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ARTICOLI

Elena Bozino

HAMILTON BASSO'S COURTHOUSE SQUARE

From the early 1920s to his death, Hamilton Basso (1904-1964) wrote eleven novels, four nonfiction books, ten short stories, two poems and hundreds of journalistic pieces, and yet he remains a relatively unknown writer, overshadowed by some of his contemporary writers and friends such as William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe and Sherwood Anderson to name but a few whom he met while working for the *Double Dealer*.¹ He was born in New Orleans and most of his life was spent there and in New York City. His literary subject was the Southern myth; his attitude toward it was detached and cosmopolitan. Basso studied law at Tulane University but William Faulkner and the other writers at the *Double Dealer* influenced his decision to leave law school for journalism and literature, his lifelong profession and vocation respectively. At various times Basso worked for all three of the city's major papers. During the late 1920s he lived for a time in New York City, trying his hand at advertising, which he detested. Finally, he devoted himself entirely to his own writing, finishing an autobiographical novel, *Relics and Angels*, in 1929. After his marriage in 1930 to Etolia Moore Simmons, he went back to newspaper work to support them and completed a biography of the Confederate General, P.G.T. Beauregard, published in 1933 with the title *Beauregard: The Great Creole. Cinnamon Seed*, Basso's second novel followed in 1934 and 1935 saw the publication of *In Their Own Image*.

Hamilton Basso's fourth novel *Courthouse Square*, published

¹ The *Double Dealer* was a literary periodical founded in 1921 in New Orleans.

in 1936, was a great success and was widely advertised in the major literary magazines of the time. Reviewing *Courthouse Square* in the *New York Herald Tribune* for November 1, 1936, the novelist Lyle Saxon wrote, "This is Hamilton Basso's best novel to date; it places him among the significant writers of the South, and it is a fine fulfillment of the promise given in his earlier books. Mr. Basso has always written well, but in *Courthouse Square* he has reached full stride as a novelist, for in this volume he has something very definite to say."

Such high praise was echoed in other reviews, and *Courthouse Square* established Basso as a young Southern writer of some importance, one to be compared with Wolfe, Faulkner, and Caldwell. Saxon's judgment is incisive as well as laudatory because he sees the novel as a natural development of Basso's talents and achievements. In a sense, *Courthouse Square* combines the best elements of his three previous books, creating, perhaps, his most fully representative novel.²

In the article for *The Times-Picayune* called "Mr. Basso's South Again", the reviewer, who signs himself A. G., agrees with this acknowledgment of the development of Basso's literary skills:

"Hamilton Basso, New Orleans writer, once wrote a novel, *Cinnamon Seed*, which stirred one's faith in the younger generation of Southern novelists, but which failed to mark him as a first-rate craftsman. Then he wrote *In Their Own Image*, which hinted that he had slipped a little, that he perhaps lacked the artistic integrity that the first work indicated. Now, with his new novel, *Courthouse Square* (Scribner), he has, as the sports writers would say, staged a comeback. This is not the great American novel, by any odds. But it is one that shows a subtle imagination and a depth of feeling that the earlier works lacked. For one thing, *Courthouse Square* is a better built story than the others because its narrative form, notwithstanding its use of the trick "throw-back" of time and place, is smoother and clearer. In another sense it is superior because Basso reveals a sensitiveness to character and scene in place of what in the other books seemed only a detached manipulation of ideas apparently not closely related to his experience. But most gratifying is his new manifestation that he has, after all, an intelligent understanding of the art of novel making. In the earlier works he gave evidence of being swayed by a sentimentality for background and an outmoded conception of how his particular kind of novel should be con-

² JOSEPH R. MILLICHAP, *Hamilton Basso*, Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1979, pp. 56-57.

HAMILTON BASSO'S COURTHOUSE SQUARE

structed. Now, something or other has reformed him and the present book shows that his claim for a place among the sturdier Southern penmen is justified.”³

That *Courthouse Square* was not considered an example of the great American novel was no surprise for Basso who in fact claimed in an article he wrote for *The New Republic* that:

“The great American novel will probably never be written, for the simple reason that the only authentic source-spring of great fiction is experience and the span of a lifetime is much too limited, and contemporary pressures too great, for any one man to experience the geographical immensity of forty-eight states and the manners and mores of a people who differ, not only sectionally, but even county by county.”⁴

Writing the “great American novel” had been an obsession for many writers and had been the subject of critical debate since the second half of the nineteenth century, following Emerson’s Transcendentalism and the awareness of a need for a national literature. The desire to write a new kind of novel dominated American literature in the 1920s: Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925) with its Jamesian “center of conscience” represented by the narrator Nick, Hemingway’s *In Our Time* (1923) but also *Fiesta* (1926), with the overlapping of stories and *vignettes* in the former and the dramatization of action in dialogue in the latter, Faulkner’s *The Sound and Fury* (1929) with its overlapping of narrative viewpoints and apparently less significant works such as Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg Ohio* (1919) where the uncertain form – novel or short stories? – is already a new and open form or Jean Toomer’s *Cane* (1923).⁵

In *Courthouse Square* Basso returned to the autobiographical character found most often at the center of his novels. David Barondess, the protagonist of this book, is not merely another sensitive young Southerner, he is a Southern writer who has published two novels critical of the South. Unlike the earlier autobiographical heroes, Tony Clezac and Dekker Blackheath,

³ A.G., “Mr. Basso’s South Again”, *The Times-Picayune New Orleans States*, November 22, 1936, p. 5.

⁴ HAMILTON BASSO, “New England Chat-Book”, *The New Republic*, June 17, 1940, p. 831.

⁵ ROSELLA MAMOLI ZORZI, “Introduction” to *William Carlos Williams: Il grande romanzo americano*, ed. Rosella Mamoli Zorzi, Venezia, Marsilio Editori, 1995, pp. 12-14.

who were both in New Orleans, David is a South Carolinian, but like Basso he was educated in New Orleans and worked there as a newspaper reporter before leaving for New York and literary success. The novel is composed of five parts, with a total of thirty-one chapters. Some of the chapters are divided into numbered sections with the exception of chapter fifteen where asterisks are used instead of numbers. It is set in the present (1936), and David is about the same age as his creator, thirty-one or thirty-two. There are a few flashbacks to his youth, but for the most part David's boyhood, and even young manhood, are not at issue here. Instead, the novel relies more on Basso's later life for its inspiration, particularly his social observations in South Carolina which were also used for *In Their Own Image*.⁶

Courthouse Square is in reality three stories woven into one sweeping picture of David Barondess, a successful novelist who returns to his old home town, Macedon, S.C., hoping to find the life perspective he lost in New York. He is a man 'always in arms against life,' in search of the realities which lie hidden beneath the superficialities of present-day civilization. David comes of a long line of men with uneasy blood in their veins. His grandfather, convinced that the slaves should be freed, deserts friends and family and leaves the South to fight with the Union Army. In the next generation David's father loses caste in the community because he insists on defending those weaker and less fortunate than himself. He is a judge in the town of Macedon, and because he hands down what he considers a fair decision in a case between a Negro and a white man he is ruined politically.

David returns to his home after ten years in New York. He has written several books which have brought him a certain material success as a writer, but he is estranged from a wife he loves and he is filled with deep disgust for cities. Reality, he feels, lies in the land he has left behind him – in *Courthouse Square* in this Southern town. He returns, believing that he will find peace and serenity, but instead he finds the same intolerance and hatred that he seeks to escape. Because of his success in writing he finds himself mistrusted and envied. He no longer fits into this scheme of small-town in the South: his vision

⁶ JOSEPH R. MILLICHAP, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

is too broad, his ideas too liberal. On his return he also finds his father defeated, old and half blind sitting on the veranda of a decaying Southern mansion – a man destroyed by his own idea of justice.

Basso succeeds admirably in giving a picture of the town. We meet briefly the friends of his father's family and his own friends, now approaching middle age. We look into the homes of those who live within sound of the courthouse clock: the gossips, the solid citizens, the liberals – few enough of these – and the Negro servants. In sharp, vivid sketches the author brings these characters to life; we learn to know the town, we can see and hear and even smell it.

The story begins to unwind before the reader is fully aware of it.

A Negro druggist⁷ wishes to buy a decaying old mansion in

⁷ The Negro protagonist in *Courthouse Square* is Alcide Fauget, a tiny old man who looks almost white. Fauget had achieved some fame in the town by performing an emergency tracheotomy on a young girl in the local café, and he is respected by both the black and white communities. It is revealed later that Fauget is the illegitimate son of Cincinnatus Legendre, a Confederate general and the last of the legendary Legendres, and an octoroon woman of New Orleans.

Alcide Fauget bears the burden of this illegitimate birth, and his color, "neither black nor white" ultimately leads to his tragedy because he is a "black" man trying to lead a "white" life. He was raised by his mother in comfortable circumstances and was able to "pass" well enough to be admitted to a white medical school. After his graduation, he refused to continue in this false identity and returned to Macedon, where he opened the pharmacy and did not practice medicine openly for fear of revealing his identity. His wife is now dead and Fauget, feeling that he too is approaching death, decides to benefit his people with the profits from the pharmacy. He plans to buy the old Legendre Mansion and turn it into a hospital for blacks, as they are refused treatment at Macedon's white hospital.

Fauget contacts John Barondess, his lawyer, to effect the sale. When news of Fauget's intentions are rumoured about the town, the white community reacts with alarm at the symbolism of transforming a great "white" house, though fallen in ruins, into a black hospital. White resentment turns not so much against Fauget as against John Barondess, who is accused of encouraging the black pharmacist. David Barondess supports the Fauget project and his father's connection with it. He hears of the intentions of a lynch mob after Fauget but manages to rescue him from the mob. As a result of the riot both Fauget's pharmacy and the Legendre Mansion are burnt to the ground.

Fauget is one of Basso's most memorable creations, a characterization even Faulkner could be proud of. A sense of guilt, inherited from the past and demanding powerful expiations that exceed our ability to give, is recur-

order to make a hospital for Negroes, and fearing that he will be cheated by real estate dealers he goes to David's father to ask him to arrange the sale. The father agrees to help the Negro and says that he believes that the idea is a good one. Kitchen gossip begins and the story gets to the local newspaper. The editor of the paper, an unsuccessful writer, dislikes David and prints a story which tends to stir race antagonism. David resents this and springs to his father's defense. He and his family become involved in a struggle which shakes the small community to its depths. Incident follows incident until the citizens of the town are tense, ready to be inflamed to violence.

Envy, malice and hatred are not wanting, and the "poor whites" are incited to riot. As usual, the Negroes suffer. The Negro quarter is stormed, the proposed hospital is set on fire. David attempts to save the Negro druggist from the mob. He succeeds in this, but the fury of the mob is turned upon him and he is brutally beaten. Bleeding and unconscious he is left lying in Courthouse Square.⁸

The novel ends with the return of David's estranged wife Letitia. They have been married for three years, are deeply in love with each other in spite of various disagreements and a crisis arising from David's infidelity with a beautiful movie starlet, Letitia's resulting loss of her unborn baby and David's outbursts of temper.⁹

Courthouse Square can be defined as a psychological narrative in that it is centered upon the protagonist, David Barondess and his search to define himself before he can achieve his maturity in his personal life or his literary career. All the events that take place in the narrative are the fruit of the age-old

rent in Faulkner. Joe Christmas in *Light in August* is led to believe that he might have an infinitely small trace of Negro blood which functions as a symbol of his guilt, and unreasonably it preys upon his mind until he must die in expiating it.

It must be remembered that Fauget is fifteen-sixteenths white so that even his Christlike identification with the downtrodden blacks is only a slight extension of the Barondesses' liberal position on racial issues. Like Joe Christmas, the white blood in Fauget's veins pushes him to seek his own place in the white world and this inevitably leads to his destruction.

⁸ LYLE SAXON, "Courthouse Square", *New York Herald Tribune Books*, November 1, 1936, p. 8.

⁹ FLORENCE MILNER, "A Literary Coterie in New York", *Boston Evening Transcript*, November 21, 1936, p. 4.

Southern mentality, with all its prejudices and preconceived ideas. Several elements in Southern novels may actually function as parts of the physical surroundings of the main characters and their actions. Minor characters sometimes serve as a part of the scene and may induce atmosphere or act simply as parts of the "background" against which the more important characters of the story live their lives. Usually when characters function in this way, they remain "flat" and may be little more than stereotype figures; more effectively used, such characters achieve the stature of living human beings and are realized as such. Yet they blend into the place and time of the action and serve as part of the surroundings of the story. Frequently human beings are presented in such a way that they lose individuality and are realized only as mobs, crowds, or armies. The mass may function as a background against which the action takes place, even though such action may also involve the mob and be involved with it. Or the crowd may actually function as a single character as in scenes of riot or other such action.¹⁰

There is a striking example of a crowd as a single character in *Courthouse Square* when the inhabitants of Macedon upsurge against Alcide Fauget's plan to buy the Legendre mansion and turn it into a hospital for black people, cruelly destroying houses and assaulting David.

It is not necessary to suggest that this book is autobiographical to say that its David Barondess is Hamilton Basso. Probably the details of the life of the writer and the details of the life of his character are wholly dissimilar. But as early as 1936 it was suggested that this Barondess, half-lost Southerner who returns in unhappiness to seek serenity in his South, is not only man for Basso but man for a great many young men who grew up in the South late enough to escape the full binding power of the legend which covered every dark thing, but late enough also to see through its loveliness things that were neither lovely nor just nor noble. An earlier generation was blind to such things. A later generation may see clearly to their removal: Basso and his Barondess are unhappy and uncertain between them.¹¹

¹⁰ LOUIS D. RUBIN, JR. and ROBERT D. JACOBS, *The Southern Renaissance*, The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1953, pp. 138-139.

¹¹ JONATHAN DANIELS, "Native's Return", *Saturday Review of Literature*, November 7, 1936, p. 11.

David is a more mature and effective character than the earlier variations of Basso's autobiographical protagonists. He is older, more talented and more successful; at the same time he remains gentle, sensitive, and rather confused. His confusion, again like the earlier protagonists, exists essentially in terms of his relationship with his past as part of a region, a town, and a family. David Barondess is forced to return home in an attempt to find himself in the Southern roots of his experience. He is sensitive to the natural and traditional beauty of the area, but he is forced by circumstances into an awareness of its evil, and the necessity for combating it.

He thought he could return to Macedon and fit into place among the Macedonians and be made to feel at peace and at home there and work out his literary career under the beaming approval of the Macedonians whom he had begun to leave behind before he left them behind for his 10 years' absence. Not that David Barondess is in any way soft and sentimental and sleazily romantic. Instead, he has that special kind of modern toughness of mind that strips away dishonesty. It is only that there is a gentleness about his stormy awareness, a certain human sympathy behind the realism, that the major character of no other young Southern writer has had.¹²

David's motivating force is a burning ambition to find a mode of expression for beauty so that he can expose those things which serve to make life ugly – such as injustice and intolerance. In the records of his grandfather and father he sees an example of what he aches to tell the world.

But he is caught up in the web of entanglements of Macedon which had erected a statue to its founder, old Cincinnatus, then turned against the principles of liberty and freedom on which it was founded. Petty jealousies, love affairs and a family feud of by-gone days once more engulf him just as if he had never left. Helplessly he is swept on in the manner of a Greek tragedy toward the inevitable conclusion. Once more his father is involved in a matter which is anathema to mob-minded classes in the South – he is accused of planning to help “the nigger druggist” buy the ancestral home of old Cincinnatus.

His desire to help the South and his passion for his native land contrast with his awareness of the ills and ignorance that

¹² STANLEY YOUNG, “Under the Mimosa and the Moonlight”, *The New York Times Book Review*, October 25, 1936, p. 6.

abound in the inhabitants of Macedon thus giving rise to his inner torment.

Such is the framework of *Courthouse Square* – but it takes Basso's pen to quicken it into a living picture. Through photographic character portrayal he makes the people of Macedon and others involved as human as your closest friend or enemy. Dialogue that crackles with spontaneity speeds the tale whose tempo never slows even when the author chooses to convey his thoughts by the stream-of-consciousness pattern. His are flesh and blood people – David, his family, "Tisha" his wife, Jock, his Gotham gadabout friend who wants to hunt for Beauty with a pack of bloodhounds – the Macedonites – so typical of the South – they all walk in bold outlines across "Courthouse Square." ¹³

The setting of the South, however, is the real protagonist of the novel. In *Courthouse Square* the setting in question is Macedon, South Carolina, a typical Southern county seat and market town. As usual, names are significant for Basso. Macedon sits among the Piedmont hills, and, like its ancient namesake, it is a half civilized place which has produced a hearty race of warriors. The place and the people were corrupted by the vice of slavery, however, and instead of expanding to the world Macedon turned in on itself after the Civil War. Its paramount characteristic is stasis; nothing changes, indeed nothing has changed since the Civil War. Nothing could change because the town, like the larger South which it represents, had to cling to its false vision of itself in order to justify the economic exploitation which was its real identity.

Macedon was founded in the eighteenth century by the Legendre family, who dominated the cotton-growing community through the period of the Civil War and the great house of the area on the first hill outside of the town was built by Old Cincinnatus; after the Civil War the family name disappears as the only daughter marries into the less noble Lamar family. Even the Lamars soon abandon the Legendre Mansion, and this old ruin becomes symbolic of the ruined older order. ¹⁴

David's absence from his native land allows him to see the South with new eyes and express a judgment which is neither

¹³ MORGAN REYNOLDS, "Courthouse Square", Hamilton Basso Papers, by permission of the Beinecke Library, New Haven.

¹⁴ JOSEPH R. MILLICHAP, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-60.

critical nor flattering but realistic. Basso neither entirely attacks nor altogether defends the South; he is primarily concerned with setting its virtues against its weaknesses, and the latter are primarily associated with a false pride of ancestry.¹⁵

Aware of ugliness in the South, angry at injustice and intolerance and exploitation, nevertheless the Southern legend, the languorous Southern living, the camellias and the earth still through his senses and memories pull his heart. The poet Basso is in love with the South. But the intelligent Basso knows that she can be sluttish and evil. All the same he loves her as some other men have done before. And the sum of his book is in the South's beauty.¹⁶

The success of *Courthouse Square* is not in the evocation of social and historical themes; rather, as in the works of Faulkner and Thomas Wolfe, it lies in the successful integration of theme with narrative. Basso discovers in the history of the Barondess family a story which crystallizes the meaning of Southern history as aptly as Faulkner's complicated genealogies; in the person of David Barondess the author creates a character as capable of knowing the contemporary world as Wolfe's wanderers.¹⁷

The author has the ability to stand on the courthouse square and "see the flesh-and-blood aspect of a town without attacking it for the sake of attacking, without crucifying his characters for a mot, without sentimentalizing them to gain a shelf in the libraries of the South.

There are, of course flashes of social satire. There is an uncompromising vocabulary in which to say just what he means. There is understanding – not the easy, fast-stepping, hard-boiled understanding of the breezy young novelist, but the mature, rich passion of a muscular talent that builds the stuff of novels out of a hot heart and a cool head."¹⁸

Basso has approached the contradictoriness of Southern character by first recognizing it in himself. He has seen what is good in the old Southern tradition, and seen equally what

¹⁵ FREDERICK HOFFMAN, *The Art of Southern Fiction*, London and Amsterdam, Southern Illinois University Press, 1967, p. 25.

¹⁶ JONATHAN DANIELS, *art. cit.*, November 7, 1936, pp. 11-12.

¹⁷ JOSEPH R. MILLICHAP, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

¹⁸ STANLEY YOUNG, "Under the Mimosa and the Moonlight", *The New York Times Book Review*, October 25, 1936, p. 6.

evils are devouring it like maggots; and he has computed at exactly what price the good is worth fighting for.

David Barondess is only Hamilton Basso, of course, in the sense that they are both Southerners wrestling with the problem of the South. Otherwise Barondess keeps his own identity which is all to the good in a novel. *Courthouse Square* deserves attention for its significance of subject matter; it deserves equally for its clear, able, sometimes beautiful writing.¹⁹

More than in any of his other novels Basso integrates this story with his own ideas. Using the character of a writer as protagonist allows him to editorialize a bit, but these preachings are well integrated into a narrative which aptly demonstrates their essential accuracy.²⁰

The most fitting tribute to Basso as a writer and as a man can be found in the moving words written by his friend and editor Malcom Cowley after his death in 1964:

"When I heard that Hamilton Basso was dead, I thought about his particular combination of courage, mischief, warmth – those great *embrazos* he gave you! – restlessness, intellectual curiosity, kindness to younger persons, and above all, devotion to his craft. Then I remembered my first visit, to the Bassos in the summer of 1934.

At the same time I had been reading his second novel *Cinnamon Seed*. It isn't a good novel, for Ham when he wrote it was a young man still learning his craft, but it expresses such a warmth of feeling for his native Louisiana that I couldn't help sending him a letter about it. In 1935 the Bassos moved to New York, and Ham joined the staff of the *New Republic*, where I was then literary editor. He enjoyed writing for the paper, but he never liked to move to in literary circles, notwithstanding his fondness for many writers as individuals. "There was too much pretentiousness," he said through one of his characters, the hero of *Courthouse Square*, and too much being something you were not... It was better to get off in your own room and be your own self and do your own work, and if that imposed the penalty of loneliness, of walking lonely through the streets and talking to bums and chippies and panhandlers and cabdrivers and the tough guys who hang around the Garden, it was more heartening and satisfactory in the end...".

He had a passion for learning his craft. None of the novels was autobiographical, but the central character in almost all was a man involved in the author's dilemma of being a Southerner deeply attached to the South and to the soil, yet repelled by what Ham was the first to call Southern Shintoism – while also being repelled by the coldness and

¹⁹ LOUIS KRONENBERGER, "Return of the Native," *The New Republic*, November 25, 1936, p. 123.

²⁰ JOSEPH R. MILLICHAP, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

impersonality of the North; he was a man who couldn't, and yet must, go home again.

But there was – beside his love for crotchety human beings and his interest in private conflicts that burst into public violence, as in *Courthouse Square* and *Sun in Capricorn* (the South has more of those conflicts than the North, and that helps to explain why so much of our powerful fiction has been Southern – there was still another quality that distinguished his work from the beginning. Ham took an organic view of human society and its future on this planet.

As for the novel, it would be finished at last with meticulous care, the final manuscript from his typewriter always looking as if it had been copied by a professional typist. Ham told me once that if a single word seemed wrong, something impelled him to redo the whole page and make improvements.

The last pages were written in October, when he was already under sentence of death, but they give no hint of his deathly fatigue; they are, they had to be, as perfectly finished as anything he had ever consented to publish. In view of his medical history, one has reason to say that he sacrificed his life to his passion for honest craftsmanship. The work came first, and living second. Like his friend Thomas Wolfe, he was a hero and martyr to the act of writing.”²¹

ABSTRACT

The author discusses in her essay the novels written by Hamilton Basso, a contemporary of Faulkner, who created his own “Yoknapat-wapha” in the imaginary town of Macedon, South Carolina, exploring issues of race and history in the South, especially in his novel *Courthouse Square*, published in 1936.

KEY WORDS

H. Basso. *Courthouse Square*. American literature.

²¹ MALCOM COWLEY, “The Writer As Craftsman”, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, June 27, 1964, p. 17-18.

Aldo Ferrari

PER UNA STORIA DELL'IDEA EURASISTA.
UNO SGUARDO DA (SUD-) OVEST

Альдо Феррари

К ИСТОРИИ ЕВРАЗИЙСКОЙ ИДЕИ:
ВЗГЛЯД С (ЮГО-)ЗАПАДА

Запад и евразийство

Уже в период временного угасания евразийского движения, в тот период, когда в СССР было невозможно рассматривать это интеллектуальное движение в научном плане, на Западе появилось несколько серьезных исследований по данной проблеме; особенно в 60-х гг., благодаря в основном работам О. Босса¹ и Н. Рязановского². Еще в 1955 г. вышла в свет интереснейшая монография Э. Саркисянца³, посвященная культурному и духовному общению России с Востоком; в этой монографии собраны многочисленные сведения, необходимые для определения некоторых интеллектуальных предпосылок евразийства. Речь шла о серьезных и обстоятельных исследованиях, получивших стимул благодаря довольно широкому доступу к произведениям проживающих и творящих в эмиграции евразийцев, а также благодаря интеллектуальному уважению, часто и несомненной симпатии к ним. Тем более, что произведения этих авторов читались вне идеологического советского контекста, что-то вроде побочной, в основном исчерпавшей себя линии интеллектуальной русской эволюции.

Ситуация коренным образом изменилась, когда одно-

¹ O. Böss, *Die Lehre der Eurasien. Ein Beitrag zur russischen Ideengeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Wiesbaden 1961.

² N. RIASANOVSKY, *Prince N.S. Trubetskoy's "Europe and Mankind"*, in "Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas", 13 (1964), pp. 207-220; *The Emergence of Eurasianism*, in "Californian Slavic Studies", 4 (1967), pp. 39-72.

³ E. SARKISIANZ, *Russland und der Messianismus des Orients. Sendungsbewusstsein und politischer Chiliasmus des Osten*, Tübingen 1955.

временно с распадом СССР и исчерпавшейся привлекательностью марксизма-ленинизма, евразийство вновь вышло на свет совершенно неожиданным образом, в качестве одного из основных идейных течений постсоветской России. Это, естественно, вызвало новый интерес к евразийству и во многих европейских странах евразийская перспектива стала темой многочисленных исследований и монографий, различных друг от друга по своему направлению и значению. Отметим здесь тот энтузиазм, с которым евразийство было принято в начале 90 годов в тех европейских политических течениях, которые могут быть определены как “радикальные правые” или “новые правые”. Необходимо между тем заметить, что данный интерес был вызван прежде всего тем, что такие неоевразийские авторы, как Александр Дугин, заняли позиции, идеологически совместимые с позициями Тириара, Де Бенуа, Стойкера, Мутти⁴.

Но все это выходит за рамки научной сферы, где внимание, вызываемое и современным, и классическим евразийством, привело к различным результатам. Однако критические тона заметно преобладают над положительными. В своем комплексе евразийство воспринимается в основном западными учеными как определенная позиция, выдвинутая неспособностью русской культуры рационально уживаться с модернизацией, а также и с Западом, который является авангардом данной модернизации. В этом аспекте евразийство рассматривается в сущности как ложная мифологема в культуре и политике, несущая с собой определенную опасность⁵. Так, например, относится к евразийству Витторио Страда: “Для России ситуация не разрешена и остается крайне обостренной и на сегодня, причем не потому, что это “восточная страна”, согласно былой идеологии, воскрешаемой теперь в евразийском ключе. Если принять понятие хронотопа модернизации, отказавшись тем самым

⁴ M. DESERT, D. PAILLARD, *Les eurasiens revisités*, in “Revue d'Etudes Slaves”, LXVI/1 (1994), pp. 83-84; A. FERRARI, *Nazionalismo russo e idea eurasiasta*, in C.M. SANTORO (a cura di), *Nazionalismo e sviluppo politico nell'ex URSS*, Milano 1996, pp. 138-141.

⁵ A. IGNATOW, *Der “Eurasismus” und die Suche nach einer neuen russischen Kulturidentität. Die Neubelebung des “Evracijstvo”-Mythos*, Köln 1992, p. 43.

от одностороннего и механистического восприятия модернизирующего процесса, то вопрос сведется к тому, чтобы понять русский хронотоп в его отличии от, скажем, японского или американского, как французский в свое время отличался от немецкого и т. д.”⁶.

Исходя из данной точки зрения – чисто западнотрической, хотя и на таком культурном уровне, который исключает любую механическую односторонность, – евразийство не может быть рассмотрено иначе как отклонение, в конечном итоге уводящее в сторону, по сравнению с односторонним путем, хотя и хронологически отличающимся от универсальной исторической эволюции. В действительности можно заметить, как оценка евразийства западными учеными связана с их принципиальным отношением к России. Чем больше данная страна рассматривается как некая аномалия по сравнению с западными критериями, тем менее они готовы признать допустимость евразийской концепции, которая конкретно подразумевает как наиболее радикальное выражение русского требования на историческо-культурную независимость от Запада. Результаты такого подхода иногда довольно-таки интересны. Так, например, Ч. Дж. Халперин, глубокий знаток периода татарского ига на Руси, отрицает какой бы то ни было научный вес евразийства, объясняя большую часть недостатков работ историка Г.В. Вернадского тем, что этот автор являлся приверженцем евразийства. Согласно Халперину, «... Vernadsky's Eurasian monographs from 1920 fare very badly... George Vernadsky's scholarly reputation does not rest upon the merits of these works. On the other hand, the more deplorable aspects of eurasian ideology manifested in these publicistic and partisan pieces cannot be dismissed out of hand when analyzing Vernadsky's intellectual development and his historiographic evolution»⁷. С другой стороны Халперин утверждает, что «Longtime residence in US had, by the late 1940s, altered Verna-

⁶ В. Страда, *Россия, Запад, Восток и современность // Цивилизации и культуры*. Вып. 3, *Россия и Восток: геополитика и цивилизационные отношения*, Москва, 1995, с. 321-322.

⁷ Ch.J. HALPERIN, *Russia and the Steppe: George Vernadsky and Eurasianism*, in “Forschungen zur Osteuropäischen Geschichte”, 36 (1985), p. 104.

dsky's political values, and he reverted to the democratic traditions of his family and social background which Eurasianism had scornfully and viciously rejected»⁸. Из этих слов становится ясным, что само принятие политико-культурных основ Запада уже является интеллектуальным прогрессом.

Не должны вызывать удивления и существующие в связи с этим предрассудки. Как показал К. Леви-Стросс, этноцентризм присущ практически всем культурам, как архаичным, так и в современным⁹. И западная культура не исключение. Поэтому существуют основания утверждать, что изучение евразийства требует открытого восприятия историческо-культурной специфики, в том числе и русской, подразумевая конкретные проявления плюрализма в исторической эволюции различных цивилизаций¹⁰. Однако, несмотря на некоторые явные исключения (О. Шпенглер, А. Тойнби, П. Сорокин, а в последствии и Н. Элиас и Ш Эйзенштат), современная западная культура, в своей совокупности, представляется не особенно благоприятной для применения этого подхода. Со времен просветительства до гегельянства и марксизма в ней утвердился глубоко эгоцентрический и односторонний подход к истории, преобладая, например, над альтернативной линией, предложенной Дж. Вико и другими историками. Этому способствовало и очевидное превосходство, достигнутое на политико-экономическом уровне в течение последних веков, которое повсеместно вызвало процессы, характеризующиеся как «глобальная вестернизация»¹¹.

Таким образом, евразийство оказалось камнем преткновения для западных ученых, которые не случайно – за исключением основательной работы Босса и новейшей монографии М. Ларюеля¹² – еще не обращались к рассмотрению этого движения во всем его размахе, не

⁸ Там же, с. 147.

⁹ Cl. Lévy-Strauss, *Razza e storia e altri studi di antropologia*, Torino 1967, pp. 104-106.

¹⁰ Для общего взгляда на цивилизационный подход см. Б.С. Ерасов, *Цивилизация: слово – термин – смысл // Цивилизации и культуры*. Вып. 2, *Россия и Восток: геополитика и цивилизационные отношения*, Москва 1995, с. 3-30.

¹¹ S. LATOUCHE. *L'occidentalisation du monde*, Paris 1989.

¹² M. LARUELLE, *L'ideologie eurasiste russe ou comment penser l'empire*, Paris 1999.

пытаясь даже включить его в русскую культуру, а, наоборот, пытаюсь подчеркнуть его маргинальность. Так, например, Рязановский говорит о «striking disjointedness, ... lack of fundamental connection between Eurasianism and preceding Russian views of the world»¹³.

Последнее суждение может быть принято лишь частично. Это интеллектуальное движение несомненно представило новое явление элементарно внутри современной русской мысли, но сами евразийцы не отрицали того, что позаимствовали многие элементы (преданность православию, антизападничество, неприятие петровских реформ и т. д.) из разных течений и представителей русской культуры. Особенно П. Савицкий настаивал на включении евразийства в один из «двух миров» современной русской культуры, туда, куда входили Гоголь, славянофилы, Достоевский, К. Леонтьев и В. Соловьев, в качестве радикальной оппозиции западнической и прогрессивной группировки, начиная с просветителей XVIII в до Добролюбова, Писарева и Михайловского¹⁴.

Усилие, необходимое для понимания евразийства на конкретной почве, на которой оно родилось, в действительности приводит к заключению, что данное течение смогло утвердиться в силу того, что оно вобрало в себя широкий диапазон исторических и культурных стимулов, сформировавшихся в дореволюционной России, пересмотренных затем в драматическом, но вместе с тем интеллектуально стимулирующим, контексте российской эмиграции межвоенного периода. В этом смысле изучение евразийства не может абстрагироваться от широкой и углубленной реконструкции исторических, политических, литературных, художественных и научных предпосылок, которые до сих пор образуют мало исследованную предысторию этого движения.

Именно это и составляет в основном предмет моих исследований, которые движутся в различных, хотя и тесно переплетенных между собой направлениях, с одной стороны к тому, что может быть определено как восточ-

¹³ N. RIASANOVSKY, *The Emergence of Eurasianism*, in "Californian Slavic Studies", 4 (1967), p. 52.

¹⁴ П.Н. Савицкий, *Два мира // На путях. Утверждение евразийцев. Книга вторая*, Берлин 1922, с. 11.

ная ориентация русской культуры, а с другой – к морфологическому и многолинейному подходу к истории, представляющему важную характеристику данной культуры. Учитывая оба аспекта, евразийство, или правильнее евразийская перспектива, перестает казаться чуждым или маргинальным по отношению к совокупности русской культуры явлением, а, напротив, является ее последовательным выражением, что и заслуживает особенно внимательного и углубленного исследования. С западноевропейской точки зрения присутствует еще один интересный ключ толкования евразийства, а именно его сопоставление с другими интеллектуальными европейскими движениями в период между двумя мировыми войнами, входящими в общую категорию “консервативной революции”¹⁵.

И, наконец, сама возможность рассмотреть это интеллектуальное движение и в свете аналогичных историко-культурных проблем, вызванных характером встречи Запада с неевропейскими цивилизациями (Китая, Японии, Индии, Турции и т. д.) была еще недостаточно использована, в то время как она смогла бы создать плодотворную почву для исследований.

Первый “поворот к Востоку” русской культуры

Отчетливые признаки того, что мы определяем как “восточная ориентация” русской культуры, появились лишь в середине XIX века, когда разворачивается многостороннее оспаривание постулата об окончательной европеизации России в результате петровских реформ. Благодаря распространению европеизации русская культура почти полностью вобрала в себя европейские представления об Азии и Востоке, рассматриваемые как отрицательные начала противоположные Европе: деспотизм и рабство против свободы, эмоции против разума, созерцание против действия, застой против прогресса. Преодолев

¹⁵ Л. Люкс, *Евразийство и консервативная революция. Соблазн антизападничества в России и Германии // Вопросы философии*, 1966, 3, s. 57-69; S. Kulešov e V. Strada, *Il fascismo russo*, Venezia 1998, pp. 64-85.

конфликтное, но паритетное отношение, присущее Средневековью, пройдя через период опасения, вызванных натиском Османской империи, Европа со своей технологией и просветительством уже с пренебрежением смотрела на Восток, чья отсталость объяснялась в основном, следуя Монтескье, климатическими условиями или характером правления. От Гиббона до Гегеля Восток рассматривался в европейской культуре как пройденный этап истории и уже маргинальный вариант, как заря цивилизации, уже превзойденный Западом.

Русское самосознание послепетровского периода полностью восприняло такую постановку для обоснования своего желания оторвать раз и навсегда Россию от Азии и соединить ее с Европой как воплощением цивилизации и прогресса. В свете такого идеологического определения, сама двойственная европейско-азиатская природа России рассматривается как нечто подобное зарождающимся колониальным империям, в которых выделяется европейская метрополия и колониальные внеевропейские владения. Однако такое сравнение справедливо лишь частично, так как территории русской империи находились не за морем, а были неразрывно связаны с метрополией, что затрудняло их четкое разделение. В отличие от Англии и Голландии, от Франции и Испании, Россия не *имела*, а сама *была* империей. Именно это и было одним из многочисленных факторов, препятствующих, несмотря на энергичную политику насаждения, действительной реализации идейных замыслов Петра Великого. В результате петровских реформ Россия получила заимствованные представления о своем общественном устройстве, не успев приспособиться к ним из-за геокультурных и геополитических особенностей, не соответствующих западной модели. Несмотря на это, утверждение европейского характера России было в основном безоговорочно принято образованными классами русского общества на протяжении всего XVIII века, который представлял из себя долгий переходный период подражательства, во время которого Россия впитала из Европы технологию, организационные модели, формы культуры, обычаи и моды.

Эти процессы происходили, несмотря на растущее сопротивление наиболее экстремальным формам такому подражательству, и в политической и культурной сферах.

Это неприятие нашло свое проявление в интересных культурных формах, но пока еще не затрагивало центральный тезис русского самосознания о принадлежности России к Европе. Данная реакция, особенно показательная в литературной и историографической сфере, была направлена в основном на утверждение чувства национального русского достоинства, не пытаясь в течение всего XVIII века выдвинуть самостоятельные принципы, противостоящие европейским¹⁶.

Эта идеологическая структура пережила кризис в начале 30 годов XIX века и в культурной и политической сфере. Этапы этого кризиса хорошо известны: от публикации "Философского письма" Чаадаева в 1836 г., отрицающего успокаивающий тезис о состоявшемся включении России в европейскую цивилизацию, до утверждения движения славянофилов, проводившего последовательные и сознательные усилия по индивидуализированию исторических, культурных и социальных особенностей России, противопоставляя Европе ее религиозную веру (православие), национальную психологию (органическую и соборную), основную социальную структуру (крестьянскую общину). Но такое изменение течения происходило всегда внутри европейских культурных категорий, на первом месте романтических и консервативных. То же самое можно сказать и об историческо-географическом понимании России славянофилами: Восток, да, но Восток Европы, славянский и православный. Никто из славянофилов или сторонников "официальной народности" никогда не думал противостоять западникам, утверждая азиатскую или восточную натуру России, ограничиваясь лишь тем, что Россия противопоставлялась Европе на основе ее автономных духовных принципов.

После травмы Крымской войны Россия начала, с одной стороны, интенсифицировать свою экспансию на Восток, а с другой – пересматривать культурные направления, которые не затрагивая основную западную ориентацию, ввели в русскую культуру альтернативные элементы, которые в последствии будут взяты и заново вылеплены евразийством. И все это в самых различных сфе-

¹⁶ H. ROGGER, *Russian Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century Russia*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1960.

рах культуры, включая научную и художественную деятельность. На первом месте вспоминается сейчас географическое переосмысление, произведенное такими мыслителями, как Николай Данилевский и Владимир Ламанский, которые в своих произведениях "Россия и Европа" (1871) и "Три мира Азийско-Европейского материка" (1892) произвели радикальное физико-географическое развенчивание Европы, не подразумеваемой более как автономный континент, а лишь как полуостров Азии, а также разработали идею России-континента, автономного географического и культурного мира. Такое переосмысление произошло одновременно с развитием научного осознания Востока, а в особенности азиатских регионов русской империи. Здесь, на первом месте, необходимо отметить расцвет академического востоковедения в Московском, Казанском, Харьковском и Петербургском университетах¹⁷.

На научном уровне другим важным направлением в приближении русской культуры к Востоку стало рождение Географического Общества, основанного в Петербурге в 1845 г.; в его основные задачи входило также географическое и этнографическое исследование нерусских территорий империи¹⁸. Тесно связаны с деятельностью Географического Общества были крупные географические экспедиции П.П. Семенова Тянь-Шаньского, и особенно Н.М. Пржевальского, оказавшие значительное влияние на формирование нового русского отношения к Востоку¹⁹.

Необходимо тем не менее отметить, что это новое отношение к Востоку, а также и сама империалистическая экспансия России, произошли в основном в сфере

¹⁷ В. Бартольд, *История изучения Востока в Европе и России*, Ленинград 1925; S.W. Vucinich (ed.), *Russia and Asia. Essays on the Influence of Russia on Asian Peoples*, Stanford (Ca.) 1972, pp. 30-51; *История отечественного востоковедения с середины XIX века до 1917 года*, Москва, 1997.

¹⁸ Л.С. Берг, *Всесоюзное географическое общество за сто лет*, Москва-Ленинград 1946; W. BERELOWITZ, *Aux origines de l'ethnographie russe: la Société de Géographie dans les années 1840-1850*, in "Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique", XXXI, 2-3 (1990), pp. 265-274; C.B. CLAY, *Russian Ethnographers in the Service of the Empire, 1855-1862*, in "Slavic Review", 54/1 (1995), pp. 45-61.

¹⁹ D. RAYFIELD, *The Dream of Lhasa. The Life of Nikolay Przhevalsky (1839-88), Explorer of Central Asia*, London 1976.

идеологической концепции, на которую оказало широкое воздействие евроцентрическая перспектива. В произведениях сторонников данной азиатской экспансии – от Погодина до Достоевского – утверждается в сущности, что Россия выполняет в Азии роль цивилизатора. И это не особенно отличается от того, что утверждали европейские колонизаторы.

Но именно в этот период внутри русской культуры начали созревать различные позиции, в которых можем заметить притязание на некое культурное и духовное сходство с Азией и Востоком. Во первых, не надо забывать о Константине Леонтьеве, который определял русских как “загадочных славяно-туранцев” и, предчувствуя конец петербургской России, приглашал своих соотечественников удалиться без сожаления от нее “...отрясая романо-германский прах с наших азиатских подошв”²⁰. И в те же годы Николай Федоров установил особенное определение отношения между Россией и Азией в рамках своей оригинальной религиозно-научной утопии. Как известно, в философии Федорова занимал важное место контраст между сельским хозяйством, которое он связывает с делом всеобщего воскресения, и кочевой экономикой, которая по его мнению охватывала торговлю, ростовщичество и пиратство. В этой оптике Федоров приглашал Россию не переходить на сторону эксплуатирующих держав Запада, а использовать свою натуру агрикультурной державы, сходную с азиатской, дабы действовать в качестве миротворца между Востоком и Западом²¹. Но наиболее ярким сторонником азиатского характера России был князь Эспер Ухтомский, востоковед, который в 1890 г. сопровождал царевича Николая в его путешествии через Азию, играя не второстепенную роль во внешней восточной политике России в конце XIX века: “Запад нас умственно дисциплинирует; но в общем лишь тускло отражается на нашей жизненной поверхности. Все под нею и в недрах народного бытия проникнуто и дышит глубоко восточными умозрениями и верова-

²⁰ К.Н. Леонтьев, *Избранное*, Москва, 1993, с. 167, 168.

