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## ARTICLES / SAGGI

### PALESTRINA'S AND PORTA'S CHORAL MASS SETTINGS OF *DESCENDIT ANGELUS DOMINUS*: A COMPARISON

**VERONICA FRANKE**  
(University of KwaZulu-Natal)

#### **Abstract**

*L'obiettivo di questo saggio è di fornire una descrizione e una comparazione delle procedure di prestito evidenti nelle messe di Porta e Palestrina che si basano sul mottetto di Penet Descendit Angelus Domini. Il saggio esplora le motivazioni dei due compositori nella loro selezione di modelli, incluso il contesto ecclesiastico all'interno del quale entrambi trascorsero la loro vita, la loro modalità di frequentazione di una determinata tradizione artistica – modalità che sono di imitazione, di emulazione, di omaggio e di competizione – e la loro dipendenza dallo stile del modello. Il saggio inoltre affronta questa selezione di modelli da parte dei due autori a paragone di quella dei loro contemporanei, e come l'estensione e ramificazione dei loro adattamenti si rifletta sulle loro procedure stilistiche e, più in generale, sul loro sguardo complessivo di compositori.*

**Keywords:** Palestrina, Porta, Parody, *Imitatio*, Polyphony

#### **Introduction**

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina and Costanzo Porta, two of the most venerated musical exponents of the Italian Renaissance, both wrote

mass settings based upon Penet's motet *Descendit Angelus Domini*<sup>1</sup>. The goal of the present paper is to provide a description and comparison of the borrowing procedures evident in their choral settings, and, in the process, address the following crucial issues: a) what motivated Palestrina and Porta in their selection of model? b) how does their selection of models compare with that of their contemporaries? c) to what extent do the ramifications of their reworking processes reflect on their stylistic procedures and outlooks as composers?

As is well known, the tradition of reshaping existing music for a new use was an extremely important procedure of musical composition in Italy during the Renaissance. This was specifically the case in the extensive literature of the mass which played so prominent a role among the major musical genres of the time<sup>2</sup>. These musical compositions displayed a wealth of invention in recasting their models, freely reworking the musical themes and fabric of another composer's choral work. However, it has been clearly established that the musical borrowings did not involve a mere appropriation of musical material from other works. The composer's ingenuity was tested by his ability to discover and exploit new and interesting possibilities of simultaneous alignment of the voice-parts of the model. The more he could transform his model, incorporating as much as possible while creating a new work as different as possible from its source, the stronger a composer he would demonstrate himself to be<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Palestrina's four-voice mass *Descendit Angelus Domini* may be found in Palestrina (1969:1-31). Note that the first original version was printed by Istituto Italiano per la Storia della Musica, Rome – prior to the Kalmus reprint. Porta's five-voice mass may be found in Porta (1964-70:1-17). Penet's motet may be found as a transcription in Quereau (1974:253-257).

<sup>2</sup> The reformulation of pre-existent models was frequently encountered in other genres, apart from the mass, including the chanson, magnificat, motet and instrumental pieces.

<sup>3</sup> Various musicologists have touched on the subject of a possible connection between the practice of basing new musical works on previously composed models and the classical concept of *imitatio* as understood and fostered in Renaissance literature and the visual arts, but they differ amongst themselves as to *imitatio*'s exact meaning, nature, and extent. This concept was first introduced into Renaissance musicology by Lockwood (1966). It was given broader explication by Brown (1982). Further views were explored by Perkins (1984 and 1987); Burkholder (1985 & 1987); Wegman (1989); and Meconi (1994). Meconi gives



While Palestrina (1525-1594) had an essentially Roman career deeply rooted in the papal Rome of the ascendant Counter-Reformation, Porta (1528/9-1601) – both a revered composer, and prominent teacher of north Italian composers – held positions in several Italian cities including Venice, Cremona, Padua and Ravenna. Both composers were inextricably linked to the Church, and their oeuvres were centrally devoted to sacred choral music, especially to the composition of masses<sup>4</sup>.

While Palestrina's and Porta's mass settings based on Penet's *Descendit Angelus Domini* are similar with regard to structural delineation, organisational principles, and expressive projection; they differ with regard to overall style and manipulation of texture. Concerning the former aspects, the two masses demonstrate the same carefully balanced and articulated musical phrases, smoothness of line, regularly-used intervals, and – in the area of rhythmic motion – a similar cautious handling of durational components that proceed gradually from longer to shorter note values back to longer values within successive phrases. Secondly, they share a similar judicious use of dissonance and chromaticism to generate forward movement, and, finally, both mass settings focus on the delivery and content of the mass text so that all text segments are clearly defined and are highlighted by their polyphonic textural treatment which in turn reinforces structural and formal articulation.

With regard to overall style and textural manipulation, Palestrina's mass shows taut structural control by allowing each musical motive to permeate all the voices through structural imitation, and by careful cadential planning. Porta's more concise setting, on the other hand,

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us an invaluable synopsis of the divergent views of Lockwood, Brown, Perkins, Burkholder and Wegman: hence no further interpretation of these musicological and analytical contributions is necessary here. Meconi, in her provocative article, questions the link between musical and rhetorical imitation. She feels that there is insufficient proof that compositional practices were inspired by rhetorical theories of *imitatio*. Also see Meconi (2004).

<sup>4</sup> Palestrina's music is subjected to detailed analysis in Jeppesen (1946); and Quereau (1982). Also see the essays on Palestrina commemorating the fourth centenary of the composer's death in *Early Music* (1994) and in Rostirolla, Soldati & Zomparelli (2006). Further recent related studies include Addamiano & Luisi (2013); and Sherr (2016). Porta's masses are given detailed analysis in Pruett (1960 & 1969), Sartori (1977); and Fenlon (1983).

highlights a predilection for brevity and refined homophonic writing, leavened by simple polyphony. Rather than emphasising the development of motivic complexes set in a syntactic imitative contrapuntal style, Porta's mass focuses on sonority and voice grouping involving a conversational type of alternation between subgroups of the main choir<sup>5</sup>.

### Analysis and Comparison

The musical model selected by Palestrina and Porta was a two-part, aBcB responsory form motet for four voices by the French composer Hilaire Penet. The masses of Palestrina and Porta appear to be the only two works of the period which draw upon Penet's motet. The texture of the model is characterised by pervasive imitation but is not so contrapuntally dense as to obscure clarity and stability of motivic content. Both *Partes* of the motet contain three lengthy textual phrases each of which is accompanied musically by a motivic complex which in turn is further subdivided<sup>6</sup>. While the two masses, as noted above, bear strong resemblances in terms of organisational principles, they differ substantially in their approaches to musical borrowing procedures, reflecting the dissimilarities in overall style and textural manipulation<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Note that the Kyrie, Gloria and Credo of Porta's mass demonstrate a penchant for quasi-homophonic, polychoral writing, while his Sanctus and Agnus are increasingly polyphonic displaying strict contrapuntal writing in line with many of his other compositions, particularly his earlier motets, which are relentlessly polyphonic.

<sup>6</sup> When referring to the use of borrowed material, Roman numerals are used to designate motivic complexes, and letters their subdivisions. Thus, in the *Prima Pars*, the textual phrases with accompanying musical motives may be enumerated as follows: "Descendit angelus Domini" (musical motive 1a) "ad Zachariam dicens" (musical motive 1b), "accipe puerum" (musical motive 2a) "in senectute tua" (musical motive 2b), "et habebit nomen Joannes Baptista" (musical motive 3). In the *Secunda Pars*, motivic complexes are designated as follows: "Ne timeas" (musical motive 4a), "quoniam exaudita est" (musical motive 4b) "oratio tua" (musical motive 4c), "et Elisabeth uxor tua pariet tibi filium:" (musical motive 5), "et habebit nomen Joannes Baptista" (musical motive 6). Note that motivic complexes are defined predominantly by their text content rather than their musical content. Also note that musical motives 3 and 6 – representing the concluding sections of each *pars* of the motet – are the same, as *Descendit Angelus Domini* is a responsory motet.

<sup>7</sup> Note that the two masses of Palestrina and Porta vary slightly with regard to the subdivisions of their movements. The subdivisions within the Kyrie, Gloria and Agnus Dei follow standard patterns. Both Credos are divided into three divisions: "Patrem

### **Palestrina's *Missa Descendit Angelus Domini***

Palestrina's four-voice mass is intensely reliant upon the fabric of the model and borrows extensively from all voices of the motet. Original material alone, i.e. material not derived from the model, is seldom found within his mass. The dependence of mass on model is also seen in the number of times that extensive polyphonic borrowing occurs. There are more instances of three, four and five-voice borrowings than of two-voice or linear borrowing. Moreover, these polyphonic borrowings frequently encompass a substantial number of bars in succession. Thus, Palestrina skilfully manipulates all voices of the model, reworking the latter's characteristic musical motives and general structure in each movement of his mass – borrowing, transforming and interweaving contrapuntal relationships between successive entries of motives. (See Examples 1a, b, c and 2a, b below with accompanying analytical discussion).

As was the norm in many 16<sup>th</sup> century imitation masses, the opening and closing phrases of each movement of Palestrina's mass, the openings of most subdivisions and the material used in several other sections are determined by the opening and conclusion of the model and by the order of points of imitation within the model. For example, the opening of all divisions of the mass borrow from the opening model point of imitation, and the concluding section of both *partes* of the motet serves to conclude all movements of the mass excluding the Sanctus. Furthermore, the opening of many subdivisions of Palestrina's mass – including the *Qui tollis*, the *Et iterum*, *Benedictus*, and *Agnus Dei II* – borrow the opening motivic complex of the *Secunda Pars* of Penet's motet. Palestrina's tendency to borrow the original sequence of model motives in order is notable, particularly in his earlier imitation masses. This cyclic distribution of pre-existent material may be seen,

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omnipotentum", "Crucifixus" and "Et iterum" in the case of Palestrina; and "Patrem omnipotentum", "Crucifixus" and "Et in Spiritum" in the case of Porta. Both masses employ a three-fold division of the Sanctus with subdivisions at the "Sanctus", "Benedictus" and "Hosanna". Also note that in the Palestrina mass, written for four voices, the "Benedictus" is written for a reduced number of voices, while the number of voices is increased from four to five in the second "Agnus Dei". In the Porta mass, written for five voices, there is a reduction of voices at both the "Crucifixus" and "Benedictus".

for instance, in the Kyrie where the first five model points of imitation from the *prima pars* of the motet (motives 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, and 3) are employed in order; in the first subdivision of the Gloria (bars 1-57) where the first five model points appear consecutively; in the final subdivision of the Credo (bars 191- 217) where motivic complexes 4a, 4b, 5, and 6 are borrowed in succession; and finally at the openings of the Sanctus and Agnus Dei where motives 1a, 1b and 2a appear.

As did many other 16<sup>th</sup> century mass composers, Palestrina frequently reinforces text repetition by immediately repeating the same model motivic material. He points out, for instance, the following verbal symmetries in the Gloria and Credo: “Laudamus te, Benedicimus te, Adoramus te, Gorificamus te”, all of which borrow the same model motive 1b; the two “Qui tollis” phrases that use the same model material from motive 4a; “visibilium ... et invisibilium” which repeat motive 1b; “Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine, Deum verum de Deo vero”, all of which utilise motive 5; and “Et unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam” which use motive 2b.

In his process of borrowing, Palestrina shows great respect for the linear integrity of the melodic lines he borrows. He thus tends to preserve the melodic and rhythmic content of his borrowed motive entries so that they present the same linear profile in his mass. Another factor which dominates Palestrina's patterns of distribution of model material involves the relationship of musical characteristics of specific model motives to the meaning of certain sections of the mass text. A good example is the upward leap of the interval of a fourth between the third and fourth notes of motive 4b to coincide with the phrase “et resurrexit tertia die”.

Example 1 shows the opening of Penet's motet followed by Kyrie I of the masses by Palestrina and Porta so that we may draw a comparison of the borrowing procedures between the two composers. Palestrina's manipulation of model motivic polyphonic complexes and his interweaving of the contrapuntal relationships between the various entries of the voice parts of the model are clearly illustrated and described below. Porta's use of the same borrowed material is discussed later in the present paper.

EXAMPLE 1a: Penet: *Descendit Angelus Domini*, bars 1-26

Musical score for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass, bars 1-26. The score is in G major and common time. The Soprano part begins with a whole note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5. The Alto part has a whole rest in the first bar, then a half note G3, followed by quarter notes A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. The Tenor and Bass parts have whole rests throughout the first six bars.

Soprano  
De - scen - dit an - ge - lus Do - mi - ni ad Za - cha - ri - am di -

Alto  
De - scen - dit an - ge - lus Do - mi -

Tenor

Bass

Continuation of the musical score. The Soprano part continues with quarter notes G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, followed by a whole note G5. The Alto part continues with quarter notes G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, followed by a whole note G5. The Tenor part has a whole rest in the first bar, then a half note G3, followed by quarter notes A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. The Bass part has a whole rest in the first bar, then a half note G2, followed by quarter notes A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3.

- - cens, De - scen - dit an - ge - lus

ni ad Za - cha - ri - am di - cens,

De - scen - dit an - ge - lus Do - mi -

De - - - scen - dit

2

ad  
ad Za - cha - ri - am di -  
ni ad Za - cha - ri - am di - - - cens, ad Za - cha - ri - am.  
an - ge - lus Do - mi - ni ad Za - cha - ri - am di - cens,  
Za - cha - ri - am di - - - - - cens, di -  
- - - - - cens, ad Za - cha - ri - am di -  
di - - - - - cens ad Za - cha - ri - am  
ad Za - cha - ri - am di - - -  
- cens di - - - - - cens ac - ci - pe  
- cens, di - - - - - cens: ac -  
di - - - - - cens: ac - ci - pe pu - e -  
- - - - - cens: ac - ci - pe pu - e - rum,

EXAMPLE 1b: Palestrina: Kyrie, *Missa Descendit Angelus Domini*,  
bars 1-20

[Cantus] Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son, [e - le -

[Altus] Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son. [Ky - ri -

[Tenor]

[Bassus] Ky - ri - e e - le - i -

- - - i - son.][Ky - ri - e e - le - i -

- e e - lei - son.] [Ky - ri - e e - le -

Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son.\_\_\_\_

son.\_\_\_\_ [Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son.]\_\_\_\_

2

son, e - le - i son,] [Ky - ri - ee -  
- i - son.] [Ky - ri - e e - - - le - i -  
[Ky - ri - e e - le - - - - - i - son, e - lei -  
Ky - ri - e - - - - e - lei - - - -  
lei - - - son.] [Ky - ri - e e - lei - son.]  
son.] [Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son.]  
son.] [Ky - ri - e e - lei - - - - son.]  
son.] [Ky - ri - e e - lei - - - - son.]



EXAMPLE 1c: Porta: Kyrie, *Missa Descendit Angelus Domini*, bars 1-9

Musical score for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass, bars 1-9. The score is in 4/4 time and B-flat major. The lyrics are: Soprano: Ky - ri - e e - le - ; Alto: Ky - ri - e e - le - - - i - ; Tenor: Ky - ri - e e - le - - - ; Tenor: Ky - ri - e e - le - - i - son; Bass: Ky - ri - e e - le - i -

Musical score for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass, bars 4-9. The score is in 4/4 time and B-flat major. The lyrics are: Soprano: - i - son Ky - ; Alto: son Ky - ri - e - ; Tenor: - i - son: e - le - i - son: Ky - ri - e - ; Tenor: Ky - ri - e e - le - i - ; Bass: son Ky - ri - e e - le -

2

ri - e e - le - i - son.  
 e - le - - - i - son.  
 e - le - - - i - son.  
 son e - le - i - son.  
 - - - - - i - son.

As shown in Example 1a, Penet uses paired voices at the outset of his motet, and continues with a strict contrapuntal setting. The opening full melodic subject is constructed from two motives which may be designated 1a and 1b respectively. Musical motive 1a accompanies the phrase “Descendit angelus Domini” and musical motive 1b the words “ad Zachariam dicens”. In Palestrina’s mass (Example 1b), the opening soprano and bass voices borrow the same relationship that exists between the soprano and alto of motive 1a of the model. The alto entry of bar 1 of Palestrina’s mass seems to function as an auxiliary entry, anticipating the bass entry in bar 3. Subsequently, the tenor (bar 7ff) of Palestrina’s mass borrows intact the tenor of Penet’s motet (bar 8ff), and is paired with the bass entry, as in the model, but with a single bar’s imitative temporal distance instead of two bars distance. There are also slight rhythmic and melodic modifications in order to enhance easier perception and to accommodate the text and vertical sonorities.

Model motive 1b, accompanying the phrase “ad Zachariam dicens” is employed from bar 11 through to the final cadence of Palestrina’s Kyrie I. Here the tenor, bass and alto entries (bars 11-14) imitate the same entries in bars 12-16 of the motet (see Example 1a and 1b). There are slight alterations, particularly with respect to the imitative

temporal distance of the voices. The soprano entry of bars 15-16 of Palestrina's Kyrie I borrows the bass entry of bars 19-20 of Penet's motet. This linear entry together with the new entries of model motive 1b (tenor and bass entries of bars 16-20) round off Kyrie I, creating new vertical relationships which do not exist in the model.

EXAMPLE 2a: Palestrina: Gloria, *Missa Descendit Angelus Domini*, bars 1-26

[Cantus] Et in

[Altus] Et

[Tenor] Et in ter - ra pax ho - mi - ni - bus.

[Bassus] Et in ter - ra pax ho - mi - ni - bus bo -

ter - ra pax ho - mi - ni - bus bo - nae vo-lun-ta -

in ter - ra pax ho - mi - ni - bus bo - nae vo-lun-ta -

bo - nae vo-lun-ta - - tis bo - nae vo- lun - ta - tis.

- nae vo-lun - ta - - tis.

The image displays a musical score for a Latin liturgical text, likely a Mass. It consists of three systems of music, each with a vocal line (Soprano and Alto) and a piano accompaniment (Tenor and Bass). The lyrics are: "tis. Lau-da-mus te. Be-ne-di-ci-mus te. Ad-o-ra-mus te. Glo-ri-fi-ca-mus te. Gra-ti-as". The score is written in a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature (C). The vocal lines are in a soprano and alto range, while the piano accompaniment is in a tenor and bass range. The lyrics are written below the notes, with hyphens indicating syllables that span across multiple notes. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the bass line and a more melodic line in the tenor line.

tis. Lau-da-mus te. Be-ne-di-ci-

tis. Lau-da-mus te.

Lau-da-mus-te. Be-ne-di-ci-mus-te.

Lau-da-mus te.

mus te. Ad-o-ra-mus te.

Ad-o-ra-mus te.

Be-ne-di-ci-mus te. Ad-o-ra-mus te.

Glo-ri-fi-ca-mus te. Gra-ti-

Glo-ri-fi-ca-mus te. Gra-ti-

Glo-ri-fi-ca-mus te. Gra-ti-

Gra-ti-

EXAMPLE 2b: Porta: Gloria, *Missa Descendit Angelus Domini*, bars 1-15

SOPRANO  
Et in ter - ra pax ho - mi -

ALTO  
Et in ter - ra pax ho - mi - ni -

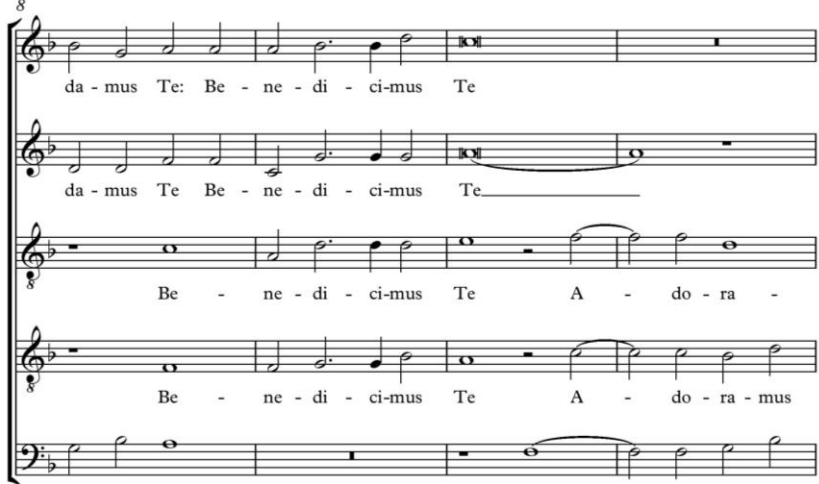
TENOR  
Et in ter - ra - pax ho -

TENOR  
Et in ter - ra pax

BASS  
Et in - ter - ra pax ho -


4  
ni - bus bo - nae vo - lun - ta - tis Lau -  
bus bo - nae vo - lun - ta - tis Lau -  
mi - ni - bus bo - nae vo - lun - ta - tis  
ho - mi - ni - bus bo - nae vo - lun - ta - tis  
mi - ni - bus bo - nae vo - lun - ta - tis Lau -

2  
8



da - mus Te: Be - ne - di - ci - mus Te  
da - mus Te Be - ne - di - ci - mus Te  
Be - ne - di - ci - mus Te A - do - ra -  
Be - ne - di - ci - mus Te A - do - ra - mus  
da - mus Te A - do - ra - mus

12



Glo - ri - fi - ca - - mus Te Gra -  
Glo - ri - fi - ca - mus Te Gra -  
mus Te Gra - ti -  
Te Glo - ri - fi - ca - mus Te  
Te Glo - ri - fi - ca - mus Te Gra -

Examples 2a and 2b show the opening of the Gloria both of Palestrina's and Porta's mass settings on *Descendit Angelus*<sup>8</sup>. The paired-voice entry between tenor and bass at the outset of Palestrina's Gloria borrows from the paired-voice entry (motive 1a) between the soprano and alto of the opening of the motet. The imitative temporal distance is reduced to half a bar in the mass versus two bars (in the motet). The subsequent paired-voice entry between soprano and alto in bars 5-12 of the mass proceeds with the same relationship that exists between tenor and bass of the motet (bars 8-16) and encompasses model motives 1a and 1b. "Laudamus te, Benedicimus te, Adoramus te, Glorificamus te" all borrow motive 1b of the motet accompanying the phrase "ad Zachariam dicens". The bass voice entry of bars 19-23 of the motet is borrowed extensively: at "Laudamus te" (bars 12ff, bass); at "Benedicimus te" (bars 17ff, bass); at "Adoramus te" (bars 20ff, bass); and at "Glorificamus te" (bars 22, tenor). The soprano in bar 14-15 of the mass borrows the tenor entry of bar 15-16 of the motet while the relationship between tenor and soprano in bars 15-19 at "Benedicimus te" and alto and bass in bars 19-22 at "Adoramus te" both invert the relationship existing between alto and tenor (bars 15ff) of the motet<sup>9</sup>. It is clear that Palestrina is borrowing comprehensively from Penet's motet, both manipulating and interweaving existing complexes of model relationships, and creating new vertical and scaffolding relationships with the surrounding polyphonic material.

### **Porta's *Missa Descendit Angelus Domini***

In Porta's five-voice mass, the five principal movements also commence with material derived from the opening of Penet's motet. Like Palestrina's setting, the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo and Agnus Dei conclude with material from the final motivic complex of the motet. Furthermore, the initial motivic complex of the *Secunda Pars* of

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<sup>8</sup> Discussion of Example 2b ensues later.

<sup>9</sup> Note that the bass in bars 20-22 of the Gloria could also be derived from the motet bass (bars 19ff), as noted earlier.

*Descendit Angelus* is borrowed for the beginning of many subdivisions of the mass including the *Qui tollis*, *Crucifixus*, *Hosanna*, and *Agnus Dei* II. The borrowing of model motivic complexes in order is not as extensive as in the Palestrina setting<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, Porta does not reflect verbal symmetries in the Gloria and Credo to the same extent as Palestrina, neither does he select model material for its special musical effect in pointing out the meaning of segments in the mass text.

It is evident that Porta's recompositional methods are less comprehensive than those of Palestrina, so that his mass does not exhibit a high degree of dependence upon the model. Thus, the polyphony of the model is not as closely approximated as it is in Palestrina's mass setting which borrows *in toto*, exploiting all antecedent voices simultaneously. Instead, there is a freer development of material derived from the model making Porta's distribution of model passages more random. Thorough working out of derivative material is seldom found. Porta may change the alignment of the parts, change the ordering of derivative passages from the model, and repeat some musical ideas while omitting others. Furthermore, unlike Palestrina who retains the number and disposition of voices of the model, Porta adds a new voice – a second tenor part – to those of the original.

The outer voices of the model are borrowed far more extensively and literally in Porta's mass, especially the bass or lowest-sounding voice. The inner voices are often limited in their reference to borrowed material or they are manipulated with a view to preserving the harmonic foundation of the model. Thus, dexterity comes less from contrapuntal skill than from the refashioning of integral textures of sound. In this process, Porta makes some alterations to the rhythmic and melodic outlines of borrowed motives, subjecting them to fragmentation, telescoping, combination with new material, chordal treatment and imitation. His treatment differs from that of Palestrina, whose interest lies in more literal, contrapuntally-orientated methods of alteration and adaptation and in systematic utilisation of the pre-existent material, rather than in freer, more vertically-orientated methods of emendation.

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<sup>10</sup> The openings of the Kyrie, Gloria and Sanctus of Porta's setting employ motives 1a, 1b, and 2a in succession; and the *Qui tollis* employs 4a, 4b, 5 and 6 consecutively.



As noted earlier, Example 1c illustrates Kyrie I of Porta's mass. Porta borrows from the same model motivic complex as Palestrina. The differences in procedures are stark. Palestrina retains elements of the basic overall structure of the model's opening point of imitation, borrowing the series of close imitations spanning the upper voices followed by the imitative-entry relationship between the two lower voices. Porta's setting of Kyrie I is very concise, encompassing nine bars as opposed to twenty bars. His borrowing and transformation methods are less systematic, emphasising harmonic dimensions. These methods show Porta's differing approach towards textural manipulation and stylistic processes in which imitative counterpoint is fused into an essentially quasi-homophonic and transparent texture, but with the parts enlivened by short snatches of imitation or rhythmic independence.

Only the bass voice adheres strictly to model motives 1a and 1b (See Examples 1a and 1c and compare with 1b). The other voices are sensitively rearranged with a view to preserving the sonorities of the motet, creating a new balance and rich texture. Contrapuntal manipulation is not evident; rather the example shows Porta's freer, bass dominated re-compositional methods with original material woven into the polyphonic fabric.

Similar procedures are adopted in Example 2b which also exhibits a trend towards the attenuation of polyphonic processes. Porta intersperses antiphonal repetition with *tutti* sections resulting in a polychoral style associated with late 16<sup>th</sup> century Venetian composers. Again, his setting at the opening of the Gloria is very succinct comprising 15 bars as opposed to the same passage in Palestrina's Gloria of 26 bars. Porta borrows motives 1a and motive 1b successively. The bass of the opening of his Gloria (bars 1-15) utilises the bass of Penet's motet (bars 10-16) but with a certain amount of fragmentation and telescoping. The soprano opens with motive 1b. The other voices have limited references to the motet, displaying greater flexibility and freedom in their melodic lines and reinforcing the harmonic content. Porta's exploration of the expressive potential of the harmonies and of vocal orchestration and tone colour can be seen not only in the succession of chords but in the grouping and spacing of the voices in vertical combinations, always showing

sensitivity to the syntax of the text. The voice parts are thus conceived *en bloc*, and not as a combination of independent, self-sufficient lines, all of equal importance.

### **Selection of Model, Possible Motivation, and Reflection on Outlook as Composers**

Palestrina's and Porta's selection of a sacred model by the composer Penet in their mass *Descendit Angelus Domini* may be attributable to personal taste but more likely to their close affiliations with the Roman Catholic church. When we compare their selection of models in their mass outputs generally to that of their contemporaries, interesting details emerge. Palestrina, in particular, borrows from a rather select group of works in his 54 imitation masses – either his own motets, or sacred motets that originate from the mainstream of Franco-Flemish polyphony of the earlier 16<sup>th</sup> century by Rome-based composers. Penet, for instance, was a French composer who was employed as a papal singer in the Court of Pope Leo X from 1514 to 1521. His motet was published in the renowned *Motteti del Fiore* collection (1532) of Jacques Moderne – an active and prominent music printer, who published on a large scale, and whose music publications were disseminated throughout Europe<sup>11</sup>.

