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# **Il Tolomeo**

**Articoli, recensioni e inediti delle Nuove Letterature**



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paradigma della *partnership* attraverso la rievocazione di uno dei suoi simboli archetipici: la Dea. Al centro di questo processo complesso ma rivelatorio vi è quindi la figura della *Goddess*, da un lato ampiamente celebrata, ma dall'altro anche intensamente e minutamente indagata a livello filosofico, mitico e antropologico, nei primi tre saggi fra cui ricordiamo "Journeys in the Goddess Cosmic Dance" (pp. 15-21), di Antonella Riem, che apre la raccolta. Cancellata per secoli dai panorami occidentali contraddistinti dalla *domination*, la Dea si dimostra invece un modello sorprendentemente vitale e vitalistico, capace di riemergere con forza come archetipo, e proprio in virtù del suo essere archetipo in senso junghiano si trova oggi testimoniata sotto forma di "a powerful ancestral image residing in our souls", e anche di "a long-forgotten ancient reality" (ibidem, p. 19). Non è un caso infatti che il titolo del convegno e del volume non sia incentrato sul termine nascita – o eventualmente ri-nascita – ma descriva invece un *risveglio* (richiamato dall'aggettivo *awakened*). Non *ex novo*, quindi, sboccia l'esigenza di riunire menti, anime e creatività eterogenee da svariate parti del mondo; essa risorge invece dal desiderio di unirsi in una danza cosmica capace di evocare il soffio vitale della dea e di recuperare un passato che è alla base del presente e del futuro, carico di speranze e fondato sui validi presupposti della *partnership*.

Il volume si articola in quattro capitoli: il primo, di stampo prevalentemente introduttivo, propone una presentazione dei concetti chiave e degli archetipi che costituiscono l'ossatura di base e lo scheletro di tutti gli studi raccolti. Il secondo, "The Goddess Archetypes and Myths on the Literatures in English", si compone di una nutrita selezione di lavori specifici sulla presenza del tema della *partnership* e della dea madre nelle letterature di lingua inglese, non solo contemporanee. Un aspetto rilevante di questi studi, infatti, è la compresenza di analisi sincroniche (letterature contemporanee in inglese di varie aree del mondo) e diacroniche (letteratura inglese rinascimentale e tardo-rinascimentale); tutte mettono in luce rimandi e collegamen-

ti tra tradizioni diverse che presentano spesso sorprendenti punti di contatto e interconnessioni inedite, qui attentamente rilevate e puntualmente classificate. Il terzo capitolo, "The Goddess and Artistic Creation: Poetry, Music and Art" costituisce la parte più prettamente artistica dell'opera, che ospita racconti, poesie, riflessioni sulla musica e sulle arti figurative, unite tra loro grazie al comune denominatore della *Goddess*. Per questa sezione, in particolare modo, si rivela efficace il primo di due DVD distribuiti in allegato al volume, che raccolgono le registrazioni del convegno (utili per apprezzare tra gli altri quei contributi che necessitano di essere visti più che letti, come le danze Orissi eseguite da Ileana Citaristi e Saswat Joshi, ma anche la *spoken word poetry* di Natalia Molebatsi o l'interpretazione al flauto di *Krishna and Radha* di Giacinto Scelsi da parte di Luisa Sello). Il DVD accoglie inoltre una abbondante serie di contributi iconografici appartenenti a varie epoche e tradizioni culturali selezionati per il pubblico da Alessandro Grossato e un interessante spazio dedicato alle sculture di Bernarda Visentini, scultrice friulana di grande originalità che crea dee ispirandosi alla preistoria. Il secondo DVD ospita invece i lunghi interventi di due figure chiave della ricerca internazionale coordinata da Antonella Riem: Riane Eisler e David Malouf, che hanno partecipato in videoconferenza. Il doppio DVD allegato al volume si presenta come un importante complemento allo studio critico: si tratta infatti di una scelta editoriale innovativa che felicemente allarga le prospettive proposte nelle pagine stampate. L'ultimo capitolo è "The Goddess awakened in Education and Language", sezione che inquadra il modello della *partnership* e della Dea in ambiti linguistici ed educativi. Questa sezione sviluppa temi e motivi del progetto e del relativo convegno "Partnership and Education: Possible Meanings and Contexts" (Udine, 14-15 giugno 2002), i cui risultati erano stati sistematicamente raccolti nel già citato volume del 2003 *The Art of Partnership. Essays on literature, culture, language and education towards a cooperative paradigm*.

