charismatic power of the man whose life she has saved, the "godless" physician Tom Thurnall. In showing Tom's rise to power in town, the novel also seems to propose an enlightened scientific discourse as a replacement for the religious language of *I promessi sposi*. Tom struggles especially against the religious superstition that defines God as the sender of cholera epidemics and that finds it impious to thwart his will by instituting sanitary reforms. Behind the superstition there lurk substantial material interests too. His opponent, the old-fashioned Dr Heale, asks Tom: "[Do you] expect me to offend all my best patients? and not one of 'em but rents some two cottages, some a dozen. And

what'll they say to me if I go a routing and rookling in their drains, like an old sow by the wayside, beside putting 'em to all manner of expense?" But Tom perseveres in his campaign to proselytize for his scientific view of guilt and sin:

> "You hate sin", [he tells the Anglican vicar]. "well, I hate disease. Moral evil is your devil, and physical evil is mine. I hate it, little or big; I hate to see a fellow sick; I hate to see a child rickety and pale; I hate to see a speck of dirt in the street; I hate to see a woman's gown torn; . . . I hate to see anything wasted, anything awry, anything going wrong; I hate to see water-power wasted, manure wasted, land wasted, muscle wasted, pluck wasted, brains wasted; I hate neglect, incapacity, idleness, ignorance, and all the disease and misery which spring out of that. There's my devil; and I can't help, for the life of me, going right at his throat, wheresoever I meet him". (XIV)

The violence of such language enables Tom to turn his opponents into "sanitary sinners" and to discredit them as the "devil". Religious words thus remain powerful weapons, even if they are not so precisely performative as in *I promessi sposi*.[10] Tom's definition of "sin" wins important converts, including the vicar and Grace herself, and they fight the "devil" together when the cholera strikes. Their anger about human guilt, implied in the use of the religious vocabulary, also undermines the cooly materialistic understanding of a medical pathology. The physician's task of treating the physical symptoms of his patients must take account of the forces that weaken their spiritual condition. When the methodist preacher perversely uses the epidemic to terrify his auditors into a methodist awareness of sin, consternation makes some of them actually succumb to the cholera. That fate strikes the self-serving preacher himself when he

10. As a further example of the power of the religious discourse in Manzoni, we may notice the tendency of the Milanese in *I promessi sposi* linguistically to demonize, just as Tom Thurnall does, the villains (in this case the *untori*) thought to be responsible for the spread of the plague. (For a discussion of this linguistic aspect of Manzoni's novel, see Giorgio Ficara, "Le parole e la peste in Manzoni", *Lettere Italiane*, XXXIII [1981], 16–19). Kingsley's religious discourse also aspires towards a performative power in its patently rhetorical effort to convert readers and to change society. (For a recent treatment of this frequently observed characteristic of Kingsley's art, see John C. Hawley, "Charles Kingsley and Literary Theory of the 1850s", *Victorian Literature and Culture*, XIX [1991], 169, 175-82).

is made to feel remorse for the effect of his words. The last victim is the desperately troubled mother of Grace, who expiates in death her guilt for having stolen money from Tom. In restoring the money, the anxious Grace finally puts her own conscience to rest as well.

As Tom has learned from attending such complex cases, scientific authority often needs the help of honest religious authority: "I come to you, as soul-doctor", he tells the vicar on one occasion, "to do what I the body-doctor cannot" (X). Perhaps the scientific and religious discourses gain their power by operating in a symbiosis. In the end, Grace who has been converted to Tom's view of the validity of science will convert him to a faith in God: "I found out", Tom confesses to her, "that I had been trying for years which was the stronger, God or I; I found out I had been trying whether I could not do well enough without Him; and there I found that I could not, Grace". Worsted in the struggle, he has felt his own guilt and strangely become a coward. "You, and you only", he continues, "can cure me of my new cowardice. . . . Teach me, and I shall be brave again! Teach me, Grace! and forgive me!" (XXVIII). In accord with the grace contained in her name, she cures him, pronouncing the words of forgiveness, and they will bravely fight together against sin in both its material and its spiritual dimensions.[11]

The union between the body doctor and the soul doctor may not, however, quite suffice. They may need the support of the soldier, who prosecutes the struggle on the entirely physical plane rather than the linguistic and spiritual planes.[12] For Kingsley has reintroduced the element of physical violence, which Manzoni had

11. In a brief discussion of the role of will in *Two Years Ago*, John R. Reed defines the interaction between appropriately strong human wills and the power of the active will of God (*Victorian Will* [Athens: Ohio, UP, 1989], pp. 283-84).

12. As Laura Fasick emphasizes, though, the physician Tom Thurnall has already been represented as a warrior, "a wager of war against disease rather than a bestower of comfort": "Tom's motivation is aggression rather than compassion: 'I have got – and what greater pleasure – a good standup fight with an old enemy' [XVII]" ("Charles Kingsley's scientific treatment of gender", *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, ed. Donald E. Hall [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994], pp. 99–100). To characterize the aggressive tendency of *Two Years Ago*, the reviewer T.C. Sandars coined the phrase "muscular Christianity" which of course gained a wide currency. The volume edited by Hall contains interesting recent discussions of this tendency in Victorian literature.

discredited, as a necessary and positive component in the historical power struggle. The issue of slavery in the southern American states figures importantly in the story, and the slave Marie that Tom has helped to escape pleads with passionate eloquence for the use of physical force against tyrants. At this historical juncture Christian forgiveness of one's enemies, like that practiced by Lucia, Renzo and Grace, will not render those enemies innocuous. Other characters make the same plea for wars of liberation in Italy, and towards the end of the novel five of the main characters go to the Crimea to fight against tyranny. Marie's lover Stangrave, in particular, chooses the military option, implying as well that warfare is no more a purely masculine discourse than are the others. For the victimized woman remains a strong factor in his decision:

> "Yes, Marie was right."...
> ... What if the most necessary human art, next to the art of agriculture, be, after all, the art of war? It has been so in all ages. What if I have been befooled – What if all the Anglo-Saxon world has been befooled, by forty years of peace? We have forgotten that the history of the world has been as yet written in blood; that the story of the human race is the story of its heroes and its martyrs – the slayers and the slain. . . . What right have we to suppose that it will be aught else, as long as there are wrongs unredressed on earth; as long as anger and ambition, cupidity and wounded pride, canker the hearts of men?" (XXIII)

In the struggle to cure the cankering ills of the nineteenth-century, the site of conflict is not only within the hearts, bodies, and minds of women and men. The fight must also deploy the language of arms on literal fields of battle. Whereas Manzoni has observed in physical force a factor of disintegration, Kingsley debates whether the spiritual power typified in women may not reappropriate the sword too for a healing and unifying ministry.

D'Annunzio and Yeats

John Woodhouse

These proceedings are appropriately dedicated to the memory of Alphonse Sammut, whose posthumous but newly published volume of Anglo-Italian bibliography brings home well to readers the apparently inexhaustible vogue for seeking out the sources and echoes which run through great creative literature.[1] It is a search (for some a "pursuit" in every sense), which stimulates curiosity (or hostility) in readers, and occasionally casts additional light on the meaning or significance of a work of literature, as well as amusing the individual researchers. I should give prior warning that the result of my own investigations into Yeats and D'Annunzio has not produced a neatly-packaged and satisfying bundle of "inter- textualities", but I hope that what I have to say may reflect curiously on the literary scene in London at the end of the nineteenth century. Perhaps also my work may go some way to explaining why, despite the blaze of publicity for D'Annunzio in the 1890s, there has persisted an almost total ignorance of his poetry in Britain outside a narrow academic minority. Certainly there was an almost total lack of translation of his verse, until the lyric collection *Alcyone* was Englished in 1988, a good century after the first poems of that anthology were written.[2] One implicit question I

1. Alphonse Sammut, *Bibliography of Anglo-Italian Comparative Literary Criticism 1800–1990*, edited by Peter Vassallo and Franco Lanza, Malta University, 1997.
2. Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Halcyon*, translated by J. G. Nichols, Manchester, Carcanet, 1988.

would like to be borne in mind is this: What would have happened to D'Annunzio's critical fortune if Yeats, so skilled at publicising his favourites, had been as enthusiastic about his poetry as many of his fellow Rhymers? Did Yeats's silence on the question help to stifle interest in D'Annunzio's poetry in Anglophone cricles?[3] And why was he so lukewarm vis à vis his Italian contemporary?

Among the many unpublished documents lying in the general archive at the Vittoriale (Gabriele d'Annunzio's palatial home and later mausoleum) is a brief note from Yeats, dated 2 July 1924. In it Yeats invited D'Annunzio to be the guest of the Irish National at the commemorative Games (*Aonach Tailteann*), organized that year in Dublin to celebrate the creation in 1923 of the Irish Free State. Yeats had collected the Nobel Prize for Literature in December 1923, just six months before the invitation was sent to D'Annunzio, and in 1924 his fame was at its height. The tone of his letter to the Italian poet, which was in effect written as a reminder to D'Annunzio of an earlier invitation is courteous, cordial and respectful. Also in the archive is the official invitation card with appropriately convoluted Celtic scrolling, despatched from 15 Ely Place Dublin, and signed by Yeats and three other members of "the distinguished visitors committee": Oliver St John Gogarty, H. McLaughlin and S.W. Maddock. D'Annunzio does not seem to have responded to either missive, and both documents have remained in a general file, apparently unnoticed and uncatalogued until I stumbled across them. Here is the text of the letter:

82 Merrion Square
Dublin
July 2 1924

3. If no other evidence were available, Yeats's inclusion of so much mediocrity in his 1936 edition of the *Oxford Book of English Verse* would be sufficient to demonstrate his willingness to promote such versifiers as Dorothy Wellesley and Oliver St John Gogarty, at the expense of other fine poets omitted.

Illustrious poet,

some two months ago "The distinguished visitors committee of the Aonach Tailteann" sent you an invitation to come to Ireland as the guest of our nation. It was sent through the Italian Consul as was required but I think has never reached you. We have now sent this invitation once more.

Should you find it possible to be Ireland's guest from August 1 to August 10 you will be very welcome not only to our people as a whole but to our poets and writers.

Yours sincerely,
W.B. Yeats

The sight of these documents is a reminder, if any were needed, that D'Annunzio (1863–1938) and Yeats (1865–1939) were almost exact contemporaries. In Britain they had many supporters or acquaintances in common, including influential figures such as Arthur Symons, Ernest Rhys, and George Arthur Greene. Both men had similar ambitions to revolutionise their own writings and through them the literature of their nations, which they hoped would help also in a political revitalisation. D'Annunzio could only with difficulty have encountered Yeat's work. As Toni Cerutti has shown in her recent survey of Yeatsian studies in Italy, the first translation from Yeats (his dramas) date only from 1914; only in the past fifty years has Yeats's work become readily available to Italians.[4] Yeats, on the other hand had better opportunities to read D'Annunzio's work. The Irish poet passed considerable periods in Italy, including, according to his latest biographer, some miserable weeks in Florence during 1907, "where, struck down by colds and rheumatism [he] spent his days sightseeing (The Baptistry, the Duomo) and disapprovingly reading novels by D'Annunzio".[5] He is also known to have possessed translations at least of some of D'Annunzio's plays. These facts, along with several other reasons which will become apparent, helped convince me that a clear case

4. T. Cerutti, "Yeatsian Studies in Italy", in *Yeats the European*, edited by A. Norman Jeffares, London, Smythe, 1989, p. 255.
5. R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats, A Life*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1997, p. 537.

could be made for investigating a possible relationship between the two writers.

Perhaps I should begin by attempting to explain why D'Annunzio did not respond to Yeats's letter of invitation. At the opening of 1924 D'Annunzio had a host of personal preoccupations which concentrated his mind on other more pressing matters, both public and private.[6] Most notably he had recently begun to renovate the Vittoriale, the transformed Villa Cargnacco which he had taken over following his defeat and expulsion from Fiume at the turn of 1920–1921. D'Annunzio's ambitious plans for a memorial palace on the site were by 1923 well under way, and he was desperately trying to raise the money necessary to carry out a costly rebuilding programme. At the same time that he was pressing Mussolini for financial help, he was also writing indignant letters to convince the Duce to obtain for him an honorific title in recognition of his military actions on behalf of the nation during World War One, and in 1924 his efforts succeeded and he was officially dubbed Principe di Montenevoso.[7] He was also the President of FILM, the *Federazione italiana dei lavoratori del mare,* the shipworkers' trader union which was fighting a losing battle to maintain its independence and a decent standard of living for its members, against the pressure exerted upon it by the large employers and by the fascist regime. Almost simultaneously, on 22 April 1924, Eleonora Duse died in Pittsburgh and D'Annunzio was deeply concerned with the repatriation of her body and with arrangements for her funeral.[8] A few days later he was immersed in the publication of his voluminously reworked *Faville del maglio,* issued by the Reves press. That spring and early summer also produced one of the most troublesome crises for the fascist ruling hierarchy, the assassination of Giacomo Matteotti, upon which D'Annunzio was to make certain ambivalent and, for Mussolini, frightening pronouncements. There were other factors of lesser importance, but all contributed ultimately

6. For a full account of D'Annunzio's life at the time, see John Woodhouse, *Gabriele D'Annunzio,* Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998, here especially Chapter 12.
7. See for instance his correspondence with Mussolini at the opening of the year and particularly a letter of 25 February 1924, *Carteggio D'Annunzio-Mussolini,* a cura di R. De Felice and E. Mariano, Milan, Mondadori, 1971, p. 54.
8. *Ibid.,* p. 363–64.

to isolate D'Annunzio mentally and physically on his estate overlooking Lake Garda; even had he been free, he was in no mood to leave home at that time. Furthermore, Yeats's letter itself is written on a small and unpretentious sheet of paper, no bigger than A5, and in difficult, rather crabbed handwriting, which in my view D'Annunio, with his poor English, would be unable to read or understand; the signature would have been, for non-expert Italian eyes, impossible to recognise as that of W.B. Yeats. In normal circumstances, as Osbert Sitwell once made amusingly clear,[9] D'Annunzio would have been interested in communicating with a fellow-poet and would, I believe, have responded. It should be added that Yeats's Nobel Prize had received little publicity in Italy, but (responding to an implicit suspicion here) I believe that the award of that prestigious prize would have added to D'Annunzio's interest rather than to creating a barrier of envy between him and the Irishman. D'Annunzio was continually being bombarded by a great variety of correspondence, official and personal, communications from publishers, exchanges with Mussolini and the fascist hierarchy, fan-mail of all kinds, requests from American signature collectors, as well as letters from cranks verging on the lunatic; he might understandably have ignored Yeats's self-effacing letter with its baffling signature. One might argue that the archive of the Vittoriale also contains the official and certainly more legible invitation, but it is an invitation to the Aonach Tailteann, tout court, with no explanation of what that might mean; again he might be forgiven for ignoring that particular document.

"Should you find it possible to be Ireland's guest from August 1 to August 10," wrote Yeats, "you will be very welcome not only to our people as a whole but to our poets and writers". The implication there is that D'Annunzio's presence was solicited in the first place for political rather than poetical motives. D'Annunzio had, of course, achieved universal fame during World War One, because of his military exploits in every sphere of operations on the Austrian

9. See O. Sitwell, "Gabriel D'Annunzio" in *Nobile Essences*, London, Macmillan, 1950, p. 123, where Sitwell describes an interview with D'Annunzio at Fiume: "The first words he addressed to us were, 'Well, what new poets are there in England?' (not, you will notice, 'What new generals are there?' or 'Who plays for Woolwich Arsenal?')."

Front, actions for which he had won 18 medals for valour from most of the European nations; his presence at that time in Ireland would have provided the nascent state with a ready-made celebrity. More immediately, however, he had seized Fiume in September 1919, in order to protect a small nationalist minority of Italians, beleaguered as he saw it in that Yugoslav port. That daring act alienated most European governments, most particularly that of Britain, but not the new government of Ireland. What undoubtedly touched a chord amonst Irish Nationalists were his fiery speeches attacking British imperialism; he had not been slow to exploit the English presence in Ireland to attract support from the oppressed and to provoke irritation in the oppressor. The message which he reiterated again and again went as follows:

> Dall'indomito Sinn Fein irlandese alla bandiera rossa che in Egitto unisce
> la Mezzaluna e la Croce, tutte le insurrezioni dello Spirito contro i divoratori di carne cruda e contro gli smungitori di popoli inermi si riaccenderanno alle nostre faville che volano lontano.[10]

Undoubtedly political as much as poetical considerations had led Yeats to invite him to visit Dublin. The Irish biographer of D'Annunzio, Gerald Griffin, quoted the reference to the indomitable Sinn Fein from the Fiuman newspaper report, and in his volume on the Italian poet went on to link political statements, poetic achievements and the names of Yeats and D'Annunzio: "In my humble opinion, he is the greatest of living poets with the exception of my fellow countryman, Yeats".[11]

10. [From the indomitable Sinn Fein of Ireland to the red flag which in Egypt unites Crescent Moon and Cross, all the insurrections of the spirit against the devourers of raw flesh, against those who milk unarmed peoples, will be rekindled by the sparks which fly afar from us here.]

Quoted from D'Annunzio's *Messaggio del convalescente agli uomini di pena*, in his *Prose di lotta, di ricerca e di comando*, a cura di E. Bianchetti, Milan, Mondadori, 1949, Vol. I, p. 622; similar sentiments were expressed by him in a speech reported in the Fiuman newspaper *Vedetta d'Italia* for 19 October 1919; notes for the speech, referring again to the indomitable Sinn Fein, are available in D'Annunzio's *Taccuini*, a cura di E. Bianchetti and R. Forcella, Milan, Mondadori, 1965, p. 1185.

11. Gerald Griffin, *Gabriele D'Annunzio, The Warrior Bard*, London, Long, 1935, p. 186; for Griffin's reference to D'Annunzio and the Sinn Fein see *ibid.*, p. 181.

In 1890 W.B. Yeats was the leader of the cultural triumvirate which founded the Rhymers Club, the group of young littérateurs which met socially at the Cheshire Cheese Pub off London's Fleet Street; his co-founders were T.W. Rolleston, and Ernest Rhys. There they were joined by other rhymers, including Lionel Johnston, Ernest Dowson, George Arthur Greene, John Todhunter and Arthur Symons, some of the most influential names in modern English poetry and publishing. Yeats was to become the most famous of the group, and his views of its organisation have been accepted as gospel, though, as may be seen, it is significant that in his list of members he omits the name of George Arthur Greene, the unofficial honorary secretary, coincidentally D'Annunzio's leading supporter in Britain at the time.[12] So much is well known and hardly needs repeating, but what is not so well known is that the Rhymers' meetings must have been the occasions for the first discussions in England of D'Annunzio's work. What I wish to explore next is the critical potential of the Rhymers and the surprising way that their necessary awareness of D'Annunzio had no obvious outcome, produced no particular future in British poetry salons for this rising European star.

In 1892 the young Rhymers collaborated on the publication of their first anthology, *The Book of the Rhymers' Club,* followed two years later by *The Second Book of the Rhymers' Club.*[13] In the intervening year, 1893, George Arthur Greene, published his edition of *Italian Lyrists of Today,*[14] one of the most spectacular and comprehensive anthologies of Italian poetry ever compiled; he included contributions from thirty-four Italian poets, each represented by a

12. See for instance Yeast's list of members and attenders at the Cheshire Cheese, which even included non-members who attended certain sessions and members who attended very infrequently; Greene's name does not figure among them, though Yeats's casual awareness of him is brought out periodically in his correspondence with others at the time, W.B. Yeats, *Memoirs*, edited by D. Donoghue, London, Macmillan, p. 37.

13. *The Book of the Rhymers' Club*, London, Lane, 1892; *The Second Book of the Rhymers' Club*, London, Mathews and Lane, 1894. The two volumes have now been reprinted with a brief but useful introduction and bibliography by Woodstock Books, Oxford, 1995.

14. G.A. Greene, *Italian Lyrists of Today*, London, Elkin Mathews, 1893.

tastefully translated and innovative selection of poems, and each individual author introduced by a brief bio-critical sketch. At the beginning of his collection, respecting the noble spelling of the name, Greene placed (d') Annunzio, fifteen of whose poems he translated, thirteen from *Canto novo* and one each from *Intermezzo di rime* and *La Chimera*. Yeats had a fair and, for all I know, justifiable contempt for Greene's poetic ability, but it must be said that Greene's translations from Italian were good.[15] All of the Dannunzian poems that Greene included were in their way revolutionary or novel, reflecting D'Annunzio's own search for a "new song", and for a fresh personal poetic medium.[16] One of the main aims of the Rhymers was to encourage a similar poetic revival, to rekindle the spirit of great poetry in English. Two of the Rhymers' poems in particular revealed their innovative, if not revolutionary ambitions. The first is the composition which formed a kind of invocation to the first slim volume, entitled "The Toast", the poem was composed by Ernest Rhys, and essentially regretted the faded laurels and depressed condition of contemporary poetry.[17] The other poem was an offering by George Greene himself entitled "Song of the Songsmiths", more noteworthy as a useful piece of historical evidence than for its beauty of composition. It contains, anyway, an emphasis on the

15. See Yeats's criticism of Greene and other Rhymers in a letter to John O'Leary of 26 June, 1894: "I send you the 'Second Book of the Rhymers Club' in which everybody is tolerably good except the Trinity College men, Rolleston, Hillier, Todhunter and Greene who are intolerably bad as was to be expected", in *W.B. Yeats Letters*, edited by J. Kelly and E. Domville, Oxford, Clarendon, 1986, Vol. I, p. 391.
16. D'Annunzio had openly declared his quest, both in the title of his most recent collection and elsewhere. Most notably D'Annunzio's awareness of his originality and novelty was expressed in a famous letter to the critic Guido Biagi, dated 24 May 1881, published in part by Ivanos Ciani, "La nascita dell'idea di *Canto novo*" in *Canto novo nel centenario della pubblicazione*, a cura di E. Tiboni e L. Abrugiati, Pescara, Centro Studi Dannunziani, 1982, p. 24; cf. below, note 34.
17. The poems published by Yeats himself in each of the two anthologies were of a much superior quality, and, curiously show how unchanging was Yeats's attitude from this date onwards. The poems he sent were, "A Man who dreamed of Fairyland", "Father Gilligan", "Dedication of Irish Tales", "A Fairy Song", "The Lake Isle of Inisfree" and "An Epitaph" (1892), and "The Folk of the Air", "The Fiddler of Dooney", "A Mystical Prayer to the Masters of the Elements", "The Cap and Bells", and "The Song of the Old Mother" (1893).

youthful enthusiasm of the rhymers, forging golden rhymes, their purpose being to eternalise the joy and sorrow of song at a period of cultural history which seemed begrimed and misted over, their hammers ringing out so that the whole world might hear their message.

