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**Foscolo's *Parallel between Dante and Petrarch*: A Perfect Harmony of Contrasts**

*During his stay in England from 1816 to 1827, Ugo Foscolo was particularly aware of the importance of giving a new value and deeper meanings to Italian literature; that is why a fresh approach was needed in his mind, a sort of well combined mixture of a carefully philological analysis of texts and a detailed psychological exegesis based on historical evidence. He was convinced that eliciting an emotional response, together with a historical persuasion, was the best way to properly spread a better knowledge of the classics of Italian literature, avoiding cultural approximations and superficial interpretations. Therefore, through a close examination of the Parallel between Dante and Petrarch, the present essay aims at illustrating Foscolo's original comparative discourse on the major Italian poets of the Middle Ages.*

It has been often pointed out that the friendly welcome which Ugo Foscolo (Zante 1778 – Turnham Green, London, 1827) received in England was due to the spirit of the times, which were characterized by an extraordinary interest in the classics (as is well known, “Zacinto”, Foscolo's beloved homeland, was one of his favourite memories and topics of conversation)<sup>1</sup> and, particularly, in the Italian cultural tradition and style. Anything that came from Italy was fashionable – and there was no difference in enthusiasm between the upper class and the middle class towards Italian art, architecture, music, and literature; the decade Foscolo spent there, as illustrated by Eric Reginald Vincent, «was peculiarly propitious for Italian visitors»<sup>2</sup>:

All high-born young ladies had their Italian masters and the splash they made had remote ripples; for example, we shall find a class of little Quaker girls learning the language in their suburban seminary. Dozens of Foscolo's English friends and acquaintances were able to write to him in good, or at least comprehensible, Italian.

When Foscolo visited a typical rich English home he would enter through a Palladian portico into a hall containing a group of statuary, perhaps by Canova, thence to the withdrawing room on whose walls would be landscapes by Salvator Rosa or Canaletto. As he ran his eye over the bookshelves he would notice the Italian classics side by side with the Greeks and Latins. If the daughter of the house could be prevailed on to sing – as was likely – she would probably choose an Italian aria.

[...] High society in the years after Waterloo was enthusiastic for Italian music. Rossini

left London laden with gold. Catalani, Pasta, Velluti and other popular singers were paid enormous sums to perform at private houses. The Italian Opera in the Haymarket was always crowded.

[...] Thus there was a public ready and eager for such a poem as Byron's *Childe Harold*, really a romantic poetical travel book. Roger's *Italy* ran to numerous editions. Those who could not go to Italy fed their imaginations on the scenes so delightfully conjured up for them in such works. On a prose level Lady Morgan's *Italy* gave the personal, anecdotal version of a similar theme. All these influences combined to make the way easy for Foscolo who seemed to many another Byron, come from Italy in exchange for the one who had gone away under a cloud<sup>3</sup>.

As to modern languages, Italian was taught in the academic precincts «under the folds of Clío's robe. Thus it was that Wordsworth could study Italian at Cambridge with Agostino Isola, the grandfather of Charles Lamb's Emma, just as Gray before him had become proficient in the language under Isola's predecessor, Piazza»<sup>4</sup>. As previously stated, being able to speak some Italian, or at least to understand it a little, was fundamental. Therefore, the most eminent members of the English aristocracy were encouraged and spurred on to invite renowned Italian personalities to their homes in order to assure the best company and teachers (of piano or other instruments, of language, of literature) to their families.

Let me frame our discussion by focusing our attention on the literary background pertaining to the novel. It is well known that the novel, as a genre, was already widely circulating in England and France, where the bourgeoisie chose to express itself through this new narrative code. In Italy, instead, this revolutionary genre was just at its beginnings (in the early nineteenth century, the term "romanzo" was still a synonym of the poem in verse)<sup>5</sup>. At this particular stage of this literary process, Foscolo was the first Italian writer who created a novel in the genuine meaning of the word, even if it was an epistolary one, *Le ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* (of which there were four different editions: 1798, 1802, 1816, 1817). This novel represented a new way of conceiving the relationship between the ego and reality – its protagonist was the Promethean hero who lives in a permanent and sublime conflict with his passions and the world<sup>6</sup>. As a matter of fact, it broke an old balance and, as a consequence, it made a significant change in comparison to the previous period. The social and rationalizing ego of the eighteenth century was giving way to the Romantic soul, ready to take action and bravely face danger, accepting even death to preserve its ideals and strong passions. When Jacopo's political and private hopes faded away, the only way of escaping this prostrating situation was the extreme and ineluctable decision of renouncing life. In illustration of this point, Gino Tellini has observed that

This self-character, pulled into two directions and prey to its own passions, brings its vital parabola to a close in the tragic act of suicide. Conformity to social conventions, together with the negativity of the historical setting, overwhelms the hero, who succumbs, yet without resigning himself to his own despair.

