Marisa Verna
Pubblicazioni ultimo triennio (2008 – 2010)

"Baudelaire e Faust: storia di Una (falsa) incomprensione", Humanitas, 62, 2007, pp. 969-988.

"Jouir des aubépines: sur quelques pages de Proust et la synesthésie", in U. Felten (a cura di), *Die Korrespondenz der Sinne. Wahrnehmungsästetische und intermediale Aspekte im Werk von Proust*, Wilhelm Fink, Liepzieg 2008, pp. 269-283.

Abstract

Comme les réflexions de Merleau-Ponty sur l'œuvre proustienne le suggèrent, la *Recherche* consititue une 'mise en œuvre' artistique et littéraire de cet 'avènement du sens' qui est au centre des interrogations de la phénoménologie contemporaine. La dynamique entre expérience sensible et expérience langagière se réalise pour Proust dans le miracle laïque de l'écriture, dans le style. Dans cette articulation la synesthésie, en tant que figure ouverte et destinée à reproduire l' 'entre-deux' de la sensation, est non seulement appropriée, mais cruciale : nécessaire. Pour soutenir notre propos nous avons choisi d'analyser le célèbre 'morceau des aubépines' et nous nous sommes concentrés sur trois moments cruciaux de la narration, où la progressive densification de l'écriture se dispose dans un climax sensoriel et spirituel qui tend à la parfaite fusion des deux dimensions, et ce grâce à un emploi magistral -- et inédit – de la synesthésie.

As suggested by Merleau-Ponty's considerations on the proustian work, the *Recherche* constitutes an artistic and literary 'mise en œuvre' of that same 'avènement du sens' around which the questions of modern phenomenology revolve. For Proust, the dynamics between real experience and linguistic experience is realized through the secular miracle of writing, through style. For the realization of this connection, synesthesia is not only appropriate, but crucial and necessary, being an open trope destined to express the condition of 'being-in-between' typical of feelings. This claim is supported by an analysis of the famous 'passage of the hawthorn', particularly focusing on three crucial moments for the narration in which an ever more intense prose is obtained through a climax of the senses and of the spirit which tends towards the perfect fusion of the two dimensions thanks to a superb – and unseen before – use of synesthesia.

(a cura di, in collaborazione con S. Cigada), *La Sinonimia tra "langue" e "parole" nei codici italiano e francese*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2008

"Proust et l'art de la langue. La synonymie comme idolâtrie linguistique", in S. Cigada – M. Verna (a cura di), *La Sinonimia tra langue e parole nei codici italiano e francese*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2008, pp. 231-254.

Abstract

Nous allons analyser dans cet article l'impossibilité de concevoir, selon la conception proustienne de la langue, et qui plus est son esthétique, l'idée même de synonymie.
Dès ses premières réflexions théoriques sur la langue littéraire, Proust considère en effet le sens comme le résultat d'une dynamique complexe et jamais établie une fois pour toutes. Dans les notes à ses traductions de John Ruskin, le futur auteur de la *Recherche* reproche à l'esthéticien anglais de chercher le sens là où il n'est pas : dans les dictionnaires, ou dans l'histoire des mots. Dans cette attitude il y a pour Proust ce

péché d'idolâtrie que Ruskin partage avec Montesquiou, et qui pousse à confondre l'art et la vie, le sens et les mots.

Cette conception du langage se retrouve dans la *Recherche* à plusieurs niveaux ; nous allons en analyser deux : la langue des personnages et la formation de la métaphore. Dans la langue des personnages sont relevables de nombreux 'synonymes indices', ou même des synonymes implicites, qui marquent un glissement du sens, où l'analogie de signifié au niveau *langue* n'en est que plus révélatrice de vérités psychologiques que le langage finit toujours par démasquer. Dans ce « langage indirect » étudié par Genette le synonyme n'en est évidemment pas un, et ne pourrait, sans grave perte de sens, être remplacé par son équivalent du dictionnaire.

Le cas de la métaphore est plus décisif pour une définition de l'impossibilité de la synonymie dans la conception proustienne de la langue littéraire. Nous avons choisi de présenter deux exemples de 'métaphores sémème', dans lesquelles le narrateur de la *Recherche* développe toutes les directions sémantiques du signe langue, en métaphorisant ainsi le sémème entier. Le mot est lui-même source du procès de métamorphose du réel dont la métaphore est le résultat textuel, et c'est à partir du mot, en tant que signe *total*, tel qu'il est déposé dans la conscience de l'artiste, que se départent les comparaisons.