Il volume *The Goddess Awakened* coniuga momenti creativi e critica letteraria con elegante equilibrio, allargando lo sguardo su mezzi espressivi diversi, come fotografia e danza, teatro e critica, narrativa e musica, poesia e scultura. Un plauso a tutti coloro che hanno contribuito alla realizzazione di questo progetto multidisciplinare di alto livello internazionale, unito all'auspicio che vi siano presto nuovi momenti di 'risveglio'. –

Daria Tunca

**Chantal Zabus, *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel. Second enlarged edition.* Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2007, pp. 248**

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Conducting linguistically-oriented research into African literature can be a frustrating activity. A typical novice begins his or her quest for secondary sources with much enthusiasm, but is rapidly forced to realize that very few studies have specifically addressed the role played by language in europhone African fiction. If persistent, the scholar eventually comes across a small number of books and articles on the subject; however, many of them soon fail to live up to their promising titles, as engaging introductions often give way to uninspired analyses and questionable conclusions based, for example, on the number of adjectives contained in a novel or poem.

Against this rather disappointing background, Chantal Zabus's *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel* stands out as a notable exception. Indeed, Zabus's thought-provoking work strikes a rare balance between linguistic investigation and literary evaluation, and testifies to its author's exceptional capacity for comparative analysis and critical assessment. Furthermore, in an age where academics all too often confuse erudition with bombast and tend to abandon rigorous argumentation for ostentatious name-dropping, *The*

*African Palimpsest* strikes the reader as a remarkably lucid and innovative piece of scholarship. First published in 1991, the book has recently been reissued in the form of a second enlarged edition. This new version provides useful updates, insightful elaborations and revisions of the arguments contained in the first edition, but the pioneering methodology that informed the original publication remains untouched.

The main objective of the study, as its title indicates, can best be described with reference to the metaphor of the palimpsest. In its literal sense, a palimpsest is a writing surface on which a text has been erased to make room for a new one. According to Zabus, this explanation also applies to the West African novels that she examines for, “behind the scriptural authority of the European language, the earlier, imperfectly erased remnants of the African language can still be perceived” (3). This metaphor aptly mirrors the result of a linguistic practice known as “indigenization”, which consists in expressing local – here, African – concepts, thought-patterns and linguistic features through the former colonizer’s language. The prime purpose of Zabus’s work, formulated in its opening pages, is to investigate “how indigenization is achieved” (4) in Anglophone and Francophone West African novels.

The attempt at literary decolonization inherent in the act of indigenizing language in fiction immediately brings to mind the well-known idea of “writing back to the centre”, first formulated by Salman Rushdie and subsequently developed by Ashcroft et al. in *The Empire Writes Back* (1989). The concept has since become a keystone of postcolonial studies, but Zabus resists any naïve celebration of the notion by announcing her intention to study the counter-productive effects of this strategy along with its creative facets. In a similar critical move, and despite her defence of creative writing in African languages, she also explicitly rejects any “idyllic, bucolic [...] return to the [...] roots of African culture” (118). The source of this problematization of writing in either mother- or other tongue is an acute awareness of the

political significance behind any West African novelist’s choice of language. Having established the inextricability of the linguistic and political spheres in the African context, Zabus then devotes a section to language policies on the continent. This impressively documented survey provides a necessary link between the theoretical basis of the book and the case studies it presents. Indeed, this chapter examines the mechanics and effects of language politics – here called “glottopolitics” (17) – in Francophone and Anglophone West Africa. It is argued that, because of the uncompromising imposition of French in countries such as Senegal and Côte d’Ivoire (the French colonial system was more repressive than British indirect rule), French-speaking African writers have tended to be less audacious in their linguistic experimentations than their English-speaking counterparts. Similarly, since pidginized French has hardly been left any room for development on the continent, the medium is even less frequently found in novels than the elaborate pidgins of Nigeria and Ghana, which mix English with local languages.