The quality of Greene's commemorative poem may justify Yeats's condemnation of its author as a poet, but it was intended to celebrate the first anniversary of the Club's foundation, and explains the aspirations of the young poets surrounded by the decadence of their age. I shall return to the Rhymers and their compositions in a minute, but what I would like to emphasise for the present is that here we have a group of enthusiastic young poets, looking for a way to create a new style of poetry, and here, in a companion volume, well publicised by one of their number are poetic examples by D'Annunzio, one of the most innovative of poets in any period. Consider briefly some of Greene's statements about D'Annunzio: "He is still very young, and has perhaps the largest dower of poetical genius vouchsafed to any living European of his time and of his years [. . .]".[18] "So far, d'Annunzio's career, considering his extreme youth, had been perhaps the most amazing series of triumphant successes that the last half-century has known in any country".[19] And again "The rapid rise of d'Annunzio is, I repeat, one of the most astounding phenomena of the country. He is not yet thirty years of age [. . .]".[20] Three years later Arthur Symons, Yeats's greatest friend of the time, was to meed D'Annunzio and, in his own critical writings continued Greene's enthusiastic encomia for the next twenty-five years and more; the importance of Symons will become evident in due course.

Undeniably the most important personage in the group of Rhymers, and certainly its most famous poet was W.B. Yeats. Ezio

18. *Italian Lyrists of Today*, cit., *Introduction*, p. xxix.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6. Yeats seems to have disliked Greene; apart from his deliberate omission from the lists of Rhymers which he compiled and his adverse criticism of his poetry, Yeats wrote ambiguously to Ernest Rhys (when the latter informed him of Greene's death?) "in pleasure at the thought that Greene had showed so much genius – a sort of fat weed on Lethe's warf"; for the correspondence see E. Rhys, *Letters from Limbo*, London, Dent, 1936, p. 159. (For Yeats's insult cf. *Hamlet*, I, iv).

Raimondi, in an important paper delivered in 1975,[21] linked the names of D'Annunzio and Yeats:

> In un libro che ha avuto un ruolo rivelatore nella poesia inglese del Novecento, da Yeats a Eliot, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature,* Arthur Symons, poeta e critico della fin de siècle uscito dalla scuola dell'esteticismo, rivolgendosi a Yeats e ripetendo ciò che questi aveva scritto qualche anno prima nel suo saggio *The Celtic Element in Literature,* presenta il D'Annunzio come il protagonista italiano del simbolismo, di una poetica, egli dice, che vuole "spiritualizzare la letteratura" e riscoprire "l'anima delle cose" nello specchio musicale e inquieto della vita interiore".[22]

That passage gives. the impression that Yeats wrote on D'Annunzio's poetics, an impression accepted from Raimondi by that other well-known Anglicist, Benedetta Bini, "È proprio da questa definizione che parte il saggio di Ezio Raimondi".[23] But in fact Yeats's essay on the Celtic elements in literature mentions the Abruzzese poet only once, and then in the context of half a dozen other Euoprean artists:

> [...] the symbolical movement which has come to perfection in Germany in Wagner, in England in the pre-Raphaelites, in France in Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, and Mallarmé, and in Belgium in Maeterlinck, and has stirred the imagination of Ibsen and D'Annunzio, is certainly the only movement that is saying new things.[24]

21. "Il D'Annunzio e il simbolismo" in *D'Annunzio e il simbolismo europeo,* a cura di E. Mariano, Milan, Il Saggiatore, 1976, p. 25.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
[In a book which had a revelatory role in English eighteenth-century poetry from Yeats to Eliot, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature,* Arthur Symons, poet and critic at the end of the century who had emerged from the aesthetic school, addressed Yeats and repeated what Yeats had written some years earlier in his essay *The Celtic Element in Literature,* and presents D'Annunzio as the italian protagonist of symbolism, of a poetics, he says which desires "to spiritualize literature" and rediscover "the soul of things" in the musical and unquiet mirror of the interior life].
23. To judge by her interesting article on "D'Annunzio e le fin de siècle inglese", in *Gabriele D'Annunzio: la scrittura e l'immagine,* Autori vari, Napoli, Guida, 1979, pp. 93–9, here p. 99.
24. W.B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions,* London, Macmillan, 1961, p. 187.

Yeats was silent about D'Annunzio's *particular* importance, and makes no further mention of him. That omission becomes more significant when one considers that Yeats was willing to accept as influences upon his own "generation" both the French symbolists, and the pre-Raphaelites. It is also interesting to see Yeats avoiding the newly fashionable critical term, *symbolist*, favouring the traditional but now ambiguous *symbolical*. His implicit objection may tell us something about his refusal at that stage to be considered part of a school of thought or art.

Arthur Symons had dedicated that volume on *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* to Yeats (who described Symons as his dearest companion of those years)[25], and there, in the very dedication to his friend, Symons characterised D'Annunzio as the one new force in Italy. During the next quarter of a century Symons continued to eulogise D'Annunzio and his work. For much of that time, particularly in the early years, Yeats must have been subjected to a continuous bombardment of Symons's enthusiastic criticism, for the two Rhymers travelled widely in each other's company, notably in 1896 when they undertook their journey together through Ireland to Galway, Sligo, and the Island of Aran, and for some months between 1895 and 1896 they shared a common entrance to their residences in the Temple, and a common housekeeper, Mrs Old.[26] Incidentally, all this time Symons was translating D'Annunzio and keeping Yeats well informed about his activities. Symons's critical support for D'Annunzio went on from strength to strength, notably in his famous review of the *Trionfo della morte* in 1898, his English renderings of some of the poems from *Il piacere* the same year, and particularly, as far as Yeats was concerned, in his translations of *La città morta, La Gioconda,* and *Francesca da Rimini,* all done between 1900 and 1902, at a time when Yeats was looking for inspiration in his own innovative theatrical enterprises. Symons gave Yeats a

25. The dedication is at p. v of Arthur Symons, *Symbolist Movement in Literature,* London, Heinemann, 1899. For Yeats's stated affection see W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* London, Macmillan, 1955; sixth edition, 1977, pp. 318 ff.; cf. W.B. Yeats, *Memoirs,* London, Macmillan, 1972, p. 97: "[. . .] my most intimate friend at first at Fountain Court and afterwards at Woburn Buildings".

26. See Arthur Symons, *Letters to W.B. Yeats 1892–1902,* edited by Bruce Morris, Edinburgh, Tregara Press, 1989, p. 34.

signed copy of his translation of *La Gioconda*, and on p. 67 of Yeats's personal copy of *Francesca da Rimini* there is a sketch, possibly in Yeats's own hand of the stage setting described in the scenario to Act III.[27] Symons's last eulogy of D'Annunzio occurs in his collection of essays published in 1926,[28] by which time we can reasonably assume that Yeats had little interest in Symons or D'Annunzio, and the names of Yeats and D'Annunzio continued to be linked in Symons's essays, as in his comments on D'Annunzio's tragedy *La città morta*:

> *La città morta* is almost more a poem than a play, and there is in it a beauty which is to be found in the work of no contemporary writers for the stage except Maurice Maeterlinck and W.B. Yeats. And this beauty is of an entirely individual kind, a poetry of sensation, or of an emotion which is made up of a spiritual apprehension of the things of the senses.[29]

On the wider public stage, certain other pro-Dannunzian propaganda of the 1890s culminated in Georgina Harding's bowdlerized translations for Heinemann of the earlier novels.[30]

Yet despite the saturating effect of such publicity (or perhaps because of it), Yeats seems to have been unmoved, his attitude, in those few brief allusions that he makes to D'Annunzio, is, to say the least, ambiguous. Perhaps he geniunely was unable fully to understand D'Annunzio's literary objectives and achievements. In 1904, during the course of an interview with the American critic Ashton Stevens writing in the *San Francisco Examiner*, Yeats declared that he could not "make out" D'Annunzio's first play, *La città morta*, because although it was meant to be "real" he found the dialogue completely "unreal"; but he did find the *Francesca da Rimini* more accessible:

27. I am obliged to Professor Warwick Gould for drawing my attention to these two details.
28. In the essay "Gabriele D'Annunzio", in *Eleonora Duse*, London, Elkin Mathews. 1926, pp. 111–29.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
30. She translated and bowdlerized D'Annunzio's four major novels written before 1900, *Il piacere*, *L'innocente*, *Il trionfo della morte*, and *Le vergini delle rocce*, while Heinemann's wife, Magda Sindici, under the pseudonym Kassandra Vivaria, would later unreadably translate *Il fuoco*; cf. below, note 36.

> His *Francesca da Rimini* I can follow easily enough, for that is a flight of fancy. But as drama – Well, in the first act there is an admirable scene with the jester – which has nothing to do with the play. And later there are an astrologer and a peddler – and, as I remember, nothing to do with the play. But at present [. . .] I do not like to say that I do not like D'Annunzio's plays. Sometimes it takes a long time to understand an artist. I do see most lovely passages in his work, but it will take me perhaps a long time to understand him as an artist that has influenced the whole of Europe.[31]

If Yeats had read the play in Italian it is strange to see him so unappreciative of the linguistic revolution which D'Annunzio was attempting in *La città morta,* if in Symons's English the difficulties disappear. Perhaps Yeats was being disingenuous, or at most diplomatic, in declaring that he couldn't "make out" the *Dead City;* it is a relatively transparent, if ingenious plot which reflected Schliemann's recent discoveries at Mycenae, D'Annunzio's experience of the site in 1885 and the transposition of the ancient Agamemnon myth on to a modern love triangle which develops amongst the site archaeologists. In the case of the *Francesca da Rimini* Yeats's judgement would seem again to be too casual. Here is an historical piece, based loosely on Dante's episode in *Inferno* V, and a flight of fancy only in the sense that it is fleshed out by D'Annunzio's lurid imagination, though a "fanciful" approach might justify "unreal" language. Perhaps it was in an attempt to clarify his understanding of the *Francesca* that he had tried to get James Joyce to review the translation of it done by Arthur Symons. In December of that year he wrote to Joyce in the following terms:

31. The article, "The Poet Yeats talks Drama with Ashton Stevens" forms the Appendix to Roy Foster's *W.B. Yeats, a Life,* cit.; here p. 537.

18, Woburn Buildings,
Euston Road
December 9th, 1902

My dear Joyce,

I have been three times to the Speaker Office, but the Editor is still away. At last, however, I have got hold of the Editor of the Academy. I think I interested him in your work [. . .] I suggested that the Academy should give you a book of D'Annunzio's for review. He said "No, we can't do that, we couldn't trust a man we don't know with D'Annunzio, we have taken a certain line about him for years. We think him a great artist but detest his morals". I imagine that the Academy has a somewhat more popular audience than the Speaker and it has to be a little careful about moral questions.

Yours sny
W.B. Yeats[32]

I do not think we should attribute too much importance to Yeats's interview with the *San Francisco Examiner*. I myself would characterize Yeats's responses as being typically off-hand replies to journalistic queries, of little interest and importance to him beyond the publicity and the fee which they brought in their wake. Never one to hold back his critical opinion of others, at least in private, why did Yeats not himself review *Francesca da Rimini*? Perhaps he was unwilling to pass judgement on the translation of his friend Symons? Perhaps he was unwilling to give an equivocal opinion on a work which might well have been a masterpiece? Why not let Joyce's intellect and frankness do the task for him? But what is also extraordinary about Yeats's reticence concerning the *Francesca* is that Arthur Symons's introduction to his edition of 1902 gave a perfectly good critical view of the play, and stressed its European

32. W.B. Yeats, *Letters*, edited by J. Kelly and R. Schuchard, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994, here volume III, pp. 272–73; I am grateful to Professor Kelly for drawing my attention to this correspondence in its earlier unpublished stage.

dimension and revolutionary quality.[33] This was the first Dannunzian experiment in verse drama, and Symons is very good in his analysis of D'Annunzio's method. Yeats himself was interested professionally in the genre, but where was the evidence of his intellectual curiosity? Apart from the brief mention in the letter to Joyce he appears completely to have ignored this and other plays. Further, the view of Greene and Symons that D'Annunzio had an influential European dimension, finds only lukewarm acknowledgement in what Yeats said to Stevens ("but it will take me a long time to understand him as an artist that has influenced the whole of Europe") and may indicate an unwillingness to give favourable publicity to one whom he could regard as a literary rival. Forty-somethings often regard praise of their contemporaries as a threat. For a decade Yeats would have heard nothing but praise of his potential Italian "rival", and here again Symons in his Introduction did add that the *Francesca,* "acted with the greatest success in the chief cities of Italy" had "raised more discussion than any play in verse of this century".[34]

The output of both poets is prolific, and it would be possible, in a sterile sort of way, to point to parallels in their work. Ultimately I believe that such a search for echoes in this case is futile. Yeats, like D'Annunzio seems to have been determined to be inimitable, and might well have deliberately set aside the works of his Italian contemporary at a very early stage in his own career in order not to be influenced by one whose star was at the time more powerfully in the ascendant. D'Annunzio, too, had consciously broken away from Carducci's literary influence when he published his Canto novo.[35] But above all it was Yeats's Irishness that dictated the mood and content of his poetry to the exclusion of most else, perhaps especially including D'Annunzio. Yet the poetic aspirations and ambitions

33. Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Francesca da Rimini,* translated by Arthur Symons, London, Heinemann, 1902.
34. *Ibid.*, p. v.
35. See above, note 16; in a rich paragraph D'Annunzio's most significant words were: "Ho avuto la forza di ribellarmi; e con un lento ma laboriosissimo processo di *selections* sono venuto fuori *io,* tutto io; non mi resta che spezzare gli ultimi deboli lacci e poi gettarmi nel mio *mare*". [I've had the strength to rebel and with a slow and most laborious process of *selections,* I've managed to break the final weak chains and then plunge into my own sea].

of the two poets coincided at many points, though here I stress the element of coincidence; I certainly could not and do not wish to explore possible common sources for their writings. In particular we might consider sentiments such as those of Yeats in *The Moods*:

> Everything that can be seen, touched, measured, explained, understood, argued over, is to the imaginative artist nothing more than a means, for he belongs to the invisible life, and delivers its ever new and ever ancient revelation. We hear much of his need for the restraint of reason, but the only restraint he can obey is the mysterious instinct that has made him an artist, and that teaches him to discover immortal moods in mortal desire, an undecaying hope in our trivial ambitions, a divine love in sexual passion.[36]

Those ideas find a ready parallel in the statements which D'Annunzio puts into the mouth of his autobiographical protagonist Andrea Sperelli in the opening chapter of the second Book of *Il piacere*, or later in the pronouncements of Stelio Effrena in the first Book of *Il fuoco*, when he discusses the joy of creativity, the attribute of divinity in the artist.[37]

There are other general points which the two had in common. Their mutual interest in the occult should be mentioned here, though D'Annunzio was no mystic. He chose as his librarian and cataloguer of his manuscripts Antonio Bruers, partly, rumour had it, because of Bruers's expertise in the occult, but mainly because Bruers had a reputation already as having catalogued the impossibly labyrinthine library of Carducci. Certainly in his attitudes D'Annunzio was not so formalized or organized as Yeats, and often spoke of such

36. *Essays and Introductions*, cit., p. 195.
37. In Georgina Harding's translations of those two novels, references to these and other intellectual discussions are excised; see *Il piacere*, a cura di G. Ferrata, Milan, Mondadori, 1969, p. 212, and *Il fuoco*, a cura di G. Ferrata, Milan, Mondadori, 1975, p. 98; in both novels such sentiments recur *passim*. Arthur Symons harped upon Andrea Sperelli-Dannunzio's literary theories in his essay on D'Annunzio in *Eleonora Duse*, cit., pp. 122–3, where large sections of *Il piacere* are pertinently translated. Readers should be warned that when Dedalus Books reprinted Ms Harding's translations in 1988 *taliter qualiter*, they did so without acknowledging the thousands of bowdlerizations and deletions they were perpetuating, including the excision of most of the intellectual material in the text.

mysteries with some degree of cynicism, though it suited him to have a house-ghost in the person (perhaps) of Richard Wagner, whom the poet alleged haunted his music room.[38] Both men made good use of the Greek and Latin Classics and of the early Italians, particularly Dante, as inspiration for their compositions and both echoed the notes of the pre-Raphaelites, particularly of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, whom Yeats declared to be one of the paramount influences upon his generation and whose family origins in the Abruzzi (their home town being Vasto) gave D'Annunzio a particular feeling of affiliation with him. Both were profoundly interested in the Italian Renaissance, Yeats used profitably his reading of Castiglione, D'Annunzio was in Italian understandably able to range much wider, but, coincidentally, one of his "mentors" was Castiglione's friend Pietro Bembo. The myths created by both men often have a timelessness which evoke folkloristic origins and contemporary nationalist aspirations:

> The events it describes, like the events of most of the poems in this volume, are supposed to have taken place in the indefinite period, made up of many periods, described by the folk-tales, rather than in any particular century.[39]

Yeat's views there correspond exactly with the mood evoked in D'Annunzio's finest play, *La Figlia di Iorio,* and the presence of folklore in a play with modern reverberations is palpable in his second finest play, *La fiaccola sotto il moggio* which exploits serpent-lore visible in pre-Virgilian sources. Connected with that foklore, more evidently in Yeats than in D'Annunzio, is the nationalist theme which influenced the Irish poet from an early age: "From the moment when I began *The Wanderings of Oisin,* which I did at that age [of 20], I believe my subject matter became Irish"[40]; elsewhere his *Essays and Introductions* tell us

38. Not untypical is an aside in a letter to Guido Treves's managing director Beltrami, "Sono molto inquieto e torbido, non senza accessi notturni di licantropia", [I am most restless and turbulent, not without attacks of lycanthropy at night] in V. Salierno, "G. Beltrami e G. D'Annunzio", *Rassegna Dannunziana,* May, 1996, XXIX, p. 33.
39. W.B. Yeats, *Poems,* Edited and Annotated by A. Norman Jeffares with an Appendix by Warwick Gould, London, Macmillan, 1989, Appendix VI, p. 750.
40: *Ibid.*

that by 1883 he had decided to use exclusively Irish scenery in his poetry.[41] Until the end of his life D'Annunzio was fiercely proud of his Abruzzese roots, but well beyong the limits of a province, his nationalism was of a far vaster order. He had in mind a Latin civilisation, to combat that of Teuton and Slav, a culturally imperial ideal, to which a revived Italy was central. To achieve his aim "he set his bow at every prey his desire aimed at", and in his *Laus vitae* claimed the world as his own, plucked like an apple and squeezed to slake his thirst.[42]

Temperamentally the two men were too diverse for Yeats to have felt much sympathy for D'Annunzio, particularly in the 1890s. D'Annunzio had a physical energy which drove him through bullets and mud during World War One and which animated most of his writings. He invented for himself a tenth muse, *Energia,* which helped him translate that physical energy into his literary creations. Yeats, by contrast, stated that his own protégés, Lionel Johnson and Ernest Dowson had shown by their examples that violent energy, like a fire of straw, destroyed vitality and proved useless artistically.[43] More dire for Yeats would be the way that much of that physical energy manifested itself in D'Annunzio's major inspiration for his literary work: sex. The sensuality which characterised Ernest Dowson's life apparently appalled Yeats at what he called that "ascetic stage" in his own life. Nevertheless, in the same sentence he also revealed that he envied Dowson his dissolute existence.[44] At the same time Yeats was also expressing his hatred for the sentimental and promiscuous love affairs conducted by George Moore; by contrast he claimed that he was one of the last Romantics, believing in a monogamous relationship which

41. *Essays and Introductions,* cit., p. 203.
42. The quotation is from "Canta la gioia" in *Canto novo;* the lines from *Laus vitae* (*Maia*) are:

> O Mondo sei mio!
> Ti coglierò come un pomo,
> ti spremerò alla mia sete.

43. *Autobiographies,* cit., p. 318.
44. *Ibid.,* p. 492. Interestingly some of Dowson's sensual poetry has similar themes to that of D'Annunzio's *Canto novo,* and similar moods to Arthur Symons's equally Dannunzian *London Nights;* see, for example his *Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae* in Earnest Dowson, *The Poems,* edited by A. Symons, London, Laurie, 1905, though Dowson has an irony which is only rarely detected in D'Annunzio's work.

would suffice for a lifetime.[45] D'Annunzio, par contre, at the age of sixteen had pawned his grandfather's watch in order to obtain money to pay for a prostitute. Subsequently D'Annunzio's European reputation widened, not only because of his literary triumphs, but also because of his well-publicised sexual gymnastics and his public reputation as a lecher, his complete flouting of public morals, his many adulterous affairs (one of which brought him a three-month prison sentence, later amnistied).[46] Whatever might have been Yeat's other motives for his diffident approach to D'Annunzio, to have celebrated D'Annunzio's genius before the turn of the century may have seemed to Yeats nothing less than an act of immorality, rather as Dr Jekyll might have regretted his Mr Hyde. That inhibited view of sexual adventures was subsequently to give way in later years when Yeats was more open, and indeed boastful, about the darker side of his complexes. In view of Yeats's submission to the Steinach operation of 1934, with its monkey-gland implants, it would be interesting to know whether he was aware that D'Annunzio's sexual potency and unashamed libidinousness continued strong until the poet was well into his seventies.[47]

It would be unreasonable to indict any poet for not giving publicity to another, and certainly impertinent for a non-expert on Yeats such as I, nor would I ever wish to do this. At the opening of this paper I did warn that I would not produce a neatly packaged bundle of intertextualities. It may be, however, that some of these details, offered from the viewpoint of an Italianist, may help Yeatsian experts to explain further certain aspects of their poet's psychological attitude and make-up, and this may be as far as one can go in examining any possible literary relationship between the two men.

