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Mauro Lo Dico

**THE CLASSICISM OF HENRY JAMES:
HIS HELLENISM & CONNECTION TO ROME¹**

In one study on Henry James and the classics, Michael Clark duly notes “James’s lifelong preoccupation with ancient Greek culture” (210). In another, Aladár Sarbu claims that “Hellenism for James, may not be the most appropriate phrase, as his classical background is overwhelmingly Roman in character” (258). Both scholars represent the current dichotomy in Jamesian criticism concerning the Master’s relationship with Greece and Rome. As would be expected from such research, much analysis focuses on his fiction, yet a closer look at the American’s education and travels in addition to new evidence from personal letters only recently published can shed more light on this topic. By taking all of these factors into consideration, it becomes evident that the classicism of the novelist is not particular to one culture or the other. Rather, his art contains a more balanced outlook with regards to the ancients, one incorporating Greek ideals as they were perceived through Roman eyes.

¹ I would like to thank Dr. Ve-Yin Tee for proofreading an earlier draft of this paper.

The Education of Henry James

The classical learning of James has already been covered by Elizabeth Block who emphasizes the Latin half of his schooling. It is true that already by the age of 15 his friend Thomas Sergeant Perry, the future classicist who would publish *A History of Greek Literature* in 1890, confirms in a memorandum that “[James] and I read together at Mr. [Reverend W. C.] Leverett’s school a fair amount of Latin literature. Like Shakespeare he had less Greek” (Lubbock 1: 8). Yet James sought more Greek instruction as a letter he wrote to Perry a year later reveals: “I fully intended to study Greek when I came here [at M. Rochette’s in Switzerland], but I have not now the time, I shall commence it as soon as I possibly can” (*CLHJ*, 1855-1872 1: 28). He was also exposed to Greek drama by the time he attended the Academy of Geneva, to which he equates his scientific lectures with “tragedy” and the literary ones with “bright comedy,” “the professor in each case figuring the hero, and the undergraduates, [...], partaking in an odd fashion of the nature at once of troupe and spectators” (*Au* 245).

The James family later moved to Bonn, Prussia, where Henry finally received his opportunity to study Greek under “one Doctor Humpert Latin and Greek Professor at the Gymnasium here” who “is a pleasant genial man with very little force of character, and more book-learning,

that is knowledge of Greek and Sanscrit [sic] than anything else” (*CLHJ*, 1855-1872 1: 51). In yet another letter to Perry, he writes that “[t]hey [his classmates] study naught else than Latin and Greek” (59) at the Gymnasium whose library “has scarcely any but the Ancient Authors” (60). Returning to America, James studied “English, Classical [Languages/Civilization], French, German, Spanish, Drawing and Music” at the Berkeley Institute in Newport.² William James recognized his brother’s love for antiquity persuading him to go to Germany because that was where “really classical and cosmopolitan literature” was written (*CLHJ*, 1855-1872 2: 14).³

James kept in touch with the academic world of classical studies even after completing school. He was on friendly terms with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1: 161-62, 171, 197, 333, 339), Harvard Professor of French and Spanish from 1836 to 1854, whose poetry contains classical elements such as the epic dactylic hexameter in “Evangeline.” He knew Richard Chevenix Trench, the Archbishop of Dublin, who was also a philologist (1872-1876 1: 210, 226, 358). Dr.

² From the 24 May 1862 edition of the newspaper *Mercury* in Newport, as found in Harlow (8).

³ Mr. Brooke of “Travelling Companions” “thought, I lived, I ate and drank, in Latin, and German Latin at that” (*CS1* 538), while although studying in English, Morgan Moreen, “The Pupil,” uses a Greek-German lexicon (*CS3* 730).

Thomas Inman, who published in archaeology and mythology, was his doctor in Liverpool (221, 222, 225, 335). Among the friends of the family, Charles Eliot (translator of Dante's *Divine Comedy*) of the Nortons shared James's passion for the classics (Edel *Henry James* 1: 210). He introduced him to Emilia Pattison who was married to Mark Pattison, a classical scholar (*CLHJ*, 1855-1872 1: 302, 343). James was on good terms as well with Charles Callahan Perkins, an art critic who lectured on Greek and Italian art and engraving several times in the 1870s at Lowell Institute in Boston (343). During his first trip to Europe as an adult, James went "to hear Ruskin lecture at University College on Greek Myths" (236), and socialized with the art and social critic as well (245, 256-57). He listened to William Morris read out his version of the myth of Bellerophon (238, 246), and travelled across the continent visiting the ancient sites and classical museums.

The impact of this classical immersion surfaces in James's fiction. In "A Day of Days," for instance, Thomas Ludlow, who is "[b]orn in one of the lower strata of New York society" (*CSI* 107), considers himself "not educated. I know no Greek and very little Latin" (120). Conversely, Miss Henrietta Congreve of "Osborne's Revenge," presumably rich and from New York, like her creator, is believed to be "wonderfully clever, and that she read Latin and Greek" (375). The "*bourgeoise* Egeria" (749),

Serafina, “The Madonna of the Future,” complains how Theobald often “talks away, without stopping, on art and nature, and beauty and duty, and fifty fine things that are all so much Latin to me” (757). In “Benvolio,” the Professor “taught [his daughter] the Greek alphabet before she knew her own, and fed her with crumbs from his scholastic revels” (CS2 104). From “An International Episode,” “[t]here was Lady Jane Grey we have just been hearing about, who went in for Latin and Greek and all the learning of her age” (382). Laura Wing of “A London Life” “wondered what her sister supposed Miss Steet taught them – whether she had a cheap theory that they were in Latin and algebra” (CS3 449). And Morgan Moreen, “The Pupil,” learns Latin (718, 720) and Greek (730) from his teacher Pemberton.

The most telling inclusion of classical education in Jamesian fiction is through “Gabrielle de Bergerac,” who persuades her brother to hire the Latin tutor, Coquelin, who had half a dozen little copies of the Greek and Latin poets, bound in yellow parchment, which, as he said, with a second shirt and a pair of white stockings, constituted his whole library. He had carried these books to America, and read them in the wilderness, and by the light of camp-fires, and in crowded, steaming barracks in winter-quarters. He had a passion for Virgil. M. Scarron was very soon dismissed to the cupboard, among the dice-boxes and old packs of cards,

and I was confined for the time to Virgil and Ovid and Plutarch, all of which, with the stimulus of Coquelin's own delight, I found very good reading. [...] He wrote a very bad hand, but he made very pretty drawings of the subjects then in vogue, – nymphs and heroes and shepherds and pastoral scenes. (CS1 438)

She also introduces her nephew M. le Chevalier to Plutarch in French (436), a noteworthy emphasis because, as the author of the *Parallel Lives* of Greeks and Romans, he was the first to integrate the study of both classical cultures. James was certainly read in the Greek biographer. The statues of the Grand-Dukes of Tuscany in Livorno are “represented, that is dressed, or rather undressed, in the character of heroes of Plutarch” (CTW2 568); Cousin Maria of “Mrs. Temperly” is “a woman of Plutarch” (CS3 176); and there is an allusion to the Greek's biography of Theseus in “The Modern Warning” (430; see also Tintner *Pop* 127). The ancient author's fusion of both Greek and Roman societies was a technique that attracted the American writer who was fond of comparing and contrasting his own times with the classical world.

James was much more proficient in Latin, but he was at the same time very interested in things Greek. A complete compilation of all the research done on Jamesian Hellenism is a Herculean task beyond the scope here, but it should suffice to mention that the American's tendency

to Hellenize his writings is well documented. Dorothy Bethurum was the first critic in 1923 to explain the author in these terms when analyzing Isabel Archer of *The Portrait of a Lady*: “The meaning of her development is, in fact, this moral growth, for with James, as with the Greeks, wisdom and virtue are synonymous” (327-28). Of his novels in general she concluded that “[u]nless the moral sense be thoroughly bound up in the sense of the beautiful, as in the case of the Greeks, it can never be wholly sufficient” (330). Specific Greek authors were singled out in 1949 when Leon Edel, noticed the particular use of Euripides’ *Orestes* in the dramatic version of *The Other House* (CP 679), and Ray B. West Jr. and Robert Wooster Stallman noted elements of classical Greek theatre, namely comedy, in “The Liar” (212). More recently in 2004, Raymond Benoit has argued that the Platonic discourse of reality versus appearance plays itself out in “The Beast of the Jungle” through John Marcher and May Bartram. This aspect is certainly reminiscent of the conversations between the protagonist “of the semi-classical” (Curtsinger 22) “Benvolio” concerning “the absolute [Plotinus’ “The One”] and the relative [Plato’s *Protagoras*] with the Professor” (CS2 111) who is “a devout Neo-Platonist” (103) and whose daughter goes to live in the Antipodes (124-25), non-existent islands first coined by Plato in *Timaeus* (63a). The Antipodes make another appearance in one of James’ very last

publications, “France” (9 June 1915; *CTW2* 773), in which he also compares the eponymous country to ancient Greece, “the most golden aspect of antiquity” (775). Indeed, for over eight decades critics have been demonstrating how Hellenism is present throughout the Jamesian canon.

James’s Travels

It is surprising to note that such an avid traveler as Henry James (*cf.* the two-volume *Collected Travel Writings* compiled by the Library of America series) never visited Greece, not even the southern third of his beloved Italy, the old *Magna Graecia* (Great Greece). There are three main reasons for this anomaly, the first two being rather practical. One was that travel around the western half of Europe in James’s day was much more established and therefore convenient than in the eastern half because there already existed a network of expatriate communities. Another was that on his first voyage to Europe as an adult James had intended to go as far south as Sicily (*CLHJ*, 1855-1872 2: 63, 110), but by the time he reached Florence he was experiencing a severe case of constipation which forced him to reconsider his itinerary (137, 152-53). Thanks to medication prescribed by an Irish doctor practicing in the Tuscan city (167, 171), he was able to enjoy Rome and even Naples, but

by 8 November 1869 Sicily was no longer in his plans (180). He had perhaps decided to take the precaution of scaling down his trip because his health might still have been precarious. In all of the subsequent trips to Europe, never again would James go further south than Naples, the reason for this being complex.

Naples was a major city in antiquity and even more so in Magna Graecia, being colonized by the Greeks and therefore quite Hellenized. James first visited it in 1869, describing the scenery to his mother in a letter interestingly in Latin literary terms:

On each side of me the bay stretches out its mighty arms – holding in one hand the sullen mass of Vesuvius + in the other, veiled in a mist which shadows forth the dimness of their classicism, the antique sites of Baiae + Cumae – all haunted with Horatian + Virgilian memories” (230).

Although he appreciated the Greek artifacts at the national museum, he rather abruptly mentions that he had also “been to Paestum + seen the Greek temples” (231). He would not publish a travelogue about the area until the first decade of the twentieth century, “The Saint’s Afternoon and Others,” which contains very few references to its ancient Greek past in comparison to the Roman era (*CTW2* 600-19).

The same can be said about the representation of the city and its environs in his fiction. One of the “Travelling Companions,” Mr. Brooke, sees the usual tourist sites there including the museum and Pompeii (*CSI*

537-38) – a Roman not Greek archaeological site. In James's very next published tale, "A Passionate Pilgrim," the narrator describes Nuremberg as "so forcible an image of the domiciliary genius of the past" (563), comparing it to Pompeii. Although *Roderick Hudson* visits and talks "about the Naples Museum, the Aristides, the bronzes, the Pompeian frescoes" (NI 361), he does not go into any details. Part of "Georgina's Reasons" is set in the southern Italian city where Mildred Theory "poured forth floods about Magna Graecia" (CS3 29) and "knew about the statues in the museum, about the excavations at Pompeii, about the antique splendor of Magna Graecia" (30). The next creative use of area occurs in *The Awkward Age* where Mr. Longdon carries on with Mitchy about "the Virgilian associations of the Bay of Naples" (N4 963). Finally, "The Beast in the Jungle" is also set around Pompeii. Despite the bay area being more closely connected with ancient Greek culture, James saw the region primarily through Roman eyes.

Sicily, although technically not part of Magna Graecia, was also deeply Hellenized if not Greek. In an article about Ernest Renan visiting southern Italy in 1875, James quotes from one of the Frenchman's letters describing how Sicily and Greece are still quite similar owing to their shared history (LC2 628-29). Although James agrees that "the great ruins

– Syracuse,⁴ Agrigentum, and Taormina –” of which “M. Renan [writes] is of course very eloquent and interesting,” the American was not sufficiently tempted enough to experience the island and its Greek atmosphere first-hand. In fact, the previous year James was tempted to take a voyage back home that would stop “at Naples, Messina + other picturesque places” (*CLHJ*, 1872-1876 2: 129), but that trip never materialized. Furthermore, when reviewing another French author, Auguste Laugel and his *Italie, Sicile, Bohême: Notes de Voyage*, James sees Sicily in its Roman provincial context (“this once imperial island” [*LC2* 471]), in spite of the fact that most of “its shrines and temples” are Greek.

Sicily, like Naples, hardly shows up on James’s fictional radar either, and when it does it again is viewed through Roman-tinted glasses. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, much of which is set in Rome, the characters consider going to Greece and Sicily, but the few who do reveal little that is worthwhile about their voyages (Chapters 31, 38, 39). Adrian Frank in “The Impressions of a Cousin” travels to Sicily, but the reader learns nothing more from the entry of the narrator’s diary, which is written in the Italian capital (*CS2* 721). The sister of Laura Wing in “A London Life”

⁴ The tasteful Benvolio sometimes wears “an antique Syracusan coin, by way of a pin, in his cravat” (*CS2* 84).

(mentioned earlier), Selina Wing Berrington, has further connections to the classics as well as to the island. Her first name is the Romanized Greek (Σελήνη) for moon, and at one point she sings to her children and is thus likened to Saint Cecilia (CS3 469), the patroness of musicians who came from Rome and died in Sicily.⁵ Like Magna Graecia then, all things Sicilian despite their Greek associations are seen from a Roman perspective.

It is tempting to go as far as to interpret in James a preference for Roman civilization, a view that might be supported by the short story “A Bundle of Letters.” In it, the German professor Dr. Rudolf Staub compares two Americans in rather derogatory, Magna Graecian terms. The first, Louis Leverett, “presents all the characteristics of a period of national decadence; reminding me strongly of some diminutive Hellenised Roman of the third century” (CS2 515). The second is Miranda Hope who “produces nothing but evil, and her tastes and habits are similarly those of a Roman lady of the lower Empire” (516). But perhaps these descriptions reveal more about James’ view of Germans, rather than of ancient Greece or Rome whose characteristics, as can be seen, overlap without strain.

⁵ There is a church in Rome dedicated to the saint where Rowland Mallet meets Christina Light and Assunta, and they gossip about Roderick Hudson who, at this end of this seventh chapter titled “Saint Cecilia’s,” as Mallet learns, has left for Naples.

Greece proper and the eastern Mediterranean were on James's itinerary as well, but once more he never went there. Travelling with some friends of the family in 1873, James wrote to his sister Alice about how Edmund Tweedy did not take to his wife Mary Temple Tweedy's suggestion of visiting Athens in the winter (*CLHJ*, 1872-1876 1: 264). As usual, this lack of Greek travelling experience is mirrored in his fiction. The earliest example appears when the "Travelling Companions" want to go to Greece (*CS1* 523, 532), but the reader never discovers whether they do. The Countess of "Benvolio" "was in Italy, in Greece, in the East, in the Holy Land, in places and situations that taxed the imagination" (*CS2* 120), but those images are never described. In "Pandora" Count Otto Vogelstein "wondered what form of culture Mr. and Mrs. Day had brought back from Italy, Greece, and Palestine (they had travelled for two years and been everywhere)" (830), but the typically Jamesian picturesque depictions that brought his American, English and French settings so alive are lacking in this tale. Indeed, the French rural landscape to the naïve American Lewis Lambert Strether of *The Ambassadors* is at first "practically as distant as Greece" (*N6* 374). The great ancient Greek metropolises of Smyrna and Constantinople surface in "Eugene Pickering" (*CS2* 48-81), "Georgina's Reasons" (*CS3* 32) and "The Chaperon" (845), but predictably are only mentioned. In fact,

Smyrna “of all places” (Putt 92; Wagenknecht 183) is considered by Adeline R. Tintner to be even “burlesque, limericklike” (*Book* 27).⁶ This confusion among readers as well as the inconsistency between his interest in ancient Greece on the one hand and his not seeing its modern manifestation on the other may be explained by returning to Italy and its capital.

Henry James travelled most of Western Europe and North America, where he found Italy by far the most inspiring non-English speaking country (Wright 208, 217). Of all the cities he visited Rome was his favourite, and this fact has not escaped critics either.⁷ One observation that both James W. Tuttleton (43) and Agostino Lombardo (230-32) made at *The James Family and Italy: A Symposium* in April 1988 (and John Lyon 142-54 and Elzbieta Foeller-Pituch agree) was that the Italy James knew was only marginally historical and rather more artistically metaphorical – the eternal city being its prime example. James’ knowledge of the classical past, however, should not be underestimated.

⁶ James satirically refers to this place once more in “A New England Winter” where Rachel Torrance dresses like “a Smyrniote” (CS3 96).

⁷ See Bisztray “The Role of Rome in Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun* and Henry James’s *Daisy Miller*,” Block “The Rome of Henry James,” Foeller-Pituch “Henry James’s Cosmopolitan Spaces: Rome as Global City,” Lucas “Manliest of Cities: The Image of Rome in Henry James,” Lyon “Henry James and the anxiety of Rome” and Stone “Henry James and Rome” for just the major studies in English.

A look at the study of ancient history demonstrates how well James understood the Mediterranean.

A Tale of Two Cultures

Rome was of course the largest city in its empire, which is traditionally divided linguistically and culturally into the Latin West and Greek East. The Roman historian Ramsey MacMullen, however, argues that the capital had the largest number of Greek speakers in the entire Mediterranean, even more than huge eastern metropolises such as Alexandria (345 n.12). Greek ideas permeated Roman civilization to such an extent that the Romans can be considered as the first neoclassicists. With current research in cultural studies becoming ever more specialized, the notion of antiquity as Greco-Roman tends to be overlooked. James and other contemporary artists would not have made similar hair-splitting differences between both peoples. This stance is best exemplified by the way he treats classical mythology.

In “The Last of the Valerii,” set in Rome, almost all the deities in it are called strictly by their Roman names: Hercules (*CS*/ 804), Minerva (806, 807), Ceres (806), Bacchus, Venus (807, 808, 822), Juno (808-12, 819-22), Proserpine (811), Jupiter (817), and Diana (819-20). The only exception is Mercury (817) who is referred to also as his Greek

equivalent Hermes (814-15).⁸ The most important of these is Juno, of which a statue is unearthed becoming an obstacle in the marriage of the international couple who are the protagonists of the tale. The Italian husband, Count Valerio, is so mesmerized by it that he begins to neglect his American wife who, in order to save their relationship, reburies the statue. Years later Valerio, still possessing its hand as a relic, receives a visitor one day who questions him as to whether it was Roman. “‘A Greek,’ said the Count, with a frown” (827).

The statue is indeed “in the large and simple manner of the great Greek period” (808). So why does the narrator, the godfather of the countess, never refer to it as Hera, Juno’s Greek manifestation, interchangeably as he does with Hermes/Mercury? There are two schools of thought concerning this matter. M. Clark suggests that Valerio, descending from the Romans, is sexually repressed like his ancestors were, at least in comparison to the more liberal Greeks. This is the reason why the messenger god, whose phallus was a popular symbol in his Greek aspect but not in his Roman one, is referred to as both Hermes and Mercury – that is, to emphasize Valerio’s dilemma (211-12). The other theory, as Suzi Naiburg puts forth, is that

⁸ In “The Velvet Glove” as well, Diana (CS5 756) is also called by her Greek name Artemis (741).

The Count's identification of the statue as Greek rather than Roman indicates that his affinities are more with Hera than with Juno, with the more poetic and older religious tradition of the Greeks than with the more functional, civic, and secular tradition of the Romans. The Greeks personified their gods and goddesses and developed a rich literature and mythology about them. The Romans were more practically and politically oriented; their deities were more functionally defined. (160)

While both of these explanations carry considerable weight, there may be another more encompassing factor.

For James Greece and Rome were so alike in many ways that the need to make such a differentiation artistically at times did not matter. As Nathalia Wright noted, citing "The Author of *Beltraffio*" in particular, James derived his Hellenism from Italy (223). The large amount of time that he spent there coupled with the vast extent to which scholars see his work as being influenced by ancient Greek literature certainly lends credence to this connection. Furthermore, ancient Rome encompassed both Greek and Latin cultures, making it one of the first and largest cosmopolitan cities ever. Himself a cosmopolite, this was certainly one reason why James was attracted to the capital whose international status never really fell with its empire, at least not in his eyes (Foeller-Pituch). In other words, the proverbial eternal city was for him universal as well.