[...] Step by step, and in clear connection with the biography of Foscolo, *Ortis* became the first modern Italian novel, a distressed reflection on the collapse of Jacobin utopia and Napoleonic myth as well as on the cultural crises that laid bare the powerlessness of revolutionary intellectuals.

In his dual misadventure as lover and disappointed patriot, Jacopo manifests an absolute need for individual freedom. [...] Death appears as revenge against the tyranny of Teresa's father as well as a kind of self-assertion. A boundless desire for life is transformed into anxiety for death<sup>7</sup>.

Jacopo's self-analysis through his letters reveals, as has been highlighted, «an exceptional individuality both stormy and tormented»<sup>8</sup>, which would have represented a complex and multifaceted symbol, providing a powerful magnetic attraction to readers of the following decades.

Foscolo was fully aware of his charisma and potential. During his stay in England, he wished to create the first nucleus of the future Italian learned class in London. As Vincent has pointed out,

After the first Italian revolutionary movements of 1820-21, a new aspect of English Italianism began to appear. The essentially liberal public opinion of the masses led by the Whig aristocrats now included the Italians, together with the Greeks and Spaniards, in the picture of oppressed people, held down by reactionary or foreign governments. The English sympathy for the Risorgimento movement – that was later to have important political consequences –, developed in the period of Foscolo's stay in this country. His reputation as "patriot" availed him far more than his fame as a poet or scholar, with the majority of those he met<sup>9</sup>.

In other words, with a prestigious supporter such as Holland House, he wanted to elicit an emotional response and, at the same time, a moral consensus from the liberal public opinion in favour of the Italian cause (one Nation, free and autonomous), to which he tributed a lifelong devotion.

He thought this enterprise would be better accomplished if accompanied by a more complex, historical, and philologically correct approach to literature. Hence his need and strong will to describe and comment upon the Italian classics anew (especially the so-called "three crowns": Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio), providing deeper insights into their works<sup>10</sup>. So, his methodology (which could be defined as "interdisciplinary", with an expression belonging to our time) was really

«revolutionary», as Walter Binni observed<sup>11</sup>; and it was not sheer coincidence that Francesco De Sanctis, in his *Storia della letteratura italiana* (1870), borrowed more than one of Foscolo's sharpest critical ideas.

Foscolo's essays on Petrarch, written during the first years of his voluntary exile in London, in their final version<sup>12</sup> comprise three essays: *On the Love, On the Poetry, and On the Character of Petrarch*; a fourth essay followed, the *Parallel between Dante and Petrarch*, in which the Author compared the different personalities, with their stylistic manifestation, of the two major poets of the Italian Trecento. The four essays were written almost entirely in French by Foscolo; afterwards, they were translated into English by native speakers<sup>13</sup>.

The first three essays stemmed from an article previously written in 1818 for the «Edinburgh Review», but then published in the «Quarterly Review» in 1821. Foscolo intended to examine the Lover, the Poet, and the Man, according to historical and biographical sources, in particular that of the famous Abbot de Sade<sup>14</sup>. Foscolo agreed with his thesis, according to which the character of Laura in the *Canzoniere* actually corresponded to Laura de Noves, who married Ugo de Sade, ancestor of the famous Marquis. He also took into consideration Petrarch's Latin works, regarded as a sort of prologue to the rhymes of the *Canzoniere*. The role of Foscolo's interpretation was of paramount importance in Petrarch's criticism, because it didn't fit in with the patterns shown in such works as the *Life of Petrarch* (1775), by Susannah Dobson, whose biography was modelled on the *Mémoires of the Marquis de Sade*; the *Vie de Petrarque* of the Abbot Roman (1818), and the love story *Pétrarque et Laura* of Félicité Ducrest de Saint-Aubin, countess of Genlis (1819), both reviewed by the Author in the article of 1821.

Thus, a complex and extremely varied poetical physiognomy took shape in the *Essays*, developing as a whole into a definite and truly original form. Foscolo let the other characteristics of Petrarch's personality emerge; the poet of Laura was, in fact, a renowned moral philosopher, an admired humanist, as well as an erudite scholar. This aspect, therefore, is related to Petrarch's biography. Furthermore, a fresh approach to Petrarch's poetry was also given through Foscolo's interpretation – we cannot forget he was a philologist and an expert of stylistics. As a matter of fact, the poetical text acquired a totally new and pre-eminent position, being considered as a system in which every single element was connected with the others as it would occur in a surprisingly complex organism. In so doing, Foscolo overcame the boundaries of the previous Italian critique, represented by Gian Vincenzo Gravina, Melchiorre Cesarotti, Cesare Beccaria, discovering the hidden articulation between psychology and style, contents and external form. In Foscolo's view, the combination of history, psychology, and philology was crucial in

order to really appreciate Petrarch's verse.

