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Robert Clark-Majerus

Lockdown Beauty: Naturalist Meditations

Wintrange is an ancient landscape, sheltered and long-fertile, with many tributary streams flowing towards the Moselle. Millenia before the Romans came to plant vines, it will have given nourishment to many people. Around our village, where there is level ground, medieval common pastures are now lush with deep grass and wild flowers, sheltered between beech and hazel woods. The bird song is choric, one species tuning in with another, filling the space with sound and a kind of fellowship. The cuckoos hereabouts keep cuckooing minute by minute, hour by hour, an expenditure of energy insufficiently explained by sexual or territorial impulses. One evening, on a neighbour's roof, a bird I do not recognise trills on and off for perhaps half an hour, seemingly just singing with joy.

I read recently an ethologist who maintains that each woodland has its own accents and patterns, that there is a local identity as well as a species practice. We might say that the thrushes here sing "Wintrangely". As we walk in their company, it is easy to believe they mention our passing, and that they celebrate the unusually early warmth and seemingly unending days of sun. What else could that song thrush be doing at the end of a branch way above our heads other than celebrating the day on behalf of all those who can admire his wonderful notes.

In one meadow a few days ago, we found this Orange Tip butterfly (*Anthocaris cardamoines*) drinking nectar from a Garlic Mustard plant (*Allaria petiolata*). The underwings of the male Orange Tip are delicately patterned like leaves on a white ground, bringing to mind Gerard Manley Hopkins's "Pied Beauty":

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Glory be to God for dappled things –
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him.

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My second photograph is of an inch-long green caterpillar hanging at my eye-level from the branch of a tree about five metres above the ground. The thread by which it hung must have been at least a hundred times its body length, but it was valiantly struggling to climb back up to the branch. I remember from my schooldays that caterpillars abseil like this to escape a predator on the branch or to descend to the forest floor so they can pupate. This

caterpillar was trying to get back up, so it had fled a predator. I found myself wondering how such small creatures know to do this, and how the word 'bravery' does and does not attach to such situations. 'Blind instinct' is perhaps all humans can call it, but it seems much smarter than blind, more reasoned than instinct. My mind moves to our current human predicament, our struggle to survive, and our struggles with the Coronavirus: how did this thing – a complex of a few protein molecules without even cellular structures – come to be so successful at replicating itself inside animal bodies? It is only a millionth of the size of the cells it infects and turns into replicating machines. This raises a perennial question: is a virus an organism, or just a chemical accident?

Little Lamb who made thee
    Dost thou know who made thee
Gave thee life & bid thee feed.
By the stream & o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing wooly bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice!
    Little Lamb who made thee
    Dost thou know who made thee

    Little Lamb I'll tell thee,
    Little Lamb I'll tell thee!
He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a Lamb:
He is meek & he is mild,
He became a little child:
I a child & thou a lamb,
We are called by his name.
    Little Lamb God bless thee.
    Little Lamb God bless thee.

Please God, whilst you are thinking of lambs, spare a thought for caterpillars, and viruses. Who made them? How does it appear to us that they have so much intentionality? Are they just chemical accidents which are, again by accident, capable of cloning themselves. They certainly do not correspond to 'bravery' or the military metaphors with which our politicians ornament their speeches.

My third photograph is of a pair of tiny walnut buds. Of all the trees hereabouts the walnuts are the last to come into bloom and leaf. The catkins and flowers appear several days before the leaves open, and within two weeks the fruits are set. Every day in April we stand amazed at how fast nature is. Cherry trees are in bloom for only a few days, then the seed is set and the petals fall. Four months from now each walnut tree will rain hundreds of walnuts. Such a profligate necessity! We fear the corona virions that succeed. How many billions are wasted?

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Jacki Ferro

Alice's Daughter: Co-writing for Recognition, Recovery and Reconciliation

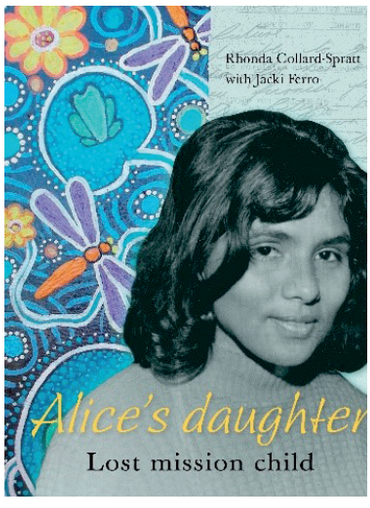

Fig. 1. *Alice's Daughter*: Lost Mission Child by Rhonda Collard-Spratt with Jacki Ferro (Collard-Spratt & Ferro 2017).

Book Synopsis and Memoir Co-writing Overview

In 1954, aged three, Rhonda Spratt was taken from her Aboriginal mother and placed on Carnarvon Native Mission in remote Western Australia. Growing up in the white world of chores and aprons, religious teachings and cruel beatings, Rhonda drew strength and healing from her mission brothers and sisters, her art, music and poetry, and her unbreakable bond with the Dreaming. In Rhonda's own words:

> I lived my early years on a native mission in Western Australia – growing up without a mother's love. I was always searching for my people's language, dance, songs and stories. I went on to find some family, my culture, my identity and ultimately myself. In writing this book, I wanted to speak about what happened to us as a people, on a human level, through the eyes of a child (Collard-Spratt & Ferro 2017: xi).

Co-written with memoirist Jacki Ferro, *Alice's Daughter: Lost Mission Child* (Collard-Spratt & Ferro 2017) is the story of Rhonda's search for culture and family as she faces sexual and physical violence, racism, foster families, and her father's death in custody. The memoir maintains Rhonda's point of view by incorporating Rhonda's verbal storytelling and poetry, and adapts original documents gathered through FOI (Freedom of Information), including correspondence between the government and Alice Spratt (Rhonda's mother), police reports relating to Rhonda's violent encounter with the Western Australian police force's Tactical Response Group, court documents, a national enquiry report into her father's death in custody in 1983, media articles, and interviews with other witnesses. The result is an engaging, accessible narrative, supported by significant research, photographs, and official records. Endnotes and a glossary of Aboriginal language and Australian-English terms further inform the reader of Australia's recent political interracial history and policies, and provide insight into the language and culture of the world's oldest Indigenous people. The book is particularly topical given the current world-wide 'Black Lives Matter' and 'Me Too' campaigns.

A major theme of *Alice's Daughter* is the phenomenon of 'Connection to Country' (Common Ground n.d.), which is central to Aboriginal people's belief system, identity, and culture. Through Rhonda's vibrant storytelling, artwork and poetry, readers begin to

understand the depth of this connection. The white settlers' belief that Australia was 'Terra Nullius' or 'a land belonging to no one' (Oxford University Press 2010) led to subsequent Protectionist era policies in every Australian State and Territory. These policies placed Aboriginal people on reserves and missions, denied them access to traditional hunting and gathering grounds, and forbade cultural rituals and the speaking of native languages that connected Aboriginal people to their 'Country' (particular tribal area), families and communities.

These policies, together with State-based child removal policies from 1910-1970, saw several generations of Aboriginal children across Australia, particularly those of mixed descent, taken from their parents and placed in white foster homes, reserves, missions, orphanages and hostels. The result was a loss of familial and community ties, and Aboriginal languages and cultural practices (HREOC 1997). Still today, the impacts of these policies on the so-called 'Stolen Generations' include a loss of wellbeing, poor mental health, lack of identity, and an inability to form loving, close relationships.

The co-writing of *Alice's Daughter* involved synthesising the disciplines of visual art, verbal storytelling, poetry, archival research, policy research, interviewing, media articles, etymology, community development, social planning, psychology, and memoir writing.

The Co-writing Journey

Prior to meeting Rhonda Collard-Spratt, Jacki Ferro worked for twenty years in health education and promotion and community development. In 2012, while managing an art mentoring program for Aboriginal people at a local community centre, the two met, and Rhonda shared the story of the time when she was twelve years old and first met her mother Alice, for five minutes. This led to Jacki's agreement to co-write Rhonda's life story.

What began as an exercise in recognising and documenting the extraordinary life of an Aboriginal woman who had been subjected to separation from family, institutionalisation, and dispossession from land, culture and language through a childhood in which she was shown no love, became a close collaboration that led to a process of recovery for Rhonda, and, ultimately, a friendship between Rhonda and Jacki in the true spirit of Reconciliation.

The project grew to involve research that shone a light on the major issues and events that have affected every Aboriginal person in Australia today – namely, police violence, racial discrimination, a disproportionate number of Aboriginal children being placed with white foster families, the National Apology to the Stolen Generations by Prime Minister Rudd in 2008, and the transgenerational trauma of loss and dispossession that Stolen children have passed down to their children.

More than that, through the writing process, Rhonda transformed from a depressed, shy and guarded woman into an increasingly confident and outgoing personality, proud to speak out about injustices against her people. Rhonda found healing and recovery through sharing the stories of her past and, ultimately, she has accepted and thrives in her role as a proud representative of the mission children of the Stolen Generations, officiating at National Sorry Day events, and speaking on national radio and television and in other media in Australia.

Verbal Storytelling

For one day each week, for two-and-a-half years from February 2013, Rhonda shared with Jacki the stories and anecdotes of events from her life. Rhonda's natural storytelling ability is endemic to her culture and personality, and this talent extends to developing characters and bringing both humour and tragedy to scenes with equal vividness. In developing the narrative, Rhonda would tell the stories, while Jacki typed as she talked. Jacki then read back the story aloud, and the pair then adapted each scene to heighten the fun, drama, or gravitas, including inserting relevant dialog. *Alice's Daughter: Lost Mission Child* has readers laughing as Rhonda and her mission sister Susan draw stories in the sand with sticks, and crying as Rhonda relives her vicious and violent gang rape at the age of sixteen.

Poetry

Lost Mother

The land is my lost mother
I yearn to know and see;
I slowly walk timidly into her arms
She caresses and nurtures me.
Her beautiful fragrance and songs wash over me
Giving me fresh dreams,
Filling the emptiness, replacing my worth;
Sadness and pain buried deep in the earth.
She whispers and tells me that here I belong;
Let your spirit be free, let your spirit be strong.
This land is yours as far as the eyes can see;
It flows in your blood right down to the sea.
My spiritual totem she reveals to me
Emotions of peace, feelings of belonging.
Her gentle soft tears drop from the sky;
She is happy for she has found
Her precious lost child (Collard-Spratt 2017: x).

Rhonda has written poetry throughout her life, and her poems express the heart-breaking toll that separation from her mother had on this young child's emotional and mental health. After writing her memoir, the two authors looked to Rhonda's poetry, and inserted selected poems at key points throughout the book where they reflected particular emotions or events.

Rhonda's poetry distils her profound emotions, and enlightens us further about Aboriginal culture and experience. Examples include *Lost Mother*, which expresses Rhonda's deep sadness at growing up separated from her mother (Collard-Spratt & Ferro 2017: x), *The River*, which describes Rhonda's loss of connection to her Country and culture (Collard-Spratt & Ferro 2017: 12), *Lost Child*, a poem about the cruelty of the white missionaries who ruled Rhonda's life from the age of three to sixteen years (Collard-Spratt & Ferro 2017: 44),

Payback, about Rhonda's anger towards police at the injustices against Aboriginal people due to the colour of their skin (Collard-Spratt & Ferro 2017: 98), and *Emotionally Dead*, which exposes the depression that gripped Rhonda for many years as a result of PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) from events during both childhood and adulthood (Collard-Spratt & Ferro 2017: 86).

Incorporating Research

Rhonda had already gathered many official government records about her mother, Alice Spratt, through Freedom of Information. The authors applied for documents relating to Rhonda's own life through FOI of the Department of Child Protection in Western Australia. Surprisingly, many of Rhonda's documents arrived with large sections redacted by government officials, such as details regarding who had admitted Rhonda into care at the mission in 1954, and the address of her parents. In compiling the memoir, the authors selected certain documents to scan, such as the 'Report on Inmate', Rhonda's school report card from 1964 (Collard-Spratt & Ferro 2017: 28), and others to transcribe (due to illegibility), such as a letter from Rhonda's mother Alice Spratt to the government, pleading to buy a green swimsuit with her own money, dated 1950 (Collard-Spratt & Ferro 2017: 2).

Including original historical documents was important, in order to counter claims by certain Australian politicians and other outspoken right-wing Australian personalities who, in recent years, had questioned the existence of the Stolen Generations (Huffadine 2016). The authors wanted to prove, through verified documents, that these events happened to Rhonda and her family, and to highlight the racist language of the times that indicated the institutionalised racism of the Australian government towards Aboriginal people. For example, on page 116, Alice Spratt's 'Application for Australian citizenship' in 1958 is included. Aboriginal people were not considered Australians by birth until a national referendum in 1967. Alice had applied for citizenship so that she could get maternity support payments for her two young sons. The application asks for the 'castes' (ratio of Aboriginality versus white racial background) of herself ('9/16ths') and her parents, father Clarence Spratt ('3/4 caste'), and mother Edna May Belotti ('3/8ths caste'). Alice's initial maternity support application was rejected as the government correspondence indicated that she had 'a preponderance of 1/16 of native blood'. This is an example not only of the racist nature of Australian policies towards Aboriginal people, but it provides an example of when the authors re-phrased this event into Rhonda's own words, so that Aboriginal readers would understand. Rhonda said, "Mum was too black, so she wasn't allowed to receive a maternity allowance unless she became an Australian citizen". In many other instances, key passages from official records were transcribed into wording that reflected how Rhonda speaks, so that the entire book, *Alice's Daughter*, remains consistently written in Rhonda's distinctive voice.

Larger passages where events using government correspondence and documents were re-written into Rhonda's voice include most of *Chapter 9 The brolga and other stories from mother* (Collard-Spratt & Ferro 2017: 100-108), and large sections of *Chapter 7 Death in custody* (Collard-Spratt & Ferro 2017: 77-87). Chapter 9 opens with Rhonda explaining that her mother, Alice Spratt, came to stay with her for three months in 1993. This setting enabled

the authors to incorporate stories from Alice's childhood, including growing up on Moore River Native Settlement made famous by *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* (Pilkington Garimara 1996). Government memos and correspondence provided much information around the lives of both Alice Spratt and her father (Rhonda's maternal grandfather) Clarence Spratt. Alice's childhood was even more harsh than her daughter Rhonda's childhood, as Moore River was run by government officials, not missionaries, and punishments were regular and inhumane. Alice had a strong spirit and, as a child, she escaped more than once from the reserve, but was always caught by police and returned. An example of how the authors adapted correspondence relates to the period, after being recaptured, when fourteen-year-old Alice was sent to work as a house servant for white property owners:

> Mother worked as a domestic servant at the 'Coolart' property in Walebing. She told me how the Mistress made her wear shoes to serve morning and afternoon teas. Mother had never worn shoes in her life. She tripped and fell, breaking cups and saucers and even their precious crystal.
>
> "Breakages seemed to be the order of the day", wrote the white lady in her complaint letter.
>
> Mother felt continuously growled at, and eventually she ran away. She reported in to the Moora police who took her to the Native Girls' Home in Perth.
>
> Two weeks later, in September 1949, Mother was sent by train to 'Yarrabubba Station' in Meekatharra to again work as a domestic. This job didn't work out either. Six months later, Mother was put back on a train for Perth.
>
> Maybe she got the sack because her boss didn't want to increase her wage as it was up for review by the Commission of Native Affairs. But her boss man wrote, "She is very tired in her work, and doesn't take any interest at all. On top of this she seems too fond of hanging around the men working here, and I don't feel like taking the responsibility of her".
>
> Mother never arrived. Although placed on the train, she failed to report in at the girls' home. She had taken off yet again. A hand-written note on the authorities' memo stated that the train fare would now be 'chargeable' to Alice Spratt herself.
>
> The police eventually caught up with Mother in Geraldton. She was controlled by the 1936 Native Administration Act (WA). This Act meant that the Chief Protector of Aborigines controlled Aboriginal 'children' up to the age of 21. Mother was breaking the white law by being on the run. She told them her next move was most likely to Carnarvon (Collard-Spratt & Ferro 2017: 104).

In the above passage, police memos, historical correspondence, and government policies combine with Rhonda's interviews to ensure that, while the facts of when, where

and with whom Alice travelled and worked are accurate, the historical material is worded in Rhonda's voice, as she would say it. For example, "Mother felt continuously growled at".

Chapter 7 *Death in Custody* recounts the circumstances around the suspicious death of Rhonda's father Ronald Mack Ugle in Broome prison in 1983. Ronald's death was a case investigated in 1990 by the National Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Commonwealth of Australia 1990). Rhonda could not bring herself to read the reports about her father's death, so Jacki read them and wrote up a summary of the major points. By this time in the co-writing process, Jacki understood how Rhonda spoke, and so Jacki was able to write this chapter from Rhonda's point of view. The authors interviewed Ronald's prison cellmate on the day of his death, Laurie Tittum, who happened to also be a close childhood friend or 'mission brother' of Rhonda's. Laurie's recollection of the events of the day Ronald died clarified the suspicion that prison officers had not done everything possible to save Ronald's life.

> Seven years after his passing, an inquiry was held into my father's death. His case was part of the 1990 National Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The national inquiry was held because a high number of Aboriginal deaths in custody had occurred in WA in the 80s (Beresford 2006). Although the inquiry eventually found that his death was due to a heart attack, according to the submission, my father's death "was caused or contributed to by injuries suffered while in prison".
> The report from the inquest found that several days before his death, my father asked authorities if he could go to his brother's funeral. Permission was refused. A fellow prisoner, my mission brother Laurie Tittum, gave evidence that my father was unusually quiet and unhappy in the following days. Denied the emotional release of grieving, my father died on the day of his brother's funeral. Maybe, in part, he died from a broken heart, unable to say his final goodbyes (Collard-Spratt & Ferro 2017: 82).

Similarly, in *Chapter 1 A black girl in a white world* and *Chapter 10 Sorry business*, Jacki incorporated passages from both the report from the Commonwealth Government National Enquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, the *Bringing Them Home Report* (HREOC 1995), also known as the 'Stolen Children's Report', and the landmark speech of National Apology to the Stolen Generations by former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (Rudd 2008), which Rhonda attended in Canberra.

Despite multiple sources of information, *Alice's Daughter* is written in simple and distinctly Aboriginal-Australian language, ensuring its accessibility to Aboriginal readers, from the viewpoint of the subject, Rhonda Spratt. Readers follow little Rhonda's antics with her group of friends, reliving the cruel discipline they encountered, the constant labour of chores, including gathering wood, ironing, preparing meals, and polishing wooden floors, and the incessant practice of Christian worship, while the children's own Aboriginal culture, spirituality, and languages were forcibly prohibited.

A Credible Teaching Resource

Alice's Daughter touches on many of the major issues relating to Aboriginal Australian

history since white settlement – the Stolen Generations, Aboriginal deaths in custody, police violence against Aboriginal people, physical and sexual violence against Aboriginal people, institutional and casual racism in Australia, and the National Apology to the Stolen Generations. Importantly too, the memoir presents ideas around how healing is possible for Aboriginal people, and how social change could lead to greater self-determination for Aboriginal people, and Reconciliation between white and black Australia.

All policies relating to Australian-Indigenous relations are explained and referenced in both the text and endnotes of *Alice's Daughter*. A glossary of Aboriginal language and Australian-English terms at the end of the book provides another teaching tool of interest to those studying Indigenous cultures and languages.

Fig. 2. Rhonda's "mission sisters" collect firewood for Carnarvon Native Mission. Rhonda stands atop the pile in the pink shirt, circa 1963 (Collard-Spratt & Ferro 2017).

Photographs from Rhonda's childhood in the mission support Rhonda's claims, and will interest readers. Fortuitously, in 1990, Churches of Christ Australia had produced a book in which they published many photos of Rhonda and her mission brothers and sisters at Carnarvon Native Mission (Sewell 1990). Churches of Christ gave the authors permission to re-print these photos in *Alice's Daughter*.

Rhonda's original artwork also attracts readers' attention as it epitomises traditional Aboriginal painting styles and captures memories of events depicted in the story, such as *Rainbow Snake Dancer* (Collard-Spratt & Ferro: 80), which Rhonda painted from memories of her first corroboree when she was aged sixteen.

Fig. 3 Rainbow Snake Dancer by Rhonda Collard-Spratt (Collard-Spratt & Ferro 2017).

Finally, *Alice's Daughter* provides insight into the mind and heart of an Aboriginal Elder who regained her connection to culture, language and Country after surviving being stolen and living through police and other violence and her father's death in custody. This perspective and historical account is a great teaching tool for all those working in Indigenous communities today across the political, legal, police, foster care, health care, community service, and social planning sectors.

A Tool for Reconciliation

Alice's Daughter has become a representative voice of Australia's first nations people who have maintained their connection to culture and country despite dispossession, separation, and institutionalisation. Although the book recounts many traumatic events, the theme of healing gives readers hope, and the writing process and subsequent promotion of this book in communities by the two authors together is a living example of the essence of Reconciliation. Rhonda wanted to write her story in order to speak for those who have not found their own voices. Many Aboriginal readers have commented on the authenticity of these events, and have agreed with the psychological fallout that their loveless upbringing has had on their mental health, resulting in their inability to sustain intimate family relationships throughout their lives, and their susceptibility to addiction to alcohol and drugs. Co-author Jacki Ferro pressed Rhonda to explain further how these issues have affected her and her "mission family" today, and to share Rhonda's ideas about how the lives of Aboriginal people in Australia could be improved. In *Chapter 12 Through Yamatji Eyes*, the theme of societal change is highlighted when Rhonda visits Uganda with a choir of Australian singers:

> Everywhere they looked, Ugandans could see their own image – in the streets, on posters and billboards, people working in the banks and shops, people the same as them, same skin, same hair. This would give them a feeling of oneness, of not being different, and of thinking they could grow up to fully participate in and lead their communities, and make something of their lives. It would give them a strong sense of belonging, knowing this is their place. To me, this isn't nothing. To me, this is everything and so much more (Collard-Spratt & Ferro 2017: 139).

Rhonda's perspective provides ideas for social planners and policy makers wanting to improve self-determination among Indigenous populations after colonisation.

Is *Alice's Daughter* Translated into Italian or Other Languages?

Published in English in 2017 by Aboriginal Studies Press (AIATSIS), the authors have successfully and gratefully found translators who have translated the front material of *Alice's Daughter: Lost Mission Child* into both German and Italian (in those respective countries). Academics in Spain have translated the entire text into Catalan, and are currently translating it into Spanish and, with the help of a translator in France, are translating the entire text into French. Despite this, the authors are still seeking a European publisher interested in taking on the project for distribution throughout Europe and other non-English speaking markets world-wide.

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Patrick Early

Dystopia

A fog-ridden island where all the contours are blurred,
with shaky ground beneath your feet.

The only road leads nowhere.
Those flowers on the shrubs are question marks.

That's a Faulty Hypothesis tree,
branches permanently tangled.

The twisted tree of Misunderstanding
points to a stream called Ah So That's How It Is.

As you press deeper into the wood,
Brambles of Obscurity close in.

No wind. The doubt is stifling.

Your voice has no echo
while unsolved mysteries crowd in.

To the right, there's a cave where Nonsense lounges.
To the left, a lake of Deep Confusion.

Something stirs in its depths but,
rising gaily to the surface,
are lies.

Ignorance reigns over the valley,
spreading illusion from its head.

Despite these attractions, the island is much frequented
and the tiny footprints seen along the shore
all point to the interior.

As though people came here to get away from something
and inevitably were lost.
In life, such things happen.

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Flannery O'Connor and Elizabeth Bishop Admired Each Other's Work and Had Never Actually Met. They Talked on the Telephone.

A very nice thing happened last night.
Elizabeth Bishop called me up from Savannah.
She was on a freighter going to Brazil
so she couldn't visit.
The only picture I have seen of E. Bishop
is of a very pretty mature brunette
sitting on an open porch in a rocking chair.
Robert says he has one of her standing
next to a naked Indian woman and the caption says:
"One of the rare photographs of the poet, Miss Bishop".
Lourdes was not as bad as I expected.
Somebody in Paris told me the miracle at Lourdes
is that there are no epidemics.
We went to Europe and I lived through it
but my capacity for staying at home
has now been perfected, sealed
and will last me for the rest of my life.
Elizabeth has sent me a present.
It is an altar with Bible, chalice
and two fat candles in it
a cross above this with a ladder
and the instruments of the crucifixion
hung on it and on the top of the cross a rooster.
It's all wood except the altar cloth
and the rooster and these are of paper
very much to my taste...
It's not a crucifix at all – she just don't know what a crucifix is.

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Alessia Tamer

Another Kind of Death

When I wake up in the morning it feels like I have left a part of me in the oneiric landscape that still lingers in the back of my head: flashes of sensations, twirling colours, otherworldly melodies sooth my racing, anxiety-scarred mind. That was nothing, I always tell myself, just a dream, surely. Coffee is lulling me into the first stages of the day as the muffled sound of traffic filters through the dusted glass of my kitchen window; a persistent cacophony of honks and irritated half-censored obscenities accompanies me as I brush my teeth and pick the necessities for the day.

The street is crowded with people coming and going; little children holding their parents' hands, asking for that thing or the other, business women clutching their briefcase, men in full pinstripe suit nervously looking at their watches, everyone has the same expression, that is, that of the one who believes the world is committing a heinous crime not waiting for them, not cherishing for their invaluable time. I walk amongst them, pacing leisurely, looking up at the sky, breathing deeply and savouring the moment: the crisp late-autumn air is filling my lungs, a hint of acrid exhaust gas reaches my nostrils, as the space filled with cars is right next to me, and what can only be petrichor permeates the atmosphere.

The Hospital is only a few blocks away, but I take my sweet time examining the texture of the walls, caressing the leaves of those seemingly never-ending hedges; my fingers dance softly over the cold, roughly cut metal of a fence. My eyes follow the fingers down where more skin stings due to the cold air and my mind screeches to a full stop. What are these called? I am sure I know their name. How can I forget such a common word? The cold is stronger now; I try and protect myself from it clutching the… soft wool around my neck and speed up a little. Every wish to procrastinate gone with that word.

The next thing I notice is I'm frantically repeating words in my brain as if it was a poem, a desperate doggerel without an order, a sense, and my chest is tightening uncomfortably. Why was I going to… to the white building with the nurses again? Was I sick? Step after step, I begin feeling light-headed, almost nauseous, as I unsteadily put one… shoe after the other. It feels like my brain has a hole, somewhere, and words are running away, fast, fast, faster. What is happening?

I reach the place. It is nice. Doctor said it's ok. Just words. A little. Some of them. I'll be fine. What do I need words for after all?

I go back home. The street is full of people. The air is cold. It's not far, I'll be there soon. I still feel like something is missing.

Something important.

But what are words for?

Important.

Maybe?

I sleep. I dream.
I wake. Something's missing.
Words.

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Giovanni Verdoliva

This Thing of Darkness I (Now) Acknowledge Mine

I was maybe three or four years old when a woman asked my mother if I were adopted. The reason behind her surprise was that I spoke Italian to my cousins, who were intimidated by my articulate and exclusive way of speaking, which my aunts considered so snobbish.

My mother speaks mostly Neapolitan, my father both Italian and Neapolitan. However, they both shared the same high expectations for my sister and me. The first step was the key for the future, namely the Italian language, a necessity which became more and more urgent after our moving from Campania to Friuli-Venezia Giulia in 2003. They did not want us to speak our own "indigenous" language, for Neapolitan seemed to them a harsh tongue of delinquency, the initial step toward criminality. Hence our parents would speak to us in Neapolitan, and we would reply in Italian. They did not tell us – they did not know – that the Italian language would open the doors before us, closing those behind us. The fact that knowing Italian was, for my parents, a significant hope, unconsciously devalued my perception of Neapolitan, the medium they used themselves. Years later, because of work, I felt, from a practical point of view, the necessity of understanding Venetian, the language all my colleagues would use among themselves. However, I have never felt the urge to learn Friulian, as much as I have never needed Neapolitan: Italian was more than sufficient. Without acknowledging it, I thought that I had to be aware of my own indigenous language. That ferocious and rough tongue appeared to me as a sinister creature whose intention was that of devouring my future – and I accepted the idea. I was an evanescent speaker with an exclusively passive competence of a language which seemed to be as dangerous as inappropriate.

Then Elena Ferrante's books came my way, and so did maturity. To mature consisted in doubting anything which, growing up, I had accepted without asking. Neapolitan changed its face, and so did my perception of it. As I ventured into that precious reading, I saw the protagonists of the Neapolitan novels confronting several issues, some of which I personally knew, and I started to see my own "indigenous" language as a rich, dense and visceral medium. No legislation safeguards Neapolitan, and, in a way, there is no necessity for a law: Campania's significant numbers of speakers – who are most often almost exclusively monolingual, as my mother is – support and protect the language.

Only through education I have learnt that languages are not only externally endowed with culture and heritage, but also an inner instrument through which one can remember and recover one's roots. I have hence recognised the intensity of the Neapolitan language, its rage, its fury and notoriety; but I have also learnt to see its innate melodrama, its tenderness, its humour and its depth – which convinced me to gain possession of my own legacy, one word at a time.

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Gillian Dooley

"The Origins of Speech Lie in Song": Music as Language in Coetzee's *Age of Iron*

Abstract I: In *Vergogna*, David Lurie trova irragionevole l'affermazione secondo cui "la società umana ha creato il linguaggio per comunicare pensieri, sentimenti e intenzioni", credendo, privatamente e al contrario, che "le origini della parola risiedano nel canto" (Coetzee 2000: 3-4). Nel mio libro del 2010 *J. M. Coetzee and the Power of Narrative*, ho incluso una breve disamina di riferimenti musicali come forma di linguaggio nel lavoro di Coetzee. In questo articolo esaminerò i miei presupposti in modo approfondito, rintracciando risonanze musicali in *Età di ferro*, sia nella prosa che nella forma e struttura del romanzo. Cercherò di dimostrare che nonostante sia noto per la sobrietà dello stile, Coetzee è in realtà uno scrittore lirico e appassionato, attento ai ritmi e alle strutture musicali che sono elementi essenziali per il suo lavoro.

Abstract II: In *Disgrace*, David Lurie finds preposterous the proposition that "Human society has created language in order that we may communicate our thoughts, feelings and intentions to each other", privately believing that, on the contrary, "the origins of speech lie in song" (Coetzee 2000: 3-4). In my 2010 book *J. M. Coetzee and the Power of Narrative*, I included a brief survey of references to music as a type of language in Coetzee's work. In this paper I will examine my claim in greater depth, seeking musical resonances in his novel *Age of Iron*, both in his prose and in the form and structure of the novel. I will attempt to account for my impression that despite his reputation for spare, academic prose, Coetzee is a lyrical and impassioned writer, and that musical rhythms and structures are an essential element in his work.

Keywords: J. M. Coetzee, *Age of Iron*, music in literature.

I begin with David Lurie's unspoken belief that "the origins of speech lie in song, and the origins of song in the need to fill out with sound the overlarge and rather empty human soul" (Coetzee 2000: 3-4). The temptation might be, perhaps, to proceed with an examination and elaboration of this idea in *Disgrace*, with the opera David Lurie struggles to write on his daughter's farm, as "he is held in the music itself, in the flat, tinny slap of the banjo strings, the voice that strains to soar away from the ludicrous instrument but is continually reined back, like a fish on a line" (Coetzee 2000: 184): the music a symbol of the human soul trapped

in the toils of life, of the doubts and difficulty of the specific life of this specific character in his time and place.

But no, I am pulled back to the earlier South African novel *Age of Iron*, and another soul even more tortured than David Lurie who needs to learn not so much how to live in her time and place, as how to die in it. Although in July 1990 Coetzee said of *Age of Iron*, "I am still too near its writing – too near and too raw – to know what to think of it", he allowed himself to comment that

> Elizabeth Curren brings to bear against the voices of history and historical judgment that resound around her two kinds of authority: the authority of the dying and the authority of the classics. Both these authorities are denied and even derided in her world: the first because hers is a private death, the second because it speaks from long ago and far away (Coetzee 1992: 250).

For much of the novel, this denial of Mrs Curren's authority means that she speaks without being answered. The novel itself is a letter addressed to an absent other who may never read it. Nevertheless, it is possible to read Coetzee's work as a kind of polyphony[1]. And indeed, in *Doubling the Point* he writes that

> there is a true sense in which writing is dialogic: a matter of awakening the countervoices in oneself and embarking upon speech with them. It is some measure of a writer's seriousness whether he does evoke/invoke those countervoices in himself, that is, step down from the position of what Lacan calls "the subject supposed to know" (Coetzee 1992: 65).

Carrol Clarkson glosses the Bakhtinian implications of this passage: "A serious author, playing up this dialogic potential of writing, instead of trying to suppress it, raises a countervoice, producing a discourse inflected by an invisible interlocutor" (Clarkson 2009: 8). So rather than being a monologue – like a melody alone, perhaps supported by simple harmonies, strummed on a guitar, say – this kind of writing requires or assumes separate but interdependent equal voices engaging together in a discussion – as in polyphony or counterpoint. Clarkson does not make the musical connection explicit, but she does say that "Coetzee pulls out all the literary stops to switch the terms of the conversation" (Clarkson 2009: 104), and "in so doing, Coetzee plays up the countervoices" (Clarkson 2009: 105).

"Countervoice" is itself not a musical term. The musical term is "counterpoint", defined succinctly in the Penguin *New Dictionary of Music* as "the simultaneous combination of two or more melodies to make musical sense" (Jacobs 1958: 86). The musical implications of the word "voice", apart from the obvious, are explained in the entry for "counterpoint" in the *Oxford Companion to Music*: "The term 'voice-part' in the definition is intended to include instrumental strands as well as choral, the word 'voice' being commonly used by musicians

[1] Brian Macaskill has discussed the contrapuntal character of narrative in Coetzee and Bakhtin extensively in several essays, including his "Fugal Musemathematics" triptych in *Word and Text* 2014-2015.

in this comprehensive sense" (Scholes 1970: 260). For a musician, reading about "voices" being "played up", not to mention "pulling out all the stops", inevitably makes one think of counterpoint on the organ, and the master of contrapuntal organ music, Johann Sebastian Bach.

In "What is a Classic?", Coetzee interrogates his youthful memory of hearing Bach for the first time, drifting on the South African summer air from a neighbour's record player to the 15-year-old "mooning around our back garden", transfixing him. What he heard that day in 1955 was, he confidently states, "Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* played on the harpsichord" (Coetzee 2001: 8). The *Well-Tempered Clavier* is perhaps the most famous of Bach's works for solo "klavier" – a generic term for a stringed keyboard instrument (as opposed to the organ, which is a wind instrument). It consists of two sets of 24 preludes and fugues, each containing a prelude and fugue in each key of the chromatic scale, major and minor, from C major to B minor. The word "prelude" took on independent life with Chopin in the nineteenth century, but in Bach's days it merely meant something to be played before something else, and was often improvised: it did not imply any particular form – it could be fast or slow, in common, triple or compound time. In this case, of course, the something else a prelude preceded was a fugue, the apotheosis of counterpoint. However, counterpoint is present in almost all Bach's works.

Mrs Curren is a classicist. Her sensibility is anchored in the ancient civilisations of Greece and Rome. But her classicism encompasses "classical" music too. Early in the novel, she sits at her piano and plays "the old pieces: preludes from the Well-Tempered Clavier, Chopin preludes, Brahms waltzes" (Coetzee 1990: 23) – the standard fare of an amateur pianist, the sort of thing I also play when the mood comes upon me. "Then at last I went back to Bach, and played clumsily, over and over again, the first fugue from Book One" (Coetzee 1990: 23). She is challenging herself: we amateur pianists of a certain age can manage many of the preludes, but the fugues are a different matter. Edward Said talks about the difficulties Bach presents to the amateur keyboard player:

> The technical problems he presents derive mainly from a contrapuntal style in which every voice (every finger) must be independent, so that what one hears is not a melody and simple accompaniment but a flowing, constantly transformed texture comprising two, three, four, five or six voices, each of them imitating the others with minute differences in rhythm, inflection, melodic variation. Most players end up by struggling through this, with the result that Bach's amazing harmonic audacity, ingenious rhythmical flexibility and constant melodic inventiveness (many performers can scarcely manage two voices, whereas Bach requires the capacity to play several strands simultaneously, each with complex clarity) are ignored (Said 2007: 251).

Mrs Curren makes music despite her difficulties – "the sound was muddy, the lines blurred, but every now and again, for a few bars, the real thing emerged, the real music, the music that does not die, confident, serene" (Coetzee 1990: 24). The confidence and serenity of Bach seems bound up with her ability to face death, and her capacity to imagine physical union with the homeless man, Vercueil:

> I made tea, put on a record. Bar by bar the Goldberg Variations erected themselves in the air. I crossed to the window. It was nearly dark. Against the garage wall the man was squatting, smoking, the point of his cigarette glowing. Perhaps he saw me, perhaps not. Together we listened.
> At this moment, I thought, I know how he feels as surely as if he and I were making love.
> Though it came unbidden, though it filled me with distaste, I considered the thought without flinching (Coetzee 1990: 30).

Just a few pages earlier, she had written: "My existence from day to day has become a matter of averting my eyes, of cringeing. Death is the only truth left. Death is what I cannot bear to think. At every moment when I am thinking of something else, I am not thinking death, am not thinking the truth" (Coetzee 1990: 26). And at the end of the novel, she dies in Vercueil's embrace, from which "there was no warmth to be had" (Coetzee 1990: 196). Thus the music of Bach has accompanied, if not facilitated or occasioned, a change in Mrs Curren, from cringeing at the thought of the inevitable approach of her death, to facing without flinching a thought which fills her with distaste, which she may not yet associate with death but which the reader will learn to. Coetzee writes of Bach, in "What is a Classic?"

> In Bach nothing is obscure, no single step so miraculous as to surpass imitation. Yet when the chain of sounds is realized in time, the building process ceases at a certain moment to be the mere linking of units; the units cohere as a higher-order object that I can only describe by analogy as the incarnation of ideas of exposition, complication, and resolution that are more general than music (Coetzee 2001: 9).

Is this not, in turn, analogous to the progress we witness in this first part of *Age of Iron*? Exposition: Mrs Curren receives the diagnosis of terminal cancer and on the same day Vercueil appears in her backyard. Complication: struggling with the news, she plays Bach on the piano, and Vercueil listens. She begins to think of Heaven, absurdly, as a hotel lobby: a place of comfort and no pain where Bach's "Art of Fugue" is piped through the public address system. She talks of "cringeing", evading the truth by not thinking of death. She plays Bach again, this time on the record player. Resolution: she sees Vercueil listening too and imagines making love with him, at first with distaste, but then with more acceptance: "Two souls, his and mine, twined together, ravished. […] Stillness and ecstasy" (Coetzee 1990: 30). This acceptance foreshadows her willingness at the end of the book, at the end of her life, to face Vercueil in the embrace of death.

The two souls twined together while listening to the Goldberg Variations anticipates the moment when Vercueil first responds to her verbally, waiting with her in the hospital carpark while Florence and her son Bheki search the hospital for his friend. "He was learning to talk to me. He was learning to lead me on. I felt an urge to interrupt: 'It is such a pleasure!' I wanted to say. After long silence it is such a pleasure" (Coetzee 1990: 76). She can speak the truth to Vercueil, even if his response is often vague, sketchy or deliberately uncommunicative: "Early on he decided he could get away with choosing which of my questions to hear, which

not to hear" (Coetzee 1990: 187). At last she has a real countervoice, rather than the absent daughter she has to call up in her imagination with impassioned appeals and rhetorical questions, or occasionally on the telephone with "love but not truth" (Coetzee 1990: 129). Perhaps there is an analogy here between Bach's works for solo instruments – the cello suites are the most famous examples, but as I write I am listening to a sonata for solo flute (BWV 1013) which, although it is a single line, has all the complexity of a contrapuntal work: other voices are implied: the ear supplies the harmonising countervoices – and his two-part inventions, where the two parts are present, although the work is on smaller and simpler scale.

In the immediate aftermath of writing *Age of Iron* Coetzee said to David Attwell, "I think of my own prose as rather hard and dry; but there remains in me a tug toward sensual elaboration – toward the late-Romantic symphony and away from the two-part invention, say" (Coetzee 1992: 208).

Bach's two-part inventions are simple counterpoint for keyboard, written as teaching pieces for perhaps not beginners, but elementary students. His use of the term "*inventione*" is not drawn from musical language: it is a reference to rhetoric:

> Traditionally, this concept of "invention" denoted an important stage in composition; it originated from […] Cicero's rhetoric, which was still widely studied in the 18th-century Germany. In his *De Inventione*, Cicero listed five stages in creating an oration, namely invention (*inventio*), arrangement (*dispositio*), style (*elocutio*), memory (*memoria*) and delivery (*pronuntiatio*). He explains, "one must first hit upon what to say; then manage and marshal his discoveries, not merely in orderly fashion, but with a discriminating eye for the exact weight, as it were, of each argument; next go on to array them in the adornments of style; after that keep them guarded in his memory; and in the end deliver them with effect and charm" (Tomita 1999).

In choosing Bach's music for elementary students as one axis on a continuum with the late-Romantic symphony at the other end, Coetzee allows for a huge range and diversity of music. They are almost as different as music can be. The inventions can be played by one inexpert pianist: the late-Romantic symphony – those of Mahler would be the prime examples – needs the largest possible orchestral forces, with an expert conductor and players of the highest technical expertise, and often virtuoso singers as well.

Along that spectrum, although towards the complex end, lie Bach's choral works, including the cantatas and the two Passions. Mrs Curren's love of Bach does not stop with the works for solo keyboard – the preludes and fugues, the Goldberg Variations, the Art of Fugue. As she approaches the settlement at Guguletu, which is being destroyed by violence and fire, she hears a noise "which at first might have been taken for wind and rain" but which "began to break up into shouts, cries, calls, over a *ground bass* that I can only call a sigh: a deep sigh, repeated over and over, as if the wide world itself were sighing" (Coetzee 1990: 94; my emphasis). This musical allusion most vividly evokes the opening chorus of Bach's St Matthew Passion. Although it is not strictly speaking a ground bass – a bass part consisting of a phrase repeated many times, similar in many ways to the riff in a rock song

– it has a sighing, tragic pulse in the orchestra that accompanies the divided choir, one half calling to the other in antiphonal countervoices: "Sehet! Wen? […] Seht ihn! Wie? […] Sehet! Was? […] Seht? Wohin?" This famous chorus is as moving as any Mahler symphony, and hardly less complex, with eight orchestral and nine choral parts.

Later in her journey towards death Mrs Curren writes, to her absent daughter, of what will be left when she goes:

> Never fear, I will not haunt you. […] It is not my soul that will remain with you but the spirit of my soul, the breath, the stirring of the air about these words, the faintest of turbulence traced in the air by the ghostly passage of my pen over the paper your fingers now hold (Coetzee 1990: 129-130).

Turbulence in the air could be caused equally by the voice, singing or speaking, or an instrument being sounded. And indeed, in the next paragraph:

> Letting go of myself, letting go of you […]: a hard task, but I am learning. The music too. But the music I will take with me, that at least, for it is wound into my soul. The ariosos from the Matthew Passion, wound in and knotted a thousand times, so that no one, nothing can undo them (Coetzee 1990: 130).

Bach's sacred vocal music, the Passions and the cantatas, are perhaps the most complex, moving and dramatic music ever written about death. The "ariosos" – the arias – in the St Matthew Passion are not based on biblical texts like much of the narrative recitative, but are settings of original German texts by Picander. They contemplate the death of Christ and the death of the singer: "Mache dich, mein Herze, rein; ich will Jesum selbst begraben", sings the Bass in part Two. This attention inward is found in many of Bach's sacred arias:

> This contemplation of, and preparation for, death was peculiar to Lutheran Germany and had its roots in the Reformation. […] Central to Luther's reforms was his belief that the fate of the soul was determined at death. […] For Lutherans such as the Bachs, the fate of the soul was the responsibility of the living individual, nurtured by the family and the church; at death the destiny of the soul was determined irrevocably. The *ars moriendi* became an essential task of an everyday life shadowed by mortality (Yearsley 2005: 238-239).

Mrs Curren's *ars moriendi* – art of dying – is also her essential task, though for her it is not a simple theological question. She longs to be saved: "I do not want to die in the state I am in, in a state of ugliness. I want to be saved. How shall I be saved?" (Coetzee 1990: 136). The Bach aria, in the most sublime and comforting rhetoric, answers, "Welt, geh aus! Lass Jesum ein!" Mrs Curren writes, "Why do I not call for help, call to God? Because God cannot help me. God is looking for me but he cannot reach me. God is another dog in another maze" (Coetzee 1990: 137-138). William Purcell suggests that "*Age of Iron* should […] be read as an account of Christian salvation in which a lost soul, Mrs Curren, is saved by learning to love

the unloved and unlovable" (Purcell 2013: 1). There is no doubt that Christian rhetoric is continually called up in the novel, although it is accompanied by a heavy freight of allusions to other ancient and classical cultures[2]. However, I think it is possible that much of the Christian rhetoric we find in Mrs Curren's account is mediated through the Lutheran ethic of Bach's sacred music: the attention is turned inward to the individual soul, to readying oneself for death. She is not uncritical of this tendency, however: "The country smolders, yet with the best will in the world I can only half-attend. My true attention is all inward, upon the thing, the word, the word for the thing inching through my body" (Coetzee 1990: 39).

⁂

> The sheer inventiveness and prodigious intelligence at work in every phrase of a highly complex and intellectual style that is capable nevertheless of pathos, drama, exuberance and other forms of considerable expressivity (Said 2007: 250).

In the early 1990s, at the time when he had just written *Age of Iron*, Coetzee said that he thought of his prose as "hard and dry" (Coetzee 1992: 208). The description I have just quoted – actually Edward Said's assessment of Bach's style – seems to be just as apt for the virtuosity of much of Coetzee's prose. Consider Mrs Curren's description of Bheki's friend John:

> I did not like him. I do not like him. I look into my heart and nowhere do I find any trace of feeling for him. As there are people to whom one spontaneously warms, so there are people to whom one is, from the first, cold. […] A simplified person, simplified in every way: swifter, nimbler, more tireless than real people, without doubts, without humor, ruthless, innocent. […]
> I remember a cat I once nursed, an old ginger tom whose jaw was locked shut by an abscess. […] Around this boy I now felt the same wall of resistance. Though his eyes were open, he did not see; what I said he did not hear (Coetzee 1990: 78-79).

Even truncated like this, it is possible to see the way Coetzee links ideas across paragraphs, using repetition and holding ideas across time, like a keyboard player holding countervoices in the fingers. Elsewhere there are homonyms, assonances, half rhymes, echoing musical sequences and motifs; and always the musical rhythm of his prose invites reading aloud.

Mrs Curren is finally moved to pity when the boy John is taking refuge in her servant's room awaiting his martyrdom. "Poor child! Poor child! From somewhere tears sprang and blurred my sight". The police arrive. She cries "Wait […] wait […] wait […] he is just a child!" (Coetzee 1990: 151-152). She tells them she has cancer: "*Cancer!* What a pleasure to fling the word at them!" (Coetzee 1990: 155). Rousseau writes, "In order to move a young heart, to

[2] See my article "Hades this place, and I a fugitive shade": Classical Languages and Cultures in J. M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron"* for a discussion of the interplay of Christian with other cultural references in this novel.

repulse an unjust aggressor, nature dictates accents, cries, complaints" (Rousseau 2000: 294). Cries and complaints are her only recourse against the obduracy of the young warrior and the implacable power of the police. The orchestration of these few pages, with Mrs Curren's desperate cries and complaints ringing out above the unmoved, four-square efficiency of the police – "all in a day's work" (Coetzee 1990: 154) – is like a musical lament sung against a ground bass. A lament will not change the singer's plight, but she bears witness by voicing her complaint in repeated, anguished cries. "I am watching you", Mrs Curren says. "I am watching everything you do" (Coetzee 1990: 153). Her powerlessness in this situation is her only power, and although she can neither move John's heart nor repulse the police her voice rings out from the pages of Coetzee's novel.

"Nature dictates accents, cries, complaints", Rousseau says: "The most ancient words are invented in this way, and this is why the first languages were tuneful and passionate before being simple and methodical" (Rousseau 2000: 294). Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages* might have been the source for the contrarian David Lurie's opinion that "the origins of speech lie in song"[3]. It may be perverse to take this belief of a character like Lurie, many of whose other opinions are clearly at odds with those of *Disgrace*'s implied author, as some kind of manifesto from Coetzee himself. Nevertheless, I believe that one of the clues to Coetzee's enduring popularity is the musical quality of his prose which sings itself from the page directly into the reader's mind and soul.

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Depression on a Screen. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in the Light of Cognitive Theories of Depression

Abstract I: Questo articolo analizza "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" alla luce di alcuni studi dello psichiatra americano A. T. Beck, in particolare le teorie cognitive e i criteri diagnostici da lui elaborati per interpretare e analizzare sintomi e livelli della depressione. Dallo studio è emerso che molti dei sintomi presenti nell'*Inventory for Measuring Depression* (sedici su ventuno) sono rinvenibili – a diversi livelli di significato e significante – sia nella struttura poetica che nel tessuto figurativo dell'opera, mentre aspetti specifici della *Cognitive Therapy of Depression* (in particolare ciò che Beck definisce "Faulty Information Processing" e due dei punti cruciali di questo processo cognitivo, vale a dire la "Selective abstraction" e la "Arbitrary inference") sono individuabili in alcune delle più importanti isotopie figurative del poema.

Abstract II: This article analyses "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in the light of the American psychiatrist A. T. Beck's diagnostic criteria and cognitive theories for interpreting and evaluating symptoms and levels of depression. This study aims to show that many symptoms listed in Beck's *Inventory for Measuring Depression* (sixteen out of twenty-one) are recognizable – at different levels of signifier and signified – in both the poetical structure and the imagery of the poem, whereas specific aspects included in *Cognitive Therapy of Depression* (for instance, the cognitive process defined by Beck as "Faulty Information Processing" and two crucial points of this process, "Selective abstraction" and "Arbitrary inference") are identifiable in some of the most relevant figurative isotopies of the poem.

Keywords: Prufrock, Beck, Modernism, psychology, depression.

Since the ancient Greeks, the nature of creative genius has been a subject of interest for speculative curiosity. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates maintains that the supreme poet is invariably one who creates his verses under the inspiration of the Muse, and the state of mind into which he falls is comparable to madness:

> If a man comes to the door of poetry untouched by the madness of the Muses, believing that technique alone will make him a good poet, he and his sane compositions never

> reach perfection, but are utterly eclipsed by the performances of the inspired madman (Plato trans. 1973: 48).

Over the centuries, the assumption of a close connection between creativity and mental imbalance has become increasingly sophisticated with the development of psychology as a distinct field of study, leading to notable present-day research which tries to shed more and more light on any possible connection between geniality and specific psychological or even psychiatric disorders[1].

It was during the years in which Freudianism was progressively widespread that many writers themselves started to become aware of a definite connection between their creative impulse and some kind of psychological distress. This is demonstrated by the fact that they refused to undergo psychoanalytic treatment or to complete it if they were engaged in composing a literary work. In this regard, Wellek and Warren maintained that:

> Most of them have not wanted to be 'cured' or 'adjusted', either thinking they would cease to write if they were adjusted, or that the adjustment proposed was to a normality or a social environment which they rejected as philistine or bourgeois. Thus W. H. Auden has asserted that artists should be as neurotic as they can endure (Wellek & Warren 1978: 83).