That none of Palestrina's imitation masses have been based on a work by his immediate contemporaries, nor any member of the Venetian school, except de Rore, nor notable composers of the Parisian school is striking. Nine of Porta's fifteen masses are parody works. His sources – some of which have not been identified – include madrigals by Palestrina and de Rore, and motets by Penet and Gombert.

The contemporaries of Palestrina and Porta – Lassus, De Monte and Gallus – who stand outside the orbit of the Counter-Reformation, and who were impervious to liturgical directives, show a wider range of taste, modelling their masses on the compositions of their predecessors and contemporaries, selecting sacred motets, and secular compositions (chansons and madrigals) from the Parisian, Roman and Venetian schools. Lassus' selection of models, for instance, includes

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<sup>11</sup> Many of the motets from Moderne's anthology were reprinted in numerous later collections.

motets by Lassus himself and others; Italian madrigals by Sebastian Festa, Arcadelt, de Rore, Willaert and Palestrina, and chansons by French and Dutch masters such as Gombert, de Monte, Clemens, de Sermisy, Certon and Sandrin. Approximately 50% of the masses composed by Lassus, Gallus and de Monte use motets while the use of madrigals ranges between 20% and 35%, and that of chansons or liedere between 10% and 30%. This contrasts greatly to Palestrina's use of motets, madrigals and chansons as models in his imitation masses. Eighty-four percent of Palestrina's masses borrow motets, 15% madrigals and only a single mass is derived from a chanson.

Continuing with the issue of motivation behind the selection of Penet's motet, it is possible that the masses and their source motets could have been sung at the same liturgical ceremony and thus conceived of as belonging together. The motet would then have been performed either during the Offertory, Elevation or Communion<sup>12</sup>. As Carter reinforces, documentary and manuscript evidence from the 16<sup>th</sup> century suggests that motets might have been "liturgically paired with the masses based upon them" (Carter, 1992:70).

Palestrina's and Porta's selection of Penet's motet may also reflect a consciousness on the part of both composers that they were partaking in an artistic tradition – one of imitation, emulation and competition<sup>13</sup>. Certainly musicians could hardly have been ignorant of so widespread and universal a doctrine which pervaded pedagogical and artistic techniques throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Whilst musicologists have not established exact parallels between specific categories of musical borrowing and types of literary borrowing, this should not rule out the possible influence of the concept of rhetorical *imitatio* on that of musical *imitatio*. There are certainly common elements that imply a consciousness of, and association with corresponding procedures derived from rhetorical tradition.

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<sup>12</sup> Anthony Cummings has offered valuable insight into instances of imitation masses being sung in conjunction with their models for the same occasion. See Cummings (1981).

<sup>13</sup> The concept that concerns us here is the meaning of *imitatio* as a doctrine fostering the creation of new works through the imitation of models, particularly literary models. Many 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century writers modeled their works not only on writers of their own time but on classical Greek and Latin authors, borrowing words, idioms, phrases, as well as ideas and matters of style.

Rhetorical *imitatio* encompassed to some degree the idea of homage and of emulation – of a sense of competition between elaborator and model that is inherent within the choice of an antecedent and in the refashioning of its material, as the imitator strove to surpass what his predecessor had achieved. Meconi has stated that: “For classical authors of rhetorical treatises as well as their Renaissance followers concepts of emulation (with the implication of homage) and competition are all part of the ongoing debate about whom one should emulate” (Meconi, 1994:153). This influence of emulation and competition may explain the differences in the recompositional techniques of Porta and Palestrina. Thus, their creation of a new musical work through borrowing constituted not only an avenue to exhibit creativity, but a consciousness of engagement with a tradition involving competition with each other. Competitive composition tested their compositional skills as they sought to demonstrate new and individual ways of transforming the pre-existent model.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Palestrina's and Porta's selection of Penet's motet was most certainly dependent upon the style of the model. While their borrowing procedures differ considerably, Penet's motet, for the most part, conforms to the overall contrapuntal techniques of both composers. In many fundamental areas – including melodic interval progressions, harmonic vocabulary, rhythmic motion, and dissonance treatment – the structural delineation, organisational principles, and expressive projection cultivated by both Palestrina and Porta is similar to that of the model. The similar relationship of Penet's contrapuntal techniques to the demands of Palestrina's and Porta's compositional procedures enabled both composers to borrow from Penet's motet quite freely.

To conclude, the present essay shows that both Palestrina and Porta, in their mass settings based on Penet's *Descendit Angelus Domini*, found their roots of inspiration in the devout, restrained, and liturgical atmosphere of Italian Renaissance polyphony. The latter point reflects the influence of the ecclesiastical context within which both composers spent their entire lives. Most importantly, the essay demonstrates that while the formal and organisational principles adopted by Palestrina and Porta are similar in their respective masses,

their procedures of borrowing are very different, reflecting their differing stylistic and textural approaches in the two masses, and contributing to the multiplicity of reworking procedures within Renaissance mass settings as a whole.

Palestrina favours detailed re-composition, reflecting his more contrapuntal approach, found particularly in his earlier imitation masses. While reworking and manipulating model material, he ensures that well-defined and readily discernible versions of entries of model points of imitation, all presenting the same linear profile, appear in his mass.

Porta, on the other hand, borrows more frugally. He is more succinct in his approach using refined polyphonic processes whereby the vertical elements dominate the horizontal. His methods of alteration and adaptation are thus not orientated toward the manipulation of contrapuntal relationships between successive entries of model motives. Rather he refashions model material from the lowest voice upwards, manipulating masses of sound rather than threads of melody. This anticipates one of the significant features of the Baroque: the awareness of the bass as the foundation, the fundamental supporting voice.

Whilst the differing approaches to polyphonic borrowing by both Palestrina and Porta may be attributable to autonomous factors generated by overall stylistic and creative procedures of the composers at the time, it seems plausible that Penet's motet *Descendit Angelus Domini* could also have been considered a vehicle for contrapuntal and technical display in a genuinely competitive sense, and as a means of paying homage to a Rome-based, Franco-Flemish composer working in papal circles from the earlier part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

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## SICILY'S HISTORICAL TRAUMAS: LUIGI PIRANDELLO'S "L'ALTRO FIGLIO" AND ITS CINEMATIC RENDITION BY PAOLO AND VITTORIO TAVIANI IN KAOS (1984)

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### **Sommario**

*Il saggio prende in esame una novella pirandelliana e la sua resa cinematografica. In "L'altro figlio", Maragrazia, la protagonista, vive completamente e tragicamente emarginata dagli abitanti di Farnia (Sicilia) che la considerano una vecchia pazza. Causa della sua apparente pazzia sembra essere la lontananza dei suoi amati figli, emigrati da anni in America come tanti concittadini, con i quali ha perso ogni contatto. Un giovane medico appena arrivato a Farnia ha pena di Maragrazia e, interessandosi del suo stato mentale, decide di farsi raccontare la storia della sua vita. Viene così a scoprire che il marito della povera donna era stato ucciso da una banda di briganti, usciti di prigione grazie ad un decreto di Garibaldi, e che lei stessa è stata violentata e tenuta prigioniera per mesi da uno dei briganti dal quale avrà un figlio che però non riuscirà mai ad accettare. Attraverso l'analisi 'transmediale' della novella, il saggio si concentra sull'esame della narrativizzazione e resa cinematografica del trauma storico collettivo Siciliano.*

**Keywords:** Historical trauma, Garibaldi, emigration, mafia, Italy's unification

The short story "L'altro figlio" (1902), in *Novelle per un anno*, stands out within the corpus of Pirandello's work for the brutality of its drama and for evoking a world very different to the mostly bourgeois reality presented in the author's best-known short stories, plays, and novels; it is a natural and agrarian world marked by destitution and degradation (Concolino, 2016:98-99). In writing the *Novelle*, Pirandello's literary goal was that of writing a story for each day of the year, however, his death ended the project prematurely (Radcliff-

Umstead, 1991:344). Thus, the *Novelle* are collected according to the sole principle of the daily passing of time and of “una unitaria espressione della totalità del mondo pirandelliano dolorosa e non certo gaia” (Salsano, 2016:51). As for many other short stories of the collection, Pirandello transformed “L’altro figlio” into a one-act play, much later in 1923; nevertheless, neither the short story nor the play has attracted much attention from critics, and they both remain marginal within the critical studies on Pirandello’s art. For comparison and contrast, I, then, turn to the Taviani brothers’ cinematic rendition of the story in *Kaos* (1984), where Pirandello’s oneiric and symbolic return to his dead mother is “paralleled to by an etymological and historical return to Sicily’s primeval past” (Marcus, 1993:183).

This return is well expressed by the film’s epigraphic words, “I therefore, am son of Kàos, and not allegorically, but in reality, because I was born in our countryside that is located near an intricate forest, called Càvusu by the inhabitants of Agrigento — a dialectal corruption of the genuine and ancient Greek word Kàos” (Marcus, 1993:183). Pirandello’s return is to the Greek colonisation of Sicily which is paralleled by his journey into his personal chaos, guided by his mother’s words, “Learn to see with the eyes of those who no longer see” (Marcus, 1993:184-85). Thus, “*Kàos* can be read as a lesson in seeing, in the healthy, open, chaotic vision of the authorial consciousness, and the closed, fixed, pathological, *in malo* vision of the imaginatively impaired” (Marcus, 1993:185). The lesson in seeing is indeed the *leitmotif* that threads the proem and the four stories: “Il corvo di Mizzaro”, “L’altro figlio”, “Mal di luna”, “La giara”, and “Requiem”. Hence, I contend that in “L’altro figlio” the Tavianis are inviting us to see the *Risorgimento* “with the eyes of those who no longer see”, and whose voice was not heard during those historical years.

The story centers on Maragrazia’s traumatic life. As Garibaldi arrives in Sicily, he orders the release of all prisoners. Bandits are freed, too, causing horrible violence; Maragrazia’s husband is killed, she is raped, and gives birth to a son who she cannot accept, while her beloved sons emigrate to America. In 1895, Sigmund Freud published *Studies in Hysteria*, where he linked neurosis to past traumatic

experiences (now 1963:36-38), and Pirandello, like many intellectuals of his time, was very much influenced by Freud's trauma theories (Stone, 1989:101). Etymologically, the word "trauma" comes from the Ancient Greek word "πῶς να σημάνει τραύμα" and means "wound", and Maria Antonietta Grignani already highlighted how Pirandello's characters tend to have "a wounded subjectivity" (1999:77). The image of the wounded subject is central in my study, as I contend that Pirandello describes both the national unification and Sicilian emigration as a wound, separating – instead of joining – Italians, as national subject, who twice missed the historic chance to become one people. My argument is that Maragrazia's multiple traumas represent Sicily's historical traumas rooted in Italy's unification and the consequent massive emigration. As Pasquale Verdicchio observes, "[Italian] emigration is part and parcel of the oppressive process of nation building" (1997:98), which created the colonial subjugation of Sicily (Sorrentino, 2013:97). As any colonisation inevitably causes trauma (Kalayjian & Eugene, 2010:212), in this work, I intend to apply trauma theories to explicate Sicily's position as subaltern "Otherness" within Italy's national project. My research's scope is not completely new, as Norma Bouchard, writing about the *Risorgimento* and its aftermath in Sicily, argues that, "*Risorgimento* truly emerges as that transgenerational specter described by Abraham as a trauma that is transmitted and repeated from earlier to later generations" (2006:76). In her groundbreaking article, Bouchard outlines how historical trauma is a leitmotif in the works of Sicilian writers such as Verga, Pirandello, Lampedusa, and Consolo.

Historical traumas relate to historic events involving losses of both the lives and the cultures of the affected people (LaCapra, 2011:49), while trauma narratives centre on the reconstruction of and recuperation from the traumatic event through accounts of the traumatised who need to tell their experiences to make them real both for themselves and for the community (Tal, 1996:137). As a trauma text, this story is a way to reconstruct and recover historical memories, which have been neglected or suppressed by post-unification Italian mainstream culture and rhetoric. To 'right' national history, Pirandello metaphorically inscribes post-unification Sicily's

historical traumas in the personal traumas of the story's protagonist Maragrazia, her husband, and her son Rocco. Pirandello's rhetorical move is a well-codified narrative strategy in trauma literature, as traditional languages cannot adequately convey the horror of the survivors' experiences. As Tal comments: "As it is spoken by survivors, the traumatic experience is re-inscribed as metaphor" (1996:16).

The story begins with Maragrazia asking, "C'è Ninfarosa?" Ninfarosa is a fictitious and allusive name. In Greek mythology, nymphs are famous for being perennially young, beautiful, and, consequently, the natural target of men's sexual desires. The name points to the woman's young and provocative beauty, "Bruna e colorita, dagli occhi neri, sfavillanti, dalle labbra accese, da tutto il corpo solido e svelto, spirava una allegra fierezza (Pirandello, 1957:928). For Maragrazia, though, Ninfarosa's real seductive power is her ability to write letters to her sons in America. Just like Ninfarosa, the name Maragrazia is also fictitious and highly allusive to "Mala Grazia" – carrying an ominous fate. As Maragrazia drops down on the steps of Ninfarosa's house to wait for her, the narrator describes her as "un mucchio di cenci [...] unti e grevi [...] e impregnati di sudor puzzolente e di tutto il sudicio delle strade [...] le palpebre sanguinavano [...] bruciate dal continuo lacrimare [...] gli occhi chiari apparivano come lontani, quelli d'un'infanzia senza memorie" (926).

Maragrazia lost the ability to take care of herself, and, as a result, she also lost all human traits, becoming a heap of dirt and grease. As Giuseppe Barone noticed, Maragrazia's tragic existence is rooted in her "trauma affettivo del distacco" – due to her sons' emigration to America – that becomes a metaphor of Sicily's massive emigration during the years 1892–1920 (1987:206). Although between 1881 and 1913 Italian industrial production increased by a staggering annual rate of 4.2 percent, during almost the same period (1901-1914), 28 percent of Southern Italians emigrated to the Americas (Daniele & Malanima, 2001:72; Barone, 1987:201). Paradoxically, that increase in industrial production was sustained also by Southern workers' remittance money, even if Sicily, and the South in general, did not

benefit from the government's industrial development plans (Barone, 1987:205).

Every time people from her village, Farnia, leave for America, Maragrazia follows and scrutinises them to see to whom she can entrust the letter that Ninfarosa wrote for her. For fourteen years, Maragrazia has repeated the same actions: having Ninfarosa write a letter and then finding a person to whom to entrust its delivery. The letter that she dictates to Ninfarosa follows the same script, "Cari figli [...] io non ho più occhi per piangere [...] perché gli occhi miei sono abbruciati di vedervi almeno per l'ultima volta" (Pirandello, 1957:930). Ruggero Jacobbi argues for Maragrazia's agency in choosing her life style – since she refused *l'atro figlio*'s support – and writes, "Maragrazia sceglie l'emarginazione, una vita da stracciona; quelli che gli altri ritengono la sua abiezione è, invece, la sua dignità" (Alonge, 1993:xxix). On the contrary, I contend that her inability to take care of herself, her being lost with "gli occhi chiari [che] apparivano come lontano d'un'infanzia senza memorie" (Pirandello, 1957:930), and her obsessively repetitive behaviour in writing letters to her sons are all characteristics that point to trauma.

As Laurie Vickroy writes, "Trauma disrupts our notions of fixed personality traits and draws attention to reactive behaviour"; consequently, to avoid pain victims separate or dissociate themselves from physical and emotional self-awareness. In other words, trauma victims' "splitting off from one's body or awareness can reduce the victim's immediate sense of violation and help the person to endure and survive the situation" (2015:8). What I find intriguing here is the idea that a trauma survivor needs to split off from her own body or awareness – hence, Maragrazia's apparent apathy about her filthy living conditions. In such splitting, the trauma survivor acts very similarly to the subaltern occupying the "third space", as described by Homi Bhabha (1990:211). Ultimately, trauma is an experience of both displacement and dislocation, although with different results. Whereas in the "third space" a new hybrid identity is created, in the case of a trauma the splitting of the personality leads only to "dysphoria and a numbness that takes the meaning out of life and makes it hard to relate to other people" (Tal, 1996:135).

Unlike the short story, where the plot develops over a few days and in many locations, in the Tavianis' cinematic rendition, Maragrazia's trauma is narrated only in one day and in one location: the dirt road that takes the emigrants away by carriage. The Tavianis' choice of the unity of place and time creates a tightened and pressing rhythm, dramatising the epiphany of Maragrazia's trauma and the doctor's involvement in it. In the first scenes, however, the most significant difference between the text and the film lies in the script of the letter, "Cari figli miei è vostra madre che scrive a voi, nella vostra bella terra d'oro, da questa nostra terra di pianto." The image of the "terra d'oro" works as the polar opposite to the "terra del pianto", both politically and economically. Thus, "la terra di pianto" and "la terra d'oro" live in symbiosis, determining not only how Sicilians envision their land but also how much they are invested in believing in the myth of "la terra d'oro". Each image needs the other to survive (Marcus, 1993:200). By making a comparison between "la nostra terra di pianto" and "la vostra bella terra d'oro", the Tavianis are describing America as a viable and concrete form of escape for Sicilian emigrants.

In 1984, when the film was released, reference to Sicily as "la terra del pianto" had acquired a new meaning, as Sicily was living through the most brutal, bloodiest, and most traumatising of Mafia families' wars. Between 1979 and 1986, the Corleonese family single mindedly transformed the Sicilian Mafia's structure from a multi-family criminal organisation to a single-family one by physically eliminating its competitors (Calabrò, 2016:23). In those years, Sicily witnessed a level of violence without precedent: 500 people were killed, and 500 went missing in Palermo alone. The list of victims included Mafiosi but also 'clean' politicians, policemen, judges, and bystanders — the collateral damage in any war. Totò Riina, the ruthless head of the Corleoneses, described this war's victims, "Diventarono come tonni [...] e noi li uccidemmo [...] ci fu una mattanza" (Calabrò, 2016:12). In the Tavianis' cinematic rendition, Pirandello's Sicily is necessarily intertwined with the Sicily of "gli anni della mattanza."

In Pirandello's story, the "trauma affettivo del distacco" (Barone, 1987:206) is a collective experience, and everyone in Farnia is touched by it; even the letters are only "un inganno" (Salsano,

2016:56). As Jaco Spina admonishes, “S’io fossi re – disse, e sputò – s’io fossi re, nemmeno una lettera farei più arrivare a Farnia da laggiù”. The letters are deceiving, since “solo il bene dicono, e ogni lettera è per questi ragazzacci ignoranti come la chioccia – pïo pïo pïo – se li chiama e porta via tutti quanti! Dove son più le braccia per lavorare le nostre terre?” (Pirandello, 1957:928). Through the words of Jaco Spina, who claims that the letters seduce and steal young men from their families and their lands, Pirandello seems to support the theory of many *anti-emigrazionisti* who considered emigration a real calamity for the South and were highly skeptical of its benefits. Above all, they protested the government’s inactivity and incompetence in alleviating the South’s economic problems that made emigration so alluring and necessary for its population (Wong, 2006:118). Conversely, in the film, America is described as a mistress one can possess for personal enjoyment, as a father reminds his son who is leaving, “Fai l’uomo con le donne, ma non sposare una straniera” (Marcus, 1993:202). By gendering America as a female and constructing the emigrants as “l’uomo”, the film, unlike the story, is empowering Sicilian immigrants with the agency to possess and enjoy the New World, further suggesting America’s availability for their own personal use.

In the story, thanks to Farnia’s new doctor, Maragrazia finds out that Ninfarosa has been deceiving her by writing only scribbles over the last fourteen years, “E perché m’ha ingannata così? Ah, per questo, dunque, i miei figli non mi rispondono! [...] mai nulla ha scritto loro di tutto quello che io le ho dettato [...]. Dunque non ne sanno niente i figli miei, del mio stato? Che io sto morendo per loro?” (Pirandello, 1957:933). The act of writing letters in Farnia is unreliable, as it defies its own purpose, which should be making communication possible.

The letters should have been the in-between space linking the separated families, where each other’s needs and desires could have been expressed and hopefully met. Hence, Maragrazia’s final and agonising question, “E perché m’ha ingannata così?”, refers not only to Ninfarosa’s betrayal, in not writing what she said she would, but to Maragrazia’s own isolation, resulting from that betrayal. Maragrazia’s sons’ unwillingness to write to their mother, then, further underscores

the wound separating the two parts of the family. As the emigrants make their homes in America, they may lose interest in keeping ties with a homeland that ultimately forced them into exile.

In the film, the wound bleeds more profusely, as the emigrants, walking on the dusty dirt road to the carriage that will take them away, realise that those are the last moments they can spend with their loved ones accompanying them, and some of them cannot stop weeping. When they find out that their departure is delayed by three hours because of a broken wheel, one of them shouts in joy, "Abbiamo ancora tre ore da passare insieme", revealing the anguish that each one of them is carrying inside. It is during that time that the doctor tells Maragrazia about her letter, "Sono solo sgorbi". Although she is ridiculed by the others on account of the letter, she shouts out her own victory, "I figli miei non mi dimenticarono. [...] Non mi risposero perchè no ricevettero niente da me". However, her shout of joy alienates her even more from the others, who start making gestures with their hands, signaling her insanity.

In Pirandello's rendition, instead, Ninfarosa is the only one reporting about Maragrazia's insanity, when she is confronted by the doctor's reproach, "lei s'affligge sul serio per quella vecchia matta?" (1957:936). In both versions, the doctor is motivated to discover Maragrazia's real story because of the way the village people construct her as a madwoman. His human interest is naturally intertwined with his professional duty to probe her mind. In pursuing the truth about Maragrazia's mental health, the doctor conducts an interview similar to medical anamnesis, through which the patient history is revealed (Marcus, 1993:195). However, in Maragrazia's case, her personal anamnesis reveals the history of another patient: the newly formed Italy.

Both Pirandello and the Tavianis make the doctor into a very crucial character, as he is the one who corrects Ninfarosa's wrongdoing. From Pirandello's description, we find out that the new doctor is young and not originally from Farnia; rather, "è venuto da poco" (Pirandello, 1957:932). The text does not give us more information about his geographical provenance. In the film, though, the doctor's accent clearly situates him outside of Sicily and the South, possibly from central Italy. Consequently, the doctor is



removed from Maragrazia both in time and, at least in the film, in space. His temporal and spatial distancing is important in the narrative because he becomes the witness to Maragrazia's secret trauma, taking place in a time and space appropriated by the national myth of Italy's unification. The doctor is moved by Maragrazia's situation of alienation, bordering on madness, and decides to dig into her mind and memory that have stored "Cose nere! cose nere! Vossignoria non era allora neanche nella mente di Dio, e io le ho viste con questi occhi che hanno pianto da allora lagrime di sangue. Ha sentito parlare vossignoria d'un certo Canebardo?". The doctor is taken aback by her words and briefly perplexed by the name "Canebardo", which, nonetheless, he recognises and exclaims, "Ma come c'entra Garibaldi?" (Pirandello, 1957:941). By concocting a name that evokes the idea of a dog and that of a patriotic poet, Pirandello is clearly ridiculing Italy's national hero through humour, one of the *leitmotif* of the *Novelle* (Salsano, 2016:51).

Finally, Maragrazia tells him her story, and how it crossed with Garibaldi's coming to Sicily and ordering the release of all prisoners from jails, "Ora, si figuri vossignoria che ira di Dio si scatenò allora per le nostre campagne! I peggiori ladri, i peggiori assassini, bestie selvagge, sanguinarie, arrabbiate da tanti anni di catena". Although Maragrazia has difficulty in telling her story, she continues, "Tra gli altri ce n'era uno, il più feroce, un certo Cola Camizzi, capobrigante, che ammazzava le povere creature di Dio, così, per piacere, come fossero mosche" (Pirandello, 1957:941). Maragrazia recounts how the bandits would take men from the fields and force them to join in their most horrific actions. Her young husband was taken, too. After three days, he was able to escape and return home, but he came back as a changed man, "Ma egli, zitto, sedette vicino al fuoco, sempre con le mani nascoste così, sotto la giaccia, gli occhi da insensato, e stette un pezzo a guardare verso terra; poi disse: 'Meglio morto!' " (942). Her husband, Nino, is the first to be traumatised. To examine Pirandello's representation of Nino's trauma, I will use Lawrence Langer's work describing the Holocaust victims' need to adapt to new ethical categories to survive such an ordeal. Although we do not know exactly what the bandits forced Nino to do, we know that he must have done something horrible with his hands, which he keeps hiding

under his jacket. In those three days, he had to repudiate his ethical categories of 'good' and 'evil', 'guilt' and 'responsibility' to be able to commit whatever he was coerced to do, to survive. Nonetheless, once he was home again, he had to reacquire and live by his old moral categories. Whereas in those three days his ability to suppress his sense of responsibility and guilt allowed him to sustain his life and spirit, in his house their crushing weight was too much for him to bear, making him loathe his own life, 'Meglio morto' (1985:122-23).

As Langer asserts, "The survivor does not travel a road from the normal to the bizarre back to the normal, but from the normal to the bizarre back to a normalcy so permeated by the bizarre encounter with atrocity, that it can never be purified again. The two worlds haunt each other" (1985:88). Nino's trauma – resulting from the awareness of a forced complicity with an oppressive power that "destroys those *over* whom and *with* whom it seeks domination" (Vickroy, 2002:167) – becomes a metaphor for Sicily's historical trauma, rooted in the unification. As Anna Cento Bull reports, "The government worried about brigandage turning into an organised political revolt in favour of the deposed southern monarchy, and decided to intervene with drastic measures, including the imposition of martial law" (2001:41). To that end, the government often relied on repressive, corrupt, and violent local power-holders, who used up the resources brought into the island without generating any wealth and who "succeeded in influencing the evolution of the process of political and social modernisation over the last two centuries by playing the weakness of the state against its own persistent autonomy" (Pezzino, 1997:54-56). Moreover, Sorrentino underlines how Caterina in *I vecchi e i giovani* (1909) "è indignata del *modus operandi* del nuovo stato italiano nell'isola trattata come terra di conquista. Caterina si fa portavoce delle rimostranze di un'intera generazione di patrioti che, dopo il 1860 si unisce nell'idea che fosse 'Meglio prima!'. Una generazione che vede infranti i propri ideali dalle politiche di sfruttamento della Sicilia del neonato Regno" (2013:61-62).

Pointedly, Kali Tal observes trauma victims' inability to communicate their witnessed horrors through language, as the words of Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor, testify: "The word has deserted the meaning it was intended to convey – impossible to make them

coincide.... We all knew that we could never, never say what had to be said, that we could never express in words, coherent, intelligible words our experience of madness on an absolute scale” (Tal, 1996:122). Nino is unable to articulate his horrific experience, involving not only his hands but also his eyes, which he keeps on the ground in a sign of shame. After spending three days in this condition, he leaves the house to go to work and never comes back.

In the film, as Maragrazia recounts her story to the doctor, the camera moves away from them to show us Garibaldi liberating a Sicilian village. He is easily recognisable by his iconic marks: red shirt and a blue cloak, blonde hair and beard. As he trots on his white horse in the background, he passes in front of a palace, easily recognizable as Donnafugata's in Luchino Visconti's *The Leopard* (Bonsaver, 2007:106). As he proceeds, a carriage full of *garibaldini* follows him, distributing rice to the village people who are coming out of their houses. As Garibaldi and his men leave the scene, we see Cola Camizzi, dressed in black on a black ox, going in the opposite direction. Marco Trupia, Camizzi's second in command, follows him on foot. As Bonsaver observes, with this scene the Tavianis enter into a dialogical conversation with Visconti's retelling of the Italian *Risorgimento* as a failure: indeed, in Sicily nothing has changed, as Tancredi had prophesied, and violence keeps hurting and traumatising its people (2007:107).