²¹ См.Н.Ф. Федоров, *Философия общего дела*, т. II, Москва, 1913, с. 334.

ниями”²².

Кроме этих интересных, но довольно изолированных ранних проявлений более “восточного” понимания идентитета России, наверное можно утвердить, что появление евразийской идеи в послереволюционные годы было подготовлено длительным процессом “открытия Востока”. Этот процесс, сходный многими своими аспектами с процессом, происходящим на Западе, с другой стороны отличается специфичностью географического и историко-культурного положения России, которой не было необходимости искать Восток в заморских колониях, но могла чувствовать себя сопричастной с ним, чуть ли не участвовавшей в его натуре. Немаловажный взнос в этом отношении был предоставлен также Теософским Обществом, где явно чувствовалось влияние восточной духовности и чья основательница, Елена Блаватская, всегда подчеркивала свою русскость, несмотря на то, что большую часть своей жизни проводила за границей²³. Между прочим, русский экзотеризм, получивший через наиболее крупных своих представителей – от Блаватской до Гурджева и Рериха – несомненно “восточное направление”, может сам представлять интересную область для научного изучения.

Все эти разнородные элементы привели к тому, что в течение десятилетий непосредственно перед и после революции, Восток и Азия заняли важную роль в русской культуре. Хотя часто и отрицательную, как распространение “желтой” опасности, монгольской опасности, особенно начиная с В. Соловьева, который в своем известном “Рассказе об Антихристе” описывает завоевание России и света дальне-восточными полчищами, под предводительством японцев. Затем у символистов (особенно у Белого; здесь можем вспомнить об азиатской крови Аبلеухова в романе “Петербург”) и футуристах, особенно в Хлебникове, называющим себя “сыном Азии”²⁴. А также тема

²² Э.Э. Ухтомский, *К событиям в Китае. Об отношениях Запада и России к Востоку*. Санкт Петербург 1900, с. 48.

²³ О влиянии теософии в России см. M. CARLSON, *No Religion Higher than Truth. A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875-1922*, Princeton (N.J.) 1993.

скифства, к которому, вне литературного движения, получившего это имя, примкнули такие деятели, как Брюсов, Блок, Белый, Клюев, Оресин и Есенин, была энным проявлением этого вида азиатского наваждения, которым в ту эпоху была пропитана русская культура. Восточные мотивы получили новую рельефность и значимость также и в искусстве на грани двух веков, как показывают Наталия Гончарова, Михаил Ларионов и, особенно, Николай Рерих, русский художник доведший до экстремальности освоение духовных и культурных веяний Востока.

Новая парадигма российской цивилизации

В итоге евразийцы представили новое явление внутри русской культуры, а с другой стороны, они вновь приняли веяния и тенденции, уже присутствующие в ней, синтезируя их под травматическим толчком русской революции и тех эпохальных изменений, которые она представляла. В особенности, революция, со своим насильственным разрушением петербургской и “европейской” фазы русской истории, создала благоприятные условия для радикального пересмотра, который и продвинули евразийцы, восстанавливая в основном морфологическую и полицентрическую концепцию истории, разработанную Данилевским и Леонтьевым во второй половине XIX века. Если славянофилы отвергли культурное превосходство романогерманской Европы, противопоставляя ей идеал православной и общинной России, то эти мыслители оспорили самую основу евроцентризма, т.е. просветительско-гегелевское утверждение истории, как единого процесса развития, во главе которого была, естественно, поставлена сама современная Европа. В концепции Данилевского, намного опережающей теории XX века Шпенглера и Тойнби, ход истории не является эволюционным, линейным и одноро-

²⁴ Об этой теме см. интересные статьи Дж. Нива: *Du panmongolisme au “mouvement eurasien”* // его же, *Vers la fin du mythe russe*, Lausanne 1988, p. 126-142 и *Les paradoxes de l'affirmation euroasienne* // его же, *La fin du schisme. Etudes littéraires et politiques*, Lausanne 1993, pp. 292-308.

дным процессом, а строится из “историческо-культурных типов”, полностью автономных, основанных на собственных религиозных, культурных, политических и экономических ценностях. Таким образом, в этой концепции не существуют универсальные цивилизации, а различные историческо-культурные “типы”, полностью автономные, чье развитие неповторимо и абсолютно не может быть измерено параметрами другой цивилизации. К десяти “типам”, выявленных Данилевским в универсальной истории, в “Византизме и славянстве” (1875) Константин Леонтьев добавил еще один тип, византийский.

Этот подход был позаимствован и евразийцами, начиная с монографии Николая Трубецкого “Европа и человечество” (1920). Трубецкой задумал проект этого произведения уже в 1910 году, но книга вышла в свет лишь десять лет спустя, после того, как стали более ясны его основные понятия в результате ужасов революции и победы большевиков, которые окончательно указали, что Россия не принадлежит к западному миру (“романо-германскому”), а представляет автономную историко-культурную систему. Произведение “Европа и человечество” в первую очередь является страстной критикой “эгоцентризма” европейской культуры, ее претензии на универсальность, того, что в последствии получит определение “культурного империализма”. Не случайно итальянский перевод данного произведения носит подзаголовок “Первой критики евроцентризма”²⁵. Со страстной красноречивостью Трубецкой утверждает, что в отношении национальной традиции современная европейская культура предлагает всего две позиции, одна из них шовинистская (априорное утверждение превосходства своего народа над другими), а другая – космополитическая (отрицания различий между культурами и желание объединить их в одну культуру, универсальную). Эти позиции противоположные лишь теоретически, так как “универсальная” культура, которую космополиты (в сущности евро-западники) хотят установить во всем мире, является все той же романо-германской: “Европейская культура не есть

²⁵ N. TRUBECKOJ, *L'Europa e l'umanità. La prima critica dell'eurocentrismo*, Torino 1982.

культура человечества. Это есть продукт истории определенной этнической группы”²⁶. Европейский космополитизм таким образом является всего лишь “супернационализмом” или “романо-германским шовинизмом”. Шовинизм и космополитизм, два лица все той же эгоцентрической позиции, должны быть преодолены в пользу более комплексного подхода, уважающего достоинство всех культур. Ибо абсолютно невозможно доказать превосходство романо-германской культуры над другими. Речь идет в основном об эгоцентрическом предрассудке, создающим иерархическую шкалу, совершенно произвольно основанную на сходстве между собой и другими: “Объективных научных доказательств нет вовсе. Самое простое и самое распространенное доказательство заключается в том, что европейцы-де побеждают дикарей; ... Грубость и наивность этого доказательства должны быть ясны для всякого объективно мыслящего человека”²⁷.

И, по мнению Трубецкого, всякая культура основывается на автономных ценностях и идет по собственному пути, но может быть подтолкнута подражать иностранным моделям. Это может произойти и из-за внешних принуждений (например, в результате завоевания силой) или из-за внутренних принуждений, нечто вроде комплекса неполноценности относительно внешней модели, априори считаемой лучшей. Это именно и судьба многих народов современной эпохи, которые покоренные техническо-военным превосходством Запада, расходуют свою лучшую энергию в попытке ассимилировать его культуру. Такая попытка, по мнению Трубецкого, обречена закончиться неудачей именно из-за существенной разнородности различных культур. Несовершенное восприятие культурной модели Запада приводит к тому, что все народы, вступившие на путь подобной ассимиляции, предназначены занять подчиненную позицию, ведущую к разочарованию. Именно такая судьба досталась и России, которая прошла через ужасный кризис своего самосознания: “Весь восемнадцатый век прошел для России в недостойном поверхностном обезьянничании с Европой. К концу этого века умы верхов русского общества уже пропита-

²⁶ Н.С. Трубецкой, *История. Культура. Язык*, Москва, 1994, с. 59.

²⁷ Там же, с. 69.

лись романо-германскими предрассудками, и весь девятнадцатый и начало двадцатого века прошли в стремлении к полной европеизации всех сторон русской жизни..."²⁸. Этот анализ, которым Трубецкой и объясняет революционный перелом, явно обращается к старому тезису славянофилов. Но даже и социалистическая революция не смогла предоставить, по его мнению, решения проблемы русского самосознания, так как оно также основывалось на западных принципах, представляя поэтому только последующий этап процесса европеизации. Как все страны, которым угрожала потеря духовной специфики, Россия должна была противостоять римско-германской цивилизации через сознательное возвращение к своим собственным автономным историко-культурным ценностям. Весь последующий интеллектуальный путь евразийства, начиная со статьи "Верхи и низы русской культуры. Этническая основа русской культуры" (1921) самого Трубецкого, представлял собой попытку определить такие ценности, в надежде – вскоре оказавшейся обманчивой – возвести на их основах новую Россию послесоветского периода, не зависящей от западной, романо-германской модели.

Евразийство, таким образом, может быть рассмотрено как новое проявление этой многолинейной исторической концепции, составляющей еще малоизвестную и малоисследованную характеристику русской культуры. Расцвет данной позиции в России не случаен, он вытекает в основном из интенсивных, плодотворных, но одновременно и конфликтных отношений с западной культурой, которая долго впитывалась, но никогда не была ассимилирована до конца. Вынужденная думать в соответствии с европейской моделью, считающейся универсальной, русская культура реагировала на данную модель различным образом, от принятия до отказа, создавая одновременно особенный подход, который оспаривал такое превосходство. Отсюда и предрасположенность России к выдвиганию цивилизационных концепций, в рамках которых можно рассматривать свою самобытность вне западных категорий и создавать таким образом теоретическую основу для утверждения особого места и самостоятельной

²⁸ Там же, с. 102.

роли во всемирной истории. Поэтому основные варианты многолинейной концепции истории появились особенно тогда, когда принадлежность России к Западу ставилась под сомнение. Данилевский и Леонтьев писали именно в период после Крымской войны, которая привела к кризису в отношениях России к западным государствам, а тезисы евразийцев появились после революции, положившей конец вестернизации России. И как уже было показано, евразийство стало существенным шагом в развитии теории цивилизаций²⁹.

К мировому полицентрическому порядку

Питаемые евразийцами надежды на то, что их идеи будут восприняты советской властью, оказались иллюзиями. В политическом аспекте их проект несомненно окончился полным крахом. Одновременно, необходимо рассмотреть, что не только результаты исторических, антропологических, лингвистических и географических исследований, проведенных представителями данного течения заслуживают более внимания, чем оказываемое им до сих пор. На самом деле их определение России, как центрального ядра евразийского мира, исторически и культурно различной от Дальнего Востока и Европы, также не был оспорен во время советского периода. Во время семи десятков лет своего существования СССР действительно создал автономную геополитическую сущность, резко противоположную Западу, представляющую частичную реализацию их тезисов, хотя и в направлении, неприемлемом самими евразийцами, и смертельным – как это известно – для некоторых из них (С. Эфрон, Д. Мирский), которые считали возможным подобное наложение.

Возрождение евразийской перспективы в России после советского периода является, по моему мнению, одним из самых интересных явлений современной культуры и потенциальным творческим ответом на вызов, брошенный

²⁹ Б.С. Ерасов, *Цивилизационная теория и евразийские исследования* / *Цивилизации и культуры*. Вып. 3, *Россия и Восток: геополитика и цивилизационные отношения*, Москва, 1995, с. 18.

кризисом коммунистической идеологии и распадом СССР. Ответ, который с одной стороны восходит к важным, хотя долгое время и недооцененным, течениям интеллектуальных русских традиций, а с другой стороны ставится предоставить России послесоветского периода геополитические и геокультурные категории, направленные на строительство международной политической системы полицентрического типа. Направление, которое может быть принято или отвергнуто, но культурное достоинство которого нельзя отрицать.

ABSTRACT

The Eurasian movement, founded at the beginning of twenties by some of the most representative Russian émigrés (N.S. Trubeckoj, D.P. Svjatopolk-Mirskij, L.P. Karsavin and so on), produced a deeply innovatory interpretation of Russia as an autonomous, neither European nor Asiatic, world.

Eurasian ideas were met with much opposition both in Soviet Union and in émigré culture and, as the movement rapidly declined, its historical and cultural role has been underestimated for a long time. Anyway, since the last years of the Soviet period, mainly as a result of the impressive audience of neo-Eurasian Lev Gumilëv's works, Eurasianism gained an outstanding position in Russian cultural and political life.

This huge renaissance of Eurasianism in post-Soviet Russia is generally seen with suspicion due to its anti-Western attitude, but it must be regarded as an interesting attempt to overcome the collapse of Communist ideology and Soviet Union. Roughly speaking, we can say that neo-Eurasians aim at giving post-Soviet Russia cultural and geopolitical criteria linked to the project of a new, polycentric, world system. Are they wrong or right? I can't answer, of course, but I think that they put a major question; and not only to Russia.

KEY WORDS

Eurasianism. Russian emigration. Geopolitics. Post-soviet Russia. International political system.

Giuseppina Grespi

EL PAPEL DEL PROFESOR EN LA PROMOCIÓN DE LA AUTONOMÍA DEL ALUMNO

En los últimos años, en las discusiones teóricas sobre la didáctica del español, se va reconociendo siempre más la importancia de la autonomía en el aprendizaje, es decir la importancia de que el alumno consiga dominar el propio proceso de aprendizaje y aprenda a aprender.

En este estudio intentaré individuar el tipo de enseñanza que tiene que escoger hoy el profesor para alcanzar su objetivo de responsabilizar al alumno y hacerle protagonista en su proceso de aprendizaje.

1. *El desarrollo de la autonomía*

La autonomía no es un método que se puede enseñar como una regla gramatical, sino que resulta ser la capacidad de tomar decisiones para el propio aprendizaje y en definitiva es el resultado de un proceso de reflexión sobre este aprendizaje.

Hay que aclarar que la autonomía no es sinónimo de autodidactismo y autoaprendizaje y no significa que, dando autonomía al alumno, el profesor abandone cualquier iniciativa y control en el aula. Aun si no le es posible seguir el camino individual de cada alumno en su proceso de aprendizaje, el profesor sigue siendo siempre el responsable del progreso de sus alumnos si se esfuerza en buscar las condiciones favorables para el desarrollo de cada uno en su propio proceso de aprendizaje. A través de varias iniciativas que dan autonomía al alumno tendrá que animarlo a que se comunique en español (aumento de la competencia comunicativa) y que transmita sus problemas en el proceso de aprendizaje (aumento de la competencia de aprendizaje); por eso el profesor tiene que organizar su trabajo

de manera que los alumnos puedan determinar autónomamente los objetivos, contenidos y procedimientos hacia un aprendizaje eficaz del español. Promoviendo la autonomía el profesor trabajará para capacitar a los alumnos a tomar decisiones y escoger la estrategia mejor para su aprendizaje, transformándolo en persona responsable de lo que está aprendiendo y cómo lo está aprendiendo.

La cuestión básica entonces es: ¿cómo ayudar a los alumnos a aprender con más eficacia? En otros términos, en qué modo los profesores pueden favorecer la autonomía que ayude al alumno a organizar su propio aprendizaje.

2. *El papel del profesor: ¿enseñanza tradicional o enseñanza centrada en el alumno y en el proceso de aprendizaje?*

El profesor tiene que entrenar a sus alumnos a aprender cómo se aprende, fomentando la capacidad de tomar decisiones, la independencia y la responsabilidad de todo lo que aprenden. Por eso los alumnos tendrán que experimentar diferentes estrategias y técnicas de aprendizaje y el profesor les ayudará a reflexionar sobre la aplicación de estas estrategias para poder mejorar sus maneras de aprender.

Los profesores de idiomas que quieran que sus alumnos sepan trabajar con autonomía, tienen hoy que rechazar la enseñanza de tipo tradicional y en cambio escoger una enseñanza centrada en el alumno y en el proceso de aprendizaje. En la enseñanza del español de tipo tradicional, el profesor actúa una actividad premeditada, cuyo desarrollo se puede establecer de antemano y será perfectamente controlable. Este profesor es el centro de las actividades de enseñanza y aprendizaje: se sitúa frente a los alumnos, durante el curso habla sólo en español, selecciona las tareas y los ejercicios, da instrucciones, explica, corrige y al final tendrá la sensación de que todo está bajo control.

Frente a la enseñanza de tipo tradicional hay otro tipo que pone al alumno en el centro de todas las consideraciones didácticas: en cambio de limitarse a recibir pasivamente los conocimientos que el profesor decide exponer en sus lecciones, el alumno se transforma en persona activa y responsable del propio aprendizaje.

Se ha constatado que el enfoque de la enseñanza no puede

permanecer fijado en el profesor, en el manual o en los objetivos y contenidos establecidos antes, sino que el profesor tiene que comprender que para aprender una lengua hay que centrarse sobre todo en el *proceso de aprendizaje* es decir, lo importante es el camino para llegar al aprendizaje y no el objetivo prefijado.

2.1 *¿Qué lengua utilizar en clase?*

Otro punto importante es aclarar que tipo de discurso y de lenguaje deba tener el profesor en la clase de idiomas. El profesor, a través de su discurso, implementa las actividades y los ejercicios, pregunta, controla, ayuda, corrige y al mismo tiempo es ejemplo de lengua para el alumno. Por eso los profesores deberían siempre tener conciencia sobre qué, cuándo, cómo y cuánto hablar. Además, cuando hablamos en español en clase, no es necesario utilizar un español simplificado, como ha sido demostrado por Nunan¹, sino que resulta más útil usar un español elaborado y recurrir a repeticiones y paráfrasis.

Lo de utilizar siempre y únicamente la lengua meta (el español) en clase, no tiene que ser una norma inflexible. Hay que considerar siempre los alumnos que tenemos en frente, la edad, el nivel, las características socioculturales, etc., porque a veces, sobre todo con los principiantes absolutos, que no dominan el español, puede resultar que el uso de la lengua materna los haga sentir más seguros y puede facilitarles la realización de determinadas tareas y la comprensión de determinados conceptos gramaticales. Sin embargo el español tiene que continuar siendo el vehículo de comunicación más importante en una clase de español.

3. *El error y la autoevaluación*

Es importante también determinar el papel del profesor en relación con el error.

Hay que subrayar que cometer errores es parte del camino

¹ NUNAN, D., *Language Teaching Methodology*, Prentice Hall International (UK) Ltd., 1991.

hacia el aprendizaje y que no es algo que deba evitarse a toda costa.

Tarea del profesor es entender la manera y el momento más oportunos para intervenir en presencia de un error y hacer que los alumnos lleguen a considerar y aceptar el error como una etapa necesaria del proceso de aprendizaje. Por parte del alumno comprender que cometer errores es parte del camino de su aprendizaje, es algo inevitable pero necesario para mejorarse.

A este propósito podría ser útil proponer a los alumnos una lectura sobre lo que piensan otros alumnos de lengua española sobre el error y hacerle subrayar, por ejemplo, las ideas que les parecen más interesantes en rojo y las ideas con las que no están de acuerdo en negro, proponiendo al final una discusión o una relación escrita de lo que piensan ellos sobre el error.

Las frases podrían ser estas ²:

David:

Me preocupa mucho cometer errores; Prefiero quedarme callado antes que decir algo mal. Sólo hablo cuando estoy totalmente seguro de hacerlo bien.

Héctor:

Creo que no importa si cometemos errores al hablar o al escribir; es normal, estoy aprendiendo una nueva lengua y no voy a hablar como un Premio Nobel de literatura. Lo importante es comunicarse, que te entiendan lo quieres decir.

Dora:

En realidad no me preocupa cometer errores cuando escribo. La profesora me los corrige y nadie se entera, pero en clase es otra cosa. Cuando trabajamos en grupos o en parejas y tenemos que hablar, sólo digo frases muy cortas para no equivocarme.

Mario:

Hay momentos en que me gusta que me corrijan y me digan en que me he equivocado y por qué, pero no siempre. Es decir: cuando estoy hablando sobre un tema que me interesa, si me corrigen luego no sé cómo seguir, me pierdo, me cortan la idea. No creo que sea necesario corregir cada palabra; prefiero que me dejen terminar la idea y después, si es necesario, pasar a analizar las cosas que he dicho mal.

¿Y tú que piensas? ¿Cuál es la opinión que coincide más con la tuya? ¿Por qué? Coméntalo con tu compañero.

Ahora escribe un breve comentario con tu opinión; puedes tomar como punto inicial las ideas más interesantes de cada uno de los párrafos anteriores:

² GIOVANNINI A. et al., *Profesor en acción 1*, Madrid, Edelsa, 2000, p. 43.

Yo creo que Mario tiene razón porque..., Pienso lo mismo que..., No estoy de acuerdo con..., En mi opinión...

¿Prefieres que te lo corrija un compañero o el profesor o dejarlo como está?

Resulta además necesario que el profesor ayude a sus alumnos a llegar a una autoevaluación. La autoevaluación es un momento importante de la autonomía. Contrariamente a lo que se puede pensar no representa la etapa final del aprendizaje, sino el eje central de la autonomía en clase. Sabemos que, para el profesor, es imposible seguir individualmente siempre a cada estudiante: a través de la autoevaluación el estudiante se transforma en el controlador de sus progresos, puede sacar conclusiones sobre el propio proceso de aprendizaje y, si es necesario, cambiar algo en su forma de aprender.

Cambiando, como hemos visto, el papel del profesor, necesariamente los alumnos se transforman en los verdaderos protagonistas del propio proceso de aprendizaje.

Para favorecer este pasaje, el profesor tiene que crear las condiciones para la **interacción** entre él y el alumno, ayudándole a tomar conciencia de los factores que determinan aprender español y de la utilidad de los materiales didácticos. Para este fin el profesor tendrá que:

a) Hacer reflexionar a los alumnos sobre la lengua como sistema formal.

Las actividades que ayudan a este tipo de reflexión son actividades que entrenan la competencia lingüística y que tienen que ver con el dominio de reglas gramaticales, la pronunciación, la ortografía y la sistematización del vocabulario.

La reflexión será dirigida a que el alumno se pregunte qué es "gramática" y cómo aprender las reglas, a una toma de conciencia idiomática del funcionamiento del sistema formal del español, a hacer hipótesis y verificación de reglas gramaticales, a inferir la morfología a través de la comparación y a comparar diferencias y semejanzas entre la lengua materna y el español³.

b) Hacer reflexionar a los alumnos sobre los procesos de aprendizaje.

³ GIOVANNINI A., et al., *Profesor en acción 1*, Madrid, Edelsa, 2000, p. 39.

En este caso el profesor formulará actividades que entrenan la observación de estrategias y técnicas de aprendizaje, que desarrollarán el control y la evaluación, es decir las que ayudan al alumno a “aprender a aprender”. En esta fase será también aconsejable hacer reflexionar a los alumnos sobre la utilidad del error y darles la posibilidad de autoevaluar los objetivos y contenidos lingüísticos, los materiales y las estrategias para llegar a los objetivos propuestos.

c) Entrenarlos en las cuatro destrezas, las estrategias sociolingüísticas, sociales, discursivas y afectivas.

El alumno tendrá que autoevaluar lo que ha aprendido a través de las estrategias utilizadas para la comprensión oral, la comprensión de lectura, la expresión escrita y la interacción oral.

Las actividades que el profesor tiene que proponer serán en general actividades que desarrollan la competencia discursiva, la competencia estratégica y la competencia sociolingüística y que entrenan a los alumnos en la práctica de la comunicación. Los alumnos, por ejemplo, a través del uso de la lengua tendrán que obtener que alguien haga algo o conseguir unas informaciones; así, para obtener que la comunicación tenga éxito, se ven obligados a utilizar los recursos que habitualmente utilizamos en nuestra lengua, como por ejemplo pedir si les han entendido o pedir aclaraciones, etc. Hay que subrayar que no es importante la perfección lingüística en estas actividades, sino la consecución del objetivo. Por eso el profesor, durante la actividad, no tiene que intervenir corrigiendo todos los errores porque podría interferir en el desarrollo del aprendizaje.

4. Cómo evaluar las necesidades y los intereses de los alumnos

El profesor, ya al inicio del curso, tiene que capacitar a los alumnos para saber evaluar sus necesidades e intereses, el porqué y para qué quieren o tienen que aprender español.

Lo que más desean los alumnos es comunicarse en español y el profesor tiene que facilitar y fomentar el desarrollo de la competencia de comunicación en español del alumno. Por eso es indispensable practicar una enseñanza centrada en los procesos de aprendizaje de los alumnos y además es importante que, al escoger los textos de lectura y preparar las actividades, tenga en cuenta los intereses de sus alumnos.

Sugerimos aquí abajo una lista de preguntas que ayudarán a los profesores a pensar en cómo se puede facilitar un ambiente de comunicación y de cooperación en clase y cómo promover la autonomía de los alumnos:

- ¿Los alumnos están interesados en los textos o temas que propongo para discutir?
- ¿Acepto que los alumnos sugieran algún tema/texto?
- ¿Explico los motivos de mi elección?
- ¿Comento con los alumnos las ideas expresadas en el texto?
- Propongo analizar los textos, si resulta necesario, bajo la doble perspectiva de la cultura meta y la de los alumnos?
- ¿Ayudo a los alumnos a expresarse (de forma oral o escrita) respecto a los textos y temas propuestos?
- ¿Los alumnos reaccionan en función de sus experiencias y de sus sentimientos personales?
- ¿Tengo en cuenta la personalidad de cada alumno?
- ¿Los alumnos pueden cooperar y discutir entre ellos sobre las diferentes opiniones con absoluta independencia?
- ¿Los alumnos participan de forma activa en trabajos de grupo?

El profesor que quiera promover la autonomía de sus alumnos tiene que estimularles para que afronten las siguientes cuatro cuestiones, que además pueden servir al profesor como orientación para estructurar sus clases de español.

- 1) ¿Por qué aprendo español?
- 2) ¿Qué quiero aprender?
- 3) ¿De qué forma aprendo mejor?
- 4) ¿Cuánto he aprendido de lo que he estudiado?

Comentaremos cada cuestión y daremos ejemplos de actividades para realizar en clase:

¿Por qué aprendo español?

Se ha demostrado que no existe aprendizaje sin una motivación adecuada. Por lo que atañe una lengua extranjera, existe en el estudiante una motivación intrínseca: la lengua es medio de comunicación y de relación con otros modos de vivir y de pensar, con otras culturas y sociedades. Este es un terreno fértil en el cual el profesor puede moverse para sustentar la motivación que puede enriquecerse de motivaciones extrínsecas (por ejemplo poder acercarse al extranjero por turismo o trabajo).

El primer objetivo didáctico es que el estudiante reconozca,

con la ayuda del profesor, las propias necesidades e intereses: esto será muy útil sobre todo en las primeras lecciones del curso. Es también posible que a lo largo del curso, el estudiante, haciendo progresos en el aprendizaje, cambie sus necesidades: por eso el profesor tendrá que, además de estimular la motivación del estudiante, darle continuamente oportunidades para revisar sus necesidades.

Proponemos una actividad (aconsejándola para una de las primeras lecciones en una clase de principiantes) que estimula a los alumnos a pensar en las motivaciones que les pueden empujar a estudiar la lengua española. Los alumnos tienen que relacionar unas fotografías, de personas diferentes, con unas frases que indican la motivación de estas personas. Al final los alumnos tendrán una serie de motivaciones y podrán individualizar y decir la propia.

Por qué estudio español ...

Las frases podrían ser:

... porque mi novio/a es ...

... por mi trabajo.

... para leer en español.

... para hablar con mis amigos.

... para viajar a México, Perú, España ...

... porque me gusta.

.....
¿Y tú?

¿Qué quiero aprender?

El profesor tiene que poner a los alumnos en condición de reconocer los objetivos de su curso de español y poderse preguntar: ¿Qué aspectos del español necesito o quiero aprender sobre todo? ¿Qué contenidos lingüísticos necesito profundizar? ¿Qué tipo de ejercicios necesitaría practicar más?

Si, por ejemplo, somos profesores de lengua en un Instituto Profesional, el estudiante necesita el español sobre todo para su puesto de trabajo. En un Instituto Turístico, el alumno necesitará probablemente saber las fórmulas específicas para hablar por teléfono en español, saber qué decir cuando una persona llega al hotel, qué se dice cuando una persona no está, etc. En este caso es necesario hacer practicar mucho el diálogo al alumno, hacer ejercicios que se ocupen de la comprensión auditiva y simulaciones de situaciones previsibles.

¿De qué se trata? ¿Cuál es el tema presentado?

Si el alumno sabe contestar a esta pregunta está también en condiciones de reconocer los problemas que puedan crearse durante el proceso de aprendizaje.

Para poder escoger las mejores estrategias para resolver una tarea, el alumno, antes de empezar un ejercicio dado, tendría que saber identificar el objetivo del ejercicio, y antes de la comprensión teórica de reglas gramaticales, debería reconocer el funcionamiento de un determinado fenómeno gramatical en la tarea propuesta.

Para ejercitar a los alumnos a individuar el por qué de un ejercicio propuesto se pueden proponer ejercicios como este:

a) Lea este texto:

Se habla español

El español, idioma oficial de España, es el nombre que se da al castellano, una de las lenguas románicas derivadas del latín que trajeron los conquistadores romanos. El castellano es actualmente la segunda lengua más hablada en todo el mundo, con unos 330 millones de hispanohablantes.

En España se hablan otras lenguas románicas: el catalán y el gallego. El catalán, que tiene un cierto parecido con el francés, lo hablan siete millones de personas que viven en la costa mediterránea y en las Baleares. El gallego, parecido al portugués, lo hablan tres millones de personas en Galicia, en el noroeste de España.

En el País Vasco, unas 600.000 personas hablan vascuence o euskera, una lengua que no procede del latín y que es una de las más antiguas de Europa.

La Constitución española de 1978 dice que el catalán, el gallego y el vascuence son, junto con el español, lenguas oficiales en sus respectivas comunidades autónomas: Cataluña, Galicia y País Vasco.

b) Complete:

Lenguas que se hablan en España:

– Diga cuántas y cuáles son

.....

– Diga de cuáles Comunidades autónomas son lenguas oficiales

.....

– Ordene de mayor a menor según el número de personas que las hablan:

.....

.....

.....
.....

¿Cuál es el objetivo de este ejercicio? Marque la respuesta correcta:

- 1) Aprender todas las palabras.
- 2) Entender la información básica del texto.
- 3) Practicar los números en español.

¿De qué forma aprendo mejor?

El profesor y el material didáctico que utiliza han de presentar diferentes tipos de actividades y ejercicios para entrenar al alumno en la identificación de diferentes estrategias de aprendizaje y permitir que elija las técnicas de aprendizaje que más le convengan. El profesor puede ayudar a esta búsqueda a través de una actividad de este tipo ⁴:

Aquí tienes estas ideas sobre cómo aprender español. Léelas y escribe tú en un papelito una idea de cómo crees que se aprende bien español.

- Aprender un idioma es algo muy serio. Los juegos son una pérdida de tiempo.
- El vocabulario hay que aprenderlo de memoria.
- Lo importante es aprender a comunicar, no ser perfecto en gramática.
- Aprendo mucho cuando en la clase hay actividades diferentes: cantar, leer, moverse ...
- La gramática sólo se aprende con esquemas y con las explicaciones del/de la profesor/a.
- El diccionario es muy importante: sólo cuando traduzco una palabra a mi idioma, la aprendo.
- Para mí son muy útiles los juegos de roles, porque me ponen en una situación casi auténtica.
- Sólo aprendes si te diviertes. Por eso los juegos son muy importantes.

Toda la clase formamos un círculo y nos intercambiamos los papeles. Lee el que te ha tocado. Imagina que esa es tu opinión y defiéndela de forma convincente durante un minuto. Tus compañeros/as tienen que adivinar si es tu verdadera opinión o si tú piensas de otro modo.

⁴ Esta actividad se encuentra en: CERROLAZA, M. *et al.*, *Planeta 3*, Madrid, Edelsa, 2000, p. 46.

Un cuestionario de este tipo puede, por ejemplo, ayudar al alumno a tomar conciencia de su manera de aprender:

¿Cómo mejorar nuestro estudio⁵?

¿Hace alguna de estas cosas? Marque con A B C:

A (nunca), B (a veces), C (habitualmente)

- a) Compruebo lo que sé y lo que no sé.
- b) Respondo, mentalmente, a las preguntas dirigidas a otros compañeros.
- c) Para aprender nuevas palabras me imagino una situación en la que pueden aparecer.
- d) Contrasto mis apuntes de clase con los de mis compañeros.
- e) Analizo el tipo de errores que cometo y así intento no repetirlos.
- f) Busco las mejores condiciones ambientales para estudiar: un lugar sin ruidos, con una temperatura agradable.

¿Cuánto he aprendido de lo que he estudiado?

Como hemos visto, la autoevaluación por un lado sirve para reflexionar sobre lo que se está haciendo, por otro es el punto de partida del proceso de aprendizaje.

Para que el estudiante pueda comprobar si ha aprendido, el profesor le someterá a un test y el alumno puede responder a cuestionarios sobre los contenidos lingüísticos tratados en las últimas lecciones, rellenar fichas de autoevaluación, etc.

Por ejemplo puede rellenar una ficha de este tipo:

Has aprendido a:

Preguntar nombre / profesión / origen

.....
.....
.....

⁵ *Profesor en acción*, cit., p. 37.

Pedir una cosa en el bar

.....
.....

Pedir la cuenta

.....

Dar las gracias. Responder

.....

Preguntar si existe algún lugar o cosa. Responder

.....

El alumno averigua si las técnicas de aprendizaje utilizadas han sido eficaces, o si el resultado del test ha sido negativo, tiene que buscar otras técnicas para mejorar su estilo de aprendizaje. Por ejemplo, puede preguntarse qué tipo de actividades le parecen más útiles en su aprendizaje: ¿hablar? ¿leer? ¿trabajar con video? ¿escribir? o explicaciones de gramática, ejercicios de libre elección, actividades de simulación, deducción personal de una regla de gramática, trabajo en grupo, el uso del diccionario, etc.

Si por ejemplo estamos trabajando a la memorización de nuevo vocabulario y queremos que el alumno busque las técnicas que le ayuden más en este tipo de actividad, se podría proponer un cuestionario de este tipo:

¿Qué técnicas utilizas para memorizar las palabras?

He aquí algunas técnicas para memorizar nuevas palabras, marca lo que haces tú para aprender vocabulario:

1. No lo hago nunca o casi nunca
2. Lo hago a veces
3. Lo hago siempre o casi siempre

– repaso muchas veces

– pongo las palabras similares en grupos (colores, profesiones)

– dibujo lo que representa la palabra

– escribo la palabra nueva en fichas y su definición al otro lado de la ficha

– uso combinaciones de sonidos e imágenes

- repito la palabra en voz alta muchas veces
- escribo muchas veces la palabra
- utilizo la palabra en nuevas frases
- uso el diccionario para entender lo que leo
- si no comprendo algunas palabras intento comprender del contexto lo que significan

Al final resulta eficaz que los alumnos comenten con sus compañeros las diferentes técnicas que utilizan.

5. La negociación y la cooperación

Podemos concluir que para poder llevar a la práctica la autonomía resultan ser elementos fundamentales el desarrollo de la “pedagogía de la negociación” y la cooperación.

Ante todo tenemos que aclarar que “por negociación se entiende la toma de conciencia sobre los objetivos que uno tiene al proponerse aprender español, para cotejarlos con los compañeros, encontrar el tronco común que responda a los intereses de todo el grupo, y buscar el modo de completar ese tronco común con las ramas que lo completan para dar con el árbol que responda a los objetivos personales” (E. Martín Peris)⁶.

Nos será de ayuda esquematizar los varios aspectos en la “negociación”: los **objetivos**, el tipo de **actividad** y la **contribución de los alumnos**.

Los **objetivos** de la negociación son ayudar a los alumnos a tomar conciencia:

- 1) Sobre qué, por qué, cómo aprender;
- 2) Sobre el propio papel;
- 3) Sobre el proceso de aprendizaje;
- 4) Sobre el grado de comunicación alcanzado

Las **actividades** son:

⁶ *Profesor en acción 1*, cit., p. 54.

- 1) Con enfoque sobre el proceso de aprendizaje;
- 2) Actividades que respondan a las necesidades y a los intereses de los alumnos;
- 3) Actividades de aprendizaje;
- 4) Actividades de interacción.

Los **alumnos** podrán contribuir con:

- 1) Ideas y opiniones sobre el proceso de aprendizaje;
- 2) Emociones, actitudes, preferencias;
- 3) Necesidades, intereses

El profesor deja de ser sólo el que transmite su saber y ha de abandonar su posición tradicional *ex cathedra*: ahora organiza las actividades, forma los grupos, los coordina, aporta informaciones, da explicaciones; es al mismo tiempo guía y director de una forma de aprendizaje muy eficaz: el aprendizaje en cooperación. La cooperación entre todos (entre los alumnos y entre profesor y alumnos) es la base para lograr el objetivo final: el dominio del español.

Aprendizaje en cooperación significa sobre todo trabajar en pequeños grupos y por parejas. El profesor tendrá que decidir, según los diferentes objetivos y contenidos y según la clase que le está en frente, el número de los grupos y cómo intervenir en el trabajo de cada grupo (ayudando, guiando, corrigiendo, etc.) según las necesidades de aquel grupo en particular.

Con el trabajo por parejas además aumenta la interacción alumno-alumno y se reduce la duración de discurso profesor-conjunto de la clase.

Las principales ventajas del aprendizaje en cooperación son:

- Los alumnos tienen la posibilidad de hacer más práctica si hay varios grupos que trabajan simultáneamente.
- En grupo los alumnos superan las inhibiciones derivadas de la actuación individual ante el grupo clase.
- Muchas veces los alumnos del mismo grupo se ayudan aclarándose las explicaciones del profesor o del libro de texto.

Hay ventajas también para el profesor: ahora no se ha una oposición fuerte entre profesor/alumno porque los dos son responsables del proceso de aprendizaje. Durante el trabajo, siendo los alumnos mismos que se ayudan y contestan a las dudas de los compañeros en dificultad o se corrigen entre

grupos los trabajos por escrito, no es necesario que el profesor esté atento a cada pregunta de los alumnos o que corrija todos los trabajos, sino que tendrá que decidir en qué grupo intervenir, según las necesidades, y podrá ser al mismo tiempo fuente de información, guía, evaluador de los progresos, etc.

En definitiva, depende de la habilidad del profesor obtener un aprendizaje cooperativo en el aula y conseguir que todos saquen provecho de las ventajas de esta forma de organización que los conducirá, paso a paso, a ser protagonistas activos en su proceso de aprendizaje dentro y fuera de clase.

ABSTRACT

In the last years it has been demonstrated the importance to develop the autonomy in the learning. The teacher has to consider student's needs and interests and students have to cooperate with the teacher to learn how to learn, becoming the protagonists of their learning process. The study explains the strategies a teacher has to choose to reach this objective.

KEY WORDS

Autonomy in learning. Teacher's strategies. Mistake importance. Student's autoevaluation.

René Lenarduzzi

BORGES E LA TRADIZIONE LETTERARIA ARGENTINA

Nel 1921 è di ritorno in patria il giovane Jorge Luis Borges dopo lunghi anni vissuti in Europa; prima in Svizzera, poi in Spagna. Ha già scoperto la sua vocazione letteraria che ha intrapreso con decisione. Apparteneva a una di quelle famiglie di Buenos Aires che contava fra i suoi antenati militari che avevano partecipato alle guerre dell'indipendenza prima e alla guerra contro l'indio dopo; e anche una nonna inglese, il che non era una eccezione visto che verso il territorio del *Rio de la Plata* gli inglesi avevano dimostrato da sempre un particolare interesse. Borges aveva lasciato qualche anno prima una città – Buenos Aires – che stava appena risvegliandosi da una situazione di stagno durata secoli e si ritrovava al suo ritorno con una metropoli che non riusciva però a occultare le tracce particolari del suo passato sopravvissuto nei quartieri della periferia e nei bassifondi. Sono anni di euforia e di ottimismo in Argentina. Curioso e polemico, Borges si inserisce nel mondo letterario del suo paese e ne diventa presto un protagonista di rilievo. Particolarmente attratto da quello che restava del vecchio Buenos Aires che aveva conosciuto durante la sua infanzia, nelle sue prime opere pubblicate – libri di poesia – vuole riscoprire il mito di questi luoghi e dei loro abitanti. Nel poema *Arrabal*, del primo libro di poesia esclama:

Esta ciudad que yo creí mi pasado
es mi porvenir, mi presente;
los años que he vivido en Europa son ilusorios,
yo estaba siempre (y estaré) en Buenos Aires. (p. 32)¹

¹ Le citazioni dell'opera di Borges sono prese da: J.L. BORGES, *Obras Completas 1923-1972* (a cura di Carlos V. Frías) Buenos Aires, Emecé, 1974 e il numero delle pagine fanno riferimento a questa edizione.

In questi versi ci sono già due degli argomenti principali di tutta la sua opera: l'annullamento del tempo e la realtà come illusione. E si trova anche quella che è una delle preoccupazioni estetiche dei suoi anni giovanili: il progetto di costruire una letteratura nazionale; non soltanto nella scelta del paesaggio urbano della sua città, o del paese e dei suoi uomini, ma anche nella scelta delle parole e dello stile: il giovane Borges si era proposto di creare un idioma argentino. Appartengono a questi anni tre libri di poesia: *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923); *Luna de enfrente* (1925) e *Cuaderno San Martín* (1929). A questi si aggiungono altri tre libri di saggi: *Inquisiciones* (1925), *El tamaño de mi esperanza* (1926) e *Evaristo Carriego* (1930).