Nevertheless, while it is true that many writers withdrew from Freudian therapies for fear of withering their inspiration, it is also true that most of them were attracted to psychoanalytic theories to such an extent and absorbed them so profoundly as to be inspired in their experimentalism by the basic psychoanalytic method known as "free association of ideas". From that moment on, the synergy between literature and psychology has become not only apparent but also unavoidable and extremely fruitful. As time goes by, their interaction, founded upon their mutual interest in investigating the human mind and soul, has resulted in the development of hitherto unexplored fields of research powered by a reciprocal illuminating role which has pointed to unexpected perspectives of interpretation.

To return to the technique of "free association of ideas", whereas its influence has been unanimously recognised in Woolf and Joyce's narrative techniques (obviously with stylistic peculiarities which differ from one author to another), it is in T. S. Eliot's work, and namely in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", that we find a pattern of how this method can act, at several cognitive levels, as a structural basis for the poetic process. Indeed, if in modernist novels the stream of consciousness offers an exploration of the characters' psyche through a dramatisation of their thoughts, in "Prufrock" we can observe how "the

[1] An extremely interesting study about the relationships between creativity and mental disorders (manic-depressive illness in particular) is included in *Manic-Depressive Illness: Bipolar Disorders and Recurrent Depression* (2nd ed.), Frederick K. Goodwin & Kay Redfield Jamison, Oxford University Press, 2007. The *Part III*, "Creativity", presents studies, tables, evidence and data about "Depression, Mania and Suicide in Eminent Writers, Composers, and Artists". A table recording "Mood Disorders and Suicide in Eminent British and Irish Poets born 1705-1805" and a "Suicide rates" diagram (updated to 2001) of writers and artists are included in the chapter.

poet assumes the right to make use of any materials that seem to him significant" (Kenner 1978: 127). This in order to 'freely' communicate both the emotional state and the cognitive workings which underpin the composition of his dramatic monologue, without avoiding those moments when he feels incapable of generating poetry and that may be defined as 'creative impotence'. Furthermore, being a man who had been prone to depressive episodes throughout his life, Eliot gives shape, alongside the externalisation of his sense of failure as a poet, to moods, sensations and mental attitudes that could be seen as a sort of universal mirror of a depressive state.

It is a well-known fact that he suffered from severe depression from 1921 to 1922, and that this experience was decisive in inspiring the composition of his masterpiece, *The Waste Land*. Nevertheless, it is in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", lines that so extraordinarily impact our minds – written by the poet when he was in his early twenties (when he had not yet been diagnosed with any psychological problem) – that we find a vivid poetical projection of several depressive symptoms. He was young but – as he explained later in life, when asked about the nature of his disturbed (if not desperate) *persona* of his first poem – he was in an anguished mood more appropriate to middle age: "It was partly a dramatic creation of a man of about 40 I should say, and partly an expression of feeling of my own through this dim imaginary figure" (Eliot 1962: 17)[2].

That in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" Eliot was giving a poetic shape to a personal malaise was somehow revealed in two moments of his private life in which he formulated the same expression – "The Prufrock Complex" – as a response to the way some people were trying to categorize his behavioural attitudes:

> In a palm-reader's report on himself, TSE pencilled "The Prufrock Complex" against "when faced with a personal problem, any prolonged contemplation of probabilities merely produces hesitancy and indecision. You must have quick decisions but not the impulsive ones". He wrote "Prufrock complex" again in the matching report on Henry, against "you are inclined to weigh too carefully the pros and cons of your difficulty, with the result that you merely become hesitant and undecided" (Eliot 2018: 382).

Considering the nature of the two circumstances, it is difficult to decipher exactly how serious Eliot was when formulating this definition. What is certain is that in modern literary imagination Prufrock "[…] has become the archetype for the 'complex' of over-scrupulous timidity. He is a man paralysed by an overwhelming anxiety about the possibility of getting things wrong: his judgement has such nicety and fastidiousness that it never arrives at decision, let alone action" (Perry 2016). I would add that the 'complex' revealed by "The Love Song" goes far beyond an "over-scrupulous timidity": as we shall see, precise symptoms of a depressive state seem to emerge from the poem.

[2] Interview in *Grantite Review*. I agree with Ronald Schuchard when he states that "though Eliot upheld an impersonal theory for the poet in the creative process, as a critic, he was, ironically, always in search of the ways in which a poet's sensibility or vision of reality are evident in the allusive texture of the poem" (Schuchard 2017: 94).

Seen from this angle, Prufrock can be considered as a tangible, valuable tool for psychologists to gain further insights into their depressed patients' thoughts and attitudes, to empathise more with them: a patient affected by a psychological disturbance will be required to describe the signs of his mental state, but he will never be able to illustrate them with the exactness and vividness of a poet. Conversely, a psychologist/psychotherapist could interpret from a non-exhaustive perspective the transferred meanings conveyed by a poetical and distinctively figurative language (above all in such a case, when the poem is recognised as one of the most cryptic in modern literature).

An interwoven analysis aimed at interpreting a selection of lines from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in the light of certain cognitive theories of depression could, on the one hand, provide literary critics with new insights into the poet's inner feelings and the obscure significances of his verses and, on the other hand, add knowledge to the complex jigsaw puzzle of depressive disorders.

I will focus in particular on some theories developed by Aaron T. Beck, nowadays one of the most authoritative figures in the field of psychopathology and globally recognised as the father of cognitive therapy. The two studies I will use are the pillars of Beck's research: *An Inventory for Measuring Depression* and *Cognitive Therapy of Depression*.

The first study, an article published in the *Archives of General Psychiatry* in 1961, is an inventory of symptoms (known as "BDI: Beck's Depression Inventory") that is an objective method for diagnosing depression and measuring its severity. The research, carried out by Beck and some members of his team, identifies twenty-one symptom-attitude categories based on behavioural and other empirically measurable manifestations. The *Inventory* is still one of the most frequently employed psychometric methods in the diagnosis and assessment of depression, and it is notable that most of them (sixteen out of twenty-one) can be found – at different levels of signifier and meaning – in both the poetical structure and the imagery of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". They are, specifically: "mood, pessimism, sense of failure, lack of satisfaction, guilty-feeling, sense of punishment, self-hate, self-accusations, self-punitive wishes, irritability, social withdrawal, indecisiveness, body image, work inhibition, fatigability, loss of libido" (Beck *et al.* 1961: 562).

Focusing on "The Love Song", it is immediately evident that the sense of 'creative impotence' and all the depressive symptoms it delivers are implicitly but ubiquitously present throughout the poem. Traces of 'mood' and 'pessimism' are, for instance, already detectable in the figurative effect of the epigraph, where the lines from Dante's *Inferno* point to a grim spirit of complicity which connects souls condemned to a mutual infernal fate. 'Indecisiveness', 'work inhibition' and 'fatigability' emerge whenever the syntax or rhetorical means such as anaphors or free repetitions of words, phrases or even sentences slow down the rhythm of the poem, so conveying a feeling of lethargy, a need to rest and "un formidabile stato d'inattività, uno stallo della coscienza che costituisce il l*eitmotiv* della poesia" (Crivelli 2015: 85)[3].

Many of the symptoms are also perceptible in those sequences of the poem in which the voice of the author himself is heard, becoming separate from the character-voice

[3] "A formidable state of inactivity, an impasse of the conscience that is the *leitmotiv* of the poem" (my translation).

and intermittently inserting itself. This happens when the poet experiences his 'creative impotence', the feeling of being inept at writing proper lines and giving the answers a poet is expected to provide. It is at such moments that Eliot's early *persona* splits from the enervated speaker to directly express his emotional response at a self-reflective and self-referential level. In these circumstances the poet reveals himself to be anxious, irritated, devoured by a 'sense of failure' and a 'lack of satisfaction' which escalate into a self-interrogation of his own identity as a poet: "'Do I dare?' and, 'Do I dare?'", "Do I dare / Disturb the universe?", "So how should I presume?" (Eliot 2018: 6); "And how should I presume?", "And should I then presume? / And how should I begin?", "Shall I say" (Eliot 2018: 7); "Should say: 'That is not what I meant at all. / That is not it, at all'", "'And this, and so much more? – It is impossible to say just what I mean!'", "[…] should say: 'That is not it at all. / That is not what I mean, at all'" (Eliot 2018: 8).

These questions – that come systematically before the creation of correlative objectives or metonymies which communicate a depressive mood through the convergence of several symptoms – mark the moments when Eliot achieves what he is subliminally wishing in the image he generates in the line: "But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen" (Eliot 2018: 8). Indeed, through the formulation of these meta-communicative questions, the nervous activity of the poet during the moments of his highest and most throbbing creative pressure is transcribed directly onto the page. The *climax* of this rhetorical-psychological mechanism is aimed at in the following distich:

> I should have been a pair of ragged claws
> Scuttling across the floors of silent seas (Eliot 2018: 7).

After meta-poetical questions and efforts to get back into the right poetic gear, Eliot generates a correlative objective that superbly communicates a depressive state.

The verbal form that introduces the image, "I should have been", reveals low self-esteem: the poetical voice is implicitly admitting that he should not have been a human being but an animal, or better much less than an animal, because the comparison is to "a pair of ragged claws", that is to say to what remains of the carcass of an animal that is "not one of the noble creature of the sea, but one of the lesser and one that lives off the discards of others […]" (Eiss 2016: 88). In this desire to have been created in such a disquieting mutilated shape, symptoms such as "guilty feeling", "sense of punishment", "self-hate", "self-accusations", "self-punitive wishes", come to the surface. This comparison goes far beyond a mere synecdoche. It goes further than an animalisation, further than a dehumanization: "Le 'ruvide chele' sono una caduta dall'umano all'inumano, ma anche riduzione dal vertebrato all'invertebrato, e dall'integrità al frammento" (Calimani 1998: 53)[4].

The focus on the "ragged claws" emphasises the absence of a body, the annihilation of any physical perception. The image of lifeless claws that are "Scuttling across the floors of

[4] "The 'ragged claws' are a fall from what is human to what is inhuman. They are also a reduction from a vertebrate creature to an invertebrate one and from what is a whole to what is fragmented" (my translation).

silent seas" points to a violent sense of disorientation and, at the same time, underlines the impossibility for the claws to perform their primary activity of grasping material in order to survive: it is the objective correlative of the cognitive and expressive impotence of a poet who feels himself incapable of getting his hands on "the overwhelming question" of life, in order to turn it in poetry.

About twenty years after the *Inventory*, Beck published – together with A. John Rush, Brian F. Shaw and Gary Emery – *Cognitive Therapy of Depression*, a study focused on the cognitive aspects of neurotic disorders: the symptoms listed in the "BDI" are explained from a cognitive-emotional perspective. Particularly interesting from our point of view is the concept of "Cognitive Triad", based on the assumption that "there are three major cognitive patterns that induce the patient to regard himself, his future and his experiences in an idiosyncratic manner". These cognitive patterns are: "1. The patient's negative consideration of himself/herself; 2. The tendency of the depressed person to interpret her/his ongoing experiences deleteriously; and, 3. A cynical view of the future" (Beck *et al*. 1979: 11-12).

Beck maintains that these cognitive phenomena are primarily activated by what he defines "Faulty Information Processing": a retroactive elaboration of experience from a destructive perspective. This theory points to systematic errors in the thinking of depressed people that reinforce their belief in the validity of a negative conception of themselves and/or of some past experiences that can impinge on their lives. It is a pessimistic way to organise past reality, and the emotional response tends to be extreme. Two crucial points of this process are "Selective abstraction" and "Arbitrary inference". "Selective abstraction" consists of "focusing on a detail taken out of context, ignoring other more salient features of the situation and conceptualising the whole experience on the basis of this fragment"; "Arbitrary inference" refers to "the process of drawing a specific conclusion in the absence of evidence to support the conclusion or when the evidence is contrary to the conclusion" (Beck *et al.* 1979: 14).

Poetical dramatisations of "Faulty Information Processing", of both "Selective abstraction" and "Arbitrary inference", can be found in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". As widely noted, in the poem there are some explicit references to a – psychologically devastating – 'social circumstance' involving the speaker. It is not possible to know whether the situation he refers to is a specific one or represents a prototype of the speaker's general and quotidian circumstance. Moreover, it is clear that this situation is the obsession that emerges neurotically in different parts of the poem in the shape of photograms of reality, metonymies and objective correlatives that enhance the overall depressed mood.

The toxic past experience creeps into the poet's cosmic speculation by the double occurrence of the couplet "In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo", which gives the first specific pieces of information about the external context in which the "Selective abstraction" has found fertile ground. The image created is crystalline, and its impromptu occurrence sounds like a sinister omen, the premonition of a breakdown that the speaker would not be able to escape from.

The detrimental refractions of the "Selective abstraction" will mostly manifest themselves after the couplet's second occurrence, acting so vigorously on the speaker's unconscious as to become dominant over – and distressingly pervasive throughout – the poetical mood, ebbing away the speaker's *ego* progressively and irremediably:

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.
And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair –
(They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin –
(They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")
Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse (Eliot 2018: 6).

After this second occurrence the poet feels so weak that he lacks the strength to even ask himself whether he should dare compose poetry or not. He therefore postpones the matter with the expression – already repeated three times in the previous stanza – "there will be time"; but the successive lines make it clear that there will be no time to rebuild his identity as a poet. The poetic space is now entirely subjugated by the "Selective abstraction" that vehemently irrupts, forcing the poet to observe himself from the outside, to look upon himself with the same disqualifying eyes of the women in the room (and here the presence of symptoms which can be read in the *Inventory* such as "guilty-feeling", "self-hate", "self-accusations", "social withdrawal", "body image" are palpable).

Through a logical-figurative mechanism moving within a synecdochic progression, the poet firstly takes the image of the moment of his departure from the room out of context ("Time to turn back and descend the stair"); secondly, he insists on a detail (taken out of context) of his appearance which he believes to be the source of the staring women's negative judgements: "With a bald spot in the middle of my hair". The following parenthesis reveals the violent eruption of the "Arbitrary inference": without any evidence to support such a conclusion, he infers that the women are maliciously making fun of his baldness: "(They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")".

Then, at times, the poet seems to instinctively try to learn a way of facing the situation and fighting his fears by grasping for tangible details which could save him from falling into the pit of despair into which the "Arbitrary inference" is pulling him. He concentrates on the elegance of his garment, on some sartorial details: his "morning coat", his "collar mounting firmly to the chin". However, soon some negative feedback, revealed by a couple of adjectives ("modest", "simple" regarding his necktie), are sufficient to restart the "Faulty Information Processing" by leading his thoughts towards the second "Arbitrary inference", once again closed in brackets: "(They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")".

From this moment on, the psychological collapse will not relent until it has led to desires of physical punishment (represented, for instance, by images such as: he "pinned

and wriggling on the wall"; his balding head "brought in upon a platter"), followed by the ego's total annihilation conveyed by objective correlatives that weave the moods within which depression determines itself.

The self-destructive attitude is also perceived through the frustrating comparison with John the Baptist: Prufrock feels demolished by the mythic parallel. John the Baptist's decapitation was due to the inflexibility of his certainties. Prufrock's head upon the plate symbolises his ridiculous uncertainties: it is the figurative objectivization of the "Selective abstraction" of a small group of women laughing at his "slightly bald" head. Prufrock feels to be nothing but a parody of a prophet. He has got neither answers nor words of hope and all he can prophesize is a future of failures, panic and death:

> But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
> Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,
> I am no prophet – and here's no great matter;
> I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
> And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
> And in short, I was afraid (Eliot 2018: 7-8).

What he wants is to absolve himself of any responsibility, both as a man and as a poet. He seeks social withdrawal to avoid external judgement and poetical proof. So, he images himself an old man wearing "white flannel trousers" and walking "upon the beach":

> I grow old ... I grow old ...
> I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.
>
> Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
> I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
> I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.
>
> I do not think that they will sing to me (Eliot 2018: 9).

The anxiety seems to decrease, and the imagery becomes oneiric and peaceful. He seems to have found peace with the feminine voices that had so ruthlessly tormented him, and he eavesdrops on the "sea-girls" singing their mermaid songs in the deep. The depths of the sea, that had earlier been the correlative objective of a persecuted psyche, are now a sublime reassuring world inside which Prufrock's escape from reality would seem to find refuge.

Nevertheless, it is nothing but a temporary illusion. The tendency of a depressed person to minimise pleasure and maximise pain prevails again. The momentary and ephemeral capacity to avoid anguish is stifled and the poem is eventually driven to lines that reinstate the supremacy of a pessimistic mood. The antinomy of the lines "till human voices wake us, and we drown" communicates a tragic inescapability from the trivial chat of the humiliating women over their cups of tea. Prufrock is not only unable to forget the past

"Selective abstraction", but he is completely overwhelmed by it. As lucidly maintained by Ezra Pound, who knew both Eliot and "Prufrock" so well, "It is a portrait of a failure, or of a character who fails" (Pound 1971: 50)[5] and, as I have demonstrated, of depression.

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[5] From a letter written by Ezra Pound to Harriet Monroe on 31st January 1915.

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More than Language and Literature: Postcolonial Connections and Linguistic Paradigms in Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's Indian English Fiction

Abstract I: L'articolo tratta dei legami transdisciplinari fra lingua e letteratura nel contesto postcoloniale, concentrandosi sulla scena letteraria indiana di lingua inglese. L'articolo sottolinea l'importanza di un approccio al testo letterario che tenga presente aspetti linguistici per svelare complesse questioni identitarie. In quest'ottica, viene presentata un'analisi preliminare di alcuni racconti tratti da *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2017) di Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, uno scrittore della comunità adivasi, i cosiddetti 'tribali'. I racconti, che descrivono lo sfruttamento di tale comunità, presentano una notevole ricchezza stilistica grazie al Indian English, ai prestiti dalla lingua santhali, e al gioco fra i vari registri del testo.

Abstract II: This article investigates the interdisciplinary connections between language and literature in the Indian postcolonial context. I argue that a linguistic approach to contemporary Indian English fiction is useful to unpack complex cultural, social and identitarian questions. As a case study, I analyse some of the short stories from *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2017) by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, a contemporary author from a marginalised ethnic group of rural India. My methodology benefits from postcolonial studies, sociolinguistics and critical stylistics, to show how Shekhar reshapes the canon by foregrounding Indian English, borrowings from the Santhali language and registers of specialised discourse.

Keywords: language and literature, Indian English, identity, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, Adivasi.

1. Introduction

This article sets up a preliminary investigation of the deep and persistent connections between language and literature in the postcolonial context (Kachru & Smith 2008; Talib 2001), in particular by focusing on Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's Indian English literary production. While contemporary academic discourse has recognised peculiarities and specificities of the two domains of language and literature, with their own specific sets of frames, tools and paradigms, to a certain extent, the two fields are naturally coterminous and related. In fact, language constitutes the building blocks *par excellence* of literature, creative domains

and human culture in general, and as such operates a powerful tool for the representation of ideas, experiences and memories.

Clearly, this is a huge theoretical debate that is outside the purpose of the present paper, but my argument regards the necessity to return to the centrality of language in scrutinising literary texts and the benefits that linguistic theories too can provide in the analysis of fiction, with the aim to gain more insights into literary discourse. This type of interpretation, moreover, is particularly relevant in the case of postcolonial literatures, a wide and variegated area in which the question of language has had a remarkable weight in terms of external imposition, but also in the sense of internal appropriation and reinvention of the code. Furthermore, a number of fields of language studies such as critical discourse analysis and critical stylistics have often concentrated on the construction, circulation and reinforcement of ideologies, points of view and identitarian expressions across texts, and such a reflection flawlessly fits into the postcolonial research agenda and its investigation of literary works.

In this paper, I argue that a linguistic (in particular sociolinguistic and stylistic) approach to contemporary Indian English fiction is fruitful and allows to unpack cultural, social and identitarian questions, in particular considering marginalised communities. As a case study, I intend to offer a preliminary analysis of some of the short stories contained in the collection *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2017) by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, a contemporary author that belongs to one of the marginalised ethnic groups of rural India. These stories primarily concern the (self)representation of Adivasi identity, but function via a host of complex linguistic and diegetic strategies. I will apply an interdisciplinary methodology informed by postcolonial studies, variation sociolinguistics and critical stylistics, to show how Shekhar reshapes the boundaries of the canon by crafting a polyphonic style that draws from a wealth of different linguistic levels, including the use of Indian English, borrowings from the Santhal language (the mother tongue of the author's ethnic group) as well as elements of specialised discourse (i.e. medical register). This project is in line with recent scholarship that emphasises the correlation and overlapping between language and literature, in particular with regard to the postcolonial world, in which a linguistic lens permits to unearth significant cultural issues. For example, in their exploration of World Englishes, Kachru and Smith (2008: 172) define postcolonial writers as "exponents of creativity", given their capacity to shape and elaborate non-standard forms, whilst Sailaja (2009), in her description of Indian English, utilises a series of literary references too. Furthermore, important Indian English authors such as Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh and Arundathi Roy have been innovatively investigated with the aid of linguistic frames and concepts (Bandyopadhyay 2010; Sarangi 2018), thus once again testifying to the interdisciplinary link between language and literature in the postcolonial arena. Here I will take into account a recent and perhaps less known author, whose work however deserves critical attention. Before focusing on Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's stories, it is vital to outline the theoretical background necessary for the development of my argument.

2. Theoretical Background: (English) Language and Literature in India

To understand the complex and stratified presence, role and power of English in India

today, we need to remember how the language was imported during the colonial period and transformed into a cultural 'object' (Auddy 2020; Bendy 2020). English language implementation was primarily sanctioned by the so-called Macaulay Minute (1835) (Sailaja 2009: 106-110), which not only established the central role of the coloniser's language but also forged the relation between an external hegemonic cultural power and a local cultural context seen as subaltern (Spivak 1988). Schools were set up and teachers followed traditional pedagogical practices in terms of both contents and methods, and the ideal model of English language teaching (ELT) was related to the Anglo-Saxon tradition, from Shakespeare and King James' Bible to the Romantic poets. The literature-based approach to language teaching continued until recently, and as a meta-fictional example I can briefly cite *Family Matters* (2002), a novel by Rohinton Mistry, in which a retired university professor of English has to be treated in a Mumbai hospital. The doctor who looks after him turns out to be a former pupil of his, during the 1960s, and immediately recalls his English classes about Coleridge and Forster, demonstrating how even ELT for medicine also touched upon literary materials. Aside from questions of disciplinary appropriateness, it is worth noticing that in India the massive and rooted presence of literature in language teaching practices brought to the emergence of a literary flavour of the diatopic English variety, still present today and attested by a range of obsolete linguistic items (Sailaja 2009).

However, the impact of English should be considered within a broader imperial project, which by means of different strategies naturalised conditions of subalternity and otherness, relegating Indians speakers of English into a permanent condition of inferiority and marginality. Due to space restrictions, I am not able to properly dwell on this aspect but suffice to say that with the advent of independence in 1947, the question of language policies and roles acquired even more importance given the intricacy of the new multicultural federal state (Bedi 2020). English accompanied the acknowledgement of Hindi and the other national languages, but at the same time it fully emerged and showed its inner processes of creative stylistic variation. As Ashcroft (2009: 3) holds, "colonial languages have been not only instruments of oppression but also instruments of radical resistance and transformation", in particular thanks to the imaginative power of different waves of Indian authors, from Raja Rao to Salman Rushdie, who have transformed and enriched the coloniser's language. In a similar vein, Denke (2013: 72) affirms that "postcolonial creative writing and theoretical discourse provide ample space for such transformations and refresh the question of the use of imperial language", also challenging and questioning the new role attributed to English in terms of nativised language that is able to express and reproduce local reality and culture.

The relevance of the nexus between language and literature therefore emerges *in toto* as the two areas are intertwined and contribute to the representation of the cultural landscape of India, including the liminal areas of society, for example the Adivasi community of which I will speak below. If on the one hand literature is a form of *fictio*, a non-mimetic discourse, on the other, it cannot be denied that it operates as a sort of figurative mirror for the depiction of society and human experience at large, especially in the postcolonial arena, as many scholars and theorists have underlined (e.g. Ashcroft 2009; Talib 2002). From this angle, according to Kachru and Smith (2008: 168), literary works in English "are a valuable source of sociocultural knowledge not easily recoverable from grammars, dictionaries and

textbooks", and as such can be analysed with the specific purpose to study how different language levels are innovatively elaborated to convey and express cultural meanings in the postcolonial setting. The choice of focusing on the literary work of Shekhar is primarily driven by his capacity to utilise the expressive code in a heteroglossic and dynamic way, hybridising the text with instantiations of Indian English, loanwords from vernacular language and a range of different registers. Moreover, although they belong to the fictional domains, Shekhar's stories incorporate elements of the author's personal experience as an Adivasi medical officer in Jharkhand, and in this light they may be viewed as social narratives that witness one of the numerous contemporary microcosms of India. Thus, the author aligns with original Indian English literary productions that renovate postcolonial genres and address contemporary questions in the formation of what Varughese defines "new India, a new canon" (2013: 13).

3. Narrating the Adivasi Context

In this section, I will briefly introduce the Adivasi world, whose name generally refers to the so-called indigenous peoples of India, also known as 'Scheduled Tribes' (Jeffrey and Harriss 2014: 8-9). According to the 2011 Census, these ethnic groups constitute 8.6% of India's population (i.e. 104 million people), and live in different parts of the country. Their social positioning constitutes a sort of internal discrimination because, in spite of the postcolonial discourse of freedom, independence and recognition of human rights, not only India does not recognise the status of autochthonous population for them, but they are even regarded as 'primitive', totally alienated from society and confined to specific areas and reserves. The colonial policies of segregation inaugurated during the Raj are thus perpetuated, along with the terminology and classification used to define such ethnic groups, whose original lands are very frequently exploited because of the presence of rich mineral resources, as it occurs for example in Jharkhand, a state created in eastern India in 2000 in response to local pressures (Chandra, Mukherjee & Mukherjee 2008).

In particular, the Santhal represent the largest ethnic group in Jharkhand, although they also live in other states like Odisha, Bihar and West Bengal. In spite of their rich cultural heritage, for instance their colourful dances, the Santhal, like other scheduled tribes and scheduled castes, often have to vacate their territory, where they used to work as farmers, and look for a job in the numerous coalmines that now devastate the landscape. Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar comes from this milieu and in his literary production, seems to index a sort of 'self representation' of Adivasi culture, i.e. a voice within the community, following a broader scheme of postcolonial writers giving visibility to the oppressed and peripheral subjects.

For many postcolonial authors, in fact, the representation of identity and commitment to social (and ethical) questions, including 'minority' groups, is of paramount importance, and frequently this occurs especially via English language works, which can attract national and international interest and therefore communicate with a wider audience in order to raise sensibility and awareness of certain issues. However, the presence of Adivasi in Indian English literature is still peripheral, or based on stereotypes, if not totally absent, according to patterns that have erased, silenced or plateaued the reality of minority groups.

For Chakraborty (2017: 3-4), for example, the "contemporary representation of Adivasi still follows the colonial paradigm of the 'noble savage', and in accordance with urban Indian stereotypes this romanticising view finds its crystallisation through a representation of Santhal dance".

To debunk such narratives of marginal categories and reverse ideological perspectives, Shekhar's project entails the idea of voicing the subjugated Adivasi community, but at the same time it also delves into the notion of problematizing the very sense of community, i.e. exposing controversial issues and questions. In other words, Shekhar's stories are particularly salient because they are governed by an unbiased attitude and thus they seem to encourage a rethinking and revision of Indian English literature in order to create a new map of Adivasi culture and identity, going beyond static clichés. To carry out his literary discourse, the author has turned to linguistic heteroglossia that combines and overlaps different registers and specialised vocabulary (e.g. music, mining, medicine as well as idiolectical and figurative expressions), but more importantly he has employed code mixing between Indian English and vernacular (Adivasi) language, with the ultimate target of "refashioning the English language to suit the Santhali sentiments" (Tripathi 2017: 195).

4. Language, Literature and Adivasi Stories Within and Outside the Community

Collecting ten stories, some of which previously published in periodicals, the book under consideration deals with the reaction of Adivasi people towards the challenges posed by the radical exploitation and implicit annihilation of Jharkhand, a wide process often disguised as a development of new opportunities leading to modernity, progress and welfare for all. As a whole, the volume obtained a good reception from readers who appreciated the writer's style in handling a discourse of ethnic and social discrimination that foregrounds the contradictions of contemporary Indian economic growth at the expense of disadvantaged subjects. However, the stories caused a heated debate, in particular within the Adivasi community itself, for the controversial portrayal of some of its members. As a matter of fact, rather than offering a reassuring description of his own community, the writer has provokingly criticised and unveiled hidden sides of the Adivasi cultural identity by means of a clever manipulation of the linguistic texture. The author's innovative use of various linguistic devices and patterns, however, does not merely aim at generating aesthetic and poetic effects of defamiliarisation, but plays a key role in the thematic organisation of the writing. In Chakraborty's (2017: 5) view, for example, it is "one component of the representational matrix through which the radical Otherness of the Adivasis as subalterns is foregrounded in the text". To put the same point otherwise, the linguistic peculiarity of the text is functional in the treatment of questions, in particular concerning local identity and liminality, thus demonstrating once again how, in the postcolonial scenario, language and literature seem to function in tandem to corroborate the manifestations of culture. I will now take into account a couple of these stories and will analyse a number of passages from both, using linguistic and stylistic tools.

Constructed as a sort of monologue narrated by a Santhal farmer and musician called Mangal Murmu, the eponymous story "The Adivasi Will Not Dance" expands on the general

crisis that constantly threatens and impoverishes tribal society in terms of both material commodities and immaterial culture. The old narrator, in a confessional tone, explains to a mute interlocutor, perhaps a journalist, how mining companies supported by the government are in reality responsible for forced eviction and eradication that have determined the social disintegration of the Santhal community in spite of the national rhetoric that celebrates the development of the area as well as the apparent recognition of local ethnic and cultural groups. Even symbols of Adivasi art such as dance and music have been depredated and turned into orientalising commodities. When the authorities organise a public ceremony for the laying of the foundation stone for a large thermal power plant in Godda, they ask Murmu and his fellows to play and dance for a very special guest, the President of India. Their intention is to offer a kind of folkloristic spectacle that should symbolise unity of the country and multiculturalism, whilst in reality it is an act of power grounded upon the effects of neoliberal policies that ruthlessly abuse the natural and human environment. Mangal Murmu accepts and arranges a troupe of artists for the event, but when he finally stands in front of the President, he cannot control his anger and misery, and delivers a provoking discourse of denunciation, with disastrous consequences.

I will now look at three passages taken from this story to show how the text gains in complexity through a range of linguistic structures and forms. These plot-advancing elements are entrenched in the cultural paradigm of postcoloniality and foster empathetic bonds.

> But we Santhals are fools, aren't we? All of us Adivasis are fools. Down the years, down generations, the Diku have taken advantage of our foolishness. Tell me if I am wrong. I only said, "We Adivasis will not dance anymore" – what is wrong with that? We are like toys – someone presses our 'ON' buttons, or turns a key in our backsides, and we Santhals start beating rhythms on our tamak and tumdak, or start blowing tunes on our tiriyo while someone snatches our very dancing grounds. Tell me, am I wrong? (170).

> Such diseases that we can't breathe properly, we cough food and forever remain bare bones. For education, our children are at the mercy of either those free government schools where teachers come only to cook the midday meal, or those Kiristan missionary schools where our children are constantly asked to stop worshipping our Bonga-Boru and start revering Jisu and Mariam. If our children refuse, the sisters and the fathers tell our boys that their Santhal names – Hopna, Som, Singari – are not good enough. They are renamed David and Mikail and Kiristofer and whatnot. And as if that were not enough, Muslims barge into our homes, sleep with our women, and we Santhal men can't do a thing (172).

> It is this coal, sir, which is gobbling us up bit by bit. There is blackness – deep, indelible – all along the Koyla Road. The trees and shrubs in our village bear black leaves. Our ochre earth has become black. The stones, the rocks, the sand, all black. The tiles on the roofs of our huts have lost their fire-burnt red. The vines and flowers and peacocks we Santhals draw on the outer walls of our houses are black. Our children – dark-skinned as they are – are forever covered with fine black dust. When they cry,

> and tears stream down their faces, it seems as if a river is cutting across a drought-stricken land. Only our eyes burn red, like embers (174).

The three extracts are, first of all, characterised by stylistic hybridity which manifests itself through borrowing from different sources, such as *jawan* (attested in the *Oxford English Dictionary* from Urdu with the meaning of 'soldier') or Santhal words, for example with honorifics like Diku (indicating an 'outsider' but also a 'moneylender') or technical terms for musical instruments (*tamak*/*tumdak*). In the postcolonial field, the presence of loanwords and codemixing reflects the vivacity of a culture, but it also has a political and social meaning because "refusing to translate words not only registers a sense of cultural distinctiveness, but also forces the reader into an active engagement with the vernacular culture" (Ashcroft 2009: 176). Moreover, foregrounding the Santhal language is an act of recognition for a language that struggles to emerge and acquire its own visibility and independence (Choksi 2017).

The author's stylistic creativity also takes the form of 'eye dialect' (Wales 1995: 167), namely a sort of misspelling that tries to orthographically reproduce the dialectical pronunciation of the term: for Shekhar, this device is more than a simple phonological embellishment because names like 'Kiristian/Jisu/Marian' alludes to the complexity of the religious sphere as Adivasi people are directly and indirectly pushed to conversion to some official faith, such as Christianity or sometimes Hinduism. This point is of particular interest when considered in connection with the discourse of naming, which constitutes a pillar of cultural and societal organisation. The demolition of the Santhal community, in fact, is also carried out by onomastic practices that impose foreign (i.e. western and Christian) names on children, thus obliterating their cultural heritage. Other important strategies that contribute to the general makeup of the story comprise the use of inclusive pronouns ('we'), by which the speaking character refers to his broad ethnic group, implicitly in opposition to external subjects. The excerpts also display the persistence of parallelism and listing patterns, both as lists of lexical items (for instance 'the trees / the stones / the tiles') as well as entire clauses (we + verb structure), which cumulatively strengthen Murmu's lamentation.

In the extracts and the entire story, repetition is an especially productive device when it concerns chromatic allusion and symbolism: because of the unwise, extensive and destructive mineral extraction, the predominant colour that seems to completely shroud people, animals and the environment is black as shown by an abundance of related lexical items such as 'coal' or 'blackness'. But the chromatic suggestion is even more linguistically powerful because it seems to create a before/after effect, namely the state of beings and things before and after the pernicious advent of unlimited extraction, so that bright and vivid colours ('ochre earth') that used to characterise natural and cultural life are now replaced by dark, almost fiendish hues. The consequence of the black devastation is even highlighted by the temporal adverb 'forever', which produces permanent effect, already anticipated by the preceding adjectives 'indelible' and 'black'. Moreover, it is worth noticing that coal representing the colour black is figuratively given agency, in a transitive form (with the noun phrase 'gobbling us up bit by bit'), and becomes a sort of monstrous metaphor for the extinction of the Santhal community. Even when a colour other than black is quickly evoked

('red'), it expresses a negative meaning as the term collocates with the images of burning ashes that cause much suffering.

The multivoicedness of Shekhar's writing as a means for representing a complex community and context runs throughout the collection, and I will now move to another story, entitled "November is the Month of Migrations". The narrative follows Talamai Kisky, a 20-year-old Christian girl who, like many other Adivasi people, has to travel to West Bengal looking for a job, and foregrounds another type of exploitation to which the Adivasi are sometimes subjected, namely that of physical and sexual nature. Given the sensitivity and controversy of the theme, which also pervades another story, entitled "Merely a Whore", the readers' response was quite shocked and rather unsupportive of an Adivasi author exposing and deconstructing some scandalous issues of his own community. The following extract captures the general atmosphere of the text:

> Come November, Santhal men, women and children walk down from their villages in the hills and the far-flung corners of the Santhal Pargana to the railway station in the district headquarters. These Santhals-villages, entire clans- make up long, snaking processions as they abandon their lands and farms to take the train to Namal, the Bardhaman district of West Bengal and the paddy fields there. In the month that these Santhal families will spend in Bardhaman, they will plant rice and other crops in farms owned by the zamindars of Bardhaman, they will plant rice and other crops in farms owned by the zamindars of Barhaman. […] Talamai walks away from her group. She has been attracted by a man. He is young, fair, a Diku, and a jawan of the Railway Protection Force. A bread pakora in hand, he has signalled her to approach and has disappeared round a corner. […]
> "Are you hungry?" the jawan calls out as Talamai rounds the corner. "You need food?" He is standing in front of the policemen's quarters.
> "Yes", Talamai answers.
> "You need money?"
> "Yes."
> "Will you do some work for me?"
> "Yes." Talamai knows what work he is talking about. She has done it a few times by the Koyla Road, where many Santhal women and girls steal coal from trucks. She knows many girls who do that work with truck drivers and other men. And she knows that on their way to Namal, Santhal women do this work for food and money at the railway station too (39-40).

In a nutshell, the story illustrates "the painful, disturbing and sad state of Adivasi for whom every day was a struggle to survive" (Tripathi 2017: 194) by using a style that contrasts with the descriptive and apparently plain title. The diatopic linguistic dimension is signalled by borrowed or non-standard terms, for instance *zamindar* (indicating a landowner and originally an aristocrat, from a Persian root), but we should also pay attention to the shift in focalisation whereby the story is narrated via an omniscient voice, but provides the perspective of the girl. Here the discourse of sexual exploitation becomes a disturbing allegory for the general mistreatment of the territory and its natural community, with a

parallelism between the body of the character and the surrounding land, both being violated by an external force. The moral brutality of the scene, when the dire conditions of everyday life force women to prostitution, is hidden within the question-and-answer structure that forms the conversation between the two characters and naturalise the soldier's hypocrisy in offering food to a young girl in exchange for sex. Equally significant is the underlexicalisation process functioning through general or vague, and yet attention-getting, words ('some work', 'what work', 'that work') that actually replace and refer to unspeakable or taboo concepts. The scandalous treatment of the sexual and bodily aspect of the story sustains heteroglossia, with the Bakhtinian sense of the 'carnivalesque', i.e. an excessive embodied form of representation to contrast the idea of power and the establishment in a provoking and distressing way. If the reference to prostitution and sexual exploitation certainly irritates many members of the Adivasi community, it nonetheless discloses unsaid truth from within the community and abolishes any form of insincerity, attesting the ethical commitment of the postcolonial writer to his work.

Overall, the pragmatic effects of this kind of multi-voiced writing are linked to the multiple reactions that the readers experience toward the text in terms of language and style. As I have briefly mentioned, Shekhar's stories have attracted mixed reactions given the series of questions he touches upon in his production. Positive responses have been in relation to the question of human and natural mistreatment of the Adivasi territory and people, and have appreciated the amalgamation of different voices for a complex context. Yet negative responses have come from some Adivasi readers, who have strongly criticised the breach of the sense of origin and belonging, and even rejected the text. For them, selecting a topic that exposes the community's inner tensions remains deplorable. Both types of reaction are a way to approach the author's construction of a fictional narrative that pivots around his effort to unpack the voice within and across the Adivasi community. As Talib (2002: 133) affirms, "attitudes towards language in fiction are very often reflective of, or are affected by, what goes on outside it". By manipulating and transforming the language paradigm, Shekhar's writing offers a provoking self-representation of a portion of postcolonial Indian society to foreground marginalised subjects.

5. Concluding Remarks

In this article, I have focused on the interdisciplinary connection between language and literature in the postcolonial world and have sketched out the benefits of a linguistic and stylistic approach to Indian English fiction, specifically concentrating on Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, an Adivasi author whose stories evoke and denounce discourses of marginalisation, exploitation and erasure. For the writer, polyphony, hybridity and language variation can be regarded as tools for meaning making in the narrative representation of a community, constantly threatened by neoliberal waves of modernity disguised as modernity, development and progress. In this vein, Shekhar's short stories are texts that challenge the reader thanks to idiolectal language choices and convey the author's impartial idea of (self)representation of a specific cultural group, going beyond a strict prejudice of belonging.

Using the case study of Shekhar's provocative stories, I have suggested that in the

postcolonial context language and literature should be seen as two disciplinary domains that function hand in hand, in a scenario in which questions of language, power and identity are interweaved and impact on society, and its textual representations at large. An examination of Indian English literary texts that also employs theories, tools and frames from fields such as sociolinguistics or stylistics constitutes a critical enhancement because it acknowledges how the problem of language has informed genres and inspired authors to engage with culture. In this regard, language is more than a code of communication and becomes an arena of confrontation in which the mechanics of culture function and produce meaning through the cogs of multi-layered history, reminding us how English is intimately part and parcel of both colonialism and postcolonialism, being an imperial language and a means of emancipation at the same time. This type of interdisciplinary approach to postcolonial discourse thus encourages an inclusive revision of the very idea of canon and raises awareness of some of the issues, complexities and entanglements that characterise the world we live in.

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Ilaria Natali

Il medico a teatro: *Lucius Junius Brutus* di "Mad Nat" Lee

Abstract I: L'originalità di stile e contenuti della produzione di Nathaniel Lee è spesso interpretata principalmente alla luce della presunta malattia mentale dell'autore. Il presente contributo propone un nuovo approccio all'opera di Lee; dimostra come la tragedia *Brutus* (1680), che contiene una sorta di nosologia delle alterazioni del pensiero o del comportamento umano, sia un testo liminare, sulla soglia tra opera letteraria e trattato medico. L'autore si appropria del discorso scientifico a lui contemporaneo non solo per contestare le più recenti concezioni di patologia mentale, ma anche come strumento per articolare una riflessione sulla condizione del potere politico.

Abstract II: The original style and contents of Nathaniel Lee's production have often been interpreted as indicative of the author's alleged mental illness. This contribution proposes a new approach to Lee's works, suggesting that the tragedy *Brutus* (1680), which contains a sort of nosology of alterations in thought and behaviour, is a liminal text on the border between literature and medical treatise. Lee appropriates the scientific discourse of his time not only to question recent notions of mental disorder, but also to articulate a reflection on the condition of power in the political world.

Keywords: Nathaniel Lee, follia, internamento, Commedia della Restaurazione, storia della medicina.
Nathaniel Lee, madness, internment, Restoration drama, history of medicine.

1. Follia dell'autore e follia del testo

Difficile trovare una produzione letteraria che meglio di quella del drammaturgo Nathaniel Lee esemplifichi l'assunto di Carlo Dossi, "tra medicina e letteratura corse sempre amicizia" (1995: 1). Nella forma e nel contenuto, opere quali *Nero* (1674), *Sophonisba* (1675), *The Massacre of Paris* (1679), *Caesar Borgia* (1679) e *Lucius Junius Brutus* (1680) rappresentano e rielaborano teorie secentesche del disturbo mentale, con numerosi riferimenti a stati umorali e patologici[1].

In effetti, non è solo per le copiose descrizioni e performance di follia del suo teatro che Lee attira da secoli lo sguardo della medicina[2]: sono principalmente la sua figura e la

[1] Le date indicate fanno riferimento alla prima messa in scena delle opere.

[2] Nel presente studio si è scelto di adottare il termine "follia", oramai sorpassato in ambito scientifico, per richiamare un concetto ampio di alterità rispetto alla norma socioculturale. Come *madness*, anche questo termine ha risonanze in vari ambiti, tra cui "the world of literature and art and of religious belief" (Scull 2015: 14).

sua storia personale ad aver invitato a una lettura dell'opera in chiave interdisciplinare. Della vita di Lee, meglio noto tra i contemporanei come "Mad Nat", si ricorda soprattutto la reclusione nell'ospedale di St. Bethlehem o Bedlam, allora unico istituto pubblico inglese per la cura delle malattie mentali. Tra il 1682 e il 1684, dopo quasi dieci anni a Londra come apprezzato autore teatrale, Lee si trovò quindi costretto a calcare un altro tipo di palcoscenico, il teatro della follia di Bedlam e i suoi spettacoli a pagamento per i visitatori[3]. Ci è giunta indirettamente anche una sua ironica sintesi di come pare si sia svolto il colloquio preliminare all'internamento: "They called me mad and I called them mad, and damn them, they outvoted me" (Porter 2002: 88).

Probabilmente l'autore fu ricoverato perché soggetto a momenti di delirio ed euforia, sintomi che presto i contemporanei collegarono a quell'eccesso di "bombast and extravagant frenzy" (Chambers 1844: 390) che era il veicolo stilistico primario delle sue opere. Per Lee, già definito nel 1675 un "hot-brain'd fustian fool" (Wilmot 1800: 13), l'internamento portò con sé una seconda condanna: la tentazione di stabilire un'interrelazione tra la presunta follia di Lee e le caratteristiche tematico-formali della sua opera fu talmente forte da ridurre l'intera reputazione dello scrittore ad una cronaca della sua malattia. Quando l'opera di Lee non era considerata un sintomo di pazzia, si suggeriva che la sua modalità espressiva 'da folle' gli aveva aperto la strada verso Bedlam: "Nathaniel Lee", dice Anthony Wood nel 1684, "endeavoring to reach high in expression in his plays, broke his head and fell distracted" (Wilson 1968: 89).

La condanna 'estetica' è quella che si rivela più drammatica e persistente per Lee e la sua fortuna letteraria. A quasi due secoli dalla morte dell'autore, le sue opere continuavano a essere viste come manifestazione di "an impetuosity in which it is easy to discover the traces of incipient insanity" (Ward 1875: 543). Anche in tempi più recenti, la critica non ha abbandonato il proposito di rilevare il carattere farneticante dei suoi *plays* in rapporto ai principali modelli espressivi dell'epoca, i più misurati di Dryden e Otway[4]. Accanto ad apporti utili e innovativi, sullo studio dell'opera di Lee si sono riversati nel tempo approcci che sembrano esemplificare quelli che oggi consideriamo i principali rischi interpretativi dell'indagine interdisciplinare tra letteratura e (storia della) medicina. Lee è stato oggetto, infatti, di tentativi anacronistici di 'diagnosi a distanza', spesso condotti secondo concetti di salute mentale poco consoni al contesto pre-psichiatrico del mondo da lui conosciuto e descritto.

D'altra parte, la produzione di Lee ha anche sollecitato fruttuosi percorsi di ricerca multidirezionali, spesso volti ad affrontare l'annoso problema della sua collocazione in rapporto alle convenzioni più diffuse nel teatro della Restaurazione. Dal momento che i tentativi di far rientrare le tragedie entro i canoni aristotelici hanno evidenziato alcune forzature, si è pensato che Lee scriva in limine tra tragedia e commedia, idea che giustificherebbe l'impiego frequente di toni dissacranti e satirici[5]. Tuttavia, nei drammi di Lee si può rico-

[3] Per maggiori informazioni sulle visite a pagamento e il *mad show* di Bedlam nel Sei-Settecento, cfr. ad es. Porter 2000 e Andrews *et al*. 1997.

[4] Cfr. ad es. Brown (1983: 385), Frank (2003: 109) e Danby (2014: 191-208).

[5] Cfr. Verdurmen (1989: 83-84) e Brown (1983: 385-401).

noscere anche "a […] destruction of the clichés of early Restoration tragicomedy" (Hughes 2008: 208); non è senza riserve, inoltre, che possono essere annoverati tra gli "horror plays" discussi da Hermanson (2014: 14). In definitiva, nessuna categorizzazione sembra funzionare appieno, e nessuna riesce a dar conto in modo soddisfacente dell'originalità di temi, immagini e modi espressivi impiegati da Lee. L'eccentricità dei personaggi e l'alterità dello stile delle sue opere in rapporto ai canoni tardo-secenteschi hanno finito, quindi, per essere giustificate supponendo che le stesse qualità caratterizzassero il pensiero dell'autore.

A prima vista, non pare che mettere in scena la follia a fine Seicento costituisca uno scarto dalla norma. Il teatro della Restaurazione, così come quello dei decenni precedenti, è invaso da regnanti che perdono il senno, innamorati malinconici, pazzie simulate. È chiaro che Lee accoglie e rielabora la tradizione recente, inclusa quella shakespeariana, ma con alcuni accorgimenti: lo stato di disordine mentale è raramente innescato da una frattura nell'ordine costituito o un'azione distruttiva, e si fa piuttosto primo motore della tragicità delle vicende, come avviene in *Brutus* e *The Massacre of Paris*. Ancor più originale, a mio avviso, è il livello di pervasività della rappresentazione della patologia mentale nell'opera di Lee: l'eccentricità è sia tecnica di composizione letteraria, sia tratto distintivo di più di un personaggio in ciascun *play*. Per Lee, il folle è nel mondo e lo domina, anche in senso letterale, poiché le anomalie comportamentali caratterizzano non solo chi partecipa alla società, ma soprattutto chi vi ricopre incarichi di potere, come evidente in *Nero* o *Caesar Borgia*. La pervasività dello stato patologico è anche data dall'insistenza sui dettagli con cui ciascuna condizione è rappresentata: lo stato fisico-mentale dei personaggi è in genere illustrato con dovizia sintomatologica e specifici riferimenti al discorso medico-scientifico dell'epoca.

È opportuno ricordare, a questo punto, che nell'Inghilterra del tardo Seicento coesistevano e si intrecciavano diverse nozioni di disturbo mentale, che non mi soffermo qui ad illustrare per ragioni di spazio e per averne già trattato altrove[6]. Il discorso medico accostava idee antiche e recenti, ivi incluse teoria degli umori, circolazione del sangue, spiriti animali o vitali, fumi e vapori. La concezione di alterazione mentale, temporanea o permanente, era una struttura dinamica all'interno della quale non vigeva un principio di esclusione che scartasse i punti di vista poco in armonia o persino incompatibili tra loro[7]; di conseguenza, anche Lee ricorre a vari sistemi di riferimento contemporaneamente, derivando idee, per esempio, da Robert Burton, William Harvey e Thomas Willis. A suscitare interesse, tuttavia, non sono tanto le fonti specifiche da cui Lee trae materiale per le proprie rappresentazioni, ma il modo stesso in cui è articolato il suo discorso interdisciplinare e come si interseca con la tradizione letteraria e culturale.

Non è da escludere che l'interesse di Lee per l'ambito medico derivi da una sua consapevolezza di essere percepito in termini di alterità o eccentricità mentale rispetto alla norma socioculturale del proprio tempo già prima del ricovero a Bedlam. Credo, tuttavia, che qualsiasi valutazione, presente o passata, sulla condizione mentale di un autore sia poco rilevante

[6] Cfr. Natali 2016.

[7] Rileva Michael MacDonald, "Physicians tried to maintain their scientific respectability by accepting some modern ideas and marrying them to ancient remedies, a match that was more attractive politically than philosophically" (1981: 197).

ai fini dell'analisi della sua opera: in linea con Allan Ingram, infatti, ritengo che la follia trovi espressione in letteratura sempre e solo in quanto rappresentazione (Ingram & Faubert 2003: 4). L'approccio più produttivo, nota Shoshana Felman, è esplorare le "sophisticated ways by which literature communicates with madness" (2003: 4); è per presentare alcune ipotesi a tale riguardo che di seguito vorrei concentrare l'attenzione su una delle opere più note di Lee, *Lucius Junius Brutus*, messa in scena nel 1680 e pubblicata l'anno successivo.