As James wrote in a letter on 16 April 1882 to his friend Isabella Gardner:

I am a Greek as I admire you – & a Christian Martyr as you persecute me. You remind me of a Roman lady of the Decadence, at the Circus: I myself being the Christian Martyr! I am not at all Roman – I am Greek! (Tintner *Pop* 109).

A. R. Tintner simply interprets this classical reference as “the Greek material combining with that of the time of the Roman decadence, when the early Christians were martyrs.” Since this letter was written about the time of the tales “The Siege of London” (1883) and “Lady Barberina” (1884), both of which contain many ancient allusions in her opinion, she quickly concludes that the Master “tosses off the two groups of matter that he is handling to produce these rather indirect tributes to classical legends.” When dealing with the classics, James did not toss anything off – directly nor indirectly. As a result of his classical, albeit mostly Roman, education and Italian travels, James demonstrates a firm understanding that the Greek and Roman cultures both complemented each other. Rome and her literary exponents represented for him the culmination of that union, hence one reason why he did not feel the need to travel further south in Italy nor east in the Mediterranean. Like Dante who had Virgil guide him through Hell, James had the Latin classics as his cicerone for the literary odyssey that was his career whose destination was Greek in spirit.

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William F. Purcell

**IS BARBARA KINGSOLVER'S *THE POISONWOOD BIBLE*
A "POSTCOLONIAL" NOVEL?**

In a National Public Radio interview American writer Barbara Kingsolver made what struck me as a rather remarkable assertion: namely that her 1998 novel, *The Poisonwood Bible*, is part of “the postcolonial tradition,” which she said is a tradition “we’ve inherited” (Interview with Michael Kransey). This caught my attention for three reasons. First, it never occurred to me to consider postcolonial writing a “tradition” in any sense of the word as I understand it. Second, I was mildly amused at the idea of a white American, who has lived her entire life in relative affluence, claiming for herself the mantle of postcoloniality. Hers, after all, is not the sort of background one normally associates with the term—though, theoretically, I see no reason why that should automatically exclude her. And finally, I wondered if a text by such a writer, which focuses on characters representative of the American cultural majority, could or should indeed be considered “postcolonial”? Judging simply from the political positions it stakes out vis-à-vis European colonialism and American hegemony in Africa, Kingsolver’s text certainly *feels* postcolonial. It is therefore tempting to regard it as such. And, a cursory

search of the internet reveals that the author is not alone in considering her novel “postcolonial”.¹ However, when subjected to a postcolonial reading it seems to me the text fails to live up to either the author’s noble intentions or the postcolonial reader’s expectations.

I do not intend to consider at length here the question of whether postcolonial writing has become a tradition in the sense that, for instance, European realism is a tradition. Ultimately, such a discussion may be little more than a pedantic exercise in hairsplitting. If a tradition is measured by a combination of such factors as longevity, matters of form and subject, and an identifiable school of practitioners somehow indebted to those practitioners who went before them, then it may be reasonable to speak of a “postcolonial tradition”—or at least an “*African* postcolonial tradition.” For one, europhone texts produced by indigenous African novelists date back at least to the 1930 publication of Solomon Plaatje’s *Mhudi*. This particular novel, in turn, is but the first of many similar texts since produced that have sought, notes Lyn

¹ The jacket blurb, for instance, places the novel “alongside the classic works of postcolonial literature,” while a cursory search of the internet reveals that most book vendors regularly classify it under the heading “postcolonial fiction.” One critic, in turn, described it as a “postcolonial parable” (*Village Voice* 77), and another as “an innovative treatment of the topic of post-colonialism” (Austenfield 294). There are, as well, at least two university instructors who have included the novel in their reading lists of postcolonial literatures (Paxton, Zwicker). And one academic so far has published an essay in which she makes a case for reading and teaching the novel as postcolonial (Jussawalla).

Innes, both to reclaim African history from European contempt and delineate it on African terms, and to affirm an African cultural validity long denigrated by Europeans as primitive and savage (37). At the same time, literary critics have long given at least tacit recognition to a body of literary production—poetry, fiction, and plays—that has been described as *postcolonial*. Deepika Bahri, for instance, in her wide-ranging and illuminating 1995 essay, which tries to get a handle on this elusive term, points out that “the *postcolonial*” is not just “an academic construct” but “a literary genre” as well (53). Rather than quibbling over when a genre becomes a tradition, the more relevant issue is that of who and what can (or should) be considered “postcolonial.”

Peter Childs and Patrick Williams try to demonstrate through the “Points of Departure” catalogued in their book, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*, that while there may seem to be “obvious” answers to the questions of when, where, who, and what is “the postcolonial,” there are inevitably multiple alternate possibilities contesting for inclusion (or at least a hearing). This would certainly argue for at least considering a text such as Kingsolver’s. Still, I would like to keep in mind Jeremy Hawthorn’s point that the term “postcolonial” is freely applied to issues that fall into either (or even both) “critical or theoretical groupings” (269). While the term has been particularly

contentious in discussions of *theory*, there really has been relatively little of the same bickering about who or what *writing* should or should not be included under the heading of “postcolonial.”

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin famously got the discussion started in 1989 when they defined “post-colonial,” for their purposes, “to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day” (*Empire* 2). Consequently they argue for the inclusion not only of texts from such places as the various African countries, India, Bangladesh, and the South Pacific Islands, but also Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and even the United States. While many have taken exception to the inclusion of such First World literatures (particularly the USA), most critics agree in principle with the emphasis their definition gives to the literary production of those nations formerly grouped under such banners as “Commonwealth literatures” and “Third World literatures” (and more recently “emergent literatures” and “new literatures in English”). Elleke Boehmer, for instance, wrote in 1995 that for her postcolonial writing is “that which critically scrutinizes the colonial relationship. It is writing that sets out in one way or another to resist colonialist perspectives” (3). More recently Hawthorn said that for most

readers the term applies to that “literature emanating from or dealing with the peoples and cultures of lands which have emerged from colonial rule (normally, but not always, relatively recently)” (269). Even Aijaz Ahmad, for whom Ashcroft et al.’s definition, from a theoretical standpoint, is rendered practically useless by the breadth of “transhistoricity” that deprives it of specificity (283), nevertheless quickly agrees that as a literary designation “postcolonial” refers simply (and at times pejoratively²) to the literary production, in the first instance, “of non-white minorities located in Britain and North America,” and more recently to “the contemporary literatures of Asia and Africa” (282). What all of these definitions have in common is that they foreground the experience of colonization (or, in its North American permutation, domination and exploitation by a materially superior and overwhelming surrounding culture) and resistance to/recovery from it.

What question remains, then, is whether an American writer of the dominant cultural grouping, or a text by such a writer that focuses on characters representative of that majority, can or should be considered

²Ahmad also associates the term “postcolonial” with the notion of “Europe and its Others,” adding that “[i]n at least one of its many nuances, ‘postcolonial’ is simply a polite way of saying not-white, not-Europe, or not-Europe-but-inside-Europe [or its North American offshoot]” (282).

“postcolonial.” Ahmad would most certainly say no. Hawthorn and Boehmer seem at least to allow for the possibility, while Ashcroft et al., obviously, say yes. Arif Dirlik and Peter Hulme, as well, agree. Both arrive at their conclusions from similar Marxist interests (which, ironically, lead Ahmad to the opposite conclusion). Both similarly argue that neither colonization nor postcoloniality is the privileged (or exclusive) domain of the colonized and those who would represent them (or, I would add, of Marxism). The existence of the colonized implies a colonizer, both of whom were affected (albeit in different and doubtless unequal ways) by the process. My intention here is not to resurrect questionable (or even discredited) binary relationships but rather to stress that colonialism was a multifaceted phenomenon which cannot be viewed simply as a one-sided victimization. Hulme insists that ““postcolonial”” as a critical term should be “descriptive,” not “evaluative,” and should refer to “a *process* of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome”—to whatever extent that may be possible (120). By this I take him to mean a *mutual* process of moving away from those assumptions about the nature of the relationship between the former colonizing and former colonized societies; assumptions that originated in Western liberal paternalism, were often uncritically accepted by both the colonizer and the colonized, and have

since locked the two in such unequal and binary relationships as civilized/primitive (if not savage), teacher/disciple, benefactor/dependent.

Dirlik similarly reasons that if one of the basic themes of postcoloniality centers on “a crisis in historic consciousness ... then the First World itself is postcolonial.” He argues that

[t]o the extent that the Euro-American self image was shaped by the experience of colonizing the world ..., the end of colonialism presents the colonizer as much as the colonized with a problem of identity (300).

Therefore, he suggests, “one does not have to be *postcolonial* in any strict sense of the term to share in [the concerns and themes of postcoloniality]” (300). And it is within this framework that a writer like Kingsolver, or her text, *might* be considered postcolonial.

Kingsolver has described her novel as a “political allegory” intended to dramatize the “the awful things” perpetrated by the United States government “all over the world, in [her] name” throughout the twentieth century (*Barbara Kingsolver: FAQ*). Through the alternating voices of her five central female characters, she relates the gradual disintegration of the family of Reverend Nathan Price, a zealous, self-righteous fundamentalist American Baptist preacher who in 1959 took his wife and four daughters from Georgia to the jungle village of Kilanga in the soon-to-be-independent Belgian Congo on a

one-year mission to convert primitive African heathens living in darkness. Recounting, first, a year and a half of pestilence, disease, drought, floods, hunger, witchcraft, and finally the bloody political upheaval of Mobutu's American-supported coup and assassination of independence Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, the novel catalogues the ineptitude and arrogance of Price as he confronts and attempts to change a people and culture he does not understand and who do not particularly desire what he has to offer. The anticlimactic latter third then kaleidoscopes across the more than 30 years of Mobutu's reign of terror in Congo/Zaire, with occasional intimations of American subversion in neighboring Angola and of South African apartheid. Throughout, Price and his religion function as stinging metaphors for an inept and arrogant American foreign policy driven by a similar patronizing, self-righteous zeal and xenophobic loathing of competing political and socio-economic ideologies.

The novel represents Kingsolver's engagement with and repudiation of the exercise and consequences of twentieth century American political, economic, and cultural hegemony. It is in this vein that Feroza Jussawalla has made a case for reading the novel as postcolonial, focusing on what she calls the "postcolonial intent of the work" (169). Specifically, she suggests a reading of

the text as a *Bildungsroman* with daughter Leah as the central character, tracing that character's gradual rejection of her identity as a member of the hegemonic culture and simultaneous reidentification and solidarity with the African peoples, in the process of which, Jussawalla suggests, Leah becomes "a trope for the suffering of Africa" (166). It is, arguably, a reading that focuses on the sort of "crisis of historic consciousness" Dirlik suggests the shifting colonial/hegemonic order poses for the First World subject. It is also, again arguably, an act of textual resistance to hegemony's attempt to define the hegemonic subject. The character and the author refuse to be interpellated as members of the hegemony, but rather embrace the oppressed.

I am sympathetic with Jussawalla's project, as I take the position articulated by both Hulme and Dirlik that postcoloniality is not the exclusive domain of the colonized. Just as colonialism and hegemony have shaped the subject construction of both the Third World and First World subject, so too has the dismantling of the formal structures of colonialism. However, I find her privileging of intent problematic. Such a privileging, it seems to me, only confirms Ashcroft et al.'s observation of a tendency for the word "postcolonial" to be reduced at times to simply a synonym for "anti-colonial" (*Key Concepts* 188). If that is indeed the case, then there are a great number of texts

previously regarded as colonialist in nature that would suddenly demand inclusion in the postcolonial canon (if such a canon indeed exists). Jussawalla herself is aware of this implication and suggests Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*. A better candidate would probably be Alan Paton's most sensitive anti-apartheid text, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, while (highly questionable) cases could also be made for Joyce Cary's African novels or even something like Elspeth Huxley's *Red Strangers*. In terms of the American case, as well, such anti-slavery texts as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* would demand reconsideration. More importantly, such a privileging of intent automatically deprioritizes other theoretical concerns, particularly those connected with issues of representation.

Kingsolver's text is clearly rooted in an anti-colonialist/anti-hegemonist ideology. It takes the European powers and the United States to task for all of the misery that colonialism, neo-colonialism, and hegemony have helped to bring about. At the same time it clearly articulates the author's deep-felt solidarity with the African masses. Nevertheless, a postcolonial reading of the text reveals tendencies on the part of the author to essentialize Africa, to perpetuate stereotypical and derogatory images and conceptions of the

continent and its peoples (and to likewise perpetuate similar images of Christians, particularly evangelical Christians, and missionaries), and in the end to do little more than invert the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized rather than lead to Hulme's "process of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome" (120, cited above).

Kingsolver's novel is the only work of fiction I am aware of that comes with an author's bibliography of sources (545-546). To me, at least, this suggests the author wants the authenticity of her rendering of historic events and her representations of Africa and African peoples to be taken seriously. She states in the "Author's Note" that during the process of researching and writing the novel she was unable to travel to Congo/Zaire. She therefore relied for her information in part on memories of a brief childhood experience, "travel in other parts of Africa, and many people's accounts of the natural, cultural, and social history of the Congo/Zaire" (IX). A brief review of the contents of that bibliography, in turn, is revealing. Of the 29 works listed, 11 contain either the word Congo or Zaire in the title; some half dozen are travelogues written by Westerners, dating from the classic nineteenth century texts of David Livingstone and Henry Morton Stanley to more contemporary accounts of journeys up the Congo; another half dozen items are pertinent to

the political and historic background of Congo's pre- and post-independence period; several are anthropological and zoological works; four are works of fiction; one is linguistic in nature; and one is Albert Schweitzer's 1921 missionary journal, *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest*. It seems initially an impressive amount of research.

However, a closer look at this bibliography reveals that quite a few of the works, particularly those anthropological and zoological in nature (as well as Schweitzer's missionary journal and two of the works of fiction), have little or nothing to do with Congo. This applies, for example, to Chinua Achebe's acclaimed first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, and Janheinz Jahn's highly respected 1958 anthropological text, *Muntu*, both of which Kingsolver singles out for specific mention as sources from which she "gleaned many kinds of instruction" (IX). Achebe's novel, of course, is situated in nineteenth century Igbo country of present-day Nigeria, while *Muntu* spans the length and breadth of sub-Saharan Africa, and draws mostly from West African cultures, as it tries to tease out an essential African culture. It is also a touch ironic to note that although Jahn's book has achieved elevated status among African American scholars, Achebe has said writers in Africa have generally "dismissed it" because of its essentializing project ("Interview," 133). Briefly,

he suggested, Jahn's project reflects the aims and ideology of the negritude movement of the 1950s and probably gained authority among African Americans who were "looking for a crystallization of the ideas of their blackness" (133).

One of the consequences of the breadth of Kingsolver's research is a tendency, as in many colonialist and anti-colonialist texts emanating from "First World" writers, to reduce Africa from a continent teeming with hundreds, perhaps thousands, of diverse cultures and languages to an undifferentiated cultural monolith. For instance, in her text there is a tendency to use "Congo/Zaire/Angola" and "Africa" almost synonymously. In the opening chapter, for instance, as Orleanna Price looks back across the years at her time in the Kilanga region of colonial Belgian Congo, she says "Africa and I kept company for a while" (9), and then in the space of four paragraphs uses the word "Africa" five more times, saying variously that she was "afflicted with Africa" (9), that she "walked across Africa with [her] wrists unshackled" (9), that Livingstone and those who followed "walked out on Africa as a husband quits a wife" (9), that she "trod on Africa without a thought" (9) but that "Africa shifts under my hands, refusing to be party to failed relations" (10). In the later chapters Leah as well makes a myriad of

such overarching and essentializing statements. The development of urban cities, for instance, is “a bad idea, at least for Africa” (454); malaria and other insect-born diseases are reminders that “Africa has a thousand ways of getting under your skin” (456); her children as well, are not Congolese or members of one or another of the specific ethnic groups that make up the country, but “Africans, for always” (470), while the space her children were born into is neither Congo/Zaire nor Angola, but “Africa” (472); even her choice to settle in Congo despite all of the hardships she had previously endured, she says, is “to give Africa a fair shake” (504). Throughout the text Congo/Zaire is Africa, and Africa is Congo/Zaire. I can hardly imagine her similarly setting a novel in, say, France or Mexico, and then labeling these places and their peoples respectively as “Europe” and “Europeans” or “North America” (or “the Americas”) and “Americans.” Yet, precisely because it is Africa it seems permissible for a continent of cultural, linguistic, geological, and zoological diversity to be reduced to a single (and itself quite diverse) region.

In the process of essentializing Africa, Kingsolver also seems to have freely borrowed cultural practices from other parts of the continent and relocated them to Kilanga. In particular, I have argued elsewhere, there are two practices that she seems to have borrowed specifically from Achebe’s novel

about the Igbo of eastern Nigeria, far removed from the Congo region, and reinscribed them onto the culture of Kilanga. One is the practice of abandoning twins in the forest at birth (210-211), a practice anthropological evidence suggests probably never existed in this region.³ The other is a belief in what Achebe's text calls the *ogbanje* child, which in the present text Anatole describes as "a child who keeps dying before birth and coming back into her [mother's] womb" (128-129). It is the inclusion of these practices, the first in particular, that I feel contributes to relating the text more closely to colonialist writing than to postcolonial texts. That is because they are indicative of a tendency on the part of the author to view Africa, like many other Western writers before her, not as a continent that is home to hundreds,

³ Anthropologist Hermann Hochegger catalogues a number of rituals among various Congolese ethnic groups, all connected with blessing, purifying, and naming twins, and in at least one case petitioning for their rebirth after a premature death. John Janzen, as well, notes that among many of the Kongo subgroups women with twin pregnancies often were treated in healing rituals involving *ngoma* drum therapy in order to enhance successful birthing and the survival of healthy children (161-162). Elsewhere in the region, Wyatt MacGaffey says that among other Bakongo groups twins were treated with deference because it was believed they, along with other persons of 'abnormal birth' such as albinos, could use their supposed supernatural powers to somehow afflict persons who incur their displeasure (73). While not proof of the non-existence of twin infanticide practices, the existence of these rituals indicates that twins, rather than being killed or cast away, were permitted to live, and, in some cases, were even desired. In addition, Hochegger also catalogues rituals in several Congolese cultures for beseeching deceased children to return to the mother's womb, which would suggest that they are not considered the sort of evil spirit-children that torment mothers as recorded in Achebe's novel. For a complete discussion see Purcell, 2-3.

or even thousands, of diverse cultures but rather as an undifferentiated cultural monolith. Further, by selecting for inclusion and drawing attention to these particular beliefs and practices she also reaffirms, authenticates, and perpetuates stereotyped Western images of African cultures as superstitious, and in the case of the killing of twins, as primitively brutal, cruel, unfeeling, and indifferent to the weak and defenseless.

This type of homogenizing of Africa and perpetuating stereotyped images is not limited to these few cultural practices. Rather, it extends also to Kingsolver's representations of the land and its peoples. The Africa she portrays, for instance, is a wild, dangerous, and hostile environment in which the human inhabitants are locked in a constant struggle to survive on the most basic level. It is a world in which children are eaten by crocodiles that lurk in the river (81); where villagers are stalked by hungry lions (139-141); where ravenous army ants devour everything and anything in their path (299-311); and where deadly poisonous snakes strike unsuspecting victims with lightning speed (361-367). It is a world rampant with sickness and diseases like malaria, which is an ever-present threat that requires the Europeans in particular to ingest a regular diet of quinine (35, 148 and elsewhere); like "*kakakaka*" (dysentery) that claims the lives of the village's children on an

almost daily basis (172); or like the numerous other infections that leave the children with ever-present “white crusts on their eyes and [genitals]” (91). It is a portrait of the African environment not all unlike that of a Joseph Conrad or a Rider Haggard, rich in detailed information of a zoological nature, but one in which potential tragedy and death for the human inhabitants lurks constantly on the fringes.

Kingsolver’s Africans, as well, are for the most part stereotyped as often helpless, blissfully ignorant, and totally complacent victims of this hostile and unhealthy environment. For instance, the village of Kilanga is peppered with characters like the one-eyed Mama Tataba (39), and a one-legged ritual dancer (45), the legless Mama Mwanza (51), and the fingerless Tata Zinsana (53). The children, as well, have bloated bellies from parasitic infestation and malnutrition (50), and there are scores of people with rotting teeth from a lifetime of sucking on the sugar cane that grows wild (113). As Ruth May observes, each family has “their own handicapped children or mama with no feet, or their eye put out. When you look out the door, why, there goes somebody with something missing off of them” (53). Yet, despite the deformities and infirmities, none seem bitter or despondent over their misfortune. Rather, again quoting Ruth May, they are “not even embarrassed

of it. They'll wave a stump at you if they've got one, in a friendly way" (53). Indeed, it seems at times almost as if Kingsolver is reaffirming theories about the environmental origins of a supposed African complacency towards life as the primary obstacle to material, scientific, medical, and technological progress that were endorsed by earlier generations of so-called authorities on African issues, such as Elspeth Huxley.⁴ Rather than striving to overcome hardship, Kingsolver's African villagers seem just happy to exist: they are grateful for the daily blessings nature provides and accepting of the suffering and hardships that come with being a part of that natural world. Unlike Europeans who seek to dominate, to conquer, and to manipulate the natural world to their advantage, the villagers are satisfied simply to be part of it.