Con un'immagine che è di moda oggi fra i critici argentini, Martín Lafforgue dice che il 1930 è, senza dubbio, un anno 'cerniera' per l'Argentina,² e che questo stesso anno segna un taglio nell'opera borgesiana: il Borges poeta cede al narratore di racconti; il criollista sceglie una posizione cosmopolita; cambia le chiassose riunioni di caffè e gli atteggiamenti provocatori delle avanguardie con la compagnia degli intellettuali del gruppo *Sur* o il silenzio delle biblioteche. Questo cambiamento quasi radicale gli preclude la simpatia di una parte dei suoi colleghi coetanei; ma, d'altra parte, gli apre le porte a nuove tematiche e a nuove vie espressive che daranno luogo alla scrittura di quei racconti con i quali più tardi raggiungerà la fama mondiale. Come narratore pubblica *Historia Universal de la Infamia* (1935), *El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan* (1941), *Artificios* (1944). Questi due ultimi libri saranno raccolti più tardi in *Ficciones*; e nel 1949 apparirà *El Aleph*. Bisogna riconoscere tuttavia che malgrado questa apertura della sua opera alle tematiche universali, il filone nazionalistico tradizionale non sparirà completamente dalla sua narrativa. Abbandona la stretta scelta criollista del suo primitivo progetto letterario, cambian-dola con un disegno più largo dalle connotazioni cosmopolite. L'universo come caos, l'esistenza come puro frutto dell'azzardo, la ciclicità del tempo, il testo che svela la sua propria

² LAFFORGUE, M., *El Antiborges*, Buenos Aires, Javier Vergara ed., 1999, p. 17. Quest'opera riunisce testi critici di autori che sia per differenze letterarie che ideologiche o politiche hanno contrastato l'opera di Borges. Sono interessanti per l'argomento trattato in questo articolo i testi riportati nel capitolo IV: *El nacionalismo popular: la crítica del intelectual nacional popular*, con lavori firmati da J. Abelardo Ramos, L. Castellani, J. Hernández Arregui, A. Jauretche e L. Justo; pp. 119-179.

costruzione, il destino personale come trappola... sono alcune delle tematiche alle quali la sua narrativa si appella e che introducono nuove valenze umane ed estetiche nell'ambito della letteratura universale. Borges ha donato all'immaginario del nostro secolo dei simboli che sono diventati ormai emblematici: la biblioteca di Babele, il labirinto, le tigri, il sognatore che scopre di essere al tempo stesso creatura del sogno di un altro sognatore, il giardino dei sentieri che si biforcano...

Quali furono le ragioni, le circostanze, le motivazioni che spinsero Borges ad abbandonare quella vetta nazionalistica che caratterizza i suoi anni giovanili? Perché eliminò parte dei suoi scritti quando preparava la prima edizione della sua intera opera? Perché più tardi negò apertamente la paternità e addirittura la esistenza di alcuni scritti, fra questi il libro *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, di cui si racconta un aneddoto che dice che Borges ravvribidì quando un professore di Oxford rammentò quest'opera e disse che nella biblioteca di quell'università c'era un'esemplare?³

Per tentarne una risposta bisogna fare previamente qualche delucidazione sulla letteratura argentina perché, come tutte le letterature dell'America Ispanica, quella argentina presenta delle connotazioni particolari che contrastano con quelle delle letterature europee.

La ricerca di una propria identità è uno dei tratti più rilevanti della letteratura ispanoamericana. Si sono posti questo problema sia gli scrittori che i critici e gli storici della letteratura. Se anche le letterature europee si sono interrogate su questo argomento non l'hanno mai fatto con l'insistenza, perfino la veemenza, di quelle dell'America Latina perché secoli di storia e civiltà garantivano all'Europa una tradizione che a queste nuove nazioni americane mancava. Infatti, una volta indipendizzate dalla colonia spagnola, gli uomini di quelle terre si trovarono con un paese da costruire, da inventare; e il passato solo offriva, da un lato, le culture precolombiane, civiltà distrutte e quasi sconosciute e i cui sopravvissuti costituivano la fascia più arretrata e disprezzata della società; e dall'altro, la cultura spagnola, quella contro la quale si era lottato e che si cercava di scavalcare.

³ BORGES, J.L., *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, Buenos Aires, Proa, 1926. Malgrado il rifiuto da parte di Borges, il libro è stato ristampato dopo la morte dello scrittore a Buenos Aires nel 1993 con permesso della sua vedova.

Il caso dell'Argentina era ancor più drammatico. Infatti l'Argentina era stata la periferia di quell'impero: una terra sconfitta e quasi sconosciuta che non aveva nemmeno un nome proprio fino a duecento anni prima. Quelle terre non possedevano né minerali preziosi né gruppi umani abituati al lavoro organizzato che attirassero l'interesse dei conquistatori spagnoli. L'Argentina non ha avuto come il Messico o il Perù delle sofisticate civiltà precolombiane né un passato coloniale spagnolo nei quali fondare una propria tradizione. Tuttavia la storia e la politica coloniale dell'Europa a partire dalla rivoluzione industriale fanno diventare l'Argentina a cavallo fra il XIX ed il XX secolo uno dei paesi più ricchi del Sud America, e perfino del mondo di allora. Quella Argentina ricca degli inizi del secolo vuole scoprire sé stessa, cercare un'immagine nella quale identificarsi. Soprattutto perché la sua crescita era frutto di un eterogeneo flusso di immigranti arrivati da tutte le parti del mondo.

Infatti, alla fine dell'800 l'Argentina cambia faccia radicalmente. La classe dirigente, spinta dal pensiero di figure intellettuali come quelle di Sarmiento e Alberdi prima, e quella della generazione dell'80 dopo, era impegnata a fare dell'Argentina un paese "civile", cioè "europeo" (il che vale a dire inserito nell'economia e nella politica liberale che aveva caratterizzato l'esplosione industriale e l'espansione del neocolonialismo). Va allora alla ricerca non delle proprie radici ripiegandosi verso il passato, bensì di un modello nuovo di nazione creato praticamente dal nulla. Il progetto consisteva nel costruire una nazione senza popolazione indigena ma con popolazione bianca, senza il peso dell'autorità della Chiesa Cattolica ma liberale e laica, senza i modelli culturali della tradizione spagnola ma secondo i modelli della modernità che proponevano allora gli Stati Uniti e paesi come la Francia, l'Inghilterra, la Germania.

Nel 1910 l'Argentina festeggia in pompa magna i cent'anni della sua nascita come paese con governo proprio. Ma questa nuova realtà nazionale appena nata ha bisogno di trovare una identità, degli archetipi, dei modelli che permettano di amalgamare una popolazione così eterogenea. E se le generazioni precedenti avevano cercato di scavalcare tutto quello che poteva impedire la modernizzazione tanto agognata per il paese neonato; cioè, tutto quello che aveva a che fare con la tradizione indigena e la tradizione della cultura coloniale spagnola,

adesso, invece, davanti a una realtà caotica di uomini, lingue e tradizioni diverse si sente il bisogno di guardare indietro per riscoprire le antiche radici.

In questo contesto politico e sociale viene scritta la prima storia della letteratura argentina che è, d'altra parte, il primo tentativo di scrivere una storia di una letteratura ispano-americana. Ricardo Rojas è l'autore di questo meritevole lavoro datato 1917-1922 e che ha contrassegnato lo sviluppo dell'istituzione letteraria in Ispanoamerica.⁴ Un dato curioso ma significativo lo costituisce il fatto che questa storia non rispetti rigorosamente la cronologia. Infatti, il primo volume non riguarda la letteratura coloniale argentina bensì la chiamata "letteratura *gauchesca*", che non è come verrebbe da pensare, la letteratura dei gauchos, ma quella delle opere in versi scritte da uomini di cultura che avevano scelto il linguaggio e la realtà rurale come elementi costitutivi dei loro testi e fra le quali spicca il *Martin Fierro*.⁵

La scelta di Rojas aveva una chiara base ideologica che ubbidiva al programma politico culturale ufficiale che voleva dare un volto d'identità alla neonata nazione; e cioè: sottolineare la tesi che in questa letteratura *gauchesca* si covava il seme della tradizione letteraria della nuova nazione. Per affermare questo, prendeva spunto da un saggio di Leopoldo Lugones.⁶ Infatti, nel suo saggio *El Payador*⁷ Lugones cercò i punti in comune fra le civiltà classiche della Grecia e di Roma e la cultura argentina. E tracciò un parallelo fra gli antichi aedi greci e i gauchos: i primi furono la base sulla quale Omero

⁴ ROJAS, R., *Historia de la literatura argentina. Ensayo filosófico sobre la evolución de la cultura en El Plata*, vol. I: *Los Gauchescos*, Buenos Aires, Coni Hnos, 1917. I restanti volumi (*Los coloniales*, *Los proscriptos* y *Los modernos*) sono apparsi successivamente fino al 1922.

⁵ Il *Martín Fierro*, di José Hernández, è l'opera massima della letteratura 'gauchesca' e viene considerata anche la massima espressione della letteratura argentina. A Borges, che si occupò più volte di quest'opera, piaceva invece ripetere che se fosse stato scelto il *Facundo* di Sarmiento come modello della letteratura argentina, un'altra sarebbe stata la sua storia.

⁶ Leopoldo Lugones (1874-1938), una delle figure più importanti delle lettere argentine, ritenuto nella sua maturità lo scrittore argentino per antonomasia. Nell'opera di Borges viene citato spesso visto che rappresentò, anche se con certo sguardo critico, un modello letterario per il giovane Borges.

⁷ LUGONES, L., *El Payador. Hijo de la Pampa*, Buenos Aires, Ed. Otero, 1916.

scrisse le sue opere; i secondi – i gauchos – preannunciarono il *Martin Fierro*, opera epica, secondo Lugones che sta alla Argentina come l'*Illiade* e l'*Odissea* stanno alla cultura della Grecia classica. Le premesse idealistiche di Lugones e Rojas ebbero un forte impatto sulla critica letteraria in particolare, e sulla cultura argentina in generale. L'influenza che ha avuto la Storia di Rojas nella cultura argentina, e particolarmente nell'ambito della letteratura, ha condizionato e, in una certa misura, vincolato l'attività sia degli scrittori che della critica poiché il testo, in qualche modo, indirizzava la ricerca di ciò che era insito nella letteratura argentina, sia nella rappresentazione di una realtà geografica ed umana propria che nella scelta di un idioma consono alla realtà dei suoi parlanti e non alla prescrittiva accademica. Da quello che abbiamo detto precedentemente risulta chiaro che il giovane Borges degli anni 20 era stato impegnato con quegli ideali. Poi, come si sa, cambiò opinione.

Conoscendo le circostanze storiche dell'Argentina in torno agli anni '30 non risulta difficile capire l'atteggiamento di Borges. Il movimento nazionalistico prendeva il sopravvento e rappresentava non solo un'ideologia che rivendicava un'identità nazionale ma che era inquinata da altre ideologie e rappresentava una serie di valori non facili da condividere per chi si era formato in un clima di principi liberali. Se Borges si allontana dal suo primo progetto di creare una letteratura ispirata all'idea di nazione è perché le idee sostenute dalla corrente ideologica nazionalista in Argentina provenivano principalmente da dottrine che Borges non condivideva. Infatti, in uno studio monografico sul nazionalismo argentino, lo storico americano David Rock⁸ percorre la storia di questo movimento e ne analizza le basi ideologiche. Queste sono: l'autoritarismo politico e le conseguenti simpatie verso i regimi fascisti e nazisti; il tradizionalismo basato su una convinzione idealistica, arcadica del passato; la ortodossia cattolica ed il clericalismo; il federalismo provinciale e la cultura tradizionale spagnola come risposta al cosmopolitismo liberale; un forte sentimento contro gli ebrei; il revisionismo storico che rivendica le figure di Juan

⁸ Rock, D., *Authoritarian Argentina: The Nationalist Movement, Its History and Its Impact*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1993. Noi abbiamo seguito la versione spagnola: *La Argentina autoritaria. Los nacionalistas, su historia y su influencia en la vida pública*, Buenos Aires, Ariel, 1993.

Manuel de Rosas e, più avanti, Juan Domingo Perón... Ed è precisamente durante gli anni '30 che il movimento nazionalista prende il sopravvento in Argentina. Il pensiero di Borges riflette proprio il contrario di tutto questo: da giovane ebbe una certa, fugace simpatia per la rivoluzione russa e per il partito di Yrigoyen in Argentina,⁹ anche se ormai anziano dichiarò di essersi iscritto al partito conservatore; non professò nessun credo religioso e si può ritenere che in questo ambito fu un agnostico, le sue esperienze come argentino si limitarono quasi sempre al fatto di essere un abitante di Buenos Aires; non nascose mai una certa posizione critica verso la Spagna e la cultura spagnola; ammirava gli ebrei e la cultura ebraica; ripudiava le figure di Rosas e di Perón. È logico pensare, quindi, che, man mano che prese coscienza delle connotazioni ideologiche che caratterizzavano il pensiero nazionalista in Argentina, andò allontanandosi da quel progetto giovanile nato dall'entusiasta riscoperta della sua patria al rientro dall'Europa.

Tuttavia Borges non si limita a un cambiamento silenzioso e progressivo nella scelta dell'ambito di rappresentazione della sua letteratura, o nel abbandono di un modello linguistico locale, ma rifiuta quella ideologia nazionalistica così lontana dai suoi profondi principi personali attraverso l'attività di critico. Nel 1951 Borges pronuncia una conferenza nel Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores la cui versione stenografica viene riportata nel suo libro *Discusión*. Si tratta di *El escritor argentino y la tradición*.¹⁰ Prima di formulare la sua opinione personale riguardo al tema della tradizione letteraria argentina prende in esame quelli che sono "los planteos y soluciones más corrientes": uno sostiene che la tradizione letteraria argentina "ya existe en la poesía gauchesca"; l'altro afferma che la tradizione letteraria argentina è quella della letteratura spagnola; per ultimo, ci sono, secondo Borges, quelli che ritengono che gli argentini mancano di una tradizione letteraria propria, che si trovano "como en los primeros días de la creación". Con la sua pungente e raffinata intelligenza Borges smonta uno per uno questi giudizi; ma è sul primo che si ferma più a lungo

⁹ Su queste simpatie politiche di Borges durante le prime decade del XX secolo si trovano interessanti riferimenti in: SALAS, H., *Borges. Una biografía*, Buenos Aires, Planeta, 1994. Si vedano, in particolare, i capitoli 12 e 15.

¹⁰ La prima edizione di *Discusión* è del 1932; la conferenza "El escritor argentino y la tradición" fu pronunciata, invece, diciannove anni più tardi e inserita quindi in una riedizione del libro.

giacché è la soluzione più comune e a suo giudizio “se ha hecho casi instintiva” e “se presenta sin colaboración de razonamientos”. Come si sarà capito già, si riferisce all'ipotesi presentata prima da Lugones, e da Rojas poi, nella sua *Storia della Letteratura Argentina*.

Quali sono gli argomenti, le prove, che offre Borges per respingere queste teorie? Il primo parte da una distinzione fra la letteratura dei *gauchos* (o, come la chiama Borges, dei *payadores*) e la letteratura *gauchesca*. Quest'ultima non è una continuazione o derivazione dalla prima bensì un genere letterario tanto artificiale come qualsiasi altro che per rispecchiare la prima imita il linguaggio rurale e sottolinea i tratti costumbristi e il “color local”. Il secondo argomento si centra proprio su questo concetto del “colore locale” come tratto fondamentale dell'identità nazionale di una letteratura.

Il ragionamento che fa Borges è molto abile e sottile: se l'archetipo della letteratura argentina si trova nella letteratura dei *gauchos*, non è nella letteratura *gauchesca* che ritroviamo questo archetipo; perché la letteratura è artificio e l'artificio del linguaggio rurale e l'artificio del colore locale che adoperano i cosiddetti poeti *gauchescos* non sono rilevanti, anzi, sono contrapposti a quelli dei *payadores*: Questi ultimi quando compongono e cantano, cercano di parlare perfettamente, non adoperano un registro volgare. “No quiero decir que el idioma de los poetas populares sea un español correcto, quiero decir que si hay incorrecciones son obra de la ignorancia” (p. 268). Anche per ciò che riguarda il “colore locale” e i regionalismi, è preferibile citare ancora le parole stesse di Borges:

“No sé si es necesario decir que la idea de que una literatura debe definirse por los rasgos diferenciales del país que la produce es una idea relativamente nueva; también es nueva y arbitraria la idea de que los escritores deben buscar temas de sus países. Sin ir más lejos, creo que Racine ni siquiera hubiera entendido a una persona que le hubiese negado su derecho al título de poeta francés por haber buscado temas griegos y latinos. Creo que Shakespeare se habría asombrado si hubieran pretendido limitarlo a temas ingleses, y le hubieran dicho que, como inglés, no tenía derecho a escribir *Hamlet*, de tema escandinavo, o *Macbeth*, de tema escocés. El culto argentino del color local es un reciente culto europeo que los nacionalistas deberían rechazar por foráneo”. (p. 270)

Quale è, allora, secondo Borges, la tradizione dello scrittore argentino? Ascoltiamo ancora le sue proprie parole:

“Creo que podemos contestar fácilmente y que no hay problema en esta pregunta. Creo que nuestra tradición es toda la cultura occidental, y creo también que tenemos derecho a esa tradición, mayor que el que pueden tener los habitantes de una u otra nación occidental.” (p. 272)

Come spiega Borges la pretesa che lo scrittore argentino abbia più diritto alla tradizione occidentale che un'altro scrittore pure lui occidentale? Per il fatto, secondo lui, che l'argentino è erede della cultura europea ma allo stesso tempo è fuori dell'ambito geografico-sociale dell'Europa, non ne subisce un'influenza diretta. Questa distanza gli permette di esprimersi senza sentirsi particolarmente legato, senza “superstizioni”, con più flessibilità, più liberamente.

Questo saggio di Borges ha avuto un forte impatto nell'ambito dell'attività letteraria in Argentina e ha contribuito a superare il condizionamento di una critica pigra e stagnante nei parametri della traccia ideologica di Rojas e i suoi seguaci nazionalisti.

Tuttavia si deve riconoscere un'altro debito allo scrittore. La letteratura di Borges, come si sa, è una letteratura che si inserisce nella corrente della chiamata “letteratura fantastica”. E di questa letteratura lui si è occupato non solo in quanto creatore ma anche in quanto uomo di lettere: è stato autore insieme a Bioy Casares e Silvina Ocampo di un'antologia ormai famosa nel mondo intero: *Antologia della letteratura fantastica*; e di altri lavori quali *Manual de Zoología Fantástica* e il *Libro de los seres imaginarios*; tutti e due in collaborazione con Margarita Guerrero. Inoltre, la famosa collana di racconti fantastici che in Italia ha fatto tradurre e pubblicato Franco Maria Ricci: *La biblioteca di Babele*. La sua opera non solo ha indirizzato giovani scrittori verso questa corrente della narrativa ma ha spinto gli storici della letteratura e i critici a rintracciare nella letteratura argentina la presenza del fantastico. E il panorama si è dimostrato generoso di esempi e ha aperto le porte a una nuova interpretazione della letteratura argentina e della sua tradizione.

Infatti, dall'800 in poi, ed ispirato da diverse vicende, sia propriamente letterarie, che sociologiche, e ideologiche, il fantastico è un argomento sempre presente nella produzione letteraria del paese sudamericano. Più che un condizionamento geografico – l'immensità, l'isolamento e il tedio delle sterminate praterie della pampa – c'è una matrice sociologica nella scelta di questa tematica fantastica. Infatti, inizia nel periodo della letteratura romantica sotto l'influenza di Hoffman e ben

presto si arricchisce con gli apporti dello scientificismo, dello psicologismo di filiazione positivista. Non si deve dimenticare che in America Latina, e molto significativamente nel Rio de la Plata, come reazione all'arretratezza coloniale spagnola ancorata al pensiero cattolico scolastico, l'ideario filosofico politico delle classi che fecero le guerre dell'indipendenza prima e la costruzione delle nazioni dopo era quello dell'Illuminismo e quindi, del Positivismo. Può sembrare strano che queste correnti ideologiche provochino la nascita di una letteratura fantastica; ma non si deve dimenticare il fascino che, a cavallo fra i secoli XIX e XX, avevano per i positivisti fenomeni quali l'ipnosi, la catalessi, il sonnambulismo, la parapsicologia, argomenti presenti nei racconti fantastici rioplatensi dell'inizio del XX secolo e che più tardi, invece, lasciano il posto a altri giochi più sottili che mettono in rilievo l'irruzione di fatti anormali in mezzo alla più banale normalità.

Si può allora concludere che Borges nel contesto della letteratura del suo paese abbia fatto luce su ciò che riguarda la tradizione argentina sia come creatore sia come critico. Come critico, con fine intelligenza e con coraggio, ha sbloccato gli stretti parametri in cui un programma politico culturale aveva rinchiuso la produzione letteraria del suo paese; come creatore, attraverso la sua opera ha fatto luce su una vena di significativa presenza nella letteratura rioplatense ma che nessuno aveva fin'allora valorata.

Una nazione costruisce una tradizione letteraria attraverso il tempo e a partire da quegli elementi che a lungo andare si rivelano ricorrenti fino a diventare un tratto che serve a rivelarne l'identità, un modo de essere, un comune denominatore. L'invenzione d'una tradizione letteraria, invece, non basta per costruire una nazione; a volte può essere un ostacolo per capire chi siamo, come siamo. Per rispondere a queste domande, la letteratura – la buona letteratura – ha sempre una risposta. L'istituzione letteraria spesso risulta una bussola mendace, soprattutto quando si propone di confermare superficiali certezze anziché svelare la realtà.

La morte de Borges, a Ginevra, nella primavera del 1986, costituisce un fatto che viene ad associarsi a una lunga serie di personaggi famosi dell'Argentina che sono morti lontani dalla loro terra. Se ci sia soltanto il caso dietro tutto questo non lo si può sapere; ma la serialità dei fatti finisce per diventare, inevitabilmente, una tradizione. Borges, come Mariano Moreno,

come San Martín, come Sarmiento, come Rosas, come Gardel... è morto in terre straniere. Il suo corpo riposa oggi in un cimitero di Ginevra; e la sua tomba è sigillata da una pietra. Una strana pietra il cui epitaffio può sconcertare il visitatore. Una frase: *Hann tekr svertbit Gram ok leggri i methal theira bert*, che sono i versi di una antica saga scandinava, il *Volsunga Saga*. Sotto, il disegno di una nave vikinga; e sotto a questo, un'iscrizione in spagnolo: *De Ulrica a Javier Otárola*; senz'altro, una dedica. La chiave per interpretare questo curioso, ultimo omaggio si può rintracciare nel racconto *Ulrica*, incluso in *El libro de arena*. Lo stesso Borges diceva nell'epilogo di quell'opera che *Ulrica* era l'unico dei suoi testi in prosa in cui compariva il tema dell'amore. Il testo in lingua germanica antica si traduce così: *Prende la spada Gram e la posa fra loro due*. Javier Otárola e Ulrica sono i personaggi del racconto. Ulrica era norvegese e Javier Otárola, colombiano. Malgrado tutti questi riferimenti cosmopoliti si può ritrovare nella tomba che María Kodama dedica a suo marito un tratto che Borges riteneva caratteristico dell'essere argentino e al quale si riferiva parlando della poesia di Enrique Banchs¹¹ le cui immagini convenzionali sono significative "del pudor, de la desconfianza, de las reticencias argentinas; de la dificultad que tenemos para las confidencias, para la intimidación" (p. 270).

ABSTRACT

Borges has been attacked by certain critics from his own country for the fact that his works do not reflect Argentinian cultural and literary tradition. Nevertheless, Borges's youthful works show clear traits of nationalism that the author gradually began to abandon around the forties. This article offers an explanation for this change and analyses the impact that Borges's work – both as writer and as critic – had on literary studies and on the interpretation of Argentinian literary history.

KEY WORDS

Borges. Argentinian literary history. Fantastic literature.

¹¹ BORGES, J.L., *El escritor argentino y la tradición*, cit.

Rosella Mamoli Zorzi

ART IN THE MUSEUMS AND ART IN THE HOMES:
TABLEAUX VIVANTS IN ISABELLA STEWART
GARDNER'S TIME*

On April 27, 1889, the *Boston Journal* carried an article that described the annual "Artists' Ball" of the Art Students' Association, in Boston: the lady patronesses were artfully placed to represent Paul Veronese's *Marriage of Cana*, the huge Louvre painting. The reporter wrote:

"Here, on a dais, covered with red, was a group 'After the marriage of Cana'* by Paul Veronese. All the luxuriant wealth of draperies, all the gleaming of jewels, which the stately painters love to represent, were carried out by the patronesses. Mrs. Martin Brimmer was the central figure of this Venetian picture, as she received in a superb Venetian costume of yellow brocade over a white satin petticoat, with red ornament, pierced with a diamond-arrow on her hair. Mrs. Whitman in black velvet, the sleeves picked up with white, and with the large ruche common to the period, stood at her left. Mrs. Loring was in rose color, with a small Venetian cap. Mrs. Long was in white satin, with girdle of silk."¹

Among the patronesses there was – of course – Isabella Stewart Gardner, who apparently had even her own "blackamoor" in order to look like a Veronese lady:

"To recall still further the memories of Venice, at one side of the dais stood a very small blackamore (*sic*), the attendant of Mrs. John Gardner. No one could doubt that the grand Venetian dame in her

* This essay is part of a more extended work-in-progress. Some material in this part was presented at the Lisbon EAAS 1998 Conference, as a seminar at the Graduate School of CUNY in December 1999, and as a lecture at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, in Boston, in June 2000. Asterisks indicate slides.

¹ *Boston Journal*, April 27, 1889. Boston Museum of Fine Arts Archives, Clippings, Book 2, p. 38.

costume of old rose brocaded satin, cut décolleté and ornamented with jewels, was thoroughly in the character of the time, as she stood on the dais or walked through the gallery, her black attendant, with turban and other proper accessories, holding her train and a small and docile black and white dog at the same time.”²

During the ball, according to the *Boston Daily Advertiser* of April 27, there was quite a lot of expectation for a grand tableau vivant, which, at half past eleven, had not yet been presented. It was to represent Rembrandt's *Night Watch* (Ill. 1).

From the report, it is not quite clear if the tableau was finally staged, but the reporter seemed to be content with the fact that “the figures for the great Rembrandt were present all the evening, and were pictures, every one of them, that suggested the frame in which they belonged”.³

In the articles in the various papers there seems to be some confusion between people dressed up in costumes after specific paintings and tableaux vivants: Rembrandt's *Night Watch* was specifically expected and defined as a tableau, while the group on the dais “after the Marriage of Cana” by Veronese must have been more of a receiving line than a real tableau, in spite of some “placing” of the figures, as the *Boston Globe* reporter underlined. The brocade-dressed patronesses were placed

“against the background formed by a long dark seat of dark wood behind which there were hangings of deep red cloth”

making thus “a living picture of such form and coloring as one seldom sees”.

In spite of the Veronese painting being defined “a living picture” (which is a literal translation of the French “tableau vivant”), it is clear that the ladies were not placed in a *real* tableau vivant, since they were standing (and not sitting down as in the painting) and also moving about.

It is not difficult to imagine Isabella Stewart Gardner wearing several rows of her famous pearls on a Venetian silk brocade dress – having given up, for one night, one of her famous Worth gowns, as the black one in which Sargent portrayed

² *Ibidem.*

³ *The Boston Daily Advertiser*, April 27, 1889, *ibidem.*



Ill. 1: REMBRANDT, *The Night Watch* (Rijksmuseum), in *L'opera pittorica completa di Rembrandt*, Presentazione di G. Arpino, Apparati critici e filologici di P. Lecaldano, Milano, Rizzoli, 1969, tavv. XXVIII-XXIX.

her. It is more difficult to imagine her sitting still, with numerous other ladies, in a painting where she could not possibly be a *prima donna*, as the central figure is a male figure, that of Christ.

The reporter in fact continued describing in detail Mrs. Gardner who

“stood at the end of the line in a Venetian-red brocade of a very rich and heavy quality. It was cut extremely low in the neck, front and back, and the sleeves were queer, large puffs, over longer ones of gauze. A long chain of pearls encircled her neck twice, and the front of the bodice was one mass of diamonds, two diamond stars nestling in her hair also. Mrs. Gardner’s little white poodle was carried by her side by a little blackamoor page.”⁴

The reporters do not seem to agree on the color of Mrs. Gardner’s poodle – black and white or just white? – but they do agree on her royal appearance, on the dazzling jewels, and on the perfection of someone who chose to have the little “blackamoor” whom one finds in so many of Veronese’s paintings. Also in this case, “display proved power”, as Martha Banta has observed of the staging of social events by Ward McAllister.⁵

In the description of the ball the various reporters mention a number of painters: Fra Angelico,⁶ (Fra Angelico’s Angels)*, Titian, Paris Bordone, Tintoretto, Franz Hals, van Dyck. But they also describe Greek maidens and Roman youths dancing with Puritans, Arabs and many Venetians.

⁴ Although there seems to be no photography of Mrs. Gardner in this attire, there is a painting by Dennis Miller Bunker, hanging in the Director’s office at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, that shows Mrs. Gardner recognizably dressed as described above.

⁵ MARTHA BANTA, *Imaging American Women. Idea and Ideals in Cultural History*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1987, p. 652.

⁶ Fra Angelico, Van Dyck, the Greek maidens and the Roman youths are mentioned in *The Boston Journal*, cit. The mere mention of Beato Angelico opens up a chapter in the changes of taste in painting brought about by Ruskin, whose theories were particularly appreciated in America because of the connection between morality, religion, and art. Beato Angelico’s presence here proves the penetration of Ruskin’s theories in the United States. On the subject see ROGER STEIN, *Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought in America: 1840-1900*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1967. A famous story by Edith Wharton, *False Dawn* (in *Old New York*) focuses on the slow change in pictorial taste in a rich American family, whose son is sent on a Grand Tour to Europe, where he meets Ruskin, and returns with no Raffaello, but with a totally unappreciated Beato Angelico among other “primitives”.

These descriptions of the Artists' Ball – however inexact they may be – testify to the vogue of tableaux vivants.

Before we look at other tableaux vivants in the time and circles in which Isabella Stewart Gardner moved, on this and on the other side of the Atlantic, I would like to define tableaux vivants, as this form of entertainment, that by 1889 had had a long history, is often confused with other forms – as was the case with the reporters I mentioned.

Tableaux vivants were a very popular kind of “home theatricals”, for several decades akin to, and connected with,⁷ charades and other family games. They were staged not only in big halls, but very much in the home parlors. They were also a very ephemeral kind of entertainment, in that they lasted only seconds, not even minutes: a stage curtain was pulled open in front of a seated, expecting audience, in the home parlor, and it was pulled close after several seconds of absolute immobility on the part of the “players” – the figures being placed so as to represent a painting, or any scenes from poems, novels, or other sources. Several tableaux vivants were shown in succession, with music accompanying them.⁸

There was a complex element of lighting, which changed over the years, as illumination changed: from candles, to magnesium, to gaslight. Most important, the tableau – after the curtain had opened – took place on a platform *behind one or more layers of gauze stretched onto a frame*.^{*} The gauze could be either white, black, or slightly colored,⁹ but it must be well-stretched.

⁷ In Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848) Becky's tableaux vivants are a clear explanation of how these were used to illustrate the various syllables composing the words in a charade.

⁸ Tolstoy used a startling comparison describing the horrors of war in *War and Peace*: “The roar of guns, that had not ceased for ten hours, wearied the ear and gave a peculiar significance to the spectacle, as music does to tableaux vivants”. The reference is to Napoleon, going towards Semionovskoie on horseback, through the battlefields of Borodino. See L. Tolstoy, *Guerra e pace*, tr. E. Cadei, Mondadori, 1951, vol. III, p. 293. I owe the reference originally to William A. Williams Jr.'s concordance (<http://www.Concordance.com>).

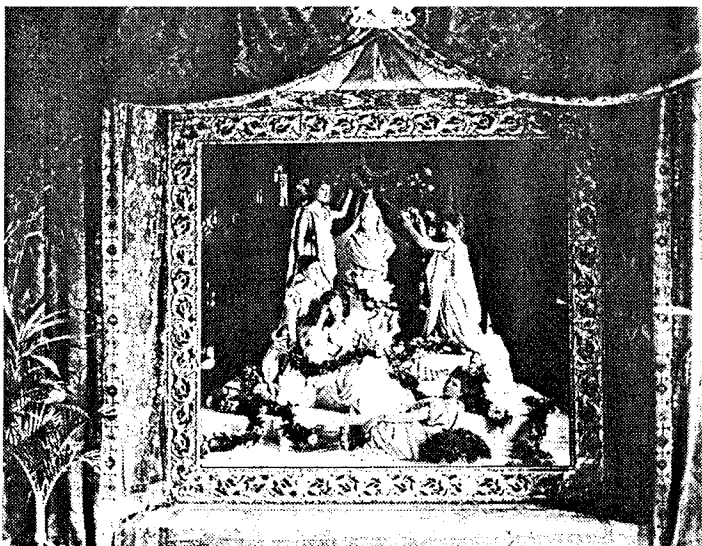
⁹ C.H. Fox's *Theatrical Catalogue* (no date, no place, 106 pp.) advertized “Tableaux gauze, Light Blue, Grey, White and Black”, 108 in. wide, 3 shilling 6 pence per yard. It also advertized Cloth and Plush Curtains, complete with Pulleys, Spinning wheels on hire, and costumes.

Tableaux vivants had therefore a very precise technical set up, and the stretched gauze, with the proper lights, was what "made" the tableau. Between the people "frozen" in their attitudes on the stage and those looking at them in the audience there was therefore a visual filter, which enhanced the artificial character of the representation (Ills. 2, 3).



Ill. 2: Sketch for a tableau, presumably for *The Abbott* by Sir David Wilkie (1883), pen and wash, in *Van Dyck in Check Trousers*, S. Stevenson and H. Bennett eds., Edinburgh, The Scottish National Portrait Gallery, 1978, p. 47.

If the tableau lasted only a matter of seconds, perhaps with an *encore*, the process of preparation was instead at times quite long, and part of the fun for the performers must have been this very process. There usually was a painter – a man – to organize them, although the event belonged very much to the feminine world of the home. The painter was in most cases a friend of the family who provided the scenery, a background, painted by himself. The women prepared and sewed the costumes, and were most often – if not exclusively – the protag-



Ill. 3: Homage to Queen Victoria (1888), *ibidem*, p. 50.

onists: dressing up in the luxurious costumes of time past enhanced their beauty. Tableaux vivants well reflected the patriarchal structure of the nineteenth century society and family, as, even in the case of cultured women, who knew the paintings they were staging, the whole set up was highly conservative, taking place, as it did, within the home, and underlining the traditional functions of women as hostesses and beauties.¹⁰

In the course of the nineteenth century, this form of “home theatricals” became very popular, and there were many “hand-books” explaining how to set up the frame, the curtains, the lights, how to make the costumes etc.

The subjects were chosen almost from any source – provided that they could furnish a “scene”: scenes from Shakespeare were always popular, but the sentimental nineteenth century also liked “social” subjects as the one representing “The silk dress” (Ill. 4), where two tableaux in succession offered the points of view of the rich and of the poor.

¹⁰ This was even more true in the case of middle-class mid-century tableaux vivants (see below) not representing paintings, but sentimental and moral scenes. See also BANTA, *op. cit.*, p. 650.



Ill. 4a: *The Silk Dress*, in CHARLES HARRISON, *Theatricals and Tableaux Vivants for Amateurs*, London, Upcott Gill, 1882, p. 120.

Ill. 4b: *The Silk Dress*, *ibidem*, p. 121.

The tableaux we are speaking of here, however, are of one very specific type: those that represented paintings – such as the *Marriage of Cana* or *The Night Watch* which were mentioned. By the 1880s and 1890s this particular type of tableaux vivants had become very popular: the bourgeois society that in the course of the century had brought tableaux into stifling home parlors, and had represented sentimental scenes, opened up to art, brought back, we can say, tableaux vivants to their courtly origins.

A tableau vivant representing a painting presumed a visually cultured audience: the success of the entertainment depended on the immediate recognition of the painting on the part of the audience. Therefore the fashion for this particular type of entertainment tells us a lot on the pictorial tastes of the times, and on the degree of visual culture of both the people who staged them and their audiences.

Behind the taste for tableaux representing paintings there is the transformation of American society, where art, by the 1880s, had really made it to the center of the cultural scene. One may think of the great museums that had been founded in the second half of the nineteenth century – be it the Metropolitan Museum of Art in new York (1870) or the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (1870). Great collections were formed: the mere names of Mrs. Potter Palmer, of J. Pierpont Morgan, Charles Lang Freer, Henry and Louisine Havemeyer, Henry Clay Frick (1849-1919, although his collection opened in 1935), and, of course, Isabella Stewart Gardner, evoke wonderful collections.¹¹

If Isabella Stewart Gardner's museum had its gala opening on January 1st 1903, the Museum land purchase had been signed in 1898 (January 31st), and Mrs. Gardner had actually started her amazing collection in 1894, with the purchase of Botticelli's *Tragedy of Lucretia*.

The general centrality of art was crucial in this period. Some of the painters who were friends and in some cases advisors to Mrs. Gardner in her purchases were also “stage directors” or

¹¹ See *Before Peggy Guggenheim. American Women Art Collectors*, R. MAMOLI ZORZI ed., Venice, Marsilio, 2001.

performers of tableaux vivants: one example is Ralph Curtis (1854-1922).

Curtis corresponded at length with Mrs. Gardner, in delightfully witty letters, often addressing her as "mia carissima regina" ("my dearest queen"), signing himself "Raffaello", and at times offering her a "crimson velvet piviale" (pluvial, ceremonial vestment) or some fire iron dogs.

The painter Ralph Curtis was also the son of the owners of the Palazzo Barbaro* in Venice, which Mrs. Gardner rented several times, "holding court" there, royally, Cleopatra-like, as Henry James suggested, or being portrayed as she stepped in from her balcony on the Grand Canal, against a background of fireworks, by Anders Zorn*.

Ralph Curtis, a lively and elegant young man – he is portrayed with his parents and his beautiful wife Lisa Colt Rotch in the Palazzo salon, in a most famous painting, *An Interior in Venice* (1899), by Sargent* – did not disdain taking part in "home theatricals" in Venice when he was not looking at pictures in Dresden, "deer shooting with the Metternichs" in their "vast estates" near Marienbad, reading Casanova's "fearfully immoral but deeply interesting" memoirs and advising Mrs. Gardner to do the same ("But you must get some gnome to buy them for you and then hide them away from the Boston Grandies"), or going to Sevilla for the Feria, to Paris for the Exposition, or to Bayreuth to hear Tristan, or, simply, painting.¹²

He took part in some tableaux vivants at Mrs. Bronson's,¹³ an American expatriate who had a house right across the Salute on the Grand Canal, a friend of Robert Browning and Henry James. At Mrs. Bronson's house, as Ralph's mother wrote to her sister-in-law, on October 27, 1883:

"there were beautiful tableaux the other night ... Afety (Ralph) was in powder and satin – 18th century* – very pretty".¹⁴

¹² See Ralph Curtis's letters in HENRY JAMES, *Letters from the Palazzo Barbaro*, R. Mamoli Zorzi ed., London, Pushkin Press, 1998 (repr. 2001), pp. 186-203.

¹³ For her portrait: *Robert Browning a Venezia*, R. MAMOLI ZORZI ed., Venezia, Fondazione Scientifica Querini Stampalia, 1989, n. 65, p. 33.

¹⁴ See the reproduction in R. MAMOLI ZORZI, *The Pastimes of Culture. The Tableaux Vivants of the British Expatriates in Venice in the 1880s and 1890s*, in *Textus*, 12, 1999.

These tableaux had been arranged by another painter, Frank Duveneck,

“who appeared himself as the Bravo of Venice* – in four tableaux – wrapped in a cloak, sharpening his sword, giving the blow – and lastly wiping the fatal weapon. It was tremendous and made real blood run cold.”¹⁵

We may imagine Meissonnier's *Bravos** as the source of this tableau.

Other tableaux vivants organized by English and American expatriates in Venice were those in the house of Lady Layard, again on the Grand Canal, near the Rialto. Lady Layard was the wife of Sir Austin Layard, a diplomat and the discoverer of Niniveh, who had some of the Mesopotamian jewels he excavated made into a necklace and earrings for Lady Layard.¹⁶ The Layards were also the extraordinary collectionists, who, with the help of Morelli, had in their Venetian home such paintings as Bellini's *Mahomet II**, part of the collection which was donated to the London National Gallery.

In Lady Layard's house, as we know from her detailed, unpublished, diary, the English painter Henry Wood organized tableaux, usually for Christmas, where the performers were her nieces, but also exiled Royalty such as Princess Olga of Montenegro, the daughter of Queen Darinka, the widow of the assassinated king of Montenegro. We can see Princess Olga in a drawing by Kirchmayer.¹⁷ She was the “poor little princess, with no money or art”, whom James contemplated as “a possible subject” for a story, “needing to be a little filled up”.

On Christmas night of 1888, for instance, after some rehearsing during the preceding week, the tableaux vivants were started and

“Nela [one of Lady Layard's nieces] opened them in a picture called “The Love Letter after Romney” (Ill. 5). After came Dora in a Gainsborough hat*, the princess Olga as Turkish coffee bearer, then Dora as Galatea* Mr. Marzials as a “Venetian Senator” (Ill. 6), and then looking shy in modest costume Mrs. Hulton as The Spanish Fortune Teller. Mr.

¹⁵ Letter of Ariana Curtis to Mary Curtis, Oct. 27, 1883, in HENRY JAMES, *Letters from the Palazzo Barbaro cit.*, p. 172.

¹⁶ See Sir Austen's portrait by Charles Vigors and Lady Layard's by Palmaroli in *Browning a Venezia*, cit., n. 111, p. 41 and n. 112, p. 43.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, n. 91, p. 70.



Ill. 5: Not ROMNEY, but Sir JOSHUA REYNOLDS, *Mrs. Lloyd (The Love Letter)*.



Ill. 6: G.B. TIEPOLO, *A Venetian Senator* (Fondazione Scientifica Querini Stampalia).

TABLEAUX VIVANTS IN ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER'S TIME



Ill. 7: *Venetian spoon-vendor* (from ZOMPINI, *Le arti che vanno per via nella città di Venezia*, Venezia, 1785).

Fischer was a van Dyke*, Mrs. Acton as Beatrice Cenci*. Nela as a Venetian spoon-vendor (Ill. 7) and lastly Henry and I in our modern costume in one picture,”

In 1892 other tableaux vivants were staged, where

“Mrs. Hulton and Agostini appeared as Herodias’ daughter with the head of St. John the Baptist, Mrs. Zecchin as a Madame Lebrun’s painting, Ola in a titianesque picture holding up a dish of flowers*. Mr. Woods as a Franz Hals Burgmeister, while Carisi (le teneur) played vales on the piano”.

Other tableaux vivants of the same time and circles in Venice had as subjects “a Velasquez man”, “a Rembrandt Dutch Man with a pipe”, “Titian’s daughter”.

Lady Layard was asked a special staging of tableaux vivants when Empress Frederick, the daughter of Queen Victoria and the wife of the Emperor of Germany, arrived in Venice in the Fall of 1892:

"These tableaux were produced by Henry Wood's and Ludwig Passini, each of them undertaking separate pictures; Passini himself appeared in one of them as Morone's (*sic*) "Tailor"*. I was in two of them as a peasant in one of Woods' pictures, and then as a Longhi lady*, my husband appeared in another as a Lanzknecht".