As to scholarly research, Foscolo was aware of the value of Gerolamo Tiraboschi, whom he considered a leading Italian historian, or that of Ludovico Antonio Muratori, whose worthy work he drew upon in preparation of the aforementioned article on Petrarch. However, in his mind, the task of historical and philological verification was only a preliminary stage – without a doubt essential to thorough literary research, but not exhaustive to the purpose of a critical investigation that would provide for a truly new and total conception of poetry.

In my opinion, the structure of these three essays is not the result of an arid and abstract schema; it derives, instead, from a need of clarity and precision and, consequently, has to be considered as a sensible and well organized "system". In fact, every single element of the triadic structure is autonomous but, at the same time, interconnected with the others as a whole. As a matter of fact, in every stage of its development, this structure re-defines the qualities and the interrelations of the elements which constitute it.

The concepts expressed in the first essay recur in the second and the third; they acquire a different and clearer meaning according to the context. Love is predominant, as it is an experience not only of life but also of art. In the second essay, dedicated to Petrarch's poetry, love is analysed from a stylistic point of view. To put it briefly, Foscolo attempts to configure a space in which the psychological analysis is adapted to the different stylistic stages of Petrarch's verse. Undoubtedly Foscolo is still far from the idealistic attitude of mind of the Romantic period. It is true, though, that the central essay focuses on poetry, and this choice is really meaningful. The underlying conviction is that a work of art reflects the historical situation of its time, and yet it transcends it, going beyond ordinary limits. Above all, it creates something completely new, unpredictable in its future artistic effects. As it has been noted<sup>15</sup>, Foscolo believed in the power of the creative imagination and in the genius' freedom. This belief was fundamental in the years to come, when firstly De Sanctis and then Croce devoted themselves to deepening this crucial concept.

If in the first essay Foscolo examines the emotions of Petrarch and in the second their poetic sublimation and style, in the third (*On the Character*) – and also in the *Parallel*, returning to the comparison with Dante – he lets the character of the poet emerge. In the words of Eugenio Donadoni, who thoroughly examined this aspect in Foscolo himself, «understanding the poet» means «to assess the soul and understand at the same time the relations of that soul with the conditions of external life»<sup>16</sup>.

The *Essays on Petrarch* are concrete expressions of this intent. Due to the re-

currence of the Petrarchan themes and motifs analysed by Foscolo, we can carry out, via the identification of a central theme, a cross-reading of the first three essays. This cross-reading allows us to conjure up a vivid image of the Petrarch that Foscolo intended to portray to his readers and, at the same time, to validate the coherence of the critical concepts in his three essays, later resumed in the *Parallele*.

It seems, therefore, that it is possible to identify in the “love-modesty” thematic link the *leitmotiv* from which originates the critical reading of Foscolo’s *Essays on Petrarch*<sup>17</sup>. «Although Petrarch has contrived to throw a beautiful veil over the figure of Love», as Foscolo explains, «which the Grecian and Roman Poets delighted in representing naked – it is so transparent that we can still recognize the same forms» (*On the Love of Petrarch*, EEG II, 543)<sup>18</sup>.

By alluding to the extreme transparency of the veil, Foscolo wants to reject the tradition that inspired readings of Petrarch «with sentimental prepossession» (*On the Love of Petrarch*, EEG II, 553). This is the reason why Foscolo refuses an over-simplified reading, which in the *Canzoniere* would consider the only path to spiritual asceticism. The individual and exemplary journey that leads from sin to grace, through the redeeming plan of Providence, requires a kind of ascetic-spiritual reading which cannot, however, exclude a worldly-amorous interpretation. And, in the belief that Petrarch returns to the Pythagorean theory of love rather than to the Platonic in his poems, Foscolo states that

At the same time that he [Love] excites the spiritual, he cannot avoid exciting the material, portion of our nature; and that we desire the body as much as the soul of the object of our affections, must be ascribed to the grossness of our senses, and not to the viciousness of our passion (*On the Poetry of Petrarch*, EEG II, 585).

So, with varied and numerous examples, Foscolo illustrates how Petrarch veiled with modesty the concrete representations and details of his love for Laura. That is, the author of the *Essays* wants to emphasize how Petrarch felt the binding force and the earthly nature of his passion. Only later, in fact, would Laura’s poet have discovered the spiritual aspect active and invigorating:

At first Petrarch saw in Laura only the most beautiful of women; one whom he was destined to love, and who inspired and ennobled his talents: he coveted glory only as it might secure her esteem and affection, and he hoped to have found happiness on earth. He next discovered in her the form and the virtue of an angel – that his love burnt only to enlighten and purify his heart; to fix his mind; to harmonize those faculties, which would otherwise have been a prey to perpetual perturbation; to lift his desires and thoughts towards heaven [...] (*On the Love of Petrarch*, EEG II, 552-553).

