

anch'io con la mia brava etichetta, ancorché (parzialmente) derisoria. Ammesso che voglia dire qualcosa, "realismo gnostico" vuol dire un realismo che si fa preciso per accogliere il Sacro: una realtà frugata per rivelarne la mancanza, l'inadeguatezza a una luce superiore."

Realismo gnostico è una definizione *poetica*, cioè costruita apposta per essere riempita di senso (ed infatti bisogna "ammettere che significhi qualche cosa"). In queste 81 paginette affastellate, seppur viene nominata la "surdeterminazione funzionale delle azioni" di Genette come forma di ridondanza per rendere le rappresentazioni più realistiche, tecnica evidentemente utilizzata nel libro per tutta la sua lunghezza, che cosa è presente di sostanziale se non una soffusa autocelebrazione del proprio portfolio di competenze che si vuole chiamare "poetica", annessa al tentativo ostentato di oggettivarla tramite l'adesione ad un *-ismo* che non si dia in pasto al lettore, *causa ornatus*, come pacifico e notorio?

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Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Pleasure*, translated and annotated by Lara Gochin Raffaelli, introduction by Alexander Stille, New York, Penguin, 2013, pp. 355.

Undertaking the translation of a literary work by any renowned author is always a daunting task. Thus the challenge presented by the intricate prose of the sophisticated aesthete and highly gifted Gabriele D'Annunzio, a rare master of the craft of writing, was bound to be all the more formidable. Faced with having to teach *Il Piacere*, D'Annunzio's first novel and a masterpiece of Italian literature, in translation, Lara Gochin Raffaelli was driven to produce a new and much improved translation of this classic work.

Before this the only version available was *The Child of Pleasure*, published in 1898, a translation that John Woodhouse refers to as "Georgina Harding's sanitized version". No new translation of the novel had been produced in over a hundred years, perhaps because of D'Annunzio's later tainted reputation as a supporter for fascist ideology. Until now, the late Victorian version remained the only available translation being reprinted a number of times both in England and America.

Regrettably, for this reason, English-speaking readers and scholars, unable to access the original have always been presented with a partial experience of D'Annunzio's novel. They read a text which, while establishing the author's reputation as a decadent and controversial writer, never drew attention to his far more complex philosophical thinking. Traces of Nietzschean philosophy, particularly the perilous notion of the *Übermensch*, central to this novel, along with echoes of Schopenhauer, had all been carefully removed or underplayed in the Harding translation. By minimizing the novel's overwhelming eroticism and excluding allusions that might offend Victorian sensibilities, as well as passages deemed to be too intellectual for the genre, the text was mutilated and reduced to "sentimental fiction".

Raffaelli's unabridged translation fully restores the novel's sensuality and eroticism along with its philosophical complexity. She also succeeds in rendering the rich, textured beauty of D'Annunzio's elegant, nuanced prose and reproducing as accurately as possible the interspersed verse present in the novel. This translation also restores the non-chronological, retrospective, structure of the original text, whereas the Harding translation followed the reordering of the chapters that D'Annunzio had allowed for the first French version. The plot-line, structured around two long flashbacks imbedded between references to that infamous day, on the 31 December 1886 when Andea Sperelli is first waiting for his ex-lover Elena Muti and is then told that she has no intention of resuming their love affair, adds tension to the novel leading up to its dramatic conclusion. Even though, in retrospect, D'Annunzio saw this as a flaw (*difetto di costruzione*) and was happy to have the opportunity to revise it in translated versions of his novel, he never authorise a restructured chronological version in Italian, suggesting that he had responded to marketing pressures not artistic considerations.

The translation negotiates the constraints imposed by the English language to preserve the meaning of the original and the characteristic fluid cadence of D'Annunzio's style. By opting for a more contemporary language and less formal register, Lara Raffaelli deftly makes the 19th century Italian text more acceptable to modern readers and the dialogues between the lovers seem more natural even to the ears of younger readers. Occasionally some of the nuances of the wordplay in the Italian employed by D'Annunzio are lost in the

translation. A simple example is the use of the word ‘agitate’ to render *agitare*, which in Italian means ‘to upset, to make one feel uneasy’ as well as ‘to excite, to stir (physically or emotionally)’; ‘agitate’ does not evoke quite the same range of sensations.