After Nino's disappearance, Maragrazia decides to look for him, and as she arrives at the gate of the bandits' hideout, “Ah, che vidi!”, Maragrazia's recounting of what she witnessed is so horrific that “con gli occhi sanguigni sbarrati, allungò una mano con le dita artigliate dal ribrezzo. Le mancò la voce”. She finally finds the strength to continue, “Giocavano [...] là, in quel cortile [...] alle bocce [...] ma con teste d'uomini [...] nere, piene di terra [...], le tenevano acciuffate pei capelli [...] e una, quella di mio marito [...] la teneva lui, Cola Camizzi [...] e me la mostrò. Gettai un grido che mi stracciò la gola e il petto”. Her screams scare the bandits and, as she reports, “Cola Camizzi mi mise le mani al collo per farmi tacere, uno di loro gli saltò addosso, furioso; e allora, quattro, cinque, dieci, prendendo ardire da quello, gli s'avventarono contro [...]. Erano sazii, rivoltati anche loro della tirannia feroce di quel mostro”. At last, Maragrazia

has the satisfaction to see Camizzi killed by “i suoi stessi compagni”. Then the old woman falls onto the chair exhausted, panting, and shaking (Pirandello, 1957:943).

The doctor's curiosity about her story makes her relive it. The horror she witnessed remains in her memory and, in reliving it, her body contorts in torment. The heads that the bandits are playing with belong to those men who refused to be part of an unlawful and oppressive power, like Nino. In the film's *bocce* scene, while some men are shown to be totally indifferent to the atrocity of that game, others cannot even raise their eyes up. Those latter men have their backs turned away from the game, and their eyes implore pity and compassion from the viewers, the film's intended interlocutor. Dominick LaCapra underscores the importance of empathy in historical trauma as “a desirable affective dimension of inquiry which complements and supplements empirical research and analysis. Empathy is important in attempting to understand traumatic events and victims” (2011:78). In other words, the viewer must have an affective involvement to fully understand historical traumas.

In producing a devastatingly brutal scene like that of the *bocce*, the Tavianis force the viewers to disavow any recuperation of the past through uplifting or optimistic messages of national rhetoric. The *bocce* scene is central to Maragrazia's recounting of her trauma in the cinematic rendition. Voyeuristically, we become part of that scene's horror to better empathise with those who, just like us, are forced to participate in that psychopathic drama. However, Maragrazia's trauma does not stop at that. Marco Trupia, the man who first attacked Cola Camizzi, takes her by force and keeps her imprisoned for three months, “[D]opo tre mesi, la giustizia venne a scovarlo là e lo richiuse in galera, dove morì poco dopo” (Pirandello, 1957:943). The rape of a woman as a metaphor for the taking of land is a well-established topos, going back to the Romans' legend of the Sabine women's capture. In Maragrazia's story, though, her rape was not actualised by Garibaldi or one of his men; instead, a local brigand was the culprit. However, Marco Trupia carried out his violence because of Garibaldi's order. Once again, the story brings to the fore the complicity of the two powers, the revolutionary and the local, acting to the detriment of the peasantry.

It is important to notice the Tavianis' cinematic depiction of Maragrazia's rape differs from Pirandello's. Unlike the *bocce* scene, the film does not show her imprisonment, rape, and liberation, instead, Maragrazia narrates this to the doctor. In Maragrazia's recounting, the events concerning the police's arrival, her liberation, and Marco Trupia's incarceration are missing; she only states, "dopo tre mesi vennero a liberarmi". The subject of the sentence is not specified. Consequently, there is no sense of judicial closure, as there is in the original story. Pirandello seems to convey that, after all, the Italian state has enough power to at least carry out justice, thereby inviting Sicilians not to maroon their own homeland by crossing the Atlantic toward America. By denying America as a concrete possibility for Sicilian masses to live with dignity and prosperity, he is left with only the choice of believing in the new nation-state, albeit very lukewarmly.

In contrast, the Tavianis seem not to share Pirandello's trust in the government. In 1980, Piersanti Mattarella, Sicily's governor, was gunned down while going to church with his wife. Mattarella was a 'clean' Christian-Democratic (DC) politician who was intent on fighting *Cosa Nostra* and the politicians who were supporting it — first and foremost, Palermo's mayor Vito Ciancimino (DC). His death seemed to be linked to a deal between the Mafia leader Stefano Bontade and then-Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti (DC) (Calabrò, 2016:60). In 1982, Sicilian and Communist *Deputato* Pio La Torre, who had been trying with little success to pass special laws in Parliament to deal with the Mafia, was also killed. A few months later, his special appointee General Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa had the same fate (Calabrò, 2016:114; 117; 119).

The Italian state seemed unable and unwilling to effectively deal with *Cosa Nostra* and its oppressive power. Only by the end of 1982 did the state start to organise its response to this new wave of violence, through special laws and special police corps. Even then, its response was hesitant and ambiguous. Since many of its politicians were colluding with Mafia leaders, the war continued well into the early 1990s (Calabrò, 2016:119; 234). The Tavianis' stance on emigration is the point of most divergence from Pirandello's, as they seem to construe Sicilian emigration as a safety valve for its people,

as supported by many *emigrazionisti*, like Francesco Nitti (Wong, 2006:116-18).

During the period of her imprisonment, Maragrazia becomes pregnant, “Le giuro che mi sarei strappate le viscere: mi pareva che stessi a covarci un mostro! Sentivo che non me lo sarei potuto vedere tra le braccia. Al solo pensiero che avrei dovuto attaccarmelo al petto, gridavo come una pazza”. Almost immediately after his birth, Maragrazia’s child is taken to his father’s relatives to be cared for because she rejects him. Even in her rejection, she cannot deny being his mother, “Ora non Le pare, signor dottore ch’io possa dire davvero ch’egli non è figlio mio?” (Pirandello, 1957:944). Maragrazia’s trauma has grown exponentially, from her husband’s death, and his head used as *boccia*, to her rape and her total detachment from the son growing inside her. How could she ever go back to a normalcy, even one “so permeated by the bizarre encounter with atrocity”? How can rehabilitation be possible?

In genocide studies, which deal with massive traumas, the ability to forgive the perpetrator is considered paramount for the victim’s rehabilitation. Jennifer Vanderheyden points to the paradox of forgiveness, being at the heart of reconciliation even when confronted with the extreme evil of genocide, and asks: “How can forgiveness be possible, yet in many ways a requisite for reconciliation?” (forthcoming 2019). Even Nelson Mandela, who served 27 long years in prison, adopted forgiveness as the cornerstone of his presidency and legacy in South Africa. Famously, upon leaving prison, he stated, “I knew that if I didn’t leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I’d still be in prison” (as quoted in Vanderheyden). However, Maragrazia cannot forgive Marco Trupia, and, thus, she is stuck in her metaphoric prison, having to live in a condition of liminality. Tal argues that the anthropological concept of liminality can be successfully applied in trauma studies, as the trauma survivor finds herself living between two disjunctive worlds: that of her traumatic event and that of her post-traumatic life (1996:117). Not being able to forgive Marco Trupia, who is part of her trauma, Maragrazia cannot transition to her ‘post-liminality’ state, which would include her acceptance of her son Rocco.

To better interpret Maragrazia's inability to forgive, I turn to Hannah Arendt's conceptualisation and definition of punishment and forgiveness, especially *vis-à-vis* radical evil, "The alternative to forgiveness, but by no means its opposite, is punishment, and both have in common that they attempt to put an end to something that without interference could go on endlessly" (1958:241). Hence, Maragrazia, once confronted with extreme evil, has two possibilities to come to a closure: She can either forgive, or she can punish her abuser. Eventually, the law punishes Marco Trupia; however, Arendt's words seem to suggest that punishment must be performed by the victim. Arendt, then, states that there exists what "we call a 'radical evil' and about whose nature so little is known. [...] All we know is that we can neither punish nor forgive such offenses and, therefore, they transcend the realm of human affairs and the potentialities of human power" (1958:241). What we know, though, is that these offenses are unpunishable and unforgivable because they go beyond the human ability to forgive or punish. How can Maragrazia forgive the killing of her already traumatised husband, the cruel mutilation of his body, and her three-month-long sexual abuse? What would a fit penalty be? How can an evil of such devastating proportions be measured and codified into a punishment? Maragrazia's inability to forgive her perpetrator impedes her acceptance of her son Rocco, who becomes the last victim of the domino effect of Maragrazia's traumas.

The doctor tries to reason with her and asks her, "Ma lui, in fondo, vostro figlio, che colpa ha?". Without hesitating, she answers, "Nessuna! [...] E quando mai, difatti, le mie labbra hanno detto una parola sola contro di lui? Mai, signor dottore! Anzi ... Ma che ci posso fare, se non resisto a vederlo neanche da lontano! È tutto suo padre, signorino mio; nelle fattezze, nella corporatura finanche nella voce". Then, she adds, "Mi metto a tremare, appena lo vedo, e sudo freddo! Non sono io; si ribella il sangue, ecco! Che ci posso fare?" (Pirandello, 1957:944). Although she admits that he has no culpability, Rocco's resemblance to his father triggers Maragrazia's memories of her abuse, which she re-experiences every time she looks at him. She is, thus, confronted with two irreconcilable demands: being a mother to him or avoiding her traumatic memories.

Vickroy describes the difficult relationship between trauma and remembrance: “Fundamental to traumatic experience is that the past lingers unresolved, not remembered in a conventional sense, because it is not processed like nontraumatic information, either cognitively or emotionally”. Traumatic experiences are, thus, re-experienced repetitively and without change (2002:12). By a cruel twist of nature, Rocco is for his mother “the past that lingers unresolved”. It is only human, and a matter of survival, for Maragrazia to avoid him. Nonetheless, her rejection results in his trauma of not being accepted by her and being forced to live in exile from his own mother, who sent him to live with his father’s relatives. Maragrazia becomes for him the site of not belonging, and not being able to feel the safety and security of the *heim*, ultimately displacing him both physically and emotionally.

Pirandello’s and the Tavianis’ dealing of Rocco’s trauma differ greatly. In the story, the doctor decides to go and reproach him for not taking care of his mother. As he reaches Rocco’s house, the doctor meets Rocco’s wife, his children, and his animals. Rocco is working on the land, and when questioned by the doctor he shows him that his mother has a place in his house, but she prefers the street, “non dovrei rispettarla come madre, perché essa è sempre stata dura con me; eppure l’ho rispettata e le ho voluto bene” (Pirandello, 1957:939). Rocco, while admitting to her un-maternal behaviour toward him, has been able to move beyond that and forgive her. Ultimately, he was able to work through his trauma and find coping mechanisms that allowed him to move toward a state of closure and ego identity (LaCapra, 2011: 22). The story seems to disavow the possibility for the older generation to work through its trauma as it ends with Maragrazia dictating the same letter to the doctor, “Cari figli ...” (Pirandello, 1957:944). Nevertheless, it suggests the possibility that – personified by Rocco – the new generation, born from the rape of Sicily, has a chance to rehabilitate. As Teresa Fiore argues, “L’emigrazione nel racconto di Pirandello appare come male minore rispetto ai mali portati dall’unificazione”, and in depicting Sicilian emigration, Pirandello is intent in portraying also “la resistenza granitica di certi siciliani di fronte alle assurdità della vita (2008:270).



The film shows a contrasting picture of Rocco. As the emigrants are waiting for the wheel to be fixed, Ninfarosa points him out to the others, saying, “qui non c'è erba per pascolare, ma portò qui le sue vacche perchè sapeva che qua sua madre sarebbe venuta. Come fa sempre, la segue”. As we hear her words, we see him milking a cow, pouring the milk in a bowl, and bringing it to his mother. As Maragrazia sees him approaching her, she covers her face with her ragged shawl and turns her face away. Rocco, then, leaves the bowl on a rock, where the doctor, confused by her behaviour, takes it and tries unsuccessfully to have Maragrazia drink it.

The next scene shows Maragrazia sitting on the ground, with her back leaning on a wall of stones, telling the doctor her story. As she says, “ma è tutto suo padre, che ci posso fare se mi metto a tremare appena lo vedo”, we hear Rocco weeping from behind the wall. Then, he starts sobbing hard and looks at his mother, who looks back at him, emotionless and un-empathic toward his sorrow. This scene is a powerful cinematic representation of what Caruth defines as the “wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (1996:4). The survivor's cry addresses the perpetrator, asking her to have compassion on her victim (2). However, in the case of Maragrazia, compassion is unattainable, because her trauma broke down any dimension of security. Thus, she employs and redirects all of her energy toward defensive mechanisms that destroy any form of empathy (Vickroy, 2015:10–11).

After this encounter with her son, Maragrazia, realising that the emigrants have already left without her letter, starts panicking. The doctor reassures her, reminding her that another group will leave the following week; “Ma è sicura che vuole scrivere quella lettera?”, Maragrazia does not answer. She looks intently at Rocco, and he looks back at her, nodding his head as a sign of hopeful approval. Instead, Maragrazia, her facial expression displaying disgust, grabs a pumpkin nearby, throws it at him, in the typical *bocce* style, and turns away from him. In the film, just like his mother, Rocco acts out of his trauma, not being able to work through it. He has no family around him and is not leading a productive life. For both son and mother, “the past returns and the future is blocked or fatalistically caught up in a

melancholic loop [...]. Any duality [...] of time (past, present, and future) is experientially collapsed” (LaCapra, 2011:21). Neither of them can transition to a post-liminality state that would allow them to escape the “melancholic loop”. Thus, the cinematic version of Maragrazia’s drama displays the impossibility for the new generation to work through its trauma, since Sicily’s violence has not abated, and, therefore, the future is unattainable or “blocked.” Consequently, emigration is the only possible rehabilitation from a history of violence. As Millecent Marcus acutely observed, Maragrazia embodies the motherland (1993:220). However, as she refuses to accept her good son and venerates the ones who abandoned her, she allegorically represents Sicily’s inability to mother. Marcus argues, “Maria Grazia sees only with the eyes of the past [...] unable to move, change, or open herself out to a future of emotional progress. Like Maria Grazia, Sicily turned inward and refused history, choosing instead to nurse its millennial wounds” (1993:201). The stones Maragrazia leans against are the metaphor of both “the material building blocks of Sicily and the key to Maria Grazia’s petrified mode of thought” (1993:201). Ultimately, Sicily’s inability to mother, and thus to nurture, forces its people to emigrate as the only way to survive.

Trauma as a literary strategy works well for Pirandello for two reasons. Firstly, because any traumatic experience is a story needing to be told to become real. As Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman observe, “Massive trauma precludes its registration; the observing and recording mechanisms are temporarily knocked out. [...] The victim’s narrative [...] does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an [...] event that has not yet come into existence” (1991:57). Although Maragrazia lived her trauma in her body and mind, her psyche did not register it. Hence, the importance of the listener who is, then, in charge of inscribing the event. As Vickroy states, to survive, trauma victims need to dissociate from the event (2015:8). It is only through Maragrazia reporting it to the doctor that her trauma is given birth and is articulated, and, thus, she becomes cognitively aware of it. This explains her physical discomfort in telling her story, which, at times, prevented her from proceeding. As a trauma survivor, Maragrazia lives not with memories of the past but with an event that has no

completion or closure, and, thus, continues in the present and is current, for her, in every respect (Laub & Felman, 1991:69).

The doctor becomes a co-owner of such a trauma and through his very listening becomes part of it, living Maragrazia's disorientation, grievances, and confusion (Laub & Felman, 1991:58), "Il giovane medico stette a guardarla, raccapricciato, col volto atteggiato di pietà, di ribrezzo e di orrore" (Pirandello, 1957:943). The reader and viewer become witnesses, too, of course, adding another layer of recording. We record the doctor recording, through his presence and ears, Maragrazia's articulation of her trauma, thus activating two different historical canvases. In the first canvas, we observe Maragrazia's trauma, rooted in Garibaldi's coming to Sicily and its continuation throughout the post-unification years. In the second, we observe the doctor, who is estranged from that historic event because of his young age and geographical origin. The doctor is, thus, forced to confront the myth of Italy's unification through Maragrazia's traumas.

This brings us to the second reason for Pirandello's literary choice – trauma's capacity to shatter national and personal myths. As Tal writes, "only trauma can accomplish that kind of destruction [...], the tragic shattering of old myths" (1996:122). National myths are part of the official history, and they do not belong to one individual; rather "individuals borrow from them and buy into them in varying degrees". They are collective myths that help us create our ideas of a nation and of its "character" (115). Personal myths, conversely, are an individual's sets of beliefs, expectations, and reasons through which circumstances and actions take form, usually as schemas, which become the paradigms through which we make sense of the world. Trauma forces the listener/writer of the story to revise his myths; "crucial [...] is the ability to consider the author as *survivor*, to bring to bear the tools of sociology, psychology, and psychiatry [...] to the task of reading the literature of survivors. If we begin here, we can start to examine the process of writing as an act of personal revision" (116). Personal revision would lead us, the readers, to consider some important questions: What changes in Pirandello's representation of his personal myths have occurred, and how do they affect his conceptualisation of national myths?

Although Garibaldi was a hero in Pirandello's family, Pirandello witnessed the betrayal and defeat of those ideals at the hands of the moderate liberals, who took charge of Italy's unification (Providenti, 2000:13). This dramatic revision of his personal myths brought him, first, to sarcastically describe Garibaldi as "Canebardo" and, then, to describe Garibaldi's revolution as leading to the rape of Sicily with the complicity of Southern 'bandits'. This complicity produced and reproduced Sicily's wound, with an ensuing bleeding out of its own people. Consequently, the text's brutal, collective traumas seem to foreground Pirandello's disenchantment with the national myth of Italy's unification as a tale of heroic freedom for all.

### **Conclusion**

Adopting a lens that combines both post-colonial and trauma studies allowed me to bring to the fore both Pirandello's and the Tavianis' ideological positioning within Italy's unification. The three artists are critical about the nation-building process that ultimately separated its people, as many left the island to survive its historical traumas. For Pirandello, emigration is a bleeding wound, affecting not just Maragrazia but the whole nation, as trauma blocks any opening to the future. As emigration is not an acceptable option, Pirandello is left with the only choice of theorising that Sicily can work through its trauma and find coping and adapting mechanisms that will enable it to survive its post-unification evils. In contrast, the Tavianis' filmic rendition disavows Pirandello's position, as it points to emigration as the only way for the Sicilian rural masses to survive Sicily's traumatic history. At the time the Tavianis released their movie, Sicily's bloodiest Mafia war worked as a reminder that trauma had not left that land, and emigration continued to remain the only viable solution.

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## **TOURISM AND IMPERIALISM IN ITALIAN EAST AFRICA: THE DISCURSIVE AND PRACTICAL FUNCTIONS OF THE *GUIDA DELL'AFRICA ORIENTALE* (1938) IN CONSTRUCTING A COLONY**

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### **Sommario**

*La Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana fu pubblicata nel 1938 dalla Consociazione Turistica Italiana – questo il nome con cui il Touring Club Italiano era conosciuto sin dal 1937, quando fu costretto a 'italianizzare' il proprio nome. La guida è palesemente propagandistica nei toni e si presenta come un trionfante risultato in onore del Re e appena incoronato Imperatore Vittorio Emanuele III, del Duce, e dei soldati morti in Abissinia. Le 640 dense e dettagliate pagine della guida furono pubblicate solo due anni e quattro mesi dopo la dichiarazione della conquista dell'Abissinia da parte delle forze di Mussolini e della sua incorporazione nell'Africa Orientale Italiana: una nuova entità politica che includeva le già esistenti colonie della Somalia e dell'Eritrea. La meticolosa guida rappresenta, in effetti, un notevole risultato da parte degli autori che avevano intrapreso complesse ricerche in una regione ancora molto instabile e caratterizzata da continue ostilità tra le truppe coloniali e i combattenti della resistenza, che le forze italiane non furono mai in grado di pacificare completamente. A posteriori, data la nostra conoscenza di come la storia si è evoluta, si può essere tentati di vedere la Guida dell'Africa Orientale semplicemente come un ulteriore pezzo di tragicomica magniloquenza nel vanaglorioso arsenale di propaganda auto-incensatoria dell'Italia fascista. Tuttavia, la guida rappresenta chiaramente un investimento significativo di tempo e denaro per cui le ragioni della sua produzione necessitano una più attenta indagine. In questo articolo analizzo da vicino il testo della guida attraverso l'apparato teorico degli studi postcoloniali sul turismo. Sostengo che la guida sia molto più rilevante di una semplice millanteria coloniale; e che rappresenti piuttosto il piano di un impiego del turismo come elemento essenziale dell'assoggettamento, dello sfruttamento economico e dell'insediamento coloniale nell'A.O.I. (Africa Orientale Italiana). Intendo affermare che, come emerge dal sostegno*

*ufficiale di cui godeva, e dagli investimenti in esso, il regime italiano pianificò l'utilizzo del turismo al massimo del suo potenziale come arma per la conquista definitiva e l'assoggettamento della popolazione colonizzata.*

**Keywords:** Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana, Touring Club Italiano, Consociazione Turistica Italiana, Italian Colonialism, Tourism

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The *Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana* was published in 1938 by the *Consociazione Turistica Italiana* (C.T.I.)<sup>2</sup> as the 24th instalment of their Guide to Italy. The 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> books in the series are devoted to the Italian possessions in the Aegean (1938) and to Libya (1937) respectively. That the C.T.I. was able so quickly to incorporate the freshly conquered territories of the new Italian Empire into their offering of detailed guidebooks is as astounding for the hubris of the endeavour as it is impressive for the scale, speed and thoroughness of the work undertaken<sup>3</sup>. This fascinating document is not only a record of the ambitions of a Fascist state determined to impose its authority and its model of modernity onto the territories it had conquered, but also a prescient recognition of the economic potential of mass tourism: an industry that would indeed grow into one of the world's largest in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Apostolopoulos, 1996:17). The guidebook is also an important document in the history of European colonialism because it is a record of a uniquely articulated entanglement of tourism and imperialism from the very outset of a colonial project. Indeed, the detailed and impeccably researched content of the guide provides clear evidence of state investment in tourism infrastructure in Italian East Africa. The *Guida*

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<sup>1</sup> All translations were done by the author.

<sup>2</sup> The *Consociazione Turistica Italiana* was the name chosen to replace *Il Touring Club Italiano* as a result of the Mussolini regime's campaign to forcibly 'purify' the Italian language of foreign loanwords.

<sup>3</sup> That the Aegean, Libya and Italian East Africa were incorporated into a series of guidebooks to each Italian region is also interesting. This speaks volumes of colonial Italy's concept of its colonies which it saw as extensions of the Italian metropolitan heartland and potential sites of mass settlement by Italian citizens.

*dell'Africa Orientale Italiana* (referenced as *Guida* hereafter) manifestly illustrates that Mussolini's Fascist government planned to harness and develop the modern phenomenon of tourism in its colony as a central strategy for consolidating the Italian presence in the conquered region, extracting economic value from the colony, and reinforcing a relationship of economic and cultural dependence of the local Africans on the Italian occupiers.

I am by no means the first to note the unique level of deliberate entanglement of tourism and colonialism in the Italian case. Malia Hom (2012:282) examines "tourism as a colonizing strategy" in colonial Libya and Albania. Her analysis makes use of the Touring Club's guides to Albania (1939) and Libya (1937), among other texts, to argue for the special importance Italian colonial policy placed on tourism. She notes that in the 31 years of the Italian occupation of Libya (1912-1943), tourism was successfully implemented as an economic driver in the colony, a force for modernisation, and an extremely powerful propaganda machine which served to integrate Libya, Italy's so called "fourth shore", into the nation's concept of itself as an Empire. Poignant is her observation that just out of sight of the leisure routes traipsed by Italian tourists were the numerous concentration camps in which tens of thousands of Libyans perished during the same period (Hom, 2012:284). Brian McLaren (2006) argues along similar lines, though focusing special attention on the architectonics of the tourist infrastructure in Libya and its contribution to the modernisation of the colony. He states that "following the military conquest and creation of viable infrastructure of transportation and public services, tourism can be considered a third wave of colonization" and that "[o]rganized travel in the Italian colonies was widely regarded as an important economic force that could facilitate the process of modernization" (McLaren, 2006:5). It is clear from these studies, that tourism was indeed effective as an arm of Italian imperialism in Libya and that there is therefore no reason to imagine that the regime would not attempt to repeat its success in *Africa Orientale Italiana* (A.O.I.; Italian East Africa). Malia Hom notes that Italian East Africa was beyond the scope of her own study but that "a comparative study of the burgeoning tourism industries in Italian East Africa and Italy's Mediterranean colonies would be a

welcome addition to the scholarship on Italian colonialism and tourism history in general” (2012:283). Given that no such study has to date been done, this study aims to cover some of the ground in this regard and contribute to deepening our understanding of tourism as a colonial strategy in the Italian case.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the discursive and practical functions of the *Guida dell’Africa Orientale Italiana*: the discursive functions concern how the text contributes to writing the colony into existence as a textual entity or an idea of nation while the practical functions concern the way the text could be used by would-be settlers and investors as a manual for colonisation and settlement. In my estimation, the text is designed to serve three major functions contributing to consolidating the regime’s position in the region and drawing economic value from the newly constituted colony. Firstly, the guide served as propaganda for the regime, aimed at concretising the colony in the imaginary of the Italian nation. Secondly, it was designed to encourage and facilitate tourism and the development of tourist infrastructure in the colony, for the purpose of extracting wealth and encouraging investment along with being a detailed manual dedicated to potential settlers and investors in the colony. Thirdly, it serves as an ethnographic survey of the indigenous people of the region, enacting what Arjun Appadurai terms “metonymic freezing” (Appadurai, 1988:36). When applied in the realm of tourism, Appadurai’s concept can be used to indicate a situation where indigenous populations are trapped in the limbo of the ethnographic present subject to the objectifying gaze of the tourists, upon whom they have become economically dependent – their cultures reduced to a repetitive performance designed to meet the expectations of tourist onlookers hungry for an ‘authentic’ and ‘exotic’ experience.

## **2. Writing the colony into existence**

This section concerns the ways in which *La Guida dell’Africa Orientale* was designed to contribute towards writing *Africa Orientale Italiana* into existence in the collective national imaginary of the Italian people as an imperial colony. The reading of the guidebook

performed in this section is underpinned by a theoretical approach to the study of nationalism which, broadly speaking, views the nation as a product of printed media (Anderson, 1983; Said, 1994; Bhabha, 2013). As is proudly indicated in the preface of the guidebook, *La Guida dell'Africa Orientale* was published only two years and four months after the surrender of Addis Ababa to Mussolini's forces and the proclamation of the return of the Empire. Atkinson argues that "[p]ersuading Italians whose traditional affiliations were local and regional to identify with Italy and its imperial agenda meant mobilizing the increasing range of geographical media that circulated through everyday lives" (2005:22). He cites the *Guida dell'Africa Orientale* as an example of these geographical texts designed to produce an imaginary for the Italian Empire.

According to the writer of the preface of the *Guida dell'Africa Orientale*, Carlo Bonardi, the guidebook is composed of 640 dense and meticulously researched pages containing all the information then available to the conquering colonisers and "an inventory of everything the Italians found there" (*Guida*:5)<sup>4</sup>, laid bare and rendered accessible to metropolitan audiences by, to use Edward Said's terms, "the authority of the European observer, traveller, merchant, scholar, historian, novelist" (1994:58). As a stock-take of the natural resources of the conquered territory it is clear that that the guidebook is a document of much greater importance than one might initially assume, forming an intrinsic part of the process of writing the colony into existence and establishing a blueprint for its economic exploitation. A compelling piece of evidence for the effectiveness of the guide as propaganda is a 1939 review in the English publication *The Geographical Journal* where the author, E.H.M. Clifford, praises the thoroughness of the guide, of which he is largely uncritical and takes at face value<sup>5</sup>, in the following terms:

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<sup>4</sup> "Un inventario di ciò che gli Italiani vi hanno trovato"

<sup>5</sup> An indication, perhaps, of a tacit approval of the perceived benefits of Italian occupation, *The Geographical Journal* reviewer's only nod to the status of the *Guida dell'Africa Orientale* as a piece of propaganda (elaborate, complex and detailed, but a piece of propaganda nonetheless) is his criticism of the historiography of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict, the character of Haile Selassie and the representation of Addis Ababa as "la capitale barbarica dei Negus" (the barbaric capital of the Negus) among other more blatant attempts to sully the image of the independent nation prior to the invasion.

