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E-mail: simplegadi@uniud.it

Sede amministrativa / Address:

Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Germaniche e Romanze
via Mantica, 3
33100 Udine
Italia
Tel: 0432556778

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Indirizzo Direttore responsabile / Address of Editor-in-Chief:

Prof. Antonella Riem Natale
Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Germaniche e Romanze
via Mantica, 3
33100 Udine
Italia
e-mail: antonella.riem@uniud.it
tel. 0432 556773

E-mail: simplegadi@uniud.it

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Tom Petsinis

Prospecting

Median aged with respect to this young nation's greying population, you were recently made redundant from a position you had competently filled for more than half your life, and in which you expected to remain until retirement. At the time, you were surprised more by your own reaction to this turn of events than by the dismissal itself. Instead of feeling anger at the clinical manner of your termination, you were genuinely sorry for the young personnel manager who delivered the news, not only because you detected a diffidence in his inability to look you in the eyes, but perhaps more so for the way the afternoon light angled into his office, betraying a scalp that well-groomed thinning hair endeavoured to conceal. Instead of cursing the changing times and being resentful of the new breed of salesmen (where you had travelled around the country bound to a suitcase heavy with samples and pamphlets, they were now flying through cyberspace at the speed of intuition, lighter than a thought, finding markets in undreamt of places, recording figures that have translated to soaring company profits), you left the office with a lightness of being, wishing them well with heartfelt sincerity, while in the background a host of computers farewelled you with a joyful choral hum.

The Town Hall's clock was counting to five when you stepped onto the crowded street passing through the very heart of city's central business district. Each toll struck out a round-bodied sound that quivered for an instant before being absorbed by the next, until the last, which reverberated for some time, stirring flags and winter trees, filling a busker's clarinet, brushing facade and forehead – all in thinning out to silence. Where only yesterday the hour's metallic touch sent a chill down your spine, now you were surprised again by the turn of your emotions: instead of succumbing to hopelessness, self-pity, inadequacy in terms of finding employment in this brash, new world (the image of your suitcase kept flashing to mind), you saw in your termination an act of providence. At that instant, you happened to be passing the Stock Exchange, sidestepping people checking

prices through the window, when your attention was caught by a mineral company whose shares had dramatically increased. You were not an investor (in fact, you refused to gamble, even when colleagues invited you to join their Tattslotto syndicate), but that company's name, Gem Explorations, and the fleeting glimpse of its figures on a screen, confirmed your intuition.

In the weeks that followed you withdrew your savings (a confirmed bachelor, you had always lived modestly), cashed in a large component of your superannuation (you suddenly realised that the future was now), bought a van and equipment, and set out for the great desert, which some have called the soul of the country. Years earlier (perhaps going back to your idealistic youth when words like God and Truth resonated with meaning, or perhaps further back, to your impressionable childhood when all seemed possible, or perhaps further back still, to a fleeting dream that brushed your lashes and left a few grains of sand in the corner of your eyes) you had heard or read or glimpsed that buried in the vast wilderness lay a precious gemstone which rewarded the finder with visions that transformed one's life forever. As a concentration of natural light, the stone (it did not have a name or a classification) was said to possess a refractive property that revealed wonders, just as a drop trembling on the tip of a black branch revealed the wealth of the rainbow. Now whether or not the story of this gem was somehow influenced by the legend of the Philosopher's Stone and its alchemical qualities, you were unable to say; in any case, unlike that stone, which people sought more for material gain than personal good, your gem was said to disclose that which the finder most wanted, and that in a metaphysical sense, like the Manna that fell from the biblical sky in the wilderness, which assumed the taste desired by the eater.

And so, your worldly possessions packed into the van, you drove off the main highway, and rattled for days along red-dust roads, until the desert edged closer - flat, stretching to the shimmering horizon, forbidding. You had found the wilderness, but in the absence of detailed information, where would you dig for the gemstone? What feature of the landscape would favour one spot over another? Should you dig near an outcropping of rock, taking advantage of its

precious shade? Or among the gnarled shrubs that clawed the barren land? Or in one of the many natural depressions, which may have once been watering holes? Yes, the chances of finding the gem were infinitesimal, but not only this, you knew nothing about its physical appearance - it might be at your feet and you would not know to pick it up. To make this encounter with the desert even worse, you had set out on this journey of discovery without a map. At the time (perhaps arrogantly, perhaps idealistically) you reasoned that the work of others could not possibly guide you to your goal, and that in such matters your dreams and intuition must serve as a map, your will as a compass.

After years of prospecting, beneath a sun whose remorseless stare cracks stones, through nights that chill your breath so it drips from the tent, you have pushed so far into the desert that even the lizards remain inert as you pass, perhaps mistaking you for a shadow. With arms strong from all those sales trips carrying the heavy suitcase (nothing is ever wasted in life), you swing the pick with conviction, striking rock, at times liberating a shower of sparks that spices the air with the smell of boyhood's firecrackers. You shovel out piles of soil, opening ever deeper shafts, throwing each scoop with greater vigour, occasionally breaking out in song, surprising yourself by the tone of your voice, made mellow and resonant by the depth, like the brooding of a didgeridoo. Yes, you have found opal blacker than charcoal, struck veins of gold that flashed like lightning, unearthed sapphires that once lay at the bottom of an ocean long turned to sand, but there has not been even a glint of what you seek. As for the finds that would excite and satisfy others, delivering them from desert to the comforts of the city, those treasures barely quicken your heart, and then only because of the thought of food and supplies and the continuation of your search. Of course you feel disappointment (blood still runs through your veins, as confirmed by a recent accident with the pick), but like the alchemists who sought the Philosopher's Stone in elements, and viewed each failure as a step closer to their inevitable success, so you have always looked back at each abandoned dig as proof of one less hole to explore for the gem's ultimate discovery.

And so more years pass, during which your hair and beard have grown in a neglected tangle, and your body has become closer to shadow than substance. Having no-one to impress, away from society's demands for an image of respectability, you have been discarding objects along the way, which has not only made travelling easier, but engendered a pleasant feeling of lightness, a buoyancy not experienced since your schooldays, especially in spring. How you rejoiced in throwing away your shaving equipment, particularly the silver razor, a gift from parents on your eighteenth birthday, for prior to that you had been sharing your father's. Standing on a rock, you threw it as though a ball and watched it arc against a sky scoured by the sun, your lips turning in a parabolic smile. And some months later you renounced the mirror, which you had bought brand new before embarking on this quest. (Now you see that all mirrors are used after the first reflection, and that they are new only before the quicksilver settles, and then in a place without light). You spent some time thinking how best to dispose of it. Should you break it with a hammer into countless pieces and scatter these in the dust? But something held you back from this, not fear of bad luck (like gambling, Lady Luck has never stirred your heart), but more the thought of multiplying the mirror's duplicity. Should you leave it flat on the ground, facing the sky? In the absence of water and other reflective surfaces, the desert sun had become arrogant, forgetting that it also was subject to death, as your science teachers taught. Confronting its image once a day, and then precisely at noon, would have the effect of bringing it down to earth, rendering it less harsh on humans. But then myth of Narcissus sprang to mind and dissuaded you from this. What if the sun should fall in love with its own image, pine for it, become pale and introspective, and lose the strength of its life-giving force? You, a mere shadow, would be responsible for plunging the world into perpetual night. (Were these thoughts nothing more than whims, the desert playing tricks on your mind, as it did with mirages, or were they the first signs of something worse - madness arising from solitude?) In the end, you took the mirror into a shaft, breathed on it, wiped your reflection clean, and buried it down there. After filling the shaft and planting some spinifex in the loose soil, you walked away feeling liberated, light-footed (you even

did a jig around the mirror's grave), as though freed from someone to whom you were chained since birth.

It was a short time after this that cracks of doubt began appearing in your stubborn determination. At first you sought to address them by swinging harder with the pick, singing louder in the shaft, but when they widened and a sense of hopelessness seeped through, you felt your resolve weakening, beginning to give way. At that point your enterprise would have been undermined, your dreams collapsing under the weight of reason, but for a distant memory, a recollection of a sentence from that story about the gemstone that suddenly echoed in your ears (was it really a memory, or a flutter of blind hope borne of the present desperation?), whose words passed through you like a breeze through dry grass: continue seeking and the gem will appear on your third last breath. Not thinking twice, you sped off, keeping to a straight line for several days, before the van sputtered, choked, and stopped dead still. The way back now impossible, there was only one course of action: loading yourself with supplies and equipment, you continued on foot, fully aware that your very life depended on raising the gemstone to the light.

After days of trekking, you are struggling with the weight on your shoulders, back, and hanging from the broad belt around your waist. The sun clashes against your forehead; thirst has cracked your lips, your shadow is shrivelling. But you tramp on, discarding more objects to lighten your load, and in so doing realise just how many useless things you stuffed into the backpack. Here you are, on a mission of life or death mission, and you have foolishly taken an alarm clock, a diary, even a pen inscribed with your name. You are struck by the thought: the things that define us are in fact the greatest obstacles to truth. It is late afternoon when, having reduced your possessions to the barest essentials, you find yourself gasping for breath, unable to take another step. Is this to be the end, here in this depression, witnessed by this unblinking lizard whose throat pulses with anticipation? You drop to your knees and dig wildly with a small pick. Is it sunstroke? A last desperate attempt to find the gemstone? Or are you digging your own grave? Just then a trickle of water springs from below like a wriggling

snake and fills the hole. Providence, you think. The strike of the pick that brought up the water must have coincided with what was surely your third last breath. This is the spot! You scoop and drink in celebration. The water is cool, a little brackish, but refreshing.

Surviving on birds and animals attracted to the water, you have been living and digging underground for years, opening a network of galleries and corridors, yet finding nothing with the property of the gemstone. You have not been disheartened by the situation (after all, the water is daily proof of your conviction, warding off that earlier sense of hopelessness); on the contrary, your resolve has steeled, your blows with the pick stronger in anticipation of the successful strike.

In excavating yet another shoulder-wide corridor, you suddenly stop and steady yourself against a sense of disorientation caused by the palpable darkness in the mine. Panicking, you drop the pick and make for the opening, only to find that you are unable to locate it in this labyrinth. But even if you were to chance upon the shaft of outside light, you are struck by the thought: having dug so far into the depths of the earth, you could never climb out. You are now a prisoner of your own work! And if someone were to come across the shaft by chance (though the vastness of the desert and the laws of probability would preclude this), he would not see you in the dark, nor hear your cries for help, but would more than likely fill it as a precautionary measure.

Somehow, you find your way back to the pick and resume digging, determined to strike the elusive gemstone on your second-last breath.

Tom Petsinis is an Australian poet, playwright and novelist. He was born in Macedonia, Greece, and immigrated to Australia as a child. The Australia Council has awarded him a Writers' Fellowship and a Residency at the B.R. Whiting Library in Rome. He was recently a Creative Fellow at the State Library of Victoria and a writer-in-residence in Lavigny, Switzerland. He has published work in various genres. Poetry: *The Blossom Vendor*, *Sonnets: Offerings from Mount Athos*, *Inheritance*, *Naming the Number*, *Four Quarters* and *My Father's Tools*. Fiction: *Raising the*

Shadow, The French Mathematician, The Twelfth Dialogue, The Death of Pan. Plays: *The Drought, The Picnic, Elena and the Nightingale, Salonika Bound.* His work has been translated into a number of languages. He has participated in national and international literary festivals, including Struga, Rotterdam, Maastricht, Vilenica and Dornbirn. He lives in Melbourne with his wife and two daughters and lectures in mathematics at Victoria University.

Luigi Natale***Diego Asproni: il custode della Terra***

Vedendo io non potere pigliare materia di grande utilità o diletto, perché gli omini, innanti a me nati, hanno preso per loro tutti l'utili e necessari temi, farò come colui il quale, per povertà, giugne l'ultimo alla fiera e, non potendo d'altro fornirvisi piglia tutte le cose già da altri viste, e non accettate, ma rifiutate per la loro poca valetudine.

Leonardo da Vinci

La luce dolce di settembre si posa su ogni cosa allungando il giorno. Le nuvole bianche comparse sulla collina paiono piccole culle, il mare parla di altre presenze.

Come custodire nella vita tutta questa bellezza?

Conosco un pittore che vive a Bitti, in Sardegna, che ha il dono dei legami scintillanti tra il visibile e l'invisibile. È Diego Asproni. Nei volti che dipinge c'è il mare, la montagna, gli alberi, il canto del paesaggio, la voce, il coraggio, la dignità, l'onore, la leggenda delle genti.

Senza seduzione, Diego Asproni toglie uomini, donne e bambini da un mondo immobile e rassegnato: tra storia e coscienza la vita ritrova così riscatto in un bagno di luce.

Quando sale su una scala per dipingere gli affreschi murali, la sua figura si fa celeste, i campi incontrano il cielo, restano sospesi tra gli astri, e in un istante inizia duraturo il grande viaggio del risveglio.

La sua è partecipazione d'identità, intima persuasione del vero; il silenzio delle figure dipinte arriva dai confini dell'infinito, portandosi Iddio per mano dall'eterna provvisorietà.

Il respiro della sua anima va srotolato per sentieri d'amore.

Un leggero vento piega le punte argentate degli alberi d'olivo, la pace perduta ritorna in un'impronta arcaica, che ci aveva solo preceduti.

Viaggio con gli occhi in ascolto. Abbiamo appuntamento a Sos *Enattos* di Lula, è una miniera, dove è stato minatore. Ora fa l'insegnante, senza dare a vederlo, credo che il suo spirito sia rimasto minatore. Il suo abbraccio scava nel profondo dell'essere. Con la luminosità di gesti e parole, mi accompagna a vedere le laverie, e poi le vie buie della terra.

Lo guardo, mentre cammina e spiega, e sento che tutto quello che racconta e tocca è vivo, e ancora lo ferisce. Non trattiene nulla per sé, ha la capacità di saper restituire, sa leggere i pensieri, perché sa amare. Da un ramo di castagno vedo crescere, intorno, la vita: nelle bocche chiuse di alcune entrate della miniera, Diego Asproni ha dipinto la quotidiana *gravitas* dei fratelli minatori, con la *levitas* poetica dell'incontro, una luce che cresce sempre di più e ci parla sull'orlo delle lacrime, alimenta la gioia sul polso dell'esistenza. Su di un fiore si è posata una farfalla bianca, osserviamo come conversano e ci vengono in soccorso dopo la storia di un pozzo che udì la terra gridare.

Nella pittura come nella vita, Diego ci risparmia le impalcature, procede rapido, un pensiero puro e chiaro, ha a cuore il bene dell'umano, come quando la vita in armonia si allinea con l'aurora del nuovo giorno. Il suo lavoro di pittore è scavo di minerali, carichi di energia, odori, colori, sapori, memorie, che a lui parlano mandando segnali, forme, sostanze, strati profondi che poi diventano trasparenze sottili, su affreschi, encausti, tele, murales. Una coscienza viva e rara, che bussa al destino di noi tutti.

Diego racconta: "sono sempre più spesso amici pastori e minatori che mi indicano luoghi e colori interessanti. È con il loro aiuto che raccolgo le ocre gialle dell'altopiano di Bitti, da quelle più luminose a quelle più bruciate, le limoniti giallo aranciate, le cloriti verdi e il bianco di zinco, che raccolgo invece nei livelli più profondi della miniera di Sos *Enattos* di Lula. Le ematiti oscure vengono dalle discariche di Buggerru; la pirite dorata dai fiumi di Piscinas; i neri

di manganese e le pietre amaranto dall'isola di San Pietro; i rossi e viola dalle pianure del Campidano; i verdi dalle colline sinuose del Logudoro”.

Basta un breve viaggio per attraversare millenni.

Diego è aria, pioggia vento, filari di viti e alberi, è realtà, è solitudine degli insiemi, è lo sguardo di un bambino che domanda perché splende la luna; in lui non esistono parole aspre, insincere, crudeli... non le sa pensare.

Seguendo le vie del suo percorso artistico, sui muri dei paesi vicini, dove prima non c'era nulla, di colpo spuntano sguardi e spiriti originari; le superfici che occupano, i volti di donne e bambine delle miniere, Diego li sottrae dall'oblio. Sono superfici elastiche, faville di vita, sfumature di sentimenti, il *turgor vitalis* al quale nessuna parola si può aggiungere.

All'imbrunire, un nastro sottile rosso arancio avanza, venato di blu, indaco e bianco, all'orizzonte, gli strati dei tempi che vedo negli affreschi dentro le chiese di campagna sono identici a quell'eternità laggiù sospesa, e allora gli uomini fatti di spirito e materia scompaiono silenziosi nelle pieghe tra buio e luce. Tutto ciò parla, possiamo sentire il brusio dell'universo che sorge, ci si può accostare ai misteri, allungare le mani e toccare la prima nota dell'anima.

Sento la grande fragilità dell'essere umano, la sua meravigliosa bontà, quando Diego accetta di farsi da parte, e racconta come nascono le sue opere, che sono dei capolavori, perché la loro forza spirituale è assolutamente infrangibile.

L'impasto d'amore che questo grande *maestro* sardo, pittore del mondo, ci invita a mangiare a casa sua, è immortale, perché fatto di terra, acqua, limo, luce. Questa è la nostra vera e unica tenera sostanza che pensa con il cuore.

Tra qualche giorno, creando una nuova lingua, ritornerà l'equinozio d'autunno, il filo d'erba cambierà colore, le bacche di mirto manderanno il loro profumo, per un sovrappiù d'amore, i grappoli d'uva saranno maturi e lucenti, l'estate avrà conservato le miniature di sorrisi, gesti e sogni. La bellezza passa solo attraverso la bellezza, come la campagna che adesso mi viene incontro e come l'arte di Diego Asproni, che è il *custode* di questa terra sarda ma anche del nostro pianeta.

Mi volto per un saluto a mano aperta, mentre la prima foglia che cade mi riporta, come un sole rovesciato, nel suo sguardo.

Luigi Natale, nato a Orotelli (Nuoro), vive a Pordenone, ha pubblicato alcune sillogi poetiche: *Ospite del tempo* (1998, con prologo di Enzo Dematté), *Il telaio dell'ombra* (2001 con prologo di Mario Luzi) e *Orizzonti sottili* (2005). I suoi versi sono apprezzati da scrittori e critici di fama, come Enzo Dematté, Mario Luzi, Barberi Squarotti, Bino Rebellato, David Malouf, Robert Dessaix, Brian Matthews. La sua poesia è stata tradotta in inglese da David Malouf e Tom Petsinis e in polacco da Jaroslaw Mikolajewski. Ha in preparazione una nuova raccolta poetica.

Veronica Brady

All that is solid melts into air: Australia's future?