2. Rappresentazioni di follia in *Brutus*

Poco dopo la sua prima rappresentazione sotto il regno di Carlo II, *Brutus* fu censurato per "Scandalous Expressions & Reflections vpon Ye Government" (TNA LC 5/144)[8]. I motivi della censura sembrano abbastanza evidenti: parlare della fondazione della Repubblica romana ripetendo la parola "Commonwealth" per tredici volte difficilmente non avrebbe suscitato allarme a soli venti anni dalla Restaurazione, specie dopo il presunto complotto papista del 1678. È forse a seguito della censura che si è spesso pensato a *Brutus* come a un testo di propaganda pro-repubblicana, focalizzando l'attenzione sul presunto orientamento di Lee "in favour of the men who overthrew the tyrant" (Auchter 2001: 221)[9]. Come intendo dimostrare di seguito, tuttavia, quest'opera non rappresenta un'ennesima favilla della polemica repubblicana ormai quasi spenta. Per poter essere considerata propagandistica, la tragedia dovrebbe soddisfare almeno una condizione essenziale; proporre un'immagine di Bruto positiva, se non esemplare; tale condizione, a mio parere, non è soddisfatta nel testo.

Il contesto del *play* è abbastanza noto. Secondo *Ab Urbe condita libri* di Tito Livio[10], una delle fonti principali di Lee, Lucio Giunio si finge pazzo per proteggersi dalla tirannia di Tarquinio il Superbo, guadagnandosi così l'appellativo di "Brutus" ("irrazionale", "stolto"). Appreso dello stupro di Lucrezia e rivelata la propria dissimulazione, è a capo della rivolta che schiaccerà l'ultimo re. Nella storia si potrebbero già configurare i tratti di un tipico *revenge play*, se non fosse che, nella versione di Lee, le vicende di Lucrece non sembrano essere determinanti per spronare Brutus all'azione (Lee 1967: I.i.94-111, 12). In modo piuttosto inconsueto per il teatro secentesco, inoltre, Brutus rivela l'inganno della sua condizione a sole dodici brevi battute dalla propria comparsa in scena (I.i.198-201, 16)[11]. È principalmente da quanto dice al figlio Titus che apprendiamo come sinora abbia interpretato "all variety of aping madness" (I.i.121, 13), apparentemente simulando non tanto una vera e propria istanza di follia, quanto la patologia che nel Seicento si definiva "idiocy" e costituiva un impedimento generico delle capacità intellettive[12]. La tempestiva rivelazione di Brutus permette al drammaturgo di porre l'accento sul momento dell'azione e del cambiamento, anziché concentrarsi sulla

[8] Il testo del manoscritto è citato, ad es., in Nicoll 1952: 10n.

[9] Per un'interpretazione del testo come propaganda repubblicana o *whig*, cfr. anche Loftis 1967; secondo Hayne, *Brutus* rappresenta i rischi dell'estremismo repubblicano (1996).

[10] Cfr. Livio 1841: I.lvi-lx, 133-142.

[11] Nel conteggio delle battute, non si tiene conto del soliloquio in I.i.94-133, in cui non c'è finzione di follia.

[12] Secondo *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* di Locke, "mad Men put wrong *Ideas* together, and so make wrong Propositions, but argue and reason right from them: But Idiots make very few or no Propositions, and reason scarce at all" (1975: XI.ii.13, 161). Sull'argomento cfr. anche Andrews (1988: 66).

corruzione del regno di Tarquin. Soprattutto, a Lee dovette sembrare superfluo soffermarsi sullo spettacolo della simulazione di Brutus quando molto più spunto offre il fatto che tale simulazione può nascondere una reale patologia o persino esserne un sintomo.

Davanti al figlio, Brutus subisce una metamorfosi degna del testo ovidiano, in cui muta non solo atteggiamento ma persino aspetto: Titus osserva che "no part of him" rimane "The same; nor eyes, nor mien, nor voice, nor gesture!" (I.i.224-5, 17). La trasformazione, tuttavia, non porta ad un'immagine 'normalizzata' di Bruto, ma segna piuttosto il passaggio da una rappresentazione di alterità ad un'altra:

> […] No, degenerate boy,
> Brutus is not the same; the gods have waked him
> From dead stupidity to be a scourge,
> A living torment to thy disobedience.
> Look on my face, view my eyes flame, and tell me
> If aught thou seest but glory and revenge,
> A blood-shot anger, and a burst of fury,
> When I but think of Tarquin […] (I.i.228-235, 17).

Occhi in fiamme, il sangue che ribolle, Brutus incarna il cliché del *raging fool* secentesco, caratterizzato da rabbia furente, esaltazione e violenza. I segnali della sua *manic insanity* sono, poi, ripresi e rafforzati nel corso dell'intera tragedia anche attraverso le percezioni altrui; ad esempio, Titus nota che "the gods light'ned from his awful eyes, / and thundered from his tongue" (II.i.488-9, 41) e Sempronia si interroga: "is he not mad?", riferendosi alla sete di sangue che ora "rains from his own bowels" (V.i.92-93, 84). Effettivamente, Brutus ha raggiunto un nuovo stato, anch'esso suggerito e definito dal proprio nome: la brutalità incontrollabile che infiamma il folle[13]. La forza del tradizionale eroe erculeo si fonde qui con la frenetica ed iraconda sregolatezza della pazzia, dando vita ad un nuovo ibrido, una sorta di *herculean madness*.

Come si evince sin dalla *Summa theologiae* di Tommaso D'Aquino (1969, III, q.15, a.9, 70), la rabbia, se giustificata, non è segno di alterazione morale o mentale, e può essere anzi tratto del virtuoso; lo ricorda anche Tiberius nel testo di Lee, "You may be angry, and may be forgiven" (II.i.12, 26). Ma sono continui i momenti del dramma in cui la virtù e le ragioni di Bruto sono messe esplicitamente in discussione, persino da lui stesso:

> O Rome, O mother, be thou th'impartial judge
> If this be virtue, which yet wants a name […] (I.i.130-1, 13).

La furia di Brutus non può configurarsi come virtù perché Lee non le attribuisce un motivo chiaro e razionale. Il protagonista, suggerisce anche David Vieth, ci appare incoerente, poiché il suo odio intenso verso Tarquin si scatena d'improvviso, dopo ben venti anni

[13] L'immagine della follia di Brutus è derivata essenzialmente da Burton (1638: 104-105); idee molto simili compaiono in Willis (1685: 479).

di silenzio e dissimulazione, senza chiaro innesco (1975: 62-63). Altrettanto oscura rimane la ragione che spinge Brutus ad impedire a Titus di unirsi alla novella sposa Teraminta, figlia illegittima di Tarquin, donna che, per ammissione dello stesso Brutus, è "chastely good" e "Without the smallest tincture of her father" (II.i.321-2, 36). Naturalmente, l'atto più terribile e ingiustificabile dell'eroe è l'uccisione dei propri figli, che insiste siano condannati ad una morte senza onore. È legittimo dubitare, quindi, che Lee stia portando avanti una linea politica antimonarchica: più che all'opera di un salvatore della patria, sembra di assistere all'imperversare di un nuovo tiranno (così lo definiscono spesso i figli e Teraminta, es. II.i.363, 37 e V.i.116, 85) spinto dalla s-ragione.

La follia di Brutus è solo un tassello in un complesso mosaico di riferimenti medici e biologici che domina il *play*. Lee costruisce un'anatomia della mente e del corpo umano: l'immaginario del dramma, nota Vieth, è "viscerale" (1975: 64), pervaso da idee di smembramento e sventramento. Sono menzionati, inoltre, i "fumes" della cattiva digestione (IV.i.163, 66), disequilibri degli umori, degli spiriti vitali (es. I.i.101, 12; 173, 15; 440, 24; II.i.362, 37; IV.i.513, 78) e del flusso sanguigno (es. I.i.102, 12 e II.i.439, 40)[14]. Se "multitude is a mad thing" (II.i.31, 27), come sostiene Fabritius, è perché ciascun individuo che costituisce la folla presenta, in modo più o meno temporaneo, una mancanza di lucidità. Per esempio, la *gens Tarquinia* e la corte partecipano di una comune forma di squilibrio: proni ad eccessi bestiali e brutali, sono guidati da istinti primari e dominati da impulsi erotici. Lucrece, violata da Sextus, di lui ricorda i "red and sparkling eyes, / The flushing blood that mounted in his face, / The trembling eagerness that quite devoured him" (I.i.367-9, 22). Questo tipo di follia distruttrice non si riscontra nei testi medici secenteschi, ma richiama senz'altro la concezione di "alienatione" animalesca che Marsilio Ficino attribuisce all'eccesso di "sangue adusto" in *El libro dell'amore* (VII.iii, 188).

Con l'occhio di un medico piuttosto che di un drammaturgo, già in apertura di *Brutus* Lee presenta una coppia di innamorati che si definisce in termini di alterità dalla norma comportamentale. Queste sono, infatti, le parole rivolte da Titus a Teraminta:

> O Teraminta, why this face of tears?
> Since first I saw thee, till this happy day,
> Thus hast thou past thy melancholy hours,
> Even in the court retired; stretched on a bed
> In some dark room, with all the curtains drawn;
> Or in some garden o'er a flow'ry bank
> Melting thy sorrows in the murmuring stream […] (I.i.1-7, 9).

Teraminta mostra i sintomi della malinconia flegmatica illustrata da Burton[15], mentre

[14] Lee sembra trarre nozioni da più fonti, ma la principale è ancora *Anatomy of Melancholy*, che illustra i "Fumes arising from the stomack" (1638: 198), parla di disequilibrio negli spiriti vitali e nel sangue (es. 1638: 15, 34).

[15] Scrive Burton: "For example, if [melancholy proceeds] from fleagme […] it stirres up dull Symptomes, and a kinde of stupiditie, or impassionate hurt: they are sleepy, saith *Savanarola*, dull, slow, cold, blockish, […], *they are much given to weeping and delight in waters, ponds, pooles, rivers* […]" (1638: 191).

Titus attraversa due diverse condizioni nel *play*, incarnando le principali tipologie di "madness" individuate da Hobbes (2011: 86-7). Dapprima lo vediamo, come dice il padre, vittima di "the heated channels of [his] veins" (Lee 1967: II.i.351, 37), vale a dire in preda a una smisurata "ecstasy" ed "extravagant passion" (I.i.34-5, 10) per Teraminta: con il proprio febbrile ardore si propone persino di riscaldare l'amata, dominata dai freddi umori della malinconia ("Cold as thou art", I.i.38, 10). Dopo che Brutus mette in evidenza le inopportune "raptures" e gli eccessi patologici di Titus (I.i.198-99, 16), impedendogli di consumare il matrimonio appena celebrato, quest'ultimo piange e trema "drowned in his melancholy" (III.iii.14, 55), affezione che lo accompagnerà fino a una morte cercata e desiderata. La follia di Titus è accecante e autodistruttiva, ma non al punto di impedirgli di riconoscere, a sua volta, l'irragionevolezza del padre, e biasimarlo perché intende ucciderlo in maniera così umiliante (IV.i.534-547, 78). È particolarmente innovativo che, anche se i singoli stati patologici di Titus rimangono isolati e autonomi, alla sua alterità mentale sia attribuito uno status di processo e una capacità di dinamismo raramente concettualizzata dalla scienza dell'epoca.

Attraverso i personaggi di *Brutus*, in definitiva, Lee sviluppa una nosologia del disturbo mentale o comportamentale che poggia su modelli preesistenti per arricchirli di nuove declinazioni e rielaborarli in combinazioni originali. Si fa strada l'ipotesi che il testo non attraversi solo diversi modelli e convenzioni letterarie del proprio tempo, ma soprattutto che si situi in una posizione liminale tra opera teatrale e trattato medico. Nella tragedia, immaginario letterario e scientifico si fondono fino a farsi indistinguibili, in una modalità ibrida che pare suggerire una natura fittizia comune alla creazione artistica e al discorso della medicina. Se la figura semileggendaria dell'eroe Brutus può sembrare patologica agli occhi del Seicento è perché nell'identificare i sintomi della follia si attua una procedura arbitraria e basata su criteri variabili, dipendenti dal contesto epocale. Non senza intento satirico, quindi, Lee ricostruisce una realtà distante nel tempo e nello spazio reinterpretando i comportamenti dei personaggi alla luce di nozioni moderne di salute e malattia; così il virtuoso mondo dell'antica Roma si trasforma in una sorta di *Narrenschiff* o, in termini più moderni, di Bedlam. È rispetto a quest'ultimo scenario che spicca una differenza fondamentale: i folli di Lee non sono internati o isolati, non sono in cerca di cure e terapie. L'alterazione del pensiero o del comportamento è, piuttosto, accettata criticamente e consapevolmente come inevitabile nel palcoscenico del mondo.

3. Il folle, il medico, il sovrano

Brutus mette in discussione la stabilità del confine tra normalità e anormalità di pensiero e comportamento appropriandosi dello stesso discorso che si occupa di tracciare e descrivere tale confine. Lee sembra percepire il concetto di patologia come profondamente radicato in uno specifico quadro sociale e culturale; dal momento che il disturbo mentale ha senso solo se contestualizzato o storicizzato, sottolinea la transitorietà dei suoi modelli, mettendo in discussione la legittimità di qualsiasi lettura della follia.

Queste idee sono di grande attualità nel momento in cui *Brutus* le affronta. Sebbene a livello giuridico varie forme di difficoltà fisica, mentale o sociale risultino ancora regolamentate in modo indifferenziato dal *Poor Law Act* del 1601, nella seconda metà del Sei-

cento si vanno affermando nuove linee di condotta riguardanti la specifica gestione e cura del disagio mentale. Sempre più spesso si sente la necessità di ricorrere all'internamento e all'allontanamento dalla società del diverso, come dimostrano i progressivi ampliamenti cui è sottoposto l'ospedale di Bedlam: l'espansione iniziata negli anni Trenta del Seicento culmina nella totale ricostruzione del 1676, quando gli spazi per i pazienti si moltiplicano in un nuovo edificio maestoso e regale.

Mentre la società si prepara a isolare l'alterità mentale, il mondo scientifico elabora nuove categorizzazioni e soprattutto nuove terapie fisiche estremamente invasive finalizzate a ricondurre il paziente alla 'ragione'. Particolarmente rappresentative di questa tendenza sono le indicazioni offerte da Thomas Willis in *De Anima Brutorum* (1672): si apprende dalla versione inglese del trattato che qualsiasi cura deve essere accompagnata da isolamento, e compito del medico è usare forza pari e contraria a quella dimostrata dal paziente, così che "to desperate Love ought to be applied or shrewed indignation and hatred" (1683: 193). Inoltre, "to correct and allay the furies and exorbitancies of the Animal Spirits" il medico necessita di "threatnings, bonds, or strokes, as well as Physick" (1683: 206). Che la linea di confine tra cura e sopruso si stesse facendo molto sottile era già emerso agli occhi dell'opinione pubblica nel 1632, quando l'unico medico responsabile di Bedlam, Helkiah Crooke, fu al centro di uno scandalo per trattamenti barbarici e palesi abusi nei confronti dei ricoverati.

Lee percepisce il sintomo di un importante cambiamento nella concezione e nella gestione del disturbo mentale in Inghilterra, e risponde a questa situazione elaborando in *Brutus* una riflessione sui concetti di malattia e di potere. Tale riflessione finisce, poi, per ampliarsi a trattare un problema storico più vasto e complesso, poiché la tragedia stabilisce una rete di analogie tra la pratica della medicina e quella della ragion di stato. Il discorso medico si fa, quindi, pretesto e strumento per articolare anche un dibattito politico.

In *Brutus*, il governo è un organismo la cui salute dipende da ciascuno dei suoi componenti. A rendere palese la corrispondenza tra patologia umana e i problemi 'organici' di Roma è Titus, che spiega a Teraminta come il padre si sia autoproclamato rimedio per la follia dominante:

> The body of the world is out of frame,
> The vast distorted limbs are on the rack
> And all the cable sinews stretched to bursting,
> The blood ferments, and the majestic spirit,
> Like Hercules in the envenomed shirt,
> Lies in a fever on the horrid pile.
> My father, like an Aesculapius
> Sent by the gods, comes boldly to the cure.
> But how, my love? By violent remedies,
> And says that Rome, ere yet she can be well,
> Must purge and cast, purge all th'infected humors
> Through the whole mass; and vastly, vastly bleed (II.i.436-47, 40).

Brutus, come Thomas Willis e altri medici di fine Seicento, propone una cura di "violent remedies" che non sembra promettere successo, ma solo sofferenza. Non va dimenticato, inoltre, che il novello Asclepio è tanto disfunzionale quanto il mondo che ironicamente si ripromette di sanare: in Brutus, quindi, prende corpo la tradizionale figura del *quack*, un medico ciarlatano e folle simile a quelli che popolano la *Narrenliteratur*. Da una prospettiva politica, il sanatore della patria non è meno tirannico e brutale del sovrano che intende spodestare, e giustifica l'uso della violenza con la ragion di stato, pur senza invocarla apertamente. Lee suggerisce che questa modalità di pensiero, nel mondo medico così come in quello politico, traversa una soglia sensibile, in cui si annidano storture e rischi di sopruso: si vanno ad intaccare valori di giustizia e libertà, e quella fondamentale legge di natura che secondo Locke è "the preservation of all mankind" (2004: 5).

La metafora anatomica, già ampiamente sfruttata almeno sin dalla *Repubblica* di Platone, non ha molto di innovativo; tuttavia, anche in questo caso, Lee declina elementi della tradizione nell'attualità politica e sociale del proprio tempo. Alla monarchia restaurata sembrano alludere le parole di Vinditius, secondo il quale "the people in the body politic are but the guts of government" senza "head" (I.i.294-297, 19): come nota J. M. Armistead, "when Charles I was beheaded, the state itself became headless" (1979: 26) ed entrò in crisi il concetto che il re potesse rappresentare la mente dell'organismo politico. Soprattutto, Carlo II, re e medico del corpo malato dell'Inghilterra, era considerato un guaritore anche fuor di metafora, poiché dopo l'Interregno aveva reintrodotto la cerimonia del tocco regale, che si credeva sanasse miracolosamente una serie di malattie. Attraverso questa rete di riferimenti, *Brutus* mette in discussione la *fiction* di onnipotenza semidivina della regalità inglese: l'immagine del sovrano si rivela improvvisamente nella sua superba fallibilità umana[16].

Carlo II è indubbiamente uno degli obiettivi di Lee in quella che si configura sempre più come una satira della sovranità, ma non è il suo unico obiettivo. Il discorso politico in Brutus ha respiro ampio, stimola una riflessione generale sulle cariche e le funzioni di governo, su tutta la condizione del potere piuttosto che su figure specifiche che lo rappresentano. A suggerire questa ampiezza di vedute sono le relazioni intertestuali che Lee stabilisce tra la propria opera e gli scritti di Niccolò Machiavelli, indicati come fonte di ispirazione per *Brutus* nella dedica iniziale al Conte di Dorset (Lee 1967: 4, 45-47). Nei *Discorsi*, infatti, Machiavelli loda la "simulazione della stultizia" di Bruto, portandolo ad esempio a quanti intendano ribellarsi ad un principe: la finzione consente di "prima misurare e prima pesare le forze loro" per poi passare all'attacco (III.2, 2000: 229, 265). Il Brutus di Lee si discosta da questo modello di comportamento: non raccoglie le proprie forze prima di svelare l'inganno della finta follia, non attende di aver organizzato razionalmente la rivolta, pare solo spinto da un *furor* irresistibile. Che la ragione machiavellica sia in lui assente è ulteriore motivo di ironia, e sottolinea l'instabilità e inefficacia del suo comportamento.

Con l'immagine del mondo come corpo malato, Lee amplia e rinsalda la connessione con l'opera di Machiavelli, che spesso nel *Principe* e nei *Discorsi* ascrive poteri di guarigione

[16] La metafora Stato/organismo richiama anche *Microcosmographia* di Crooke, lo stesso medico di Bedlam al centro dello scandalo del 1632, secondo il quale il corpo umano è "rule and square of all bodies" e l'anatomia apre la strada a tutto lo scibile umano (1615: 12).

del corpo politico a chi lo governa. Per Machiavelli, la "medicina" deve essere sempre assunta "a tempo" dallo Stato (III.26, 1962: 20) e perché il malanno non "ammazz[i … il] corpo" (III.1, 2000: 224), spesso è necessario ricorrere al "ferro" (I.58, 2000: 127), vale a dire alle esecuzioni. Il politico-medico, come Brutus o Thomas Willis (che ho eletto qui a rappresentante dell'alienista secentesco), deve essere pronto a colpire, tagliare e agire con decisione a seconda di quanto richiede la gravità della patologia. È questo cinismo privo di basi morali che Lee sembra mettere in discussione tanto nell'ambito della medicina quanto in quello della politica: in caso di necessità il potere si può fare eccessivo e illegittimo, ogni arbitrio sembra possibile, ogni violenza giustificata e ogni sopruso tollerabile.

Leggendo *Brutus* alla luce delle relazioni con l'opera di Machiavelli risulta chiaro come la riflessione politica di Lee vada oltre le specificità del proprio tempo per mettere in evidenza che, in qualsiasi tipo di governo, chi ha autorità decisionale può godere di eccessivi poteri e scarse competenze. Per citare Bacon, "as there are mountebanks for the natural body, so there are mountebanks for the politic body; men that undertake great cures, and perhaps have been lucky in two or three experiments, but want the grounds of science, and therefore cannot hold out" (1972: 35). La tragedia di Lee destabilizza il paradigma della sovranità nel capo di Stato e della sua emanazione, il medico moderno, che acquisisce potere assoluto sul suo paziente; a queste figure è lecito esercitare un pragmatismo bestiale come a Brutus, che non è spinto da *pietas* ma da violenza, furia, barbarie e ambizione.

Rimangono aperte, nel testo di Lee, una serie di domande. Per esempio, chi protegge l'individuo dall'arbitrio di quanti detengono il potere, o dalla fallibilità umana, compresa quella del sovrano e del medico? *Brutus* non propone risposte, la sua conclusione è ambigua e non allude ad alcun recupero di un equilibrio. Un tiranno è sconfitto, ma un altro si appresta a prendere le redini del mondo, negando qualsiasi senso di speranza in un miglioramento o una rinascita. Nessuno, in *Brutus*, sembra aver imparato dai propri errori, che si suppone continueranno a ripresentarsi ciclicamente. Rimane solo l'amaro sorriso dello spettatore davanti all'ironica promessa dell'iracondo e ambizioso Brutus di costruire un futuro "where rancor and ambition are extinguished" (III.ii.62, 51).

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Suspended Quotations: A Corpus Analysis of Functions

Abstract I: Questo lavoro si avvale di strumenti tipici della linguistica dei corpora, oltre che di analisi manuali, per confrontare la *suspended quotation* in Charles Dickens e in Jane Austen. Il confronto tra due autori così differenti per stile, scopo e contesto letterario è funzionale alla creazione di un elenco dei ruoli che possono essere svolti da questo particolare espediente narrativo. Lo studio mostra che sebbene alcune delle funzioni identificate nella letteratura precedente in riferimento alle *suspended quotation* di Dickens siano specifiche di questo autore, molte altre possono essere considerate 'universali'. L'analisi mostra inoltre che questo espediente narrativo può svolgere una gamma di funzioni molto più ampia rispetto a quelle evidenziate fino ad ora.

Abstract II: By joining manual analysis and corpus linguistics methods, this paper compares and contrasts the use of suspended quotations in Charles Dickens and Jane Austen. An analysis of two authors whose styles, aims and literary contexts are so different is functional to creating a list of functions typically performed by suspended quotation generally. The study shows that some roles of the suspended quotation reported for Dickens' novels in previous literature are indeed specific to this writer and his idea of narrative, while others can be considered 'author-independent'. Furthermore, the current analysis has revealed that suspended quotations lend themselves to a much wider range of functions than those reported and described in the literature thus far.

Keywords: Dickens, Austen, CLiC database, POS tagging, semantic tagging.

Introduction

In the last few years, corpus analysis tools and methods have become increasingly important in the study of literary works (Mahlberg 2013), and new tools have been developed specifically for this purpose. One such tool is the CLiC web app (clic.bham.ac.uk; Mahlberg *et al*. 2016), an online concordancing system that analyses a wide collection of 19th century novels, annotated so as to distinguish speech (i.e. dialogue) from other parts of the text (e.g. suspended quotations).

The notion of suspended quotations – or suspensions – was first introduced by Lambert (1981) with reference to cases where the narrator interrupts a character's speech by interposing at least five words between the first and second part of the character's line.

Lambert examined novels by Charles Dickens, analysing the first 100 paragraphs containing instances of speech in each volume. He asserted that Dickens used suspensions for three main reasons: i) to provide information on 'suprasegmentals', i.e., gestures, facial contortions and other details that play a fundamental role in making fictional dialogue life-like; ii) to make fun of characters; and iii) to attack characters that deserve punishment. Thus, Dickens made use of suspended quotations to establish indirect contact with his readers. This conclusion is supported by the fact that – as Lambert noted – suspended quotations were used more frequently in Dickens' early novels and less frequently in his later novels (from *Bleak House* onwards). This may be related to the fact that in 1853 Dickens started giving public readings of his novels, thus having direct contact with his audience. Since Lambert's work was published, suspended quotations have been considered a distinguishing feature of Dickens' writing style (Newsom 2000).

Suspended quotations have more recently been analysed with corpus linguistics methods. Using the CLiC web app, Mahlberg and Smith (2012) found that Dickens' novels are less homogeneous in terms of the use of suspensions than Lambert's (1981) results suggest. Furthermore, by analysing concordance lines around characters' names (thus used as node words), lexical patterns and clusters in suspensions, a number of researchers have attested that the suspended quotations in Dickens' works very often illustrate habitual behaviour or typical character features, as opposed to atypical behaviour or reactions triggered by specific situations (Mahlberg 2012; Mahlberg & Smith 2012; Mahlberg *et al*. 2013). Suspensions were also shown to be used to provide the narrator's interpretation of the character's speech (Mahlberg 2012) or to clarify the character's manner or attitude (Mahlberg *et al*. 2013). Lastly, corpus studies have suggested that these linguistic units contribute to meaningful patterns in fictional prose (Mahlberg *et al*. 2013) and work as places where synchronicity between speech and body language can be explored productively (Mahlberg 2012; Mahlberg & Smith 2012; Mahlberg *et al*. 2013).

The current paper uses the CLiC database and corpus linguistics methods to see whether the roles of suspended quotations found in Dickens' novels in previous literature are specific to this writer and his idea of narrative, or should rather be considered 'intrinsic' roles of suspensions (RQ1), and to create a more complete list of the functions typically performed by suspended quotations in general (RQ2). To these aims, the suspended quotations of a novelist who strongly differs from Dickens in terms of style, aims and literary context were analysed and compared to those in Dickens' novels. Among the many novelists present in the CLiC database, Jane Austen was considered a suitable choice due to the fundamental role that dialogue plays in her works (Babb 1962; Morini 2009).

This study is in no way a literary or stylistic comparison between the two writers, but rather intends to provide researchers with a general description of the functions that suspended quotations may perform, which could be a useful starting point for further investigation of this specific narrative feature across literary periods and authors. As an adjunct, this paper tests out a specific semi-automated analytical method and verifies its adequacy to identify the functions of suspended quotations.

The following sections provide a description of the materials and methods used, and

report the results of a manual analysis of suspended quotations in Austen's novels. This is followed by a comparison between suspended quotations in Austen's and Dickens' work. Finally, the concluding remarks section offers a list of the functions that may be performed by suspended quotations.

Materials and Methods

The current paper capitalises on collections of texts stored in the CLiC database, which include the following Jane Austen novels: *Emma* (E), *Mansfield Park* (MP), *Northanger Abbey* (NA), *Persuasion* (P), *Pride and Prejudice* (PP) and *Sense and Sensibility* (SS). The database also contains the following works by Dickens: *Barnaby Rudge* (BR), *Bleak House* (BH), *David Copperfield* (DC), *Dombey and Son* (DS), *Edwin Drood* (ED), *Great Expectations* (GE), *Hard Times* (HT), *Little Dorrit* (LD), *Martin Chuzzlewit* (MC), *Nicholas Nickleby* (NN), *Old Curiosity Shop* (OCS), *Oliver Twist* (OT), *Our Mutual Friend* (OMF), *Pickwick Papers* (PP) and *Tale of Two Cities* (TTC). Each novel is annotated to distinguish characters' speech (i.e. dialogue) from other parts of the text (e.g. suspended quotations). It is particularly useful that the CLiC database distinguishes short suspensions (less than 5 words) from long ones (5 or more words).

For this study, only long suspensions were extracted and two corpora were created, including the suspended quotations from Austen's and Dickens' novels, respectively. Table 1 provides a summary of the two corpora in numbers.

Tab. 1.

	Dickens	Austen
No. of texts	15	6
Total no. of suspended quotations	7680	506
Total no. of words (suspensions only)	84417	4808
Average no. of suspensions per text	512	84.33
Average length of suspensions	10.99	9.50

As table 1 shows, the average lengths of suspended quotations by each author are similar (10.99 vs. 9.5), but, as the average number of suspensions per text shows, Dickens uses this narrative feature six times more often than Austen (512 vs. 84.33). This certainly explains why Dickens' suspended quotations have long caught scholars' attention, while Austen's have not.

As a first step, the suspensions in Austen's novels were manually classified in terms of the functions they perform. Initially, the suspensions that performed functions already described by Lambert (1981), Mahlberg (2012), Mahlberg and Smith (2012), and Mahlberg *et al*. (2013) were identified and classified. These functions included: illustrating synchronicity between speech and body language (or, in other words, providing information on gestures, facial contortions and other bodily details), making fun of characters, attacking characters that deserve punishment, illustrating habitual behaviour or typical character features,

providing interpretation of the character's speech, and clarifying the manner or the attitude of the speaker (see Introduction). The remaining suspended quotations were then analysed, and 'new' functions were attributed to them[1].

As a second step, it seemed logical to check whether the new functions found in Austen's suspended quotations also appeared in Dickens' corpus of suspensions. Since the latter comprises as many as 7680 lines, manual analysis was considered unsuitable, and we decided to try some form of semi-automated analysis. In corpus linguistics, a highly useful way of analysing a corpus is to compare it to a reference corpus and extract keywords, key POS tags and/or key semantic tags, the latter two being extensions of the keyword concept (Culpeper & Demmen 2015). In this study, we opted to compare the two corpora to each other. While previously untested in the given scenario, this procedure was expected to be able to highlight functions of suspended quotations as well as differences between the two authors in the use of those functions. Thus, the two corpora were tagged using Wmatrix (Rayson 2003), a corpus analysis and concordancing tool that offers automatic Part of Speech (POS) tagging and automatic semantic tagging. Key POS tags and key semantic tags were extracted by comparing the two corpora[2]. The lists were ordered by log-likelihood (LL; a measure of statistical significance) and only the positive key items with $LL > 15.13$ ($p < 0.0001$ 1d.f.) were considered, a threshold that guarantees a very high level of statistical significance. Additionally, following Gabrielatos and Marchi (2011), each list was checked to ensure the items above the threshold included all the items having the same %DIFF (an effect size measure) of the last item above the threshold. When this was not the case, the list of items to consider was enlarged to include all the required keywords.

The results of the manual and automated analyses are illustrated and discussed in the following sections.

Manual Analysis of the Functions of Suspended Quotations in Austen's Novels – Findings and Discussion

A manual analysis of Austen's suspensions revealed most of the functions that previous scholars had observed in Dickens' suspended quotations, plus a few extra uses. In particular, as many as 48.81% of the suspended quotations in Austen's novels were used to clarify the manner or attitude of the speaker, as illustrated in examples [1]-[5]. This function was also observed in Dickens' works by Mahlberg *et al*. (2013).

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[1] A manual reading of the extracted data showed that 15 concordance lines had been wrongly identified by the software as suspensions, and were actually cases of text in between reported speech, as in the following example: *As to the management of their children, his theory was much better than his wife's, and his practice not so bad. "I could manage them very well, if it were not for Mary's interference", was what Anne often heard him say, and had a good deal of faith in; but when listening in turn to Mary's reproach of "Charles spoils the children so that I cannot get them into any order", she never had the smallest temptation to say, "Very true"*. (*Sense and Sensibility*). Cases such as these were removed from all analyses and counts.

[2] Such automated comparisons produce lists of unusually (in-)frequent POS tags, i.e. key POS tags, and unusually (in-)frequent semantic tags, i.e. key concepts, characterising each set of data. Keyness (i.e. prominence or non-prominence) of a given item (e.g. a semantic tag) in the corpus is established through statistical analysis.

[1] *cried Mrs. Norris, unable to be longer deaf;* [MP]
[2] *said Harriet, in a mortified voice,* [E]
[3] *(slowly, and with hesitation it was spoken),* [NA]
[4] *whispered one of the girls;* [P]
[5] *said Marianne, in her new character of candour,* [SS]

A much lower percentage of cases (27.47%) described concomitant actions, for example extracts [6]-[9]:

[6] *said Thorpe, as he handed her in*, [NA]
[7] *replied John Knightley, as they passed through the sweep-gate,* [E]
[8] *said Mrs. Reynolds, pointing to another of the miniatures,* [PP]
[9] *said Sir Thomas, taking out his watch;* [MP]

Furthermore, 22.33% of the suspended quotations found specified the time that the speech was performed, with reference to other events or actions. Examples [10]-[13] illustrate such instances:

[10] *said he, after a short pause* [NA]
[11] *said Emma triumphantly when he left them* [E]
[12] *he cried, after hearing what she said* [SS]
[13] *said Crawford to William as the latter was leaving them,* [MP]

Given the frequency of their occurrences, the functions illustrated above could be considered the dominant functions of suspended quotations in Austen's novels. However, they are not the only uses of this narrative feature. Some suspended quotations (8.70%) were used to provide readers with the desired interpretation of the character's speech (or reasons for such speech), including reactions triggered by specific situations, as also noted by Mahlberg (2012) regarding Dickens' works. Some instances are depicted in examples [14]-[17]:

[14] *cried Emma, feeling this to be an unsafe subject,* [E]
[15] *said Elizabeth; and then, unwilling to let the subject drop, added,* [PP]
[16] *he continued, in a lower tone, to avoid the possibility of being heard by Edmund, and not at all aware of her feelings,* [MP]
[17] *replied Elinor, startled by the question;* [SS]

There were instances of suspended quotations (4.74 %) that were used to specify to whom the speech was addressed, as in examples [18]-[20]:

[18] *Mr. Elton was appealed to* [E]
[19] *said Mrs. Bennet to her husband,* [PP]
[20] *said he, addressing Lady Middleton,* [SS]

A few suspended quotations (2.17%) illustrated habitual behaviour or typical character features, as shown in examples [21]-[23]. This function was also observed in Dickens' works by Mahlberg (2012) and Mahlberg and Smith (2012):

[21] *said Mr. Woodhouse, always the last to make his way in conversation;* [E]
[22] *their considerate aunt would reply,* [MP]
[23] *said Mrs Smith, assuming her usual air of cheerfulness,* [PP]

A small percentage of suspended quotations (0.79%) expressed the addressee's attitude, as illustrated by the underlined text in extract [24]:

[24] *Catherine found Mrs. Allen just returned from all the busy idleness of the morning, and was immediately greeted with, "Well, my dear, here you are", a truth which she had no greater inclination than power to dispute; "and I hope you have had a pleasant airing?"* [NA]

Finally, a minority of suspended quotations (0.20%) served to specify the place where the speech was performed (and the atmosphere of that place), as in example [25]:

[25] *cried Tom Bertram, from the other table, where the conference was eagerly carrying on, and the conversation incessant* [MP]

Of course, all suspended quotations perform the function of identifying the speaker – which is clearly the primary function of suspended quotations, though not a particularly interesting one. It should be noted that in one case (0.20%; example [26]) this was the sole function of the suspension:

[26] *as it was observed by her aunts,* [MP]

This confirms that a span of 5 is just the right threshold to analyse the function of suspended quotations, as it allows us to highlight all the interesting cases while minimising the presence of suspensions that only fulfil this general function.

Naturally, some suspensions (32.61%) perform more than one function. Such suspended quotations may be rather long and include several phrases or clauses, as exemplified in [27] where the first prepositional phrase (*in a lower tone*) portrays the manner in which the speech is uttered (followed by an explanation of such manner), while the coordinate clause (*and not at all aware of her feelings*) offers readers an interpretation of the speaker's reasons for saying such a thing. However, short, simple suspensions with more than one function are not infrequent. An example is [28], where the adverb (*gravely*) expresses manner, while the gerund (*examining*) describes a concomitant action:

[27] *he continued, in a lower tone, to avoid the possibility of being heard by Edmund, and not at all aware of her feelings,* [MP]
[28] *said he, gravely examining it;* [NA]

Suspended quotations where body language is specified (20.75%) were found to always have multiple functions. This is largely because descriptions of body language – which Mahlberg (2012), Mahlberg and Smith (2012) and Mahlberg *et al*. (2013) observed in Dickens' novels, and which can be said to correspond to Lambert's (1981) observation on how Dickens' suspensions provide information on gestures, facial contortions and other details for the purpose of making fictional dialogue life-like – never appear on their own. This can be observed in examples [29]-[32]:

[29] *cried Emma, shaking her head* [E]
[30] *said she, with a countenance no less smiling than her sister's,* [PP]
[31] *said Edmund, after looking at her attentively,* [MP]
[32] *said Mrs. Norris, her eyes directed towards Mr. Rushworth and Maria, who were partners for the second time,* [MP]

Indeed, in real life, body language always conveys some kind of meaning. Examining the present data, the body language descriptions in Austen's novels relate to the functions of: describing concomitant action (49.5%; [29]), expressing the speaker's manner or attitude (44.7%; [30]), identifying time (3.8%; [31]) and providing an interpretation of the speaker's reasons for his/her speech (2.8%; [32]).

The only two functions observed in Dickens' novels which were not found in Austen's work are making fun of characters and attacking characters that deserve punishment. This result could be expected, since they are characteristic features of Dickens' narrative approach and style.

Automated Comparison between the two Corpora – Findings and Discussion

The next phase of the research study was to check whether the new functions found in Austen's suspended quotations also appeared in Dickens' corpus of suspensions. To this aim, an automated comparison between the two corpora at the level of grammar categories and semantic fields was performed; next, their concordance lines were read.

Table 2 summarises the key positive items characterising each set of data. The tags are accompanied by their official explanations in square brackets. Where necessary, examples from the corpus have been added in italics/parentheses.

Tab. 1.

Positive key POS tags in Austen		**Positive key semantic tags in Austen**
Tag		***Tag***
PPHS1 [3rd person sing. subjective personal pronoun]		E4.1- (Sad)
CS31 [subordinating conjunction (*as soon as*)]		T1.1.3 (Time: Future)
PPHS2 [3rd person plural subjective personal pronoun]		T1.2 (Time: Momentary)
NP1 [singular proper noun]		T2- (Time: Ending)
CS [subordinating conjunction (*while, after, before*)]		

Positive key POS tags in Dickens		**Positive key semantic tags in Dickens**
Tag		***Tag***
VVZ [-s form of lexical verb]		B1 (Anatomy and physiology)
APPGE [Possessive pronoun, pre-nominal]		O2 (Objects generally)
AT [article]		B5 (Belongings)
PPIS1 [1st person sing. subjective personal pronoun]		S2.2. (People: male)
PPI01 [1st person sing. objective personal pronoun]		A1.1.1 (General actions/making)
NN1 [singular common noun]		M2 (Putting, pulling, pushing, transporting)
VVG [-ing participle of lexical verb]		O1.1 (Substances and materials: solid)

Key Tags in Austen's Suspensions

The key POS tags in Austen's suspensions include singular subject pronouns (PPHS1) and proper names (NP1), the latter almost always being subjects following a verb of saying (e.g. *said Emma*; *replied Harriet*). These tags are evidence of the function of identifying the speaker. Furthermore, their presence in Austen's list of key items suggests that the author took advantage of this function more often than Dickens did. However, in more than 50% of the cases, the speakers were identified through a pronoun (222 vs. 211). This would make it difficult to investigate Austen's suspended quotations starting from characters' names alone, which was the strategy used by Mahlberg (2012) and Mahlberg and Smith (2012) in their analysis of Dickens' works.

Another key POS tag of Austen's suspended quotations is PPHS2. Equally spread across all novels, it is instantiated by the plural subject pronoun *they*, which typically appears in the lexical pattern *as/when they* (88.2%) followed by verbs of motion (e.g. *said Lucy, as they walked up the stairs together* [SS]) – thus indicating the function of describing concomitant action – or by verb *be* (e.g. *said Emma, when they were fairly beyond the sweep gates,* [E]) – thus serving the function of identifying the time of the speech. These two functions are also expressed by key POS tags CS31 (*as soon as*) and CS (*while, after, before*). Most of the examples in these groups perform the function of identifying the time of the speech by establishing a temporal relationship between the reported speech and other actions or events in the story (e.g. *said she, as soon as they were left to themselves* [PP]; *said Miss Crawford, after a short pause* [MP]; *and, before she could reply, he added* [PP]), while rare cases serve to describe a concomitant action (e.g. *She was interrupted by a fine tall boy of eleven years old, who, rushing out of the house, pushed the maid aside, and while William was opening the chaise-door himself, called out,* [MP]).

The key semantic tag E4.1- primarily comprises the verb *cried* (87.2%; e.g. *cried Mrs. Dashwood as she entered* [SS]) and indicates the introduction of direct speech. The fact that this tag is key for Austen's suspensions compared to Dickens' suggests that the proportion of Austen's suspensions indicating the introduction of direct speech is higher than in the other author. The remaining cases of tag E4.1- are words that embody the function of indicating manner or attitude (12.8%; e.g. *he replied, and without the smallest apparent embarrassment* [E]; *replied Sir Thomas, gravely interposing,* [MP]). Lastly, key semantic tags T1.1.3 (for example the

words *presently*, *soon*, and *the next day/morning*) and T1.2 (for example *moment* or *moments*) express the time of the speech. Finally, key tag T2- (for example the words *pause*, *paused*, *pausing*, *quitted*, *finished*, *stopped*, *ceased*) includes words that primarily expresses the time of the speech (e.g. *said she, after a short pause,* [PP]; *And Emma distinctly heard him add, in a lower tone, before he quitted the room* [E]). Less frequently, they introduce concomitant action (e.g. *added he, stopping in his walk, and turning towards her,* [PP]) or provide an interpretation of the reasons for the speech (e.g. *replied Darcy, who could contain himself no longer*, [PP]).

Although the extraction and analysis of key POS and key semantic tags in Austen's suspensions performed in this study did not manage to highlight all the functions identified in the manual analysis, it did succeed in recognising the most frequent ones. Furthermore, it brought to the fore an extra function (i.e. identifying the speaker) which had passed unnoticed in the manual analysis. For these reasons, it can be considered a suitable analytical procedure for the purposes of this paper.

Key Tags in Dickens' Suspensions

The key POS tags PPI01 (*me*) and PPIS1 (*I*) characterising Dickens' suspensions are due to the presence of three novels – *Great Expectations*, *Bleak House* and *David Copperfield* – written partially or completely in the first person.

The gerunds (VVG) express concomitant actions (e.g. *says Mr. Snagsby, walking deferentially in the road and leaving the narrow pavement to the lawyer* [BH]; *said the old man, stopping and turning round* [BH]), synchronicity between speech and body language (e.g. *said Mr. Kenge, shaking hands with us* [BH]; *said he, folding his arms and shutting his eyes with an oath* [BH]; *said Ada, clasping her hands upon his arm and shaking her head at me* [CD]) or less frequently, a comment on the characters' speech (e.g. *said Richard, coming to my relief* [BH]*; I think I added, without very well knowing what I said* [BH]).

On the other hand, the VVZ group of present tense, third person singular verbs is largely composed of speech-describing verbs immediately following the subject (75%). They express a large range of meanings corresponding to the following: expressing a character's attitude (e.g. *asserts; expostulates; murmurs; pleads; recommends; repeats; retorts; urges*); underlining interruption and continuation of speech (e.g. *begins; goes on; resumes*); and announcing the introduction of direct speech (e.g. *adds; answers; declares; observes; remarks; replies; returns; says*). The remaining 35% of cases are miscellaneous verbs that are part of longer clauses and variably refer to subject, object or indirect objects. Further analyses would be needed to make sense of these miscellaneous cases.

The presence of category AT (article) testifies to the ample use of noun or prepositional phrases and goes together with categories NN1 (nouns) and APPGE (possessive adjectives *his*, *her* and *their*). The latter categories respectively include or collocate with general nouns identifying: the speaker or the addressee (e.g. *Chancellor*; *Lady*; *librarian / / aunt; daughter; father, cousin; friend; guardian; husband; mother; patron; sister*); parts of the body (e.g. *arm*; *back*; *body*; *bosom / / arm(s); chin; eye(s); eyebrows; face; feet; (fore)finger(s); head; hand(s); hair; knee(s); leg(s); lip(s); mouth; neck; nose; shoulder; teeth; throat*); personal or house objects (e.g. *apron*; *basket*; *ball*; *bonnet*; *book*; *bottle / / chair; fan; glass; glove(s); handkerchief; hat; needle; paper; parasol; pen; pipe;*

pocket; spectacles; stick; stool); attitude or manner (e.g. *alacrity*; *alarm*; *anger*; *animation*; *anxiety*; *apprehension*; *assurance*; *astonishment*; *attention*; *authority*; *bitterness*; *boldness // indignation;* ADJ + *manner; reluctance; repugnance; tone; uneasily; ungainly*); or, less frequently, places (e.g. *bedroom; bed-chamber*). These suggest a wide range of functions, namely: identifying who utters the speech, specifying whom the speech is addressed to, illustrating synchronicity between speech and body language, clarifying the manner or the attitude of the speaker, and specifying the place where the speech is performed. Finally, a frequent colligation indicating attitude or manner was observed: gerund (VVG) + possessive adjectives (APPGE) + word *voice* (as in the following examples: *said the Major, lowering his voice* [DS]; *said Rachel, with a tremble in her voice* [HT]). Thus, the three POS categories of AT, NN1 and APPGE combined seem particularly productive for analysing the function of suspended quotations in Dickens' novels.

An analysis of the key semantic tags in the Dickens dataset highlights the following functions in the suspended quotations found there: describing synchronicity between speech and body language, and portraying concomitant actions (B1 - Anatomy and physiology; A1.1.1 - General actions/making; and M2 - Putting, pulling, pushing, transporting); and identifying the speaker or addressee (S2.2. - People: Male). Finally, categories O2 (Objects generally), B5 (Belongings; this group includes personal objects, such as *coat*, *cuff*, *dress*, *gloves*, *handkerchief*, *hat*, *pocket*, *waistcoat*, and *rig*) and O1.1 (Substances and materials: Solid; this group includes names of objects such as *ashes*, *glass*, *gold*, and *strings*, and a few character's names, such as *Brass*) – along with the presence of nouns referring to personal or house objects in key POS category NN1 (see above) – show that concomitant actions and body language act within or interact with personal belongings and the surrounding environment, the latter typically being indoors.

Concluding Remarks

Until this study, suspended quotations had only been studied in investigations of Charles Dickens' works, and had been considered a distinguishing feature of this writer. Without denying the prominence and specificities of this narrative feature in his writing, this paper has shown that many of the functions detected in Dickens's suspended quotations can also be observed in an author who strongly differs from Dickens in terms of style, aims and literary context, namely Jane Austen. This suggests that some uses of suspended quotations can be considered 'author-independent', or 'intrinsic roles' of suspensions (RQ1). More specifically, while it is indeed one of Dickens' distinguishing marks to use suspended quotations to make fun of characters or attack characters that deserve punishment, other functions reported in the literature regarding his use of suspensions – i.e. illustrating synchronicity between speech and body language (or, in other words, providing information on gestures, facial contortions and other bodily details); illustrating habitual behaviour or typical character features; offering the reader the desired interpretation of the character's speech (or reasons for such speech), including reactions triggered by specific situations; and clarifying the manner or the attitude of the speaker – are also found in Austen's suspended quotations, and can thus be considered 'intrinsic' roles of this narrative feature.

Furthermore, the current analysis has revealed that suspended quotations lend themselves to a much wider range of functions than those reported and described in the literature thus far (RQ2). In fact, this study has highlighted as many as eight functions that had not previously been pointed out. Specifically, the new functions discovered were: describing concomitant actions; specifying the time the speech is performed, with reference to other events/actions; specifying whom the speech is addressed to; expressing the attitude of the addressee; specifying the place the speech is performed; identifying who utters the speech; announcing the introduction of direct speech; and highlighting interruption and continuation of speech. In our research, most of these were observed not only in Austen's novels, but also in Dickens' works. It may very well be that these functions had not been mentioned in previous analyses of Dickens' use of suspended quotations due to being considered of little literary interest – a sort of 'expected' role of suspended quotations – or because of their limited frequency compared to the other functions observed. Nevertheless, taken together, the 14 functions mentioned above provide researchers with a list of functions that may be performed by suspended quotations (see Appendix), of which 12 could be considered 'author-independent'. This list is an improvement over previous descriptions of the functions of suspended quotations, which were very interesting but only relevant to Dickens' works, to be used as a potential starting point for further investigating this narrative feature across authors and literary periods. Of course, the list of functions presented in this paper is by no means exhaustive. An analysis of a wider range of authors would be needed to compile a list of every possible function performed by suspended quotations.

Finally, this study offers an interesting methodological contribution. The fact that in both corpora the concordance lines obtained through automatic tagging and key-items extraction procedures included the most frequent functions observed by manual analysis, and in some cases provided interesting cues to functions that had not been noted during the manual analyses, shows that automatic tagging can provide a different perspective to looking at suspended quotations. By drawing attention to individual words (grouped by grammatical or semantic category), tagging also brings to the fore some of the less frequent or less remarkable functional patterns that would otherwise go unnoticed, thus proving to be a useful complementary approach to manually reading the concordance lines. Moreover, automatic tagging could be considered a way to get a 'quick and dirty' idea of the functions of suspended quotations in an author's work, or to quickly compare several authors.

Besides providing answers to our research questions, our analyses lead to some additional observations, which could provide a springboard for future research.

First of all, the manual analyses of Austen's data revealed that when body language was specified between speech, the suspended quotation always performed multiple functions. In Austen's novels, the functions observed in connection to body language included: describing concomitant action; expressing the speaker's manner or attitude; identifying the time of the speech; and providing an interpretation of the speaker's reasons for his/her speech. An analysis of suspensions or other textual elements mentioning body language in a wide range of authors may help to provide a more detailed description of the ways in which body language contributes to the narrative structure of a novel.

The analyses also affirmed that the two authors employed suspended quotations in different ways. In particular:

– Dickens used suspensions six times more often than Austen.
– Austen identified characters through proper names and pronouns much more often than Dickens, who for this purpose used a statistically significant higher number of general nouns (e.g. referring to characters by their profession).
– Austen used suspended quotations primarily to clarify a speaker's manner or attitude (48.81%), describe body language (20.75%) and concomitant actions (27.47%), and make time references to when the speech was performed, often in relation to other events/actions (22.33%). She did use suspended quotations to describe a character's typical traits or habitual behaviour, but these instances were rare (2.17%).

These rather sterile observations could perhaps be the starting point for more interesting comments on the ways different authors build their narratives. For this purpose, however, the whole novel should be considered and a wider range of analytical methods would need to be employed.

