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Franco Marucci. *Authors in Dialogue: Comparative Essays in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century English Literature*. Oxford, New York: Peter Lang, 2020. Pp. 220. ISBN 978-1-78997-598-7 (hardback); ISBN 978-1-78997-599-4 (ePDF).

*Authors in Dialogue* is a collection of essays and conference papers which aims to scrutinise a set of little known or yet unexplored literary texts ranging from late Romanticism to early Modernism. Marucci's sheer erudition allows him to act as a veritable comparatist or, rather, as a literary archaeologist enthusiastically engaged in establishing a cultural dialogue between authors extending from Byron to James Joyce. The dialogue becomes prolific due to Marucci's interest in digging up European – and particularly Italian – sources that inspired the writers selected for analysis. Innovatively enough, Marucci avoids the much-celebrated Bakhtinian approach to dialogism or other methodologies, such as Northrop Frye's archetypal criticism and Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence" (Bloom 1973) and takes Yuri Lotman's theory about cultural semiotics as the linchpin of his argument. Confessing that "Lotman's works are still remarkably underused in the English-speaking academic world" (vii), Marucci chooses to apply Lotman's model, according to which "the texts of single successive cultures" are "expressions of their predominant codes (cultural, ethical, religious, behavioural, etc.), so that each text can be seen as a variant of the 'text culture' ascribable to a given cultural type" (vii). Moreover, given the dynamicity of cultures, some texts fail to abide by standard cultural codes and may consequently contain "alternative and conflictual codes" (viii). In a nutshell, Lotman's critical view – which gained momentum in Italy in the 1970s – helps Marucci define dialogism as "the sharing of common preoccupations, the recursiveness of motifs, themes and patterns, the emergence of constants, a network of explicit or hidden confrontations" (vii), an endeavour which is on a par with the contemporary debates on "world literature."

*Authors in Dialogue* consists of a Preface and twelve chapters which may fall into four categories, given Marucci's nuanced understanding of the term "dialogue." The first category includes dialogues between original works and their adaptation or parodic reworking in later centuries. Such is the case of the Donjuanesque myth reinterpreted by Byron in his *Don Juan* (Chapter 1). Marucci claims that, unlike Faust, Don Juan is an emblematic legend represented in all European literatures, which inspired an English masterpiece like Byron's. However, the author is right in saying that "both Faustian and Donjuanesque remakes in England are of little or no value taken as a collective body" (1) because they have been neglected or only sketchily tackled by scholars. Marucci's goal in this chapter is to reveal the main functions of the Don Juan myth as a narrative model and to show how "the subsequent remakes exploit the resources of a generative fabula which, initially fragmented, solidifies into a written Ur-text that provides a tentative 'grammar' for future use" (4). Borrowed from the language of cinema, "remake" is the conceptual tool whereby Marucci analyses three English Don Juans: Thomas Shadwell's *The Libertine*, a faithful remake of one version of the original, Byron's *Don Juan*, a "loose remake" (8) and Robert Browning's poem "Fifine at the Fair," in which any trace of the original is erased to such an extent that "the nature of a Donjuanesque remake has escaped the notice of the most careful scholars of the Don Juan myth in English literature" (8).

Dialogues between an author and other contemporary peers, as reflected by debates in letters or critical essays, or with other sources, are also part of the first category. Chapter 3 is a foray into the story of a typically Victorian young middle-class Englishman who goes on a *grand tour* patterned after a journey in Central Europe George Eliot had made before writing the story "The Lifted Veil" in 1859. Marucci interprets the story as a satire on the middle class and as a parody of current literary genres and, most importantly, as "a metaphor for the waning of Romanticism" embodied by Latimer, the protagonist who "must give way to the responsible and socializing realist" (28). Chapter 4 provides a minute analysis of the reception of George Eliot in Italy and zooms in on *Romola*, a historical novel set in Italy, whose preparation determined Eliot to read "nearly sixty books" (39). Special attention is devoted to the Eliot chapter in Mario Praz's *La crisi dell'eroe nel romanzo vittoriano*, a ground-breaking book published in Italian in 1952 and translated into English by Angus