⁴ Huxley, among others, supported an idea popular in the early part of the twentieth century attributing the relative lack of scientific and technological development in sub-Saharan Africa, as compared with the West and with Asia, to climate. In a 1936 article she called for research into the environment "to discover how far this might be a contributory cause of [Africans'] apparent backwardness" ("Nature of the Native" 16). Later she expanded her thesis to include modes of production and divisions of labor, suggesting that whereas Europeans in their northern climate have had to work hard to cultivate the land, Africans have had to do "infinitely less, because there is no winter and plant growth is so much quicker, and what work there was he managed, for the most part, to delegate to his wives" ("Some Impressions" 206). Eventually she even applied her theory to political life, suggesting the "Puritan spirit" and its "passion for individual liberty" to be a product of the northern climate which she said "promoted forethought, doggedness of character and a tendency to brood over matters of principle," characteristics she said were not indigenous in Africa ("West Africa" 318).

Repeated, as well, are the notions that even the refuse of Western material society represent often comic improvements to the standards of living for the indigenous peoples.⁵ Rachael observes, for instance, the children and adults of the village are “all dressed up in ragbags of Baptist charity” (43). She points particularly to the adult males wearing shirts with “childish prints, ... [a] cast-off janitor uniform[,]... antique wing tips curling up at the toes, black rubber galoshes unbuckled and flapping open, ... even a knit woolen cap with a ball on top,”—obviously out of place in a tropical climate—“or a woman’s bright yellow beret” (44). Then there are the shoes made from old automobile tires (44) and the carburetor air cleaner cover (33) or “salvaged hubcap” (459) turned into cooking pots. Indeed the villagers, as Kingsolver presents them collectively and individually, in their deformity and material poverty could be primary subjects for Oxfam and Save the Children posters so often seen in Western societies.

⁵ In the story “Everything Counts,” Ama Ata Aidoo similarly catalogues the frequently absurd forms Western aid to developing countries takes: “Snow-ploughs for tropical farms. ... Outmoded tractors. ... Discarded aeroplanes. ... And now wigs—made from other people’s unwanted hair” (2). Aidoo’s catalogue squarely criticizes such Western “largess” as little more than convenient and financially expedient ways (in such forms as tax write-offs) to dispose of excess production, outdated equipment, and other unwanted junk, often with little or no concern for what practical benefits such donations may (or may not) actually bring to the recipients. Unlike Kingsolver’s catalogue, however, it does not simultaneously turn the indigene into an object of amusement.

To be fair, the author's interest from the beginning is not with the African characters, but with the Price women and the consequences for them of patriarchy and American hegemony. Consequently, as Kimberly Koza suggests, all of the Africans in the text are included primarily to provide local color and romance; they are not real people—though the general reader will undoubtedly perceive them as such (287). Ironically, though, this is one of the characteristics Boehmer attributes to “colonial” fiction (3), and, unfortunately, the presence of most of these characters in the text serves primarily to confirm many Western assumptions and presuppositions about Africans as helpless victims in dire need of the benefits of a superior Western civilization.

Only one of Kingsolver's Africans is treated as more than “local color”: Anatole, the orphaned school teacher and translator for Nathan's sermons whom Leah marries. Yet even he is not realistic. Rather, he is a highly romanticized character intended to embody some pre-colonial African nobility that counters derogatory Western stereotypes of Africans as intellectually, culturally, spiritually, and politically underdeveloped. The distinctive body art that intricately adorns the character's face and are emphasized several times in the text (125, 279 and elsewhere) clearly set him apart as an “Other,” linking him to pre-colonial, pre-Western, pre-Christian society. Leah similarly likens

him in appearance to “a Pharaoh or a god in an Egyptian painting” (279). Highly intelligent, he speaks at least four languages: “French, English, Kikongo and whatever all he first started out with” (126). He is obviously Price’s intellectual superior, engaging the preacher calmly and rationally in discussion about local beliefs and traditions—not defending them so much as trying to make Price aware of their significance to the local people—while Price himself rages emotionally and irrationally about heathenism (128-133). He is, as well, knowledgeable and articulate on subjects ranging from contemporary history and politics (e.g. 229-235) to sociology, ethics, and economic theory (280-284). At the same time he is a true son of the land, well-versed in traditional crafts, such as the fashioning of weapons for hunting (277), and in traditional herbal medicines (399). In the latter parts of the novel, as well, he is a tireless champion of the people, working long hours for little remuneration to educate them, and suffering long imprisonments under the Mobutu regime for his political activities—during which he even tutors his jailers and fellow prisoners in literacy (431). He is, in other words, a self-sacrificing proletarian-revolutionary hero of mythic proportions. What Kingsolver apparently fails to realize, however, is that rather than embodying some idealized pre-colonial indigenous social order, the character is firmly

rooted in her own left-wing socio-political ideology, which is of decidedly Western origins.

If Kingsolver's representations of Africa and Africans are problematic, so, too, are her representations of the Western characters. Particularly in the post-climactic latter third of the novel, the three surviving siblings ultimately deteriorate from what were well-defined and engaging characters into stereotyped caricatures for predictable and not-very-sophisticated political positions. For it is in this latter section that Kingsolver turns to polemic to vent her anger at the injustices inflicted on the developing world by colonialism and hegemony. In the process, as Koza suggests, she often essentializes both Africans and Americans, generalizes, and oversimplifies complex histories (288). The result is that the latter part of the novel becomes an almost Manichean struggle between world-consuming evil and vulnerable innocence, or as Leah puts it, between "white men [and] Africa" (420). This crime against humanity will only be expiated when the passage of time "erases whiteness altogether" (526).

Adah, Leah's crippled younger twin, is the least important of the three surviving siblings insofar as my present discussion is concerned. In the anti-climactic section of the novel she is portrayed as a victim of hemiplegia, a

birth defect resulting from atrophy of half of the brain that causes paralysis in one side of the body. She nevertheless possesses a brilliant mind. Mostly silent owing to her condition, in the sections of the novel she narrates she articulates an acerbic and cynical assessment of her father's religion. It is only after the death by snake bite of the youngest sister, Ruth May, and the subsequent disintegration of the family that she is freed from her father's oppressive patriarchy and can realize her full potential, eventually becoming a medical doctor specialized in researching tropical diseases. Along the way, she also forces herself to both talk articulately and to walk straight. Ultimately she is turned into a mouthpiece through which Kingsolver voices some predictable and not very insightful positions regarding the oppressive nature of patriarchy.

Then there is Rachel, who in the earlier sections of the novel is rather convincingly developed as a self-centered, malapropism-spewing teenage prom queen. Unfortunately, she too disintegrates in the latter sections of the novel into a very flat stereotype of the exploitive, neo-colonialist Western capitalists in Africa who, on the one hand, despise and look down on the Africans as inferiors, yet drain from Africa every penny they can squeeze out.

Of greatest interest in this regard is Leah, arguably the heroine of the novel and the character who comes closest to embodying Kingsolver's own political

positions. It is her journey, her transformation, from obedient daughter who desires only her father's approval to mature woman who has rejected the oppressive gender and racial injustice of the culture of her childhood, that Jussawalla claims makes this a postcolonial novel. While I agree that Leah's gradual awakening to the oppressiveness of her father's religion (and the culture it represents) in the sections of the novel leading up to Ruth May's tragic death makes her a fascinating character, like her sisters in the post-climactic sections she too collapses into a flat caricature manipulated to articulate particular political positions that are ultimately inconsistent with postcoloniality.

Hulme suggests that postcolonial writing should move in the direction of disengaging with the colonial syndrome (120). In the present novel, and particularly in the Leah-Anatole relationship, Kingsolver fails to do this. Rather, the text remains engaged in the colonial binary while inverting it through a series of reversals of colonialist themes and practices in which Leah and Anatole trade places as colonizer and colonized. In this variation it is the black man who rescues the white woman from oppression by the white man, with Anatole becoming Leah's deliverer from the "guilt of her blood" and her past life of enslavement to her father's delusions (399). The African then

inscribes his name (through marriage) upon the Western woman, with Leah Price becoming Leah Price Ngemba (429 and elsewhere). He is, as well, her teacher from whom she passively and longingly relearns “the history of the world,” discovering the “truth” of a near-idyllic pre-colonial Kongo society and the European conspiracy to erase all memory of it (519-20). Finally, he becomes her source of consolation and forgiveness when she feels weighed down by guilt and racial self-loathing, her white skin itself being the badge of moral inferiority Leah longs to erase but cannot (421, 474, 526 and elsewhere). Ultimately, rather than becoming Jussawalla’s First-World postcolonial subject who moves beyond the colonial syndrome, Leah instead becomes something more akin to what Albert Memmi has called a “left-wing colonizer” (30); that is, a Westerner living in a colonial (or neocolonial) situation who sides with the colonized in an uneasy relationship.

For Memmi, all Westerners living in a colonial situation are, either from the moment of their arrival in the colony or their birth into it, beneficiaries of the injustices of the colonial system and, therefore, colonizers (17). Some colonizers, Memmi says, eventually “discover the economic, political and moral scandal of colonization” and refuse “to become what his [or her] fellow citizens have become” (19). The practical choice for such colonizers is to

leave. That is because those who choose to stay and join the struggle, practically speaking, can never completely separate themselves from their membership in the colonizing race. Their culture, their language, the privileges of their race all become bricks in a barrier that prevents them from successfully pursuing the only alternative to leaving, namely, in Memmi's words, "adopt[ing] the colonized people and be[ing] adopted by them" (22). Their ideology, as well—usually communist or socialist and of the same Western origins as such right-wing ideologies as cultural hegemony and economic liberalism which are the underpinnings of colonialism—, becomes another barrier. For one, it gives rise to embarrassment and denial when they discover that the colonized can act at times in ways equally as brutal as the colonialists (30). For another, they are frustrated to realize that the colonized are frequently not receptive to their ideology, but rather have agendas or objectives different from their own (27-39). Finally, their convictions about the superiority and universality of their ideology tend to delegate to these benevolent colonizers self-appointed roles in the liberation struggle that are no less patronizing, paternalistic, or condescending than those assumed by the most benevolent officers of the colonial service or members of the missions.

In Kingsolver's novel Leah clearly finds herself in a similar position. Having first rejected the oppressive and paternalistic religion of her father and then having been shocked by the realization of American complicity in the Mobutu coup and the murder of Patrice Lumumba, Leah chooses to join the struggle on the side of the oppressed. Nevertheless, her membership in the colonizing race prevents her from ever being unconditionally accepted by the colonized: rather, her acceptance is always contingent on her position as Anatole's wife (434, 472, 500-501, 523-524). She is, as well, Memmi's "revolutionary and ... exploiter" (23) who sides with the oppressed while also taking advantage of the privileges of her passport (albeit initially, at least, not without twinges of guilt) for such things as vaccinations for her children, educational opportunities for her family, or simply rest and recovery after a particularly difficult childbirth—luxuries not available to native Congolese women (455, 467).

Then there are the ideological conflicts. Like Kingsolver herself, Leah has transformed herself into "a pinko [who wants] to change the world" (Interview with Epstein 37). That is, her focus is on the causes of material development and economic justice, while her method of analysis reflects the categories and vocabulary of the Western Marxist intelligentsia. She becomes, in turn,

something of a self-appointed missionary for these causes, volunteering at clinics (419, 433), offering instruction in areas such as nutrition and sanitation (436, 523-524), and, together with Anatole, organizing schools (437) and agricultural cooperatives (433, 522-523). Owing to her zeal and the depths of her convictions, she is, at the same time, “confused” by the apathetic response of the indigenous people to the wisdom and benefits she has to offer and tries to rationalize their behavior, first seeing it as a by-product of oppression and then, ironically, resorting to the sort of worn environmental theories proffered a generation earlier by colonialists such as Elspeth Huxley (523-525). Finally, there is the issue of the violence of the Simbas, Congolese rebels loyal to the murdered Lumumba, which conflicts with Leah’s ideology. It is, after all, the violence of colonialism and imperialism, namely the murder of Lumumba, which finally drove her into the camp of the oppressed. Yet, although she is appalled by their savagery, she nevertheless sees the Simbas as “an army of pure desperation and hate” (421) whose anger is quite “understandable,” though their actions are not (434). While not exactly “construct[ing] myths,” as Memmi calls it (32), to explain their behavior, Leah does go to great lengths to make distinctions between the violence of the colonialist and the colonized. The result of all this is that Leah (and Kingsolver) fails to move

beyond the colonial syndrome. Instead, Leah becomes Memmi's left-wing colonizer who, like those well-intentioned missionaries in the 1970s who resisted the call by the African churches for a mission moratorium,⁶ seems incapable of allowing (or perhaps unwilling to allow) the Congolese to be agents of their own liberation without her participation and guidance. Further, Leah's racial self-loathing and romanticized notions of the indigenous people's innocence and moral superiority merely invert the assumptions underlying the colonial syndrome. In the process, Leah becomes herself a colonized subject, colonized by Africa and Anatole. And it is for this and the other reasons I have pointed out that I feel the novel fails to live up to the expectations of the postcolonial reader.

Jeremy Hawthorn notes that, in contemporary intellectual circles, the word "postcolonialism" and its connate terms have become "fashionable" (269). For

⁶ Speaking independently in 1971, Christian leaders in Asia, Africa, and South America—Emerito Nacpil (Philippines), John Gatu (Kenya), and José Miguez-Bonino (Argentina)—each called on the Western churches to initiate a moratorium, for at least five years, both on sending missionary personnel to these regions and on providing financial and material support for church-sponsored projects. Such a moratorium, they felt, was a necessary first step in overcoming the suffocating relationship of dependence by the indigenous churches on the Western churches that undermined self-reliance and self-determination. It would also afford them the space they needed to interpret the Gospel into their own cultural context without Western interference. Interestingly, the rationale underlying these calls for a moratorium echoed the principles of self-reliance articulated in Julius Nyerere's Arusha Declaration of 1967. Needless to say, these calls went largely unheeded by the West. For a fuller discussion see Anderson, also Luzbetak (107).

many contemporary liberal-humanist-intellectual (and pseudo-intellectual) elites the words resonate because of their association with anti-colonialism/imperialism, anti-capitalism, anti-globalization, feminism, environmentalism, and because of their accompanying materialist politics of the left that have the right “feel” about them. This, I believe, is the case with Kingsolver’s novel. The author is undoubtedly passionate and sincere about the positions she takes; too passionate, perhaps, for in the latter part of the novel she allows her politics to take over her art, turning what began as well-defined, complex, and compelling characters into stereotyped caricatures reduced to mere mouthpieces for rather worn and predictable political positions—all to the artistic detriment of the novel as a whole. Nevertheless, it has been well received and highly praised, particularly by critical readers sympathetic to her political positions.⁷ The positions she stakes out, however,

⁷ For example, Millicent Bell likens Kingsolver to D. H. Lawrence and to Hemingway (424). John Leonard likewise dubbed her America’s “own Lessing and our own Gordimer” (30), while Ruth Conniff gives the author’s intents her blessing. Judith Bromberg is sufficiently impressed by the novel’s political and moral message to make it required summer reading for her high school students (13). Elsewhere, Robin Antepara calls it a “wondrous epic” whose characters allegorically explore “different aspects of the American mindset” (25), and Liane Norman likens Kingsolver to “George Eliot, Tolstoy, and Dickens” (59).

Predictably, readers at the opposite end of the ideological spectrum trashed it. In one of the most damning reviews, Lee Siegel dismissed Kingsolver as a purveyor of politically correct “Nice Fiction,” the purpose of which (so he claims) is to advance “the amoral pursuit of virtuous appearance. ... The portrait of people doing evil things to each other, or of

rather than being postcolonial in the sense of Hulme or Dirlik, are based on a humanistic-universalistic liberalism that tends to be sentimental—“dewy-eyed” is how Sarah Kerr described her (Kingsolver, Interview with Kerr 54)—and at times uncritical, totalizing, and even fashionable. It is not the sort of “postcolonial liberalism” that Duncan Ivison aspires to, a liberalism that goes beyond the colonial binary, facilitating “a genuine ‘multilogue’” among diverse peoples brought together, for whatever reason, into a commonly shared space (163). It is, rather, the sort of humanistic liberalism of which Ngugi wa Thiong’o is highly critical (15); a liberalism that begs the oppressor to recognize the humanity of the oppressed while at the same time reaffirming so many of the stereotyped representations of the oppressed as helpless, blissfully ignorant, and totally complacent double victims of Western racism and a hostile and unhealthy environment who are still in need of the materialist benefits of Western scientific, technological and intellectual achievements. Whatever the laudable humanitarian intentions behind their production, ultimately such representations, William Shultz and Willis

someone sick and dying, or of a person psychologically hurt, flatters the portraitist. It can enfold the writer in a mantle of invincible goodness. The artistic worth of the portrait fades away as an issue. What remains is the invaluable appearance of goodness” (31-32).

Hartshorn of Amnesty International remind us, are “not particularly helpful in forming a picture of our common humanity” (qtd. in Achebe, *Education* 94).⁸

In the end, like in so many colonialist novels before it, Africa and its peoples become in Kingsolver’s text little more than an exotic backdrop against which very Western characters descend into the depths of their own cultural darkness and come face to face with the sickness of their culture. It is, indeed, a powerful (if overly simplistic) condemnation of Western capitalism and imperialism. However, good intentions (and correct politics) alone are insufficient. In order to achieve postcoloniality a text, particularly one by a First-World writer, must, in my opinion, push beyond the colonial binary, first by recognizing the multifaceted and complex nature of the former colonial world, as, for example, does Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, the original version of Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *A Grain of Wheat*, or (with less artistic success) Dominic Mulaisho’s *The Tongue of the Dumb*. It must then strive towards, not dialogue, which by its very nature remains locked in a binary relationship, but, as Ivison put it, “multilogue” with the diversity of

⁸ Schultz and Hartshorn were specifically criticizing a Western journalistic tendency, particularly in photojournalism, to highlight poverty, disease, and the consequences of economic, social, and political injustice in its coverage of various African societies. Achebe’s essay, “Africa’s Tarnished Name” (77-95), expands the discussion to include literary and non-literary textual representations.

participants involved in the negotiation (163). In my estimation this text fails to do that. Rather, it simply inverts the binary.

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VACILACIONES Y AMBIGÜEDADES EN EL USO DE LOS PRONOMBRES DE OBJETO DIRECTO E INDIRECTO DE TERCERA PERSONA EN ESTUDIANTES DE ESPAÑOL COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA

Resumen

El presente estudio se propone reflexionar acerca de la dificultad que supone, por parte de nuestros estudiantes de español L2, el uso de las formas pronominales de tercera persona de complemento directo e indirecto sobre todo cuando nos referimos a personas. La preposición ‘a’ no se encarga de marcar solo el caso acusativo sino el dativo; esto significa que el complemento de persona, al contestar a la pregunta *¿a quién?* podría desempeñar tanto la función de complemento de objeto directo de personas como la de objeto indirecto. A partir de algunas aportaciones teóricas este trabajo se propone ilustrar un corolario de problemas con los que los estudiantes de E/LE podrían toparse y que, aparentemente, aparecen sin solución.

1. Pautas para reconocer el complemento directo

Los manuales de español como lengua extranjera y las gramáticas didácticas destinan a los complementos del verbo, y más en concreto a las formas pronominales del complemento directo e indirecto, unas pocas y

exiguas páginas suficientes sólo para entender la función que desempeñan y su estructura. Dado que sería un serio problema que los objetos directos fueran objetos indirectos y viceversa, este estudio, al centrarse en las vacilaciones entre el pronombre acusativo y el dativo, quiere presentar, a través de algunas aportaciones teóricas, un corolario de problemas a los que los estudiantes de E/LE podrían enfrentarse y que aparentemente aparecen sin solución.