Abstract I: The task of imagining those of us who are not of Aboriginal descent into existence in this strange new land (Australia) for two hundred years, which is a very short time in world history, is both challenging and necessary. This paper explores two attempts in doing so as presented in Joseph Furphy's *Such is Life*, published in 1903, and David Malouf's more recent *An Imaginary Life*, published in 1978.

Abstract II: Il compito di immaginarci, noi, non Aborigeni, un'esistenza in questa nuova e strana terra (l'Australia) per duecento anni, un lasso di tempo molto breve nella storia del mondo, è una sfida necessaria. Questo articolo esplora due opere che offrono prospettive diverse su questa esistenza: *Such is Life* di Joseph Furphy, pubblicato nel 1903, e il più recente *An Imaginary Life* di David Malouf, pubblicato nel 1978.

My title, of course, comes from Karl Marx's discussion of the effects of the Industrial Revolution. But it is not a far-fetched reference, I believe, when applied to a settler society like Australia, "last sea thing dredged by sailor Time from Space" (O'Dowd 1979: 95) as far as its effects are concerned, since our arrival has had similar effects, damaging if not dissolving relations built up over thousands of years between the land and its Aboriginal inhabitants and imposing on it a model developed elsewhere in my view with disastrous consequences for both.

Mircea Eliade argues that settlement in a hitherto unknown land involves more than material and economic development and that the consequences are also, imaginative since "the transformation of chaos into cosmos" needs to be "given a form which makes it become real" (Eliade 1974: 113). In traditional societies this transformation has, by and large, been pursued. But from the beginnings, faced with a strange and difficult environment, we have tended to

suspect what is unseen and indefinable. In 1904, for example, Stephens noted that “there is in the developing Australian character a sceptical and utilitarian spirit that values the present hour and refuses to sacrifice the present for any visionary future lacking a rational guarantee”. Attempting to mould an untouched and often intransigent environment to their will, the settlers “had little time or energy to spare for metaphysical speculation, feeling that what they achieved they owed to themselves, and found little for which to thank their fathers” heaven (Turner 1968: x-xi), and it is much the same today, I believe.

By and large our energies are still devoted to material and economic development and in many respects we remain, as Hope put it, “secondhand Europeans” who “pullulate / Timidly on the edge of alien shores” (Hope 1979: 130). Yet the task of imagining ourselves into existence in this strange new land two hundred years is a very short time in world history is both challenging and necessary. In this paper therefore I would like to explore two attempts, to do so, Joseph Furphy's *Such is Life*, published in 1903, and David Malouf's more recent *An Imaginary Life*, published in 1978.

Such is life (1), to begin with it, is the more explicit in its attempt to discover our place in the larger scheme of things, to develop some kind of cosmic understanding to enable us resist the pressures of this new place. Its opening scene has a cosmic setting which conveys a sense of our human vulnerability with the narrator and central character, Tom Collins, finding himself unemployed, speculating that this may have been predestined “ever since a scrap of fire-mist flew from the solar centre to form our planet” (p. 1). Decides to fill in his time by setting down the events of a week in his life as a Government official in the outback before the coming of the railway when goods and supplies had to be transported by teams of bullocks.

Most novelists set their characters in a social context. But here society seems to have dissolved, leaving the individual solitary and exposed to the powers of nature. The novel's opening scene describes a solitary horseman riding across the Riverina plains between earth and sky under the “geodesic dome” of the firmament with the sun blazing “wastefully and thanklessly down” (p. 2) and

concludes on a similar cosmic note with a parody of Macbeth's despairing "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" speech: "Such is life, my fellow mummies just like a poor player, that bluffs and feints his hour upon the stage, and then cheapens down to mere nonentity" (p. 297).

In this pioneering world, the public realm and the "power of illumination" it usually offers (2) no longer seem to exist. The self is alone in an indifferent and often hostile world. As Tom puts it later: "We are all walking along the shelving edge of a precipice and any one of us may go at any time or be dragged down by another" (p. 94).

Furphy's characters, mostly bullock drivers, live and work on the fringes of society, carrying supplies and produce to and from remote stations, must rely on their wits to survive, often at odds with the squatters they serve since their bullocks need grass and most squatters will not let them graze on their properties so that the drivers have to break into the squatters' land to let their bullocks feed there. So the drivers' lives tend to involve a series of "dirty transactions". As one of them says wearily to Tom:

The world's full of dirty transactions. It's a dirty transaction to round up a man's team in a ten-mile paddock, and stick a bob a head on them, but that's a thing that I'm very familiar with; it's a dirty transaction to refuse water to perishing beasts, but I've been refused times out of number and will be to the end of the chapter; it's a dirty transaction to persecute men for having no occupation but carting, yet that's what nine-tenths of the squatters do (p. 13).

Working and living as they do more or less as outlaws, they find brief moments of community in the evening in chance encounters with other travellers around the camp fire sharing stories, mostly about survival in a harsh and indifferent land which has little or no sympathy for or with human beings or indeed, their animals. As a result they must accommodate themselves to the land as best they can by transforming the "chaos" facing them into "cosmos" by finding some "latent

meaning" in it, "so grave, subdued, self-centred; so alien to the genial appeal of more winsome landscape" and interpreting it "faithfully and lovingly" (p. 65). But this meaning lies beyond commonsense, pointing to the larger, more mysterious reality hinted at in the description early in the early scene of a group around a campfire at night:

It was a clear but moonless night; the dark blue canopy spangled with myriad stars grandeur, peace and purity above; squalor, worry, and profanity below. Fit basis for many a system of Theology unscientific, if you will, but by no means contemptible (p.13).

One is reminded here of Prospero's vision in *The tempest*:

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on and our little lives
Are rounded with a sleep.

and also of Pascal's *Pensee* number 265:

When I consider the short duration of my life, swallowed up in the eternity before and after, the little space which I fill, and even can see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of spaces of which I am ignorant, and which know me not, I am frightened and astonished at being here rather than there, for there is no reason why here rather than there (2).

For them, therefore identity becomes an anxious matter. As Luiz Carlos Susin points out traditional societies identity is a "closed circle around sameness" (Susin 2002: 87) in which the self "triumphs above all as critical understanding, distinguishing and identifying good and evil in a very particular way, based on itself, on its glorious position as basis and referent of the whole of reality spread out its feet" (ibid.: 80), whereas, in contrast, in settler societies, initially at least,

the self is a pilgrim to some elsewhere beyond the horizon rather than a figure like Ulysses who is trying to find his way home or to re-establish it there, as many more privileged settlers in this country tried, to “build a New Britannia in another world”, as Wentworth put it in the early days in New South Wales (Turner 1968: 12).

Such is life it, I suggest, is a “pilgrim text” of this kind since in it Furphy explores the possibility of better kind of society than the one we have at present, one which provides a “fair go” for all. So, as he says, it is a novel whose “temper” was “democratic and its ‘bias’ offensively Australian”, attempting to dissolve established forms and practices. There is not the space to explore any further what he has to say on this score, though it is worth pointing out that, as we have already noted, he anticipates some of the metaphysical concerns evident in work of later writers like Patrick White and Randolph Stow. Instead let us turn to David Malouf’s *An Imaginary Life*, published in 1978 (3).

As the contrast between the two titles implies, stylistically it is very different from *Such is life*, much shorter, less argumentative and more of an idyll, what Bakhtin called a “chronotope of threshold” since it combines the motif of encounter with a crisis or break in life which expands the reader’s sense of reality. It is about a “Wild Child” brought up by animals in the wilderness. But its protagonist, is a sophisticate Ovid, the Roman poet who has been banished by the Emperor to the fringes of the civilised world to live amongst the tribal people there who becomes aware of a “latent meaning” to be found there. But for Malouf this meaning is metaphysical rather than political or social, as it was for Furphy and comes from beyond the self, “the unknown” into which the “Wild Child” he encounters there finally leads him to follow “the clear path of [his]fate” to push out beyond the merely human, “beyond what know cannot be my limits” (p. 135) In that sense he can be seen as a Promethean figure. Nevertheless the tone is “feminine”, receptive rather than “masculine” and aggressive – as it is in *Such is life* – since he is responding to a call from beyond the self which is to transform it.

Significantly, the real life Ovid shared this preoccupation in Ovid, in his major work, the *Metamorphoses*. As *An Imaginary Life* concludes, Ovid is following the Wild Child, identifying with him with the "immensity of the landscape" and caught up in a life beyond history and "beyond the limits of measurable time" (p. 144). If we return to the questions facing a settler society like ours, it could then be said that, properly seen, colonial identity ought not be a "closed circle around sameness" (Sosis 2000: 88), a replication of the world from which we have come, but, Malouf suggests, "a continual series of beginnings, painful settings out into the unknown, pushing off from the edges of consciousness into the mystery of what we have not yet except in dreams" (p. 135), dreams which will enable us to live in tune with the universe, in contrast with *Such is life* in which, as we have seen, a tension exists between the self and nature.

In this way I suggest that *An Imaginary Life* may have something significant to say to us as a Australians about the task of settlement which is still to be achieved, which is to move beyond the limits of the imperial imagination and, to draw on the distinction made by Heidegger (11), learn from its First Peoples who have lived in and with this land so long, intimately and respectfully, learn how to "dwell" in it rather than merely to "build" on it, exploiting it for our own purposes.

NOTES:

1. Barnes, John (ed). 1981. *Portable Australian Authors. Joseph Furphy*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press: 1. Hereafter all page references will be given in my text from this edition.
2. Pascal, Rene. *Pensees*. In Maynard Mack et al (eds). 1965. *World Masterpieces II*. New York: Norton & Company: 32.
3. Malouf, David. 1978. *An Imaginary Life*. London: Chatto & Windus: 15. Hereafter all references will be given in my text from this edition.
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Veronica Brady was born in Melbourne in 1929. She became one of the first Australian nuns to teach in a university, broadcast on radio or join in socio-political debate. After teaching at Loreto Convent in Kirribilli, NSW, she moved to the University of Western Australia in 1972, becoming an Associate Professor in 1991. She has spoken out publicly against the Vatican stance on abortion, homosexuality and contraception, and has been involved in the Aboriginal rights movement and the anti-uranium mining lobby. She also supports the ordination of female priests in the Catholic Church. Sister Veronica Brady is a member of many organisations including Amnesty International, the Campaign against Nuclear Energy, the Campaign against Racial Exploitation, the Fellowship of Australian Writers and the Association for Study of Australian

Literature. She is the author of several books including *The Future People*, *The Mystics and Crucible of Prophets*

Karen Hughes

Fluid waters: cultural exchange in the land of the Ngarrindjeri, a poetics and a politics

Abstract I: In this article I examine the fluid dialogic relationships, inherent in storytelling modes and women's lived practices across cultures, as a political economy of kinship and exchange between cultures sometimes present at the intersections of Indigenous and settler Australian women's lives. This project is part of a larger micro-history of women from Lake Alexandrina in the lands and waters of the Ngarrindjeri Indigenous peoples in southern Australia. Here I reflexively explore the politics and poetics of exchange relationships that not only shape the writing of history but reinscribe the persona of the historian to produce histories that are not merely cross-cultural, but cross-culturalised (1). I further discuss how the hints and revelations in the Lake Alexandrina women's stories present an alternative reality, in post-Apology Australia, the richer tapestry of a still possible mutually constituted world.

Abstract II: In questo articolo esamino la relazione dialogica e fluida, che è parte integrante della modalità del raccontare le storie e delle pratiche vissute dalle donne di culture diverse, in quanto economia politica di relazione familiare e scambio tra le culture presente a volte alle intersezioni di vita di donne indigene e australiane. Questo progetto è parte di una micro-storia più ampia di donne del Lago Alexandrina nelle terre e le acque dei popoli indigeni Ngarrindjeri che vivono al sud dell'Australia. Questo lavoro di ricerca è una riflessione sulla politica e la poetica delle relazioni di scambio che non solo danno forma alla scrittura della storia, ma riscrivono e inscrivono la figura chi narra la storia per ottenere alla fine storie che non solo sono cross-culturali, ma "cross-culturalizzate". L'articolo

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discute inoltre di come i suggerimenti e le rivelazioni nelle storie delle donne del Lago Alexandrina presentino una realtà alternativa che offre possibilità di costituire un mondo mutuale e complementare nel contesto di un'Australia che ha offerto le scuse ufficiali della nazione agli Aborigeni per i genocidi e ingiustizie perpetrati nel corso dei secoli.

Ellen Trevorrow, a renowned fibre artist and grand-daughter of the oldest living Ngarrindjeri (2) woman, the revered storyteller Aunty (3) Hilda Wilson, speaks of a poetics of weaving, "stitch by stitch, circle by circle, all things are connected", she says "in the Ngarrindjeri way" (Bell *et al* 2008: 10). From her I have learnt stories told and teachings imparted during this process. I have watched as Aunty Hilda Wilson at the age of almost ninety took up the rushes (*Cyperus gymnocaulos*) without effort in the manner of her mother Olive Varcoe and continued her story: of women, of men, of country; spinning yarns, weaving threads. The woven object is artefact, text and signifier. It holds memories of socio-cultural eco-place, of land, water and sky worlds and of relationships between human and other sentient beings. In between the woven object and the weaver is a narrative inscribed within the infrastructure of each.

I did not know my great, great grandmother Louisa Coad, who lived in the time of Ned Kelly (4), but she made patchworks across the Lake at Milang. A few of them survive. She and my great grandmother Ada Pavy would stay up talking by the window that looked across the water, stitching together utilitarian objects of beauty and strength. My mother's cousin Marjorie Quinn continues that tradition, also by Lake Alexandrina, making quilted objects, often in a communal setting as women talk and tell stories that are often other to the dominant local discourse, that are within a gendered domain of being and knowing.

The women's stories, Ngarrindjeri and settler, are about such acts of suturing and the political economy of this exchange within and across cultures. Their speech

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events constitute extraordinary cultural and political documents that are acts of generosity and grace. In the remembering and sharing of their stories with a wider audience the Indigenous historians invite an inclusivity. This is a continuance of a tradition of exchange and diplomacy that can be traced in the records of white explorers and missionaries to the first moments of colonisation but has often been misread or overlooked. The first sub-Protector appointed to the Ngarrindjeri lands at Wellington in 1842, Scottish-born policeman and soldier George Mason formed a long term love relationship with a powerful local woman of the *Jaralde* clan, Grandmother Louisa Karpany, although both were married to others. Two children were born of their relationship, and a large present day Ngarrindjeri dynasty founded (Bell 1998: 433-4). But after Federation and its whitening, segregating impulses of 20th century interwar Australia, the creolised south was barely a memory (Hughes 2010).

For the white women living around the Lakes of the Ngarrindjeri lands, acts of speech and memory are transgressive occurrences. In speaking of cross-cultural and Indigenous pasts they break a silence that both ruptures and gives voice to a prior complicity with the masculinist domination of the colonisation that led to the clash and then the separation of Indigenous and settler cultures around the Lake, with a Christian Aboriginal mission on one shore, the “white” town on the other (Hughes 2007). The women's stories, each in their own way can be read as narratives of possession, of belonging differently to place. The implicit dialogues between them allow a narrative interface to occur that destabilises and reconfigures cultural and historical space. These are insurgent realities, what Foucault (1980: 81) called the “insurrection of subjugated knowledges” that make a fluid conduit between past and present, offering a new position of being human, figured on kinship and reciprocity within the cross-cultural *lacunae* of Ngarrindjeri country. Walter Benjamin (1970) recognised the transgressive and revolutionary turn, in the darkening times of 1930s Europe (paralleling that of a deeply assimilationist Australia) for unauthorised

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autobiography and *ego-histoire* (5) to cosset “moments of danger” that can implode “authorised” narratives. Such are the lights under the bushels of common sense pragmatism. Deborah Bird Rose writes that:

[t]he many recent shifts in Australian society and culture have confirmed that, far from being the consolation of the powerless, remembrance is an active force for social change. (Rose 2001: 79).

Aunty Hilda Wilson's story privileges prior Ngarrindjeri ownership of the lake of her birthplace and the cultural and discursive authority that is invested in her speaking position of senior Ngarrindjeri *hutchu* (6), the oldest traditional owner of *Kayinga* (Lake Alexandrina). This status is situated in her maternal genealogy that traces ownership to the waters and land of *Milangk* (Milang), *Kumarangk*, (Hindmarsh Island), *Kurangk* (the Coorong) and *Raukkan* (the ancient camping ground). It is expressed through her position within the (Sumner-Rankine) family as “the eldest daughter of the eldest daughter of the eldest son of the eldest daughter of the first tribal marriage of Ben Sumner and Kundjawara” (Kartinyeri, 1998), who was born at Milang in the 1820s. It is resonant also in her contemporary status of seniority within the wider Ngarrindjeri community extending to other regions of South Australia, most notably Adelaide and Point Pearce (Yorke Peninsula), and in her active mothering role (“the heartbeat of our family” as her great grandson, the celebrated AFL football player Michael O'Loughlin put it at her recent 90th birthday celebrations), as a reproducer of culture through her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren many of whom continue the traditions of political activism and cultural custodianship of Hilda's forebears. The centring of her narrative acknowledges the moment of recognition, on our first trip to Raukkan together, of the spatial, temporal and metaphoric underpinnings that her life shared with that of Dorothy Johnson my grandmother born in the white town in 1909, through the deeply complex, tangled post invasion history of the Lake - that preceded these women's births

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by as little as two to three generations. It was a history on which my grandmother, reflective of both her gender and the wider context of her times, was largely silent despite a lived reality that was contrary.

In the wider ongoing project that this article arises from – one that looks at the interconnections of Ngarrindjeri women and settler women in the around the Lakes of the Lower Murray in southern Australia - Hilda Wilson's is the longest and most detailed of the women's narratives, a fact that reflects many things – her openness to sharing narrative; an imperative to create an historical space that reaches and educates a wider audience; the long Indigenous performative tradition into which she is comfortable speaking; the closeness that has developed between us during this project, and the time I have needed to spend learning other ways of being in the world that such a partnership in research, friendship and epistemology can offer (7).

Our collaboration has developed during many actual and imagined journeys over a seven year period. It has involved several important trips "home" to Raukkan, the site of the former Aboriginal mission, where she was born in 1911, and to other places of memory and knowledge in the surrounding Coorong and Lakes region of the now threatened Lower Murray waterways (8). Hilda is exceptionally clear about emphasising Lake Alexandrina and Raukkan as her ancestral and spiritual place of belonging despite having lived much of her adult life several hundred kilometres away. Firstly on Point Pearce, on the Eyre Peninsula, where her father moved in the late 1920s in search of full employment denied at Raukkan; and from the early 1970s onwards, after the 1967 Federal Referendum which allowed the Commonwealth rather than individual states to legislate on behalf of Aboriginal people (9), in the northern suburbs of Adelaide where she has lived since in the company of her youngest son and his family. One of the themes made clear in her narrative is the continuity of knowledge and cultural practice through movements and disruptions, both exilic and chosen, and how knowledges and country travel with the body through a relationship of self-reflexivity (10).

