

(through which the man runs desperately), but it stands all the same as a place of the common imagery, the synthesis of all the features of a repulsive setting for the development of human civilization (at least, in no industrial times!): that is, conveying inevitably the reader to the paradoxical deduction that Life itself does not help to live. And this so far as the physical space is concerned. But regarding time, 'Iceland', or this transfigured 'Thule', is just the symbol of the hard, terrific and endless series of years of primeval humanity, always struggling for its existence against the blind hostility of the environment, and exposed night and day to the perils of wild beasts: a strong contrast with the legends of Lost Paradises and Golden Ages. And this refers back exactly to some fundamental verses of Lucretius' description of the continuous dangers and awful difficulties of life of primitive men in his materialistic poem *De Rerum Natura*, which was obviously, among Latin classical authors, the Leopardi's 'livre de chevet'.



### THE 'ALVIDA' BY GIACOMO CORTONE

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After the success of Torquato Tasso's *Torrismondo*, other Italian tragedies were placed in mysterious Northern Europe. One of them was Giacomo Cortone's *Alvida*, applauded in Udine in 1614, printed in Padova in 1615, and quite forgotten now. This tragedy is mentioned, among the Italian imitations of *Torrismondo*, by Umberto Renda in a long essay published in 1905-6. Although the quality is rather poor, literarily speaking, it is worth reading as a document of Nordic spell - combined in this case with the violent atmosphere of XVIIth century's tragedies. The male protagonist is Orcano, Count of Flanders, who seeks Alvida in mar-

riage from her father Lico, King of Norway. For Lico does not accept, Orcano leaves for Egypt thinking of revenging himself. In the meanwhile Lico promises his daughter to Ormondo, King of Denmark. Orcano, coming from Egypt with an army under the name of Arcesio, seizes the town and takes Alvida prisoner. Alvida is killed by Odrisia (but she had already maimed herself, biting her tongue and spitting it at Orcano, according to the violence of Giraldi's tragedies), Orcano's sister, who had been seduced by Ormondo (IV 8 p. 110: she had fallen in love with him when he was wounded, as Angelica with Medoro in *Orlando Furioso* XIX 20-30; but Ormondo, behaving himself ignobly as many characters of the Italian tragedy of that period, refused to marry her). All the *dramatis personae* die a violent death.

I shall always quote the text according to G. Cortone, *Alvida*, Padova 1615, referring to the pages of this edition. From the first lines (I 2, 4-5) it is clear that Norway's distance from the rest of the world is not warranty of peace and safety. Lico and his court are waiting for Ormondo and are ready to celebrate the marriage, but Alvida is upset by her dreams (her nurse tries to reassure her, saying that dreams are not true, like in Tasso's *Torrismondo* I 1, 125-126). As a matter of fact Vaffrino, Orcano's lieutenant, plans to insinuate himself into the Court changing his voice and his language (like his homonymous, Tasso's Vaffrino in *Gerusalemme Liberata* XVIII 57-60). In spite of the nurse's gossiping about kissing (I 6, 13-19) according to *Aminta*'s model, the atmosphere becomes soon tragic not only because of Alvida's dreams (I 6, 20-23) but also of the counsellor's topical considerations about Fortune (II 3, 32-33). The dialogue between Odrisia and her waiter Locro is also gloomy, being constructed on that between Clorinda and Arsete in *Gerusalemme liberata* XII 18-20 and 39-40 (even if here Odrisia will not die fighting with her ancient lover Ormondo, as Locro has dreamt and is afraid of).

The sad destiny of Norway is strictly connected with its king's personality. The

Lico's character is modelled on the ancient good kings, as Priamus in Virgil's *Aeneid*. He has, for instance, some aspects of Theseus in Euripides' *Suppliants*: Lico too believes that a good chief must involve people in his decisions (II 6 p.43). Vaffrino's plan just relies on Lico's *pietas* (III 2 p.57):

## VAFFRINO

Siciliano son'io: fuggo i miei danni,  
E pietà vò cercando nel pio seno  
Del Re Norvegio, de la cui bontade  
La fama porta per lo Mondo il grido...