La métaphore ne marque partant pas un procédé d'équivalence sémantique, elle n'est pas synonyme d'un mot ou d'une expression, car elle naît d'une *évocation*, d'une résonance mémorielle que les mots déclenchent dans l'esprit de celui qui l'énonce. L'écriture proustienne lance en effet sur le réel « des réseaux d'interrogation », où toutes les virtualités du sens sont actives. Dans ces conditions, croire dans l'existence des synonymes est pour un écrivain une trahison de son devoir d'artiste, qui est de ne pas dire « trois fois à peu près la même chose », mais de trouver une vérité capable de donner lieu au voyage dans soi-même que chaque lecteur est censé commencer, une fois le livre fini.

The aim of this article is to analyze the impossibility of conceiving of the idea itself of synonymy within the proustian understanding of language and his esthetics.

Since his first theoretical reflections on literary language, Proust considered meaning as the result of a complex dynamics, never established once and for all. In his notes to his translations of John Ruskin, the future author of the *Recherche* reproaches the English esthetician of looking for linguistic meaning where it cannot be found: in the dictionaries or in the history of words. In this attitude Proust sees the same sin of idolatry that Ruskin shares with Montesquiou and that leads to a confusion between art and life, meaning and words.

This conception of language can be found in the *Recherche* at different levels. Two of these will be analyzed in this article: the language of the characters and the formation of metaphor. Within the language of the characters it is possible to observe various 'clue synonyms', or even 'implicit synonyms', marking meaning shifts, where the similarity of meaning at the level of *langue* is even more revealing of psychological truths that language ends up always exposing. Within this "indirect language" studied by Genette, it is clear that there is not just one synonym and that it could not be simply replaced by its equivalent in the dictionary without a serious loss of meaning.

The case of metaphor is even clearer to establish the impossibility of synonymy within the proustian understanding of literary language. Two examples will be presented of "sememe metaphors", in which the narrator of the *Recherche* develops all the semantic directions of the linguistic sign by the metaphorisation of the whole sememe. The word itself is at the origin of a process of metamorphosis of reality of which the metaphor is the textual result. It is from the word, as a *total* sign and as it lies within the artist's conscience, that all comparisons derive.

Therefore the metaphor does not realize a process of semantic equivalence, it is not a synonym of a word or an expression because it is born from an *evocation*, from the resounding of a memory that words awake within the soul of the person who produces it. Indeed the proustian style reflects on reality a "network of questions" where all the potentialities of a meaning are activated. Under these conditions, for a writer to believe in the existence of synonymy is like treason against his duty as an artist, which is not to say "trois fois à peu près la même chose", but to find a truth able to give way to that journey through the self that every reader is supposed to begin once the book is fnished.

(a cura di, in collaborazione con M. Modenesi – G.L. Di Bernardini), *I registri linguistici come strategia comunicativa e come struttura letteraria*, EduCatt, Milano 2010, pp. 9-272.

(a cura di, in collaborazione con A. Frigerio), *Proust e lo spazio*, EduCatt, Milano 2009.