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Our very early discussions of history, family and place began in the home of Hilda's younger sister, Ethel Karpany a talented historian and wicked raconteur, gifted with an acerbic memory for narrative description and detail. A large photographic archive housed in albums and boxes that spilled from suitcases under her bed and wardrobe shelves – family snaps and reclaimed museum material - complemented this talent. Sadly, Ethel Karpany has passed on and was not able to take part in this project. This story however acknowledges her and her desire to make the past known in the present and to find the present in the past (11).

Kitchen tables and domestic spaces – places of socialisation – have been significant sites of exchange within and across cultures. Mostly our recording sessions have occurred during conversations around kitchen tables in Hilda's Adelaide home, in mine and in Cabin One at Camp Coorong, the Ngarrindjeri cultural education centre co-founded by her granddaughter Ellen Trevorrow, our second home on these journeys home. Sometimes our conversations have been in the company of Hilda's family and friends. Through their own relationship to a particular narrative event, as actors or custodians, they have contributed episodically and contextually to this performative exchange. Similarly parts of our recording process have occurred, very often spontaneously, always at Hilda's instigation, on visits to her family and friends within the wider Ngarrindjeri community living in metropolitan Adelaide and over a range of community events. These have included sitting together in the elder's box at consecutive Aboriginal football and netball carnivals across the breadth of regional southern Australia in the late 1990s to the mid 2000s, where Hilda remarked that this was not possible a generation ago, that white and black could not sit side by side (12); a journey by riverboat with one hundred elders along the Murray from Tailem Bend into Lake Alexandrina to participate in a two day public *Ngrikkulun* (cultural festival) on the Ngarrindjeri lands at Raukkan where Hilda was spontaneously invited to perform *Pata Winema*, "the old corroboree song" (13), not far from the place near the water where she had learnt it at ceremonies

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from her great grandmother, Ellen Sumner; a reunion of members of the large Sumner family descent group to celebrate the launch of Doreen Kartinyeri's four volumes of Sumner family history (1998), in which Hilda's story is situated.

Hilda has urged that I digitally record these celebrations, often directing me to include particular shots of country or family, to augment for their cultural significance so that at a later date the DVDs can be taken out as an artefact, much like the weavings deployed to evoke memory, events, people, or the boxes of photographs under Ethel Karpany's bed, to induce further story ("spinning a yarn" (14)) at a later time. This way they can make their way through the generations of community in often hidden domestic spaces - weaving, suturing and encouraging further extensions of story.

The places we have visited during our work are locations where Hilda has lived, played, been educated in Ngarrindjeri and European traditions, celebrated, loved, worked, resisted domination and raised up her family of eight children, with her husband Robert Wilson and later after her move to Adelaide as a sole parent and economic provider. The synaesthesia of place, story and social relations, walking and conversing in and on those places has been accompanied by the mnemonic effect of recalling and connecting events that had occurred there, others who have lived there and stories that were set there. They map a sense of space around the Lake that extends into the wider regions of South Australia and beyond, that is often gendered and specifically Indigenous.

It must be said that I consider seven years a relatively short span of time, within our other lives, for such acts of disclosure and understanding, especially within a cross-cultural framework which until the still relatively recent recognition of Native Title through the Mabo High Court Judgement (1992) and the Reconciliation movement that followed in often halting steps has not been supported by broader social constructions in Australian society. Now the Rudd Labour Government's 2008 National Apology to the Stolen Generations has perhaps brought us closer to the possibility of an ethical and promised home.

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The Hindmarsh Island Bridge Royal Commission of 1995 had made it particularly clear for many Aboriginal people, that sharing culture was a risky and dangerous thing to do (15). Processes of exchange and utterance shifted meanings as they moved across cultural boundaries and were often subject not only to misunderstandings but betrayals of trust. The potentiality of cross-cultural conversations while beginning to be valued and legitimated in places within the academy are nonetheless mostly enacted within and constrained by academic research expectations that have been shaped by, and continue to be located in, principally white and masculinist cultural practices that require closure, fixity and a linear demarcation of time. I consider such research engagement a work in progress at the early stage of understanding and producing shared stories - one in which we need to think and work cross-culturally. Minoru Hokari talks about this pedagogic infoldment in reference to his project of cross-culturalising history. He describes it thus: 'Instead of focusing our historical practice on Aboriginal pasts we must learn the Aboriginal way of constructing the past, and then interact with their mode of history' (Hokari 2000: 38). And Diane Bell reminds that:

[s]tories and memories of loved ones sustain and structure the Ngarrindjeri social world; explain the mysterious; provide a secure haven in an otherwise hostile world; bring order to and confer significance on relationships amongst the living; hold hope for future generations; and open up communication with those who have passed on.....Everything has a story, but not everyone knows every story. Nor does everyone have the right to hear every story, or, having heard it, to repeat the words. (Bell 1998: 45).

Hilda Wilson's life narrative is a series of episodic interlocking and overlaying stories performed in social contexts that link to others stories either told or not told that chart a sweep of history much bolder and broader than that of a single

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life or a community intergenerational history. These stories are spatially and relationally located and hold important complex moral, ethical and historical-cultural knowledge. "Verbal learning", cautions Deborah Bird Rose, "although it may seem straightforward, is often opaque to the newcomer" (Rose 1992: 29).

Aileen Moreton Robinson argues also that such stories are inter-dimensional:

Oral histories and collective memories make visible and affirm the continuity and persistence of Indigenous subjugated knowledges in spheres of interdependent cultural domains which are peopled by both spiritual and human beings. (Moreton-Robinson 1998: 97).

Aunty Hilda Wilson's stories are highly political in that they are produced within a system of foreign domination. Their narrative strategies are part of an Indigenous epistemological practice that is characterised by an openness and flexibility that is able to widen to include non Indigenous practice, global concerns and partnership strategies within its value system. In Australia such embodied stories at the intersections of lived experience and place at the boundaries of culture (16) have the power to redress the "cult of forgetfulness and disremembering" (Stanner: 1968). They are a re-turn as well as a re-remembering, and when heard together they connote a state of wholeness. Such relationships and knowledges have the potential to change bodies and nations.

NOTES:

1. See Hokari 2000.
2. The Ngarrindjeri Indigenous Australian peoples are a federation of 18 clan groups (*Laekinyeri*) whose traditional lands and waters are the in the Lower Murray region of South Australia.
3. "Aunty", "Uncle", "Grandmother" etc are used as respect terms for Ngarrindjeri elders, a common practice across many parts of southern Australia.

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4. Ned Kelly (1854-1880) was a famous Australian bushranger and outlaw, now deeply connected with notions of rebellion and the underdog in the national psyche. See Carey 2001; Brown 1980.
5. See Nora 1987.
6. Hilda Wilson offers this word to represent “grandmother” in the social sense. She used it specifically when referring to Glanville Harris, her maternal grandmother's sister in law who was also the midwife who attended Hilda's birth, giving them an especially close bond.
7. See Eisler, M. 1987.
8. Recent prolonged drought, climate change, and the over-allocation of Murray River waters upstream to irrigators is causing the increased salinity and dramatically receding water levels in Ngarrindjeri country, threatening many aspects of the environment, Ngarrindjeri culture and cultural practices. See *Ngukkan.Kunnun.Yunnan* a 22 minute DVD made with 20 Ngarrindjeri community members, led by Edith Carter, during a Hero Project Workshop.
9. See Attwood and Markus 2007.
10. See Bell 1998:262-266 and Hughes 2007: 48-9 for an explanation of the entwined relationship between land and body.
11. See Dening 2001.
12. Consorting laws were introduced in 1934 under the *Aborigines Act SA* in an attempt to prevent social interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
13. See Bell 1998 for more on this.
14. Ngarrindjeri use this term frequently, indicative of the strong relationship between weaving and story.
15. See Langton 1996.
16. I use the concept of boundaries here in relation to Heidegger's (1971) perception that a “boundary is not that at which something stops but, as

the Greeks recognised, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing”.

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Karen Hughes is a writer, filmmaker and lecturer at the Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies at Monash University, Melbourne. She has published a number of articles on cross-cultural relationships and strategic alliances between Indigenous and settler women in Australia and is currently working on a book on the interconnected lives of Indigenous and settler women around Lake Alexandrina in southern Australia in the early twentieth century.

Karen Hughes. Fluid waters: cultural exchange in the land of the Ngarrindjeri, a poetics and a politics.

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James Tar Tsaior

In the Name of the Father... Masculinity, Gender Politics and National Identity Formation in Postcolonial Nigeria.

Abstract I: This paper negotiates masculinity, gender politics and national identity in Nigeria and foregrounds the sexist character and temperament of national symbols and emblems which inscribe gender and sexual practices within the patterns of socio-political and cultural life. The paper argues that Nigeria is a phallogentric society where traditional culture and modes of epistemology still dominate even with the advances of modernity and globalization. It locates the ambiguities, ambivalences and contradictions within the Nigerian nation-state in multiple cultural imperatives which privilege masculinity over femininity deploying the Nigerian national anthem and pledge as analytic categories. As veritable markers of national identity, the paper contends that the anthem and pledge constitute a representational site for the contestation of gender politics and ideology and the inherent paradoxes this conflictual gender reality orchestrates. It concludes by interrogating the sexist and (en)gendered ideological formations internalized in the anthem and pledge, advocates a democratization of the gender space and the re-imagining of gender relations in national identity formation strategies in postcolonial Nigeria.

Abstract II: Questo articolo si focalizza sull'incontro tra mascolinità, politica di genere e identità nazionale in Nigeria, ne sottolinea il carattere sessista e la temperie di simboli nazionali ed emblemi che accomunano il genere e le pratiche sessuali al modello di vita socio-politica e culturale. L'articolo dimostra come la Nigeria sia una società fallogentrica in cui cultura e modalità epistemologiche

tradizionali ancora dominano anche se stanno avanzando modernità e globalizzazione. Si identificano ambiguità, ambivalenze e contraddizioni all'interno della nazione-stato Nigeria nei numerosi imperativi culturali che privilegiano la mascolinità sulla femminilità utilizzando l'inno nazionale nigeriano e le sue promesse come categorie analitiche. Si ritiene che, da veri e propri segni di identità nazionale, l'inno nazionale e le sue promesse costituiscano un luogo simbolico per la contestazione di politica di genere e ideologia, e l'intrinseco paradosso creato da questa conflittuale realtà di genere. L'articolo si conclude con la messa in discussione delle formazioni ideologiche sessiste dell'inno e delle sue promesse e auspica una democratizzazione di genere e nuove narrazioni nelle relazioni di genere nella formazione dell'identità nazionale nigeriana post-coloniale.

Introduction

Embedded in the Christian imagination is the dominant idea of the trinitarian nature of the Godhead. This episteme is particularly encoded in Catholic theology and doctrine where Catholics ritually sign themselves repeatedly during liturgical worship and other forms of ecclesial celebration. Invoking the Godhead through the formulaic words: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", Catholic Christians profess their doctrinaire faith in God the Father as the perfect creative essence, the Son as the quintessential redeemer and the Holy Spirit as the teacher of the Truth. But beyond this role in creation and the economy of human salvation, the Godhead is refracted as male and hence appropriated by the patriarchal tradition as the approximation of masculinity. This masculinization of the Godhead confers enormous social and sexual capital on the male and validates the claims and assumptions of ascendancy and superiority of masculinity over femininity. Indeed, male-defined, totalizing hermeneutics of sacred scripture has lent eloquent testimony

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to these masculinized accounts even though radical feminist theology and interpretation reject this rhetoric of the masculine sexuality of the Godhead (Ferguson *et al* 1988: 255). However, this uneven, asymmetrical and exploitative gender relationship is internalized and concretized in socio-political and cultural institutions central to the nation-state and its corpus of discourses, not only in Nigeria but also in other patriarchal societies where the patrilineal order takes ascendancy over the matrilineal.

Within the canon of nationalist discourses fabricated by a dominant phallic order, the representation of women is executed in contradictory and ambiguous perspectives. Women are delineated as embodying central nationalist emblems and symbols. Indeed, they are constituted as mothers of their nations and hence synonymous with nationhood. However, the mother-nation dialectic pales into insignificance as women are erased from the central contours of national life and are marginalized in nationalist discursive existence. They are consigned to the peripheries as the actual operations of the national symbols interpellate them as subalterns (Boehmer 6; Kandiyoti 429). The notion of the nation becomes defined in terms of masculinity as the patrilineal principle takes precedence over the matrilineal in important socio-political, juridical and cultural processes. In this (en)gendered space, gender becomes firmly etched on the agenda of national identity formation strategies in many African societies especially in postcolonial Nigeria.

What is the Sexuality of (Y)Our Nation?

The contradictions in the representation of the nation as a mother, on the one hand, and its masculinization, on the other, raises the spectre of a problematic questions: What is the sex of (y)our nation? Are nations masculine or feminine? Why does the sex of nations matter at all? What are the political and cultural imperatives at play in the naming of a nation? Is it possible to execute a non-sexist representation and identity of nationhood? Why will a nation drive itself into the controversy of dual identity with male and female identity markers? This

paradox encapsulated in the questions above has continuously haunted many African nations. This is particularly where phallic ideological and political imperatives compel the internalization and inscription of women into the nationalist struggle for liberation only to abandon, objectify and subject them to exclusionary practices when emancipation has been achieved.

In India, for instance, as in many parts of the so called "Third World", including Nigeria, women were "drafted" or "conscripted" into the resistance struggle as an inclusionary process of acknowledging their central role in the birthing of these nations. This was important as part of the nationalist ethos because "the struggle for women's emancipation was expediently connected to an anti-colonial, nationalist struggle. After independence was won, militant women found themselves, typically, back in 'normal', subordinate roles and came to recognize the dangers of conflating national liberation with women's liberation" (Katrak 395). The fraudulence and sexist politics which characterized nationalist struggles in many countries sufficiently demonstrated that women were objects of exploitation by their men who found them useful when the national liberation wars raged. However, as soon as the wars were won, nationhood became an exclusive preserve of men and became defined as a male heritage.

This exclusion of women from nationalist ideologies of liberation has found justification in the masculinist idea that men nurture societies or nations by shedding their blood, their sweat and their semen (Gilmore 230). These idealist tropes of nationhood in patriarchal societies like Nigeria have become focal in the very constitution of what authentically passes as the 'ideal' and becomes configured as the very soul of national existence. The men sacrifice their blood in nationalist warfare for the liberation and protection of the integrity of the nation's borders and sovereignty; their sweat for production which is also critical to national growth and their semen for reproduction which also assures the nation of its continuity.

This perspective undermines itself since women are also strategic to the accomplishment of these national roles men exclusively ascribe to themselves.

Women in Nigeria, for instance, form a substantial percentage of agricultural and economic production as farm hands and business entrepreneurs in many communities thus driving the local and national economy. The male semen on its own alone cannot reproduce as it takes the female egg for fertilization to happen. In this regard, it is only consistent with masculinist ideology to claim that men are more crucial to national survival as semen secretion is useless without the egg donation by women which is necessary for reproduction to take place. National survival through reproduction can be seen as a complementary role between the two sexes. It is, therefore, uncharitable for men to assume that they play a more important role in the reproductive process as agents of national sustenance. Women too can make such a valid claim.

Indeed, women in Nigeria and Africa play a very defining role in the construction of national structures which help to consolidate nations as they negotiate their way in the historical process. As Ali Mazrui (2000) argues, women constitute an indispensable socio-cultural category within national economies through their triple custodial role as the custodians of fire, water and the earth. These elements are necessary for national survival and development. Fire, for instance, is a symbol of science and technology. Water is a veritable source of life and the rite of purification; the earth represents the fertility of the womb, of plant and animal life, and it is also the store house of mineral resources which constitute the wealth of nations. And if women are custodians of all these, it follows that they are the custodians of the souls of their nations.

The Nigerian Anthem and Pledge

The sexuality of the Nigerian nation as a postcolonial state constitutes a contestable site in nationalist discourse as demonstrated in the ambiguities and contradictions in the national anthem and pledge. Nigeria won independence from colonial Britain in 1960 through what is largely described as on a platter of gold. This means that political autonomy for Nigeria was achieved without the spilling of blood as it happened in the protracted resistance of nations like

Angola, Algeria, Mozambique, Namibia, and South Africa where freedom has become synonymous with bloodshedding. The nationalist engagement against Britain in Nigeria was through intense negotiations and lobbies which were embodied in the series of constitutional conferences which eventually led to independence. That most of the nationalists in the vanguard of struggle were men can be explained partly in the fact that Nigeria is a patriarchal society where women have always been subordinated to men through time; and partly because colonial ideology and educational policies privileged men and discriminated against women such that the nascent elite was entirely composed of men.

It is against this backdrop that it is significant to observe that the national anthem of Nigeria emphasizes the founding role of men and deifies them in the canon of national formation and screens out women as if they never existed. This eloquent silence has a historical dimension which can be explained in the limited and limiting role apportioned to women at the time. It is also this unfairness of history that has created the gender problem in the anthem and the pledge. For embedded in these national identity markers is an ambivalent but intense gender politics which plays itself out and seeks to celebrate and idealize both masculinity and femininity simultaneously. The national anthem deifies and romanticizes masculinity. It etches men on the canvas of nationalism, praising their sense of patriotism and heroism with an atavistic fixity (Bhabha 1990: 3). The anthem is specifically addressed to men in a martial register:

Arise, O compatriots,
Nigeria's call obey,
To serve our *fatherland*
With love and strength and faith,
The labour of our *heroes* past
Shall never be in vain,

To serve with heart and might
One nation bound in freedom
Peace and unity (my italics).

Besides the fact that the anthem possesses a belligerent spirit for which it has been interrogated as a protrusion of martial culture associated with men, it also gives value to a masculinist principle through its invocation of the male principle. Nigeria is, for instance, masculinised as “our fatherland”. The nationalist fighters are characterized as “our heroes” effectively screening out the heroines of the nationalist struggle. If anything, women are only generically included as mere accessories or appendages to men. This validates the earlier claim by phallic ideology that men are the ones who fight to protect the territorial integrity of nations as if women do not form part of the armed forces of the nation and are not deployed for combat missions. “Fa(r)therland” contrasts radically with “(m)otherland” which is the metaphor for nationhood when it privileges masculinity to constitute nationhood in terms of femininity. The heroes of the nation are those men who in 1960 won national independence from colonial Britain after the nationalist ferment. These include Nnamdi Azikiwe, the first president; Tafawa Balewa, the first prime minister, and the other nationalists like Herbert Macaulay, Ahmadu Bello, Obafemi Awolowo: an all male cast. Interestingly enough, all of these men were from the majority ethnic extractions raising questions about the marginality of ethnic minorities in the configuration of the Nigerian nation right from its invention as an imagined community of heterogeneous peoples.