The diarist, this time, is Zina Hulton, the author of another interesting unpublished journal, *Fifty Years in Venice*. Her husband was a painter who exhibited his works in the Venice Biennale, in the section called "Venetian Painters" although he was in fact British.

If one looks at the paintings mentioned in the Venetian expatriates' tableaux vivants, one finds names of painters such as van Dyck, Franz Hals, Reynolds, Guido Reni (to whom the famous portrait of Beatrice Cenci* was at the time ascribed), Titian, who were definitely popular in the 19th century. Some of these very names come up in the American tableaux vivants of the same period that were written about in the press, or which were used by novelists in their works.

Portraits by Franz Hals¹⁸ and a Velasquez, for example, were staged at the benefit performance of the Kit Kat Club in New York in February 1891, together with "works of Greek sculpture". A Franz Hals was staged at a benefit for "St. Katherine's Home in Jersey City", a Velasquez at the New York Decorative Arts Society in 1893.¹⁹ A painter from the Metropolitan Opera House, T.D. Plaisted, had been engaged to paint the sceneries of the Kit-Kat Club tableaux, while other contemporary painters set up tableaux from their own paintings.²⁰

If there was a "Titian's Daughter" staged by the expatriates in Venice, there was one in the newly built house of the newly rich Brys in New York, in Edith Wharton's most famous tableaux vivants in *The House of Mirth*, where

¹⁸ One Franz Hals was exhibited, together with paintings by Claude Monet, portraits by Rembrandt, *The Dance of the Gypsies* by Corot, and pictures of the Dutch and Flemish School at the Union League Club, in New York, as *The New York Times* reported on February 13, 1891.

¹⁹ JUDITH FRYER, *Reading Mrs. Lloyd*, in *Edith Wharton. New Critical Essays*, Alfred Bendixen and Annette Zilversmith eds., New York, Garland, 1992, pp. 27-55.

²⁰ JACK McCULLOUGH, *Living Pictures on the New York Stage*, Eppin, Bowker, 1981, p. 98.



Ill. 8: VAN DYCK, *Queen Henriette Maria* (Windsor Castle), in *L'opera completa di Van Dick 1626-1641*, Presentazione e apparati critici di E. Larsen, Milano, Rizzoli, 1980, tav. XXV.

"a brilliant Miss Smedden from Brooklyn showed to perfection the sumptuous curves of Titian's daughter*, lifting her gold salver laden with grapes above the harmonising gold of rippled hair and rich brocade".²¹

There were van Dycks too staged both in Venice, in Boston at the Artists' Ball, and in Wharton's New York, where

²¹ EDITH WHARTON, *The House of Mirth* (1905), With an Introduction by Cynthia Griffin Wolff, New York, Penguin Classics, 1985, p. 134.

“a young Mrs. Van Alstyne, who showed the frailer Dutch type, with high blue-veined forehead and pale eyes and lashes, made a characteristic Vandyck, in black satin (Ill. 8), against a curtained archway” (p. 134)

just like Ariana Curtis in Venice.²²

There was also “a Veronese supper, all sheeny textures, pearl-woven heads and marble architecture” in the same group of fictional tableaux, where Lily Bart, the protagonist, chose not to dress up as Tiepolo’s Cleopatra** but as Reynolds’s Mrs. Lloyd* – surely the same painting called by Lady Layard “The Love Letter”, not by Romney (he never painted one) but by Reynolds.²³ In Wharton’s novel other paintings mentioned are “Kauffmann nymphs garlanding the altar of love” (surely Angelica Kauffmann’s²⁴ nymphs), “a Watteau group of lute-playing comedians, lounging by a fountain in a sunlit glade”, Botticelli’s Spring, and a portrait by Goya (p. 133-134).

If there was a Galatea at Lady Layard’s in Venice, there was a most famous Galatea* (Chicago, 1881) touring the United States in the 1880s: Mary Anderson appeared as a statue at the beginning and at the end of Gilbert’s play *Pygmalion and Galatea*.²⁵

²² Letter of Ariana Curtis, in *Letters from the Palazzo Barbaro*, cit., p. 172. Daniel also wrote about it, p. 176.

²³ This scene has been the subject of much criticism, see JUDITH FRYER, *Felicitous Space. The Imaginative Structures of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather*, Chapel Hill, The University of Carolina Press, 1986, pp. 75-82.

²⁴ Not Hugo Wilhelm Kaufmann, as indicated in the Notes to *The House of Mirth*, cit., p. 335.

²⁵ See McCULLOUGH, *op. cit.*, p. 93. A photo was taken by Napoleon Sarony. Mary Anderson remembers how the painter Alma Tadema wanted her to appear “draped after some Tanagra figurine”. As the effect was not good (“Galatea looked like a stiff Medieval saint”), the actress made the statue in her own way, in “white Greek clothes”, helped by her mother in the last hour before the show (“suddenly, the statue that I wanted stood before me” in the long mirror), MARY ANDERSON, *A Few Memories*, London, Osgood, 1896, p. 150. Mary Anderson also appeared as “America” in the Great Pageant in Queen’s Hall in London during the war, when the US had just entered the war. When she appeared “the entire house rose and cheered, and stood, while Sir Thomas Beecham’s orchestra played the American National Anthem as I came down the flight of stairs to be embraced by Great Britain (Clara Butt), England (Lady Tree), Belgium...”, MARY ANDERSON DE NAVARRO, *A Few More Memories*, London, Hutchinson, 1936, p. 160.

There were painters engaged to direct tableaux vivants on both sides of the Atlantic: a painter from the Metropolitan Opera House, T.D. Plaisted, had been engaged to paint the sceneries of the Kit-Kat Club tableaux, while other contemporary painters set up tableaux from their own paintings.²⁶ Also in Wharton's fictional tableaux there is a painter: "the distinguished portrait painter, Paul Morpeth, had been prevailed upon" (p. 131) to organize the tableaux vivants at Mrs. Bry's: he has been identified as John Singer Sargent²⁷ or as William Merritt Chase.²⁸

There were tableaux vivants representing contemporary paintings at the Kit Kat Club, as we mentioned, but there were some also in painters' circles: at the Gersons' home, where William Merritt Chase fell in love with his future wife who was still a girl when they met, in 1880 there were tableaux after F.S. Church's paintings²⁹. Painters liked dressing up as figures in old paintings, as Chase's photograph in a 17th century à la Van Dyck costume* taken in Munich in 1876 shows (but this would take us into another genre).³⁰

William Merritt Chase organized tableaux at the New York decorative Art Society in 1893,³¹ staging representations of paintings by "Velasquez, Doré, David, Alma Tadema, Gerome, and Gainsborough". New and old paintings were chosen.

We have now seen how popular tableaux vivants representing paintings were in the 1880s and 1890s, when they definitely represented a respectable (even children staged tableaux vivants)³² and even highbrow entertainment in American soci-

²⁶ JACK McCULLOUGH, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

²⁷ *House of Mirth*, *cit.*, p. 334.

²⁸ JUDITH FRYER, *art. cit.*, p. 30.

²⁹ Alice Miller's *My Father*, quoted in RONALD G. PISANO, *William Merritt Chase*, Boston, Little Brown, 1993, p. 46.

³⁰ Perhaps it could be called the genre of "fancy portraits", where painters represented their subject in fancy or simple old time costumes. On the subject see SARA STEVENSON and HELEN BENNETT, *Van Dyck in Checkered Trousers*, Edinburgh, Scottish National Portrait Gallery, 1978.

³¹ FRYER, *art. cit.*, p. 31.

³² On Saturday February 3, 1883 there were "Enjoyable tableaux (sic) and Dances at the Academy of Music" in New York, for the children. There was one opening tableau, which then moved into a pageant: "The homage

ety, at home and in Europe.³³

This “respectability” and highbrow character brought them back – as I mentioned in passing – to their courtly origins: tableaux vivants were used in professional theatres between acts, descending, as a genre, from the medieval and Renaissance English miracle and mystery plays, as Holstrom has indicated;³⁴ in the 18th century a French lady, Madame de Genlis, took them from the theatre³⁵ to use them as entertainment at the court of the French king, staging historical scenes (1761) to instruct the children of the Duc d’Orléans. Madame de Genlis must have been a person who really enjoyed the theatre, as she remembers being dressed up as an angel, as a little girl, and not wanting to take off her wings for the whole day after the procession. She also remembers being dressed up as “Amour” with a “pink robe covered with lace scattered with little artificial flowers of all colors, arriving only at my knees” and wearing “little boots the color of straw and silver, my long hair down and a pair of blue wings”.³⁶ The painter Madame Vigée Lebrun arranged tableaux vivants when she went to St.

paid to Prince and Princess Carnival by throngs of fantastic little people, under the auspices of Apollo, the God of Music, and the Court Jesters, who are most conspicuous in the Royal Pageant”. The “little people” being both the fairies and the children. *The New York Times*, February 3, 1883.

³³ As late as 1912 the New York debutantes posed for some “oriental Tableaux” staged by photographer James Breese; see BANTA, *op. cit.*, p. 653.

³⁴ “The art form itself was related to medieval survivals in religious plays and Christmas cribs and to the festivities of the late renaissance: see KIRSTEN GRAM HOLSTROEM, *Monodrama Attitudes Tableaux Vivants. Studies on some trends of theatrical fashion 1770-1815*, Stockholm, Almqvist and Wiksell, 1967, p. 239. This book is an essential study of the subject, also as regards Goethe.

³⁵ In 1760 Carlo Bertinazzi (1713-1883), known as “Carlin”, a Harlequin famous first in Venice and then in Paris from 1741, recreated in 1760 Greuze’s painting *The Village Betrothal* during the entr’acte of *Les Noces d’Harlequin*. See McCULLOUGH, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

³⁶ In the Prologue to her *Memoires* she wrote: “mon habit d’Amour étoit couleur de rose, recouvert de dentelle de point parsemée de petites fleurs artificielles de toutes les couleurs; il ne me venait que jusqu’aux genoux; j’avais de petites bottines couleur de paille et d’argent, mes longs cheveux abattus et des ailes bleues”: in HONORÉ BONHOMME, *Madame de Genlis. Sa Vie, son Oeuvre, sa Mort 1746-1830*, Paris, Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1885, p. 6. Madame de Genlis went to court in 1770, took care of the little girls of the Duchess of Chartres (1777), became “gouverneur” of the Duc d’Orléans’ children (1782-1791, when she was dismissed), and wrote *Theatre à l’usage des jeunes personnes* (1779), *Les Veillées du Château, ou Cours de*

Petersburg in 1775,³⁷ as McCullough informs us, and Baron Grim, as Martin Meisel writes, in 1765, ten years earlier, reminds us of this form of entertainment "à la campagne".³⁸

Tableaux vivants, however, seem to have spread throughout the courts of Europe only *after* Goethe used them in his most popular novel, *Elective Affinities* (1809). He had seen very special tableaux vivants in Naples in 1787, where, during his Italian journey, he had seen beautiful twenty-year-old Emma Hart, later Lady Hamilton, performing her "attitudes" for Sir William Hamilton, who, in Goethe's words

"after being an art dilettante for many years, and after studying nature for so long, has found the acme of delight in both nature and art in the person of a beautiful young woman.... He has had a Greek costume prepared for her which is most becoming to her; wearing it, she unpins her hair, takes a couple of shawls, and knows how to give such variety to her attitudes, her gestures, her expressions, that one ends up by really believing one is dreaming".³⁹

Sir William Hamilton had had a "box", lined with black velvet, with a huge gilded frame, on the one side open, prepared for Emma to show off her abilities. Her representations – or attitudes – were directly inspired by the Pompei frescoes, but also by her spouse's wonderful collection of vases, in a city, Naples, that had a great tradition of theatrical and ephemeral architecture, the ideal cultural background for beautiful Emma. Emma had been previously portrayed by Romney, as "Circe, Calypso, Euphrosyne, a Sybil, a Bacchante, Saint Cecilia, Lady Macbeth, Cassandra".⁴⁰

Morale à l'usage des enfants (1784) and *Leçons d'une gouvernante à ses élèves* (1791). She also published *Arabesques mythologiques, ou les attributs de toutes les divinités de la fable* (Paris, Charles Barrois, 1810).

³⁷ McCULLOUGH, *op. cit.*, p. 7. McCullough cites other examples preceding Goethe.

³⁸ MARTIN MEISEL, *Realizations. Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth Century England*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 47.

³⁹ GOETHE, *Italienische Reise* (Caserta, March 16), in *Sämtliche Werke*, Frankfurt am Main, Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, 1994, pp. 225-226 (my translation). For a discussion of Goethe's tableaux vivants in *Elective Affinities*, see R. MAMOLI ZORZI, *The Pastimes*, *cit.*, pp. 76-78.

⁴⁰ MEISEL, *op. cit.*, p. 338. See also *An Illustrated Catalogue of Engraved Portraits and Fancy Subjects painted by Thomas Gainsborough, RA, Published*

Goethe used tableaux by Van Dyck ("Belisarius"), by Poussin ("Ahasuerus and Hester"), by Terburg ("The Paternal Admonition") in *Elective Affinities* (1809). His taste for the theatre, his liking for Neapolitan "presepi" (creches, or nativity cribs), and his unconditioned admiration for Emma Hamilton's attitudes must have counted in his choice of tableaux vivants in his novel. In 1813 tableaux vivants were staged to celebrate Grand Duchess Maria's birthday, which Goethe described in a letter.⁴¹

Tableaux vivants seem to accompany courtly celebrations throughout Europe: in 1821, on the occasion of Grand Duke Nicholas' visit to the court of Prussia, the painter William Hensel staged some tableaux vivants with scenery by Shinckel and music by Spontini. The Prussian kaisers' birthdays were celebrated with tableaux vivants, which we find staged as late as 1910, 1912, and even, for Louise Queen of Prussia in 1929.⁴² They seem to have been particularly popular in German culture.⁴³ Decades earlier, *The New York Times* actually reported at length on the "historical pageants and brilliant scene at the Prussian court" (2-3-1883).

The bourgeois 19th century took over tableaux vivants, making it a form of entertainment that spread to theatres and homes: by the 1830s and 1840s tableaux vivants were adapted to family taste and moral subjects.

They also developed in an opposite direction: in public the-

between 1760 and 1820, and by George Romney, Published between 1770 and 1830, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1891.

⁴¹ Letter to J.H. Meyer, 9-2-1813 from Weimar, in *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche vom 10. März 1805 bis 5. Juni 1816*, Band 7 (34), II Abt., Rose Unterberger ed., Frankfurt am Main, Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, 1994, p. 181.

⁴² See for instance *Dem Kaiser Heil! Vier lebende Bilder zu Kaisers Geburtstag*, Berlin, Boehm, 1910; *Kaisers Geburtstag 1912*; *5 lebende Bilder mit verbindendem Text z. Feier d. 53. Wiederkehr des Geburtstages Kaiser Wilhelms II*, Berlin, Boehm, 1911; *Lebende Bilder aus dem Leben der Königin Luise, Geeignet z. Feier des 10. März oder z. Gedächtnis des 19. Juli*, Mühlhausen, Danner, 1928.

⁴³ In addition to the amazingly vast bibliography regarding Germany, one may quote Dumas, who, in *Le Comte de Montecristo*, Paris, Nelson, n.d. vol. IV, p. 330 (1841-1845), wrote: "Mademoiselle d'Armilly, qu'on apercevait alors, formant avec Eugénie, grace au cadre de la porte, un de ces tableaux vivants comme on en fait souvent en Allemagne" (see William A. Williams 1998, *Concordance*, cit.).

atres they presented a didactic purpose but they also became a means to justify the presence of naked women⁴⁴ on the stage, after flourishing in the 1830s presenting "Living Statues" of ancient history, especially Greek history, as the "Grecian Statues" staged by Andrew Ducrow in New York.⁴⁵ In the United States theatres were at times closed down on charges of immorality. In 1847 the Apollo rooms in New York were closed down because Dr. Collyer's models,⁴⁶ who also presented a personification of the most famous nude statue of the 19th century in America, Hiram Powers' *Greek Slave*, were considered indecent. (Among wealthy society people only Alva Vanderbilt in 1883 dared to represent the famous *Greek Slave* by Powers, perhaps with some scandal.)⁴⁷ Nobody had closed down anything in Berlin, in 1843, where a lot of nudity was on show, be it the *Farnese Hercules* (Ill. 9), Thorwaldsen's *Bacchus and Ebe*, or Canova's *Three Graces*, even if the police were in the room⁴⁸. At Napoleon III's court the tableau representing "Diane chasseresse entourée de nymphes" was "toute une exposition de splendeurs charnelles" and the tableaux "dépasserent les bornes de convenances"⁴⁹ even in that far from Puritan court.

In the 1850s and 1860s in America tableaux vivants in the homes sometimes represented paintings, but most often chose "scenes" from nursery rhymes, novels, fairy tales, or "exempla-

⁴⁴ This tendency produced also libertine literature, such as the libertine stories that have nothing to do with tableaux vivants in *Les tableaux vivants ou mes confessions aux pieds de la Duchesse*, par un rédacteur de la R.D.D.M. (Paul Perret), Amsterdam, 1870, the pornographic illustrations in *La Maison de Verre. Défilé de tableaux vivants*, Paris, Aux Dépens de la Compagnie, 1891 (with lesbian and interracial erotic scenes), or *The Marchioness's Amorous Pastimes*, London, Privately printed, 1893.

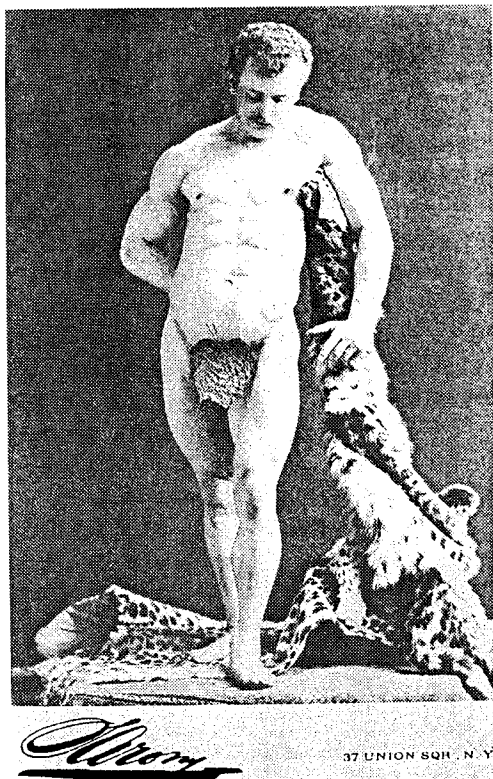
⁴⁵ McCULLOUGH, *op. cit.*, p. 8. But see the whole of Ch. 2, "The Beginnings in New York 1831-1847" as regards theatres in New York.

⁴⁶ T.A. BROWN, *History of the New York Stage*, New York, Dodd and Mead, 1903, vol. II, p. 23.

⁴⁷ FRYER, *art. cit.*, p. 31.

⁴⁸ GODÉFROI SCHADOW, le père, *Relation d'une représentation de tableaux vivants qui eut lieu le 5 mai 1843, dans la salle de l'Académie royale des beaux arts à Berlin*. "Si, parmi le grand nombre de spectateurs, quelques-uns sentaient un désir impur, on ose soutenir que les artistes étaient plutôt animés d'un sentiment profond, et absorbés en fixant cette nature dévoilée" (p. 14).

⁴⁹ PIERRE DE LANO, *Les Bals Travestis et les Tableaux Vivants sous le second empire*, Paris, Simonis Empis, 1893, p. 30.



Ill. 9: Eugene Sandow as *The Farnese Hercules*, photograph by Napoleon Sarony, in *The Teatrical Photographs of Napoleon Sarony*, Kent State University Press, 1978, p. 101.

ry" moral tales. In George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) Gwendolyn Harleth impersonates "Hermione as the statue in the *Winter's Tale*", Shakespeare being a favourite source throughout the century. Handbooks published in London, New York, Boston multiplied, giving practical instructions and suggesting subjects.

In 1869 the handbook by Annie Frost suggested new subjects as "The complaint is made every winter of a want of suitable subjects..." as "The old established pictures are worn threadbare, and many are not able to take the time, or command the books to search out new ones".⁵⁰ There were tab-

⁵⁰ *Frost's Book of Tableaux*, or SARAH ANNIE FROST, *The Book of Tableaux and Shadow Pantomimes*, New York, Dick and Fitzgerald Publishers, 1869, p. 3.

leaux such as "The Dancing lesson", tableaux based on proverbs (Two are company, three is a crowd), on charades (The Courtship, The Newsboy, The Bookworm), Mother Goose Tableaux, Fairy Tale Tableaux, and tableaux "from the Sociable" presenting such subjects as The Temperance Home, in addition to many others such as The Brigand's Family, The Witches in Macbeth.

William F. Gill, in *Parlor Tableaux and Amateur Theatricals*, printed in Boston in 1867,⁵¹ gave a list of as many as 167 tableaux (and pantomimes), ranging from subjects most popular in the 19th century such as "Beatrice Cenci led to Prison" – made famous by Shelley's play and Paul Delaroche's painting, – or "Raphael's cherubs", Raphael being the painter preferred by Americans in the 19th century,⁵² to scenes from Shakespeare, patriotic scenes (The Genius of Liberty, Emancipation), biblical scenes.

James H. Head's *Home Pastimes and Tableaux Vivants*, printed in Boston in 1860, insisted on the necessity that art should not be limited to the painter's studio but should "embellish every home",⁵³ and offered a number of historical subjects (such as Napoleon and his old guard at Waterloo), and a high number of allegorical figure, ranging from Liberty to the Spirit of Chivalry to Faith*, not to mention Little Eva and Uncle Tom, Hiawatha Sailing, and again scenes from the Bible and family life (Marriage Bliss). There were tableaux which have an obvious pictorial origin, such as The Banditti,⁵⁴ made popular in the 19th century by the prints from Salvator Rosa's paintings, but where the painter was ignored. In the "Portrait of Gabrielle", instead, the source, Delaroche, was openly acknowledged.

The taste for tableaux vivants representing paintings was related to a number of different visual entertainments and to

⁵¹ GILL, *Parlor Tableaux and Amateur Theatricals*, Boston, Tilton and Company, 1867, pp. 349-352.

⁵² See DAVID ALAN BROWN, *Raphael and America*, Washington, The National Gallery of Art, 1983.

⁵³ HEAD, *Home Pastimes and Tableaux Vivants*, Boston, Tilton, 1860, p. 7.

⁵⁴ The Italian Brigands, or Banditti, had been popular in the theatres in the late 1830s with Horace Vernet's "Celebrated pictures of the Brigands as starting image" (McCULLOUGH, *op. cit.*, p. 15).

the fortunes of photography in the nineteenth century. “Glyptoramas” and “Panoramas”, with their painted scenes and illusionary set-up, had something in common with the fundamental principles of tableaux vivants, that is the rendering of an “illusion” in realistic terms, and in both cases a painted scenery was used. Crowds gathered to see “the largest painting in the world,” the “National Panorama of the Surrender of Yorktown, at 59th Street, corner Madison Avenue, 50 cents (Children 25 cents), open daily (Sundays included), from Sunrise to Sunset”, or to see “The Siege of Paris”, lit up by electricity, in 1883.⁵⁵ Verisimilitude, realism and illusion – the three tenets of so much literature and art in the nineteenth century – intermingled also in tableaux vivants, as they did in famous “Passion Plays”, such as that of Oberammergau, which had had a long tradition, but became very popular in the 1880s.

Tableaux vivants were also connected, as regards sentimental subjects, with the taste for melodrama, in which often medieval costumes were often used, due to the revival of the taste for the middle ages. This could also be seen in the masked balls, in the numberless pageants, and even in the backdrops of photographs taken in the studios.

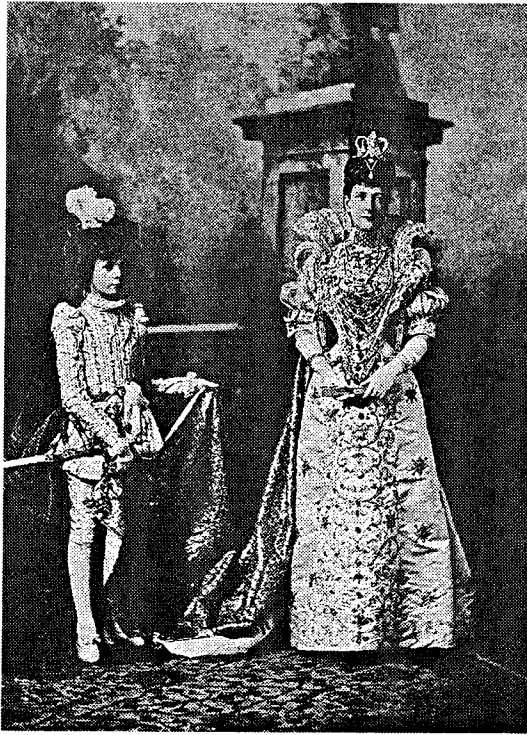
Photography was of course also important, and many well-known photographers experimented with photos of tableaux vivants: Henry Peach Robinson had a *Little Red Riding Hood* (1858),⁵⁶ Julia Cameron created *The Parting of Lancelot and Guinevere* (1874),⁵⁷ and other tableaux, Lewis Carroll had Alice Liddell pose as *The Beggar Maid*, and staged *St. George and the Dragon* (a. 1874)⁵⁸ in a very special rendering of the tableau as the actors were children and the objects children’s toys. But Carroll’s use of a trunk of clothes and gadgets – tin crown and swords included – from the Drury Lane Theatre in his “glass house” above his rooms at Oxford is part of the Victorians’ taste for fancy dressing. A taste shared by the aristocracy, as we can see in the photo of Arthur, Duke of Connaught, dressed up as *The Beast* of the fairy tale (*Beauty and the Beast*) for the Fairy Tale Quadrille at the Marlborough House Ball in 1874*,

⁵⁵ *The New York Times*, January 1, 1883, and January 28, 1883.

⁵⁶ *Tableaux vivants. Fantaisies photographiques victoriennes*, Paris, Editions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1999, p. 38.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 69.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 44.



Ill. 10: *Alexandra as Marguerite de Valois* (1897), in *Van Dyck in Check Trousers*, cit., p. 72.

or Alexandra (Ill. 10), Princess of Wales, with her page,* dressed up as Marguerite de Valois, for the Devonshire House Ball, in 1897.⁵⁹

Napoleon Sarony⁶⁰ had used the new medium to produce photos of famous actresses, often in costumes and with a particular scenery: we have mentioned his photo of Mary Anderson as *Galatea*. There were Adelaide Ristori as *Lucretia Borgia* (c. 1885), and Eugene Sandow (1893), the "greatest strongman

⁵⁹ *Van Dyck in Check Trousers. Fancy Dress in Art and Life, 1700-1900*, Edinburgh, Scottish National Portrait Gallery, 1978, n.p., and p. 74.

⁶⁰ Born in Quebec in 1821, he died in Manhattan Nov. 9, 1896, the brother of Olivier François Xavier (1820-1879), a portrait photographer. Napoleon was a lithographer in New York in 1833, founded the firm Sarony and Major (later Sarony and Knapp), producing theatrical posters. He moved to Birmingham, in England, where he opened a photographic studio. He became famous for his portraits of actresses, having gone back to New York in 1866. See BEN L. BASSHAM, *The Theatrical Photographs of Napoleon Sarony*, The Kent State University Press, 1978.

of the Victorian age”, as the *Farnese Hercules*. “Stage props” that were used in theatrical photos were in fact used also in “usual” (non theatrical) photos.

In a few photos from a private collection one can see a little boy in 18th century attire (Count Nicolò Mocenigo) standing in front of a rocky studio backdrop and Countess Matilde Papadopoli⁶¹ in front of a vaguely Gothic window, again a studio backdrop. The Gothic background is no different from that used in history paintings, such as those by Hayez* or Molmenti*.

The fact that tableaux vivants were sometimes photographed takes us back to the gist of the matter: these representations of a work of art were, as I mentioned at the beginning, ephemeral, in that they lasted only seconds. We are then in the condition of discussing tableaux vivants on the basis of the actual painting which was reproduced (that is only on the basis of their source); or we can discuss them on the basis of ekphrasis, that is the verbal description of the representation (the tableau) of a representation (the painting), or on the basis of the photographs (that is the visual representation (photo) of a representation (tableau) of a representation (painting)). There is no way to discuss the “real thing”, unless we go to Laguna Beach in August and see the tableaux vivants that are produced there every summer.⁶²

In spite of their actual “non existence”, we can “see” them, especially when described wonderfully by such great writers as Edith Wharton. We can see them through our imagination, not only by linking them to a society that had a strong family life – and no movies and no television – and a taste for the theatre, but that also had a good visual culture. We should imagine them in the way Wharton suggested:

“Tableaux vivants depend for their effect not only on the happy disposal of light and the delusive interposition of layers of gauze, but on a corresponding adjustment of the mental vision. To unfurnished minds they remain, in spite of every enhancement of art, only a superior kind of waxworks; but to the responsive fancy they may give magic glimpses of the boundary world between fact and imagination.”

⁶¹ See MAMOLI ZORZI, *The Pastimes*, cit.

⁶² McCULLOUGH, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

TABLEAUX VIVANTS IN ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER'S TIME

We can only think of 19th century tableaux in these terms, to try and catch the "magic glimpses of the boundary world between fact and imagination" that another great American writer, Nathaniel Hawthorne, caught in his works, and in his representation of tableaux vivants in his novel *The Blithedale Romance*.

ABSTRACT

This essay discusses the characteristics of tableaux vivants, a form of home and theatrical entertainment, as staged in the USA and in Europe. The bourgeois 19th century developed a form of dramatic representation that was made popular by Goethe and his *Elective Affinities*. In the USA it developed in two directions, the home and homely tableaux, often represented at charities, and the tableaux staged in the theatre to present naked women (pornographic literature also developed from tableaux). Tableaux representing paintings are interesting signs of which painters and paintings were popular at the time, as instant recognition of the subject represented was essential. This essay is part of a more extended work-in-progress.

KEY WORDS

Tableaux vivants. Paintings. America.

Cristina Memo

ENTRE NEOCLASICISMO Y ROMANTICISMO:
LA LOCURA EN SAÚL DE GERTRUDIS
GÓMEZ DE AVELLANEDA *

Premisas: la obra y su contexto

En la evolución del género trágico, el paso del Neoclasicismo al Romanticismo marca el desfase entre el rechazo tradicional de la locura y su valoración positiva, ateniéndose a lo cual es posible marcar una línea distintiva precisa entre uno y otro estilo. Es por eso que llama la atención el caso de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (Santa María de Puerto Príncipe, actual Camagüey, 24 de Marzo de 1814-Madrid 2 de Febrero de 1873), escritora romántica que logra conciliar en una única visión los elementos que tanto su época como la anterior alegan a la descripción del trastorno mental.

La convivencia de los dos estilos es evidente sobre todo en la tragedia bíblica *Saúl*, que se estrena en el Teatro Español de Madrid el 29 de octubre de 1849 consiguiendo un éxito inmediato y enorme, y que se somete a numerosas refundiciones que desembocan en la versión definitiva que se incluye en las *Obras* del año 69¹. La obra dramatiza los acontecimientos narrados en el *Primer Libro de Samuel*², es decir, el pecado de Saúl, primer rey de Israel, el cual infringe el precepto divino de no dejar en vida a ninguno de sus enemigos, por lo cual Dios lo castiga con una locura que lo lleva a ponerse por grados en contra de todas las personas que lo rodean, hasta llegar finalmente a desafiar al mismo Dios. La tragedia se acaba cuando

* GERTRUDIS GÓMEZ DE AVELLANEDA, *Saúl*, Madrid, José Repullés, 1849.

¹ GERTRUDIS GÓMEZ DE AVELLANEDA, *Obras literarias, dramáticas y poéticas*, pról. de J. Nicosio, biografía de N. Pastor Díaz, Madrid, Rivadeneyra, 1869- 71.

² VATTIONI, F. (ed.), *La Bibbia di Gerusalemme*, Bologna, EDB, 1990.

el rey, dándose cuenta de haber matado a su hijo Jonathás por error, se suicida.

La locura en Saúl y los fundamentos de la locura clásica

Al ocuparse del rol del trastorno mental del protagonista con respecto a la ideología de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda³, los críticos han dejado de lado la de los demás personajes. Sin embargo, la afinidad conceptual de *Saúl* con el *Fedro* de Platón⁴, obra que determina de manera fundamental el desarrollo de la dramatización clásica de la locura⁵, echa luz sobre la presencia y la función de dichos trastornos mentales. En el diálogo, el filósofo reparte la locura en cuatro grupos principales: locura de amor, profética, poética y una última que se produce por el deseo de elevación sobre el mundo, y el parecido con *Saúl* puede verse analizando las finalidades que cada personaje tiene dentro de la trama de la tragedia.

Relativamente al protagonista, lo que impulsa su pasión es el deseo de elevarse por encima de todo y de todos, lo que parece interpretable como una degeneración de la cuarta forma de locura tratada por Platón. Su hija Micol, por otro lado, aspira a ver realizado su sueño de amor con la persona que Dios ha destinado a quitarle el reinado a Saúl, el joven David. Éste, si por un lado comparte la pasión amorosa de Micol, por otro es también y sobre todo poeta en la obra. Finalmente, la misión de los profetas en *Saúl* es el anuncio de la voluntad divina, aun cuando esto conlleve poner su vida en peligro.

Sin embargo, abordando el tema de la influencia clásica en *Saúl*, hay que operar una distinción entre el protagonista y los demás personajes con respecto a los tipos de locura que padecen, pues en la tragedia antigua ésta se considera únicamente

³ Cfr. EMILIO COTARELO Y MORI, *La Avellaneda y sus obras. Ensayo biográfico y crítico*, Madrid, Tipografía de Archivos, 1930; ROSARIO REXACH, *Estudios sobre Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. La reina mora del Camagüey*, Madrid, Editorial Verbum, 1996; CARMEN BRAVO-VILLASANTE, *Una vida romántica. La Avellaneda*, Barcelona, Edhasa, 1967.

⁴ PLATÓN, *Fedro*, en *Dialoghi filosofici di Platone*, al cuidado de Giuseppe Cambiano, Torino, Utet, 1981, vol. II, pp. 175-182.

⁵ RUTH PADEL, *A quien un dios quiere destruir, antes lo enloquece. Elementos de la locura griega y trágica*, Buenos Aires, Manantial, 1997, p. 15.

como un castigo y no tiene, por tanto, acepciones positivas⁶. En la obra de Gómez de Avellaneda, por contra, sólo la pasión del protagonista perjudica su felicidad, llevándolo a oponerse a la divinidad, mientras que las locuras de Micol, David y los profetas les aportan una serie de ventajas; en este sentido, pues, sólo Saúl es un personaje realmente neoclásico. A pesar de ello, desde un punto de vista estético, también los otros personajes se pueden estudiar dentro de la relación con la tragedia antigua.

La locura en *Saúl* funciona de dos distintas maneras, viniendo por un lado del exterior y por otro del interior, las cuales pueden incluso coincidir en un mismo personaje, como es por ejemplo el caso del protagonista. En la tragedia griega es el primer concepto el que prevalece, dado que la locura es en la noción clásica una fuerza exterior que se apodera de la persona, a partir de lo cual se considera que está presente sólo cuando es manifiesta⁷.

En este sentido, todos los personajes principales sufren posesiones que presentan características parecidas a las de la tragedia griega. Saúl sufre una serie de posesiones que hacen sus rasgos semejantes a los de los animales y su semblante torvo. Del mismo modo, la posesión de Samuel lleva a la deshumanización del personaje, que se vuelve pura acción en manos de la voluntad divina, y asimismo, tanto Achimelech como David sufren evoluciones sensibles en su naturaleza, pues la locura los lleva de ser débiles a fuertes. En la tragedia antigua, la alternación entre posesión y cordura es funcional a la humillación del hombre, que en los momentos en que está en sí se puede dar cuenta de la degradación de su estado, lo que concurre a la tarea de la locura misma, que es el castigo de quien la padece. Sin embargo, desde su punto de vista cristiano, la escritora considera que es Dios quien envía la posesión, pero que ésta se puede volver útil o aportar un daño conforme a la disposición anímica que encuentra.

Otra de las características de la locura en la tragedia clásica es que debido a ella unos personajes pueden conocer el futuro; hay en este sentido una distinción entre profetas y personas que pronuncian profecías en determinados momentos de su vida: la idea de que hay algo duradero en la locura nace en los

⁶ RUTH PADEL, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

siglos sucesivos, por lo que también la profecía no puede ser algo permanente. En Grecia el profeta se determina según unas imágenes que se encuentran también en la obra de la que se ocupa el presente estudio.

Ante todo, en la iconografía clásica, los profetas ven desde la oscuridad, en el sentido de que están ciegos o habitan cavernas⁸. En *Saúl* tanto los sacerdotes como la Pitonisa de Endor viven en las cavernas, que tienen en la tradición griega y latina connotaciones de muerte, pero son también el lugar donde se pueden encontrar los dioses, además de estar fuertemente relacionadas con la oscuridad, la cual se considera como metáfora natural de la locura porque el negro es el color de la conciencia y de la pasión, y también de sus opuestos, inconciencia y muerte.

Otra serie de imágenes que definen al profeta son las que releva Ruth Padel, la cual afirma que “En los ataques de locura de estos personajes se entrelazan imágenes de repetidas tormentas y fuego con otras de persecución que empuja y desvía”⁹, y se puede observar que Gómez de Avellaneda se vale en su composición del mismo tipo de concepción de la locura profética. En el primer acto de *Saúl* todos los cambios climáticos preluden a la entrada de Samuel en escena. En la quinta escena, la prohibición de Achimelech a los soldados de que entren en el templo se acompaña por la imagen del cielo que empieza a nublarse. Por lo tanto, cuando Sela dice “Anuncia todo próxima tormenta” en la séptima escena, se refiere obviamente al tiempo atmosférico, pero también a su significación metafórica en relación con la locura profética, tanto que cuando llega Samuel en la novena escena, lo hace precedido de un trueno.

En cuanto a las imágenes de persecución, Samuel, Achimelech y la Pitonisa son unidos por el destino al que los envía Saúl. Los tres, en cuanto el rey los identifica como representantes en la tierra del Dios que está urdiendo un complot en contra de su persona, son perseguidos a su vez por él. La figura del profeta se construye textualmente de manera que el público esté llevado a aceptar lo que dice como verdadero incluso antes de su realización, ante todo porque es profeta, con las características que se acaban de ver, y después porque tanto él mismo como los demás personajes en la obra lo hacen.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

En *Saúl*, nadie cuestiona las palabras de los profetas, y el hecho de que los acontecimientos en la obra correspondan retrospectivamente con ellas no es en este sentido que un añadido. Por contra, no se puede decir que las visiones de los personajes que no son profetas son verdaderas si no se comprueban de una manera clara e indudable por acontecimientos en el texto, y hasta entonces no son que una prueba más de su locura.

Las visiones son el producto de la manipulación por parte de la divinidad de los sentidos al fin de producir una desorientación en la persona, la cual ya no es capaz de discernir entre lo que proviene de dentro y de fuera, entre lo que es real y lo que no lo es. En este sentido, son muy afines a la función que tiene el vagabundeo con respecto a la locura, pues tanto el vagabundeo como las visiones se insertan en el plan divino de derrumbar las seguridades del loco y de hacerle ver que la realidad ya no es atrapable según sus categorías lógicas. Las dos ideas son tan cercanas conceptualmente como para que la locura se considere a menudo como vagabundeo mental, y de hecho, muchas veces a la visión corresponde un ponerse en movimiento de la persona.

Siempre se le ha dado a la locura un sentido de desplazamiento en el espacio, tanto en el sentido físico como en el psíquico, tanto que quienes han sido marcados por ella por lo menos una vez o se alejan por sí mismos o tienen que ser alejados por los otros componentes de la sociedad. El suicidio de Saúl, pues, desde el punto de vista de la locura es la concretación de un aislamiento social empezado anteriormente dentro de sí.

En la distancia física se concreta la distancia mental que se crea a causa de las visiones entre los cuerdos y el loco, y en efecto Saúl cuando enloquece se va del campamento y se dirige sin motivo aparente hacia las montañas. El delirio obliga a la persona a andar incluso sin entender las motivaciones, bajo los efectos de una persecución. En *Saúl* ésta se representa mediante unas entidades abstractas, que residen en la mente de quienes empiezan el vagabundeo, o se concreta en la persona del rey mismo, para huir del cual los sacerdotes y David tienen que ponerse en marcha hacia otro lugar.

Gómez de Avellaneda hace que cada personaje se trasplante de su sitio de origen a otro, sin embargo las finalidades son distintas. Llegando al monte de Gelboé, Saúl encontrará allí la muerte, mientras que los demás verán solucionarse sus proble-

mas, lo que demuestra que cómo las visiones, el vagabundeo puede dañar o no dañar, dependiendo de las intenciones divinas. Esto se debe a la superposición de distintos planos culturales relativos al vagabundeo, que tiene diferentes valores ético-religiosos según el contexto. En el mundo antiguo el viaje representa sólo algo negativo, en su doble vertiente de imagen de la locura o causa de ella mediante el dolor: el no tener casa es signo de una relación incómoda con Dios, o de la búsqueda de riqueza, e incluso en una parte de la teología medieval el viaje se carga de significación negativa, como alejamiento de Dios¹⁰. En *Saúl* de Gómez de Avellaneda este concepto relativo al vagabundeo coexiste con la tradición de orígenes bíblicos en la cual el ideal del hombre es el de vagabundo en la tierra.

Otro concepto típico de la locura trágica antigua que se acoge en la obra es el cambio en las características espirituales de las personas, el cual, así como los cambios en el físico, es un signo de la locura a los ojos de los demás pero ante todo a los de la persona que lo sufre. Antes de enloquecer, el individuo sabe que puede contar con sus propias fuerzas. Saúl, por ejemplo, conociendo por experiencia su fuerza de guerrero está seguro que puede seguir derrotando a los enemigos mediante ella, como denotan sus palabras: “[...] Con brazo y corazón de bronce,/ Combatiendo contra las huestes filisteas,/ Voy a probaros con mayores triunfos/ La protección que el cielo me dispensa” (1,8).