Abstract

Anche se pochi lo hanno letto per intero, il romanzo di Proust è certamente celebre: ad oggi in Francia si contano ogni anno più pubblicazioni su Proust che su Napoleone o De Gaulle, e la *Recherche* è stata classificata -non a caso- un "lieu de mémoire", *luogo della memoria*, nella gigantesca opera di Pierre Nora che raccoglie tutti quei 'monumenti', siano essi architettonici o solo culturali, che vanno a costituire la memoria -e l'identità- della nazione francese. Altrettanto nota è l'importanza della struttura temporale nell'opera proustiana: qualunque antologia scolastica di buon livello riporta infatti il brano "della madeleine", che illustra il meccanismo della memoria involontaria, cui spesso viene ridotto, con una sineddoche -quanto mai particolarizzante- tutto il significato di un'opera immensa. Non tenteremo certo qui di riparare ai torti che la mitizzazione ha arrecato al capolavoro proustiano. Ci limiteremo a illustrare un angolo di quell'universo, che crediamo significativo e degno si essere studiato: ci concentreremo su un particolare tipo di sguardo, inaugurato nella letteratura francese da Baudelaire, e assunto da Proust nella propria estetica con modalità proprie ma con finalità non troppo lontane da quelle dell'illustre predecessore, che Proust definiva "vera figura di Michelangelo del nostro secolo": la descrizione di spazi osservati dall'esterno. Non ci risulta infatti che uno studio sistematico sia mai stato dedicato allo sguardo dall'esterno: osservando finestre chiuse, vetrate, mondi celati e spesso immaginati, il lettore è infatti spesso risucchiato fino ad un misterioso 'occhio del ciclone', in cui spazio e tempo finiscono per coincidere. I passaggi relativi a questo approccio al testo proustiano sono numerosi, e offrirebbero materia per uno studio molto vasto. Noi menzioneremo quelli che ci sono parsi più significativi, ma la via ci pare aperta verso indagini probabilmente feconde. Rovesciando la nostra affermazione iniziale, lo spazio si può esplicare -e non solo nella *Recherche*, ma nella possibilità umana di pensarlo- solo nel tempo. Solo grazie al tempo, lo spazio si può ritrovare: e in questo modo si tornerà anche a Baudelaire, che ha compreso per primo il fascino di una finestra chiusa, e per primo ha concepito la poesia come 'fantasmagoria della memoria'. Proust ha spostato il centro di tale percezione "infantile" -che per Baudelaire è l'*imagination*, magica facoltà che permette all'artista di intuire l'armonia dell'universo- dall'oggettività dell'Assoluto alla soggettività dello spirito. Lo stile è *visione*, guardare e concepire il mondo in un determinato modo e saper oggettivare quello sguardo, in modo che altri possano entrarvi e vedere a loro volta. L'arte resta tuttavia, anche per Proust, la sola esperienza capace di ingenerare *metamorfosi*, e, di conseguenza, verità. Il reale in quanto tale, ovvero lo spazio geometricamente e analiticamente concepito, non esiste per Proust. Parlando della scrittura verista-naturalista in un articolo del 1913, Proust la definisce "cette parodie de la vérité où le 'néo-italianisme' trouve le moyen de supprimer toute réalité véritable et profonde". Dall'esterno di una finestra chiusa si può invece guardare il tempo: se stessi nel tempo.

"Finestre, serre, telescopi, acquari: lo sguardo dall'esterno nella descrizione proustiana", in M. Verna – A. Frigerio (a cura di), *Proust e lo spazio*, EduCatt, Milano 2009, pp. 39-54.

Abstract

Even if few have read it entirely, Proust's novel is undoubtedly famous: to this day in France the number of publications on Proust each year exceeds the number of those on Napoleon or De Gaulle, and the *Recherche* has been classified – not surprisingly – as a "lieu de mémoire", *place of the memory*, in that huge work by Pierre Nora that collects all those 'monuments', be they architectural or just cultural, that constitute France's memory and identity. The importance of the temporal structure in Proust's work is also well known: any good textbook will quote the passage of 'the madeleine' describing the mechanism of involuntary memory which is often used to represent the meaning of the whole work by means of an extremely reductive synecdoche. No attempt will be made here to amend the wrongs that mythicization has done to Proust's masterpiece.

The aim of the present contribution will be rather to describe a small portion of that universe which seems significant and deserving of attention. Attention will be placed on a particular perspective, introduced in the French literary tradition by Baudelaire and taken up by Proust in a very idiosyncratic way, even if with aims not very different from those of his famous predecessor, whom Proust defined as "a true image of Michelangelo of our times": the description of spaces observed from the outside.
Indeed we are not aware of any systematic study dedicated to external perspective: by observing closed windows, stained glass windows, hidden and often imagined worlds, the reader is often sucked into a mysterious "eye of the cyclone" in which space and time in the end coincide. The passages related to such approach to Proust's work are numerous, and would provide material for an extensive study.
Only the most significant will be mentioned here, but the way is open to researches that are likely to be very insightful. Reversing our initial statement, space can be realized only in time, and not only in the *Recherche*, but in the human capacity to think of it. It is only in time that space can be reconstructed: in this way it will be possible to rediscover the intuitions of Baudelaire, who was the first to understand the appeal of a closed window and to consider poetry as a 'phantasmagoria of memory'.
The center of that "childish" perception that for Baudelaire is the *imagination*, a magic ability that allows the artist to perceive the harmony of the universe, is moved by Proust from the objectivity of the Absolute to the subjectivity of the spirit. Style is *vision*: observing and understanding the world in a certain way and being able to turn that perspective into an objective experience, so that also others may enter it and see for themselves. However, also for Proust art remains the only experience capable of generating *metamorphosis* and, consequently, truth.
Reality understood as a geometrical and analytical space does not exist for Proust. Referring to verist-naturalist writing in an article in 1913, Proust defines it as "cette parodie de la vérité où le 'néo-italianisme' trouve le moyen de supprimer toute réalité véritable et profonde". Looking at a closed window instead it is possible to gaze into time; to gaze at oneself into time.