45. *Autobiographies* cit., p. 431.

46. For these details see my *Gabriele D'Annunzio*, cit.

47. For interested readers D'Annunzio describes his orgies, one of 5 October 1933 lasting for twenty-four hours, followed by eleven hours of unbroken sleep, in Annamaria Andreoli, *Di me a me stesso*, Milan, Mondadori, 1990, pp. 71–191; cf. also Attilio Mazza, *L'harem di D'Annunzio*, Milan, Mondadori, 1995.

Giorgio Bassani, James Joyce and the *Storie ferraresi**

Brian Moloney

Marco Forti wrote in 1984 that Bassani was "uno scrittore che non nasconde le sue letture né le sue dichiarate preferenze letterarie".[1] Amongst these declared preferences, Benedetto Croce and James Joyce have been mentioned frequently, both in interviews which Bassani has given and in his critical writings.

> Io non sono un romanziere che ambienta le sue storie a Ferrara, ma un poeta che parla della sua vita, e dei luoghi legati a questa vita. Parlo di Ferrara per le stesse ragioni per cui, per esempio, Leopardi parlava di Recanati, e Joyce di Dublino.

Thus Bassani in the course of an interview with Donatella Bisutti, published in *Grazia* in 1968. It is perhaps not often that that particular learned journal is cited at academic conferences or in learned journals, so let met redress the balance by citing an interview published by Anna Dolfi in 1981, in which he cites Proust and Joyce as his "immediati predecessori" and then goes on to say:

*A paper given at the 1997 International Conference: England and Italy: Literary and Cultural Relations from 1300 to the Present Day.

1. M. Forti, *Prosatori e narratori del Novecento italiano*, Milan, Mursia, 1984, p. 367.

> La mia massima aspirazione è al tempo oggettivo, al tempo cartesiano della conoscenza, ma come Proust e come Joyce io so di non avere il diritto di raccontare delle storie.[2]

At first sight, Bassani and Joyce do indeed seem to have much in common. Both are very autobiographical writers, drawing on their own experiences and those of their families and friends to construct their plots, and using themselves and their friends and relatives to compose their characters, incorporating into their fictions numerous actual events and striving to recreate with historical accuracy the topography of one city – Dublin in the case of Joyce, Ferrara in the case of Bassani. Joyce claimed of *Ulysses* that if Dublin were to disappear from earth, it could be reconstructed from his work. I suspect that Bassani might have been tempted to make the same claim about Ferrara and *Il romanzo di Ferrara*, although he has incorporated into his city more purely imaginary elements than Joyce did with Dublin; after all, visitors who at Ferrara railway station ask their taxi driver to take them to Barchetto del Duca, the Finzi-Contini family mansion in Corso Ercole Primo d'Este, are likely to be disappointed – or simply taken for a ride. It is difficult to imagine Joyce saying, as Bassani did to Maralyn Schneider:

> "Quando [la realtà] non mi serve, la invento".[3]

Both writers escaped from their native cities and subsequently wrote about them from a distance – Joyce from Trieste, Zurich and Paris, Bassani from Rome. At the same time, the two writers seem poles apart. What has Bassani to do with the vast canvas of *Ulysses* and the experimentalism of *Finnegan's Wake*? It comes as no surprise to discover that, on occasion, Bassani has carefully specified that it is the Joyce of *Dubliners* that he admires[4], although I would speculate

2. "'Meritare' il tempo", in A. Dolfi, *Le forme del sentimento. Prosa e poesia in Giorgio Bassani*, Padova, Liviana, 1981, p. 82–83. Cf. the interview with Stelio Cro, Canadian Journal of Italian Studies, 1, i, 1977, p. 43–44.
3. M. Schneider, *Vengeance of the Victim. History and Symbol in Giorgio Bassani's Fiction*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. 227.
4. Cf. the interview with Giorgio Varanini in id., *Bassani*, Florence, La Nuova Italia, 1970 (Il Castoro, Vol. 46), p. 5.

that the *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* has also had a certain influence. It has, after all, been described as "the picture of the archetypal artist who must effect an escape from Ireland", just as Bassani depicts in both Bruno Lattes and the "io narrante" of *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* the budding writer who had to effect his escape from Ferrara, just as he himself left the city in order to write about it from afar, as Joyce did about Dublin.

The influence or the pervasive presence of the tales of *Dubliners* in the five stories which make up *Le storie ferraresi*, and eventually become, with the title of *Dentro le mura*, the first book of *Il romanzo di Ferrara*, has been commented on and analysed by a number of critics. I propose to pull those comments together, adding some of my own, particularly concerning the way in which the influence of Joyce is harmonised with that of Croce. I then propose to go on to attempt to draw some conclusions about Bassani's aims in writing and about the way in which he may be read.

It was perceptive of Anna Dolfi, in her 1981 study of Bassani, to link "Lida Mantovani" with Joyce's "Eveline",[5] the story of a young woman who at the last minute refuses to leave Ireland with her sailor-lover, staying at home instead with her brutal widowed father and younger siblings in order to keep the promise she made to her dying mother to keep the family together for as long as she could. Both stories are permeated by a sense of weariness, while Maria Mantovani, Lida's mother, looking out of the window from her bed, reminds one of Eveline, at the very beginning of Joyce's tale, "watching the evening invade the avenue".[6] But the snow which the dying Maria Mantovani watches as it falls brings to mind another Joycean story, namely "The Dead", the concluding story of *Dubliners*, in which Gabriel hears the snow "falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead" (p. 220).

Aspects of Maria Mantovani's unhappy history recall that of Gabriel's wife Gretta, who in Galway had been loved by Michael Furey, the lad who stood in the rain in order to see her for the last

5. *Op. cit.*, p. 14–15.
6. J. Joyce, *Dubliners*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1963, p. 34. Subsequent references to this edition will be given in brackets in the text.

time before she came up to the convent in Dublin and who subsequently died at the age of seventeen from consumption. As Maria Mantovani contemplates her daughter Lida, now mother of an illegitimate child by the Jewish David, who will not marry her, she recalls her own history – how she was made pregnant by Andrea Tordozzi, "il fabbro di Massa Fiscaglia", who cycled to Ferrara every Sunday, sixty kilometres there and back, to see her and their baby in Ferrara.[7] One night, returning to his village, he is caught by the rain and catches pleurisy. Unlike Michael Furey, however, Andrea Tordozzi does not die. He avoids military service in the first world war because of his medical condition and then moves to Feltre, in the Veneto, where he marries and has a family. Bassani turns the knife in Maria Mantovani's wound; unlike David, he was indeed the marrying kind. There is a sense in which other aspects of Gretta's history are repeated in Lida Mantovani's story. She has two men in her life; she marries the second, Oreste, but it is the first, David, whom she loves. And like Gabriel, Oreste dies a disappointed man. Radcliff-Umstead was right to comment that "[w]ithin the agonized soul of Bassani's characters in the Ferrarese tales is the same kind of wound torturing the fictional figures of two foreign writers most admired by the Italian Author: James and Joyce".[8]

Snow also falls on Ferrara in "Gli ultimi anni di Clelia Trotti", as the young Jew, Bruno Lattes, returns home in the early hours of the morning, resolved, finally, to discuss frankly with his father the latter's hope and plans for his, Bruno's, future, for his escape to Palestine or America. In one of the story's ironic twists, he finds his father, who usually waits up for him, sound asleep in an armchair in his study. The young man is suddenly and painfully struck by the resemblance which he perceives between his father and the elderly Socialist school-teacher under police supervision.

> . . . stette fermo a guardare la scarna tempia del padre, una tempia fragile fragile, più cartilagine che osso, e quei bianchi e leggeri come

7. G. Bassani, *Il romanzo di Ferrara*, Milan, Mondadori, 1980, p. 12–13. Subsequent references to this edition will be given in brackets in the text.
8. D. Radcliff-Umstead, *The Exile into Eternity. A Study of the Narrative Writings of Giorgio Bassani*, London and Toronto, Associated University Presses, 1987, p. 75.

> piume, così simili, proprio nella loro leggerezza e bianchezza, ai capelli di Clelia Trotti. Quanti anni ancora sarebbe vissuto suo padre? E Clelia Trotti? Ci sarebbe riusciti, tutti e due, a vedere la conclusione della tragedia che stava sconvolgendo il mondo?
> Sebbene prossimi alla morte, entrambi, in fondo, non favevano che sognare (p. 121).

Clelia Trotti in her virtual prison in via Fondo Banchetto dreams of the rebirth of Socialism, in which process she seems to have assigned a significant rôle to Bruno Lattes, while his father in his virtual ghetto in via Madama dreams of his son obtaining a passport and making good his escape. Bruno has no illusions on either score; he has made it clear to Clelia that he is not in fact a Socialist and never would be, and he is sure that the Questura would never grant him a passport. Meanwhile, outside, the snow continues to fall:

> Dopo aver socchiuso uno dei due scuri, [Bruno] spinse lo sguardo attraverso i vetri appannati e le spie delle persiane. La neve continuava a scendere. Fra qualche ora sarebbe stata alta, avrebbe steso su tutta la città, prigione e ghetto comune, il suo silenzio opprimente (p. 122).

That phrase, "prigione e ghetto comune", continues to link Clelia Trotti and l'avvocato Lattes, a link which is confirmed when, only a few pages and two months of narrative time later, she uses the same phrases as his father. "E poi lei è tanto giovane, ha l'intera vita davanti" (p. 126). Just so his father would talk of Bruno's future and the brilliant career awaiting him in America or even "Erez": "Lui era giovane – insisteva –, gli stava davanti l'intera vita" (p. 118).

In his discussion of this passage, Radcliff-Umstead sees the snow as symbolising death, defeat and despair and the incident as modelled on the episode in "The Dead" in which Gabriel Conroy looks out from the window of the Dublin hotel at the snow falling on the city and the countryside.[9] But one's reading of the story must surely be conditioned also by one's knowledge of subsequent events, which Bassani has chosen to reveal at the very beginning of the story. We already know that Clelia Trotti was wrong to believe that Bruno would never leave Ferrara, since when he attends her funeral, in the autumn of 1946, he is

9. *Id.* p. 65–66.

a lecturer in Italian, about to achieve tenure, in an American university. He made good his escape in 1943, when Clelia Trotti was imprisoned again and his parents deported.

Bernard Benstock distinguishes three levels of dead in Joyce's story: the deceased, the moribund, and the living dead – those, that is, who have outlived their time and have become irrelevant. The shifting time-frames of Bassani's story make Clelia Trotti, from the point of view of 1946, one of the deceased, as are, by this time, many of the Jews of Ferrara, but from the point of view of the late 1930s and early 1940s, Clelia Trotti has already outlived her time. The radiant optimism which shines in her eyes is totally misplaced. Radcliff-Umstead rightly applies Benstock's scheme to "Gli ultimi di Clelia Trotti", but it could just as profitably also be applied to "Una notte del '43", the final story of *Dentro le mura.*

Snow also falls on Bassani's Ferrara in "Una notte del '43". The historical events to which the title of that story refers were the arrest by the *repubblichini,* of eightythree known or suspected antifascists and the murder, on the night of 15th November, of eleven of them. Four of the murdered men were Jews, as were many of the others arrested, who were transferred to the concentration camp at Fossoli, whose hospitality Primo Levi also enjoyed, and then to Auschwitz or Buchenwald, whence, in Bassani's fiction, only one returned, namely Geo Josz of "Una lapide in Via Mazzini". Much has been made of the fact that Bassani, in his story, moves these tragic events from November to December, which is a strange shift for one who has claimed that there is, in his work, "la ricostruzione di un tempo storico, perduto, del personaggio",[10] and who regards the events of that night as marking the beginning of Italy's civil war, but it is clearly deliberate. Vancini's film, *La lunga notte del '43,* sets the events, chronologically, in December, but in November weather, shrouding the city in fog, rather than snow, and thereby missing the reference in Bassani's snow to the snow falling in "The Dead".

Bassani may have made certain changes to the historical record out of caution – or as a precaution – such as giving the *federale fascista* responsible for the atrocity a fictional, rather than his real name. It is possible that he moves the action from November to December primarily for aesthetic reasons, in order to describe the

10. "Meritare il tempo" *cit.*, p. 83.

city not as it really was when the events took place but in a fantastic, transformed, state. But I would suggest that, while Bassani indeed wished to incorporate into his tale a reference to Joyce's, his reasons were moral rather than primarily aesthetic and display a remarkably perceptive understanding of Joyce's story, in which, as Benstock suggests, there are different kinds of death at stake. These kinds of death range from the literal death of Michael Furey and the numerous others whose graves are marked by "the crooked crosses and headstones" to the metaphorical or moral death of the self-satisfied and morally unaware Gabriel, who at the end of the tale is also literally dying, and to his aunts, who are relics of a bygone age. So, too, in Bassani's story, one can perhaps distinguish different kinds of death, ranging from the literal death of the victims of the crime to the moral death of those who perpetrated it. Just so, in "Una lapide in via Mazzini", those who can refer to an Auschwitz survivor as: "quel rottame" (p. 72) are hardly alive morally.

One other allusion to Joyce in "Una notte del '43" has, however, as far as I am aware, gone unnoticed. The story is dominated by the figure of the paralysed pharmacist, Pino Barilari, who from his upstairs window gazes down on the road in which the atrocity was committed and on the Caffè della Borsa, which is frequented, in the post-war years, by a number of ex-Fascists, including Carlo Aretusi, "soprannominato Sciagura" (p. 140), who was responsible for the killings. As a seventeen-year-old lad, Barilari had been one of the few Ferrarese to take part in the March on Rome. On the return journey, at pistol-point, the bored, irritated and drunken Aretusi had forced Barilari, a shy virgin, to go to bed with a prostitute, something he had discreetly avoided doing earlier in the journey whenever the Fascists had celebrated their aggressive masculinity by frequenting the brothels at the towns where the train had stopped. As a result of that encounter he had caught the syphilis which now paralyses him.

The Joycean echo which I detect here is from "The Sisters", the first story of *Dubliners*, which relates the apparently edifying death of an elderly Catholic priest from two points of view – that of the paralytic priest's pious spinster sisters, who had looked after him during his last years, and that of a young student whom he had befriended. Joyce nowhere names the priest's last illness, but his description of his symptoms leave no doubt that he was suffering

from G.P.I. – general paralysis of the insane – which, before the discovery of antibiotics, was the final stage of syphilis. Joyce used syphilis and paralysis as metaphors for a general moral corruption which he believed to be characteristic of Dublin. There can be little doubt that Bassani is doing the same. The positioning of "The Sisters" as the first tale of *Dubliners* makes the priest's syphilis surely emblematic; the implicit accusation of moral corruption colours our reading of the remaining stories, sets a tone or mood, as it were. Bassani's positioning of "Una notte del '43" as the final tale of *Le storie ferraresi* and then of *Dentro le mura* is equally emblematic; it both sums up that "primo libro" and colours our reading of the rest of *Il romanzo di Ferrara.* A damning verdict on Ferrarese society, pre-war, war-time and post-war, has already been passed; it is and always has been, in the narrator's view, morally paralysed and corrupt.

In an Italian context, moreover, the use of paralysis as a metaphor acquires a resonance or overtone which it could not have in Joyce's fiction. Did not Croce, particularly in his celebrated Eliseo lecture given in September 1944, describe Fascism as a temporary disease in an otherwise healthy body politic? And was not Bassani a declared *crociano,* dedicating his volume of essays, *Le parole preparate* to the Neapolitan philosopher in 1966? Bassani was able to accept Croce's view that the past is always with us in the present and the future, consequently becoming our present reality. It thus follows that all history, for Croce, is contemporary history, in the sense that the past affects us now. There is a unity across time as historical events reverberate in the present. (In parenthesis, it has to be said that Bassani also reverses the process; because of his flexible treatment of historical and narrative time, it is the future, and especially the future of the second world war and the Holocaust, that casts its shadow over the past. We know from the very beginning of the novel what is to be the fate of the Finzi-Contini family in *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini*). Croce's influence also accounts for Bassani's deeply-felt and clearly-voiced conviction that he was writing "storia" and not "cronaca". It is in this sense, I believe, that Bassani could say: "il mio unico vero grande maestro è stato Benedetto Croce. [...] Per la mia formazione mi considero quindi, in linea assoluta, debitore nei confronti di Benedetto Croce [...]"[11]. This was a remarkable tribute to Croce, coming as it

11. Varanini, *op. cit.,* p. 11.

did in 1969, when Croce's influence in politics and historiography was sharply in decline.

At the same time, Bassani – a Jewish writer, writing mainly after the Holocaust – is unable to accept the more optimistic elements of Croce's view of history – of history as, essentially, the history of liberty, with each further stage in its development being marked by a further realisation of humankind's potential for freedom. This view of history is essentially benign and reassuring, and it was in the context of this philosophy of history that Croce made his pronouncements about Fascism as a temporary disease in an otherwise healthy body politic, or as an inexplicable outbreak of irrationality, history being positive and rational. The danger was that this could degenerate into a rather high-minded but fundamentally empty belief that everything would turn out right in the end.

Croce developed this view of Fascism in the 1940's, when Fascism seemed to have been defeated, but Bassani took a much more pessimistic view not only of Fascism but of post-war Italy, in which, he found, nothing very much had changed, while his view of the history of the Jews in Italy was that it consisted of a series of periods of relative emancipation followed inevitably and invariably by periods of discrimination and repression. Thus the Jews did not in fact enjoy Croce's further realisation of humankind's potential for freedom. Barilari's paralysis is not a temporary but a fatal disease.

I also believe that Bassani's desire or need subtly to distance himself from Croce accounts for what seems to me to be a major difference between the Italian writer's tales and Joyce's.

Joyce described his work as "history mythicised", but as has been pointed out, there are remarkably few specific time-frames in the stories of *Dubliners*. We have the general impression that they are set in a period that runs from, say, about 1890 to about 1910 – or perhaps slightly earlier, since Joyce left Dublin in 1904.

The contrast with Bassani could hardly be more marked. When Bassani collected his stories together for publication in volume, he called them, collectively, *Le storie ferraresi*, polemically making the point that these were indeed "history", not "cronaca". Each of them contains allusions or references to Ferrarese Jewish history which,

put together, and, in the context of *Il romanzo di Ferrara*, taken in conjunction, that is, with allusions and references in Bassani's other works, amount to a comprehensive overview of the history of the Italian Jewish community from the Renaissance to the present. Why, after all, is Barchetto del Duca situated in Corso Ercole I d'Este, rather than, say, in Via Pavone or Corso Porta Mare, both equally distant from the old ghetto and in the same residential area? I would argue that the Finzi-Contini mansion has to be there because the period of Este rule was for the Jews a kind of golden age. They had been encouraged to move to Ferrara in the thirteenth century, since the Este wished to encourage bankers and financiers while at the same time ensuring that the key points in the economy were not occupied by Gentiles who might constitute a politcal threat. The very name of the road in which the Finzi-Contini live – and where young Jews, now excluded from the city's fashionable Eleonora d'Este tennis club, meet to play behind the walls, is thus a tangible reminder that their forebears had once, in that same city, enjoyed religious and educational freedom, as well as prosperity.

One could continue at length on this theme. A second period of emancipation occurs during the Napoleonic period, when Moisè Finzi-Contini purchases land and lays the foundation of his family's wealth. A third occurs as a result of the Risorgimento and the destruction of ghetto gates. All are followed remorselessly by periods of further repression, although none can match the horrors which the twentieth century brings. The history is not expounded systematically, of course, as it might be in more traditional historical novels, for that would be contrary to Crocean aesthetics and would introduce elements of "non-poesia" into a work which is intended to be highly poetical; but the historical perspective is very broad indeed, much broader than Bassani's immediate subject-matter might suggest, and it is essential to the overall understanding of the work as a whole. To read *Il romanzo di Ferrara*, or, indeed, any of the single works which make it up, without reference to that historical perspective, is to risk reading it and them as "cronaca" rather than as "storia".

In this context, the Joycean technique of the epiphany – an account of which he could have read in the *Portrait of the Artist* – must have

had a particular appeal for the Italian writer. In the first place, as representing a moment of intense intuitive awareness, and so eliminating the need for systematic explanation, it could easily be accommodated within his Crocean poetics. In the second place, it could be used to imply a moral judgement or a reference to the historical perspective to which I have already referred. One example which springs to mind has already been discussed, namely the occasion on which Bruno Lattes, in "Gli ultimi anni di Clelia Trotti", returns home in the early hours of the morning and finds his father asleep in the armchair. It is one detail and one detail only which makes him see the resemblance between his father and the elderly Socialist, namely the texture – the lightness and whiteness – of his father's hair. Another example would be the occasion when Geo Josz, in "Una lapide in via Mazzini", hears the elderly conte Scocca whistle "Lily Marlen". The narrating voices, in that story, are mostly those of uncomprehending and insensitive members of the Ferrarese middle class, for whom the Count's whistling is a "sibilio ozioso, innocente" and for whom Geo's action, in vigorously slapping the face of the "pover conte", is inexplicable. It is enough, for Geo and the informed reader, however, to evoke the Count's past as a Fascist spy and informer and to confirm that society has not fundamentally changed. The centrality of the episode is confirmed by the brief final section of the story, in which a different, more perceptive and more compassionate narrating voice comments:

> È ben vero che la luce diurna è noia, duro sonno dello spirito, "noiosa ilarità", come dice il poeta. Ma fate che scenda alla fine l'ora del crepuscolo, l'ora ugualmente intrisa d'ombra e di luce di un calmo crepuscolo di maggio, ed ecco che cose e persone che dianzi vi erano apparse del tutto normali, indifferenti, può succedere che a un tratto vi parlino (e sarà, in quel punto, come se foste colpiti dalla folgore) per la prima volta di se stesse e di voi (p. 96).