Siguiendo a Gómez Torrego suele decirse que para reconocer el complemento directo se debe hacer la pregunta *¿qué?* o *¿qué cosa?*. Sin embargo, él mismo desaconseja este procedimiento difundido por la escuela tradicional ya que la respuesta a esta pregunta no siempre coincide con el complemento directo sino con el sujeto o con el atributo (2007: 76) Veamos algunos ejemplos:

-*Le gustan los helados* [la respuesta a la pregunta *¿qué?* o *qué cosa le gustan?*, será los helados. Ahora bien, el grupo sintáctico nominal *los helados* no desempeña la función de complemento directo, sino la de sujeto]

-*Su padre es médico* [la respuesta a la pregunta ¿qué es su padre? será médico. Ahora bien, *médico* no desempeña la función de complemento directo, sino la de atributo]

Si el complemento directo, un nombre o un sintagma nominal que complementa a un verbo transitivo, contestara sólo a la pregunta *¿qué?* o *¿qué cosa?*, las opciones de tener a una persona como objeto directo serían muy pocas. A menudo, el complemento directo de persona contesta a la pregunta *¿a quién?*. Veamos algunos ejemplos:

-*Juan acompañó a su padre al aeropuerto* [si bien *su padre* es el complemento directo de la oración, para obtener alguna respuesta no podemos preguntar *¿qué?*, sino *¿a quién acompañó Juan al aeropuerto?*]

La marcación diferencial del objeto del español corresponde a la alternancia entre ausencia y presencia de la preposición ‘a’ en el objeto directo. Como es sabido, en general, los elementos afectados por la acción transitiva de un verbo deben aparecer con marca si son humanos, suprahumanos (Dios, los ángeles, el Diablo, etc.) o cosas personificadas (R.A.E., 2009) (Blanca Sanz, 2011: 184)

Sin embargo, la preposición ‘a’ no se encarga de marcar solo el caso acusativo sino el dativo. Esto significa que la construcción preposicional, al contestar a la pregunta ¿a quién? podría desempeñar tanto la función de complemento de objeto directo de personas como la de objeto indirecto¹:

-*Arancha escribió a su hermano* [si contestamos a la pregunta ¿a quién escribe Arancha?, la respuesta será *a su hermano* que no desempeña la función de complemento directo, sino la de complemento indirecto]

Para establecer el tipo de complemento, pueden hacerse varias pruebas y aplicar la siguiente fórmula: transformar la oración activa en pasiva y si el complemento que acompaña al verbo de la oración activa se convierte en el sujeto paciente de la oración pasiva, podemos afirmar que el complemento en cuestión es el complemento directo. En *Arancha escribió un correo a su hermano* el complemento directo de la oración es *un correo* dado que en la oración pasiva el sintagma nominal desempeña la función de sujeto: *Un*

¹ El complemento indirecto, desde el punto de vista semántico, designa al destinatario de la acción expresada por el verbo o, como afirma Gili Gaya, más específicamente a “la persona o cosa que recibe daño o provecho de la acción del verbo, o el fin a que dicha acción se dirige” (1961:70). Además de designar a la persona que resulta beneficiada o perjudicada por la acción (*Le han roto las gafas de sol*), dependiendo del significado del verbo, puede asimismo designar al destinatario de la acción (*Le hablé de ti a mis amigos*), a la persona que experimenta lo que el verbo denota (*Le inquieta tu forma de hablar*) o a la persona afectada por las características de algo (*La camiseta le queda pequeña*).

correo fue escrito por Arancha a su hermano. Gómez Torrego nos indica además que el complemento indirecto, al permanecer su función sin cambios en las oraciones pasivas, no es pasivizable (2007: 88)

-*Arancha escribió a su hermano* (CI)

-*Un correo fue escrito por Arancha a su hermano* (CI)

La fórmula indicada anteriormente y que nos permite determinar el tipo de complemento no es infalible. De hecho algunos verbos no permiten la transformación a pasiva:

-*Tengo dos perros* (CD) → *²*Dos perros son tenidos por mí*

-*María tiene una casa bonita* (CD) → **Una casa bonita es tenida por María*

Otra de las pautas para distinguir entre ambos complementos es sustituir el complemento directo por los pronombres átonos *lo, la, los, las* y el complemento indirecto por los pronombres átonos *le, les, se*.

-*Arancha escribió un correo* → *Arancha lo escribió*

² El símbolo asterisco (*) indica incorrección.

-Arancha escribió un correo a su hermano→ Arancha le escribió un correo

-Arancha escribió un correo (CD) a su hermano (CI)→ Arancha se (CI) lo (CD) escribió

A pesar de las pautas indicadas no siempre es fácil para un estudiante de E/LE determinar el tipo de complemento, sobre todo cuando nos referimos a personas. Muchos estudiantes a la hora de analizar oraciones del tipo *Fotografié a Carlos mientras practicaba surf* o *Vi a Carlos al salir del supermercado*, confiando en sus conocimientos, podrían de hecho preguntarse si ‘a Carlos’ se trata de un complemento directo o indirecto, puesto que ambos contestan a la pregunta ¿a quién?. Esta pregunta les llevaría a dudar sobre si lo más correcto sería sustituir el complemento de persona ‘a Carlos’ por el pronombre átono *le* o *lo*.

2. El leísmo

Existe un fenómeno gramatical, denominado leísmo, que corresponde al uso incorrecto de los pronombres *le/les* como complemento directo en lugar de *lo/la/los/las*. La Real Academia considera como propio el uso de *le* para complemento directo cuando se trata de sujeto animado masculino y singular, e impropio, por ser menos extendido en el habla culta, el uso de

los clíticos de dativo cuando se trata de sujeto animado masculino plural y femenino singular y plural. En la oración indicada anteriormente ‘a Carlos’ es un complemento de objeto directo que puede ser sustituido sin que la oración resulte agramatical por los pronombres *lo* o *le*, respectivamente:

Lo/Le fotografié mientras practicaba surf; Lo/Le vi al salir del supermercado; Veamos otros ejemplos:

● Cuando el referente es una persona:

1a)

-Cuando *LO* vieron [a Carlos], *no lo reconocieron*

-Cuando *LE* vieron [a Carlos], *no le reconocieron* (uso extendido y admitido por la norma culta del español estándar cuando el referente es singular y de sexo masculino)

1b)

-Cuando *LA* vieron [a María], *se quedaron maravillados*

-Cuando **LE* vieron [a María], *se quedaron maravillados* (uso poco extendido y no admitido por la norma culta del español estándar cuando el referente es singular y de sexo femenino)

1c)

-Cuando *LOS* vieron [a Carlos y a María], *decidieron marcharse*

-*Cuando *LES vieron* [a Carlos y a María], *decidieron marcharse* (uso menos extendido y no admitido por la norma culta del español estándar cuando el referente es plural y de sexo masculino)

1d)

-*Cuando LAS vieron* [a sus primas], *hablaron mal de ellas*

-*Cuando* LES vieron* [a sus primas], *hablaron mal de ellas* (uso poco extendido y no admitido por la norma culta del español estándar cuando el referente es plural y de sexo femenino)

2a)

-*Jamás LO vi tan triste como hoy*

-*Jamás LE vi tan triste como hoy*

2b)

-*Jamás LA vi tan triste como hoy*

-*Jamás *LE vi tan triste como hoy*

2c)

-*Jamás LOS vi tan tristes como hoy*

-*Jamás *LES vi tan tristes como hoy*

2d)

-*Jamás LAS vi tan tristes como hoy*

-*Jamás *LES vi tan tristes como hoy*

● Cuando el referente es una “cosa” masculina singular se aconseja el uso de los pronombres átonos de acusativo si bien el fenómeno del leísmo, a pesar de no ser tolerado por la Gramática académica, existe y se presenta de forma menos extendida. Su uso resulta muchísimo más raro si el referente es una cosa femenina singular o plural.

3a)

-El cuadro que me regalaste no LO he colgado todavía

*-El cuadro que me regalaste no *LE he colgado todavía*

3b)

-¿Sabes dónde está mi cuaderno? -Sí, LO he visto sobre la mesa

*-¿Sabes dónde está mi cuaderno? -Sí, *LE he visto sobre la mesa*

3c)

-Los apuntes de matemáticas me LOS prestas cuando puedas

*-Los apuntes de matemáticas me *LES prestas cuando puedas*

3d)

-La pulsera que me compraste para mi cumpleaños, no LA encuentro

*-La pulsera que me compraste para mi cumpleaños, no *LE encuentro*

3e)

-Las películas de Amenábar LAS he visto todas

*-Las películas de Amenábar *LES he visto todas*

2.1 Leísmo. Los verbos de afección psíquica

Existen casos dentro de la norma que plantean problemas con respecto a la elección de los pronombres átonos de tercera persona. La cuestión para nuestros estudiantes de E/LE se complica aún más si consideramos que a menudo, la elección entre los pronombres de acusativo y de dativo, depende de otros factores que nos llevan constantemente a recurrir a la semántica, de fundamental importancia para comprender la sintaxis y, en nuestro caso, para determinar las funciones que desempeñan determinados elementos que giran en torno al verbo. Estamos convencidos del hecho de que gran parte del funcionamiento sintáctico puede ser explicado desde una perspectiva semántica. Xavier Frías Conde (2001), en un estudio sobre la semántica de la oración del español, ilustra la teoría del lingüista francés L. Tesnière, que parte del hecho de que “el verbo es el núcleo sobre el que giran todos los elementos de la oración. Por tanto, dentro de un esquema jerárquico, él es el elemento fundamental y que servirá de columna vertebral al resto de la oración”.

Los verbos de afección psíquica provocan, como afirma Gómez Torrego, vacilación “a la hora de elegir la forma pronominal adecuada de c. directo o

c. indirecto” (1993: 78) El *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas*³, por lo que se refiere al correcto empleo de los pronombres átonos, precisa que con los verbos psicológicos o de afección psíquica como *afectar, asustar, asombrar, divertir, impresionar, molestar, ofender, perjudicar, preocupar, enfurecer, detestar, temer, desagradar, aburrir, gustar, repugnar, irritar*, etc., se utilizan los pronombres de complemento directo cuando el sujeto se concibe como agente y se interpreta como aquella entidad animada que actúa de manera que el objeto resulte afectado por el proceso psicológico expresado por el verbo:

Estructuras agentivas

-A mi madre LA asusto cuando me lanzo en paracaídas

Véase otras cláusulas agentivas: *Tranquilité a mis padres cuando me llamaron*→ *LOS tranquilicé cuando me llamaron*; *Cuando la película de terror terminó, asustó a sus amigos*→ *Cuando la película de terror terminó, LOS asustó*; *Juan asombró a sus amigos cuando, contra lo esperado, llegó tan pronto a la cita*→ *Juan LOS asombró cuando, contra*

³ «leísmo», en *Diccionario Panhispánico de dudas* [en línea]. Disponible en Web: <http://buscon.rae.es/dpdI/>[Consulta: 22 de noviembre de 2011].

lo esperado, llegó tan pronto a la cita; María preocupó a su hermana cuando recibió la mala noticia→ María LA preocupó cuando recibió la mala noticia; Los estudiantes molestaron al profesor→ Los estudiantes lo molestaron.

Los verbos de afección psíquica no admiten siempre una interpretación agentiva del sujeto. La elección del clítico de dativo o de acusativo depende de la capacidad (mayor o menor) del sujeto para actuar de manera que el objeto resulte afectado por el proceso psicológico indicado por el verbo. Cuando el uso de los pronombres de acusativo no se admite, mucho depende del sujeto que no actúa ni de forma voluntaria y deliberada para que la reacción psíquica se desencadene. La elección del clítico está vinculada con el mayor o menor grado de voluntariedad con la que actúa la entidad animada:

-Su hermano, cuando abrió la puerta, LO asustó (deliberadamente, voluntariamente)

-Su hermano, escondido detrás la puerta, LE asustó (involuntariamente)

-Los profesores más severos inquietan a los estudiantes→ Los profesores más severos LOS inquietan (deliberadamente, voluntariamente)

-Los profesores más severos inquietan a los estudiantes→ Los profesores más severos LES inquietan (involuntariamente)

Cuando el sujeto no se concibe como agente directo de la acción, por resultar inanimado, el complemento se considera indirecto y se usan los pronombres de dativo:

-A mi madre LE asustan los deportes extremos

Puesto en pasiva queda más claro:

*-*Mi madre es asustada por los deportes extremos*

Por lo tanto, cuando el sujeto es inanimado o es una oración, el objeto en lugar de pronominalizarse en acusativo, se pronominaliza en dativo. El sujeto que aparece pospuesto, además de presentar un experimentador como complemento (semánticamente la persona que resulta beneficiada o perjudicada por la acción), no admite una interpretación agentiva y se interpreta como mera causa del proceso desencadenante o del estado expresado por el predicado. El complemento indirecto, por otro lado, no designa al destinatario de la acción, sino al que la experimenta. La acción

del verbo es el centro de todo el proceso, como ya hemos indicado, y es la que da papel a los actantes⁴ y a los circunstantes.

Para Cano Aguilar (1981: 66) o De Miguel (1992: 49), el sujeto de verbos como *atemorizar*, *enfurecer*, etc., puede interpretarse como una ‘causa’: una entidad, animada o inanimada, que, de manera no voluntaria, no controlada, desencadena el proceso psicológico designado por el verbo (Martínez Linares, M. A 1998: 120)

Estructuras no agentivas

- A Juan LE asombra el corte de pelo de María
- A Juan LE inquieta tu forma de hablar
- A María LE enfurece el recuerdo de tus palabras
- A mis niños LES atemoriza la oscuridad de la noche
- A mis padres LES preocupa mi actitud
- A mi hermana LE molestan los mosquitos
- A los dictadores LES irrita la libertad de prensa
- A las personas mayores LES deprimen los días de Navidad
- A las mujeres LES aburren los partidos de fútbol

⁴ Siguiendo a Xavier Frías Conde (2001: 5) “los actantes son elementos obligatorios, exigidos por el verbo, mientras que los circunstantes son elementos innecesarios, añadidos de la oración que amplían su significado, de los cuales se puede prescindir sin dañar el significado de la oración”.

-A María LE tranquilizó la llegada de su marido

-A Carlos LE asusta la hipoteca de la casa

-A María LE gustan las películas de amor

-A mis amigas LES encanta comer bocadillos y otras cosas ricas

-A mucha gente LE desagrada el olor del ajo

Si la razón del uso del pronombre de objeto directo o indirecto se debe en parte a los factores ya elencados, el *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas* nos informa de que

Con sujetos no animados influyen también otros factores; por ejemplo, cuando el sujeto va antepuesto, es más frecuente el uso del pronombre de complemento directo (*Mi actitud LO decepcionó*), mientras que, cuando el sujeto va pospuesto y el experimentante ocupa la posición inicial, es más frecuente el uso del pronombre de complemento indirecto (*Nunca LE decepciona mi actitud*)

Con estos verbos existe, por tanto, una mayor tendencia al leísmo cuando un sujeto inanimado aparece detrás del verbo:

-El corte de pelo de María LO asombra [a Juan]

-Tu forma de hablar LO inquieta [a Juan]

- El recuerdo de tus palabras LA enfurece* [a María]
- La oscuridad de la noche LOS atemoriza* [a mis niños]
- Mi actitud LOS preocupa* [a mis padres]
- Los mosquitos LA molestan* [a mi hermana]
- La libertad de prensa LOS irrita* [a los dictadores]
- Los días de Navidad LOS deprimen* [a las personas mayores]
- Los partidos de fútbol LAS aburren* [a las mujeres]
- La llegada de su marido LA tranquilizó* [a María]
- La hipoteca de la casa LO asusta* [a Carlos]

Como afirma Inés Fernández-Ordóñez (1999) en un estudio sobre el leísmo, laísmo y loísmo

Sin embargo, la selección de caso depende de la interpretación que el hablante quiera otorgar a la oración. Si el sujeto animado no se concibe como agente, el dativo es posible (cf. 5a-a'), y si un sujeto inanimado u oracional puede concebirse como "causa" del proceso que afecta al experimentante, podemos encontrar el acusativo (5b-b'): a. *Su secretaria lo molestó con continuas interrupciones.* a'. *Su secretaria le molesta con su nuevo peinado.* b. *El tráfico / Que vengas la irrita.* b'. *A María le irrita el tráfico / que vengas*

Vázquez Rozas (1995), por su parte, afirma que la fluctuación del pronombre depende de factores variables relacionados no solo con la animación del sujeto (sujeto como agente o sujeto como causa), sino con el aspecto más o menos estativo o perfectivo de la cláusula. En ocasiones, el dativo se relaciona con el imperfectivo y el acusativo con el aspecto perfectivo:

-Que no se hubieran hecho daño, LOS tranquilizó

-A los padres LES tranquiliza que no se hayan hecho daño

-El hecho de que no comiera, LA asustó

-LE asusta el hecho de que no comas

-Al decirle todas aquellas mentiras LA decepcionó

-A Pedro nunca LE decepcionan tus mentiras/sus amigos

*-LA sorprendió cuando de forma inesperada su ex marido decidió
prestarle ayuda*

-A Pedro LE sorprende que hayas llegado puntual

Con algunos verbos de afección psíquica como *encantar, molestar, disgustar, preocupar, gustar, desagradar, agradar, interesar*, etc., se usa el pronombre de CI. El uso del pronombre de dativo se emplea más frecuentemente por admitir, además de una interpretación no agentiva del sujeto que suele aparecer pospuesto al verbo, una interpretación más estativa que perfectiva de la oración:

-A María *LA/LE gustan las películas de amor

-A María *LA/LE molesta el tráfico

-A María *LA/LE gusta su vecino

-A mis amigas *LAS/LES encanta comer bocadillos y otras cosas ricas

-A la abuela *LA/LE preocupan sus nietos

-A María *LA/LE interesa la política

2.2 Leísmo. Los verbos de influencia y de percepción

El *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas*⁵ nos informa de que la vacilación del clítico de dativo o de acusativo es un fenómeno que se comprueba con algunos verbos de influencia, como *prohibir, autorizar, ordenar, permitir, exhortar, proponer, impedir, mandar*, etc. Con los verbos que siguen la estructura verbo de influencia + complemento de persona + verbo

⁵ «leísmo», en *Diccionario Panhispánico de dudas* [en línea].

subordinado, en infinitivo o precedido de *que*, o un nombre de acción, se utilizan los pronombres de dativo:

-LE pedí que me ayudara a limpiar la casa

-LE permitió irse de viaje con sus amigos

-LE propusieron irse a trabajar a Inglaterra

-LES ordenó que no contaran a nadie lo que habían oído

Con otro tipo de verbos, pertenecientes a la misma clase, que se caracterizan por estar acompañados de un complemento preposicional (*obligar A, invitar A, convencer DE, incitar A, animar A, forzar A, autorizar A*, etc.), se emplean los pronombres de acusativo:

-LOS invitó a entrar en política

-LO animó a irse de viaje

-LAS obligó a mentir

-LA autorizaron a salir del país

Si bien con algunos verbos como *obligar, autorizar* o *animar* se preserva el uso del dativo,

mandar está eliminando el dativo a favor del acusativo cuando el infinitivo dependiente es intransitivo (9a'). *Después de cenar, los mandaron irse a la cama*. Este cambio de régimen de *mandar* se explica como una asimilación de su comportamiento sintáctico al de los verbos causativos en sentido estricto: *hacer* y *dejar* (Inés Fernández-Ordóñez, 1999)

Con el significado de ‘obligar’ y ‘permitir’ los verbos causativos *hacer* y *dejar*, siguen la misma estructura que los verbos de influencia (verbo causativo + complemento de persona + verbo subordinado). La elección del clítico depende, en este caso, del verbo subordinado. Si éste es intransitivo se emplean los pronombres de acusativo, de lo contrario, si el verbo es transitivo los de dativo:

-LE hizo tomar una manzanilla para el insomnio

-No LE dejaron abrir las cortinas porque los cristales estaban sucios

-LA dejó salir un rato de clase

-LO hizo subir a su habitación para contarle la verdad

-No LOS dejó subir al tren porque no tenían billete

Algo semejante parece ocurrir con los verbos de percepción *ver* y *oír*. Seguidos de un complemento de persona y una oración de infinitivo, el complemento de persona es directo:

-LA vimos bajarse del autobús

-Cuando LO oyó gritar, le preguntó si le había pasado algo

Sin embargo, no es raro que para hacer referencia al complemento de persona se empleen los pronombres de dativo, en lugar de los de acusativo, si el verbo subordinado es transitivo y va acompañado, a su vez, de un complemento directo:

-LES oí decir muchas tonterías

-LE vi tomar una cerveza

No obstante,

el acusativo no es imposible en el segundo caso (Cano, 1981: 352-354), y es más, parece ser hoy la solución generalizada en la mayor parte de los territorios distinguidores: al menos en Aragón, La Mancha, Andalucía, Canarias, América central, Perú, Chile y Argentina (Uruburu, 1993: 150; García, 1975: 295-301) (12b'). a. *A María la vi / oí cantar*. b. *A María le vi / oí cantar unas seguidillas*.

b'. *A María la vi / oí cantar unas seguidillas* (Inés Fernández-Ordóñez, 1999)

2.3 El leísmo de cortesía como norma de uso

Analicemos, a continuación, algunas oraciones cuyo complemento de persona si bien puede ser sustituido por los pronombres átonos *la/lo/las/los* que desempeñan la función de complemento directo, el uso de los pronombres átonos de CI *le, les* no se considera incorrecto. El empleo de los pronombres de CI en lugar de los pronombres de CD está aceptado por la Academia, como norma de uso, en tratamientos de cortesía cuando se refiere a usted/ustedes (y no cuando se refiere a *él/ella/ellos/ellas*):

-LE informo [a usted] que sus datos se tratarán con la máxima confidencialidad

-¿LE ayudo [a usted] a subir las escaleras?