Un cambio causado por la locura conduce el hombre al desconocimiento de sí mismo, lo que lo obliga a establecer una relación dialéctica consigo, que puede llevar a la aceptación o al rechazo. En el caso de David y Achimelech, la aceptación de este “otro” en el “yo” es fuente de una cadena virtuosa, en la que la fuerza lleva a más fuerza. Para Saúl, por contra, la falta de resignación significa una total interiorización del drama. En el *Saul* de Alfieri¹¹, David no contrapone su voluntad a la del rival, afirmando: “A morir vengo; ma fra l’armi, in campo,/ Per la patria, da forte; e per l’ingrato/ Stesso Saul, che la mia morte or grida”¹², lo cual denota que su persecución por parte

¹⁰ RUTH PADEL, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-141.

¹¹ VITTORIO ALFIERI, *Saul*, al cuidado de Raffaello Ramat, Firenze, S.T.E.T., 1949.

¹² *Ibidem*, acto 1 escena 2, vv. 52-54.

del rey es sólo la exteriorización de un drama que este último está viviendo dentro de sí. El rey Alfieriano sabe que la figura de David es protagonista pero no causa de su tragedia, como denota esta afirmación: "Ah! No: deriva ogni sventura mia/ Da più terribil fonte..."¹³.

En la obra de Gómez de Avellaneda se encuentra la misma conciencia por parte del protagonista de la presencia de una voluntad ajena y superior a él, cuya fuerza no logra aceptar. La violencia que el rey dirige hacia David es sólo reflejo de la violencia que dirige en el interior hacia la voluntad que se le contrapone, y de la que David es a la vez instrumento y solución. La rebelión de Saúl contra este elemento ajeno que descubre en su interior culmina en el suicidio: dándose la muerte, el protagonista no sólo se elimina a sí mismo, sino que también destruye al "otro" que lleva dentro de sí, a la locura. Así como la violencia, la autodestrucción es una reacción, la extrema, al miedo causado por el extrañamiento de uno con respecto a su propia persona.

Todos los dramas paralelos al del protagonista en *Saúl* dependen del hecho de que las personas no son más que objetos envueltos en la órbita de su autodestrucción, mediante los cuales el rey se produce dolor. De hecho, en un primer momento el objetivo de su violencia son personas a él desconocidas, y después lentamente Saúl la va dirigiendo hacia personas conocidas, como Samuel, hacia su hija a través de la figura del marido de ésta, hasta llegar en el epílogo a matar a su otro hijo Jonathás. La gran paradoja ínsita en la locura es que es una manera de evitar el dolor, y sin embargo lo multiplica; el loco se hace violencias a sí mismo para deshacerse de la locura, a lo que ésta reacciona "golpeando" con más fuerza al hombre.

El núcleo del drama desde el punto de vista clásico, pues, es el conflicto, interior al protagonista, entre dos voluntades. Saúl quiere y no quiere porque Saúl es dos personas al mismo tiempo: por un lado intenta basar sus acciones a lo que él es y desea, pero por otro dentro de sí se le contrapone otra voluntad que le hace actuar según sus designios, haciendo que el hombre luche contra sí mismo, hasta el final.

¹³ *Ibidem*, acto 2 escena 1, vv. 26-27.

La locura en Saúl y el Romanticismo

Con el Romanticismo empieza la consideración de que las pasiones definen al hombre y representan su ámbito de libertad. En *Saúl* la divinidad inserta en las almas de los personajes unos deseos que los llevan a salir de los cánones sociales de la racionalidad. La presencia de Dios en la obra representa, por tanto, en sus efectos, el elemento que niega el bien social en función de un concepto de bien individual y abstraído de la lógica en que se fundan los vínculos interpersonales.

En este sentido, pues, también la pasión de Saúl es positiva en cuanto es una manera de reivindicar su identidad con respecto a la mediocridad que el formar parte de la jerarquía social le impone, y el medio con el que puede enfrentarse a su destino. El rey se encuentra prisionero de una voluntad que lo sobrepasa, y a cada golpe de esta voluntad que le recuerda su condición de mortal reacciona con unos actos de voluntad que expresan su deseo de libertad. Como afirma Emilio Cotarelo y Mori:

[...] no cabe duda que el personaje de Saúl es verdaderamente grande y simbólico. Es la encarnación del libre albedrío llevado al último extremo; de la absoluta independencia moral del individuo; de la rebeldía contra todo poder exterior, y todo ello con cierta verosimilitud, cierta realidad, que lo hace perfectamente admisible en el terreno del arte¹⁴.

Desde el punto de vista romántico, pues, la locura del personaje de Saúl cambia de signo, y el rey se vuelve el perfecto representante del ideal de libertad, es decir, que es el hombre que, consciente de la imposibilidad de cambiar el estado de las cosas, reivindica su libre albedrío entregándose voluntariamente a la lucha contra su suerte.

Entre las pasiones que rigen el curso de los acontecimientos en *Saúl*, sobresale el orgullo, que encuentra su máxima expresión en el protagonista. Como en muchas obras del teatro romántico, la soberbia es el pecado y la locura el castigo, pero es a raíz de esta última que el héroe se daña irremediablemente, por lo cual se crea una ambigüedad entre la culpa y la inocencia del héroe, que en último término no resulta directamente responsable de la dialéctica destructiva entre el yo y el

¹⁴ EMILIO COTARELO Y MORI, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

otro dentro de sí. En este sentido, Saúl se distancia parcialmente de la tragedia clásica, en cuanto la voluntad del protagonista no es de ataque, como pasa en ésta, sino fundamentalmente defensiva, rasgo éste que caracteriza el espíritu romántico¹⁵.

El orgullo del héroe romántico, en la defensa, se dirige hacia sí mismo autopotenciándose y dando lugar a un subjetivismo extremo. En la tragedia clásica, la tendencia es de no considerar justa la lucha del hombre contra el hado, mientras que la romántica, apoyándose en un sentimiento del yo que se encuentra ya en núcleo en un genial exponente de la tragedia neoclásica como Alfieri, considera que a pesar de que el juicio divino sea irremediable, el esfuerzo para establecer su propia identidad dignifica al hombre. Ante una voluntad disgregadora de la realidad, que es lo que en Saúl se representa mediante el desfase entre sus acciones y las respuestas que le vienen del mundo exterior, los románticos establecen el principio de la voluntad unificadora del individuo, al que se le llama *aristocratismo romántico*¹⁶.

Se puede observar este mismo tipo de orgullo también entre las consecuencias de la locura amorosa de Micol, mediante cuya provocación, Gómez de Avellaneda realiza una subversión del rol femenino en la tragedia, pues la mujer pasa de ser un angelical objeto de amor a ser un sujeto capaz de desafiar las reglas sociales en función de su pasión. El “todo o nada” que la joven pronuncia en la primera escena del tercer acto hace ascender también la joven en su orgullo al rango de “superhombre”, o, usando un término más adecuado al pensamiento de la escritora, “supermujer”, y la pasión amorosa es el medio que responde a su necesidad de transgresión.

El hecho que no se castigue su orgullo entra en la perspectiva personal de la autora, para la cual no entregarse totalmente al amor es faltar a la sacralidad de su origen¹⁷. De este modo, la visión del amor como orgullo de Micol y la visión de David, el cual incluye al amor entre las creaciones de la divinidad, se sustancian recíprocamente, en una relación dialéctica

¹⁵ RAFAEL ARGULLOL, *El Héroe y el Único, El espíritu trágico del Romanticismo*, Madrid, Taurus, 1982, p. 15.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 261.

¹⁷ FLORINDA ÁLZAGA, *La Avellaneda: intensidad y vanguardia*, Miami, Ediciones Universal, 1997, p. 28.

insoluble. La intención didáctica tomada de los autores neoclásicos, juntada con su propio cristianismo, eleva aquí a su máxima importancia el interés hacia la pasión humana del Romanticismo, por lo cual en la locura de los personajes de Micol y David hay una admirable conciliación de los dos estilos.

La locura poética de David le consiente actuar en su sociedad en calidad de "segundo Dios", teniendo poder de intervención en las almas de los personajes que lo rodean. Ello entra en la concepción romántica del poeta en la medida en que esta corriente literaria lo considera como un "segundo Hacedor", porque la representación de la belleza es un acto de creación, en el cual mediante una tensión de la voluntad el artista proyecta hacia lo exterior una imagen de su mundo interior¹⁸. David, así como Saúl y Micol, es un ser superior, pues la poesía representa una evasión de los límites humanos de uno y se vuelve una manera de anhelar a lo infinito.

El arte poético tiene, tanto para los románticos como para Gómez de Avellaneda, un valor religioso, porque en el acto artístico se construye por voluntad divina una triple conjunción de sentimientos entre el individuo, la naturaleza y su Creador. Es por ello que, como afirma la dramaturga, "Los poetas, en punto a sentimientos, nunca se engañan"¹⁹, pues el sentimiento del poeta es la verdad, en cuanto es el mismo sentimiento que tiene la verdad, constituida por el mundo y Dios. De aquí que se considera, por tanto, que la locura sagrada es el trámite hacia la inmortalidad.

A la luz de este concepto, también los profetas en *Saúl* adquieren un valor distinto con respecto a los del teatro clásico. Como afirma Elizabeth Frenzel, en la época moderna se borra la distinción entre profetas y personas comunes según la idea de que todos pueden hacer de trámite entre el mundo terreno y el supranatural. Ellos, así como el artista, están en perfecta armonía con la que se ha visto ser la *verdad* absoluta para los románticos. La consonancia con la creación se puede notar en la insistencia con la que Gómez de Avellaneda presenta la locura profética en conexión con las imágenes de la naturaleza, lo cual denota la sacralidad que ésta tiene, pues la

¹⁸ RAFAEL ARGULLOL, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

¹⁹ GERTRUDIS GÓMEZ DE AVELLANEDA, *Autobiografía y cartas*, estudio y notas de Lorenzo Cruz-Fuentes, Huelva, Diputación Provincial de Huelva, 1996, p. 114.

naturaleza y la divinidad para los románticos son dos facetas del mismo ente. Sobre todo, los profetas se presentan en relación con la tempestad y con el momento antes del amanecer, cuya significación para la escritora fuera de la obra puede ofrecer una ulterior clave de lectura dentro de ella. Refiriéndose a la tempestad encontrada durante su primer viaje hacia Europa, la autora escribe:

Puede morir el hombre, pensaba yo, perecer puede en esta terrible lucha víctima de su osadía. Pero, ¿qué es la muerte para él?...Lo que posee de grande, de noble, de sublime no morirá nunca. Su cuerpo puede estar sepultado entre estas olas que su genio ha despreciado; pero ese genio, esa fuerza creadora, ese gran ser invisible que le anima, no acabará con él, ni existe en la naturaleza entera un poder capaz de destruirle...²⁰

No puede haber una declaración más apasionada de adhesión al Romanticismo: la tempestad simboliza para la escritora una muerte que no acaba con el hombre, cuyo genio no sucumbe a las fuerzas extremas de la naturaleza. De hecho, en el poema que Gómez de Avellaneda dedica a Heredia en ocasión de su muerte, se encuentran estos versos: "Mas la patria del genio está en el cielo,/ Allí jamás las tempestades braman,/ Ni roba al sol su luz la noche oscura..."²¹.

Si la tempestad y la "noche que roba la luz al sol" son la muerte que insidia al genio, a esa característica del hombre superior que lo destina a lo Sublime, entonces el hecho de que la tempestad y la oscuridad dependan de alguna manera de los profetas, pues preludian a su llegada y reproducen plásticamente el contenido de las declaraciones de éstos, las figuras de los profetas en *Saúl* asurgen al rol quienes manteniendo una relación tan estrecha con la muerte, pues parece casi que la llevan dentro de sí, la dominan. Los románticos creen en la existencia del *ánima mundi*. De aquí que también para Gómez de Avellaneda sea posible que algunos personajes actúen en consonancia con los fenómenos de la naturaleza a causa de una comunión de sentimientos con ella y con la divinidad que está por detrás de sus manifestaciones. Por tanto, los profetas en *Saúl* entran

²⁰ Cit. en DOMINGO FIGAROLA-CANEDA, *Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. Biografía, bibliografía e iconografía*, Madrid, Sociedad General Española de Librería, 1929, p. 253.

²¹ Cit. en FLORINDA ÁLZAGA, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

en el número de los seres que aun formando parte de la humanidad, no le pertenecen del todo a causa de una relación individual y total con la divinidad. Para la escritora, como se puede observar, hay personas que tienen a causa de sus pasiones una vida interior superior a la de la sociedad en la que viven, la cual en consecuencia no las reconoce como propias. De aquí que los románticos, partiendo del concepto religioso de locura, interpretan como una elección de la persona por parte de Dios el anhelo de inmortalidad de éstas. Por eso, la incomunicabilidad en la que el loco está sumido, en la época moderna se ve como el atributo necesario de las almas superiores.

En el Romanticismo, el hombre ya no es sólo objeto de aislamiento social, sino sujeto productor del alejamiento con respecto a la humanidad, y la incomunicación representa el camino hacia la soledad. El aislamiento es el atributo necesario del héroe romántico, el cual tiene el imperativo moral de proyectar hacia la sociedad una soledad que ya percibe dentro de sí como ser superior a los demás, pues desafiar la fragmentación del mundo es también desafiar a la humanidad que la acepta²². De aquí que los románticos sientan una especial afición hacia los personajes que, aun quedando dentro de la humanidad, no están sumisos a sus leyes. La figura del *outsider*, el hombre que vive fuera de las normas sociales, se vuelve una constante en el Romanticismo, y así aparecen en la literatura figuras de piratas, ladrones, viajeros, y asesinos, sólo para citar algunos ejemplos. Por lo general, la valoración que los escritores hacen del *status* moral del personaje es inversamente proporcional a la que de él hace la sociedad ficticia en la que se encuentra. Gómez de Avellaneda, en cuanto escritora romántica, se adopera para "salvar" a unos personajes, moralmente superiores a los que les rodean, valiéndose de la falta de comunicación entre ellos y la sociedad.

Gómez de Avellaneda subraya la naturaleza común del sufrimiento de los hombres y la necesidad de verlo compartido. De aquí que Micol, por ejemplo, tenga en Sela su referente de comunicación en sus momentos de desesperación, así como David tiene a Jonathás. Sin embargo, allí donde se perfila una posibilidad de comunicación no hay comprensión, pues los valores morales del hombre superior y de la sociedad no son

²² RAFAEL ARGULLOL, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

los mismos. Sela concibe el matrimonio como solución a las ansias de Micol, y sin embargo a través de la voz de la joven la escritora expone unas ideas radicales con respecto al desfase entre éste y el amor. Por otro lado, se ha observado el aislamiento social en el que se sume Saúl a causa de la conciencia de la imposibilidad de comunicarse con los demás. El superhombre, repitiendo un concepto ya expresado, tiene un destino de soledad. Así se encuentra a Micol en el cuarto acto enloquecida y sola, llevando consigo el mayor símbolo de la fugacidad de lo terreno, las flores. La soledad de los héroes románticos es necesaria para que éstos puedan imponer su propia individualidad.

Para los Románticos, pues, la sociedad y sus convenciones ya no representan la verdad en su valor absoluto, y *Saúl* es el ejemplo perfecto de como la verdad del mundo para los modernos ya no es atrapable según las categorías lógicas en que se fundan las relaciones. De aquí que la escritora valore todos aquellos elementos que permiten al hombre un tipo de conocimiento extrarracional. Hay una curiosa inversión en la obra de los instrumentos comúnmente asumidos del conocimiento racional. Las pasiones permiten a los personajes conocer a Dios, pues son el motor de su relación de aceptación u oposición a su voluntad, y en cambio la posesión por parte de éste, con sus alegados de visiones, profecías y cambios físicos y espirituales, les permiten conocerse a sí mismos y a su destino. Es decir, que conociéndose a sí mismos conocen a la divinidad, y conociendo a la divinidad se conocen a sí mismos.

La experiencia de la divinidad, sin embargo, es también la comprensión de su superioridad con respecto al hombre, lo que se vuelve doloroso pues con la percepción del estado de las cosas no se junta la posibilidad de cambiarlas. A Saúl la realidad le aparece como enajenada, pues a su conciencia de ser superior a los demás hombres no sigue la facultad de dominarlos. La locura del rey se encuentra en consecuencia amplificadas por el hecho que, viendo que ya no hay una dependencia entre sus acciones y los efectos de éstas, se encuentra incapaz de juzgar la realidad según categorías lógicas. La percepción de la locura dentro de sí lo hace además consciente del condicionamiento por parte divina que está sufriendo, lo que lo desespera en cuanto que ya no puede reconocerse y actuar en base a lo que su propia naturaleza le dicta. En la visión del Romanticismo, por vía del proceso del conocimiento,

subentra en el hombre el “gran miedo” de saber que no es dueño de su destino, lo cual se puede aceptar – el cual caso se abre la posibilidad de la salvación, entendiéndola como salvación de la locura – o no, pero la no aceptación dignifica al hombre en la búsqueda de un espacio de autoafirmación²³. Micol, David y los profetas se salvan de la locura punitiva en cuanto aceptan la superioridad divina, mientras que el orgullo de Saúl lo empuja hacia el desafío directo.

El daño que el protagonista se autoinflige, desde el punto de vista romántico es la representación de un deseo de conocimiento y aceptación del dolor provocado por su escisión interior, pues es viviendo hasta lo extremo la experiencia del sufrimiento que el héroe adquiere forma e identidad. Saúl en la violencia extrema, es decir, matándose a sí mismo, mata también a la locura que vive dentro de él. Asimismo para Hölderlin el suicidio es la manera de alcanzar el Único mediante la propia aniquilación, llegando a representar de esta manera la reconciliación trágica entre el sacrificio y la autodestrucción²⁴. Profundizar en el desgarramiento de la conciencia del hombre moderno, entre ser y no-ser, es para el Romanticismo crear una posibilidad de unidad. A la luz de estas consideraciones, la autodestrucción de Saúl adquiere un valor positivo, pues en el pensamiento romántico realmente su honor se establece en su acto extremo de voluntad. En el suicidio del héroe Gómez de Avellaneda no niega la potencia de la divinidad sino que pone a su lado la grandeza humana, que prefiere renunciar a sí misma a aceptar una vida a medias.

El darse la muerte es un privilegio que los escritores románticos conceden sólo a sus personajes más estimados, y observando los destinos que la escritora reserva a los personajes de *Saúl*, sólo el protagonista se autodestruye, por lo que se podría decir que es el único verdadero héroe trágico en la obra. Sin embargo, hay evidencia en lo dicho de que Gómez de Avellaneda considera a Micol, David y los profetas igualmente dignos de elevarse al rango de superhombres. Considerando esto, y que en otras obras, como es por ejemplo el caso de la novela *Sab*²⁵, la escritora tiende a considerar al encierro en el monasterio como una forma de lento suicidio en cuanto es un aisla-

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 104.

²⁴ Cit. en ARGULLOL, *ibidem*, p. 69.

²⁵ GERTRUDIS GÓMEZ DE AVELLANEDA, *Sab*, Madrid, Anaya, 1970.

miento definitivo de la sociedad, cabe añadir a este análisis la hipótesis de que realmente para la escritora el suicidio y la religión representen dos maneras igualmente aceptables de dignificar al hombre, pues Micol, David y los profetas encuentran viviendo en Dios su totalidad e individualidad, así como Saúl la encuentra en la autodestrucción. Como es obvio, no se piensa hacer ninguna valoración moral con respecto al tema, ni afirmar que Gómez de Avellaneda considere la pausibilidad en la vida real de la ecuación que se ha hecho, sino más bien hacer una consideración de tipo literario, y literariamente, es evidente que los dos conceptos en *Saúl* coinciden y que la autora considera como positivos todos los esfuerzos de las almas superiores para aislarse de un grupo humano en el que no se reconocen y por su parte no los acepta.

Conclusiones

Los elementos que se han relevado con respecto a la influencia del Neoclasicismo y el Romanticismo en la obra de Gómez de Avellaneda, echan luz sobre su uso absolutamente personal de la tradición literaria. Los dos estilos, antes que en la obra, conviven en la mente que se asoma por detrás de ella, en consecuencia de lo cual la escritora opera con éxito para encontrar una forma de armonizar en una única visión ambas tradiciones y las concepciones del hombre que presentan.

Gómez de Avellaneda al escribir la obra ha privilegiado la naturaleza humana sobre las exigencias de la escenificación dramática, y como resultado de ello *Saúl* es una obra que antes de despertar preguntas literarias, cuestiona a quien la lee, convirtiéndose en un impresionante instrumento de análisis de lo que reside en el alma del hombre, tan llena de incongruencias, de contradicciones.

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ABSTRACT

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (1814-1873), Cuban writer, to describe madness in her tragedy *Saúl*, makes equal use of neoclassic and romantic ideas. From Neoclassicism she takes the conception of mental insanity as a divine punishment, the description of the prophet as one related to darkness, storm and fire, visions and wandering conceived as a way of making a person lose his bearings, and the refusal of the inner change as the root of self-destruction. The romantic influence on the play resides in the ideas of madness as a positive rebellion against Fate, of the poet as a "second Creator", of prophets as natural beings, of man as a producer of isolation, of sensation as knowledge and of self-destruction as a struggle for establishing oneself's identity. Thus, by blending these elements, the authoress transforms the play in an accurate portrait of human soul's contradictions.

KEY WORDS

Gómez de Avellaneda. Saul. Theatre. Neoclassicism. Romanticism. Madness

Roberto Righi

THE LABYRINTH AND THE LOCKED ROOM:
PAUL AUSTER'S *THE NEW YORK TRILOGY*

The words rhyme, and even if there is no real connection between them, he cannot help thinking of them together. Room and tomb, womb and womb, womb and room.

PAUL AUSTER – *The Invention of Solitude*

The New York Trilogy (1987) is probably the most important and representative of Paul Auster's novels. With his philosophical(ly) postmodern touch, Auster explores contemporary reality, and portrays it in a novel that becomes a mirror of the postmodern age.

Even if the three sections of the *Trilogy* are really different, at the end of the last story (*The Locked Room*) the Narrator maintains that the

three stories are finally the same story, but each one represents a different stage in my awareness of what it is about¹.

The Narrator (who can be seen as Auster's alter ego or fictional representation in the novel) is thus an ex-centric or de-centered postmodern artist who lives in a fragmented world that cannot be conceived and reproduced with the "conventionally ordered notion"² of unity and continuity. His world is the postmodern world as defined by Hutcheon: a "labyrinth without center or periphery"³. Jameson argues that "the unity or incoherence and fragmentation of the subject – that is, the accessibility of a workable subject position or the absence of one – is itself a correlative of the unity or lack of unity of the

¹ PAUL AUSTER, *The New York Trilogy: The Locked Room*, London: Faber and Faber, 1987, p. 294. All further references to this text, hereafter cited as *LR*, will be given in parentheses in the text.

² LINDA HUTCHEON, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, New York and London: Routledge, 1988, p. 59.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 59.

outside world”⁴. And, as we will see, Auster identifies the contingency of his labyrinthine world with a labyrinthine consciousness. Struggling to present the unrepresentable, to “[put] forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself”⁵ in order to find a solution to, or a way out of, the (physical and metaphysical) labyrinth of the postmodern condition, the Narrator synthesizes the metaphor of a locked room as the subject’s (metaphysical) place of (self-)knowledge, salvation and (poetic) creativity.

In *City of Glass* the protagonist, writer Daniel Quinn, loves to wander aimlessly through the streets of New York, a daily habit that helps him “understand the connectedness of inner and outer”⁶:

Using aimless motion as a technique of reversal, on his best days he could bring the outside in and thus usurp the sovereignty of inwardness. (CG, 61)

For Quinn walking is a way to avoid inwardness and “exert some small degree of control over his fits of despair” (CG, 61): in this way he stops thinking about his suffering, i.e. the pain of the thought of his lost wife and child. But at the same time the writer gets lost into the city and himself:

New York was an inexhaustible space, a *labyrinth of endless steps*, and no matter how far he walked, no matter how well he came to know its neighbourhoods and streets, it always left him with the feeling of being lost. *Lost, not only in the city, but within himself as well.* (CG, 3-4, my emphasis)

New York, the main setting for most of the events of the novel, is a city of the world, the microcosmic emblem of the world at large; it is the perfect symbol of the postmodern metropolitan space: the city skyline and the grid of Manhattan

⁴ FREDRIC JAMESON, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London and New York: Verso, 1991, p. 137.

⁵ JEAN-FRANÇOIS LYOTARD, “Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?” (translated from the French by Régis Durand), in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984, p. 81.

⁶ PAUL AUSTER, *The New York Trilogy: City of Glass*, London: Faber and Faber, 1987, p. 61. All further references to this text, hereafter cited as CG, will be given in parentheses in the text.

streets suggest the idea of a three-dimensional labyrinth, a monotonous and anonymous structure that leads the characters to the unreal and alienating non-place of disappearance:

New York was the nowhere he had built around himself, and he realized that he had no intention of ever leaving it again. (CG, 4)

But when Quinn is hired as a detective and starts shadowing Peter Stillman Sr.⁷, things change for him: the writer cannot avoid inwardness any more and is obliged to become aware of the concrete reality and totality that surround him. Paying attention to Stillman and his movements is like paying attention to himself and his own (inner and outer) movements. Quinn begins what Jameson defines as "an aesthetic of *cognitive mapping*", accomplishing "exactly what the cognitive map is called upon to do in the narrower framework of daily life in the physical city: to enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole"⁸. The necessity to map out and recognize the social and spatial structures he lives in is a gnoseological problem: "the alienated city is above all a space in which people are unable to map (in their minds) either their own positions or the urban totality in which they find themselves [...]"⁹. Quinn records Stillman's daily movements in a red notebook, and after re-reading what he has written down he (almost unconsciously) decides to retrace the old man's steps on a map of New York. When he looks at the signs he has drawn, he is really surprised as he starts glimpsing the shapes of letters in them:

It seemed to him that he was looking for a sign. He was ransacking the chaos of Stillman's movements for some glimmer of cogency. [...] He wanted there to be a sense to them, no matter how obscure. (CG, 69)

⁷ As the Narrator tells at the beginning of the novel, "[i]t was a wrong number that started it" (CG, 3). Out of mere chance, one night Quinn receives a phone call from a person looking for detective "Paul Auster". He decides to play the role of the detective and is hired (as "Auster") by Peter and Virginia Stillman, as they fear that Peter's father, Stillman Sr., plans to kill them.

⁸ FREDRIC JAMESON, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

Hoping to find “some glimmer of cogency”, Quinn actually starts his personal cognitive mapping trying to map out, read and interpret Stillman’s steps:

For Stillman had not left his message anywhere. True, he had created the letters by the movement of his steps, but they had not been written down. It was like drawing a picture in the air with your finger. The image vanishes as you are making it. [...]

And yet, the pictures did exist – not in the streets where they had been drawn, but in Quinn’s red notebook. (CG, 71)

It could all be an outer projection of Quinn’s mind, as the reliability of the letters he sees on the map is strongly called into question. The detective experiences the (physical and metaphysical) fragmentation and lack of cogency of the (post-modern) world: he cannot find the (inner and outer) compass to map a reality characterized by ontological and gnoseological relativity, and gets thus lost in his “labyrinth without center or periphery”; it is an unrepresentable and unrepresentable infinite maze, where words become useless, since signified and signifier are ineluctably separated:

Quinn’s mind dispersed. He arrived in a neverland of fragments, a place of wordless things and thingless words. [...]
In his dream, which he later forgot, he found himself in the town dump of his childhood, sifting through a mountain of rubbish. (CG, 72)

In his oneiric activity, Quinn condenses and elaborates the world into a labyrinth of junk, a “neverland” of unrecognizable fragments. As we have seen, the fragmentation of the world corresponds to the fragmentation (and thus incoherence) of the subject’s (un)consciousness, a concept that is perfectly summarized by the Narrator’s reflection on the relativity of the knowledge of others and ourselves:

We exist for ourselves, perhaps, and at times we even have a glimmer of who we are, but in the end we can never be sure, and as our lives go on, we become more and more opaque to ourselves, more and more aware of *our own incoherence*. No one can cross the boundary into another – for the simple reason that no one can gain access to himself. (LR, 247, my emphasis)

The Narrator particularly explores all these themes in *Ghosts*, the second story of the *Trilogy*, where the protagonist, detective Blue, has to shadow a man called Black, constantly watching

him from a window and following him through the streets of New York¹⁰. Here again the character's cognitive mapping (i.e. his almost obsessive effort to unravel the puzzle of Black's life) starts to coincide with an exploration of the self. While Blue follows Black wandering through the streets of New York, in fact, he starts thinking about himself:

Black takes advantage of the weather to wander farther afield than previously, and Blue follows. [...] As they move through the narrow streets of Brooklyn Heights, Blue is encouraged to see that Black keeps increasing his distance from home. [...]

It has been many years since Blue crossed the Brooklyn Bridge on foot. The last time was with his father when he was a boy, and the memory of that day comes back to him now¹¹.

During his walk, the detective starts being overwhelmed by thoughts, memories and associations of ideas that quickly follow one another:

These *divagations* last several hours, and at no point does Blue have the sense that Black is walking to any purpose. (*Gh*, 151, my emphasis)

The physical, concrete movements, divagations, trigger off Blue's mental divagations, i.e. his process of inwardness and (self-)knowledge. It is an experience that Auster himself knows very well, since he describes it in *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), his partially autobiographical book:

Sometimes it feels as though we are wandering through a city without purpose. [...] Sometimes it seems as though we are not going anywhere as we walk through the city [...]. But just as one step will inevitably lead to the next step, so it is that one thought inevitably follows from the previous thought, and in the event that a thought should engender more than a single thought (say two or three thoughts, equal to each other in all their consequences), it will be necessary not only to follow the first thought to its conclusion, but also to backtrack to the original position of that thought in order to follow the second thought

¹⁰ The protagonist of *Ghosts*, Blue, is a detective, hired by a mysterious man called White to shadow Black. For this reason he moves into a flat just opposite to Black's. Blue's job is to watch him constantly from his window and follow him, and write weekly reports to be sent to White.

¹¹ PAUL AUSTER, *The New York Trilogy: Ghosts*, London: Faber and Faber, 1987, pp. 148-49. All further references to this text, hereafter cited as *Gh*, will be given in parentheses in the text.

to its conclusion, and then the third thought, and so on, and in this way, if we were to try to make an image of this process in our minds, a network of paths begins to be drawn, [...] as in the image of a map [...], so that *what we are really doing when we walk through the city is thinking, and thinking in such a way that our thoughts compose a journey*, and this journey is no more or less than the steps we have taken, so that, in the end, we might safely say that we have been on a journey, *and even if we do not leave our room, it has been a journey*, and we might safely say that we have been somewhere, even if we don't know where it is¹².

Auster gives here a perfect description of cognitive mapping, associating the (potentially infinite) network of thoughts to the (potentially infinite) journeys we can take in a grid of streets: as we can get lost in the (postmodern) labyrinthine metropolis, we can get lost in our labyrinthine consciousness as well. But the author also introduces the theme of the (locked) room as a metaphor, a spatial figuration of our consciousness: it is the place of the mind and of the heart where everything can happen, where inwardness starts and creativity flows out. Essentially, the characters of the *Trilogy* wander through their (concrete and abstract) labyrinthine spaces in order to find an answer, a haven of certainties: “[w]andering, in Auster, has this original aspect: rather than pitting the individual against a cold, hostile world, it forces him to confront himself and the scattered fragments of his existence. Everything relates back to the self, and, while the [locked] room serves as a microcosm, the outer world itself becomes an enclosure, which speaks in veiled tones”¹³. We can observe in this way that Auster deliberately chooses three detectives as protagonists of the novels of the *Trilogy*, because “[w]e’re surrounded by things we don’t understand, by mysteries, and in the books there are people who suddenly come face to face with them”¹⁴. The cases, the mysteries they are involved in are “things they don’t know or understand” (*AH*, 270), i.e. they face gnoseological, epistemo-

¹² PAUL AUSTER, *The Invention of Solitude*, London: Faber and Faber, 1982, pp. 121-22, my emphasis.

¹³ PASCAL BRUCKNER, “Paul Auster, or The Heir Intestate”, in DENNIS BARONE (ed.), *Beyond the Red Notebook*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995, pp. 29-30.

¹⁴ PAUL AUSTER, *The Art of Hunger: Essays, Prefaces, Interviews & The Red Notebook*, London: Penguin Books, 1993, p. 270. All further references to this text, hereafter cited as *AH*, will be given in parentheses in the text.

logical and existential questions: “[t]he question of who is who and whether or not we are who we think we are” (*AH*, 270). In other words, Auster’s quest is a “metaphysical quest”, “an eternal quest without guaranteed results”¹⁵: his characters are detectives of the self trying to trace a (physical and metaphysical) map that could help them find the right points of reference (i.e. the compass) to put their (inner and outer) fragmentation back again and come out of the chaos of their postmodern condition.

Blue’s physical and mental divagations make him move from the “surface of things” to the “world inside him”:

For the first time in his life, he finds that he has been thrown back on himself, with nothing to grab hold of, nothing to distinguish one moment from the next. He has never given much thought to the world inside him, and though he always knew it was there, it has remained an unknown quantity, unexplored and therefore dark, even to himself. He has moved rapidly along the surface of things for as long as he can remember, fixing his attention on these surfaces only in order to perceive them [...]. (*Gb*, 143)

The detective starts undertaking a journey through his labyrinthine spaces, a process of self-knowledge, “reflecting” on and “speculating” about Black and consequently himself. Black becomes a kind of double, “the Other – that gaping hole, that absence at the heart of oneself which narratives must fill up, furnish, clothe –”¹⁶, and without whom “there is no definition of the self”¹⁷:

Now, suddenly, with the world as it were removed from him, with nothing much to see but a vague shadow by the name of Black, he finds himself thinking about things that have never occurred to him before, and this, too, has begun to trouble him. If thinking is perhaps too strong a word at this point, a slightly more modest term – speculation, for example – would not be far from the mark. To speculate, from the Latin *speculatus*, meaning mirror or looking glass. For in spying out at Black across the street, it is as though Blue were looking into a mirror, and instead of merely watching another, he finds that he is also watching himself. (*Gb*, 144)

¹⁵ PASCAL BRUCKNER, *art. cit.*, p. 32.

¹⁶ MARC CHÉNETIER, “Paul Auster’s Pseudonymous World”, in DENNIS BARONE (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 38.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 38.

Therefore, when Blue realizes that Black will remain a mystery, a ghost throughout the whole story, he loses his certainties, his belief as detective that the world (and consequently his inner world) has an order that can be categorized. Like Quinn, Blue experiences the sheer fragmentation and arbitrariness of the “real”: his “case achieves no answers, but rather the total dissemination of all that he once ‘knew’. Signifiers and signifieds no longer match up; the strident categories of subject and object have broken down completely [...]”¹⁸:

He says to himself: what happened is not really what happened. For the first time [...] *he discovers that words do not necessarily work*, that it is possible for them to obscure the things they are trying to say. (*Gh*, 147-48, my emphasis)

As detectives of the self, Blue and the protagonists of the other sections of the *Trilogy* try to unravel their (physical and metaphysical) cases, “evoking the epistemological – how am I to *know* my place in the world? – and [...] adding to it the ontological questions now central to postmodernism: what is the *nature* of this world? And what is the *nature* of my place, or lack of place in this world?”¹⁹ The Narrator (we must bear in mind that he is the Narrator of all three sections) tries to answer these questions, to present the unrepresentable in his narratives, synthesizing impossible, short-circuiting (thus poetic) metaphors.

Trying to figure himself out after his “speculation”, his process of self-knowledge, Blue sees the image of

a man who has been condemned to sit in a room and go on reading a book for the rest of his life. This is strange enough – [...] seeing the world only through words [...]. But this book offers him nothing. There is no story, no plot, no action – nothing but a man sitting alone in a room and writing a book. That’s all there is, Blue realizes, and he no longer wants any part of it. But how to get out? How to get out of the room that is the book that will go on being written for as long as he stays in the room? (*Gh*, 169-70)

As the detective cannot discover anything about his oppo-

¹⁸ RICHARD SWOPE, “Approaching the Threshold(s) in Postmodern Detective Fiction: Hawthorne’s ‘Wakefield’ and Other Missing Persons”, in *Critique* 39.3 (1998), p. 212.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 209.

ment, he does not manage to locate himself either. He sees the figuration of his consciousness, the image of his (inner) locked room, but he experiences it as a prison. In other words, Blue does not accept the relativity and ambiguity of our life. In the course of his (meta-physical) investigations, in fact, when he decides to enter Black's room, he remains utterly disoriented and dislocated:

Having penetrated Black's *room* and stood there alone, having been, so to speak, in *the sanctum of Black's solitude*, he cannot respond to the darkness of that moment except by replacing it with a solitude of his own. To enter Black, then, was the equivalent of *entering himself*, and once inside himself, he can no longer conceive of being anywhere else. But this is precisely where Black is, even though Blue does not know it. (*Gb*, 190, my emphasis)

Blue does not understand the ontological nature of his quest and the metaphorical significance of the figuration of the locked room: he does not grasp his inner compass and gets lost in his labyrinthine consciousness.

Quinn undergoes an analogous process: "[d]etection becomes a quest for identity, as the mystery outside releases the mystery inside the detective"²⁰. For this reason the writer feels upset and incomplete when Stillman Sr. disappears: he cannot locate his opponent any more, and therefore he "cannot locate [himself], either within the complex labyrinth of the city or within the labyrinth that has become his own identity"²¹. The character's sense of displacement corresponds thus to a gnoseological and existential crisis:

Quinn was *nowhere* now. He had nothing, he knew nothing, *he knew that he knew nothing*. Not only had he been sent back to the beginning, he was now before the beginning, and so far before the beginning that it was worse than any end he could imagine. (*CG*, 104, my emphasis)

In *The Locked Room* the Narrator acknowledges the same crisis of displacement when, in the obstinate search for his friend Fanshawe, he arrives in Paris²². Like Quinn, he experi-

²⁰ MADELEINE SORAPURE, "The Detective and the Author: *City of Glass*", in DENNIS BARONE (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 77.

²¹ RICHARD SWOPE, *art. cit.*, p. 220.

²² The Narrator is the protagonist of *The Locked Room*. He is contacted

ences the “connectedness of inner and outer”, the interdependence between the self and its environment, so that he loses his (physical and psychical) positions when he does not recognize the totality that surrounds him:

I had been displaced, and it made me suddenly unsure of myself. I felt my grip loosening, and at least once an hour I had to remind myself why I was there. (LR, 287)

Not only does the Narrator lose Fanshawe’s traces, but also his own. Looking for his friend, he gets lost into himself: as for the other characters, the Narrator’s “investigation cannot possibly concern the world, [but] it can only refer the investigator to his own interiority, where the unconscious bubbles up”²³:

My true place in the world, it turned out, was somewhere beyond myself, and if that place was inside me, it was also *unlocatable*. This was *the tiny hole between the self and not-self*, and for the first time in my life I saw this *nowhere* as the exact centre of the world. (LR, 232, my emphasis)

As we have seen with Quinn and Blue, the physical displacement also causes a psychological displacement and fragmentation:

I became inert, a thing that could not move, and little by little I lost track of myself. If I am able to say anything about this period at all, it is only because I have certain documentary evidence to help me. [...] Those days come back to me in fragments when they come at all, bits and pieces that refuse to add up. (LR, 293)

Like Blue during his investigations, the Narrator identifies his opponent, Fanshawe, with a specular double: trying to find and locate him, he finds his own (un)consciousness, his unlocatable “nowhere”, “the tiny hole between the self and not-self”. It is a (meta-physical) place where he can only wander

by Sophie Fanshawe, the wife of Fanshawe, a friend of his when he was young. As Fanshawe, a writer, has mysteriously disappeared, she wants the Narrator to become the literary executor of his works. When he receives a letter from his friend, who tells him he is still alive but wants to remain missing, he starts an obsessive search for Fanshawe.

²³ MARC CHÉNETIER, *art. cit.*, p. 37.

alone: he gets lost into his "labyrinthine interiority", where the "self remains the ultimate mystery, the ultimate *threshold*, across which we have no access, the locked room inside the skull" ²⁴:

Fanshawe was exactly where I was, and he had been there since the beginning. From the moment his letter arrived, I had been struggling to imagine him, to see him as he might have been – but my mind had always conjured a blank. At best, there was one impoverished image: the door of a locked room. That was the extent of it: Fanshawe alone in that room, condemned to a mythical solitude – living perhaps, breathing perhaps, dreaming God knows what. This room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull. (LR, 292-93)

It is at this point that he becomes aware of the meaning of his search: Fanshawe becomes the embodiment of the place of consciousness, of the pivotal center of identity; the Narrator is looking for nothing but his own self. He has a clear vision of a "room [...] located inside [his] skull", but the door of this room is locked, inviolable. With this metaphor the Narrator (as a poet, an ex-centric artist) presents the unrepresentable (of the postmodern condition he embodies): the metaphor is both abstract and concrete; it is powerfully paradoxical and short-circuiting; it struggles to make possible the impossible, to give a meaning to the fragmentation and unknowability of the postmodern "real" with its arbitrary language. The image of the locked room becomes thus a symbol of reaction to, and redemption from, the alienated and sterile situation he finds himself in. After this perception the Narrator starts his personal "speculation": his physical and psychical displacement drives him to a mad-like (almost schizophrenic) state and activity. This is how he can tell the same story three times, in three different ways ²⁵: differently from Blue, he takes a step further and accepts the ambiguity of life, using (postmodern schizophrenic) creativity as a means of exploration of his emotional landscapes:

²⁴ RICHARD SWOPE, *art. cit.*, p. 226.

²⁵ This reading is clearly referred to Jameson's definition of postmodernism, for whom the aesthetic model of postmodern art can be associated to schizophrenia: alienation, dislocation and lack of historicity cause "a breakdown in the signifying chain, that is, the interlocking syntagmatic series of signifiers which constitutes an utterance or a meaning. [...] With the breakdown of the signifying chain, therefore, the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time." (FREDRIC JAMESON, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27).