First Geo, then the narrator and then we, as readers, begin to understand Geo's inarticulate anguish when faced with the realisation that nothing has changed, that there is nothing he can do to communicate what he has suffered.

Geo has survived; but he has not escaped. Escape is a central theme of *Dubliners*. Eveline, given the opportunity to sail to South

America, cannot seize her opportunity and stays with her degenerating father, to whom she sacrifices her chance of happiness. Mr Doran, in "The Boarding House", is trapped into an unsuitable marriage with his landlady's daughter. So, too, Elia Corcos, on the verge of a brilliant career, allows himself to be trapped in a marriage with a working-class girl. Lida Mantovani's affair with David – who would like to go to America – is her vain attempt to escape: "Ne ho abbastanza: di te e di questa vita", she shouts at her mother (p. 21), to whom she inevitably returns. Similarly, Clelia Trotti's "escapes" from the house in which she is a virtual prisoner, are an illusion. But in the context of Bassani's work and in the shadow of the Holocaust, the theme of escape assumes a new dimension. Bruno Lattes and the narrator of the trilogy alone succeed in escaping in the sense of not merely surviving but of constructing new and free lives for themselves outside Ferrara, although they are haunted by the need to understand what has happened; "capire e far capire" is one of the main declared aims of Bassani's writing, not merely to capture the essential flavour of the past.

Like *Dubliners*, *Dentro le mura* is a highly structured collection of tales. "Una lapide in via Mazzini" is central to the first book of *Il romanzo di Ferrara*, the third of five tales, because the experience of the Holocaust is central to an understanding of Bassani's view of history. Like many Holocaust writers, Bassani feels the need to bear witness; not in his case, to the experience of the death camps, since he was one of the eighty-five per cent of Italian Jews who escaped the roundups, but to the moral history of his society, just as Joyce set out to "write a chapter in the moral history of [his] country".[12] He sought example and inspiration from writers who were ironists: Flaubert, Svevo, Henry James and James Joyce. It is perhaps Henry James and his concern with the pathos and tragedy of the past who exercises the greatest influence over the later novels; but what Bassani learned from Joyce was especially valuable in the creation of what Guido Fink has called "la sferzante, ironica prospettiva storica e morale con cui Bassani filtra l'intera vicenda".[13] Fink, who was a

12. *Letters of James Joyce*, London, Faber and Faber, Vol. 1, 1954, ed. by Stuart Gilbert, p. 62; cf. Vol. 2, 1975, ed. by Richard Ellmann, p. 134.

13. G. Fink, " 'Quella' notte del '43". Paragone Letteratura 44, 1993 [1994], p. 12–31.

eight-year-old boy in Ferrara in 1943, was referring to the tale which deals with the events he remembered; but his comment is valid for all the *Storie ferraresi* and therefore for *Il romanzo di Ferrara* as a whole.

Bassani's enthusiasm for *Dubliners* was well in anticipation of modern critical attitudes. Although Joyce's tales had been translated into French as *Gens de Dublin*, with a preface by Valéry Larbaud, as early as 1924, it was not until 1954 that Brewster Ghiselin's pioneering study was published and only in 1969 was a good critical edition produced (edited by R. Scholes and A. Walton). If Walz is right to say that "[i]n the history of Joyce's development as a novelist, *Dubliners* is important also because, in writing it, Joyce discovered the main subject matter and the central setting for all his subsequent work – the Dublin citizen in all his variations and the city itself",[14] the same could also be said of Bassani and the *Storie ferraresi*, with *Dubliners* providing a valuable model for the Ferrarese novelist.

14. Z.R. Bowen and J.F. Carens, *A Companion to Joyce Studies*, London, Greenwood Press, 1984, p. 157.

Lo Shakespeare di Lampedusa

Agostino Lombardo

Non so quanto di nuovo si possa dire sul Lampedusa anglista, dopo gli appassionati "ricordi" di Francesco Orlando e dopo Gioacchino Lanza Tomasi, che ha scritto la bella e illuminante Introduzione ai due volumi di *Letteratura Inglese* pubblicati da Mondadori a cura di Nicoletta Polo, materiale confluito tutto in Giuseppe Tonaro e (Opere, Molero, Mondadori 1995. Le citazioni sono tratte da questo testo, — e tanto più che, specie Orlando, sono i protagonisti, insieme a Lampedusa, di questa avventura intellettuale, il pubblico di questa straordinaria performance.

Forse quel poco di nuovo che posso aggiungere alla lora riflessione e rievocazione può nascere dall'ottica che mi è più familiare, quella dell'anglista. Un anglista un pò più anziano di Orlando e che proprio negli anni, tra il 1953 e il 1954, dedicati al "corso" di inglese cominciava il suo lavoro di professore di fronte, ahimè, a quelle folle di studenti che il destino ha assegnato alla nostra materia. Un anglista quindi che avrebbe potuto grandemente avvantaggiarsi dalla partecipazione al "corso" frequentato da Orlando e che in qualche modo ricorda quello di letteratura comparata tenuto da Francesco De Sanctis, quasi altrettanto privatamente, a metà dell'Ottocento — con la differenza che le lezioni desanctisiane, poi trascrittte da Benedetto Croce in *Teoria e Storia della Letteratura,* erano affidate agli appunti di quei fortunati studenti, mentre quelle di Lampedusa ci sono pervenute nel testo fornito dall'eccezionale

maestro (che evidentemente non lo bruciò, (come assicurava di fare).

Quale lezione, allora, un giovane anglista avrebbe potuto ricavare da questa esperienza? La lezione, vorrei subito dire, sarebbe stata anzitutto una lezione di libertà, di spregiudicatezza, di autonomia intellettuale. Certo, io non so fino a che punto sia vero che, come dice Lampedusa a modo di introduzione, "questo che sentirete non è che la somma dei miei ricordi e delle mie impressioni", "il residuo, il precipitato di trenta anni di letture disordinate passate attraverso un cervello notorio per la sua smemoratezza. *Quindi avete poco da sperare*" (p. 158). Le letture, sterminate, ci sono (in quegli anni forse solo un critico che Lampedusa non cita, Mario Praz, ma che non poteva non conoscere, aveva letto altrettanto di letteratura inglese, come di altre letterature), ma i "ricordi" passano sicuramente attraverso il filtro sia delle storie letterarie che lo stesso Lampedusa dice di avere sottomano sia di scritti critici inglesi e francesi ma probabilmente anche italiani (Praz, appunto, ma anche Croce ed Emilio Cecchi). In ogni modo, il bagaglio critico non condiziona in alcun modo Lampedusa. Egli non ha schemi, dogmatismi, remore e pregiudizi accademici - non li ha, nel caso della letteratura italiana (si pensi a come tratta l'Ariosto o il Carducci) e non li ha a proposito della letteratura inglese . . . sempre assolutamente onesto — quando non ha letto un libro lo dice — e sempre assolutamente libero. Di Drayton, per esempio non esita ad affermare, che è, "non si sa bene perchè, supremamente noioso" (p. 715) — e proprio a questo punto parla della "grande utilità che si ritrae dalla lettura dei cattivi poeti e dei cattivi romanzi quale incitamento ad amare i buoni" (*ibid.*); del grande Milton, che pure ammira, dice che è "una persona seria e una persona per bene: cioè un seccatore" (p. 757); per Alexander Pope usa parole esemplari della sua disposizione:

> Pope è il fiore del classicismo. Se per poesia si vuole
> intendere l'imitazione degli antichi . . . il culto esclusivo della
> forma, la faticosa vittoria sulle difficoltà della tecnica, egli
> fu grande poeta. Se invece si vuol intendere come poesia un approfondimento intimo, la ricerca di un modo personale di espressione
> la facoltà di rendere universale un brivido individuale, egli
> non lo fu affatto" (p. 838)

Per il Foscolo traduttore di Sterne si distacca dal coro degli elogi — a mio avviso peraltro meritatissimi:

> Foscolo, grande poeta, mancava proprio dell'humour e della levità steriana e il suo *Didimo Chierico* mi ricorda sempre gli ippopotami di Disney che intrecciano carole nella Danza delle ore; e sì che Sterne non è Ponghielli (p. 861)

E ancora: Carlyle è "un autentico camorrista" (p. 1046); Tennyson è il "rappresentante maggiore" dell'ottimismo vittoriano, un "ottimismo sazio, riposato, e un pò pacioccone" (p. 1094). E si veda un passo su *Finnegans Wake*, che farebbe scandalizzare le masse degli adoratori di Joyce. Lampedusa, si badi, ha per Joyce grande ammirazione:

> Fra questa schiera di pesci che tentavano di risalire lo spumoso torrente della letteratura inglese, capeggiati dalla trotella Lawrence, vi erano due grossi salmoni, di gran peso e (come si vide poi) di ottimo gusto. Uno era T.S.Eliot . . . l'altro fu James Joyce, che con le pinne e con la coda lottò per anni contro la secolare corrente, suscitò attorno a sè sprazzi iridescenti bellissimi e chiazze di fango, fu soverchiato ma non virò di bordo. Grande artista e nobile figura. Del resto, senza possibili eredi. (p. 1242)

Ma ecco cosa scriv e di *Finnegan's Wake*:

> Per comprendere F. W. occorrerebbe esser Dio . . . Ma quando si fossero risolti i tranelli del vocabolario non si sarebbe che a mezza strada della comprensione: si dovrebbe ancora procedere con la massima cautela perchè Joyce fulmineamente e senza l'avvertenza sia pure di una virgola passa dalla narrativa alla descrizione e da questa alla riflessione, dalla narrazione dell'oggi a quella di dieci anni prima o due anni dopo, e l'esposizione del monologo interiore di un personaggio si muta di colpo in quella di un altro personaggio o in quella dell'autore medesimo. Tutto ciò senza la minima indicazione stradale e nello stesso linguaggio composto di parole distorte o inventate. Si prova la stessa sensazione che proverebbe un viaggiatore che giunto alla stazione di Termini Imerese e aspettando di veder delinearsi poco dopo la stazione di Flumetorto vede invece arrivare lo scalo di Schneidermu'hl e dopo un chilometro ancora quella di Ostenda e poi di nuovo quella di Swansea

> per ritrovarsi poi a quella di San Mauro. E i nomi delle stazioni, per giunta, sono scritti in caratteri arabii.... Fuori dei paradossi, FW è al di là del limite: l'arte è espressione per gli altri e non se stessi. Il solo fatto di far stampare un libro è indice della credenza nella comunicabilità di quanto si è scritto. Ma se si è scritto soltanto per se stessi e in un linguaggio strettamente personale non vi è speranza di comunicazione. (pp. 1246-48).

Si veda però la conclusione, davvero tipica di Lampedusa, della sua libertà e insieme della sua fedeltà all'idea, al ruolo, dell'artista (quel ruolo che si apprestava ad assumere):

> Però, che io non vi senta parlare con scherno di questo martire della espressione individuale. Pazzo forse ma di una pazzia alla quale, eticamente, la saggezza di un Wordsworth o di un Monti non è degna di lustrare le scarpe. Non pazzo, si ode sibilare, ma mistifcatore. E chi sibila sono coloro che non scorgono la mistificazione che si spiattella sulle tele di Bouguerreau o nelle odi di Carducci, nei litri di sciroppo della musica di Bellini o dei versi di Gozzano (p. 1249)

Una lezione di libertà, dicevo, di autonomia e di spregiudicatezza anche stilistica (la stessa che troviamo spesso in Mario Praz). Ma, come già si può notare dagli esempi che si son fatti, anche una lezione di intelligenza critica, di penetrazione del testo. Il "piacere del testo" di cui scrive Barthes è invero alla base, è la motivazione stessa, e la sostanza, di queste lezioni, e tanto più che Lampedusa ha una conoscenza approfondita, capillare della lingua inglese — basti ricordare che i testi li cita generalmente nell'orignale. Ed è da questo libero, persino gioioso rapporto col testo (c'è una gioia della lettura, qui, che è ormai raro trovare), che al di là delle informazioni fattuali che vengono fornite, e al di là del legame con la storia politica dell'Inghilterra (dell'amata Inghilterra, quasi seconda patria si potrebbe dire) che Lampedusa sempre si sforza di istituire (più volte, del resto, dice che avrebbe preferito parlare di storia più che letteratura), nascono alcune davvero penetranti indicazioni di lettura. Le citazioni potrebbero essere innumerevoli, ché non c'è pagina che non ne offra, ma mi limiterò a ricordare alcune delle più significative. Così, il pur breve discorso sui *Racconti di Canterbury* di Geoffrey Chaucer, "una delle grandi opere dell'umanità, uno dei "libri di

viaggio" nei quali l'uomo ha espresso tanta parte di sè (*l'Odissea*, la *Commedia*, questo, *Don Chisciotte*, *Candido*, le *Anime Morte*, *Pickwick*)", individua nell'opera i tre temi che appaiono a Lampedusa propri della letteratura inglese: "la casa (*the home*), l'umorismo e il fiabesco" (*idem*). Dopo Shakespeare e il teatro elisabettiano, si veda quel che scrive di John Donne e delle sue poesie:

> Sono cinquantotto poesie. E rileggendole adesso nel mio vecchio libro mi accorgo che non ve ne è una sola che non sia segnata a fianco a matita. E giustamente. Non ve ne è una sola di second'ordine, come non ve ne è nessuna perfetta. . . . Sono un indiscutibile capolavoro, nel quale fra descrizioni di abbracciamenti e brutalissimi giochi di parole sull'infedelità femminile (e maschile) circola onnipresente, mascherata in mille modi, la Morte. . . . Egli esalta con sontuosa eloquenza I meriti di Dio, lo ama come benefattore, ma non gli si abbandona. Egli non ha padrone. Unica sovrana di questo altissimo spirito è la Morte (pp. 721–22)

Ci sono, andando avanti, splendide osservazzioni su Milton, "grande maestro degli sconfitti" (p. 757), o su Izaak Walton (e giustamente Lanza Tomasi addita all'atenzione del lettore la pagina sulle strade e sui negozi di Londra con cui il discorso comincia) (p. 783), ma vorrei, rimanendo nel Seicento, evocare la pagina sul *Diario* di Samuel Pepys (scritto tra il 1659 e il 1669):

> In questo *Diario* non vi è la minima traccia di autoesaltazione: anzi egli quasi non parla del proprio lavoro che fu notevolissimo, al punto che egli viene considerato come uno dei fondatori della Marina Britannica. Vi si parla di musica e di teatro, ma poco e sempre con moderazione.
>
> Ma allora che cosa c'è di notevole? L'elemento eccezionale, anzi unico, è che Pepys si guardava dal di fuori, tale e quale come uno scrittore quando un suo personaggio. L'effetto è sbalorditivo.
>
> Nulla è taciuto. I più segreti pensieri, le fantasie più sciocche, le azioni più meschine, le innumerevoli sciocсezze che ognuno do noi commette tutti I giorni sono esposte con la massima semplicità . . . (p. 810)

E si vedano, nel Settecento, le pagine su Defoe, di cui Lampedusa è quasi unico nel sottolineare lo "spirito tragico" (p. 826), Swift: "*I*

Viaggi di Gulliver (. . .) sono senza dubbio il più crudele libro che sia mai stato scritto", (p. 835), Boswell e Johnson, e nell'Ottocento (a parte i poeti romantici, di cui dirò), Jane Austen, Emily Bronte, Charles Dickens, che sollecita particolarmente la riflessione di Lampedusa:

> Ogni artista è creatore di uomini, non foss'altro che di se stesso. Ad alcuni di essi però è stata concessa la facoltà di creare dei mondi . . . Alcuni di questi mondi sono sconfinati, quelli di Tolstoj e di Balzac; altri minuscoli, quelli della Austen e di Proust. Tutti gonfi di linfa vitale, tutti imortali. Alcuni rassomigliano al nostro mondo; altri, come quello di Cervantes, sono signoreggiati da una nobile follia; tutti però sono fuori del tempo, soprattutto quello che alla ricerca del Tempo è dedicato.
>
> Dickens è uno dei più insigni creatori di mondi. E il suo mondo è uno dei più singolari: di esso conosciamo ogni campo, ogni strada, ogni volto. Eppure dobbiamo ogni volta dire a noi stessi che non abbiamo mai incontrato alcunché di simile: forse li rivedrom se saremo buoni e andremo in Paradiso. Il regno di Dickens è il realismo magico. Regno di infinita attrattiva, regno difficilissimo da governare. Kafka soltanto ne ha avuto uno simile; ma il riso di Dickens rende il suo.più bello. (p. 1020)

E si vorrebbero indicare, procedendo nel tempò, le pagine su George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, se non premesse far qualche cenno alle pagine dedicate alla poesia. Se è vero, infatti, che Lampedusa si muove con estremo agio su ogni terreno, e se è anche vero che in questi anni che precedono il *Gattopardo* è probabile che si interessasse particolarmente dei problemi del romanzo, e che in certo modo gli scrittori che ha mensionato facessero parte della sua "Tradizione", è tuttavia di fronte alla poesia che la sua analisi si fa più acuta e commorra (forse anche perché poteva avvalersi più facilmente del testo). S'è detto di Cahucer e Donne, ma si veda quel che scrive di alcuni romantici, e per esempio di Colerdge e di *Kubla Khan*

> che davvero e la poesia più poesia che esista, se per poesia si vuole intendere un tessuto di immagini folgoranti e di sonorità. Sono una cinquantina di versi che descrivono un giardino magico orientale con sottintesi presagi di sventura. È una specie di poema di Valéry

> avanti lettera, uno di quei poemi nei quali non esiste il verso fiacco o indifferente e che lascia alla fine una sensazione di voluttuosa dolcezza, senza cagione e senza fine proprio come dopo la contemplazione di un tappeto persiano o di un paravento di Coromandel. Emozione suscitata solo dai colori e dai suoni.
> È senza dubbio il capolavoro di Coleridge; è forse uno dei dieci poemi supremi . . . (p. 912)

o di Keats, poeta-angelo, come lo chiama, la cui morte precoce diede origine, come leggiamo, allo

> *Adonais* di Shelley, il solo poema che un grande poeta abbia scritto in morte di un suo eguale, ode splendente e funeraria . . . Keats è poeta da leggersi nella sua integrità. Se si eccettuino i pochi suoi primissimi poemi, non vi è un solo verso, in lui, mediocre. Un rigore ferreo domina l'onda della ispirazione, la trasforma, la purifica e la cambia, dalla irruente scomposta corrente che essa in tanti poeti grandi è ancora, in un placido fiume che riflette il cielo, si, ma sotto la superficie del quale le energie domate ribollono. Se di miracolo può parlarsi in questo mondo, miracolo sono le poesie di Keats.
> Vi ho già detto: occorre leggere tutto Keats. Perchè oltre a questi canti si trovano tesori in brevi frammenti, in poesie non completate, penne che le ali lasciarono cadere mentre l'angelo andava ad arricchire i cori del cielo (pp. 970, 972)

E vorreri ancora ricordare le sorprendenti pagine su G.M. Hopkins: e dico sorprendenti perchè a quel tempo c'era assai poco su Hopkins, non solo in Italia (ne aveva parlato, stranamente, Bendetto Croce). Ma Lampedusa ne riconosce tutta l'importanza, la modernità (e infatti ne parla presentando il Novecento), la qualità rivoluzionaria del suo linguaggio e dei suoi ritmi, del suo "sprung Rhythm":

> L'azione rivoluzionaria di Hopkins consiste infatti nell'adozione dello *sprung verse*, del verso di slancio, che si diaprte leggero dal trampolino vigorosamente accentato del suo inizio per distendersi poi su misure puramente quantitative che vengono daccapo ritmate dal coplo di tamburo dell'inizio del verso seguente. In modo che non vi è più il "bel verso" tradizionale bensi una successione di versi che nel loro insieme costituiscono l'equivalente del bel verso antico. (p. 1266)

E ancora:

> Quasi eguale importanza hanno avuto le sue innovazioni di vocabolario. Hopkins desiderava ottenere una distillazione di poesia; chi dice distillazione dice concentrazione; per aver una buona bottiglia di cognac occorre un barile di vino. Quindi, necessità di eliminare qualsiasi parola che non rechi carica poetica (gli elementi idrici del vino) in ispecie i pronomi relativi, gli articoli; necessità anche di usare con larghezza delle possibilità della lingua inglese di formare parole composte e di scegliere emozionalmente più che logicamente queste parole ... (idem). Lo slancio, l'elevatezza, l'artitezza ritmica e verbale di Hopkins hanno pochi eguali. Certamente il più grande lirico inglese da Keats a noi (p. 1269)

La stessa passione Lampedusa non nutre, forse, per T.S. Eliot ma certo si riconosce in molte delle sue posizioni, e per esempio nel concetto di tradizione, nella visione della letteratura "come un processo continuo nel quale il presente contiene il passato" (p. 1272). E proprio a Eliot dedica molte pagine (che varrebbe la pena raccogliere in un volumetto com'è stato fatto di recente per quelle su Shakespeare), di osservazioni cui qui si può soltanto accennare: quelle su *Prufrock*, ad esempio, "una lirica di disinganno, ironia, disgusto, la contemplazione di un mondo triviale, sordido e vuoto" (p. 1274); sul *Waste Land* dove "Lo sconforto, lo squilibrio di quel primo dopoguerra (che fu peggiore del secondo) che tanti hanno tentato di esprimere ha trovato [. . .] la voce che lo restituisce intero appunto perchè lo sorpassa inserendosi nel dolore millenario" (p. 1278); su *Ash Wednesday* e sui *Four Quarters*, "il più alto poema che sia apparso in questo secolo" (p. 1293), dove troviamo anche un'analisi approfondita della struttura musicale dell'opera — e certo ha ragione Lanza Tomasi quando scrive che Lampedusa, "tanto sordo alla complessità di codice linguistico della musica ... è un acuto analista del senso fonico e ritmico, quindi musicale della poesia" (pp. 563–64).