The Consociazione Turistica Italiana are to be heartily congratulated on this, the latest addition to their series of guides. To have produced so complete a publication so soon after the Italian occupation of Ethiopia is a remarkable achievement, particularly in view of the still very unsettled state of the country. This mass of information, resulting from a great deal of travelling and a thorough study of available documentation, is ably presented. (Clifford, 1939:448)

This review is instructive in terms of our understanding of the mechanisms by which the text effected its rewriting of the territory it represented. By appearing as an objective, scientific and thus seemingly stable account of the landscape, its history and the people that inhabited it (this later making use of blend of the picturesque and pseudo-scientific anthropology discussed below), the guide occludes the underlying political motives that informed its commission. The volume, though being of recent production by a foreign invader with a clear agenda, manages to pass itself off as the most objective and reliable account of the landscape and its people available.

According to Huggan (1989:127; see also Tickell, 2004:21), colonial cartography hinges on the systematic erasure and forgetting of old and the imposition of new spatial configurations on the landscape in the interests of an imperial agenda. Said says that “[j]ust as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings” (1994:7). Atkinson (2005) notes that an important element of these images and imaginings came in the form of maps and geographical surveys. It is a commonplace that one should not confuse the map with the territory. A map is a representation of the landscape, which is very often imbued with ideological significance. The enthusiasm for geography and map-making shown by the Fascist state and Mussolini himself, is indicative of how a “[p]ersistent coalition of bellicose regime, colonial lobby, and geography played a

significant but often overlooked role in fascist expansionism” (Atkinson, 2005:20). Maps are by far the most important feature of the guidebook.

Prominent throughout the guidebook, as we shall observe in due course, is a focus on roadbuilding and the new roads of the Empire are a prominent feature of maps designed to encourage motoring tourism as a first step to investment and settlement in the hinterland of the colony. The reviewer from the *The Geographical Journal* is enchanted by the maps in the guide and by the apparent progress they represent. He says: “[t]he maps are numerous, well produced, and up to date, showing the remarkable amount of road construction that has been achieved” (Clifford, 1939:449). The maps produced by the C.T.I. represent the first maps of A.O.I. for civilian use. From the very detailed section of the guide devoted to the available maps of the region (*Guida*:30-32), and the mention of the Director of the *Ufficio Superiore Topografico* of each of the five Governorates in the acknowledgments at the beginning of the guide (*Guida*:7-8), it is clear that the C.T.I. maps were based on maps produced for military purposes by the *Istituto Geografico Militare*<sup>6</sup> during the conquest of Abyssinia. It is telling that maps which were created for use by the invading military, were so quickly repurposed for the next wave of invaders: the tourists, settlers and entrepreneurs with the trusty *Guida dell’Africa Orientale* in their pockets.

In a comparative study of early imperial and colonial era cartographic practices, Jeffrey C. Stone (1988:59) argues that the maps produced in the colonial period had as their main function not the minute description of the topography of the landscape, but rather served as a survey of the location of the local populace for the purposes of colonial administration. This observation is valuable in terms of the present study of the *Guida dell’Africa Orientale* and is clearly demonstrated by the maps and descriptions of the administrative areas of A.O.I. in the guide. After the invasion of 1936, the Ethiopian Empire was merged with the colonies of Somalia and Eritrea to form six administrative districts of a new territory called

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<sup>6</sup> The *Istituto Geografico Militare* (IGM), or *Military Geographic Institute*, is an Italian public organisation coordinated by the Italian Army. It is the national mapping authority of Italy.

Italian East Africa. The ancient Empire of the King of Kings, Emperor Haile Selassie, was written out of existence in the guidebook and, in its place, a textual blueprint for a colony is drafted along with a comprehensive set of new maps and national symbols to match. The composition of the new colony is explained in a section entitled *Sguardo d'insieme* in minute detail to Italian readers, who were thus to assimilate the revised geography imposed by the conquerors on their new empire<sup>7</sup>. Each of these governorates had new heraldry designed for it along the lines of the crests of the Italian regions, provinces and communes: a set of new symbols to delineate, define and contain the new administrative regions of the colony. Each of these insignia features the symbol of fascist Italy along with an image designed to represent the indigenous culture of the governorate, such as a crescent moon to represent Islam for Harar and a rose to represent Addis Ababa, whose name in Amharic means 'new flower'. These insignia are prominently displayed on the inside cover of the guidebook.

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<sup>7</sup> "Italian East Africa is the official designation of the Italian colonial empire in East Africa proclaimed by il Duce on 9 May 1936 (year XIV of the Fascist Era) and consists of the Colony of Eritrea (c. 119 000 km<sup>2</sup> with c. 600 000 pop.), Italian Somalia (c. 600 000 km<sup>2</sup> with c. 1 million pop.), and the Ethiopian Empire (c. 989 000 km<sup>2</sup> with between 5-10.5 million pop.) equalling a total land area of 1 708 000 km<sup>2</sup>, (5 times that of Italy) with 7 to 12 million inhabitants. Italian East Africa is now divided into 5 governorates: Eritrea (capital Asmara; c. 202 000 km<sup>2</sup> with 1 million pop.); Amara (capital Gondar; c. 223 000 km<sup>2</sup> with c. 2 million pop.); Harar (capital Harar; c. 202 000 km<sup>2</sup> with c. 1 400 000 pop.); Galla and Sidama (capital Gimma; c. 353 000 km<sup>2</sup> with c. 1 600 000 pop.); Somalia (capital Mogadiscio; c. 702 000 km<sup>2</sup> with c. 1 300 000 pop.), and finally the Governorate of Addis Ababa (c. 7000 km<sup>2</sup> with c. 300 000 pop)" (*Guida*:33).

[Africa Orientale Italiana è la denominazione ufficiale dell'Impero coloniale italiano in Africa Orientale, proclamato dal duce il 9 maggio 1936 XIV, e comprendente la Colonia Eritrea (c. 119 000 kmq. Con c. 600 000 ab.), la Somalia Italiana (c. 600 000 kmq. con c. 1 milione di ab.) e l'Impero d'Etiopia (c. 989 000 kmq. con forse 5-10.5 milioni di ab.), in totale c. 1 708 000 kmq. di superficie (c. 5.5 volte quella dell'Italia) con forse 7-12 milioni di abitanti. L'A.O.I. è ora divisa in 5 Governi: Eritrea (capoluogo Asmara; c. 202 000 kmq., 1 milione di ab.), Amara (capoluogo Gondar; c. 223 000 kmq. c. 2 milioni di abitanti); Harar (capoluogo Harar; c. 202 000 kmq. c. 1 400 000 ab.), Galla e Sidama (capoluogo Gimma; c. 353 000 kmq., c. 1 600 000 ab.), Somalia (capoluogo Mogadiscio; c. 702 000 kmq., c 1 300 000 ab.), più il Governatorato di Addis Abeba (c.7000 kmq., c. 300 000 ab.) (*Guida*: 33)].



Worth quoting is Tickell's study of British colonial India as an example of how maps were utilised as a fundamental part of the colonial project:

Not only was the production of an accurate map of India a practical necessity for the military and political domination of the subcontinent, it was, as a number of postcolonial commentators have pointed out, also a way of constructing India as a domain of British cultural and political sovereignty. As in other orientalist projects of this period, the continuous process of gathering and organizing factual information about India (in this case Indian topography), neutralized the threat of its cultural and physical difference and, in turn, presented the authoritative "position of the [European colonial] subject as fixed and unchangeable". (Tickell, 2004:20 citing Pratt, 1986:140)

Thus, for the average Italian, unlikely ever to set foot on African soil, the empire that Mussolini had conquered in their name would always be little more than a visual representation in the form of maps proudly displayed all over Italy in various forms of media, including the map of the empire on the inside-cover of the C.T.I. guidebook (Atkinson, 2005:22-23).

Part of the same process of rewriting the landscape to Italian specifications is a section on toponymy in the guidebook. The writer of the section complains that the project of accurately labelling and mapping the landscape is often frustrated by the nomadic lifestyle of the inhabitants of the region (*Guida*:32). He goes on to explain how the orthography of the place names in the colony was beset by inconsistencies owing to the linguistic diversity of the region and the motley history of its cartography by various powers. This situation, he says, would shortly be set to rights as the place names in the colony would all be made to conform to the Italian pronunciation and orthography. This short section is particularly interesting because it betrays an anxiety on the part of the coloniser that the landscape, its inhabitants and their mode of living frustrate the project of European

modernity to map, fix, categorise and label the landscape. It suggests that the urge to rationalise the landscape exceeds in importance the mode of subsistence of the local people in that harsh territory. The review in *The Geographical Journal* indicates the incisive intervention of Italian toponymic reforms and principles of town-planning on the cityscapes of Ethiopian towns:

Much of the accounts of the larger cities (e.g. Addis Ababa, Gondar, Dire Dawa, and Harar) is devoted to town-planning schemes that have been prepared. These are unquestionably a wise measure and appear to have been finely conceived. But it will of course be some years before there is much to show in this direction, particularly while the present economic chaos prevails. Little is said of present conditions. In all principal towns streets have been renamed, so that it is difficult, if not impossible for the old stager to locate himself without reference to a town plan. (Clifford, 1939:449)

Clifford's review reveals the textual reframing of the conquered territory of which the guidebook was an essential contribution as well as the reviewer's faith in the Italian project of modernisation. The guide would have been one of the first significant pieces of media in which the Ethiopia of the Negus was erased and the new Italianised landscape of the colony would have appeared. The fact that the guide focuses on the anticipated future landscape as opposed to the current lay of the land is an example of the colony as a product of discourse far from the realities on the ground.

An example of this is the elaborate description of the plans for the future of the landscape of a new imperial capital at Addis Ababa:

The Italian city will rise up in the area bordered to the north by the former Great Ghebbi line (Via Toselli-Via Mogadiscio) and to the south by the current Vallauri Radio Tower where the new railway station will be built. The principal axis of the city will be Viale Mussolini which will be extended beyond the current station and

culminate at the façade of the new station; it will be tree-lined, and will be a minimum of 40 metres and a maximum of 90 metres wide [...] Also along the axis of Viale Mussolini, downhill from the commercial sector, between the current station and the new one, will extend the monumental zone. At the centre of this sector public buildings will be erected among which the Residence of the Governor General, the Palazzo del Fascio with the Torre Littoria. This will be the heart of the Empire, the centre of imperial life; here will be found the headquarters of the Government Offices, Military Headquarters, banks and insurance companies. (*Guida:477*)<sup>8</sup>

Of special note also are the plans to completely erase the centre of Addis Ababa, replacing it with parks and grand houses, as well as the plans described in the guide for the establishment of separate quarters to house the indigenous people, divided into ethnic areas very much along the lines later adopted by the Apartheid era planners of South African townships (*Guida:478*). These ambitious plans to radically restructure Addis Ababa's landscape into a grand imperial capital, structured according to Fascism's unique concept of capitalist modernity, totalitarian architectonics and racist principles of strict separation along ethnic lines, are symbolic of the guidebook's function as a piece of propaganda. As Clifford says above, "little is said of present conditions" in the region, instead, reading the evocative language of the guidebook and trusting in its confident tones, in the mind of the reader a mirage of a rationally designed and magnificently appointed city is conjured up.

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<sup>8</sup> "La città italiana sorgerà nella zona limitata a N dalla linea ex Ghebbi grande – via Toselli – via Mogadiscio e a S dall'attuale centro marconigrafico Vallauri, ove sarà costruita la nuova stazione ferroviaria. L'asse principale della città sarà il viale Mussolini, che sarà prolungato oltre l'attuale stazione fino alla facciata della nuova stazione; esso sarà alberato, con una larghezza minima di m. 40, massima di 90... A valle del quartiere commerciale, tra l'attuale stazione e quella nuova sempre lungo l'asse del viale Mussolini si stenderà la zona monumentale. Al centro di essa sorgeranno gli edifici pubblici, fra cui il Pal. Del Governo Generale, il Pal. Del Fascio con la Torre Littoria. Sarà questo il cuore dell'Impero, il centro della vita imperiale; qui saranno le sedi degli Uffici di Governo, dei Comandi militari, delle banche, degli istituti di assicurazione".

The guidebook also played a role in imbuing the landscape of the territory with a sort of sacred geography, complete with pilgrimage routes at the most important sites in the struggle to subject that land to Italian control. For example, included in the preface of the guidebook, written by fascist senator Carlo Bonardi, is a paragraph which describes the tourism potential of A.O.I. in the following terms:

Of special interest are the regions of Eritrea and Somalia: sacred for the Italian blood spilled here in remote and recent times. Sites that would not have any character worthy of note for tourists, take on an elevated historical and emotional importance; names like Dógali, Amba Alági, Macallè, Adua, Tembièn, Amba Aradàm, Mai Cèu, Neghèlli, Gianagobò, Birgòt, and Gúnu Gádu shall always evoke sacred memories in the hearts of every Italian. Pioneers and tourists should not overlook the dutiful tribute of the fallen in the cemeteries which mark the stages along the path to ultimate victory. (*Guida*:15)<sup>9</sup>

This endorsement of the guide by Fascist Senator Carlo Bonardi<sup>10</sup> is an indication of its importance as propaganda as well as the entanglement of tourism, settlement and nation-building. In the preface, Bonardi delineates the intended scope and function of the guidebook. Firstly he notes:

The goal of the guidebook is, first and foremost, to render homage to his Majesty the King Emperor; to *il*

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<sup>9</sup> “Interesse specialissimo presentano le zone dell'Eritrea e della Somalia sacre per il sangue versato dai nostri in tempi lontani e vicini. Luoghi che non avrebbero per il turista alcun carattere degno di nota, assumono una importanza storica e sentimentale altissima; nomi come Dógali, Amba Alági, Macallè, Adua, Tembièn, Amba Aradàm, Mai Cèu, Neghèlli, Gianagobò, Birgòt, e Gúnu Gádu susciteranno sempre una sacra commozione nel cuore d'ogni Italiano. Pioneri e turisti non dimentichino il doveroso tributo ai Caduti che riposano nei cimiteri che segnano le tappe della Vittoria”.

<sup>10</sup> Bonardi joined the Fascist Party in 1923 and served first as a Deputato (May 1924-January 1929) and then as a Senatore (January 1929-August 1945). Soon after the March on Rome, he became Undersecretary to the Ministry of War in Mussolini's Government. This committed fascist politician became Vice-President of the Touring Club in 1928 and President of the organisation in 1935.

*Duce*, the founder of the Empire; the major Leaders who contributed to the completion of this titanic undertaking; to the Heroes who fell in the name of Italy and all Combatants; to the Princes of the House of Savoy; to the most humble Soldiers; to the Sailors, to the ever-faithful Black Shirts; to the Workers, who through their work and sacrifice paved the way for the conquest and rendered it definitive. It is homage also to Italians of every rank and class whose discipline and readiness to take commands from their Leader demonstrated our resolve in the face of the sanctions of 52 foreign states united in the illusion that they could impede the will of a people to find its own place in the sun. (*Guida*:5)<sup>11</sup>

The value of the guidebook as masterful propaganda is not to be dismissed. Not only does the guidebook contribute towards writing the colony into existence, but it contributes towards creating a history for the colony: a history dominated by the bold action, courage, tenacity, grit and determination of the Fascist New Man in all his incarnations.

The first print-run of the guidebook saw 490,000 copies produced and distributed freely to the members of the Touring Club. Further updates and reprints were promised. As history would have it, no such reprints became necessary as war broke out, Italy was ejected from East Africa in 1941, and the erstwhile colony dissolved. However, had history turned out differently, it is clear that the guidebook would have become one way in which armchair *pionieri e turisti* at home would be able to explore their faraway colony in great detail in their imaginatons, all the while imbibing what the Fascists would have

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<sup>11</sup> “La guida si propone anzitutto uno scopo ideale: quello di rendere un omaggio alla Maestà del Re Imperatore, al Duce fondatore dell’Impero, ai grandi Capi che lo hanno coadiuvato nella realizzazione della titanica impresa, agli Eroi caduti nel nome d’Italia e ai Combattenti tutti, dai Principi di Casa Savoia, ai più umili Soldati, ai Marinai, alle fedelissime Camicie Nere, agli Operai, che col loro lavoro e col loro sacrificio hanno preparata e resa definitiva la conquista. Omaggio pure agli Italiani di ogni cetto e condizione che, con la loro disciplina pronta a ogni ordine del Capo, hanno dimostrato come si risponda alle sanzioni applicate da 52 Stati coalizzati nell’illusione di poter infrangere la volontà di un popolo risoluto a trovare il proprio posto al sole”.

them believe about that territory, its people, its history, and the activities of the colonists living there. The guidebook was, for this reason, first and foremost a marvellous piece of propaganda.

### **3. Tourism as a catalyst for economic expansion and settlement**

The writers of the *Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana* are clear that the tourism infrastructure in A.O.I. was still in its infancy at the time of writing and that the guide represents an early step in transforming the colony into a safe and pleasant destination for Italian mass tourism. Bonardi writes the following in his preface to the volume, underlining the intention to valorise the colony through an entanglement of tourism infrastructure and economic development:

The guidebook clearly also has tourism-related goals: as we work to complete the road network, as we consolidate, day-by-day, safety and security so too are the logistical structures being improved. New hotels and refuelling and refreshment stops are being built, all of which makes possible, in a word, the development of that great modern phenomenon we call "tourism". The excellent climate; the quality of the road network, and, therefore, the development of motoring; the expansive panoramas; the fauna; the flora; the character and customs of the populations varied in terms of race, religion, language; and its great economic potential all make Italian East Africa a country destined for a bright future in tourism. (*Guida:5*)<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "La guida risponde anche a finalità turistiche, evidenti: mentre si sviluppa e si perfeziona la rete stradale, mentre si consolida, giorno per giorno, la sicurezza generale, progredisce anche l'organizzazione logistica: si creano nuovi alberghi, si perfezionano i punti di tappa e di rifornimento, si rende in una parola possibile lo sviluppo di quel grande fenomeno moderno chiamato "turismo". L'eccellenza del clima, la perfezione della rete stradale, e quindi lo sviluppo dell'automobilismo, i vasti panorama, la fauna, la flora, i caratteri e i costumi delle popolazioni diverse per razza, per religione, per lingua, le risorse economiche potenziali, fanno di gran parte dell'A.O.I. un paese destinato a un brillante avvenire turistico".

It is clear from the fact that the guidebook was commissioned, and from its content, that the fascist regime early on saw the potential of tourism to create economic value in its colonies. The second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century would indeed witness the establishment and consolidation of mass tourism, what Bonardi describes above as “that great modern phenomenon”, as one of the largest industries in the world and a defining feature of globalisation (Apostolopoulos, 1996:17). For purposes of comparison, Ballengee-Morris (2002) performs an interesting study on the use of tourism as a catalyst for investment and settlement in Virginia which, importantly, benefitted the incomers and out-of-state investors more than the local people hosting the incoming tourists. She writes:

New businesses required workers and physical expansion and that in return required migration. Family members moving to other regions encouraged visitations. Hotels, inns, boarding houses, restaurants, taverns, and points of interest became a part of expansion.

(Ballengee-Morris, 2002:234)

The guidebook to A.O.I. makes it clear that similar initiatives were being put in place in occupied Ethiopia in a deliberate attempt to draw tourists to the region which would in turn be followed by investors and settlers<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Potential tourists, settlers or investors wishing to travel to A.O.I. could take ships operated by Lloyd Triestino which left the ports of Genova, Naples, Venice and Trieste bound for African ports. The options for reaching the ports of A.O.I. were many given the strategic location of the Italian colonies on the busy shipping route of the Red Sea. Services devoted to the Italy/A.O.I. routes included *Linea 152 Celere Tirreno-Africa Orientale Italiana* which departed every 15 days from Genova, stopped at a number of ports on the Tyrrhenian coast before continuing to, among other stops, to Massawa (10 days), Djibouti (12 days) from where a train to Addis Ababa could be caught, and Mogadishu (16 days). The price of ticket to Massawa was L. 2815 for 1<sup>st</sup> class, L. 1920 for 2<sup>nd</sup> class, L. 1335 for 2<sup>nd</sup> class economy, and L. 875 for 3<sup>rd</sup> class. For purposes of comparison: a packet of Sigarette Nazionali at the time would have cost L. 0.50 for a pack of ten. So for the price of getting to Massawa from Italy in third class, a passenger would have to pay the equivalent of 1750 packs of cigarettes. This would have been a considerable expense for the average Italian of the time. The cheapest available ticket between an Italian port and Massawa on any line was L. 800. Alternatively a traveller could fly in an Ala Littoria Savoia Marchetti S73 from Rome to Asmara or Addis Ababa with stops at Siracusa, Bengazi, Cairo, Wadi Halfa, Khartoum, Cassala and Asmara for those continuing to Addis Ababa. The trip took three

An essential first step on the path to the demographic and industrial colonisation of Ethiopia, and a project close to the heart of the Touring Club, with its focus on automobile touring, was the building of a network of modern roads. Just like their Roman predecessors on whom they modelled their imperial ambitions, the Fascists placed enormous value on the completion of great works of engineering and infrastructure development as a potent visual symbols of their control of the land, as a mark of the modernising benefits of Italian rule, and, of course, to consolidate their hold on the conquered territories and facilitate the next wave of civilian colonisation with tourists at the helm. It is worth noting McLaren's assertion that in the Libyan case "[t]he tourist system had the task of constructing an image of a modern and efficiently organized colony thereby putting the accomplishments of Fascist colonization on display" (2006:6). The functional linkage between tourism, propaganda, and economic development is clear in the Libyan case described by McLaren. He continues to say that Italy's infrastructure projects in Libya had a practical and a propagandistic value in that "[t]hey provided the necessary amenities to create the impression of a more modern and efficient colony, while giving an important visual corollary to the Italian military and administrative presence in the region" (McLaren, 2006:23). For those millions of Italian citizens at home, who would never lay eyes on Italy's African possessions, media like the C.T.I. guidebook, vaunting the achievements of Italians as road builders and sweeping modernisers, would serve to cement their belief in the legitimacy of the Empire. The legacy of this discourse endures to this day in the popular imagination of Italians about their colonial past (Labanca, 2004:309).

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and a half days and included in the trip were room and board at the Grande Albergo Berenice in Bengazi, the Grand Hotel Nilo in Wadi Halfa and the C.I.A.A.O. Hotel Asmara for those continuing to Addis Ababa. The cost of the the trip was L. 4500 for Asmara and L. 6000 for Addis Ababa. Accomodation for travellers in A.O.I. was largely handled by the state-owned *Compagnia Immobiliare Alberghi Africa Orientale*, the conveniently hospitable acronym of which was C.I.A.A.O. According to the guide by mid 1938 there were hotels run by C.I.A.A.O. or other private entities of a high standard equipped with running hot and cold water, baths, showers, patisserie, barber services and restaurants in every city or town of any importance in the empire and plans to build many more C.I.A.A.O. hotels in every important centre.



As roads and communication networks fanned out across the empire at an incredible pace, and hotels and infrastructure were built to bring the comforts of home to this wild frontier, the realisation of Mussolini's dream of settling millions of Italians in the Ethiopian interior became ever closer to being made a reality. Del Boca provides a colourful description of the frenzy of investment and construction which, in a very short time, transformed the landscape of Ethiopia:

Certain that Ethiopia was theirs for good, convinced that the Ethiopian tribes would furnish them with an inexhaustible and dirt-cheap labour force, the Italians set about providing the empire with what it lacked, in other words, practically everything; roads, railways, factories, hospitals, schools, hotels, post offices, telephone exchanges, etc. In the space of five years, the life span of the ephemeral empire, they wrought miracles; Haile Selassie was right when he said they had a genius for constructing. In five years, they endowed Ethiopia with over 5000 kilometres of new roads, some asphalted, some flattened with steamrollers, overcoming difficulties that seemed insurmountable. (1969: 232)

The enormous investments, actual and planned, in the construction of roads, rails, hotels etc. would do little good without the support of the detailed maps and information in the guide. The guide is therefore far more than propaganda but a detailed manual for the civilian settlement and colonisation of the newly conquered empire. According to Cannistraro, between 1936 and 1937, the Italian government put aside 19.136 billion lire in the budget to support infrastructure development in A.O.I. (1982:5). This exceeded the total national revenue of Italy during the same period by 555 billion lire. Creating and maintaining an empire was an expensive enterprise, and tourism was clearly identified as a driver of for the economic colonisation of the colony and one way to make this investment pay off in the longer term. Del Boca (1969:237) makes it clear that the Fascist establishment knew full well that Ethiopia would require the investment of vast sums of capital and the passing of many years

before it would become profitable, noting that the huge amount of money invested into the colony in the five years that it was under Italian rule is an indication of the long-term ambitions of the regime to render the colony fit and appealing for mass settlement by the masses of landless peasants overcrowding Italy at the time. The historian notes also that during the five years of Italian occupation in Ethiopia only 300,000 Italians settled there: a figure which he describes as “laughable”, given the ambitions to settle millions (Del Boca, 1969:236). If I may be indulged the temerity to disagree with this eminent and pathfinding historian, I would suggest that this figure is far from laughable. Firstly, attracting 300,000 ill-prepared people armed with scant information, in the space of a mere five years to settle – in what was essentially a lawless and wild frontier country recently ravaged by war and still roamed by bandits and rebels, economically underdeveloped, characterised by poor communication routes – is, in my opinion, not to be so casually dismissed. Secondly, dismissing the ambitious plans put in place by the regime as pure and misguided hubris because they failed is unfair, given that the project was interrupted by the outbreak of the most catastrophic war in modern European history, which posed (and proved to be) an existential threat to the regime. In this instance, Del Boca falls into the very discursive trap he was so instrumental in overturning: that of dismissing the seriousness of Italian colonialism based on the fact that it was short-lived. Further evidence for my claim in this regard is the comparison of the Libyan case. According to McLaren, the Governor of Libya, Italo Balbo, had plans that were considered ambitious to populate Libya with 20,000 carefully selected Italian settlers per year beginning in 1938, with the goal of gradually settling 500,000 by 1950 (2006:39). Given these comparatively modest ambitions in the context of a colony just a stone's throw from the shores of the homeland and that had been in Italian hands already since 1912, it is clear that Del Boca's derision of the settlement of 300,000 Italians in Ethiopia in a mere five years is unfair. My analysis of the *Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana* and supporting documents, indicates the far more frightening possibility that, given enough time, a state on the African continent, home to millions of Italian settlers with an

economic and social system resembling that of Apartheid South Africa could well have materialised.