«Towards heaven» – in other words, towards the otherworldly dimension which Petrarch tended to due to a strong will of faith, nonetheless always seeing it tinted with the “numinous” and the unknown. In this regard, a comparison between the two writers may perhaps prove illuminating in order to better understand Foscolo’s arguments on the dual character, earthly and heavenly, of Petrarch’s amorous sentiment. Indeed, it is interesting to note how Foscolo himself had created, with the verses of *Le Grazie*, a “system” of poetic images that allow the reader to move from the known (the earthly feeling of life) to the unknown (the extra dimension of harmony). This, the author stated in his *Appunti*, he wanted to achieve by developing the previously mentioned idea of the “veil”. In fact, the veil preserves the Graces from the «unhappy ardour of human passions» («ardore infelice delle passioni umane») and from «fatal delusions of love» («deliri funesti dell’amore»)<sup>19</sup> and allows them to reside on earth, without being contaminated, to dispense to men those consolations for which they were sent down from heaven.

Thus it is possible to deduce, from the comparison between the two poets, that the symbol of the veil, used by both, represents all the possibilities of a redemption – in other words, of a saving transformation. This transformation can be interpreted in Petrarch as godly peace among senses and spirit; in Foscolo this takes the shape of a mediation between instinct and reason, and indicates conquering a “transcendental” dimension (in the Kantian acceptation of the term) that would surpass individuality to reach a much deeper and serene vision of human nature. So, on the one hand the pudicity (symbolized by the veil) “covers” the fire of human desire and its more evident manifestation, and on the other hand it becomes the means to “discover” a wider and more complex reality. This same reality, as Foscolo suggests, is born of «compassion»<sup>20</sup>, and hence of the understanding of an ideal state that has its foundations in harmony, i.e. in the conciliation of the opposite drives of the human soul. In conclusion, the author of the *Essays* believes Petrarch’s poetry to have reached unprecedented levels of perfection and argues the reasons for its vitality using the Pythagorean-Aristotelian concept of catharsis and its psycho-physiologic effects.

To my mind Foscolo’s *Essays*, highlighting the more human and conflicting side of Petrarch (with which Foscolo happened to be in robust and invigorating accordance), have contributed to the consolidation and enrichment of a certain type of Petrarchan criticism, that began in England about half a century before with the distribution of Sade’s *Memoires*. This would reconstitute the author of the *Canzoniere* with a more precise historical and poetical physiognomy, no longer deformed by the weight of excessive allegory.

While respecting biographical and historical fact, Petrarch’s love story takes a



more narrational rhythm, characterized by precise rhetorical strategies designed to capture the reader's attention. Foscolo admired, and made others admire, the poetic sublimation of passion, the splendid images, the high concepts, the melody and variety of the verses within Petrarch's poetry; he was almost trying to reproduce in his presentation «the progressive interest of a narrative» which he had found in the *Canzoniere* (*On the Love of Petrarch*, EEG II, 553).

Beyond the characteristics we have already mentioned, there is no doubt that the contemporary English essayists' example was highly influential. The fourth essay, i.e. the *Parallel between Dante and Petrarch*, paid homage to the tradition which almost imposed a comparison between the two poets. As Foscolo explains, «Dante, like all primitive poets, is the historian of the manners of his age, the prophet of his country, and the painter of mankind; and calls into action all the faculties of our soul to reflect on all the vicissitudes of the world» (*A Parallel between Dante and Petrarch*, EEG II, 646). Instead,

Petrarch makes us see every thing through the medium of one predominant passion, habituates us to indulge in those propensities which, by keeping the heart in perpetual disquietude, paralyze intellectual exertion – entice us into a morbid indulgence of our feelings, and withdraw us from active life (*A Parallel*, EEG II, 645-646).

Foscolo's Dantism, as Ettore Bonora observed, even in a sensitive reader and lover of Petrarch, as Foscolo was, «implied, if not a negative opinion, at least a lesser opinion of Petrarch as a man»<sup>21</sup>. This limitation appears evident in the structure of the fourth essay that, as has been noted<sup>22</sup>, lets aspects surface in the comparison that would not have had the same relevance if analysed singularly.

Nevertheless, Foscolo's lesser, or should we say better, "alternative" sympathy for Petrarch can be deduced indirectly from historical and biographical considerations rather than from explicit declarations. In these, in fact, Foscolo picks up a beloved theme often expressed in his writing – that which in the civil, political and moral freedom of a state identifies the ideal and indispensable condition for originality and fecundity of Italian literature:

Dante applied his poetry to the vicissitudes of his own time, when liberty was making her dying struggle against tyranny; and he descended to the tomb with the last heroes of the middle age. Petrarch lived amongst those who prepared the inglorious heritage of servitude for the next fifteen generations (*A Parallel*, EEG II, 648).