"Ce 'lac inconnu où vivent ces expressions sans rapport avec la pensée et qui par cela même la révèlent': le rôle du registre linguistique dans la *Recherche du Temps Perdu*. Les cas de Bloch et du Duc de Guermantes", in M. Modenesi – M. Verna – G.L. Di Bernardini, *I registri linguistici come strategia comunicativa e come struttura letteraria*, EduCatt, Milano 2010, pp. 95-119.

Abstract

Les études sur le langage des personnages proustiens sont nombreuses, et le texte critique désormais incontournable de Gérard Genette, *Proust et le langage indirect*, a désormais démontré que les insurgences de la dimension psychologique profonde des personnages passent nécessairement par des écarts de langage: fautes, oublis, glissements de sens, et souvent apparition d'un registre inattendu. *A la recherche du Temps Perdu* peut en effet être interprété, entre autres, comme une gigantesque mise en scène du langage: dans la dynamique des différentes 'langues' qui s'y confrontent (langages des personnages, langue matricielle, métalangage, création rhétorique), se dessine dans une vibration constante l'image toujours imprécise de l'âme humaine. Dans cette 'chair vivante' qu'est la langue pour Proust on peut isoler différents niveaux d'analyse: linguistique, social, psychologique, esthétique. Le problème du registre entre dans tous ces niveaux, à des titres différents. Nous nous concentrerons surout sur le langage de deux personnages, le duc de Guermantes et Bloch, qui nous paraissent comme les plus représentatifs de l' enchevêtrement de relations que manifeste la parole. Rarement le registre peut selon Proust être un simple 'marqueur' social (même dans les cas qui peuvent apparaîte comme les plus simples, tels le liftier, le personnage d'Aimé et sa célèbre lettre à la famille, Françoise, sa fille), il est au contraire révélateur de ce que Proust appelle une "loi du langage": celle qui " veut qu' on s' exprime comme les gens de sa classe mentale et non de sa caste d' origine" (*Côté de Guermantes*, II partie).

Dans le langage de ces deux personnages se dessinent en filigrane les enjeux idéologiques, moraux, mais aussi psychologiques de l' "Affaire", l'un des événements historiques qui dans la *Recherche* sont 'tissés' et comme cachés dans le flou et l'évident manque de sens de l'Histoire. Dans notre communication nous tenterons d'identifier le *rôle* du registre -- émergence de mots nouveaux, d'expressions incongruës, de tournures incohérentes avec l'appartenence culturelle ou sociale -- dans la représentation de cette *vérité* du coeur de l'homme, dont la langue est le principal agent révélateur. C'est en effet à travers des glissements de registre que ces deux personnages révèlent leur attitude profonde, leur 'vérité' à l'égard d'un fait de l'histoire, qui fonctionne en fait comme un 'déclencheur' de couches plus profondes de leur nature.

Dans nos conclusions nous nous concentrerons sur la *valeur* que le registre -- son ambiguïté, son indécidabilité-- semble posséder dans l'esthétique proustienne: marqueur, avec d'autres éléments du langage, du *mensonge* représenté par la parole, et auquel la langue de l'art peut seule répondre.