If words followed, it was only because I had no choice but to accept them, to take them upon myself and go where they wanted me to go. [...] The story is not in the words; it's in the struggle. (LR, 294)

Fundamentally, the Narrator finally learns what Fanshawe had always tried to teach him indirectly in their youth: the importance to live, to experience and taste life in order to know ourselves and survive in the non-meaning of the postmodern reality. Fanshawe is aware of the inexplicable and inescapable "mysterious centre of hiddenness" (LR, 210) of life, and wants to unravel it: the Narrator remembers an episode, when Fanshawe goes into a freshly dug tomb:

Somewhere in the middle of the cemetery there was a freshly dug grave, and Fanshawe and I stopped at the edge and looked down into it. [...] Fanshawe said that he wanted to see what it was like at the bottom. [...] When his feet touched the ground he looked back up at me with a half-smile, and then lay down on his back, as though pretending to be dead. [...] Fanshawe was alone down there, thinking his thoughts, living through those moments by himself, and though I was present, the event was sealed off from me, as though I was not really there at all. (LR, 220-21)

It is as if Fanshawe were (symbolically) entering his own locked room: the Narrator realizes that he cannot enter it, that he cannot share his friend's thoughts, that they will always be unknown to him. For this reason the locked room can be perceived as a tomb: it is the cold, sterile, inaccessible place of incommunicability and loneliness. But, most importantly, this scene reminds him of something that happened in the boys' childhood:

By some obscure train of thought, it made me think back to when we were very small – no more than four or five years old. Fanshawe's parents had bought some new appliance, a television perhaps, and for several months Fanshawe kept *the cardboard box in his room*. He had always been generous in sharing his toys, but this box was off limits to me, and he never let me go in it. It was *his secret place*, he told me, and when he sat inside and closed it up around him, *he could go wherever he wanted to go, could be wherever he wanted to be*. But if another person ever entered his box, then its magic would be lost for good. I believed this story and did not press him for a turn, although it nearly broke my heart. We would be playing in his room, quietly setting up soldiers or drawing pictures, and then, out of the blue, Fanshawe would announce that he was going into his box. I would try to go on with what I had been doing, but it was never any use. Nothing interested me

so much as what was happening to Fanshawe inside the box, and I would spend those minutes desperately trying to imagine the adventures he was having. But I never learned what they were, since it was also against the rules for Fanshawe to talk about them after he climbed out. (LR, 220, my emphasis)

Fanshawe's box, just like the tomb, is "his secret place", his metaphor of the locked room of consciousness: his microcosm, his "nowhere", is this mental place that nobody can enter and violate, and that cannot be presented and represented. This experience of absolute solitude in the locked room starts off the process of self-knowledge: Fanshawe (physically and metaphysically) wanders inside his inner geography, he (magically) explores and discovers new emotional landscapes.

Once the Narrator understands the importance of this experience, he (fictionally) presents the different degrees of awareness of the question of (self-)knowledge.

In *Ghosts Blue*, not accepting the ambiguity of the "real", drifts into his labyrinthine "nowhere" and feels like a prisoner, "like a man who has been condemned to sit in a room" (*Gh*, 169). For him, thus, the locked room is a tomb from which he would like to escape: but he does not find any way out:

Then, from out of the blue, he begins to consider another possibility. What if he just simply left? What if he stood up, went out the door, and walked away from the whole business? He ponders this thought for a while, testing it out in his mind, and little by little he begins to tremble, overcome by terror and happiness, like a slave stumbling onto a vision of his own freedom. [...] But that is not to say he does not feel afraid. From this moment on, there is only one word that speaks for Blue, and that word is fear. (*Gh*, 186-87)

Confronted with the hidden ambiguity of his labyrinthine consciousness, the feeling that prevails in *Blue* is fear, terror. His position also represents Fanshawe's nihilistic choice: the writer decides to disappear from the world, to escape from the terror of the relativity and paradoxicality of the postmodern "real"; he hides in a locked room that becomes his (physical and metaphysical) tomb. That is why there is no answer, no (creative and vital) solution in the words of the notebook he writes for the Narrator: while the Narrator struggles to present the unrepresentable in his narratives, Fanshawe intentionally wants to erase it, to fool the reader with sterile, arbitrary, failing words:

All the words were familiar to me, and yet they seemed to have been put together strangely, as though their final purpose was to cancel each other out. I can think of no other way to express it. Each sentence erased the sentence before it, each paragraph made the next paragraph impossible. [...] And yet, underneath this confusion, I felt there was something too willed, something too perfect, as though in the end the only thing he had really wanted was to fail – even to the point of failing himself. (LR, 313-14)

On the other hand, the Narrator understands that our self, our locked room can be a prison, but “a prison that opens the gates of freedom; the self is a dungeon we must voluntarily enter in order to find escape”²⁶.

From this point of view the locked room as tomb represents the first necessary stage (i.e. of death) that the self has to go through in order to gain the possibility of redemption and rebirth.

The theme of rebirth is particularly dealt with in *City of Glass*. As we have seen, after the disappearance of Stillman Sr., Daniel Quinn has nognoseological and epistemological certainties any more: lost in the unrecognizable and alienating “nowhere” of New York and in the infinite labyrinth of his consciousness, the writer decides to take refuge in Peter and Virginia Stillman’s flat. Entering the apartment (where the whole case, the mystery began), he enters his (un)consciousness; he crosses the ultimate threshold between the physical and the metaphysical; in this flat the (poetic) metaphor of the dark, locked room becomes incarnate, it becomes a symbolic womb, “a kind of mental uterus, site of a second birth. In this enclosure the subject gives birth, in essence, to himself”²⁷. Quinn takes off all his clothes, “making himself completely naked like the child just emerged, or about to emerge, from the womb”²⁸: it is his final metamorphosis, the last phase he lives through in order to complete his quest for identity and develop into a new man:

For the case was far behind him now, and he no longer bothered to think about it. It had been a bridge to another place in his life, and now that he had crossed it, its meaning had been lost. [...] He remembered the moment of his birth and how he had been pulled gently from his mother’s womb. (CG, 130)

²⁶ PASCAL BRUCKNER, *art. cit.*, p. 28.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

²⁸ NORMA ROWEN, “The Detective in Search of the Lost Tongue of Adam: Paul Auster’s *City of Glass*”, in *Critique* 32.4 (1991), p. 231.

Daniel Quinn "gives birth, in essence, to himself": it is a rebirth of the self that implies a new awareness and an acceptance of all the ambiguities and contradictions, of the unknowability, of the gnoseological and epistemological uncertainties of the postmodern condition.

Metaphorically, this is what happens to the Narrator in the final act of *The Locked Room*, what makes him decide to pour out all his creativity: he reads the red notebook that Fanshawe has left for him, but after he finishes reading it, he destroys it. He is not lured by the writer's blinding words, and he gains his personal (poetic) freedom and independence, since he manages to accept his own, and the world's, ambiguities and contradictions. In other words, he understands that they are the necessary condition that makes the process of (self-)knowledge start and helps him face the fragmentation of the world and become a mature, independent postmodern subject:

One by one, I tore the pages from the notebook, crumpled them in my hand, and dropped them into a trash bin on the platform. (*LR*, 314)

ABSTRACT

In his novel *The New York Trilogy* (1987), Paul Auster fictionally explores the contradictions and ambiguities of contemporary postmodern reality. The protagonists of the three stories find themselves in a New York that becomes the emblem of the postmodern space: an unknowable and infinitely fragmented labyrinth they get lost into. As they have the ontological necessity to know and define the "real", their environment, they start a "cognitive mapping" that makes them experience gnoseological relativity, their own labyrinthine consciousness. The Narrator (who maintains to be the narrator of all the three sections) offers a solution to the chaos of their postmodern condition, synthesizing the metaphor of a locked room as a physical and metaphysical place of (self-)consciousness, (self-)knowledge and creativity.

KEY WORDS

Paul Auster. *The New York Trilogy*. Postmodern novel.

Valentina Rossi

SARAH KANE'S *BLASTED*: THE SCANDAL BETWEEN
THE BRITISH AND THE ITALIAN PRODUCTIONS

Sarah Kane (1971-1999) was the daughter of a *Mirror* journalist and grew up in Essex. Her career as playwright began quite early at the age of seven, when she wrote her first "violent" short story about someone whose father was shot. Some years later, by the time she was studying for A-levels, she was also busy directing Chekhov's *The Bear* and the Joan Littlewood musical *Oh, What a Lovely War!* at school. After A-levels Kane began her drama degree in Bristol. Here she stood out as an actor and director, not yet as a writer. Her first substantial written work, a series of three monologues under the umbrella title of *Sick*, was firstly performed in Bristol and then at Edinburgh Festival in 1994. One was about rape, one about a woman questioning about her sexual identity and another about eating disorders: they were all performed in the first person, confrontational, and it felt as one was listening to a first hand experience. Kane later withdrew the monologues – disowned them in effect – because she thought that audiences regarded them as confessional: these monologues are now hard to find and have never been performed afterwards.

Kane graduated from Bristol and went straight on to David Edgar's playwriting MA at Birmingham University, being accepted on the course on the basis of a monologue called *Starved*, which tells of a bulimic woman. It is during this period that she started her first play *Blasted*, but kept it hidden from her tutors until it was well under way. Mel Kenyon, an agent, went up to Birmingham to see the end-of-year show in 1993 and when the embryo of *Blasted* was performed, she was "awe-struck"¹ and later asked Kane if she could read the whole

¹ SIMON HATTENSTONE, "A Sad Hurrah", "The Guardian Weekend", *The*

thing when it was completed, thus becoming her agent.

Blasted premiered on January 18th 1995 at the Royal Court Upstairs Theatre in Sloane Square, London. It was a horrifying examination of the effects of contemporary war on three people in a Leeds hotel room and included scenes of fellatio, frottage, micturition, defecation, homosexual rape, eye-gouging, cannibalism and suicide.

Accused of putting audiences through a "catalogue of lurid on-stage depravity"², she was vilified by the press and proclaimed the most notorious playwright in Britain.

Unfazed by the cacophony of media criticism, she directed her second full-length play, *Phaedra's Love*, at the Gate Theatre of Notting Hill in London in May 1996: the play was her contemporary take on the myth of King Theseus's wife, Phaedra, and her taboo-breaking passion for her stepson Hyppolytus. Here she both waved a variation on classical myth and worked her way through masturbation, fellatio, rape, castration and disembowelment. Predictably more condemnation followed and same journalist commented that it was not a theatre critic that was required to review the play, but a psychiatrist.

In 1997 she completed her third play, *Cleansed*, that opened at the Royal Court Theatre in the London West End in May 1998: it was a twenty-scene play about love, death and drug addiction in a concentration camp. The play was no less violent than the previous and outraged a new set of critics with scenes that included injection of heroin into an eyeball, violent amputation and suicide. Again, it was fuelled by her revulsion of Serb atrocities, minimalist and elliptical but once again the critics suggested that the violence in *Cleansed* was gratuitous and exaggerate. In other critic's opinions however, her first plays demonstrated remarkable insight and clarity because they offered us a powerful warning, by showing the tragic but logical conclusion of humanity's escalating, destructive behaviour.

Her fourth play, *Crave*, which opened at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh during 1998's Fringe Festival and was subsequently transferred to the Royal Court in London, was a sudden change of style. A virtuoso poem for four voices, styled

Guardian, July 1st 2000, p. 29.

² Quoted in HEIDI STEPHENSON, NATASHA LANGRIDGE, *Rage and Reason - Women Playwrights on Playwriting*, London, Methuen Drama, 1997, p. 129.

as two parallel conversations, it drew on T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and the Bible, and proved that Kane could write with tender, playful, Beckettian brilliance. The play was written by Kane under the pseudonym "Marie Kelvedon" (Marie was her middle name and Kelvedon Hatch was a town near where she was born): it was a means of writing for – and seeing her work played in front of – an audience unswayed by the influence of the *Blasted* phenomenon.

In *Crave*, four nameless voices (Methuen names them A, B, C and M) – different characters of warring factions of one person's consciousness – sit around and discuss love, desire, abuse and the ultimate desire, death. It marked a departure in Kane's work because, having pioneered a new theatre where brutality and action express an emotional narrative, here she deployed language like music. Many critics hastening to talk about Kane's new found maturity as a playwright, *Crave* was widely reviewed as Kane's best piece of writing.

Only a few months later, when she committed suicide, she was under commission to a number of theatres and had a play soon to go into production (*4:48 Psychosis*, which premiered at the Royal Court Upstairs in London in June 2000): like all her work, it was about the catastrophe of love and its extreme consequences. The play is, in fact, a sombre, poetic and subjective meditation on suicide and it is definitely the most refined of Kane's plays.

Blasted, *Phaedra's Love*, *Cleansed*, *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis* add up to a body of work, which pushed recklessly at theatre's naturalistic boundaries. Each was a new step on a journey in which Kane mapped the darkest and most unforgiving internal landscapes: of violation, loneliness, power, mental collapse and, most consistently, love. As James Macdonald (the director of *Blasted*, *Cleansed* and *4:48 Psychosis*) said, it is astonishing that so young a dramatist could so in short time write plays stylistically so different from each other as the five she left us. She was, as Mark Ravenhill said, "a contemporary writer with a classical sensibility who created a theatre of great moments of beauty and cruelty, a theatre to which it was only possible to respond with a sense of awe"³. She pioneered a form of experimental theatre, which gave audiences a powerful sense of hav-

³ Quoted in SIMON HATTENSTONE, *art. cit.*, p. 34.

ing lived through the events shown on stage, and tackled the large issues of war, violence and love, identity, insanity and desire.

Kane wrote simply and starkly about the world around her, a world in which violence and love were deeply entwined, and hope and despair were mirror images of each other. For her, *Blasted* was simply a play about fragility, survival and hope. Her intention was to be absolutely truthful about abuse, violence and war. And since war is illogical, it seemed wrong to her to use a predictable theatrical form; instead, she tried to draw on lots of different authors, from Ibsen to Pinter, to Brecht and, eventually, to Beckett, in order to create some kind of dramatic course within the play, like drama history within the play itself.

She thought that acts of violence simply happened in life, they didn't have a dramatic build-up, and they were horrible. There is, she said, "no real debate in this country about how you represent violence in art. We don't know how to talk about it; we don't know how to deal with it. The violence in this play [*Blasted*] is completely de-glamorised. It's just presented. [...] Of course that's shocking. Take the glamour out of violence and it becomes utterly repulsive"⁴. Kane didn't seem to know how she wanted her audience to respond. Her job was to represent it, while people should judge for themselves and she had no interest in trying to manipulate people's emotions or opinions: what she wanted to do was to tell the truth about human behaviour as she saw it. As a matter of fact, Kane's plays do not take sides: she showed compassion for her characters but does not justify their behaviour.

Furthermore in this direction, Kane hated the idea of theatre just being an evening pastime, she thought it should be emotionally and intellectually demanding. But people, in her view, only expect to sit in front of a play and not participate. To fight this tendency, Kane claimed that there should be a place for good new writing, irrespective of the box office, for one cannot second-guess audiences and control how they will respond to any given theatrical experience.

Kane would rather risk overdose in the theatre than in life, because, if theatre can change lives, then by implication it can

⁴ Quoted in STEPHENSON, LANGRIDGE, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

change society, since we are all part of it: for theatre is not external force acting on society, but it is part of it, a reflection of the way people, within that society, view the world. And films, books, or theatre, they all represent something which already exists, even if only in someone's head, and through that representation they can change or reinforce what they describe. Playwright Harold Pinter, who knew and appreciated Kane, said:

"What frightened me was the depth of her horror and anguish. Everyone is aware, to varying degrees, of the cruelty of mankind, but we manage to compromise with it [...] but I don't think she could do that. I think she had a vision of the world that was extremely accurate, and therefore horrific. Because the world is an awful place. It's a very beautiful place, but this species mankind is an absolute bloody disaster. The elements of sadism are astonishing. She wasn't simply observing mankind; she was part of it. It seems to me she was talking about the violence within herself, the hatred within herself, and the depths of misery that she also suffered"⁵.

Kane thought that through being very, very low comes the an ability to live in the moment because there isn't anything else. What do you do if the truth is behind you? Many people feel that depression is about emptiness but actually it is about being so full that everything cancels itself out. And since you can't have faith without doubt, what are you left when you can't have love without hate? Long before she died, Kane admitted that she found the creative process gruelling and exhausting. A character in *Crave* says "I write the truth and it kills me"⁶. In an interview just before her suicide, the playwright said she felt much the same.

We want now to focus our attention on the production of Kane's first play, *Blasted*, in the British première of 1995 and in the first Italian staging of 1997: for, although notorious and worrying, Kane's fame run throughout Europe very quickly and wasn't – and isn't nowadays – neglected by other European countries (not to mention the American and Australian productions), in whose staging, directors and actors gave new, different and interesting interpretations of Kane's body of work.

⁵ QUOTED IN SIMON HATTENSTONE, *art. cit.*, p. 31.

⁶ SARAH KANE, *Crave*, London, Methuen Drama, 1998, p. 31.

The action in *Blasted* is set in a fancy hotel room in Leeds where Ian, a dying racist, middle-aged tabloid journalist has brought a speech-impaired, seemingly epileptic 21-year-old former girlfriend Cate for purposes of seduction.

He enters the room, fag stuck in his mouth, and marches over to the minibar to pour a double gin, leaving Cate waiting uncertainly in the doorway. After much hesitation she decides to stay. While they talk we come to know that Ian was once married and has a son. The gunsling he wears suggests it's not just the forces within he has to fear, and, from his constant racist jibes and confessions he makes to Cate, we gather that he is an undercover operator from some secret right-wing nationalist army.

Ian wants to reconquer Cate, insists that he loves her but makes violent advances on her: he calls her a "spaz"⁷ and, during one of her cataleptic fits, he rapes her. There are following scenes of oral sex and masturbation; eventually Cate goes to the bathroom and disappears.

Outside is the civil war and the city seems to be taken over by the military. A soldier bursts in the bedroom: he takes Ian's gun, eats his food, drinks his gin out and checks his passport. Suddenly a shell blasts a hole where the window was. When the two men recover from the blow, the soldier describes in lip-smacking details the appalling atrocities he has committed elsewhere and the tortures that his dead girlfriend Col had to suffer. Then he rapes Ian at gunpoint and eventually bites out his eyes and eats them.

When Cate comes back the soldier has killed himself. Cate carries a baby who cries because it's hungry. After a while the baby dies and Cate buries her under the floorboards. Ian wants to die as well but Cate prevents him from doing it and then she goes out looking for food. The play shows now a sequence of snapshots of Ian masturbating, defecating, laughing, having a nightmare and eating the baby's corpse.

Eventually Cate enters the room carrying some food and gin, blood seeping from between her legs. She sits next to Ian, eats her food (meat, but she was previously a vegetarian) and then feeds Ian with the remaining; she drinks some more gin

⁷ SARAH KANE, *Blasted & Phaedra's Love*, London, Methuen Drama, 1996, p. 5.

and sucks her thumb and in the end the scene goes completely dark.

Following Kane's precise stage directions, the set of the play is indeed a very common hotel room ("the kind that is so expensive it could be anywhere in the world"⁸), rendered with alarming naturalism. The stage immediately suggests the kind of chamber piece about relationships with which theatre-goers are so familiar. And yet, almost from its first words, "I've shat in better places than this"⁹, there is an uneasy awareness that this play is not behaving itself: the moral unease that accompanies these first lines grows until the scene finally changes and we learn that, during the night, Ian has raped Cate.

The 1995 British production of *Blasted*, directed by James Macdonald, followed meticulously Kane's precise stage directions, for which nothing is left to imagination, from the furniture on stage to every act of violence perpetrated by and on the characters (this, of course, was the most disturbing element of the staging).

On one hand we have a precise geographic reference, on the other hand indefiniteness: so even from the beginning we can literally feel a tension, which is never to be released, between two poles, the realistic and the oniric poles, on which the whole structure of the play is based. Moreover, the hotel room in Leeds is one of those places/no places that, since they belong to a globalised industrial production, are made of those standard elements which are always the same wherever in the world we are: let us think to Mac Donald's fast foods, or Holiday Inn hotels, for instance. Therefore, the hotel room is the symbol of the Western world which enters the rest of the world though preserving its unaltered models.

The first part of the play has the precise aim of introducing the characters and their interpersonal relationship: Ian (Pip Donaghy) is racist, xenophobe, hates the immigrants and the homosexual people, fears diversity and has an almost maniac need for law and order, whereas Cate (Kate Ashfield) impersonates astonishment and innocent amazement: what, however, prevents the play from commonplace, is the absence of any moralism, either in the text and in the actress' interpretation, so that the audience avoids identification with Cate's innocence

⁸ SARAH KANE, *Blasted & Phaedra's Love*, London, Mehtuen Drama, p. 3.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

because her innocence is rendered as childishness and handicap.

At the end of the first part of the play, before entering the bathroom, Cate looks outside the window and, almost by chance says "Looks like there's a war on"¹⁰: this line introduces the second part's scenery. So without any notice, the second part begins with the entrance of an armed soldier (Dermot Kerrigan): when Cate leaves the stage, there is a loud knock on the door, and, in the play most daring moment, the soldier enters, apparently from nowhere, bringing with him the terrifying fragments of a world blown apart by violence. In this way, the tension of the first part of the play is almost premonition of the disaster to come. And when it comes, the structure of the play fractures to allow its entry: the form is a direct parallel to the truth of war it portrays – a traditional form is suddenly and violently disrupted by the entrance of an unexpected element that drags the characters and the play into a chaotic pit without logic explanation.

Nothing is said, nor when he speaks or even in the original text, about the soldier, nor a description of his uniform (on stage he wears trousers and vest), nor about his nationality: he represents the logic of war, destruction, violence and madness, which contrasts openly with the apparently opposite logic, that of the extreme right-wing policy, which is racist, cynical, equally violent but self-styled as "civil", the one Ian represents.

The tension culminates when a bomb shell hits the hotel and leaves a big, dark, disquieting hole on the wall which represents the connection with the outer world: it will allow Cate to enter the room and leave it when she afterwards goes out in search of food and means that the violence which occurred in the hotel room has also destroyed the world outside it. The blast made by the bomb also seems to introduce the most explicitly violent and criticised part of the play, i.e. when the soldier rapes Ian at gunpoint and then munches noisily on his eyes: there are no changes in the scenery, apart from the hole, no different or dimmed lights, nor attempts to disguise what is going on, the violence happens right in front of us and we can also hear all the noises. At this point the audience,

¹⁰ SARAH KANE, *Blasted & Phaedra's Love*, London, Methuen Drama, 1996, p. 34.

during the first première, was stunned and shocked and many had already left the theatre, outraged by the explicitness of the scenes.

So, when Cate comes back with the baby in her arms, the stage is still showing the hotel room, but its scenario is definitely bleaker and more horrid: the once beautiful and luxurious room is reduced as a battle field – again, parallels with the outer world, torn by the civil war, are evident. The lights now have gone down to show only blind Ian, who is almost buried by the floorboards apart from his head: this seems to allude to Ian's near death, even because, when the baby Cate has brought with her dies, she buries her in the same place.

When Cate leaves again in search for food, sudden changes of lighting ("Darkness. Light. Darkness. Light"¹¹ is the line we read in the text, and almost the same effect that we have on stage) show us Ian performing a series of actions which look like horrific vignettes about a crazy man who is dying and the play gives up dialogue: he masturbates, defecates, laughs hysterically, cries and eats the dead baby – again the audience averts their eyes because of the extreme vividness of the images. Then Cate comes back with food which she got in exchange for sex from the soldiers (the blood seeping from between her legs has a disquieting likeness with the real one), she eats the food and feeds Ian who eventually thanks her.

The end of the play is as disconcerting as the rest of it: it seems like Macdonald – and the author as well – is trying to tell us that a certain sense of peace is pervading the brutalised scene: there is rain, then silence, the lights are very low, and then a sudden blackout, which leaves the audience uncertain about what to do.

Kane said that *Blasted* was a text about survival and hope: as a matter of fact, it is an act of hope that, in the chilling scenery of the end of the play, we must interpret Cate's final gesture: she finds the nerve for an act of open-handedness towards Ian, with whom she shares her food. So, in the end, it is Cate who, previously childish and unfit for the world, now reveals herself to be the strongest character of the play: her innocence and purity eventually win, because they remain the same even through human degradation and physical violence.

¹¹ SARAH KANE, *Blasted & Phaedra's Love*, London, Methuen Drama, 1996, p. 59.

In a world where human dignity is systematically lowered, solidarity stands up as only value: so, even if the starting point of the play was a political dimension (a clear, pitiless analysis of contemporary society), the solution is to be found the human and private dimension.

Nevertheless, when *Blasted* premiered, critics were quick to condemn it as a “feast of filth”¹² although some were brave enough to subsequently revise their opinion, noting, like Edward Bond, that Kane’s play was written in the bleached language of truth and poetry.

Blasted implies that modern Britain is a society where potentially traumatising events, such as rape and murder, are rendered inconsequential by the constant diet of them the press provides.

In a language at once sensational and habitual, the reporting of limit events is evacuated from any significance and real trauma is buried without a trace: it is no coincidence that Ian is a journalist, and, as such, responsible for witnessing on a daily basis, but here the traditional role of the journalist as the bearer of historical testimony is reduced to the churning out of lurid clichés down the telephone:

“A serial killer slaughtered British tourist Samantha Scrace in a sick murder ritual comma, police revealed yesterday new point par. The bubbly nineteen-year-old from Leeds was among seven victims buried in identical triangular tombs in an isolated New Zealand forest pint new par. Each had been stabbed more than twenty times and placed face down comma, hands bound behind their backs point new par. Caps up, ashes at the site showed the maniac had stayed to cook a meal, caps down point new par ...”¹³

The journalist writes of horrific events from which he is removed by thousands of miles, in hackneyed language repeated in different variations in countless newspapers. There is a formula, *Blasted* is telling us, for rendering atrocities in a familiar, easily digestible fashion: there is nothing strange in the murder of seven people. Journalistic haste – to meet a deadline, to capture a readership – only expresses further the real kernel of a traumatic event.

¹² JACK TINKER, “This disgusting feast of filth”, *The Daily Mail*, January 19th, 1995.

¹³ SARAH KANE, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

Ian is obviously a bad witness: not only does he make the events he reports seem routine and commonplace, but he is detached, both literally and symbolically, from those events. In this way, *Blasted* is also the story of the revenge of the events on the bad witness, culminating in the removal of his eyes.

Irony heaps upon irony in the press reception of *Blasted*, with accusations of gratuitousness and sensationalism. In isolating and fetishising various sexual acts, the media had presented exactly the kind of distorted, alienated sexuality that Kane seeks to examine. Ian's chauvinism, racism, homophobia and bigotry are dissected to reveal his sexual relations at a battlefield in which he strives for power and dominance, while desperately trying to tighten a grip on life made vulnerable by disease and the threat of political assassination. So, in separating sex from its context, the media has failed to recognise Kane's work as an examination of the social construction of sex: *Blasted* shows us the violence in society and suggests a material basis for its existence.

However, nothing could have prepared Kane for the response to *Blasted*, which cast her as the bad girl of British theatre. She expected criticism but didn't expect it to become a news item on *Newsnight* and *The World at One*. The thing that shocked her the most way was that the critics seemed to be more upset by the presentation of violence than by violence itself. "I mean, a 15-year-old girl has just been raped in a wood but there's more space in the tabloids about my play than about this brutal act. That's the kind of journalism that the play absolutely condemns"¹⁴.

Kane wasn't actually surprised by the fact that the press chose to get angry about the cultural event that drew attention on what was really happening in Bosnia, and the shock wasn't much about the content, not even about the shock of the new, but about the familiar being arranged in such a way that it could be seen afresh. Speaking in terms of Aristotle's Unities, the time and action are disrupted while unity of place is retained: this, of course, caused a great deal of offence because it implied a direct link between domestic violence in Britain and civil war in former Yugoslavia. In a 1997 interview she said: "Of course the press wish to deny that what happened in

¹⁴ Quoted in STEPHENSON, LANGRIDGE, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

central Europe has anything to do with us, of course they don't want us to be aware of the extent of the social sickness we're suffering from – the moment they acknowledge it, the ground opens up to swallow them. They celebrate the end of the Cold War then rapidly return to sex scandals (which sell more papers) and all that has been done to secure our future as a species is the reduction of the overkill factor”¹⁵.

Blasted raised the question ‘What does a common rape in Leeds have to do with a mass rape as a war weapon in Bosnia?’ And the answer appeared to be ‘Quite a lot’: the unity of place suggests a paper-thin wall between the safety and civilisation of peacetime in Britain and the chaotic violence of civil war, a wall that can be torn down at any time, without warning. “With Britain an island, we are not used to people marauding through our country – Kane said – people think we are safe here. But with the rise of nationalist machismo, it *could* happen here”¹⁶.

Time, however, has written two new acts for *Blasted* in the form of the events in Yugoslavia and in Kane's own suicide in 1999. Seven years ago, atrocities such as Kane imagined in *Blasted* seemed unreal, but by now we have all unfortunately read accounts of similar happenings which are very close to home. At the same time, the young playwright's lonely death suggests that the torment of the play was about more than enthusiastic extrapolation from the world outside her window, but it was also an expression of some dark, internal process. This lends the play to an extra dimension which was nurtured by Macdonald's new and, as critics said, deft direction and superb, selfless performance from the cast: it seems there is nothing gratuitous in *Blasted* and when the play is produced nowadays, the audience feels like the cast on stage, unsure whether to laugh or to cry. Of course the play might still be flawed for somebody, but it survives today as a more humane, impassioned, dramatic testament which has encouraged even not-British directors to produce it.

Since 1995 *Blasted* has been produced at least once in almost every country in Europe and soon enough it was staged in our country as well.

¹⁵ Quoted in STEPHENSON, LANGRIDGE, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

¹⁶ Quoted in DAVID BENEDICT, “Disgusting Violence? Actually it's quite a peaceful play”, *Independent on Sunday*, January 22nd 1995.

The Italian director of the Teatro della Limonaia¹⁷, Barbara Nativi, met Sarah Kane in London 1996 when she was already working on the Italian translation of *Blasted*. What in *Blasted* attracted Nativi, was its total lack of linearity, so that in the beginning she definitely didn't get the point of it at all, but it nonetheless fascinated her and therefore, after completing her work, she proposed to the actors of Laboratorio Nove (the theatre's company of actors which Nativi directs) to stage Kane's play. After reading the play, the first reaction of the actors was a complete rejection of the play which, they unanimously claimed, was just disgusting and devoid of any artistic merit. Nativi was then forced to defer a further attempt for the following year. It was necessary, as Nativi said, that, when staging such a piece, a certain complicity would reign between the director and the actors, otherwise the director becomes only a sadist in front of them.

Eventually, a few months later in Siena, Nativi directed the very first Italian *mise en espace* of *Blasted*, which was a very risky experience for the actors: it was only a public reading of the play but they already felt very ill at ease with the text. The scenes of the first part of the play were probably the hardest to be performed-read because of the strict stage directions written by Kane on the text. Nativi asked herself why was the first part of the text so realistic, so full of details, whereas the second part of the play showed us a more oniric and surrealistic dimension.

Naturalism was a choice made by Kane in order to express criticism and condemnation against a society that accepts violence and what made her great was indeed her ability to connect violence from the world outside with the violence we undergo in our private life: nothing in the context changes and nobody does anything against it. So, in order to be as detailed as reality itself, Kane wanted her text not to lack precise description of reality.

It is actually hard, for Italian actors, to act in a naturalistic

¹⁷ The Teatro della Limonaia is located in Vila Corsi Salviati, in Sesto Fiorentino, one of the smaller towns on the outskirts of Florence and has an established tradition of cultural activity. In 1987 the old lemon-house in the villa became the Teatro della Limonaia (as the name suggests) and was placed under the artistic direction of Barbara Nativi: in this space has afterwards born a new company of actors – il Laboratorio Nove – with Silvano Panich as its director.

way, since we are used to emphasising and underlining every sentence, which is not how English actors work: being natural for us, is to be considered a great conquest. And even the Italian setting of the play is different from the almost sober hotel room of the British production: the room's furnishing (Dimitri Milopoulos' scenes and costumes) here has a direct bound with the furnishing of the Venetian theatre La Fenice which burnt in that same year, as if to quote theatre being indeed inside of a theatre, and to draw closer the parallel between far away violence and domestic violence by making the action happen in Venice, just in the core of Europe.

The play premiered at Teatro della Limonaia on September 16th 1997 under the Italian title of *Dannati* ("damned", although Nativi's choice appears to limit the sense of the English original title only to the mental state of the characters and not also to the world that surrounds them) with Silvia Guidi as Cate, Roberto Posse as Ian and Michele Andrei as the soldier.

In the first part of Nativi's production there is nothing but the exact execution of the stage directions, as if to wait for the situation to be shaped by something that will come later: indeed, because of this, in Nativi's experience, the first two scenes were definitely the worst to be performed and also to be watched.

Already in the second scene however, naturalism seems to fade slightly: at the point when Cate disappears and the soldier knocks at the door, Nativi saw the beginning of the so-called Brechtian phase of the play. Ian and the soldier knock at the sides of the door alternatively, as if they were playing in some kind of give-away show: they look like children playing hide-and-seek or, worse, the game of war, but the result is quite a funny scene, which definitely doesn't anticipate what will happen next.

What happens next is the most striking moment of the whole production: the bombshell blasts the hole on the wall, the noises are very loud, colours fade away and it almost gives one goose-bumps. The effect is that of an action movie and not of a theatre piece: light and music playing on the scene and on the characters, make them look like unreal, as if we were watching a screen and not a three-dimensional space in which it is represented the catastrophe of a civil war in England.

After the explosion the only light that illuminates the scene

is an almost Expressionist greenish-yellowish light which is a fit introduction to the almost oniric dimension which we are entering now: when Ian finally meets his destiny and destiny takes revenge on him under the shape of the violent soldier. And what exactly makes violence explode is, in Nativi's interpretation of the text, a certain line said by Ian during the dialogue between him and the soldier: the soldier is trying to convince Ian that, being a journalist, he should write about the tortures and the violence that the soldier's girlfriend Col has suffered before dying. But Ian answers: "I don't cover foreign affairs"¹⁸ and hence the soldier's rage against Ian's coarseness which culminates in the anal rape and the eye-gouging, rendered, again, so truthfully that the audience had to avert their eyes from the stage.

The scene now is very similar to the British production: blind Ian is buried under the floorboards and the only light on stage illuminates him from above. Behind him, the window curtains fall on the floor to reveal Cate who is holding the baby. In Silvia Guidi's interpretation of Cate, the character, like in the English production, has not lost her innocence and her unfitness, but is more firm, somehow she appears stronger, surer of what she needs and what she has to do. Acting now is very far from initial naturalism and the play just follows the stage directions which, in this production, are read by a voice behind the scene that describes Ian's actions (the only thing we don't see is Ian eating the baby) while rain falls on him.

When Cate comes back again the whole scenery falls apart, leaving the stage appear what it really is: Nativi saw in this sudden stage effect a parallel with Cate's final loss of innocence. Cate now walks rigidly, as if she has been traumatised by some event or person (but in this production blood doesn't seep from between her legs, we get that she's been probably raped only by the way she walks), and brings meat which she eats (and she previously was a vegetarian) and then feeds Ian. The last actions are disconnected from the voice which speaks from the backstage: the play ends with Cate's final gesture of compassion for Ian. She opens an umbrella to protect him from the rain that is still falling from the ceiling and, after this last tender gesture, the stage is blacked-out, as Kane wanted, and very similar to the English production.

¹⁸ SARAH KANE, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

Italian critics were less outraged by Kane's play than the English two years before. They acknowledged Nativi's ability as a director and praised the actors' "bravery" to act in such a difficult piece. Once we overtake the embarrassment given by the explicit sex scenes, some said, the play makes us focus on its main theme, that of violence, of human indifference and of pitiless insensitivity towards it. *Blasted* lets us think about the loss of certain values that our world has lately undergone and deserves to be seen and discussed. Kane indeed, as we have already seen, thought that there was nothing else than violence to write about: because, in her opinion, violence was the first and most important problem for us mankind, although she profoundly disliked it. There should be no attempt to make spectacles of her plays, but just to condemn what society instead acknowledges and takes for normality: like Kane said, we need to see things happen in order to understand them.

Moreover, if we go back to British drama history, we find that sex and violence were hardly unheard of on the London stage.

In 1956 John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* opened the floodgates to a long suppressed wave of creative energy. Osborne together with Arnold Wesker, Shelagh Delaney and John Arden, became a new, salient force in English drama by means of focusing their attention on the working classes, portraying the drabness, mediocrity and injustice in the lives of people. In 1965 Edward Bond's *Saved* was first staged at the Royal Court Theatre in London: almost immediately it achieved notoriety through a shocking scene in which a baby in a pram was stoned to death. And in 1980 the Royal Court presented Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain*, where was simulated an act of anal rape. Sarah Kane's theatre was made of scenic and verbal excesses from the very first of her works, *Blasted*, in 1995, which marked and about turn in British playwriting. Kane relied on a precise tradition of scenic horrors, following a blood-red thread which runs through the English staging culture from the Elizabethans (even more from the Jacobean), to our contemporaries, and especially to Edward Bond. Elizabethan and Jacobean references become in this way, models which need to be drawn up again, whereas the tales of violence are filtered through scenography, while they keep their traditional conventions but become also highly contemporary (many any are, for instance, the references to Shakespeare: in

Blasted Ian is blinded by the soldier like Gloucester in *King Lear*).

And if we overlook at British theatre of the last ten years we realise that it has undergone nothing short of a revolution and has thrown up a volatile, vigorous, highly exciting generation of new dramatists whose fame extends beyond the UK. What do these writers have in common? Youth certainly, in that they are mostly in their late-twenties. A love of language that knocks on the head the fashionable notion that we live an age entirely dominated by images. A faith in theatre as a moral weapon or means of telling a good story; all possess highly individual voices, but although they are to disparate to be called a movement, they have revitalised a theatre which for too long had lived off the glories of its past, i.e., the authors that became famous in the 60s and 70s (David Hare, David Edgar, Howard Brenton, Trevor Griffiths, John McGrath, Caryl Churchill, just to quote some of them).

From 1968 on in England emerged a new generation of playwrights who were strongly politicised and thought that theatre should not only denounce the unjust elements of society, but also try to draw the country towards a socialistic transformation. The trust in the concrete possibility for a socialistic alternative in Great Britain suffered a big defeat in 1979, with the electoral triumph of the Conservative party led by Margaret Thatcher, whose government marked a turn in British political and cultural life. The main difference between Thatcher and the previous conservative governments was the end of the consensus policy, that until then had guaranteed a certain agreement on autonomy and Welfare State. Thatcher created a new consensus based on individualism and the principles of free market: what she obtained was the diffusion of the so-called enterprise culture at public expense and so increased unemployment and weakened Welfare State. The direct consequence of this was the loss of the collectivity spirit because "there is no such thing as society: there are individuals, men, women and families"¹⁹.

For what concerned theatre, Thatcher cut the funds for the Arts Council because they were convinced that culture was like any other product in the market and that it had to be subject-

¹⁹ Quoted in ROBERT HEWISON, *Culture and Consensus. England, Art and Politics since 1945*, London, Methuen, 1995, p. 294.

ed to the same laws, so it was given impulse to self-financing and private sponsors. But sponsorship often implied subtle censorship that weighed on the "political" theatre which had born in the Seventies. And what we have in the Eighties is a great impulse given to commercial theatre: musicals and comedies (the ones by Tom Stoppard, Alan Ayckburn or Alan Bennet) and revivals of those plays written in the 30s and 40s (especially the ones by Priestley, Rattigan and Coward).

The crisis of the political theatre in the 80s was worsened by the facts of 1989, which marked the end of the socialistic alternative for the capitalistic models. Some authors were able to mediate their social criticism with the new commercial issues of the so-called mainstream theatre: the results were works like Howard Brenton's and David Hare's *Pravda* (1985) and Caryl Churchill's *Serious Money* (1987) that had great success.

The new generation of the Nineties is made of young people who, by virtue of birth, are all children of Thatcherism: they grew up in a Britain that witnessed the decline of many once sacred institutions (the monarchy, the church, the law, the family and even government itself) and that regarded financial success as a measure of individual worth. What they have in common is a disillusion with the world they inherited and they write, often with jaunty humour, about its violence, its decay, its lack of idealism and moral values. They often use tactics to get their point across: and however one reviews their work, all these writes seem motivated by a sense of dismay at the moral vacancy of modern life. Their attitude is more towards cynicism and nihilism than protest, but the absence of solution is not a limit, on the contrary, it is one of their main themes: what they stage is the end of ideologies and the absence of an alternative positive model. And the form they use is "estranging, destabilising the conventional relation between spectator and performance, disrupting traditional expectations of narrative and aesthetic coherence; de-familiarising and interrogating the oppressive power of naturalised cultural forms"²⁰. The greatness of these authors (Mark Ravenhill, Martin Crimp, Jez Butterworth, Philip Ridley and, of course, Sarah Kane) is their new language that reaches new audiences and the means they use: participating in the theoretical debate on what is our

²⁰ GRAHAM HOLDERNESS, *The Politics of Theatre and Drama*, Macmillan, London, 1992, p. 13.

contemporary age; using the elements of mass-communication; working out a new relationship with the past literary tradition. This is the most important contribution that these authors are giving for a new definition of the role of theatre as critical conscience of society.

The scene, in Kane's works, is the place where conflicts happened, where she revisited all the aberrations on the 20th century and tried to imagine new ones for the 21st.

For Kane, reality was mostly represented by threatening violence, and even by the role of its victims, the ones who are almost unable to speak and express themselves properly: in *Blasted*, Cate stammers, in *Cleansed*, Carl is deprived of his tongue. Many are thus the occasions in which silence is forced, muteness seems almost imposed and expression is erased, although there is still space for a certain tenderness, for showing affection and love even in those bleak scenarios.

An author that dies so young, however, is normally blocked in a fixedness of stylistic and linguistic gestures which should build up his or her truest expressive marks. But often, even in the most uniqueness of a creative plot, we can find some threads of different colours and some atmospheres which are totally new.

On one hand, all Kane's work is characterised by the idea of scene as a battlefield, on the other hand, the meaning of actions changes radically from play to play. *Crave*, for example, tells of violence and abuse, but is poetically structured and refers explicitly to Beckett's last plays, sometimes to Shakespeare and the Bible. Her last work, *4:48 Psychosis*, shows that this choice is even more radical. Here Kane argues over identity by affirming and denying it, and it is almost impossible to state a definition of gender for the play.

Where *Blasted* had at least a pseudo-conventional setting – a hotel room through which the total nightmare of civil war bursts, the last two plays can be placed everywhere. Where *Cleansed* boasted a catalogue of cruelties performed in an university campus, in *Crave* and in *4:48 Psychosis* physical self abuse is rendered as a verbal torrent (“flash flicker slash burn wring press dab slash”²¹). And where *Crave*, which *4:48 Psychosis* most resembles, had a quartet of vaguely distinguishable

²¹ SARAH KANE, *4:48 Psychosis*, London, Methuen Drama, 2000, p. 29.

personae, *4:48 Psychosis* could, in theory, be performed by any number of actors.