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APPENDIX

List of functions that suspended quotations may perform:

1. Illustrating synchronicity between speech and body language (or, in other words, providing information on gestures, facial contortions and other bodily details)
2. Illustrating habitual behaviour or typical character features
3. Offering the reader the desired interpretation of the character's speech (or reasons for such speech), including reactions triggered by specific situations
4. Clarifying the manner or the attitude of the speaker
5. Describing concomitant actions
6. Specifying the time the speech is performed in relation to other events/actions
7. Specifying whom the speech is addressed to
8. Expressing the attitude of the addressee
9. Specifying the place where the speech is performed
10. Identifying who utters the speech
11. Announcing the introduction of direct speech
12. Highlighting interruption and continuation of speech
13. Making fun of characters
14. Attacking characters that deserve punishment

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Michael Field: spazi poetici alternativi attraverso ispirazioni ecfrastiche

Abstract I: Il fascino del rapporto tra la letteratura, le arti sorelle e il viaggio intreccia le imprese dell'essere umano e l'atto di scriverne, di farne un racconto, di condividerle con gli altri (Pantini 1999). Le poesie contenute nella raccolta *Sight and Song* (1892) di Michael Field, pseudonimo maschile sotto il quale scrivevano Katherine Harris Bradley e sua nipote Edith Emma Cooper, riescono non solo a celebrare il rapporto tra la letteratura e le arti figurative ma diventano anche rappresentazione verbale dell'arte visiva, ovvero dell'*ékphrasis* considerata scambio tra culture visive e testuali. Nella presente analisi le rivoluzionarie ispirazioni ecfrastiche delle scrittrici dimostreranno come fosse possibile osservare l'arte e la realtà in modo diverso e tradurla in testi poetici per far emergere quella capacità politica di sconvolgere identità e gerarchie sociali dell'epoca vittoriana.

Abstract II: The allure of the connection between literature, journey and the sister arts interlaces with the endeavours of human beings and with the act of writing about it, of transforming it into a story and sharing it with others (Pantini 1999). The poems included in the collection *Sight and Song* (1892) by Michael Field, male pseudonym of authoresses Katherine Harris Bradley and her niece Edith Emma Cooper, not only manage to celebrate the affiliation between literature and the figurative arts, but they also become a verbal representation of the visual art, namely of that *ékphrasis* deemed to be as an exchange between visual and textual cultures. In this analysis, the revolutionary ekphrastic inspiration of the two authoresses will validate the possibility of observing art and reality in a different way and translating it into poetic texts so as to allow the rise of that political capability of subverting Victorian identities and social hierarchies.

Keywords: Michael Field, *ékphrasis*, *Sight and Song*.

Introduzione

Sotto lo pseudonimo di Michael Field, Katherine Harris Bradley (1846-1914) e sua nipote Edith Emma Cooper (1862-1913) pubblicarono otto libri di poesie, ventisette testi teatrali e un *masque* alla fine del XIX secolo in Gran Bretagna. L'attenzione della critica verso i testi di Field – o forse dovremmo dire "delle Fields" – è aumentata negli ultimi anni con pubblicazioni che mettono in risalto il valore artistico di testi scritti a quattro mani (Treby 2000; Bickle 2008; Thain & Vadillo 2009; Donoghue 2014; Parker & Vadillo 2019).

Dopo l'uscita del loro primo dramma in versi, intitolato *Callirhoë and Fair Rosamond* (1884), le due donne godettero di una calorosa accoglienza nei panni di Field all'interno dei circoli letterari vittoriani ottenendo l'ammirazione di poeti come Walter Pater e George Meredith. Al loro confidente, Robert Browning, confessarono che la scelta dello pseudonimo maschile fu mossa dal desiderio di rifiutare le "drawing-room conventionalities" per parlare liberamente di tematiche che il mondo intero "[would] not tolerate from a woman's lips" (Field 1933: 6). Browning, però, tradì l'amicizia con le scrittrici lasciandosi sfuggire la vera identità di Field poiché la rivista *Athenæum* (5 luglio 1884) fece riferimento all'autore usando il pronome "she".

I testi di Cooper e Bradley erano ormai diventati troppo autorevoli sulla scena letteraria britannica (Parker & Vadillo 2019: 6). Le due poetesse, drammaturghe e assidue scrittrici di testi in forma diaristica ed epistolare (Field 1933) condividevano l'insolito privilegio (per le donne) dell'indipendenza economica e conducevano una vita simbiotica interamente dedicata al lavoro. Un sodalizio che, rivelando la visione di se stesse come artiste, le ha sostenute in una lotta per loro affermazione tra i letterati e nella società patriarcale. In uno dei diari, Bradley confessava la sua invidia verso le possibilità concesse agli uomini, come in questo breve estratto: "What good times men have, what pipes, what deep communings!...yet if women seek to learn their art from life, instead of what the angels bring down to them in dishes, they simply get defamed" (Bradley cit. in Leighton 1992: 218).

Bradley e Cooper andavano alla ricerca di quei momenti creativi riservati esclusivamente agli uomini nell'epoca vittoriana. Le due donne, infatti, ammiravano la fratellanza che gli uomini mostravano nei profondi discorsi sull'arte ed erano convinte che, palesando di desiderare una vita diversa da quella che la società del tempo si aspettava, sarebbero state diffamate. Anche la corrispondenza, custodita sia presso la Bodleian Library (Oxford) che nella biblioteca di Houghton ad Harvard[1], dimostra la bramosia creativa delle due donne. Il presente saggio si pone l'obiettivo di analizzare alcune tra le ispirazioni ecfrastiche delle scrittrici inglesi col fine di tradurre le loro esperienze visive in poesie viaggiando per l'Europa. Il 5 giugno del 1880, infatti, intrapresero una sorta di *Grand Tour* europeo al femminile

[1] Sia Rothenstein che sua moglie, Alice, erano amici intimi di Bradley e Cooper, e rimasero in contatto con loro per molto tempo. Il loro carteggio con Cooper e Bradley presso la *Houghton Library* di Harvard, ancora poco studiato, comprende una collezione di oltre cento lettere all'interno della *Rothenstein's Collection*. William Rothenstein (1872-1945), artista e critico d'arte, condivise con le scrittrici la convinzione appassionata dell'importanza dell'artista per la comunità a prescindere dall'identità sessuale. Si veda https://digitalcollections.library.harvard.edu/catalog?page=2&q=Rothenstein&search_field=all_fields.

(Pfister 1996) e ammirarono molti dipinti di artisti italiani (Thain & Vadillo 2009: 238). Intanto, iniziarono a scrivere componimenti sui dipinti e le opere d'arte dei musei che visitavano. Due anni dopo venne pubblicata la raccolta poetica *Sight and Song* (1892). In una lettera all'amico Bernard Berenson, Edith afferma: "Artistic form in all the arts tends toward music; artistic matter in all of them towards painting. It is pictures alone in which the technique is harmonious as a musician's score that lend themselves to poetry" (Cooper cit. in Thain & Vadillo 2009: 316)[2]. In queste poche righe, Edith traccia quella che diventerà la teoria centrale che guiderà l'esperimento delle scrittrici nella traduzione poetica e la motivazione del titolo della raccolta. Affermare, infatti, che la forma artistica tende a essere musicale significa elevare le esperienze visive di dipinti e sculture a esperienza auditiva. Per estensione, quindi, i poeti-come-traduttori devono comprendere e riprodurre, attraverso la poesia, la musica o la "canzone" dell'opera d'arte (Kennedy & Meek 2019). Da qui il titolo della raccolta *Sight and Song*. Infatti, come scrive Cooper a Berenson, poiché la tecnica pittorica non è diversa da uno spartito musicale (Vicinus 2005: 332), il dipinto si presta a essere trasposto in canto poetico.

Sguardi ed elegie di viaggiatrici non convenzionali

Il fascino del rapporto tra la letteratura, le arti sorelle e il viaggio intreccia le imprese dell'essere umano e l'atto di scriverne, di farne un racconto, di condividerle con gli altri (Pantini 1999). A tal proposito, l'arte poetica riesce a celebrare il rapporto tra la letteratura e le arti figurative, configurando il tema più generale della traduzione e della comparazione tra i diversi linguaggi[3] che approfondiscono il rapporto tra testo ed immagine (Varga 1989; Pfister 1993). In questo sistema, testo scritto e immagine possono valere come due segni che interagiscono tra di loro. Essi sono degli elementi associabili dotati di significato e, quindi, capaci di produrre un atto comunicativo. Operano in questa direzione prima gli studi della comparatistica (Barthes 1985; Meyer 2002; Segre 2003), le *visual cultures* (Mirzoeff 1999; Cometa 2004) e lo sviluppo dell'*ékphrasis* negli anni '60 del Novecento con gli studi critici di Krieger (Mitchell 1994). Infatti, citando Krieger nel testo *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (1994), Mitchell paragona la poesia ecfrastica a un atto di "*verbal conjuring* […] as it obeys what Murray Krieger calls the ekphrastic principle. Something special and magical is required of language. The poem, as Krieger puts it, 'must convert the transparency of its

[2] Questa citazione è parte di una lettera scritta nel 1891 da Edith Cooper al critico d'arte Bernard Berenson, che le scrittrici conosceranno durante il loro soggiorno a Parigi. Molte lettere sono contenute all'interno della raccolta intitolata *Michael Field and Fin-De-Siecle Culture & Society: The Journals, 1868-1914, and Correspondence of Katharine Bradley and Ethel Cooper from the British Library, London*. Nell'introduzione a questo prezioso catalogo, Marion Thain fa notare che le lettere intercorse tra Cooper e Berenson svelano che la donna è innamorata di Berenson. Purtroppo l'amore non è corrisposto e sfocia in diversi episodi di malessere fisico. Questo particolare dimostra come la sessualità tra le donne non possa essere facilmente contenuta solo all'interno dell'etichetta di "lesbismo" e che, mentre il loro amore reciproco era il fulcro del romanticismo di Michael Field, entrambe si avvicinarono appassionatamente anche ad alcuni uomini nel corso della loro vita (per approfondimenti si rimanda al catalogo del carteggio di Field curato da Charles Robert Ashbee (1863-1942) e consultabile in versione digitale sul sito della Houghton Library, Harvard University. Inoltre si rimanda anche ai seguenti testi: Thain 2003; Thain & Vadillo 2009.

[3] In questo caso il termine "linguaggio" è inteso in un'accezione lotmaniana, ovvero come "qualsiasi sistema regolato che serve come mezzo di comunicazione e utilizza segni" (Lotman 1998: 133).

verbal medium into the physical solidity of the medium of the spatial arts'" (Mitchell 1994: 158). Quindi, la rappresentazione verbale dell'arte visiva, l'*ékphrasis* appunto, è considerata non solo una forma di paragone tra parola e immagine, essa è anche uno scambio tra culture visive e testuali (Kennedy & Meek 2019). A tal proposito Cometa afferma che Lessing è riuscito a spostare "l'attenzione della critica estetica sulle opere d'arte, aprendole ad una sorta di 'orizzonte dialogico' animato da uno slancio squisitamente umanistico" (Cometa 2004: 11). Secondo Cometa, gli studi di Lessing (2002) prediligono la poesia come genere letterario che si presta maggiormente alla descrizione di un'esperienza estetica e, infatti, lo scrittore tedesco discute in questi termini del testo poetico e dell'oggetto d'arte:

> Oggetti che esistono l'uno accanto all'altro, o le cui parti esistono l'uno accanto visibili, i veri oggetti della pittura. Oggetti che si susseguono l'un l'altro, o le cui parti si susseguono, si chiamano in generale azioni. Di conseguenza le azioni sono i veri oggetti della poesia. Tuttavia tutti i corpi non esistono solo nello spazio, ma anche nel tempo. Essi perdurano e possono apparire in ogni momento della loro durata, e in combinazioni differenti. Ognuna di queste apparizioni e combinazioni momentanee è il frutto di una precedente, e può essere la causa di una successiva, e perciò per così dire il centro di una azione. Di conseguenza la pittura può anche imitare le azioni, ma solo allusivamente, tramite i corpi. D'altra parte le azioni non possono sussistere di per sé, ma dipendono da determinati agenti. In quanto questi agenti sono corpi, o vengono considerati corpi, la poesia rappresenta pure corpi, ma solo allusivamente, tramite azioni (Lessing 2002: 63).

Nelle suggestive parole di questo brano, Lessing stabilisce i confini e le interazioni tra l'arte poetica e la pittura. Infatti, la poesia sarebbe l'arte del tempo mentre la pittura dello spazio e, di conseguenza, secondo Lessing la poesia imiterebbe le azioni e la pittura riprodurrebbe i corpi.

L'azione – così come interpretata da Lessing – che Michael Field compie in *Sight and Song* è quella di costruire un museo poetico al cui ingresso le spettatrici e gli spettatori vengono accolti/e da due epigrafi. Nella prima, tratta dall'*Edipo a Colono* di Sofocle (c. 406 BCE), un cieco e morente Edipo recita "ὅσ' ἂν λέγωμεν πάνθ' ὁρῶντα λέξομεν", ovvero "le espresse parole veggente mi rendono!" (Sofocle 2014: 71, v. 74). La seconda epigrafe è un verso di "Ode to Psyche" di John Keats: "I see and sing, by my own eyes inspired". Entrambe le epigrafi sono l'anticipazione della visione ecfrastica letteraria che ispirerà le poetesse e incarnano la visionarietà di cui parla Christina Walter. Paragonando le scrittrici a Walter Pater, la studiosa afferma: "Like Pater, then, Field negotiates in these two epigraphs both a disembodied, visionary model of sight and a physiological model and ultimately privileges the latter. Moreover, this negotiation announces that the volume will blur the seeable and the sayable – as does Oedipus' spoken vision – and that this blurring will explore the limits of knowledge and the opacity of subjectivity" (Walter 2014: 63). Secondo Walter, dunque, in *Sight and Song* Cooper e Bradley imitano il modello pateriano che esorta le lettrici e i lettori a vedere le loro ecfrasi come immagini moderne esplorando le forze impersonali che modellano la visione e riflettendo sul significato di una soggettività per categorie di identità

sociale (Walter 2014). Tutto ciò viene reso all'interno del volume sia attraverso la particolare dinamica della sua *ekphrasis*, sia con il gioco basato sul modello del museo. La prefazione/atrio del museo è costruita dallo sforzo di tradurre in versi "what the lines and colours of certain chosen pictures sing in themselves" (Field 1892: V) e con il fine di esprimere non solo ciò che le immagini rappresentano per il poeta ma, piuttosto, "what poetry they objectively incarnate" (*SS:* V). Alla luce di queste affermazioni, la traduzione delle opere d'arte in forma poetica diventa una metodologia che consente all'osservatore di rappresentare l'oggetto così come appare. Il primo passo in una tale modalità di apprensione è la soppressione. Chi traduce deve sopprimere, secondo le scrittrici, "the habitual centralisation of the visible in ourselves", per eliminare le nostre "idiosyncrasies and obtain an impression clearer, less passive, more intimate" (*SS:* VI). Inoltre, il poeta/la poetessa deve lottare per una "continuous sight" che sia libera o filtrata attraverso "theory, fancies, or his mere subjective enjoyment" (*SS:* V). Sebbene le poesie di *Sight and Song* ispirate da quadri dipinti da pittori italiani non sembrino avere un ordine tematico, molte sono dedicate ai ritratti di donna. Tra questi, il testo "La Gioconda" (*SS:* 8), ispirato al quadro del visionario Leonardo da Vinci[4], ha un doppio fine. L'intento è quello di riuscire a rientrare nei canoni dell'estetismo maschile pur presentando una donna per nulla angelicata e, al tempo stesso, offrire strategie di resistenza a quelle stesse norme estetiche (Lysack 2008: 123). "La Gioconda" (*SS:* 8) è il componimento che più distrugge il privilegio dello sguardo maschile che nell'Ottocento riduceva la donna a merce di scambio. Infatti, negli undici pentametri, questa Monna Lisa non è paragonabile a un angelo perché possiede "a dusky forehead" (*SS:* 5, v. 6) e dei seni "Where twilight touches ripeness amorously" (*SS:* 5, v. 7). Sebbene vestita, la Gioconda si rivela nella pienezza della sua costituzione anatomica e l'aggettivo *dusky*, ovvero dalla pelle scura, risulta essere in armonia col paesaggio dai colori tetri descritto come "Landscape that shines suppressive of its zest" (*SS:* 5, v. 10). La donna ritratta da Leonardo da Vinci sembra essere per le scrittrici qualcosa di indecifrabile, nonostante "the patience in its rest / Of cruelty that waits and doth not seek / For prey"; (*SS:* 5, vv. 4-6) che non garantisce alcun senso di sicurezza. Le paure proiettate dalle spettatrici sulla Gioconda sono, infatti, un'inquietudine per i tentativi falliti da parte degli uomini di dominarla, quelle "vicissitudes by which men die" (*SS:* 5, v. 11). Allo stesso modo, "ritraendo" una donna altrettanto misteriosa, il componimento intitolato "A Portrait" (*SS:* 27) segue la linea de "La Gioconda" (*SS:* 5), ma si differenzia da quest'ultimo per una critica più aspra delle rappresentazioni femminili da parte degli uomini. La poesia trae ispirazione dall'omonimo dipinto di Bartolomeo Veneto (*SS:* 27) conservato allo *Städelsches Institut* a Francoforte. Le quattro rime alternate d'apertura confinano la donna nel prototipo ideale angelico attraverso cui veniva raffigurata (Gorham 2013):

> A CRYSTAL, flawless beauty on the brows
> Where neither love nor time has conquered space
> On which to live; her leftward smile endows
> The gazer with no tidings from the face (*SS* 27, vv. 1-4).

[4] Nella raccolta, il poema intitolato "Drawing of Roses and Violets" (*SS* 5) è ispirato al disegno di Leonardo da Vinci che le scrittrici videro presso l'Accademia di Venezia. In questa poesia il pittore è definito come visionario perché "saw the spring / Centuries ago, Saw the spring and loved it in its flowers" (SS: 5, vv. 1-2).

L'aspetto di questa donna è ambiguo. Se da una parte è così delicata da apparire adamantina, d'altro canto mostra anche capelli che sembrano "yellow snakes" (*SS:* 27: v. 13). Accostare l'immagine del serpente a un colore, il dorato, che in età vittoriana era associato alla donna-angelo (Gitter 1984: 936), è un ossimoro provocatorio. Le serpi, infatti, hanno un significato diabolico nella tradizione cristiano-cattolica, mentre i capelli a spirale evocano l'immagine di Medusa, pericoloso personaggio della mitologia greca dalla sessualità sfrenata e simbolo della "phallic woman"/donna fallica (Gitter 1984: 951). La donna dotata di pene rappresenta probabilmente il desiderio maschile e femminile di una donna attiva e virile (Creed 1995: 116). Invero, il fatto che la donna della poesia mostri uno dei due seni come se lo sfilasse con naturalezza dalla vestaglia ("She bares one breast, half-freeing it of robe", SS: 28, v. 27), mette in evidenza un'intraprendenza insolita, che le permette di reagire all'abbandono da parte dell'amato diventando invincibile e irrefrenabile nei versi seguenti:

> Thus has she conquered death: her eyes are fresh,
> Clear as her frontlet jewel, firm in shade
> And definite as on the linen mesh
> Of her white hood the box-tree's sombre braid,
> That glitters leaf by leaf and with the years waste will not fade.
> The small, close mouth, leaving no room for breath,
> In perfect, still pollution smiles – Lo, she has conquered death! (*SS:* 29-30, vv. 40-49).

Come le rime dell'ultima strofa dimostrano, anche il testo poetico esprime quanto la poesia stessa possa articolarsi come vita e "respiro", come uno spazio memore della realtà, che può esistere innanzitutto nelle coscienze di quanti fanno esperienza del componimento per mezzo della lettura. A livello metrico, i primi quattro versi iniziali e il sesto verso di ciascuna delle sette strofe di "A Portrait" sono pentametri giambici, mentre il quinto e il settimo verso sono formati da sette piedi giambici. Questo movimento delizia nel segnalare un crescente desiderio sessuale che – come argomenta Lysack – va oltre la reclusione nello spazio domestico in cui le donne erano confinate:

> Although the natural world might constitute an essentialized space, as constructed as any feminized domestic space, the point is that the woman in the poem creates for herself a sensory realm in which a male gaze apparently cannot place limits on feminine sexuality. This is a space not merely for one woman's sexual awakening, but one in which the possibility exists for pleasures to be exchanged between women. Nature, like a second woman, responds to the first in an ecosystem where fluidity is not only generated but also reciprocated (Lysack 2008: 127).

La teoria del risveglio sessuale femminile di cui parla Lysack si sposa bene con gli ultimi due versi in cui la donna simula una specie di ritiro sensuale: accennando da una bocca piccola e chiusa alcuni "pollution smiles" (*SS:* 30, v. 49), cioè sorrisi che contaminano o avvelenano, lei ha conquistato la morte (*SS*: 30) e superato proprio i confini della rappresentazione maschile che voleva una donna passiva e pudica.

Sebbene la voluttuosa giovane di "A Portrait" non abbia un nome, ha comunque molto

in comune con le diverse "Venus" che popolano la raccolta. Venere appare centrale almeno in tre componimenti: "The Birth of Venus" (*SS:* 13), "Spring" (*SS:* 102) e "The Sleeping Venus" (*SS:* 98). In questi componimenti la natura e i fiori non sono associati all'innocenza e al candore femminile[5]. Infatti, le immagini floreali spostano l'attenzione da un regno del tutto femminile ed eterosessuale a legami omosessuali contrastando il desiderio della donna che si riscopre libera nel rifiuto dell'eteronormatività[6], ovvero della tendenza normativa implicita che tiene conto solo dell'esistenza dell'eterosessualità, considerata 'normale' espressione delle relazioni sessuali (Borghi & Rondinone 2009). "The Birth of Venus", in cui la dea "seeks to bind / New-born with a tress / Gold about her nakedness" (*SS:* 13, vv. 8-10), canta il rapporto omoerotico tra Venere e Flora che sono presenti nel quadro:

> And her chilled, wan body sweet
> Greets the ruffled cloak of rose,
> Daisy-stitched, that Flora throws
> Toward her ere she set her feet
> On the green verge of the world […] (*SS:* 13, vv. 11-15).

In questi versi, Venere e Flora si spostano insieme mentre, nel dipinto di Botticelli, Venere è fisicamente in equilibrio tra le immagini maschili e femminili, con la testa chinata a sinistra verso i venti Zefiro e Borea, e solo il bacino rivolto in direzione di Flora. Infatti, tutto il componimento descrive due diversi tipi di desiderio erotico, quello maschile e femminile. Field dimostra come i desideri delle dee siano reciprocamente coinvolgenti concentrandosi sulle immagini floreali che, perdendo l'originario senso di purezza e candore, fanno da cornice perfetta a un'unione tra Venere e Flora come coppia lesbica, prima di essere ritratte nel mondo degli uomini rappresentati dai violenti Zefiro e Borea (*SS:* 13, vv. 16-20):

> Flora, with the corn-flower dressed,
> Round her neck a rose-spray curled
> Flowerless, wild-rose at her breast,
> To her goddess hastes to bring
> The wide chiton of the spring (*SS:* 13, vv. 16-20).

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[5] Negli anni in cui Cooper e Bradley scrivono, l'universo femminile era spesso paragonato alla flora perché la donna doveva socialmente essere delicata, assertiva e rosea. Inoltre, non è forse un caso che ancora nell'Ottocento l'idoneità delle donne allo studio della scienza, oggetto di forti contestazioni, venisse limitata allo studio della botanica. I fiori, infatti, erano tradizionalmente legati all'idea di femminilità, e coltivare e disegnare piante sembrava una degna occupazione casalinga per le donne (Fara 2008).

[6] L'eteronormatività prescrive i comportamenti 'da non assumere' ma allo stesso tempo codifica fortemente i comportamenti considerati 'normali' e 'giusti' (Abbatecola & Stagi 2017; Borghi & Rondinone 2009). La norma eterosessuale "traccia dei confini invisibili nelle traiettorie biografiche. Afferma chi si può o non può essere, cosa si può o non può fare. Confina gli spazi, definisce i luoghi, costruisce i desideri, delimita i diritti, struttura il linguaggio" (Abbatecola & Stagi 2017: 44). I *Queer Studies*, analizzando l'eteronormatività, hanno messo in discussione la sessualità normativa e, quindi, ciò che ha diritto di essere considerato 'normale' e manifestato nello spazio pubblico e le relative violazioni alle regole di questa sessualità normativa e di genere. (Cfr Butler 1993; 2004; 2006).

I momenti felici trascorsi tra le due dee mostrano alla fine del testo poetico una Venere triste "by the sea-wind scarcely moved" (*SS:* 15, v. 39) e con un "Tearful shadow in her eyes" (*SS:* 15, v. 32) perché Flora resterà l'unico amore che lei non riuscirà ad avere: "She is Love that hath not loved" (*SS:* 15, v. 40). Lo stesso sguardo malinconico si trova nel componimento "Spring" (*SS:* 102), tratto da un altro dipinto botticelliano, "La Primavera". Le due poetesse videro la grande tempera su tavola di Sandro Botticelli presso La Galleria dell'Accademia, dove il quadro restò esposto prima del trasferimento agli Uffizi nel 1919. La pallida Venere è triste al punto da essere esplicitamente cantata in apertura di "Spring" (*SS:* 102): "VENUS is sad among the wanton powers, / That make delicious tempest in the hours / Of April or are reckless with their flowers" (*SS:* 22, vv. 1-3). Venere, dea della bellezza, dell'amore e della generazione, è angosciata nonostante sia circondata dal risveglio della primavera e dalla danza delle tre Grazie. Infatti, il suo sentimento di afflizione continuerà nelle domande che affollano la poesia sull'improvvisa sparizione delle Grazie nel momento in cui entra in scena Eros: "They are the Graces in their virgin youth;/ And does it touch their Deity withruth/ That they must fade when Eros speeds his dart?/ Is this the grief and forethought of her heart?" (*SS*: 24). È quanto nota anche Jill Ehnenn nel saggio intitolato *Looking Strategically: Feminist and Queer Aesthetics in Michael Field's "Sight and Song"* (2004). Precisando che anche Vernon Lee aveva sottolineato la riluttanza e la tristezza della Dea, la studiosa afferma che il sentimento di angoscia di Venere espresso da Field "is clearly communicated by the 'Tearful shadow in her eyes' (*SS*: 15)" (Ehnenn 2004: 225). La poesia stessa continua a insistere in seguito su questa infelicità perché Venere, sebbene circondata da piante fiorite di mirto, "is sad" (*SS:* 24, vv. 41) ma anche "tender with some dread" (*SS* 24, v. 45), con occhi spalancati e dai tratti "dark and heavy with their pain" (*SS:* 24, v. 49), in quanto esterna un dolore causato dall'amore crudele che viene definito "blind and tyrannus" (*SS:* 25, v. 52). In mezzo a tulipani, rose, alberi di arancio e viti d'uva, la poesia si chiude con un'immagine/senso di vuoto e abbandono per un amore disperato e negato: "Venus, looking on, / Beholds the mead with all the dancers gone" (*SS:* 26, vv. 78-79).

Non è la stessa lettura che Cooper e Bradley offrono per omaggiare l'olio su tela di Giorgione intitolato "Sleeping Venus", che ammirarono nel 1891 alla Dresden Gallery in Germania. La posizione supina del soggetto ritratto da Giorgione ricorda "La Venere di Urbino" di Tiziano (Wethey 1987). Si tratta, infatti, di un nudo femminile su lenzuola stropicciate ma, nonostante il titolo suggerisca una figura passiva, quella di "The Sleeping Venus" (*SS:* 98) è una donna che non nasconde la sua sensualità. Infatti, imitando la donna misteriosa in "A Portrait" (*SS* 27), l'affascinante Venere varca i confini del suo "arched shell" (*SS* 98, v. 4) per sdraiarsi su un terreno aperto circondato da colline (*SS:* 98, vv. 13-14). Il suo corpo è generoso, ("has curves" *SS:* 99, v. 15), nella più tradizionale raffigurazione della fertilità femminile, ma il braccio sinistro è disteso lungo il fianco e la mano destra, "Falling inward" (*SS:* 101, v. 63), suggerisce l'atto della masturbazione. Lo spazio aperto attorno a lei erotizza il "paesaggio del suo corpo":

> With desirous sway, each breast
> Rises from the level chest,

> One in contour, one in round –
> Either exquisite, low mound
> Firm in shape and given
> To the August warmth of heaven (*SS:* 100, vv. 37-42).

Il forte autoerotismo dei versi di questa strofa (Lysack 2008: 129) preannuncia alle lettrici e ai lettori la palese consumazione di un atto sessuale nella strofa che segue:

> Not even sleep
> Dare invalidate the deep,
> Universal pleasure sex
> Must unto itself annex –
> Even the stillest sleep; at peace,
> More profound with rest's increase,
> She enjoys the good
> Of delicious womanhood (*SS:* 101-102, vv. 63-70).

Ammirazione, desiderio e identificazione si intrecciano in queste rime, che risultano l'unica testimonianza scritta ottocentesca di un atto di masturbazione femminile, come afferma Jill Ehnenn in un prezioso volume intitolato *Women's Literary Collaboration, Queerness, and Late-Victorian Culture*:

> Here Michael Field daringly creates for their readers what is perhaps the only positive contemporary description of female masturbation. Despite the continued sensual description and erotic suggestion in the rest of the poem, their gaze is not prurient. The poem is not a blazon, a catalogue of female parts; and while Venus is the object of the gaze, she is not a commodity for market exchange (Ehnenn 2008: 87).

Una sensualità e una sessualità che effettivamente non turbano la nostra sensibilità perché il piacere che alla fine il poema presagisce resterà a lungo:

> In communion with the sweet
> Life that ripens at her feet:
> We can never fear that she
> From Italian fields will flee,
> For she does not come from far,
> She is of the things that are;
> And she will not pass
> While the sun strikes on the grass (*SS:* 105, vv. 119-126).

La promessa delle liriche di Field è una sorta di monito che si concretizza nel verso che recita "while we gaze it seems as though / She had lain thus […] since the ages far ago" (*SS:* 104, vv. 115-116). Lo sguardo e il pronome "we" si riferiscono alle svariate possibilità omoerotiche e autoerotiche che, in termini fortemente transfemministi/queerfemministi, si traduce nella dimostrazione del concreto potenziale erotico di tutte le identità di genere. Lo

chiarisce Anna Robins in *A Woman's Touch: Michael Field, Botticelli and Queer Desire* (2019) affermando che la poesia di Field è la dimostrazione delle identità sessuali fluide esistenti durante l'età vittoriana (Robins 2019: 155). A quel tempo, infatti, riconoscere il piacere sessuale femminile o bisessuale era un tabù poiché molti credevano che fosse improprio per le donne e per tutte le identità di genere avere e mostrare una sessualità in quanto "existing male models were the best on offer" (Robins 2019: 158). A tal proposito è bene ricordare come non tutte le poesie/quadri di *Sight and Song* raffigurino donne. Infatti, la raccolta critica anche l'ideologia di sesso/genere dell'età vittoriana e le più ampie nozioni di femminilità e sessualità attraverso la figura del "young boy". Mentre i precedenti testi poetici hanno mostrato nuove prospettive attraverso cui guardare famosi ritratti di donne, Field presta attenzione anche ad alcuni quadri raffiguranti figure maschili. Martha Vicinus ha osservato che "the adolescent boy" era pericoloso per gli artisti del Novecento quanto la donna predatrice (Vicinus 1994: 93). Vicinus discute il ruolo letterario della figura del giovinetto che scrittori e scrittrici idealizzavano nei loro testi. In particolare, il ragazzo rappresentava un fugace momento di libertà e innocenza pericolosamente attraente:

> For men, the boy suggested freedom without committing them to action; for women, he represented their frustrated desire for action. But most of all, his presence in fin-de-siècle literature signifies the coming of age of the modern gay and lesbian sensibility: his protean nature displayed a double desire – to love a boy and to be a boy (Vicinus 1994: 93-94).

Dall'estratto appena riportato si evince chiaramente che la posizione liminale e contraddittoria dell'adolescente ha permesso alle donne di esprimere le loro sensazioni. Il ragazzo, in quanto vergine, rappresentava al tempo stesso l'innocenza e la libertà dal sesso eterosessuale (Vicinus 1994: 90). Infatti, *Sight and Song* omaggia anche *L'Indifférent* di Watteau, (*SS:* 1) in cui un giovane dai tratti femminili balla in punta di piedi (*SS:* 1) ed è descritto metaforicamente come una "human butterfly", ovvero una farfalla umana (*SS:* 1, v. 15). Attraverso il poema intitolato "The Shepherd-Boy", viene omaggiato il "Garzone con flauto", un dipinto a olio su tavola attribuito a Giorgione o a Tiziano e conservato ad Hampton Court, Londra (*SS:* 65). Il pastorello, con "A RADIANT, oval face: the hair/ About the cheeks so blond in hue" (*SS:* 65, vv. 1-2), emana una bellezza dai tratti femminili sconvolgente. Il potenziale erotico che doveva avere per le scrittrici – e per la società del loro tempo – la castità adolescenziale trova la sua spiegazione nel simbolo di ribellione e allo stesso tempo di innocenza che il fanciullo rappresentava anche nelle relazioni dello stesso sesso (Vicinus 1994: 103). In definitiva, le *ekphrasis* ispirate a quadri di pittori italiani, così come *Sight and Song* nel suo insieme, osservano, in primo luogo, la realtà in modo diverso e la traducono per far emergere quella capacità politica di sconvolgere identità e gerarchie sociali dell'epoca vittoriana. *Sight and Song* suggerisce, inoltre, che il desiderio di Bradley e Cooper di rappresentare la soggettività impersonale era una delle ragioni principali per cui si esibivano identità e relazioni fuori dalla norma eterosessuale, sia nella poesia che nella vita.

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Narrative Form and Palimpsestic Memory in Namwali Serpell's *The Old Drift*

Abstract I: L'articolo esplora il romanzo di esordio di Namwali Serpell, *The Old Drift* (2019), attraverso la lente della 'memoria del palinsesto', individuando l'interconnessione tra memoria e migrazione. In primo luogo, si analizza il rapporto dialettico tra tempo eonico e alcuni elementi paratestuali che, nel tentativo di stabilire ordine e guidare il lettore, sembrano imitare ed evocare la stessa trama intricata del palinsesto. Quindi, si discute l'oscillazione tra narrazione extradiegetica e intradiegetica e l'uso del modello del romanzo multi-generazionale, mettendone in luce il carattere palinsestico in cui varie generazioni e storie diverse si intersecano, generando una spirale che rifrange le traiettorie multiple e invisibili del tempo.

Abstract II: This essay explores Namwali Serpell's debut novel *The Old Drift* (2019) through the lens of 'palimpsestic memory', contending that the novel articulates an interconnectedness between memory and migration. Firstly, I will investigate how the tension between aeonic temporality and some paratextual elements that attempt to install order and direct the reader's orientation mimic and resonate with the intricate motif of the palimpsest. Then, I will illustrate how the alternation between extradiegetic and intradiegetic narration and the format of the multigenerational novel contribute to create a palimpsestic tale where several generations and different stories are inextricably intertwined, generating a spiral pattern where the multiple and invisible trajectories of temporality are refracted and eventually converge.

Keywords: palimpsestic memory, migration, narrative form, postcolonial fiction, allegory.

With the publication of *The Old Drift* (2019), Zambian-American novelist Namwali Serpell (born in 1980) immediately aroused some critical attention. Her first short-story, "The Sack", won the prestigious Caine Prize for African Writing in 2015, for being "formally innovative, stylistically stunning, haunting and enigmatic in its effects" (n.p.), as remarked by Zoë Wicomb, Chair of the prize committee. In a similar vein, her debut novel displays energy and originality. Reviewing Serpell's *opera prima* in *The New York Times*, Salman Rushdie has praised the author's powerful contribution to the emergence of African women's writing, describing the novel as "an impressive book, ranging skilfully between historical and science fiction, shifting gears between political argument, psychological realism and rich fabulism" (n.p.).

As Rushdie's comment illustrates, the strength of *The Old Drift* lies in the kaleidoscopic variety of its narrative forms, refusing categorisation and thus blurring the borders among various literary genres, from epical myth to magic realism. In this respect, the novel engages with questions of memory and migration, specifically as it comes to grips with the physical and mental displacement of three families – one black, one white and one interracial – recounted mainly from the viewpoint of women. A multi-generational tale, *The Old Drift* tracks the dislocations of the three families between Europe (England and Italy) and South-East Africa (Zambia), spanning continents, generations and historical frictions. Yet, what appears at first sight to be a novel of colonial exploration soon turns out to be mainly a story of psychological exploration. The narrative is structured into three sequences: each section focuses on a single member from the three families and it zooms in on the same generation, while flashbacks recount events related to the families' ancestors. These multifocal chapters are only apparently the schematic articulation of a much more complex tale, since they are interspersed with italicised sections narrated by a choral "we", which presumably comes through the voice of a swarm of mosquitoes, thus lending a dramatic and lyrical quality to the story.

As the title indicates, *The Old Drift* is about an old ford over the Zambezi River that can be said to witness the painful passage of Zambia into nationhood against a background of struggles and displacements. A few miles away from the Victoria Falls, the crossing place becomes the settlement of colonial explorers working on the building of the Kariba Dam, a construction symbolically embodying the birth of a nation. One of the drifters, the English traveller Percy M. Clark, befriends an Italian hotelier, Pietro Gavuzzi, and comes into conflict with a local boy, N'gulube. These men are the forefathers of the three families in the novel. It is 1904 and the first chapter, narrated in the first person by Clark himself, provides the backbone of a polyphonic novel: from stories of loss and hope to meditations on the passage of time, the following generations of each family gradually converge. Following nine members of the families – Agnes, Thandiwe and Joseph for the family descending from Clark; Matha, Sylvia and Jacob, who belong to N'gulube's family; and Sibilla, Isabella and Naila, the descendants of the Italian Gavuzzis – *The Old Drift* spans more than one hundred years, recounting the transition from colonial Zambia towards a close imagined future, while connecting memory frictions with stories of migration.

In this essay, I seek to investigate the interplay between memory and migration in Serpell's novel and to this end I draw on Max Silverman's formulation of "palimpsestic memory" (2013), a conceptual configuration that captures the connections across time and space, insomuch as it privileges the use of multiperspectivity and multifocalisation, thus blurring spatial and temporal boundaries. Silverman's approach which is indebted to Michael Rothberg's model of "multidirectional memory" (2009), sees the palimpsest as a motif which well captures "the superposition and productive interaction of different inscriptions and the spatialisation of time central to the work of memory" (Silverman 2013: 4). Silverman's notion of the palimpsest shares Rothberg's conceptualisation of "multidirectional memory" understood as an "open-ended assemblage" (Rothberg 2009: 528). Interestingly, the palimpsest mixes different ethnic, political and racial realities across history and geography while connecting "disparate elements through a play of similarity

and difference" (Silverman 2013: 4). In *The Old Drift*, Serpell explores the history of Zambia, intersecting collective and individual memories through a multiplicity of voices and perspectives. The novel then brings together colonialism and migration showing how the present is haunted by a past which is not immediately visible.

In the literary context, the term palimpsest is used to denote a document bearing visible signs of earlier traces, thereby describing narrative conflation of temporal layers, as in Hilda Doolittle's seminal novel *Palimpsest* (1926) where various historical periods are interconnected largely through the use of stream-of-consciousness. Unlike H. D.'s novel, however, *The Old Drift* resorts to the discursive construction of the palimpsest as a way to address the distinct nature of diasporic memory. In this respect, palimpsestic memory, as Silverman argues, serves as a vehicle of interconnection that transcends the mononational dimension by perceiving "history in a nonlinear way and memory as a hybrid and dynamic process across individuals and communities" (4). Serpell herself emphasises her aesthetic preoccupation with temporal conflation in an interview to the science fiction online journal *Big Echo*, where she acknowledges her attempt "to synthesize the very, very old with the very, very new" (n. p.). In so doing, the novel does seek to illuminate a specific experience of human migration by means of a palimpsestic overarching frame. The hybrid format of *The Old Drift*, with the fusion of historical realism, science-fiction, ecocriticism, magical realism and Afrofuturism[1], and the incorporation of Bantu words, brings the multi-layered structure of the narrative to the fore, through a generic flexibility that may be said to reproduce a multi-perspectival memory model. On the one hand, *The Old Drift* can be seen to draw on the literary legacy of the African historical novel, that "received a tremendous injection of energy from the historical phenomenon of decolonisation, which infused the novel with a sense of historical agency and a desire to contribute to the construction of viable postcolonial cultural identities for the new African nations" (Booker 2009: 141). From this perspective, the massive historical scale of the novel combines questions of politics, race, class and gender and it highlights the crucial role of the past in shaping Zambian cultural identity. On the other hand, elements of magic realism, such as the mosquitoes that take turns narrating the story with the main characters, contribute to materialise "an alternative universe in which fantastical elements are placed side by side with the real in a process of establishing equivalence between them" (Quayson 2009: 160). In terms of genre, as Stephen Slemon has remarked, postcolonialism and magic realism overlap because they remain "locked in a continuous dialectic with the 'other', a situation which creates disjunction within each of the separate discursive systems, rending them with gaps, absences, and silences" (Slemon 1988: 11). Likewise, in Serpell's novel, this dialogism between postcolonial discourse and magic realism is manifested in the collision between memory and dreams, fragments of colonial irruption and the recuperation of myth-like elements which seek to retrieve what Slemon calls the "lost voices" (Slemon 1988: 16) of the past.

[1] In "Black to the Future" Mark Dery introduces the term "Afrofuturism", describing it as "speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of 20th-century technoculture – and more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future" (Dery 1994: 180).

In the following pages, I will demonstrate how Serpell's use of the multi-generational format is a clear manifestation of the migrants' attempts at embedding cultural, spatial, temporal and linguistic divergences, as in a palimpsest. In order to show that *The Old Drift* shares Silverman's model of palimpsestic memory, I will focus on how repetitions and echoes of the past tend to construct meaning, interlacing the memories of the various migrants that populate the novel. As the story unfolds, chronicling the lives of the following generations, it also shows the ever-changing geo-political boundaries of the world, establishing connections between the private lives of the characters and major historical events. Furthermore, as this essay illustrates, a certain generic instability, shuttling from realistic fiction to autobiographic memoires, and the combination of various historical threads, contribute to create a palimpsestic tale where several generations and different stories are inextricably intertwined. In short, from Percy M. Clark's real exploration of the area around the Victoria Falls in 1904 to the AIDS epidemic of the 1990s, from the collapse of the Italian Fascist regime in the mid-1940s to Zambia's struggle for independence in 1964 and its Afrofuturistic aerospace programme, the novel employs the multi-layered form of the palimpsest, highlighting the complex functioning of memory as an entanglement of invisible and parallel trajectories. Surprisingly, not only does *The Old Drift* explore the thread between memory and migration; it also opens up to the near future, by foreshadowing the revolutionary effects of technological progress and its significant impact on social life and on the human body.

The Palimpsest, the Paratext, and Temporal Disarray

From the very initial pages, the reader of *The Old Drift* is confronted with a schematic paratext which attempts to give order and shape. A family tree is provided in order to guide the reader through the intermingling of the narratorial voices. Also, the "Contents" section achieves a similar ordering function insomuch as it articulates the discourse-level of the novel, allowing the reader to visualise its multifocal narrative frame. *The Old Drift* is structured into three sections – "The Grandmothers" (Sibilla, Agnes, Matha), "The Mothers" (Sylvia, Isabella, Thandiwe), and "The Children" (Joseph, Jacob, Naila) – each divided, in their turn, into three chapters, entitled after the names of the nine characters. Thus, despite its patriarchal foundation, the novel's overarching organisation is quite matriarchal. Furthermore, these nine chapters are inscribed into a narrative frame where two other chapters, "The Falls" and "The Dam", respectively open and close the novel, acting as a prologue and an epilogue. As already alluded to before, "The Falls" is a sort of travel journal, narrated in the first person by Percy M. Clark, while "The Dam" is told in the third person by an external narrator[2]. Finally, each chapter is anticipated and followed by the short italicized chapters narrated by mosquitoes. These *"[t]hin troubadours, the bare ruinous choir, a chorus of gossipy mites*" (Serpell 2019b: 19) allegedly weave a "*worldly willy web*" (19), attempting to install a sequence of "*cause and effect*" (19) into a spiral-like story. By juxtaposing the onomatopoeic

[2] In the "Acknowledgements", Serpell makes clear reference to Percy M. Clark's work, *The Autobiography of an Old Drifter* (1936), claiming that she has not tried to amend or replace his prejudicial language in the chapter, "all racism his" (Serpell 2019b: 564).

buzzes of the insects, testimonial accounts of the explorations of the environment and metanarrative incursions, these italicised chapters allegorically exemplify Serpell's fusion of historical chronicle and magical realism. While the genealogical tree entails memory, origin and a vertical proliferation of connections, Serpell's interruption of the linear structure of genealogy by means of horizontal lines can be said to exceed the boundaries of each family and eventually link the last generation of the three families. This is shown in the final interrelation among Joseph, Jacob and Naila, whose friendship, by the end of the novel, leads to the birth of a boy in 2024. Though no information is revealed in the novel about this mysterious birth, readers can find the unnamed child, called "a boy", in the family tree. The boy's birth thus represents the symbolic unifying point of connection of the three characters and, consequently, of the three families.

However, such a unifying role embodied by the mosquitoes' chorus and by the paratextual components of the novel is soon undermined by the epigraph, where an extract from Seamus Heaney's translation of Virgil's Book VI of *The Aeneid* (2016) is quoted. By paying homage to the Irish poet's last work, Serpell indirectly foregrounds the epic scale of her novel in a similar vein to Virgil's poem on the founding myth of ancient Rome. Interestingly, the epigraph features the Trojan hero while crossing the Lethe River, in search of the soul of his father Anchises. Before a "hovering multitude" (epigraph), Aeneas contemplates the river drifting "somnolently" and is bewildered by the flowing of water and people, inquiring about the identity of these souls. Aeneas is in the underworld and the Lethe is a metaphor for death: the river symbolises oblivion owing to its beneficial power of purifying the memory of the past, thus installing forgetfulness in those who drink from its waters. This disruptive force of the river symbolically embodies the unpredictable and unstable mechanisms of memory, its openness to change and revision, as in Silverman's model of the palimpsest. Recalling Walter Benjamin's idea of the "constellation"[3], which embodies the overlap between time and space, Silverman sees the palimpsest as a space that "creates correspondences between different elements so that the 'oppositions' between the fragment and the totality, past and present, here and elsewhere, and movement and stasis are not in fact oppositions but in permanent tension" (Silverman 26). The constellation forms an image where the fragments of memory not only entail a temporal dimension; rather, they acquire a figurative aspect or, in Benjamin's words, a *bildlich* nature that "bears to the highest degree the imprint of the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded" (Benjamin 1999: 426). This figurative staging of memory is illustrated, for instance, in the episode when Percy M. Clark, at the very beginning of the novel, compares the Zambezi River to the Lethe. In the African river, "one plumb forgets the millstone the question of money ties around the neck in Merrie Old England" (Serpell 2019b: 15). Behind this juxtaposition lies the awareness that the African landscape has deeply changed Clark, specifically in respect of money. Clark's

[3] As Silverman himself claims, his model of the palimpsest is reminiscent of Benjamin's idea of memory as "constellation", entailing an "overlapping of spatio-temporal sites in which personal and collective memory and the conscious and the unconscious collide" (26). Benjamin understands the relationship between past and present as a dialectic overlay that "comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation" (Benjamin 1999: 426).

dependence on money in his native country signals the capitalist logic that lies at the heart of imperialism. And yet, his adventures as a pioneer in the Zambian veld, in contact with a world where "fortune flipped lives as the storm flips the leaves" (9), leads Clark to a change of attitude towards money, indicating how colonialism may be a tricky business. Allegorically, in the same way as the Lethe induces drowsiness and oblivion, so the Zambezi brings about change, disclosing the transformative power of colonialism. Furthermore, the Zambezi river recalls the Lethe owing to their common symbolism of death: close to the African river, a cemetery remembers the corpses of the migrants who had moved to present-day Zambia for the construction of the Kariba Dam. The old drift of the Zambezi is then a "memory place" and its earth retains the traces of human history, acting as a figurative construction where various layers of time and space are intertwined.

With its peculiarly disjointed temporality, palimpsestic memory stretches the boundaries of time, allowing for a patterning of past and present where the latter reveals traces of the first. This temporal disarray is reflected in the narrative structure of *The Old Drift*. Whereas the chapters narrated by the nine characters chronicle the major events of their families diachronically, the choral "we" addresses the reader by using the present simple, commenting on the stories of the single characters and giving voice to the Zambian wild natural environment: "*we are Nature's great superfluity.* […] *We pollinate little and feed very few, no predator needs us to live. […] We are an asterisk to Nature, a flaw, a digression, a footnote if ever there was one*" (431). This is how the chorus talks to an anonymous "you", by bridging the gap between individual stories and their atemporal essence. The use of the present tense evokes the spectral presence of the past whose chronological frontiers continue to emerge in the present. It should be noted that the uncanny voice of the mosquitoes materialises this resurrection of the past through fragments: the effect the chorus produces is one of immediacy that refuses the idea of the past as a "closed" moment, envisioning it, instead, as open and in transition. These voices, similar to "*Russian dolls of metamorphosis, each phase of us [them] hatched from the previous*" (261), thematise, for example, the metamorphic nature of human life, from one generation to the other. Also, they epitomise the very palimpsestic format of the novel, its generative capacity of constructing narratives, mimicking the insects' evolution from "*egg to larva, the comma-shaped pupa, then the winged and wobbly imago*" (261). The delicate and complex process of development of the mosquitoes echoes the generational transformations that affect the three families, while also illustrating the multi-layered structure of the novel.

The novel juxtaposes linear and circular time, a combination that lends a magic realist quality to the narrative. As a multi-generational novel, it follows a chronological structure with a progression from the birth to the maturity of the various family members, as well as the transition from colonialism towards independence in Zambia. However, this linear flow of time is continuously interspersed with forms of circular and eternal time, typical of legends and fairy tales. While each chapter is indicated with a precise year and bears references to certain historical events – the Italian Partisan resistance in Sibilla's chapter, Zambian Independence in Agnes' chapter, the space programs of the 1960s in Matha's chapter – thus symbolising the material conception of time, the negation of chronological time is enacted in

various ways, from subjective time to evolutionary time. What this disarrayed temporality conveys is the repetition of similar patterns, such as greed for power, generational conflicts, prejudice and the search for care. One of the effects of this palimpsestic layout is the sense of interconnectedness between people and places despite the differences they share.

Each character lives in a specific moment and in a given place but also belongs to a larger multi-generational pattern, their actions having ramifications across time and space. Moments of special insight recur when some characters share traces that tend to converge as in a palimpsest. Sylvia, the first of "The Mothers" the reader encounters, lives in a sort of atemporal dimension. "Deprived of human voices" (204), as a baby she makes friends with her shadow, thereby creating a kind of double version of herself. Born to Matha Mwamba, an African woman without a husband, Sylvia grows up in Kalingalinga, Lusaka's overpopulated suburban neighbourhood close to the airport. In this modest house on the outskirts of the Zambian capital city, Matha's incessant tears paradoxically compensate for the baby's muteness. Matha, who has been left by her lover, begins to cry and does not stop for decades. Her teardrops can be seen as a metaphor for the fluidity that pervades the story: a sprawling symbol for the format of the novel itself, Matha's crying is contagious insomuch as that it resonates across the neighbourhood, attracting other women who gather in her house in a sort of pilgrimage. Whilst tears permeate the narrative, Sylvia seems to inherit the same patriarchal model dominating her mother's world. In the same way as Matha, Sylvia will get pregnant and, even worse than her mother's misadventure, she will eventually fall victim of the AIDS epidemic of the 1990s. Interestingly, this logic of temporal circularity is embodied also in Sylvia's child, Jacob. As a young boy, he develops a fascination with planes and drones, symbolically inheriting Matha's dream of becoming the first African woman on the moon. While Matha's coming of age coincides with Zambian transition from colonialism to freedom, Jacob's obsession with drones, arises from the technological revolution of the third millennium, thus creating temporal connections between past and future. Significantly, the story of this family is thus split between identification and dis-identification, obedience and self-assertion. The plotline of the Mwambas serves as a means for constructing the history of the nation in the aftermath of the genocide and economic exploitation inflicted by British colonial abuse. While the family represents a primary place of belonging, it can also be invoked to explain the oppressions, imbalances and revolutionary effects of postcolonial history. Matha and her descendants embody the idea of the family as a site of solidarity that resists social marginalisation and gender discrimination. Thus, the intersection between family and nation illustrates the relationship between the private and the public, recalling Bhabha's "intricate invasions" (Bhabha 1992: 141) of history into the domestic sphere, where "another world becomes visible" (141).

