

CARLA CHIUMMO

## IPPOLITO NIEVO'S POLITICO-MILITARY POETRY<sup>1</sup>

The short but very intense literary experience of Ippolito Nievo (1831-1861) was intertwined with his growing military commitment, which resulted in his participation – as a leading figure – in Garibaldi's ventures: first in the Lombardy and Veneto campaign of 1859; then in the *Spedizione dei Mille* [*Expedition of the Thousand*]. Even though Nievo is mostly known for his masterpiece *Le confessioni d'un Italiano* [*Confessions of an Italian*] (1858, but first published in 1867), which has become a nineteenth-century Italian classic, there is still much to investigate with regard to his poetry (four collections produced within a span of ten years), particularly in relation to his political commitment. Indeed, especially after 1848, and in the following decade, known as the “decade of preparation” – that is, before Italy's independence – Nievo shared with other patriotic poets of the time the view that poetry's political power could inspire social change. My essay will look at a selection of poems from his four collections in order to shed light on Nievo's coded political language, which made use of both a serious style – following the example of Ugo Foscolo and Alessandro Manzoni – and a unique humorous reinterpretation of Giuseppe Giusti's satirical style – at times criticized by Nievo's «master» Carlo Tenca<sup>2</sup>. I will argue that Nievo's poetry of resistance was truly attuned to ni-

<sup>1</sup> Throughout the essay references to Nievo's poems, except for *Gli amori garibaldini*, are based on IPPOLITO NIEVO, *Poesie*, edited by MARCELLA GORRA, Milano, Mondadori, 1970, thereafter cited as P. References to *Gli amori garibaldini* are based on the revised edition by ERMANNÒ PACCAGNELLA, Genova, De Ferrari, 2008, thereafter cited as AG. All translations of Nievo's verses are mine.

<sup>2</sup> CARLO TENCA, *Di alcune recenti poesie italiane* [*On Some Recent Italian Verse*], in *Il Crepuscolo*, 15 October 1854; two years later, Tenca will write again about Nievo's «soverchia imitazione» [«overwhelming imitation»] of Giusti's poetry (ivi, 7 sept. 1856, now in ID., *Saggi critici*, edited by GIANLUIGI BERARDI, Firenze, Sansoni, 1969, p. 260). In his epistolary Nievo shows to be in agreement with the opinion of the critic, who had also refused to publish his poem *L'Umanità* [*Humanity*], which Nievo renamed *Il Crepuscolo* [*The sunset*], in honour of Tenca's magazine.



Carla Chiummo

nineteenth-century Italian “popular” ideals<sup>3</sup>, and that for Nievo “resistance” had to go beyond political and military aspects in order to involve social ones, as he made very clear in his famous essay *Political Revolution and National Revolution* (1859).

## 1. Beyond love poetry

In Nievo’s first two collections of *Versi* [*Verses*] (1854, 1855), the sentimental tone is still very much present, starting with the first poem dedicated to his beloved Matilde Ferrari<sup>4</sup>. Not before long, however, as in *Gli Amori* [*Loves*]<sup>5</sup>, published in his 1855 collection, an ironic tone – too much in Giusti’s style, as Tenca underlined – overlays the sentimental one with militant and political allusions. Yet, already in the second poem of the first collection, entitled *Bruto minimo all’Università* [*Brutus Minimum at University*]<sup>6</sup>, the «Musa furbesca»<sup>7</sup>, as Nievo himself writes, rages against the corrupted and asphyxiating academic circles in Padua and Venice, regarded as «Sibari gentil della laguna»<sup>8</sup>. The disillusion after 1848 are still vibrant, and the «Canto di Bruto»<sup>9</sup> is not the one «del grande Bruto / che vendicò nella Tarquinia gente / la morte di Lucrezia e il van rifiuto; / né dell’altro minor, che d’aver spente / le grandi luci che l’avean cresciuto / nelle bolgie Dantesche ancor si pente»<sup>10</sup>. This «Brutus minimum» comes from the «scuola d’un dotto Pirlone»<sup>11</sup>, ‘Don Pirlone’ being the name of a satirical, anticlerical magazine in the Rome of 1848, as well as the pseudonym of Nievo’s friend Michele Corinaldi – the latter wrote, like Nievo, for the «Pungolo» of Milan<sup>12</sup>. Above all, as Gorra recalled<sup>13</sup>, ‘Don Pirlone’ (present also in Giusti’s poetry) is the mediocre

