
REVIEW: FRANCOFONIA 65 – CAMUS/PASOLINI: DEUX ÉCRIVAINS "ENGAGÉS"

by Giovanni Gaetani

2013 was without any doubt, a great, memorable year for all the readers and specialists of Albert Camus's works. Indeed, on occasion of his birth centenary many remarkable events took place worldwide – conferences, expositions, publications, and documentaries. One of these events is the publication of the issue 65 of *Francofonia* on *Camus/Pasolini: deux écrivains "engagés"*, edited under the guide of Silvia Disegni, professor of French Literature at the University of Naples "Federico II".

Founded in 1981 by Liano Petroni (1921-2006), who has been one of the most important Italian critics of Camus, as well as a close friend, *Francofonia* is a six-monthly journal of study and research on francophone literature, published under the auspices of the University of Bologna "Alma Mater Studiorum". This issue of the journal is a partial gathering of the texts presented at the homonymous international meeting held in Naples (15th-18th November 2010), well-described by Silvia Disegni in her introduction.

All along the nine texts – of which two in French and seven in Italian – the undeniable political, artistic, and philosophical affinities between Camus and Pasolini are analyzed. A study of the potential mutual influences is instead missing, both for a precise choice of the authors (p. 3 and p. 117) and for a matter of necessity: indeed, even if chronologically belonging to the same generation (Camus was born in 1913 while Pasolini in 1922), the two intellectuals unfortunately

never had the opportunity to meet each other in real life. This *rencontre manquée* is even more absurd if we consider that Camus and Pasolini had many friends in common (Carlo Levi, Nicola Chiaromonte, Ignazio Silone) and some real opportunities to meet, as both Silvia Disegni and Samantha Novello show (pp. 15-16 and p. 92, note 41). Despite their distance in life, they actually share a certain intellectual approach to existence, a way to see and describe things, a particular attitude to art and, lastly, a common political sensibility.

In her essay *Camus/Pasolini: Posture ex-centrique de deux écrivains journalistes "engagés" du XX^e siècle*, Silvia Disegni masterfully shows us the similar ways in which Camus and Pasolini have been two eccentric journalists and writers: starting from their will to "think and live in our history" (Camus, p. 16), that is, "to not place themselves outside history" (Pasolini, p. 17), Disegni discusses how and why they both refused the notion of *engagement*, preferring to it the one of *témoignage*. In their perspectives the artist cannot follow the orders of a party, nor he can express the orthodox doctrines of a political view with his art, as already André Gide remarked in his important *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, a book who had a great impact on Camus. "One must not commit the error to reduce an art work to a mere political message", says Disegni, clarifying also that for Camus the relationship between art and politics is "tautological": "it is not the fight that makes us artists, it is the art that forces us to be fighters" (Camus, p. 19). There are, anyway, some extreme cases in which the artists must get out of his artistic universe in order to defend his ideas with other means – what the author rather calls *intervention*. Pasolini is illuminating at this regard (p. 21): 'in some occasions the artist must have the civil courage to stop expressing himself through the mediation of his works and, then, to start expressing himself directly, with his own existence, that is, to "throw" his body into the fight'.

The essay goes on analyzing the peculiar position that both intellectuals occupy, the one of "the lonely knight, the Franc-tireur" that the author defines *ex-centrique* (p. 24), underling once more the Greek and Latin etymology of the term (ἐκκεντρος, *ex-centrum*, outside the center). After a close examination of the biographical and geographical reasons that clarify their eccentricity towards society and towards their respective communist parties (p. 25), the essay

ends with a critical paragraph in which the author points out that too often both Camus and Pasolini rhetorically claimed their eccentricity as a kind of exclusion, when instead they were in fact publicly recognized from all their contemporary intellectual colleagues and, more in general, from the institutionalized intellectual *milieu* (pp. 27-30). Disegni concludes his work quoting Bourdieu, who defines the intellectual field as a "paradoxical universe in which freedom from institutions is found inscribed in those institutions" (p. 30).

Jeanyves Guérin, whose name cannot be unknown to every true Camus' specialist, being the editor of the fundamental *Dictionnaire Albert Camus*, gives us a perfect, detailed, and synthetic reconstruction of what he calls *Smarrimenti algerini di un "giusto"*. The text by Guérin, originally in French, has been translated to Italian by Michela Lo Feudo and Silvia Disegni with its title translated in English as: *Algerian losses of a "Just"*, evidently with reference to *Les Justes*. This text follows and recaps what Guérin has already written in many previous works on the subject (see note 23, p. 47): his main aim is to restore a certain objectivity on Camus' complex position towards Algeria's independence war, which at the moment remains the last true accusation addressed to Camus from every side of the critique. Indeed, as the author sadly ascertains in the opening of his essay: "Today three sentences still blur twenty-five years of Camusian writings", referring to the famous – but always badly reported – sentence of Camus "if this is justice, I prefer my mother" (*si c'est cela, la justice, je préfère ma mère*) (p. 33). Far from being an apologetic text or a kind of short pamphlet, this essay is instead a witness of Guerin's historical knowledge as well as of his intellectual honesty: in fact, while he recognizes Camus' courage and good faith in his request for a federal Algeria and an immediate civil truce, he points out also Camus' naivety and incapacity to analyze appropriately the geopolitical situation of French Algeria, given his generalizations and undervaluation of the Arab culture and his "gallo-centrica" (French-oriented) education (p. 41). In his conclusion Guerin regrets that today "we hear no voice like Camus' one": "His hesitations, his scruples, even his contradictions make him a person close to us, closer than his detractors, so stiffened in their certainties" (p. 47).