These are the heroes that deserve celebration for without them Nigeria would have remained shackled to the yoke of British colonialism and imperialism. Women like Margaret Ekpo, Funmilayo Kuti and the Aba women who were also in the vanguard of the anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggle are excluded from the canon of nationalist names. Their contributions as women did not matter because it is the blood, sweat and semen of men that can validly win

national freedom and populate it with citizens. This exclusive masculinist self-presenting of the Nigerian anthem ends on a fraudulent note as women are subordinated to men and effectively erased from the nationalist hall of fame. What this national narrative as encoded in the anthem means effectively is that women have always suffered stereotypification in the hands of men. Colonialism which also represented a male ideology was discriminatory against women by denying them education and a voice and hence access to public space, consigning them to silence and privacy. Independence which also conferred enormous political capital on men was also unjustly used by men as an oppressive and exploitative weapon against women.

But beyond the engendered question, the issue of minority rights and subaltern categories remained largely unaddressed at the onset of Nigerian nationhood. Minority agitations were part of the causes that precipitated the first military intervention in democratic politics in 1966 when the first coup d'état occurred. It is, therefore, little wonder then that these issues have returned to haunt the nation as the minority groups are now in the process of liberating themselves from a more dangerous hegemonic threat, namely internal colonialism by the dominant ethnic nationalities: the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba. The minority question has become pronounced in contemporary Nigerian politics because it is the minorities that produce the wealth of the nation which is used by the majorities to develop their areas. The armed agitations in the Niger Delta today as a reaction against the Nigerian government and international monopoly capital represented by the multinational oil corporations like Shell and Chevron whose degradation of the environment through oil drilling, spillage, gas flaring and the despoliation of farmlands is the centre of the struggle. The reality is that in such circumstances of armed conflict as is currently the case in Nigeria's Niger Delta, it is still women that suffer the indignities and privations.

The ambiguity of the nation's sexuality and the ambivalence in national identity formation in postcolonial Nigeria persists as the national pledge resonates an alternative vision and temperament which privileges femininity. Thus, while the

national anthem is male-centred, the pledge is female-centred. It valorizes a feminine principle and inscribes women into the fabric of national arrival and becoming through the appropriation of the pronominal "her", a specific feminine reflexivity which constructs women as the mothers of the nation thus equating nationhood with womanhood. The pledge announces exultantly:

I pledge
To Nigeria, my country,
To be faithful, loyal and honest,
To serve Nigeria with all my strength
To defend *her* unity
And uphold *her* honour and glory
So help me God (*italics mine*).

The pledge is much less martial than the anthem perhaps emphasizing the supposed feminine virtues of grace, temperance, faithfulness, loyalty and submission especially in the restricted spheres of domesticity and the privacy of matrimonial or conjugal relations in familial spaces. Increasingly though, women groups have started to resist this hegemonic socializing as a patriarchal strategy to subordinate them and cast them in subsidiary roles. Woman is represented in the pledge as the veritable embodiment of nationhood, bearing and nurturing patriotic and loyal citizens. The pledge also is particular about service which is the admirable quality patronizingly associated with women both in the domestic and public domains. The repeated referentiality to Nigeria as *her* is symbolically significant as it suggests the femininization of the nation and the apparent construction of a space for women in mainstream Nigerian national structures.

But the pledge ends with the familiar image of the masculinized Godhead in the hapless and solicitous words, "So help me God" further problematising the gender politics encoded in the national anthem also in the pledge. With this, it is

clear in an ideological sense that masculinity still serves as the true custodian of national institutions and symbols of nationhood, occasionally yielding a limited space to women when it serves its imperial, hegemonic interests. The idea embodied in the pledge is the helplessness of the woman without the dominant presence of the man to ensure national stability and sustenance.

Thus, the Nigerian national anthem and pledge ambiguously orchestrate gender politics which is indelibly invested in their matrices raising fundamental questions about the sexuality of Nigeria as a nation. Related to this is the subtle process of including women in national emblems and symbols with the ultimate political strategy of excluding them in a postcolonial Nigeria. This exclusion through inclusion is what has galvanized the feminist ideology to contest the transcendental and absolutist power of masculinity and the imperial knowledge systems that legitimate its hegemony and domination of women. Women have, therefore, sought to emerge from the archipelagoes of silence and torn the veil of invisibility by contesting silence and invisibility in diverse publics. They also undermine the masculinist nationalist discourse which constructs them in terms of subalternity. As according to Spivak (1995), "the subaltern cannot speak" as a woman, since language has been appropriated from her by a dominant phallic order, Nigerian women through their transgressive actions and interrogatory artistic practices have continued to undermine phallic assumptions especially as inscribed in the anthem and the pledge, among other national symbols. The sexualization of the nation and the nationalization of sexuality as embodied in the Nigerian anthem and pledge have amply demonstrated that gender politics is a necessary aspect of national identity formation.

These national symbols as veritable markers of Nigerian nationhood have yielded themselves to gender discourses which have fore-grounded the ambivalences inherent in the fabrication of nationhood in Africa as in other parts of the world. This has raised significant questions about the very character and identity of nations as aggregations of peoples and cultures in an imaginary

territorial space and as a community. In this regard, gender transcends an individuated treatment as it is always thought to be among human beings as a culturally determined category. Gender also defines nationhood, sometimes in contradictory ways as in the case of Nigeria where the national symbols of the anthem and pledge espouse the causes of masculinity and femininity. Beyond underscoring the relevance of gender to national discourse, this contradictory manifestation of gender politics in the national anthem and pledge of Nigeria illustrates the abiding presence of gender as an analytic category in discourses that affect not only individuals in private and public spaces but also nations as imagined communities and societies.

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James Tar Tsaaior holds a PhD in English from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He has taught in universities in Lagos and Ibadan, Nigeria. His research interests include African and Afro-Diasporic Literatures, Folklore, Gender and Cultural Studies as well as Literary Theory and Criticism. Is emerging area of interest now is Media and Film Studies. He has published in these areas in local and international journals. Dr. Tsaaior is a poet and his collection, *Moments and Monuments* (Free Enterprise, Lagos, 2005) has received critical acclaim and a second volume, *Hearth of the Heart* is due soon. Beginning October, 2011, he will be a Fellow of the African Studies Centre, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom where he will be involved in research on myth and modernity in African literature.

Stella Giovannini

Internalizing the landscape: Jane Urquhart's "A Map of Glass".

Abstract I: This paper tries to show how the structure of the romance and the main themes, loss and search for identity, in *A Map of Glass*, Jane Urquhart's latest novel, are determined by the characters' disposition to internalize their Canadian landscape. In fact, this process of "emplacement" turns out to be the essential way to rediscover oneself and one's family. In particular, in a country like Canada, this is still more comprehensible as its inhabitants are so closely related to a landscape, which, more than history, haunts their imagination and shapes their desire for survival and a sense of personal and national belonging.

Abstract II: Il presente articolo si prefigge di dimostrare come la forma e il contenuto dell'ultimo romanzo *A Map of Glass* di Jane Urquhart siano determinati dalla tendenza dei personaggi a interiorizzare il paesaggio canadese. Il processo attraverso cui l'umanità dell'opera viene assorbita nel contesto naturale risulta essere la via privilegiata per recuperare la propria dimensione spirituale e per rinsaldare i legami familiari che sono alla base della riappropriazione dell'identità soggettiva. In particolare, in una realtà quale quella canadese, tale strategia è ancora più comprensibile dato che i suoi abitanti sono intimamente legati ad un paesaggio unico che, più ancora della storia, dà forma alla loro immaginazione e al desiderio di sopravvivenza e di consapevolezza personale e nazionale.

Jane Urquhart's latest novel, *A Map of Glass*, has received very little attention by literary criticism since its publication in 2005, even if this work reached the final selection for the Regional Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best Book. Apart from some interesting reviews on daily newspapers such as *The Independent*

and *The Guardian*, only very few scholars, among them Susan Moore, have devoted their attention to this book. In particular, Susan Moore has focused on the themes of loss and place in the text hoping that her examination could lead individuals to question the consequences of pollution and further damages against nature. It is interesting to notice that Moore is an expert of geographic location and that her article was published in *The Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* (Moore 2008), rather than in a literary journal. This testifies not only to the wide-ranging appreciation Urquhart enjoys beyond the field of literary criticism, but also to the central role the notion of place holds in her fiction.

As regards critical reception, Urquhart has often been praised for her complex narrative structures related to the theme of the supernatural and for her meticulous attention to time and space. This last coordinate in particular, space, dominates her whole narrative production, as is often the case in postcolonial literatures where the dimension of time is less relevant than that of place. In young countries like Canada this phenomenon is even more important, since the environment is the main source of identity for the inhabitants, although they still show an ambivalent attitude towards it. Space is seen, in fact, as both a fascinating and menacing element, towards which Canadians develop a complex love/hate relationship which leads to what Margaret Atwood aptly described as "paranoid schizophrenia". (Atwood 1972). Some reviewers have occasionally argued that Urquhart generally values setting more than characterization and plot in her narratives: Anne Compton, for instance, points out that it is really the landscape which creates stories in her fiction. Referring, in particular to *The Whirlpool*, *Changing Heaven* and *Away*, Compton asserts that "Her three fictions, constitute, to use Frye's title, 'a secular scripture', an interconnection of body of stories, containing an integrated vision of the human relation to landscape" (Compton 2005). This evaluation can be applied to *A Map of Glass* as well, since both the structure and the main themes in the novel

are determined by Urquhart's tendency to internalize the landscape, whose untamable nature is the real subject.

As regard the structure of the text, it is useful to refer to Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* to detect the model of invention used, that is, romance. This is, in fact, the most effective structure Urquhart could use to show the complex and ambiguous relationship that links the individual to his/her Canadian mother land (Frye 1976). Thanks to its greater flexibility in representing themes and creating the plot, romance is apt to expose the great capacity Canadian nature has to stir the imagination and its excessive claims upon the lives of those living in it. Since nature often absorbs their stories, the inhabitants' survival depends upon THE telling of their personal and collective narratives. For this reason, literary reviewers have defined Urquhart's work as characterized by remarkable ecological sensitivity. By releasing the characters' voice through a process of internalization of the landscape, the author also deconstructs the idea that her country's mythology depends upon an extensive report of official history, thereby celebrating national culture through minor stories.

As far as the structure of *A Map Of Glass* is concerned, the quest pattern of the romance, dominates and develops as the protagonists descend into the idealized and extraordinary world of nature. This journey into the darkest side of reality is perilous and calls for a crucial struggle which ultimately leads to an enlightening discovery about oneself and society. In this sense, Andrew's case is exemplary: his death opens the book and is the result of his desperate dive into nature. The protagonist, a man in an advanced stage of Alzheimer's disease, is presented as wandering across an uninhabited island in Southern Ontario, overwhelmed by a feeling of terror in the midst of an environment connoted by deep snow, shining sun and a wonderful forest. Despite the beauty of the surroundings, the man has no memory and no words for the familiar landscape and is driven unconsciously to the edge of a frozen river where, detaching a scrap of humanity from his past, he realizes that his whole life has been a total failure. Shortly before dying, he murmurs, in fact "I have lost everything"

(Urquhart 2005: 5). Andrew's death represents the destiny expected and reserved to some characters in romances: they must die after having accomplished their spiritual pilgrimage in order to experience in that a final act of self-knowledge.

The story of this character's and his family's existence is introduced and commented upon extensively only in the second section of the book entitled "The Bog Commissioners", where his past is closely related to the figures of his ancestors. In this central part of *A Map of Glass* the reader finds the description of the first pioneers, Andrew's relatives, who settled in Timber Island, the same place where Andrew dies in the present-day setting. Urquhart is fascinated by the Canadian landscape and the impact the first settlers had on the land, decimating forests and building towns. She, thus, inserts the ancestors' story within Andrew's story to justify his final awareness about himself (Zettel 1991). The man deprived himself and those interested in him of any true and satisfying relationship and thus sentenced himself to perpetual sorrow and loneliness. In particular, a metaphoric sign of his emotional aridity is his job: he is a historical geographer, accustomed to analyzing nature more than experiencing it. A clear sign of his participation in the land emerges only just before his death, at the end of his existential search for meaning: as he orientates himself through nature the whole unnamed world becomes so beautiful to him that he is aware he has left behind vast, unremembered territories. The dangerous voyage into nature and one's personal past emerges thus as a genuine appreciation of reality which is absorbed inside the land. After uttering a few words, Andrew, in fact, asserts that the "language and the knowledge of a cherished place re-enter his consciousness" (Urquhart 2005: 4-5).

The rite of passage marked by the descent towards a final resurrection can be also found in association with the character of Sylvia. She is the protagonist of the first and last sections of the novel ("The Revelations" and "A Map of Glass") and, indirectly, in the central part "The Bog-Commissioners", as she is the person who gives Jerome, the artist-photographer, Andrew's journals containing a

fictionalized account of his family, which goes back four generations to the genesis of his great-great-grandfather's timber empire on Timber Lake. Her constant presence in each section of *A Map of Glass* is due to the fact that her main objective at present is to re-create Andrew's past, with whom she had an adulterous relationship. After reading of her former lover's death in the newspaper, the woman leaves Prince Edward County for Toronto in search of Jerome, the young artist who found Andrew's body. Sylvia suffers from an Asperger's-like syndrome that forces her to feel more comfortable with known objects and places than with people. The trip from her native county to a huge city like Toronto is a very hard trial for a human being who is almost incapable of moving to new locations and talking to others. She knows, however, that she must battle against this autism in order to learn the language necessary to remember her dead lover Andrew. Daughter of a small-town doctor, Sylvia is married to Malcom, her father's successor, and the only male presence she has lived with, apart from her parents. The relationship to Andrew is so important to her because she had always been written off as disabled until she starts this secret intimate affair. It is precisely love that sets the protagonist free and encourages her to rebel against the suffocating daily experience of life with Malcom and to enter the idealized territory of risk. As in *Changing Heaven*, romantic love is the objective correlative for passion and vitality, the privileged way out of the orderly ordinariness of the world rejected by the character of Ann Frear and symbolized in her process of ascent to the heights. During their relationship, Andrew is always absent, "away" to use one of Urquhart's favorite adjectives, in that he has always refused to open up with Sylvia. Thus, he becomes permanently and eternally lovable, being the object of her unfulfilled desire. The only way for Sylvia to bridge this distance is to invent and convey the stories from her lover's past as narratives that enable her to re-create her longing for Andrew.

The third protagonist in *A Map of Glass* is Jerome; his dangerous journey is essentially a dive into his personal past in order to get rid of some spiritual ghosts

such as his father's. Again, as in Sylvia's case, the character needs to open up in order to communicate his fears and frailties which are the result of a very negative relationship with his father. This struggle for re-appropriation of one's own past results in the character's successful psychological effort to convey his subjective emotions and needs to other people. At the beginning of the story, in the section "The Revelations", the man is still reticent in that he refuses to discuss his own painful family heritage – an alcoholic father and a brutalized mother – with his lover Mira. Only in the very last pages, in the final section "A Map of Glass", he is able to reveal the miserable conditions in which he lived during his childhood. During that time, everything "was all eaten away" by his father's addiction, 'which was so huge a part' of his mother's life that any other aspect "paled in comparison" (Urquhart 2005: 362). The final *anagnorisis* consists in the protagonist's realization that existential survival only arises out of a genuine contact among human beings and is symbolized by Mira and Jerome's embrace in the text. When one is willing to show the deepest shortcomings and imperfections, even the animals surrounding the scene of reconciliation participate in this process of inward resurrection, as witnessed by Jerome's cat, Swimmer, in the following passage:

Mira wrestled her way back into his embrace and held on to him with a force she wouldn't have thought possible in the past, held on to him while he cried like a broken child. When it was over, they both fell asleep sitting upright on the couch, their heads touching. Swimmer, who had been hidden behind the refrigerator when he saw that Jerome was angry, joined them once he was certain all was safe, walked around Jerome's lap three times in a circle, then settled in and went to sleep as well (Urquhart 2005: 363).

Jerome manages to reach this stage of spiritual awareness because of his link with nature, objectified both by his job and his contact with Sylvia. He is, first of

all, an artistic photographer, whose main attention focuses on the remote Timber Island and its changeable and inconstant elements and natural phenomena like the grandeur of the Canadian wilderness, the harshness of the winters, and the relief of the thaw. In addition to this, it is the bond with a historical geographer, Sylvia, his lover, which allows him to retrieve his past, which is so closely intertwined with Andrew's land and history.

Framed inside the structure of the romance, the reader can find the two main themes in *A Map of Glass*: the loss of and the search for identity, which are also intimately connected with the representation of the relationship between human beings and nature. The former motif is closely related to the latter, since it is a consequence of this journey into the characters' personal and collective past through the landscape. In the novel all three protagonists try to retrieve their self-consciousness through the re-appropriation of both their present and past dimensions. Andrew, whose death dominates the entire plot, has devoted all his life to studying the natural environment that characterized his family life. He has focused all his main activities and emotional efforts to map his country, detailing the abandoned house, the old fences, and the remains of previous settlers. Remarkably amazed by the beauty of the surrounding panorama, just before dying, the man lets himself go and accepts to be absorbed physically by nature. Commenting upon this stage in Andrew's personal progress, the narrator points out the undisputed superiority of the place over human beings, a supremacy that, despite its unquestioned pre-eminence, enables mankind to re-activate the working of memory leading to awareness. Intrigued, as usual, by her country's landscape, in her very lyrical style, Urquhart describes Andrew's last moments of life, immediately before the final statement about his loss of everything, with the following words:

He begins once again to move forward. Often he bumps against trees, but this does not worry him because he knows they are meant to be there, and will remain after he has passed by them. Like an animal, he

is stepping by instinct through the trees, branch by branch, the smell of the destination on the edge of his consciousness. While he is among pines, an image of an enormous raft made of the word *glass*, which in turn, connects again, for just an instant, with the word *ballroom*. In this daydream there are men with poles standing on the raft's surface. Sometimes they are dancing. Sometimes they are kneeling, praying (Urquhart 2005: 3).

Andrew's retrieved identity is then witnessed by the writing of his journal in which he tells the history of Ontario by introducing the narrative of his forebears. The central section, "The Bog Commissioners", represents the 19th-century settlers' life in Upper Canada, an existence dominated by the figure of the patriarch Joseph Woodman, Andrew's great-great-grandfather. This man, a ferocious shipbuilder who left England to move to Canada after his unsuccessful initial plan to drain the Irish bogs, is the most accomplished exemplary of the so-called "temper dominated by androcracy" to use Riane Eisler's definition, that is, by a destructive power linked to pseudovalues like war, command, exploitation and hierarchy (Eisler 1987).