The guidebook also acknowledges a number of commercial concerns and state-supported monopolies which helped sponsor the guide and which were, in turn, likely to benefit from increased traffic of tourists, settlers and business travellers between Italy and A.O.I. These included Azienda General Italiana Petroli (A.G.I.P; General Italian Oil Company), which held monopoly on fuel in the colony, the Azienda Monopolio Banane, which was Somalia's biggest agricultural concern, and maritime transport companies, which operated routes that tourists would utilise in reaching A.O.I. from Italy, such as *Lloyd Triestino S.A. di Navigazione* and *Adriatica S.A.* which largely monopolised the routes between Italy and the ports of its African Empire, as well as operating a shuttle servicing the coastal cities of the Horn of Africa; the airline Ala Littoria which operated routes between Italy and the major centres; and the state-operated colonial hospitality concessionary Compagnia Immobiliare Alberghi Africa Orientale (C.I.A.A.O.; The Hotel Real-Estate Company of East Africa). Said (1994:281) argues "[c]olonialism is the forced extension of the capitalist system to new markets", where the colony and its people are reduced to the status of commodity and a natural resource to be consumed and exploited. Haile Larebo, in a study of Italian empire building in Ethiopia, makes reference to the concerted effort of the regime to promote capital extension and by proxy colonial penetration into Ethiopia. She writes:

As in Eritrea, this exclusion of foreign competition gave the new Italian business a protected market. By the early 1940s, about 4007 industrial and 4785 commercial firms with a total capital of about 2,700,000,000 Lire and 1,000,000,000 Lire respectively were authorized to work in A.O.I., and another 4,452 were under consideration. Out of these 1,225 industrial and 1,435 commercial companies (with a capital of 458,598,000 Lire and 603,322,000 Lire respectively), applied to work in the four Ethiopian governorships. But only four hundred industrial and 650 commercial firms actually made some

investment in the Empire; the remainder simply acted as distributing or purchasing agents for their mother firms in Italy. (Larebo, 2005:85)

It is important to remember that the highlands of Ethiopia were considered ideal for European settlement, given the healthy climate and fertility of the land. The guidebook is a unique record of a practical model for creating a settler colony. Of particular interest, in terms of investment and settlement, are sections of the guide devoted to sectors for potential investment in various types of agriculture and livestock rearing, forestry<sup>14</sup>, mineral resources, and logistics among others (*Guida*:92-108). These details would have been of little interest to the casual tourist and were obviously targeted at travellers interested in investment. The level of detail is astounding: it includes such minutiae as figures relating to the capacity in tonnage of the various ports in A.O.I., import and export duties and tariffs applicable to different products, and a detailed list of suppliers, retailers and industrial and commercial concerns already present in the colony for the purposes of setting up business networks (*Guida*:101-108). Within this precise section on the economic potential of the colony there is a description of the various programmes planned to be implemented for the rapid settlement of the colony. These are worth quoting in full here as they render clear and unambiguous the plans of the regime to effect mass settlement in the conquered region and introduce an agricultural, industrial and commercial system, which would be profitable to both Italian settlers and to the homeland. The plan detailed below is striking also because it describes a model of land redistribution and the regulation of indigenous labour with an ominous resemblance to the migrant labour system adopted by colonial and apartheid South Africa. Most importantly, the inclusion

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<sup>14</sup> Interesting, in regard to forestry, is the mention in the guidebook of the efforts of the so-called *Milizia Forestale* to reforest areas of the colony that had been denuded by years of deforestation. The guide mentions that this foresaw the cultivation of alien species to supplement the local flora biome. Of particular interest, from the perspective of colonial culture, are the unsatisfactory attempts mentioned in the guide to introduce Mediterranean plant species in Eritrea (99). The practice of importing species from Europe, in an effort to shape the indigenous landscape to suit the tastes of settlers, was commonplace in colonial settings with deleterious long term environmental consequences on native biodiversity being the inheritance of many postcolonial states.

of this policy serves as clear evidence that the guidebook was designed as a manual for settlement in the colony.

The plan provides for four forms of colonisation. Firstly: demographic colonisation, directed by the large "Colonisation Entities" autonomously and as legal persons, financed by banks and other assisting institutions and bodies. Each Entity will annually send a large number of family heads chosen from the regions (in Italy) assigned to each for settlement on lands (in Africa) assigned to each Entity; the following year, the family head having established a home and prepared the land, the remainder of the family is sent. Secondly: capitalistic colonisation initiated by Italian citizens, large land owners, industrialists and capitalists. Indigenous manpower organized and directed by Italian nationals will be allocated to the latter. Thirdly: Industrial colonisation undertaken by appropriate "Companies" to develop industrial plants making use of indigenous manpower organized and directed by Italian experts. Fourthly: Small-scale colonisation which consists of the allocation of modest concessions of land (10-51 hectares) to veterans of the Ethiopian campaign and to workers who contributed to the conquest of Ethiopia<sup>15</sup>. (*Guida*:98)

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<sup>15</sup> "Il piano prevede 4 forme di colonizzazione: 1a Colonizzazione demografica, diretta da grandi "Enti di Colonizzazione" a carattere autonomo e con personalità giuridica, finanziati da banche e altri istituti ed enti assistenziali. Ogni Ente invia ogni anno sui terreni a lui assegnati un forte numero di capi famiglia scelti nella medesima regione; l'anno seguente, allorchè il capo famiglia ha sistemato la casa e i terreni, viene inviata la famiglia. 2a Colonizzazione a tipo capitalistico, a iniziativa di cittadini Italiani, grandi proprietari di terre, industriali, capitalisti. A questi saranno affidate mano d'opera indigena, inquadrata e diretta da nazionali. 3a Colonizzazione a tipo industriale svolta da apposite "Compagnie" per la coltivazione di piante industriali usando mano d'opera indigena inquadrata e diretta da tecnici ed esperti nazionali. 4a Piccola Colonizzazione, che prevede la concessione di modesti appezzamenti di terreno (10-15 ha.) ai veterani della campagna etiopica e agli operai che hanno cooperato alla conquista dell'Etiopia".

A comparison with Libya is again instructive. McLaren mentions organised tours run by the Italian Colonial Institute and the Touring Club, such as a fourteen day cruise in 1924 organised by the I.C.I. (2006:50). On board were 255 potential investors from various fields of commerce, industry and agriculture who were invited on the tour explicitly for the purpose of soliciting investment in the colony. He also cites as an example of the dynamic linkage of tourism, economic development and propaganda, the popular and influential annual Tripoli Trade Fair. This fair was designed to draw prospective investors to the colony, showcase the arts and industries of the colony, attract tourists and establish colonial Libya firmly in the national consciousness as an arena for leisure, a rich land to be exploited economically, and a source of exotic imports.

The guidebook, which the writers promised to update frequently and continuously, was an essential part of the long-term ambition of settling the colony with thousands of Italians. In an age of easy access to information we may take for granted how transparent the world has become. We must remember that in 1938 the guide was the *only* reliable source of practical information about the territory at the time and for this reason it would have been essential for the success of any trip to the empire be it for leisure, business, or with the intention of settling there.

#### **4. The 'native' as spectacle**

I turn my attention now to the ways in which the *Guida dell'Africa Orientale* frames the indigenous inhabitants of the Italian empire in East Africa as elements of the picturesque and objects of the tourist gaze, essentially freezing them in time and place and limiting their agency as autonomous subjects. In his classic 1954 treatise on the subjects of colonialism and neo-colonialism, Jean-Paul Sartre considers the role tourism can play in the creation of a relationship of dependency of the hosts on the visitors and, more insidious still, the aestheticisation of the former for the pleasure and diversion of the latter. In this case his observations concern Asia, regions of which, in Sartre's time, formed part of the French overseas empire, but the observations are substantially applicable to our purposes here:

The picturesque has its origins in war and the refusal to understand the enemy: our enlightenment about Asia actually came to us first from irritated missionaries and from soldiers. Later came travellers – traders and tourists – who are soldiers that have cooled off. Pillaging is called shopping, and rape is practised onerously in specialized shops. (Sartre, 2001:22-23)

McLaren (2006:121) argues that the C.T.I. guide to Libya participated in the dissemination of exoticising discourses drawn on the one hand from the decadent exoticism of romantic colonial literature and, on the other hand, the pseudo-scientific and racist practices of colonial anthropology. Balangee-Morris's observations about the case of tourism development in rural Appalachia are again relevant. She describes how the othering category *hillbilly* was crafted by writers of texts aimed at tourists. She argues that these texts were a means of waging a discursive war against the local people in order to gain access to the mineral wealth of the region. She writes: “[c]olour writers came into the region and defined the people in romantic, generalized, and stereotyped way creating a mythic Appalachian culture, which served the marketing of the new tourist industry in the area” (Balangee-Morris 2002:235).

It is important to understand what is meant by the kind of exoticism described by Balangee-Morris above, and which is apparent in the *Guida dell’Africa Orientale*. According to Huggan, exoticism is nothing more than a “mode of aesthetic perception – one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery” (2012:13), while Edward Said (1994:159) describes the exotic as “aesthetic substitution which replaces the impress of power with the blandishments of curiosity”. Both of these discursive exercises can be considered strategies of containment along the lines termed by Arjun Appadurai as “metonymic freezing” (1988:36). Appadurai's thesis concerns the constitution of the concept of “native” as opposed to the Western subject as visitor/observer. Appadurai outlines three faulty

assumptions of the discipline of anthropology which are particularly relevant to this study. He writes:

We have tended to use the word *native* for persons and groups who belong to those parts of the world that were, and are, distant from the metropolitan West. This restriction is, in part, tied to the vagaries of our ideologies of authenticity over the last two centuries. Proper natives are somehow assumed to represent their selves without distortion or residue [...]. What it means is that natives are not only persons who are from certain places, and belong to those places, but they are also those who are somehow *incarcerated*, or confined, in those places [...]. Natives are in one place, a place to which explorers, administrators, missionaries, and eventually anthropologists, come. These outsiders, these observers, are regarded as quintessentially mobile; they are the movers, the seers, the knowers. The natives are immobilized by belonging to a place. (Appadurai, 1988:37)

These assumptions all concern the spatial and temporal isolation of the native as opposed to the Western subject. While the Westerner can roam and observe, the native must remain fixed and be observed; while the Westerner can change and adapt his environment, the native must remain an unchanging element of a specific habitat to which he has been confined. To Appadurai's explorers, administrators, missionaries and anthropologists, I must add tourists. Tourists are above all consumers of difference; they are drawn to the four corners of the world in a quest to experience the exotic and to rediscover in distant peoples a sense of cultural authenticity they feel has been lost in their own countries (Cohen, 1988).

The idea of tourist as amateur anthropologist and consumer of difference is strongly expressed in the following two extracts from the guide:



The local populations and their habits and customs, if observed attentively offer considerable interest; even a tourist with limited time will note varying physical features, some more resembling those of Europeans and others resembling those of Negroes; greater or lesser nobility in their bearing; a variety of dress; different dwellings and villages; differences in the plants cultivated and the methods used to cultivate them; different livestock, markets, festivals, churches, cult sites or trees, nuptial ceremonies and funerals, songs, dances and arts. (*Guida*:15)<sup>16</sup>

Diverse natural environments and the economic potential these afford lead to differences in the material lives of the various peoples. This can be observed by travellers in the form of dwellings, agriculture, household items and tools, foodstuffs, primitive industrial products, and, in general, any material activities performed by the populations of the regions visited. More difficult to perceive are the features of social life, an understanding of which requires careful observation, study, and enquiry which is not always easy to perform. (*Guida*:83)<sup>17</sup>

The guide includes a 13 page section describing the appearance, customs, habits and cultures of the various subject people living within the borders of the new empire. Indicative of the importance

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<sup>16</sup> “Le popolazioni e i loro usi e costumi, se guardati con occhio attento offrono pure non lieve interesse; il turista anche affrettato noterà i caratteri somatici più o meno affini a quelli degli europei o dei negri, la maggiore o minore nobiltà del portamento, il vario modo di vestire, le forme dell’abitazione e dei villaggi, le piante coltivate e i metodi di coltivazione, il bestiame, i mercati, le feste, le chiese e i luoghi o gli alberi cultuali, le cerimonie nuziali e funebri, i canti, le danze e le fantasie”.

<sup>17</sup> “Le differenze di ambiente fisico e le diverse possibilità economiche che ne derivano si ripercuotono sulla vita materiale delle varie genti. L’occhio del viaggiatore può cogliere queste diversità considerando le abitazioni, le colture, gli utensili del lavoro e della casa, gli alimenti, i prodotti dell’industria per quanto primitiva, e in genere tutta l’attività materiale delle popolazioni nei territori che percorrerà. Più difficile riesce cogliere gli elementi della vita sociale, la cui conoscenza richiede uno studio particolare mediante osservazioni e indagini non sempre agevoli”.

that racial classification and separation assumed in the fascist colony, the guidebook provides an orderly classification of the various groups according to their phenotypes (*Guida*:81). Atkinson argues on similar lines that “[t]heir (the geographers of the fascist regime) analyses of social structures, demographic conditions, and settlement patterns, for example, were inflected through the frameworks of European racial science and their recurrent concern was to identify, isolate and rank the region’s races” (Atkinson, 2005:21). A clear example of this tendency is how, as discussed above, the administrative districts of the A.O.I. were reorganised along ethnic lines and the vision of an ethnically divided Addis Ababa. This divide-and-rule strategy is apparent elsewhere in the guidebook where Eritreans and Somalis are treated with greater respect and tolerance than the newly conquered Abyssinians. In a general introductory section to the guidebook – which details the practical elements of a trip to A.O.I. (following a section on health precautions where the Italian tourist is cursorily advised to limit his exposure to natives and not to enter their huts owing to the prevalence of infectious disease) – there is a section devoted to advice on dealing with the character of the various indigenous populations of the region. It reads:

The Abyssinians (by which is meant the Tigre, the Amhara, the people of Shewa and other populations that live among them) have a closed character and are proud, temperamental and, like all orientals, deceitful and guarded. The Galla and Sidama are, in general, of a more open disposition, generous, excitable, but weak-willed and lazy. The Somalis are, in general, intelligent, generous, but also very often lazy and deceitful [...]. The Eritreans and the Somalis are proud to have belonged to Italy for a long time and to have contributed to the conquest of the Empire: the ascari and dubat enjoy great prestige throughout Italian East Africa. They consider themselves, as compared to the Abyssinians, almost equal to Italians and their natural collaborators. The traveller should take cognizance of their spirit and merit which are solemnly recognized by the Fascist

Government and taking them for Ethiopians would be considered a grave injustice and offensive. (*Guida*:19-20)<sup>18</sup>

Alongside anthropology, the guidebook enlists a colonial fantasy of exploration and seductive colonial myths of discovering and exploring an untamed landscape inhabited by wild and mysterious people can be strongly felt in the extract below:

This wild country of violent contrasts where innumerable peoples, languages, civilizations and religions mingle in bewildering diversity, this land rich in history, legend and the unexpected, where lives are lived much like they were in Biblical times, has an allure which was deeply felt by our great explorers of Africa and is being felt today by our pioneers who often find in the forms of the landscape a faint resemblance to the Fatherland. (*Guida*:13)<sup>19</sup>

Here primitivism is highlighted and celebrated for its aesthetic quality and the African Other is represented as untainted by civilisation and offering a window into the past. The fantasy of exploration and discovery is further emphasised in a long section devoted to the

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<sup>18</sup> “L’Abissino (sotto questo nome s’intendono i tigrini, gli amara, gli scioani e altre popolazioni che con essi convivono) è di carattere chiuso, molto orgoglioso, volubile e, come tutti gli orientali, dissimulatore e accorto parlatore. Il Galla e il Sidama sono in generale di carattere più aperto, generosi, facili all’entusiasmo, ma deboli di volontà e indolenti. Il Somalo è in generale d’intelligenza sveglia, generoso, ma anche spesso indolente e dissimulatore... Gli Eritrei e i Somali sono orgogliosi di appartenere da gran tempo all’Italia e di aver contribuito alla conquista dell’Impero; ascaro e dubat godono di grande prestigio in tutta l’A.O.I. Essi si considerano, di fronte agli abissini, quasi pari agli Italiani e loro naturali collaboratori. Di questo spirito e dei loro meriti, riconosciuti solennem. dal Governo fascista, è doveroso tener conto nel trattare con loro; scambiarli per etiopici sarebbe grave offesa e ingiustizia”.

<sup>19</sup> “Il fascino di questo selvaggio paese dai violenti contrasti, ove s’incontrarono e si sovrapposero innumerevoli genti e linguaggi, civiltà e religioni diversissime in una vicenda confusamente intuibile, terra densa di storia e di leggenda e d’imprevisto, ove la vita umana si svolgeva pur ieri come ai tempi biblici, è stato profondamente sentito dai nostri grandi esploratori africani e lo subiscono ora i nostri pionieri, che trovano spesso nelle forme del paesaggio un qualche richiamo alla Patria”.

history of European exploration and study of the region in which the secretive nature of the Ethiopian Empire which eluded European imperialism and remained mysterious to Europeans for many centuries is highlighted (*Guida*:73-80). The section naturally focuses on Italian explorers in the region who are monumentalised as intrepid heroes in whose footsteps the modern tourists are encouraged to follow. Papson argues that “[t]ourism depends on preconceived definitions of place and people” whose “definitions are created by the marketing arm of the government and of private enterprise in order to induce the tourist to visit a specific area” (1981:225; see also Hall & Tucker 2004:13), while Hollinshead claims that indigenous people in tourist zones of postcolonial settings find themselves “in a sort of tourized confinement in the suffocating straightjacket of enslaving external conceptions” (1992:44, see also Hall & Tucker 2004:13). These observations on tourism in contemporary postcolonial countries are fascinating when read against the backdrop of the *Guida dell’Africa Orientale* which reveals a prescient and cynical recognition of tourism’s potential to create economic and cultural dependency of a colony on the metropole. McLaren’s study of Italian tourism in Italian Libya indicates the perfection of this “self-conscious staging of indigenous culture” (2006:125), which saw Italians intervening in, and shaping to, their pre-conceived exoticising paradigm the local architecture, art, music and dance of the indigenous Libyans for the pleasure of Italian tourists which was in its infancy in A.O.I. but, based on the contents of the *Guida dell’Africa Orientale*, was very likely to be repeated.

## 5. Conclusion

The guidebook is very clearly propagandist in its tone and presents itself as a triumphant achievement in honour of the King and newly crowned Emperor Vittorio Emanuele III, il Duce and the soldiers who died subjugating Abyssinia. The dense and detailed 640 page volume was published only two years and four months after the declaration of the conquest of Abyssinia by Mussolini’s forces and its incorporation into Italian East Africa. The meticulously detailed guidebook does indeed, in a sense, represent an impressive achievement on the part of

the writers who undertook intricate research in what was still a very unsettled region characterised by continued hostilities between colonial troops and resistance fighters. In retrospect, given our knowledge of how history unfolded, it may be tempting to view the *Guida dell'Africa Orientale* as a mere piece of bombast in Fascist Italy's arsenal of self-aggrandising propaganda. However, as my analysis shows, the guidebook clearly represents a significant investment of time and money which make the motives for its commission worthy of suspicion and study. Based on my analysis of the text, I must conclude that the *Guida dell'Africa Orientale* is far more significant than a piece of colonial bluster. Rather it represents a blueprint for the harnessing of tourism as an essential element in the subjugation, economic exploitation and settlement of A.O.I. and that the Italian regime planned to utilise to the full the power of tourism as a potent strategy in the final conquest and subjugation of their colonial subjects and their lands.

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## ROSSO FLOYD<sup>1</sup>: A 'SONOROUS' NOVEL BY MICHELE MARI

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### Sommario

*Il romanzo Rosso Floyd (2010), di Michele Mari, descrive le origini della band britannica, i Pink Floyd. In questo lavoro apparentemente diaristico, Mari crea anche una dimensione sofisticata, inaspettata e 'sonora' che unisce i costrutti binari della forma musicale con quella letteraria. Ogni 'capitolo' del romanzo presenta una 'voce' isolata che rappresenta la prospettiva personale di individui connessi alla storia della band. La risultante molteplicità di voci derivante da questa forma, crea una stringa strutturata di 'suono' che trasforma il libro in una 'partitura' polifonica. In questo articolo verranno identificati gli strati 'sonori' dell'opera tra le pieghe della sua fusione formale postmodernista.*

**Keywords:** genre, musical score, dialogism, novel, Michele Mari.

Michele Mari's work, often on the periphery of the Gothic, is largely associated with experimentation in both genre and historical referencing. His 2010 novel-cum-documentary, *Rosso Floyd*, purports to deal with the history of the British pop band Pink Floyd but is neither a documentary nor a novel in the 'traditional' meaning of the form. The book's defiance of traditional form is clear from the very start, the only identifiable adhesion to the label of 'novel' being the author's use of the novelistic imperatives of fantasy and imagination and a manipulation of "the form of the novel, so clumsy, verbose, and undramatic, so rich, elastic, and alive" (Woolf, 2008:42).

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<sup>1</sup> In order to avoid confusion, the novel's Italian name, *Rosso Floyd*, will be used to designate Mari's book, while the band's English name, Pink Floyd will be used to designate the group.

The novel's 'chapters' are diaristic pieces couched in the 'voice' of historically identifiable individuals connected to the band; the novel has no page numbers<sup>2</sup> and no structured narrative development apart from a flow of personal recollections of past events variously relating to Pink Floyd. In a purposeful misdirection, the title page of the book describes the work as a '*romanzo*'/novel<sup>3</sup> but immediately follows this designation with a list of other genres that make up the work, thereby creating shifting boundaries while appearing to provide orientation for the reader. The disparate formal pieces listed as making up the novel's parts – 'laments', 'testimonies' and other clearly defined literary forms – are interspersed in random order throughout the 'novel' and used as vehicles for the personal contributions by individuals who impart varying perspectives at differing degrees of intimacy to the band's original founder, Syd Barrett. However, these entries do not only represent disparate genres used for the pleasure of subversion, but serve as an important structural framework that goes beyond their predictable content. While these pieces give relevant information about many aspects of the group's history, they also function within the dictates of their named structural forms, thus creating a complex, but hidden substratum upon which the book is built: "A novel made up of 30 confessions, 53 testimonies, 27 lamentations of which 11 otherworldly, 6 interrogations, 3 exhortations, 15 referrals, one revelation and one contemplation" (Mari 2012)<sup>4</sup>.

This programmatic opening clearly serves as a map for the book's structure. Each of these pieces belongs to a clearly defined genre which elicits the readers' expectations while teasing them into engaging more intimately with the book's ground map. Each, therefore, has a stronger function in the overall scheme than the simple listing seems to imply. This game is then followed by the

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<sup>2</sup> All quotations from the book will therefore be referenced to the section or 'entry' rather than to the page number.

<sup>3</sup> The original Italian is footnoted after its English translation. All translations, unless otherwise stated, are the author's own.

<sup>4</sup> "Romanzo in 30 confessioni, 53 testimonianze, 27 lamentazioni di cui 11 oltremondane, 6 interrogazioni, 3 esortazioni, 15 referti, una rivelazione e una contemplazione".

preface on the following page, which subverts the field further by stating a disclaimer (“Avvertenza”), cautioning the reader from identifying the work as a history:

The confabulation of the voices, which belong from time to time to individuals who actually lived or who are still alive, to made-up characters or fantastic beings, is subservient to a rhetorical and linguistic structure, and has no pretension whatever to having documentary status.<sup>5</sup>

The ‘warning’ issued to the reader around the dangers posed by the “confabulation” of memory is therefore a signposting for the work, mitigating against the veracity of the speeches ‘reported’ in the ‘novel’ by the ‘witnesses’. Right from the beginning, therefore, while the reader is enticed to read *Rosso Floyd* as a biographical history of Pink Floyd – a real band – as an untrustworthy memoir made up of shifting perceptions and unreliable ‘confabulations’, the reader is also led to witness the destabilisation of any possible attempt at biographical certainty. The reader must therefore take cognisance of two levels of reading: the superficial or ‘immediate’ level which appears to capture the band’s biographical history and a second, more esoteric level, based on the genre type of each entry, which creates a complex layer of sonority as the work unfolds, presenting other patterns of relevance on the outer perimeters of the content. While in psychiatry ‘confabulation’ has no intentionality of deceit, in this literary version the disruption of memory is a purposeful game of shifting perceptions, aimed at disorientating the reader.

The first, or superficial level of reading, deals with the more obviously identifiable celebrity gossip similar to the many tribute books written on the band’s fame and fortune and based on verifiable historical facts around the group’s rise and fame. It looks at Syd Barrett and his much-acclaimed personal charm, Roger Waters’ insecurities and tantrums, David Gilmour’s arrival as backup for the

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<sup>5</sup> “La confabulazione delle voci, appartenenti di volta in volta a individui realmente vissuti o viventi, a personaggi inventati, a esseri fantastici, obbedisce a una retorica strutturale e linguistica, e non vuole in alcun modo avere un valore documentario”.

star, Syd, whose progressive mental deterioration caused many guilt-ridden about-turns for his band mates preceding his elbowing-out in 1968. This 'gossip' also covers Syd's influence on the band's early musical profile as well as relations between the band members and the general British music scene of the 1960s. There is elegiac reference to childhood friendships, later professional acquaintances and reference to famous individuals connected to the music industry of the time. Amongst these the reader encounters the 'opinions' and 'revelations' of members of the British and American pop scene of the '60s, '70s and '80s. The reader 'hears' from music producers, film directors and impresarios each of whose fame is secondary to the band's celebrity status in an ever widening series of gossipy associations. There are behind-the-scene battles and tribulations: personal squabbles between Gilmour and Waters and the many psychologically fraught, internecine battles that eventually lead to the band's acrimonious relations, all presented in highly personalised perspectives.

Moreover, even greater than content, the real importance of these diaristic entries is their form. Each entry captures the memories and personal opinions of a clearly defined historical personality, presented to the reader by each of these individual's 'verbal' presence in the form of short, isolated 'monologues'. Each speaker's presence on the page is an individual verbal signature halfway between an oral rendition and a virtual sound recording. The book thus becomes a complex alternation of voices; some reach the reader from the afterlife, others from remembered episodes – opinions and judgements, echoes of recorded documents, snippets of hearsay and gossip, 'factual' reports, emotional memorial pieces – all presented 'verbally' on the written page under the umbrella of a 'remembered' past.

However, another more important ludic quality is intermingled with this pretended 'historicity'. Even though these pieces are fragmentary in nature, they ironically underscore the true nature of the novel, the inherent propensity of which, according to Bakhtin, is a drive towards "contact with the spontaneity of the inconclusive present" (1981:27). Therefore, the 'spoken' and highly personal perspectives of these pieces adds an importantly 'literary' level of reading to the work, a structure that, by being a clearly fantastic and

unreal perspective, underscores the literary rather than the historical essence of the work. This flow of voices, therefore, creates a level of reference – a sonorous and hidden structure – that is, in my opinion, the real scope of the work and of much greater interest for the engaged reader. On this more fundamentally relevant level, *Rosso Floyd* points to the issue of what the term ‘novel’ actually means. The fact that the author calls this a ‘novel’ must make the reader decode this apparently non-novelistic structure as an indicator of a subversive or ‘hidden’ form. If the reader accepts the criterion for the novel as a “multi-linguaged consciousness” (1981:11), which Bakhtin posits in *The Dialogic Imagination*, then it must be accepted that Mari achieves an alternative and perhaps more fundamental definition of the form by using unrelated dialogues to create an alternative ‘novel’.

Mari makes this quality overt by creating multiple voices as the structuring basis for *Rosso Floyd*: a subtle game of shuffling genres and vocal choruses adding up to become a literary construct arbitrarily identified as a ‘novel’. But while creating a substratum of voices for the projection of the novel’s essence, the sonority, as embodied in the genres of these individual pieces, also turns the book into a virtual score which plays on the sound effects of the structures themselves. Here the literary game extends way beyond the content; the successive concatenation of sound-related genres follow one another in the text, creating a string of ‘sound’ in a way that could be read as a semblance of musical scoring, or what Davies calls “organized sound” (2012:2). This is therefore an inclusion of synesthetic virtual sound in the verbal form. However, the reader must decide if the ‘sound’ itself can be virtual but still present through its being conjured up by the ‘sonorous’ genre that contain it. In terms of strict definition of ‘music’, the understanding of the term that I am proposing clearly falls short, but as a literary game the idea is engaging and worth an attempt at evaluation<sup>6</sup>.

As an opening gambit, the listing of the genres relating to the pieces that make up the ‘novel’ invites the readers into the work, enticing them along a predetermined path of forms inherently

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<sup>6</sup> There are many definitions of what music is, or should be, but it is out of the scope of this article to engage too closely with a definition of musical form in its own right.

associated with aural sound. Some, like the 'confession', the 'interrogation' and the 'testimony'<sup>7</sup>, represent forms of individual exchange mainly of a verbal nature, others such as the 'lamentation' or 'lament', point to a close association between voice and song, while the 'exhortation' indicates an oral address between individuals but defined by "a dramatic evocation of emotional experience" (Kennelly, 1987:92). The 'interrogation', 'referral' and 'revelation' all, likewise, rely on a direct one-to-one verbal interaction. While each of these genres has a formal tradition which may be as much written as verbal, their shared relationship with patterns of verbal sound makes them primarily identifiable as verbal forms and, therefore, structurally important to the overall design of Mari's 'novel'.