Proprio questa pagina di Lanza Tomasi può meglio di ogni altra introdurci alla parte della storia letteraria dedicata ai Sonetti di Shakespeare, dove infatti tra i maggiori contributi di Lampedusa è proprio questa sua particolare sensibilità musciale, per cui "si compiacava, nell'evocare il suono di una poesia, sul come questo

suo dispiegarsi musicale fosse più importante di quello verbale e sintattico" (p. 564). E Lanza Tomasi cita l'analisi del sonetto 129: "non si tratta più di rintocchi ma di colpi di maglio; le rime al mezzo, le allitterazioni, il rimbombo delle rime finali creano un'atmosfera parossistica, e il sonetto incede barcollando fino all'inferno, che è infatti la sua parola di chiusa ed è anche la più comune bestemmia inglese" (p. 620). C'è un limite, che troveremo anche nel caso delle opere teatrali, nelle pagine di Lampedusa sui Sonetti, ed è quello del "diografismoe — un errore che Croce condanna nel suo grande saggio del 1919, e che lo stesso Lampedusa a volte non manca di denunciare. Sulla scorta dell'amato Sainte-Beuve Lampedusa, così come colloca le opere letterarie nella storia, sempre cerca di indicare il rapporto tra l'arte di uno scrittore e la sua biografia — un esempio assai rilevante è, qui, quello di Byron. Nel caso di Shakespeare, egli sa benissimo, naturalmente, che questa biografia è lacunosa, e di fatto, fin dalle prime pagine, distingue tra una "biografia documentata" e una "biografia deduttiva". E tuttavia la sua convinzione che "ogni poeta dipinge se stesso e la propria vita nella sua opera; Shakespeare deve aver fatto lo stesso" (p. 607), lo spinge a "costruire" una biografia che sostenga la lettura. Onde la interpretazione dei Sonetti come espressione di una storia personale, in cui l'amore omosessuale di Shakespeare per il giovane amico è lacerato dalla presenza di un rivale e poi della "dama bruna":

> Dal rigido formalismo dei primi diciassette sonetti (illuminati dalla passione nascente) si passa bruscamente alle espressioni di amore più brucianti, all'appagamento rapido e al godimento. Poi sopravvengono I primi sospetti, le prime gelosie; adesso si presenta Chapman, il rivale in poesia e in amore; tristezza e rimpianti; dopo, il sordido accomodamento, la spartizione; dopo ancora entra in scena la "Dark Lady" che seduce il poeta (di già mortalmente offeso); in seguito fa suo anche il ragazzo; e il poeta affonda nella disperazione e rinnega la carnalità (pp. 620–21)

Si dovrà tornare su questo elemento della critica di Lampedusa. Qui in ogni modo va detto che il "biografismo" non intacca quella capacità di lettura del testo poetico che abbiamo già rilevato. Anche di fronte a Shakespeare, il poeta più amato, "il nome "più glorioso dell'umanità" (p. 604) verso il quale Lampedusa non teme di nutrire

"idolatria", il critico mantiene la propria oggettività di giudizio, non ne fa un mito, sempre distingue, davvero crocianamente, tra "poesia" e non "poesia". Che è metodo pericoloso, ma che qui è riscattato, come il "biografismo", da un gusto pressoché infallibile, che consente a Lampedusa di riconoscere e indicare al suo pubblico i luoghi alti della raccolta (mentre su quelli di minore altezza è fin troppo reciso). Un esempio del suo modo di procedere:

> I sonetti 36, 37, 38 e 39 non presentano alcun interesse. Il 40 è un miracolo: uno dei gridi di amore più puri (poeticamente parlando) e più sostenuti che vi siano: una dedizione assoluta espressain grida elementari. La parola *love* vi è ripetuta otto volte e fada basso obbligato al lamento (p. 615).

E più avanti:

> Il 64 e il 65 potrebbero non esserci. Il 66 è un capolavoro: un urlo di insofferenza, di dolore, di arrabbiata melancolia. Si prevedono i tremendi tuoni di Lear e di Timone. 67, Niente. Il 68 ha un bel verso 2 ma si prolunga parlando ridicolmente di parrucche. . . . Nel 73 la vena poetica è ricominciata a fluire piena: il sentimento autunnale, la sensazione della fine mesta ma fastosa riempie questo sonetto che con i consueti rintocchi di frasi ripetute, con le immagini esclusivamente gialle or grige, con il meraviglioso verso 4 ("nude absidi dirute dove un giorno cantarono i dolci uccelli"), tocca un'altra volta quasi le estreme cime dell'ispirazione di Shakespeare (pp. 616–17).

E infine:

> L'86 è di nuovo un vertice. Preso l'abbrivio dalla immagine marina del primo verso . . . Shakespeare s'inoltra nel sonetto a piene vele con un moto maestoso e serrato, con una gravità, con un'abbondanza di rime echeggianti, con degli accenti di tale solennià alle art magiche del rivale che rendono questo poema uno dei più impeccabilmente costruiti . . . (pp. 617–18)

Le qualità, e i limiti, riscontrati in queste pagine sui Sonetti (che sono comunque tra le più illuminanti e originali di una "fortuna" cominciata proprio a Palermo nel 1890 con una versione di Angelo

Olivieri) li ritroviamo nell'esame che Lampedusa fa, una per una, delle opere drammatiche di Shakespeare. Anche in questo caso non è possibile, qui, seguirlo nelle singole analisi (a volte brevi, ma a volte assai dettagliate), che portono dall'*Enrico VI* per giungere alla *Tempesta*, e ci si dovrà accontentare di indicarne i salienti. Uno dei quali è certamente Falstaff — quello dell'*Enrico IV*, non quello resuscitato delle *Allegre Comari di Windsor*:

> Ma la gemma fra tutti i personaggi, è, inutile dirlo, Falstaff, gemma di Dio sa quanti carati, uno dei tre o quatro massimi personaggi shakespeariani. Adorabile mascalzone, uomo dallo spirito sempre invitto e sempre leggiadro, creazione impareggiabile del più alto humour, ognuno di noi darebbe dieci anni di vita per il privilegio di incontrarti un'ora . . . la sua prontezza di spirito,la sua felicità verbale, l'inesausto dinamismo del suo carattere lo portano sulla cresta dell'onda del nostro affetto, sempre vittorioso. . . . Dopo Falstaff si possono trovare in Shakespeare delle creature di pari altezza artistica — di *maggiori* no. (pp. 632–33).

Dopo le pagine illuminanti e fin appassionate su questa che chiama "agilissima balena" (le immagini marine sono frequenti nel Lampedusa critico, come del resto in Shakespeare), si spererebbe di trovare pagine simili intorno all'*Amleto* e tanto più che lo aveva visto da bambino, nel teatro della per lui mitica casa di Santa Margherita del Belice di cui scrive così amorosamente nei "Luoghi della prima infanzia". Ma, forse proprio per questo, ne parla poco ("Il silenzio è il solo omaggio che gli spiriti inferiori ma onesti possano recare in dono a certe divinità. Né quindi vorrò trasgredire a questo principio parlando a lungo di *Amleto* (p. 640)."A lungo invece parla delle "dark comedies" che circondano l'*Amleto*, e sopratutto di *Misura per Misura*, su cui ha pagine esemplari sia dei vari registri stilistici, in primo luogo quell'ironia, che è capace di usare (e ancora una volta si pensa a Mario Praz, che *Misura per Misura* riscoprì e tradusse) sia della folgoranti illuminazioni critiche:

> Come dice Shakespeare nel sonetto 144; e come riafferma Joséphine Baker nella nota canzone, ognuno di noi ha due amori" E tutti e due sinceri. Uno ufficiale, sacramentale, coniugale, legittimo, confessabile e conformista. L'altro segreto, peccaminoso, adulterino, illegittimo,

> clandestino e scandaloso . . . Io pure sono di quella illustre schiera. la mia moglie intellettuale si chiama Amleto, le mie amanti, che mantengo pubblicamente a suon di pellicce di visone, fuori-serie e rubini di Bulgari, sono Cordelia, Desdemona, Lady Machbeth e Sir John. Ma in un appartamentino della periferia ho una mantenutina, una sartina, della quale tutti dicono che è brutta, che si contenta di una giardinetta, di un lapin e di uno zircone. E quando sono con lei Amleto mi sembra inconcludente, Cordelia un pò freddina, Desdemona oltremodo oca, Lady Macbeth un pòtroppo lesta di mano e Sir John, via! un pò troppo panciuto.
> Il mio amore sotterraneo è *Misura per Misura.*
> E se mi dicessero che tutte le opere di Shakespeare debbono perire tranne una che debbo scegliere io, prima tenterei di uccidere il mostro che me ne facesse la proposta; poi, se non vi riuscissi, tenterei di suicidarmi; e se nemmeno a questo potessi arrivare, ebbene, dopo tutto, sceglierei *Misura per Misura.* Grande poema indefinibile, grande opera di teatro inclassificabile, questa che è troppo tragica per essere commedia, troppo ironica per essere tragedia, nella quale i versi più commoventi si alternano alla più aspra e "maledetta" prosa, questa opera porta, come la Pietà Rondanini alla quale rassomiglia, nella sua goffaggine e scabrosità, il segno più accecante del genio più trascendentale. . . . In *Misura per Misura* il male ha corrotto anche la pietra. Non so cosa sia che me lo faccia pensare, ma io vedo questa Vienna come per metà demolita, con le mura rose da una lebbra . . . la gente erra per le strade come nei tempi di grande calamità. Sembra un quadro di Monsù Desiderio. E questa sensazione la avevo venticinque anni prima che esistesse il *Terzo uomo.* Città spettrale, composta di postriboli, prigioni e soffitte dove piangono donne abbandonate. (pp. 646–47).

E alla fine di un'analisi che è davvero un grande contributo critico, l'angoscia shakespeariana è sottolineata attraverso un richiamo all'odiato Carducci: " 'Guglielmo, re de' poeti da l'ardua fronte serena'. È un verso di Carducci. È la sua Mille e Unesima fesseria" (p. 651).

Anche a proposito delle grandi tragedie Lampedusa ha osservazioni illuminanti, che spiace non poter riferire passo passo. Esse sono a volte accompagnate da una polemica contro il melodramma che può indebolirne la portata, com'è il caso dell'*Otello* ("l'opera *Otello* ha ucciso per gli italiani la tragedia *Otello*", (p. 655), in cui Lampedusa toglie a Jago ogni qualità diabolica per farne (ed è

comunque giudizio interessante) "un mediocre malfattore":

> ne troviamo a decine in tutte le amministrazioni statali, parastatali e private, intenti a scrivere lettere anonime ai superiori che non li han fatti promuovere ... Si deve soltanto al temperamento di otello, alla sua estrema facilità allo squilibrio se la tragedia scoppia. Il personaggio tragico è Otello, Jago la spregevole miccia che fa deflagrare la mina (p. 655).

La polemica contro il melodramma (e contro Boito più che Verdi, sembra di poter dire) esplode a proposito del *Macbeth*, la cui analisi è appunto preceduta da parole di fuoco contro "uno dei più sinistri fenomeni che si possano riscontrare nella storia di ogni cultura" (p. 658); ma essa non tocca (come invece fa nell'*Otello*, almeno in parte) l'interpretazione dell'opera, che raggiunge momenti assai alti, per esempio a proposito del paesaggio, dell'inizio (quello che Lampedusa non chiama "incipit" ma "partenza"), della costruzione:

> Il *Macbeth* mi sembra essere *tecnicamente* la più perfetta opera di Shakespeare. Ma questa tecnica è addirittura bruciata nel fuoco inesauribile delle immagini che hanno tale intensità da poter vivere da sole, anche strappate dal contesto... E questa "vena" fenomenale, che per durata ed omogeneità d'ispirazione non ha equivalente, nonché altrove, neppure in Shakespeare, si mantiene senza un in toppo sino alla fine, sino all'urlo di disperato coraggio del Re criminale. Non esiste successione di scene più dense di poesia, più compresse di significato ... per quanto possibile sia all'uomo, qui è stata creata l'opera perfetta. (p. 662)

E vorrei ancora ricordare certe osservazioni sul *Lear* (apprezzata da Lampedusa anche perchè l'opera è "sfuggita per un capello alla manomissione di Arrigo Boito" e perciò "si presenta anche a noi italiani in tutta la purità della sua bellezza", p. 656) e per esempio quelle sulla "tempesta, la vera tempesta dei cieli" che è "la grande protagonista di questa apocalisse in forma di dramma. Essa rugge durante due atti, rugge per l'eternità" (p. 657); su Cleopatra, "la più pericolosa, la più divina donna dopo Eva, come Eva amica dei serpenti; muore dopo aver chiamato Ottavio 'ciuco scostumato' ed aver pronunciato sillabe incomprensibili e dolcissime sul profumo dei balsami, la dolcezza dell'aria" (pp. 664-5); sul *Coriolano*: "... la

tragedia dell'orgoglio. Dell'orgoglio smisurato, non orgoglio di politico o di guerriero, del vero orgoglio, quello dell'artista", p.667 — che è frase, quest'ultima, davvero signficativa e forse premonitiva. Sull'Autolico del *Racconto d'Inverno*"

> Un personaggio dei più polposi, dei più bizzarri che Shakespeare abbia creato ... Attraentissimo ladro campagnolo, mano lesta e lingua arguta, Autolycus è una specie di fauno che erra attraverso i campi, adocchiano ragazze e 'lenzuola stese sulle siepi a sbiancare'. Anche lui è della stessa stoffa di Sir John. E sarebbe davvero peccato che fosse un uomo onesto. Non si può che deplorare che si trovi nella seconda parte, e che sia quindi uno Czeco. Avrebbe adornato, nella prima parte, e rischiarato di un sorriso la troppo austera galleria dei delinquenti siciliani. (p. 673)

E infine su *La Tempesta,* con qui il "ricordo" di Shakespeare si conclude:

> L'ultima opera di Shakespeare è fra le sue più alte... esprime l'animo di Shakespeare nel 1612 o giù di lì, al momento in cui aveva deciso di lasciare Londra.
>
> È l'animo del più grande poeta che sia mai nato e che il mondo... ha riempito di amarezza. Questa amarezza egli la ha sputata via dapprima (Troilo e Misura per Misura), dopu sublimata in canto altissimo e straziante. E amarezza in corpo non si ha più. Soltanto il ricordo dell'amarezza, ciò che si chiama disgusto ... E vuole una sola cosa: ritirarsi in campagna e dimenticare.
>
> La favola del Duca mago, benefico e perseguitato; che, fattisi amici gli spiriti elementari, attira nel suo rifugio i nemici; e li perdona e dà loro la sua bellisssima figlia (l'arte?) e dopo spezza la bacchetta, sotterra il libro, disperde i sortilegi. E se ne va. A morire....
>
> Qui troviamo le liriche più fatate, qui quell'Ariel che è una replica dell'Oberon liberata da ogni ridicolo e presentato come mero figlio della luce. Qui l'inquiettante Calibano cui tanto si promette in modo così ambiguo. Qui ancora Miranda e Fernando che rinnovano in extremis il miracolo adolescente di Romeo e Giulietta.
>
> Qui soprattutto Prospero, Shakespeare, il padrone degli elementi, il potentissimo, mite, disilluso Incantatore. 'È il mio finire è la disperazione.'
>
> Sono le ultime parole che dalla soglia della morte ci rivolge il Signore delle ombre e dei sorrisi. (pp. 674–75)

Queste frasi comprendono insieme i pregi e i limiti di queste lezioni shakespeariane. Pregi che come s'è visto stanno nella straordinaria sicurezza del gusto, nella totale libertà e spregiudicatezza, in una scrittura che, pur trattandosi di "lezioni", si fa spesso estremamente suggestiva e pregnante. I limiti sono quelli del "biografismo", per cui la grande crisi epocale, di trasformazione del mondo a tutti i livelli, di passaggio dal Medioevo all'età moderna, in cui tutta l'opera di Shakespeare e in specie quella maggiore, è radicata, viene letta da Lampedusa come una crisi personale. L'identificazione (del resto frequente nella critica) tra Prospero e Shakespeare percorre l'intero discorso di Lampedusa: del Berowne di *Pene d'amor perdute* si dice che "vi vediamo uno, il primo, di quei personaggi che sono i portavoce di Shakespeare, i personaggi che esprimono l'autore" (p. 627); *Riccardo II*" ci mostra . . . uno Shakespeare che si guarda allo specchio. . . . Questo Re sensibile e interiorizzato . . . lo abbiamo già conosciuto sotto altre vesti nei Sonetti" (p. 629); nel *Sogno di una notte di mezza estate* è Teseo "che incarna l'autore", "L'autore in un umore di serena gaiezza ma che non nasconde il sorridente scetticism, il *désenchantement,* la sovrana indifferenza del Dio costretto per qualche tempo a soggiornare tra gli uomini che è la nota sempre presente, mai ostentata dello Shakespeare migliore" (p. 620); nel *Mercante di Venezia* è Antonio "il personaggio Shakespeare. Indeciso, arguto, pronto ad effondersi, generoso, è un gran personaggio poetico ma uno strano mercante" (p. 630); *Enrico V* . . ." ci appare trasformato nel dramma che porta il suo nome. Gli è capitata un'avventura straorddinaria, invidiabile: è diventato Shakespeare . . . chi conosce quel personaggio-Shakespeare che troviamo in quasi tutte le opere, non stenta troppo a ritrovare il poeta sotto la maschera ferrigna del vincitore di Agincourt", (p. 635); in *Come Vi Pare* "i personaggi che rappresentano l'autore . . . sono tutti. Ognuno tormentato, ognuno ironico, ognuno sorridente con la disperazione nel cuore" (p. 638); nel *Troilo e Cressida,* "Troilo è l'ultimo personaggio che incarna, in parte, l'autore. Dopo di lui non incontreremo più uno Shakespeare travestito. Il poeta non ha più bisogno di far esprimere il suo tormento da una data figura, ma investe di esso tutto il dramma, foggia il mondo intero a immagine del suo dolore; la *vicenda* è diventata Shakespeare e i miseri personaggi esprimono ciascuno una nota separata del suo canto" (p. 644).

Come nel caso dei *Sonetti,* il "biografismo" in ogni modo non basta a impoverire l'apporto di Lampedusa alla nostra lettura del testo Shakespeariano, e tanto più che, a differenza di Croce, Lampedusa (che spesso menziona rappresentazioni teatrali, e anche cinematografiche) ha una percezione della "teatralità" di queste opere che è ancora abbastanza rara, in quegli anni, nella critica shakespeariana. D'altro canto, quel "biografismo", quel tentativo di costruire un "ritratto" di Shakespeare, un personaggio-Shakespeare, appare anche come un annuncio della stagione che si prepara, non più critica ma narrativa. Stagione che ha tutt'altro carattere ma che pure è certo reparata anche da questa riflessione alla letteratura inglese, da questo "ricodro" di Shakespeare - sembra farne fede la citazione dalle *Tempesta* (il mare, le sirene) e la presenza dell'opera Shakespeariana nella biblioteca del "narratore" dello *Lighea.*

Un'altra America: Echi Eliotiani nelle Poesie Fiorentine di Eugenio Montale*

Paola Sica

È opinione ricorrente che l'immagine ideale dell'America, vista come paese giovane, vitale e spregiudicato, sia emersa nella narrativa italiana degli anni del fascismo grazie all'attività di traduttori e saggisti come Cesare Pavese ed Elio Vittorini. Nel caso della poesia, il mito americano come alternativa a una cultura italiana isolazionista e provinciale usualmente è stato dato per scontata, se non è stato del tutto ignorato. Qualcuno come Romano Luperini, nel corso di analisi dedicate a argomenti diversi, ha messo in luce le somiglianze fra il metodo oggettivo della poesia anglo-americana di T.S. Eliot e quello della poesia italiana di Eugenio Montale degli anni trenta, ma senza approfondire le ragioni di tale comune itinerario. Più di recente, in *Montale's Mestiere Vile* del 1995, George Talbot è ricorso al supporto delle teorie della traduzione, e ha spiegato la poesia di Montale come fenomeno di riscrittura della letteratura nord-americana da lui tradotta fra gli anni trenta e quaranta. Talbot sostiene che, a differenza di autori della nuova generazione come Pavese, Vittorini

* Questo saggio ha origine dall'ampliamento di una relazione che ho letto quest'anno alla conferenza dell'American Association of Italian Studies negli Stati Uniti.

o Pintor, "Montale belonged quite definitely to the Cecchi faction".[1] Implicitamente, cioè, Talbot ammette che Montale apparteneva al gruppo degli americanisti tradizionali, più legati a una concezione eurocentrica e umanista della cultura. Oltre a questo, Talbot, riferendosi ad autori come Melville, Dickinson o T.S. Eliot, afferma che fra gli anni trenta e gli anni quaranta, "[Montale's] elective translations from English, as opposed to the commissioned ones he undertook to make ends meet, form an important context to his own "original" work of the period".[2]

Sono d'accordo con Talbot: le preferenze di Montale traduttore – ma anche di Montale critico, o più semplicemente uomo – si riflettono sulle sue soluzioni estetiche. Vorrei anche aggiungere, però, che tali preferenze influiscono sulla riconfigurazione di correnti culturali del clima italiano dell'epoca – delle correnti a cui Talbot allude soltanto. Tali tendenze portano a identificare un mito dell'America più complesso di quello che è stato tracciato fino ad ora nella cultura italiana degli anni trenta. Accanto al mito di un'America ribelle, incontaminata e senza radici che è stato a lungo studiato, si profila un mito rivale, . . . quello indicato da Talbot senza essere a pieno esplicitato, di un'America altrettanto libera e vitale, ma profondamente radicata nella tradizione europea. un mito che emerge esaminando l'impatto del modello eliotiano nell'opera di Eugenio Montale, e che si pone non solo come denuncia al fascismo, ma anche come denuncia a una cultura eurocentrica in declino.