The story of Andrew's ancestors focuses then on its real core, Joseph's two children: the lame, but bright-minded, Annabelle who seems interested only in painting shipwrecks, and Branwell, a fresco artist, who completely refuses his family life and business. The man's denial of his heritage is due to the fact that it is modeled upon greedy intentions, the repression of emotions and the abuse of people and the landscape. In fact, Branwell disapproved of his father because he tried to prevent him from marrying his love Marie and even sent him to Europe for a long time. In the present, all that is left of the Woodsman family are two geographical landmarks: Timber Island and a hotel buried under the sand, which had been run by Marie and Branwell and was the couple's dream of freedom and emancipation from the patriarch Joseph. The dynasty of this timber yard empire is sentenced to failure because of the frailty of material

success and the powerful changes the lust for money can wreak. The Woodsmans, both as 19th-century artists and businessmen have irremediably scarred the landscape. Consequently the loss of money and people is but the logical result of this wicked behavior.

With reference to Sylvia, the search for identity is triggered by her relationship with Andrew, the historical geographer. In order not to lose her dead lover completely, she passes down his journals to Jerome and in the process goes through her whole existence. The process of memory applied to Andrew's narrative intersects the woman's life and simultaneously reveals that she has always been obsessed with the idea of stability connected essentially to the knowledge of places and objects. She is described as someone who hates changes and has lived, for this reason in the same place, doing the usual daily activities without any kind of emotional participation in them. In fact she is used to cataloguing every item in her family home and shows more intense relationships with china horses than with her husband, the patriarch physician who agreed to take her off her weary parents' hands. Andrew and a blind friend, for whom Sylvia makes tactile maps, are the only individuals who have ever treated her like a real and complete person. The man, in particular, is an overwhelming presence in her life since he enabled her to re-discover the darkest and most genuine sides of her being, that is, feelings and physical sensations. The reunion between her mind and body is successful only through sex with Andrew who becomes the craftsman of her new satisfying human existence. The narrator introduces this mutual union as essential and very simple, by using these words:

Andrew's voice, telling her such things, over and over, was inside her head almost all the time now. In the past she leaned toward his whisper, had once or twice heard him sing, and then, near the end, had heard the terrible noise of his weeping. A recording of the sounds he had made was always playing in her mind, but she was losing the

shape of his face, the look of his legs and arms and hands, the way his body occupied a chair, or moved across a room toward the place where she stood, as she had always stood each time, waiting for him to touch her. She had never told Andrew how touch, until him, had been a catastrophe for her, how heaving leapt over the hurdle of touch, he would then become a part of her, – without him ever being aware of this – how the idea of him would be like something she was carrying with her, like an animal, or baby or a schoolbag, or maybe something as simple and essential as this purse that rested on the passenger seat of the moving car (Urquhart 2005: 38).

In the first section of the novel, the images used by the narrator to introduce Sylvia's personality testify to the repression of her instincts and deepest feelings because of the stifling environment and family. For this reason the process of opening up to the lover was really the only strategy for survival she has. Digging into her memory, the woman associates a bleeding and half-dead robin to herself. This reference is the most accurate means to allude to Sylvia's entrapment and consequent sorrow and inward loss. Remembering her favorite fairy tales, the protagonist highlights the one related to the robin where cruelty and wanton abuse deface the surrounding beautiful landscape:

She had begun to turn the pages of the book. Oh the berries and the feathers and the flowers – pure delight – and yet, and yet something was terribly wrong. The first decal portrayed a beautiful robin, his wings limp, falling back toward the earth because an arrow had pierced his side, producing one bright bead of blood (Urquhart 2005: 56-57).

Once settled in the hotel in Toronto, near Jerome's house, Sylvia begins the voyage into her consciousness and describes her predominating sense of fear through the images of the wind and the mirror. She has always been afraid of

the wind as this natural element produces change and transformations and she is terrified with any notion of the unexpected. Only manifestations of stability, even when artificial and an invention of human rationality, have the power to make her feel at ease in the world:

When she was a child, there had been – apart from other people – two things that particularly separated her from calmness: wind in a room and outdoor mirrors. She could still call up the fear she had left when, one morning in June, she had walked into the dining room to discover the sheer curtains moving like sleeves toward her, and a bouquet of flowers that had been dead and still the previous day bending and shaking in the breeze that entered through the open window. She had become accustomed to the fact that the air moved when she was outside, but she believed the interior of the house was the realm of stillness, so that when she became aware of the wind in the room it seemed to her that something alien and disturbing had begun to animate all that she had relied on to be quiet and in place (Urquhart 2005: 89-90).

It is interesting to notice that in this passage the character's main feature is emphasized through the image of a basic natural element such as the wind and, that, at the very end of the quotation, the concept of quietness is associated to that of place, in order, again, to show the indissoluble bond between them.

The second troubling object in Sylvia's life is the presence of mirrors that encroach on her private territory, her soul, while she would like to shut everything else out. Refusing even to look at them, she reveals her complete inability to accept the reality around her and the inseparable link between humanity and society:

But when she had passed by a row of mirrors and had seen herself reflected in them – herself drenched in sunshine with the hem of her dress moving, grass under her shoes, barn and trees, hills and clouds behind her – she had begun to cry and had not stopped crying until her father was forced to take her home. When questioned, all she could say was that nothing was where it should be. What she had meant, she realized much later, was that mirrors had shown her that there was no controlling what might enter the frame of experience, that the whole world might bully its way into a quiet interior, and that there would be no way of keeping it out (Urquhart 2005: 91).

Sylvia's tendency to detach herself from any inexplicable contingency also emerges in relation to the most important part of our body, our face, whose changeable expressions challenge her autistic need to entrap reality into rational and clear labels. The following extract immediately shows this absolute denial of any form of unpredictable life:

“When I was small”, she said, “I distrusted the human face and all the changes of expression that the human face invariably brought with it. Animals were somehow less threatening, though I suppose it is possible to read a change of mood or disposition in the face of an animal, particularly if one looks directly into its eyes” (Urquhart 2005: 109).

On the contrary, the most revealing image of the protagonist's effort to transfix the world outside to find a little sense of peace and permanence, and thus, of security, refers to the china horses. Their description signals that they are the most remarkable symbol of stability since they have the power to erase all the transient categories through which humanity shapes experience, that is, time and space. Any form of creation itself is refused and the following passage contains the most perfect triumph of death over life:

There was no time at all in the brown pasture, just weather and changing light. The four horses were grouped together because there was a calm love that existed among them, with no variation in it: it neither gained nor faltered in intensity. That and the fact that as long as they were grouped together there could be no arrivals, no departures, no accidents. The horses could prevent things from happening by standing close to one another without ever touching. Touch, Sylvia knew, caused fracture, and horses should never, never fracture. Horses had to be shot if anything about them was broken. Her father had told her that. Her mother, in the story, had shot the one horse, and still, while Sylvia slept, the weather of the clock ticked on and the storms boomed out into the night, and then continued to mark the mornings when she was awake, and when she was at school while school was still a part of her life. These were the kind of things she liked to think about at the time that Malcom first came into her life: unnamed china horses (Urquhart 2005: 86-87).

Jerome's search for identity is possible thanks to his bond with Sylvia, the woman, whose very name unveils her link with nature. After having received and absorbed Andrew's heritage through his journals, the artist feels that something new has been happening inside his soul. The process of memory is now ready to work and to turn back to the most sorrowful part of Jerome's life, his childhood. In the midst of this time there is the disquieting figure of the patriarch father whose violent and destructive behavior irremediably ruined his whole family. From that time on, he has decided to devote himself exclusively to instability because this is the main cipher of his experience. Thus, he became a photographer interested only in documenting the transience in nature which he associated with the heavy sinking snow and the dripping icicles of the season. As the narrator highlights at the beginning of "The Revelations", Jerome

"considered himself instead a sort of chronicler. He wanted to document a series of natural environments changed by the moods of the long winter and wanted to mark the moment of metamorphosis, when something changed from what it had been in the past" (Urquhart 2005: 11). This refusal of the past corresponds to his personal denial of his family life leading him to search for continuous changes everywhere in order to survive. Jerome's journey from transience to stability is completely different from Sylvia's, which goes, instead, from permanence to risk because of her different family life. By listening to and absorbing Sylvia and Andrew's experiences, the photographer comes to reveal his own personal doleful past and therefore he frees himself of its darkest sides. In this way a childhood marked by fear and sense of guilt emerges, together with the memory of a mother, deprived of any kind of satisfaction and even of her own past:

He had told Mira about the nights he had spent listening to his father roam the apartment like an angry nocturnal beast, the sounds of bottles breaking, his father collapsing on the cold tile of the bathroom floor, the smell of urine and vomit.... "There was never past for her (Jerome's mother)", he said (Urquhart 2005: 362).

These revelations on Jerome's life eventually lead to his final resurrection, witnessed in the very last pages of the novel when the artist is able to remember his father and feel pity for him, asserting that the cause of his existential failure may have been only his huge ambition:

He leaned back to allow the memory to take shape and could hear the sound of his father's voice reading a story about a toy canoe launched at the head of Lake Superior, not far from where they had lived in the north....What had happened then? What had happened once this tiny object reached the desired destination? It could only have been

overwhelmed, Jerome decide, swallowed up – destroyed, in fact – by the enormity of its own wishes (Urquhart 2005: 370-371).

As this paper has tried to demonstrate, the structure of the romance and the main themes, loss and search for identity, in *A Map of Glass* are determined by the characters' disposition to internalize their Canadian landscape. In the last section of the novel, Andrew himself clearly asserts this intrinsic inclination, recurrent in Urquhart's fiction, when he discovers people's identity in their place of origin. The process of "emplacement" thus turns out to be the essential way to come back to ourselves and our family. In a country like Canada, this is still more comprehensible since its inhabitants are so closely related to the landscape, which, more than history, haunts their imagination and shapes their desire for survival and their sense of personal and national belonging. For this reason, the best means to bring this analysis to completion is the narrator's comment upon the internalization of the landscape through Andrew and Sylvia's voice:

"Andrew always said that there were people who were emplaced". Sylvia was standing now, speaking to Jerome's back....."It seems that those who are emplaced are made that way by generations of their people remaining in the same locations", she continued, "eating food grown from the same plot of earth, burying their dead nearby, passing useful objects down from father to son, mother to daughter. He (Andrew) said that I was like that to such a degree, I was almost an anthropological discovery. Or perhaps an archeological discovery; something more or less preserved, more or less intact. I was so emplaced, you see, that it was an adventure – almost an act of heroism – for me to leave the County..... He (Andrew) also told me that there was always a mark left on a landscape by anyone who entered

it. Even if it is just a trace – all but invisible – it is there for those willing to look hard enough.” (Urquhart 2005: 325-326)

Urquhart seems to say directly to each one of us that reality can be apprehended only through a re-appropriation of one's own landscape.

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Stella Giovannini è docente di ruolo di lingua e letteratura inglese presso il liceo classico “Dante Alighieri” di Ravenna (Italy), Dottore di ricerca in letterature e culture dei paesi di lingua inglese, ha pubblicato vari saggi e articoli su Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence, Susanna Moodie, sulla linguistica americana (Noah Webster) e sulla specificità dell'inglese canadese. Nel 2000 ha pubblicato la monografia *Spazi dell'Altrove: La Narrativa Canadese di Margaret Laurence*, per la casa editrice Armando.

Rodwell Makombe

Cultural identity and the transnation in Mokae and Ndlela's stories.

Abstract I: Following the emergence of migrant communities and diasporic cultures, it has become increasingly difficult to think about culture and cultural identity as limited to the boundaries of the nation state. In fact some cultural theorists have long predicted the death of the nation state. This paper seeks to deconstruct the concept of the nation state as a signifier of cultural identity- a concept which was constructed during and in the aftermath of political decolonisation in the postcolonial world in general and post-apartheid South Africa in particular. It thus advocates freedom from national borders and the formation of transnations and transcultures. The study uses insights from Phil Ndlela and Gomolemo Mokae's stories published in the anthology *At the rendezvous of victory and other stories* (1999); stories that capture the "immigrant problem" and the politics of cultural identity in post apartheid South Africa.

Abstract II: L'emergere di comunità e culture migranti mette in crisi il modello essenzialista della identità culturale vista come limitata e definita dai confini degli stati nazionali. Questo articolo si pone come obiettivo di discutere e decostruire l'utopia essenzialista delle identità nazionali costituite dopo la fine della colonizzazione nel mondo post-coloniale in genere e in modo particolare nel Sud Africa del post-apartheid. Si auspica che il concetto di identità venga liberato dalla nozione di confine nazionale per dare spazio a transnazioni e transculture. Lo studio si basa sulle storie di Ndela e Mokae che, pubblicate nell'antologia *At the rendezvous of victory and other stories* (1999), hanno icasticamente presentato il "problema dell'immigrato" nel Sud Africa del post-apartheid e nel resto del mondo post-coloniale.

This paper seeks to investigate the representation of cultural identity in the stories of two South African writers, Gomolemo Mokae and Phil Ndlela. The short narratives, "Milk and honey galore, honey!" and "A question of identity" respectively appear in an anthology entitled *At the rendezvous of victory and Other stories* compiled by Andries Walter Oliphant (1999). Both narratives celebrate and interrogate the dawn of South African independence and the postcolonial cultural challenges facing post-apartheid South African society (Oliphant 1999: 7). In this paper, I intend to challenge and deconstruct 'essentialised' national identities constructed during and in the aftermath of national liberation in the postcolonial world in general and post-apartheid South Africa in particular.

Gomolemo Mokae's story projects post-apartheid South African society as multicultural. The most pertinent question raised in this story is how post-apartheid South Africa as a microcosm of a cosmopolitan community negotiates and translates the possibilities of co-existing with aliens or foreigners that have invaded its national borders. Is it possible, given the multiple cultural groups residing in South Africa today, to conceive cultural identity as confined within specific national boundaries? Who is the genuine South African citizen? Is it someone born within the confines of South Africa's national borders, whose ancestors lived within the present geographical limits or one who owns an identity document that specifies South Africa as his/her country of birth? Using national identity as a criterion of categorizing people and ascribing identity is problematic in present day South Africa; massive movements of people from its neighboring countries, went to work on the Rand in the second half of the 20th century and, more recently, the influx of migrants from politically troubled African countries continues to arrive. In Mokae's story Themba Mlotshwa, the protagonist, is a foreigner who has all along pretended to be a South African citizen, and has been denigrating and stereotyping other immigrants.

He is originally from Lesotho, has lived in South Africa for seven years and has never gone back to his home country (not even temporarily) where he left a wife and seven children. His "real" Sotho name is Tsepo Moloto but when he

crosses the South African border, he adopts a new name, Themba Mlotshwa. The name strategically aligns him with the Zulu nation of South Africa and thus gives him a sense of security in his newly-found home. However, the abandoned wife and children remind us of the consequences of migration on the family unit. In this case, while migration has liberated the individual (Themba), it has divided the family. From the beginning of the story, Themba disguises as a South African citizen. It is only after the arrival of his wife that his past is exposed. Themba's dissolution of his Sotho identity encapsulates the predicament of the diasporic citizen whose new transnational cultural identity is both "melancholic and convivial" (Ashcroft 2009: 16). Living in a foreign land is melancholic in the sense that it exposes him to an alien culture that is hostile and exclusive, but it is also convivial in that it opens up new life opportunities for him.

The name "Themba" which literally means "hope" holds the promise of happiness in the diasporic space. This happiness is, however, disrupted and perhaps transformed into melancholy by the arrival of police Chief Krappies Van Wyk accompanied by Themba's long abandoned wife. Themba is thus entrapped in a shifty cultural space akin to Homi Bhabha (1994)'s interstitial space, a space that promises happiness and melancholy, gain and loss. As Bhabha (1994: 5) puts it, "the interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy". The interstitial passage suggested by Bhabha is evident in the thin line of demarcation between the two names "Tsepo Moloto" and "Themba Mlotshwa". This subtle name-change dramatizes the hybrid nature of identity in the transnation and makes it difficult for us to conceptualize it in Manichean terms. Themba maintains his initials "T M" initials even after crossing the national border. This implies that cultures may overlap and intermingle, but one's cultural roots are never completely lost. Paul Gilroy (in Georgiou and Silverstone, 2007: 30) argues that "diasporic identity is about roots as much as it is about routes in the diasporic journey". Cultural identity draws from the past (roots) and the present (routes) to move into the future. In the new global order, which Appadurai (in Croucher 2009) characterized as post-

national, the nation is not the sole signifier of identity because it is intricately connected to other nations in a global network. Bill Ashcroft defines the transnation as “a complex of mobility and multiplicity that supersedes both ‘nation’ and ‘state’.” (2009: 14). Applied to Themba’s case, cultural identity is not only located in his past (Tsepo Moloto) but also in his present (Themba Mlotshwa).

Mokae’s story suggests that national boundaries can be successfully transcended and new “transnational” identities can be formulated just as Themba/Tsepo has done. Considering the way Themba hates immigrants, it is possible that he tries to distance himself from his own past. Apart from having acquired a new name, Themba has strategically imbibed South African cultural values and a kind of strategic ‘patriotism.’ To consolidate his own precarious position, he calls other illegal immigrants “unpatriotic Africans who left their independent countries” only to deprive South African citizens of job opportunities.

South Africa is the “milk and honey” of Mokae’s story title. It reminds us of Canaan, the biblical Land of promise. Ibrahim Patel’s restaurant, where people from different parts of the continent converge and dine together, epitomizes the transnation in that it brings together a variety of cultural formations and symbolizes the ideal Canaan of Africa. Being an Indian business man, Patel is perhaps a neutral intermediary of the heterogeneous African tastes (symbolic of cultural differences) that constitute cultural and a political rendezvous of people from a variety of cultures. The cultural composition of the restaurant and the wide range of cultural tastes it satisfies underscore the impossibility of a cultural politics that views the nation as “the only or the primary source of cultural and political belonging” (Croucher 2009: 77). In other words, South Africa is no longer a nation in the narrow sense of a group of people who share the same history, culture, traditions etc. It is a flexible entity, negotiating the imperatives of what Appadurai characterized as the post-national global order which is “more fluid, more ad hoc, more provisional, less coherent, less organized and simply less

implicated in the comparative advantages of the nation state" (Croucher 2009: 82).

The fact that the restaurant is owned and managed by Ibrahim Patel (an Indian) implies the "transnationality" of South Africa's cultural economy. In spite of his foreign status, Ibrahim Patel has taken the responsibility of serving an African diet. The "OAU", Ibrahim Patel's restaurant, reminds us of the Organization of African Unity (now AU), a political body that sought to bring together culturally diverse African countries. This restaurant is thus symbolic of the vast multiculturalism of the African continent. One of the characters in the story, the Nigerian Chief Onigbinde, points out that African cultures interact harmoniously in spite of many differences; for example, South Africans use Nigerian regalia for their traditional ceremonies. It is for this cultural intermixing that different cultural groups in Africa remain inextricably indebted to one another.