The nature of Catholic 'confession' relies on the relationship between the speaker and the reader-as-listener, combining both the need of speaking one's guilt as well as that of being heard. Guilt and its ultimate outcome, redemption, give meaning to the 30 examples of this form to be found in *Rosso Floyd*. The 'confessions' are interspersed throughout the pages of the book in a way that can be described as being a "recuperation of voices" (Cubilie & Good, 2003:4) or elaboration on facts 'lost' to the 'historical' memory of the group. These 'confessions' cover the personal thoughts of each of the band members, mainly those closely related to Syd. "Confessione prima" ("First Confession") is in the voice of Richard William Wright, also designated as "L'uomo topo" ("The Mouse Man"), the second is David Gilmour, "L'uomo gatto" ("The Cat Man"), the third is Nick Mason, "L'uomo cane" ("The Dog Man"), the sixth Roger Waters, "L'uomo cavallo" ("The Horse Man"), the seventh Peter Watts-Alan Parsons, while the other confessional entries appear in varying combinations of these specific band members. Their proximity to Syd Barrett, the 'Diamond' at the core of the work – a link established in the first entry of the novel, ("Lamentazione prima oltremondana. I siamesi"[First Outer-worldly Lament. The Siamese Twins]) – determines these confessional pieces as the closest ring of consanguinity, as it were, to the founder of the band himself. The

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<sup>7</sup> Barzel refers to testimony as an "experiential form of discourse" (2002:160).

'guilt' of each individual towards the absent Syd is therefore voiced in the form of a 'first circle', or what could be equated with a musical theme<sup>8</sup> underpinning all the other literary layers and threading through the work from beginning to end. The 'themes' of these confessional entries function as a returning constant does in a musical composition, which re-evaluates Genette's notion that "the only mode that literature knows is narrative, the verbal equivalent of non verbal events" (Genette & Levonas, 1976:4).

Music exists in time – not space – for the ear, being satisfied by a return to the main key of the piece and by a sufficient reminder of the matter of the main section – avoids losing interest in a mechanical re-statement of 'heard' material. (Davie, 1953:5)

The reader's interest in the personal confessional statement of each closely linked member of the band creates an equivalent to thematic scoring that binds the entire work around the figure of Syd Barrett himself.

The "testimony", the second form mentioned in the introduction of the book, is an entirely different literary-cum-verbal communication, which implies the external eye of an independent onlooker, designating to some degree a personal encounter and representing a different pattern of voice-to-writing experience. Closely identified with the biblical notion of remembering, with which *Rosso Floyd* is also closely linked, the testimony subsumes the idea of survival and "serves as a tool for uncovering hidden truths" (Park-Fuller, 2000:22). These testimonies present a 'history' formulated through the personal experience of the individual, "[that functions] as a valid human description" (Barzel, 2002:167). The 53 testimonies in *Rosso Floyd* stretch the reader's perceptions into the more important region of "one's *created* experience" (Park-Fuller, 2000:28. Italics in original), underlining the truly fictional nature of the text by bringing into the work a layer of imagined response in a dialogic correspondence that

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<sup>8</sup> "Themes [are] well defined melodies rather than organized groups of material" (Davie, 1953:11).

equates the antiphony in a musical score. These 53 testimonies can thus be described as a second circle of voices, or ancillary extras, at a further remove from the immediate founders of the group: impresario Peter Jenner, who quotes another early impresario of the group, manager Andrew King, choir master John Aldiss, drummer of the group Nice, David O'List, road manager Alan Parsons, who mentions the name of the deceased Peter Watts, another road manager for Pink Floyd in the tour for *The Dark Side of the Moon*, Julian Lennon "figlio di John" ("Son of John", "Testimonianza ottava"/"Testimony Eight"), creator of the special effects for the shows Peter Dinkley, singer Bob Geldof, stage designer Bob Ezrin (the same piece repeated twice to create an echo effect in the book), columnist Jason Coleman, Roger's brother and mother, Duncan and Mary Waters, friends David Gale and Nigel Lesmoir, Syd's childhood girlfriend Ann Murray, his sister and brother-in-law Rosemary and Paul Breen, the gnome whose picture accompanied many Pink Floyd visual pranks, celebrity photographer Michael Rock, friend Jack Monk who gives information on the years following Syd's expulsion from Pink Floyd, the caretaker of Syd's apartment block Ronald Salmon, television host John Peel, guitarist Clive Welham, drummer William Wilson, singer Eric Clapton, bassist Clive Metcalf, Syd's brother Alan Barrett, whose family connection entitles him to the privilege of the final testimony, in which he mentions Syd's death on a night when the full moon shone like a diamond<sup>9</sup>, thereby again picking up Syd's established designation.

The lamentation in particular is an expression of suffering and the subsidiary wish for the alleviation of that suffering. As a heightened form of emotional expression it is also, more than the others, associated with poetry or song. In *Rosso Floyd* the lamentation brings both a worldly and otherworldly dimension, a fusion between biographical content and Gothic form. The series of laments in the novel draws from a group of people that create yet another outer layer of Pink Floyd aficionados, those whose presence amongst the chosen has in some way been forbidden or peripheral.

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<sup>9</sup> "The papers didn't fail to note that that night the moon shone in the sky like a diamond" ["I giornali non han mancato di notare che c'era la luna piena, e che splendeva come un diamante nel cielo"] (Mari, 2010, Testimoniana trigesimoquinta. Alan Barrett (2)).



The first lament (“Lamentazione prima oltremondana. I siamesi”[First Outer-worldly Lament. The Siamese Twins]) echoes the otherworldly voices of the “Siamese twins”, Blues musicians Pink Anderson and Floyd Council, whose first names Syd Barrett ‘borrowed’ to designate Pink Floyd. The exchange of these two otherworldly voices introduces Gothic note, playing with the expectation embedded in the Siamese twins’ symbolism: the individual parts fuse to become the unit rather than the other way round, all shown here in a progressive accumulation of ‘sounds’. The second (“Lamentazione seconda. Arnold Layne”) is in the voice of the fictional character of Pink Floyd’s legendary first hit, Arnold Layne, a sexual pervert persona whose ‘outing’, in the song, results in his ‘ostracism’, in virtual ‘reality’, in the ‘recollected’ piece in *Rosso Floyd*. The double remove from identifiable reality – the ‘hidden’ secrets of a fictitious ‘identity’ captured in a pop song, but ‘remembered’ in a book of fiction about an actual band – runs the gamut of the word’s possibilities in fictional writing. The ‘voices’ of these pieces strongly echo the notion of absence and loss, so central to the nature of the lament. The three lamentations that follow; Bob Klose, whose voice discounts his importance as a founding member, Stuart Sutcliffe on the other hand taking up the subject from Bob Klose’s previous ‘voice’, laments his ill luck in dying young after founding the Beatles, Brian Jones who again picks up the previous speakers’ words, mentioning his own founding role in the Rolling Stones, all from the “olimpo dei pellicani” (“Olympus of the pelicans”), from which their ‘voices’ hail.

These ‘laments’ are therefore the history of the history, the voices of early band members whose departures resulted in a “fine della leggenda” (“the end of the legend”, “Lamentazione sesta. Chris Dennis”). Geoffrey Mottlow’s, peregrinations on the peripheries of other groups form the core of the dirge in “Lamentazione settima. Geoffrey Mottlow” (“Seventh lamentation. Geoffrey Mottlow”). The lament of Marzio Aquaviva calls on another peripheral circle – the internet fan club dedicated to Syd Barrett – while the twinned laments of the directors Kubrick and Antonioni recall the band’s work on their respective iconic films: *2001: Space Odyssey* and *Zabriskie Point*, drawing the film industry into the ‘novel’ in an ever widening circle

of linkages-as-absence to Syd, the 'diamond' at its core. Therefore, on this level of the lamentation the author adds yet another tonal layer to the 'novel', its recurrence based on absence equating a series of intermittent sounds on the periphery of the 'score'.

With the interrogations, exhortations, referrals, revelations, the novel introduces other forms of implied verbal communication into the ever-widening narrative circles. The 'interrogation' is structured around a one-to-one exchange based on verbal form of a confrontational nature ("sono furibondo, furibondo [I am furious, furious]"; "Interrogazione prima John Gordon"/"First interrogation John Gordon"), in which the nefarious deeds against Syd are questioned and evaluated ("che bisogno c'era di rovinare tutto dichiarando che quei pezzi non sono stati composti per Syd" ["what need was there to ruin everything by declaring that those pieces were not made for Syd"]), or the accusation by David Bowie, signed in the name of Ziggy, his show-world persona, on the disgraceful pleasures of gossip against Syd ("Ti piace spettegolare, eh..."[You like to speculate, don't you?], "Interrogazione seconda. David Bowie"/"Second interrogation. David Bowie). In the voice of Marzio Acquaviva in "Interrogazione terza. Marzio Acquaviva (2)", the reader finds an intertextual cross-reference accusing Roger Waters of deception ("prenderci in giro [making fools of us]") in a widening circle of voiced accusations. The exhortation introduces another level to the vocal layering of the piece. In "Esortazione prima. Michel Rémy", the supplication inherent in the exhortation form extends outwards, away from the nuclear nub of the band members to the fans or outer layer of the circle of relevance, in which these pieces extend the vocal expansion of the novel into ever-widening circles of sound surrounding the nucleus associated with the absent Syd Barrett.

Many more examples can be given from the text. Suffice it to say, however, that this so called 'novel' has been developed organically, from within, through the build-up of voices that create its many 'characters'. Each of these 'characters' is a voice rather than a fictitious 'person', a perspective that determines the narrative moment of each dialogic presence. Bakhtin defines the novel as a "diversity of speech types [or] a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (Bahktin, 1981:262). Each appearance of this 'voice' in

*Rosso Floyd* adds to the cumulative modulation of 'sound' that structures the novel. However, the 'voices' are not the only differentiation of perception that the novel offers the reader. Each entry is defined in its heading as a specific genre which both melds it to the whole while also allowing each entry to have its own, specific identification. The dichotomous distance between the sound of the voice and the written text is bridged by the titles of the pieces, which introduce the sounds of that voice through the identification of the genre, thereby linking the words and the written page. Like music which "is about the creation and organization of sounds and silences" (Smith, 1997:504), the titles of the genres introduce the sounds associated with that genre. For the reader the text has been a guide not just to the content of the history relating to Pink Floyd, but to the nature of writing, its integral functioning with the subject that it defines and its general form as a vehicle for the essence of the work itself.

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## SVILUPPO DI UNA CERTIFICAZIONE PER GIOVANI APPRENDENTI DI LINGUA: IL NUOVO ESAME PLIDA BAMBINI

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### **Abstract**

*This essay describes how to create a language examination for very young learners. In the text, language examinations for children are analysed, as well as the washback effect they could have. The main principles of language testing are defined. In the last section the development of the new language examination of Italian for children, Plida Bambini, is explained, and its main features are described.*

**Keywords:** certificazione, testing, esami, giovani apprendenti, italiano

### **1. I giovani apprendenti di lingua: nuovo target per gli enti certificatori**

Le certificazioni linguistiche sono presenti nel panorama politico-linguistico europeo, e non solo, da diversi decenni (approfondimenti sulla storia e la descrizione delle principali certificazioni europee in Novello, 2009). La loro spendibilità si è imposta su più piani d'azione creando una domanda-offerta che ha condotto ad un imponente processo incentrato sui sistemi valutativi.

La diffusa mobilità professionale e intellettuale ha contribuito ad aumentare in maniera decisiva la fruizione degli esami di lingua, che, in particolar modo in seguito alla richiesta da parte del Consiglio d'Europa agli Enti Certificatori di calibrare le prove sui livelli descritti dal Quadro Comune Europeo di Riferimento, attualmente rappresentano il mezzo per ottenere un documento ufficiale che attesti il grado di competenza comunicativa raggiunto. Un esame di

certificazione ha, difatti, lo scopo di comunicare il livello linguistico posseduto dal candidato garantendo, nella maniera meno arbitraria possibile, un determinato grado di prestazione nella lingua *target*. L'attestazione ottenuta tramite il superamento delle prove contenute nell'esame di un Ente Certificatore riconosciuto rappresenta, quindi, una dichiarazione ufficiale del livello di competenza linguistica posseduto.

Risulta chiaro come la spendibilità di questo documento rappresenti uno dei maggiori fattori di richiesta dello stesso a cui vanno, però, aggiunti due fenomeni tra loro agli antipodi che si sono venuti a delineare nel nuovo panorama politico-linguistico, vale a dire: la necessità dell'integrazione linguistica e il puro piacere di imparare una lingua. Sulla base di una domanda sempre più diversificata e cospicua, gli Enti Certificatori europei hanno conseguentemente aumentato la loro offerta, passando, dai pochi livelli proposti ai loro esordi, ad essere in grado di valutare tutti i livelli (perciò da A1 a C2) del Quadro Comune Europeo di Riferimento, proponendoli anche per diverse tipologie di apprendenti (Novello, 2009).

Una categoria emergente che sta trovando sempre più spazio tra le proposte degli Enti Certificatori è quella dei bambini. Gli esami che hanno come destinatari i giovanissimi apprendenti stanno riscontrando un buon consenso a livello europeo, basti pensare alla sempre più diffusa proposta di prove a loro destinate da parte di Enti quali: Trinity College London, Cambridge Esol, City and Guilds, British Institutes (per un approfondimento sugli esami di inglese per bambini si veda Novello, 2012), Ciep (Ministero dell'educazione francese). È da subito palese come le finalità siano ben diverse rispetto ad una certificazione per adulti e giovani adulti; in una certificazione per bambini il concetto di spendibilità viene a mancare lasciando posto al piacere di veder concretizzato il termine di un percorso di successo. La percezione che un bambino ha del proprio apprendimento è generalmente molto debole, a causa del suo sviluppo cognitivo e della poca esperienza nell'autonomia; per questo motivo l'ottenimento di un attestato/diploma che dimostri il risultato raggiunto può fungere da elemento "premio" per il tempo impiegato e l'interesse dimostrato nell'acquisire una lingua e diventare, così,

veicolo per la comprensione dei progressi raggiunti. In questo modo i bambini riconoscendo la positività del percorso intrapreso sono ulteriormente motivati nel proseguire il contatto con la lingua.

Tale processo è stato fortemente avvertito dalle famiglie, dagli insegnanti e dagli Enti Certificatori e ha dato il via a un nuovo ciclo di domanda-offerta che ha portato alla nascita delle certificazioni per bambini. La consapevolezza della positività e dei benefici dell'avviamento precoce all'apprendimento delle lingue ha senz'altro contribuito alla diffusione del fenomeno certificativo per i giovani apprendenti di lingua. Le varie forme di bilinguismo e di accostamento precoce alla lingua straniera sono da diverso tempo analizzate (Fabbro, 2018, 2006, 2004; Torresan, 2013, Agliotti & Fabbro, 2006; Gullberg & Indefrey, 2006) con diffusione di risultati che ne evidenziano gli aspetti positivi. La base scientifica di questi studi, ma anche il valore affettivo o di utilità rivestito dalla lingua *target*, hanno, senza dubbio, contribuito ad avvicinare le famiglie a percorsi di lingua accostati ad un esame di certificazione finale. L'esame di certificazione di lingua racchiude in questo caso una valenza nuova, diversa, che mira ad incoraggiare, motivare e promuovere l'apprendimento linguistico.

### **1.1 L'impatto di una certificazione per bambini**

Come tutti gli esami di certificazione, anche quelli per bambini non sono legati ad un corso, ma si basano su un sillabo elaborato dall'Ente Certificatore. Proprio il sillabo costituisce uno degli elementi di maggior impatto della certificazione (Alderson, Clapham & Wall, 1995; Consiglio d'Europa, 2009). Essendo questa selezione di conoscenze e abilità solitamente elaborata da esperti del settore che abbinano, appunto, elementi linguistico-comunicativi a livelli di competenza, essa può fungere da punto di riferimento per il confronto con percorsi linguistici progettati dalle diverse scuole ed orientare, in questo modo, la didattica degli insegnanti.

È chiaro che una certificazione non fornisce alcuna indicazione metodologica e non suggerisce alcun percorso di insegnamento ai docenti (Machetti & Strambi, 2003), ma il confronto dato dall'analisi del sillabo può orientare sugli obiettivi raggiungibili ai diversi livelli;

inoltre, l'osservazione delle tipologie di prove selezionate è senza dubbio utile al fine di comprendere le modalità che più si prestano a verificare le competenze linguistiche nei bambini. Ancora, i criteri di valutazione adottati, il peso assegnato alle diverse abilità e il concetto di misurazione per la valutazione di giovanissimi apprendenti possono fungere da riferimento per chi si occupa di insegnamento/apprendimento linguistico nei bambini.

Dalla prospettiva della ricerca, poi, la creazione degli esami di lingua e dei documenti ad essi legati porta, indubbiamente, un contributo significativo all'analisi della competenza comunicativa, dei suoi livelli e delle modalità di valutazione (Backman & Palmer, 1982). Lo sviluppo di un buon esame prevede, come spiegato successivamente, un lungo lavoro di studio e progettazione, per cui l'impatto di tale esame a livello di ricerca scientifica nel campo della valutazione ha sicuramente una valenza positiva, ancora di più in un ambito ancora poco esplorato come la valutazione nei bambini.

Un altro elemento legato all'impatto della certificazione è rappresentato dagli effetti che la stessa avrà sui bambini e sulle famiglie. La validità consequenziale di un esame (Messick, 1989) deve tener conto degli effetti sociali del test e dei suoi risultati, soprattutto in un periodo storico in cui, come ribadito da Weir (2007), i test hanno effetti importanti sulla vita delle persone e rappresentano uno strumento di potere e controllo.

In una certificazione per bambini, per cui, è basilare prestare molta attenzione all'impatto sociale della stessa, essendo lo scopo quello di aumentare la curiosità e il piacere di imparare una nuova lingua. Per tale motivo tutte le componenti dell'esame, dal costruito alla grafica, devono essere pensate e costruite tenendo a mente l'impatto psicologico individuale e sociale.

È doveroso, infine, considerare l'impatto che la certificazione può avere nella diffusione della lingua che rappresenta, proprio per gli effetti retroattivi finora considerati. Se questi avranno un impatto positivo è chiaro che contribuiranno ad un accostamento piacevole alla lingua *target*, aumentandone, così, la diffusione.



## **2. Il Quadro Comune Europeo di Riferimento e i giovani apprendenti**

Un documento che conferma l'aumento di interesse per la valutazione di giovani apprendenti di lingua è rappresentato dalla recente pubblicazione da parte del Consiglio d'Europa di esempi di descrittori per due gruppi di apprendenti che riguardano rispettivamente i giovani dai 7 ai 10 anni e dagli 11 ai 15 anni (Consiglio d'Europa, 2018b). Il documento, che si accompagna alla nuova versione del Quadro Comune Europeo di Riferimento, ha lo scopo di raggruppare i descrittori esistenti secondo la suddivisione in livelli proposta dal Quadro e di gettare in questo modo le basi per un futuro lavoro di sviluppo di descrittori per giovani apprendenti. Risulta immediatamente chiaro come questa raccolta rappresenti solamente lo stadio iniziale di una riflessione che, se protratta, necessiterà indubbiamente di una tempistica importante e di un lavoro di calibrazione molto attento, ma la sua pubblicazione segna l'apertura ad un *target* fino a questo momento poco considerato.

La formale attenzione a questa fascia di candidati anche da parte del Consiglio d'Europa, oltre che degli Enti Certificatori come riportato nei paragrafi precedenti, dimostra, per cui, come i bambini e i ragazzi stiano diventando un pubblico sempre più indagato e con caratteristiche specifiche che necessitano di essere studiate. Le motivazioni espresse dal Consiglio d'Europa relative alla pubblicazione di descrittori già esistenti e non allo sviluppo di nuovi vanno ricercate nel voler innanzitutto identificare quali descrittori del Quadro fossero rilevanti per gruppi di giovani apprendenti, considerato che i descrittori, appunto, non sono stati sviluppati riferendosi a gruppi specifici e tantomeno a bambini. Si è pensato, per cui, di selezionare i descrittori adatti e/o adattabili al gruppo d'età e al contesto considerato. L'intento del Consiglio d'Europa è stato quello, inoltre, di raccogliere esempi di descrittori esistenti già validati da esperti linguistici, tra cui quelli del Portfolio Europeo delle Lingue per Giovani Apprendenti, essendo questo documento di riferimento già validato e in linea con i principi di calibrazione del Quadro.

Proprio il Quadro essendo stato in aggiornamento parallelamente a questa raccolta ha costituito motivo di riflessione sul lavoro proposto: non sarebbe stato utile, a parere dei curatori<sup>1</sup>, proporre una nuova serie di descrittori prima della pubblicazione della nuova versione del documento. Per quanto riguarda l'età minima considerata viene specificato che non si tratta di una decisione definitiva, ma la scarsità di descrittori al di sotto dei 7 anni non ha permesso una raccolta degli stessi. La scelta della divisione nei due gruppi 7-10 e 11-15 è stata dovuta sia al fatto di non aver avuto abbastanza descrittori disponibili per la fascia dai 9 ai 12 anni e creare così una categoria intermedia, sia per aver preso in considerazione le età soglia di 7 e 11 anni indicate nelle teorie di Piaget (1967) per lo sviluppo cognitivo. I 7 anni, inoltre, non vogliono escludere i 6, ma rispecchiano maggiormente il livello inferiore della scuola primaria nella maggior parte dei sistemi scolastici. I 15 anni, invece, sono stati scelti come età massima in quanto i descrittori del Portfolio Europeo delle Lingue per età maggiori sono gli stessi degli adulti.

È importante ricordare, come del resto indicato nei documenti del Consiglio d'Europa, che le scale di livello rappresentano degli strumenti per definire le abilità, perciò un parlante difficilmente potrà essere categorizzato in un solo livello, ma a seconda dell'esperienza e delle caratteristiche personali potrà possedere livelli diversi nelle diverse abilità. Tale considerazione vale ancora di più per i giovani apprendenti, nei quali le caratteristiche personali devono tener conto anche dello sviluppo cognitivo e sociale di ogni gruppo.

Di conseguenza i descrittori vanno interpretati considerandoli come obiettivi possibili e non come ciò che ci si aspetta od è necessario raggiungere ad un dato livello. Tale considerazione è di fondamentale importanza quando si lavora con i bambini, proprio perché il loro grado di sviluppo cognitivo non permette di delineare con esattezza degli obiettivi standard, ma piuttosto delle indicazioni su ciò che può essere più adatto per l'età e i livelli considerati.

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<sup>1</sup> Goodier T.; Moe E.; Hasselgreen A.; Docherty C.; North B. & Szabo T. (Language Policy Division).

### **3. Lo sviluppo di un esame**

Creare un esame di certificazione richiede un lungo lavoro suddiviso in più momenti che necessitano di essere pianificati e gestiti in maniera molto precisa (Alderson, Clapham & Wall, 1995; Weir, 1993, 2005).

Prima della pubblicazione un esame viene sviluppato attraverso fasi che prevedono una durata di qualche mese ciascuna; ciò significa che per costruire un nuovo esame di lingua possono essere necessari anche alcuni anni (questo avviene naturalmente quando tutte le fasi vengono rispettate ed il team di lavoro è composto da esperti del settore). Le fasi si dividono generalmente in (Weir, 1993; Consiglio d'Europa, 2009; Alte, 2011):

- fase di pianificazione
- fase di progettazione
- fase di sviluppo
- fase operativa.

Nella prima fase, quella di pianificazione, una volta stabiliti i destinatari e il proponimento dell'esame, vengono indagate e ricercate tutte le informazioni riguardanti gli agenti influenti sul test, vale a dire: le persone coinvolte nella valutazione (dagli studenti agli insegnanti, dai genitori agli organismi scolastici o ministeriali), le influenze esterne (i contesti educativi e socio-economici) e i fattori interni (modalità di organizzazione del lavoro di preparazione e validazione dell'esame, risorse e conoscenze disponibili). Nella fase di progettazione si passa, poi, alla stesura del syllabo sulla base delle specificazioni iniziali individuate (vengono definite le abilità per ogni livello considerato). Vengono in questa fase indagate le diverse caratteristiche dei candidati al fine di tracciarne un profilo preciso che includa: il contesto, l'età e la nazionalità; queste informazioni saranno utilizzate per la selezione dei materiali che comporranno il test. Si passa successivamente alla delineazione delle modalità (tipologia di prove, tipologia di item, lunghezza dei testi, consegne, modalità di somministrazione, tempi) e alla stesura della prima versione del test.

Sempre in questa fase vengono sviluppate le prime versioni delle scale di valutazione e vengono definiti i punteggi delle prove oggettive. A questo punto è utile prendere delle decisioni riguardo agli esaminatori, considerando quale tipo di formazione sarà più adatta alle loro esigenze; senz'altro è consigliabile stendere delle istruzioni da fornire per la somministrazione del test.

Nella fase di sviluppo si procede con il pre-testing e le analisi statistiche e qualitative (analisi degli item in rapporto all'utenza). Sulla base delle informazioni ottenute si prosegue con le revisioni necessarie e con la stesura definitiva delle specificazioni del test. Vengono proposte, poi, delle considerazioni sulla somministrazione del test al fine di produrre le linee guida definitive relative alla sua amministrazione e vengono contemporaneamente analizzati i dati riguardanti la validità, l'affidabilità e la praticabilità del test. Vengono raccolti e analizzati i feedback richiesti sia ai candidati che agli esaminatori. È possibile che in questa fase sia necessario ripetere il trialling dei materiali revisionati, anche più di una volta, a seconda di quante modifiche si rendono necessarie. Infine, nella fase operativa, viene stesa la versione definitiva del test e vengono definite le procedure amministrative e di valutazione, il tutto, naturalmente, preceduto dalle analisi post-test (revisioni e consultazioni con il team di lavoro sulle diverse parti dell'esame). Dopo questa prima parte della fase operativa segue un continuo monitoraggio volto ad assicurare il mantenimento di un livello costante di difficoltà dell'esame; è fondamentale in questa fase controllare regolarmente la validità onde assicurarsi di misurare correttamente le abilità testate.

È fondamentale precisare come qualsiasi decisione presa nelle diverse fasi debba essere considerata provvisoria e come il team di lavoro debba essere pronto a ritornare su decisioni prese precedentemente. Tale flessibilità deve accompagnare tutto il processo, in quanto anche dopo la somministrazione del test è verosimile che emergano delle criticità da risolvere. Come suggerito nelle procedure Alte (Association of Language Testers in Europe, 2011) poi, è basilare dopo che il test è stato proposto per un certo periodo di tempo considerare una revisione che parta dalle fasi iniziali dello sviluppo del test in modo tale da poterlo adattare ad una

popolazione che sarà necessariamente cambiata e per aggiornarlo sulla base dei più recenti studi sul language testing.

#### 4. Fondamenti del testing

Sono stati citati alcuni concetti fondamentali relativi al language testing (validità, affidabilità, eticità, praticabilità) che vale la pena approfondire (si veda anche Novello 2009, 2014). Il concetto di validità è considerato fondamentale nel language testing in quanto è legato alla capacità di un test di misurare ciò che intende misurare. Naturalmente, rivestendo tale importanza, l'argomento è stato trattato da diversi studiosi (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955, 1971; Lado, 1961; Bachman, 1990; Davies, 1968, Thorndyke & Hagen, 1977; Popham, 1981; Anastasi, 1988; Carroll & Hall, 1985; Hughes, 1989; Messick, 1989; Weir, 1990; Cumming & Berwick, 1996; Davies & Elder, 2005) i quali hanno indagato i diversi aspetti della validità, cercando di descrivere tutte le loro componenti. Il comune denominatore delle varie descrizioni si può ritrovare nell'intento di definire ciò che è effettivamente rilevante in un test, analizzando quello che si rivela essenziale alla misurazione delle abilità. La definizione che si è venuta, così, a sviluppare negli anni prende in considerazione anche l'uso del test ed include *“the degree to which evidence and theory support the interpretations of test scores entailed by proposed uses of tests”* (AERA, APA, NCME, 1999).

