

Hispanic Intertextuality in Contemporary Sardinian Poetry*

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The Sardinian people have undergone a process of acculturation, initially Iberian and later Italian, which was particularly marked in the period of fascist nationalism and in that of post-fascist national centralism. Yet the Sardinian language is different from the Italian language and the Sardinian worldview is therefore equally different. It is upon this diversity that Sardinia's special statute autonomy should have been founded, whereas nowadays most so-called "educated" people still consider Sardinian to be a dialect of Italian and, moreover, one with negative connotations. It was therefore inevitable, once it was accepted that the school system should integrate totally with the language and culture of the Italian nation, that students would continue, as they still do today, to be deprived of their own identity. One might conclude, not without a certain bitterness, that those responsible for schools in Sardinia have never even considered the problem of a *ratio studiorum* that takes into account the pluriculturalism and plurilingualism of the past as well as the bilingualism of the present.

In the 1950s the *Plan for the Regeneration of Sardinia* proposed that two sites should be established in order to develop a chemical industry on the island. The project, imposed from outside, had a disastrous impact on the cultural and anthropological fabric of the territory, leading to a loss of identity. Within this context a group of poets and intellectuals founded, in the town of Ozieri, a literary prize to encourage a revival of poetry in the Sardinian language. The spontaneous and unexpected level of adhesion was such that this prize, having rapidly increased in importance and prestige, led to the establishment of at least seventy other prizes along the same lines. Sardinian poets had finally gained an audience and even critical acceptance. They showed a desire and a keenness to retake possession of their own tongue and took their place at the school of contemporary Italian and European poetic language.

The historical circumstances of the island, even though it had belonged to the Confederation of Kingdoms of Aragon and Castile since the Middle

* Translation by Christopher John Pain.

Ages, were little different from those of the confederate kingdoms of the colonies across the Atlantic. Aragonese and later Castilian sovereigns recognized the Sardinian nation and, by conceding a semblance of autonomy to the *Regnum Sardiniae*, demonstrated a desire to foster a modicum of self-respect and esteem among the Sardinian people.

The policy of exclusively Italian acculturation practiced in schools, not so much in the 19th century (the national anthem of the Kingdom of Italy was *Cunservet Deus su Re* ‘God save the King’) as in the twentieth, has led to a decline in self-esteem and widespread social malaise. Nowadays, despite those few rare cases of economic development which stem from the Sardinian people’s own capacity to take advantage of their local material and immaterial resources, school curricula continue to ignore the island, its language, its culture and its history.

The renaissance of spoken and written communication in the Sardinian language, however, has breathed new life into the Sardinian linguistic and literary system, which is bilingual, and has encompassed the poets and writers who have been acclaimed in the various local literary competitions and have gone on to publish collections of poetry, works of fiction and drama. These innovations have altered the system as a whole and, being motivated by a strong sense of identity, have brought a new dynamism and a new sense of direction. Literary competence, which is widespread on the island, acts as an invariant with respect to language. That is to say, those who have learnt to appreciate literature and know how to compose poetic and narrative texts do it in the languages they know well and do it best of all in their mother tongue, rather than in Italian. In order to update their skills, both passive and active, these poets have taken on board the formal processes of contemporary poetic language, not only Sardinian, and not only Italian. And in the course of their research they have naturally encountered Spanish poetry, and found in it an extraordinary affinity.

Publishers – the parallel text editions of foreign poets published by Guanda and edited by Carlo Bo come to mind – have acquainted our readers and poets with the poetry of other nations and, on the whole, the latter have tended to prefer the literature of the Hispanic area.

Predu Mura, for instance, had an elective affinity with the poetic language of García Lorca. As a descendent of a Romany community of Andalusian provenance, which many centuries before had settled in Isili, working and dealing in copper, he felt an extraordinary connection with Lorca’s Andalusia. The intertextual correspondences with his own work are so fitting and so frequent that the literati of Nuoro called him the Sardinian

García Lorca. The forge where he worked in copper became metaphorically the literary forge of the *rimas nobas* and the poet a “wordsmith” experimenting with new formal processes. His song *E commo* thus considered to be the manifesto of the new Sardinian poetry; this smith of “fresh songs” was able to charm poets and readers alike with his extraordinarily moulding skill:

E commo Deus de chelu
 a chie canto
 cust'urtima cantone cana?
 A bentanas apertas
 a su tempus nobu promissu
 a Sardigna
 barandilla de mares e de chelos?
 Su bentu ghattat boches.
 Commo m'ammento:
 unu frore ruju
 una melagranada aperta
 una tempesta 'e luce
 cussa lapia 'e ràmine luchente!
 Fippo operaiu 'e luce soliana
 commo so' oscuru artisanu de versos
 currende un'odissea de rimas nobas
 chi mi torret su sonu 'e sas lapias
 ramenosas campanas
 brundas timballas e concas
 e sartàghines grecanas.
 Cada corfu 'e marteddu
 allughia unu sole
 e su drinnire
 de una musica 'e framas
 m'ingravidabat su coro
 e mi prenabat soso ocros
 d'unu mare 'e isteddos.
 Frailàrju 'e cantones friscas
 camino a tempus de luce
 pudande sos mezus frores
 in custa paca die chi m'abbarrat
 prontu a intrare
 in su nurache 'e s'umbra.
 Gai fortzis su sole
 in custa die de chelu
 est bénniu a cojubare
 frores de neulache
 chin fruttos de melalidone.¹

Here the intertextuality is Hispanic, Dantesque (“new rhymes” and “blacksmith of the mother tongue”), Ungarettian (the “wall of shade” becomes the “Nuraghe of shade”), while Quasimodo’s “worker of dreams” becomes “worker of sunlight”. Synaesthesiae are constructed in the Lorquian surrealist mould: “*musica ‘e framas*” (music of flames), “*mare ‘e isteddos*” (sea of stars), “*die de chelu*” (day of sky).

Passive and active linguistic and literary competence in Sardinia, when considered statistically on the basis of the number of inhabitants, is certainly higher than that of other regions of Italy. All, or nearly all, Sardinian speakers are able to improvise and write in the gnomic, satiric, commemorative, parenthetical and celebratory genres. Sedimentation from various languages has left many interferences in our culture. From Roman acculturation the Sardinian tongue has conserved almost intact the characteristics of the Latin language in its rustic form. Dante in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia* even wrote that it would be wrong to speak of Sardinian as a true vulgate, since it differed little from Latin and was like a *simia linguae latinae*.

Benvenuto Lobina must be credited with having contributed appreciably to the growth of Sardinian narrative prose. *Po Cantu Biddaona* is not merely an extraordinary novel written in the Campidanese language, it is also a masterpiece which represents a great leap forward compared to the then-current level of the best narrative works in the prose section of the Ozieri Prize. As a boy in Cagliari he wrote verses in Italian and also breathed the freer air of the Second Futurism. After switching to the Sardinian language, he gained success at the Ozieri Prize and other major poetry competitions. The success of his prose stems, I think, from a wise use of a lyrical experience gained through reading literature of importance: not only that of Spanish poets from Jiménez to García Lorca, Machado, Alberti and Neruda, but also Latin-American novelists, from García Márquez, to Vargas Llosa and Juan Rulfo. In the prose of his novel and of his short stories a story-telling style of oral narration alternates with an intensely lyrical evocation, direct with indirect speech, descriptive and documentary articulation with fanciful and surreal monologue. The writing displays, by means of a non-fortuitous irony, the light regional coloration of an Italian ill-learned which sits uncomfortably with certain diastatically marked characters. In general the narrator’s voice gives free rein, within the fabric of the narrative layers, to the various linguistic registers that traverse the array of characters.

Together with Predu Mura and Benvenuto Lobina, Antoninu Mura Ena represents the third element in the great twentieth-century literary

Sardinian-language triad. He showed that he was already a poet of high stature in 1988 at the “Pompeo Calvia” Dialect Literature Prize held in Sassari. This complex and intellectual writer of great importance gave us a masterpiece in *Recuìda*. The collection, on which he worked for around thirty years, wraps up an existence dedicated to philosophy and literature. *Recuìda* means grand return, re-appropriation of identity and revelation of non-illusory truths which may accompany us on the great day. A refined connoisseur of songs for guitar, Mura Ena succeeded in blending the melodic tradition of the Sardinian lyric with the gnomic and choral tradition. More than anyone else, he has been able, with lucid intellectual awareness, to balance his experience of the anthropological situation in Sardinia with a culture ranging from Plato to St. Augustine, and from Hegel to classics from every era of European literature. It is thus possible to glean from his writings a dense tissue of intertextualities ranging from unknown 14th-century Spanish authors to García Lorca, or from Dickinson to Eliot, from *attittidos* to *muttos*, in a poetic synthesis without equal in the Sardinian tongue.