The novel draws on a range of genres and modes. D’Annunzio derived much of his power as an author and poet from his great emotional sensitivity. He, like his alter ego Sperelli, responds with equal intensity to his love of art, nature and women:

Art! Art! Here was the Source of pure joy, forbidden to the multitude, conceded to the elect; here was the precious Food, which makes man similar to a god. How could he have drunk from other cups after bringing his lips to that one? How could he have sought other pleasures after having tasted the supreme one? [...] How could his hands have idled and frolicked wantonly over the bodies of women after having felt a tangible form erupt from his fingers? How, ultimately, could his senses have weakened and become perverted into base lust after having been illuminated by a sensibility that discerned invisible lines in the appearance of things, perceived the imperceptible, gauged the hidden thoughts of Nature?
(132-133)

He continues to proclaim his sensuous, melancholy affinity with antiquity and nature in a series of sonnets. Lara Raffaelli’s new rendering of these sonnets is linguistically a more accurate version of the Italian originals compared with those in *The Child of Pleasure*. They are rendered in rhyming or blank verse in a meter similar to that in the original. Translating the sonnets, which embody the protagonist’s difficult quest for artistic integrity in the face of the degrading influence of sensuality, the tensions between content and form is largely preserved, even if she had to compromise between fidelity to the meaning and retaining the form of the original.

Besides Spirelli’s sonnets, other lines of poetry, both in their original language – be it Latin, German, French or English – and in Italian, are scattered throughout the text. For these she provides published translations in endnotes to aid the contemporary reader.

There are also copious annotations on the many literary, classical, mythical or enigmatic and cryptic references in the text, which make the book more accessible to general public and enhance understanding by steering the reader towards possible interpretations.

The title *Pleasure*, opted for by Raffaelli, seems to express, as the translator says in the Foreword, “very succinctly the essence of the novel, which is centred entirely on the pursuit of pleasure, the quest to experience ever-greater and transcendent forms of pleasure, whether as an aesthetic principle or a physical sensual sensation” (xii). Like in the original title, ‘pleasure’ becomes the focal subject of the book, thus emphasising that the pursuit of pleasure to limits beyond pleasure, ultimately leads only to moral dissolution, emotional ruin and the realisation that all is vanity or nothingness.

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Camillo Faverzani (éditeur), *Part[h]enope. Naples et les arts / Napoli e le arti*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2013, pp. 450 (Collana «Leia. Université de Caen, vol. 28»).

Fernand Braudel nel suo capolavoro dedicato all’età di Filippo II trattò il Mediterraneo – popolato da guerrieri e mercanti, contadini e cittadini – quasi alla stregua di un grande, affascinante personaggio da romanzo, con un cuore pulsante e complicate peripezie individuali. Ripensare la cultura sviluppatasi nelle grandi città del Mediterraneo in termini storici, ma senza tacere i colpi di scena romanzeschi che qualche volta la storia riserva, è la sfida che l’Université Paris 8 ha proposto, grazie alla guida sagace di Camillo Faverzani, ad altre università invitate a un progetto denominato «Pôle Méditerranée». Primo risultato giunto alle stampe è questo volume dedicato alla città di Napoli fra Tre e Novecento: raccoglie gli Atti di un convegno celebratosi a Parigi nel novembre 2012 con la partecipazione di due dozzine di studiosi italiani e francesi impegnati in diversi ambiti di ricerca (dalla letteratura alla musica, dalla storia dell’arte all’antropologia, alla storia politica). Il risultato è un affascinante mosaico che va a comporre quel «creuset de contradictions multiculturelles» (per usare l’espressione di Faverzani) che Napoli è