As the narrative progresses, its linear structure is questioned by the persisting return of the chorus and by its testimonial authority which challenges human agency: "[*b*]*ut while you rule the earth and destroy it for kicks, we loaf about, unsung heroes. We've been around here as long as you have – for eons before, say the fossils*" (Serpell 2019b: 545). Though the chorus might be addressing the characters, or the reader, the words of the insects are inscribed within a broader temporal scale, spanning across eras. This last observation marks a distance

between *Chronos* and *Aion*. The mysterious chorus questions the linear succession of time, what the Stoics used to call *Chronos*, while foregrounding, instead, the pure time of *Aion* in which, borrowing from Gilles Deleuze, "each event communicates with all the others, and they all form one and the same Event, an event of the Aion where they have an eternal truth" (Deleuze 1990: 64). The aeonic temporality the mosquitoes bring to light is a cyclical pattern in which all times return eternally, evoking the perspective of a present which, in Deleuze's words, "spreads out and comprehends the future and the past" (90) at once. This is suggested, for instance, in the chorus preceding the last family member, Naila, whose story begins in 2019 and ends in a near future. The mosquitoes claim responsibility for the failures of many invasions, from the fall of the Roman Empire to debacle of the British military campaigns in South America. "*It was us*", they declare, "*and a matter of time*" (Serpell 2019b: 486). This last quote signals a fluid temporality that stretches chronological time to the limits, creating a disrupted form of time typical of magic realism: "*Our essence is somewhere between or besides. We flee but our flight is unruly and tangled, a haphazard over, a swarm. We loiter a lot but we move over time. We do best when we choose to meander. Come and go, nor fast nor slow, but at a peripatetical pace*" (486). As a swarm, the mosquitoes encapsulate the disrupting force of collective memory: what the insects seem to suggest is that to perceive events in their actual completeness one needs to visualise them in a palimpsestic, figural dimension where "memory traces overlap, intersect and are transformed" (Silverman 2013: 26).

Thus, with its multi-scaled temporality and its schematic paratextual infrastructure, *The Old Drift* can then be said to edge towards the aesthetics of the palimpsest. In addition, as the extracts above make clear, the narrative is contaminated by several intersections of cultural and social values and their coexistence does not imply a harmonious and shared vision, even of the same historical moment and for the same generation. Rather, the complex process of interconnection, interaction and compression of stories gestures towards the logic of palimpsestic memory in which memory is perceived as a "hybrid rather than pure category" (Silverman 2013: 8), thereby reflecting an alternative awareness of temporality.

Multiple Focalisation and the Multi-generational Novel

In the opening chapter of the novel, we witness the death of David Livingstone, whose heart is buried under a tree in the Zambian veld, while the ambiguous narrator, contemplating the final moments of the Victorian explorer, claims that "*[w]ith his rooting and roving, his stops and starts, he becomes our father unwitting, our inadvertent* pater muzungu" (Serpell 2019b: 1). The last phrase, meaning "white man" in Bantu, embodies the symbolic power of Livingstone's expedition from England towards Zambia in that, as the narrator clarifies, "*the story of a nation – not a kingdom or a people – so it begins, of course, with a white man*" (1). Paradoxically, Livingstone's death, with his vital organ planted in the Zambian earth, entails a process of transformation. What the reader realises here is that a sense of erratic movement, capable of percolating across time and space, animates a novel where memory trajectories contaminate generations and genealogies. In search of the source of the River Nile, Livingstone reaches the banks of the Zambezi: his errantry, hence, generates a network of ramifications that cut across time and space, creating, as the mosquitoes report, a "chaos of capillarity" (2). On that

piece of land where Livingstone's heart is buried, a rhizomatic structure emerges, with three generations of the three families interacting by means of empathic, economic and socio-political connections.

Despite the historical events on which the plot is based, the scattering of memories, as they collide and conflict, contributes to a "turning that unrolls" (563) days, years and decades. As memory, migration involves mobilisation, departing from a stable point: it has, as Julia Creet argues, "an effect on how and what we remember and that displacement intensifies our investments in memory, illuminating the *topos* of memory itself" (Creet 2011: 10; emphasis in the original). Along these lines, *The Old Drift* evokes the past as a way to illustrate the present and imagine the future. If, in Creet's words, memory and migration entail movement, "where we have arrived rather than where we have left" (6), so Serpell's exploration of Zambia is full of crossings and intersections. As the mosquitoes put it, to err means "*to stray or to veer or to wander*" (Serpell 2019b: 2), so in this section I intend to show how multi-perspectivity and the multi-generational format are able to convey a "loose net of knots" (19), in an echo of Silverman's conceptual model. Firstly, palimpsestic memory retains the traces of the composite and multi-layered history of a place, highlighting how memory functions "according to a complex process of interconnection, interaction, substitution and displacement of memory traces" (Silverman 2013: 28). Secondly, it subverts the vision of the past as a definitive temporal moment, envisioning it, instead, as a "dynamic, unstable, multivalent and ambivalent 'image'" (28).

As a narrative of migration, the novel challenges stability, privileging instead a multi-layered articulation which implies different speaking positions and multiple spatial configurations. Such a construction of space recalls Sara Upstone's transformative conceptualisation of the "post-space" in postcolonial novels, that she understands as "a necessary turmoil that offers the tapestry of influences and possibilities that only a fractured, multiplicitous space can provide" (Uptstone 2009: 15). Thus, in *The Old Drift*, the migrants' trajectories may be said to reveal, in Upstone's words, fluid and unstable sites of "possibility and resistance" (11). In this respect, the focal perspectives of the various characters are juxtaposed to the changes of material space as it shuttles from colonisation to independence, undergoing a series of precarious territorial divisions into new states, such as Northwest Rhodesia, Northeast Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia. These spatial fractures unveil, as in a palimpsest, the spatialisation of memory. In addition, due to the tension between multiple focal perspectives and contrasting diegeses, the novel complicates the assumption that memory itself emerges from stability, thus underscoring a link between spatiality and temporality as signifiers of instability. As Creet argues, what if one assumes that "memory is *not* a product of stability, but quite the opposite, that it is always attended by migrations?" (Creet 2011: 6; emphasis mine). In keeping with Creet's contention, Serpell's novel can be said to challenge the allegedly stable operations of memory.

In contrast to the traditional historical novel, *The Old Drift*'s opening scene introduces a fragmented, unreliable narrative mode. As alluded to before, the novel alternates short, italicised chapters offering a choral viewpoint with long chapters narrated by an omniscient extradiegetic narrator. Despite being titled after the nine family members, these longer

chapters often employ a variable focalisation, a technique allowing Serpell to contrast perspectives and create narrative tension. The dialogue between the two types of narrator impinges on the novel with the extradiegetic narrator disclosing the internal frictions of the various characters and the intradiegetic narrator constructing apparently odd juxtapositions among the narrative strands. This fragmented narrative viewpoint, with a constant dialogism between the intradiegetic narrator and the extradiegetic one, complicates and amplifies the connections between narrative form and memory, echoing Rothberg's multidirectional approach in which diverse discourses interact, showing the "dynamic transfers that take place between diverse places and time during the act of remembrance" (Rothberg 2009: 11). Whereas the long chapters are focused on a single character, the shifting focalisation reveals the logic of a spiralling memory which recalls Silverman' palimpsest in that it achieves to connect distant places and several generations, disrupting the unity of the narratorial perspective. Notably, this poetics of the palimpsest complicates the condensation of distant spatio-temporal dimensions by evoking the idea of memory as a composite amalgam "whereby one element is seen through and transformed by another" (Silverman 2013: 4).

The palimpsestic organisation of Serpell's prose is evident on the level of focalisation. Take, for example, the following passage in which the external narrator reports how Sibilla realises that she is not a "bastard child with no past" (Serpell 2019b: 72) but the illegitimate daughter of Giacomo, Pietro Gavuzzi's son:

> Nobody had ever told Sibilla that Signora Lina was her aunt, or that the Signora's brother Giacomo was her father, or that this man – Pietro Gavuzzi, who had apparently run this hotel in the middle of Africa – was her grandfather. Staring frozen before his portrait, trying to see her face in his, […] Sibilla was speechless (72).

As in the birth of a nation, so Sibilla's origin is situated in a distant past. While living in Zambia, where her husband Federico is engaged in the construction of the Kariba Dam, Sibilla establishes bonds with her origin. Here, a local boy leads her to N'gulube, the old black man having met her grandfather in his youth. Paradoxically, such a narrative overlay shows the unpredictable trajectories of memory and migration. It is in this remote place, a village inhabited by the Tonga people, "a cluster of mouldy thatched roofs" (75), that Sibilla eventually learns the truth about her birth. Events, then, do not follow a linear chronological articulation; rather, they float in the characters' minds, combining past and present.

The italicised chapters, instead, move the narratorial perspective beyond the boundaries of human voice. Though this intradiegetic viewpoint is ambiguous, as it will be shown in the following pages, the chorus often addresses an anonymous "you", that might be identified with both the reader and the characters themselves. The chorus communicates with this mysterious addressee in various ways: by metafictionally commenting on the spiral-like format of the story, "*You go hunting for a source, some ur-word or symbol and suddenly the path splits, cleaved by apostrophe or dash.* […] *Where you sought an origin, you find a vast babble which is also a silence*" (2); by warning mankind against the dangers of the world, "*Trust our biology, it teaches you better. If you grip too tight, you'll lose the fight. If you stay in one place, you'll fester and waste*" (318), and, eventually, by ironically questioning its own narratorial authority, leaving

the reader with a plenty of doubts about its identity as it gravitates on the threshold between insects and electronic devices, "*ERROR. HTTP 404 FILE NOT FOUND. WE ARE HAVING TROUBLE RECOVERING THE FEED. CHECK YOUR MONITOR AND TRY AGAIN*" (562). Despite the unifying function of the chorus, apparent amnesia and contradictions, as the last quote manifests, reveal the palimpsestic method of storytelling as it hinges around both acts of remembering and forgetting.

In formal terms, Serpell adopts the format of the "multi-generational novel", which has ramifications on family configurations, with socio-cultural transformations transmitted both synchronically and diachronically. Interestingly, the combination of vertical and horizontal lines provides a useful framework for understanding the negotiation of individual stories and collective tragedies in *The Old Drift*. The strong focus on the portrayal of generations, both diachronically and synchronically, combines the private with the public sphere. Serpell complicates this multi-generational narrative frame with the voice of the mosquitoes that ventriloquise the persistence of the past. The word "generation", as the insects observe, "*is related to* genocide, genre *and* gender – *they all come from* *gene-, 'to give birth'" (318). The common etymology "gene" hence foreshadows the possible invisible trajectories which proliferate in the novel: in invoking what course the story will follow, the chorus achieves an archival function, highlighting the multiple ramifications of memory. As Astrid Erll argues, the term "generation", from the Greek *genesis* ("origin"), displays a double meaning: vertically, it implies "the production and reproduction of a species from one generation to the other" (Erll 2017: 111), while, horizontally, it designates the members of the species "that have the same age" (111). In some postcolonial novels, that Erll terms "fictions of generational memory" (110), the entanglement of mnemonic transitions is predicated upon "enmeshments that cut across what is constructed as the boundaries of family, gender, race, nation, colonizer, and colonized" (115). Erll's observation seems to be confirmed by Serpell's palimpsestic connections between family memories and migration, where the concept of individual memory is inextricably linked to a collective dimension that emerges from the transition from one generation to the other.

The Novel as an Allegorical Palimpsest

According to Silverman, the palimpsest is conveyed through the figural language of "metaphors, analogies, allegories and montages" (Silverman 2013: 4), linguistic devices allowing for connections and transformations across time and space. Owing to the magic realist tones *The Old Drift* presents, allegory constitutes an interesting speculative source, consigning the reader to a multi-layered proliferation of meanings. The cluster of distant spaces and different temporal moments finds in the palimpsest the privileged metaphor for Serpell's rich narrative. As Silverman makes clear, his poetics of palimpsestic memory, which clearly derives from Benjamin's conceptualisation of memory as "dialectics at a standstill" (Benjamin 1999: 463), reveals how "time and space are reconfigured through a ceaseless process of straddling and superimposition of elements, and condensation and displacement of meaning" (Silverman 2013: 22). By combining the logic of the paradigmatic

and syntagmatic axes, allegory provides an adequate interpretative tool to capture memory's overlay of multiple temporal moments[4].

This weaving together of multiple traces is perceived by the reader in the character of Sibilla, works as a symbolic collection among the various narrative strands. As her name suggests, the woman incarnates the mythological oracles of ancient Greece, whose prophecies were said to be capable to orientate human destiny. Not only does her name suggest a problematic interweaving of the temporal axis, it also reconnects Serpell's multi-generational story to the epic-scale tones of Virgil's *Aeneid*. As already discussed before, in the epigraph of the novel Virgil's hero is going to consult the famous Cumaean Sybil's oracle, on whose prophecy Aeneas' fate in Italy depends. In a similar vein to Virgil's mythological figure, the illegitimate daughter of the Italian aristocratic Giacomo Gavuzzi embodies the intricate texture of Serpell's story. In her childhood, the world manifests to Sibilla as an "elaborate tapestry of memory" (Serpell 2019b: 48). However, her extended vision of temporality applies to the whole novel and, allegorically, her hair becomes the emblem of the flowing of time, establishing unpredictable connections among people and places. Sibilla's face and body are entirely covered in a coat of hair, as if by some mysterious magic. The reader eventually discovers that Sibilla's mother, who worked as a servant for the Gavuzzis, had developed a craving for parsley during her pregnancy and that the garden where parsley was grown had been fertilised with the leftover hair of a barber. According to this anecdote, Sibilla's hirsutism is then an inherited condition striking its roots in the earth itself where she was born, though forms of rhizomatic ramifications extend beyond her geographical origin[5].

Hair is to be found everywhere in the novel, becoming an allegorical vector for cohesion. Horizontally, hair establishes mnemonic connections between the three families while, vertically, it also interlaces the members of the same family. This double power of hair points to the complex layering of memory in *The Old Drift* as a rhizomatic element that blurs linearity. In her old age, Sibilla becomes a client of Sylvia's salon, thus linking her storyline with that of the Mwambas, N'gulube's descendants. If hair links Sibilla's journey from Italy towards Zambia through Sylvia's trade in the newly-born African nation, Sibilla's daughter, Isabella, similarly seems to benefit from her mother's hirsutism. Isabella temporarily runs a wig business, until she marries an older Indian man, Balaji, who sells hair products. A further instance of the generative, allegorical force of hair is exemplified in the third generation of Sibilla's family. Her granddaughter, Naila, decides to satisfy her father's desire to scatter his

[4] Silverman draws on Craig Owen's study of the allegorical nature of Benjamin's philosophy, who claims that allegory "implicates both the metaphor and the metonymy" (Owen 1980: 73). This interface of the paradigmatic level of substitution and similarity (metaphor) and of the syntagmatic level of continuity and association (metonymy), as theorised by Roman Jakobson, emerges, according to Owen, in Benjamin's treatment of the urban landscape as "a sedimentation in depth of layers of meaning which would gradually be unearthed" (Owen 1980: 84).

[5] Sibilla's character is clearly inspired from the Italian Giambattista Basile's tale "Petrosinella", collected in his *Pentamerone* (1634). Basile's story, that later influenced the Brothers Grimm's "Rapunzel" (1812), recounts the story of a pregnant woman stealing parsley from an ogress' garden, being then forced to leave her child to the cruel woman.

ashes in the Temple of Tirumala. She then travels to South India, a journey that amplifies the geographical scope of the novel, where Naila, clinging to the Hindu tradition of tonsure, has her hair cut from an Indian barber. This practice allows her to mourn her father's loss and reconnect herself to one of the multiple fragments of her composite ethnic origin.

Allegorically, hair retains its metanarrative power, suggesting a generative force capable of multiplying narrative strands. Furthermore, hair becomes a flexible performative symbol where past, present and future are intertwined, creating a sense of solidarity among people and opening up to continuous transformations. The regenerative function of this allegoric language clearly emerges in the last generations where the technological revolution projects people into the future, blurring the border between human mind and machines. In the last chapters, the novel features the proliferation of high-tech machines called "Beads", technological devices embedded in human hands. In the same way as smartphones, the "Beads" become a means in the hands of the government for controlling citizens and, at a later stage, for transmitting an experimental HIV vaccine on them. Again, history seems to replicate itself: the dystopian perspective epitomised by the "Beads" seems to entail a twenty-first century version of colonial power, because of their implications in terms of individual freedom. Also, this speculative stance provides an eerily warning about the delicate interface of biopolitical issues and privacy protection, as the debate on the use of apps for monitoring the current COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates.

By the end of the novel, Jacob, Joseph and Naila, the representatives of the third generation of the three families, see present Zambia as a reflection "of the olden days, when the British first came here, a hundred years ago" (547). As in a palimpsestic modelling of memory, the three young people decide to resist this further re-enactment of the past by means of sabotage and revolt. The idealism infused in the very final pages of the novel constitutes a further instance of palimpsestic memory: close to the old drift, where a cemetery hosts the tombs of those colonial settlers coming from England, Italy, Poland, India and North America – the place then being a symbol of the connection between memory and migration, a drift of people, culture and time itself – Jacob, Joseph and Naila, the inheritors of the multiple trajectories of their ancestors, mount a revolution by hacking technology, eventually carrying the reader towards the future.

As I have attempted to demonstrate, in *The Old Drift* Serpell creates a narrative structure that reflects the multi-layered and fragmented articulation of palimpsestic memory. British colonialism, racial stereotypes, human migration and other manifestations of displacement affect the story-lines of the three families, creating a tensional interaction between chronological and cyclic time. Whereas the hybrid narrative format stages a dialogic structure between intradiegetic and extradiegetic narrators, the temporality of the novel straddles the continuum from the past towards the future. On the one hand, it attempts to order events chronologically with temporal linearity and paratextual elements; on the other, the turn to aeonic and circular temporality disrupts any possibility of stability. In line with Creet's vision of memory as an unstable mechanism, Serpell's saga suggests that time progresses but its curve is not linear, showing residues and invisible traces lying behind the stories of migration. This vision of memory, however, discloses also a future-

oriented approach, recuperating Jacques Derrida's cosmopolitan vision of a "democracy to come", that Silverman sees as "the prospect of new solidarities across the lines of race and nation" (Silverman 2013: 8). Furthermore, the use of allegoric language offers a vision of the symbolic structure of palimpsestic memory, disclosing hidden connections across time and space.

In the last chapter, the reader is no longer certain of the real identity of the chorus – "*Are we truly men's enemy,* Anopheles gambiae, *or the microdrones Jacob designed?* […] *are we really a we? Or just a swarm in the swarm?*" (562). As an "*Archimedean spiral*" (562), the novel unveils the sprawling entanglement of generations, synchronically as well as diachronically, by interlacing families, gender, ethnicity, nations, individuals and places. Both ancient and futuristic, *The Old Drift* tells the story of a nation through the intermingling memories of many characters and places with a polyphonic style that starts as a historical novel, turns to magical realism and eventually ends as a speculative parable.

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Because the Poet: Pasolini According to Patti Smith

Abstract I: The transdisciplinary dialogue, the rebellious attitude, and the sublimation of dissidence by experimenting new forms as an act of hope are the key features of the relationship between Pier Paolo Pasolini and Patti Smith, who saluted the Italian writer as one of her greatest teachers throughout her entire career, along with Blake, Rimbaud and the Beats. From the poetry of *Babel* to the lyrics of *Easter*, passing through the photographic series *Pasolini es vie*, the eclectic American artist has never ceased to appraise the literary works and movies of this author as a constant source of inspiration, creating a bond that became very important to the audience but was never properly explored by the critics. In terms of reception, one should not forget that this original relationship also led many (especially outside Italy) to discover the figure of Pasolini. This article seeks to investigate Patti Smith's Pasolini and the works that influenced her most, revealing through an intertextual and interdiscursive approach how the poet contributed to shape the imaginary and spiritual vision of one among the most important lyrical voices in the world today.

Abstract II: Il dialogo interdisciplinare, l'attitudine ribelle e la sublimazione della dissidenza attraverso la sperimentazione di nuove forme come atto di speranza sono i nodi cruciali del rapporto tra Pier Paolo Pasolini e Patti Smith, che ha sempre considerato lo scrittore italiano tra i suoi più grandi maestri lungo tutta la sua carriera, accanto a Blake, Rimbaud e la Beat Generation. Dalla poesia di *Babel* ai testi di *Easter*, passando per la serie fotografica *Pasolini es vie*, l'eclettica artista americana non ha mai smesso di celebrare le opere letterarie e cinematografiche di questo autore come una costante fonte di ispirazione, creando un legame divenuto molto significativo per il pubblico ma mai debitamente approfondito dalla critica. In termini di ricezione, non bisogna inoltre dimenticare che questa originale relazione ha anche spinto molti (soprattutto fuori dall'Italia) a scoprire la figura di Pasolini per la prima volta. Questo articolo esplora il Pasolini di Patti Smith e i lavori che più l'hanno influenzata negli anni, rivelando attraverso un approccio intertestuale e interdiscorsivo come il poeta abbia contribuito in maniera determinante a plasmare l'immaginario e la visione spirituale di una delle più importanti voci cantautorali del panorama contemporaneo.

Keywords: Pier Paolo Pasolini, Patti Smith, literature and music, poetry, lyrics.

Prologue. New Frontiers in Connecting Arts: Pasolini on Instagram

On December 11th 2018, Patti Smith posted on her Instagram account a series of pictures taken at the Pasolini memorial in Ostia, quoting some famous lines from *Una disperata vitalità* and commenting on them with a note to honour the poet's interartistic legacy, so significant for her life and her artistic journey:

Fig. 1. Patti Smith Official – Instagram Account (@thisispattismith). December 11th, 2008 (https://www.instagram.com/p/BrPkyegBirF/).

Followed by more than six hundred fifty thousand people, the profile keeps track of Smith's reflections when she is on tour or perusing her private archive. The songwriter employs the semiotic space offered by the popular new medium in an original way, with the purpose of maximizing the quick communication intended by the social network (which basically consists of a picture or a short video with a caption) as a real "author space" called *thisis…* where she publicly shares photographs, little poems, notes, memories, as well as political statements.

This is, specifically, one of the three posts dedicated by Smith to the Italian author since 2018, under which one can find hundreds of comments from all over the world such as: "Your post introduced me to Pasolini, I did not know of him"; "Pasolini was brilliant and changed my life and thinking when I first saw his work as a young woman. He's an artist who has stayed with me for decades since, also because of you"; "Merci Patti pour cette promenade après PPP"; "Una referencia de sabiduría a un hombre con sus luces con sus sombras, gracias por recordarlo siempre"; "Ho conosciuto l'opera artistica di Pasolini grazie a Patti Smith. […] Nel 1977 leggendo le interviste mi accorsi che citava continuamente due poeti francesi, Rimbaud e Verlaine, e Pier Paolo Pasolini". If over the years Patti Smith paved the way towards Pasolini for so many people, what is the real bond between the two

artists? The relationship reveals a surprising, long-lasting and transdisciplinary connection; but, before answering this question, we need to take a step back.

A Poet and a Rockstar, Under the Sign of Blake and Rimbaud

Patricia Lee Smith was born a poet. As a matter of fact, before becoming widely known by the name of Patti Smith, the 'Rock'n'Roll nigger' or the 'punk poet laureate', and selling billions of copies with albums such as *Horses* and *Wave* that turned her into one of the most influential and critically acclaimed songwriters of the second half of the Twentieth Century, the artist from Chicago started her career with three collections of poems: *Seventh Heaven* (1972), *Early Morning Dream* (1972) and *Witt* (1973). These lesser-known volumes, published at the time as 'limited edition' to become a real memorabilia nowadays, actually hold the primary key to the poetics, the style and the dreamscape *entre les artes* that would legitimise her among the literary minds of contemporary North America. Raised as a writer in New York within Allen Ginsberg and William Borroughs' *milieu*, roaming around Andy Warhol's Factory and the Chelsea Hotel, Smith began to merge her poetry and music in the perspective of a 'performance', as retraced by her most authoritative biographers: "Patti's strongest suit had always been her ability to improvise; […]. By applying this method with different combinations of poems and songs, she would eventually produce something as original as an Andy Warhol painting, in a different way" (Bockris & Bayley 1999: 105). Unlike other colleagues in the showbusiness, Smith's mass-scale success did not weaken the literary substance of her works but rather fostered it, setting up a constant interconnection between music and poetry whose originality was always guarded by the artist, who never ceased to write books throughout the decades not as a side but as a main activity bound to the music and not divided from it; this was arguably also a way to harmonize the inevitable contradictions between her intellectual authority and her commercial success through the years. Suffice it to recall the publishing success story of the memoir *Just Kids*, that won the USA National Book Award for Nonfiction in 2010 and the Sweden Polar Prize in 2011, being commended by the writer Elizabeth Hand for the *Washington Post* as "one of the best books ever written on becoming an artist; not the race for online celebrity and corporate sponsorship that often passes for artistic success these days, but the far more powerful, often difficult journey toward the ecstatic experience of capturing radiance of imagination on a page or stage or photographic paper" (Hand 2010).

The open disclosure of the literary interlocutors that dwell in her world does not shape up to be a "highbrow" display in order to embellish or to dignify her writings, but it implies a transcendental dialogue between the living and the dead to retrace the path taken by her masters and to establish a new dialogue with them. For this reason, the methodological framework drawn-up to address the question will make use of the studies on Postmodern arts by Frederick Jameson, Julia Kristeva's formulation of intertextuality ("any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another", Kristeva 1986: 37) and Harold Bloom's theory on influence, especially for what concerns the notion of *tessera* ("a poet antithetically 'completes' his precursor, by so reading the parent-poem as to retain its terms but to mean them in another

sense", Bloom 1997: 14). In addition, Walter Benjamin's concept of "dialectical image" (Benjamin 2002: 40) could be precious considering also that "art is derived from other art; stories are born of other stories" (Hutcheon 2012: 2) when the adaptation of a legacy in the present age is at issue.

Poetically speaking, Smith's tutelary deities have been Arthur Rimbaud and William Blake. The impact of the French *maudit* poets on Smith – an American idolization launched by the Beat Generation in the 1950s and brought forward by Bob Dylan and Jim Morrison in the 1960s[1]– was examined in depth by Carrie J. Noland, who pointed out:

> [Rimbaud's significance for Smith] lay in the fact that he, perhaps more than any other poet, explored and exploited what is most poetic about poetry, what makes poetry distinct from other linguistic practices, namely, the extensive use of figures displacing elements from one semantic field to another. Poetic figuration is in this sense paradigmatic of the type of cultural displacements, odd juxtapositions, and forced ambiguities promoted by punk subculture (Noland 1995: 603)[2].

While the poetical magnetic field of Rimbaud orbits for Smith around the pole of the visionary as an "arriver à l'inconnu par le dérèglement de *tous les sens*" (Rimbaud 2016: 141), something really close to the punk legacy of "disorder" or "unknown pleasures" that Ian Curtis would sum up at the end of the 1970s (Curtis 2014: 33-35), the figure of Blake circles around the pole of the visionary as the supreme holiness of poetry, the spiritual act capable of sharing the deepest dreams of life and sublimating sorrow, loss and ultimately death. In her 2007 introduction to one of the most widespread editions of Blake's *Poems*, selected by Smith herself[3], the artist recalls the days of Allen Ginsberg's passing and reveals her true vision about the London poet, adding that her mother gave her *Songs of Innocence* when she was a child and then her father helped her to properly understand it:

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[1] Dylan was probably the first author to ever name Rimbaud directly in a modern Pop-Rock song. Closing the side A of his critically acclaimed *Blood on the Tracks* album, the 5th stanza of the ballad *You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go* recites: "Situations have ended sad / Relationships have all been bad / Mine have been like Verlaine's and Rimbaud / But there's no way I can compare / All them scenes to this affair…" (Dylan 1975). The songwriter from Duluth had previously quoted the French poet also in *A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall* (1963) and in his *poème en prose Tarantula* (1971), as underlined by many critics (Shelton 1986: 333; Carrera 2001: 25, 52). As for The Doors, the reference book remains *Rimbaud and Jim Morrison. The Rebel As Poet* (1993) by Duke Professor of French Literature Wallace Fowlie.

[2] In this respect, it is also worth noting how "aggrieved communities can use the very instruments of their displacement and dispossession to forge a new public sphere with emancipatory potential" (Lipsitz 1997: 14), taking into consideration the state of poverty and hardships in which Smith was raised. For a broader look on these matters, see also Minganti 2002, Chiriacò 2016.

[3] Almost unnoticed by the critics but highly appreciated by the audience, this Smith's curatorship of Blake's poem for Vintage Classics – which followed the philological edition by Geoffrey Keynes – would probably deserve some attention considering that between 2007 and 2016 it was the most popular edition of Blake's verses among the English and North American youth. To testify that, more than ten reprints in ten years and the eyewitness account of who is writing this essay. See also: https://www.finebooksmagazine.com/blog/patti-smiths-blake (consulted on 6/05/2020).

> When Allen Ginsberg lay dying, I was among those who sat vigil by his bedside. I wandered into his library and chose a book, a volume of Blake in blood-red binding. Each poem was deeply annotated in Allen's hand, just as Blake had annotated Milton. I could imagine these prolific, complex men discoursing: the angels, mute, admiring. William Blake felt that all men possessed visionary powers. He cited from Numbers II:29: 'Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets'. He did not jealously guard his vision; he shared it through his work and called upon us to animate the creative spirit within us. […]
>
> To take on Blake is not to be alone.
> Walk with him. William Blake writes 'all is holy'.
>
> That includes the book you are holding and the hand that holds it (Smith in Blake 2007: 11-12).

From prose to poetry, including the tribute of *My Blakean Year* ("So throw off your stupid cloak / Embrace all that you fear / For joy shall conquer all despair", Smith 2004), it is not by chance that the English poet and engraver appears in Smith's lyrics when the call to resistance and reaction becomes explicitly collective, like a hymn or an anthem, which everyone is welcome to join. In this respect, the most notable case is possibly *People Have the Power* (Smith's most well-known song next to *Because the Night*), where the songwriter tries to harmonize "innocence" (represented by the lamb) and "experience" (represented by the leopard, a variation on *The Tyger*) in a vision of universal empathy, love and social justice:

> And the leopard
>
> And the lamb
>
> Lay together truly bound
>
> I was hoping in my hoping
>
> To recall what I had found
>
> I was dreaming in my dreaming
>
> God knows a purer view
>
> As I surrender to my sleeping
>
> I commit my dream to you
>
> People have the power (Smith 1988).

In addition to that, taking into account that "the attempt to synthesize the highbrow and the lowbrow varieties of experience in America has always been a constant feature of the national culture" (Kroes 1988: 116) and that the Beat movement carried out the final "desanctification of exalted social institutions through the mixture of high and low culture" (Halasz 2015: 38), Smith's refunctionalization of her masters' lessons converges towards a proper Postmodern attitude as Jameson puts it, "fascinated precisely by this whole 'degraded' landscape of schlock and kitsch, […]: materials they (the postmodernisms, *A/N*) no longer simply 'quote', as a Joyce or a Mahler might have done, but incorporate into their very substance" (Jameson 1991: 2-3). In order to provide just one example for this particular *modus operandi*, a telling poem by Smith is *Picasso laughing*:

> april is the cruellest month etc. what remains?
>
> brian jones bones, jim morrisons friend jimi hendrix
>
> bandana. sweatband angel. judies garland. the
>
> starched collar of baudelaire. the sculptured cap of
>
> voltaire. the crusaders helmet like a temple itself.
>
> rimbaud's valise. his artificial limb genuflects (Smith 1973: 30).

Within a typical Beat framework (no capital letters, irregular punctuation, *enumeración caótica*, constant *enjambement*, catachresis) the writer frantically mixes layers of culture, using the opening words from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* to draw the empty surface of our modern capitalist society and then she inserts elements to cram it, for what remains of the most emotional and creative souls (from Baudelaire to Hendrix) are just fetishes (a bandana, a collar, a valise) as if to say that also poetry has no way out of this reified world we inhabit.

For this reason, in conclusion to this introduction that retraces her poetics, another Smith's feature to highlight is her penetrative strategy of "Intermediality" – see the 1966 manifesto by Fluxus artist Dick Higgins and, of course, Pop Art – with the aim to enhance the message she wants to convey through painting and especially through a renovated concept of photography, whose "new meaning resides in those modes of identification which are associated with the Imaginary" (Kraus 1986: 203). So, in the age of the supremacy of the visual, reading literature can be more than just a private act eventually flowing into intertextuality: photography, fashion and every possible semiotic surface – from album covers to t-shirts – can become functional to convey a literary substance.

Who's Patti Smith's Pasolini?

Lesser known within this geography of literary formation is the presence of Pier Paolo Pasolini, who turns out to be crucial in Smith's artistic path throughout the years. By her own admission, she has always identified with Pasolini's rebellious attitude, his political

activism and spiritual dissidence sublimated through the art-making process. This dialectic between the arts defines the work of the Bolognese intellectual as seminal in the second half of the twentieth century. Smith has repeatedly told the Italian press the reasons why she considers the author of *Le ceneri di Gramsci* as one of her most relevant teachers:

> I think that one of the most important example Pasolini taught me is just not to fear using many different media to express oneself. He used poetry, film, activism and so, even though I don't work on film but music, I found that I lacked fear to express myself in several different ways through art, through poetry, through Rock'n'Roll, and infused activism within art. He was a very great teacher for me, for infusing activism within art and to feel that the art is pure (Smith 2012).

The importance of Pasolini, who was also deeply influenced by Rimbaud, was such that after the poet's death Smith – together with Mapplethorpe – decided to pay a visual tribute to him with an experimental two-piece photo installation called *Pasolini es vie – fuck fascists*, that portrayed her while painting a sun-shaped eye and a graffiti of the sentence on a wall, as a way to salute him as a warrior for freedom of expression[4].

Before dealing with the literary realm, the core of our study, it is essential to lay emphasis also on the active role of Smith in promoting the work of Pasolini across the world in the last forty years. Indeed, the songwriter has been at the forefront of lectures, exhibitions, TV or radio appearances and events dedicated to the Italian author, among which: the organization of a one-week crosscutting Festival at the Auditorium Parco della Musica in Rome where she allotted many initiatives to Pasolini (including the screening of *Medea* with a commentary by her and Bernardo Bertolucci, and a reading of *La religione del mio tempo* edited by Pierpaolo Capovilla); playing a "Concert for Pasolini" near Udine preceded by a public visit on Pasolini's gravestone in Casarsa; making a pilgrimage to the Idroscalo (Parco Letterario Pasolini/CHM Lipu) in Ostia to pay homage to his memorial. Smith also gave the inaugural lecture at the Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò in New York for the most prestigious American retrospective on the writer, *Pasolini: The Poet of Ashes*, explaining in great depth the reasons behind the decisive importance of Pasolini in her life, an issue she reiterated in an interview for *L'Unità*:

> Pasolini, like William Blake, was hugely important to me. He gave a new possibility, he was a good artist to look up to. A mentor, culturally complete because he knew how to build bridges between art, poetry and politics. Deeply spiritual and political at the same time. And then there was a sense of freedom in the way he used language and other means of expression, […]. See, when I was a young girl, I had a strict religious upbringing and I stood up against it. Pasolini gave me a new interpretation of Jesus. Jesus was a revolutionary, the Jesus of *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* was one of the people, living for the people. I finally figured it out when I wrote *Horses* and the song *Gloria*: Pasolini opened a new road to Christ for me – Jesus as he really is,

[4] The diptych is now visible on *The Patti Smith Blog*: https://patricialeesmith.tumblr.com/post/14326584492/pasolini-es-vie-fuck-faschists (consulted on 06/05/2020).

> not some kind of portrait imposed by religion. […] In 1960s' New York Pasolini was considered a master by everyone. Going to see his films was a ritual. I remember once I went to the cinema with my friend Mapplethorpe, and everyone already had a seat in the theatre, Warhol and all the poets like us who studied him and drew inspiration from him (Smith & Boschero 2005: 19).

On the same subject, more recently, Smith made a significant revelation during the Italian Rai TV show *Borderline* about one of her most acclaimed lyrics:

> The most important influence Pasolini had on me was to help me having a new perspective on Christ, as an historical and spiritual figure. I rebelled against my own church when I was twelve and, you know, I wrote lines like 'Jesus died for somebody's sins but not mine' because I wanted the responsibility for my own actions. But I didn't sing it because I didn't believe in Christ but because I couldn't find my relationship to him, and when I saw *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, […], I finally saw Christ in another way: a revolutionary, a man of the people (Smith 2013).

The line Smith mentions, "Jesus died for somebody's sins but not mine" (Smith 1975) opens in fact her debut album *Horses*, defined by the critics as the work responsible for "the remaking of Rock'n'Roll from the Seventies" (Paytress 2010: 3) and ranked number 44 on *Rolling Stone*'s list of "The 500 greatest albums of all time", by virtue of "the perfect fusion of poetry and garage band rock and roll […] that belongs as much to the world of literary and cultural criticism as it does to the realm of musicology" (Shaw 2008: backpage). Given this, the awareness that Pasolini's art and thought have had such a weight on Smith's approach to spirituality and to the figure of Jesus Christ, a recurring central theme in her poems and lyrics from the beginning until today, seems to add another possible layer of depth to the concept of a milestone for what concerns the relationship between poetry and music in our contemporary world.

Babel, or Descending into the Afterlife with Virgil and Pasolini

Patti Smith was among the first poets (most likely the first ever) to bring Pasolini into the North American literary debate by means of poetry itself. Indeed, the first significant English translation of Pasolini's poetry, by Norman MacAfee and Luciano Martinengo, dates back to 1982[5], but as early as the end of the 1970s Smith had already dedicated a threnody to the Bolognese author. The last section of the collection *Babel*, written during the *Radio Ethiopia – Easter* world tour and published in 1978, contains many references to Italian culture and history, from painting to cinema (*florence*), from literature to Opera (*OPERA IS TRUTH AND CARUSO IS QUEEN*) and its final part is entirely devoted to Pasolini. The poetical epiphany of Italy revolves in fact around a rather extended "Rimbaudesque" prose poetry that proves to be relevant for our inquiry right from the very start:

[5] Previous translations appeared either in periodicals or in an extremely limited number of copies not intended for sale (Healey 1998: 287).

Fig. 2. Patti Smith on Pasolini's tombstone in Casarsa before playing the "Concert for Pasolini" in Codroipo (UD). August 1st, 2015. Source and credits: Centro Studi Pasolini – Casarsa della Delizia.

Italy (the round)
for pasolini

pickin thru the ruins with a stick. the wet leaves against

my legs and the bottoms of my feet. in my pocket the silky

roll of my stockings. my stomach is contracting. the stones

are cold and wet. the rein of virgil and in the distance

another castle, parted like the scalp of a student, by a seizure

of mold. the quaaludes. the fluid muscle of the crowd.

the hot lights. action as a blade that cuts another slice. history.

limbs. nostalgic ruins in/ruin. the suspicious rivers

and the caves of naples. a ripple in the water is another rib (Smith 1996: 166).

The short poem opens with a dedication to the poet and an evocation of Virgil, who is depicted almost as a keeper of all the beauty and the ruins of the peninsula among castles, "suspicious rivers" and the Neapolitan caves that immediately bring to mind the dark entry to the cave of the Cumaean Sybil, through a word combination which seems to recall the English version of the Latin masterpiece: "So ceased the rivers' uproar, when its grave Sire / Looked o'er th' expanse, and, riding on in lights, / Flung free rein to his winged obedient car" (Virgil 1908: 8). The setting makes way for the entrance of Pasolini, the main character and addressee of these lines, who descends into the Afterlife as a second Aeneas:

> what is kinder more flattering than images
> released with a breath? a still? death frozen and flat in
> a dimension of shadow and point. or the final shots of
> pasolini mugging mineo in an alley. […].

> the poem/maker film/maker is blinded by the bright night. he has
> gone underground he has gone under. somewhere a slayer
> goes undercover. fascist or lover it doesn't matter. the scenes
> of pasolini remain even as he is lowered. a flag of flies
> unfurl. over there, in the flowers, erect fellows playmate.
> their sticky plumage curdles the blood of observers (Smith 1996: 166).

If Aeneas founded a new city, Pasolini founded a new way of making art, based on his powerful and desperate vitality that consisted also in his *impegno* (not casually, echoes from Dante's *Inferno III* resound in "flag of flies"[6]). As a matter of fact, his legacy should teach us how to be free human beings and free artists, mixing the codes and the expressive media, crossing the borders of the genres and genders, dulling language conventions, risking one's own life to defend one's free – reckless, honest, dangerous – self. The wordplay "the final shots of pasolini" holds here an amphibological value, referring both to his last footage and the wounds inflicted by his unknown murderer. The haunting death of the poet has, then, a central role on the stage, providing the opportunity for a reflection about the eternal worth of real art, beyond the limits of death:

> italy. how lovely you are. and how treacherous is your
> makeup. i am an insect, a movie star, where are my shades
> and my boots I am lost. i have taken a lot of speed and
> i can't bear to live outside film […].
> the actress blows kisses to pierre pa-olo rising from the
> sea. victim of fascist and faggots and the purity of his art.
> waving goodbye. the thrust of his arm. the trust of his
> view.
> pasolini is dead. et morte. shower of petals (Smith 1996: 174).

The funeral scene seems modelled after the last frames of *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964) so that initially the poet becomes a sort of *figura Christi* who sacrificed for "the purity of his art" but then he resurrects *triumphans* among a "shower of petals" thanks to that purity.

An Underground Resurrection: *Easter*

In the same year Patti Smith published *Easter*, the best-selling record of her career, which was saluted by Dave Marsh of *Rolling Stone* with an article called *Can Patti Smith Walk on Water?*: "It is transcendent and fulfilled, and its radiance must be honoured. No one else could have made this record […]: no one else in Rock'n'Roll would have the nerve to connect Lou Reed, the Bible, Rimbaud, the Paiutes, Jim Morrison, Bruce Springsteen and the MC5" (Marsh 1978: 33).

[6] The translation into English of the famous *Inferno III*, vv. 52-66, so dear also to T. S. Eliot that Smith was constantly reading in those years, always presents "flag" for *insegna* (v. 52) and very often "flies" for *mosconi* (v. 66). See: Alighieri 2008: 57. Furthermore, a possible reference to Dante here seems to fit perfectly within this Virgilian evocation of the Afterlife.

As the title itself clearly anticipates, spirituality was here meant to be the key theme of the work and in the liner notes of the album Smith decided to reproduce through a cut-up method all the private notes, quotes, references, visual and artistic fascinations that had inspired her for the making of every single track, thus creating a real Postmodern collage. In correspondence to the very opening tune, *Till Victory*, the figure of Pier Paolo Pasolini is once again invoked:

> till victory
>
> in vienna (wein) there is area that
>
> surrounds and circulates thru the hotel de
>
> france. the italian bikers. the shoppe of priests.
>
> leather jackets made in heaven fashioned from
>
> the skin of alain delon. here is the street of the
>
> trucks. here is lantern row where hard bucks
>
> lean and strut and pose for the passing of
>
> pasolini (Smith 1978).

Almost as a classical Hymn to the Muses, within the same Beat configuration analysed so far, the passage of Pasolini sets the tone for the beginning of a poetic and musical journey. The syntactic overturning creates a hyperbaton and produces an effect of suspense that meanders through the verses until we discover the identity of the subject who causes the action in a Middle-European nocturnal underground atmosphere. This literary suggestion seems reminiscent of many descriptions from Pasolini's realistic novels of the 1950s such as *Ragazzi di vita* (1955) and *Una vita violenta* (1959), that in turn had extensively inspired the scripts of the director's first movies, *Accattone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1962). Indeed, leafing through the pages of the English versions of the novels, translated and edited by Emile Capouya (*The Ragazzi*) and William Weaver (*A Violent Life*), both published in New York in 1968 – Smith's same *milieu*, let us not forget –, one may find such passages: "Meanwhile, Lenzetta was waiting for Riccetto and Alduccio, sitting in the dust by a low wall, dressed to kill in his velveteen pants and his red-and-black striped jersey […]" (Pasolini 1986: 116). Or:

> 'I'm leaving. What's the use staying here to watch these punks!' Again laughing loudly, to irritate the others, he left the tent and started wandering among the attractions of the park. There were a few people in the illuminated grounds, some older boys with motorbikes, tough bucks, a bunch of bikers, and even more sailors. They walked in little groups, assuming an idle, menacing air, strutting, humming or trying to pick

> up the girls behind the counters of the shooting-galleries. Tommasino imitated them, strolling among the pines […] (Pasolini 1996: 17).

Furthermore, even though an English translation of *Le ceneri di Gramsci* (1957) would only appear in 1982, Smith's lines pick some poetic strings that resonate within the same frequency of *Il pianto della scavatrice*, especially in its nocturnal opening section:

> Annoiato, stanco, rincaso, per neri
>
> piazzali di mercati, tristi
>
> strade intorno al porto fluviale,
>
> tra le baracche e i magazzini misti
>
> agli ultimi prati. Lì mortale
>
> è il silenzio: ma giù a viale Marconi,
>
> alla stazione di Trastevere, appare
>
> ancora dolce la sera. Ai loro rioni,
>
> alle loro borgate, tornano su motori
>
> leggeri – in tuta o coi calzoni
>
> di lavoro, ma spinti da un festivo ardore
>
> i giovani, coi compagni sui sellini,
>
> ridenti, sporchi […] (Pasolini 1976: 93-94).

It is perhaps not a coincidence that in the aforementioned interview for *L'Unità* the American artist mentions this very poem while talking about the dangers of globalised capitalism. Love and empathy are ruled out decreeing the supremacy of greed and indifference, in complete opposition to the concept of "Solo l'amare, solo il conoscere conta" expressed by the Italian poet:

> It's true. I'm a moralist as long as I follow some indispensable rules, which are nothing but the basic teachings of Christ: to love each other, help each other, be compassionate

> and let freedom rule. […]. Yet one more lesson from him: he already knew what globalization was going to bring about. He was already frightened by the materialistic drift of our culture. A lesson to remember now more than ever. Our current society totally lacks morality […] Just as much as it lacks the word "love", something Pasolini was deeply committed to. "To love and to know count. Not having loved, not having known", Pasolini said […] Now the words of the day are: consumerism, materialism, sex, drugs, power, gluttony, greed, voracity. I know it's easy to say that, but the only word we are really missing today is "love", that's the mightiest power (Smith & Boschero 2005: 19).

To conclude by considering also a diachronic specificity, these words show that Smith's reception of Pasolini has deepened through the years: from a first "punk" reception in which the Italian author was depicted as the anti-establishment nonconformist artist, faithful only to the destructive purity of his poetry just like the French *maudits*, she gradually delved into the keynotes of Pasolini's peculiar philosophy, his intellectual restlessness about modern times, his visceral spirituality. Accordingly, the powerful interaction between these two artists inevitably morphs into a living demonstration of their own poetry, their own art, and their own passion – a keyword for both –, in their struggle against and within an alienated and reified society. Lacan once wrote "I am not a poet but a poem; a poem that is being written" (Lacan 1979: viii): the artistic journey of Pier Paolo Pasolini and Patti Smith epitomises the very best of that sentence.

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Metaphors of Psychological Deterioration: the Case of Depression

Abstract I: Il presente articolo si propone di individuare e analizzare i comportamenti linguistici metaforici di individui che convivono con stati depressivi. A tale scopo, sono stati selezionati quattro *fora* online di auto-aiuto dedicati a varie malattie mentali, tra cui la depressione. I dati raccolti sono stati interpretati alla luce dei principi cardine della Teoria della Metafora Concettuale e della Teoria psicologica dell'Auto-determinazione. La combinazione di questi due quadri teorici permette, in primo luogo, di individuare modelli metaforici ricorrenti nella comprensione della depressione e, in secondo luogo, di discernere una dimensione psichica armonica da una problematica per il benessere psicologico della persona.

Abstract II: The present article aims at identifying and analysing the linguistic metaphorical behaviours of people living with depressive disorders. To this end, four online *fora* dealing with mental illnesses were selected in order to gather data on how individuals metaphorically describe their depressive states. The data were interpreted by means of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Self-determination Theory. Combining a linguistic theory with a psychological one allows to deepen our comprehension of depression and helps diagnose it: linguistic behaviour paves the way for accessing the psychological dimension of individuals while revealing a potential tendency towards harmonic or problematic mental states.

Keywords: depression, conceptual metaphor theory, self-determination theory, online *fora*.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to explore how the symbolic perceptions of depressed individuals are organised in order to understand what they reveal about the nature of their mental states. Mental states influence perceptions and the resulting view of reality may be communicated via metaphors. Demjén (2014: 1) mentions that the language choices made while speaking and/or writing are not random, but provide important clues about the nature of people's perceptions, experiences and attitudes. The study behind my article also contributes to identifying prevailing metaphorical conceptualisations that signal a tendency towards a deteriorated psychological dimension typical of depressive states. In fact, language can communicate an alteration in people's perceptual dimension, as well as an ongoing psychological change (Levitt *et al.* 2000).

No longer relegated to their mere rethorical and ornamental role, nowadays metaphors are deemed to be part of our universal mental toolkit (Kimmel 2002). In the past, metaphors were considered as devices that could obfuscate the 'objective' representation of reality because they did not reflect a 'truthful' image of the world, but rather its figurative and allegorical aspects. Metaphorical language was therefore downgraded to mere stylistic embellishment of extra-ordinary language (Landau, Keefer & Meier 2010). This view of metaphor, and of language more generally, derives from an idea of reality as something completely external and independent of how human beings conceptualise the world. Such a view does not take into account the human aspects of reality, that is, human perceptions, conceptualisations, motivations and actions (Lakoff & Johnson 2003) that shape individuals' understanding of the world.

A paradigmatic change in the theory of metaphor took place after the publication of the first edition of *Metaphors We Live By* by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (2003). This publication led the way to new theoretical and practical studies on Conceptual Metaphor Theory, whose main principles will be treated in the following section.

Lakoff and Johnson claim that metaphors are, first of all, a matter of thought, which manifests itself in our ordinary linguistic behaviour. Avoiding the use of metaphorical language would therefore be impossible since it is a pervasive and inescapable phenomenon whose mechanisms originate in our mind. Metaphors are an integral part of our ordinary system of thought and language (Lakoff 1993: 203) and reflect conventional models of thought (Semino 2008: 5). In order to understand their role in human cognition and language, it may be useful to consider human mechanisms of reality comprehension and organisation. When individuals are faced with an unfamiliar phenomenon, they rely – more or less consciously – on their cognitive capacity to create analogies and structure concepts on the basis of what is already known and familiar (Boden 2004). Gentner and Colhoun (2010) write that a familiar situation is used as a model to understand an unfamiliar one and project inferences onto the latter. In metaphorical language and thought, familiar phenomena normally concern concrete, tangible and/or bodily domains of experience, which define the source domain of a metaphor. On the contrary, the unfamiliar, less tangible or more abstract phenomenon which needs to be structured more clearly, tends to be the target domain of a metaphor.