Apart from these differences anyway, the scene becomes always the place where catharsis happens and where the extreme horrors of violence sublimate into passion or complete absence, into excess or total lack of words.

ABSTRACT

After completing an MA in playwriting at Birmingham University, Sarah Kane (1971-1999) exploded onto the London theatre scene in January 1995 with her controversial first play, *Blasted* (Royal Court Upstairs), a horrifying examination of the effects of contemporary war on three people in a Leeds hotel room. Accused of putting audiences through a "catalogue of lurid on-stage depravity", she was vilified by the press and proclaimed "the most notorious playwright in Britain". Unfazed by the cacophony of media criticism, she directed her second play, *Phaedra's Love*, in May 1996 and two years later, *Cleansed* and *Crave*. Short before committing suicide she had finished her fifth play, *4:48 Psychosis*, which premiered in London in June 2000. In the last six years her plays have been staged all through Europe, and even in Italy, Kane found her interpreter and director in Barbara Nativi which directed two of her plays, *Blasted* and *Crave*. Her plays offer us a powerful warning, by showing the tragic but logical conclusion of humanity's escalating, destructive behaviour, and simultaneously they force us to confront our shared responsibility for the brutal reality which already exists. Together with other contemporaries, such as Mark Ravenhill, Martin Crimp and others, she pioneered a new generation of playwrights who, against all traditions, gave the English scene a new and deep impulse.

KEY WORDS

Violence. Society. No solution. Hope.

Lais Toffanin

BETWEEN HISTORY AND MYTH: IMPERIAL IMPOSTURE
AND ITS RELATION TO POPULAR MONARCHISM
IN RUSSIA

Popular monarchism and imperial or royal imposture are not exclusively Russian phenomena but, if the former has many parallels in other countries,¹ the latter has particular persistent features in Russian history: not only is it connected with the popular idea of monarchy, but it also represents the parallel profane imitation of, and active opposition to, the utopian idea of a benevolent Tsar-deliverer.

The relation between ruler and people in Russia has been studied from a variety of aspects: literary, folkloric, social, political, and even religious. In his study on the bandit-revolutionary Sten'ka Razin, Philip Longworth has compared conventional literary sources with songs and legends from oral tradition and stressed that it is wrongly assumed that Russian peasant revolts were 'spontaneous, elemental outbursts, lacking coherent goals and uninformed by ideology'. In fact, far from being a simple reaction to given stimuli, the presence of recurrent patterns suggests a continuity of ideas in such uprisings.² Boris A. Uspenskii has concentrated on the study of the nature of imperial imposture as a cultural phenomenon and adds to the social or political perspective a religious one. His approach to the question is based on the analysis of the ideological conceptions of Russian society and explains how 'royal imposture in the broader sense of the term is by no means invariably linked to social movements, nor does it necessarily involve a

¹ See YVES-MARIE BERCÉ, *Il re nascosto. Miti politici popolari nell'Europa moderna*, tr. Augusto Comba, Torino, 1996 (hereafter *Il re nascosto*).

² See PHILIP LONGWORTH, 'The Subversive Legend of Sten'ka Razin', in VITTORIO STRADA (ed.), *Rossija/Russia*, 2, Torino, 1975 (hereafter 'The Subversive Legend'), pp. 17-18.

struggle for political power'.³ Daniel Field presented two case studies and focussed on the significance of two complementary myths: the myth of the benevolent Tsar and the myth of the peasant.⁴ What emerges from these and other studies is the invariable – and ancient – connection between the phenomenon of imperial imposture and popular monarchism as it was mutually perceived or constructed by the ruler himself, the people and even by pretenders or impostors⁵ from the beginning of the centralisation process that followed the fixation of imperial power.⁶

At the roots of this connection lies the perception of the monarch as a sacred figure, a concept founded on the opposition between righteous and unrighteous Tsar developed in early Russia and legitimated during the centuries by combining elements from divine and natural law. A righteous Tsar is a true Tsar 'by nature': God predestined him to this role before his birth, his sacred inner nature and his power are both conferred by God, and he is perceived as an image of God, as an icon. Conversely, an unrighteous Tsar is such by an act of self-will, not by God's grace. Even if legitimately enthroned, he is considered as a usurper, a pretender claiming the sacred religious qualities of a true Tsar. His power is only 'outward appearance' conferred by the Devil and he is perceived as an idol. However, the only criteria for the distinction of a true Tsar from a false one was predestination and this allowed any imperial impostor to claim his right to the throne on this same

³ See BORIS A. USPENSKII, 'Tsar and Pretender: *Samozvanchestvo* or Royal Imposture in Russia as a Cultural-Historical Phenomenon', in A. SHUKMAN (ed.), *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, Ann Arbor, 1984 (hereafter 'Tsar and Pretender'), pp. 259-260.

⁴ See DANIEL FIELD, *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar*, Boston, 1976 (hereafter *Rebels*).

⁵ While P. Longworth has used the term 'pretender' meaning either a claimant to the throne or an impostor, D. Field has drawn a distinction: a pretender claims the throne on the basis of rules of succession differing from those that the reigning monarch relies on; an imperial impostor presents himself as the person who, under the commonly accepted rules of succession, would be the legitimate monarch. See P. LONGWORTH, 'The Pretender Phenomenon in Eighteenth-Century Russia', *Past and Present*, 66, 1975 (hereafter 'The Pretender Phenomenon'), p. 61; D. FIELD, *Rebels*, p. 8.

⁶ See P. LONGWORTH, 'The Subversive Legend', p. 18; B.A. USPENSKII, 'Tsar and Pretender', p. 260; MAUREEN PERRIE, 'The Popular Image of Ivan the Terrible', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 56, 1978 (hereafter 'The Popular Image of Ivan'), pp. 275, 280, 285-286; D. FIELD, *Rebels*, p. 22.

ground, especially when the natural line of succession was interrupted, and a ruler, who could be seen as a pretender himself, was enthroned (e. g. the False Dmitrii, Boris Godunov, Catherine II etc.). In this context B. A. Uspenskii can see imperial imposture as 'a quite predictable and logically justified consequence' of this conception of imperial power.⁷

The dichotomy Tsar-icon/Pretender-idol corresponds to the juxtaposition order/disorder, the first being the reflection of Christian, normative behaviour, the second of pagan, carnivalesque 'anti-behaviour'. In early Russia anti-behaviour seems to have been connected to masquerades (involving the dressing up

⁷ To stress the necessity of considering the conception and the representation of power in Russian society when speaking about pretenders and impostors, it is worth noting that the opposition between a sacred (iconic) institution and false, misleading idols was still alive in the nineteenth century: K. P. Pobedonostsev referred to power as something sacred 'founded on truth, and inasmuch as truth it has as its source the All-High God and His commandments (...) The first act of power must be the finding of truth and its discrimination from falsehood; on this is founded the faith of the people in power, and the gravitation towards it of all mankind.' What Pobedonostsev considered falsehood (idolatric) were institutions, such as Parliamentarism, founded on false principles: 'It is sad to think that even in Russia there are men who aspire to the establishment of this falsehood [Parliamentarism] among us (...) Yet even where centuries have sanctified its existence, faith already decays; the Liberal intelligence exalts it, but the people groans under its despotism, and recognises its falsehood. We may not see, the overthrow of this idol, which contemporary thought in its vanity continues still to worship.' Cf. K.P. POBEDONOSTSEV, *Reflections of a Russian Statesman*, Ann Arbor, 1965, pp. 43-44, 253-254. See B.A. USPENSKII, 'Tsar and Pretender', pp. 262-263, 265; on the conception of imperial power and the meaning of the term Tsar see also the works of GIANFRANCO GIRAUDO, 'L'età di Ivan III', *Rivista Storica Italiana*, LXXXIV (1972), 2, pp. 358-436; *Drakula, Contributi alla storia delle idee politiche nell'Europa Orientale alla svolta del XV secolo*, Venezia, Libreria Universitaria Ed., 1972; *Alle origini dello Stato russo: da Ivan III a Pietro il Grande*, Venezia, CLUEC, 1984; 'L'eresia come filo rosso nella storia della Rus"', *Studia Slavica Mediaevalia et Humanistica Riccardo Picchio dicata*, Roma, Ateneo, 1986, pp. 299-310; 'Rol' pravoslavnogo carja v učreždenii moskovskogo patriaršestva', *IV centenario dell'istituzione del Patriarcato di Mosca*, Roma, Herder, 1990, pp. 105-115; 'Idea di Roma e retaggio russo nell'ideologia di Pietro il Grande' *Idea giuridica e politica di Roma e personalità storiche*, II, Roma, Herder, 1992, pp. 79-111; *Lessico giuridico, politico ed ecclesiastico della Russia del XVI secolo*, Roma, Herder, 1994 (co-author G. Maniscalco Basile); 'Appunti sul lessico politico della Moskovskaja Rus"', *Ricerche Slavistiche*, XLIII (1996), pp. 37-61; 'Titul gosudarej moskovskich v venecianskoj istoričeskoj literature i diplomatičeskich dokumentach (XV-XVII vv.)', *Rim, Kostantinopol', Moskva: Sravnitel'no-istoričeskoe issledovanie centrov ideologii i kul'tury*, Moskva, RAN, 1997, pp. 326-350.

in the Tsar's clothes to simulate the external signs of his status) and to have been perceived by the authorities as a blasphemous attempt to 'steal' the Tsar's sacred attributes.⁸ Paradoxically, Tsars such as Ivan IV and Peter I are known to have forced aristocrats to represent a false Tsar, the court and prelates of the Church to unmask or denigrate opponents and to lay emphasis on their authentic (predestined) right to the throne as well as on the divine nature of their power.⁹ At the

⁸ B.A. Uspenskii has indicated that in historical, folklore and ethnographical documents "playing at Tsar" "is seen as playing at being a sacred, omnipotent being", as "a variant of royal imposture, though one completely divested of any kind of political pretensions" and for this reason "ruthlessly punished in the seventeenth century"; further he assumed: "any kind of masquerade or dressing up was inevitably thought of in early Russia as *anti-behaviour*; i.e. a sinister, black-magic significance was attributed to it in principle" and "this is how imposture too, and evidently, 'the game of Tsar', was perceived in early Russia". Cf. B.A. USPENSKII, 'Tsar and Pretender', pp. 266-268, 272.

⁹ "Ivan IV (...) seems to have deliberately flaunted the religious standards, which were the basis of his legitimacy, especially during the *Oprichnina*. He revelled in blasphemy and his cruelties often manifested the ironic twist of what is termed "*glumlenie*": he denigrated his victims, ostentatiously violating their status by immersing them in inverted worlds of carnival". According to Priscilla Hunt there is a relation between Ivan IV's sense of own sacredness and his practice during the *Oprichnina*. His actions would respond to a whole system of ritual and mythical analogies and oppositions, the centre of which were the Tsar and the State, bound to sacralize blasphemy and atrocity. This connection is detectable in the personal mythology of kingship Ivan developed, "by which he interpreted his blasphemies and atrocities during the *Oprichnina* as Christian and which he articulated to justify himself in face of criticism and betrayal by his subjects". Cf. P. HUNT, 'Ivan IV's Personal Mythology of Kingship', *Slavic Review*, 52 (1993), (hereafter 'Ivan IV's Personal Mythology of Kingship') pp. 769-772, 774. Paul A. Bushkovitch has analysed how the changes introduced in the rite of the Epiphany ceremony of the Russian court since the 16th century affected its ideological symbolism. Some of his conclusive remarks on the ceremony in the 18th century relate to the theme of masquerades and anti-behaviour. The church created this court ritual as an alternative to the folk practices (*sviatki*) in the 15th century, but under Peter the Great it seems to have faded away, and by 1710 only the church without the Tsar and the court being present observed it. "What Peter did was to allow a ceremony of the Russian court that was part of the court ritual to die (...). In its place, Tsar Peter and his friends brought the folk culture to the court by producing their own version of *sviatki*, one close to the popular custom, with its drunken parties, eroticism, and dressing up. Peter also used the carnival atmosphere of *sviatki* to substitute a ceremony that mocked the church for one that had visually demonstrated the superiority of the church to the Tsar. (...) Peter was constructing a counter-ritual to the traditional with its bless-

same time, popular belief associated anti-behaviour to black magic and sorcery: following the images of popular consciousness, Boris Godunov regarded Grishka Otrep'ev, the first False Dmitrii, as a sorcerer; the latter, recognized, in his turn, Godunov as a false Tsar, a pretender and a magician; Vasili Shuiskii was haunted by the False Dmitrii's ghost; Sten'ka Razin was a wizard who voted himself to black magic, engaged in unexplainable metaphysical performances, and was visited by witches.¹⁰ Like their imperial counterparts, who encompassed the unity and integrity of Christ's two opposite natures (human and divine) in one single body,¹¹ performers of anti-behaviour

ing of the waters". Cf. P.A. BUSHKOVITCH, 'The Epiphany Ceremony of the Russian Court in the 16th and 17th Centuries', *Russian Review*, 49, 1990, (hereafter 'The Epiphany Ceremony'), p. 16. Lindsey Hughes has observed that during Peter's reign "many 'serious' institutions and endeavours had their own mock counterparts. The ceremonial aspects of the Petrine era cannot be understood without attempting to reconcile the apparent conflict between, on the one hand, the elevation of monarchical power through lavish triumphal parades, panegyric literature, and engravings, and on the other hand, its debunking through mock rituals and play offices and institutions". Mock ceremonies involved the All-Mad, All-Jesting, All-Drunken Assembly which L. Hughes interpreted as "Peter's version of 'rebellious ritual' and 'group abdication from the structures of the social order itself', but it was subversion with rules, which took established models (in this case religious rites dress, and formulae), then undermined them. Rather than being subverted from below, however, with paupers becoming princes, in this case it was the 'prince' himself who effected the swap, but the iron hand of the autocrat was never effectively disguised in the person of Archdeacon Peter, Peter Mikhailov, or whoever". "Peter's masquerades were not true carnival at all, in the sense that 'people are liberated from authority, behaviour is unfettered and hierarchy is suspended'. On the contrary, Peter's 'courtly carnival' celebrated authority as sacred". Cf. L. HUGHES, *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great*, London, 1998, pp. 248, 257, 266. See also R.K. MASSIE, *Peter the Great: his Life and World*, London, 1981, pp. 119-121, 262, 268-270; Stephen Lessing Baher, *The Paradise Myth in Eighteenth-Century Russia*, Stanford, 1991, pp. 57-64.

¹⁰ See B.A. USPENSKII, 'Tsar and Pretender', pp. 273-276; see also P. LONGWORTH, 'The Subversive Legend', p. 21; Y.-M. BERCÉ, *Il re nascosto*, pp. 99-100; JEFFERY BROOKS, *Quando la Russia imparò a leggere. Alfabetizzazione e letteratura popolare, 1861-1917*, tr. Gino Scatista, Bologna, 1992 (hereafter *Quando la Russia imparò a leggere*), p. 271. On the appearance of a would-be Peter III perceived as a healer by the people of Montenegro at the end of the XVIIIth century see M. MARCELLA FERRACCIOLI, G. GIRAUDDO, 'Suggerimenti, realtà e scontri di Imperi: Stefano Piccolo e la guerra russo-ottomana', *A. Djurova's Festschrift*, publishing due in 2002.

¹¹ See E.H. KANTOROWICZ, *I due corpi del re: l'idea di regalità nella teologia politica medievale*, Torino, 1989.

also had a messianic feature: legends about Sten'ka Razin often portrayed him as a Christ-like figure, born of a devout widow, immortal or due to resurrect; his death was interpreted as a martyrdom and Pugachev was believed to be Razin revived.¹² Part of this same feature is the popular consideration of crime as a misfortune and of the criminal as a wretch. This conviction derives from the Christian idea of salvation through suffering and of passive resistance to the evil, an idea that recalls the humiliation and scorn suffered by Christ.¹³

In his Christ-like nature it would seem that an impostor could be as sacred as a Tsar, which would confirm what B. A. Uspenskii sustained about the phenomenon of royal imposture being the second side of the sacralized Russian idea of the power and the ruler. In the context of the emergence of a pretender to the throne the Christ-like element could also be related to the motif of the immolation of the *tsarevich*.¹⁴ This theme has first been developed in the early Russian chronicles in the story of the assassinations of Boris and Gleb: the two are Christ-like sanctified characters that die as martyrs taking the sins of the world upon themselves. They represent the first Russian prototype of the innocent heir to the throne killed in the struggle for power. At this stage there is still only a princely power in Kievan Rus' but in later Muscovite times the ap-

¹² Although Razin wasn't a pretender himself, he is certainly an example of an anti-behaviour performer. His supposed resurrection in Pugachev's clothes (when he actually becomes a pretender) reflects this dual nature: according to legends on this theme, he was believed to be "the secular Messiah, the apocalyptic social liberator and avenger" concerned with the people's welfare that everybody awaited. Cf. P. LONGWORTH, 'The Subversive Legend', pp. 22-23. See also Y.-M. BERCÉ, *Il re nascosto*, pp. 122-123.

¹³ See J. BROOKS, *Quando la Russia imparò a leggere*, p. 262.

¹⁴ See FRANCIS CONTE, *Gli Slavi*, tr. Ernesto Garino, Dario Formentin, Torino, 1991, pp. 491-492. See also *Racconto dei tempi passati. Cronaca russa del secolo XII*, ed. Itala Pia Sbriziolo, Torino, 1971, pp. 76-81. Y.-M. Bercé has underscored how the accounts on the death of the first Dmitrii present the event as a martyrdom in which the impostor with his passive resistance to his fate is identified with Christ. At the same time his inclination to sacrifice draws a parallel between the false Dmitrii and the assassinated true *tsarevich*, whose early age, rank and death modality show, in turn, his holy affinity to the sanctified Boris and Gleb. In time contaminations and overlapping in the accounts and legends on the young Dmitrii's death relate not much to this episode, as to the theme, common in all ages, of the innocent prince who dies and resurrects for the redemption of the Russian people. See Y.-M. BERCÉ, *Il re nascosto*, pp. 97-98, 100-102, 212-213.

pearance of an impostor claiming to be the *tsarevich* escaped from death (e. g. Dmitrii Ivanovich) acquires the messianic significance of the social deliverer.

The element of sorcery on the one side, and the messianic feature on the other, can both be read as part of a mythologizing process of the historical figures of impostors: it has been shown that, irrespective of historical period and geographic location, collective memory remembers a historical personality and a historical act by assimilating them to a mythical hero, who undergoes mythical trials and performs mythical deeds.¹⁵ The same process can be applied to rulers as well: popular culture transmitted an idealized image of Tsars, who appear to have gained the reputation of champions of the people, of liberators from oppression and oppressors. This is particularly evident in the legend of the Tsar-deliverer. Even if subjected to variations, the story tells of a deliverer who wants to free the faithful people from oppressors; his intentions are contrasted by wicked courtiers and officials who try to kill the deliverer; having escaped death, the deliverer then wanders from place to place, understanding the people's sufferings by experiencing them himself; eventually, he returns to the capital, is recognized as the true Tsar and inaugurates a new regime of liberty by freeing the people from oppression.¹⁶

Maureen Perrie has raised an interesting issue on the concept of the 'benevolent Tsar' related to Ivan IV, and her conclusions on the promotion of this belief may also be reflected in the pretenders' and imperial impostors' devices to gain followers. To the hypothesis of V. K. Sokolova on the fact that Ivan IV's struggle against the boyars created his positive image, M. Perrie adds the intention of the Tsar himself to project such an image by means of demagogic appeals to the people.

¹⁵ In his study on the image of bandits in popular literature J. Brooks has remarked that Russian outlaws who first abandoned the social order and in the end returned to it, either as redeemed or defeated, have common features with the heroes of the monomythical religions, such as the Christian one, who undergo an initiating journey into another world and after ritual passages finally return to earth. See J. BROOKS, *Quando la Russia imparò a leggere*, p. 255. See also MIRCEA ELIADE, *Il Mito dell'eterno ritorno (Archetipi e Ripetizione)*, tr. Giovanni Cantoni, Roma, 1968, pp. 61, 64-65; M. ELIADE, *Trattato di Storia delle Religioni*, ed., Pietro Angelini, tr. Virginia Vacca, Gaetano Riccardo, Torino, 1999, p. 394.

¹⁶ See D. FIELD, *Rebels*, p. 6.

Ivan's purpose was to win popular support in his campaign against the boyars by presenting them as oppressors of the common people, but in reality his campaign covered a policy ultimately directed toward the interests of a centralising State.¹⁷ Apparently, like Ivan IV, impostors demagogically played with people's psychology to promote their image of social deliverers-avengers: they exploited the myth of the 'benevolent Tsar-deliverer' by promising justice and freedom to gather supporters in their uprisings, but at the same time they acted, dressed, and behaved in front of their followers in a way to produce a likeness corresponding to the illusory image of the ruler rooted in popular imagination; officials, secretaries and counsellors worked for them; they also fabricated proofs, false documents, or body marks to strengthen their credibility.¹⁸ This should make evident that conscious 'self-mythisation' both by Tsars and impostors played a great role in the building of the Tsar-deliverer utopia and that personal charisma was indisputably associated with the active participation in this myth-making process when pretenders and true Tsars reinforced a (legitimate or illegitimate) claim to the same throne.¹⁹

One could ask what was the meaning of this gigantic repre-

¹⁷ M. Perrie has seen evidence of Ivan's attitude in the way the *Oprichnina* was introduced, e.g. leaving Moscow and announcing his abdication because of the treason of the boyars, *voevody* and officials (1565): "Ivan was here clearly bidding for the support of the citizens against the boyars, and in their reply the Muscovites not only called upon the tsar to defend them against 'the wolves' and 'the mighty', but also offered to help him to destroy their common enemies". "Ivan was seeking to present the introduction of the *Oprichnina* as a continuation of the policy of curtailing the power of the boyars. (...) he was, at least, trying to win the support of the common people for his reforms, by claiming that he had their interests at heart". Cf. M. PERRIE, 'The Popular Image of Ivan', pp. 279-281.

¹⁸ The exploitation of the belief in the Tsar-deliverer by pretenders has been identified by P. Longworth as well: "The archetypal pretender was a would-be revolutionary, albeit of a primitive type, a man who exploited the device of pretension as the only possible means of acquiring the necessary charisma to raise mass support among the Russian people". Cf. P. LONGWORTH, 'The Pretender Phenomenon', p. 74; see also pp. 77-78, 82; P. LONGWORTH, *Les Cosaques*, tr. Robert Latour, Paris, 1972 (hereafter *Les Cosaques*), p. 145; J. BROOKS, *Quando la Russia imparò a leggere*, p. 264; B.A. USPENSKII, 'Tsar and Pretender', p. 264; Y-M. BERCÉ, *Il re nascosto*, pp. 81, 115, 127-128.

¹⁹ Y-M. Bercé has reported on the ability of the first False Dmitrii to touch King Sigismund's feelings when the Polish court recognized him as the real Tsar. See Y-M. BERCÉ, *Il re nascosto*, p. 84.

sentation for the mass of the people. P. Longworth saw in the legends on Sten'ka Razin a vehicle for seditious ideas and regarded them as 'an oral forerunner of the *samizdat*' of ordinary people.²⁰ As such they convey a subversive ideology and an exhortatory message calling for an active participation in the struggle against oppressors, even after the hero's death. Razin's messianic element does not imply passive religious belief in the hope of deliverance by external means, and popular uprisings in subsequent governments prove that there is a connection between the social myth of the impostor who declares himself to be the Tsar-deliverer and active peasant protest.²¹

As stated above, the appearance of an impostor was seen as a manifestation of anti-behaviour and disorder, and an impostor was considered either as a bandit-criminal, or as a rebel.²² In popular literature bandits question the relation between the individual and society: they refuse submission to the institutions of the ordered society (Church and State), and chose to live in freedom outside of it, in disorder and persecution. This rebellion against the authorities is usually marked by failure and the rebel seeks to be readmitted in society. The only means of reintegration is either repentance and submission to the State, or a humiliating death.²³ It turns out that folklore legends and popular literature mirror a whole system of values at variance with that of the ruling *élite*. If impostors were perceived in legends, popular literature and in their life as social

²⁰ See P. LONGWORTH, 'The Subversive Legend', p. 18.

²¹ According to P. Longworth, "the legend must be held to reflect an ideology, however primitive, likely to challenge the existing order (...). There can be no doubt that its messianic features kept the idea of social liberation alive; that many of its themes served to legitimise the idea of rebellion by casting rebels in a favourable light; that the debonair and daring 'son' of Razin must have presented an exemplary model for the young; and that various of the stories about Razin himself were of an obviously agitational character". Cf. P. LONGWORTH, 'The Subversive Legend', p. 33.

²² See J. BROOKS, *Quando la Russia imparò a leggere*, p. 258-259.

²³ In comparing American, English and French outlaws with their Russian counterparts in popular literature J. Brooks has pointed out how the value of individual independence of Russian bandits and criminals was strongly diminished by the power of the ordered society. They never succeed in asserting their individual heroism but on the contrary their adventures show the superiority of the legitimate social order embodied in the divine person of the autocrat over the (extraordinary) individual. See J. BROOKS, *Quando la Russia imparò a leggere*, pp. 255-256; see also pp. 281-282.

deliverers by the people, but as rebel-bandits by the authorities, this is an indication of the feeling of alienation of the mass from the oppressive higher social strata and their institutions. Peasants understood and justified the condition of the rebel-bandit that led him to act against the law, because the law was identified with the social enemies.²⁴ However, the delegitimation of the law did not imply the delegitimation of Tsardom: loyalty to the Tsar was promoted, whereas unjust laws were attributed to the influence of wicked officials and of Tsar agents, guilty of standing as an obstacle between the ruler and the common people.²⁵

Nevertheless, as D. Field indicated, the myth of the Tsar-deliverer itself had a subversive aspect. According to the idea of power discussed above, the Tsar's sacred plenitude of powers made him accountable only to God. The Christian idea of a future reward (deliverance) helped to shape the ruler as a source of hope and consolation, but the myth also inculcated passive submission in the people. By contrast, hostility towards the officials inspired rebellion. Illegal performances were frequently passed off as having been legitimized by the Tsar. Asserting the false approval of the Tsar was a device used in peasant revolts and tells something about the awareness of peasants, or at least of their leaders, that social myths could be constructed and manipulated against the regime.²⁶ When em-

²⁴ Because of the inevitable failure of his rebellion, the bandit was inexorably compelled to make a choice between punishment and repentance in front of society; this made of him also an object of compassion for the peasants. See J. BROOKS, *Quando la Russia imparò a leggere*, p. 261.

²⁵ See D. FIELD, *Rebels*, pp. 1, 15.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 13-15, 23. This is also P. Longworth's opinion about the legends on Razin: "whereas the legend's attitude to gentry, merchants, officers and officials is clearly hostile, its attitude to the Tsar is not. (...) Razin might prey on ships belonging to merchants and boyars, for example, but never on the Tsar's. Indeed he often flies his flag. Features of this kind have been dismissed as manifestations of the 'Tsarist illusion'. This interpretation is imperceptive, however-for such features do not imply loyalty to the Tsar as such but rather to Tsardom as a legitimising agency. (...) He flies the Tsar's flag as a cover for his piracy and even claims to plunder on the Tsar's behalf. In this way laws regarded as unjust are not attributed to the Tsar, while lawless activities are given the spurious sanction of the Tsar's authority. This attitude (or legitimising trick) was exemplified repeatedly in peasant protest from the 17th century onwards, and it is quintessentially subversive". Cf. P. LONGWORTH, 'The Subversive Legend', p. 28. See also P. LONGWORTH, *Les Cosaques*, pp. 135, 144-145. See also YVES-MARIE BERCÉ, *Il re nascosto*, p. 121.

bodied or exploited by charismatic impostors, the myth of the Tsar-deliverer manifested its subversiveness in social protest and served as a means of advancing political demands. Such demands often found expression in some programme of reform. For instance, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, rebellions led by impostors in the name of the Tsar originated prevalently from marginal social groups – Cossacks, bandits, runaway serfs – especially in the geographical area between the Ukraine, the Black earth belt and the Orenburg region, where the once-free population was then undergoing a process of enserfment. These revolts were independent from established political interests, and reform programmes implied the determination to overthrow the oppressive government, a substantial revolutionary change of the social order. Incidentally, if, on the one hand, Sten'ka Razin insisted on loyalty to the Tsar, on the other hand, he proposed a rudimental model of democracy to rule the provinces, of which the Cossacks *krug* was a prototype.²⁷ In the cases of intervention by the authorities, the rebels employed, in their turn, the obverse and complementary myth of the naïve peasant: 'gullible, easily misled and blindly trusting in a benevolent Tsar'. Both myths worked, to a certain degree, as a ready-made excuse to commit illegal acts of protest and, at the same time, to avoid punishment.²⁸

The phenomenon of royal imposture and popular monarchism are the result of the way in which power was crystallized and understood in Russia both by the ruler and the ruled. The explanation of power by official ideologues and the application of it by the rulers promoted the idea of the sacralized nature of the ruler and of his function. This concept presupposes the fundamental opposition between the expression of truth (a true Tsar) and its obverse (the appearance of a false Tsar). As a consequence, a whole system of oppositions is reflected in the nature of Tsardom as an institution: if the holder of power is the representative of a sacred truth wanted and established by God Himself, the challenger of this sacred figure is the representative of a blasphemous devilish will. The Christian faith of the ruler manifested through archetypal Biblical rituals contrasts

²⁷ See P. LONGWORTH, 'The Pretender Phenomenon', p. 63, 68-69; P. LONGWORTH, *Les Cosaques*, p. 144; P. LONGWORTH, 'The Subversive Legend', pp. 27-28, 32-33.

²⁸ See D. FIELD, *Rebels*, pp. 210, 213.

the leftovers of a pagan pre-ordered culture, i.e. the superstitious beliefs and carnivalesque performances of the inverted world. The order given by a centralized monarchical State is in opposition to the consequent disorder of a (democratic) separation of power.

As Y-M. Bercé put it, if power can shape opinions, popular expectations can impose their shape on power.²⁹ In the popular representation of power the myth of the benevolent Tsar-deliverer, as the personification of a glorious future rule of liberty and justice, is deep-rooted both in the image of the ruler and in the image of the impostor. The function of this mythisation by the people is a projection of their hope that the next ruler, be it the legitimate heir (i.e. Dmitrii Ivanovich, Aleksei Petrovich) or an impostor, will be concerned with social welfare and that his sacrifice will produce the change needed. From this point of view, it would seem that in the people's eyes only the ruler, or the misjudged impostor interested in the 'common good' has the 'divine' right to call himself 'true' and, as a consequence, sacred, no matter whether he is of royal descent or not.

There is messianism in the expectation that the true *tsarevich*-Saviour escaped death and will come back to save the people. There is also opportunism in the way legitimate power is represented: if the only criterion to distinguish a true Tsar is predestination, then the legitimate *tsarevich* could be hiding among any community and any community could arbitrarily build up a 'legitimate Tsar' to follow and pursue its own interests. Only when the legitimate principle is overtaken by the constitution of a legal government the usurpation will be perceived as such.³⁰ As if, somehow, a legal principle killed the myth of the legitimate Tsar-deliverer, of that Messiah who, in his quest for the truth, experienced the people's sufferings and is bound to return to re-establish prosperity.

²⁹ See Y-M. BERCÉ, *Il re nascosto*, pp. xii.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 298-300; 212-214; 112.

ABSTRACT

If power can shape opinions, popular expectations can impose their shape on power. At the roots of the connection between the phenomenon of imperial imposture and popular monarchism in Russia lay the perception of the monarch as a sacred figure, a concept that presupposes the opposition between righteous and unrighteous Tsar. However, the only criterion for the distinction of a true Tsar from a false one was predestination and any imperial impostor could claim a right to the throne. As a consequence the phenomenon also represents the parallel profane imitation of, and active opposition to, the utopian idea of a benevolent Tsar-deliverer.

KEY WORDS

Russia. Myth. Imperial Imposture.

Mario L. Togni

“TENDER MERSEZ UV THE CARRON CROZE”:
LA VOCE DI UN PICARO NELLA GUERRA CIVILE AMERICANA

“On the classic banks of the Rapidan”

Il breve romanzo di Kittrell J. Warren, *Life and Public Services of an Army Straggler*, epigone dell'umorismo dell'Old Southwest e precursore dei romanzi sulla Guerra Civile, rappresenta una rara, cruda versione dell'esperienza diretta della guerra nel Sud. Le avventure del disertore confederato Billy Fishback nella Virginia del 1862 vengono stravolte in una sorta di assurdo gioco di inganni e violenze, di follia ripetitiva e monomaniacale, metafora dell'estrema e alienata autodifesa del Sud.¹

La Guerra Civile ha rappresentato per la narrativa americana un'inesauribile fonte di ispirazione, sia per i temi proposti sia per la gamma di scorci, toni, voci, discorsi attraverso cui si è data forma a esperienze più profonde, sconvolgenti, destabilizzanti.² La guerra aveva fornito nuovi ruoli, a partire da quelli che contadini e operai si dovettero inventare una volta trasfor-

¹ “Billy Fishback is a Confederate army straggler who roams the no-man's land of the battle-torn South, a confidence man turned vicious by the war who deserts all causes and denies all human virtues. He has none of Simon Suggs's saving sense of humor, Sut Lovingood's knack for outrageous fun, or Ovid Bolus's abilities and polish. The days of Melville's 'one cosmopolitan and confident tide' have been destroyed by the criminal realities of the Civil War; Billy Fishback plays potentially lethal games that mirror the unpredictable chaos of the national conflict. He thus dramatizes a fearfully violent new country.” (Lenz, p. 137).

² Secondo la bibliografia di ALBERT J. MENENDEZ, *Civil War Novels*, New York, Garland, 1986, sono più di mille (1028) i romanzi sulla Guerra Civile pubblicati negli ultimi 120 anni, fino al 1985. Ironicamente, il testo di Warren non compare.

mati in soldati, con le infinite sfaccettature che l'attività militare quotidiana comportava, a quelli sperimentati dalle donne, che parteciparono più direttamente al lavoro nelle fabbriche e nell'agricoltura e condivisero nuove responsabilità. La narrativa creerà nuovi personaggi, nuove vicende – sia dei soldati al fronte, lontani dalle famiglie, sia dei civili in un mondo privato di parenti e amici arruolati; svilupperà temi nuovi (o più articolati), quelli della lontananza da casa, dell'attesa del ritorno, lo sgomento di fronte all'immane, inarrestabile perdita di vite umane, la necessità di adattamenti repentini, i cambiamenti nell'esistenza dei sopravvissuti. Il mondo nero con la sua straordinaria esperienza entrerà nella narrativa con più difficoltà, a parte i vecchi stereotipi. Si realizzerà soprattutto una nuova autoesplorazione dell'America, il capillare, quotidiano processo di scoperta dell'Altro: i soldati del Nord e del Sud si conosceranno reciprocamente attraverso la lettura a più livelli del paesaggio attraversato, il dialetto degli abitanti, le conversazioni con i prigionieri, gli scambi di battute da una trincea all'altra, la condivisione di sentimenti, emozioni, dolore e rabbia di questa esperienza unica ma bifronte e sfaccettata.

Al di là dello sfruttamento commerciale della vena sentimentale, di avventure romantiche o eroiche, di nostalgia di uno scottiano e improbabile Old South, la Guerra Civile ha prodotto, a ondate successive, un grande numero di testi che riflettono l'immediatezza dell'esperienza bellica: in primo luogo lettere, che unionisti e confederati, nonostante le difficili condizioni e le difficoltà pratiche, scriveranno come mai prima; poi diari, scritti al momento, colmi del senso del vivere un'esperienza che, per quanto modesta e limitata, come nel caso di un soldato semplice, si intuiva importante, eccezionale, iscritta in un fatto storico ed etico di portata cosmica, diari talvolta scritti mentre i fatti – la battaglia, la ritirata, la malattia – accadevano intorno, ancora frementi del momento, dello struggente desiderio di vivere, o sopravvivere.³ Memorie, biografie e autobiogra-

³ Diari e lettere furono scritti al fronte, negli accampamenti, in viaggio, all'ospedale. Le difficoltà da superare vanno dalla cronica mancanza di carta e inchiostro (specialmente per i confederati), di francobolli, di tempo libero, di luce, di raccoglimento e di notizie, all'analfabetismo (con la conseguente collaborazione dei compagni per leggere, scrivere lettere e in alcuni casi insegnare a scrivere), e la censura (soprattutto l'autocensura: i soldati stessi si astenevano dal toccare argomenti che avrebbero ulteriormente aggravato i timori e la solitudine delle famiglie).

fie invece furono di solito scritte dopo un arco di tempo di decantazione, adottando un'opportuna prospettiva, più o meno rigida o artificiale, basate in misura variabile su fatti, ricordi, tratti anche dai propri diari o lettere. Si va da narrazioni pedestri e oneste, ma a volte dall'improvvisa, profonda forza evocativa, a invenzioni o adattamenti a filoni commerciali sperimentati con successo, con omissioni, abbellimenti, censure – soprattutto per chi, dopo la Ricostruzione, voleva correggere un'immagine di sé e del proprio operato, modificando opportunamente il proprio passato. Militari di alto grado descrissero azioni belliche cui parteciparono solo dopo che altre pubblicazioni ne avevano chiarito tutti gli aspetti.

La Guerra Civile, dal punto di vista narrativo, non riuscì a esprimere un'epopea nazionale, che pur nella tragicità e sofferenza insite nel tema, potesse costituire un'affermazione positiva dello spirito americano.⁴ I sacrifici, i caduti avrebbero avuto una giustificazione coerente con le promesse ideali che il Trascendentalismo aveva creato per gli americani, e anche con la retorica antischiavista del Nord. Anche quei romanzi che si limitarono all'apoteosi della vittoria nordista e abolizionista e mostrarono la guerra come una crociata morale per la liberazione degli schiavi, con il trionfo finale del bene, non poterono nascondere il disagio insito in tale rappresentazione. Questo disagio è più evidente in molti diari e scritti autobiografici, da Alcott a Whitman, ad anonimi soldati. Lo scarto tra l'ideale (sia esso un principio morale come l'antischiavismo, o la difesa della patria o dell'unità) e la realtà incontrata, specialmente nella vita quotidiana dell'esercito e negli ospedali militari, era incolmabile. Con il passare dei mesi e poi degli anni, cominciarono a cadere le illusioni più o meno romantiche: la guerra era stata, ed era, molto di più, concretamente, profondamente. Aveva cambiato persone, vite, luoghi, rapporti. Con i suoi veleni ideologici, le sue condanne morali assolute, il fanatismo (variamente mimetizzato) di interessi economici e politici, gli oscuri e sfaccettati pregiudizi razziali, la presenza inamovibile del dolore e dei disagi, era penetrata nelle radici profonde delle coscienze, ma anche della cultura regionale, nel folklore come nella letteratura, nel concetto stesso dell'identità americana:

⁴ Non mi riferisco, p. es., ad *Absalom, Absalom!*, che, pur avendo indubbe qualità epiche, non redime gli orrori della Guerra Civile in una visione ottimista o di speranza o anche di accettazione.

l'americano si identificherà d'ora in poi per aver sofferto la sua versione di Guerra Civile e per la sua posizione e responsabilità in essa e nelle sue conseguenze.⁵

La complessità dell'esperienza della guerra, con gli aspetti impensabili, stravolgenti la quotidianità che essa faceva affiorare, vissuta sia in campo militare sia civile, rifiuterà semplificazioni superficiali, retoriche, trionfalismi o condanne puramente legati a etichette, a fazioni, a centri di potere.⁶ Sono soprattutto le lettere e i diari a esprimere la problematicità del vivere quotidiano, l'affanno del sopravvivere di fronte a situazioni inconcepibili; ci rivelano, dietro una volontà di capire e raccontare, l'anticonformismo e la sincerità di chi mette in gioco la propria persona e il proprio modo di vedere, senza quell'allineamento con la visione semplificata, riduttiva che il potere politico ed economico del Nord vincitore (e poi anche del Sud restaurato) confezionerà. Il Sud, via via che la guerra si prolungava, e soprattutto dopo la sconfitta, si poneva domande, provocava discussioni: non basterà una firma d'armistizio, né una distesa di tombe, a definire e chiudere il passato. Non si finirà, come si dimostra scrivendo e leggendo queste righe, di interrogarsi su questo conflitto. Perché fu una guerra terribilmente sofferta, con troppi morti, feriti, distruzioni e sofferenze, per lo strascico drammatico di problemi che vennero acuiti e ampliati dagli interventi postbellici, eredi delle ideologie prebelliche.⁷ Come verrà chiarito nei decenni seguenti, il problema nero era la vera, profonda causa del conflitto; la condizione degli ex-schiavi non fu risolta ma trasformata in altre problematiche, senza veri miglioramenti: la perdita dei diritti civili, la discriminazione, la violenza del Ku Klux Klan, l'emarginazione culturale ed economica, il razzismo, saranno solo in parte affrontati e risolti oltre un secolo dopo.

⁵ Mark Twain stesso sentirà il bisogno di spiegare la sua anomala partecipazione alla Guerra Civile per due settimane, quando si unì a una compagnia di volontari confederati del Missouri; alla vista del primo caduto, la compagnia si sciolse e Twain emigrò nel Nevada. (v. "A Private History of a Campaign That Failed", 1885).

⁶ Ironicamente, alla fine del conflitto la moda di rappresentazioni sentimentali e nostalgiche dell'Old South delle piantagioni avrà successo anche grazie agli editori e lettori del Nord.

⁷ Fu il conflitto più mortale per l'America, i suoi quasi 620.000 morti equivalgono all'incirca ai caduti americani di tutte le altre guerre. Troppi in ogni bilancio, anche in quello dell'ottimismo del *manifest destiny*.

Per quanto definitivo intenda apparire, qualunque romanzo sulla Guerra Civile, considerando anche l'imprevedibilità dei lettori futuri, lascia inevitabilmente un finale aperto, un commento ambiguo, un'area di silenzio sospeso, un'attesa di risposta. La modernità di un'opera quale *Army Straggler* nasce proprio da questo ostinato provocare domande sulla guerra, nell'apparente linearità e normalità della narrazione comica della violenza, dell'imbroglio, della slealtà. Il romanzo, concepito nel 1861 e scritto dal 1863 in poi (Warren si era arruolato come soldato semplice nell'esercito confederato il 3 luglio 1861), viene pubblicato nel 1865 a Macon, in Georgia (ne esiste soltanto una copia). La continuazione promessa nell'introduzione non verrà mai pubblicata.⁸ *Army Straggler* è parte della Guerra Civile, non un commento distaccato su di essa. È l'esperienza di un narratore/autore che vive un presente traumatico, ma non rinuncia a portarsi dietro un passato di tradizioni letterarie, incongruo e ingombrante come un bagaglio troppo pesante durante la marcia. Completamente calata nel presente è invece l'esperienza del protagonista Billy Fishback, che del proprio vago passato, che poco ormai gli appartiene, utilizza con variazioni ed invenzioni solo quegli elementi che gli possono far comodo; probabilmente, in fondo è spinto a un'ossessiva ricerca di bottino più dalla visione della morte davanti a sé che dalla speranza di sopravvivenza. Sopravvivenza che è buttarsi su una strada e andare avanti, sempre più o meno in fuga, imbastire un *confidence game*, un bidone, che dovrebbe ottimisticamente assicurargli un futuro che però risulterà sempre diverso dalla forma immaginata, spiacevolmente sorprendente.

