

Rivista di poesia comparata

Direttore responsabile: Francesco Stella

Iniziative

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6 dicembre 2019
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I'M SO TIRED OF FLORENCE: READING MINA LOY

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« indietro

WOLE SOYINKA, *Man and Nature*

translated by Armando Pajalich, edited by Marco Fazzini, Lugo, Edizioni del Bradipo, 2005, pp. 64

Cleto Munari, to whom the book is dedicated, talks in his introductory note of 'occasional nature'; and he is certainly right, as this collection, here at its first edition worldwide, has been printed in only a thousand copies, sixty of which provided with a cover showing a black and white drawing by Giuseppe Sciacca. Fortuitous coincidences (though very often, beyond coincidences, lay human passions and relations) have in fact brought to life, on July the 13th 2005 (Wole Soyinka's seventy-first birthday), this collection of brief and striking poems, through which the Nigerian poet celebrates Nature and its beauty. And anyone possessing a copy of those sixty of the existing thousand must feel a lucky person. Lucky first of all for the very possession of such a fine book, published by Edizioni del Bradipo in their very selective series "I dardi del poeta", edited by Marco Fazzini and enriched by Sciacca's evocative illustrations. Secondly, for the same choice of including in this edition both the original in English with its translation into Italian, and the reproduction of Soyinka's manuscripts; the original poems are accompanied by the fine and accurate translation of Armando Pajalich, who has been Soyinka's Italian voice since 1979, thus representing a case of 'double' first edition of the text, which appears here for the first time both in English and in Italian. Thirdly, the fortune of having such a book, one has to point out, arises not only from its fine edition and from its being gold dust, but also from the immense relevance of Soyinka's reflections not only in the landscape of Nigerian literature, but also at a worldwide level.

If one can talk of occasional nature, in fact, this does not imply that what has been written by Soyinka is also 'light' and 'provisional', as his work is on the contrary permeated by a strong will to come back, once again, on the delicacy of natural elements – such as rainbow, whose arc "is rounded in a market place / Where scattered tribes of a busy world unite" ("si fa tonda alla piazza del mercato / Dove si uniscono tribù disperse di un mondo indaffarato", p. 31) – in order to discover in them a source of knowledge and wisdom. This approach to nature is not new, if one considers for instance Niyi Osundare's *Eye of the Earth*, recently and finely translated into Italian, which also celebrates the *necessity* to find balances both in the world and in our private lives. Nonetheless, in Soyinka this necessity is strictly linked with a deep religious vision which leads him to draw a consistent and symmetrical universe, in which Nature and deities form a harmonic ensemble which human kind should fear, rather than either challenge or exploit for their own interests: "Who kills for love of god kills love, kills god / Who kills in name of god leaves god / Without a name" ("Chi per amor di dio uccide, amore uccide, uccide dio / Chi di dio in nome uccide, dio lascia / Senza più nome", p.53). Therefore, together with poems openly dedicated to Nature and its elements (a leaf, a tree), there are other poems focusing on human life (specifically represented by the market) and on Yoruba deities.

Soyinka's poems are in fact strongly influenced by Yoruba culture, as always, but *Man and Nature* also aims at discussing themes of general interest, as both the commitment and the widely range of interests characterizing Soyinka's writing find a confirmation in this collection, which wants to answer today's increasingly hard times. As Pajalich underlines in his introductory note, significantly entitled "Respectfully" ("Rispettosamente"), in consideration of that balance suggested by Soyinka throughout the volume, "surrounded as we are by frightening aggression – economic, armed or pseudocultural – Soyinka's wise fragments ask us to stop and think. Maybe they ask for a new departure or a new sowing" (p.9). These poems, so fragmentary that sometimes they are condensed in one sentence ("Hell's location is a place of choice": "L'inferno si trova in un luogo di tua scelta", p.51), are meant not only as reflections on the contemporary world, whose most banal and although significant details we are invited to observe and remember, but also as a praise for those, Soyinka amongst them, who have attempted a reconciliation of the elements through a brave and sometimes dangerous fight for the dignity and freedom of both human kind and the world we live in: "Courage is its own crown, sometimes / Of thorns, always luminous as martyrdom" ("Il coraggio è corona di se stesso, a volte / Di spine, sempre luminoso come un martirio", p.37).

This is therefore a precious book, both in its contents and form, and certainly the fruit of the serious thought of an experienced poet, but also the result of friendships and mutual relations which basically put in practice what Soyinka wishes for in this new and unusual poetic work.

Tiziana Morosetti

(Tiziana Morosetti PhD University of Bologna, now holding a postdoctoral scholarship. Her research focuses on both Postcolonial Studies and African Literatures in English. She is editor-in-chief of the journal *Quaderni del '900*. She is now involved in a study on utopian writing in African literature.)

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Author: Janne Wass

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