È interessante vedere come gli studiosi abbiano proposto negli anni diverse, anche se non distanti, interpretazioni di validità (per un approfondimento si veda D'Este, 2012) proponendo stimolanti spunti di riflessione relativi al language testing. Fondamentale citare Davies che negli anni '90 descrive la validità come l'insieme di cinque sottogruppi:

- a. *face validity*, che riguarda il giudizio che il test ottiene dagli attori coinvolti (studenti, famiglie ecc.);
- b. *content validity*, che implica invece un giudizio di tipo professionale (come può essere quello di un insegnante o di un esperto) sul contenuto del test, ovvero sul suo rispettare il sillabo di riferimento;

- c. *construct validity*, strettamente legata alla validità di contenuto, riguarda il rispetto delle teorie di riferimento sulla costruzione di test;
- d. *predictive validity*, ossia il grado di predittività di un test, vale a dire quanto i risultati di un test possono predire abilità future;
- e. *concurrent validity*, cioè il mantenimento dello stesso grado di validità di un test nel confronto con una versione parallela (Davies, 1990; Novello, 2014:45).

Degna di nota si rivela, poi, la proposta di Weir (2007) in cui rientrano:

- a. validità di contesto: aspetto che include non solo parametri linguistici (e quindi l'input fornito e l'output atteso, in modo da testare l'abilità che si intende testare), ma anche il contesto socioculturale dell'esecuzione del compito;
- b. validità cognitiva: si identifica con la misura di quanto un test elicit i processi cognitivi coinvolti in un contesto di vita reale;
- c. validità di correzione: comprende tutti gli aspetti legati alla corretta interpretazione e misurazione delle prove e include, quindi, il concetto di affidabilità legato al punteggio, vale a dire la costanza dei risultati attraverso somministrazioni successive e diversi correttori (se un testo non è valido, allora non è affidabile);
- d. validità di criterio: è un concetto legato al post test, cioè alla correlazione tra punteggio e criteri esterni. Può riguardare:
  - la comparabilità con altri test;
  - l'equivalenza con diverse versioni dello stesso test;
  - la comparabilità con standard esterni.

- e. validità consequenziale: introdotta da Messick (1989), ha la finalità di assicurare che le conseguenze sociali dell'interpretazione di un test siano in accordo con lo scopo del test stesso e siano coerenti con altri valori sociali. Questo tipo di validità è legata all'effetto retroattivo che il test ha su insegnamento e apprendimento e all'impatto sulle istituzioni e sulla società. (Novello, 2014:45-6)

La validità è un concetto astratto che viene reso operativo una volta avviato il processo di validazione, il quale si rivela chiaramente un momento complesso, decisamente non statico, che accompagna, come già visto, la costruzione del test in più fasi.

Interessante il metodo di validazione delineato da Xi (2008) che, riprendendo da Kane, Crooks & Cohen (1999) e Bachman & Palmer (2005), divide i processi in tre macro aree che sono:

- f. valutazione, che riguarda le condizioni di amministrazione del test, lo sviluppo e l'uso delle rubriche valutative;
- g. generalizzazione, che comprende tra l'altro indagini sull'affidabilità, sulla coerenza della struttura del test e sui diversi gruppi di candidati;
- h. estrapolazione, che include analisi dell'evidenza dei risultati e delle evidenze empiriche (per una sintesi si veda D'Este, 2012).

Le stesse fasi sono riprese dall'Alte (2011) nello schema per la validazione: *observation, evaluation, generalisation, extrapolation*. Van Der Walt & Steyn (2008) spiegano come la validazione a posteriori includa due fasi: l'analisi dei risultati e dell'evidenza che forniscono relativamente all'abilità dei candidati e la validazione empirica delle procedure che hanno condotto ai risultati stessi (processo che include la presa in considerazione della validità di costruito, di contenuto, di criterio e gli indici di affidabilità).

L'affidabilità indica la costanza dei risultati attraverso somministrazioni successive: ci si aspetta che una prova fornisca

misure comparabili anche su soggetti diversi e in tempi diversi. Ciò implica che una prova ottenga lo stesso risultato anche con valutatori diversi. Tale caratteristica è basilare in un test in quanto, come strumento che si propone di misurare la competenza linguistica, esso deve essere in grado di fornire misure costanti delle abilità verificate. Un test, per cui, è affidabile quando i suoi risultati sono comparabili con risultati ottenuti con differenti somministrazioni e diverse correzioni. Ovviamente anche del concetto di affidabilità si sono occupati diversi studiosi (Bachman, 1990; Davies, 1990; Weigle, 2002; Hamp-Lyons, 2007; Muñoz, 2009; Chapelle, 2012) che hanno analizzato sia gli aspetti più tecnici legati alla misurazione sia le procedure per ridurre gli errori di misurazione. Non si deve dimenticare, come peraltro indicato nel manuale Alte (2011), che tutti i test contengono un certo grado di errore; l'attenzione all'affidabilità mira, per cui, a ridurre la percentuale.

Dal concetto di validità si sviluppa anche quello di eticità di un test (Shohamy, 1997; Davies, 1997, 2008; McNamara & Roever, 2006) il quale è strettamente legato all'impatto del test stesso e al valore ad esso attribuito. Da qui la necessità di attuare considerazioni etiche sulla prova, le quali, come specificato in Barni (2010) non dovranno riguardare solamente la scientificità della realizzazione del test, ma anche le conseguenze sociali dei suoi risultati.

Lancia (1983) descrive la praticabilità come l'insieme delle possibilità che permettono di utilizzare il test. Essa, difatti, include aspetti quali l'economia (di costi e di procedure – preparazione, amministrazione e correzione) e la somministrazione (durata delle prove, spazi fisici e personale coinvolto). Quando un esame è rivolto a grandi numeri risulta immediatamente chiaro come anche la praticabilità diventi un aspetto fondamentale per riuscire a gestire i complessi e diversi aspetti che lo riguardano.

Chiariamo in questa sede anche il concetto di autenticità, che prevede di creare situazioni di elicitazioni di performance il più possibile simili a quelle della vita reale. Tale concetto (di cui si sono occupati: Morrow, 1979; Weir, 1983, 1990, 1993, 2005; Alderson, 2000; Hawkey, 2004) è particolarmente utile nello sviluppo di esami di lingua ed è considerato nelle due categorie di seguito indicate:



- a. autenticità interazionale, riferita alle attività cognitive utilizzate dal candidato nell'eseguire i compiti del test;
- b. autenticità situazionale, riguardante il contesto del compito (Bachman & Palmer, 1982; Novello, 2014:45-6).

Lo scopo di prestare attenzione all'autenticità è quello di creare task rappresentativi della vita reale, attenzione che inevitabilmente avrà degli effetti positivi anche sul processo di acquisizione linguistica che precede il test.

## **5. La certificazione Plida Bambini**

La certificazione Plida Bambini (primo esame per bambini dell'Ente Certificatore Plida della Società Dante Alighieri) è nata con lo scopo che contraddistingue, come descritto nei paragrafi precedenti, gli esami di lingua per giovani apprendenti, vale a dire: la motivazione.

Plida Bambini vuole essere uno strumento per stimolare la curiosità e aumentare l'interesse dei bambini che vivono all'estero e si avvicinano all'italiano, premiando la loro attenzione per un'altra lingua con un diploma rilasciato in seguito ad una prova divertente e coinvolgente. Gli insegnanti e le scuole che propongono Plida Bambini hanno l'intento di gratificare i giovani candidati per il tempo dedicato ad acquisire una nuova lingua e mirano ad accrescere ulteriormente il loro coinvolgimento nell'acquisizione di una lingua straniera.

La certificazione Plida Bambini è anche la risposta ad una sempre maggiore domanda registrata dai Comitati Dante Alighieri in numerosi Paesi in cui i bambini imparano l'italiano (in particolar modo la richiesta è stata avanzata da: Argentina, Australia, Bielorussia, Canada, Francia, Germania, Russia, Stati Uniti, Sudafrica). Famiglie e insegnanti hanno manifestato l'interesse di vedere riconosciuto il percorso svolto; i bambini con l'ottenimento del diploma possono avere un premio concreto per un impegno che dal loro punto di vista può sembrare molto astratto e ricondurre così la loro aspettativa a una dimensione di concretezza propria della loro età. Docenti e famiglie hanno visto nella certificazione una modalità

per premiare i bambini per i risultati raggiunti e renderli consapevoli degli obiettivi conseguiti. Di conseguenza il loro impegno diventa successo e il successo aumenta la soddisfazione e la motivazione. Proprio la motivazione, come ribadito in numerosi studi (Stevick, 1990; Freddi, 1994; Schumann, 1999; Littlejohn, 2001; Balboni, 2006; Caon, 2008; Novello, 2012), riveste un ruolo chiave nell'apprendimento linguistico, è la componente che permette di raggiungere il successo, anche con ottimi risultati. Lo sforzo cognitivo diventa sfida piacevole, i risultati ottenuti motivo di proseguire. Plida Bambini si propone proprio di aiutare i bambini ad interpretare il risultato raggiunto come spinta per continuare il percorso intrapreso con la lingua italiana.

La certificazione si pone, difatti, anche l'obiettivo di aumentare l'autostima dei bambini, riconoscendo positivamente i risultati da loro raggiunti, anche se in parte. La valutazione è stata a questo proposito attentamente studiata, in modo che i giovani candidati non debbano vivere un'esperienza negativa nell'età in cui si gettano le basi per un coinvolgimento duraturo con altre lingue e culture, non solo l'italiano. L'impatto dell'esame ha rivestito, perciò, un ruolo fondamentale nella costruzione dello stesso e ne ha influenzato tutto l'impianto. Le prove proposte, le modalità degli esercizi, i punteggi stabiliti, la grafica e le illustrazioni sono tutti il risultato di un pensiero di fondo volto a coinvolgere emotivamente i bambini, onde motivarli a proseguire un piacevole percorso con la lingua. Ciò non toglie alla certificazione il carattere scientifico che la distingue. La sua costruzione rispetta i principi del testing linguistico e i dati che raccoglie fungono da validi indicatori del livello testato (McNamara, 2000; Fulcher & Davidson 2007).

La costruzione dell'esame, che ha richiesto circa tre anni di lavoro, ha visto il susseguirsi delle fasi di pianificazione, progettazione, sviluppo e operativa in cui il team di lavoro<sup>2</sup> ha attivato i vari processi di sviluppo del test monitorando costantemente la validità e l'affidabilità dei materiali prodotti. Nell'elaborazione dell'esame e dei documenti che lo accompagnano sono state prese in considerazione le

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<sup>2</sup> Supervisore scientifico: Matteo Santipolo; autrice: Alberta Novello; team Plida: Silvia Giugni, Barbara D'Annunzio, Aurora Tomasi, Paola Vecchio.

caratteristiche dei giovanissimi candidati (psicologiche ed esperienziali) unitamente alle richieste di tipo linguistico-cognitivo che possono essere presenti in ogni livello, in base all'età e al tipo di prova (Piaget, 1967, 1970; Cameron, 2001; Fabbro, 2004, 2018; Weir, 2005; Consiglio d'Europa, 2018a). Sulla base di queste informazioni sono stati elaborati tutti i materiali relativi all'esame.

La certificazione Plida Bambini è rivolta a bambini dai 7 ai 10 anni che abbiano frequentato almeno un anno di scuola primaria e/o abbiano raggiunto le competenze base di letto-scrittura. L'età dei destinatari coincide con la fascia d'età indicata dai recenti documenti del Consiglio d'Europa nell'ambito dell'apprendimento dei giovani discenti, in particolare in "Collated Representative samples of descriptors of language competences developed for young learners aged 7-10 years" (2018b). I livelli proposti sono tre:

- Pre A1: Plida Rosso
- A1: Plida Blu
- A2: Plida Giallo.

Ogni livello viene presentato ai bambini con il nome di un colore e la rappresentazione di un personaggio fantastico (un coniglio) che funge da mascotte che li accompagnerà nello svolgimento dell'esame e che, poi, sarà ritrovata nel diploma finale.

Le abilità testate in ogni livello sono: ascolto, parlato, lettura, scrittura. Le prove sono equilibrate in modo che le performance dei bambini siano maggiormente orientate alle abilità orali, le quali rivestono un ruolo principale nell'esposizione linguistica dei giovani apprendenti (Daloiso, 2014). La struttura dell'esame, perciò, considera il diverso peso delle abilità e include un maggior numero di item riservato alle prove orali, bilanciando in questo modo la valutazione delle prove orali e delle prove scritte.

La soglia di sufficienza è stata stabilita considerando le caratteristiche dei candidati ed ha un valore informativo per gli esaminatori considerato che ai bambini viene rilasciato il diploma con indicato il superamento dell'esame e non il punteggio ottenuto. Tale decisione è stata presa e ponderata sulla base degli attenti studi dei documenti del Consiglio D'Europa i quali, come spiegato

precedentemente, invitano ad interpretare i descrittori raccolti per i giovani apprendenti come possibili obiettivi e non come perentori punti di arrivo o di passaggio da un livello all'altro, considerate le differenze cognitive, culturali e sociali legate all'età dei candidati presa in considerazione.

Questo tipo di considerazioni unite alla finalità di aumentare la motivazione nei bambini rappresentano le ragioni per una scelta della gestione della valutazione su due binari paralleli: da una parte la valutazione interna per gli addetti ai lavori, necessaria, come già descritto, per un riscontro sulla calibrazione dei livelli e la descrizione delle abilità, e dall'altra la valutazione esterna rivolta ai candidati che verranno premiati con il diploma del coniglio in rosso, blu o giallo a seconda dell'esame eseguito.

Le tipologie di esercizi proposti, quindi, oltre a rispondere ai criteri di validità di contesto e cognitiva, sono state create pensando di far vivere ai bambini un'esperienza divertente. In fase di pre-testing, unitamente ad un ritorno di dati positivi riguardanti la validità e l'affidabilità del test<sup>3</sup>, è stato, difatti, confermato un alto livello di gradimento da parte dei bambini. Successivamente al test è stato, a tal proposito, somministrato ai bambini un questionario per indagare l'impatto immediato dell'esame sul loro stato emotivo e i risultati hanno evidenziato un riscontro positivo e piacevole. Il questionario predisposto mirava ad indagare anche la percezione dei bambini sulla difficoltà della prova e questa indagine si è rivelata particolarmente interessante per le considerazioni interne sul grado di richiesta linguistico-cognitiva rivolta ai bambini.

Il questionario è stato costruito in modo che i bambini fossero facilitati nella risposta grazie a dei simboli che rappresentavano graficamente un riscontro alle domande proposte e di seguito riportate:

- 1) Come è stato l'esame?
- 2) Hai avuto abbastanza tempo per fare l'esame?
- 3) Ti sono piaciuti gli esercizi?

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<sup>3</sup> I dati raccolti hanno convalidato il range di superamento ipotizzato per ogni item e permesso, di conseguenza, di rivedere alcuni item che non rientravano nello stesso.

- 4) Quale esercizio ti è piaciuto di più?
- 5) È stato facile rispondere alle domande?
- 6) Hai capito sempre cosa dovevi fare?
- 7) Conoscevi tutte le parole?
- 8) Ti piacciono i disegni?
- 9) Rifaresti un altro esame di italiano come questo?

Il questionario è stato spiegato e letto ai bambini nella loro lingua materna.

Al fine di ottenere maggiori informazioni sull'impatto e l'efficacia dell'esame è stato elaborato e distribuito un questionario anche ai somministratori chiedendo loro di osservare in particolar modo la partecipazione dei bambini, in termini di interesse e serenità, unitamente alle parti più tecniche di costruzione della prova.

I feedback ottenuti dal pre-testing e dai questionari di indagine, hanno, confermato le attese di un impatto positivo. L'esame è stato valutato positivamente dal 96% dei candidati. I disegni sono stati apprezzati da più del 95% dei bambini, mentre gli esercizi hanno registrato un gradimento del 90% circa. Le consegne (unite anche alla traduzione nella lingua d'istruzione) sono risultate chiare (dal 90% in su dei bambini e per il 100% degli insegnanti) e lo sforzo cognitivo adeguato (le risposte alla domanda n.5 del questionario sopra si collocano tra il 64% della voce "facile" e il 36% della voce "medio"; la prove sono state ritenute adeguate anche dagli insegnanti). L'approccio ludico e sfidante studiato si è rivelato vincente al fine di creare un'atmosfera il più possibile serena per i giovanissimi candidati (il 94% dei candidati ha risposto positivamente alla domanda n.9 del questionario riportato sopra). Tale risultato si dimostra fondamentale per i principi che hanno guidato la realizzazione degli esami e pone la valutazione in una visione positiva all'interno del processo di apprendimento linguistico. La ricaduta positiva che può assumere una certificazione è un elemento importante da prendere in considerazione in un percorso di formazione linguistica per giovani apprendenti, ed è opportuno evidenziare agli insegnanti e alle famiglie la centralità di questo aspetto. La valutazione assume, così, un ruolo motivante, essenziale e

permettere di far vivere ai bambini un'esperienza piacevole legata ad una fase di per sé delicata (Novello, 2014).

La certificazione Plida Bambini risponde di conseguenza all'ottica di internazionalizzazione dell'attuale politica linguistica che mira a creare approcci e contatti positivi con nuove lingue e culture. L'italiano per bambini diventa un mezzo gradevole per entrare in contatto e scoprire una nuova lingua e cultura e la certificazione rappresenta la gratificazione per l'impegno dimostrato.

La Società Dante Alighieri, da sempre impegnata nella diffusione dell'italiano, guarda con la creazione di questi esami anche ai giovani apprendenti, proponendo uno strumento a loro misura, pensato per soddisfare bisogni e richieste che si discostano completamente dal mondo adulto.

### **5.1 Il sillabo della certificazione**

La costruzione del sillabo degli esami Plida Bambini ha ripreso i principi della certificazione, vale a dire l'attenzione agli interessi e alle capacità dei giovani apprendenti di lingua.

Sulla base di un'attenta analisi dell'utenza e di un processo di ricerca e studio della letteratura scientifica (Little, 2009; Alte, 2011; Consiglio d'Europa, 2018a) è stato costruito un sillabo ad hoc per il *target* di destinatari individuati. La struttura comprende per ogni livello della certificazione, ossia preA1, A1 e A2:

- i domini, i contesti e i temi;
- gli obiettivi comunicativi;
- gli obiettivi comunicativi nelle singole abilità;
- gli obiettivi linguistici;
- le tipologie testuali.

I domini presi in considerazione sono quello personale, pubblico ed educativo in quanto caratterizzanti il vissuto dei bambini dell'età considerata. I contesti e i temi indicati sono stati selezionati sulla base di un'accurata osservazione del vissuto e degli interessi dei bambini *target*, prendendo in considerazione sia la letteratura sull'argomento (Cameron, 2001; Santipolo, 2012; Murphy, 2014; Consiglio

d'Europa, 2018a) sia l'esperienza e il materiale didattico in campo linguistico.

Negli obiettivi comunicativi sono state incluse le competenze che il bambino è in grado di dimostrare attraverso funzioni e atti comunicativi realizzabili grazie all'impiego delle sue capacità linguistiche e cognitive. Gli obiettivi comunicativi nelle singole abilità riprendono le indicazioni del documento del Consiglio d'Europa, "Collated Representative samples of descriptors of language competences developed for young learners aged 7 – 10 years" (2018b), che fa a sua volta riferimento al Quadro Comune Europeo.

Gli obiettivi linguistici comprendono il contenuto linguistico che può essere valutato ad ogni livello; è stata evidenziata una differenziazione tra gli obiettivi in solo riconoscimento e gli obiettivi in produzione.

Le tipologie testuali consistono in una sorta di elenco a cui fare riferimento nella costruzione degli esercizi/prove. Sono incluse le tipologie di testo maggiormente fruite dai bambini nella fascia d'età considerata. L'utilizzo del sillabo ai fini dell'esame prevede, chiaramente, una consultazione incrociata delle parti che lo compongono al fine di poter stabilire cosa e come testare in maniera appropriata.

## **5.2 Il *format* d'esame**

Per le prove d'esame sono stati selezionati degli esercizi il più possibile familiari al mondo dei bambini, cercando di rispettare richieste cognitive adeguate e stimolando nel contempo il loro interesse. La grafica ha svolto un ruolo chiave nella costruzione delle prove; la ricerca del disegno è stata fondamentale sia per la motivazione sia per veicolare al meglio il messaggio linguistico; si è rivelato basilare, per cui, studiare attentamente ogni singolo dettaglio grafico dell'esame.

Come già accennato, maggior spazio nei tre esami è stato dedicato alle abilità orali. La prova relativa al parlato è costituita per tutti e tre i livelli da un fascicoletto separato in cui lo stimolo visivo costituisce la parte predominante per l'elicitazione della performance orale. Le

prove di ascolto prevedono tutte di verificare la comprensione orale attraverso l'uso di immagini, griglie da completare (senza la scrittura) o istruzioni da eseguire; in questo modo, oltre ad aumentare, la validità della prova, non viene richiesto un compito troppo complesso per giovani parlanti con un livello elementare. Anche le prove di comprensione scritta sono supportate (in tutti i livelli) da immagini per la verifica valida della comprensione. Le prove di produzione scritta, infine, vanno dalla scrittura di semplici parole su input visivo per il livello preA1 alla scrittura di un breve test con concetti chiave per immagini per il livello A2.

Le prove sono graduate sia all'interno di ogni singolo esame sia, ovviamente, tra gli esami al fine di indagare, come già indicato, i diversi possibili livelli all'interno di gruppi di bambini della stessa età. Di seguito lo schema del *format* dell'esame:

<b>Plida Rosso (PRE A1)</b>			
<i>ascoltare</i>	<i>Leggere</i>	<i>Scrivere</i>	<i>Parlare</i>
Colorazione item  <b>5 item</b>	SM (a due uscite) per immagini (parola – immagine)  <b>5 item</b>	Completamento (tessera)  <b>5 item</b>	Risposte a brevi domande su di sé  <b>5 item</b>
Individuazione item per immagini  <b>5 item</b>	SM (a due uscite) per immagini (parola – frase)  <b>5 item</b>	Scrittura di una parola con immagine di supporto  <b>5 item</b>	Denominazione oggetti  <b>5 item</b>
Abbinamento item per immagini ad una figura  <b>5 item</b>			Descrizione di un'immagine  <b>5 item</b>
SM (a due uscite) per immagini  <b>5 item</b>			

Tabella 1: *format* esame pre A1



<b>Plida Blu (A1)</b>			
<i>ascoltare</i>	<i>Leggere</i>	<i>Scrivere</i>	<i>Parlare</i>
Abbinamento item per immagini ad una figura  <b>6 item</b>	SM (a due uscite) per immagini (frase – immagine)  <b>4 item</b>	Risposta a domande relative ad immagini  <b>6 item</b>	Risposte a brevi domande su di sé
SM (a tre uscite) per immagini  <b>6 item</b>	Individuazione item per immagini su lista di parole scritte  <b>4 item</b>	Completamento testo con immagini di supporto  <b>6 item</b>	Descrizione azioni di una sequenza di immagini
Individuazione e colorazione item  <b>6 item</b>	Abbinamento frasi a immagini  <b>4 item</b>		
Riordino di immagini  <b>6 item</b>			

Tabella 2: *format* esame A1

<b>Plida Giallo (A2)</b>			
<i>ascoltare</i>	<i>Leggere</i>	<i>Scrivere</i>	<i>Parlare</i>
Abbinamento parole a immagini  <b>4 item</b>	Vero/falso brevi frasi e immagine  <b>4 item</b>	Completamento chat  <b>6 item</b>	Risposte a brevi domande su di sé
Griglia  <b>4 item</b>	Abbinamento frasi a immagini  <b>4 item</b>	Scrittura breve lettera (bullet point per immagini)  <b>4 item</b>	Racconto di una storia per immagini
Abbinamento nomi a immagini  <b>4 item</b>	Esecuzione di istruzioni (disegno o SM di disegni o riordino di disegni)  <b>4 item</b>		Descrizione delle differenze tra due immagini
Riordino di immagini  <b>4 item</b>			
SM (a tre uscite) per immagini  <b>4 item</b>			
Disegno su istruzioni  <b>4 item</b>			

Tabella 3: *format* esame A2

## **I punteggi e i criteri di valutazione**

Il ruolo della valutazione in questo esame è stato precedentemente esplicitato. Gli obiettivi e le finalità degli esami hanno guidato la scelta dei punteggi da attribuire e dei criteri da considerare. Ovviamente nelle prove soggettive maggior peso è dato alla comprensibilità del messaggio e all'efficacia comunicativa (Dickins, 1992).

Sia per le prove oggettive che soggettive sono stati calcolati i punteggi da attribuire assegnando alla valutazione un ruolo affidabile e di importante comunicatore relativamente al livello delle abilità testate. Per ogni abilità è stato calcolato un punteggio in base al peso ad essa attribuito; lo stesso procedimento è stato adottato per il range di punteggio relativo ad ogni descrittore.

Come previsto dalle fasi di costruzione di un esame (Alte, 2011) nella fase operativa del Plida Bambini sono stati definiti i criteri e i punteggi delineati precedentemente.

L'analisi dei dati e delle informazioni raccolte nella fase di post-testing ha permesso di riflettere ancora di più sulle scelte proposte e di stabilire con maggior precisione su quali elementi focalizzare l'attenzione durante la valutazione. In particolar modo, per le prove soggettive, la lettura degli scritti dei giovani candidati e l'ascolto delle registrazioni delle loro prove orali, hanno permesso di testare la funzionalità delle griglie di valutazione create e di modificare i descrittori leggermente ambigui o di difficile interpretazione per i correttori. I dati del post-testing hanno confermato, inoltre, la scelta di categorizzare le prove soggettive nelle tre soglie di superamento, vale a dire con basso, medio o alto profilo, assegnando a ciascuna soglia un range di punteggio. Ciò permette all'Ente certificatore di ottenere dati statistici per uso interno sulle abilità e le loro modalità di valutazione.

## 6. Riflessioni finali

Come descritto nei paragrafi precedenti, la nascita del nuovo esame di certificazione Plida Bambini ha accolto la richiesta di una prova finale di lingua, avanzata dagli attori del processo di acquisizione dei giovani apprendenti di italiano all'estero. Tale interesse a voler misurare la competenza linguistica nei bambini si accompagna alla sempre maggiore attenzione all'argomento a livello europeo e non solo (vedi paragrafo 1).

Trattandosi di un pubblico particolarmente sensibile per caratteristiche cognitive, sociali e personali, grande importanza è stata riservata nella costruzione dell'esame alla componente emotiva, considerando come fattore prioritario proprio l'impatto della certificazione sui giovani candidati. I risultati riportati del pre-testing hanno dimostrato come l'intento di tale ricaduta positiva dell'esame sia stato pienamente raggiunto per tutti i livelli proposti.

Pensando che la motivazione alla lingua è uno dei fattori che coinvolge maggiormente i bambini in età della scuola primaria (Myles, 2017), l'attenzione all'effetto di ritorno che riveste una certificazione dovrebbe essere imprescindibilmente preso in considerazione. Lo sviluppo dell'esame, come delineato precedentemente, ha visto impiegate tutte le fasi fondamentali della costruzione di un valida prova di certificazione e ha richiesto la produzione di diverso materiale (il sillabo, i criteri di valutazione, il format delle prove, le prove e i questionari per i candidati e per i somministratori). Proprio questo materiale, considerato lo studio e il lavoro adoperato per la creazione, potrà auspicabilmente fornire un contributo alla ricerca scientifica e fungere da strumento per ulteriori riflessioni sulla valutazione e la certificazione di giovani apprendenti.

Essendo Plida Bambini il primo esame di certificazione di lingua italiana rivolto a bambini dai 7 ai 10 anni che studiano italiano all'estero, sarà indubbiamente interessante per gli

addetti ai lavori, interni ed esterni al team di creazione, seguirne lo sviluppo e continuare ad analizzarne i dati al fine di proseguire nell'apporto di considerazioni e valutazioni al mondo scientifico.

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## BOOK REVIEWS / RECENSIONI

**DANIELE COMBERIATI & XAVIER LUFFIN (eds), *Italy and the Literatures from the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti. Beyond the Language and the Territory*. Canterano, RM: Aracne, 2018.**

The collection *Italy and the Literatures from the Horn of Africa*, edited by Daniele Comberiati and Xavier Luffin, aims to investigate literary and filmic contributions emerging from the Horn of Africa by employing a comparative approach. In doing so, it explores the relationship between texts and films beyond the monolithic idea of national literature and language. The first contribution of this collection thus lies in the multilingual, transnational and multicultural rationale, which avoids a monolingual and mono-national approach and suggests new directions for diasporic studies.