Army Straggler nasce dall'esperienza diretta, dentro la guerra, ne porta i segni; ma tende stranamente ad assumere, a posteriori, un'aria meno "realistica" di altri romanzi sulla Guerra Civile apparsi nei decenni seguenti, scritti e pensati a distan-

⁸ "On the classic banks of the Rapidan, in 1863, we patiently sketched the outlines of the STRAGGLER, part of which we have since as patiently labored to fill..." (p. 4). Warren, nato in Alabama nel 1829 ed emigrato in Georgia nel 1837-8, dove tornò a vivere dopo la guerra, facendo il giornalista, il giudice e il legislatore, fu autore di altre due opere: *Ups and Downs of Wife Hunting*, pubblicata nel 1861 (e recentemente, a cura di Floyd C. Watkins, presso Emory University, Ga., 1957) e *History of the Eleventh Georgia Vols., Embracing the Muster Rolls, Together with a Special and Succinct Account of the Marches, Engagements, Casualties, Etc.*, pubblicata a Richmond nel 1863. Mori nel 1889.

za dalla guerra, anche da autori che non vi avevano partecipato (come nel caso di Stephen Crane).⁹ Ma al di là del problema della tecnica narrativa del realismo e della prospettiva storico-culturale (problemi sociali, politici, economici dei Confederati negli anni '60, la visione della vita di quella generazione) il romanzo porta nel suo tono l'inconfondibile segno della brutalità e della disillusione della guerra nel Sud. La risposta di Fishback all'affermazione dignitosa e contenuta di Mrs. Lane ("Only two years ago, I had a father, a mother, a large and affectionate circle of friends and kindred, an affluent and happy home, and the best and noblest of husbands. A great gulf now separates me from my relations, my property has been wrenched from me by a process it is not necessary to relate and my Henry, ..." p. 12) riassume tutta la ferocia del tempo: "Poor widders with gangs o' pesky little brats is mighty slow stock in any kind o' marryin' market, now a days. But I wouldn't cry about it." (ibid.) Neanche il pianto può servire: "Come, come, widder, that ain't no munny in crying, so you mite as well dry up." (p. 13) *Army Straggler* partecipa di quella più precisa ricostruzione narrativa della quotidianità del periodo bellico che troviamo in diari e lettere, in un'ottica già consapevole di una resa angosciosa, dello svanire dell'iniziale impeto romantico, del vivere la realtà della guerra: "Wherever they went, the people along the road began to pack up and prepare to move and some fled without either packing or preparation." (p. 18)

Opera modesta ma unica, viva, sfaccettata, espressione irripetibile del coinvolgimento della gente del Sud nella normalità dell'orrore quotidiano della guerra, è l'unico testo che racconta la brutale violenza del disertore vagabondo, volto unicamente all'appropriazione cinica e meccanica di ciò che gli può prolungare o rendere più gradevole la vita, indifferente ai danni e al dolore che provoca. L'autore lascia intravedere una sottile vena di pena e compassione per la sofferenza causata dall'inarrestabile ingranaggio distruttivo della guerra. Dal romanzo emerge il senso di sconfitta del Sud, non ancora avvistata negli

⁹ Come suggerisce John Limon, "There is no alternative to acknowledging that American realism followed from noncombatant biographies more readily and successfully than from combatant biographies." (37). La tendenza della critica è di sminuire la portata del vissuto nella rappresentazione realistica della guerra.

eventi militari ma subodorata, una sensazione di prossima rovina, la distruzione di un sistema che si trova a essere ormai superato. Il mondo medievale del Sud invaso dalla cultura in realtà di un altro tempo, non interagisce col nuovo, non trova un possibile adattamento, è destinato inevitabilmente a scomparire.

Il Sud intravede dopo la disfatta militare anche il crollo del velo dell'autoinganno – perpetrato nell'impossibile difesa dello schiavismo – che aveva inquinato fino alle radici la sua cultura e il suo linguaggio. Dopo la devastazione delle truppe di Sherman, la complessa ricostruzione (o restaurazione) della storia bianca proseguirà parallelamente alla mancata rigenerazione della condizione nera, non ristrutturata in un nuovo organismo storico, sociale, culturale. Come mostra *Army Straggler*, la distruzione del Sud (anche su scala individuale, familiare) non prelude a un riscatto, una ricostruzione giusta, riafferma invece la violenza, l'inganno, il furto dei tempi dello schiavismo. Le forze vitali di questo vecchio Sud che la guerra ridurrà a rovine, ironicamente si riprenderanno quando riusciranno a forzare la Ricostruzione in termini di ricostituzione del potere dei piantatori bianchi.

La mappa della storia

Il romanzo delinea gradualmente una topografia della guerra, con riferimenti precisi – pur attraverso la visione vaga di Fishback – agli avvenimenti bellici nei mesi centrali del 1862, nella Virginia settentrionale, teatro di battaglie tra i più devastati e insanguinati. Non vi si tracciano mappe di battaglie, posizioni strategiche degli eserciti, schemi di spostamenti e appostazioni. Il disegno che risulta dalle orme di Fishback e compagni nel loro frenetico andirivieni è un groviglio di linee incerte, confuse, ripetitive, che evidenzia antiretoricamente i luoghi della quotidianità tra i campi di battaglia (nomi famosi, da manuale) nei tempi tra schermaglie, scontri, massacri, ritirate e avanzate; i luoghi sono per Fishback quelli del sottobosco di una sopravvivenza malavitosa, e i tempi sono ore rubate, tra una fuga e una licenza mercanteggiata o falsificata.

L'inizio della narrazione è un punto preciso, nel tempo e nello spazio: 9 marzo 1862, nella "muddy earth" di Manassas che emana ancora il pesante fetore dei cadaveri. Qui nasce

Fishback come personaggio, già avviluppato nella guerra e inestricabilmente impigliato nei suoi progetti di criminale sopravvivenza. I nomi sulla mappa e nel romanzo sono quelli "sacri" delle battaglie della Guerra Civile nella campagna della Virginia. Nomi come santuari, visitati alacremente dalla guerra (Bull Run, Manassas, Petersburg, Richmond, Fredericksburg, Malvern Hill) fanno da sfondo all'esistenza scellerata di Fishback. Mentre il generale Johnston si sta ritirando, vengono menzionati Gordonville, Culpeper, i fiumi Rappahannock, Rapidan, Chickahominy e più lontano si sentono gli echi dei movimenti del grande esercito del Generale Robert E. Lee. Un'altra mappa disegna il nord-ovest, la valle dello Shenandoah, teatro di altre sanguinose battaglie, con nomi pesanti come Luray Valley, Strasburg, Winchester, Font Royal.

Nel suo vagare Fishback vede solo ciò che gli sta vicino e gli interessa: i suoi casi e i suoi piani, gli obbiettivi, i colpi, la compagnia che ha abbandonato o che vuole temporaneamente raggiungere, un compare che cerca di evitare. *Army Straggler* non è costituito né dagli eroismi né dalle lacrime e sangue delle grandi battaglie canoniche: la storia si svolge nel sottobosco delle campagne virginiane, nel Piedmont, con allusioni al Blue Ridge, alle città di Richmond e Petersburg. Sono strade poco frequentate ma dove si incontrano ossessivamente gli stessi personaggi e le stesse, ripetitive vicende, poche abitazioni, i boschi per nascondersi, e le cittadine sono soltanto nomi. C'è un sentore di massicci spostamenti di truppe, echi di battaglie combattute, di disfatte e attacchi. Gli abitanti sembrano esistere isolati in case di campagna vulnerabili, senza difesa, si muovono a disagio in cucine, camere da letto, stalle, fienili; soldati disertori si aggirano come spersi, fuori posto. Qui si sente la guerra come mancanza, assenza: le famiglie dimezzate, la paura dei nuovi arrivi, la penuria di cibo, di cavalli, di animali da fattoria; gli accenni al lavoro nei campi e in cucina indicano la scarnificata essenzialità della vita dei civili, sempre pronti a nascondere e nascondersi, a difendersi da quelle furbizie che riescono a individuare, provati dal peso dei sacrifici, dalle difficoltà a lavorare la terra, ospitare soldati, sfamarli e curarli. Sono episodi (talvolta solo accennati) di equivoci e comicità aspra e brutale, storie di malumore e ambiguità, situate in zone intermedie dell'esistenza umana, dove si annidano soprusi e crudeltà esercitate da chi non ha potere riconosciuto, furtivamente e a colpo sicuro. Si sente il peso del dopobatta-

glia e la sospesa attesa del prossimo passaggio di truppe; si intuiscono già la stanchezza e gli stenti del Sud provato dalla guerra, che più del Nord soffrirà la fame e la mancanza anche di ciò che è indispensabile alla vita.¹⁰

Anche i segni della topografia indicano un finale di ripiegamento, fuga e annientamento, apparentemente senza emozione né commento da parte di Billy, e forse senza nemmeno la consapevolezza dello svanire: per questo la visione aspra della vita nella guerra, e della fine della vita nella guerra, in un meccanismo insensato, appare in tutto il suo orrore disumanizzante. Quella di Fishback, come quella delle sue vittime, al di là delle definizioni degli storici sulla guerra totale, è la vita trasformata in una macchina non pensante di distruzione, di annientamento degli altri e di sé.

Billy Fishback, picaro e disertore

In questo contesto si muove Billy Fishback, personaggio rozzo e insensibile, ma sfaccettato in più ruoli: picaro, disertore, *confidence man*, assurdo antieroe, vittima di guerra, corteggiatore volgare e bugiardo, ladro cronico, assassino. È un protagonista monomaniacale, con l'idea fissa di rubare, magari a chi l'ha ospitato, dopo avergli soffiato cena e letto, e scappare prima dell'alba con un cavallo altrui. Prodotto del tempo? Attraverso le sue gesta si vuole esprimere anche il desiderio di fuga, di libertà, di ritorno a casa dei disertori, senza ignorarne la spietata brutalità.

L'ossessione di Fishback crea un *pattern* di ripetizione meccanica dello stesso tentativo d'inganno senza discriminazione tra le vittime né un accenno di solidarietà o comprensione umana; si appoggia a storie articolate, sempre pronte (come farà Huckleberry Finn), come scuse infantili, in cui pare credere anche lui stesso:

“I've jest hearn my pappy's ded. I aint got no bruthers nur sisters, and thar haint nobody to look arter the black ones – which thar is nigh on to a hundred uv em – sept mammy, and the overseer, and she's got the rickets and can't stay long – though” said he, wiping the corners of

¹⁰ L'esercito confederato non concesse medaglie al valore: erano tutti parimenti eroi.

his eye, – "the overseer is mity tentative, razes whapping big craps, and don't leve nothin ondun. Shan't pester bout nun uv these things," sighing profoundly,"ontwell my bleedin kuntry gits lifted outen the bog; maby next fall I'll get a furlo and go home to have a little ritnin up" – then turning to Miss Caroline, he remarked, "mammy's got a pyanner and a sofy too." (pp. 9-10)

Fishback è prigioniero di una situazione creata dalla guerra ma che rispecchia anche la sua assoluta mancanza di principi. *Confidence man* senza scrupoli e senza redenzione, riassume le caratteristiche del picaro ereditate dai personaggi umoristici della tradizione dell'Old Southwest (soprattutto il Simon Suggs dei racconti di Johnson Jones Hooper). L'aspetto più degradante è l'applicazione brutale dell'inganno, del *confidence game*, in ogni episodio, senza umorismo né giochi d'intelligenza o di seduzione. Il suo rapporto con gli altri, sempre utilitaristico, è giocato sulla falsità, la violenza, la slealtà. Preclude ogni possibilità di solidarietà, amicizia, compassione. Pur non riconoscendo la fratellanza umana, Fishback da buon *confidence man* usa le tecniche e il linguaggio dell'amicizia per conquistare la fiducia delle vittime. La libertà di violenza gli viene sia dalle sue radici nella frontiera del Sud (Georgia; si ricordi la brutalità e crudeltà presenti in *Georgia Scenes*, 1835, di Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, che Warren qui menziona), sia dalla tradizione dei personaggi dell'Old Southwest, sia dal contesto della guerra in corso.

Il racconto è sostanzialmente una catena di avventure picaresche di Fishback in fuga dall'esercito confederato e alla ricerca di un malloppo per tornarsene in Georgia e "ritirarsi" con un armistizio privato dalla Guerra Civile. Come il picaro originale, Lazarillo de Tormes, con la sua quotidiana lotta per la sopravvivenza cerca di entrare nel mondo che intende sfruttare, di farne parte utilizzando le proprie risorse di astuzia, calcolo, inganno. Del picaro Fishback ha la mente astuta, pronta ad afferrare l'occasione, a utilizzare ogni conoscenza per turlupinare il prossimo e assicurarsi il pasto o la vita.

Il motore dell'attività e della personalità di Billy è il *confidence game*, il bidone, già con una lunga tradizione nella cultura e nella letteratura americana. Il modello più immediato si trova quasi dovunque nei racconti umoristici dell'Old Southwest, radicati in una narrativa folkloristica orale estesa e popolare, terreno fertile di sviluppo e ispirazione per innumerevoli scrittori. Il tema è connesso con la natura picaresca del

personaggio, con le sue condizioni di sbandato e soprattutto con la sua parentela letteraria e biografica con gli anteroi dell'umorismo dell'Old Southwest, una discendenza diretta che ha una comune origine nella frontiera povera e selvatica del Sud. Ma il *confidence game*, con la sua ripetitività e onnipresenza, si può leggere anche come un codice della cultura del Sud, basata sulla frode insita nella dottrina dello schiavismo e nella sua difesa.

Con altri *confidence men* che Billy incontra si creano soprattutto scontri, false alleanze, in particolare con Slaughter, mente fredda e spietata, abile e colto parlatore il cui professionismo sicuro e sottile è lontano dall'eleganza e dal fascino del pur crudele imbrogliere Simon Suggs.

Tutti i possibili complici cedono facilmente e immediatamente alle proposte disoneste di Fishback. I loro piani fraudolenti alla fine sono nullificati non dall'intelligenza o dalla giustizia, ma da schemi più astuti e spietati o dal caso. Necessaria e frequente attività (e tecnica) personale o di gruppo è la falsificazione di documenti, passaporti, lasciapassare, lettere di identificazione e di spiegazioni, auto- e biografie: tutte storie false raccontate con particolari convincenti e con mestiere consumato.

La decostruzione della fiducia umana comprende la costruzione di prove, di verità, di identità ad hoc, progetti ingannevoli. Sono menzogne multiformi che astutamente e cinicamente risvegliano la solidarietà e la simpatia delle vittime. Per quanto assurde e infondate siano le affermazioni, vengono prontamente credute e scatenano il processo dell'imbroglio. Quasi segno dell'ambiguità della Guerra Civile stessa, anche i documenti militari sono falsificati; Fishback s'inventa un'appartenenza a luoghi, una storia familiare, un curriculum, ma anche legami con persone, che sono solo virtuali. Le nuove, provvisorie identità (un passato, beni e soldi, la proprietà, prospettive, schiavi, potere, una vena di persecuzione) durano il breve tempo della stangata. La parola scritta, con la sua carica di oggettività burocratica, in contrasto con la vecchia tradizione orale e di "recitazione" e seduzione, è il nuovo potere del *confidence man*, gli fornisce garanzie e appoggio, ben lontani dall'incanto magico della parola detta, con i suoi contorni emotivi e fantasiosi.

Fishback gioca sui sentimenti altrui, finge affetto, amore, amicizia, li fa nascere negli altri come una loro debolezza e un punto di forza per sé. Le vittime accettano l'adulazione, non

usano quel discernimento e buon senso indispensabili alla sopravvivenza; per quanto ingenui (anche Fishback a sua volta lo è) non sono innocenti, sono troppo pronte a corrompersi. L'inversione dei ruoli di ingannatore e ingannato è facile, sono sempre in atto vari giochi di inganno; le vittime sono solo temporanei destinatari, non riconoscono il *con man* che loro stesse vorrebbero ingannare.

La finzione dei sentimenti e la colpevole partecipazione delle vittime al gioco dell'inganno sono ben esemplificate nell'episodio del corteggiamento di Miss "Calline". Fishback, intuendo sia l'avidità sia l'ingenuità della famiglia ospite, nonché la presenza di un appetibile bottino, abbindola genitori, sorelle, amiche e la ragazza stessa, con una promessa di matrimonio, basata su un improbabile, repentino innamoramento e una finta posizione economica – la piantagione e relativi schiavi in Georgia – contando di abbandonare la ragazza e scappare con il bottino. È interessante notare la permanenza della tematica della seduzione anche della famiglia per carpire la dote (o meglio, come qui, tutti gli averi), come del resto avviene anche nei racconti di Simon Suggs e in *Huckleberry Finn* (nell'episodio di Mary Jane). La menzione del denaro è precisa, fiscale, la sua presenza (si veda la progettata vendita degli schiavi di Caroline e il calcolo del ricavato) è concreta e brutale. Corteggiamento e sentimenti coinvolti vengono messi a nudo in modo spietato, senza segni di tradizioni romantiche se non in una luce ironica o sarcastica. La cosiddetta vittima cessa di esserlo quando rivela la sua brutale avidità, ipocrisia, menzogna, calcolo, facilità a usare le persone, assoluta assenza di sentimenti autentici. L'occhio spietato, senza veli, del narratore vede tutto. L'episodio dell'innamoramento e del fidanzamento, con la proposta di matrimonio, diventa paradossalmente una rappresentazione ironica dell'amore mercenario, le parole, i gesti sono solo finzioni degli effetti del sentimento (non provato), svuotati di giustificazioni; Caroline non suscita compassione perché a sua volta ha spietatamente rifiutato il giovane senza mezzi, economicamente meno appetibile. D'altro canto, l'avidità di denaro e il meccanismo fraudolento per procurarselo sembrano trovare giustificazione perché ogni cosa e persona si offre con il cartellino del prezzo.

La visione spietata dell'avidità, insensibilità, crudeltà viene parzialmente corretta da leggeri, obliqui tocchi, che vogliono restare sullo sfondo, di autentica, silenziosa solidarietà umana.

Ancora una volta, è riconoscibile la parentela con la forza e la generosità dei legami presenti nei diari e nelle lettere dei soldati. È quella gente che, nonostante la guerra, il dolore, la povertà trova ancora posto per un soldato che bussa alla porta e che avrà cena e accoglienza. La casa viene aperta, la persona usa la propria forza per difendere anche la vita di un altro. Le risposte generose di Mrs. Lane ("She told him that while any part remained of the little that was left to her, she could not send away shivering and hungry, those who were engaged in the service to which her husband had sacrificed his life." p. 11) e del Capitano Royal ("Certainly, certainly, I'll go and bring them to my house, and nurse them like a father until they are able to travel." p. 65) creano il centro più positivo, costruttivo del romanzo. Ma la magia è di breve durata, perché la regola del comportamento degli altri personaggi ci spinge a chiederci dov'è l'inghippo, dove finisce l'illusione. Nel generale gioco dell'inganno, esistono personaggi sinceri? È possibile essere sinceri? Il dubbio è che le parole non significhino mai quello che sembrano, che si sia scollata definitivamente ogni referenzialità. Il narratore scherza, il lettore si aliena. Ci accorgiamo che, nel mondo rappresentato della Guerra Civile si è spezzata la fiducia che le parole possano mai sottintendere un accordo, una comprensione. Il *con game* nella Guerra Civile diventa metafora di un gioco più grande: l'inganno delle ragioni del razzismo, delle giustificazioni della schiavitù, dei risultati della ricostruzione.

Il linguaggio di Fishback non è una mistificazione da *local colorist* di maniera, non nasconde ricchezze vernacole. È volgare, rozzo, pesantemente sgrammaticato, privo di fascino o poesia o di qualità centrifughe e ribelli. Nel ricco e complesso gioco linguistico del testo è un segno della bassezza morale e intellettuale di Fishback (forse assimilabile a Pap Finn):

"Wonder what battle he lost his manners in? and that young umun, how she did cackle and squeal. Well, they aint mor'n made expenses outen me, for I give em bad munny fur my sepper, and here's what's left, (displaying the provisions he had stolen.) The old umun lemme have four dollars and a haff and my sepper for a five on the Munro Rale rode bank. Wonder ef that'l be funny when she finds it out. Maby hit'l make em all laff on the tother side uv thar dod-rotted mouth yit. No sich as that aint a hurtin o' none o' my feelins." (p. 42)

È un dialetto fatto di esagerazione, non di accuratezza fone-

tica ma di sorpresa visiva (*eye dialect*), più vicino all'incomprensibilità di Sut Lovingood che alla ricchezza di Huck Finn e alla varietà dei personaggi vernacoli dell'umorismo dell'Old Southwest.

Il suo anticulturalismo è tipico della frontiera e dell'Old Southwest, ma qui non evidenzia qualità di azione, di buon senso, di inventiva *yankee*, di praticità *western* contrapposte all'intellettualismo esangue dell'Est. Quella di Fishback è limitazione di raggio d'azione, di capacità di comprensione di situazioni e di linguaggi. Anziché muoversi con destrezza guidando la comprensione degli altri (come accade nei classici racconti del *confidence man*) Fishback deve portare la situazione ai suoi termini, riducendola a una scala e a un raggio di movimento limitati ed elementari. La sua furia di fronte alla vuota, assurda ampollosità da incantatore di Slaughter ("Now listen at you; you've got a mighty quality tongue, real ristercratic mouth, but I ain't a hearin you." p. 69) significa che non capisce il linguaggio dell'altro (in realtà un altro registro, giocato sull'ironia e sull'iperbole) che sente come un'esclusione dal gioco, un ridimensionamento nel gioco dell'inganno, di cui perde il controllo nel momento in cui perde il controllo del linguaggio (e, alla fine del romanzo, della violenza e della libertà di movimento).

Fishback è profondamente immerso negli avvenimenti quotidiani, i grandi eventi storici del 1862 lo sfiorano soltanto; è attratto dal qui e ora, travolto dalla necessità del momento, senza possibilità o capacità di spaziare in una visione più ampia. Nello scenario della guerra, si muove a strappi, a tentativi, con sortite e ritorni, seguendo ripetitivi disegni di spostamento, di incontri; il suo è uno sforzo miope di uscire dall'incubo della guerra restandone ai margini, che termina con una morte stonata, imprevista: ma sottintesa a ogni gesto, a ogni ora di chi vive quei tempi. I *confidence games* sono solo i precari sollazzi della *masque* della morte rossa: ma le macchie scarlatte sono di sangue sulle divise e il campo di battaglia è solo un terreno calpestato che non conosce valore né coraggio, ma solo morte, dolore, resti umani.

Il Sud in guerra

Army Straggler è un romanzo nella guerra, non sulla guerra.

Sa di cronaca dal fronte prima o dopo la battaglia, può venire da un posto qualunque perché non c'è un angolo di Virginia che non sia o stia per essere il fronte. La guerra è diventata un modo di vivere, uno stato delle cose entrato nella forma stessa della vita quotidiana, una condizione senza uscita, senza speranza, come più sentono i vinti che presagiscono la sconfitta.

Quello di Fishback e di altri disertori e vagabondi (gli *stragglers* del titolo, istituzionalmente senza patria) è un muoversi senza sicuri punti di riferimento, per le strade, nelle campagne: "Swarms of stragglers had for several days infested the settlement along the road, to such an extent that all property capable of being secreted or secured by lock and key, had been disposed of." (p. 10) La luce che li attira e poi li distrugge sono i luoghi della guerra, gli accampamenti dove sta la propria compagnia, una casa ospitale e facilmente depredata, un progetto di imbroglio e di furto. Il Sud in guerra è un territorio devastato, anche da se stesso (nel romanzo il danno viene dai soldati e dai disertori confederati), uno scenario di fughe, agguati, azioni afferra e scappa, cavalcate, complotti, lotte a mani nude, sopraffazione, affannosa ricerca di un nascondiglio o di un bottino. È una sopravvivenza personale ai livelli più elementari, l'autodifesa degli organismi più semplici: si attua in una costante ricerca di vettovagliamento, un pasto che possa saziare per qualche ora (come accade al picaro classico), con l'occhio attento a un qualunque oggetto incustodito che possa tornare utile, specialmente un cavallo: equestre antieroe *on the road*, Billy ruba e abbandona cavalli nel suo frenetico percorrere le stesse strade, come farà Dean Moriarty con le automobili.

Army Straggler non è un affresco di varia umanità della Guerra Civile, né un film storico sulle azioni belliche, ma un documentario amatoriale di persone, animali, cose, case, strade, campi devastati, di rapporti umani infranti o inquinati da sospetto, paura, inganno, di incontri in un clima di sospensione delle fondamentali norme di comportamento. Lo sconvolgimento della guerra si legge nel gesto quotidiano di donne private del marito, morto o al fronte, o dei figli caduti già all'inizio della guerra; si legge nella morte dei soldati dilettanti e imberbi di Bull Run; nella campagna che sente l'assenza degli agricoltori e dei cavalli da tiro; lo si legge nei vecchi vulnerabili ma ancora sostenuti dall'avidità, forse nata o acuita dalla paura e dal bisogno; nell'apparire fugace di schiavi silenziosi e inde-

cifrabili, oggetto di violenza verbale e fisica che nasconde rabbia, disprezzo; nell'improvviso ritorno di uomini dal fronte, che all'arrivo sono già ripartiti, nei soldati che disertano rubando cavalli e uccidono per assicurarsi la fuga. Sono personaggi che appaiono e scompaiono come animali sconvolti, imbizzarriti, senza più direzione, abitudini, percorsi.

La realtà che emerge ha un aspetto fluido, di società informale non più contenuta in rigide ma rassicuranti norme e categorie: pare preannunciare la perdita di orientamento nella cultura del Sud durante la guerra e dopo la resa. Al termine dell'avventura, l'aspettativa più autentica e profonda, per ogni personaggio, è soltanto la morte. È la risposta realistica e antiretorica all'idealismo e alla retorica della guerra confederata, la vera medaglia al valore, la certa licenza illimitata. La speranza di sopravvivenza per il Sud bianco e schiavista sarà la prospettiva incerta di una dura, inconcepibile sconfitta, difficilmente mimetizzabile in un romanzo che, pur ambientato nel 1862, è stato scritto dal 1863 al 1865, quando l'esito del conflitto si faceva sempre più chiaro. Per il Sud nero, alla vigilia dell'emancipazione di Lincoln, si apre un secolo di disillusione, violenza, emarginazione.

Army Straggler è una narrazione dei primi tempi della guerra, ma già con la percezione di una realtà inquinata, l'esperienza del disinganno; pare aver senso solo la ricerca individuale di una uscita disonorevole, sostenuta da giochi di sopravvivenza a spese altrui; ma l'astuzia e le capacità vitali del vecchio *frontiersman* del Sud sono diventate qui segni dell'inarrestabile, imminente rovina, anche a livelli umani, capillari. Le avventure non divertono più, pesa l'aggiunta di danno e sofferenza che Fishback si lascia dietro, il *con man* si trasforma in un complice e alleato della guerra, distruttivo al pari di essa, impegnato in una piccola campagna privata. Se questa è una guerra per la sopravvivenza, se è lo sforzo tenace del picaro di restare vivo ancora un giorno, se è la negazione di vuota retorica da parte di un autentico antieroe, è altrettanto vero che questa esperienza della guerra diventa una metafora della perdita dei valori umani, dell'abbandono sia della retorica del coraggio e della generosità, sia della loro concreta, autentica pratica. Con questo tono e prospettiva, il romanzo non può che assumere un pur incerto, titubante ruolo di critica. Sono questi i segni più autentici e trascurati della vera storia del Sud durante la guerra, il suo destarsi a una progressiva autoconsapevolezza, il suo

domandarsi e scavare al di sotto delle costruzioni ingannevoli della retorica schiavista con cui si era identificato per secoli. Nel romanzo, il finale a vortice che porta alla morte di Billy può esprimere il disorientamento del Sud nel momento in cui comincia a mettersi in discussione.

In questa rappresentazione del Sud bellico è certamente assente ogni vena romantica o sentimentale; in un passo in cui l'autore si lamenta delle frasi sdolciate della moglie ("It's me she'll kiss to death, and ask with a sickening whine, if I want my sugar-lumpshy-plumpshy-sweetness to be taxed with such servile duties. Yes, I do." p. 80), paradigmatico del tono di Warren, si rivela tutta la distanza dalle mode alla Walter Scott. Ci vorrà la perdita di ciò che costituiva il Vecchio Sud per porlo in prospettiva nostalgica, di *lost cause*, di eroismi astratti (romanzeschi e romantici, alla Tom Sawyer, fundamentalmente centripeti, di chi in fondo si conforma) non nati da autentici gesti di coraggio, generosità. La presenza, l'interattività della guerra (agli episodi del 1862 partecipa come personaggio lo stesso autore) rende impossibile una distanza sanitaria, una prospettiva idealizzata, una risoluzione "romantica" della storia. Anche se il viaggiare di Billy sembra avere la libertà dei tempi di pace e gli episodi cerchino spesso di rappresentare aspetti della vita normale, sia il tono della narrazione sia la giustificazione di comportamenti e lo sfondo degli episodi sono certamente bellici. Si menzionano i movimenti dei soldati, si percepisce l'eco o la previsione delle battaglie, l'odore di fucili, cannoni, polvere da sparo, e anche il lezzo marcio dei cadaveri.

La sfaccettatura di Fishback pone il problema dell'identificazione personale, ma anche del suo appartenere al Sud, il suo essere confederato e schiavista; anche il narratore, entrando nella storia come personaggio, affermerà la propria identità di confederato e razzista (si veda la poesia pesantemente ironica sui neri, pp. 94-96), sollevando contemporaneamente il problema dell'identità del Sud. Ma fino a che punto il romanzo mette in discussione la guerra com'era concepita e vissuta nel Sud, la responsabilità del Sud, le profonde radici dello schiavismo (che nemmeno il Nord né la chiesa riconobbero)? Difficile posizione per Warren; l'autore, pur dietro una maschera ironica e umoristica, che gioca sulle reali posizioni del narratore, afferma indubbiamente la sua identità di confederato che, pur condividendo una tolleranza per la presenza anche fisica dei neri, non nascondeva l'arrogante, inflessibile pregiudizio dell'inferiorità

dello schiavo e la conseguente necessità della discriminazione razziale.

Il nero che fugge rubando un cavallo, quasi imitando l'abitudine di Billy, indica la paura dei sudisti che l'avanzare delle truppe unioniste spinga gli schiavi ad abbandonare "slealmente" le piantagioni. Gli schiavi qui vengono menzionati con disprezzo ("cuffies"), sono ladri o servitori non abbastanza svegli o svelti, nemmeno per un arrogante Fishback, che li considera solo come capitale da portare con sé in Georgia, se riuscirà a ingannare la promessa sposa, sciocca vittima che li porta in dote: "You aint heard me say it was – fetch me a flitter, nigger, can't you hear nothin? – niggers is a mighty pester." (p. 53) Sono ridotti a prezzo, a svendita, a bottino del bianco povero che cerca di arricchirsi, assimilandosi ai piantatori che l'hanno portato alla guerra. Siamo lontani dalla rappresentazione umoristica ma spietatamente ironica dell'arroganza volgare e crudele dei bianchi nei racconti del pur confederato e schiavista Johnson J. Hooper (v. "The Captain Goes to a Camp Meeting"), come dalla "True Story" di Twain, dove l'autore bianco viene cancellato dalla voce nera e dolente di Rachel. Qui la voce bianca vuole ancora raccontare una storia monocolor del Sud. Sarà breve il miraggio dei neri che ritroveranno, una volta eliminata la schiavitù istituzionale, i ceppi che i bianchi riproporranno in infinite forme per svuotare l'emancipazione e l'aspettativa di un'esistenza umana e civile. Sarà un altro vagare nella notte alla ricerca di un salvifico fiume Giordano, come racconterà Faulkner in *The Unvanquished*. Pur moralmente nel torto, è attraverso la sua sofferenza che il Sud cercherà di acquistare la dignità del ferito, del vinto, del distrutto.

Il racconto della guerra

La narrazione si realizza attraverso un linguaggio ricco, complesso, a volte stridente: lo stile aulico, affettato, barocco, ironico, consapevole del narratore e di alcuni personaggi si affianca alla riproduzione del dialetto più chiuso e comico, quello di Fishback, alla tradizione vernacolare, folkloristica, locale, con forti legami con l'umorismo dell'Old Southwest, alle immagini fresche della diretta esperienza del Sud e della guerra, all'uso consapevole dei topoi della retorica classica. Anche la forma letteraria e la struttura narrativa del testo subiscono l'urto degli

eventi e ne sono modificati, altro segno della percezione da parte dell'autore del dissestamento del Sud. La classica struttura narrativa della cornice ("*framework*") che giustifica e facilita al suo interno la rappresentazione vernacolare cara agli autori dell'Old Southwest, in *Army Straggler* viene sconvolta dall'apparizione dell'autore a fianco del *villain*, dalla mescolanza di registri linguistici, dalla contaminazione dei generi (autobiografia, romanzo picaresco, umorismo dell'Old Southwest, romanzo di guerra), dal disorientamento delle posizioni morali e culturali (narratore colto rispetto al personaggio vernacolare, disertore e criminale rispetto ai cittadini più generosi, ecc.). In *Army Straggler*, tra la vecchia rappresentazione che assegnava precisi, invalicabili confini, pur concedendo grande libertà di espressione, e la rappresentazione romantica e nostalgica di un Old South, dove scompare la contemporaneità e un autentico mondo vernacolo, pare di avvertire l'inadeguatezza di strutture rigide, tradizionali e il bisogno di trovare un'espressione più autentica nella sua forma più aperta, estemporanea, confusa, ibrida. La classica cornice narrativa si apre, quindi, in una prospettiva poliedrica, in cui la realtà è percepita in modi diversi; il narratore colto, distaccato si trasforma improvvisamente in personaggio, compagno e vittima di Fishback e testimone delle sue gesta e degli avvenimenti della guerra ("'You'r a start nateral fool; I never seed yore things, and don't no nuthin about em,' was his mild and amiable reply." p. 43). L'autore viene ingannato, derubato e insultato da Billy. La cintura sanitaria non regge più. La storia sembra voler assumere più testimoni, diversi punti di vista.

Il narratore ironico, talvolta inaffidabile, si prende gioco del lettore. L'ironia e l'umorismo, l'assurdità dell'agire di Fishback, il coinvolgimento del narratore vanno creando una posizione morale di condanna del mondo rappresentato, cioè della guerra, ma non un messaggio esplicito. Il narratore si presenta senza apparente necessità all'interno della storia, come personaggio, testimone non motivato, gioca con il registro e con il dialetto, con il tono con cui narra la storia del *villain*. Nemmeno il suo insistere nello sfoggio di cultura libresco, eclettica, in tono satirico, è sempre convincente. Ma l'autore non può che stare all'interno della vicenda, perché Warren scrive mentre è soldato, nel caos della guerra; il mescolarsi delle vicende del romanzo è radicato nel concreto, sovrastante fatto della guerra stessa.

Il narratore è sordo e cieco a tutto ciò che non è immedia-

to, se scava fatti (a volte palesemente fasulli) dal passato, non dimostra mai né onniscienza né senno di poi. Ma è un narratore consapevole: ci parla del suo scrivere, di sé in quanto narratore. Insiste, ma senza cercare di convincerci, un po' convenzionalmente, sulla verità dei fatti, sull'aspetto autobiografico del romanzo. Spostando il fuoco da sé in quanto narratore a Fishback, crea l'impressione che l'esperienza della guerra sfugga, non la si domini più nemmeno attraverso una prospettiva narrativa. Un effetto disgregante viene dalla varietà di registri, che a volte suonano stonati, usati in situazioni sbagliate, segno dell'assenza delle ragioni che richiedono l'uso coerente di quegli stessi registri, cioè perdita di contatto con la realtà. Si svela l'ironia e l'assurdità della maschera del linguaggio aulico e pomposo (a volte con citazioni errate) che vuole passare per colto e consapevole, un altro inganno che vuole passare per verità.

La fine di Billy

Army Straggler, pur pervaso di spirito confederato, può essere letto anche come una sorta di critica all'America ufficiale, retorica, come accade spesso nei testi narrati nel modo picaresco. Pone anche proposte di lettura imbarazzanti. A distanza di quasi un secolo e mezzo dall'evento spartiacque della storia degli Stati Uniti, nonostante la ripetuta esperienza di orrori bellici anche a distanze ravvicinate, la reazione della critica letteraria e culturale di fronte alla trasposizione narrativa dell'esperienza diretta della guerra pare a volte rivelare un'immaturità da svago dilettantesco. Sia editori sia lettori e critici (ne fanno fede l'ignoranza e la non pubblicazione) tendono a privilegiare come testi rappresentativi romanzi che non sfigurino nei "salotti" – da cui in effetti sembrano provenire molte idee. In romanzi come *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Rebellion to Loyalty* e *The Red Badge of Courage* – testi intellettuali, discriminanti – le qualità tipiche dei tradizionali canoni letterari sono facilmente riconoscibili. C'è una resistenza nel lettore e nel critico di fronte a quella narrativa che affronta apertamente e con i sensi svegli l'esperienza brutale della guerra: che è coinvolgimento in un caos, non razionalizzazione del dare e ricevere violenza, di tattica e strategia, cause ed effetti. Il sapore acre della realtà della guerra, di ogni guerra pare debba appar-

tenere all'esperienza stessa, individuale, privata, senza cercare trasposizione ma solo sublimazione: nel raccontare avventure belliche, non si menzioni la parola *sweat*, ma *perspiration*, perché l'eroe rischia di sembrare un cavallo. Persiste il rifiuto di quel realismo nato dentro l'esperienza della Guerra Civile (v. diari meno noti e studiati) di mali sapori e odori, dolore di organi devastati, difficoltà di funzioni corporali, di chi esce dall'esperienza coperto non di segni rossi del coraggio ma di sangue rappreso e fango sporco, sudore ed escrementi. Qui il soldato vero è nudo e il suo corpo vulnerabile, sporco, piagato, maleodorante non è ben accetto.

La morte di Fishback alla fine del romanzo confina con l'assurdo. Con il disertore moribondo anche il lettore si aggrappa a un vortice di parole: lo stile è ampolloso, innaturale per la situazione e il personaggio; le sue ultime parole, "mortuary consequences" (p. 98), ironicamente appaiate a una sua battuta precedente ("That fool Jack's dun turned him over to the tender mercez uv the carron croze". p. 46), in realtà significano soltanto morte, sembrano un accenno a un altro inganno, un abortito *con game*, un estremo esorcismo di Fishback (quasi alla E.A. Poe) per un'ultima zampata contro la vita. Nello scenario finale con la prigionia, l'infermeria, il lazzaretto, l'epidemia - il vaiolo, antico, oscuro terrore -, la balordaggine della sua vita diventa coerente con la sua perdita di conoscenza, emerge un'immagine di ineluttabilità della guerra e delle sue conseguenze, Fishback viene stanato dai suoi ultimi astuti nascondigli: "Got the small-pox - got it bad - they put you in here to kill rebs. Yankee bullets can't kill em fast." (p. 89)

Alla fine dei giochi e degli inganni c'è la morte vera; quei giochi che erano anche una speranza di salvezza e di fuga, di vita, falliscono, non riescono a salvare, barare non serve. I giochi non divertono più, non distruggono più la morte, Sheherazade ha finito le storie.

La fuga e l'annientamento finale di Fishback e dei suoi progetti, narrati nei termini dell'assurdo, preannunciano la fine della Confederazione, fine sentita da Warren come molti bianchi del Sud soltanto come distruzione e morte, povertà e perdita della libertà, spogliazione e umiliazione: scomparsa di un modo di vivere con cui il Sud bianco si era illuso di trascendere l'orrore della schiavitù e la propria responsabilità. L'ultimo viaggio di Fishback in treno (le sue astuzie, messe in azione per l'ennesima occasione, con sicurezza consumata, questa

volta gli procureranno l'arresto e la morte) non lo porterà in Georgia (che rappresenta il lieto fine, la soluzione privata alla guerra) ma alla prigione e al lazzaretto: e a quell'ultima sensazione, lo scivolare nell'incoscienza della morte.

Il finale è una vertigine, della mente e delle parole: la mappa fisica del mondo reale, sensibile svanisce, si scatena l'ultima allucinazione, si apre il baratro dell'intimo, della vita consapevole, forse del presentimento della fine: "Mortuary consequences, mortuary consequences, mortuary consequences,' were the receding thoughts of our hero as his mind clung to the objects of sense, and yet fluttered to be loose. These words were the straws at which drowning consciousness caught in her struggle to rise." (p. 98) Ma Billy Fishback, umano senza coscienza, non va oltre queste grottesche parole: l'orrore vero è per il lettore non per il protagonista, per lo spettatore non per l'attore. Più vero sarà l'orrore della storia dei neri – al tempo di *Army Straggler* ancora schiavi, ma accesi da una ancor vaga promessa di emancipazione – quando, finita la guerra e le apparenze della Ricostruzione, vedranno morire la speranza.

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ABSTRACT

This short essay intends to draw our attention to a long forgotten text, available now in a text based on the only original copy of the 1st edition of 1865. *Life and Public Services of an Army Straggler* is a short novel about the Civil War in Virginia, conceived in the first year of the war (Warren volunteered as a private in the Confederate Army in 1861) and written practically in the war fields of Virginia soon after. Billy Fishback, the protagonist, is a picaresque rogue in the tradition of vernacular Old Southwest humor, to which he adds a vein of cynical brutality. The maze of the on-the-road adventures of a straggler, the comic confidence games are transformed into an absurd, violent match of cheating and death, a powerful metaphor of the war in the South.

KEY WORDS

Kittrell J. Warren. Picaresque. Civil War novel. Old Southwest humor.

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