While Themba tends to essentialise identity by limiting the taxonomy of "genuine South African" to the borders of nationality, Chief Onigbinde, the Nigerian of Mokae's story, points out that Africans are brothers, hence the boundaries of the nation state are not rigid; they are porous, flexible and can always be transcended. The crux of the argument is that Africans have shared a lot of cultural values over the centuries and, therefore, there are more similarities than differences between them. Africa's cultural diversity is reflected in cultural symbols, the "kaleidoscope of traditional dress" and the "languages [that are] as varied as the diners' different tastes in dishes" (Mokae 1999: 208).

The major trope of Mokae's narrative is that people are usually divided on emotional grounds (for example, xenophobia in the case of South Africa) rather than on the basis of concrete cultural differences. Themba's advocacy for the repatriation of foreigners is thus more emotional than rational because extremely contradictory. When the Nigerian chief speaks about the traditional dress that South Africans adopted from Nigeria, we are told that Themba "shrivel[ed] in his kaftan" and wished "he had his traditional weapon on him" so he could "wipe the smirks off the faces of the unwelcome interlopers" (Mokae

1999: 211). Themba's intense phobia is founded on traditional stereotypes and generational falsehoods inculcated in his imagined national identity. The immigrants from different countries are portrayed in a stereotypical cast. Nigerians are represented as drug lords, potential cheats and consumerists as implied in the chief's "regal, flowering robes" and the "gold tooth" (Mokae 1999: 207). These stereotypes confine Themba to a binary world that classifies everyone from Nigeria as a potential drug lord. Although this position is adopted as a survival strategy, it "becomes the basis of exclusion through the rhetoric of verisimilitude and authenticity that asserts what is 'real' and 'true.'" (Childs & Williams 1997: 159). This mindset, which is a narrow version of what Spivak (1990) calls strategic essentialism (picking up the universal that will give you the power to fight the other side), explains his inclination to engage in xenophobic violence at the slightest opportunity.

Another character of the book, Dr. Looksmart Banda, a Malawian herbalist is projected as a counterfeit doctor who speaks "broken English" perhaps because he is uneducated. He is dark in complexion with "sparkling white teeth" (Mokae 1999: 209). This description is crafted with the intention of excluding him from the South African nation because such an appearance cannot be South African. However, the Malawian correctly points out that South Africa and Malawi are culturally intertwined because of the traditional medical help that South Africans get from Malawian practitioners. In that sense, there is actually a symbiotic relationship between the two countries hence the need for cultural integration rather than "nationalistic" isolation.

While Gomolemo Mokae acknowledges the diverse cultural formations within the South African transnation and sees the possibility of multicultural integration, Phil Ndlela (1999) chooses to present culture, through the narrator of his story, as something that can be defended and kept in a state of purity. His narrative interrogates "the question of identity" from a single, narratorial perspective. The title, "A question of identity" is overtly loud, posturing as the writer's reading of his own story.

The narrator of Ndlela's story is locked up in an essentialised cultural apartment where being South African assumes a particular ethnocentric meaning. Unfortunately, he expects all South Africans, even those in the diaspora (America) to partner him in that static cultural apartment. Ndlela's story is about a young South African man who has just arrived in New York for his studies at a Graduate school. Having failed to negotiate what he perceives as a wide cultural gap between his Xhosa culture and American culture, he adopts an essentialist attitude that castigates everything that differs from his cultural worldview. He expects fellow Africans in America, his "brothers and sisters" (Ndlela 1999: 211) as he puts it, to adhere to "African culture". What he does not realize, of course, is that the Africans he refers to as his 'brothers and sisters' have cultures that are obviously different from his because Africa, as we have seen in Gomolemo Mokae's story, is a heterogeneous continent. Africans have different life experiences that shape their cultures. A common ground can only be reached through negotiation rather than prescription.

America, as a microcosm of the diasporic space like post-apartheid South Africa, is indeed "complex and confusing" (Ndlela 1999: 212) for the narrator because he is impervious to transcultural influences. He views all Africans stereotypically, as a monolithic mass, thus revealing his essentialist view of culture. The narrator is indeed "naïve and dumb" (Ndlela 1999: 212) because he has isolated himself only to blame everyone and everything around him. His predicament is that he fails to transcend the boundaries of his "national culture": he has crossed borders physically but he is still psychologically bound to a static, perhaps "tribal" world.

The narrator has a tendency, like Themba, to stereotype those that do not ascribe to his idea of what it means to be African. Standing aloof on a cultural pedestal like Chinua Achebe's Odili in *A Man of the People* (1989, 1966), he goes on to launch a tirade against Professor Makapela, a successful South African intellectual whom he portrays as culturally lost. His unsubstantiated allegations against Professor Makapela reverberate back to him, exposing his purism and self righteousness. He characterizes Professor Makapela as

“uprooted and assimilated” (Ndlela 1999: 216) yet he too is culturally dislocated: for all his claims to cultural authenticity, he only has his command of the Xhosa language to show for it.

His cultural disposition, particularly his unmistakable Judeo-Christian sensibility, shows that he is similarly acculturated; his own people keep feeding him Christian tracts (Psalms) as if there is nothing in his own culture to sustain him in America. South African traditional beer may not be primitive as Professor Makapela puts it, but the fact that it is South African does not necessarily make it healthy, but American beer is not better either, healthwise. That the “standard of South African education is disgustingly low” (Ndlela 1999: 217) as Professor Makapela puts it, may be a mere historical fact in some cases, given the ravages that apartheid brought about in Bantu Education: saying that, does not necessarily mean one is not South African enough.

The narrator's essentialised view of culture and sense of patriotism is narrow and exclusive. While he seeks to demonize Professor Makapela, like Themba who denigrates fellow immigrants, the narrator does not realize that he is no different. When he looks at Professor Makapela through the mirror of his judgmental eyes, what he sees is actually his own image. He calls Professor Makapela a “balding bastard” and “country bumpkin” (Ndlela 1999: 216). Yet those very labels are equally appropriate for him. Professor Makapela may be a “country bumpkin” because he has forsaken the culture of his people, but then the narrator is equally so because he refuses to adjust to a new cultural setting.

Subscribing to a culture does not mean singing the anthem of that culture all the time, though knowing the anthem may be necessary in some instances. Professor Makapela used to be proud of South Africa, but he is not anymore because of the high crime rates in the country. While the book he has written on South Africa reflects an outsider's perspective, writing such a book does not render him “un-South African” either. Edward Said (in Ashcroft, 2009:19) represents exile as an elevated position “from which truth can be spoken to power”. This is perhaps the advantage that Professor Makapela utilizes in writing a book that tackles “head on” the corruption and violence in post-apartheid

South Africa. The fact that Professor Makapela has portraits of Ronald Reagan and George Bush in his house instead of Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo should not make the narrator question "is this man a genuine black South African or an impostor?" (Ndlela 1999: 216). What is a genuine black South African in the first place - that is the question.

Although the narrator seeks to project the Professor as culturally rootless, it is apparent that his perception of culture is myopic. Like Themba in Mokae's story, he sees culture as something that can be preserved in a state of purity. He does not seem to appreciate the fact that Professor Makapela has learnt and lived in America for so long that he cannot be expected to remain untouched by cultural contact. His narrow view of culture is evident when he addresses Professor Makapela's children, Neo and Thabisa, in Xhosa: when they respond in English, he labels them as culturally lost. The two girls encapsulate the complexity of diasporic identity. While Neo embodies the "new" values of American society as her name implies, Thabisa (the person who brings happiness), symbolizes the freedom and happiness associated with exile.

Neo and Thabisa cannot be portrayed as cultural renegades because for all that the narrator thinks they lost, they also gained something new in the American cultural milieu. Given the time Professor Makapela has been away from home, it is possible that these girls were born in America and there is no way they could be expected to be fluent in Xhosa. More importantly, the Professor's predicament is in fact a problematic one given his cosmopolitan/transnational disposition. Here is a man who has lived in a foreign country for many years, who has absorbed values from a foreign education system (like Moses who was educated in the wisdom of the Egyptians) to the level of being a Professor. Is there a way he can stand on a pedestal unaffected by these experiences? Even Moses is said to have adopted "monotheism from the Pharaonic culture" (Ashcroft 2009: 18).

It is a fact that Professor Makapela has not spoken Xhosa (his mother tongue) for a long time, perhaps because he has little occasion to do so. But is speaking Xhosa equivalent to being culturally authentic? Is it not possible for Professor

Makapela to remain Xhosa while speaking English? Is Thabisa more Xhosa than Neo, since she has a Xhosa name? These are questions that the narrator overlooks. What is perhaps questionable about Professor Makapela is his cursory attitude towards the culture of his people. However, if Professor Makapela is to be categorized as unpatriotic and culturally lost, then the narrator is parochially judgmental. His conception of getting educated is also limited to merely reading books. When he says "trying out American beer is not part of my mission", (Ndlela 1999: 217) he thinks he is being smart, yet his academic mission, learning by merely reading books, is equally narrow. Trying American beer is not equivalent to losing one's culture. Learning means unlearning certain prejudices and embracing new worldviews. It is a pity that the narrator will go back to his country and church in Mdatsane clutching a degree but nothing from the culture he has lived in.

Ndlela's story presents two conflicting perspectives on cultural identity embodied in Professor Makapela and the narrator. The narrator represents a view that has been rejected by Stuart Hall in his popular essay "Cultural identity and the Diaspora". Stuart Hall argues that "cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation" (Hall 1997: 52). It is the aspect of "constant transformation" that the narrator does not appreciate. Professor Makapela is a transnational citizen. He has embraced the American system which has opened opportunities for him and his family. Professor Makapela is, in that sense, opportunistic and strategic. He takes what is best for him, for example the green card, which he says will open many opportunities for his family. Through Professor Makapela, we see that cultural identity is not necessarily about refusing to learn other cultures and speaking one's mother tongue. As Wole Soyinka argues, a tiger does not necessarily have to proclaim its tigri-tude (in Tighe 2005: 132).

Finally, Mokae's conceptualization of cultural identity, as reflected in his story, clearly conflicts with Phil Ndlela's. While Ndlela seems to advocate allegiance to a specific set of cultural values as opposed to diasporic intermix of cultures, Mokae recognizes the impossibility of any attempt to define culture on the basis

of geographical confines provided by the nation state. Mokae's view of identity embraces the concept of the transnation that reaches beyond the nation state to "consider the liberating potential of difference and movement" (Ashcroft 2009: 13). The illegal immigrants in Mokae's story have different cultural habits, yet they still belong together. Cultural identity is thus not only located within the geographical limits of the nation state, but also beyond the nation. National boundaries are utopian constructions imagined and conceived during and in the aftermath of decolonisation. In the new transnational/diasporic space, which Ashcroft (2009) idealizes as the transnation, these confines are blurred, negotiated and transcended.

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Rodwell Makombe was born 31 years ago (1979) in Zimbabwe, Masvingo, one of the most populous provinces in the country. She did most of her studies in that country completing her first degree in English at the University of Zimbabwe in 2002. In 2007, she graduated with an MA from the same university. At the moment, she is at the University of Fort Hare, South Africa, where she is pursuing a doctorate in literature. She is particularly interested in postcolonial studies and literature. Her PhD thesis uses postcolonial theory to investigate the intersection of crime, violence and apartheid in literary works of Richard Wright and Athol Fugard.

Giuseppe Episcopo**“City Effects, City Defects”. *Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies*. International Gadda Conference. Edinburgh, 18-19 June 2010.**

Edinburgh, the city that created its future and fulfilled its destiny by duplicating itself during the eighteenth century - two towns dwelling in one city, to paraphrase Goethe's Faust - could not have been a better place to hold “City Effects, City Defects”, the first international conference entirely dedicated to Carlo Emilio Gadda's *L'Adalgisa*.

For two days, 18th and 19th of June 2010, Edinburgh's long sunlight was the stage of *L'Adalgisa*'s Milanese nocturne, Gadda's portrait of a society taken at the edge of its deformation, reformation, and transformation. The novel is a suite in ten movements composed by Gadda as a result of a complex process of writing and selection of pages, book chapters and early sketchbooks that, in turn, became a boundless avanttext archipelago. An archipelago navigable thanks to an accurate philological analysis and, at the same time, intelligible as a magnificent expression of Gadda's compositional technique. So, “City Effects, City Defects” became a metaphorical image, setting the novel in a wide range of analyses during this anniversary conference that unveiled *L'Adalgisa*'s inner structure, its perpetual flux or stream of linear and non-linear combinations.

Emilio Manzotti's and Claudio Vela's outstanding and multifaceted papers explored the intratextual and intertextual layers of *L'Adalgisa*, and its linguistic plasticity came under the spotlight of a remarkable philological analysis pushing the boundaries of Gadda criticism.

Paola Italia anticipated a multidisciplinary project in which the long-lasting tradition of the philological discipline is hybridised with the latest medium at our disposal: the web in which Gadda's palimpsests become fields of analysis and experimentation. Remo Ceserani's, Niva Lorenzini's, and Riccardo Stracuzzi's

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papers delved into the synchronic and diachronic “crossover” strata of the text: a geography of portraits and a landscape of memories inextricably interrelated in a system that is itself connected with other languages and cultural atmospheres. Massimo Riva and Federica Pedriali focused on the endemic “dynamic” stratum of the novel; Gadda’s narrative “noise” (Pedriali) breaches the static order and, through this breach, a continuous multi-layered process of contamination comes into the text, becoming the “gnommero”, or the art of “knitting” (Riva). Gian Mario Anselmi, Giuseppe Stellardi and Giorgio Pinotti focused on the “physical” stratum. It is from this standpoint that the novel’s thresholds encroach on the centre: the thresholds with their permeable condition as opposed to the centre, home to intimacy and elusiveness. If the peripheral layers are the city effects, their counterpart is the centre, due to its own peculiar facet: the centre defects to the thresholds, it continuously spills out into external strata. Insofar as the centre appears to be an elusive core, the physics of the novel’s core are its *perpetuum mobile* prerequisite.

It is arduous to summarise the conference in just a few pages. The outcome of “City Effects, City Defects” will be published in the decennial special edition of *The Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies (EJGS)*. For the moment let it suffice to recall that *L’Adalgisa*, from different perspectives, sits at the crossroads of multiple future/past solutions: it dismantles traditional structures and establishes a new dis/order of things. Its peculiarity lies in the sense of transition that the novel communicates (from one age to another, and yet, of course, from one social era to another in simultaneously centrifugal and centripetal tendencies), and in the fact that this novel in itself is transitional, being the starting point and the place of departure of a long-term process. During the self-confession *Intervista al microfono* (dated 1950 and published several times since), Gadda explores - and partly explains - the ongoing transition from what can be considered an “old” Gadda (the author of *Il castello di Udine* and *La Madonna dei Filosofi*) to a “new” Gadda, the writer of *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* and *La cognizione del dolore*. A process that could be considered one specifically of

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formation, turning in a way an “author” into a “real writer” (un “autore” in un “narratore”).

As shown during the conference, *L'Adalgisa* occupies a key turning point within that process. For this is not a turn against or away from the themes, the styles, or the interests Gadda had cultivated until then; it is rather something that could technically be considered a turning point. It is the moment in which the chrysalis of the narrative structure begins to encompass Gadda's motives, his philosophical and scientific background, his syntactic pyramids, his “corkscrew” periods.

It is not by chance that in 2010, its tenth anniversary, *The Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies* devoted a two-day conference to *L'Adalgisa*. “City Effects, City Defects” for the *EJGS*, just as *L'Adalgisa* was for Gadda, was set a turning point of projects, at the very moment when a series of brand new proposals were beginning to take shape around the journal: the “Nicola Benedetti Scholarship”; the publication of the *Gadda Pocket Encyclopaedia* in four volumes and its online twin version; the first edition of “Premio Gadda Giovani” in 2011; the second edition of “The Edinburgh Gadda Prize” in 2012, to name just a few.

In keeping with the spirit of *The Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies*, the conference was not just celebrating the past. It was rather the first step of a forthcoming series of events. The first closely followed the conference “City Effects, City Defects”: it was the first edition of the Gadda Prize Award Ceremony. As Federica Pedriali stated in an interview with the BBC: “This has been an amazing collaboration between local people, academic institutions, show-business personalities and school children. What we are planning has never been seen in Edinburgh before. We want to encourage academic excellence, give young people a taste for fiction writing”. Federica Pedriali (Professor of Literary Metatheory and Modern Italian Studies at the University of Edinburgh and Director and General Editor of *The Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies*) made a perfect synthesis of the Gadda projects' aims: to be inclusive,

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to enable connections between different cultures and disciplines, and to involve different parts of society.

The “Blackwell Gadda Workshop” and the “Gadda Prize Award Ceremony” were the instantiation of these aims. The former, run by Daniela Nardini (actress), Denise Mina (writer) and Annie Griffin (BAFTA award-winning film director), was addressed to the twelve Edinburgh pupils (selected from more than twelve secondary schools) who reached the semifinals of the “Giallo giovane” first edition. The ‘Gadda Prize’, on the other hand, gave international awards to scholars who had entered the first literary prize dedicated to Gadda and had excelled in it. Donatella Martinelli won the first “Crolla Amato Gadda Prize” with the essay “Il ‘bel ragnatelo’. Cronistoria della bancarotta dell’Adalgisa” (in *I quaderni dell’Ingegnere*. Einaudi: 2006). Elisabetta Carta (*Cicatrici della memoria. Identità e corpo nella letteratura della Grande Guerra: Carlo Emilio Gadda e Blaise Cendrars*. Doctoral Thesis. University of Cagliari: 2009) and Cristina Savettieri (*La trama continua. Storia e forme del romanzo di Gadda*. Edizioni ETS: 2008) won ex aequo the “Gadda First” category, and Enrico Testa won the first “Novecento in Saggio Prize” (*Eroi e figuranti. Il personaggio nel romanzo*. Einaudi: 2009).

In conclusion, we leave the last words on this event go to Gianrico Carofiglio, Honorary President of “The Edinburgh Gadda Prize”:

Benché Gadda sia accolto da tempo tra i più importanti scrittori del Novecento, la critica di lingua inglese si è sviluppata solo di recente, in parte per via del fatto che i suoi testi sono stati spesso giudicati in traducibili [...] Quest’ultima considerazione per sottolineare ancora una volta l’importanza della rivista e del Premio. Decisivo dal punto di vista della crescita e dell’approfondimento del dibattito critico internazionale sull’autore, il premio è altrettanto importante per l’attenzione che saprà calamitare sulla cultura italiana tutta.

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Giuseppe Episcopo has a PhD in Modern Philology (University of Naples Federico II, Italy) and is at present PhD student in Italian (University of Edinburgh, UK).