-¿En qué puedo atenderLE [a usted]?

-Sin otro cometido que añadir, LES saludamos atentamente [a ustedes]

-LE informo [a usted] que el error ha sido subsanado y corregido en nuestros servidores informáticos

-Como trabajador de esta empresa, LE invitamos [a usted] formalmente al evento

-¡*LES felicitamos* [a ustedes] y *les deseamos* [a ustedes] *lo mejor!*

-*LES obligamos* [a ustedes] *a tomar decisiones apresuradas*

3. Verbos cuyo complemento de persona podría interpretarse bien como OD bien como OI

Las dudas que nuestros estudiantes tienen sobre el empleo correcto de los pronombres átonos, según la función que éstos desempeñen dentro de la oración, algunas veces dependen de ciertos verbos cuyo complemento de persona podría interpretarse bien como objeto directo bien como objeto indirecto. “En general, se trata de verbos transitivos cuyo régimen habitual en español medieval era el dativo y que, bien desde antiguo, bien desde época más reciente, están convirtiéndolo en el acusativo” (Inés Fernández-Ordóñez, 1999). *Ayudar, avisar, llamar, enseñar, obedecer, amenazar y temer* son algunos de los más notables. En el *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas* se indica que *ayudar*

cuando significa ‘ofrecer ayuda a alguien’, se ha generalizado su uso como transitivo en gran parte del dominio hispanohablante [...] En ciertas zonas no leístas, sin embargo, se mantiene su uso como intransitivo, conservando el dativo con que se construía en latín (lat.

adiutare): «*Su hijo Leoncio LE ayuda [a ella] a vivir*» (*Hoy* [El Salv.] 30.1.97)⁶.

Veamos, a continuación, algunos ejemplos sacados del *Corpus de referencia del español actual* (CREA)⁷ que, por lo general, contiene una amplia variedad de textos escritos y orales, producidos en todos los países de habla hispana y procedentes tanto de libros como de periódicos y revistas, y respecto a la lengua hablada de la radio y de la televisión:

-“Cuando me dijo que quería ser torero me dolió”, dijo Parejo. “Cabía la posibilidad de que no valiera. Pero luego me demostró que tenía cualidades y le ayudé” (*Diario El País*, S.A., Madrid, 1985)

-Entonces yo le ayudé a establecer esta política económica, que yo considero al cien por ciento acertada (*El Mundo*, 24/09/1994: Entrevista a Javier Pérez de Cuéllar)

⁶ «ayudar», en el *Diccionario Panhispánico de dudas* [en línea]. Disponible en Web: <http://buscon.rae.es/dpdI/>

⁷ Real Academia Española: Banco de datos (CREA). *Corpus de referencia del español actual* [en línea]. Disponible en Web: <http://www.rae.es> [Consulta 22 de diciembre de 2011]

-Yo le ayudé a organizar una fiesta en la embajada de España, a la que asistieron el general y Evita (*Cambio 16*, nº 996, 24/12/1990: Miguel De Molina)

-Llevaba poco tiempo en París, estaba soltero y yo le ayudé a conectar con alguna gente. Siempre me quedó muy agradecido (Cebrián, Juan Luis, *La rusa*, Círculo de Lectores, Barcelona, 1986)

-Tomé la decisión inmediatamente: abrí la puerta y la ayudé a entrar (Pardo de Santayana, José Ignacio, *El beso del chimpancé. Divertidas e insólitas historias de la vida cotidiana en un zoo*, Aguilar, Madrid, 2001)

-Años después me confesaron que los ayudé sin saberlo (Llongueras, Lluís, *Llongueras tal cual. Anécdotas y recuerdos de una vida*, Planeta, S.A., Barcelona, 2001)

-Lo ayudé a vestirse y salimos los dos al patio a jugar, simulando alegría e intentando escudriñar qué pasaba en la habitación de arriba con la persiana echada (Llongueras, Lluís, *Llongueras tal cual. Anécdotas y recuerdos de una vida*, Planeta, S.A., Barcelona, 2001)

-Sin musitar palabra alguna, lo ayudé a salir del coche (Llongueras, Lluís, *Llongueras tal cual. Anécdotas y recuerdos de una vida*, Planeta, S.A., Barcelona, 2001)

Respecto al verbo «avisar» en el *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas* se señala que con el sentido de ‘avisar a alguien de algo’

el contenido del aviso se expresa mediante un complemento introducido por la preposición *de*: *Avisaron al embajador DE la llegada del presidente*. Si este complemento es una oración subordinada introducida por la conjunción *que*, es correcto el empleo conjunto de la preposición y la conjunción: *Avisaron al embajador DE QUE el presidente había llegado*. El complemento de persona es, en esta construcción, el complemento directo, pues funciona como sujeto de la pasiva: *El embajador fue avisado DE la llegada del presidente*. Por ello, cuando este complemento es un pronombre átono de tercera persona, deben emplearse las formas *lo(s)*, *la(s)*⁸

Asimismo, nos informa de que con el sentido de ‘avisar algo a alguien’

el contenido del aviso se expresa mediante un complemento directo y el complemento de persona es indirecto: «¿Quién LE avisó mi

⁸ «avisar», en el *Diccionario Panhispánico de dudas* [en línea]. Disponible en Web: <http://buscon.rae.es/dpdI/>

llegada?» (Melgares *Anselmo* [Esp. 1985]). Este régimen es el habitual cuando el aviso se expresa a través de una oración subordinada encabezada por la conjunción *que* o un pronombre, y especialmente cuando la intención es admonitoria o amenazante: «*Cierta mañana de calor terrible LE avisaron QUE lo habían ascendido a mayor*» (Martínez Perón [Arg. 1989]); *Te aviso QUE me estoy cansando de tus impertinencias; Se LO avisó.*»

Veamos, a continuación, algunos ejemplos tomados del *Corpus de referencia del español actual*:

-Una doncella la avisó de que la llamaban por teléfono (Grandes, Almudena, *Los aires difíciles*, Tusquets, Barcelona, 2002)

-Al inspector Ferreiro lo conoce algo mejor: fue él quien lo avisó de que el administrador de las tierras de Sabucedo andaba en malos pasos (Casares, Carlos, *Dios sentado en un sillón azul*, Alfaguara, Madrid, 1996)

-“El coche era bonito, pero no para tanto”, decía, hablando de su pasado, Fabián. Nada más recuperarlo, la dueña de la pensión le avisó de que se lo estaba llevando la grúa. Un desastre. (Gala, Antonio, *Los invitados al jardín*, Planeta, Barcelona, 2002)

-Regresó al hotel y cuando el reloj le avisó de que eran las cinco menos cuarto y tras una vacilación en el hall de recepción, decidió subir a su habitación (Vázquez Montalbán, Manuel, *Galíndez*, Seix Barral, Barcelona, 1993)

Entre otros verbos cuyo complemento de persona podría interpretarse bien como OD bien como OI encontramos los verbos *obedecer* y *llamar*. El uso habitual de los pronombres átonos de complemento indirecto y de complemento directo en las siguientes oraciones podría dar lugar en nuestros estudiantes de E/LE a dudas sobre el uso más correcto: *Cuando su mujer le ordenó que se fuera, él la obedeció*; *Cuando el padre le ordenó a Jesús que se quedara en casa, él le obedeció sin quejarse*; *Cada vez que la llamo por teléfono, le digo que la quiero*; *Le llamaron para comunicarle su despido*.

Estos verbos se caracterizan por el cambio de régimen que están sufriendo, si en el español medieval se construían con pronombres de dativo, hoy están pasando a construirse frecuentemente con pronombres de acusativo. Según la información extraída en el *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas* el verbo *obedecer*, en su uso, aparece hoy normalmente como transitivo con el sentido de ‘cumplir o llevar a cabo lo que dicta [una orden,

norma o impulso] o lo que manda [una persona]: «*Pero todos LO obedecen a usted*» (Leñero *Martirio* [Méx. 1981]); «*Alfonso LA obedeció en el acto*» (V. Llosa *Elogio* [Perú 1988]); «*Empezaron por dormírsele las piernas. No LA obedecían, no tenían fuerza*» (Boullosa *Duerme* [Méx. 1994]). Es igualmente habitual y correcto el uso de *le, les*): «*Los gatos LE obedecían [a ella] y se quedaban dormidos esperándola*» (*Época* [Chile] 22.7.96); «*Los dos monstruos [...] obedecían a Dindi ciegamente, pero solo LE obedecían a él*» (Mujica *Escarabajo* [Arg. 1982]).⁹

Respecto al verbo *llamar* su uso aparece en el diccionario como transitivo cuando adquiere el significado de ‘dar voces o nombrar a alguien para atraer su atención’ («*Fue el propio Ambrosio quien LO llamó desde la puerta*», C. Bonald *Noche* [Esp. 1981]) o cuando significa ‘establecer comunicación telefónica [con alguien]’ («*No hace mucho LO llamó por teléfono un tipo de voz imperiosa*», Galeano *Días* [Ur. 1978]). Si lo más habitual y aconsejable es interpretar como el complemento que expresa al destinatario de la llamada como directo y usar, por tanto, las formas *lo, la, los, las* por lo que respecta a los pronombres átonos de tercera persona, no faltan numerosos ejemplos de uso intransitivo, procedentes incluso de

⁹«obedecer», en *Diccionario Panhispánico de dudas* [en línea]. Disponible en Web: <http://buscon.rae.es/dpdI/>

zonas no leístas: «*Marcel LE llamó por teléfono para decirle que Ana estaba muy mal*» (Aguilera Caricia [Méx. 1983]).¹⁰

El verbo *enseñar* con el significado de ‘hacer que alguien aprenda algo’ es transitivo por llevar como complemento directo lo que se aprende o se enseña. Aunque el complemento directo no esté presente, el complemento de persona sigue siendo indirecto:

-En el colegio a los niños les enseñan la importancia de compartir todo

-En el colegio a los niños les enseñan mucho

Con *enseñar a* + infinitivo el complemento de persona puede, sin dejar de ser su uso válido, pronominalizarse en acusativo:

-En el colegio a los niños los enseñan a compartirlo todo

Con el verbo *temer*, con el significado de ‘temer a algo o a alguien’, su objeto, incluso cuando es inanimado, puede pronominalizarse en dativo (uso extendido en el español de América):

¹⁰«llamar», en *Diccionario Panhispánico de dudas* [en línea]. Disponible en Web: <http://buscon.rae.es/dpdI/>

-Juan teme a los terremotos porque cuando era niño destruyeron su casa→ Juan les/los teme

-Juan teme a las personas violentas→ Juan les/las teme

Cuando el verbo *amenazar* significa ‘dar a entender que se quiere hacer algún daño o mal a otra persona’, la persona amenazada puede pronominalizarse, pero ocasionalmente, en dativo. Se prefiere el uso de los pronombres de acusativo:

-La amenzaron con quitarle el hijo de dos años

-Lo amenzaron de muerte con una pistola

4. Verbos sin la interposición del complemento directo y verbos cuyo complemento directo puede estar omitido

El complemento indirecto puede aparecer con dos tipos de verbos distintos, los verbos transitivos y los verbos intransitivos que no poseen un complemento directo. Dicho de otra forma, hay dos clases de complemento indirecto: el que complementa al verbo a través de un complemento directo y el que lo complementa sin la interposición del complemento directo siguiendo el esquema biactancial intransitivo. Gutiérrez Ordóñez (1999) en

un estudio sobre los dativos, presenta una lista de algunos verbos que siguen este tipo de esquema (de incumbencia: *incumbir, atañer, competer, convenir, tocar, corresponder, esperar*; de adecuación: *bastar, sobrar*; de moción física y de cambio: *llegar, ir(se), subir, venir, caer, volver, escaparse, nacer, morir*; de acontecimiento: *ocurrir, sobrevenir, suceder, acontecer, presentarse*; de afección síquica: *admirar, alegrar, satisfacer, encantar, interesar, divertir, preocupar, urgir, convencer, impresionar, ofender, molestar, servir, etc.*). Veamos algunos ejemplos:

-*A ellos esa cuestión no les atañe*

-*A ella no le competía dar la información solicitada*

-*A Juan le espera un viaje largo*

-*Le bastó una mirada para darse cuenta de lo que sentía*

-*No les llegaron los medicamentos a los que tenían derecho*

-*No le escapó una palabra*

-*Se le escapó una carcajada en un momento serio*

-*A Juan se le murió el perro*

-*Les sobrevinieron problemas con su salud*

-*Se le presentó un problema grave*

-*Al entrenador le disgustó la conducta de su jugadores*

-*Este lápiz le pertenece a Juan*

Algunos gramáticos, acerca de la posibilidad que tiene el complemento indirecto de aparecer tanto en estructuras transitivas como intransitivas, no llegan a una solución común. P. P. Devís Márquez en un estudio sobre el objeto indirecto destaca que la mayoría de los autores que han tratado el tema pertenecen a dos grupos bien diferenciados:

aquéllos que han aludido a la posibilidad que tiene el complemento indirecto de aparecer tanto en estructuras transitivas como en intransitivas y aquellos que han advertido la necesidad de un complemento directo para la aparición de uno indirecto, negando así la posibilidad de que éste se encuentre en estructuras oracionales intransitivas (1995-1996: 273-274)

Asimismo, advierte de que existen casos de gramáticos, como por ejemplo S. Gili Gaya, que muestran cierta ambigüedad acerca de este tema. Si éste último por un lado afirma que

el complemento indirecto se llama indirecto porque no recibe la sola acción significada por el verbo, sino la que expresa la unidad de éste con su primer complemento (establece que el complemento indirecto es directo con relación al conjunto “verbo+complemento directo”, pero indirecto con respecto al solo verbo), por otro dice que con verbos intransitivos puede haber un solo complemento de

persona, animal o cosa, a quien se refiere la acción, en concepto general de daño o provecho, y, por consiguiente, más próximo al dativo que al acusativo (*La función gustaba a todos*) (1995-1996: 274)

Con algunos verbos como *pagar, aplaudir, robar, silbar, aconsejar*, etc., la presencia del pronombre átono de dativo hace únicamente referencia al objeto indirecto. Esto suele ocurrir cuando el directo se sobreentiende o resulta inanimado:

-*Cuando el conferenciante terminó [su discurso] le aplaudieron/le silbaron*

-*Cuando mi madre llegó a la estación le robaron [el bolso, el monedero]*

-*Hace dos días le pagué [el alquiler] al dueño*

-*Cuando vi que se encontraba mal, le aconsejé que se fuera al hospital*

Otras veces el uso del dativo se justifica en el hecho de que con algunos verbos como *tocar, fotografiar, ver, agarrar, besar, mirar, golpear, herir, arañar*, etc., el objeto pertenece a la entidad expresada por el objeto indirecto. Cuando no es directamente la persona, sino una parte del cuerpo (o alguna cosa que posee) de quien recibe la acción expresada por el verbo, se suelen emplear los pronombres átonos de complemento indirecto:

-Quizás tenga fiebre. Tócalo/la (lo/la→ a él/a ella)

-Quizás tenga fiebre. Tócale la frente (le→ la frente)

-Lo/La fotografié (a él/a ella) mientras practicaba surf

-Le fotografié la cara mientras practicaba surf

-Lo/La (a él/a ella) toqué con cariño

-Le toqué la mano con cariño

-Lo/La vi (a él/a ella) al salir de la peluquería

-Le vi la cabeza al salir de la peluquería

-Lo/La agarré (a él/a ella) al sentir que se iba a caer

-Le agarré la camiseta al sentir que se iba a caer

-Lo/La besé (a él/a ella)

-Le besé la boca

-Lo/La miré

-Le mire los ojos

-Lo/La golpeé hace dos días y todavía le duele

-Le golpeé la cabeza hace dos días y todavía le duele

-Lo/La herí sin darme cuenta

-Le herí la mano sin darme cuenta

-Lo/La arañaron y la/lo mordieron para robarle el bolso

-Le arañaron y mordieron la mano para robarle el bolso

-El tiburón lo/la mordió

-El tiburón le mordió la pierna

-Lo/La quemó con el mechero

-Le quemó el dedo con el mechero

Sin embargo, no siempre es así. Con algunos verbos transitivos el uso de los pronombres átonos de complemento indirecto resultaría agramatical:

-Lo/La odio (a él/a ella)

*-*Le odio su cara*

-Lo/La adoro (a él/a ella)

*-*Le adoro su camiseta*

5. Otras cuestiones: las oraciones impersonales con *se*

Las dudas sobre si es más correcto el uso de los pronombres átonos de dativo o de acusativo para referirse al complemento directo en oraciones impersonales con *se*, es otra de las cuestiones que acarrea en nuestros estudiantes de E/LE no pocas dificultades. Como se señala en el *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas* («leísmo»), originariamente, en las oraciones impersonales con *se* la función de complemento directo la desempeñaban los pronombres de dativo. Este uso sigue manteniéndose (*le, les*), tanto en España como en gran parte de América, cuando el complemento es masculino. Sin embargo, si el complemento directo es femenino se emplean más frecuentemente los pronombres de acusativo *la* y *las*:

-A Pedro Almodóvar se le considera como el mejor director de cine español

-A Isadora Duncan, iniciadora de la danza moderna, se la considera la mejor bailarina de ballet del mundo

-A los fumadores se les prohíbe fumar en lugares públicos cerrados

-A los niños se les quiere mucho

*-A las mujeres musulmanas se las obliga a usar el burka para ocultar su
belleza*

-No se encontraba bien. Se la veía cansada

-A mi abuela se la ha respetado siempre

Tal vez hayamos pasado por alto algunas cuestiones relativas al uso de los pronombres de objeto directo e indirecto de tercera persona en español que, quizás, deberíamos haber tratado para una visión más amplia y exhaustiva del tema, pero creemos que un trabajo de este tipo podría ser aprovechado por los profesores de E/LE para dar a conocer y abordar las problemáticas que frecuentemente este tipo de estudio conlleva en nuestros estudiantes de E/LE. A pesar de que la bibliografía sobre el argumento es extensa, creemos que, debido a un uso a menudo incoherente de los pronombres, simplificar el problema en exceso sería un error. La realización de este trabajo no quiere ofrecer una solución de carácter significativo a eventuales ambigüedades y vacilaciones sobre el tema, pues los usos que contravienen a la norma nos hacen pensar que no hay usos sistemáticos al respecto, sino estimular en los estudiantes la reflexión y acostumbrarlos, a partir de las teorías de ilustres lingüistas, a prestar

atención a la semántica, de fundamental importancia para comprender la sintaxis y determinar las funciones que desempeñan determinados elementos que giran en torno al verbo. “La *asistematicidad* hemos de suponer que no es aleatoria, indiscriminada, y para tratar de determinar tendencias y establecer leyes sobre el uso, habrá que contar con un amplio muestrario de datos sobre la realidad lingüística, tal y como de hecho se da. Solo entonces se podrá acometer una profunda – y a nuestro juicio necesaria – revisión del problema” (José Ramón Heredia, 1994: 50)

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René Corona

MARE NOSTRUM OU LE POÈME DE LA MER

«Homme libre, toujours tu chériras la mer!»

Baudelaire (*Les Fleurs du mal*)

1. Il y a plusieurs façons de lire un poème, à voix basse¹, bien sûr, ou mentalement² mais souvent nous risquons de nous égarer dans la lecture en suivant distraitemment d'autres pensées car les mots appellent les mots, ceux du quotidien ou ceux de l'aventure, qui peut vraiment le dire? Le quotidien n'est-il pas chaque jour une sorte d'aventure? Toutefois, un mot derrière l'autre et nous sommes prêts à repartir en voyage; l'esprit humain pourtant si attentif devant un poste de télévision devient distrait dès lors qu'on lui place sous les yeux des lignes à lire, surtout aujourd'hui où la pratique de la lecture a tendance à se perdre dans nos maisons médiatisées. D'une certaine façon, lire un poème à voix haute risque également de nous égarer, mais d'une autre manière. Il y a plusieurs chemins à prendre quand on s'éloigne de la réalité. Cependant, la poésie a quelque chose de magique, elle nous reconduit toujours au point de départ et en

¹ C'est ce qu'on appelle la *ruminatio*. La lecture murmurée devient un outil mnémonique.