Many are the works on the language of proustian characters and the unavoidable critical text by Gérard Genette, *Proust et le langage indirect*, has by now shown that the emergence of the characters' deepest psychological dimension is necessarily expressed through an often swerving language: mistakes, omissions, shifts in meaning, and often an unexpected register. Indeed one of the ways, among others, in which *A la recherche du Temps Perdu* may be interpreted is like a gigantic representation of language: by means of the dynamics between the various 'languages' that face each other in the narration (languages of the characters, language of the narrator, the metalanguage, rhetorical creations), the forever imprecise image of the human soul is brought to life amid a constant vibration. In this 'living flesh', which is language for Proust, it is possible to identify different levels of analysis: linguistic, social, psychological, esthetic. In different ways, it is the problem of register at each level. Attention will be focused especially on the language of two characters, the duke of Guermantes and Bloch, who seemed to be the most representative of the tangle of relations expressed through the discourse. Very seldom register is felt by Proust as a mere 'social mark' (even when it would be the easiest thing to expect, as in the cases of the liftboy, the character of Aimé and his famous letter to his family, Françoise, her daughter); on the contrary, it is revealing of what Proust calls a 'place of language', which "veut qu'on s' exprime comme les gens de sa classe mentale et non de sa caste d' origine" (*Côté de Guermantes*, II partie).

In the language of these two characters it is possible to glimpse the ideological, moral and also psychological issues of the "Affaire", one of the historical events woven within the *Recherche* and almost hidden within History's blur and clear lack of sense. This contribution aims at identifying the role of register - i.e. appearance of new words, of incongruous expressions, of moves that are incoherent with one's cultural or social belonging - within the representation of this *vérité* of the human heart principally revealed by language. Indeed shifts of register are clues to the two characters' deepest attitude, their 'verité' regarding an historical event that actually reveals the deepest layers of their soul.

The concluding section is focused on the *value* that register, with its ambiguity, its non-decidability, seems to acquire within proustian esthetics: expression, among other linguistic elements, of the deceitfulness of discourse to which only the language of art is able to reply.

(a cura di, in collaborazione con S. Cigada), *Simbolismo e Naturalismo fra Lingua e testo*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2010, pp. 1-522.

"D'une chevelure odorante au temps de l'extase : sur des synesthésies proustiennes", in S. Cigada – M. Verna (a cura di), *Simbolismo e Naturalismo fra Lingua e testo*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2010, pp. 477-494.

Abstract
La synesthésie est certainement l'une des techniques rhétoriques les plus couramment associées au Symbolisme, et notamment à la poétique baudelairienne. L'importance de ce trope dans l'œuvre de

Marcel Proust est moins connue, la critique lui ayant privilégié la métaphore, notoirement au centre de la réflexion proustienne sur le style

L'agrégation intersensorielle est toutefois significative et même parfois décisive dans la réalisation scripturale de l'esthétique proustienne : nous sommes convaincus en effet qu'elle constitue la manifestation rhétorique privilégiée d'une dynamique du sensible que la plus récente critique proustienne d'approche phénoménologique a située au centre du débat sur la *Recherche*

Une enquête sur cette « écriture du sensible » est en cours, dont nous avons récemment présenté un premier résultat, et c'est avec une pleine conscience de la vastitude du problème que nous l'abordons ici du point de vue plus spécifique de sa relation au Symbolisme

Dans la première partie de l'article nous tenterons d'esquisser le cadre du problème d'un point de vue théorique et d'essayer une définition de la synesthésie proustienne en relation à son prestigieux modèle baudelairien.

Dans la seconde partie nous analyserons un texte qui à notre avis constitue un exemple particulièrement clair et significatif de cette relation. Nous nous proposons de démontrer en conclusion que c'est dans une complète et consciente affirmation d'originalité que Proust réinterprète l'une des plus célèbres marques stylistiques du Symbolisme, en la réutilisant dans une perspective qui est celle de son esthétique propre, une esthétique qui n'exclut pas les dettes et les hommages mais qui se démarque nettement de toute forme d'imitation.

L'esthétique de Marcel Proust se situe notoirement à la lisière d'une transformation : synthèse de ce qui la précède et avant-poste en même temps d'une modernité parfois surprenante, son « ambiguïté propre » est selon Antoine Compagnon d'être « assise entre deux siècles comme entre deux chaises, bancale ou boiteuse, et trouvant son énergie dans ce décalage ». Le paradoxe en paraît d'emblée une clé de lecture acceptable, et nous allons voir que tenter de réduire l'écart qu'il laisse béant aboutirait à manquer le sens de l'œuvre.