Yet, between these two characters, as Foscolo underlined, «the only point of resemblance» is formed by their «endeavours to bring their country under the

government of one sovereign, and to abolish the Pope's temporal power» (*A Parallel*, EEG II, 651). Both of them, therefore, appealed with their passions to men's hearts, spurred on by the «gratification of knowing and asserting the truth, and of being able to make it resound even from their graves» (*A Parallel*, EEG II, 656).

That is why they are, with their peculiarities, the expression of those faculties which no genius ever embodied:

To judge fairly between these two poets, it appears, that Petrarch excels in awakening the heart to a deep feeling of its existence; and Dante, in leading the imagination to add to the interest and novelty of nature. Probably a genius never existed, that enjoyed these two powers at once in a pre-eminent degree (*A Parallel*, EEG II, 645).

The *Parallel*, therefore, aimed at illustrating how the poets followed opposite paths; the paths, as Foscolo anticipated in the third essay, «by which nature, education, their times and the accidents of fortune, led these two men to immortality» (*On the Character of Petrarch*, EEG II, 623).

In my opinion, Foscolo's observations which can be read in the *Parallel* do not contradict what he had stated in the previous three essays. As Cesare Goffis noted, this last essay did not represent a negation of Foscolo's overall judgment on the poet of Vaucluse; instead, it can be easily assumed as a natural development of the premise of the first three essays<sup>23</sup>.

This statement could sound somewhat paradoxical. But, as a matter of fact, it is not a paradox, if we consider that biographers and critics of Foscolo have always highlighted how the first three essays and the poet's unfortunate love for Caroline Russell (his beloved "Callirhoe") were closely intertwined<sup>24</sup>.

In other words, Foscolo fell in love with Caroline, who was much younger than him; the young lady was full of admiration for the poet, but she was totally uninterested in the man. Foscolo tried to convey his message of love to her by embodying Petrarch's feelings towards Laura; but Caroline did not accept his courtship and went away from London.

This is why the majority of critics thought that the *Parallel between Dante and Petrarch* was just a way to "take revenge" – let us say – on the writer of the *Canzoniere* for his really upsetting and disgraceful failure in love. In reality, Foscolo sympathized with Dante more than Petrarch; this may be due to the great similarities between the two men, relating to their characters and moral values. But this does not mean that Foscolo was unfair. Even if he devoted himself to divulging a deeper and more precise knowledge of Dante's works and personality, he disdained "Dantolatry". Some years later, Thomas Campbell, Scottish poet and Foscolo's friend, in his *Life of Petrarch* (1841), wrote that Foscolo's vehement Dantism

and the profound admiration he felt towards Petrarch were equally relevant<sup>25</sup>.

Therefore, Foscolo carries out a proper and impartial evaluation of the two poetical bodies, but does not create any rigid hierarchy of artistic merit. He expresses his judgment without any exaggeration or unjustified overemphasis and analyses both poets' qualities. In the end, it all balances out in a perfect harmony of contrasts. His criticism is, therefore, still vital, thought-provoking, and very enjoyable.

In Foscolo's analysis the two personalities take on an even more evident and significant physiognomy due to their style, as it is ultimately connected with the two poets' work and its representative quality:

Petrarch's images seem to be exquisitely finished by a very delicate pencil: they delight the eye rather by their colouring than by their forms. Those of Dante are the bold and prominent figures of an *alto rilievo*, which, it seems, we might almost touch, and of which the imagination readily supplies those parts that are hidden from the view (*Parallel*, EEG II, 640).

Reading these quick notes on the *Essays on Petrarch*, the coherence of Foscolo's critical thought appears evident, although previously underestimated or even confuted by some critics<sup>26</sup>. In fact, it has been often said, at times and with stronger or weaker impetus, that Foscolo critical works were not coherent and did not find a linear representation in the theoretical pages that he produced. Against this view (possibly not entirely unfounded if referring to thought organization), I believe Benedetto Croce intervened with a decisive paragraph that needs no further comment:

[...] we should correct the habit of researching the history of philosophy exclusively with professional philosophers, most of whom (scholars and writers and system creators) are less valuable than amateur thinkers, who say things whereas the others say words<sup>27</sup>.