² On parle également de lecture *in silentio* ou de lecture silencieuse. Saint Augustin raconte que Saint Ambroise lisait de cette façon «et aliter numquam» et jamais différemment: «Sed cum legebat, oculi ducebantur per paginas et cor intellectum rimabatur, vox autem et lingua quiescebant [...]»; «Quando leggeva, l'occhio correva lungo le pagine e l'intelletto ne scrutava il significato, voce e lingua stavano in riposo. [...] e lo vedevamo sempre leggere a quel modo silenzioso, mai altrimenti [...]»; *Le Confessioni*, VI 3,3 (trad. di Carlo Vitali), Milano, Fabbri editori, 1996, p. 166.

revenant – l'éternel retour de notre condition humaine ou celui du mythe ? – notre bagage est plus lourd, beaucoup plus riche. Il est vrai que saint Augustin raconte qu'Ambroise lisait silencieusement et que, pendant ce temps-là, la voix et la langue reposaient, mais cette fois-ci nous lirons à voix haute car pour mieux nous imprégner du poème, il faut aussi s'écouter.

Au début donc il y a le Poème:

MARSEILLE

*Marseille sortie de la mer, avec ses poissons de roche, ses coquillages et l'iode,
Et ses mâts en pleine ville qui disputent les passants,
Ses tramways avec leurs pattes de crustacés sont luisants d'eau marine,
Les beaux rendez-vous de vivants qui lèvent le bras comme pour se partager le ciel,
Et les cafés enfantent sur le trottoir hommes et femmes de maintenant avec leurs yeux de phosphore,
Leurs verres, leurs tasses, leurs seaux à glace et leurs alcools,
Et cela fait un bruit de pieds et de chaises frétilantes.
Ici le soleil pense tout haut, c'est une grande lumière qui se mêle à la conversation,
Et réjouit la gorge des femmes comme celle des torrents dans la montagne,
Il prend les nouveaux venus à partie, les bouscule un peu dans la rue,
Et les pousse sans un mot du côté des jolies filles.
Et la lune est un singe échappé au baluchon d'un marin
Qui vous regarde à travers les barreaux légers de la nuit.
Marseille, écoute-moi, je t'en prie, sois attentive,
Je voudrais te prendre dans un coin, te parler avec douceur,
Reste donc un peu tranquille que nous nous regardions un peu
O toi toujours en partance
Et qui ne peux t'en aller,
A cause de toutes ces ancres qui te mordillent sous la mer.³ (1927)*

³ Jules Supervielle, *Débarcadères* suivi de *Gravitations*, Paris, Poésie/ Gallimard, 1966, pp. 56-57.

MARSIGLIA

Marsiglia uscita dal mare, con i suoi pesci di roccia, le sue conchiglie, e lo iodio
E i suoi alberi di nave nel cuore della città che rimproverano i passanti,
I suoi tram con le loro zampe da crostacei sono lucenti di acqua marina,
I begli appuntamenti dei vivi che alzano le braccia come per dividersi il cielo,
E i caffè figliano sul marciapiede donne e uomini di oggi dagli occhi
fosforescenti,
I loro bicchieri, le loro tazze, secchielli del ghiaccio e alcool,
E tutto ciò fa un rumore di piedi e di sedie guizzanti.
Qui il sole pensa a voce alta, è una grande luce che si mescola alle conversazioni
E rallegra la gola delle donne come quella dei torrenti nella montagna
se la prende con i nuovi arrivati lì, a spintoni li guida nella via
spingendoli senza dir nulla verso le belle ragazze
E la luna è una scimmia scappata dalla sacca di un marinaio
Che guarda tutti attraverso le sbarre leggere della notte.
Marsiglia ascoltami sii un po' più attenta, te ne prego,
vorrei prenderti in un cantuccio parlarti dolcemente
stai un po' tranquilla che ci possiamo guardare
tu sempre in partenza
e che non riesci ad andare via
a causa di tutte queste ancore che ti mordicchiano sotto il mare.⁴

Le poème est lu. A haute voix. Deux ou trois fois, cela paraît nécessaire pour mieux le saisir. Ou est-ce plutôt lui qui nous saisit? Henri Meschonnic souligne l'importance du rythme, porteur de sens: «Dans le discours, il y a toute cette rythmique et cette prosodie qu'en tant que matière du sens j'appelle la *signifiance*.»⁵. Le poème est un long discours – une parole – ininterrompu.

⁴ Notre traduction.

⁵ Henri Meschonnic, *La rime et la vie*, Lagrasse, Verdier, 2006, coll. «Folio» Gallimard, p. 58.

Le poème est lu et traduit. En fait, on ne traduit jamais un poème, on cherche à le traduire⁶. On peut le traduire – ou le détruire – (et ces mots ne font que bruire comme la plume sur la page hésitante) car l'on ne sait jamais si le résultat sera un bon résultat ou, comme disait Voltaire, ne sera que la pâle copie de l'estampe.

Et ce vers merveilleux qui revient incessant dans la mémoire traductrice:

«Qui il sole pensa a voce alta, è una grande luce che si mescola alle conversazioni».

Le traducteur n'expliquera pas pourquoi il a mis un pluriel à la place du singulier de l'original. Il y a des choses que l'on ne peut pas expliquer, elle vont de soi.

Jules Supervielle est le poète des «amis inconnus», de «la fable du monde», le poète de ceux que l'homme a tendance à ne pas écouter, les plantes, les minéraux, les animaux, les ports. Ses poèmes sont donc généreusement offerts comme haut-parleurs à ceux qui ne peuvent parler. Poète medium, en un certain sens, mais surtout attentif, capable de saisir parmi le «bruit des bottes»⁷ des hommes les voix que le vent transporte, il nous raconte des fables, il nous enchante par ses vers.

⁶ Nous renvoyons encore à Meschonnic: «Selon l'idée qu'il a du rythme, la traduction sera différente. J'inclus dans le rythme l'organisation de ce qu'on appelle les sonorités, qui sont la matière du sens.»; *ibid.*, p. 26.

⁷ Cf. «(...) Alors pourquoi ces bûcherons qui s'en viennent au pas cadencé ? (...)»; *Docilité* in *La Fable du monde*, Paris, Gallimard, 1938, coll. «Poésie», 1987, pp. 129-130.

Après on se retrouve dans une sorte d'invitation au voyage...

Dans le très beau livre de l'écrivain triestin Daniele Del Giudice un des personnages explique à un autre ce que voyager signifie pour lui:

«Se metto una mano nell'acqua... lei si immagina? Qualcosa che comincia qui e finisce al Cairo, o a Tripoli, o a Tangeri, dove potrebbe esserci qualcun altro sulla riva, anche lui con le mani in acqua... Sì, credo che sia questo il mio modo di viaggiare...»⁸

Nous pourrions donc imaginer que ce poème que Supervielle, fils d'émigrés lui aussi en quelque sorte (de Montevideo, Uruguay, à Paris, France), a dédié à la ville des Phocéens, s'intitule non pas Marseille, mais Messine, Palerme, Naples, Venise, Gênes, Tunis, Trieste, Le Pirée, Grado, Beyrouth et mettre dans chacune de ces villes un poète, Bartolo Cattafi⁹, Vincenzo Consolo¹⁰, Gesualdo Bufalino¹¹, Alfonso Gatto¹², Francesco Biamonti¹³, Eugenio Montale¹⁴, Lorand

⁸ Daniele Del Giudice, *Lo stadio di Wimbledon*, Torino, Einaudi, 1983, p. 75.

⁹ «Ma navi rumoreggiano col vento / stormiscono coi platani coi panni dei cortili, / navi che ci riportano nell'alto / mare da dove uscimmo, dove / un palmo d'azzurro costa parecchio / ed è tutto malcerto, anche l'azzurro.»; Bartolo Cattafi, *In Altomare*, in *L'osso, l'anima*, Milano, Mondadori, 1964, p. 20.

¹⁰ «[...] Ma vivo nei ricordi. E vivo finché ho negli occhi nella beata contemplazione dello Stretto, di questo breve mare, di questo oceano grande come la vita, come l'esistenza.» Vincenzo Consolo, *Vedute dello Stretto di Messina*, in *Di qua dal faro*, Milano, Mondadori, 1999, p. 91.

¹¹ «Come un bambino battuto rimango / a parlare col mare.»; *Ballo a Cava d'Aliga*, in *L'amaro miele*, Torino, Einaudi, 1982, p. 103.

¹² «Ora mi vedo in alta strada e ascolto / il mio silenzio nella solitaria / morte del mare.»; Alfonso Gatto, *Poesie 1929-1941*, in *Tutte le poesie*, Milano, Mondadori, 2005, p. 51.

Gaspar¹⁵, Umberto Saba¹⁶, Georges Sèféris¹⁷, Biagio Marin¹⁸, Georges Schehadé¹⁹ ou beaucoup plus simplement des gens comme vous et moi. Ports et poètes, toutes personnes et tous lieux confondus.

Chacun sous la même lumière, le même soleil, le même éblouissement au cœur même d'une conversation qui raconte d'un retour, le *nostos* d'Ulysse, l'éternel retour à la mer. Nostalgie et plénitude.

Le poète et la mer. Car c'est bien de rythme qu'il s'agit. Le ressac, irrépréhensible battement de cœur du poème: «Périodicité, alternance, le rythme

¹³ «Se ne andò che il mare era tutto un deposito di sole sotto celesti campiture. Era cominciata la brezza della sera e il mandorlo stormiva.»; Francesco Biamonti, *Attesa sul mare*, Torino, Einaudi, 1994, p. 52.

¹⁴ «Una carezza disfiore / la linea del mare e la scompiglia / un attimo, soffio lieve che vi s'infrange e ancora / il cammino ripiglia [...]»; Eugenio Montale, *Ossi di seppia*, in *Tutte le poesie*, Milano, Mondadori, "I meridiani", 1984, p. 73.

¹⁵ «Matin dans le duvet de la mer: ferments gris de couleurs. / Tes yeux fouillent et se perdent dans les creux.»; Lorand Gaspar, *Le repas des oiseaux* in *Egée*, Paris, Gallimard, 1980, p. 54.

¹⁶ «Penso un mare lontano, un porto, ascose / vie di quel porto; quale un giorno v'ero, / e qui oggi sono [...]»; Umberto Saba, *Mediterranea*, in *Tutte le poesie*, Milano, Mondadori "I Meridiani", 1988, p. 541.

¹⁷ «Et pourtant la vague était douce / où enfant je plongeais et nageais / et même plus tard quand jeune homme / je cherchais des formes parmi les cailloux, / essayant des rythmes, / le vieux de la mer m'a parlé: "Ton pays c'est moi"; / peut-être ne suis-je personne / mais je peux devenir ce que tu veux.»; Georges Sèféris, «*Sur scène*», in *Poèmes 1933-1955*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966, p. 175.

¹⁸ «El vento za se placa / e la risaca / ariva in saca / ma lenta e straca.» [Il vento già si placa, / e la risacca / arriva in sacca / ma lenta e stanca.]; Biagio Marin, *I Canti dell'isola*, in *Poesie*, Milano, Garzanti, 1981, p. 226.

¹⁹ «Sur cette plage abandonnée / Elle ne venait que pour s'en aller / Comme les vagues de la mer (...).»; Georges Schehadé, *Les Poésies*, Paris, Gallimard, 1985, p. 140.

tend à la régularité, à la cadence.»²⁰, écrivent Dessons et Meschonnic; Paul Claudel parle de vers iambique «universellement employé dans le théâtre ancien et dont l'élément unique (couple d'une brève et d'une longue) est la traduction la plus simple de cette pulsation qui ne cesse de compter le temps dans notre poitrine.»²¹. Une mer étale qui ne serait que l'écho de la plénitude de la vie, le ressac comme les battements du cœur.

En français, *mer* est l'homonyme de *mère* et la Méditerranée est donc une mer/mère. En italien, la mer est masculine, *il mare*, mais tous les chemins nous conduisent à la Poésie, ainsi pour obtenir le féminin, *la madre*, il suffirait d'ajouter un *d* mais nous pouvons utiliser le dialecte vénitien où la mère se dit *la mare*²². Son homographe français, la mare, nous rappelle une eau enfermée, comme dans un port, comme dans une baie, qui limite mais simultanément laisse voir, donne à voir, ouvre l'horizon. C'est aussi celle de Rimbaud et de son *Bateau Ivre*, «la flache /Noire et froide»²³, où l'enfant fait tournoyer son bateau «comme un papillon de mai.»²⁴. Et donc, une simple consonne, une occlusive

²⁰ Henri Meschonnic, Gérard Dessons, *Traité du rythme. Des vers et des proses*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2005, p. 50.

²¹ Paul Claudel, *Réflexions sur la poésie*, Paris, Gallimard, 1963, coll. «Folio», p. 14.

²² «Oh mare, oh mare / dopo una vita intiera / adesso che fa sera / tu turni in t'el gno cuor» [Oh madre, oh madre / dopo una vita intera/ adesso che fa sera / tu torni nel mio cuore], Biagio Marin, *cit.*, p. 51.

²³ Arthur Rimbaud, *Le bateau ivre*, in *Œuvres poétiques*, Garnier-Flammarion, 1964, p. 91.

²⁴ *Id.*

sonore, un *d* comme départ ou *dipartita*. Après un départ, il y a toujours une arrivée. Après un aller, il y a un retour. Une (re)naissance.

2. Il y a plusieurs façons de regarder la mer; par exemple, d'un bateau qui s'éloigne, conduisant le voyageur vers l'inconnu voire l'inattendu. Les émigrés du film «Méditerranée pour toujours»²⁵ de l'Italo-Québécois Nicola Zavaglia, sorti sur les écrans en 2000, ont peut-être vécu cet instant-là, eux qui ont dû quitter leur terre, l'Italie, pour aller travailler au Québec et qui ont conservé malgré tout le souvenir de leurs traditions comme ce figuier qu'ils mettent sous la terre, à chaque hiver, avant que la neige ne tombe et qui refleurit, miracle de la nature, au printemps suivant. On peut donc regarder la mer à l'aide d'une caméra (regard dans le regard, un peu comme dans le tableau qui met en scène le couple Arnolfini²⁶, une mise en abyme de la mer) comme l'a fait admirablement le metteur en scène Zavaglia qui, d'un témoignage d'émigrés italiens à l'autre, ne cesse de montrer des images de l'eau. L'eau de la Méditerranée, l'eau de la mémoire, leitmotiv musical, ressac de la mémoire, comme «la mer, la mer,

²⁵ «Mediterraneo sempre-Méditerranée pour toujours», film canadien sorti en 2000; le réalisateur est Nicola Zavaglia, les directeurs de la photographie Philippe Lavalette et Martin Leclerc, la musique est d'Angelo Finaldi. Cf. également: Maria Gabriella Adamo, «Méditerranée pour toujours» (Nicola Zavaglia 2000): *l'espace des origines, l'altérité, la langue migrante*, in *Langues-cultures méditerranéennes en contact* (sous la direction de Yannick Preumont et Régine Laugier), Roma, Aracne, 2007, pp. 181-195.

²⁶ Le tableau de Jan van Eyck (1434) se trouve à la National Gallery de Londres.

toujours recommencée !»²⁷ de Paul Valéry, celle que l'on ne peut oublier, celle de nos jeux d'enfants, celle de nos premières émotions, la mer tranquille, la mer violente de nos premiers romans d'aventures lus, la mer magique et mythique de Stefano d'Arrigo²⁸ avec ses monstres marins et ses magiciennes. La mer. *La grande madre*. Le mythe raconte que la Terre, Gaia, fut recouverte par le ciel, Ouranos et la fit prisonnière («Et Terre l'immense / en ses entrailles gémissait, / resserrée. [...]»)²⁹ et que son fils Cronos, le Temps dévoreur, fut celui qui émascula, à l'aide d'une faucille, le père afin que le jour puisse prendre sa place dans l'univers. Les organes génitaux furent jetés dans la mer et des gouttes de sang naquirent les Erinyes, les Furies. De l'écume naquit Aphrodite, la beauté, déesse de l'amour. Les Erinyes, hélas, sont omniprésentes et c'est alors une mer qui ne permet pas à ceux qui fuient la faim, la guerre, la misère, de trouver un havre de paix. C'est une mer qui devient épouvantable et ne pardonne pas, se transformant en un cimetière immense sans tombes. C'est un voyage de femmes

²⁷ Paul Valéry, *Le cimetière marin*, in *Poésies*, Paris, Gallimard, 1929, 1958, coll. «Poésie», 1966, p. 100.

²⁸ Et son incipit merveilleux: «Il sole tramontò quattro volte sul suo viaggio e alla fine del quarto giorno, che era il quattro di ottobre del millenovecentoquarantatre, il marinaio, nocchiero semplice della fu regia marina 'Ndrja Cambria arrivò al paese delle Femmine, sui mari dello scill'e cariddi.»; Stefano d'Arrigo, *Horcynus Orca*, Milano, Mondadori, 1975.

²⁹ Hésiode, *Théogonie*, Paris, Gallimard, 2001, p. 42.

et d'hommes à la recherche d'une vie meilleure, sans retour dans cette «Grande mer de délires douée [...] Hydre absolue (...)»³⁰.

Lucrèce, lui aimait regarder la mer déchaînée du rivage ainsi qu'il la décrit dans ses vers magnifiques où il oppose deux mondes, celui de la paix et celui de la tempête:

«Suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis,
e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem
non qui velari quemquamst iucunda voluptas,
sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suave est.»³¹

Mais différemment du poète, nous autres, hommes modernes, devant cet immense carnage nous ne pouvons que baisser la tête et pleurer. Aucun soulagement ne nous est permis. Aucune résignation, mais un juste dégoût pour certaines lois et attitudes. *Boat people* ou *barconi*, l'histoire se répète inlassablement.

3. Il y a également la mer de tous les jours, celle que vivent quotidiennement les habitants des ports et des côtes qui la longent. C'est la mer de Supervielle où malgré l'apparente tranquillité scandée par le rythme des jours, c'est une mer

³⁰ Valéry, *cit.*, p. 105.

³¹ «Dolce è mirar dalla riva, quando sconvolgono i venti / l'ampia distesa del mare, l'altrui gravoso travaglio, / non perché rechi piacere che uno si trovi a soffrire, / ma perché scorgere i mali di cui siam liberi è dolce.» Lucrezio, *De rerum natura*, Libro secondo (trad. di Balilla Pinchetti), Milano, Rizzoli, 1976, p. 112.

beaucoup plus complexe parce qu'elle nous échappe, s'égarant dans les ruelles criardes et ensoleillées du port, dans la lumière du jour, dans les voix et les bruits du quotidien. C'est la poésie du quotidien qui nous touche en même temps que la lumière frappe nos regards émerveillés. La ville de la mer, en l'occurrence Marseille, devient une personne. Le poète cherche à saisir ses secrets mais celle-ci lui échappe, «toujours en partance», grimaçante et moqueuse comme la lune-singe de la nuit-prison. La nuit où les choses se métamorphosent, où souvent l'on part pour affronter le voyage, réel ou onirique, la nuit qui transforme tout. Il faut attendre la lumière du jour, la *phos* des Grecs dont John Fowles disait qu'elle était «beauté et vérité»³².

Alors les conversations reprennent, les tramways recommencent leurs trajets incessants, les cafés se remplissent, les bateaux attendent que l'on lève l'ancre, la vie, à son tour, s'échappe, jour après jour vers de nouveaux horizons.

On voit parfois dans les ports du sud, les ports de la Méditerranée, de vieux bateaux échoués là, comme par hasard, mal repeints, aux noms étranges, aux sonorités bizarres qui nous font penser aux pays nordiques, à quelque Thulé du nord enfouie dans les brumes; des cargos où, à bien y regarder, on pourrait croiser Maqroll, le gabier d'Álvaro Mutis³³, ou quelqu'un qui lui ressemblerait

³² John Fowles, *Il mago* (trad. di Gioia Zannino Angiolillo), Milano, Rizzoli, 1968, p. 681.

³³ «Los buques han necesitado siempre de un celador. Cuando se quedan solos, cuando los abandona desde el capitán hasta su último fogonero y los turistas desembarcan para dar una vuelta y desentumecer las piernas, en tales ocasiones necesitan de una persona que

comme deux gouttes d'eau ou rencontrer d'autres aventuriers de la poésie. Même les bateaux, après quelques ultimes voyages, semblent vouloir terminer leur existence au soleil, un peu comme les vieux Anglais d'autrefois qui s'exilaient sur la Côte d'Azur.