Metaphorical language reveals the creative, fictional, and imagistic nature of human cognition, which is able to generate conceptual mappings between everyday domains of thought. Light can therefore be shed on conceptual representations of reality thanks to the linguistic choices made by individuals. Based on CMT, metaphors are thus implicated in the generation of our inner world which is profoundly imagistic, creative, dynamic, and embodied. The realm of perceptions, given its subjective nature, can be deeply imbued with metaphors. Metaphorical behaviour reveals the symbolic domain of individuals' experience and their ways of perceiving themselves and their world (Lawley & Tompkins 2000: xiv), thus creating a conceptual model of their perceptions. Analysing the metaphorical conceptualisations of people therefore means accessing their existing symbolic perceptions, which describe their way of being in the world (Lawley & Tompkins 2000: xv). This means

that their experience of reality is filtered by their organisation of perceptions, that is, the lenses through which they 'see' and interpret the world.

If one wants to study the metaphorical behaviour of individuals, the field of mental health turns out to be very fertile: communication on this topic is often imbued with metaphors since it concerns an intangible domain of experience, which therefore needs something more concrete to be referred to so as to be completely understood by the human mind. According to Bartczak and Bokus (2015: 162), one of the most promising methods to study cognitive representations of depressed patients seems to be the analysis of metaphorical conceptualisations associated with different concepts. Indeed, metaphors become a fundamental tool of human cognition because they allow to think and talk of complicated experiences in terms of simpler and more basic ones (Bartczak & Bokus 2015: 163). Nowadays, depression is one of the most common mental disorders in the world (WHO 2017). Depressive disorders involve a series of alterations that affect not only the mood, but also the cognitive, neurovegetative and psychomotor dimensions of the person affected by this disabling medical condition (Friedman *et al.* 2014). In the case of mental illness, language becomes a symptom and indicator of the psychological imbalance; for instance, people under stress often provide important information about their degree of psychological adaptation and psychological defence mechanisms manifest themselves in the way they speak (Pennebaker *et al.* 2003: 548).

Given the inextricable link between metaphors, perceptions and psychological phenomena, this article interprets the data according to a linguistic theory, that is, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, and a psychological one, namely Self-determination Theory, discussed in Section 2. Identifying the conceptualisations of an individual is fundamental since human beings tend to act as a consequence of their perception of the world. Our interpretations of ourselves create the world outside of us, and, in turn, the world outside of us influences the way we understand ourselves in a continuous interactive process (Pritzker 2003).

In this article, Section 2 introduces the theoretical framework of reference of the study, as previously mentioned; Section 3 presents the methodology employed and the data gathering process; Section 4 is devoted to the results and discussion of the data and Section 5 summarises the main findings of this study.

2. Theoretical Framework: Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Self-determination Theory

2.1. Conceptual Metaphor Theory

The present study is based on the main principles of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Self-determination Theory (SDT). CMT considers metaphor as an event of thought concerning concepts (Evola 2008: 56), which is why Lakoff and Johnson define it as 'conceptual'. Moreover, in order to define a metaphor as such, two entities of different nature and linked by a relationship of analogy or empiricism must always be involved. In particular, one entity will define the source domain, while the other will circumscribe the target domain. The latter identifies the entity we want to talk about in metaphorical terms, while the source domain designates the entity we use to define the target domain. Semino (2008: 5) defines conceptual domains as rich mental representations, portions of our

basic knowledge related to particular experiences or phenomena. A domain is therefore a coherent organisation of human experience (Kövecses 2017: 24). Using one specific source domain or another is not the same since two different source domains give rise to very different worldviews and create very different realities (Kövecses 2017: 17). The power of metaphors lies in their ability to represent reality by using information and experiences that have already been internalised. In this sense, metaphors become a tool of reality-construction which reveals the mental organisation of a person's experience of the world.

The mapping process between the two domains generates a process of alignment between the two structures involved in the metaphorical creation. This alignment entails a series of matches between the two domains, which will be then combined in a structurally coherent cluster and then in an overall mapping (Gentner & Colhoun 2010: 3). Moreover, as a natural consequence of such alignment, inferences would be transferred from the source domain to the target domain by completing the target structure (Gentner & Colhoun 2010: 3). This mechanism thus becomes a generator of new knowledge; analogy is often used in the process of reasoning and is considered as a force of mental organisation (Gentner & Colhoun 2010). Additionally, in the reasoning process there is a tendency to maintaining the structural coherence of the two domains, which is why the interpretations of a metaphor are limited in order to preserve the consistency of metaphorical mapping. This is an important aspect to be considered when analysing the possible implications of the metaphorical comprehension of a phenomenon given that it constrains its understanding and knowledge. Moreover, given their cognitive nature, metaphors can have the power to shape people's attitudes, which is crucial since research has shown that the moods of people affected by an illness can make a difference in the healing process (Ray 2004; Miller & Blackwell 2006).

2.2. Self-determination Theory

As for Self-determination Theory (SDT), Deci and Ryan (2000) explain that living organisms come into the world with a series of needs that must be satisfied to ensure their own survival and that of their species. These needs generate instincts of action that lead the organism to act in order to satisfy them. When we think of the basic needs of human beings, we may normally think of physiological needs, such as the need to eat, drink and reproduce. However, according to SDT, human beings also come into the world with a series of primary psychological needs that they need to satisfy in order to maintain a state of well-being. Specifically, this theory has identified three basic psychological needs which, if not satisfied, can lead to a psychophysical disorder: the need for autonomy, the need for connection and the need for competence. Each of these innate needs should be satisfied: just as human beings cannot thrive with food but without water, people cannot thrive psychologically by satisfying only one or two of the psychological needs mentioned. If even one psychological dimension is neglected, this is likely to lead to negative mental consequences.

As far as the need for autonomy is concerned, this refers to the organismic desire to organise one's own life experience and behaviour and to act in accordance with one's own vision of oneself (Deci & Ryan 2000). Indeed, Deci and Ryan (254) claim that the need to

develop an integrated self is a reflection of the deepest and most archaic human nature that tends towards the cohesion and unity of the self, thus avoiding its fragmentation. It is part of the human psychological architecture to integrate the different intrapsychic and interpersonal experiences that individuals live into a unity. As a result, the need for autonomy clashes with situations in which dynamics of coercive force develop.

Regarding the need for connection, this refers to the need and desire to feel connected to others, to love and feel loved, to care for people and to be cared for (Deci & Ryan 2000: 231). Finally, the need for competence takes into account the human wish to bring about effects on the surrounding environment as a consequence of one's actions. However, in order to act, people need to feel like they possess the necessary skills and abilities to be able to influence their environment and thus generate an impact on it.

The innate psychological needs theorised by Deci and Ryan (2000) would be universal since they concern the most archaic and profound architecture of the human psyche. Self-determination theory therefore argues that the satisfaction of these three primary psychological needs is associated with a general well-being of the individual. On the contrary, the inability to satisfy them is associated with a deficit in the person's psychophysical well-being.

Combining CMT with SDT proves useful in order to investigate the psychological implications of a medical condition on the people suffering from it. Since it is crucial to satisfy basic psychological human needs for one's well-being, metaphors can contribute to signaling whether those essential needs are met or not. In this sense, CMT was chosen since it regards metaphor in language as related to metaphor in thought and it underlines its significant framing function, which is remarkably relevant to the context of serious illnesses (Semino *et al.* 2017).

3. Methodology and Data

In order to identify and analyze the metaphors associated with depressive disorders, four online *fora* dealing with mental illness have been selected. Online *fora* were chosen because they can provide a genuine representation of a disease: in these virtual discussion platforms individuals suffering from an illness can find a space where they can be understood and where their feelings and emotions are not inhibited, but rather expressed freely. This online tool represents a valuable resource to rebuild one's identity when it is disrupted by a disease. Online *fora* therefore contribute to the construction of the self and the construction of a community. In this way, the typical dynamics of these virtual tools make it possible to create support groups among individuals who share the same life experience.

Regarding the data gathering process, the four online *fora* chosen are: *Mental Health Forum*, *Depression Understood*, *Beyond Blue* and *Mind*. 71 users were selected in order to collect data on how individuals generally represent their experience of depression. Users were divided as follows: 33 users from the forum *Mental Health Forum*, 21 users from *Depression Understood*, 12 users from *Beyond Blue* and 5 users from *Mind*. The number of users varies among the *fora* since some criteria of selection were adopted and if a post did not satisfy them (e.g. users dealing with aspects of depression that were not of any interest for the

purpose of this article) it was not taken into account. The total number of words analysed and that composes the corpus is 15473. Data collection took place between February 2019 and August 2019. The most recent post dates back to 15th August 2019, whereas the least recent dates back to 5th August 2015. The criteria of selection that were adopted considered the fact that online *fora* had to be in English – any variety – and they had to be open-access for privacy reasons. Moreover, users who wrote about other aspects of depressive disorders (e.g. medical treatment) were not selected: the main aim of this article is to investigate the experience of depression as described by individuals who suffer from it; as a consequence, I considered posts who could answer the following questions: how do they describe their experience of depression? How do they describe what depression provokes to their mental and bodily health? How do they describe the feelings and emotions they experience when living with depression?

With regard to the process of metaphor identification, the MIPVU procedure was followed (Steen 2010). This method was chosen as one of the most used and precise in the field of metaphor study. It includes various stages of analysis: first of all, it recommends to read the entire text in order to reach a general understanding of it; secondly, it suggests establishing the meaning in context of each lexical unit; thirdly, it should be determined whether each lexical unit may have a more basic meaning in other contexts of use (that is, more concrete, related to bodily action, and historically older). If the lexical unit has a more basic meaning in other contexts, consider whether its significance contrasts with that basic meaning; in this case, flag it as 'word used metaphorically'.

As for the examples that will be reported, they will display the exact words used by the users taken into account. This is the reason why, for the sake of authenticity of the data collected, there could be grammatical and/or spelling mistakes. Moreover, neither the nicknames nor the dates will be reported in order to preserve the privacy of individuals.

4. Results and Discussion

According to Ryan and Deci (2000: 68), the most all-encompassing representation of humanity exhibits the human being as a creature that is naturally curious, vital, and self-motivated. In their best and most primordial form, human beings are generally actors of their own lives, inspired to act and animated by a constant desire to learn, improve, and master different skills. The theoretical framework of SDT exposes the essence of human nature and is fundamental to understand that the metaphors associated with depression show that this disorder entails a progressive withdrawal of the depressed individual from what most makes him/her vital. In this context, metaphors become key indicators to understand whether individuals exhibit a general tendency towards what fully develops their human nature or whether, on the contrary, they signal a tendency towards a maladaptive psychological dimension that affects their mental health. In the table below I list the metaphors associated with depression that were more frequently found in my corpus. On the left, I list the conceptual metaphors found in the data, and on the right I indicate the number of expressions related to a specific metaphor per number of words – that is, as mentioned in Section 3, 15473 words:

Metaphor	Number of expressions per number of words
DEPRESSION IS A DOWNWARD MOVEMENT	**47**
DEPRESSION IS DARKNESS	**38**
DEPRESSION IS A CONFLICT	**27**
DEPRESSION IS A BOUNDED SPACE	**25**
DEPRESSION IS DISINTEGRATION OF THE SELF	**23**
DEPRESSION IS AN OPPRESSIVE FORCE	**22**
THE DEPRESSED PERSON IS A CONTAINER	**19**
DEPRESSION IS EMPTINESS	**19**
DEPRESSION IS INCAPACITY TO MOVE	**16**
DEPRESSION IS ISOLATION/DISCONNECTION	**14**
DEPRESSION IS A PATH	**13**
DEPRESSION IS LACK OF CONTROL	**11**
DEPRESSION IS A LIVING CREATURE	**11**
DEPRESSION IS BEING LOST	**10**
DEPRESSION IS DROWNING	**9**
DEPRESSION IS BEING TRAPPED	**9**
DEPRESSION IS BAD WEATHER	**8**
DEPRESSION IS BEING LIFELESS	**8**
THE DEPRESSED MIND IS A MACHINE	**8**
DEPRESSION IS AN ACTIVE FORCE	**7**
RECOVERY FROM DEPRESSION IS LIGHT	**6**
THE DEPRESSED MIND IS A CONTAINER	**5**
DEPRESSION IS COLDNESS	**3**
DEPRESSION IS LACK OF DIRECTION	**2**
RECOVERY FROM DEPRESSION IS ABILITY TO MOVE	**2**

The metaphors more frequently found are those that represent depression as involving a DOWNWARD MOVEMENT. Moreover, some metaphorical expressions also described depression as generating a feeling of DROWNING. Even though the implications and emotions involved may be different, these two metaphors convey a great consistency in their structure given that they both represent depression as going downwards, rather than upwards. The second most found metaphor (DEPRESSION IS DARKNESS) portrays depression as a condition conceptually dominated by dark colours. Also, individuals writing about their RECOVERY from depression sometimes described it as a return to LIGHT and the ability to lift oneself up (DEPRESSION IS ABILITY TO MOVE). These examples demonstrate that metaphors create a consistent network of conceptualisations used to talk about a given topic.

Consider now some different metaphorical conceptualisations derived from the data:

1. *I feel trapped by my anxiety and depression on the inside I feel numb, lifeless and empty.*

2. *Without a job or the ability to go out and socialize and meet new people my life is going nowhere.*
I don't want to be stuck in this situation for ever.

3. *So today is one of those really depressing days where I feel as though my life is stuck in an eternal fixed position. I'm experiencing so many setbacks which is just destroying my mental health and making me feel as though my life is going nowhere at all.*

The underlined figurative expressions are manifestations of the more general metaphor DEPRESSION IS INCAPACITY TO MOVE. In the data, users sometimes complain of an inability to move from where they are: they are trapped, they feel stuck in a position from where they cannot move, they think that their life is not progressing ahead. Conceptually, the depressed person cannot move forward. The frame of reference of these conceptualisations is MOTION ALONG A PATH, which we can consider as a primary conceptualisation since it is not based on a perceived analogy between two domains, but rather on human interaction with their own environment. One's life purpose becomes moving forward along the path in order to reach the final destination, which is the purpose of the route. What is interesting is that in the corpus I found both the metaphor LIFE IS A PATH and DEPRESSION IS A PATH; however, one excluded the other: moving forward in the depression path meant being stuck in the life path, whereas progressing in the life path meant that one could recover from depression and leave it behind. The depressed person therefore cannot move forward and/or feel lost in their life journey:

4. *You [depression] have made me have to reassess everything I know, to feel lost without hope of being found.*

5. *[...] Next time I might not be able to find my way back.*

6. *I know it's hard sometimes, and you lost motivation and seem to be lost.*

Depression, therefore, alters one's perception of what it means to live meaningfully. Examples 4, 5, and 6 are metaphorical expressions that reflect the conceptual metaphor DEPRESSION IS LACK OF DIRECTION, which is consistent with the LIFE IS A PATH frame. Depression becomes a symptom of the incapacity to satisfy one of the three human psychological needs: the need for competence. As mentioned above, one of the metaphors associated with depression is DEPRESSION IS INCAPACITY TO MOVE; the depressed person does not believe that s/he possesses the necessary skills and abilities to progress on his/her own life journey. Accordingly, the need for competence is not satisfied and, as a consequence, as predicted by SDT, individuals experience negative psychological consequences, which alter their state of well-being. This situation is potentially very harmful: when a person feels stuck in a position without any possibility of progress because s/he does not see any possible direction, s/he

might have the feeling of not seeing any future ahead of him/her. Moreover, some users also seem to think that one of the tools necessary to act and feel competent in their life is not working properly: their mind. This is testified by the THE DEPRESSED MIND IS A MACHINE metaphor found in the corpus: some users described their mind as being a broken machine that no longer could work properly, thus making them feel unable to live efficiently.

Here are some examples from the data of metaphorical expressions associated with improving one's mental state:

> 7. *I had started writing when my depression had gotten very bad, I was at the bottom of the abyss trying to reach up and climb my way out.*
>
> 8. *My journey through depression; from falling in to clambering out, and what I clung onto that helped.*

The metaphorical expressions in examples 7 and 8 describe actions to be taken in order to get out of one's depressive state. They designate an active effort and a capacity of movement from which it derives that RECOVERY FROM DEPRESSION IS CAPACITY TO MOVE: the need for competence is therefore re-established. Healing from depression restores one's need for competence because it displays that the individual is able to put into practice the necessary moves to improve one's state.

Thanks to the analysis of metaphors of depression, it is possible to identify the lack of satisfaction of another primary psychological need of the human being: the need for connection, that is, to connect with others and with one's environment. Indeed, the metaphors DEPRESSION IS ISOLATION and DEPRESSION IS DISCONNECTION are quite frequently found in the data analysed, as in the examples below:

> 9. *I always feel a barrier exists with everyone I meet, one i can never break down and progress into closeness.*
>
> 10. *Someone who got in touch and shared their own experience of depression with me – as many people have – described it as looking out at the world from inside a goldfish bowl.*
>
> 11. *Recently had my birthday and I've never felt so cold and disconnected, it made me realize how badly things have deteriorated over time.*
>
> 12. *I have experienced a few rough years, and now have isolated myself in a bubble, it gets overwhelming and I get anxious, but not over things that seem significant.*

The metaphorical expressions underlined in the examples 9 to 12 show how depression leads to a disconnection, resulting in an isolation from the social environment of interaction. This generates a situation of otherness in which depressed people feel alienated from their environment and the people around them, and causes a perceived separation between themselves and the world. This is also clear from some other expressions found

in the corpus and concerning the metaphor THE DEPRESSED PERSON IS A CONTAINER since this metaphor was often used to underline a disconnection between what was occurring *inside* the depressed individual and what was perceived *outside*. Moreover, this container is often empty (DEPRESSION IS EMPTINESS) which denotes a lack of emotional resonance in the depressed subject. Bearing in mind that the human being is, as often mentioned, a social animal, this disconnection can lead to a psychological malaise since one of the innate psychological needs most ingrained in the human psyche is not satisfied. These examples also include a feeling of being confined since depressed individuals feel trapped as if inside a goldfish bowl (example 10) or a bubble (example 12). As a consequence, the individuals feel that they cannot even generate an impact on their environment through their actions, which is instead an essential feeling to preserve one's psychological well-being. Example 11 also highlights an important link between perception and metaphor: the social exclusion and disconnection implicated in the experience of depression can truly make one feel cold (DEPRESSION IS COLDNESS), as also examined by Zhong and Leonardelli (2008).

The boundaries between the different psychological human needs are very blurred. The examples analysed so far, which reveal a dissatisfaction of the need for connection or the need for competence – or both –, also reveal a dissatisfaction of the need for autonomy. The latter is closely related to the concept of individual freedom which, however, cannot be achieved in depressive states. Some metaphorical expressions portray depressed individuals in the process of experiencing a feeling of being trapped. This is the case of all those figurative expressions that can be classified within the metaphorical conceptualisation DEPRESSION IS BEING TRAPPED, but also DEPRESSION IS A BOUNDED SPACE metaphor since it generates a feeling of being imprisoned in a confined space:

> 13. *I had started writing when my depression had gotten very bad, I was at the bottom of the abyss trying to reach up and climb my way out.*
>
> 14. *Depression obviously isn't a cave but METAPHORICALLY it sure is. […] My depression cave is good for temporary shelter but not long-term residence. […] My depression cave is useful to consign unneeded and unwanted negative thoughts and emotions to deep pits.*
>
> 15. *They could do nothing to save me, but watch me crumble into my pit of darkness […] but, that was where you [depression] wanted me, wasn't it?*

The metaphorical expressions highlighted in examples 13 to 15 show how depressed subjects live with a constant feeling of being trapped within a confined space from which they struggle to get out. This space is normally a dark, suffocating, narrow, and isolated place. Accordingly, the individual's need for autonomy is not satisfied since the feeling of being trapped does not allow them to feel free to self-develop. This self-development incapacity is also exacerbated by the fact that depressed people feel unable to maintain control over themselves and their lives: some of their figurative expressions point towards the metaphor DEPRESSION IS LACK OF CONTROL, as in the following examples:

16. *I feel like the darkness is taking over, I have lost all hope of getting through this and don't feel like it's worth the effort.*

17. *I thought I would never make it back from the darkness because this time the darkness took control of everything in my life.*

18. *Its mainly just my thoughts i cant control them i always try to think possitive but i could be having a realy good day and suddenly my thoughts take over and twist my head about and make things bad.*

These examples indicate that depressed subjects struggle to maintain control over their thoughts and life. Depression is thus portrayed as a strong force that fights against a weak one – that is, the person suffering from depressive disorders. The third most used metaphor found in the corpus is indeed DEPRESSION IS A CONFLICT: in this battle depression is often described as a general ACTIVE FORCE or takes the form of a LIVING CREATURE. In the representation of depression, the fight metaphor involving two opponents is a clear manifestation of the most basic conceptualisation EMOTIONS ARE FORCES. As previously mentioned, the satisfaction of the need for autonomy is lacking in contexts where dynamics of coercive force develop. This is therefore the case of depression denoted as an OPPRESSIVE FORCE:

19. *Every time i flirt with the idea of hope the wave of dread washes over me, almost paralyzing me.*

20. *Its like my own personal natural disaster leaving me utterly destitute of hope.*

21. *It can wrap you in a coil so tight, you can feel nothing good around you.*

The need for autonomy requires that the human psychic architecture develops a vision of the self as a unity that tends towards cohesion and coherence of one's ideas, values and life experiences. As a consequence, living situations that disrupt one's feeling of unity of the self can have serious implications on their psychological dimension, leading to alienation and disintegration of the self. In the data analysed in this study, it is evident that this necessary psychic unity is lacking during the experience of depression, thus revealing a dissatisfaction of one of our most basic psychological needs. This lack is reflected through language in the form of different metaphors, such as DEPRESSION IS DISINTEGRATION OF THE SELF, which is the fifth most found metaphor of the corpus:

22. *It just feels as if I'm falling to pieces and those pieces are majority broken.*

23. *I've always felt like something's important is missing from my life. Like, a part of me gone missing as a leaf in the wind and I feel lost without it. I estimate since 17 I have lost maybe 1/3 my time to depression and anxiety, the storm itself and including the picking up the pieces.*

These examples show that the experience of depression leads to an alteration of the

unity of the self. The metaphors in the examples above create an imagery of disintegration, separation, and shattering that becomes one of the symptoms of a deteriorated psychological dimension.

5. Conclusions

This article identified and analysed the main metaphorical conceptualisations resulting from the experience of depression as communicated by individuals writing online. To this end, four online *fora* dealing with mental disorders were selected and data gathered in order to investigate whether and how their users represent depression through the use of metaphors. The total number of users selected was 71 and the total number of words analysed was 15473. The data collected were interpreted by means of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Self-determination Theory (SDT). Combining a linguistic theory (CMT) with a psychological one (SDT) allowed to understand what the metaphors associated with depression could disclose about the consequences of this mental disorder and which patterns of metaphor use were more frequently found in people living with depressive disorders and writing in online fora.

This study demonstrate that metaphor analysis can potentially help to discern between a harmonic psychological dimension and a problematic one, hence it could contribute to diagnosing psychological conditions. In this sense, it may be possible to make predictions on which metaphorical patterns could emerge in optimal mental conditions and which ones could instead signal a tendency towards a psychological malaise. This sheds light on the potential force of metaphors to reveal aspects of the mind that otherwise could not be examined empirically.

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Fra 'letterario' e digitale: alle origini delle *Digital Humanities*

Abstract I: Padre Roberto Busa è universalmente considerato il fondatore dello *Humanities Computing* (HC) per il suo approccio pionieristico all'analisi del testo, che ha aperto la strada alla linguistica computazionale. Questo focus iniziale sul 'letterario' si è indirizzato nel corso degli anni verso nuove modalità d'interazione fra umanistiche e *computing*. Le *Digital Humanities* (DH) rappresentano un contesto di natura metodologica e di portata interdisciplinare. Questo contributo intende esplorare a grandi linee la transizione fra HC e DH, nel tentativo di evidenziare i principali elementi di continuità e/o di cambiamento.

Abstract II: Father Roberto Busa is widely recognised as the founder of Humanities Computing (HC) because of his pioneering approach to text analysis, which paved the way for computational linguistics. Over the years, this early focus on linguistic analysis has evolved to include new ways of combining humanities with computing. Digital Humanities (DH) provide a common outlook that has a markedly methodological nature and an interdisciplinary focus. The aim of this paper is to review some of the key issues behind the shift from HC to DH, highlighting elements of continuity and/or change.

Keywords: *Humanities Computing*, *Digital Humanitie*s, critica e analisi dei testi, rappresentazione della conoscenza.

Il 'letterario' – ossia quanto spetta o attiene alla letteratura – è stato strettamente intrecciato allo *Humanities Computing* (HC) fin dalle origini di quest'area di studi, che la maggior parte dei resoconti sull'argomento fa risalire almeno al 1949. In quell'anno, padre Roberto Busa incontra per la prima volta a New York Thomas J. Watson Sr. – fondatore della IBM – e gli presenta il suo ambizioso progetto d'indicizzazione relativo all'*opera omnia* di Tommaso d'Aquino, chiedendo aiuto e supporto (Jones 2016: 27-50).

Il lavoro pluridecennale sull'*Index Thomisticus* apre di fatto la strada all'applicazione del *computing* alla stesura di indici e di concordanze come anche all'analisi del linguaggio, contribuendo in modo significativo alla nascita e allo sviluppo della linguistica computazionale. Per qualche tempo, la linguistica computazionale avrebbe rappresentato il campo d'indagine e di sperimentazione più prolifico all'interno dell'HC tanto nella progettazione che nell'utilizzo di tecnologie computazionali, fungendo da punto di riferimento e per così

dire da apripista nei confronti di altre umanistiche che stavano allargando il proprio sguardo verso questo nuovo orizzonte metodico e operativo.

Il primo punto di svolta si verifica nel 2004, quando viene pubblicata una guida monumentale che da un lato fornisce un profilo complessivo e aggiornato della materia, dall'altro è testimone di una notevole ridenominazione: *A Companion to Digital Humanities* (Schreibman, Siemens & Unsworth 2004a), significativamente prefato da padre Busa. Fin dal titolo risulta subito evidente come sia intervenuto un cambiamento non solo strutturale ma anche semantico. Il composto è sempre iponimico (ad es. Gunkel & Zifoun 2009), ma da una tipologia di *computing* si è passati a una varietà di *humanities*.

Quali sono stati i fattori, gli elementi e le ragioni che hanno spinto verso questo slittamento – per non dire capovolgimento – di fulcro concettuale? L'indice dei contenuti del *Companion* dipinge uno scenario ormai articolato e variegato, sul quale hanno fatto la loro comparsa nuovi attori scientifici che contemplano presupposti e traguardi sensibilmente diversi da quelli propri di gran parte dell'analisi computazionale del/la lingua/ggio e del testo: in una parola, del 'letterario'.

In origine, l'HC trova nel 'letterario' il proprio punto di riferimento operativo, perché il testo si presta bene all'elaborazione: come nota Kirschenbaum in relazione a un contesto del tutto analogo, il testo rappresenta di gran lunga "the most tractable data type for computers to manipulate" (Kirschenbaum 2010: 60), subito dopo i numeri. La tecnologia computazionale è la cassetta degli attrezzi, dalla quale si estrae di volta in volta lo strumento computazionale più adeguato al caso in questione: viene *input*-tato del testo – predisposto naturalmente allo scopo – e ne escono output quantitativi che aprono nuovi punti di osservazione e di analisi sul 'letterario'.

Tralasciando al momento di approfondire il dibattito relativo alla contrapposizione fra macro- e microanalisi dei testi – argomento che riprenderò in un prossimo futuro – in questa sede mi propongo invece di soffermare l'attenzione su questo processo, ancora in atto, che Svensson presenta come un "discursive shift from humanities computing to digital humanities" (Svensson 2009: abstract). Il *Companion* del 2004 introduce una prospettiva che è indiscutibilmente più ampia. Accanto al prevalente focus strumentale che fino a quel momento ha rappresentato per così dire l'asse privilegiato intorno al quale ha ruotato un'intera comunità di pratiche, si presentano allora elementi di novità che sollevano questioni relative alla collocazione e anche al rango, allo statuto.

A dire il vero, un forte impulso in questa direzione avrebbe potuto provenire da un'area di attività già consolidata da qualche tempo e in posizione prominente rispetto a tutte le altre (Hockey 2004: 12-15): la *Text Encoding Initiative* (TEI). Anche in questo caso, è il 'letterario' a dominare la messa a punto di un meta-linguaggio per il trattamento elettronico di contenuti testuali umanistici, sviluppato in base ai desiderata delle comunità disciplinari interessate e nell'ottica di elaborare una strategia editoriale elettronica. Il modello, la struttura e il linguaggio di markup di TEI risultano essere strumenti estremamente versatili e perciò estensibili ad altre aree di studio e di sperimentazione, come quella della descrizione archivistica e dei manoscritti. Lungo questa traiettoria, ad un certo punto si verificano incontri fra tradizioni scientifiche, che sempre più sono costrette a fare i conti con quella che è diventata

la piattaforma di pubblicazione e di comunicazione per eccellenza: il Web. Sorgono contenitori virtuali che conservano non solo il nome antico – archivio, biblioteca – ma anche gli standard che per lungo tempo ne hanno guidato la gestione nella realtà. Su questo terreno, TEI s'imbatte e in misura significativa adegua la propria struttura a normative che concernono l'essenza stessa di queste istituzioni virtuali. L'elemento comune di fondo riguarda il tema della rappresentazione stessa della conoscenza umanistica in ambiente e in formato elettronico/digitale, che richiama su di sé un crescente interesse teorico e metodologico, tanto da diventare un oggetto d'indagine scientifica a sé stante (Cuna 2019).

Questa nuova realtà comporta dunque il progressivo superamento di una comunità di pratiche, organizzata intorno a un corredo strumentale piuttosto limitato, e apre uno spazio di manovra che non può certo essere inquadrato nell'alveo di una disciplina d'impianto tradizionale, in considerazione del fatto che la sua stessa essenza è metodologica e il suo raggio d'azione interdisciplinare. Un campo di studio, di ricerca e d'insegnamento nel quale ciò che risulta essere rilevante, significativo e più largamente accolto non segue il consueto paradigma umanistico della provenienza autorevole, ma viene stabilito su base comunitaria e collaborativa, soprattutto per quanto riguarda le tematiche, le prospettive e gli indirizzi più promettenti nel marcare un sostanziale e non isolato progresso di conoscenza. Al tempo della pubblicazione del *Companion*, sta pertanto emergendo una impostazione metodologica rinnovata, favorita tra l'altro dallo spirito collaborativo, partecipativo e solidale del Web 2.0, dove regnano incontrastati i paradigmi *bottom-up* e i saperi delle comunità. La relativa strumentazione tecnologica ha certamente prodotto un qualche cambiamento nel modo in cui la ricerca umanistica viene condotta, sebbene condizionato da molteplici fattori, come le ingenti risorse richieste per predisporre e mettere a disposizione asset digitali adeguati, e la limitatezza delle tecniche di analisi computazionale.

Il "renaming of humanities computing as digital humanities" (Svensson 2009: abstract) riflette pertanto un ri-allineamento e anche un ri-collocamento concettuale sostanziale, che tuttavia sembra resistere a ogni ingabbiamento definitorio, che non sia generico e vago. A questo riguardo, la definizione di *Digital Humanities* (DL) che Kirshenbaum (Kirshenbaum 2010: 56) riprende da *Wikipedia* ha l'indubbio pregio di essere – alla pari di molte altre – una buona *working definition*, che cerca di tenere insieme elementi e piani diversi. Ne risulta una cornice alquanto sfumata, forse poco incisiva e chiara proprio sul *working side*: sul lato operativo; e può allora essere utile il tentativo di rifinire il concetto di DH su base quantitativa: mediante *text mining* di un adeguato campione bibliografico utilizzando uno dei tanti strumenti analitici disponibili; oppure, in senso qualitativo "by examining sets of projects from self-identified digital humanities centers" (Kirschenbaum 2010: 56). È però inverosimile che l'una o l'altra opzione consentano di raggiungere un risultato del tutto soddisfacente.

Su questo versante, la ricerca accademica, o comunque istituzionale, ha speso notevoli energie nel tentativo di chiarire i molteplici aspetti della questione e di avanzare proposte condivise, che tenessero insieme punti di vista differenti. Questo discorso sull'essenza e la dimensione teorico-operativa delle DH è stato in larga parte sviluppato entro un ambito comunicativo di natura istituzionale e ufficiale, nel quale iniziative strutturate come conferenze e convegni rappresentano i contesti principali per trovare un punto di caduta comune. Lo

stesso *Companion* del 2004 è il capostipite di un'altra stirpe della comunicazione scientifica sulle DH: quella dei volumi collettanei o delle raccolte di saggi, che registrano in genere la partecipazione di interpreti e di esperti del versante universitario. In generale, l'obiettivo di fondo consiste nel (tentativo di) fornire un affresco sistematico, mentre in molti casi non si riescono a delineare nemmeno i tratti essenziali di una visione d'insieme, che si riduce a semplice sommatoria di singole esperienze e di progetti individuali.

> Do you have to know how to code? I'm a tenured professor of Digital Humanities and I say 'yes'. Personally, I think Digital Humanities is about building things. […] If you are not making anything, you are not […] a digital humanist (Ramsay 2016: 243).

Emerge qui un atteggiamento che non sembra interessato ad approfondire il contesto culturale e teorico delle DH, che è invece orientato verso l'*encoding*, la programmazione e il lato tecnologico-progettuale. Si apre così una prospettiva che intende nobilitare il contributo fattivo, e non discorsivo, di quanti – bibliotecari, programmatori, personale tecnico a supporto della didattica e altre figure professionali – si trovano a operare alla periferia di quello spazio istituzionale dal quale proviene il discorso ufficiale sulle DH. Mentre in questo discorso vengono ancora discussi argomenti tipicamente *yack*, come la *vexata quaestio* se le DH siano semplicemente quelle umanistiche gestite / trattate digitalmente, alla periferia di quello spazio sono attivi network di professionisti e di esperti che hanno assunto una posizione empiricamente orientata sulle DH e lasciano volentieri ogni aspetto teorico agli studi culturali e anche letterari. È proprio da questa rete periferica – come sostiene Scheinfeldt (2010) – che proviene la vera massa critica del lavoro digitale; e sempre da qui arrivano le proposte più originali e innovative integrate in applicazioni, servizi, e sistemi. Gli argomenti delle DH sono codificati nel codice e non hanno bisogno di essere tradotti o ri-codificati in forma testuale, come precisa ancora Scheinfeldt (cit. in Smithies 2014: 14).

Questa pedagogia del fare o, meglio del costruire digitale ambisce dunque a essere riconosciuta – al pari della scrittura – come *scholarship* non-discorsiva, che non ha bisogno di essere sostenuta o spiegata da alcuna speculazione teorica esterna, perché già il suo prodotto – un qualsiasi strumento digitale – reca con/in sé una propria valenza teorica (Ramsay & Rockwell 2012). Natalia Cecire riassume bene i termini dell'intera questione:

> These critics have sought to elaborate the ways in which digital tools are theoretical tools. Rightly noting that writing is a practice that makes certain kinds of thinking possible, they propose an analogy with other constructive acts, notably the kinds of 'building' characteristic of digital humanities research, which they argue, demonstrates why digital building should be recognizable as 'scholarship' as writing is (Cecire 2012).

Risulta essere *best practice* – nozione così tipica del contesto tecnologico e industriale – togliersi la tradizionale armatura teorica quando si ha a che fare con lo strumento digitale. L'epistemologia del costruire digitale si fonda su presupposti taciti e su nozioni implicite. L'agenda del fare digitale si disinteressa della presunta povertà di spessore teorico che al-

cuni le imputano, in quanto mira a sostanziare una forma di DH caratterizzata da modi di conoscenza immanenti e non-discorsivi.

Al di là di questi come anche di altri elementi di criticità rilevati sempre da Cecire (2012), questa proposta non avrebbe mai inteso rappresentare un'alternativa anti-intellettuale o anti-teorica. Eppure, il successivo dibattito fra teorici delle umanistiche e 'costruttori' delle DH si è spesso polarizzato su opposti versanti. Ancora Cecire (2012) non è d'accordo sulla distinzione tra teoria e pratica che *more hack, less yack!* sembra proporre, né con la logica a somma zero che vi è implicata; al contrario, *hack* e *yack* non sono antitetici come non lo sono – per dire – forma e contenuto.

Anche il contributo di Nowviskie (2014) si colloca sulla stessa linea, cercando di delineare la 'vera' storia di questa celebre frase. In estrema semplificazione, per uno studioso di letteratura o di storia, lo studio, l'insegnamento e tutto quanto riguarda la sua attività di ricerca e di comunicazione scientifica è *yacking*. Dal punto di vista del personale che opera sul versante pratico delle DH – progettazione, gestione e utilizzo degli strumenti digitali, in una parola *hacking* – lo *yacking* può a volte rappresentare una perdita di tempo che va appunto a discapito dell'*hacking*. Diversamente, dalla prospettiva dello studioso di umanistiche, questo slogan – spesso recepito fuori contesto – suona come sinonimo di "deeply theorized, verbal and written exchange" (Nowviskie 2014). Sarebbe dunque opportuno trovare un bilanciamento, un punto di equilibrio fra queste due diverse situazioni, opzione del resto ben difficile da realizzare. Per concludere, secondo il punto di vista di Nowviskie:

> to pretend or believe that 'more hack; less yack' represents *a fundamental opposition in thinking* between humanities theorists and deliberately anti-theoretical DH 'builders' is to ignore the specific history and different resonances of the phrase, and to fall into precisely the sort of zero-sum logic it seems to imply. Humanities disciplines and methods themselves are not either/or affairs. The humanities is both/and. We require fewer slogans – and more talk and grok, hack *and* yack (Nowviskie 2014).

Gli argomenti utilizzati da Cecire e Nowviskie esemplificano una corrente di pensiero che sostiene una visione più ampia e integrata delle DH, nella quale lo *hack* non rappresenta il semplice addendo strumentale e tecnologico in una concatenazione meramente paratattica, ma contribuisce a fornire le ragioni essenziali per fondare un cambiamento paradigmatico. Da posizione divergente, se non contrapposta, ancora Ramsay è il tipico rappresentante dei *DH-ers* che non scorgono alcun problema di sotto-teorizzazione nell'evoluzione delle umanistiche tradizionali verso le DH:

> I've discovered that there are lots of things that distinguish an historian from, say, a literary critic or a philosopher, and there are a lot of differences between 1995 and 2011. But to me, there's always been a profound – and profoundly exciting and enabling – commonality to everyone who finds their way to DH. And that commonality, I think, involves moving from reading and critiquing to building and making (Ramsay 2016: 243).

Questa ποίησις rappresenta – come abbiamo già visto – una forma di conoscenza tacita, se non addirittura un nuovo tipo di ermeneutica.

Premesso che il dibattito racchiuso nel più volte citato slogan *more hack, less yack!* meriterebbe certamente ben altro sviluppo, i brevi cenni fin qui prodotti mostrano come vi siano essenzialmente due tendenze di fondo: da un lato, la tecnologia digitale al servizio di un'agenda della ricerca stabilita in base ai paradigmi tradizionali delle umanistiche; dall'altro, un'agenda della ricerca umanistica modellata invece su quanto può essere fatto con la tecnologia digitale. Fra questi due poli, si verifica un graduale 'spostamento di discorso', il quale reca con sé anche altre implicazioni epistemiche. A questo riguardo, è sorprendente notare come all'origine di tale ridenominazione vi sarebbero circostanze per così dire contingenti, almeno stando a quanto riferito a Kirschenbaum da John Unsworth, che era stato fra i curatori del *Companion* uscito nel 2004:

> The real origin of that term [digital humanities] was in conversation with Andrew McNeillie, the original acquiring editor for the Blackwell *Companion to Digital Humanities*. We started talking with him about that book project in 2001, in April, and by the end of November we'd lined up contributors and were discussing the title, for the contract. Ray [Siemens] wanted 'A Companion to Humanities Computing' as that was the term commonly used at that point; the editorial and marketing folks at Blackwell wanted 'Companion to Digitized Humanities'. I suggested 'Companion to Digital Humanities' to shift the emphasis away from simple digitization (Kirschenbaum 2010: 56-57).

Questa comunicazione di Unsworth espone chiaramente gli elementi di fatto che hanno portato alla scelta: dal nome ufficiale e più diffuso, a una proposta intermedia con evidenti finalità di promozione del prodotto librario presso il pubblico, all'opzione finale che viene messa in campo per togliere di mezzo ogni possibile fraintendimento circa la natura di queste neo-nate umanistiche digitali. L'aggettivo *digital* ha infatti un primo, e superficiale, layer di significato, che rinvia naturalmente al supporto e alla semplice digitalizzazione, e un layer semantico più profondo, e dunque meno ovvio, che si riferisce all'ambiente digitale o, meglio alle metodologie informative e alle tecnologie informatiche che operano entro la dimensione elettronica o digitale.

Questa prospettiva è soltanto implicita in quelle poche parole finali della comunicazione appena ricordata, ma viene fuori certamente più chiara e meglio delineata se pensiamo al background scientifico e professionale di Unsworth (Kirschenbaum 2010: 56), che per un decennio (1993-2003) era stato alla guida dell'*Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities* (IATH) presso l'Università della Virginia ed era al tempo decano della *Graduate School of Library and Information Science* presso l'Università dell'Illinois a Urbana-Champaign. A questo riguardo, vi sono due contributi di questo autore, che presentano compiutamente questo background: 1) *Knowledge Representation in Humanities Computing* (Unsworth 2001) e 2) *What is Humanities Computing and What is Not?* (Unsworth 2002).

Fra le ragioni per le quali risulta del tutto opportuno chiedersi che cosa sia l'HC, v'è quella di operare una chiara distinzione fra chi rappresenta un modello e chi invece è un

semplice ciarlatano. A tal riguardo, Unsworth riprende le considerazioni di Tito Orlandi (n.d.) sui 'fondamenti' e sul progresso dell'HC come disciplina: la via giusta per far avanzare l'HC consiste nell'usare i computer "in what they are really special for: the computing […] which is a difficult matter to explain to the colleagues in the humanities". Secondo Orlandi, è qui che

> the charlatans are at their best. A corpus of texts without tags; an archaeological excavation put on the web; an abstruse statistical calculation meant to prove that this or that text belong to this or that author: all this may be beautiful to present, and sometimes may seem miraculous to lay people, but does not advance (humanities) computing *per se*.

Anche per Unsworth, il ciarlatano è la persona che presenta come HC un qualsiasi lavoro *computer-* o *web-based*. Sul 'mercato' dei finanziamenti culturali, questo ciarlatanismo produce competitori sleali e provoca una sorta di *dumping* scientifico, a tutto vantaggio di soluzioni rapide, economiche, spesso (sovrac)cariche di effetti superficiali e con una base di contenuti statica. Risultano invece svantaggiati progetti di ben altra natura e qualità informativa, soprattutto in ragione della loro "interactivity offered to users who wish to frame their own research questions" (Unsworth 2002). Lasciando da parte le considerazioni relative alla scala di valutazione del grado di ciarlatanismo che riguarderebbe in varia misura tutti i progetti di HC, risulta importante approfondire la nozione di HC come forma di *modeling* e pratica di rappresentazione. In altri termini, il *modeling* produce un modello o 'surrogato', che descrive il suo referente – reale o astratto – sul piano della fedeltà descrittiva (attributi) e su quello della corrispondenza di linguaggio (semantica). In ogni caso, qualsiasi surrogato – dalla descrizione minimale al record più completo – non può che offrire una rappresentazione semplificata e parziale del suo oggetto referente; e anche il sistema che tiene insieme i surrogati sulla base di una qualche logica non riesce che a dare una visione incompleta della realtà che intende descrivere. A tal riguardo, l'esempio classico di rappresentazione della conoscenza è il record bibliografico, che privilegia alcuni punti di vista sull'oggetto 'libro' – l'autore, il titolo, il soggetto e così via – a discapito di altri: una trascrizione *full-text*, ad esempio, può risultare centrale in un diverso tipo di surrogato, che a sua volta finisce per tralasciare ulteriori aspetti considerati secondari, quali le illustrazioni o la legatura. E anche il relativo catalogo, o meglio il database relazionale che sta dietro le scene, lascia intravedere una visione ontologica dell'universo bibliografico che si focalizza su determinate entità, attributi e relazioni. Alla base di tutto questo non vi sono scelte superficiali, ma alcuni impegni ontologici riguardo a quell'universo, che esprimono la prospettiva tipica della comunità di esperti che gestisce quella informazione:

> commitments are in effect a strong pair of glasses that determine what we can see, bringing some part of the world into sharp focus, at the expense of blurring other parts. These commitments and their focusing/blurring effect are not an incidental side effect of a representation choice; they are of the essence (Davis, Shrobe & Szolovits 1993: 19)

e implicano una serie di finalità in buona sostanza professionali. Al cuore dell'HC,

vi è dunque una *Knowledge Representation* (KR) che Unsworth (2001) inquadra in questo modo:

> Logic disciplines the representation, but is content-neutral. Ontology expresses what one knows about the nature of the subject matter, and does so within the discipline of logic's rules. Computability puts logic and ontology to the test, by producing a second-order representation that validates and parses the ontology and the logic of the knowledge representation.

La KR rappresenta pertanto una sorta d'interfaccia metodologica di natura interdisciplinare fra materiali umanistici e computer, articolata su tre componenti: logica, ontologia e computazione. È interessante rilevare come Unsworth analizzi ogni componente sulla base di strutture informative (tuple, tabelle e *Document Type Definition*), che finiscono per rappresentare il fulcro di tutto il discorso; e risulta altresì degno di nota il fatto che questa metodologia sarebbe stata al centro del nuovo *Master of Arts* in DH presso lo IATH dell'Università della Virginia.

Il contributo offerto da Unsworth appare rilevante sotto molteplici punti di vista: 1) propone un approccio teorico che può far evolvere su un piano più generale la pedagogia/conoscenza del fare conosciuta come *hack*; 2) presenta le basi della continuità di 'fondamenti' tra HC e DH; 3) chiarisce una volta per tutte che le DH non sono semplicemente quelle umanistiche gestite / trattate digitalmente; 4) precisa che a 'digitale' e 'digitalizzazione' va riconosciuta un'enfasi che non oltrepassi il confine strumentale e tecnologico; e da ultimo – *but not the least* – 5) dà qualche indicazione utile per saper distinguere fra un progetto di DH e una semplice ciarlataneria digitale. Un elemento ulteriore e altrettanto rilevante del *discursive* o, se si preferisce, del *disciplinary shift* riguarda il recente ingresso di un'altra partecipante nello scambio dialogico fra HC e DH: la *Library and Information Science* (LIS). In breve, la LIS rappresenta l'evoluzione delle tradizionali discipline bibliografiche, che nasce dalla combinazione di modelli consolidati e nuovi paradigmi di gestione dell'informazione sul Web. Anche la LIS si occupa di strutture informative (standard di struttura, di contenuto, di vocabolario e di codifica) e si propone dunque come un'interfaccia metodologica di natura interdisciplinare fra contenuti umanistici e tecnologia digitale. Questi contenuti sono collegati al patrimonio storico-artistico e culturale, che in larga parte è affidato alle cure di archivi, biblioteche e musei. Su questo versante, DH e LIS condividono molti argomenti e spazi d'attività (Robinson, Priego & Bawden 2015), sebbene siano le *digital libraries* sul Web a rappresentare la novità più significativa e il principale campo d'interazione.

In questo contesto, vi è un'inflazione di iniziative che, pur presentandosi come casi di DH, rappresentano invece semplici giustapposizioni paratattiche di contenuto e supporto: la veste è digitale, ma l'impostazione di fondo resta di stampo tradizionale. Tali iniziative mancano infatti del valore aggiunto iniziale: una KR ben studiata e progettata. Sarebbe davvero interessante – come già proposto da Unsworth (2002) – mettere a punto una scala di valutazione per misurare il grado di ciarlatanismo di ogni singola iniziativa che si presenta come progetto di DH: tutto ciò sarebbe certamente molto istruttivo, ma non rientra nell'economia di questa sede.

Per concludere questa panoramica sul 'cambiamento di discorso' metodologico che ha interessato la transizione fra HC e DH, è opportuno tornare ancora una volta sul concetto di KR al fine di meglio contestualizzare alcuni aspetti. Unsworth (2001 e 2002) riprende questa nozione dal lavoro di Davis e colleghi, i quali entro il contesto dell'intelligenza artificiale sostengono che KR e strutture di dati rappresentano entità distinte, anche se "every representation must be *implemented* in the machine by some data structure" (Davis, Shrobe & Szolovits 1993: 21). Nel nostro caso, il punto di vista prevalente è appunto quello orientato al piano funzionale dell'intermediazione di una KR, che ha nella struttura informativa il suo centro d'interesse.

In secondo luogo, è necessario un approfondimento che riporta il focus sul 'letterario'. La coppia di esempi di KR scelta da Unsworth (2001) sembra funzionale a presentare i due estremi di un continuo che diremo ora rappresentativo: ad un capo, il record bibliografico che "captures and makes explicit certain attributes of the original object–title, author, publication date, number of pages, topical reference", omettendone ovviamente altri come ad esempio il *full text* del libro. All'altro capo, altri tipi di surrogato che "would capture those features (a full-text transcription, for example) but would leave out still other aspects (illustrations, cover art, binding)". Il range di possibilità rappresentative può dunque spaziare dai protocolli di trasferimento della conoscenza (strutture di dati, sistemi di codifica e di classificazione) alle attività di riproduzione (facsimili) o di editing testuale.

Il ritorno del discorso alle fonti testuali rappresenta un passaggio obbligato, per la semplice ragione che – come abbiamo già visto all'inizio – quest'area ha tenuto per lungo tempo il centro della scena in relazione al progresso dell'HC e in qualche misura anche delle successive DH. A questo riguardo, è chiaramente emerso che la KR è un importante elemento di fondo che riguarda anche l'analisi testuale e le relative tecniche, nel senso che "the basis of such analysis is the encoded and digitally stored corpora governed by strategies of knowledge representation" (Schreibman, Siemens & Unsworth 2004b: xxv).

Nel contesto di un più ampio discorso metodico e applicativo inauguratosi con l'avvento di un'area interdisciplinare chiamata DH, questo elemento si presenta al tempo stesso sotto le insegne di una continuità dei 'fondamenti' e anche di una ri-definizione basata su estensioni categoriali e punti focali sui quali avremo modo di tornare in un prossimo futuro.

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La rinascita della tragedia dallo spirito del blues nel teatro di August Wilson

Abstract I: Nato nel 1945 a Pittsburgh, in Pennsylvania, August Wilson è stato il drammaturgo afroamericano più prolifico e rappresentato del Novecento. Il *Century Cycle*, un corpus di dieci testi teatrali che ripercorre la storia afroamericana del ventesimo secolo, è espressione del realismo spirituale di Wilson, un tipo di teatro che, pur aderendo alla tradizione realista euroamericana, vi immette elementi di innovazione ispirati alla musica blues e alla cosmologia Yoruba. Il saggio prende in analisi questa duplice matrice culturale per dimostrare come la drammaturgia di Wilson, pur tenendo fede al principio aristotelico della mìmesis che governa il dramma realista, sia permeata da un'estetica nera. Nel concepire un teatro in cui musica e parola si compenetrano in un contesto performativo rituale, Wilson ripristina l'armonia tra dionisiaco e apollineo auspicata da Friedrich Nietzsche, rianimando quello che secondo il filosofo tedesco era lo spirito primigenio della tragedia greca e immettendo al tempo stesso un èthos inconfondibilmente afroamericano nel canone teatrale occidentale.