The final part of the collection *Ammentos e appentos*, even includes a translation in the Logudorese language of the poem *De profundis*, part of García Lorca’s *Poema del canto jondo*.

Castellana de Burgos, is, in turn, a translation cum reworking of the anonymous *Romance de la hija del rey de Francia (Hacia el siglo XV)*. *Marineri cantadore* is the result of a similar operation, being based on the *Romance del conte Arnaldo (Hacia el siglo XV)* by an anonymous Spaniard. Alongside these pieces and the translation of Lorca’s *De profundis*, all of which highlight the attention paid by Mura Ena to Spanish poetry, the most interesting example of intertextuality is *Jeo no ippo torero*:

Jeo no ippo torero

Jeo 'ippo Juane 'Arina.
 Luvulesu, pitzinnu minore.
 In tempus de laore, a manzanu e a sero,
 de voes e de vaccas punghitore.
 Ma no 'ippo torero.
 Jeo no so mortu
 a sas chinbe de 'ortadie
 (che a Ignacio Sánchez).
 Je so mortu a s'arveschere
 in su creschere.
 No b'aiat pro me in s'arena

un'isporta 'e carchina vattuta
a isterrita, supra su sambene.
A mie no m'han vattutu
unu savanu biancu.

Unu voe m'haiat incorratu
in sa jaca 'e s'ortu.
Ohi! chi so mortu.
A mamma happe cramatu
a sa jaca 'e s'ortu.

Mamma est vennita a s'ortu.
Apporrimi sa manu
e 'ocaminde, mama
dae custa mala cama
de sa terra 'e s'ortu.
No mi lasses in terra
che infattu 'e gama.
Cramami a babbu, mama,
chi torret dae gherra...

-'Itzu meu galanu
no lu poto cramare.
Ca babbu est mortu in mare,
e tue ses orfanu,
'itzu meu galanu -.

Tue lu des contare
In donzi terra e portu
Chi at tentu malu irgrabbu,
'itzu meu galanu.
Tue lu des contare
Chi babbu est mortu in mare
in donzi terra e portu
chi babbu in mare est mortu.

Ohi sa calentura, sa calentura!
Unu 'ilu luchente mi porriat caente
babbu, su mortu in mare,
mi lu porriat caente a m'ampilare
a caminu 'e chelos.

M'ampiliaiat a fiancu
unu zovanu 'ertu
su solopattu abbertu
de cristallu biancu
e un'ispada in manos.
E una 'erta in s'imbene
chei sa mea.

L'appompiaio jeio,
m'appompiaio isse:
– Ere herido? – Sisse.
– Eres torero? – Nosse.
Vostè juchet in s'imbene una ferta
aberta, chei sa mea.

– Vostè es torero?
– Yo soy un río de leones.
Gloria de Andalusia.
Tú eres torero? –

– Nosse, vostè. Jeo no 'ippo torero.
Jeo 'ippo Juane 'Arina,
pitzinnu minore.
A manzanu e a sero,
in tempus de laore,
de voes e de vaccas punghitore.
Ma no 'ippo torero.
In sa jaca 'e s'ortu
unu 'oe m'haiat incorratu.
Ma no 'ippo torero. –

– Calla, niñito, calla.
Tú eres torero!
Lo mas grande torero sardenolo
demasiado pequeño.

Subimos juntos a los toros celestes.
Toma tu mano pequeña
a este herido leon,
torero sardenolito
niñito del corazón –.²

The intertextual connection is with García Lorca's *Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías*, and the poem cannot be understood or appreciated without reference to it, especially in the following verses:

A las cinco de la tarde.
Eran las cinco en punto de la tarde.
Un niño trajo la blanca sábana
a las cinco de la tarde.
Una espuerta de cal ya prevenida
a las cinco de la tarde.
Lo demás era muerte y sólo muerte
*a las cinco de la tarde*³.