La Méditerranée est notre mer à nous tous, celle de l'éternel *nostos*, on y revient toujours puisque c'est d'ici que tout a commencé et puisque la nostalgie est une déchirure. Comme de nombreux départs et de nouvelles arrivées, même le film de Nicola Zavaglia se termine sur le mot renaissance; cela peut vouloir dire l'espérance pour ces émigrés – ceux du film et ceux des jours, ceux de toujours – de revoir un jour leur terre natale ou peut-être renaître dans une nouvelle vie, acceptés avec leur passé et leurs traditions par cette nouvelle patrie, comme naturellement tout étranger devrait l'être. Mais après tout, cela signifie simplement faire naître, à nouveau, dans leur existence présente un peu de ce passé, un peu de cette lumière méditerranéenne.

Le poème de Supervielle nous parle d'une ville-femme qui voudrait partir mais qui est ancrée à jamais dans notre mémoire, et cette ville comme ses sœurs sur les mêmes rives qui sont, pour paraphraser les vers verlainiens chaque fois, ni tout à fait les mêmes ni tout à fait autres, c'est la Ville méditerranéenne comme une femme qui se laisse bercer par les vagues de l'existence, une femme

permanezca en ellos [...]»; Álvaro Mutis, *Gli elementi del disastro*, (a cura di Martha L. Canfield), Firenze, Le Lettere, 1997, p. 38.

avec ses joies et ses tristesses, conservant en soi avec une pudeur indicible, les «voix chères qui se sont tues»³⁴, dans un va-et-vient ininterrompu le long d'un môle, ultime territoire avant de s'engouffrer dans les eaux miroitantes du devenir et de l'infini du passé, une mélodie, une sorte de barcarolle fredonnée en suivant le tempo éternel du ressac sur la grève.

4. Quand on lit un poème c'est bien de l'émotion qu'il s'agit. C'est pour cela que traduire devient une chose compliquée car il faut restituer non seulement les outils du poème (les rimes, la rhétorique, le rythme, la grammaire) mais aussi le cœur. Nous pouvons faire un rapprochement avec ces immigrants qui viennent chercher du travail, métaphoriser de nouveau à l'aide du poème ou plus probablement – l'air du temps oblige - utiliser un oxymore, le travail de traduction du poème – le poème même – est main d'œuvre et âme (*manodopera e anima*) comme ces femmes et ces hommes traversant les frontières. Ce seront alors les travaux et les jours et la plupart du temps ingrats, en échange, ils nous offrent l'âme de leur pays, ce que nous ne connaissons pas, nous leur offrons la nôtre (la leur offrons-nous vraiment ?). C'est dans l'échange permanent que l'homme s'enrichit. L'échange, c'est la voix du poème. Un *do ut des* privé de son aspect purement utilitaire, l'émotion d'un monde à découvrir. C'est le verbe *réfléchir* qui donne la note musicale de l'accord. De même que *hôte* signifie

³⁴ Paul Verlaine, *Mon rêve familial* in *Poèmes saturniens*, Livre de poche, 1961, p. 43.

recevoir dans les deux sens³⁵. Comme le rappelle Fabio Scotto dans son essai sur le fragment:

La sensibilità romantica è indubbiamente amante del molteplice e dell'ibridazione culturale che apre la cultura nazionale allo straniero/estraneo al fine di arricchirsi della sua alterità attraverso il meticcio e di quella che Hölderlin chiama la confusione delle lingue, termine che include la «con-fusione», la «fusione con», ovvero l'incontro e la dialettica culturale foriera d'innovazione e modernità.³⁶

car si la poésie a, depuis toujours, une écoute plus substantielle envers l'Autre, il faut que la vie de tous les jours soit empreinte de ce sentiment pour y puiser le respect, la dignité nécessaires à l'existence de tous. Toutes races confondues.

Ces voyageurs nés de l'émigration et de la condition humaine, d'une géographie politique bizarrement hasardée et tracée, l'étranger *homo viator* d'aujourd'hui, nous apportent comme le poème une connaissance que nous avons oubliée: on ne naît pas immigré. C'est le hasard qui fait que l'on naît dans un lieu ou dans l'autre. Ce ne sont pas les cartes d'identité ni les tampons des douaniers aux frontières.

Auparavant, il s'agissait du poème de Jules Supervielle.

Puis apparemment il s'agirait d'un autre voyage:

³⁵ «Il y a aussi, avant de comprendre, appréhender. Et il est remarquable qu'appréhender ait deux sens, en apparence sans rapport entre eux, l'un c'est approcher et commencer à connaître, et l'autre c'est avoir peur, redouter justement ce qui approche, ou dont on s'approche. C'est justement qu'il y a un rapport très fort entre ces deux acceptions de ce même mot». Henri Meschonnic, *Le masque, parabole du visage*, Paris, «Europe», n° 995, mars 2012, p. 38.

³⁶ Fabio Scotto, *La voce spezzata. Il frammento poetico nella modernità francese*, Roma, Donzelli, 2012, p. 18.

Nous sommes dans la direction de la pluie
Froid est le soleil
des façades
aux murs redressés d'ombre

Nos mains toujours peuvent crier
il n'y a plus d'eau fraîche
dans la chambre d'écho
Il coule de la nuit des échardes de peur
La mort passe à reculons
salissant ce qu'il reste d'été [...] ³⁷

Nous interprétons. Les poètes nous le permettent. Il s'agit probablement d'un autre voyage, la souffrance est pourtant bien présente dans ces deux «traversées»³⁸, parfois la mort, mais le titre du poème de Vera Feyder est au pluriel et le voyage de l'espoir pourrait s'y insérer. C'est cela qui fait la richesse de la poésie, ses voix multiples qui s'enchevêtrent dans le parcours des existences et de l'ailleurs, poème de Vera Feyder, poème de Jules Supervielle, au service d'une même idée qui n'en est pas vraiment une puisque la poésie se

³⁷ Vera Feyder, «Voyages», *Le temps démun*, in *Contre toute absence (Poèmes 1960-2003)*, Châtelineau, Le Taillis Pré, 2006, p. 63. [«Siamo nella direzione della pioggia / Freddo è il sole/ delle facciate delle case / con i muri rialzati d'ombra // Possono sempre gridare le nostre mani / non c'è più acqua fresca / nella camera d'eco / dalla notte scorrono schegge di paura / La morte passa a ritroso/ sporcando ciò che rimane d'estate...»] (notre traduction).

³⁸ Ce n'est pas seulement le voyage qui peut avoir une note commune, à savoir la souffrance, mais la fin du voyage a aussi quelque ressemblance, dans le sens où, à la fin, c'est le camp qui attend les déportés et les immigrés. Pour les déportés des bourreaux totalitaires le camp signifie dans la plupart des cas un non retour, – et c'est ce qui arrivera au père de Vera Feyder –, pour les immigrés de ces dernières années le camp est un non lieu qui, devrait être provisoire, mais qui dure parfois très longtemps et qui, en fait se referme sur le futur de ces hommes et de ces femmes, car le plus souvent il signifie un retour inexorable à la misère et à la guerre.

fait avec des mots et non pas avec des idées, comme nous le rappelle Mallarmé³⁹. Les mots sont là, précis, dans leur justesse poétique. Que savons-nous de cette justesse ? Peu. Dans ce siècle de plus en plus superficiel où les vitrines formelles sont le mètre de mesure d'un savoir qui s'égaille au son d'*ok* performants et où l'à-peu-près domine dans tous les domaines désormais moléculaires où chacun s'écoute parler, il est nécessaire que le poème soit présent, qu'à chaque action quotidienne il faut que nous y ajoutons un peu plus de poésie puisque c'est l'émotion qui nous guide et c'est l'émotion qui nous rend plus supportable la froideur des temps.

L'émotion n'a pas de bornes, elle mélange tous les genres, elle se mêle à toutes les choses, même celles qui ne la regardent pas, elle est universelle, pas de races, pas de frontières, un même éblouissement. C'est l'émotion qui fait vivre les hommes et les hommes, la plupart du temps, ne s'en rendent pas compte ou souvent l'oublie. Un poème, un film, une œuvre d'art, un visage peut-être et la vie recommence empreinte de lumière. Cette lumière que chante Supervielle et qui représente le cœur même de nos paysages. Le renouveau de nos paysages.

³⁹ Ou plutôt il le rappelle à Degas qui lui demandait pourquoi il n'arrivait pas à écrire des poèmes puisqu'il avait des tas d'idées...

5. Dans *Le cimetière marin* de Valéry, l'immobilité de «midi le juste» soulève chez le poète des questions sans réponses. Le souvenir de cette mer «peau de panthère et chlamyde trouée / de mille et mille idoles du soleil» ne cesse de tourmenter poétiquement le poète. Le terme *idole* doit être pris dans son étymologie grecque, c'est-à-dire, *eidôlon*, dérivé de *eidos*, forme, et par extension image, simulacre, les *eidola* sont les fantômes⁴⁰. Et c'est bien cela que nous ressentons chaque fois que notre regard, notre mémoire, nos pensées nous poussent vers l'immensité de cette mer, de ce *mare nostrum* où passé glorieux et inquiétant présent s'alternent indéfiniment; nous voyons des images de vie, de mort, des images de l'immobile et du mouvement («entre le vide et l'évènement pur»⁴¹), nos propres battements de cœur, le biorythme de nos existences, «sources du poème»⁴², «naissance du vent»⁴³, notre «frêle mouvoir»⁴⁴, cette condition humaine indissolublement liée au Poème de notre mer/mère.

⁴⁰ «On retrouve dans le grec *eidôlon*, la racine **wid* (latin *video*) qui signifie «ce que l'on voit» et qui caractérise le monde des vivants: l'Hadès est (du moins dans l'étymologie populaire, *a-* privatif et *idein* «voir») le lieu où l'on ne voit pas, et c'est pourquoi ce n'est pas aux enfers, mais sur terre, qu'apparaissent les fantômes (*eidôla*) dans l'épopée homérique [...]»; *Dictionnaire culturel en langue française* (sous la direction d'Alain Rey et Danièle Morvan), Paris, Le Robert, 2005, p. 1799.

⁴¹ Valéry, *cit.*, p. 102.

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 101.

Pour revenir au poème de Supervielle, nous soulignerons la présence réitérée de la conjonction de coordination *et* que le poète de Montevideo utilise d'une façon anaphorique et qui parfois semble gêner les oreilles de ceux qui ne supportent pas cette répétition; c'est en réalité un besoin que le poème remplit admirablement. Ce *et* coordonne des faits et des gestes que la ville de la mer garde en soi. Le poème pourrait se terminer d'un vers à l'autre mais le poète a besoin de dire encore, car la ville de la mer ne s'exprime pas si facilement, il y a chez elle, des recoins du non dit, des ruelles à l'ombre où le soleil ne pénètre pas, il y a aussi des impasses, des visages de la peur, de la faim, des visages de passage. C'est pourquoi Supervielle utilise, admirablement, une figure de rhétorique, cette figure est l'hyperbate.

Il y a deux sortes d'hyperbates, celle liée à la *transmutatio* qui déplace les mots «tra parti vicine (anastrofe) o fra parti che non siano vicine (iperbato)»⁴⁵ et celle qui en rajoute: «Alors qu'une phrase paraît finie, on y ajoute un mot ou un syntagme qui se trouve ainsi fortement mis en évidence»⁴⁶. C'est de la deuxième qu'il s'agit, la moins connue. Celle qui se rapproche également de l'*épiphraise*: «Partie de phrase qui paraît ajoutée spécialement en vue d'indiquer les

⁴⁵ Heinrich Lausberg, *Elementi di retorica*, [*Elemente der literarischen Rhetorik* (1949)], trad. di Lea Ritter Santini], Bologna, Il Mulino, 1969, p. 48.

⁴⁶ Bernard Dupriez, *Gradus. Les procédés littéraires*, Paris, Editions 10-18, 1984, p. 236.

sentiments de l'auteur ou du personnage.»⁴⁷. On pourrait également penser qu'il s'agit d'un hendiadys surtout les vers: «Ici le soleil pense tout haut... et réjouit la gorge...», c'est-à-dire l'union coordonnée de deux éléments disparates («l'espressione di un'accumulazione subordinante per mezzo della forma sintattica dell'accumulazione coordinante (...)»⁴⁸.

Il est évident, hyperbate ou hendiadys, que la répétition de ces conjonctions de coordination n'est pas innocente, nous avons dit trop plein de la ville, nécessité pour le poète de rajouter à chaque vers un élément ultérieur, certainement. Mais plus probablement, quand on imagine un port et l'eau, «Tout entouré de mon regard marin»⁴⁹, quand on écoute attentivement la vie du port et des eaux c'est ce clapotis incessant, ce calme ressac quand le temps est tranquille, cette musicalité infinie qui semble englober à tout jamais la pensée héraclitéenne et le rythme des jours et de notre cœur, notre souffle. C'est cette musique là, à l'apparence monocorde que cette farandole de *et* renouvelés semble vouloir souligner. C'est notre vie qui revient toujours à son point de naissance pour mieux se laisser bercer par la voix du poème.

De Supervielle à Valéry en passant par Vera Feyder, les points de vue poétiques (les lieux d'où le regard se perd à l'horizon) ne sont jamais trop

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁴⁸ Lausberg, *cit.*, p. 164.

⁴⁹ Valéry, *cit.*, p. 101.

divergents, c'est la mémoire et le temps, c'est la vie et la mort dans leur mouvement sempiternel, «ritorno e ritrovamento dunque [...] in base al comune modello di andata-ritorno tipico del modello riflessologico da lui adottato»⁵⁰ écrit Valerio Magrelli à propos de Valéry. C'est également l'image du poète au sein du poème qui s'égare dans le regard questionnant du lecteur. Aussi revenons-nous au verbe *réfléchir*, dans les eaux miroitantes de cette mer, notre mer, où l'image réfléchie de nos existences humaines cherchent à se reconnaître, à regagner l'identité perdue. L'homme moderne retrouve grâce au poème la plénitude du soi, celle de la générosité et de la *pietas*.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Valerio Magrelli, *Vedersi vedersi. Modelli e circuiti visivi nell'opera di Paul Valéry*, Torino, Einaudi, 2002, pp. 168-169.

⁵¹ Une partie de ce texte est la réécriture d'un texte paru dans «Nuova Europa», en décembre 2002.

Mirko Orlando

**FOTOGRAFIA E RICERCA SOCIALE.
LA DIGITALIZZAZIONE DELLE IMMAGINI
TRA APOCALITTICI E INTEGRATI**

Tra i documenti che lo storico, il sociologo o l'antropologo possono utilizzare come fonte delle loro ricerche, un posto privilegiato è occupato certamente dal materiale fotografico. Fin dalla sua nascita, la fotografia si è immediatamente imposta come una tecnologia fondamentale nell'universo della ricerca scientifica e sociale, ed è proprio la sua funzione di sostegno al sapere che è stata prontamente promossa da Arago il giorno della presentazione del brevetto di Daguerre al pubblico parigino¹.

Credo si possa affermare che l'intera struttura sperimentale, così come l'ha elaborata il pensiero occidentale, si possa comprendere mediante le metafore visive che fanno del regime scopico l'ambiente più familiare alla ricerca scientifica. In più occasioni è stato del resto ricordato come l'*histor*, in quanto custode della memoria sociale, derivi il suo nome dalla radice *id*, che rinvia a sua volta al termine vedere, poiché colui che scrive la storia, e la tramanda ai posteri, è legittimato a farlo proprio perché

¹ Per una lettura dell'intervento di F. Arago del 1839, si rimanda all'appendice del testo di D. Mormorio, *Un'altra lontananza: l'Occidente e il rifugio della fotografia*, Sellerio, Palermo 1997.

testimone, perché anzitutto presente con lo sguardo nei luoghi di cui riporta le vicende. Ha ragione Merleau-Ponty quando in *Le visible et l'invisible* scrive:

Se si ricostruisce il modo in cui le nostre esperienze dipendono le une dalle altre secondo il loro senso più proprio, e se, per meglio mettere a nudo i rapporti essenziali di dipendenza, si tenta di romperli in pensiero, ci si accorge che tutto ciò che per noi si chiama pensiero esige quella distanza da sé, quella apertura iniziale che per noi è rappresentata dal campo visivo. [Merleau-Ponty, 1964]

Tuttavia la fiducia nel regime scopico della visione è stata, almeno qui da noi, troppo spesso cieca ai suoi stessi limiti, ed è in ragione di questa cecità che da un lato si è affermato, ad un livello sociale, il mito delle immagini analogiche in grado di simulare la visione dal vero, e dall'altro, ad un livello più ristretto e attento alle esigenze sperimentali, si è creata la sfiducia radicale in qualsiasi tecnologia della simulazione sensoriale, e di lì nell'intero campo dell'empiria. L'immagine fotografica (come perfetta sintesi del desiderio di cogliere la realtà senza deformazioni) è certamente, prima ancora che un documento visivo, un modo di pensare l'intero rapporto con l'*epistème* che la cultura occidentale ha col tempo elaborato, almeno a partire dalla Grecia del V sec. a. C., allorché comincia la storia del nostro realismo iconico. Perciò, se come scrive G. Anders «il mezzo fotografia è di per sé tanto degno di fede, tanto oggettivo, che può assorbire più falsità, può permettersi più bugie di

qualsiasi altro mezzo preesistente» [Anders, 1956], ci sembrano sicuramente eccedenti le parole di R. Namias apparse su «*Progresso fotografico*» nel settembre del 1905, quando annota non privo di un eccessivo entusiasmo:

Se la descrizione scritta può sorprendere per la sua efficacia, nulla può dare il convincimento e una visione per quanto minima dell'avvenimento qualunque esso sia, come una fotografia ben eseguita. È questo un vero documento, al quale quando gli archivi fotografici saranno organizzati, i posteri potranno ricorrere per impararvi non la storia narrata, che si può sempre ritenere in tutto o in parte non vera od esagerata, ma la storia figurata che non mente perché è la luce che l'ha scritta sulla lastra fotografica. [Namias, 1905]

Queste affermazioni si sostengono anzitutto sulle parole di Daguerre, quando nel presentare il suo brevetto dichiarò senza esitazioni:

Il dagherrotipo non è uno strumento che serve semplicemente a disegnare la natura [...], le offre il potere di riprodurre se stessa. [Daguerre, cit. in Krauss, 1990]

In effetti la questione non riguardava l'assimilazione del dispositivo all'occhio umano, o per lo meno non soltanto, perché ciò che davvero li differenziava era l'automaticità meccanica del primo, ed è proprio questa ad aver difeso il mito dell'attendibilità fotografica. Sappiamo tutti che una macchina fotografica mima il processo ottico, non quello visivo – che coinvolge nella determinazione definitiva dell'immagine le correzioni apportate dal cervello –, e che dunque il vedere dell'obbiettivo non è

affatto riconducibile alle logiche della visione dal vero, ma proprio questa distanza, proprio questa estromissione delle facoltà cognitive, permette alla tecnologia fotografica di rendersi più disponibile dell'osservazione diretta all'indagine scientifica. Daguerre la oppone al disegnare la natura, ma noi potremmo opporla al vedere la natura, dal momento che la macchina fotografica non vede affatto, bensì registra, e la differenza è tutt'altro che marginale. Ovviamente non vogliamo semplicemente ricordare che la visione è relativa ad immagini in movimento, quindi declinabili, e che invece i documenti fotografici restano nel tempo, e possono dunque essere archiviati, quanto piuttosto porre l'accento sul carattere misantropico di ogni tecnologia.

Del resto il pensiero scientifico si è da tempo abituato a concepire la presenza umana come fattore intrattabile di cui ci si auspica l'abrogazione, per cui l'armamentario a disposizione della scienza, è sperimentalmente più affidabile quanto più riduca la possibilità dello sperimentatore di influenzarne il funzionamento. Tuttavia, almeno a partire dalle scoperte di W. Heisenberg, è impensabile rimuovere dal discorso teorico l'interazione inalienabile tra osservatore ed oggetto osservato, ragione per cui è sempre più necessaria una riflessione ermeneutica sul paradigma visuale. L'eminente fisico tedesco, premio Nobel nel 1932, scoprì che in linea di principio non è possibile eludere gli

effetti che la stessa osservazione provoca sull'ambiente sperimentale, e anche se le sue analisi scaturiscono dal dominio della meccanica quantistica, ci siamo da tempo abituati a farne patrimonio irrinunciabile delle scienze sociali.

L'immenso patrimonio fotografico di cui disponiamo costituisce pertanto una fonte assai fragile e rischiosa di dati per il ricercatore, ma non per questo marginale nell'ambito di una corretta metodologia progettuale e analitica. Credo che, perché si possa riformulare su basi convincenti una solida riflessione sul carattere ausiliare del mezzo fotografico per le ricerche sociologiche, sia necessario depurare l'orizzonte scopico delle implicazioni positivistiche che lo hanno accompagnato nel secolo scorso, e scremarlo, in egual misura, delle accuse di mendacità di cui in più riprese è stato bersaglio, arginandole a specifiche strategie visuali senza farne bagaglio proprio dell'ontologia del mezzo.