## LICO

Peregrino,

O chiunque tu sia, vivi tranquillo,  
Ch'è noi non havrai fatto in van ricorso.

Vaffrino tells an invented story: he says that Ruggiero II, King of Sicily, having known about the discovery of the New World, sent his brother Tancredi with an army to get hold of wealth (III 2 p.58: "Mandar risolse il suo German Tancredi / Con Armata potente à far avanzo / Di stato, d'oro, ond'appagar potesse / Gl'ambitiosi suoi avidi spirti; Concedendo le leggi de le Genti / Al primo occupator l'Isole incolte"). Vaffrino, who introduces himself as the captain of some squadrons, says he was caught in a storm and he roved over the seas with his fellows for a year, without touching land. Vaffrino's story is sad and awful: he says they had nothing to eat and were reduced to feed on corpses; finally they landed on a small island and were helped by fishermen, but many of them died eating good food they were no longer used to. The story is similar to other descriptions of shipwrecks, for instance the *Viaggio e naufragio di Piero Quirino, gentiluomo veneziano* (1431) (see Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Navigazioni e viaggi*, edited by M.Milanesi, IV, Torino 1983, 47-77). But Vaffrino insists on dreadful details, for instance the need of food that obliges many sailors to eat human bodies (III 2, 60-61):

Mà, s'io dicessi, com'estinta fosse  
Da noi la fame, e la molesta sete,  
L'abominevol cibo, il rio licore,  
Onde nodriti fummo longo tempo,  
L'impietà nostra verso i propri amici

L'atrocità contro i Compagni estinti,  
E i sepolcri à i Cadaver da noi dato,  
O che horrible Istoria intenderesti.

Vaffrino uses all means to move his enemies into compassion: "rio licore" is perhaps an allusion to urin, mentioned by Piero Quirino as a better drink than salty water; but in Quirino's report there is no mention of cannibalism, not even an allusion. In Vaffrino's - as in Quirino's - tale, he and his friends get ashore after many difficulties. The little island they arrive at is in both cases inhabited by good fishermen who offer food and drinks: but the clear atmosphere described by Piero Quirino ("ma poi che da noi con li gesti e con la voce furono certificati ch'eravamo persone pericolate e bisognose d'aiuto, cominciorono a parlarne [...]: ma nulla per noi era inteso. [...] Ma, sopravvenuta la domenica [...] il suo capellano [...] fece intendere a tutti il caso [...]: e commossi a pietà tutti lagrimorono [...], sì che [...] barche sei [...] vennero per noi, portandone copia de' suoi cibi. E chi potria stimare quanta e qual fosse l'allegrezza nostra, vedendoci visitar con tant'amore e carità?") is substituted here by a tragic one (III 2 p.61):

Qui da vostri benigni Pescatori  
Non intesi al parlar, ci fu di Pane,  
Di Pesci, et d'acque dolci data aita;  
Ma, mentre le fameliche lor brame  
Molti satiar volean, sotto 'l soverchio  
Peso del cibo rimaneano oppressi.

The structure of Vaffrino's tale is that of Sinon's fraud in *Aeneid* II. Also the reactions of Lico and Leone are moulded upon Priamus' and Laocoon's patterns. Tancredi is presented as a cruel and devilish (III 2, 62-63):

Fuggo il crudel; fuggo il protervo Ulisse.

On the contrary Vaffrino takes care to present himself as a brave and honourable man, so that Lico could receive him without a doubt. He promises in exchange to make Lico's *pietas* well known (III 2 p.65):

Dovunque io me n'andrò, del Rè Norvegio  
Narrerò meraviglie.