Abstract II: Born in 1945 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, August Wilson was the most prolific and represented African American playwright of the twentieth century. His *Century Cycle*, a series of ten plays that chronicle the lives of African Americans from the early 1900s to the late 1990s, is an expression of Wilson's spiritual realism, a form of drama that, while adhering to some conventions of the Western realist tradition, also introduces elements of innovation inspired by blues music and Yoruba cosmology. This essay analyses the double cultural genealogy of Wilson's work to show how, despite respecting the Aristotelian principle of mìmesis, his playwriting draws on a quintessentially black aesthetic. In conceiving of theatre as a ritualistic performative context where music and words intertwine, Wilson restored what Friedrich Nietzsche regarded as the authentic spirit of Greek tragedy – the harmony between Dionysian and Apollonian – while at the same time injecting an African American ethos into the Western theatrical canon.

Keywords: August Wilson, tragedia, blues, Yoruba, Nietzsche.

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La tragedia possiede tutte le caratteristiche dell'epica […] e in più però, aggiunta tutt'altro che piccola, la musica, attraverso la quale i piaceri diventano più evidenti.
Aristotele (1998: 65)

Il senso dionisiaco, col suo piacere primordiale percepito anche nel dolore, è la matrice comune della musica e del mito tragico.
Friedrich Nietzsche (1995: 169)

The blues are without question the wellspring of my art.
August Wilson (Sheppard 2006: 110)

The Grounds on Which He Stood

In un celebre discorso pronunciato il 26 giugno del 1996 presso la Princeton University, il drammaturgo afroamericano August Wilson (1945-2005), sei testi prodotti a Broadway e due premi Pulitzer[1] alle spalle, cita i padri che hanno dato vita al suo immaginario:

> In one guise the ground I stand on has been pioneered by the Greek dramatists, by Euripides, Aeschylus and Sophocles, by William Shakespeare, by Shaw and Ibsen, and by the American dramatists Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. In another guise the ground that I stand on has been pioneered by my grandfather, by Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, by Martin Delaney, Marcus Garvey and the Honorable Elijah Muhammad (Wilson 1997: 493).

Wilson traccia una duplice genealogia culturale che risale, da una parte, alla matrice canonica e occidentale della tragedia greca, del teatro elisabettiano e del dramma realista (europeo e americano) e, dall'altra, al nonno materno, alle gesta rivoluzionarie di Nat Turner e Denmark Vesey, all'utopia del nazionalismo nero di Martin Delaney e Marcus Garvey e alla facoltà mitopoietica di Elijah Muhammad[2]. È nella commistione di questi ascendenti che va rintracciata l'origine del "realismo spirituale" (Young 2004: 130) di Wilson, un tipo di teatro che, pur aderendo a certe convenzioni e alla supposta universalità (lèggi: normati-

[1] Quando Wilson tiene il suo discorso d'apertura all'undicesima conferenza biennale del Theatre Communications Group, Broadway ha già ospitato le produzioni di *Ma Rainey*'s *Black Bottom* (Cort Theatre, 1984), *Fences* (46th Street Theatre, 1987), *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (Ethel Barrymore Theatre, 1988), *The Piano Lesson* (Walter Kerr Theatre, 1990), *Two Trains Running* (Walter Kerr Theatre, 1992) e *Seven Guitars* (Walter Kerr Theatre, 1996). Wilson, inoltre, ha già ricevuto il primo Premio Pulitzer per *Fences* nel 1987 e il secondo nel 1990 per *The Piano Lesson*.

[2] In un un'intervista con Sandra G. Shannon, Wilson dichiara: "I think Elijah Muhammad is one of the most important men that ever lived in America. I'd put him right up there with Du Bois, because he was the one who had an idea. For instance, if you look at the criteria of culture using Maulana Ron Karenga's criteria of mythology, history, religion, the one thing we did not have as black Americans was a mythology. We had no origin myths. Elijah Muhammad supplied that" (Shannon 1993: 545).

vità) della tradizione euroamericana, vi immette elementi di innovazione derivati in modo diretto da "the language, the eating habits, the religious beliefs, the gestures, the notions of common sense, attitudes towards sex, concepts of beauty and justice, and the responses to pleasure and pain" (Wilson 1997: 494) propri della cultura afroamericana.

Nato a Pittsburgh nel 1945 da Frederick Kittel (un fornaio bianco approdato negli Stati Uniti dall'allora Cecoslovacchia) e Daisy Wilson (una donna nera la cui madre raggiunse la Pennsylvania a piedi dal North Carolina), Frederick August Kittel trascorre l'infanzia a Hill District, un ghetto popolato da neri, ebrei e immigrati italiani. Alla fine degli anni Cinquanta la madre divorzia, si risposa con David Bedford (un ex atleta nero che ha da poco finito di scontare ventitré anni di carcere), e si trasferisce col neomarito e i sette figli a Hazelwood, un quartiere operaio a predominanza bianca in cui Frederick August, ormai adolescente, esperisce episodi quotidiani di razzismo, soprattutto nel contesto scolastico. Il precoce abbandono degli studi, causato dall'insostenibile disagio "of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois 2015: 5), coincide con la raggiunta consapevolezza di essere "an American" e, al tempo stesso, "a Negro", un soggetto in perenne oscillazione tra "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Du Bois 2015: 5). Il punto d'approdo della faticosa elaborazione della *double consciousness* arriva il primo aprile del 1965 quando, a pochi giorni dal suo ventesimo compleanno, il futuro drammaturgo elegge August Wilson a proprio *nome de plume*, un gesto che rappresenta al contempo un atto di rinuncia volontario all'eredità simbolica del padre bianco (morto quello stesso anno) e una piena, orgogliosa accettazione del patrimonio culturale nero e dell'ascendenza africana acquisiti per via matrilineare. Sempre nel 1965, grazie a un acquisto fortuito in un negozio di vinili di seconda mano, Wilson scopre la voce di Bessie Smith e dal primo, epifanico ascolto di *Nobody in Town Can Bake a Sweet Jelly Roll Like Mine*, individua in lei una madre spirituale e nella musica blues un'imprescindibile fonte di ispirazione. Da quel momento ha inizio un rigoroso apprendistato quindicennale durante il quale Wilson, nell'erronea convinzione che "in order to create art out of black life […] you had to change it" (Shannon 1993: 541), si affanna a comporre "obscure poetry" (Shannon 2006: 119) e testi teatrali che non parlano "the way blacks speak" (Shannon 1993: 541). Tra la fine degli anni Settanta e i primi anni Ottanta, tuttavia, giunto alla soglia della maturità artistica, Wilson abbandona definitivamente l'*American English* e inizia a scrivere drammi in un idioletto vernacolare che restituisce la qualità orale, la componente folclorica e le inflessioni ritmiche del Black English[3]. Il tortuoso e pluriennale percorso di scrittura che porta alla stesura definitiva e alla prima produzione teatrale di *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1984)[4] alimenta un nuovo, fortunatissimo e inarrestabile corso creativo che varrà a Wilson il titolo di "premier theatrical mythographer of the African American experience" (Marra 2000: 123). Nell'arco dei successivi vent'anni, infatti, Wilson compone il *Century Cycle* (anche noto come *Twentieth-Century*

[3] Sul Black English, si veda Antonelli 2005.

[4] *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* debutta il 6 aprile 1984 allo Yale Repertory Theatre per la regia di Lloyd Richards. Nel 1959, Richards aveva diretto la prima produzione di *A Raisin in the Sun* della drammaturga afroamericana Lorraine Hansberry.

Cycle o *Pittsburgh Cycle*), un *corpus* di dieci testi teatrali che ripercorre, decennio dopo decennio, l'"Odissea afroamericana" (Pereira 1995) del ventesimo secolo, illustrandone gli snodi, i conflitti e i *topoi* principali[5]. Evitando in modo deliberato – salvo rare eccezioni – riferimenti a personalità iconiche della cultura nera o il ricorso all'esposizione didascalica di fatti storici, Wilson si concentra, piuttosto, sulle vicende quotidiane, le relazioni interpersonali e i legami familiari di uomini e donne che, pur nelle loro differenze e divergenze, condividono la medesima ascendenza africana, il retaggio della diaspora e un passato contraddistinto dall'esperienza traumatica della schiavitù. I personaggi dei suoi drammi e i rispettivi antenati appartengono a una stessa stirpe segnata dal miasma transgenerazionale del razzismo, il quale, nelle sue varie manifestazioni diacroniche (schiavismo, segregazionismo, *racial profiling*), ha contaminato la storia dei neri d'America "since the first African set foot on the continent" (Rosen 2006: 196-197). Tutto ciò considerato, non sorprende che Wilson concepisca l'intero ciclo come una "four-hundred-year autobiography" (Shannon 1993: 540) in cui la memoria individuale, rielaborata in prospettiva storica, acquisisce un valore collettivo, generando "a culturally specific mythos that reveals ethnic authenticity" (Harrison 2002: 2).

Laddove, secondo Aristotele, i tragediografi greci attingevano al *mythos* – il *corpus* di storie tramandate dalla tradizione epica – per tramutarlo in *muthos* – la trama strutturata del testo tragico – (Burian 1997), Wilson intraprende il percorso opposto: intrecciando i fili delle sue trame, egli crea un tessuto mitologico che comprende quattro secoli di "black conduct and manners as part of a system that is fueled by its own philosophy, history, creative motif, social organization and ethos" (Wilson 1997: 498). Prima di diventare un creatore di miti, dunque, Wilson è anzitutto, e per sua stessa ammissione, un compositore di tragedie[6] che, in accordo coi precetti aristotelici, fa ruotare le proprie trame attorno a personaggi "cui è accaduto di compiere e di subire fatti terribili" (Aristotele 1998: 27). Nella *Poetica* di Aristotele, Wilson riconosce uno dei cinque fondamenti della propria drammaturgia, quello su cui, insieme al teatro di Amiri Baraka, alla pittura di Romare Bearden, alla prosa di Jorge Luis Borges e alla musica blues, ha costruito la propria visione estetica (Rocha 2000). Parlando della "double-voicedness" (Gates 1988: 51) che percorre i suoi testi teatrali, Wilson spiega come "[t]he foundation of the American Theater is the foundation of European Theater that begins with the great Greek dramatists. It is based on the proscenium stage and the poetics [*sic*] of Aristotle. This is the theater that we have chosen to work in. We embrace the values

[5] Di seguito, un elenco dei temi centrali, dei titoli e dei relativi anni di composizione/debutto di ognuno dei dieci drammi del *Century Cycle*: il dilemma della libertà agli albori del secolo (*Gem of the Ocean*, 2003), la ricerca dell'identità negli anni Dieci (*Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, 1986), sfide e opportunità nei contesti urbani degli anni Venti (*Ma Rainey*'s *Black Bottom*, 1984), la memoria della schiavitù negli anni Trenta (*The Piano Lesson*, 1987), le promesse disattese all'indomani della Seconda Guerra Mondiale (*Seven Guitars*, 1995), le contese generazionali e familiari negli anni Cinquanta (*Fences*, 1985); la tensione tra assimilazione e separatismo negli anni Sessanta (*Two Trains Running*, 1990), la marginalizzazione sociale e la discriminazione economica negli anni Settanta e Ottanta (*Jitney*, 1982 e *King Hedley II*, 1999) e l'alienazione spirituale degli anni Novanta (*Radio Golf*, 2005).

[6] In un'intervista con Vera Sheppard, Wilson afferma: "I aspire to write tragedies. I don't know if I have or not, but that is what I sit down to write. Tragedy is the greatest from of dramatic literature. Why settle for anything less than that? My sense of what a tragedy is includes the fall of the flawed character; that is certainly a part of what is in my head to write" (Sheppard 2006: 113).

of that theater but reserve the right to amend, to explore, to add our African consciousness and our African aesthetic to the art we produce" (Wilson 1997: 501-502).

Che il canone tragico fissato da Aristotele informi l'opera di Wilson è innegabile. Come ha notato David Savran, ognuno dei dieci testi che compongono il *Century Cycle* "develop[s] conflict step by step to a crisis that hinges on the disclosure of a crucial and traumatic incident from the protagonist's past" (Savran 2006: 20). Improntati sul principio aristotelico della mìmesis, i drammi di Wilson, non diversamente da quelli di Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams e Arthur Miller e proprio come la tragedia descritta nella *Poetica*, sono "imitazione di un'azione, e di conseguenza soprattutto di persone che agiscono" (Aristotele 1998: 17). L'azione che vi viene imitata è "intera e compiuta, con un inizio, un mezzo e una fine" (Aristotele 1998: 53); la trama, perciò, segue una progressione lineare fatta di nodo, mutamento e scioglimento, è scandita da colpi di scena, riconoscimenti e sciagure e, per finire, "tratto specifico di questa forma di imitazione" (Aristotele 1998: 17), è "composta in modo che […] chi ascolta i fatti avvenuti deve rabbrividire e provare pietà" (Aristotele 1998: 29) e al tempo stesso esperire la "purificazione d[a] questi sentimenti" (Aristotele 1998: 13). Se il tragediografo ideale, come vuole Aristotele, "deve produrre il piacere che deriva dalla paura e dalla pietà attraverso l'imitazione" (Aristotele 1998: 29), Wilson non può che considerarsi tale. Secondo Toni Morrison, infatti, uno degli elementi distintivi della sua drammaturgia è "the fear that animates it" (Morrison 2007: xi), una paura che è sempre accompagnata da una ricompensa catartica. In *The Piano Lesson* (1990), ad esempio, "[t]he struggle between memory and foresight, regret and promise operates within a world of terror" (Morrison 2007: xiii) e, tuttavia, "the *relief*, when the turmoil surrounding the ghost and the piano is put to rest, is an extreme, if not permanent, experience of the triumph of bravery over fear. […] In that context, the battles are truly mighty; the victories as rough as they are noble" (2007: xiii).

La nobiltà dei personaggi che animano il *Century Cycle* non è determinata dal rango, bensì dalla straordinaria resilienza del loro spirito. Degli anni di gioventù trascorsi in una pensione di Pittsburgh, città che fa da sfondo a nove dei drammi del ciclo, Wilson ricorda:

> There was a *nobility* to the lives of blacks in America which I didn't always see. […] After I discovered the blues, I began to look at the people in the house a little differently than I had before. I began to see values in their lives that I simply hadn't seen before. I discovered a beauty and a *nobility* in their struggle to survive. I began to understand the fact that the avenues for participation in society were closed to these people and that their ambitions had been thwarted, whatever they may have been. The mere fact that they were still able to make this music was a testament to the resiliency of their spirit (Moyers 2006: 64, *corsivo mio*).

Wilson, come Miller prima di lui, ritiene che "the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were" (Miller 1949: 1), e le analogie tra i due drammaturghi e le rispettive visioni del tragico non si limitano a questo punto. In "Tragedy and the Common Man" (1949), Miller sostiene che "the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing

– his sense of personal dignity" (Miller 1949: 1). Nelle tragedie greche, così come in quelle shakespeariane, l'attributo essenziale dell'eroe consiste nella sua "willingness to throw all he has into […] the battle to secure his rightful place in the world", una propensione connaturata alla sua "inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity" (Miller 1949: 1-3). A costo di peccare di ridondanza, vale la pena notare come, a quarant'anni di distanza dalla loro pubblicazione sulle colonne del New York Times, le parole di Miller risuonino nella voce di Wilson in varie interviste in cui egli discute dei propri personaggi, tutti variamente impegnati a combattere la propria "battle for the affirmation of the value and worth of one's being in the face of this society that says you're worthless" (Rosen 2006: 196-197). Rispondendo a una domanda sull'eroismo di Troy, il protagonista di *Fences* in cui si scorgono tratti del Willy Loman di *Death of a Salesman* (1949), Wilson spiega: "I think that, for me, this may be nothing than his willingness to wrestle with his life, his willingness to engage no matter what the circumstances of his life. He hasn't given up despite the twists and turns it's given him. I find that both noble and heroic" (Grant 2006: 172).

Eppure, nonostante le notevoli analogie, esiste un "ground of experience" (Wilson 1997: 497) sul quale il *common man* di Miller e il *common black man* di Wilson non possono incontrarsi. Può forse esservi un "common ground in the horrifics of lynching?", si chiede Wilson. E ancora: "[w]here is the common ground in the maim of a policeman's bullet? Where is the common ground in the hull of a slave ship and the deck of a slave ship with its refreshments of air and expanse? We will not be denied our history" (Wilson 1997: 497). È la storia di abusi e soprusi che gli afroamericani conservano nella propria genealogia a determinare la differenza tra l'eroe tragico di Miller e il "warrior spirit" di cui sono dotati i personaggi del *Century Cycle*, uno spirito fiero e indomabile che Wilson ha mutuato dai cantanti e dai musicisti blues, vero e proprio anello di congiunzione tra gli eroi della tragedia greca e quelli che animano i suoi testi teatrali. In "Tragic Aspects of the Blues" (1975), Kimberly Benston traccia dei parallelismi tra la tragedia e il blues che illuminano tale nesso:

> From the collective lyric of blues singers there emerges a single, articulate, self-conscious, struggling, yet ultimately resilient character whose endless song of woe echoes the tragic gloom and splendor of classic tragedy's finest creations. […] The bluesman, grappling with the fundamental issues of his existence, takes action against his fate by articulating his woes and thus, in effect, creating himself anew. His tragic situation […] results from the frustration of his most basic goals. It is embodied in the struggle he engages in with whatever unseen power that pushes him down (the Blues) and realizes itself in the inevitable and inescapable fact of that struggle (Benston 1975: 164, 169).

Tra i linguaggi più originali elaborati sul suolo statunitense da artisti di ascendenza africana, il blues è senza dubbio quello che ha contaminato con maggior efficacia la drammaturgia di Wilson. Sebbene le sue origini siano scarsamente documentate, si ritiene che il blues affondi le proprie radici nel suolo fertile del delta del Mississippi dove, all'indomani della guerra di secessione e durante l'era della Ricostruzione, gli afroamericani, lungi dall'ot-

tenere un'autentica libertà, si trovarono sottoposti a una nuova forma di schiavitù derivante dalla combinazione delle leggi segregazioniste e di un efferato sistema di sfruttamento economico basato sulla mezzadria. Fatica, indigenza, terrore e disillusione costituiscono il substrato socioeconomico di un genere musicale che fonde grida e lamenti[7] emessi nei campi, ritmi africani ed elementi della ballata folk per esorcizzare paure, sublimare tristezza e tribolazioni e affermare la forza vitale della popolazione afroamericana attraverso il canto e il virtuosismo strumentale. Secondo lo scrittore Richard Wright, "the most astonishing aspect of the blues is that, though replete with a sense of defeat and down-heartedness, they are not intrinsically pessimistic; their burden of woe and melancholy is dialectically redeemed through sheer force of sensuality, into an almost exultant affirmation of life, of love, of sex, of movement, of hope. No matter how repressive was the American environment, the Negro never lost faith in or doubted his deeply endemic capacity to live" (Wright 1999: 12). Pur incorporando un repertorio di vicende funeste (legami familiari recisi, condanne ai lavori forzati, vagabondaggi e linciaggi), il blues è essenzialmente una "life-affirming music" (Sheppard 2006: 111) che consente ai neri d'America di asserire la propria esistenza in un contesto razzista e annichilente il cui racconto in musica, di per sé, produce una catarsi. In altre parole, il blues reca in sé un principio di affermazione della vita analogo a quello che Friedrich Nietzsche – e Miller dopo di lui – identifica come l'essenza del "sentimento *tragico*": uno "straripante senso di vita e di forza, all'interno del quale persino il dolore agisce come uno stimolante" (Nietzsche 1983: 137).

Già nella *Nascita della tragedia* (1872), Nietzsche aveva asserito che "[l]a consolazione metafisica, che […] lascia in noi ogni vera tragedia [è] che nel fondo delle cose, nonostante qualunque vicenda dei fenomeni, la vita duri indistruttibilmente potente e dilettosa" (Nietzsche 1995: 58). In *Ecce Homo* (1888), egli torna a riflettere sulla propria interpretazione del "fenomeno *dionisiaco*", per ribadire ancora una volta che "la tragedia è la prova che i Greci *non* erano pessimisti" (Nietzsche 1991: 67), in quanto essa è prima di tutto "*affermazione suprema*, nata dalla pienezza, dalla sovrabbondanza, un dire sì senza riserve al dolore stesso, alla colpa stessa, a tutto ciò che l'esistenza ha di problematico e di ignoto" (Nietzsche 1991: 69). Quando Miller definisce "misconception […] the idea that tragedy is of necessity allied to pessimism", e conclude che "in truth tragedy implies more optimism in its author than does comedy" (Miller 1949: 3), egli dimostra, pur senza dichiararlo, di aver appreso la lezione di Nietzsche secondo la quale "[l]a tragedia è così lontana dal dimostrare qualcosa in ordine al pessimismo dei Greci […] che deve essere considerata, piuttosto, come il suo decisivo rifiuto e la sua *istanza contraria*" (Nietzsche 1983: 137). Tuttavia, nel rielaborare la tragedia greca in chiave contemporanea adattandola alla parabola esistenziale dell'americano comune, Miller – così come, tra gli altri, O'Neill e Williams – ha perlopiù ignorato l'insegnamento fondamentale del filosofo tedesco: è "la musica, [che] concede al mito tragico una significatività metafisica così penetrante e persuasiva, quale non raggiungerebbe mai, senza quell'unico ausilio, la parola" (Nietzsche 1995: 149). Ben più consapevole che il drammaturgo "non può dire ciò che già nella sua più portentosa universalità ed efficienza non sia

[7] Nel gergo blues, tali grida vengono definite 'cries', 'calls' e 'yells'. 'Moans', invece, è il termine usato per definire i lamenti.

contenuto nella musica" (Nietzsche 1995: 53) e che la "preponderanza dell'effetto musicale [è ciò che causa] quell'incomparabile consolazione che deve essere propria di ogni vera tragedia" (Nietzsche 1995: 121), Wilson – a differenza dei suoi illustri predecessori bianchi – decide di drammatizzare "blues-based stories in blue-toned language" (Gussow 2008: 45), al fine di giungere a "quel sommo grado di evidenza rappresentativa che altrimenti sarebbe inaccessibile al semplice dramma parlato" (Nietzsche 1995: 152).

Dioniso e Apollo, Kuntu e Nommo

In un *j'accuse* che, se non fosse stato pubblicato nel 1872, potrebbe essere letto come una critica feroce al dramma realista e alla tragedia milleriana dell'uomo comune, Nietzsche si scaglia contro la "mediocrità borghese" (Nietzsche 1995: 82) della tragedia euripidea:

> Euripide ha preso lo spettatore e lo ha portato sulla scena. Chi ha capito di quale materia i tragici prometeici anteriori a Euripide formassero i loro eroi, e quanto fosse lontana dalla loro intenzione l'idea di portare sulla scena la maschera fedele della realtà, si rende conto della tendenza del tutto diversa di Euripide. Guidato dalla sua mano, l'uomo della vita di ogni giorno passa dalla cavea sulla scena. […] Odisseo, l'elleno tipico dell'antica arte, adesso tra le mani dei nuovi poeti si striminzisce nella figura del greculo, il quale da ora in poi occupa il centro dell'interesse drammatico (Nietzsche 1995: 81).

Nell'assegnare predominanza alla parola in osservanza ai precetti del razionalismo socratico – il veleno che uccise la tragedia attica a colpi di sillogismi – Euripide si è reso colpevole di aver dato "lo sfratto al coro e alla musica" (Nietzsche 1995: 99), vera e propria "idea del mondo" di cui il dramma è "semplice riflesso, […] ombra isolata" (Nietzsche 1995: 153). Con la soppressione dell'elemento musicale, la tragedia perde la propria essenza e "va in rovina", in quanto è certo che "essa non possa avere avuto altra nascita se non da questo spirito" (Nietzsche 1995: 112). Nietzsche attribuisce alla musica, in quanto arte dionisiaca, la capacità mitopoietica "di generare il mito, […] e precisamente il mito tragico" (Nietzsche 1995: 118), mentre individua nella facoltà artistica apollinea una forza trasfiguratrice che è in grado di dominare il sostrato dionisiaco del mondo traducendolo in immagini e parole. Per lui, il "fine supremo della tragedia e, in generale, dell'arte" si realizza quando "Dioniso parla il linguaggio di Apollo [e] Apollo finisce col parlare il linguaggio di Dioniso" (Nietzsche 1995: 154).

I drammi di Wilson, in cui "la lingua è tesa fino all'estremo nell'imitazione della musica" (Nietzsche 1995: 50), e il blues incita il drammaturgo "a dar forma a [un] mondo di spiriti" (Nietzsche 1995: 118), nascono proprio da questo scambio dialettico tra "language-as-music and music-as-language" (Harrison 1991: 306). Come spiega lo stesso Wilson: "I have always consciously been chasing the musicians. Their expression has been so highly developed, and it has been one expression of African American life. It's like culture is in the music. And the writers are way behind the musicians I see. So I'm trying to close that gap. […] I think writers need to consciously be aware of how our expressions as writers achieve the quality of the musician's expression" (Shannon 1993: 558). Wilson è profondamente

consapevole che "you can't compete with music if all you have is words", giacché "the line without the music doesn't matter"; al tempo stesso, riconosce il potere figurativo della parola, rimarcando che "[i]f you heard the music without the line, it doesn't mean anything. It's the combination" (Shannon & Williams 2004: 189).

Wilson, non troppo diversamente da Nietzsche, ritiene che la perfezione estetica scaturisca dalla combinazione di due istinti diversi ma complementari "costretti a sviluppare le rispettive energie nella più rigorosa misura di reciprocità" (Nietzsche 1995: 172). Eppure, leggere il suo teatro – così come la musica blues – esclusivamente alla luce della teoria nietzschiana, condurrebbe a un'interpretazione difettosa (Winchester 2002). Per quanto stimolante, infatti, tale esercizio può rivelarsi altrettanto insidioso se non si tiene a mente che la tradizione vernacolare afroamericana, nelle sue manifestazioni letterarie e musicali, contiene al proprio interno delle chiavi di lettura che hanno poco a che vedere con gli strumenti della critica occidentale[8]. Pur presentando notevoli analogie col dramma realista di derivazione aristotelica e con la concezione nietzschiana della tragedia, il realismo spirituale di Wilson è permeato da un'estetica nera che nel suo costante divenire ha attraversato tutto il teatro afroamericano del Novecento, plasmando la considerevole varietà di forme, nonché i contenuti, che questo ha assunto nel corso del secolo (Pinkney 2004). Il *Century Cycle* raccoglie e rielabora l'eredità – tra gli altri – del teatro realista di Angelina Grimké e Lorraine Hansberry, del dramma folclorico di Zora Neale Hurston, del Revolutionary Theatre di Amiri Baraka e Larry Neal e, in modo particolare, di quello che la studiosa afroamericana Sandra Richards ha definito "African Diaspora drama" (Richards 2013: 230). Questa forma di teatro inizia a emergere tra la fine degli anni Sessanta e i primi anni Settanta sotto l'influsso dell'afrocentrismo, movimento che individua nella diaspora un principio di continuità tra un'originaria cultura africana e diverse comunità discendenti nate dalla migrazione forzata e dall'adattamento a contesti ostili. In questa fase, l'orientamento militante del Black Power vira verso un rinnovato interesse per l'Africa volto a recuperare il legame reciso con la terra madre attraverso lo studio di fonti storiche e tradizioni filosofiche e religiose. In ambito teatrale, ciò si traduce in un ritorno alla dimensione rituale dello spettacolo e in una forma di scrittura ispirata alla cosmologia Yoruba[9], e in particolare ai principi spirituali del Kuntu – forza che esprime la connessione col cosmo e con gli antenati – e del Nommo – il potere magico della parola, attraverso il quale l'invisibile diventa visibile. In *Kuntu Drama*, antologia seminale del 1974, Paul Carter Harrison utilizza per la prima volta i principi di Kuntu e Nommo per descrivere un teatro in grado di sollecitare "the arousal of the spirit [through] an orchestration of words, sounds, and images […] potent enough to excavate the surface of reality" (Harrison 1974: 7, 10). Giacché il realismo non riflette che una dimensione effimera dell'esperienza umana, le convenzioni teatrali ad esso associate vengono rielaborate in favore di strategie drammaturgiche e performative che consentano di scavare la superficie della realtà per accedere agli strati più profondi della coscienza. Conferire plasticità verbale (Nommo) all'energia cosmica (Kuntu) implica una rottura dell'illusione della mìmesis aristotelica che avviene attraverso "the combined use of word power, dance power, and

[8] Si vedano Gates 1988, Christian 1988 e Smith 2015.

[9] Sulla religione Yoruba, si vedano Falola and Childs 2004 e Love 2012.

music power" (Jackson 1974: ix). Così come nell'antica Grecia la "lega fraterna di Apollo e di Dioniso" (Nietzsche 1995: 166) generò il "prodigioso potere liberatorio della tragedia, che commosse tutta la vita popolare e la purificò" (Nietzsche 1995: 148), nel teatro della diaspora africana il *call and response* tra Kuntu e Nommo produce l'energia necessaria a trasfondere "the power of the sacred ritual into the secular ceremony called theatre" (Harrison 1974: 15), una cerimonia che esercita un potente effetto catartico sui suoi partecipanti. Attraverso i suoi drammi, Wilson veicola una concezione spirituale dell'universo in cui il piano temporale e materico hanno carattere sacro, per cui ogni messa in scena si configura come un rito magico-sciamanico in cui "spiritual invocation and theatrical practice" (Harrison 2002: 9) s'intersecano fino a confondersi.

Si pensi a *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1988), opera emblematica del *Century Cycle*, in cui la danza Juba[10] praticata alla fine del primo atto induce nel protagonista, Herald Loomis, una visione che lo conduce all'*anagnōrisis* finale, il riconoscimento di sé stesso come discendente della diaspora africana. È il 1911 quando il trentaduenne Loomis, dopo quattro anni di vagabondaggio alla ricerca della moglie Martha, approda nella *boarding house* di Seth e Bertha Holly, a Pittsburgh. Ad accompagnarlo c'è la figlia Zonia, nata nel 1900, pochi mesi prima che Loomis venisse arbitrariamente catturato da Joe Turner[11] e costretto ai lavori forzati per i successivi sette anni. Loomis è convinto che una volta ritrovata Martha, fuggita dal sud razzista cinque anni prima, la sua vita possa riprendere dal punto in cui era stata brutalmente interrotta da Turner, ma nel corso del dramma, con l'aiuto del *conjure man* Bynum, apprenderà che lo "starting place" (Wilson 2007: 69) da cui partire per ricostruire la propria identità – "reconnect myself together" (Wilson 2007: 81) – e riacquisire la capacità di agire nel mondo – "make my own world" (Wilson 2007: 83) – va ricercato in un passato che trascende la sua stessa esistenza e che si materializza davanti ai suoi occhi durante la *trance* provocata dalla danza rituale:

> (*LOOMIS begins to speak in tongues and dance around the kitchen. SETH starts after him.*)
> LOOMIS: (*Stops suddenly.*) You all don't know nothing about me. You don't know what I done see. Herald Loomis done seen things he ain't got words to tell you. (*LOOMIS starts to walk out the front door and is thrown back and collapses, terror-stricken by his vision. BYNUM crawls to him.*)

[10] Si tratta di una danza circolare che fonde movimento, percussioni e canto proprio come nel *Ring Shout*, che Vincenzo Caporaletti descrive nei seguenti termini: "Il Ring Shout era una forma di danza rituale, condotta circolarmente in senso antiorario (l'elemento del *ring*) attraverso cui gli schiavi neri in America, riproducendo comportamenti cerimoniali espressivi basati su modelli comunicativi fonico-cinesici-prossemici, mantenevano l'identità dell'appartenenza culturale alla madre Africa […]. Di fatto, con esso si ponevano le basi, attraverso le componenti gestuali, vocali e formali – nell'attitudine responsariale del *call and response* (l'elemento dello shout) – per il germinare di una tradizione specifica di moduli espressivi, di un sistema paradigmatico destinato a costituire il fulcro linguistico delle multiformi manifestazioni della discendenza musicale afroamericana" (Caporaletti 2002: 7).

[11] Il personaggio di Joe Turner è ispirato a Joe Turney, fratello di Peter Turney (1827-1903), Governatore dello Stato del Tennessee dal 1893 to 1897. Joe Turney era solito porre sotto arresto cittadini neri accusati di reati minori, spesso neanche realmente commessi, al fine di costringerli ai lavori forzati.

BYNUM: What you done seen, Herald Loomis?
LOOMIS: I done seen bones rise up out the water. Rise up and walk across the water. Bones walking on top of the water.
BYNUM: Tell me about them bones, Herald Loomis. Tell me what you seen.
LOOMIS: I come to this place… to this water that was bigger than the whole world. And I looked out… and I seen these bones rise up out the water. Rise up and begin to walk on top of it.
BYNUM: Wasn't nothing but bones and they walking on top of the water.
LOOMIS: Walking without sinking down. Walking on top of the water.
BYNUM: Just marching in a line.
LOOMIS: A whole heap of them. They come up out the water and started marching.
BYNUM: Wasn't nothing but bones and they walking on top of the water.
LOOMIS: One after the other. They just come up out the water and start to walking.
BYNUM: They walking on the water without sinking down. They just walking and walking. And then… what happened, Herald Loomis?
LOOMIS: They just walking across the water.
BYNUM: What happened, Herald Loomis? What happened to the bones?
LOOMIS: They walking across the water… and then… they sunk down.
BYNUM: The bones sunk into the water. They all sunk down. […]
LOOMIS: When they sink down they made a big splash and this here wave come up…
BYNUM: A big wave, Herald Loomis. A big wave washed over the land.
LOOMIS: It washed them out of the water and up on the land. Only… only…
BYNUM: Only they ain't bones no more.
LOOMIS: They got flesh on them! Just like you and me! […] They black. Just like you and me. Ain't no difference (Wilson 2007: 50-52).

È l'intervento maieutico dello sciamano Bynum a consentire a Loomis di rispecchiarsi negli antenati che hanno perso la vita durante il *Middle Passage*. Nel teatro della diaspora africana, fantasmi e spiriti si manifestano in quanto spettri di un passato i cui effetti continuano a riprodursi nel presente; la loro materializzazione ha uno scopo preciso, ossia richiamare l'attenzione dei discendenti sul colonialismo, sulla tratta e sulla schiavitù, esortandoli a interrogarsi sul retaggio di tali fenomeni. La persistenza di un passato originario legato all'Africa si palesa, inoltre, attraverso l'insorgenza di ricordi che lasciano emergere un vissuto genealogico traumatico, dimenticato oppure rimosso. Sotto il profilo drammaturgico, il ricorso allo *storytelling*, alla narrazione autobiografica e all'analessi sono gli espedienti formali attraverso i quali la memoria viene verbalizzata e acquisisce corpo testuale e sonoro, interrompendo lo svolgimento lineare dell'azione e sollecitando una profonda riconsiderazione dei modi in cui il passato ha plasmato la realtà presente e condizionerà quella futura. È in questa prospettiva che va letto il monologo in cui Loomis racconta i sette anni trascorsi nella *chain gang* di Turner, metafora dei secoli di schiavitù che i bianchi hanno imposto ai neri sul territorio americano:

LOOMIS: Joe Turner catched me in nineteen hundred and one. Kept me seven years until nineteen hundred and eight. Kept everybody seven years. He'd go out hunting and bring back forty men at a time. And keep them seven years. […] I ain't never seen Joe Turner. Seen him to where I could touch him. I asked one of them fellows one time why he catch niggers. Asked him what I got he want, why don't he keep on to himself? Why he got to catch me going down the road by my lonesome? He told me I was worthless. Worthless is something you throw away. Something you don't bother with. I ain't seen him throw me away. Wouldn't even let me stay away when I was by my lonesome. I ain't tried to catch him when he going down the road. So I must got something he want. What I got? […]

BYNUM: That ain't hard to figure out. What he wanted was your song. He wanted to have that song to be his. He thought by catching you he could learn that song. Every nigger he catch he's looking for the one he can learn that song from. Now he's got you bound up to where you can't sing your own song. Couldn't sing it them seven years 'cause you was afraid he would snatch it from under you. But you still got it. You just forgot how to sing it (Wilson 2007: 68-70).

Alla fine del dramma, Loomis ritrova la propria "song of self-sufficiency" (Wilson 2007: 86), una canzone che nell'idioletto di Wilson non può che attestare la resilienza del "warrior spirit" che anima tutti gli eroi neri delle sue tragedie blues. Una volta squarciatosi il petto e sfregatosi il volto col suo stesso sangue – un gesto rituale nel quale Pamela Jean Monaco legge una ricongiunzione alle radici africane attraverso la simulazione di una scarificazione (Monaco 2000) – Loomis è "fully resurrected, cleansed and given breath" e finalmente "free to soar above the environs that weighed and pushed his spirit into terrifying contractions" (Wilson 2007: 93-94). Lo spirito schiacciato dalla schiavitù può tornare a dilatarsi e può innalzarsi al di sopra del miasma transgenerazionale del razzismo perché Loomis, sollecitato e sostenuto da Bynum, ha praticato la *sankofa*, una forma di meditazione attiva volta a riflettere sul proprio passato genealogico – ivi inclusi gli aspetti più bui e dolorosi – per librarsi verso un avvenire costruito su una salda consapevolezza delle proprie origini. Nell'apparato simbolico del popolo Ashanti[12], la *sankofa* – un'espressione che in dialetto twi[13] significa 'torna (indietro) a prenderlo' – è rappresentata da un uccello che solca il cielo con la testa rivolta all'indietro, un'immagine che cattura la necessità di non perdere di vista il punto di partenza (lo "starting place") per affrontare al meglio il difficile viaggio che conduce verso la definizione della propria identità. Il *Century Cycle* è il racconto di questo viaggio, la narrazione teatrale di un'Odissea – quella dei neri d'America – iniziata quattrocento anni fa sulla costa atlantica dell'Africa e non ancora terminata.

[12] Ashanti è il nome di un impero precoloniale le cui origini risalgono alla fine del 1200 e la cui fondazione ufficiale è legata all'ascesa al trono (il cosiddetto 'sgabello d'oro') di Osei Tutu. L'impero comprendeva i territori che oggi si estendono dal Ghana centrale fino al Togo e alla Costa d'Avorio. Oggi, il regno Ashanti fa parte dello Stato del Ghana e conserva ancora la sua corona, ereditata nel 1999 da Otumfuo Nana Osei Tutu II, attuale sovrano.

[13] Il twi è una variante dialettale della lingua Akan parlata, tra gli altri, dal popolo Ashanti.

Nello stilare la propria "four-hundred-year autobiography" (Shannon 1993: 540) in dieci drammi, Wilson ha onorato la propria ascendenza culturale africana, assumendo il medesimo posizionamento ideologico ed estetico di coloro che Arthur Flowers definisce "the sophisticated ideological orchestrators of literary hoodoo" (Flowers 2001: 14), quei "cultural custodians" (Flowers 2001: 72) che hanno scelto di dedicare la propria vita e la propria arte alla trasmissione di una tradizione letteraria che sin dalle sue prime manifestazioni ha mostrato una tensione tra assimilazione e autodeterminazione dovuta alla compresenza di "double formal antecedents, the western and the black" (Gates 1988: xxiv). Nel conferire plasticità teatrale alla musica blues, Wilson ha esaltato e celebrato questa duplice eredità poiché, pur aderendo alle convenzioni aristoteliche, non ha rinunciato a quel "right to amend" (Wilson 1997: 501-502) che costituisce la cifra distintiva della sua drammaturgia. Ispirandosi ai principi della cosmologia africana, egli ha ripristinato l'armonia tra i "due istinti artistici primordiali" (Nietzsche 1995: 163) – il dionisiaco e l'apollineo – e ha riportato in vita lo spirito primigenio della tragedia greca, immettendo al tempo stesso un èthos inconfondibilmente afroamericano nel canone teatrale occidentale.

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Alfabetizzazione di adulti immigrati: le donne burkinabé a Spilimbergo

Abstract I: I corsi di lingua per donne immigrate hanno recentemente suscitato l'interesse degli studiosi. Numerosi casi sono citati dalla letteratura e studiati sia dal punto di vista linguistico che socioeconomico. Le donne immigrate sono vulnerabili, soprattutto quando arrivano da Paesi in cui il divario di genere è più ampio. In Italia, possono conoscere l'isolamento sociale, quando sono confinate alla famiglia e all'assistenza dei minori. La partecipazione ai corsi di L2 ha dunque una valenza non solamente linguistica, contribuisce infatti all'emancipazione e offre opportunità di maggiore partecipazione alla vita sociale. Un caso specifico è rappresentato dalle donne del Burkina Faso residenti a Spilimbergo (Pordenone), che nel 2010, 2012 e 2015 hanno frequentato tre corsi di alfabetizzazione progettati in maniera specifica per loro.

Abstract II: Language courses for immigrant women have recently attracted the interest of scholars. A number of cases are cited by literature and studied from both a linguistic and socioeconomic point of view. Immigrant women are vulnerable, especially when they arrive from countries where the gender gap is wider. In Italy, they may experience social isolation, when they are confined to family and childcare. Participating to L2 courses has subsequently not only a linguistic value; it contributes to emancipation and offers a chance for a higher participation to social life. A specific case is represented by Burkina Faso women in Spilimbergo (Pordenone), who in 2010, 2012 and 2015 attended three literacy courses specifically dedicated to them.

Keywords: alfabetizzazione degli adulti, parità di genere, L2, Burkina Faso.
adult education, literacy, gender equality, L2, Burkina Faso.

1. Introduzione

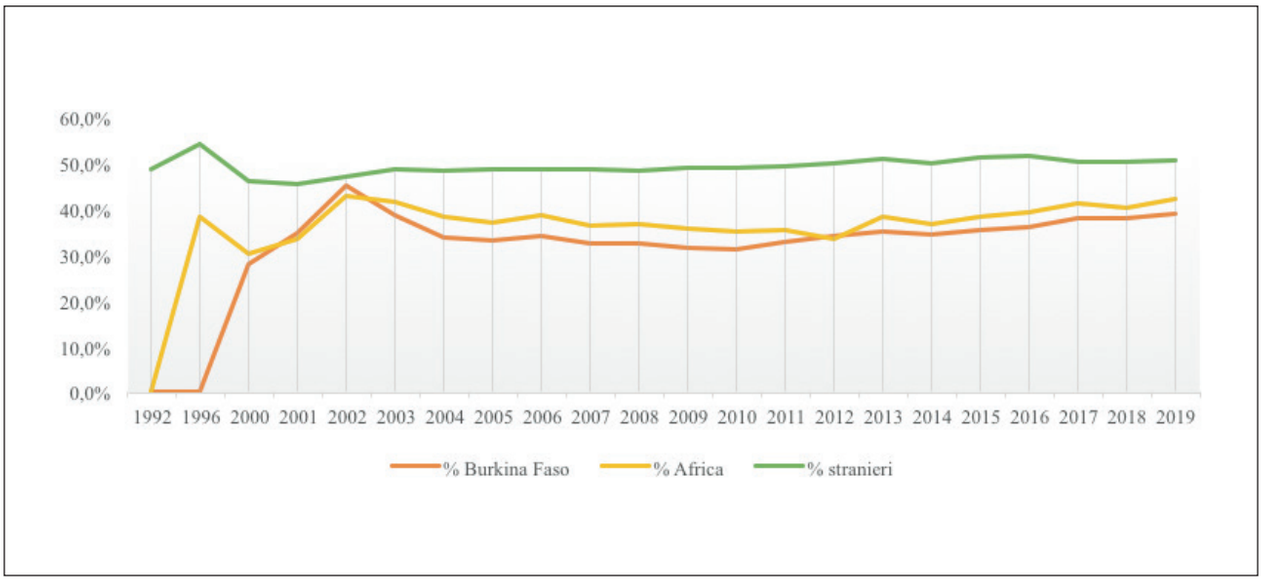
La storia della comunità burkinabé di Spilimbergo presenta diverse specificità che attraggono l'attenzione dello studioso[1]. I primi abitanti del Burkina Faso giungono nel piccolo centro abitato collocato lungo il corso del fiume Tagliamento, al confine tra le province di Udine e Pordenone, nei primi anni '90 e successivamente la presenza si fa nel tempo più numerosa. Tra alcuni dei villaggi rurali della provincia di Boulgou e il Friuli Venezia Giulia si crea un

[1] Lo scrivente se ne è occupato nella tesi di dottorato, della quale alcune parti hanno visto successiva rielaborazione e pubblicazione (Baldo 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2019).

meccanismo di migrazione a catena che porta gradualmente la comunità ad essere la quinta per dimensioni in Italia[2]. Anche rispetto alle altre provenienze presenti sul territorio i burkinabé assumono una posizione di rilievo e si trovano negli anni spesso alla seconda o terza posizione nel comune di Spilimbergo, subito dopo albanesi e rumeni[3].

Pure l'incidenza della popolazione immigrata sulla popolazione di Spilimbergo è in costante aumento e raggiunge a fine 2019 un considerevole 12,8%, di cui il 18,7% è costituito da burkinabé, per lo più giovani adulti in età da lavoro (per un approfondimento cfr. Baldo 2017a e 2017b). In questa cornice, un elemento notevole e quindi degno di attenzione è che, contrariamente a quanto accade nel caso delle altre provenienze, la componente femminile all'interno della comunità burkinabé non tende gradualmente a crescere e a bilanciare quella maschile. Rimane invece negli anni limitata e nell'intervallo tra il 2000 e il 2019, per il quale si dispone di valori in maniera continua, costituisce una media del 34,9% del totale dei residenti del Burkina Faso (2,6 punti in meno della media delle provenienze africane e 14,3 in meno rispetto agli altri Paesi di immigrazione nello stesso ventennio).

Grafico 1. Incidenza femminile sulla presenza immigrata a Spilimbergo (anagrafe comunale).



I valori più recenti della medesima serie, elaborata sulla base di dati messi a disposizione dall'anagrafe comunale, indicano al 31/12/2019 la presenza a Spilimbergo di 112 burkinabé di genere femminile, pari al 38,9% del totale. Alla stessa data l'incidenza femminile

[2] Il sito *Comuni Italiani* (http://www.comuni-italiani.it) segnala la presenza al 31/12/2016 di 316 burkinabé a Spilimbergo, al quinto posto dopo Forlì (535), Roma (397), Napoli (356) e Reggio Emilia (343). I dati, benché risalenti a qualche anno fa e non disponibili a una data più recente, hanno ancora una validità significativa al fine di collocare la comunità spilimberghese rispetto alle altre in Italia.

[3] I dati anagrafici del Comune di Spilimbergo più recenti (http://www.comune.spilimbergo.pn.it/il-territorio-e-la-popolazione/index.html#c418), relativi al 31/12/2019, vedono i cittadini del Burkina Faso al terzo posto con 288 residenti, preceduti da Romania (383) e Albania (329). L'addensamento è notevole, se si tiene conto che a livello regionale i burkinabé si collocano solamente al ventiquattresimo posto.

tocca invece il 42,2% per le provenienze dal continente africano e il 50,5% per la componente immigrata senza distinzione in base al Paese di origine. I dati sono confermati a livello nazionale, si evince pertanto una caratteristica strutturale che interessa i progetti migratori dei cittadini del Burkina Faso[4]. I valori relativi ai titolari di permessi di soggiorno sono allineati: se a livello nazionale "i motivi familiari rappresentano, ad oggi, il principale canale tramite cui i cittadini di paesi terzi possono fare legalmente ingresso" (Bonizzoni 2019: 227), per i burkinabé pare che questa via sia assai meno praticata e a fine 2018 i ricongiungimenti familiari sono solamente il 29,2%, rispetto al 46,9% medio nazionale (IDOS 2019: 462-66). La femminilizzazione dei processi migratori avviene infatti soprattutto attraverso questo meccanismo, ovvero sono solitamente gli uomini a inserirsi per primi nel mercato del lavoro e a richiamare in seguito le consorti (Bonizzoni 2019 e Cognigni 2014: 465-467)[5]. Il caso del Burkina Faso è tuttavia toccato in maniera marginale da questo fenomeno evolutivo e la presenza rimane per lo più maschile; sembra che i giovani burkinabé giungano in Italia per lavorare o con richiesta di asilo e che tendano a rimandare il momento di richiamare a sé le congiunte[6].

Questo dato, se da un lato potrebbe fare pensare a progetti migratori ancora in fase di definizione, dall'altro potrebbe essere correlato a una condizione di disparità di genere e a fattori di carattere culturale. Nel 2020 il Burkina Faso si posiziona infatti al 129° posto su 153 Paesi per punteggio di *Gender Gap Index*, con una marcata differenza di genere nei settori della partecipazione alla politica, dell'economia, della salute e dell'educazione (World Economic Forum 2019: 109-110). Per quanto concerne il caso della scolarizzazione e dell'accesso alle abilità di scrittura e lettura di base, i dati dell'*Unesco Institute for Statistics* relativi al 2018 rivelano uno scarto notevole, che tende ad aumentare proporzionalmente all'età (http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx)[7].

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[4] I dati nazionali, registrati dal *Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 2019* (IDOS 2019: 455-457), rilevano al 31/12/2018 nel Paese la presenza di 5.255.503 residenti con cittadinanza non italiana, di cui il 51,7% di genere femminile (per un approfondimento in prospettiva di genere cfr. anche Cardinali 2019, nello stesso volume). I burkinabé sono 14.582, ma l'incidenza femminile per questa provenienza scende al 32,8%.

[5] Esistono tuttavia delle eccezioni notevoli, in cui le *breadwinner* sono le donne: è per esempio il caso delle domestiche eritree, capoverdiane, latino-americane e filippine negli anni '70; oppure, purtroppo, quello della prostituzione e della tratta delle nigeriane dagli anni '90; o ancora delle assistenti alla persona dall'Europa dell'Est in anni recenti (Solcia 2011: 130-133; Degiuli 2016).

[6] Una possibile testimonianza del carattere dinamico della migrazione dei burkinabé in Italia e della tendenza a mettere in movimento inizialmente soprattutto giovani maschi in età da lavoro potrebbe trovarsi nei dati sui comuni italiani in cui questa provenienza è maggiormente rappresentata: al secondo posto figura Roma (397, di cui il 67,3% maschi) e al terzo Napoli (356, di cui ben l'88,5% maschi), due centri di passaggio per i migranti burkinabé diretti in Italia (http://www.comuni-italiani.it). Fiumicino è infatti la destinazione dei voli da Ouagadougou, capitale del Burkina Faso, e Napoli, stando alle affermazioni di alcuni burkinabé intervistati in merito, offre una rete di sostegno etnica e le prime opportunità di lavoro (Baldo 2017a: 133-134). È allora plausibile che nelle due città in cui prendono l'avvio i percorsi migratori, e in particolare Napoli che sembra essere legata fortemente al lavoro, la componente maschile sia preponderante, mentre negli altri centri urbani italiani di stanziamento la situazione tenda in seguito gradualmente a riequilibrarsi.

[7] La più recente data di consultazione dei siti indicati nel presente contributo è il 25/09/2020.

Tabella 1. Tasso di alfabetizzazione in Burkina Faso nel 2018 (*Unesco Institute for Statistics*).