È all'interno di questa cornice che negli ultimi anni si è riaperto, grazie alla venuta della tecnologia digitale, il dibattito sulle ragioni teoriche e tecniche della ricerca visuale in campo sociale, giacché, se la documentazione fotografica si è col tempo dimostrata uno strumento essenziale per la comprensione delle dinamiche sociali, storiche, politiche o antropologiche, i medesimi vantaggi debbono potersi ricavare dalla sua

moderna trasformazione digitale. Ovviamente, parafrasando il titolo di un noto saggio di Umberto Eco del 1964, la critica si è divisa tra *apocalittici* e *integrati* e, per quanto questa opposizione appaia oggi del tutto superata, è ad ogni modo comprensibile, poiché ogni cambiamento tecnologico corrisponde ad una necessaria rivisitazione dell'intero impianto teorico che si è venuto a costruire attorno ad un mezzo e, oltre a ciò, il funzionamento di una tecnologia ausiliaria alla ricerca è parte integrante della validità metodologica di una disciplina.

In proposito sono stati versati fiumi di parole, ma tutto sommato si arriva presto alla conclusione che poco o nulla sembra essere cambiato. Eppure è chiaro che ogni nuovo medium modifica profondamente non soltanto la natura dei media circostanti, o quella del medium che inevitabilmente ha soppiantato, ma anche le modalità interattive che legano l'individuo all'universo mediale. Con tutte le legittime resistenze nei riguardi dell'opera di Marshall McLuhan², non si può non accettare l'idea che i mass media intervengano a modificare il rapporto uomo-mondo ad una profondità tale che entrambi, al seguito dell'introduzione di un medium, non siano più ciò che erano prima. Se si ha dunque l'impressione che il dibattito sia poco dinamico, è perché si è mosso su

² Ci riferiamo in modo particolare ai testi *The Gutenberg Galaxy* e *Understanding Media*.

un terreno assai antico, quando non antiquato. Anzi, proprio perché si è scelto di non attingere dall'antico, si è infine giunti ad essere antiquati, riportando in auge una disputa che altrimenti pareva essersi esaurita. Vera o falsa? Questa è la domanda che si è ripresentata all'orecchio dei critici non appena la tecnologia digitale ha scosso il mondo della fotografia, la stessa identica domanda che ci si è posti fin dall'alba dell'invenzione di Daguerre. La domanda potrebbe esser posta altrimenti: indice o icona? Senza con ciò aggiungere o sottrarre nulla a quanto già detto. Ironicamente l'intera questione, oltre che antiquata, poteva altresì esser morta in partenza, poiché nata nello stesso momento in cui vennero a vacillare gli assiomi su cui voleva poggiarsi. Chiedersi se una fotografia è in grado di ricalcare il mondo con assoluta obbiettività presuppone una prima e originaria fiducia nell'obbiettività stessa, cioè la fede in una concezione dell'esperienza che già sul finire dell'Ottocento era fortemente in crisi. Gli slanci e gli ottimismo caratteristici del Positivismo erano stati frenati già molto prima che gli studiosi di fotografia cominciassero ad interrogarsi con dovuta diligenza sul problema dell'iconicità fotografica o sulla sua natura di indice.

Se il mondo perde la sua obbiettività o, meglio, nasconde all'uomo la possibilità di farsi cogliere come realtà oggettiva, ultima e incontrovertibile, allora l'intera questione dell'iconicità fotografica

diventa ridicola, poiché già il mondo nel suo immediato apparirci è, prima ancora delle sue immagini, un'icona.

Ciononostante la questione non è del tutto marginale, dal momento che da un punto di vista culturale ciò che riveste importanza non è tanto il fatto che si possa essere o meno obbiettivi riguardo un dato fenomeno, ma la credenza nelle proprie argomentazioni che via via, nell'arco della storia culturale di un gruppo, influenza le strategie relazionali tra i singoli e tra i singoli ed i prodotti medialti di cui anche la fotografia fa parte. Infatti, nonostante ciò che chiamiamo realtà sia infine una costruzione del nostro intelletto, e non un oggetto esterno su cui poter semplicemente posare lo sguardo, i nostri atteggiamenti quotidiani continuano ad esprimersi come se questo assunto non sia affatto evidente, e proprio perché di fatto si situa questa omissione tra sé e il proprio atteggiamento, possiamo dire che la realtà ancora esiste, per lo meno in qualche sua parte, nel normale svolgimento della vita. Questa presa di coscienza è tutt'altro che innocua, o priva di implicazioni, poiché traccia la direzione delle nostre argomentazioni. Se infatti la questione non è più relativa al grado di realtà di un dato processo, ma alla sua sedimentazione all'interno delle strategie relazionali di un singolo soggetto o di un gruppo, allora non sarà più l'analisi ontogenetica del segno a darci le risposte che cerchiamo, ma quella filogenetica relativa allo sviluppo

culturale di una certa categoria di segni. Non come si produce un segno, ma come funziona l'immagine che si ottiene, cioè in che modo essa può venir decodificata in un preciso contesto culturale. Ovviamente, perché una cultura elabori strategie analitiche efficienti, è necessaria una prima conoscenza dei processi produttivi che portano il segno a designare qualcosa, ma questa conoscenza non fornisce di per sé una soluzione, quanto semmai un sollecito ad una ricerca che avrà il compito di chiarire, una volta compresi questi meccanismi, la loro influenza sull'attività percettiva.

Per queste ragioni le attente riflessioni di Flusser, Mitchell o Mirzoeff, pur nella loro mirabile acuità, non possono in alcun modo sostenere un valido discorso intorno alla funzione socioculturale della fotografia³. Il rapporto immagine-impronta, trasformatosi nella dicotomia immagine-codifica, è per il ricercatore una riforma trascurabile, giacché la codifica in questione altro non è che la simulazione digitale di una tecnologia dell'impronta. Al contrario di quanto più volte è emerso nei dibattiti incentrati sul problema della digitalizzazione del patrimonio storico e

³ Ci stiamo riferendo all'indagine di autori che individuano nella tecnologia digitale la fine della condizione di base, secondo cui si può propriamente parlare di fotografia, che qualcosa debba trovarsi di fronte all'obiettivo. Secondo queste ricerche, il processo di codifica digitale che trasforma in informazione la carica elettrica del sensore (CMOS, CCD) non può in alcun modo essere affine alla tecnologia dell'impronta diretta su cui si fondava invece la fotografia analogica.

culturale, la riforma digitale (poiché come giustamente chiarisce C. Marra⁴, di riforma si può parlare, piuttosto che di rivoluzione) offre non pochi vantaggi al ricercatore che voglia fondare le sue ricerche sui documenti visivi, se non altro per la maggiore presenza di informazioni utili (quali l'ora, il diaframma utilizzato, il tempo di scatto, il profilo colore, etc.) nei file *raw*, piuttosto che sulle vecchie pellicole di celluloido.

Per quanto riguarda invece la maggior disponibilità delle tecnologie digitali al fotoritocco, e quindi alla costruzione di un falso storico, è evidente quanto questa attitudine sia stata nella storia patrimonio condiviso con la fotografia analogica, nonostante il grado di complessità, debitamente ridotto nel caso della fotografia digitale, contribuisca indubbiamente al rafforzamento di quel regime del sospetto che ormai caratterizza ogni riflessione sui documenti visivi. Sembrerebbe dunque, con le dovute cautele, che l'orizzonte del fotografico sia tutt'altro che in crisi ed anzi abbia finito con l'assolvere, meglio di un tempo, la sua originaria funzione documentale (che nel frattempo, mediante la

⁴ Cfr. C. Marra, *L'immagine infedele*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano 2006.

digitalizzazione delle immagini, si è potuta sviluppare in rete con effetti archivistici non sottovalutabili⁵).

Ciononostante, l'aria che si respira non è la stessa e la fotografia digitale, per quanto abile nel restituire i rapporti omotetici tra realtà e figurazione, è altra cosa rispetto a quella analogica, in modo particolare se a guardarla è l'occhio della sociologia. Le infinite metafore volte a creare un parallelismo inviolabile tra immagine analogica e finestra hanno finito con il farci dimenticare la dimensione oggettuale della fotografia, contribuendo in questo modo alla sua confusa definibilità teorica. In ogni caso, al di là di cosa dia a vedere, «ciò che noi vediamo non è lei» [Barthes, 1980], scriveva Roland Barthes per chiarire la trasparenza del supporto fotografico, perché come del resto uno schermo, una finestra, o uno specchio, anche la fotografia è come se fosse priva di superficie, e pertanto sorda alle riflessioni sulla sua oggettualità. Pur ammettendo le inevitabili anamorfosi, formali o cromatiche, l'esperienza catottrica mi dice che l'icona che io vedo non è un'icona ma un doppio e, come annota Umberto Eco in un suo breve saggio sugli specchi, «questa virtuale duplicazione degli stimoli (che talora funziona come se ci fosse una duplicazione e del mio corpo oggetto, e del mio corpo soggetto che si

⁵ Per un primo approccio alle problematiche archivistiche si rimanda ai capitoli conclusivi del testo di A. Mignemi, *Lo sguardo e l'immagine*, Bollati-Boringhieri, Torino 2003.

sdoppia e che si pone di fronte a se stesso), questo furto di immagine, questa tentazione continua di ritenermi un altro, tutto ciò fa dell'esperienza speculare una esperienza assolutamente singolare, sulla soglia tra percezione e significazione. È proprio da questa esperienza di iconismo assoluto che nasce il sogno di un segno che abbia le stesse caratteristiche» [Eco, 1985].

Le immagini nascono così, per fornire al mondo i suoi doppi, ed è per questa ragione che il primo passo mosso verso il segno è stato speso all'insegna dell'analogia. Tuttavia non si comprende la portata del cambiamento promosso dalla tecnologia digitale, se prima non si prende coscienza della centralità dei supporti nel determinare gli usi e le funzioni delle immagini. Credo infatti che la digitalizzazione delle immagini abbia profondamente mutato il loro ruolo all'interno del panorama culturale, per aver messo in discussione non tanto il loro valore documentale, quanto invece la loro stessa collocazione spaziale, derealizzata irrimediabilmente dall'indefinibilità dei supporti.

Troppo spesso si dimentica l'influenza che la fotografia ha esercitato sull'affermazione dei costumi e dell'intero *ethos* sociale, trascurando in questo modo la sua funzione di *attore sociale* piuttosto che meramente documentale. Come ha diligentemente dimostrato Giovanni Fiorentino⁶,

⁶ Cfr. G. Fiorentino, *L'Ottocento fatto immagine*, Sellerio, Palermo 2007.

l'identità borghese non ci è stata semplicemente tramandata dalla fotografia, ma da essa è stata costruita, provocata, permessa e poi difesa. Gran parte di questa identità si fonda, del resto, sui legami intrafamiliari che il mezzo fotografico ha contribuito a consolidare, fornendo ai singoli un valido sostegno affinché i legami parentali potessero esprimersi con efficacia. Nonostante siano passati molti anni, è nell'ormai celebre analisi di Pierre Bourdieu sulle funzioni sociali di un'arte, quella fotografica, da lui definita *media*, che troviamo gli spunti più interessanti per comprendere da vicino la collocazione del mezzo nel tessuto sociale, perché se, sulla scia di Durkheim, egli scrive, si ammette «che la festa ha la funzione di vivificare e ricreare il gruppo, si comprende bene che la fotografia vi si trovi associata, poiché fornisce il mezzo di solennizzare quei momenti culminanti della vita sociale in cui il gruppo riafferma solennemente la propria unità. [...] Senza dubbio non è casuale che l'ordine secondo cui la fotografia si è introdotta nel rituale delle grandi cerimonie della vita familiare corrisponda all'importanza sociale delle cerimonie stesse» [Bourdieu, 1965]. E ancora, troppo spesso ci si dimentica che la possibilità di sostenere i legami interpersonali, come appunto edificare l'etica familiare, riguarda non soltanto la fotografia come tecnologia della rappresentazione, ma in modo particolare la

fotografia come supporto tangibile tramite cui convogliare gli affetti. Per comprendere questo aspetto del fotografico è pertanto necessario definire una sorta di archeologia del mezzo che sia capace, attraverso una disamina del suo processo evolutivo, di far emergere la funzione antropopoietica che da sempre ha svolto.

Eppure si è soliti pensare all'invenzione della fotografia come alla nascita di un nuovo strumento di rappresentazione capace di attivare nuove e mai sperimentate relazioni tra l'uomo e l'immagine, sopravvalutando così la dimensione tecnologica rispetto a quella estetica. Procedendo a ritroso, secondo questa linea analitica, gli storici incontrano gli studi sull'ottica, la camera oscura e le molte sperimentazioni alchemiche sui minerali e più nello specifico sui materiali fotosensibili. Nondimeno, senza il bisogno di elencarli, possiamo ammettere che tutto ciò ancora non ha nulla a che vedere con la fotografia vera e propria. La camera oscura è nata per poter osservare le eclissi solari in sicurezza, e gli studi sui materiali fotosensibili, molto spesso, sono stati effettuati per avvalorare la logica dell'*opus* alchemico. Non è un caso che la storia del fissaggio, cioè dei metodi per fermare il processo di ossidazione dei materiali affinché l'immagine risultante possa essere visionata alla luce, proponga momenti molto poco pregnanti e tutti di poco precedenti l'effettiva nascita della fotografia. Per molto tempo non c'è stato affatto

bisogno di sognare la fotografia perché la si vedeva realizzata in altre forme, con altre tecniche, comunque capaci di restituirci il suo incanto. È infatti scorretto pensare al realismo come al suo carattere fondante ignorandone la dimensione metonimica dovuta alla sua più o meno evidente automaticità. Fotografia non vuol dire ricalcare con precisione la natura, ma fornirle un nuovo corpo, inscrivere in una sua parte, produrre un materiale entro cui essa possa nuovamente incarnarsi per eludere l'azione annichilente del tempo. Una sola immagine analogica sfocata è molto più convincente di mille dipinti dettagliati e perfetti, poiché ad essere pertinente, perché il segno venga scambiato per la sua matrice, non è la dimensione retinica della visione, ma quella contestuale relativa alla compresenza equivalente tra oggetto e immagine. Nella sua *Antropologia delle immagini* H. Belting ha, a più riprese, spiegato quanto la fotografia non possa essere intesa come semplice rappresentazione, per quanto minuziosa ed esatta, ma come un'effigie, un simulacro, un corpo vicario in cui il rappresentato possa nuovamente e continuamente ripresentarsi. Se hanno effetto questi corpi iconici, e se mediante una tecnologia li si potesse animare, allora la vita potrebbe davvero essere doppiata, ed è questo il sogno inconfessato del cinema, il suo segreto, l'ambizione ben colta da Casares in *L'invenzione di Morel*, dove nelle immagini

analogiche, libere di muoversi, ogni uomo trova la sua agognata immortalità.

Come immagine, anche la fotografia è traccia di qualcosa che è altrove, cioè presenta e rende disponibile al soggetto qualcosa che altrimenti non potrebbe esperire, così che anch'essa cede l'assente, lo doppia, ma lo cede in quanto assente, perché se essa c'è è proprio perché il suo modello è indisponibile. «Solamente l'uomo è fotografo. Poiché solamente chi passa, e lo sa, vuole restare» [Debray, 1992], scrive Debray, sottolineando con chiarezza il ruolo assunto dalla deperibilità del corpo nella produzione dell'immagine. Il corpo c'è perché indiscriminabile dal suo non esserci, perché c'è in quanto presente e contemporaneamente assente, cioè o come in immagine, o come in se stesso. Ovviamente la distanza del corpo da sé traccia una traiettoria percorribile soltanto attraverso la materia (che definisce lo spazio pregnante), per cui per comprendere l'immagine occorre partire dall'assenza dei corpi che con essa si elude e dalla presenza di un supporto fisico in cui i soggetti si ritrovino. Ovviamente, il corpo assente è anzitutto il corpo dei defunti, il cadavere che in ogni epoca è stato sottratto alla vista dei suoi cari perché non ne sperimentassero l'orribile metamorfosi biologica, che come ha giustamente sottolineato Remotti, non è una questione meramente biologica, perché essa «viene vissuta dalla società come un sacrilegio,

come un attentato, perché distrugge l'essere umano che essa stessa, mettendo in gioco le proprie energie, aveva costruito e costituito, e su cui aveva impresso il proprio marchio, il proprio modello di umanità» [Remotti, 2006]⁷.

Il corpo assente del defunto, al posto del quale vengono esibite le immagini, è dunque il luogo in cui nasce l'esigenza figurale, il bacino originario di ogni riflessione sul segno. Ma le immagini hanno a loro volta bisogno di un corpo, debbono cioè incarnarsi, e da questo punto di vista il corpo assente del defunto trova il suo sostituto nel corpo iconico del segno.

Così concepisce l'immagine il mondo egizio, che nel culto delle mummie realizza i corpi iconici per servire i defunti, così anche la Grecia antica, i cui *kolossoi*, o la poesia arcaica, come chiarisce J. P. Vernant, non funzionano come una «semplice copia, un ricalco o un analogon» ma come materia «dotata di efficacia» che offre agli spettatori «l'impressione che, attraverso le espressioni evocanti un definito genere di potenza, questa forza particolare si trovi a essere effettivamente mobilizzata, che essa si dispieghi, attraverso la performance del testo

⁷ Sul rapporto tra fotografia e tanatologia, nonostante l'indubbia pertinenza, non ci soffermeremo in quanto tema già da noi ampiamente trattato in altra sede. Per chi volesse approfondire si rimanda a *Ripartire dagli addii: uno studio sulla fotografia post mortem*, edito da Mjm, o, per un approccio sintetico, a *La fotografia post mortem*, in "Storia e futuro n°24".

poetico» [Vernant, 1990] o del segno visivo. Se però ad un primo stadio i segni, suoni, tracce o figure, condividevano tra loro il dominio magico dell'incarnazione simbolica del proprio referente, successivamente l'affermarsi del regime scopico, nella cultura occidentale, li ha liberati dalla loro omogeneità, e a seguito di questa frattura – già aperta dalla riflessione platonica sull'universo sensibile –, il realismo di cui si carica anche il segno fotografico non rappresenta una scelta estetica, ma un risultato essenziale e automatico dello scambiarsi dei corpi, cioè del loro migrare dalla materia-naturale, alla materia-iconica. La vittoria scopica su altri territori semantici ha ragioni profonde e complesse, che travalicano gli obbiettivi di questo intervento, se non altro perché l'intera vicenda occidentale potrebbe facilmente essere raccontata mediante l'analisi evolutiva delle ragioni del vedere e del loro rapporto con il mondo fenomenico. Ciononostante, per quel che concerne la nostra analisi, ci è sufficiente chiarire quanto il supporto fisico, in cui l'immagine trova la sua forma, sia straordinariamente pregnante, perché è nel supporto che l'immagine si sedimenta ed è sul supporto che le relazioni affettive si direzionano. L'album di famiglia, come cimelio in cui la continuità generazionale trovava la propria collocazione, dunque la propria legittimità, è un oggetto raro che deve essere ben custodito, prezioso e pertanto fragile, cioè qualcosa di cui è necessario aver cura. È questa cura

che permette agli affetti di durare, ossia ad un'identità, quella familiare, di costruirsi la propria mitologia (necessaria perché da semplice affezione, o atteggiamento, diventi un profilo sociale), ed è questa cura che presuppone, inevitabilmente, l'esistenza di un supporto, di un corpo vicario in cui il soggetto possa reincarnarsi. Questo corpo, in cui l'immagine perdura, libera il soggetto dal potere annichilente del tempo, ma allo stesso tempo è un corpo che può nuovamente essere distrutto, e la sua distruttibilità è parte integrante del suo successo sostitutivo, perché il sostituto funziona quando mantiene i tratti di una fondamentale deperibilità, non più legata alle logiche del tempo naturale, ma a quelle della cura interpersonale che così vede coronata la propria responsabilità.

La venuta della tecnologia digitale, per via della sua stessa logica produttiva, ha contribuito in maniera sostanziale al declino dei supporti – poiché migrare da un supporto ad un altro significa negare la natura stessa di ogni possibile superficie –, lasciando l'immagine in qualche modo disincarnata. Una vecchia fotografia, magari anche stampata male, non si limitava a documentare un evento, ma serviva a favorire, coronandoli, i legami interpersonali, aiutava cioè un sentimento a trovare una materia transizionale su cui perdurare. La foto non stampata è un contenuto senza corpo, ricco di informazioni ma privo di una materia solida su cui investire gli affetti.

Perciò, per concludere, possiamo constatare che la tecnologia digitale non ha affatto compromesso la componente informazionale del mezzo, quanto piuttosto la sua sfera relazionale, specialmente in alcuni territori dell'interazione sociale quali la famiglia, e le forme di ritualità funebri o comunque religiose.

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