The essay of Riccardo Antoniani ("Oil, the Vas of Italian political economy" – "Vas" was an alternative title of the novel; it is an implicit reference to the biblical expression *vas electionis*, from the Acts of Apostles 9, 15) focuses on Pasolini's unfinished novel *Petrolio* (Oil), which is considered by the author a key-text to understand Italy's real economical and political situation in 1960s and 1970s (p. 53): 'moving the horizon of his analysis towards political economy Pasolini understood in advance that the gap between economy and politics was progressively decreasing in favour of economy and of its new productive cycles'.

With an excellent, precise historical knowledge, fruit also of the oral witnesses gathered by Antoniani himself (see notes 15, 53, 55, 63), the author analyzes all the hidden circumstances that clearly connect this masterpiece of Pasolini with his mysterious assassination (p. 50-52). Remarkable is also the discussion of how Pasolini's image has been too often muddied and mocked by the Italian journalists of all periods, before and after the tragic death of the author, for reasons of pure political servility (pp. 54-57). Except for few passages where a too elaborate syntax does not help the comprehension, this essay of Antoniani is definitely a fundamental tool to understand *Petrolio*'s historical and political significance, as well as Pasolini's intellectual grandeur.

The work of Umberto Todini (*Antichità contro. Albert Camus e Pier Paolo Pasolini*, literally *Antiquities against...*) together with the one of Oreste Lippolis (*La forma del mito, i segni della storia nell'opera di Pier Paolo Pasolini*, that is, *The form of the myth, the signs of history in Pasolini's works*) and the one of Marco Antonio Bazzocchi (*Pasolini/Camus corpi nel deserto – Pasolini/Camus, bodies in the desert*) give us a detailed, interesting, and exhaustive survey of the literary relationship of the two authors with the ancient myths and characters, mainly from the Greek world: Camus with Sisyphus, Prometheus, Oedipus, Nemesis, and Caligula; Pasolini with Oedipus the King, Medea, the Oresteia, and many others non-mythological subjects (the Decameron, the Canterbury Tales, the Gospel of Matthew, etc.). The conclusive words of Todini can condense the meaning of Camus's and Pasolini's use of the ancient myth (p. 76): 'With Camus and Pasolini [...] the ancients start to come off from their pedestals where they were placed for centuries, in order to

show themselves for what they actually are, self-critical, Brechtianly alienating ("brechtianamente stranianti"), within our means ("alla portata"). The cultural, academic, bookish, celluloid power of such models of classicalities must face a principle of reality that lets emerge differently ancient and differently modern men ("uomini diversamente antichi e diversamente moderni")'.

Samantha Novello is at the moment one of the most important Italian critics of Camus – indeed, she is the only Italian scholar that worked at the four tomes edition of Camus' complete works, edited by Gallimard. Her precious essay, *Il rovescio e il diritto. Il pensiero politico di Albert Camus fra tragedia antica e tragico moderno* (*The right side and the wrong side. The political thought of Albert Camus between ancient tragedy and the modern one*), exposes with great accuracy and elegance Camus' position towards modern nihilism, its spiritual disguises and its political degenerations. Analyzing Nietzsche's and Scheler's key influence concerning Camus' understanding of the concept of *ressentiment* (resentment towards reality and men, both conceived as "morally negative", p. 80 and p. 84) Novello shows us the way the absurd reflection of *The Myth of Sisyphus* tried to achieve a tragic but optimistic thought (p. 88), in which life is no longer expiation of a primordial, metaphysical sin, but rather "a vision of love, that transforms every curse ("*maledizione*") in a blessing ("*benedizione*") and that denies the will to power" (p. 92). The variety and precision of all the bibliographical references are remarkable and definitely make this essay a valuable, praiseworthy analysis of the essential core of Camus' philosophical attempt.

The last two essays of this issue are the one of Hervé Joubert-Laurencin (*Entre Camus et Pasolini: Mastroianni, l'homme solaire, l'homme minéral*), who with originality and creativity analyzes the works of Pasolini and Camus through the figure of Marcello Mastroianni, a famous Italian actor who embodied both Meursault in Luchino Visconti's *The Stranger* and the protagonist of Mauro Bolognini's *Bell'Antonio*, whose screenwriter was just Pasolini; and the brief but thick essay of Filippo La Porta (*Vite parallele. Camus e Pasolini maestri irregolari*, that is, *Parallel lives. Camus and Pasolini irregular masters*) where the author describes separately the lives of the two intellectuals, in order to show their convergences of methods and of personalities, nonetheless respecting their essential diversities.

They share a certain loyalty to the present, because they are aware that "violence, power, and falsehood are born from the idea of future, of a remote justice, and of a calculation of what will happen" (p. 143); they share also a will to maintain a "radical connection between biography and thought" (p. 145). In La Porta's perspective, Pasolini's works express an "atheist and gnostic religiosity" (p. 146), while Camus is a "philosopher without method and system" (p. 148), "a big and troublesome amateur of thought" (p. 149). The conclusion of the author, though a little bit rhetorical, is rather efficacious and underlines once more the proximity of the two authors (p. 150): 'I like to imagine Camus and Pasolini playing in the same team, with different roles, in a dusty, suburban soccer field, under a dazzling, meridian sun'.

In conclusion, this issue of *Francofonia* is definitely an important and innovative contribution to both Camus's and Pasolini's studies. Though the circumstances of life kept them apart and though two tragic, premature deaths prevented them to finally meet, in this issue we can instead see the two intellectuals ideally talking each other. In this way, their *étrangeté* has eventually disappeared and their faces are more similar than ever before.

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