So in Vaffrino's adulation Norway should be the equivalent of Ruggero's good government (III 2 p.64 "Spero condurmi là, dove salute / Trova da man benigna il giusto, e 'l buono, / Dove libero, e vergine Governo / Regge d'Italia la più bella parte / Con dolce Impero, e à piú d'un Regno impera"). On the other hand, Leone too, in II 1, 25-26, had presented his political function according to classical examples of a good politician:

Poiche 'l mio Ré de' Popoli il governo,  
E 'l maneggio de l'arme in me hà deposto,  
[...]  
Io mi sento, no sò come, rapito  
A l'essere mortale, e mi sollevo  
Con ogni mio pensier sovra le stelle,  
[...]  
E quest'avviene (ò 'l credo) perche quando  
Gli omeri al grave peso io sottoposi:  
Ogni privato affetto pria deposi,  
A' i terreni piacer l'alma involando,  
E à tutto ciò, che 'l senso alettar puote.

That is what is now called the "bureaucrat's ideology": the idea of a man who renounces everything to devote himself completely to public affairs. This is for instance, in Seneca's *ad Polybium*, the case of Polybius, the powerful freed-man of the Emperor Claudius, who is not allowed to mourn the loss of his brother because he has to take care of his subjects (6,4 *non licet tibi flere immodice, nec hoc tantummodo non licet*. [...]) *Multa tibi non licent, quae humillimis et in angulo iacentibus licent*); but this is especially the case of the Emperor himself (7,2 *Caesari quoque ipsi, cui omnia licent, propter hoc ipsum multa non licent* [...]) *Ex quo se Caesar orbi terrarum dedicavit, sibi eripuit*).

Leone is the good counselor whose function is always above all to think of public good. He is afraid of Lico's excessive *clementia* and *pietas* (II 6 p.49 "Ch'un Principe sia pio, già non è biasmo, / Mà li convien sapere anco esser aspro, / Severo, impetuoso, e risoluto, / Sendo virtù, ch'à tempo egli sia tale") and in front of Vaffrino he plays the role of Laocoon in Virgil's *Aeneid* II (II 2 p.59 Lico: "Pietosa Istoria: intenerir mi sento". / Leone: "Fulmin dal Cielo uccida pur chi mente"; II 2 p.62 "O meraviglia: Che

sì, che 'l Rè à sogni / Del mentitore intiera fede presta?"). The model is openly declared by Leone himself (III 2, 65-66) who maintains the distance between Norwegians, wary and well organized, and Trojans, easily deceived and here presented with a little contempt:

crederesti  
D'haver, nuovo Sinon, la frode ordita  
Del Cavallo Troian ne la Norvegia?  
Non sapran tardo questa volta i Frigi;  
Nè siam noi Frigi, come forse stimi,  
Onde divin voler t'haurà condotto  
A vender frodi, per menar supplicij.

The real catastrophe is opened by the nurse's tale about the duel between Odrisia and Ormondo, where Ormondo is killed (III 4, 73-75). Odrisia reveals herself as a girl according to the *topos* of the helmet (III 4 p.75: "Tratto à l'hor l'elmo al prigionier si vide, / Che d'angelico aspetto era Donzella, / Con chioma bionda, e crespa, e de pochi anni"), and tells the dead Ormondo terrible words, shouting her revenge (III 4 p.75):

Altre feste, altre Nozze, disleale,  
Hor goderai nel disperato Inferno:  
Vanne altier de l'altrui rapito fiore,  
Milanta haver schernito Verginella  
Priva di Genitore, e di consiglio,  
E con titol di Putta noma Odrisia.