Mariella Lorusso

Lance Henson, *I testi del lupo / The Wolf Texts*, Roma, Gransasso Nottetempo, n. 17, Nottetempo, 2009, pp. 91, € 7,00.

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Il genocidio fisico e culturale delle popolazioni indigene del Nord America, seppur con le devastanti conseguenze da esso provocate, non rappresenta il solo tragico evento che segna la vita e le opere di Lance Henson. L'esperienza di due anni di guerra in Vietnam combattuta nel Corpo dei Marine, trauma collettivo e personale che da solo basterebbe per sconvolgere la vita di ciascuno, il problema dell'alcolismo che ne è seguito; una madre (*tsistsistas*) (1), fin da bambina vittima di abusi che i colonizzatori chiamavano "civilizzazione" e che hanno per sempre compromesso il suo equilibrio psichico al punto di non essere in grado di allevare il proprio figlio, cresciuto poi con i nonni e con gli zii secondo gli insegnamenti della tradizione cheyenne; un padre (francese) che ha abbandonato la famiglia e non ha mai voluto conoscere il figlio; il suicidio di un fratello; le condizioni di estrema povertà in cui si trova la maggior parte delle popolazioni indigene di tutto il continente americano sono altre esperienze che si sommano al genocidio e che hanno tuttora conseguenze indelebili sull'animo e sulla salute del poeta. Uomo di molte vite, membro dell'American Indian Movement (AIM), della Native American Church, spirito guerriero, Lance Henson è un *Dog Soldier*, cioè appartiene a una società militare cheyenne, la *Dog Soldier Society*, che ha svolto un ruolo decisivo nella lotta contro il colonialismo, è però un guerriero di pace, un uomo gentile, un poeta vero, in bilico fra l'abisso e l'incanto della creazione, una voce dal margine che unisce le tante etnie oppresse in tutto il mondo e diventa grido universale di una comune umanità sofferta.

Il tema della resistenza culturale è centrale al discorso postcoloniale e Lance Henson usa la poesia come un'arma, ben consapevole che la sua forza sia

molto temuta da chi detiene il potere. Il rifiuto di usare la punteggiatura e le maiuscole è un altro segno di dissenso e di resistenza all'inglese, la lingua del nemico, che viene utilizzata solo come strumento (Henson 2001: cxxviii-cxliv). La sua è una poesia di rabbia e di protesta che riflette la durezza e la drammaticità delle esperienze di tutti i popoli indigeni della terra, abituati all'esclusione, all'identità negata o ignorata, all'ottusità e all'ipocrisia della Chiesa e dei governi, ma sempre sorretta dalla forza di una profonda, vera umanità, dallo sguardo attento e dal fascino discreto della grazia, della bellezza del mondo naturale e spirituale, saldamente tenuti insieme da esili, ma tenaci fili che li legano alla fiducia nella rinascita, nella naturale ciclicità del rinnovamento e nella visione di un mondo più umano.

Nella raccolta *I testi del lupo* un esempio di questo articolato sentire è la poesia *talking anti-oklahoma...* con l'immagine dei volti di cheyenne morti durante l'invasione di Guthrie il cui sorriso si fa metafora di una presenza spirituale indistruttibile e perciò messaggio di sopravvivenza, è un'immagine poetica e bellissima nella sua tragicità, che viene bilanciata alcuni versi dopo dalla presenza di Coyote, il *trickster* (2), che indossa una maglietta con su scritto "combattiamo il terrorismo da 500 anni" (3), "attraversa col rosso", "leva il cappello verso una nuvola di passaggio", e conclude con il pungente commento "mi sembra di sentir parlare un padre pellegrino". Gli interventi del *trickster* introducono un elemento di comicità e di denuncia nella lirica, egli, infatti, non manca di fare osservazioni graffianti, ma è quasi sempre di buon umore e dotato di quell'ottimismo associato al sentimento di solidarietà, combinazione necessaria per affrontare le difficoltà e credere nel futuro. Non a caso, è proprio a Coyote che viene affidato il compito di ricordarci che le sorti delle "nostre sacre e belle pianure" dipendono dall'impegno di tutti a impedirne la morte, a far sì che non diventino "un canto funebre".

La poesia di Henson è difficile da collocare per l'unicità del suo approccio, per la presenza di esseri provenienti da altri mondi, superiori e dilatati, vite parallele e pulsanti che interagiscono e condizionano quelle degli umani, per le persone scomparse che affollano le sue liriche e che continuano a vivere, non solo nel

ricordo, ma anche nelle apparizioni e manifestazioni chiaramente percepibili a chi, da generazioni, ha affinato una tale capacità di "sentire". L'autobiografia e la finzione poetica si compenetrano anche grazie alla mediazione della figura del *trickster* che rappresenta la continuità della tradizione orale con il suo inesauribile spirito creativo e diviene strumento di un'estetica nativa in continuo divenire. La capacità di relazionarsi fra tutti gli esseri viventi rende naturale la concezione che gli esseri umani possano divenire animali e viceversa. In occidente tali fenomeni sono associati a eventi malvagi e negativi e vengono definiti come "stregoneria". Per gli occidentali,

[...] risulta difficile comprendere la logica implicazione dell'unità della vita: se tutti gli esseri viventi condividono una creazione e un Creatore, è logico che tutti abbiano la capacità di rapportarsi con ciascuna parte della creazione.

La struttura cosmologica è complessa malgrado la semplicità dei suoi strumenti. L'intricato equilibrio di poteri benefici o pericolosi è tenuto insieme dalla reciprocità e dalla consapevolezza che anche gli oggetti in apparenza inanimati, come le rocce, possiedono delle qualità insospettabili: la responsabilità degli uomini consiste nel mantenere il cosmo in armonia tramite riti e cerimonie (Lorusso 2008: 250).

La poesia di Lance Henson, che è essenziale, minimalista e musicale, segue le dinamiche della tradizione orale, il ritmo dei canti tradizionali cheyenne, è la voce del luogo, dello spazio, fatta di immagini fotografiche e cinematografiche, riflessioni, rivisitazioni del passato, ricordi, scene di vita, stati d'animo che collegano il mondo interiore a quello esteriore, dal forte contenuto di verità universali e capacità di trascendere le barriere delle culture, della lingua e del tempo. È il luogo in cui si concentra l'energia spirituale. Vi è un silenzio pregnante da cui emerge la poesia di Henson, egli sa trasfigurare la tristezza in poesia conferendo sempre un senso di bellezza e di armonia, anche se di dolore.

Come Simon Ortiz, Lance Henson non vede le varie culture come vittime, ma piuttosto celebra la loro capacità di ricrearsi di fronte alle nuove circostanze e anche se la sua voce si leva da una condizione di "esilio", dal margine, da uno spazio liminale, si propaga lontano porgendo una radicale alternativa all'ermeneutica occidentale.

I *Testi del lupo* sono una serie di dichiarazioni: sono i "testi", del lupo, come afferma il poeta: *they are statements by the wolf, that's why "texts", it's about what the wolves collectively feel* (4). Il lupo è uno spirito illuminato e illuminante poiché ci ha donato la sua anima cosmica (*hematasoomao*) attraverso le cerimonie sacre. Il nome *tsistsistas* per lupo è *hotneh*, termine che contiene anche una valenza cosmica sacra; si parla dei "lupi del cielo". Secondo il popolo *tsistsistas* e altri popoli tribali come gli innu dell'Alaska, *hotneh* abita in un mondo finito, completo, non necessita di nulla per sopravvivere, ma è in grado di assimilare ciò che gli serve e, per questo motivo, il suo mondo è superiore a quello degli esseri umani o di molti altri animali. Queste popolazioni ritengono che il compito del lupo sia quello di "purificare la mandria" (*clean the herd*); un lupo sano uccide solo animali malati perché riesce a fiutare il midollo della sua preda. A tali esseri va portato grande rispetto poiché "i loro riferimenti sono superiori, diversi da quelli umani e non è opportuno imporre loro delle scelte" (*to impose choice on such a being is not proper, as it is following different references*). (4)

Nella poesia che dà il titolo alla raccolta "the wolf texts", il lupo sa che gli esseri umani non vivono in un mondo "finito", autonomo, hanno perso il contatto con la realtà e non sanno riconoscere la vita pura, metafisica; sono confusi e si sentono perduti. Il lupo percepisce il dolce passaggio del mondo, "in a clearing i taste its sweet passage", gli uomini cercano di costruire fuochi per proteggersi e scaldarsi, credono di vivere in un mondo puro, integro, non sanno rinunciare alla propria vanità e presunzione, non capiscono che esiste una realtà, oltre i loro "fuochi" che è sempre stata e sempre sarà. Sebbene provino il desiderio di volare verso di essa, non ci riescono e non sono altro che "ossa che cantano al proprio dolore". Anche la lupa prova lo stesso sgomento in "canto di una lupa

in cattività” e “si sente sola” perché gli uomini “non hanno un dio” (Henson 2009: 37).

La raccolta *I testi del lupo* affianca poesie dal contenuto sociale a un altro tipo di poesie meno drammatiche, più legate alla natura e agli affetti, a Silvana, la donna che Henson ama, e ai figli. Vi è anche una serie di poesie tratta dalla *dark opera* intitolata *Coyote Road* del 1992. Ray, un danzatore cheyenne professionista che si esibisce ai powwow (5), il cui nome si ispira al protagonista del romanzo di Robert Stone, *Dog Soldiers* del 1974, è un personaggio composito, formato da caratteristiche del poeta stesso e di quattro suoi zii. Ray, ubriaco, si trova in panne su una grande strada dell'Ohio e un agricoltore bianco, Lukas, si ferma a soccorrerlo. Lukas è affascinato dalla simpatia, dalla libertà di Ray e dall'onnipresente spirito senza volto che lo segue. La presenza degli zii e del fratello scomparsi affiora costantemente nelle liriche di questa serie e accompagna tutta l'opera che si conclude con la poesia, presente in questa raccolta, *ray, at the burial scaffold of his grandfather* (Henson 2009: 56).

Il tema della fratellanza globale con immagini di rabbia e desolazione ritorna in *observations from the third world*. La poesia inizia a casa della madre in Oklahoma; poi, il poeta parte per un viaggio verso la casa dell'amico fraterno Barney Bush, poeta shawnee, in Nuovo Messico. Durante questo viaggio reale e immaginario, molti sono i riferimenti ai risultati delle colonizzazioni: gli yanomami dell'Amazzonia ancora assediati e cacciati come animali da cercatori d'oro senza scrupoli, l'atteggiamento sprezzante di superiorità dei prepotenti, la solitudine e il senso di smarrimento e infine, il dissenso verso la religione imposta con la forza rappresentato simbolicamente dalla fuga dei corvi dall'arca e del poeta dall'America, accomunati dallo stesso sogno di giustizia.

Il tragico capitolo che riguarda la cristianizzazione forzata delle popolazioni indigene del Nord America per mezzo di deplorevoli strumenti di conversione quali abusi fisici, psicologici e sessuali esercitati particolarmente sui bambini che frequentavano le *boarding school* (6), vede la madre del poeta come protagonista. All'età di nove anni ella viene portata in una di queste scuole dove subisce ripetutamente violenze di ogni genere e dove, dopo un tentativo

di fuga, viene incatenata. Questa esperienza ha segnato la sua vita, come quella di molti altri bambini, per sempre. La rabbia del poeta è ancora molto viva e dedica l'ultima poesia "*silent exile where you whispered...*" (Henson 2009: 72) a coloro che continuano a lottare contro la tirannia, affinché non si arrendano mai perché esiste un coraggio nella vita degli uomini che la paura non può toccare "the face of life filled with a courage fear cannot touch".

NOTE:

1. Nome del popolo nativo del Nord America che noi chiamiamo "cheyenne".
2. Una delle figure più antiche della mitologia nativa americana, è, per eccellenza, sinonimo di voce aborigena; è la voce del luogo, l'intermediario fra mito e spazio. "Può essere allo stesso tempo, divinità, essere umano e animale, può avere tratti superumani e subumani, sia maschili che femminili. Forza della natura che crea, distrugge e trasforma, ridicolizza inoltre il conformismo sociale e i suoi rigidi parametri comportamentistici. È ostile ad ogni genere di domesticità, maturità, modestia e fedeltà: è sempre alla ricerca di nuove possibilità, di limiti da superare. È estremamente curioso, malleabile, perseverante, sempre in movimento, in continua crescita e mutamento". (Meli 1991: xxvi-xxvii). Il *trickster* è in grado di creare tensione e dualismo fra sacro e profano, elementi essenziali nella letteratura nativa dove il dualismo, separato fra due agenti nella tradizione occidentale, si risolve qui in un unico essere, che molto spesso è un animale o un'espressione del sovrannaturale (Cfr. Lorusso 2008: 170 e Cfr. Coltelli 1996: 127).
3. Slogan ricorrente fra le comunità indigene che viene esibito su magliette, poster e adesivi, rappresenta una dichiarazione unanime che sintetizza inequivocabilmente i rapporti fra i nativi e i governi sia degli Stati Uniti che del Canada.
4. Da un colloquio con il poeta (gennaio 09).
5. Powwow: evento intertribale che si tiene nel periodo estivo durante il quale le varie tribù socializzano, eseguono canti e gare di danze tradizionali.

6. Scuole governative gestite in prevalenza da religiosi. In Canada si chiamavano *residential school*. Questo fenomeno era comune anche in Australia ed ebbe come risultato la così detta "lost generation".

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Mariella Lorusso è Professore a contratto alla Facoltà di Lettere (sede di Rimini, Università di Bologna, Italia).

Antonella Riem

David Malouf, *Ransom*, Knopf, Sydney-Australia, aprile 2009, pp.224, \$24.95. ISBN: 978 1 74166 837 7 (hbk).

David Malouf, *Io sono Achille*, traduzione: Francesca Pe', a cura di Franca Cavagnoli, Milano, Sperling & Kupfer per Frassinelli, giugno 2010, pp. 218, € 17,50. ISBN: 978-88-88320-61-8 86-I-10.

Uscito in Italia a giugno 2010, *Io sono Achille*, nell'ottima traduzione di Francesca Pe', con l'attenta e preziosa "cura" di Franca Cavagnoli, è, come di consueto nel caso di David Malouf, un "grande" romanzo, che affronta temi universali immergendo il lettore in un piccolo ma memorabile episodio dell'*Iliade*. Dopo dieci anni di guerra devastante – sulla quale si pone l'accento nella copertina italiana dove campeggia un giovane eroe con lancia e spada, l'anziano Priamo si mette in viaggio verso l'ignoto, per riavere dal "nemico" Achille il corpo di suo figlio Ettore, attraverso un ingente *riscatto* – questo il titolo dell'originale. Nell'*Iliade*, in una scena molto toccante, i due uomini s'incontrano, condividendo la loro comune umanità e il loro destino di esseri mortali, con il suo carico di dolore e perdita. Il furore di Achille si addolcisce e i due piangono e mangiano insieme, e poi, finalmente dopo tante notti insonni, riescono a dormire. Si dispone una tregua di undici giorni in modo che il corpo di Ettore, fino a quel momento straziato dall'insensata rabbia di Achille, possa avere degna sepoltura e tutti gli onori che spettano ad un eroe. L'*Iliade* si conclude dopo la sepoltura del nobile troiano.

La narrativa di Malouf spesso si concentra su personaggi e valori "maschili", presentati di frequente nel *dialogo* e nel rapporto fra due uomini. Malouf in un'intervista ricorda che i suoi personaggi maschili sono tutti, in realtà, un unico personaggio; si tratta di un modo per rendere esplicito un dialogo interiore o una serie di rivelazioni (Davidson 1983: 277) (1). In questo caso l'attenzione dello

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scrittore si concentra sul colloquio fra Achille e Priamo. Nel romanzo il fulcro dell'azione e della meditazione sono le figure di Achille, l'eroe dei Greci, e Priamo, Re di Troia. Nella scelta editoriale del titolo italiano – *Io sono Achille* – si è preferito focalizzare l'attenzione sul più giovane dei due, anche se in realtà in qualche modo è proprio Priamo il “protagonista”. È Priamo che, ispirato dalla Dea Iride (Madre dell'arcobaleno che collega cielo e terra), decide di partire per un viaggio giudicato folle e impossibile da tutti; è lui che osa andare oltre il suo ruolo e gettarsi alle spalle il passato, per tentare qualcosa di “nuovo”, affidandosi al “caso”, alla trasformazione, al mutamento, a ciò che è inatteso, provando a tramutare il fato nel *destino* che si costruisce di momento in momento attraverso le proprie scelte – responsabili o irresponsabili. Questa forza interiore di Priamo contagia anche il giovane Achille, che, forse per la prima volta, comprende pienamente cosa significhi essere *uomo*. Qui sta tutta la modernità del libro, che, come sempre in Malouf, ci parla del nostro mondo, da dentro le rughe del tempo o le linee immaginarie del sogno, facendoci riflettere sull'universalità dell'essere “umani”, nel senso più profondo e pieno della parola. Se la copertina italiana ammicca alla guerra e alla violenza, pur presenti nel romanzo nel loro ottuso e assurdo orrore, il messaggio più profondo e vero dell'opera sta nella possibilità di preferire il bene e il “buono”, che tutti sempre e comunque abbiamo. Senza nessuna edulcorazione, senza compromessi, senza paura, Malouf affronta un discorso, che è anche spirituale e poetico, sulla bellezza e bontà del mondo, seguendo in modo forte e chiaro il suo “vento” interiore e creativo. Se in questo sembra remare controcorrente, pazienza; se l'attenzione del pubblico è costruita in modo tale che possa essere attratta soprattutto da ciò che è male, morte, sangue, violenza, Malouf, come Priamo, sceglie una diversa possibilità, che porta ad un messaggio di compassione, pace e riconciliazione, nonostante la paura, il male, la violenza, la guerra. È una decisione che ognuno deve prendere ad ogni respiro, infinite volte, affinché si possa manifestare nel mondo.

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Nel romanzo alcune pagine sono dedicate all'infanzia di Achille e alla sua amicizia con Patroclo (4-13) (2), e all'infanzia di Priamo, in particolare alla sua sconvolgente esperienza, all'età di sei anni, della guerra e della devastazione. La sua fanciullezza dorata di principino viziato, all'improvviso e senza preavviso, diventa un incubo di violenza e distruzione (62-74). Questo scorcio dei primi anni di Achille e Priamo pone l'accento sull'universalità del destino umano. Divisi da un conflitto, assurdo quanto ogni altro, Achille e Priamo, sono uniti dai loro ruoli di eroe e re, ma soprattutto dalla loro umanità che viene abilmente costruita e rivelata passo dopo passo nella storia. Tuttavia, ancora più importante pur nella sua umiltà e semplicità – o forse proprio per queste – è Somace, il vecchio carrettiere che è ingaggiato con i suoi due muli, Bella e Schianto, per accompagnare Priamo al campo dei greci. Il personaggio è una creazione di Malouf che dà spessore al romanzo, rappresentando un Ideo speciale che accompagna il re Priamo attraverso esperienze di vita comune, che lo illuminano e lo avvicinano alla sua essenza, proprio perché passano attraverso la fisicità e la materia. Priamo si lascia guidare e “portare”, immergendosi nelle nuove possibilità che il caso ed una vicinanza intuitiva, genuina e *femminile* all'altro gli offrono. Somace è un'altra manifestazione del dialogo interiore di cui si diceva, e, con la sua semplice saggezza, avrà un ruolo centrale nel viaggio di Priamo da un punto di vista pratico e spirituale; lo aiuterà a fare quel balzo nel nuovo futuro che aveva percepito quando la Dea Iride lo ha *visitato*.