The validity of this method (recognized and valued particularly by Donadoni<sup>28</sup> and later by Croce) needs to be taken into account against anyone today that tries to reduce Foscolo's literary criticism to an incoherent miscellany of contradictory statements, some of which impressionistic and some of which drawing directly from the critics of the eighteenth century. First of all, as I have tried to demonstrate, the exegesis technique of the *Essays* confirms the theoretical concepts expressed by Foscolo in his previous works, hence showing a method which is far from heterogeneous and incoherent. Secondly, it represents the progressive development of an understanding of history and aesthetics preceding the literary

historiography of the later Romanticism. In fact, although it appears that the four Petrarchan essays are based on the historic-erudite tradition of the eighteenth century and on Neoclassicism, I believe Foscolo overcame the limits of his own critical studies relying on his personal sensibility.

Moreover, Foscolo's *Essays* constitute a milestone in the history of the study of Petrarch. As has been observed, within the development of a mature and modern critique of Petrarch (in other words, when the first proper monographs were constructed), the acid test is always Foscolo with his acute essays, in which he expressed fundamental observations on Petrarch's poetry<sup>29</sup>.

The *Essays on Petrarch*, unanimously considered as Foscolo's masterpiece, were born in that special cultural climate that fostered, along with German classical philosophy, the foundation of the modern aesthetics and, within a short period, the rise of the critical genius of De Sanctis. However, I would agree with Ugo Dotti that «even before De Sanctis we find Ugo Foscolo; and we can safely say that future critics will add much on his *Essays on Petrarch*, but will correct little or nothing»<sup>30</sup>.

In conclusion, the physiognomy of Foscolo's critical work is extremely complex and structured, not immune to considerations and theoretical anticipations such as those regarding, in our contemporary language, the autonomy of criticism. These will in fact constitute, from Croce onwards, the favourite areas of the cultural debate that animated and is still animating literature. In his exegetic works, Foscolo was prone to let the more authentic voice of the poet or writer emerge, reproducing all of its modulations. His methodology was varied and tuned to the different works he was using it for. His analyses – and the *Essays on Petrarch* are a clear example – could turn either to the psychological, bibliographical, historical, and sociological, or to the more specifically stylistic and literary aspects; he could highlight differently one or the other, depending on the author or the text analysed. I will not, then, consider incoherence or lack of connection between theory and practice, but instead, extreme critical intelligence, open-mindedness and methodological flexibility<sup>31</sup>. These qualities represent, in my view, some of the more relevant and original elements which define the modernity of Foscolo's criticism, ensuring its current interest and historical vitality.

Assunta De Crescenzo

- 1 See what Margaret Brose has noted in her insightful essay on Foscolo's *A Zacinto*: «The sonnet *A Zacinto* perfectly blends the autobiographical, the cosmological, the mythological [...]. Every element of the poem is cast in a double or triple dimensionality. On the spatial dimension, for the most obvious example, Zacinto is at once the native island of Foscolo's birth, the home of the wandering Ulysses, the birthplace of Venus/Love, the inaugural site of *poiesis* itself, and of human culture writ large. [...] Zacinto, then, the mother of all mothers, becomes the sacred site that initiates, contains, and closes the life of each individual human, and of civilization itself» (M. BROSE, *Back to the Body of the Mother: Foscolo's "A Zacinto"*, «Italice», vol. 74, n. 2, Summer 1997, pp. 164-184 : 178). For further details on this topic, see G. HIGHET, *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature*, Oxford and New York 1949.
- 2 E.R. VINCENT, *Ugo Foscolo. An Italian in Regency England*, Cambridge 1953, p. 47.
- 3 *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50. For a detailed analysis of the topic, see M. PRAZ, *Foscolo e Byron*, «Rivista di Letterature Moderne e Comparate», Giugno 1962, pp. 177-184, and ID., *Machiavelli in Inghilterra ed altri saggi sui rapporti letterari anglo-italiani*, Florence 1962 (ed. or. 1941). See also the still useful study of M.C.W. WICKS, *The Italian Exiles in London (1816-1848)*, Manchester 1937.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 49.
- 5 For an insightful study of this subject, see G. TELLINI, *Il romanzo italiano dell'Ottocento e Novecento*, Milan 1998, in part. pp. 1-31.
- 6 See ID. *Foscolo and the Mythology of the Self*, in ID., *The Invention of Modern Italian Literature. Strategies of Creative Imagination*, Toronto, Buffalo, London 2007, pp. 29-43.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 34-35. See also M. PALUMBO, *Foscolo di fronte all'"Ortis": la difficile abiura delle passioni*, in ID., *Saggi sulla prosa di Ugo Foscolo*, Naples 1994; and ID., «*Mensonge romantique*» e «*vérité romanesque*»: *Foscolo e il romanzo epistolare*, in ID., *Il romanzo italiano da Foscolo a Svevo*, Rome 2014 (ed. or. 2007).
- 8 TELLINI, *The Invention of Modern Italian Literature*, p. 29.
- 9 VINCENT, *Ugo Foscolo*, p. 50. To this end in particular, see M.M. Rossi, *Foscolo in England*, «Italice», vol. 31, n. 3, Autumn 1954, pp. 151-159; to my mind, this essay is one of the most perceptive analyses of Foscolo's feelings and attitudes during his English last decade. See also G. CAMBON, *Ugo Foscolo. Poet of Exile*, Princeton 1980.
- 10 About the first "crown", see FOSCOLO, *Studi su Dante*, in *Edizione Nazionale delle Opere*, 22 vols., Florence 1951-94 (EN), IX: tome 1, *Discorso sul testo della Commedia*, ed. G. Da Pozzo, 1979; tome 2, *Commedia di Dante Alighieri*, ed. by G. Petrocchi, 1981; and about the third "crown", see the *Discorso storico sul testo del Decamerone and the essay on Boccaccio*, EN X, ed. C. Foligno, 1953.
- 11 W. BINNI, *Ugo Foscolo. Storia e poesia*, Turin 1982, p. 239 (my translation; from now on, all English translations are mine, unless otherwise stated).
- 12 John Murray, London 1823. They were dedicated «To the right honourable Barbarina Lady Dacre», with the following words: «Madam, / I am prompted to inscribe these pages with your Ladyship's name as well by my own gratitude, as by the opinion of those distinguished Literary Characters, whose kind assistance, surpassed only by yours, has enabled me to present my Essays to the English reader. With one voice and with national pride they pronounce, that your poetry has preserved the very spirit of Petrarch with a fidelity hardly to be hoped for, and certainly unattained by any other translation. And each of those who