The next chapter explores the literary use of these English based-pidgins – and more particularly the Nigerian variety –, from the first fictional representation of the language in Joyce Cary’s *Mister Johnson* (1939) to its use in novels by Cyprian Ekwensi and Chinua Achebe. Based on careful linguistic observation, Zabus convincingly asserts that the forms of pidgin found in most West African narratives only qualify as “pseudo-pidgin”, in that they retain superficial characteristics of the language but do not display features that are less easily accessible to non-pidgin-speaking audiences. Importantly, Zabus goes beyond mere formal analysis to expound on the functions of pseudo-pidgin in literature. For example, she demonstrates that the language is frequently stigmatized and attributed to idiots or *illiterati*, but can also act as a medium of interethnic communication – and hence favour integration – in urban settings.

The following chapter focuses on more radically innovative works,

whether resulting from intentional linguistic experimentation or not. First, an examination of the prose of Yoruba writer Amos Tutuola reveals the presence of a high number of calques from his mother tongue in his novels, due to his rudimentary knowledge of Standard English. Zabus then borrows the notion of “relexification” from creolist Loreto Todd to describe the technique employed by authors who have consciously allowed their native languages to influence the English or French of their writings. In Todd’s definition, “relexification” refers to the simultaneous use of English vocabulary and indigenous structures and rhythms. Here, the term is adapted to denote a deliberate strategy of decolonization, which consists in the creation of a new register through the insertion of lexico-semantic and/or morpho-syntactic features of African languages into former colonial ones. Based on this theoretical framework, Zabus discusses two more experimental novels, Gabriel Okara’s *The Voice* (1964) and Ahmadou Kourouma’s *Les Soleils des indépendances* (1968). She then probes into specific forms of lexico-semantic relexification, including the use of proverbs in several Anglophone Igbo novels and that of Akan traditional material in Ghanaian Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Fragments* (1969). In the ensuing critical appraisal, she contends that relexification is a highly ambivalent strategy for, while it may allow the postcolonial writer to subvert the dominant colonial language, it can also contribute to the revitalization of the European tongue at the expense of the African one “in a perversely neocolonial fashion” (171).

The final chapter is devoted to ways of “shadowing”, i.e. ways of identifying the gap between mother tongue and other tongue in europhone texts, either by tagging an explanation onto an African-language term (a method known as “cushioning”) or by providing immediate areas of context to allow the reader to guess the meaning of an African expression (a technique named “contextualization”). Zabus emphasizes the artistic and semantic problems engendered by the presence of African words in europhone texts and then, through a discussion of Ken

Saro-Wiwa's imaginary "rotten English" in *Sozaboy* (1985), she investigates the potential of creolized forms of pidgin to bridge the gap between target and source language.

In a stimulating concluding chapter, the author predicts that former colonial linguistic media will increasingly be "othered" by African writers, and that indigenization, although a neces-

sary phase, will eventually give way to African-language literature, which will then be translated into European languages. The palimpsest, in other words, will ultimately "host the trace of a visible *original*" (211).

It seems entirely appropriate that Zabus's groundbreaking study should end with a bold look towards the future, since her scholarship shows the

way forward for interdisciplinary studies. *The African Palimpsest* applies linguistic concepts for the analysis of literature in a most precise and creative way and thus remains, almost two decades after its first publication, unsurpassed in both scope and incisiveness. ▸