In questo mondo apparentemente solo maschile, dove le donne sembrano essere solo Dee o figure piangenti è invece fondamentale presenza, intuita a volte, a volte preponderante, di un universo tutto femminile (Harding 1971), di valori diversi, cooperativi e di *partnership* (Eisler 1987, 2007, Riem *et al.*, 2003, 2007), dove essenziali sono l'amore e la cura per l'altro. Malouf, descrivendo un mondo maschile di rancori, violenza e morte, allo stesso tempo soffonde la sua narrazione di momenti di grazia, dove si esprimono solidarietà, compassione, attenzione e dolcezza. Gli eroi che giocano il loro ruolo sul palcoscenico dell'esistenza, inconsciamente custodiscono e ricordano un mondo differente,

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un rapporto più intimo, pacato e spirituale con la vita, che riemerge nei loro sentimenti, emozioni, pensieri, paure ed ansie non rivelati. Per sovvertire i valori maschili di aggressività, paura e violenza che governano il nostro mondo, è necessario costruire in sé una riconciliazione con l'aspetto femminile che è stato esiliato dalla nostra consapevolezza (3). Lo troviamo nell'episodio della mula "Bella" che, pur causando la morte del figlio di Somace, è da lui amatissima ed egli comprende l'assoluta innocenza dell'animale nell'indifesa dolcezza del suo sguardo ammaliante ancor più di quello di Elena, che è, invece, totalmente assente dal romanzo. Questa energia femminile si incontra nella Natura, rappresentata dalla Madre Terra o dalla "Signora dei Cieli" (Stone 1976: XXI); si incarna in un benvenuto silenzioso, nell'acqua fresca e rigenerante del fiume in cui Priamo immerge i piedi, in un abbraccio materno che non giudica ma accetta pienamente, culla il dolore e l'orrore portandoci ad una comprensione più piena e pura di cosa vuol dire essere "umani" Così dice Priamo ad Achille:

"Achille", dice, la voce ferma, ora, "anche tu, come me, sai che cosa siamo noi uomini. Siamo mortali, non divinità. Moriamo. La morte è nella nostra natura. Senza quel fio pagato in anticipo, il mondo non ci si fa incontro. Questo è il duro patto che la vita stringe con noi – con tutti noi, ognuno di noi – e la nostra condizione comune. E per questo motivo, se non altro, dovremmo avere reciproca compassione dei nostri lutti. Dei dolori che prima o poi devono farsi incontro a ciascuno di noi, in un mondo cui accediamo solo in termini mortali." (179-80).

Come *Vita Immaginaria*, e come una tragedia greca, *Io sono Achille* è diviso in cinque parti, cinque atti che non seguono tanto le azioni di guerra ed eroismo, che rimangono in qualche modo sullo sfondo, ma si concentrano soprattutto sull'educazione emotiva che porterà Achille e Priamo ad un ritorno al *femminile*: compassione, perdono, riconciliazione che già sono presenti *in nuce* nella bellissima e intensa apertura del romanzo.

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Dee e donne sono molto importanti nell'opera, con la loro capacità di nutrire, fisicamente e spiritualmente, di confortare e sostenere, portando ad una intima guarigione. I valori femminili divengono precipui anche negli uomini solo quando essi riescono esprimere pienamente la loro umanità, lasciandosi alle spalle l'identificazione con lo stereotipo del "rude maschio eroico". Così facendo gli uomini ritornano alla loro infanzia, tempo "governato" dalle madri, dai principi di cura, sostenibilità, amore e compassione. Giustappunto il romanzo si apre con Achille che ricorda la sua madre-marina:

Il mare ha tante voci. La voce che questo uomo aspetta di udire è la voce di sua madre. Alza la testa, si volta verso l'aria fredda che spira del golfo e ne avverte il sapore salato sul labbro. La superficie del mare si gonfia e luccica, un lustro azzurro argenteo; una membrana ridotta a una sottile trasparenza dove un tempo, per nove lune, era rimasto sospeso, raggomitolato nel sogno che precede l'esistenza, ed era stato cullato e consolato. (3).

Questo è il mondo ciclico della donna, dove vita e morte avvengono in modo naturale, secondo le stagioni dell'esistenza; dove la vita non viene brutalmente spezzata dalla innaturale violenza del mondo patriarcale, ma termina, quando giunge il tempo, all'interno delle pulsazioni ritmiche della Grande Madre. Le comunità che vivono in *partnership* (Eisler 1987), sono governate da una comprensione "femminile" della realtà, sono consapevoli della natura transitoria del mondo fisico e mantengono un dialogo costante con altre dimensioni e mondi.

Il mare, nel suo moto sempre mutevole ed eterno, è connesso alle fasi della Luna – crescente, piena, calante – che manifestano la struttura tripartita dell'universo (Donna 1994). Sebbene il potente Poseidone (o Nettuno) con il suo tridente, sia ora l'immagine predominante del Dio marino, il mare originariamente "apparteneva" alla Dea Madre: nella cultura Minoica c'era

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una *Posidaeja* femminile (Walker 1988: 351-2) e molte mitologie sulle madri-del-mare sopravvivono tuttora, specialmente nelle culture in cui la pesca è un importante mezzo di sopravvivenza (Eason 2001: 112-17). Teti, la madre-del-mare di Achille, è il tranquillo grembo da cui ha origine la vita stessa.

Alla fine del romanzo Malouf brevemente e in modo incisivo descrive la chiusa del racconto classico, ma anticipa la morte di Priamo, per mano del figlio di Achille Neottolema, il quale, inconsapevole dell'incontro compassionevole e di riconciliazione fra suo padre e Priamo, perpetra l'assurda catena di morte, vendetta e morte (205-8). La messa a fuoco conclusiva è, però, su Somace, l'uomo fisico, perfettamente incarnato nel corpo (dal sanscrito *sôma*), poeta abbastanza nel saper apprezzare i piccoli piaceri della vita, che sa adattarsi agli imprevisti della vita, che diviene il più valido Ideo per Priamo, una autentica guida nel viaggio dell'esistenza. Nei *Veda*, *sôma* è anche una pianta magica, originariamente sacra alla Dea (Sjoo & Mor 1987: 17-5), dalla quale le Sue sacerdotesse distillavano la bevanda estatica degli immortali. Anche a Somace piace condividere un sorso con un buon ascoltatore – chiunque desideri partecipare del suo dono estatico di narratore di storie. Avendo pienamente sperimentato tutte le sfaccettature del vivere, Somace rimane centrato e forte nella sua profonda comprensione delle cose, semplice e senza pretese. Somace, l'uomo fisico, il *corpo* principale della narrazione di Malouf, vive per un lungo lungo tempo, dopo che Troia è stata quasi dimenticata. Vive per raccontare la *storia*. Sopravvivono le sue storie di come, nel ruolo di Ideo, ha accompagnato il re Priamo nel suo umano viaggio di *riscatto* e perdono. Sono tutte menzogne, naturalmente, invenzioni, fantasie: "materia di leggenda, per metà racconto popolare, per metà vuota millanteria di un vecchio" (210). Allo stesso modo, Malouf "è un ladro di storie altrui, di vite altrui" (212). La cosa più notevole del divino furto di Malouf, ispirato da Ermes, protettore di ladri e poeti, è che porta una Bellezza (*Beauty*) *fluida*, femminile, intima e poetica, al nostro mondo in modo più che appropriato "il che non è sempre detto" (213).

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NOTE:

1. La figura del “doppio” è ovviamente nodo centrale nella ricerca narrativa di Malouf; ecco alcuni dei suoi “doppi” più noti: Johnno e Dante in *Johnno* (1975); Ovidio e il bambino in *An Imaginary Life* (1978); l'assassino e lo scrittore in *Child's Play* (1982); Jim e Ashley in *Fly Away Peter* (1985); Digger e Vic(tor) in *The Great World* (1990); Carney e Adair in *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* (1996). Si veda sul tema: Riem, 1988a: 181-95; Riem, 2007: 57-71.
2. Le citazioni dal romanzo di David Malouf sono tratte dalla versione italiana che qui si recensisce.
3. Though this [Goddess] archetype has many facets, one key aspect is that it symbolizes qualities that are stereotypically considered feminine, and I want to emphasize 'stereotypically' because this is not a matter of something inherent in women or men, qualities that are considered feminine such as empathy and caring, qualities of course present in men also but that are not considered appropriate for 'real men', for 'masculinity' in cultures orienting primarily to the dominator model – qualities that are so needed in our world today if we are to meet the enormous challenges we face. So the Goddess Awakened is symbolic of the movement to shift to a more equitable and peaceful way of living on this earth – a movement in which literature, education, and language have a major part to play. (Eisler 2007: 24).

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Antonella Riem è Professore Ordinario di Letteratura Inglese (Università di Udine, Italia).

Milena Romero Allué

Tommaso Moro, *Poesie inglesi*, a cura di Carlo M. Bajetta, Milano, San Paolo, 2010, pp. 202, € 16,00. ISBN 9788821567490.

La scelta di pubblicare le poesie inglesi di Thomas More può risultare sorprendente, in Inghilterra come altrove. Pochi infatti sanno che More, oggi noto come giurista, come santo martire e, ancor di più, come autore del celebre trattato filosofico *Utopia*, in realtà sia descritto dai suoi contemporanei principalmente come poeta. Come scrive Carlo M. Bajetta nella premessa alla prima edizione italiana della produzione lirica di More, da lui curata e tradotta, la poesia è l'attività con cui il giurista e cancelliere alla corte di Enrico VIII inaugura e conclude la propria carriera letteraria.

More dimostra sin da giovanissimo il proprio talento poetico quando, negli anni di studio trascorsi a Oxford, compone liriche e canzoni, così come epigrammi latini e versi comici, non di rado scurrili e carichi di allusioni sessuali e oscene. A Londra, studente di legge non ancora ventenne, traduce dal greco al latino quasi trecento liriche dalla cosiddetta *Antologia greca*, traduzioni poetiche che saranno pubblicate molti anni dopo, con il titolo *Progymnasmata* ("esercizi preliminari"), insieme alla terza edizione dell'*Utopia*, nel 1518. La creazione di poesia e la traduzione di testi classici fa parte dell'educazione e della cultura di un gentiluomo umanista, come attesta la traduzione in inglese dei *Dialoghi* di Luciano, che More porta a termine con la collaborazione di Erasmo da Rotterdam, ottenendo enorme successo. Il sodalizio, l'affinità intellettuale, il legame di amicizia e stima reciproca che lega i due eruditi porteranno alla pubblicazione delle opere più rappresentative dell'umanesimo inglese, la già citata *Utopia* e l'*Elogio della follia*, testo scritto quasi interamente durante il soggiorno dell'umanista di Rotterdam nella casa londinese di More. Desiderio Erasmo dedica il *Moriae encomium*, o "elogio

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della follia", all'amico giurista e giunge a tessergli una lode, attraverso un sottile gioco di parole, perfino nel titolo della celebre opera. Lo stesso More si diverte a creare *pun* linguistici sul proprio nome (*memento morieris*, "ricorda che devi morire", è da lui trasformato in *memento Mori aeris*, "ricorda il denaro di More"), così come Erasmo, che è solito chiamare l'amico con il soprannome *Niger* (interpretando *More* come *Moor*, "moro, scuro"), allude al nome latinizzato di More sia nel titolo che nel contenuto dell'*Encomium*: Erasmo fa riferimento a *Morus*, che in latino significa "pazzo", perché convinto che l'amico, sempre divertito della follia umana, possa essere considerato il nuovo Democrito, il filosofo celebre per il suo riso dinnanzi alle stoltezze dell'umanità. Si deve all'umanista olandese anche la celebre definizione di More, che appare nella dedica dell'*Encomium*, come *omnium horarium homo*, "uomo per tutte le stagioni", in virtù della sua affabilità e delicatezza, così come l'associazione del suo cognome a *mors* ("morte"), un termine che, assieme a *morus*, racchiude il destino del futuro martire, come osserva Peter Ackroyd nella sua bella biografia di Thomas More (1).

Se l'edizione italiana delle poesie di Thomas More può risultare sorprendente, ancora più sorprendente appare la sua prima raccolta organica di liriche in lingua inglese che, come ricorda il curatore dell'edizione italiana, "a dispetto della propria ridotta dimensione, ebbe una significativa circolazione a stampa e manoscritta". Muovendo, con grande probabilità, dalle sue esperienze adolescenziali nella recitazione e nella scrittura di brevi commedie e intermezzi comici, More esordisce in campo poetico con *Nyne Pageants*, o *Pageant Verses*, ossia con una raccolta di nove brevi liriche che, come suggerisce il titolo, descrivono altrettanti *pageants*. Il termine *pageant* offre una vasta gamma di interpretazioni ed è correttamente tradotto da Carlo M. Bajetta come "scene ricamate in arazzi", sebbene in questa accezione il sostantivo ricorra assai di rado nella cultura inglese e generalmente si riferisca alle scene teatrali di sapore allegorico rappresentate durante il Medioevo, oppure ai carri o palchi mobili su cui venivano inscenati tali drammi (2). Considerando che

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pageant viene gradualmente a significare anche “rappresentazione allegorica” e “tableau”, è evidente l’interesse di More per l’aspetto iconico, visivo, oltre che per quello allegorico e teatrale: nel descrivere e commentare in versi immagini dipinte o ricamate su stoffa (“Infanzia”, “Maturità”, “Venere e Cupido”, “Età”, “Morte”, “Fama”, “Tempo”, “Eternità”, “Il Poeta”), More evoca i drammi allegorici rappresentati nel Medioevo noti come *moralities* e, come sottolinea Bajetta, si collega all’iconografia dei *Trionfi* petrarcheschi. Le brevi liriche moreane dunque fondono mirabilmente la tradizione classica dell’*ekfrasis*, ossia la descrizione verbale di immagini visive, con la lettura allegorica e didattica di stampo medievale. Ritengo assai significativo che colui che diverrà uno dei più strenui oppositori di Lutero e dei valori riformisti esordisca con una raccolta poetica fortemente efrastica, iconica, e, per di più, ricca di allusioni alla sfera teatrale: dovranno passare alcuni anni prima che Lutero affigga le sue novantacinque tesi alle porte del duomo di Wittenberg, gettando le basi per la Riforma, e ancora più anni prima che l’Inghilterra abbracci la cultura protestante e il suo impeto iconoclasta, il suo netto rifiuto per ogni forma di immagine visiva, per ogni “idolo”, così come per il teatro, considerato fonte di depravazione e vizio. Come More è vicino, anche con sentimenti di amicizia, a Hans Holbein il giovane, che lo ritrarrà sia individualmente che con la famiglia e realizzerà le xilografie per l’*Utopia*, così è distante dalle idee religiose e politiche di Lutero: pochi mesi dopo l’attacco di Lutero nei confronti di Enrico VIII, nel 1523 More scrive la *Responsio ad Lutherum*, una sorta di accusa legale nei confronti del teologo tedesco ricca di commenti caustici e di invettive spesso volgari e offensive. Questa vena sanguigna, anticonvenzionale e non molto nota di Thomas More, assai poco consona a un uomo profondamente religioso, futuro santo e martire, è avvalorata dal poemetto *A Mery Gest How a Sergeaunt Wolde Lerne to Be a Frere* (*La divertente storia di come un ufficiale giudiziario volle imparare ad esser frate*), un componimento dalla “natura quasi sovversiva”, come scrive il curatore, che sbeffeggia l’autorità giudiziaria. Le altre liriche incluse nell’edizione italiana

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documentano la personalità complessa e i molteplici interessi di More: oltre ai già citati *Versi per scene* e *La divertente storia*, il volumetto presenta *La lamentazione della regina Elizabeth*, *Versi su Fortuna*, *Versi dalla Vita di Pico* e una coppia di due poesie brevissime, *Louis il perduto amante* e *Davy il biscaziere*.

È molto interessante *The Lyfe of Johan Picus*, ossia i versi moreani dalla *Vita di Pico della Mirandola*, che sono più un'antologia critica che la traduzione fedele della biografia dell'umanista del circolo fiorentino curata dal nipote Gianfrancesco (che Bajetta presenta in appendice nella versione originale in latino): Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, ammirato da More perché "protettore degli intellettuali che sanno amare il Vero più di ogni altra cosa" e perché "esempio di santità", può essere interpretato, in virtù del suo sincretismo in campo filosofico e teologico e della sua inesauribile sete di conoscenza, come una proiezione della natura proteiforme del giurista inglese. Nel dedicarsi con passione e impegno sia alla carriera pubblica che all'attività letteraria, More sembra infatti personificare quel *bifrons Janus* da lui cantato in uno dei primi epigrammi latini: se si accostano i versi degli anni della gioventù, spesso scurrili e osceni, la feroce invettiva contro Lutero e il *Mery Gest* di sapore burlesco alle pubblicazioni religiose, filosofiche storiche e giuridiche, gli scritti di More possono apparire a loro volta "bifronti". Con questa recente edizione Carlo M. Bajetta, studioso attento e rigoroso dei manoscritti moreani e delle pubblicazioni coeve, offre per la prima volta al pubblico italiano la versione originale delle poesie in lingua inglese di Thomas More con la traduzione a fronte, permettendo di fare luce su un lato quasi del tutto sconosciuto del grande umanista inglese: grazie a questa buona scelta editoriale e al ricco apparato critico che correde le poesie, l'"uomo per tutte le stagioni" rivela un aspetto della sua produzione letteraria e della sua personalità sinora poco studiato e il Giano bifronte dell'umanesimo inglese risulta ora un po' meno enigmatico e oscuro, o, come direbbe Erasmo, un po' meno *moor* – o un po' meno *morus*.

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NOTE:

1. Peter Ackroyd, *The Life of Thomas More*. London, Chatto & Windus, 1998, p. 6.
2. L'OED cita la poesia di More come l'unica occorrenza documentata del termine *pageant* utilizzato nell'accezione di "scena rappresentata in un arazzo".

Milena Romero Allué è Professore Associato di Letteratura Inglese (Università di Udine, Italia).