The author imagines that the shepherd boy, Juane Farina of Lula, gored by an ox's horn, tells of his agony. The boy's mother, standing at the gate of the field where her son lies wounded, begins her lament. In the delirium of fever her son invokes his father who perished in war and imagines meeting him as he rises towards heaven together with a toreador. The latter, noticing a wound similar to his own in the boy's groin, asks him if he too is a toreador. The boy retorts that he is not a toreador and relates his humiliating misfortune. Nevertheless, the greatest toreador of Andalusia takes the boy, the little *Sardignolo* toreador, by the hand and sets out with him *a los toros celestes*. In short, a boy, gored not in the bull-ring but at work in the fields, is also a toreador. The poet alternates the boy's tale with the dialogue with his mother, whose funeral lament echoes the rhythmic structure of the *attitudu* and in part that of Jacopone's lament. The climax is reached in the dialogue with the toreador with a meaningful and highly effective exchange between the Spanish and Sardinian languages. The composition freely follows traditional processes, such as the *retrograda* of the funeral lament, and the formal processes and literary expressions of García Lorca's text. Hendecasyllables alternate with decasyllables, nine-syllable lines with eight-syllable lines, seven-syllable lines with six-syllable lines, all with the greatest of freedom and abetting the poet's creativity in constructing one of the most interesting pieces of twentieth-century poetry in the Sardinian tongue.

It should also be noted that on second reading we may interpret the elevation of the wounded boy to the status of a true toreador, as that of the poetry of the little Sardinian nation to the status of true and sublime.

Note

- ¹ *And now* // And now God on high / to whom shall I sing / this last graying song: / To windows thrown open, / to the promised new times, / to Sardinia / balustrade on to seas and skies? / The wind whispers voices. / Now I recall: / a crimson flower, / a pomegranate broke open, / a flurry of light, / that glistening copper cauldron! / I, one time smithy of sunbeams, / now am a dark artisan of verses / flowing an odyssey of rhyme / new found in cauldrons' sound / copper bells' chime, / bright bowls and basins / with Grecian wrought molds. / Each blow of the hammer / brought out a sun / and each tinkle / a music of flames / impregnating my heart / and filling all my eyes / with a sea of bright stars. / Smithy of fresh-minted songs / I walk on at light's pace / reaping the best flowers / during the hours that remain in my day / ready to cross into / the shadowy nuraghe. / Perhaps the sun / in this celestial day / has come to join in suit / the flowers of oleander / and corbezzolo's fruit [Transl. G.J. Brelstaf–F. Chessa].
- ² *No toreador was I* // Juanne 'Arina was I / Boy herdsman of Lula. / In sowing season, morning and evening / Driver of oxen and cows. / No toreador was I. // I didn't die / at five in the afternoon / (as Ignacio Sánchez did). / I died at day break / in my childhood. // For me in the arena no / bag of lime was thrown down, / like a blanket, over the blood. / For me they brought no / white sheet. // Gored by an ox / at the farmyard gate. / Oh! how I died. / To my mother I cried / at the farmyard gate. // Mother came to the farmyard. / Give me your hand / and set me free, mammy, / from the pain that burns me / here on the farmyard floor. / Don't leave me on the ground, / behind the herd. / Call daddy for me, mammy, / he's back from the war... // – Oh fair son of mine, / I can't call him here. / Your father's dead at sea, / and you're an orphan, / fair son of mine. // Go out and tell / in every country and port / the misfortune you've met / fair son of mine. / Go out and tell / that your father is dead at sea, / in every country and port, / that your father, at sea, is dead. // Oh! such burning, what burning! / Bring me a shining hot thread / my daddy, dead at sea, / and help me to climb / the path to the skies. // Yet by my side arose / a wounded young man / with an open waistcoat / white as crystal / and a sword in his hand. / And a wound in the groin / like mine. // I looked at him, / he looked back at me: / – Está herido? – Yes sir. / – Eres torero? – No sir. / You, sir, have a wound in the groin / open, like mine. // – Are you a toreador? / – Yo soy un río de leones. / Gloria de Andalusia. / Tú eres torero? – // – No, sir, no toreador was I. / Juanne 'Arina was I, / Boy herdsman. / Morning and evening, / in the sowing season / Driver of oxen and cows. / But, no toreador was I. / At the farmyard gate / Gored by an ox. / But, no toreador was I. // – Calla, niñito, calla. / Tú eres torero! / El mas grande torero sardenolo / demasiado pequeño. // Subimos juntos a los toros celestes. / Toma tu mano pequeña / a este herido león, / torero sardenolito / niñito del corazón –. [Transl. G.J. Brelstaf–F. Chessa].
- ³ *At five in the afternoon*. / Five on the dot afternoon. / A boy fetched the white sheet / *at five in the afternoon* / A basket of lime waiting / *at five in the afternoon* / After that death and only death / *at five in the afternoon* [Transl. M. Sorell].

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