Davidson in 1956 and, ultimately, to Maria Tosello's *Le fonti italiane della 'Romola' di George Eliot* (1956), "the first book in any language, English included, to have been devoted to, and to be focused exclusively on, *Romola*" (43, original emphasis). Chapter 6 shows how two apparently unimportant biblical works by Matthew Arnold, *Literature and the Dogma* and *God and the Bible*, are pivotal to his understanding of the concept of "culture" and, by extension, to the understanding of his entire prose work, "until the moment when the poet gave way to the essayist" (67). Finally, Chapter 10 investigates T.S. Eliot's surprising appraisal of the Victorian novelist Wilkie Collins's *Armada*, which Eliot considered a perfect mixture of the dramatic and the melodramatic in the expression of a "conscious and unconscious obsession with guilt" (153), one of the major concerns unravelled by his poetry and drama.

The second category includes "heuristic" dialogues (ix). Chapter 2, for instance, examines John Ruskin's analysis of the paradigmatic shift from the classical age of Homer to the Middle Ages dominated by the figure of Dante and eventually to his modern times, an undertaking which Marucci claims to be Lotmanian "in embryo" (viii). The author's task is to examine a digressive passage from Book III of *Modern Painters* on Homer's and Dante's cultural landscape and, concurrently, to comment on Ruskin's late Florentine trilogy – *Ariadne Florentina*, *Val d'Arno*, and *Mornings in Florence* – which became a cultural icon during the late Victorian period. Marucci's insight into Gerard Manley Hopkins's "oxymoronic dimension of God" (123) in Chapter 8 relies on cogent and well-documented remarks on the contemporary religious scene, according to which Hopkins follows the Catholic model established by Cardinal Newman. The detailed discussion of Hopkins's ambivalent understanding of God as "mastering" and "merciful" overlaps with a comparison between Hopkins and John Keble, Robert Browning and Arthur Hugh Clough in order to shed light on "explicit or hidden confrontations" (vii). According to Marucci, "Hopkins was deeply familiar with the first, probably knew very well the second, almost surely never read the third" (124). Chapter 9 dwells on Hopkins in relation to metempsychosis and its meaning to the Victorians. Marucci furthers the discussion by considering the case of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novels *Zanoni* and particularly *A Strange Story*, his second and more relevant "metaphysical novel" (141), and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's little known prose fiction, "Saint Agnes of Intercession," and the more familiar "Hand and Soul."

The impact of friendship on the creative process represents the third type of dialogue. Chapter 5 is devoted to an in-depth analysis of Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach," which, argues Marucci, was the result of the poet's discussions with his father, the legendary headmaster of Rugby, or with his friend Arthur Hugh Clough.

The fourth and last type of dialogue is an intercultural one, perfectly illustrated by Ouida, the pseudonym of the female novelist Maria Louise Ramé, and James Joyce. Dedicated to the former, Chapter 7 expounds on Ouida's novels' merit to have created iconic characters that became part of the twentieth-century novelists' fictional universe and on how the novel *Moths* reveals the influence of Italian bel canto and opera singing on Victorian literature. Chapter 11 offers a fresh perspective on the early controversial reception of Joyce in Italy and his close friendship with Alessandro Francini Bruni during the ten years the Irish novelist spent in Trieste. Bruni was the only Italian who wrote about Joyce between 1922 and 1930, "bereft of any reverential fear, in a teasingly ironic tone spiced with a tinge of malice" (178). In Chapter 12, Marucci focuses on Joyce's interest in the almost unknown librettist Giuseppe Giacosa in order to explain the sheer importance of operatic music to Joyce's works.

The book is an absolutely enjoyable read, abounding in original critical viewpoints, even if some of them are purely speculative. The variety of texts discussed, along with the less known or completely unknown European sources that enable Marucci to enter into a dialogue with the writers under scrutiny reveal the author's undeniable comparative skills. However, it would have been profitable for readers, be they students or scholars, or common readers, to learn more about the Lotmanian model and how it applies in each case study proposed in the volume. This methodological shortcoming notwithstanding, *Authors in Dialogue* may rightfully stand side by side with contemporary studies on global literature which lay stress on transnational modes of circulation and reading.

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