

The Petrarchism of the “Canzoniere raguseo”

by Ivano Cavallini

Among the various ‘skills’ pertaining to the deceitful arts of the pander, as listed in the Tomaso Garzoni’s *Piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo* (1585), is the ability to recite Petrarch’s *Rime*. This is actually more than a matter of idle curiosity, for in its own way it attests how comprehensively the Petrarchan idiom — ‘via Bembo’ — spread beyond the literary circles and filtered into the more prosaic, day-to-day forms of communication. It should come as no surprise, therefore, to learn that close attention was paid to the poet’s works by the native musicians working on the opposite shore of the Adriatic, who were accustomed to the use of Italian as a language of culture.

In this respect we have a shining example in Giulio Schiavetti-Julije Skjavetić, *maestro di cappella* at Sebenico (Šibenik) in Venetian Dalmatia, who published in Venice in 1563 a collection of four- and five-voice madrigals, using segments of famous texts by the poet in the following manner:

- I *Era’l giorno ch’al sol si scolorava*
II *Trovom’amor del tutto disarmato*
III *Amor mi spron’in un tempo et affrena*
- I *Pace non trovo e non ho da far guerra*
II *Tal m’ha in prigion che non m’apre*
- I *Ma’l tempo è breve e nostra voglia larga*
II *La morte è fin d’una prigion oscura*
- Fu fors’un tempo dolce cosa amore*

Like many other of his fellow-countrymen, this polyphonist, who also composed two *greghesche* setting lines by Antonio Molino in the form of a parody of the neo-Greek *stradioto* (1564), turned to Petrarch, because of both the poet’s popularity in Dalmatia (he was the object of imitations in both Italian and Croatian) and the international character of madrigal polyphony, which had risen to the rank of international *auctoritas* (thanks also to Petrarchan poetry).

This was even more conspicuous at Dubrovnik (ancient Ragusa), the city that boasted an indigenous genesis of literary trilinguism without equal in the 16th century. While Latin drew its origins from the Roman legacy that filled

the Ragusan patriciate with great pride (see Lampridio Cerva's haughty claim "non tam Romam, quam Rhagusam esse romanam puto", *De Epidaurō*), Italian was the offspring of a Romance vernacular that disappeared around the mid 15th century and Croatian was the common language spoken by all classes of the republic. Not one of the three should be considered as a completely imported language. Indeed each is an essential component of Ragusan civilization, whose distinguishing feature was not the artificial conjunction of three different cultures, but the extraordinary coexistence of three linguistic levels that were expressions of the same culture. Instead it was the selective use of language – in relation to the literary genres employed – that determined whether the intellectuals of Venice's learned competitor chose to write in Latin, Italian or Croatian. While the scientific treatises destined for the European market were written in Latin, Italian (thanks to its status as a *lingua franca*) was used for essays, and Croatian was better suited to the theatre, a genre open to a wider number of citizens, not all of whom were able to understand courtly Italian.

In the case of lyrical poetry, however, the situation was more complex. Although poetry flourished spontaneously in all three languages, other considerations applied, involving distinctions of merit. While Latin tended towards the classical-humanistic conception, Italian followed the rules of Bembian Petrarchism, and Croatian combined Petrarchism with autochthonous expressions independent of the transposition process. In this respect a certain importance was assumed by the creation, at the start of the century, of a type of poetry that imitated Petrarch in the štokavo-jekava variant of Croatian, as attested in the *Canzoniere raguseo* (or Ranjina collection) a few decades before the experiments conducted in Italian by writers like Bobali-Bobaljevič, Nale-Nalješkovič and Ragnina-Ranjina on the authentic sources, i.e. on the 'Italian Petrarch'.

It also needs to be stressed that the unwritten (yet nonetheless observed) laws of the musical market would have rejected the publication of secular music in the Slavic tongue. Nonetheless, there is nothing unusual about the fact that a man of the theatre like Nalješkovič, who was highly sensitive to the musical components of the pastoral fables written in the mother tongue, should call for a lute setting also of Petrarch's poetry (which he himself translated and adapted), as demonstrated by his fine version of the sonnet *Se la vita da l'aspro tormento*, which became *Ako me nepokoj i nemir ne sprzi*.