<sup>3</sup> This is evident in his more famous considerations of *Studii sulla poesia popolare e civile massimamente in Italia* [*Studies in mainly Italian popular and civil poetry*] (1854). But Gianni Maffei also recalled Nievo’s agreement with Bonghi in the line of his well-known pamphlet *Perché la letteratura italiana non è popolare in Italia* [*Why Italian literature is not popular in Italy*], (1855). See GIOVANNI MAFFEI, *Nievo*, Roma, Salerno Editrice, 2012, pp. 32-33.

<sup>4</sup> P, p. 3. It should be recalled, however, that Ferrari came from a family of passionate Liberals from Mantua, and Nievo sends the long poem *A Legnano* [*To Legnano*] to Matilde herself: «ruggente d’ira pugnace contro gli invasori stranieri» [«roaring with fighting rage against foreign invaders»]. See FERRUCCIO MONTEROSSO, *Le lettere di Ippolito Nievo a Matilde Ferrari*, Roma, Argileto, 1977, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> P, pp. 129-140, especially p. 135.

<sup>6</sup> Ivi, pp. 4-17.

<sup>7</sup> Ivi, p. 4, v. 1: «Sly muse».

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 16: «the gentle Sybaris in the Lagoon».

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 9: «Brutus’s Song».

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 9-14: «Of either the great Brutus who revenged, for Tarquiny’s people, Lucretia’s death and her vain refusal, or the minor one who still repents in Dante’s circles for turning off the great light that had raised him».

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 20: «school of a certain egghead Pirlone».

<sup>12</sup> Ivi, p. 897.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

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*Ippolito Nievo's politico-military poetry*

turncoat in Tartuffe-style who was frequently evoked during the Liberal Risorgimento taking inspiration from the anticlerical comedy of the eighteenth-century *Don Pilone, ovvero il bacchettone falso* (1711)<sup>14</sup>. The poor «Bruto minimo» is «il cattivel»<sup>15</sup>, who «cerca e fiuta, non trova partito / da tôrsi un po' da quella matta cerchia», «il volgo ciuco / che nasce, vive e muor sempre in un buco»<sup>16</sup>. Furthermore, to stir up this «volgo ciuco»<sup>17</sup>, «Bruto minimo» pretends to be nostalgic of the revolutionary «Age of Enlightenment», critical of abuses and privileges: «Viva il secolo dei lumi!»<sup>18</sup>, he shouts, and «Fratelli siamo! Evviva!!»<sup>19</sup>. The quarrels with the young aristocrats of the Liberal Caffè Pedrocchi soon reveal themselves as clashes of no account, «fra le caricature alla francese / E i Robespierre a un soldo la dozzina»<sup>20</sup>. The young aristocrats, not scared at all by these merely verbal and inconclusive clashes, yell at him: «Ciò che or fa un lustro appena / ti regalava un nome, / or ti val nella schiena / una salva di pome»<sup>21</sup>. Just over a lustrum had passed since the revolutionary risings of 1848, which had produced only minor results in the Italian north-eastern regions still under the Habsburg Empire; Nievo, and a whole generation of patriots and ideologists of the “decade of preparation”, had to start from these, with a totally different plan and a new political and military temperament. That is, first of all, by «resisting», as his friend Giovanni Visconti Venosta repeats several times in his *Memoirs*<sup>22</sup>.