In "Eliot e noi" del 1947, guardando a ritroso, lo stesso Eugenio Montale si è reso conto che la poesia italiana contemporanea ha subito, tra altre, l'influenza della cultura anglo-americana, e in particolare quello della poesia di T.S. Eliot. Montale ha affermato che, nella poesia italiana, tale influenza ha favorito un rinnovato "contatto con l'alta tradizione europea che da noi era andata perduta". (*Sulla poesia* 445)

1. Talbot, George. *Montale's Mestiere Vile.* 15
   "Montale apparteneva definitivamente alla fazione di Cecchi." (da ora in poi, tutte le traduzioni sono mie.)
2. *Ibid.* 16.
   "Le traduzioni elettive [di Montale], diversamente da quelle da lui accettate per sbarcare il lunario, formano un importante contesto per il suo lavoro 'originale' del periodo."

Il recupero dell'"alta tradizione europea" rivisitata da Eliot comincia a mostrare i suoi effetti nelle poesie di Montale aggiunte nella seconda edizione di *Ossi di seppia.*[3] Diventa tuttavia più forte per poi attenuarsi in altre poesie che Montale ha composto a Firenze negli anni del fascismo: in *Le occasioni* – le cui poesie furono scritte in gran parte fra il 1928 e il 1939, e in *Finisterre* – le cui poesie furono scritte fra il 1940 e 1942.

Particolarmente nelle *Occasioni* e in *Finisterre,* l'influsso eliotiano si spiega tenendo conto dell'inclinazione di Montale sollecitata dall'ambiente fiorentino in cui operava. A Firenze, dopo avere lavorato per l'editore Bemporad, Montale era stato dal 1929 al 1939 il direttore del Gabinetto Giovan Pietro Viesseux, un istituto che incoraggiava la diffusione della cultura straniera. In più, aveva collaborato a *Solaria,* la rivista antifascista che mirava a costruire una "città ideale"[4] delle lettere, seguendo un indirizzo europeo e combinando stile e moralità in letteratura.[5] Sempre a Firenze, oltre a conoscere gli esponenti di quel movimento poetico più tardi definito ermetico, Montale era entrato in contatto con persone interessate a aspetti diversi della cultura statunitense come Mario Praz ed Elio Vittorini. Infine, aveva incontrato Irma Brandeis,[6] la giovane dantista

3. Già nel saggio "T.S. Eliot and Eugenio Montale" del 1948, Praz parla di contatti fra *Ossi di seppia* e *The Waste Land,*" poichè, tra altri aspetti, in entrambe le opere si presentano le stesse qualità di secco e umido, e si esprime un'analoga visione pessimistica del mondo (246). Più tardi, Laura Caretti riprende il punto fatto da Praz e rivede il contatto delle prime opere di Eliot e di Montale soprattutto da una prospettiva stilistica. Rachel Meoli Toulmin, invece, riconduе l'affinità tra la poesie iniziali dei due poeti a una questione di "carattere generale, di atmosfera" (466). In *Montale's Mestiere Vile* Talbot menziona il saggio di Praz e quello di Meoli Toulmin per introdurre il rapporto fra Eliot e Montale (50–2).
Laura Barile ammette che "quella con Eliot è per Montale una lunga convivenza (. . .) un lungo avvicinamento e ripensamento; e, forse, una scambievole influenza (51). Anche Laura Barile, come Toulmin fa riferimento alle prime analisi su Eliot e Montale (55).

4. Editoriale. 4.

5. A questo proposito è significativo il saggio "Perchè l'Italia abbia una letteratura europea" (1928), dove Leo Ferrero esorta gli scrittori italiani a seguire i modelli europei, per ritrovare la "chiave della vita, non solo europea, ma universale, che è il sentimento morale" (33).

6. Parlando tra altre cose di Irma Brandeis, in "Montale, Clizia e l'America" Luciano Rebay dichiara che "per almeno un decennio, situabile documentabilmente fra il 1938 e il 1948, Montale nutrì in segreto un proprio "American dream" (281).

americana che in *Le occasioni e Finisterre* ha offerto spunto per dare vita al personaggio di Clizia, quell'ideale donna salvifica amata dall'io lirico che rievoca una nuova Beatrice dantesca. Nell'ambiente fiorentino, l'America dalle radici europee rappresentata dall'opera di Eliot rispondeva per diversi motivi alle nuove esigenze di Montale. Tale America era un paese autorevole che, oltre a rappresentare una solida opposizione per combattere l'asfittica cultura nazionale, in campo letterario conduceva a un nuovo classicismo vitale che favoriva il superamento della dialettica negativa e delle tecniche post-simboliste su cui gran parte di *Ossi di Seppia* si fondava. Mostrava infatti il modo in cui era possibile assorbire e ordinare nel presente il vigore di una remota tradizione europee e, indirettamente, offriva spunti per contrastare le tendenze irrazionalistiche e autarchiche del fascismo.

Il modello americano esemplificato da Eliot che ha punti di convergenza con le poesie fiorentine di Montale ha una precisa collocazione. Tuttavia, saggi critici precedenti che hanno comparato l'opera di Eliot a *Le occasioni di Montale* non hanno approfondito tale punto. In uno dei primi interventi intitolato "T.S. Eliot e l'Italia", Laura Caretti si è limitata a sostenere che l'influenza del metodo eliotiano manifestatasi nelle poesie iniziali di Montale e riscontrata precedentemente da Mario Praz, torna in modo più convincente nel "decennio 1928–1938, cioè nel decennio delle *Occasioni*"(71). In tali poesie, la rivisitazione del modello americano emerge nell'opera di Montale dall'analisi di "artifici tecnici"(71) e "l'incidenza o meno della teoria del 'correlativo oggettivo'," (71) una teoria che Eliot spiega nel saggio *Hamlet and His Problems* del 1919. In *Storia di Montale,* invece, Romano Luperini ho notato l'accresciuta "tensione spasmodica verso l'assoluto"(59) nelle *Occasioni* rispetto a *Ossi di seppia*: una tensione che, secondo lui, è espressa in modo impersonale e richiama la teoria del "correlativo oggettivo" di Eliot. Luperini è andato oltre nel suo saggio, e ha dichiarato che sia nella poesia di Montale, sia nella poesia di Eliot, l'oggettività palesata risente dell'esempio dantesco e stilnovista (61). Più tardi, George Talbot, nel capitolo "The Encounter with Modernism" di *Montale's Mestiere Vile,* ha letto Montale in rapporto alle sue traduzioni di poesie eliotiane, ma non ha esaminato *Le occasioni* e *Finisterre*. A tale proposito, restando molto sul generico, Talbot si è limitato a dire:

> Critics have made much of Montale's apparent affinities with Eliot and the influence of Eliot's poetry which, it has been claimed, appeared in Montale's poetry throughout the 1930s and 1940s. By and large the affinities are incidental and the influences illusory. What Montale did derive from Eliot was a new way of looking at Dante and the stilnovisti.[7]

Le osservazioni di Laura Caretti e di Romano Luperini si basano sulle somiglianze e sulla genesi della tecnica oggettiva che è adottata nell'opera di Eliot e nelle poesie fiorentine di Montale. Tali osservazioni trascurano ciò che invece, di sfuggita, Talbot mette in rilievo. È il fatto che la tecnica oggettiva a cui Montale ricorre nelle poesie fiorentine si associa al recupero di forme e tematiche di una remota tradizione europea, spesso medievale, che è già stata rivisitata da Eliot.

Secondo me, il procedimento di Montale è parallelo a quello che emerge nella corrente metafisica dell'opera eliotiana, più che nella corrente avanguardistica predominante in *The Waste Land*. In Eliot, tale corrente metafisica ha origine in poesie minori come "The Death of Saint Narcissus", è discussa in saggi iniziali nella poesia *The Hollow Men*, e alla fine è di nuovo definita nella critica e in poesie come *Ash Wednesday*, scritte dopo la conversione del poeta alla fede anglo-cattolica nel 1927.

Nelle "Clark Lectures" tenute al Trinity College di Cambridge, T.S. Eliot ha affermato che, in letteratura, la linea metafisica a cui la poesia contemporanea deve fare riferimento si riconduce a fasi diverse della tradizione europea, e che, entro tale linea, Dante "is the first distinguished exemplar".[8] Nel saggio "Dante" scritto nel 1929, Eliot ha dimostrato che sia la lingua, sia il metodo, sia l'intensità delle emozioni che appaiono nella *Divina Commedia* possono essere usati in un modo valido ancora oggi. Da un punto di vista linguistico, Eliot ritiene che Dante è "the most *universal* of poets in modern

7. Talbot. 74
   "I critici hanno detto molto delle apparenti affinità di Eliot e di Montale e dell'influenza dell'opera di Eliot che, è stato sostenuto, è emersa nella poesia di Montale negli anni trenta e gli anni quaranta. Nell'insieme le affinità sono casuali e le influenze illusorie. Quel che Montale derivò da Eliot è un nuovo modo di guardare a Dante e gli stilnovisti."
8. Eliot, T.S. "The Clark Lectures" 56.
   Dante "è il primo distinto esemplare."

languages".[9] E questo non è dovuto solo al talento del poeta fiorentino. A quel tempo, la lingua italiana, diversamente dalle lingue europee moderne che mantenevano "national or racial differences of thought", "gains much by being the product of universal Latin", "[concentrating] on what men of various races and lands could think together".[10] Per Eliot, Dante, "none the less an Italian and patriot, is first a European"[11]. Lo spessore pre-razziale e pre-nazionale della lingua di Dante, secondo Eliot, si combina con un metodo "commonly understood throughout Europe" che è adottato nella *Commedia,* e che si chiama "allegorical method".[12] Questo metodo è tipico del mondo medievale delle visioni, e porta alla creazione di "clear visual images".[13] La lingua e il metodo allegorico, secondo Eliot, sono le caratteristiche che permettono a Dante di esprimere in modo esemplare tutte le "depths and heights of human emotions".[14]

Il saggio di Eliot tradisce il desiderio di rinvigorire la cultura contemporanea occidentale attraverso l'immagine di un'America fortemente europea. Più specificamente nei confronti della poesia britannica e statunitense, tale saggio suggerisce un recupero della tradizione europea che Dante incarna, per riconquistare l'universalità e la chiarezza della lingua e dello stile. Tutto questo si riconduce al diniego di un eccessivo irrazionalismo, affinchè sia trasmessa l'intensità del sentimento entro rappresentazioni oggettive che si adeguano alla moralità e alla teologia cristiana. In questa fase, i principi dell'opera di Dante che Eliot ammira e propone di rielaborare nella poesia contemporanea riflettono la sua politica monarchica, la sua religione anglo-cattolica e la sua poesia classica.[15] Sono principi

9. ——. "Dante" (1929). *The Selected Prose.* 206.
10. *Ibid.* 206.
"differenze nazionali o razziali di pensiero, aveva l'enorme vantaggio di essere il prodotto di una lingua nazionale come il latino, che concentrava il pensiero comune di uomini appartenenti a razze e terre diverse."
11. *Ibid.* 207.
"pur essendo un italiano e un patriota, è prima di tutto un europeo."
12. *Ibid.* 209.
"di solito capito in tutta Europa [. . .] metodo allegorico."
13. *Ibid.* 209.
14. *Ibid.* 217.
"profondità e le altezza delle emozioni umane."
15. ——. Preface. *For Lancelot Andrewes.* IX.

che, secondo il poeta americano, se applicati alla sfera estetica, infondono la speranza di un cambiamento nella sfera sociale. Altri saggi tardi di Eliot, tra cui *The Idea of a Christian Society*, confermano quest'aspirazione, poichè auspicano il ripristino di un'autorità culturale eurocentrica omogenea come quella medievale, che è radicata in un'ideale tradizione cristiana. Allo stesso tempo, esprimono un rifiuto di un individualismo anarchico (quello dei *liberal democratics*)[16] o di uno sterile paganesimo (quello dei *fascists*)[17] che, secondo il poeta americano, prevalgono nella società contemporanea in cui vive.

L'America europea di Eliot schiude delle prospettive differenti per Montale. La prosa fiorentina di Montale scritta durante il fascismo, sollecitata dal clima solariano, allude all'America di Eliot per rivedere questioni in prevalenza letterarie e morali. Da un punto di vista politico e religioso, certo, l'America di Eliot non è rivisitata da Montale per affinità, ma semmai per contrasto. È noto a tutti che Montale aveva una visione laica e liberale del mondo, ben diversa dalla visione di un Eliot anglo-cattolico e monarchico. Ne deriva che, nella riscrittura della tradizione metafisica europea filtrata da Eliot, Montale assume l'autorevolezza dello stile, del linguaggio e dell'immaginario. Tuttavia, diversamente dal poeta americano di *Ash Wednesday*, Montale nega un impianto accentrante dell'opera poetica, che mira a riflettere una società monarchica e cristiana intesa a rivelare un'unica entità trascendentale. Montale sembra dell'avviso che, nel presente, una poesia liberatoria costruita con l'appoggio dell'alta tradizione cristiana di cui Dante fa parte, può ricrearsi, ma solo occasionalmente, carpita nella fuga del tempo.[18]

Eliot definisce il suo nuovo punto di vista "as classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion."

16. In "Religion and Literature" (1935) (*The Selected Prose*), Eliot parla dei "liberal democrats," e ritiene impossibile che: "if everybody says what he thinks, and does what he likes, things will somehow, by some automatic compensation and adjustment, come right in the end" (103).
17. In "The Literature of Fascism," Eliot è dell'avviso che il fascismo sia pagano (286).
18. Montale, Eugenio. "Dante ieri e oggi." *Sulla poesia*. 33.
    Nel saggio su Dante, Montale elogia l'opera del poeta fiorentino. A un certo punto, tuttavia, Montale ammette che Dante, essendo un "poeta concentrico," "non può fornire modelli a un mondo che si allontana progressivamente dal centro e si dichiara in perenne espansione."

Nella prosa scritta da Montale a Firenze, l'America di Eliot si riflette nella creazione di regole formali per una nuova poesia classica che rinvigorisca e riordini l'innato classicismo italiano, ormai logoro e stantio. Per Montale la poesia contemporanea italiana non deve più cadere nei vecchi errori. Prendendo esempio dalla tradizione rappresentata da Dante che Eliot raccomanda, la nuova poesia deve evitare l'imitazione passiva della letteratura precedente come invece fa l'opera di Virgilio Giotti. L'opera di Giotti non va bene, lascia capire Montale nella recensione di *Caprizzi, Cansonete e Storie*, perchè esprime "quella volontà di classicismo, quel conformismo, attento, obbediente, timido anche nelle sue apparenti audacie, che è proprio di quei poeti pei quali la tradizione resta pur sempre un'aspirazione, un proposito, anzichè un'eredità posseduta che si possa anche – e fino a un certo punto – dimenticare" (*Sulla poesia* 223). Oltre a questo, la nuova poesia deve rifiutare una tradizione troppo soggettiva che deriva dal recupero di una lingua dialettale. Parlando di *Fiore in to Gotto* scritto da Edoardo Firpo, Montale afferma che "i poeti dialettali come lui doppiamente individuale e per il temperamento e per la città che rappresenta, sono essenzialmente degli artisti, degli aristocratici" (*Sulla poesia* 40). Da ultimo, la nuova poesia deve ignorare una tradizione che è sinonimo di impressionismo mistico. La poesia di "mistici scolaticci" (58) come Pietro Mignosi è da scordare, come pure lo sono parti dell'opera di Quasimodo "in cui il giovane poeta [si prepara] all'illuminazione lirica con un fervore d'attesa quasi ascetica" (*Sulla poesia* 229).

Per la poesia contemporanea italiana Montale suggerisce l'oggettività insegnata dalla poesia americana di Eliot. In "Della poesia d'oggi", Montale parte dal presupposto che in poesia non si deve "soltanto [effondere] il sentimento", ma si deve fare coincidere con una "sua materia, verbale 'fino a un certo segno'", – "quello che Eliot chiama un 'correlativo obiettivo'" (*Sulla poesia* 558). Proprio per questa ragione, recensendo *Acque e terre* di Quasimodo, Montale sostiene che in tale opera le "parti più notevoli" si riconoscono, perchè in esse prendono forma "impreviste, ma accettate fortune di architetture e di stile", che rammentano "quella patina di distacco, quel sereno acume dell'intelligenza che furono vanto della poesia dei classici" (*Sulla poesia* 230). Montale, cioè, apprezza una poesia che è oggettiva e tradizionale: una poesia che infonde speranza di

salvezza, controllando l'agitarsi delle passioni e distaccandosi dal tumulto della storia.

I principi per una nuova poesia classica elucidati da Montale che, diversamente da quelli di Eliot, si collegano a una visione umanista e razionalista del mondo, danno i maggiori risultati nelle *Occasioni* e continuano a esercitare la loro influenza in *Finisterre* – sia per le tecniche, sia per le tematiche. In tali opere, la remota tradizione cristiana che Montale rivisita tenendo conto dell'esempio americano, offre un sostegno vitale, e non delle fondamenta statiche, per creare "architetture" poetiche dalla lingua e dallo stile elevati in cui il dato autobiografico si intreccia a quello culturale. Entro queste "architetture" poetiche sottratte alle disgregazione della storia, l'io lirico mira, nel flusso, a segni occasionali che, trasformandosi da limitati ad assoluti per uno slancio d'amore idealizzato, sublimano il presente incorporando un passato salvifico, e sembrano riscattarlo in una contemplativa dimensione atemporale.

L'impatto della poesia americana si preannuncia nelle ultime poesie di *Ossi di seppia* che appartengono al ciclo di Arletta. In "Incontro" (1926), per esempio, l'io lirico introduce il lettore in un opprimente e pietrificato scenario contemporaneo, ricorrendo al supporto del metodo e dell'immaginario dantesco. Tale scenario, dove le allusioni al passato rivelano nuove ricomposizioni del presente, rievoca quello del girone infernale in cui gli ipocriti si aggirano appesantiti da cappe di piombo (*Inferno* XXIII 58–75): tutti "[vanno] sulla carraia di rappresa/ mota senza uno scarto,/ simili ad incappati di corteo" (96). All'improvviso, la "misera fronda che in un vaso/ s'alleva s'una porta di osteria" (97) e diventa un segno vivificante per l'io lirico. L'esperienza estatica che in questo inferno dei viventi fa sperare in un recupero di vigore e salvezza, però, dura solo un attimo. All'inizio della strofa finale l'io lirico esclama: "Poi più nulla. Oh sommersa! tu dispari/ qual sei venuta, e nulla so di te" (97).

Il momento della rivelazione che in "Incontro" è subito fatto cessare dal ritorno di un presente ostile, diventa privilegiato in *Le Occasioni*, soprattutto nella sezione dei *Mottetti*.[19] Nei *Mottetti*,

19. Prima di me, Glauco Cambon ha sostenuto che *Le occasioni* di Montale "probes more deeply the experience of time and eventually comes to terms with the hopeless dilapidations of contemporary history." Poi aggiunge: "that relentless lucidity in the face of a gathering storm which seemed to bring to a head the crisis of Western

l'America che l'opera di Eliot emblemizza si riflette soprattutto nella disciplina delle forme concettose tradizionali in cui le poesie sono scritte, e nel senso di liberazione che l'eco di un passato salvifico trasmette quando si sovrappone a segni e personaggi calati in una contemporaneità decaduta. I segni quotidiani che il protagonista presenta impersonalmente e fa diventare speciali, sono quasi sempre collegati al ricordo di una donna contemporanea amata. Essa è simile alla Beatrice dantesca, anche se non è figura di un Dio cristiano, perchè allegorizza una possibile entità benevola e redentrice. Questo personaggio femminile, che nelle lettere e in *Finisterre* è chiamato Clizia (lo pseudonimo di Irma Brandeis), è diverso dalle donne presenti nella poesia coeva di Eliot – ad esempio la Lady di *Ash Wednesday*. Pur riallacciandosi alla tradizione religiosa medievale come la Lady di *Ash Wednesday*, Clizia richiama, ma non rivela l'esistenza di un Dio cristiano.

Nelle *Occasioni*, la donna angelo dei *Mottetti* appare per la prima volta nella poesia "Il balcone", che fa da proemio. In "Il balcone", tale personaggio è "certo fuoco" agli occhi del soggetto lirico; è l'unica a scorgere "la vita che dà barlumi", mentre [si sporge] da questa/ finestra che non s'illumina" (107). La donna contemporanea, cioè, nel rievocare una nuova Beatrice, diventa figura di una possibile trascendenza. È l'unica a vedere la luce di una qualche divinità, anche se partecipa con gli altri a una limitata storia terrena: la "finestra che non s'illumina".

Nella sezione dei *Mottetti*, lo spessore culturale di tale donna contemporanea si arricchisce di ulteriori dettagli connessi al repertorio cristiano. Costei può aiutare l'io lirico a sconfiggere il male "[riportando] San Giorgio e il Drago" (134), oppure assume i tratti di un personaggio cristoforo che è "folgore" su una "nube" (142), o che mostra "oltre le sue pupille ormai remote, solo due fasci di luce in croce" (151).

La donna angelo dei *Mottetti* suscita le incostanti palpitazioni amorose del protagonista: le sue speranze, le sue illusioni, i suoi

civilization also allows for resilient intermittences of grace in the personal sphere, the locus of Clizia's apparitions." Cambon fa anche cenno ad altri critici che hanno notato la centralità dei "Mottetti": Ettore Bonora, in *La Poesia di Montale*, e Silvio Ramat, in *Montale* (54). Ulteriori critici che si sono occupati dei "Mottetti" sono Angelo Marchese (*Visiting Angel*) e Dante Isella (*Mottetti*).

abbattimenti. "Lo sai: debbo riperderti e non posso", inizia rattristato l'io lirico del primo mottetto quando il ricordo della donna sta per cessare. L'oblio lo rende consapevole che per lui "l'inferno è certo", e che l'unica via di scampo resta nel "[cercare] il segno / smarrito, il pegno solo ch'[ebbe] in grazia/ da [lei]"(133). E i segni, in altri *Mottetti*, compaiono. In "La speranza di pure rivederti", riluce un "barbaglio": "(a Modena, tra i portici,/ un servo gallonato trascinava / due sciacalli al guinzaglio)"(138).[20] In "Ecco il segno", il ricordo della donna è così intenso che l'uomo si identifica con lei: "Il passo che proviene / dalla serra sì lieve, / non è felpato dalla neve, è ancora/ tua vita, sangue tuo nelle mie vene" (140). Altre volte il segno carpito nel "saliscendi bianco e nero dei / balestrucci dal palo/ del telegrafo al mare" non è abbastanza per placare la sofferenza dell'uomo, e neppure "conforta i [. . .] crucci di lei su lo scalo / nè [la] riporta dove più non [è]" (139). Per il protagonista dei *Mottetti*, quest'assente nuova Beatrice, è l'unico punto di riferimento nel frastornante flusso del divenire. Costei è il prezioso tu a cui rivolgersi, perchè infonde la speranza di ricostruire, attraverso la poesia, valori e significati oggettivi che le opere di un passato rivalutato da Eliot ancora trasmettono, ma che la predominante cultura contemporanea italiana non ha conservato.