Among all rhetorical strategies, synesthesia is certainly the one most commonly associated to Symbolism and, notably, to Baudelaire's poetics. The relevance of this trope in the work of Marcel Proust is less known, since critics preferred metaphor which is known to be at the center of Proust's reflections on style.

However the combination of different sensory experiences is significant and sometimes even crucial in the written realization of Proust's esthetics: in this article it is claimed that it is the preferred rhetorical manifestation of that dynamics of the senses situated at the center of the debate on the *Recherche* by the most recent critics following a phenomenological approach.

A study on this "écriture du sensible" is underway and partial results have recently been presented; it is however with full awareness of the vastity of the task that the issue is taken up here from the point of view of its relationship to Symbolism.

The first section of the article will outline the problem from a theoretical point of view and will put forward a definition of proustian synesthesia in comparison to its prestigious baudelairian model.

The second part of the article offers the analysis of a text that seems to be a particularly clear and relevant example of this relation. The aim is to show that Proust is reinterpreting one of the most famous stylistic signs of Symbolism with full awareness and originality by using it in the perspective of his own esthetics, which is never forgetful of its origins but very clearly avoids all forms of imitation.

As is known, the esthetics of Marcel Proust is set at the borderline between two eras: it expresses a perfect synthesis of what preceded it and constitutes at the same time an anticipation of a modern spirit which is at times bewildering. According to Antoine Compagnon, its "ambiguïté propre" is due to the fact that it is "assise entre deux siècles comme entre deux chaises, bancale ou boiteuse, et trouvant son énergie dans ce décalage". This paradox seems to be a reasonable interpretation key and it will be shown that trying to reduce this yawning gap would simply lead to missing the whole sense of the work.

"Dumas figlio, *La Signora delle Camelie*" (traduzione, note, saggio introduttivo e postfazione di Marisa Verna), ETS, Pisa (in corso di stampa).

Abstract
Il dramma a tesi di Dumas figlio si propone come un teatro "intelligente", di riflessione morale, in più o meno aperta polemica con il vaudeville e il puro *divertissement*.

Il volume contiene, oltre a una nuova traduzione del dramma e della prefazione di Dumas fils (edita a scopi didattici nel 2008 presso EduCatt), un capitolo introduttivo nel quale viene indagata la forza mitogena e la canonicità del testo per la cultura europea ed extraeuropea. Il saggio introduttivo si propone di mettere in luce l'intrinseca dualità del testo stesso, dalla quale si è generato appunto il mito: delle due strutture drammatiche presenti nella pièce (quella neoromantica e quella borghese), è la prima, contro

ogni previsione dello stesso Dumas figlio a prevalere nei decenni e poi nel secolo successivo alla sua creazione.

Nel saggio finale si propone invece l'analisi di due rappresentazioni considerate cruciali per la storia drammaturgica del testo (poiché la storia scenica di questo dramma è letteralmente immensa, si propone l'analisi di una rappresentazione coeva, e di una novecentesca), in Francia e in Italia. Segue un brevissimo excursus della fortuna scenica della *pièce* nel mondo, e una bibliografia selettiva.

The *drame à thèse* by Dumas fils appears as a form of "intelligent" theatre, proposing moral reflections in at times explicit opposition against the *vaudeville* and the pure *divertissement*.

Besides a new translation of the drama and of the preface by Dumas fils (previously published by EduCatt in 2008 for teaching purposes), the volume contains an introductory chapter which investigates the mythopoeic force and the canonicity of the text within the European and non-European cultures. The introductory essay aims at highlighting the intrinsic duality of the text which has originated the myth: of the two dramatic structures which make up the *pièce* – the neo-romantic and the bourgeois one – the former prevailed in the years and centuries following its creation, contrary even to any prediction of the author himself. The concluding essay analyzes two performances, in France and in Italy, acknowledged as crucial for the dramaturgical history of the text (since the staging history of this drama is immense, the analysis concerns one coeval performance and one from the 20th century). The essay is followed by a brief digression on the international staging success of the *pièce* and by a selected bibliography.

"Pour une langue sensible : l'héritage symboliste dans l'écriture proustienne", in Olivier Bivort (a cura di), *La littérature symboliste et la langue*, Classiques Garnier, Paris (in corso di stampa).