Likewise, in the joking poem about the poor harvest of that year, *Pane e vino* [*Bread and Wine*]<sup>23</sup>, dedicated to his lifetime friend Andrea Cassia, Nievo makes a fairly clear reference to the «quistion d'Oriente»<sup>24</sup>: the French-English axis against the Austrian-Russian axis that would lead to the Plombières Agreement, which Nievo always scowled at for its prospects of a Piedmont reprisal. One should also mention the subsequent *Danza e miseria* [*Dance and Misery*]<sup>25</sup>, whose intentional subtitle is «Apertura del Carnevale 1854»<sup>26</sup>. Set during the tragic executions in Mantua, the poem opens with a question directed at a group of young girls: «Ver-

<sup>14</sup> *Don Pilone, or the hypocritical zealot*.

<sup>15</sup> Ivi, p. 4, v. 33: «the little villain».

<sup>16</sup> Ivi, pp. 4-5, vv. 35-36, vv. 31-32: «Looks around and sniffs, without finding the right party to leave that crazy circle... the asinine vulgus who was born and then lived always in the same hole».

<sup>17</sup> Ivi, p. 4, v. 31: «asinine vulgus».

<sup>18</sup> Ivi, p. 6, v. 73: «Long live the Age of Enlightenment!».

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 87: «We are brothers! Hurrah!!».

<sup>20</sup> Ivi, p. 6, vv. 107-108: «between the caricatures in French style and the Robespierres, priced at one coin a dozen».

<sup>21</sup> Ivi, p. 13, vv. 361-364: «What gave you a name a lustrum ago, now is worth a tearing of apples against your shoulder».

<sup>22</sup> GIOVANNI VISCONTI VENOSTA, *Ricordi di gioventù. Cose vedute o sapute. 1847-1860*, Milano, L.F. Cogliati, 1904, pp. 202, p. 206, *passim*.

<sup>23</sup> **P**, pp. 18-21.

<sup>24</sup> Ivi, p. 19, v. 40: «the Eastern question».

<sup>25</sup> Ivi, pp. 28-31.

<sup>26</sup> Ivi, p. 28: «Opening of the 1854 Carnival».





Carla Chiummo

gini ancor non conscie, eppur beate / d'un futuro d'amor, *che giova il pianto?*»<sup>27</sup>. It thus recalls the dramatic political context that accompanied the sad Carnival of 1854 – and further ahead, this subject is also resumed in *Mezza Quaresima* [*Half Lent*]<sup>28</sup>, reminiscent of the patriotic rivers, Isonzo and Tagliamento<sup>29</sup> and presents the poet speaking as a «Cassandra»<sup>30</sup>. Additionally, in *Dance and Misery*, resounds the harsh social criticism of which the «meschin»<sup>31</sup> – who lives amidst «il gel delle misere capanne»<sup>32</sup> – becomes the messenger.

The socio-political issue is notoriously dear to Nievo, namely in his militant prose, above all in *Rivoluzione politica e rivoluzione nazionale* [*Political Revolution and National Revolution*], and is resumed several times in this collection, as in *Accattoni* [*Beggars*]<sup>33</sup>. Here the iconology of the ragged mother with «emaciated cheeks»<sup>34</sup>, holding her son in her arms, also recalls the same encoded iconology of a ragged Italy painted by the much-admired painter and patriot, Francesco Hayez. The following verses from the same poem confirm this political interpretation: «Guai! – Lo sgherro t'attende, / il vilipendio, il carcere. Così il mondo ti rende / del lavoro longanime / il meritato prezzo: / fame, prigion e sprezzo!»<sup>35</sup>; and the final verses, citing the «British fog» and the «Osmanian Palace»<sup>36</sup>, probably echo the agreements for the distant Crimea.

In Nievo's first collection, *Drammaturgia popolare* [*Popular Drama*]<sup>37</sup> deserves special mention for its subtly ironic, rather than blazing social, criticism against the scholar who claims to write «for the people», but who does not know the people, nor does he know what they really want and can afford:

Si scrive *pel popolo*,  
*pel popol* si parla,  
e il calo dell'opere  
dà fiato alla ciarla<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 3-4: «Vergins, you that are not conscious yet, but however merry for your future love, *what is worth crying?*». Italics mine.