La quarta e ultima parte di *Le occasioni* segna una fase diversa da quella epifanica dei *Mottetti* e prepara le basi per le poesie di *Finisterre*, dove l'attrattiva del mito dell'America comincia ad essere meno persistente e, parallelamente, l'idea della poesia come distante architettura classica non intaccata dal tempo inizia a essere riformulata. La comparsa di Clizia, che per il protagonista rappresenta ancora una possibile salvezza, nell'ultima parte di *Le occasioni* si accompagna alle accresciute insidie di una civiltà contemporanea cinica e distruttiva.

20. Montale, Eugenio. *L'opera in versi*. 908–09.
In un commento sulla poesia "Due sciacalli al guinzaglio," Montale dichiara che Mirco, la sua *persona* autobiografica, una volta vide due strani cuccioli mentre camminava per Bologna, e chiese al proprietario che cosa fossero. L'uomo, risentito dal fatto che Mirco non avesse riconosciuto nei due animali due cani, rispose che erano sciacalli. Immediatamente il pensiero di Mirco andò a Clizia, a cui piacevano gli animali buffi. Mirco si chiese se quei cani fossero "un emblema, una citazione occulta, un *senhal*" della donna.

In "Nuove stanze" scritta poco prima della guerra nel 1939, Clizia è ritratta nei suoi ultimi giorni a Firenze – spiega Montale in una lettera a Silvio Guarnieri del 22 maggio 1964.[21] Nella poesia, la forza morale e la preveggenza di tale personaggio femminile che si affaccia sul mondo, si contrappone allo smarrimento degli altri alla vigilia della seconda guerra mondiale.

> [. . .] s'apre la finestra
> non vista e il fumo s'agita. Là in fondo,
> altro stormo si muove: una tregenda
> d'uomini che non sa questo tuo incenso,
> nella scacchiera di cui puoi tu sola
> comporre il senso (177).

Fuori ci sono gli uomini ignari della donna, della guerra che sta per scoppiare, dell'insensatezza di un presente che procede con le sue leggi determinate, come quelle del gioco degli scacchi. È il mondo prefigurato dalla "finestra che non s'illumina" del mottetto "Il Balcone". Dentro la stanza, a rafforzare l'idea di uno spazio chiuso della memoria che per l'io lirico è preziosa da proteggere per un eventuale riscatto, c'è la donna angelo. È caratterizzata dall'"incenso", una sostanza usata nei rituali cattolici, e non a caso "incenso" rima con "senso", proprio a rimarcare la connessione fra la sacralità della donna e la sua capacità di rendere significato.

La speranza di salvezza che la donna angelo infonde in "Nuove stanze", viene meno in altre poesie che compongono la quarta sezione. In queste poesie che si distinguono da "Nuove stanze" prevale una visione nichilista del mondo che contribuisce a ridurre gli esiti di quel nuovo classicismo vitale esemplificato dal modello metafisico eliotiano. Con l'approssimarsi della guerra e il proseguire del fascismo e, contemporaneamente all'esaurirsi della funzione di *Solaria,* le perenni "architetture" di passato e presente entro cui si costruisce la poesia di Montale, che dovrebbero proteggere dalle barbarie e rendere valore elevandosi da un presente terreno, non si rivelano abbastanza solide; si sgretolano nella memoria. La casa dei doganieri che è connessa con l'infanzia non è ricordata ("La casa dei doganieri" 161). "L'ombra crociata del gheppio" che richiama una

21. *Ibid.* 933.

possibile divinità redentrice "pare ignota" ("L'estate" 169). In "Eastbourne", l'io lirico si rivolge alla donna-angelo e rassegnato nella sua impotenza, dice: "Vince il male . . . La ruota non s'arresta. / Anche tu lo sapevi, luce-in-tenebra" (171).

Il duplice messaggio conclusivo delle *Occasioni* che deriva da una reazione ambivalente nei confronti di un'America ideale esemplificata da Eliot si sviluppa nelle poesie di *Finisterre*, scritte durante la guerra. Le poesie di *Finisterre* che subiscono di più l'influenza americana continuano a riflettere una rappresentazione oggettiva e, in rare occasioni, tendono alla vena orfica. Queste poesie, in cui predomina il personaggio di Clizia, sono caratterizzate dal monolinguismo,[22] dallo stile elevato, e dai forti richiami alla tradizione europea pre-moderna. Le poesie che invece si differenziano dal modello eliotiano, presentano delle caratteristiche diverse. In esse, la lingua colta e lo stile alto si uniscono occasionalmente a una lingua dialettale e a uno stile basso. Inoltre, nella gran parte dei casi, Clizia diventa più umana, o è addirittura sostituita dal ricordo di familiari morti.

"Iride" (1934–1944), poesia aggiunta da Montale nell'edizione di *Finisterre* del 1945, e in seguito posta all'inizio delle "Silvae" in *La bufera e altro*, si colloca fra le poesie del primo gruppo. Lo sfondo della guerra che appare nella poesia è reso minimo dal ricordo culminante della donna angelo, che invece di essere chiamata Clizia è qui chiamata Iride. Questo personaggio femminile prende forma in un distante sfondo onirico in cui si intensificano, più che altrove, una lingua e un immaginario che derivano dalla tradizione classica e sopratutto cristiana. Iride, come lo stesso Montale ha ammesso, ha una forte caratterizzazione cristofora, poichè "torna [. . .] come continuatrice e simbolo dell'eterno sacrificio cristiano. Paga lei per tutti, sconta per tutti" (963). Nella poesia, il protagonista divinizza il personaggio di Iride mettendolo in rapporta al Cristo della passione e della resurrezione. Iride è separata dall'io lirico per il "Volto insanguinato sul sudario" (239), ed è arrivata a lui perchè "forse" è stata "guidata" da "quella maschera sul drappo bianco", da "quell'effigie di propora" (240). Il protagonista, che si definisce un "povero / Nestoriano smarrito" (239), oltre a riconoscere il sacrificio

22. Montale definisce le poesie di "Finisterre" , "la sua esperienza petrarchesca."

di Cristo in quello della donna, riconosce le tracce divine di lei nei segni della natura. Scorge queste tracce nell'"ombra del sicomoro", oppure nella "pergola / di viti spoglie": la pianta che, tra altre cose, ricorda Cristo descritto come "vera vite" (15,1) nel vangelo di Giovanni. Nel comprendere il ruolo cristoforo di Iride, il Nestoriano può sperare in un riscatto; può distinguere il valore e il significato dell'immutabile amore divino da quello dell'effimero amore umano. Rivolgendosi alla donna, dice: "Cuore d'altri non è simile al tuo, / la lince non somiglia al bel soriano" (239).

Iride perde gli attributi e le funzioni di cristoforo nelle poesie di *Finisterre* dove l'influenza di Eliot metafisico cominica a essere meno forte.[23] Questo ripensamento del ruolo della donna angelo si accompagna a lievi modifiche nell'uso della lingua e dello stile. L'io lirico di "Personae Separate" non riesce più a trovare "tra gli alberi" i segni armonizzanti creati dalla luce che emana la donna. Non può più vedere "ombre concordi", assieme alle "aste di un sol quadrante i nuovi tronchi / delle radure" (199). Ora che con la guerra "troppo straziato è il bosco umano", "ciò che manca [...] è un perduto senso, o il fuoco" (199). In questa poesia dove mancano segni di una possibile salvezza, termini formali si uniscono occasionalmente a termini dialettali. Per esempio, appare "riano", una parola che, spiega Montale, deriva dal genovese "riàn" (944). "Gli orecchini", diversamente da "Personae separate", elabora la nuova tematica mantenendo uno stile alto. In "Gli orecchini", che è scritta nella forma elevata del sonetto elisabettiano, il rumore degli aerei da guerra è reso con "ronzano elitre fuori" (194). Con l'arrivo degli aerei, il cielo è privo di segni di salvezza, infatti "non serba ombra di voli il nerofumo / della spera" (194). Anche le "pietre" e i "coralli" che per il protagonista denotano la fermezza, il valore e la luce di Clizia, scompaiono. Di fronte alla violenza degli eventi a cui nessuno ormai può opporsi, è difficile sperare in una redenzione che derivi

23. A proposito di "Iride", Laura Barile è dell'opinione che la donna Iride sia una proiezione del poeta che tramite il corpo di lei partecipa a un rito non religioso. "Il tema del 'sacrificio cristiano'," scrive Laura Barile, "ci riconduce all'inizio d questo discorso: soprasenso metafisico espresso in Finisterre con un affondo in direzione alta, ore rotundo, con un tono apocalittico e un registro vicino a quello dei misteri dei testi sacri, L'Antico Testamento e l'Apocalisse, che compaiono in filigrana in alcune poesie" (56).

dal ricordo di una nuova Beatrice, tant'è vero che successivamente il protagonista dichiara: "fuggo l'iddia che non s'incarna" (194). E in "Una lettera non scritta", egli ribadisce: "Oh ch'io non oda/ nulla di te, ch'io fugga il bagliore/ dei tuoi cigli. Ben altro è sulla terra" (191).

Con l'aggravarsi della guerra, Clizia non sembra più annunciare un futuro migliore. Ormai anche la donna angelo, pur non avendo assecondato le ideologie imperanti, è succube come gli altri di un destino funesto. In "Serenata indiana" il soggetto sconsolato, usando la metafora del polipo, riconosce che nella lotta disperata per la sopravvivenza, il male, il lato brutale degli istinti prevale in tutti, senza eccezioni, ma è difficile ammetterlo:

> [. . .] Il polipo che insinua
> tentacoli d'inchiostro tra gli scogli
> può servirsi di te. Tu gli appartieni
> e non lo sai. Sei lui, ti credi te (193).

Analogamente, in "Gli orecchini", dove si delinea la "cornice" di un presente di guerra e violenza, "tornano le molli/ meduse della sera" (202). Alle pietre preziose, dure e non scalfibili che in *Finisterre* accompagnano Clizia vista come nuova Beatrice, cioè si sostituisce la viscida mollezza delle meduse o dei polipi, animali che annunciano l'arrivo di una nuova anti-Beatrice. i versi finali di "Gli orecchini" chiariscono il nuovo punto di arrivo. Rivolgendosi alla cristofora, il protagonista dichiara:

> [. . .] La tua impronta
> verrà di giù: dove ai tuoi lobi squallide
> mani, travolte, fermano i coralli (194).

Clizia, travolta come il protagonista dalle brutalità della storia recente, se apparirà, dovrà arrivare al basso del mare o della terra, e non più dall'alto dei cieli.

Il ripensamento del ruolo cristoforo di Clizia precede gli sviluppi di altre poesie raccolte in *Finisterre* come "L'arca" e "A mia madre" dove il divario dalla linea metafisica eliotiana si approfondisce. In tali poesie, l'idea di un mondo utopico basato sul recupero di valori cristiani medievali che la donna angelo prefigura, si sostituisce

all'idea di un mondo reale popolato da personaggi più umani, che riaffiorano dal passato personale del poeta, e che si collegano alla terra. Sono dei personaggi che tornano insieme alla donna terrrena Volpe nelle poesie di *La bufera e altro,* scritte in gran parte dopo la caduta del fascismo e la fine della guerra. "L'arca" e "A mia madre", che segnano l'inizio di una nuova fase, reagiscono a quelle direttive poetiche connesse a un'America ideale a cui Montale si era indirizzato nella sua opera del periodo fascista. Fanno parte di una poesia che non è più concepita come elevata "architettura" di stile, lingua e temi in cui il presente trascolora in un ideale passato cristiano medievale. Fanno parte di una poesia più realistica che prende spunto da una tendenza rivale presente nella cultura italiana contemporanea, in cui il ricordo del passato non è un rifugio illusorio dalle aggressioni del presente, ma dà la forza per sfidarlo o per accettarlo con tutte le sue contraddizioni.

L'influenza della corrente metafisica eliotiana che, in connessione a precise scelte estetiche e culturali, emerge con particolare enfasi nelle *Occasioni* e decresce in *Finisterre,* dà prova dell'esistenza di un'America utopica diversa da quella che comunemente è stata messa in luce nella letteratura italiana del periodo fascista dalla critica. In certi saggi che hanno esaminato questo aspetto tra cui l'ormai classico *Il mito dell'America degli intellettuali italiani* di Dominique Fernandez, l'idea di un'America esemplare opposta all'Italia fascista è quella di un paese libero, puro e vitale. È quell'America che Cesare Pavese ed Elio Vittorini, insieme ad altri scrittori italiani della loro generazione, hanno immaginato leggendo le opere statunitensi di Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson e William Faulkner – solo per fare alcuni nomi. È cioè un'America che ha giustificato l'impegno politico degli intellettuali nel sociale e che, particolarmente nella narrativa, ha riflesso un'approccio realistico che si connette a una democratizzazione dei personaggi, della lingua e dello stile. L'America che invece è emerge dalla rivisitazione di Eliot metafisico in Montale, è essa stessa un emblema di libertà e rigore morale come quella concepita nell'opera di Pavese e Vittorini. Tuttavia, mostra un modo alternativo in cui rinvigorire e riordinare la decaduta cultura italiana durante il fascismo . . . una lezione che, favorendo il "contatto con l'alta tradizione europea" alla maniera americana di

Eliot, porta al superamento dell'"innato" classicismo italiano, ritenuto da Montale imitativo. Quest'altra America contribuisce a formare quella corrente di rinnovato classicismo che si era diffuso con particolare enfasi nella cultura occidentale degli anni trenta, per controllare gli eccessi delle avanguardie dell'inizio del secolo, e per rafforzare quella supremazia eurocentrica che stava vacillando.

"E Quindi Uscimmo a Riveder le Stelle." – But there are no Stars. Dante in Beckett's *Endgame*

Corinna Salvadori Lonergan

In 1991 I had an extraordinary theatrical experience: I saw twenty-one Beckett plays within thirteen days – nineteen in English, two repeated in French –; and I was struck, forcibly and often, by the presence therein of Dante. I had not gone seeking Dante, but several times words or movements on the stage brought the *Commedia* to mind. That Dante is a strong factor – a term preferable to influence – which may help us to understand better the elliptic writings of the Irishman, is widely recognized in Beckett scholarship; Dante features in the index of most full length studies of Beckett, and in Knowlson's rich and meticulous biography there is an unique entry entitled specifically "Dante influence".[1] It is known that Beckett, all his life, had his Dante *sotto mano,* often carrying a small copy in his pocket.[2] In Reading there is Beckett's own annotated *Commedia,* which he brought with him to the nursing home where he died. His first

1. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The life of Samuel Beckett,* London, Bloomsbury, 1996, p. 849.
2. See, for example, Mario Esposito's letter to Richard Ellmann mentioned in Knowlson p. 719, note 26.

encounter with Dante, as far as we are aware, was in the 1920s, when Beckett studied Italian in Trinity College, Dublin. Then, as now, Dante was the dominant author in the undergraduate course. None of my predecessors, however, can claim to have enlightened Beckett on his Dantean way. Beckett's professor of French, Rudmose-Brown, had a strong formative influence on him and passed on a deep love for poetry; but in a letter written in 1983 à propos of Rudmose-Brown, Beckett made quite clear that his professor "had no part in the Dante revelation. This I seem to have managed on my own, with the help of my Italian teacher, Bianca Esposito".[3] She was not a lecturer in the Italian Department, but an outsider to whom Beckett went for what we might call grinds. Given Beckett's precise and sparse use of language, his phrase "the Dante revelation" merits note. It is resoundingly Biblical, it implies a striking disclosure of knowledge that illuminates and may be life-changing or shaping. This seems to have been very much the case, and no better acknowledgement need we of the importance of Dante, than that phrase from Beckett himself.

Dante is integrated, through words and images, in the fabric of Beckett's creations but, while both are poets and visionaries, their visions are worlds apart. It was in Dante that Beckett found Belacqua, a character he recasts in the early prose of *More Pricks thank Kicks and Dream of Fair to Middling Women;* Dante is present in the early poems "Alba", "Yoke of Liberty" (borrowed from "il giogo della libertà"), "The Undertaker's man", the long sombre poem or "Eneug" (a funeral lament) with its evocation of Dante's *Inferno* in "the pit of the Liffey", in his first published novel *Murphy,* with its Dantesque atmosphere in some of the settings – Hell, Purgatory and Paradise –; and he is found right through to the late dramaticules.[4] Writing on the latter, Keir Elam argues perceptively that if this late drama is about anything, it is essentially about death, and often a "Dantean beyond" is suggested. For Elam, Beckett

3. Bianca was a sister of the aforementioned Mario. The letter from Beckett to Roger Little is now deposited in Trinity College Library.

4. For Dante in Beckett's poetry see, among others, Lawrence E. Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic,* Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1970, and Wallace Fowlie, "Dante and Beckett", in *Dante among the Moderns,* ed. by Stuart Y. McDougal, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1985, pp. 112–20.

seems to invoke an afterworld – elsewhere, an afterlife – elsewhen, opening up the prospect of a structured Dantean universe with analogical meanings, anagogical meanings, allegorical meanings (with drama itself as a mode of damnation). Perhaps the best known of the dramaticules is *Not I*, a monologue delivered by a female mouth, appropriately named Bocca, but it recalls the (male) traitor of Montaperti, Bocca degli Abati; he is damned in the final circle of Hell – where so many Beckett characters seem to reside.[5] Or is it so? It merits asking this question of *Endgame*, and looking at two images in the play – ashbins and ladders – in a Dantean perspective. Bringing Dante to Beckett's work gives an immediate illusion that we can decypher texts that refuse unequivocal interpretation; further study proves that we cannot decypher, but that we have come a little closer to knowing the unknowable.

Some forty years ago (1958) when *Endgame* was first performed some viewers were deeply offended by the "binning" – if one may so express it – of Nell and Nagg, the two beings who may be Hamm's parents. The bins have lids; these are occasionally lifted and finally firmly closed. On first seeing the play, I was neither shocked nor offended because the bins – which are ashbins and not refuse bins – immediately suggested to my mind a version of the tombs of the heretics first seen by Dante in the sixth circle of hell. He sees *sepulcri*, and adds that "tra gli avelli fiamme erano sparte" (*Inf.*, IX, 115–18). Dante's flames burn but do not consume; in Beckett we presume that the ash in the bins is the result of fire, and his ashbins have sand also, anticipating perhaps the sand that covers Winnie in *Happy Days*, and that in turn recalls the burning sand of hell's seventh circle where the violent against God and nature are damned. Of the burning tombs Dante comments that "Tutti li lor coperchi eran sospesi" (*Inf.*, IX, 121), but the implication, at the end of Canto X, is that after the final judgement the lids will be placed on the tombs as the number of dannati in each one will be complete. Farinata stresses that the ability of the damned to know the future will cease as "del futuro fia chiusa la porta" (*Inf.*, X, 108); there will be no future in eternity. It may be worth adding, for the reader

5. Keir Elam, "The 'dramaticules' ", in *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, ed. by John Pilling, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 145–66.

unfamiliar with Dante, that the medieval author never doubted the immortality of the soul; in *Convivio* (II, 8) he writes "intra tutte le bestialitadi quella è stoltissima, vilissima e dannosissima, chi crede dopo questa vita non essere altra vita". Not a view that Beckett shared. There are strong links between cantos VI and X, of which the most obvious is the topic of exile; but in VI there is also the first doctrinal explanation given by Virgil to Dante, and it concerns the final judgement, a point elaborated further by Farinata in X. Ciacco, Virgil explains, will not speak again "Di qua dal suon dell'angelica tromba", when each *dannato*

> rivederà la trista tomba,
> Ripiglierà sua carne e sua figura", (97–98)

to remain in a fixed torment for a timeless eternity. Nagg and Nell in their bins, popping up periodically to speak (as Farinata and Cavalcante have done), but ultimately "bottled", strongly recall these images of *Inferno* VI and X. Indeed, Nagg as the father to-be-bottled is strongly reminiscent of the sad figure of Cavalcante seeking, in vain, his son. Nagg's son Hamm may "exist" but he is lost through hatred.

> HAMM: Bottle him!
> CLOV pushes NAGG back into the bin, closes the lid.
> [. . .]
> HAMM: Have you bottled him?
> CLOV: Yes.
> HAMM: Sit on him! (180–185)[6]

There is another exchange later, where the "her" is Nell, supposedly Hamm's mother.

> HAMM: Have you bottled her?
> CLOV: Yes.
> HAMM: Are they both bottled?
> CLOV: Yes.
> HAMM: Screw down the lids. (426–430)

6. All quotations from *Endgame* are from *The theatrical Notebooks of Samel Beckett*, Vol. II: *Endgame*, with a revised text, edited with introduction and notes by S.E. Gontarski, London, Faber and Faber, 1992. Quotations from *Endgame* will be followed by the line number as it appears in Gontarski.

"Bottling" means more than the lid being put on them: bottling is a preserving, storing process that stops total disintegration, it keeps "alive". Nagg and Nell continue to exist because they are bottled.