The underpinning idea of the seven interventions is, indeed, to consider the authors from the Horn of Africa and their artistic production as part of an “Interliterary Community” in which the links between the different literatures that compose it exceeds national, historical and ethnic bounds. The concept, theorised by Dionýz Ďurišin in replacement of “National Literature”, allows the authors of this collection to consider the Horn of Africa as a literary space in which writers can re-define national identities through their narratives (15). Due to their diasporic condition, their artistic production covers a wide geographical area, being at once national and transnational, global and local, multilingual and multicultural. Therefore, the interventions in this collection rely on the overlapping features of these narratives from the Horn of Africa, such as the hybridism of different languages and cultures, the link between colonialism and its legacy in present-day neocolonial practices and the re-interpretation of history by formerly voiceless subjects. The essays investigate the several intertwined layers that constitute the narratives of these authors, by exploring the relationship among them and the affiliation with their country of origin (or that of their relatives’) and their places of abode.

In the first intervention, for example, Sara Marzagora points out a disregarded aspect of the novel *Regina di fiori e di perle* (2007) by Gabriella Ghermandi. Indeed, while the latter has been investigated for its contribution towards the rethinking of Italian colonialism and the decolonization of Italian literature its relationship to the Ethiopian literary tradition in Amharic has been overlooked. Marzagora instead sheds light on the complex and problematic connection between *Regina di fiori e di perle* and other texts of the Amharic tradition, such as Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gate* (2010) and *Addis Alām* by Hiruy Wäldä Sillase (1924). This comparative approach highlights the opposition between tradition and modernity in Ghermandi's novel and places them in relation to the Ethiopian intellectual scene since the beginning of the twentieth century, when writers and thinkers scrutinised the Ethiopian cultural heritage and the idea of Western modernity. In her analysis, Marzagora shows that, while on the one hand, Ghermandi undermines the discourse about Ethiopia and Ethiopian women fashioned by Italian colonialism, on the other, her novel idealises, romanticises and homogenises the complexities underlying the concepts of Ethiopian histories, culture and literatures. Marzagora convincingly explains how the novel overlooks the social, political and ethnical fractures, as well as gender relations and geographical richness of her country. As in the case of the representation of the female characters, Ghermandi aims to counterbalance the Italian stereotype of African women as oppressed by portraying them in a very progressive way (48). However, in doing so, she denies the efforts made by Amharic writers and intellectuals to highlight and challenge the discrimination against women in their society.

The nostalgia and the memories connected to Ghermandi's experience in Ethiopia during her youth, along with the distance from her country, acted in the way of simplification, thus leading to a romantic and conservative representation of her country, "in stark contrast with the reformist tendency that has characterised Amharic literature since its inception" (30).

Lorenzo Mari, in his contribution "Somalia is a Caribbean Island", suggests an innovative reading of two texts from authors coming from a diverse context: *Yesterday, Tomorrow: Voices from the Somali Diaspora* (2010) by Somali author Nuruddin Farah and *The World is*

*Moving Around Me: A Memoir of the Haiti Earthquake* (2013) by Haitian Dany Laferrière. The bond that brings these two texts together is inscribed in the South-South relationship as described by François Lionnet and Shu-mei Shi's locution "minor transnationalism". This term emphasises the links "between two or more postcolonial cultures without making reference to the culture of their former metropolitan centres" (52). Mari's transnational analysis is further supported by the concept of "failed-state fiction" theorised by John Marx to encompass all fictional accounts that aim to challenge the neocolonial notion of "failed nation". Starting from the latter definition, relabelled "failed-state literature", and the idea of the writer as an "unaccredited analyst", Mari explores how the accounts of the civil war and diaspora, in Farah, and the Haitian earthquake, in Laferrière, deconstruct the dominant discourse coming from the West with regard to the concept of "state failure".

The intervention by Alessandro Jedlowski compares the production of two contemporary Ethiopian directors, Tewodros Teshome and Dagmawi Yimer, in order to highlight the profound differences within the Ethiopian film production. The comparative analysis, in this case based on both the plots and the biographies of the directors, aims to underline the complexities of the film production and the tension in discussing that topic in Ethiopia. In this way, it fosters an artistic dialogue "between local and diasporic directors" (90). In this regard, Jedlowski starts from the different approaches employed by the directors to fictionalise the theme of migration.

The different outcomes of Teshome and Yimer are thus considered as "a direct consequence of their biographical experiences" (78). Where Teshome (director, producer and owner of a multiplex cinema in Addis Ababa) shies away from the representation of the political and economic causes behind migration, Yimer (a filmmaker who fled from Ethiopia to become an asylum seeker in Italy) focuses on political aspects and explicitly denounces the Ethiopian government. As a result, the former appears to be related to a local audience and aligned to the government's agenda or nationalistic sentiments; alternatively, the latter is personally involved in the topic of migration due to his direct experience, which allows him to be the subject who has his ideas about the causes that have led him to leave Ethiopia.

The fourth intervention also relies on a transnational approach, since scholar Monica Jansen investigates how two texts by Somali authors, Kaha Mohamed Aden and her father Mohamed Sheikh Aden, foster “a notion of national identity and culture rooted in transnationalism and dis-homogeneity” (94). However, Jansen also shows how these two texts belong to different categories, even though they both rely on personal experiences and aim to subvert the main narrative of colonialism as seen by Italians. The categories are drawn upon Giuliana Benvenuti’s idea, which divides Italian postcolonial literature into two kinds of texts: those based on direct experiences that aim to restore the broken line between experience and narration; second, those that “foster narrations with a performative value, which simulate the reader to assume an active part of it” (96). The cross-reading analysis of the two texts, therefore, shows how Kaha’s *Fra-intendimenti* (2010) can be ascribed to the latter category, while her father’s *La Somalia non è un’isola dei Caraibi: Memorie di un pastore somalo in Italia* (2010) should be included in the former. The article, furthermore, analyses *Fra-intendimenti* in the light of “the social conflicts inherent to global capitalism”, in order to show how Kaha’s short stories perform an act of citizenship “for it intervenes and tries actively to modify dominant discourses on nationality and belonging” (101).

The fifth article is similarly grounded in the Italian postcolonial scenario. Teresa Solis examines the still overlooked production of the Italian-Ethiopian writer Carla Macoggi (1965–2013) focusing on her two autobiographical novels, *Kkeywa. Storia di una bimba meticcica* (2011), followed by *La nemesi della rossa* (2013). Solis’s main aim is to analyse the direct psychological consequences produced by colonialism on the author. The concepts of *métissage* and *nemesis* are key terms to highlight how Macoggi’s writings depict a split in the self of the subjects who have undergone Italian colonisation, along the axis of Frantz Fanon’s *Les damnés de la terre* (1961). The article, underlining this aspect, suggests that Macoggi’s novels represent a way of healing from the systematic negation of the self, perpetrated by the Italian Fascists to the detriment of the colonised subjects.

Emma Bond, in her essay, explores the relationship between two apparently distant texts, *Amiable with Big Teeth* (1940) by Jamaican-born and Harlem Renaissance poet Claude McKay and the



contemporary novels *Children of the Revolution* (2008) and *All our names* (2014) by Ethiopian-American writer Dinaw Mengestu. Bond, by employing a cross-reading of these novels, shows how they are connected by a transnational network of resistance and solidarity (123). In doing so, the article explains how American literature reveals transnational and multidirectional trajectories, due to the notion of resistance and solidarity that overstep their temporal and national confines. In particular, the historical experiences of conflict and resistance in Ethiopia (against the Fascist and, later, the Derg provisional military government) intermingle in the novels with the American civil rights movement, the experiences of refugees arriving in the US and the insurrection, described in *Children of the Revolution*, in response to illegal evictions in Washington.

The last intervention, by scholar Linde Luijnenburg, focuses on the Somali production in the Dutch language through the writings of three authors who live in the Netherlands: Sayadin Hersi, Yasmine Allas and Zeinab Jumale. Luijnenburg explores their novels with a comparative approach based on language and shared themes, but it also relates them to the context of the Dutch publishing industry and, more broadly, to the social and political scenario of the Netherlands. Even though the three authors display different strategies in terms of narrative style, they share their dislike about the label 'migrant authors', and their difficulties during the editing process, since they were asked to adapt their language to the standard Dutch in order to be published.

In conclusion, the collection *Italy and the Literatures from the Horn of Africa* provides a refreshing perspective on the field of postcolonial and diaspora studies. The emphasis on the relationships between different texts by authors within the diaspora and their importance in decolonising the Western (and Italian) discourse, encourages a new understanding of the contemporary postcolonial production from the Horn of Africa. Comberinati and Luffin's collection has the merit of looking at that geographic region as a literary space where authors are connected through several cognate features, investigated in each article.

On a minor note, the collection reveals several typos and small mistakes overlooked in the editing process, as well as, on occasion, footnotes that are not always clear (a recurrent oversight is the use of

the abbreviation *Ibid.* to refer to a note on the previous page, instead of a note on the same page, thus often leading to a misplaced reference).

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**PAOLO PUPPA, *Altre scene. Copioni del terzo millennio.* Corazzano, PI: Titivillus, 2017.**

Claudio Magris, citando Anton Čechov, afferma che mentre la narrativa commenta e analizza la vita, il teatro la mostra e che la scrittura teatrale ha un carattere notturno, ovvero consente di incontrare i propri fantasmi, i sosia. Queste riflessioni possono inserirci all'interno della raccolta, architettonicamente compiuta, di Paolo Puppa, *Altre scene. Copioni del terzo millennio*. Sin dal titolo si comprende la natura estemporanea delle otto drammaturgie, che si snodano su quattro forme dialogiche e quattro monologhi; la configurazione quasi assente della scena dà forma e consistenza a personaggi che, come bassorilievi, emergono dal nulla e al nulla sembrano tornare, con le loro storie che si perdono nella refrattaria realtà. L'autore sembra prediligere infatti l'indagine psicologica dei personaggi sebbene la narrazione sia priva di giudizi o di facili considerazioni. Il loro sostare quasi sull'orlo del delirio diventa la trama stessa del racconto, così come il dolore, l'inettitudine, il non detto, l'identità franta acquistano la stessa forza del gesto teatrale.

Il primo testo, *Casa con angolo Shoah* – titolo che fa riferimento, come spiega l'autore stesso nelle *Notarelle introduttive*, al lessico immobiliare – presenta nove personaggi, i quali tuttavia non compaiono mai sulla scena tutti insieme, spezzando dunque la dimensione polifonica a cui si pone, in controcanto, la solitudine delle voci che dialogano. Tutto si svolge nel perimetro stretto di una casa, uno spazio quasi claustrofobico come lo è quello interiore dei personaggi limitati dalle proprie ossessioni, dalle proprie irrazionali paure, dai propri desideri inconfessabili. Nessun personaggio appare intero, ma sempre franto e senza nessuna via di scampo. Una piccola famiglia borghese nasconde nella propria soffitta i vicini, ebrei in

pericolo per la nuova ondata di razzismo: questo l'antefatto che pone da subito la narrazione entro una dimensione distopica. Le dodici sequenze raccontano le dinamiche esplosive dagli esiti grotteschi, una storia senza storia, che tuttavia porta alla luce le oscurità di un passato mai finito e sempre presente con i suoi tragici relitti. Il dolore è narrato anche attraverso lo *speculum* religioso e mitico, che costituisce la filigrana di altri due dialoghi: *Giacobbe 2014* e *Deposizione*. Se nel primo un uomo ferito, spezzato, immobilizzato dialoga con un vecchio, nel secondo abbiamo due personaggi quasi opposti: un anziano bloccato a letto e un giovane adulto che assiduamente si reca al suo capezzale. In *Giacobbe 2014* il personaggio omonimo racconta la sua estenuante lotta con l'angelo ai limiti del delirio:

Ricordo bene, poi, che quello mentre continuava a storcermi la gamba fino a spezzarmi l'anca, mi ha sussurrato qualcosa nell'orecchio, tipo "da oggi in poi ti chiamerai", perché ogni tanto traduceva, ma non si capiva bene quello che mi sibilava gorgogliando colla saliva, anche perché ansava. E, ma sì. ma sì, forse mi faceva i complimenti perché io stavo lottando con uno che nel suo è una specie di Dio. E la gamba rotta rappresentava il nostro strano contatto. Poi, sono sicuro, adesso, adesso me lo ricordo bene, è volato via, ma sì, sì, volato via. Sulla canottiera era come se spuntavano delle ali. (115)

Un Giacobbe sottratto alla Bibbia, inserito nel contesto gelido e spoglio di un ospedale, un Giacobbe reduce, senza gloria, senza ricompensa celeste, il cui racconto tagliente e ironico si infrange sulla sordità di chi gli sta intorno. Le dinamiche familiari, dolorose, precarie, che rasentano quasi i toni dell'assurdo, si rendono ancora più esplicite nella drammaturgia *Deposizione*. Qui il dialogo tra padre e figlio è quello tra Dio e Cristo dietro cui si aggira silenziosa la presenza di una donna, tutti insieme costituiscono «un triangolo, o meglio una ripresentazione della trinità antica, rivissuta nello squallore di una fase terminale. Agonia di un nucleo parentale, o quel che ne resta» (7). La scena è narrata attraverso 27 stazioni di una *via crucis* che conduce a un doloroso delirio del Padre, fino all'ultimo

incalzato dall'angosciante presenza del Figlio. Un rapporto morboso, asfissiante confermato dal susseguirsi vorticoso del dialogo a due voci, reso ancor più estraniante dal mutismo della figura femminile. I conflitti tra il Padre e il Figlio conducono alla dolorosa perdita del Sé:

Padre: Oggi è per caso martedì? O giovedì? Poi ci sarebbe venerdì o sviene il sabato? E quando arriva la domenica? Io però non voglio andare a messa. Nossignore. A fare cosa, poi, a messa? A messa perché, poi? Allora, in che anno siamo? Lei mi può aiutare? Sì, sì, dico a lei, signore. Siamo sempre a Venezia, vero? Questa è Venezia? Le avanzano stivali per l'acqua alta? Posso mica rischiare di bagnarmi. (104)

È allora che il Figlio sembra assumere, per paradossale rivelazione, il proprio tragico compito con una delirante smania:

Figlio: Faccio io! Faccio io. Faccio io tutto. Ho sognato questo momento, sai. Da una vita l'ho sognato. Ferma, signora mia! Resti in cucina. O meglio, porti catino, tanto acqua, spugna, borotalco, e biancheria fresca. Tutto quello che serve. È una vita che aspettavo questo momento. Sono bravo, sono bravo, io. Vedrai, vedrai. E quando arrivano, dall'ospedale, chiederanno 'ma chi dobbiamo ricoverare?', tanto sarai lucidato e messo a nuovo. Vedrai, vedrai. No, giuro che non alzo più la voce. Tu sei mio padre e io tuo figlio. Per sempre. (105)

I rimandi alla sfera biblica e mitica sono evidenti e si ritrovano anche nei quattro monologhi che si mostrano ancor più incisivi rispetto alla forma dialogica. Non solo il mito, come ne *Il Centauro* e in *Ratto d'Europa*, ma anche suggestioni letterarie e storiche che intessono le trame di *La vera storia dell'Innominato* e *La fidanzata di Don Milani*. Il racconto monocorde del personaggio acquista una maggior intensità che acuisce il senso tragico della storia. Tutto si svolge in una scena sempre più spoglia in cui risuona ancora più dolorosa la eco della solitudine. Anche qui, come nei dialoghi, la sovrapposizione dei tempi crea un'inquietante estraneità così come la presenza di personaggi già

conosciuti come Don Milani, qui raccontato attraverso lo sguardo innamorato di una ex fidanzata che lo ricorda ancora nella sua giovinezza, il suo «povero fidanzatino del liceo, scomparso per sempre dalla vita, coi suoi segreti intatti, colla sua lotta disumana contro i sensi, e colle maschere, i simulacri, le battaglie combattute in solitudine per esprimere in qualche modo se stesso» (166). La creatura manzoniana che esordisce sulla scena, prendendo forse per la prima volta la parola:

Nemmeno un nome mi ha dato. Perché ha avuto sempre paura di me, non appena gli son caduto dalla penna. O meglio dai suoi nervi e dalle sue notti interminabili. Sì, il mio autore è sempre stato davvero strano e complicato. Oltre che infelice. Già, e la mia storia lo ha molto, diciamo pure, intrigato, fin da quando è andato a spulciare su ridicoli archivi dove noiosissimi eruditi in latino, nel secolo di Borromeo, hanno parlato di me demonizzandomi. (146)

Questo breve *excursus* dentro e attraverso i personaggi messi in scena da Paolo Puppa segna una *descensus ad inferos*, una catabasi nell'oscurità della psiche. Non esistono vie di fuga, ogni strategia di difesa sembra infrangersi nella desertificazione del mondo circostante che quasi mai appare un luogo rassicurante. Altre scene, dunque. Altri scenari, altrove immaginati, pensati, vissuti al di fuori della trama temporale della storia, al di là di ogni percezione sensoriale, di ogni credo. La conclusione della raccolta, che rappresenta, si direbbe, un teatro del disagio, è affidata al monologo di un seduttore, un imperdonabile Zeus che racconta una delle sue numerose conquiste, quella di Europa. Anche l'eros è vissuto con imperdonabile violenza e aridità. Tutto si muove, per dirla con Claudio Magris, tra utopia e disincanto, tra ricerca di una totalità e la consapevolezza di un terribile nichilismo che sta in agguato nelle piaghe della nostra società.

**Valentina Fiume**  
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**CATHERINE RAMSEY-PORTOLANO. *Performing Bodies: Female Illness in Italian Literature and Cinema (1860-1920)*. Vancouver-Madison-Teaneck-Wroxtton: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2018.**

Since the 1980s scholarly studies have extensively explored the literary and cultural perspectives on physical and psychological malady and disability. With particular reference to hysteria, Elaine Showalter, in her 1993 article “On Hysterical Narrative” (in *Narrative*, 1.1:24-35) – and earlier in her ground-breaking *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985) – pointed out how “hysterical narrative” had been one of the most popular topics in literary criticism where:

psychoanalytic theory, narratology, feminist criticism, and the history of medicine intersect, drawing both on the vogue of Freud’s case studies, especially the canonical Dora, and the recent recognition that not just psychoanalysis, but all medical practice, depends on narrative, the “doctor’s story,” which both shapes the formal case study and determines practical treatment (1993:24).

Illness, in its varied manifestations, is profoundly gendered, and especially in the form of “hysteria” has been a favourite topic in fictional works in particular since the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1995, in her *Passions of the Voice: Hysteria, Narrative, and the Figure of the Speaking Woman, 1850-1915* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) Claire Kahane articulated, in fact, how numerous late 19<sup>th</sup>-century texts are symptomatic of the “problematics of sexual difference” and of a reaction to the rise of the New Woman, as a “speaking subject” that disturbed “not only the patriarchal structure of social relations but also the gendered conventions of nineteenth-century domestic fiction” (ix). In fin de siècle novels by both male and female authors, hysteria, took a variety of functions, as stressed by Ramsey-Portolano in *Performing Bodies*, “from representing the psychological consequence from

women who failed to adhere to prescribed roles and modes of conduct or symbolizing the expression of their repressed sexual desire” (3). Female suffering, illness, maladies of a nervous nature, madness and invalidity all confirmed conceptions of women as bearers of disorders and sin, in Western literary and cultural traditions. Above all, female malady was connected to women seeking any forms of fulfilment outside of the ones imposed onto them by traditional conceptions, and therefore failing to identify with the roles of wife and mother. The abundance of scientific theories and literary portrayals of female inferiority and illness in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe coincided, as a matter of fact, with the emergence of the feminist movement whose aims threatened to disrupt the established social order.

In the last 30 years, studies on this topic have continued to flourish, with titles including, to mention just a few: Yang-Sook Shin, *The Female Malady: Discourse, Power, and Sexuality in the Eighteenth Century* (University of Missouri-Columbia, 1991); Diane Price Herndl, *Invalid Women. Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction and Culture, 1840-1940* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Helen Small, *Love's Madness: Medicine, the Novel, and Female Insanity, 1800-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Jessica Diane Droogsma, *Female Hysteria Across Cultures and Periods in American Literature* (University of Northern Iowa, 2009); Andrew Scull, *Hysteria: The Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2009); Asti Hustvedt, *Medical Muses. Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011). More recently Abir Hamdar has analysed the female suffering body in Modern Arabic Literature in *The Female Suffering Body: Illness and Disability in Modern Arabic Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014).

The clear and accessible book by Catherine Ramsey-Portolano joins this rich scholarly production by focusing on female illness in Italian literary and cinematic works from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to 1920, and aims to demonstrate the central role that the female body and its biological functions and malfunctions played in the culture of the time. As Ramsey-Portolano reminds us, the widespread evolutionist and positivist discussions intensely influenced perceptions of femininity in fin-de-siècle Italy: from August Comte, Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, neurologist Paul Julius Moebius and philosopher Otto Weininger, to Italian anthropologists Cesare

Lombroso and Paolo Mantegazza, female inferiority and predisposition to nervous disorders were linked to women's reproductive organs and functions. The prescribed remedy, according to the American physician George Miller Beard, was often confinement within the domestic sphere, or the so called "rest cure" (15).

*Performing Bodies* is an engaging analysis of fictional works by an assortment of male and female authors. Ramsey-Portolano identifies two categories of novels. The first one includes literary works which present illness as the consequence and punishment for women who have transgressed traditional female roles. In these novels, women are described as essentially passive victims of social injustice and of a patriarchal, misogynistic society. A second group of novels represents, instead, malady as a form of female agency and empowerment through which women, by feigning illness, could actively regain control over their own body. Illness, in all these literary works, contributed to the creation of the cultural and the artistic ideal of femininity that then recurred in, and dominated, early Italian cinema and the figure of the diva at the beginning of the new century.

The author structures the book in four chapters. To begin, Chapter One presents an overview of the scientific attention that was paid to hysteria and its neurological causes especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The studies of French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot and his three-volume *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (a photographic survey of hysterical symptoms in his patients), and Sigmund Freud's 1895 ground-breaking volumes *Studies on Hysteria* and 1905 *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (including the well-known case history of Dora) are examples of authoritative studies that asserted beliefs on female inferiority and physiological deficiency, and of "men writing stories of female illness, of men advancing their interpretation of femininity" (23). This first chapter also offers an overview of women's social and legal status in Italy at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The influx of female writers, in particular, was a cause of concern for many male writers and others unwilling to separate accepted and negative notions of femininity from women's ability for intellectual thought. At the same time naturalist and verist writers in Italy, such as Luigi Capuana and Matilde Serao, showed a pronounced interest in



contemporary scientific theories and female pathology as demonstrated in some of their female protagonists and their maladies.

Chapter Two is dedicated to female illness and to the representation of women's submission to patriarchal expectations in fin-de-siècle Italian society. The novels examined in this chapter are Giovanni Verga's *Storia di una capinera* (1871) and *Tigre reale* (1875), Luigi Capuana's *Giacinta* (1879) and *Profumo* (1892), Antonio Fogazzaro's *Malombra* (1881), the little-known *Madonna di fuoco e madonna di neve* (1888) by Giovanni Faldella, as well as Neera's *Il Castigo* (1881), *Teresa* (1886) and *L'Indomani* (1889), and Sibilla Aleramo's famous *Una donna* (1906). The emergence of mental illness is connected to the suffocation of female independence and sexuality, the impossibility for women to break out of the traditional roles of wife and mother, and as a consequence of female deviation from acceptable modes of behaviour. Spiritualism and mental illness – as in *Malombra*'s gothic-style setting and plot – confirm notions of women's susceptibility to malaise of a hysterical nature. Hysterical attacks are, therefore, forms of rebellion against sexual dissatisfaction and expressions of frustration and oppressed desire for passion. The consequence is, however, only the alienation or death of the heroine.

The novels discussed in Chapter Three, on the other hand, offer examples of illness as forms of liberation and empowerment. Ramsey-Portolano examines how “performing illness” transforms female protagonists into irresistible “superior female types”. Iginio Ugo Tarchetti's *Fosca* (1869), Matilde Serao's *Cuore inferno* (1881) and *Fantasia* (1883), Rocco De Zerbi's *L'avvelenatrice*, as well as Gabriele D'Annunzio's *Trionfo della morte* (1894) and *Il fuoco* (1900) provide cases of hysterical women whose theatricality and artificiality of their disease make them dominators, rather than victims of society's pressures and limitations. Female protagonists in these novels subvert the established order through a tendency to prohibited desires. Interestingly, in these works, men – such as Giorgio in Tarchetti's *Fosca* and Giorgio in D'Annunzio's *Trionfo* – are not immune from disease and are often weak, vacillating subjects with a “feminine” nature, infected and governed by vampire-like women, and associated with notions of deficiency and malaise. As oppressed men they become emblematic of the negative condition of a modern

subject unable to vitally adhere to existence (87). Yet both female and male protagonists become metaphors for diversity and vehicles through which the writers could express a criticism of the bourgeois perception of normalcy and the traditional restrictions on female behaviour of the time.

The final chapter of *Performing Bodies* is devoted to the cinematic adaptations *Tigre reale* (1916) and *Malombra* (1917). These films accentuated the appeal of their female performers – Pina Menichelli and Lyda Borelli respectively – through the exaltation of the seductive power of the emancipated woman. Belonging to the genre of diva films, Pastrone's *Tigre reale* and Gallone's *Malombra* present female characters who are both passive and active, "spectacle and narrative" (94). These films "enforce the role of the female character as representative of power by avoiding the association of the diva with notions of wrongdoing, accomplished through the sublimation of her responsibility and guilt into illness and suffering" (94). Ramsey-Portolano argues that it is, in fact, the medium of cinema itself that allowed a shift in the function of illness in these two films as compared to Verga's and Fogazzaro's original novels: "In these films illness is not a punishment for transgression, it is that which allows the diva to take center stage and act out *her story*" (95). This chapter offers an overview of the development of the role of the diva as *femme fatale* and modern model of femininity in Italy. Following Laura Mulvey's influential discussion in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), Ramsey-Portolano argues that diva films provide an early example of the female gaze in the history of Italian cinema. Illness influenced cultural and artistic standards of beauty and attraction for the actresses of this period giving divas the power to dominate the screen and minds of spectators. The diva's portrayal of illness – through dramatic poses, decadent eroticism, exaggerated gestures, pictorial style or statuary expressions – granted centrality to both the female character and the diva. In this way cinema and the acting profession offered women emancipation, independence as well as control over the production of the film itself. This is an interesting chapter that, however, leaves the reader wanting to know more about illness and hysteria in the Italian cinematic production of the time. It would be also interesting to see how divas managed the balance

between their private existence and their performative maladies on screen.

Overall *Performing Bodies* is an interesting book and a welcome contribution to the exploration of fin-de-siècle women's conditions and representations. Ramsey-Portolano offers an enjoyable reading of a wide array of figures and texts important to understanding the cultural devaluation of women and historical dispositions to treat feminine will and desire as invalid. The book also provides a valuable introduction for readers interested in further exploring the issue of female diversity and sexuality in post-unification Italian literary and visual culture.

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Proceedings of the III API Conference (Johannesburg, 1983).
- 13) **Atti del II Convegno dell'API** (Pretoria, 1982).  
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# ASSOCIAZIONE PROFESSORI D'ITALIANO / ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL ITALIANISTS

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The purpose of A.P.I. (Association of Professional Italianists/Associazione Professori d'Italiano), established in 1981, is to promote cultural exchanges and discussions on didactic and literary topics concerning the preservation and teaching of the Italian language and literature in Southern Africa both at school and university level, and to keep abreast with international developments in this field.

Congresses and Round Tables alternate every second year at various universities and cultural associations where Italian is taught. All teachers and students of Italian, as well as anybody interested in Italian culture are invited to participate.

Membership fees are as follows:

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All enquiries about the Association and applications for membership and remittances should be sent to The Hon. Treasurer, Dr Brian Zuccala, e-mail: [brian.zuccala@wits.ac.za](mailto:brian.zuccala@wits.ac.za).

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