Literacy Rate	**giovani 15-24**	**adulti 15+**	**adulti 25-24**	**anziani 65+**
entrambi i sessi %	58,29	41,22	33,02	10,13
femmine %	54,67	32,69	22,21	4,14
maschi %	61,79	50,07	44,39	19,38
GPI*	0,88	0,65	0,50	0,21

* Il *Gender Parity Index* (GPI) rappresenta lo scarto tra i generi nell'accesso alla scuola e all'alfabetizzazione di base; il valore è calcolato dividendo il dato relativo alla componente femminile per quello corrispondente maschile. Nel caso degli adulti tra 25 e 64 anni, per esempio, un indice di 0,50 indica che per le donne burkinabé la possibilità di essere alfabetizzate è la metà rispetto agli uomini, tra gli anziani oltre 64 anni scende ad addirittura un quinto (http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx).

Non stupisce quindi l'emergere nella comunità stanziata a Spilimbergo, in maniera spontanea da parte delle stesse parlanti e dai loro mariti, di un bisogno formativo legato non solamente all'apprendimento della lingua del Paese di arrivo, ma anche a colmare questa situazione di svantaggio e gap di genere. Tra il 2010 e il 2012 lo scrivente ha avuto l'opportunità di incontrare alcuni rappresentanti dei burkinabé spilimberghesi e di constatare questa esigenza. Dati quantitativi e qualitativi, rilevati attraverso questionari sociolinguistici e interviste, hanno mostrato che la situazione a livello locale riflette in maniera abbastanza fedele i tassi di alfabetizzazione riportati dall'Unesco; sussiste infatti una situazione di svantaggio per le donne, che sono escluse di fatto da alcuni ambiti assai importanti della vita sociale, come salute ed educazione dei figli (Baldo 2017a, 2017b).

Grazie al sostegno del Master *Italiano Lingua Seconda e Interculturalità* dell'Università di Udine, che ha attivato una collaborazione con l'Istituto Comprensivo di Spilimbergo, nel 2011, nel 2012 e nel 2015 è stato possibile inviare a Spilimbergo dei tirocinanti e un tutor che hanno provveduto a offrire una prima risposta a questo bisogno formativo, espresso con chiarezza anche in una intervista del 27/08/2010 a un autorevole rappresentate della comunità:

> Inf.: No, perché, qua. Qua, perché no... non arriva a insegnare un... uno... manda noi una *professeur*, non so, una maestra qua insegna eh... alle nostre donne, così?
> Ric.: A insegnare l'italiano?
> Inf.: Sì. Non c'è.
> Ric.: E perché no?

Sono stati dunque organizzati tre corsi di circa 20 ore ciascuno, totalmente al femminile, ovvero dedicati nello specifico all'insegnamento delle abilità di lettura e scrittura di base alle donne burkinabé. È stato un modo di venire temporaneamente incontro a una necessità assai concreta e pressante, che tuttavia sembra trovare a fatica risposte dalla amministrazione locale. Durante uno dei tre momenti formativi, infine, grazie alla disponibilità di tre operatrici di ripresa del corso *Tecniche di Produzione Audiovisiva* dell'Istituto ENAIP di Udine, è stato avviato un laboratorio per la realizzazione di un video che docu-

mentasse l'esperienza e registrasse il punto di vista, le aspettative e soprattutto le speranze delle partecipanti[8].

2. Quadro teorico di riferimento

L'istruzione degli adulti è oggetto di interesse e riflessioni da parte degli studiosi; in particolare per quanto concerne l'apprendimento linguistico e dell'italiano L2 alcuni punti di riferimento sono la guida e le raccomandazioni di Beacco *et al.* (2014), la monografia di Minuz (2005), infine il sillabo e i descrittori per l'alfabetizzazione di Borri et al. (2014). Si tratta di una tipologia di apprendenti che per certi aspetti può essere definita debole (Minuz 2005: 50), dal momento che può vivere con imbarazzo il rientro a scuola, ambiente nel quale si espone quella che potrebbe essere percepita come una fragilità. Il rischio è che sia messa in discussione l'immagine che l'adulto ha di sé o quella che cerca di proiettare all'esterno verso i pari (Bertolotto 2014: 117). Il contesto di apprendimento degli adulti è quindi generalmente segnato dall'emotività e dal rischio dell'innalzamento del filtro affettivo, che rischia di compromettere gli sforzi del docente e gli esiti dell'apprendimento (Bertolotto 2013).

In una prospettiva di genere, la condizione femminile è ancora più delicata, in quanto subentrano dinamiche legate allo stato delle donne immigrate rispetto ai mariti e all'interno dei nuclei familiari di cui fanno parte. L'esito, riconosciuto da diverse studiose che si sono occupate del tema, rischia di essere l'isolamento e una invisibilità che fa sì che queste persone fruiscano solo parzialmente e in maniera subalterna delle risorse offerte dal Paese di arrivo (Cognigni 2014: 468; Solcia 2011: 134; Bertolotto 2014: 124-125). Le parlanti, non impegnate a livello professionale e spesso relegate alla cura dei figli e della casa, rischiano di scivolare verso la solitudine e una marginalità che incidono anche sull'acquisizione dell'italiano. Può accadere di incontrare, ed è il caso di molte delle mamme burkinabé, apprendenti che hanno trascorso periodi lunghi in Italia, da 5 a 10 anni, che tuttavia dispongono solamente di strumenti di comunicazione orale strettamente funzionali ai domini in cui si trovano abitualmente a interagire e di abilità di lettoscrittura praticamente assenti. Emerge così il bisogno di strumenti formativi specifici, ben calibrati su questo tipo di utenza, che consentano non solamente di migliorare le competenze linguistiche delle apprendenti, ma anche di rompere l'isolamento, offrire contesti di socializzazione e favorire così l'emancipazione delle donne immigrate (cfr. il *vademecum* di Favaro 2001 e le riflessioni in Favaro 2015).

I corsi al femminile, con un pubblico di sole studentesse, spesso affiancate da insegnanti e mediatrici, non sono dunque una forma di ghetto di genere, si tratta invece di una risposta efficace, che viene incontro ai bisogni e alle esigenze specifici di questo di tipo di

[8] Si ringraziano la Prof.ssa Carla Marcato, direttrice del Master *Italiano Lingua Seconda e Interculturalità* dell'Università degli Studi di Udine, l'allora dirigente scolastico dell'Istituto Comprensivo di Spilimbergo Elzio Fede e i tre tirocinanti Andrea Muzzatti, Sonia Rovere e Karin Chiarandon. Un ringraziamento spetta poi ad Andrea Musi, direttore del corso *Tecniche di Produzione Audiovisiva* dell'Istituto ENAIP di Udine, e alle tre volontarie che si sono offerte di realizzare il video: Viviana Falcomer, Elisabetta Giusti e Sonia Russo. Il filmato *I sogni non finiscono mai* è visibile all'indirizzo internet: https://vimeo.com/52948968.

utenza (Solcia 2011: 137). Le esperienze in questo senso sono ormai davvero numerose e hanno mostrato buoni margini di successo: i progetti presentati da Favaro (2001: 44-49) nel suo *vademecum*, quelli a Milano, Lecco e Lomagna descritti da Solcia (2011), le lezioni di lingua delle maghrebine a Torino studiate da Bertolotto (2013, 2014), le ricerche sulle donne del ricongiungimento familiare condotte nel fermano e maceratese da Cognigni (2014), l'esperienza con le bangladesi descritta da Rossetti (2016), infine i rilevamenti tra le apprendenti adulte in Abruzzo di Hoxha e Lannutti (2018). Il presente contributo cerca dunque di ritagliarsi uno spazio in questo vasto e articolato mosaico di riferimento.

3. I bisogni e le esigenze delle apprendenti burkinabé

Affinché un corso con apprendenti adulte abbia successo, è fondamentale la rilevazione dei bisogni e delle aspettative delle frequentanti, in modo da offrire azioni formative il più possibile allineate e quindi efficaci. Talvolta è possibile utilizzare test in ingresso e successivamente negoziare alcuni degli obiettivi con il gruppo (Solcia 2011: 116; Minuz 2005). Tuttavia nel caso delle signore burkinabé due fattori sono stati determinanti: da una parte disporre di dati sociolinguistici accurati, raccolti con interviste individuali e un questionario assai articolato nell'ambito di un progetto di dottorato di ricerca; dall'altra il sostegno e la mediazione di Paola Guzzoni, una concittadina legata da rapporti di salda amicizia con molte delle frequentanti[9].

Per quanto concerne il primo aspetto, dall'analisi degli usi linguistici dichiarati dal campione di 18 maschi e 12 femmine burkinabé adulti di otre 20 anni emergono repertori principalmente orientati alla madrelingua bissa, al francese di eredità coloniale e, più raramente, a idiomi diffusi in altre aree del Burkina Faso o nella vicina Costa D'Avorio[10]. A fianco di questi codici, che dominano la comunicazione a livello domestico e intracomunitario, compaiono l'italiano e, seppure in misura minore, la varietà friulana[11]. In merito alla lingua ufficiale del Paese di arrivo, gli informanti hanno in particolare riferito una competenza linguistica sbilanciata a favore delle abilità orali (il 73,3% afferma di sapere parlare e capire l'italiano, mentre solamente il 43,3% è in grado di leggerlo e il 40,0% di scriverlo). Esiste inoltre un marcato differenziale di genere, che avvantaggia i maschi in tutti gli aspetti indagati.

[9] Si ringrazia di cuore Paola 'amica bianca' Guzzoni per l'amichevole e spontanea mediazione con le studentesse, che ha reso possibile la buona riuscita dei corsi e la raccolta dei dati sociolinguistici. Per quanto concerne in maniera più approfondita questi ultimi, il questionario utilizzato e il metodo di analisi sono quelli descritti in Chini (2004), ma informazioni più accurate e complete sia sul metodo di indagine sia sui risultati sono in Baldo (2017a, 2017b).

[10] Dati più completi sui repertori di questi migranti nel Paese di origine e in Italia, sui loro usi linguistici e sul contatto con l'italiano e la varietà locale friulana si trovano in Baldo (2017a: 137-150). Informazioni aggiuntive sulla lingua bissa, codice a diffusione limitata parlato nella provincia da cui proviene la maggior parte dei burkinabé di Spilimbergo, sono invece in Berthelette (2001).

[11] Sulla vitalità del friulano nella regione, in riferimento anche alla visibilità consapevole da parte di migranti adulti cfr. Fusco (2017). Alcune annotazioni sul caso di Spilimbergo sono invece in Baldo (2017b), in appendice allo stesso volume.

Tabella 2. Competenza nell'italiano dei burkinabé di oltre 20 anni, a Spilimbergo (Baldo 2017a: 151-153).

	capisci M	**capisci F**	**parli M**	**parli F**	**leggi M**	**leggi F**	**scrivi M**	**scrivi F**
sì	16	6	16	6	9	4	8	4
un po'	2	6	2	6	5	3	5	3
no	0	0	0	0	4	5	5	5

Il divario si realizza nella comunicazione orale (l'88,9% degli uomini afferma di capire e parlare l'italiano, rispetto al 50,0% delle donne), ma è evidente pure nelle abilità di lettura e scrittura (in questo caso le percentuali scendono rispettivamente al 50,0% e 33,3% per la lettura, al 44,4% e 33,3% nella scrittura).

La presenza di una mediatrice è stata cruciale, come rileva Favaro (2001: 9-10), perché ha consentito non solamente di raggiungere le informanti e distribuire i questionari, ma pure di orientare la pianificazione didattica verso alcuni dei bisogni immediati delle signore burkinabé: capire le comunicazioni con la scuola, aiutare i figli e orientarsi nei servizi, in particolare nel caso della salute. Questi aspetti emergono anche dai dati raccolti da Cognigni (2014: 472) durante la sua inchiesta nei corsi di italiano L2 per donne migranti, nei quali le motivazioni della famiglia e dell'educazione dei figli si collocano al primo posto (70% delle rispondenti), seguite immediatamente dalla salute e assistenza (51%), e sono confermati direttamente dalle parole di Fatima nel video girato a Spilimbergo (da 2'30'' circa: https://vimeo.com/52948968).

> Fat.: Come oggi... ih... c'è qualcosa, o magari io arriva un ospedale o... o magari vado a scuola di mio figlio e mi danno qualcosa da firmare... lo firma perché non lo so cosa sta firmando. Prima di fare qualcosa, per sapere cosa vuoi dire... forse è difficile.

Sul piano orale i corsi si sono dunque orientati verso routine e copioni di utilità immediata, altamente spendibili nella vita quotidiana, la "lingua di tutti i giorni" di cui parla Favaro (2015: 56-57), in maniera analoga a quanto accade nel caso di altri adulti di caratteristiche paragonabili come i richiedenti asilo (Cognigni 2019: 126). Non sono stati però trascurati gli aspetti più specifici all'utenza femminile, legati alle situazioni di esclusione sociale e di isolamento domestico, registrate grazie all'intervento della mediatrice. Le lezioni di lingua, e in misura anche maggiore il progetto legato al video, costituiscono allora una occasione unica di incontro e contatto; per queste ragioni sono stati curati con grande attenzione la fase di accoglienza e socializzazione, i momenti dei saluti, la conversazione spontanea e non mediata dalle tirocinanti che talvolta nasce tra le apprendenti e consente usi autentici e contestualizzati della lingua (Favaro 2001: 28-29, Solcia 2011: 174; Rossetti 2016: 128).

La motivazione che ha spinto le burkinabé a frequentare le lezioni è stata sempre molto elevata e, contrariamente a quanto talvolta accade, la presenza costante. La consapevolezza dell'utilità della conoscenza dell'italiano e della competenza nelle abilità scritte della lingua è infatti uno stimolo formidabile, dato che "rappresenta per le migranti una condizione necessaria per l'autopromozione e la socializzazione" (Hoxha & Lannutti 2018: 597). La vo-

lontà di integrazione, che anche Cognigni (2014: 272) registra, si è manifestata dunque con chiarezza già dagli incontri iniziali ed è stata sostenuta durante l'intero percorso. Imparare il codice del Paese di arrivo si carica per le iscritte ai corsi al femminile di significati aggiuntivi, diventa strumento di emancipazione e contribuisce alla ricerca di autonomia dai consorti. Al di là dell'apprendimento linguistico, significa avviare un processo di autopromozione della persona e di ridefinizione dell'identità sia all'interno del nucleo familiare, rispetto ai mariti e i figli, sia verso l'esterno, i servizi e la società di accoglienza (Bertolotto 2014).

Anche sul piano delle difficoltà i corsi di per donne adulte presentano specificità che è bene considerare in fase di progettazione degli interventi. Innanzi tutto la frequenza non può prevedere troppi incontri settimanali e gli orari devono tenere conto degli impegni familiari delle corsiste che hanno l'incombenza di accompagnare i figli a scuola, andare al mercato e preparare i pasti (Rossetti 2016: 137). Per questi motivi, le lezioni presso l'Istituto Comprensivo di Spilimbergo, che ha messo a disposizione gli spazi, sono state organizzate nel primo pomeriggio, in modo da dare tempo alle burkinabé di rientrare e provvedere al pasto serale della famiglia. Purtroppo non è stato possibile predisporre uno spazio per il gioco dei figli, l'utilità del quale è sostenuta da diverse fonti (Favaro 2001: 43, Solcia 2011: 173-174; Rossetti 2016: 120). Tuttavia, come si vede anche nel video, alcuni bambini hanno accompagnato le mamme a scuola e quattro banchi sono stati adattati per fornire loro un piccolo spazio dove disegnare e tenersi impegnati. Sul piano linguistico, invece, il gruppo si è presentato stratificato su più livelli e ha così bene rappresentato i ruoli e i rapporti di cooperazione normalmente esistenti tra le parlanti. È pratica comune, infatti, che le signore si muovano assieme, in piccoli gruppi, nei quali almeno una abbia un livello di competenza un po' più alto, in modo da mediare eventualmente tra l'italiano e la lingua nativa bissa. Queste relazioni di reciproco sostegno sono state favorite nelle lezioni, perché hanno consentito a tutte le apprendenti di partecipare attivamente e socializzare (Bertolotto 2014: 127). Infine, un aspetto sul quale è stato possibile riflettere è la presenza maschile alle lezioni, che tuttavia è stata limitata al minimo: solamente uno dei tre tirocinanti e la figura esterna del ricercatore, già ben noto in quanto introdotto dalla mediatrice e presentato alla maggior parte delle frequentanti e dei familiari in precedenti occasioni (Favaro 2001: 35; Rossetti 2016: 120). La caratteristica di femminilità dei corsi è stata dunque rispettata pure sul piano della docenza, delle operatrici scolastiche, della mediazione e delle operatrici nelle riprese del video.

4. I corsi e il laboratorio video

Nel 2011, 2012 e 2015, tre corsi di alfabetizzazione per le donne burkinabé di Spilimbergo hanno visto la partecipazione di dodici studentesse l'anno, motivate e individuate con l'intervento di una mediatrice culturale. Il gruppo non ha subito sostanziali modifiche nel passaggio da una edizione alla successiva, grazie soprattutto al crearsi o rafforzarsi di legami di amicizia e sostegno reciproco tra le frequentanti. Sul piano didattico la centralità delle apprendenti, in particolare durante la realizzazione del video, è stata un aspetto importante e non ci sono state reazioni legate alla conoscenza di modelli di insegnamento diversi (Bertolotto 2014: 116-117). Da una parte, le allieve non avevano mai frequentato alcun percorso di istruzione in precedenza e, provenendo da un'area rurale del Burkina Faso,

non avevano nemmeno una immagine definita della scuola o del ruolo degli insegnanti; dall'altra i docenti sono stati in grado di introdurre e mediare efficacemente la modalità di lavoro seguita in aula.

Conformemente ai bisogni rilevati dalla ricerca (Cognigni 2014: 472-473) e in base a suggerimenti diretti della mediatrice, i domini comunicativi più esplorati sono stati quello personale, pubblico ed educativo. Una necessità espressa con grande chiarezza è stata infatti quella di sostenere i figli, partecipare maggiormente alla loro vita scolastica e consolidare il proprio ruolo genitoriale nel nucleo familiare[12]. Emergono dunque preoccupazioni connotate dal punto di vista identitario e legate da vicino alla conoscenza delle forme scritte della lingua, indispensabili nella vita quotidiana delle seconde generazioni e quindi, indirettamente, sempre più centrali anche per le mamme. Pure nei compiti comunicativi, attorno ai quali si è spesso strutturata l'attività didattica, le esperienze più apprezzate sono state quelle con contenuti spendibili direttamente nella vita familiare e domestica, legate a significati noti, ma anche quelle correlate alla sanità e alla scuola[13].

I tempi della lezione si adattano dunque al contesto di insegnamento: gli approcci affettivi, oltre al *Total Physical Response*, si affiancano alle attività di alfabetizzazione e consentono di venire incontro al meglio alle esigenze e aspettative delle apprendenti (Favaro 2001: 21-22; Solcia 2011; Rossetti 2016: 121-122). Una dimensione molto importante è inoltre quella plurilingue, che valuta come risorse altamente utili e fonti di competenze trasferibili i codici già presenti nei ricchi repertori delle parlanti (Cognigni 2019: 130). Da una parte quindi si è tentato di capitalizzare efficacemente la conoscenza della lingua francese, eredità del passato coloniale del Burkina Faso, nota alla mediatrice e ad alcune delle tirocinanti. Dall'altra la madrelingua bissa delle parlanti, codice locale a diffusione limitata, si è dimostrata utile sia in attività di sostegno reciproco e nella cooperazione tra pari, sia per l'importanza affettiva e identitaria di cui si carica (Hoxha & Lannutti 2018: 599).

Nel 2012, grazie al sostegno volontario dell'Istituto ENAIP di Udine, un centro di formazione professionale regionale, è stato possibile ottenere l'appoggio di tre allieve del corso *Tecniche di Produzione Audiovisiva* e proporre così alle signore burkinabé di documentare l'esperienza. Le attività d'aula sono state affiancate da un laboratorio che è culminato nel giorno delle riprese, di fronte ad attrezzature audio, video e illuminazione professionali. L'emozione e la motivazione sono state naturalmente grandi e l'attività ha avuto una ricaduta positiva indiretta sulle attività linguistiche (Solcia 2011: 171-173). Inoltre il progetto ha previsto un approccio autobiografico, dato che le allieve sono state invitate a contribuire condividendo le esperienze migratorie e, in parte, raccontandole davanti alla telecamera. In questo senso l'intervento si affianca da un lato alla modalità dell'imparare facendo insieme, dotata di un obiettivo ben situato e autentico (*Ibidem*), dall'altro spinge a un coinvolgimen-

[12] La ricerca condotta da Hoxha e Lannutti (2018: 596-597) nella provincia di Chieti tra il 2007 e il 2008 rivela che il bisogno di sostenere i figli è centrale per il 74% delle 200 corsiste raggiunte attraverso questionario, mentre il 70% desidera aiutare nello studio e il 68% si sente in difficoltà nella comunicazione con gli insegnanti.

[13] I dati sul gradimento nei corsi, rilevati con 100 questionari somministrati in tutta Italia da Cognigni (2014: 477), mostrano che le attività *task based* più apprezzate risultano quelle sulla famiglia (100%) e sulla casa (93%), mentre i compiti definiti più interessanti sono legati alla sanità (86%) e alla scuola (75%).

to individuale e assai personale, dato che il prodotto finito è un testo dotato a tratti di una sensibile componente autobiografica (Cognigni 2014: 474-475; Hoxha & Lannutti 2018: 600). Il cortometraggio *I sogni non finiscono mai* è stato successivamente proiettato, con un forte coinvolgimento da parte delle protagoniste, di fronte ai membri delle comunità burkinabé e spilimberghese ed è tuttora disponibile online all'indirizzo: https://vimeo.com/52948968.

5. Riflessioni conclusive

La valenza extralinguistica di questo tipo di formazione, che emerge ampiamente e con chiarezza dal video e dalle parole delle signore burkinabé, non può quindi rimanere sullo sfondo. Partecipare alle lezioni di lingua, avvicinarsi o approfondire l'abilità di scrittura e le competenze orali, si collocano quasi in secondo piano rispetto al bisogno di incontro, condivisione e contatto sociale manifestati dalle apprendenti. Tornare ai banchi di scuola significa uscire per qualche ora dalle mura domestiche, emanciparsi dagli impegni familiari, stabilire o rinsaldare relazioni amicali che non sempre il ruolo e l'identità di donna migrante sembrano facilitare (Solcia 2011: 139). Alla luce anche di queste ragioni è opportuno ritagliare nelle lezioni adeguati momenti di saluto e accoglienza, spazi di socializzazione tra le corsiste, con la mediatrice e le insegnanti, così da facilitare lo scambio di qualche parola, l'emergere di una esperienza o la condivisione di un ricordo (Favaro 2001: 28-29; Rossetti 2016: 128).

L'impatto dei corsi di lingua e alfabetizzazione al femminile può essere stimato però anche nell'ottica della loro utilità nella lotta all'analfabetismo in età adulta, condizione sfavorevole che comporta una disparità nell'accesso ai servizi offerti dal Paese di accoglienza e si riverbera direttamente sull'intero territorio e sulla comunità autoctona di cui i migranti fanno parte. L'incapacità di leggere e scrivere, infatti, in tutte le sue forme, implica una valutazione sociale e pone fortissimi limiti a livello occupazionale, sanitario, educativo e individuale, in particolare nel caso della marginalizzazione della donna (Minuz 2005: 15-23; Bertolotto 2014: 112-114). La cittadina analfabeta, nella società dell'informazione e della comunicazione, vede dunque messo in discussione il diritto stesso alla cittadinanza, dato che vengono a mancare alcuni strumenti necessari ad acquisire autonomia o anche solo a orientarsi in maniera indipendente (Solcia 2011: 178; Cognigni 2014: 478).

Le donne migranti costituiscono una utenza vulnerabile pure a livello identitario, dal momento che il trasferimento al Paese di arrivo comporta una ridefinizione di sé e del ruolo familiare, nei confronti del marito e dei figli (Cognigni 2014: 478). Le burkinabé, giunte in Italia, si trovano in bilico tra due mondi (Solcia 2011: 136), in una situazione ulteriormente aggravata dalla difficoltà nel fare propri gli strumenti della comunicazione di tutti i giorni e dal non essere in grado di comprendere testi scritti. La rilevanza dei corsi di alfabetizzazione è per questa tipologia di apprendenti dunque notevole e si estende ben oltre il piano strumentale, a livello del quale interventi di durata così limitata e circoscritta rischierebbero comunque di avere efficacia limitata. Si tratta di portare in aula un codice legato anche all'affettività, all'espressione di sé e dell'esperienza migratoria, senza escludere le risorse già presenti nel repertorio delle parlanti.

Un obiettivo può allora certamente essere la promozione di forme di integrazione che sviluppino una nuova identità, nella quale "i migranti riconfigurano il loro repertorio linguistico integrandovi pienamente 1a lingua della società di accoglienza che diventa lingua

co-identitaria rispetto a quella di origine" (Favaro 2015: 52). In questo modo è possibile sostenere sia i diritti della persona alla piena partecipazione alla società sia riconoscere lo statuto e preservare le lingue e le culture di origine, in un'ottica di mantenimento del plurilinguismo e nell'auspicio di una trasmissione alle nuove generazioni. I corsi al femminile, e le esperienze laboratoriali di narrazione di sé e condivisione tra pari, si caricano in conclusione di uno spettro ampio di valenze, che trascendono il piano strettamente linguistico: rispondono a necessità pressanti delle parlanti, chiaramente espresse, contribuiscono alla parità di genere e a diritti fondamentali della persona, sostengono l'emancipazione femminile e la piena partecipazione al tessuto sociale di accoglienza, hanno un impatto rilevante sul piano emotivo e identitario, consentono infine l'espressione di risorse che rimarrebbero altrimenti inutilizzate, segnano dunque dei percorsi di cittadinanza che meriterebbero di essere attivati in maniera non occasionale e sporadica perché favoriscono scambi e incontri culturali da cui l'intera comunità trarrebbe beneficio (Hoxha & Lannutti 2018).

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La luce e l'inchiostro: letteratura e fotografia a confronto

Biancamaria Rizzardi e Giovanni Bassi (a cura di). 2020. La luce e l'inchiostro. Scritture e fotografie in dialogo. Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 172 pp., € 18,00, ISBN 978-88-4675-749-4

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Il dialogo critico tra scrittura e fotografia è da sempre un'intersezione critica stimolante che ha catturato l'interesse di numerosi studiosi, in Italia come all'estero. Negli ultimi anni, una serie di lavori ha messo in luce la contaminazione tra scrittura e fotografia, fornendo ai lettori preziosi strumenti di approfondimento sullo sconfinamento tra questi due codici linguistici ed estetici[1]. Come tutti questi volumi evidenziano, la fotografia è sia uno strumento capace di registrare il reale che un canale di interpretazione metaforica della realtà, e questo suo ambivalente potere rappresentativo ha da sempre suscitato un certo fascino nei confron-

[1] In Italia, si ricordano *Letteratura e fotografia* (2005-2007) di A. Dolfi; *Guardare oltre. Letteratura, fotografia e altri territori* (2008) a cura di S. Albertazzi e F. Amigoni; *L'occhio della Medusa. Fotografia e letteratura* (2013) di R. Ceserani; e *Letteratura e fotografia* (2017) di S. Albertazzi. In ambito internazionale, si segnala *Photography and Literature* (2009) di François Brunet, che analizza soprattutto la relazione tra fotografia e poesia (E. Barrett Browning, E. Dickinson); e *Photography and Literature in the Twentieth Century* (2009) a cura di D. Cunningham e A. Fisher, incentrato sulla sovrapposizione tra testo narrativo e fotografia in autori come V. Woolf, M. Proust e W. G. Sebald.

ti di poeti e scrittori, influenzandone le soluzioni formali ed stilistiche. Il percorso critico qui sommariamente citato si arricchisce di una nuova riflessione che, concentrando la sua attenzione sull'ambito dell'anglistica, consolida il dialogo creativo tra fotografia e scrittura.

Per illustrare in poche righe la densa argomentazione dei nove saggi contenuti nel volume *La luce e l'inchiostro. Scritture e fotografie in dialogo*, curato da Biancamaria Rizzardi e Giovanni Bassi, si potrebbe partire con l'interrogativo che Corrado Benigni ha posto in un recente articolo apparso sul portale della rivista online *Le parole e le cose* (Benigni *et al.* 2020): "cosa vediamo quando guardiamo"? In un dialogo con Tommaso Di Dio, in cui si discute il rapporto tra poesia e fotografia in generale e, nello specifico, in relazione alle recenti raccolte di entrambi i poeti, Benigni e Di Dio riflettono sulla natura "ambigua" della fotografia. Se da un lato, l'atto fotografico "non può mentire", in virtù della sua valenza mimetica, dall'altro, la fotografia, come i due poeti sostengono, "propone" solo una verità, assegnando all'osservatore il compito di andare oltre quello che un'immagine è in grado di suggerire.

Attorno a questa ambivalenza pragmatica della fotografia, oscillante tra rappresentazione fedele e trasgressione simbolica, ruota l'argomentazione dei saggi raccolti in *La luce e l'inchiostro*. Come i curatori stessi sottolineano nell'introduzione, il dialogo tra scrittura e fotografia si avvale dell'interazione tra artista/fotografo e lettore/osservatore ed "ed è solo dal contatto e dalla collaborazione tra fotografo e spettatore, tra artista e osservatore che può emerge il significato in eccesso, tanto profondo quanto inatteso" (15-16). È per questo motivo che il volume si confronta non solo con la dimensione più strettamente linguistica della fotografia, ma approccia anche la relazione tra scrittura e scatto sul piano culturale ed estetico. Non a caso già nella premessa si evince quel carattere "eccedente" della fotografia lungo il quale è orientata la discussione nel volume. In una sorta di premessa, appare una fotografia dell'artista bolognese Giovanni Bortolani. L'immagine, che appartiene alla collezione *Fake to Fake*, ritrae una giovane donna sorridente, nuda, con le braccia a copertura del seno, mentre la parte addominale assume le fattezze di un manichino, con uno squarcio sul fianco destro, come provocato da un coltello, che lascia intravedere i tessuti interni. La fotografia, come Bassi e Rizzardi puntualizzano commentando l'arte fotografica di Bortolani, trascende il reale, rivelando una eccedenza che inevitabilmente rimanda alla nozione barthesiana di *punctum*, quel dettaglio in cui si condensano i tratti emotivi in grado di "pungere" l'osservatore, destando scalpore e meraviglia.

A Roland Barthes, e alla sua indagine sulla fotografia condotta in *Camera lucida* (1980), e allo studio di Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (1977), in cui vengono esplorate le dinamiche sociali e piscologiche dello scatto fotografico, si rifanno molti dei saggi raccolti nel volume. Inoltre, vengono passati in rassegna le riflessioni critiche di Walter Benjamin, *L'opera d'arte nell'epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica* (1935), e di John Berger, *Understanding a Photograph* (2013). Se il primo ha inaugurato la discussione sulla perdita dell'*aura* dell'oggetto artistico nell'età della riproducibilità costante e continua dell'opera d'arte, come nel caso della fotografia, Berger, invece, ci ricorda che la fotografia va oltre quanto riprodotto, rendendosi portatrice di un certo "shock of discontinuity" (2013: 56) che separa il momento dello scatto dalla sua visione.

Obiettivo dichiarato dei saggi raccolti in *La luce e l'inchiostro* è indagare il nesso instau-

ratosi nel tempo tra scrittura e fotografia. Grazie ai vari casi di studio affrontati, il volume propone un viaggio nella storia della letteratura di lingua inglese, concentrandosi sulla fascinazione letteraria nei confronti dello strumento fotografico e sulla modalità di interazione tra scrittura creativa e arte fotografica. Dal clima di entusiasmo e mistero per l'irruzione della tecnologia moderna della foto all'esaltazione delle molteplici possibilità tramite cui contaminare la rappresentazione letteraria con nuovi strumenti retorici e metaforici, il volume attraversa un segmento significativo dello spazio letterario di lingua inglese, mostrando come la fotografia abbia acquisito nel tempo un ruolo sempre più rilevante all'interno dell'economia narrativa.

Il contributo di Oriana Palusci, "'Ferrying Fairies': fotografare il regno segreto", ad esempio, offre un'ampia panoramica del carattere surreale delle prime fotografie in ambito inglese. Passando in rassegna il clima culturale dell'età tarda vittoriana, Palusci analizza le sovrapposizioni tra i testi di autori come Lewis Carroll e Conad Doyle e i primi dagherrotipi popolati da creature misteriose, fate e spiriti, in grado di veicolare quel fascino per l'occulto che avrebbe lentamente scardinato le fondamenta dell'impianto realistico nel panorama culturale del *fin de siècle*. Sempre a questo periodo storico guarda il saggio di Giovanni Bassi, "Flashing Faces: Arthur Symons's Photographic Portraits". Bassi pone l'attenzione sulla convergenza tra tecnica fotografica, intesa come strumento in grado di irradiare l'immagine quasi spettrale della donna amata, e le sequenze descrittive, dai tratti evanescenti e carnali al tempo stesso, che animano la produzione poetica di Arthur Symons, soprattutto nella raccolta *Silhouettes* (1896). Pur restando nel medesimo contesto storico, tra fine Ottocento e primo Novecento, Francesco Marroni considera la fotografia nella sua capacità di registrare la realtà in maniera dettagliata. In "George Bernard Shaw e l'arte fotografica come paradosso", Marroni analizza *An Unsocial Socialist* (1917), tracciando il legame tra l'opera dello scrittore irlandese, infusa di quella forza documentaria sulle questioni socio-economiche della realtà, propri della *Fabian Society* di cui Shaw fu membro, e la fotografia intesa come mezzo nuovo in grado di raffigurare in modo trasparente la realtà stessa.

Anche durante il modernismo la fotografia assurge a strumento estetico cruciale nell'ambito della produzione letteraria. Si pensi a quanto la tecnica del *close-up* abbia condizionato, tra gli altri, la scrittura di Virginia Woolf, in modo particolare in *The Waves*, o come la composizione di *Flush* sia nata proprio dalla sovrapposizione di immagini mentali (Humm 2017). In questo clima di sperimentazione si inserisce l'esperienza di luci, colori e prospettive che accomunano la poesia di John Reed e la fotografia di Alfred Stieglitz. In "La poetica della città nelle fotografie di Alfred Stieglitz e nelle liriche di John Reed", Marzia Dati ritrae il panorama metropolitano della New York del primo decennio del ventesimo secolo con la sua articolazione tentacolare e i suoi grattacieli. Le liriche di Reed e gli scatti di Stieglitz sono rappresentazioni metaforiche di quell'*esprit* caotico e rivoluzionario che trova nello spazio urbano uno degli ambiti privilegiati dell'estetica modernista.

Un aspetto interessante che emerge da alcuni saggi, è il potere della fotografia di esplorare l'universo femminile. In "Rifrazioni tanatografiche dell'Io tra pratica poetica e fotografia: Sylvia Plath e Francesca Woodman", Carmen Bonasera rileva un particolare orientamento intimistico nella poesia di Sylvia Plath e nelle fotografie di Francesca Woodman.

Fondando l'argomentazione su basi teoriche psicoanalitiche e su approcci teorici sulla fotografia, Bonasera evidenzia la natura autotanatografica che accomuna lo stile di Plath e Woodman. Le liriche e le foto prese in esame manifestano i tratti tipici della *Nachträglichkeit* di stampo freudiano, conferendo ai versi e agli scatti il potere di dilatare la rappresentazione del soggetto oltre l'asse temporale del presente. Inoltre, ricorrendo all'immagine dello specchio, emblema lacaniano dello sdoppiamento dell'io, le due artiste mettono in scena la complessa rappresentazione dell'unitarietà del soggetto, soprattutto di quello femminile. Lo sguardo sul mondo femminile è ulteriormente indagato da Carmen Concilio in "*On Mothers*: Letteratura, fotografia e arte digitale", dove la figura materna viene esaltata tramite la sovrapposizione tra immagini e scrittura in William Kentridge, Ruth Rosengarten e Madaleine Thien. Prendendo spunto, quindi, da artisti e autori contemporanei, Concilio dimostra come il nesso tra scrittura e fotografia sia in grado di veicolare quel sentimento di *amor matris* di chiara derivazione barthesiana. Concilio tuttavia estende la sua argomentazione, abbracciando il contributo che le nuove tecnologie, come il *video-essay*, sono in grado di rappresentare. Il dialogo tra narrazione ed elemento visivo stabilisce un legame profondo in cui parole e immagini riescono a costruire qualcosa che va oltre la realtà, esprimendo il malinconico ricordo della madre perduta.

Rivolto al contemporaneo è anche il saggio di Silvia Albertazzi. In "Una storia di sguardi. L'album di famiglia", Albertazzi ripercorre il ruolo che l'album di famiglia, testimonianza visiva spesso dolorosa di ricordi e segreti, riveste nella narrativa contemporanea di lingua inglese. Discutendo alcuni estratti da Penelope Lively, Jonathan Coe, Geoff Dyer, Paul Auster, Julian Barnes e Philip Roth, Albertazzi propone una chiave di lettura dell'album di famiglia come archivio distintivo, capace di tornare indietro nei ricordi ma anche di proiettare in avanti il flusso del tempo. Dedicato alla contemporaneità è anche il saggio, "«Catching Them in Snapshot»: The Form and Function of Photography in the Epilogue of *Lives of Girls and Women* by Alice Munro" di Héliane Ventura. Con un focus sul racconto "Epilogue", Ventura espone la particolare tecnica della scrittrice canadese attraverso il procedimento di *myse en abyme* così come introdotto da André Gide. La scrittura di Munro si avvale dunque di un meccanismo metanarrativo, simile all'impianto delle scatole cinesi, in cui la giustapposizione dei livelli di rappresentazione visiva e verbale coincide anche con un processo di riscoperta ontologica del soggetto.

Nell'ultimo saggio, Biancamaria Rizzardi prosegue l'indagine in ambito letterario canadese, esaminando il tema del "*selfie* poetico". In "Selfie poetici: il *punctum* barthesiano nella poesia di Margaret Atwood e di Patricia Young", Rizzardi mette in luce la centralità dell'autoritratto nelle liriche delle due poetesse canadesi in cui il rapporto tra immagine e parola è esplorato in dialogo con la prospettiva del *punctum* barthesiano. In tal senso, il rapporto osmotico tra narrazione e fotografia si carica di una suggestiva valenza epifanica che lascia affiorare dettagli, segni vaghi e allusivi, dotati di un forte potere evocativo. Le tracce visive che attraversano i versi di Atwood e Young sono pertanto materializzazioni concrete di quel misto di casualità e contingenza che accomuna tutte le manifestazioni artistiche.

La versatilità e la molteplicità degli argomenti discussi, aldilà dei tratti comuni che sono stati sottolineati in questa recensione, contribuiscono a illuminare il complesso e arti-

colato dialogo tra scrittura e fotografia. Come l'inchiostro degli autori analizzati nel volume riesce a condensare una determinata condizione contingente, offrendo ai lettori molteplici possibilità interpretative, così la fotografia, la cui etimologia significa "scrittura con la luce", (dal greco *phôs*, "luce" e *graphè*, "scrittura, disegno"), diventa traccia visibile e luminosa della realtà, per la sua aderenza referenziale, ma anche strumento in grado di illuminare quello che esiste aldilà del contingente. A questo connubio tra realtà e finzione, i saggi di *La luce e l'inchiostro* danno risalto, ricordandoci che il lettore/osservatore resta sempre il destinatario a cui entrambe le forme artistiche tendono e da cui esse sono inevitabilmente decodificate.

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Spots of Time: Lectures on the English Literary Tradition

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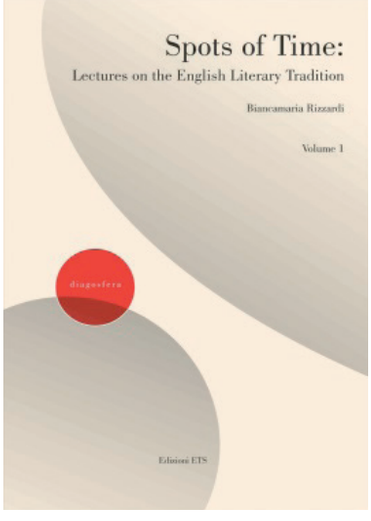

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In the past two decades several methods and theories have asserted themselves in the field of literary studies. Cognitive science has offered fascinating perspectives on the psychophysical constituents of literature as well as new tools and criteria for carrying out subtle textual analyses. Due to their minute attention to socio-political context, neo-historicism and cross-disciplinary cultural studies have, at their best, made it possible both to rewrite literary histories as more inclusive (and therefore authentic) narratives, and to explore hitherto neglected elements of individual literary works. Either historically or cognitively oriented, formalism has seen a kind of resurgence, at least in certain areas of English studies. For all this plurality of recent approaches, however, the vexed question of what literature is – the fundamental mystery of verbal art – still remains essential and open. It is the urgency of this unsolved dilemma that animates the theoretical assumptions of Biancamaria Rizzardi's

book, a collection of compelling essays on pivotal authors and texts of English literature from the early modern period to Modernism.

The theoretical perspective of the volume is discussed in the introductory essay, "Foreword to an 'approximate' reading of the literary text". Its epigraph from Virginia Woolf's magisterial observations on words and their enigmatic "echoes … memories … associations" (9) is well chosen in that it hints not just at Rizzardi's attention to form and style, but also at her effort, as a critic, to capture and transmit the magic of experiencing literature. Such interest in the rewarding, formative, life-changing experience of reading literary works is emblematised by the titular phrase "spots of time", which, as Rizzardi points out at the very beginning of this chapter, is borrowed from William Wordsworth's poem *The Prelude*. Just as in Wordsworth's text these "spots" refer to "key moments" in the history of the speaker's imagination – crucial episodes from which one can draw "renovating virtue" (9) – in Rizzardi's use Wordsworth's phrase indicates her equally epiphanic encounters with literary works, particularly with those explored in the volume.

In order to explain her conception of literature as an infinite source of aesthetic and intellectual elevation, Rizzardi originally draws on the notorious paradox attributed to the ancient Greek philosopher Zeno and especially on Aristotle's discussion of this aporia. Rizzardi acutely concludes that, like Zeno's idea of motion, literature is at the same time theoretically elusive and practically evident – it resists abstract definitions, but has always been a tangible part of human civilization. In this sense, she adroitly likens the literary text to Aristotle's notion of "intensive infinite", a concept which he formulated partly in reply to Zeno (10). In Rizzardi's view, such idea of the infinite as something which, albeit "infinitely divisible", is perceived as a whole ("the sum of the infinite partitions that compose it") is perfectly exemplified by works of literature in that they may be divided into an almost countless number of components which are nonetheless always harmonised, or at least organised, into some degree of unity (10). (Indeed, it is worth remembering that unity is a key principle in Western aesthetics from Aristotle to the Romantics and beyond). Building on these considerations, Rizzardi works out a convincing (and reasonable) theory of approximation (11): although the literary text is made of potentially infinite elements, it is possible to read and thus describe it because, thanks to our experience of its constitutive unity, we can get progressively closer to grasping its infinitude, therefore approaching it "indefinitely, as a limit or an asymptote" (10), interpretation after interpretation. What I find particularly interesting in this perspective is that, as Rizzardi remarks, "the approximate nature of reading" satisfactorily accounts for "the plurality and coexistence of critical interpretations" as well as for their "progressiveness and perfectibility" (11). As she envisages this approach as a "wise middle way" between radical Historicism on one side, and either Deconstruction or post-structuralist hermeneutics in the style of Stanley Fish on the other, it is no wonder that she refers to the German critical school of reader-response theory, and in particular to Wolfgang Iser, whose conception of literary texts and criticism displays significant similarities with hers. Within this critical trajectory, Rizzardi rightly resorts to Hans-Georg Gadamer's definition of classics as texts "speaking to all ages" (11) in order to characterise the choice of works analysed in the book.

Indeed, the first chapter or "Lecture" (Rizzardi uses the word) focuses on two poems which definitely attained the status of classics, William Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and Christopher Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* (1598). Rizzardi's critical approach in this essay is shared by many other chapters of the volume, and combines the attentive reading of selected passages from the two texts with a scholarly scrutiny of their sources and parallels both in past and in contemporary literary cultures. By pointing out Shakespeare's reworking of Ovid's poetry and its early modern imitations, Rizzardi deftly shows how in *Venus and Adonis* the female protagonist is not merely portrayed as the goddess of love, but also as "an Elizabethan courtesan" (20) and a sensual avatar of the procreative energy of nature. Along with Adonis's praise of something analogous to Shakespeare's famous idea of the "marriage of true minds", these fairly unusual characterisations of Venus indicate how Shakespeare's poem bears the traces of some of the most innovative systems of thought of his age. Greek, Latin, and sixteenth-century European love poems were also the model for Marlowe's text, where the focus on passions and the senses equally typifies "a new, restless era" (30). In this sense, Rizzardi interestingly notes that, as with other early modern rewritings of the myth, Marlowe's poem gives special prominence to the moment of seduction.

Shakespeare's four late plays traditionally known as "the Romances" are the subject of the second essay of the volume. Following a well-established critical tradition, this later phase of Shakespeare's oeuvre is here interpreted as a return to harmony after the increasingly pessimistic tones of the previous tragedies. After discussing the various causes of this turning point in Shakespeare's canon, Rizzardi carefully itemises the major motifs of the late plays, from the thematic centrality of travel and magic to the pervasive sense of wonder, from the recurring initiatory structure to the presence of masque-like passages based on music and dance. The essay shows how all these traits collude to create a decidedly symbolic (if not allegoric) type of drama, where "the regeneration of the old through the love of the young" (46) emblematises the victory of life and innocence over crime and corruption.

The following chapter revolves around the analysis of John Donne's well-known poem "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning". The essay opens with a sharp and welcome discussion of the concept of metaphysical poetry, and chronicles some of the meanings attributed to this notion throughout the history of English literature, from John Dryden to T. S. Eliot. After rightly remarking the influence of contemporary theatre on Donne's poetry, Rizzardi offers a few textual examples of the dramatic quality of his verse in her close reading of "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" and intriguingly interprets the first four lines of the poem as a theatrical scene. Somewhat ironically, it is one of Donne's detractors, Samuel Johnson, who is the focus of Rizzardi's fourth lecture. This chapter, which seeks to portray Johnson not as a man but as "a mind or rather a conscience" (69), furnishes the reader with a gripping overview of his poetics and major works such as *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia* (1759) and *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755). By virtue of its concision and incisiveness, this lively essay would work perfectly as a first introduction to the writer.

Rizzardi, who arranged her chapters in a loose chronological order, dedicates the next two essays to two of the major Romantic poets, William Wordsworth and John Keats. After adding to the long-ingrained critical assumption that Wordsworth reworked the

poetic subgenre of the ballad as a tool to express his "romantic subjectivism" (82), the fifth "lecture" analyses the poem "Tintern Abbey" by looking at its thematic structure, choice of imagery, and linguistic features more in general, even as seen against Wordsworth's contemporary verse. The text, which epitomises Wordsworth's revolutionary conception of landscape, is suggestively read as a balance between Shakespearean realism and Milton-inflected abstraction. The following chapter is even more closely focused on the reading of a single Romantic poem, Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn", here analysed at three different levels. If the first, more literal, step of the analysis stands out for its subtle attention to the estranging "point of view" from which the scene of the poem is presented (103), the central point of the second interpretive level, which suggests that "the urn contains within it the perfect representation of life in time, but lives outside of it" (105), is intriguingly consonant with Frank Kermode's notion of the "Romantic Image". While the third level of reading aptly regards Keats's negative capability as possibly "the first modern formulation of artistic impersonality" (109), the closing quotation from Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) is both illuminating and utterly refined.

The seventh chapter of the volume tackles the question of Victorian women's poetry. Although much work has been done in this field during the past three decades, the essay manages to offer some original insights, such as when it remarks the indebtedness of many contemporary Canadian female poets to their Victorian predecessors. Rizzardi's main argument is that Victorian women poets gained a privileged perspective on many of the constitutive ambiguities of Victorian verse. In particular, she contends that the process of feminisation which is typical of much Victorian poetry was turned upside down by contemporary women poets. Indeed, in place of the common dialectic between a male author and a female (or feminised) poetic I, many of the Victorian women's poems display a radical and innovative fusion of the two textual functions. Rizzardi – who here as in several other places in the volume uses classical sources with remarkable ease – rightly connects this poetic condition with the influence of Latin elegy and the Victorian adoration for Sappho.

Victorian poetry and classical reception are investigated also in chapter eight and nine, which focus respectively on the laureate Alfred Tennyson and the rebellious Algernon Charles Swinburne. After providing a description of the elegiac rhythms of Tennyson's "Ulysses", Rizzardi insightfully explores the numerous antecedents of the poem. Tennyson's reworking of Shakespeare's language is aptly compared with Wordsworth's, and Rizzardi's discussion of Dante's model is well-informed and deftly done. The most impressive part of the essay is probably the closing, where Rizzardi acutely draws on Pascal's philosophical considerations on the idea of limit, a concept which, as mentioned above, is also a key point of the book's theoretical framework. The following chapter seeks to unravel the skein of allusions to Sappho in Swinburne's much-debated poem "Anactoria". By directly juxtaposing this text with Sappho's original Greek fragments, Rizzardi points out how Swinburne echoed Sappho's verse in order to sing Sappho's tragic passion through the voice of the poet herself. Her reference to the model of Alexander Pope and especially to the possible (and still neglected) model of Giacomo Leopardi's "L'ultimo canto di Saffo" is exemplary. Whether Leopardi's poem is indeed a source for Swinburne's or simply a

European antecedent, it is undeniable that the two texts are exceptionally similar in that they do not merely share the same speaker, but are also both engaged in almost nihilistic speculations on "the cruelty of things" (168).

The last two essays of the book deal with two of the founding fathers of Modernism. In "Lecture 10" Rizzardi rightly insists on how music is the unifying principle of Ezra Pound's *The Pisan Cantos* (1948). She succeeds in deciphering some passages of these very demanding poems, by looking chiefly at their sound effects, status of the personae, and vorticose handling of fragmented images. The final chapter accurately describes how T. S. Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday* (1930) dramatises two parallel struggles: that of sin against salvation, but also that between "a lower and a higher … mode of expression" (189), the earthly (if potentially poetic) word of mankind and the divine Word. Eliot's ascetic-like aesthetic ideal is convincingly characterised as "silence beyond speech, purity beyond time" (191), and the stylistic features of the first section of the poem – such as iterations, anaphora, oxymoronic phrases, and the predominance of abstract nouns – are analysed skilfully and thoroughly.

In conclusion, it should be added that one of the points of strength of Rizzardi's book lies in her masterful attention to visual arts and in her tendency to compare literature to coeval works of art. For instance, she draws a parallel between Shakespeare's verse and Titian's mythological painting, and insists on Wordsworth's pictorial attention to landscape (87). She mentions Pre-Raphaelite paintings in her essay on Victorian women poets, and furnishes the reader with an illuminating reference to Turner's painting *Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus* in her analysis of Tennyson's "Ulysses". Finally, she refers to Charles Allston Collins's painting *Convent Thoughts* in the essay on Swinburne, and points out Pound's artistic connoisseurship. Rizzardi's interest in visuality is attested by the images in the volume. The photograph of a weaver at the beginning of the book is almost emblematic of Rizzardi's conception of literature, and the reproductions of manuscripts or title pages which open every chapter help to convey the historical momentousness of the texts analysed.

The book, which has a thorough index as an added bonus, is strongly recommended both to university students, for whom it may constitute a first introduction to fundamental authors and literary periods, and to scholars of literature, who may find in Rizzardi's sensitive readings new perspectives on canonical works.

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