Towards the end of the play, there is a suggestion that Nell may be dead; Nagg's last utterances are to call her – twice – but there is no answer from the firmly bottled Nell. When Hamm orders "Go and see is she dead" (1117), Clov, having looked into the bin, replies: "Looks like it" (1119), but there is no certainty. To the same question applied to Nagg, Clov answers, with a perversity we are accustomed to in Beckett's characters: "Doesn't look like it" (1124). When the playwright himself was asked directly by the German actress who played Nell if she had died, he replied in a manner that indicates existential uncertainty: "So it seems, but no one knows".[7] Farinata and Cavalcante, the two damned heretics in the burning tomb who speak to Dante, had denied the immortality of the soul. A preoccupying thought, this latter one perhaps, for Beckett, more so than he ever acknowledged.

Continuing the reading in the context of the images in *Inferno* VI and X, the alarm clock in the play can be seen as having the function of the "angelica tromba" of judgement day; and Clov's putting the alarm clock on Nell's bin, may indicate that, like Ciacco, she cannot come up again before judgement (1287).

As the ashbins have always suggested to me the tombs in which heretics burn, it was reassuring to discover that the preliminary two-act version of *Endgame* had a coffin on stage rather than ashbins, as if Beckett had originally set out with the Dantean image and subsequently modified it. He did not totally eliminate the image of the coffin, however, as Hamm orders Clov: "Put me in my coffin" (1378), and, in this play of relentless negativity, the predictable answer is: "There are no more coffins" (1379).[8]

The second image from *Endgame* that was stored in my Dantean memory was that of the ladder and the two windows. In the stage directions there are two windows, called the sea window and the earth window, neither is at eye level so Clov, the only character

7. Gontarski, p. 63.
8. Gontarski, p. 68; Gontarski suggests that the coffin may have been the anticipation of the ashbins.

who can walk about, has to climb a ladder to look out. Earth and sea are the two clear-cut divisions of Dante's physical world. When Hamm orders Clov to look at the earth, Clov starts searching for the telescope – an object usually used for looking at astral bodies – and to climb up the ladder. The presence of Dante's hell is so strong in this play that when one reaches this point of exchange between the two principal characters, it is impossible not to think of the end of *Inferno*. But Clov's efforts with the ladder are more easily understood if first one examines certain features that the play shares with Dante's hell.

A major one is that both Dante's damned and Beckett's Hamm and Clov lack freedom, be it of movement or of speech. The suffering of Dante's damned is related to the form of their sinning in life: they are fixed for eternity in certain shapes, positions, movements; in some cases even their utterances are controlled, as in the case of the prodigal and miserly in the fourth circle, shouting repeatedly to each other "Perché tieni?" and "Perché burli?" (*Inf.*, VII, 30). That Beckett choreographed his actors' movements – especially the number of steps taken on stage – is well known and documented. He reduced Clov's steps towards the kitchen from nine to eight; Clov's thinking walk is "six, four, six, four".[9] The result is an emphasis on automation. It emerges clearly, especially in the section from lines 653 to 712, that for Hamm and Clov there is no possibility of change in their situation, that they lack autonomy, that they are interdependent, and that their exchanges are characterized by repetitive boredom. Hamm can only sit – though the chair has castors – and although he is blind he frequently cleans his glasses as if he were wishing not only to see, but to see more clearly; Clov sees and moves about, but cannot sit. Clov is told twice by Hamm (787, 789) that he is not able to refuse to do something – all their actions are controlled and predetermined, even, it seems at times, what they say to each other. Clov comments; "All life long the same inanities" (829), and again, to Hamm, "I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others" (804). It is another assertion of automation, of not having freedom to use

9. In terms of "step control" the extreme example from *Inferno* could be Mahomet who speaks with a foot raised off the ground (XXVIII, 61–63).

other words, therefore of not eve being able to think differently from the way that is imposed. Clov says: "I couldn't guffaw again today" (1094), the implication is that the number of times that he can guffaw is predetermined. Again, it is Clov who says to Hamm: "There's one thing I'll never understand. Why I always obey you. Can you explain that to me?" (1356–1357). He must obey, he does not understand; Dante's hell is full of such characters. Nagg and Nell cannot kiss, despite their trying to do so: *"their heads strain towards each other, fail to meet, fall apart again"* (265). There is a sense that it is not love that is drawing them to each other, but a bonding hatred such as that between Ugolino and Ruggieri fixed in their physical proximity. "Why this farce, day after day?" asks Nell, pointlessly (267). The answer is suggested in Clov's assertion to Hamm about the possibility of the existence of sharks: "If there are there will be" (637), as it recalls Dante's twice repeated "vuolsi così colà dove si puote / Ciò che si vuole, e più non dimandare" (Inf., III, 95–96, and V, 23–24), which Beckett used in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*.[10]

Linked to this idea of creatures lacking all autonomy and fixed both physically and in their forma mentis – the Dante parallel is obvious – is the circularity of the play. Dante's damned are not moving in a linear fashion, or there would be an end; if they are doomed to move, they go round their circle. When Hamm expresses his great fear that existence may indeed by cyclical – "The end is in the beginning and yet you go on" (1240) – he is making a crucial existential statement: there is no end and this is the real horror. The circularity of the play was emphasised by Samuel Beckett and in the manuscript of the two-act version the theme of circularity is considerably more explicit.[11] But even in the final version, Beckett insisted on it. He stipulated that Clov's action (at line 1440, towards the end of the play) was to be a visual analogue to Clov's move in his opening monologue.[12] He wanted the mood and tempo of Hamm's first and last monologues to be identical: "The voice comes out of the silence and returns into silence";[13] he also wanted the

10. Ed. by Eoin O'Brien and Edith Fournier, Dublin, The Black Cat Press, 1992, p. 36.
11. Gontarski, p. 69.
12. Gontarski, p. 68, note to 1440.
13. See *Berlin Diary*, cited in Gontarski, p. 69, note to 1469.

handkerchief folded and unfolded at the end of the play with gestures identical to those of the opening.[14] He considered a curtain call "repugnant" and wanted Hamm and Clov to remain unmoving in their final positions.[15] No doubt because the end is in the beginning and they must suggest a beginning all over again. This is extremely infernal: in the "aura sanza tempo tinta" (III, 29) the most appalling reality is the eternal and unchanging quality of one's condition. Hamm's wish that it "be all over with sound, and motion, all over and done with" (1248) is in vain, as is Clov's ideal: "A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place, under the last dust." (1037–38) Both are wishes for total extinction and what is suggested is that the real tragedy of the human condition is that total annihilation is not possible. Hamm emphasises (at the beginning of both his first and hits last speeches): "Me – to play."

There are other hell features, such as the stench:

HAMM: You stink already. The whole place stinks of corpses.
CLOV: The whole universe.
HAMM: *(Angrily)* To hell with the universe! (845–47)

And, indeed, hell does stink, the whole of it, not just the bolgia where the flatterers are immersed in excrement. Of the many references, suffice the comprehensive one in canto XI when the doctrinal explanation of the division of hell is given by Virgil. He and Dante are about to leave the sixth circle of the heretics and need to pause awhile so as to grow accustomed to the "orrible soperchio Del puzzo che 'l profondo abisso gitta" and the "tristo fiato" (*Inf.*, XI, 4–5, 12). Beckett's characters may also be in a "profondo abisso" of some post-earthly existence.

Assertion, in Dante's hell, is often through repeated negation; we are frequently reminded of the lack of light, and the formula *né . . . né . . . né* is used to great effect, as in the canto of Pier delle Vigne or Ulisse. Negatively looms large in *Endgame* also. It is a play of constant negation in which there is no more of almost anything that is randomly mentioned – no more pain-killer, no more bicycle

14. See *Berlin Diary*, cited in Gontarski, p. 71, note to 1500.
15. See *Berlin Diary*, cited in Gontarski, p. 71, note to 1506.

wheels, no more pap, no more sugar plums, no more tide, horizon, gulls, waves, no more rugs, no more coffins. Nell says no to virtually every question she is asked, except to Nagg's "Can you hear me?" (282); we are told that Clov's seeds have not come up, that "they'll never sprout" (238), just as "there is no more nature" (197), a statement which is open to two interpretations: there is no more cycle of the seasons within the world of nature, and there is no more natural law of reciprocal bonds of love created between parent and child. *Endgame* is a play where above all there is no more love. It is a play that enacts man's inhumanity to man. The relationship between Hamm and Clov is one of deception, of inflicting pain mutually, of hatred constantly acted out. It recalls Ugolino and Ruggieri, bonded in hatred, essential to each other. In his edition of the play, Gontarski notes:

> Clov takes great pleasure in announcing the escape of the rat. Hamm is helpless, seated, unable to move, and the half-dead rat will eventually get him. Of this report of the rat's escape and Clov's tormenting Hamm about the possibility of the pain-killer only to announce "There's no more pain-killer" (line 1277), Beckett said during Riverside rehearsals, "One of the cruellest sections of the play".[16]

Clov refuses to kiss Hamm or to touch him despite the latter's requests (1212–1219), and earlier he had stated: "If I could kill him I'd die happy" (505). But in their complementarity (Clov stands, Hamm sits) and negative symbiosis, he can neither kill nor die, nor be happy.

A bestiality marks the two characters: Clov speaks of his birth as "Ever since I was whelped" (253), and Hamm of their being "bitched" (622); Clov speaks of himself and the maimed toy dog as "your dogs" (724), and he poises himself like the dog so that the image is of two dogs in profile. Beckett wanted the analogy Clov / dog.[17] In this context of bestiality, it is worth noting that the same Clov derides the injunction he was given: "They said to me, Come now, you're not a brute beast, think upon these things and you'll see how all becomes clear." (1438) This is a strong reminder of:

16. Gontarski, p. 65, note to 1271.
17. Gontarski, p. 59, note to 744.

> "Fatti non foste a viver come bruti,
> Ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza" (XXVI, 119–20).

While Dante depicts an ingenious crescendo of evil and torment as he and Virgil descend through hell to the source of all evil, Lucifer, the reader is periodically given a much needed sense of humanity and love. This is expressed primarily in the paternal/filial relationship that develops between Dante and Virgil as they journey together, but there is also the moving lyricism of Brunetto's "cara e buona imagine paterna" (XV, 83), suffering the horrors of the burning sand, and the most moving similes in the entire *Commedia* are mother and child ones. The greatest love story of the *Commedia* – Ugolino's – is told in the zone of greatest hatred, and it is a mark of Dante's artistry that he tells it when he has reached the limits of his depiction of evil: immediately after his physical attack on Bocca degli Abati, and before his last imaginative form of damnation, that of the living with Frate Alberigo and Branca Doria.

The most striking evil in *Endgame* is in the repeated destruction of the father/son bond. it is to be found first in the mutual hatred between Hamm, the son, and Nagg, the father. Hamm curses his father for engendering him (156) as hell's damned "Bestemmiavano Dio e lor parenti" (*Inf.* III, 103). He wants his father silenced, bottled, (410), and he calls for the cleaner of cess-pools to cart away his binned parents in their sand: "Clear away this muck! Chuck it into the sea!" (412). Equally cruel are Nagg and Nell who had let the child Hamm cry, frightened in the dark, "Then we moved you out of earshot, so that we might sleep in peace" (1013).

Beckett insisted on the play's denial of Hamm's filial/paternal love: he wanted no pathos in Hamm's uttering of the words "father", "son"; he added "Pathos is the death of the play."[18] Nonetheless there is a potentially pathetic, and certainly very moving, part of the play that is central to it, when Hamm, in his longest speech (916–980), tells the chilling story of the father who begs for bread for his starving male child – "my little one [. . .]. My little boy, he said, as if the sex mattered" – and he is, of course, denied food. Not only, in its broad outline, is this remarkably evocative of the story of Ugolino's four sons starved to death, but there are several details

18. See *Berlin Diary*, cited in Gontarski, p. 65, note to 1249.

shared by the two stories; moreover, there are echoes of other sections of Inferno. The following selection from Beckett's text has its equivalent in Dante. The man in Hamm's story came on

> an extra-ordinarily bitter day, I remember, zero by the thermometer [. . .] Well, what ill wind blows you my way? He raised his face to me, black with mingled dirt and tears. [. . .] It was a glorious bright day. [. . .] The sun was sinking down into the . . . down among the dead. [. . .] Where did he come from? He named the hole. [. . .] beyond the gulf. Not a sinner. [. . .] The wind was tearing up the dead pines and sweeping them . . . away. [. . .] it finally transpired that what he wanted from me was . . . bread for his brat. Bread? But I have no bread. [. . .] I cooled down, sufficiently at least to ask him how long he had taken on the way. Three whole days. [. . .] In what condition had he left the child. Deep in sleep. (Forcibly) But deep in what sleep, deep in what sleep already? [. . .] I can see him still, down on his knees, his hands flat on the ground, glaring at me with his mad eyes.

From cantos XXXII-XXXIII consider: the zone is the frozen one of Antenora, where the intense cold is related to the wind chill factor from Lucifer's perennially moving wings; Dante sees "due ghiacciati in una buca" (XXXII, 125); Ugolino: "pianger senti" fra 'l sonno i miei figliuoli Ch'eran con meco, e dimandar del pane" (XXXIII, 38–9); the sunlight enters the "doloroso carcere"; the first son dies after the three days of anguish; having told his story, Ugolino "con li occhi torti Riprese 'l teschio". From other parts of *Inferno* one could also quote "Dinanzi mi si fece un pien di fango [. . .]. Vedi che son un che piango" (VIII, 32, 36); "un vento Impetuoso per li avversi ardori, Che fier la selva e sanz' alcun rattento Li rami schianta, abbatte e porta fori" (IX, 67–70); Ulisse's "di retro al sol" (rhythmically equivalent to "beyond the gulf") "del mondo sanza gente", is a journey that denies man's calling to enlightenment – there can be no light beyond the sun – and his role as a social animal (XXVI, 117). It is worth remembering that Dante does not appeal to our humanity for Ugolino – only for his sons –; Ugolino is *tradito* because he was a *traditore*, and betrayal is what bonds the characters of *Endgame*. At no stage is there loyalty between

Hamm and Clov, and the latter blatantly and repeatedly deceives the former.

All these points have been raised to emphasise how evocative *Endgame* is of Dante's *Inferno*, so it should now be obvious that there may be an interpretative connection between Clov with the telescope looking out from the top of the ladder, and the end of *Inferno*. Dante has acquired the "piena esperienza" (XVII, 37–8), the fullness of understanding of right and wrong, and he ready to leave hell. With Virgil, he climbs up the hairy body of Lucifer and along a winding path to the earth's surface:

> salimmo su, el primo e io secondo,
> tanto ch'i' vidi de le cose belle
> che porta 'l ciel, per un pertugio tondo.
> E quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle. (XXXIV, 136–9)

But what does Clov see when he is up the ladder? From the sea window Clov sees only water; earlier, although he was only feigning to look out, Hamm's comment had been that the sea was calm because there were no more navigators to drown (1182). Both statements are evocative of the journey of Ulysses and his men; after their drowning, all is quiet, "'l mar fu sovra noi richiuso" (XXVI, 142). When he is trying to look out of the earth window, Clov is interrupted and asks impatiently; "Do you want me to look at this muckheap, yes or no?" (1332). In Dante's hell the earth is spoken of as a place of light and happiness, which it is when contrasted with the misery and murkiness of the state of damnation; in Beckett's "muckheap" we do not hear Dante's voice but the Leopardian "fango è il mondo" from "A se stesso" – a line Beckett had used as the epigraph to his 1931 essay on Proust. From the top of the ladder, in the disjointed manner of the two men's exchanges, Clov asks: "You know what she died of Mother Pegg? Of darkness" (1347); and a few lines later: "I warn you. I am going to look at this filth [the earth] since it's an order" (1393).

The sequence of these statements – the nothingness in the two views, of earth and of sea, and Mother Pegg dying of darkness – appears to be random, but it acquires substantial significance if we bring to it knowledge of the journey of Ulisse "di retro al sol, del mondo sanza gente", a text already present in the story of the starving little son. Ulisse deceives his men in presenting as desirable

a journey to an uninhabited world where there is no sun. In Dante's Judaeo-Christian tradition the sun is the symbol of God, of intellectual enlightenment, of divine grace. In *Convivio* we read: "Nullo sensibile in tutto lo mondo è più degno di farsi essemplo di Dio che 'l sole" (III, xii, 7). The world without light is the kingdom of *tenebrae*, of darkness, of evil. Hell is an "aere senza stelle", a "cieco carcere", where there is no "dolce lome", in apposition to paradise which is untarnished effulgence. Mother Pegg dies of what Ulisse and his men die: darkness. Without light we cannot survive physically, without divine light we are damned eternally. Darkness is the realm of one whose name is associated with the bearing of light, Lucifer, and to whom Dante gives a bat-like shape; a bat is a flying version of the rat, the threatening animal that is wanted dead in *Endgame*. Hamm wants light: "I want to feel the light on my face" (1135); he even wants to feel a ray of sunshine, but Clov, as ever negative, tells him that no, it isn't a ray of sunshine (1157). Hamm, the blind man who wipes (pointlessly) his dark glasses, is only stressing his not seeing, his being in *tenebrae*.

The privileged Dante pilgrim who is allowed to travel the *regni d'oltretomba*, leaves each one and binds the three together, with a reference to the stars. But there are no stars in *Endgame*, despite the fact that Clov, with his telescope, is equipped to see them. When a first time viewer, I found it truly difficult to accept that Clov sights no stars, as all the expectation was that he should. Beckett's writings show that he could give a Dantean significance to the stars. His four novellas belong roughly to the period of *Endgame*, and each one ends with images of searching for light; in two of the stories the narrator searches specifically for the stars – for the Wains in 'First Love' and for the Bears in 'The Calmative' – but he fails to find them. To note their absence denotes their importance. In Text 9 of *Texts for Nothing*, written just after *Endgame*, the preoccupation of the narrator – expressed at the start, and repeated – is: "There's a way out there, there's a way out somewhere" and the piece ends:

> "There's a way out there, there's a way out somewhere,
> the rest would come, the other words, sooner or later,
> and the power of the skies, and see the stars again."[19]

19. *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929–1989*, ed. by S. E. Gontarski, New York, Grove Press, 1995 p. 140. John Pilling noted, quite some time ago, that in this

"The beauties of the skies": might they not be "le cose belle Che porta il ciel"? But, relentlessly, these stars are present only through absence.

Where are Hamm and Clov? They call it a refuge (47, 1247), and, as Hugh Kenner asks, is it that "the outdoors has been consumed by some unimaginable catastrophe? [. . .] are we not to imagine a fallout shelter, perhaps, and the last hours of the last morsels of human life, after perhaps an H-bomb explosion?"[20] Our reading indicates that perhaps they are not in this world, as we know it. Many of Beckett's personae, like those of Dante, are communicating from an *oltretomba*. The narrator of *The Expelled*, one of the four novellas, addresses "living souls", as if he were no longer one of that group, and the end of that story has images that evoke Dante and Virgil at the end of hell and on arrival in purgatory.[21] The narrator of The Calmative begins:

> I don't know when I died. It always seemed to me I died old. [. . .] alone in my icy bed, I have the feeling I'll be older than the day, the night, when the sky with all its lights fell upon me, the same I had so often gazed on since my first stumblings on the distant earth. [. . .] is it possible that in this story I have come back to life, after my death? No, it's not like me to come back to life, after my death.[22]

It is commonplace in Beckett criticism to define his characters as purgatorial, for no better reason, one supposes, than the fact that Beckett gave to the fictional *persona* of his own self the name of Belacqua, a Florentine maker of string instruments, known to Dante and met by him in ante-purgatory. To read Sam Beckett into the character of Belacqua Shua, is suggested by the initials, but is beyond our brief; but it almost certainly is not purgatory where Hamm and Clov, Nell and Nagg belong. The essential features of Dante's purgatory are that it is a state of transition, and that it is a happy state because the soul

ending Beckett is "profoundly aware of the magnificent last words of the *Inferno*"; see *Samuel Beckett*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976, p. 132.20. Hugh Kenner, *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett*, New York, Syracuse University Press, p. 121.

20. Hugh Kenner, *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett*, New York, Syracuse University Press, p. 121.

21. *The Expelled and Other Novellas*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1982, p. 47.

22. *The Expelled and Other Novellas*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1982, p. 51.

knows that its suffering, albeit intense, is temporary. No Dante character in purgatory doubts his salvation. Hell and paradise are static states, respectively of maximum suffering and maximum happiness; they are terminal, but not so purgatory. In *Endgame* and in the *Novelle* no one is in a transit lounge – they are all trapped, and for ever – and no one is even remotely happy. The tone of the suffering is more muted in than in Dante, the characters do not suffer the physical tortures of hell, but what they share is the anguished sense that nothing changes and never will there be a true "end". The beyond the grave of these Beckett characters – and there are, elsewhere, others also – is not a happy state; there is torment in their very wish for an end because the wish is matched by the knowledge that it cannot come; in short, there is much to suggest it is infernal. The many references to intense cold suggest the atmospheric conditions of Giudecca, the zone of hell that is actually mentioned in *First Love*.[23]

That the "beyond the grave" of Beckett has features in common with the infernal region as Dante created it has been shown, texts to hand, but the difference is monumental. It lies in the theology that supports Dante's edifice which exemplifies "l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle" (*Par.*, XXXIII, 145). Beckett offers no palliative to the human condition; the novella entitled 'The Calmative' denies its very title in its ending: "in vain I raised without hope my eyes to the sky to look of the Bears. For the light I steeped in put out the stars, assuming they were there, which I doubted, remembering the clouds."[24] It may be worth remembering that in the coffins of the sixth circle Dante had placed the heretics, and the ones to whom he turns his attention are those guilty of what he calls in *Convivio* the "matta bestialitade" of thinking that the soul dies with the body – that we come to an end as thinking beings. Beckett clearly suggests that we do not end as thinking beings, and the anguish conveyed in several texts, emanates from the conviction that death does not give yearned for annihilation, but that our consciousness is eternal, and that the real tragedy of the human condition is an eternity without hope of change, without peace, in torment, in darkness – because there are no stars.

[I wish to acknowledge the encouragement of the Beckett scholar, Anna McMullan, who convinced me that it was worth saying.]

23. *The Expelled and Other Novellas*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1982, p. 27.
24. *The Expelled and Other Novellas*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1982, p. 67.