In opposition to the tragic atmosphere of the Courts, the Chorus proposes the model of shepherd's life, so far from envy, war, ambition, avidity (pp. 81-84). While the Court goes towards a complete overthrow, it is clearer and clearer than Good and Evil face each other: Lico and his country represent Good and their only fault is their *pietas*. Perhaps a good king should be less tender, in fact according to Machiavelli's suggestions; a good king should be like Leone more than like Lico: so the sly Vaffrino scorns Lico, but admires Leone (III 6; see also IV 7, 105-108). But when Arcesio accuses Lico to want to rule over the whole world, without showing any pity, Lico gives his enemy another lesson of *clementia*, also considering that, like in the ancient world, anyone could be a victim of Fortune and lose his freedom (IV 2 p.87):

O chiunque tu sia anima infame,  
 Che l'infelice condition schernisci  
 D'huom vinto, e in tuo poter ristretto homai,  
 Mentre insegnan gli essempli dè passati  
 Vincitor verso i prigionier nemici,  
 Che si guerreggia sol fin, che si vince,  
 Et che communi sono le vicende  
 De l'instabil fortuna, onde pietade  
 Da le sciagure altrui l'huom giusto apprende.

But Arcesio is ready to set his prisoner Alvida free only because he has fallen in love with her. Alvida's answer is terrible, as I said in the first lines. The cruel and famous story of Tereus and Philomela (see especially *Ov. Met.* VI 421 ff.) gave the idea of the cut tongue and Alvida shows her hate against Arcesio punishing herself (IV 2, 96-98).

It is Vaffrino himself who accuses Arcesio to have betrayed the king of Egypt's trust and reveals the real aim of the expedition against Norwegians: Lico had not wanted to give her daughter in marriage to Orcano-Arcesio because he was only a servant educated at the Norwegian Court. Trying to escape death, Arcesio addresses his last speech to his soldiers, presenting himself as a warranter of coming back (V 3 p.126), according to the general model of Ulysses:

Ma, s'io morirò, à voi poi, che speme resta  
 Di riveder la Patria? i cari figli?  
 Le mogli? i genitori, i vostri amici?  
 Chi vi ricondurrà salvi in Egitto  
 Ad adorar d'Iside il simulacro?  
 Chi pratico de l'Isole, e de' Porti  
 Per l'immenso Ocean trarrà l'Armata?  
 Chi le Circi fuggir saprà, e le Sirti?  
 [...]  
 Ne vogliate oscurar la vostra gloria

In an oppressing northern climate (in V 4 p.128 Vaffrino says that his heart does not want "più respirare à l'aria infausta / Di questo Infernal Clima") ancient virtues are perfectly at their place: Leone, like Cato the Younger, prefers to poison himself than to lose his freedom (V 6, 135-136).

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#### ALLA RICERCA DEI GOTI

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 "La Sapienza"

La mostra su "I Goti", organizzata a Milano (Palazzo Reale, 28 gennaio - 8 maggio 1994) dalla Regione Lombardia, con il concorso del locale Museo Archeologico, si presenta un'iniziativa ampia nel respiro quanto ambiziosa nel proposito di presentare la civiltà dei Goti, dalla costa atlantica dell'Iberia al Mar Nero, nella loro secolare vicenda che dall'inizio dell'era volgare si estende - nella piena evidenza del protagonismo - fino al secolo VIII, e assai più avanti per quanto concerne la prosecuzione nel più ristretto ambito della Crimea. Lo scopo didattico, che - ormai in ogni occasione consimile - mira a rendere l'iniziativa accessibile anche ad un pubblico vasto e non specialista, si unisce ad un notevole rigore scientifico nella presentazione della problematica connessa al tema prescelto, come emerge non solo dall'allestimento dell'esibizione, ma anche dal catalogo - splendido nella grafica - che l'accompagna (*I Goti*, edito da Electa Lombardia, Milano 1994, 400 pp.), e al quale spesso si farà qui riferimento.

Il volume, con capitoli affidati a differenti e spesso ben noti specialisti, si apre con due sezioni riservate, rispettivamente, ai Goti dal I al IV secolo e ai Goti in Crimea (secoli V-VII). La terza, e la più ampia, sezione è dedicata agli Ostrogoti dai Balcani all'Italia (secoli IV-VI) e consta di dieci capitoli; la maggior parte di essi trattano i diversi aspetti archeologici nelle varie fasi della vicenda di