have contributed to this volume, resigning his portion of my acknowledgment, hopes the offering of it may be accepted by you alone. / I have the honour to remain, / Madam, / Your grateful and devoted Servant, / Ugo Foscolo. / South Bank, Regent's Park, / January 1823» (U. FOSCOLO, *Opere*, 2 vols, directed by F. Gavazzeni, Einaudi-Gallimard [«Biblioteca della Pléiade»], Turin 1995, II, *Essays on Petrarch*, pp. 539-660 : 541; [Edizioni Einaudi-Gallimard], EEG, indication of page numbers directly after quotations). Barbarina Oyle (1768-1854), second wife of Thomas Brand, XXI Lord Dacre, was a writer and translator, as well as a sculptor of some value; she entered into friendship with Foscolo in 1818. In the *Essays* the author inserts some poems translated by Lady Dacre (four songs and eight sonnets in an appendix). He had dedicated the previous work on Petrarch (1821) to Charles Russell Esq.: «My dear Sir, / The first idea of this kind of commentary having been suggested one evening at your house on reading some passages of Petrarch, I have printed it, that it may remain in your family as a memorial of their hospitality to a foreigner, who sooner or later will live only in their recollections – and since you have been at the pains to translate a portion of it, and correct what I ventured to write in English, it belongs more particularly to yourself. Indeed my anxiety for the expressions of the ideas as they were originally cast in my own mind, seduced me often to retain my foreign phraseology. Still as we seldom cease to look with some interest upon any thing which, however indifferent, has been the object of our care, I am confident that this our little volume will remind you of your kindness, and my gratitude. / I am, my dear Sir, / with very sincere regard, / Yours, most truly, / Ugo Foscolo. / Bond Street, April 30th 1821» (Edizione Nazionale EN X, p. 3). See especially U. LIMENTANI, *Testimonianze inglesi sul Foscolo*, «Giornale storico della Letteratura italiana», LXXIII, 1956, pp. 390-409; and J.M.A. LINDON, *Studi sul Foscolo 'inglese'*, Pisa 1987.

- 13 Camillo Ugoni translated them into Italian and they were published in 1824 (Vannelli & Co., Lugano); as for his Italian translation, see EN X, pp. 211-297 and, of course, EEG II, pp. 661-742. For further details about Foscolo, the English language, and his ideas about the topic of translation, see C. CAMPAGNOLO, *Foscolo e il tradurre. Una biografia linguistica*, «Prospettive Settanta», n.s. 11, 1989, pp. 359-379.
- 14 See J.F.P.A. DE SADE, *Mémoires pour la vie de François Pétrarque, tires de ses oeuvres et des auteurs contemporains, avec des Notes ou Dissertations, et les Pièces justificatives*, 4 tomes, Arskée et Mercus, Amsterdam 1764-67.
- 15 See M. PUPPO, *Poetica e critica del Romanticismo italiano*, Rome 1985, p. 45; see also M. FUBINI, *Ugo Foscolo. Saggio critico*, Florence 1931 (ed. or. 1927), and L. Russo, *Ugo Foscolo poeta e critico*, in ID., *Ritratti e disegni storici*, Series I, *Dall'Alfieri al Leopardi*, Bari 1953 (ed. or. 1944).
- 16 E. DONADONI, *Ugo Foscolo pensatore, critico, poeta*, Florence 1964 (ed. or. Palermo 1910), p. 177.
- 17 Incidentally, it is to be recalled that such a connection will form the cornerstone of the poetry in *Le Grazie* (unfinished) and that it was already present in the *Chioma di Berenice* (1803).
- 18 He had written in his poem *Dei sepolcri* (1807): «[...] quel dolce di Calliope labbro / Che Amore in Grecia nudo e nudo in Roma / D'un velo candidissimo adornando, / Rendea nel grembo a Venere Celeste» (vv. 176-179). See also a passage of the *Saggio d'un gazzettino del bel mondo* (1817): «I love the rose of modesty and the only reason for my predilection is that modesty is loved by Love itself. Petrarch found it naked in the Latin poets, and covered it with a snow-white veil» («A me è cara la rosa della modestia per la sola ragione che è la più cara all'Amore. Il Petrarca lo trovò nudo ne' poeti latini, e lo copri d'un candidissimo velo»)

(EN V, p. 450).

- 19 FOSCOLO, *Appunti sulla ragion poetica delle Grazie*, EN I, ed. F. Pagliai, pp. 960, 965-966.
- 20 In the oration *Sull'origine e sui limiti della giustizia* (1809), Foscolo had stated that «the very voice of nature excites in the bowels of many men – who need to unite and love one another – two forces that compensate for all of man's warring and plotting tendencies: compassion and decency» («la voce stessa della natura eccita nelle viscere di molti uomini, che hanno bisogno di unirsi e di amarsi, due forze che compensano tutte le tendenze guerriere ed usurpatrici dell'uomo: la compassione e il pudore») [EN VII, ed. E. Santini, pp. 184-185].
- 21 E. BONORA, *Francesco Petrarca*, in *I classici italiani nella storia della critica*, directed by W. Binni, Florence 1962 (ed. or. 1954), p. 125.
- 22 G. MARCI, *Ugo Foscolo critico. I saggi sul Petrarca*, Cagliari 1977, p. 29.
- 23 See C.F. GOFFIS, *Nuovi studi foscoliani*, Florence 1958, p. 234.
- 24 See FOSCOLO, *Epistolario*. (Lettere del Foscolo e dei corrispondenti nel periodo inglese), EN XX (1970), XXI (1974), XXII (1994), ed. M. Scotti; and FOLIGNO, Introd. to *Saggi sul Petrarca*, EN X, pp. XXI-XLVII.
- 25 See T. CAMPBELL, *Life of Petrarch*, 2 vols, London 1841, 2, p. 354.
- 26 Among the most ardent detractors of Foscolo's critique, in particular of the *Essays on Petrarch* (albeit with some concession for merit), see R. WELLEK, *I critici italiani*, in ID., *Storia della critica moderna*, 5 vols, Bologna 1961 (ed. or. 1955), II, pp. 340-349; and G. CONTINI, *Saggio di un commento alle correzioni del Petrarca volgare*, in ID., *Varianti e altra linguistica*, Turin 1970 (ed. or. 1943), p. 5, note 1.
- 27 B. CROCE, *Foscolo*, in ID., *Poesia e non poesia. Note sulla letteratura europea del secolo diciannovesimo*, Bari 1942 (ed. or. 1922), p. 73.
- 28 See DONADONI, *Ugo Foscolo pensatore, critico, poeta*, pp. 139-162.
- 29 See P.G. RICCI, *Dizionario critico della Letteratura italiana*, directed by V. Branca, Turin 1986, p. 430.
- 30 U. DOTI, Introd. to F. Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, Milan 1994, p. 5.
- 31 See G.A. BORGESE, *Storia della critica romantica in Italia*, Milan 1965 (ed. or. 1905), pp. 307-308. For Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, these types of inquiry – the historical, the psychological and the aesthetic – were all complementary and converging towards a single goal, namely the identification of the germinal nucleus of the work. See also G. GETTO, *Storia delle storie letterarie*, Florence 1981 (ed. or. 1942), p. 156. Before a work of art, in Giovanni Getto's opinion, expressed with accuracy and depth, Foscolo «does not impose a constant pattern of research. On the contrary, he accepts the conditions put forward by the work of art, and carries out the task that presents itself as necessary. [...] And this is not eclecticism, but openness. Not superficial, but total commitment. Because the true master of critique will be he who serves the literary work, not who needs it; he who will make it clearer and better communicate it to others, not reduce it to an opportunity for a private and personal speech» (*ibid.*).



Fig. 1: ANDREA APPIANI, *Ritratto di Ugo Foscolo*, 1801-1802, Pinacoteca di Brera.