<sup>28</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 86-89.

<sup>29</sup> *Ivi*, p. 87, v. 69.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 41.

<sup>31</sup> *Ivi*, p. 31, v. 112: «poor one».

<sup>32</sup> *Ivi*, p. 30, v. 71: «the coldness of mean huts».

<sup>33</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 36-40.

<sup>34</sup> *Ivi*, p. 36, v. 31.

<sup>35</sup> *Ivi*, p. 37, vv. 49-54: «Woe betide you! – Armed ruffians, scorn and prison await you. Thus the world rewards you for your long effort: hunger, prison and disdain!»

<sup>36</sup> *Ivi*, p. 40, vv. 158-159.

<sup>37</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 41-53.

<sup>38</sup> *Ivi*, p. 41, vv. 1-4: «You write *for the people*, you talk for *the people*, but your shrinking production gives room to rumors». Italics mine.





### *Ippolito Nievo's politico-military poetry*

And he adds, again addressing the whiny playwright:

Di dir s'è dimentica  
per quali incantesimi  
il povero popolo  
cinquanta centesimi  
può avere d'avanzo!  
Gli paga ella il pranzo?<sup>39</sup>

Nievo is equally harsh when he ridicules the annoying and good-for-nothing *Centomila poeti* [*One Thousand Poets*]<sup>40</sup>, or, in the *Secolo delle idee* [*Century of ideas*]<sup>41</sup>, the facile supporters of modern progress. Relatedly, a satirical counterpoint of the «pessimists» of convenience can be found in the poem *Macario pessimo dei pessimisti* [*Macario, the Worst of Pessimists*]<sup>42</sup>. However, this disenchanted and ironic look on his peers is replaced with the final impetus of *Genio latino* [*Latin Genius*]<sup>43</sup>. The latter is particularly focused on the patriotic obligations of Italian poets, whom Nievo addresses without either facile optimism or defeatist pessimism, paying tribute to the «genio divo / di Virgilio e di Dante»<sup>44</sup>, against the fallacious «fasto delle stranie gale»<sup>45</sup>, that is, Nordic myths and ideals foreign to Italic culture. Here, one should always pay attention to the cryptic political implications, which had to be hidden because of censorship, as Nievo well knew after he was sued, between 1856 and 1857, for his short story, *L'avvocato* [*The Little Lawyer*].

## **2. The «Padri di Roma» and the beauty of Italy**

As Gorra first pointed out<sup>46</sup>, in Nievo's verses a coded poetry clearly emerges. In *Genio latino*, for instance, Nievo referred also to the resurgence of Rome

<sup>39</sup> Ivi, p. 43, vv. 95-100: «You forgot to say by which enchantment poor people can afford 50 cents! Do you pay for their lunch?».

<sup>40</sup> Ivi, pp. 44-53.

<sup>41</sup> Ivi, pp. 101-104. Or, in *Digiuno e digiuno* [*Fasting and Fasting*], in ivi, pp. 77-79, the Bible-thumper preacher, who preaches as a «gabbamondo» [«cheater»], ivi, p. 77, v. 26, and stuffs himself with delicacy, without caring «a satollar quella turba meschina / ch'ora vi martella invano / chiedendo un pane di farina grossa / per veder Pasqua almeno in pelle ed ossa» [«to feed that poor mob who begs in vain for a loaf of rough flour, in the hope of seeing next Easter at least in flesh and blood»], ivi, p. 79, vv. 81-84.

<sup>42</sup> Ivi, pp. 107-108.

<sup>43</sup> Ivi, pp. 109-111.

<sup>44</sup> Ivi, p. 111, vv. 97-98: «divine genius of Virgil and Dante».

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 84: «pomp of foreign gala».

<sup>46</sup> Ivi, p. 917.





Carla Chiummo

and Italy after 1848, both by his salute to Genua, «figlia di Giano»<sup>47</sup>, and when paying tribute to the «Padri di Roma»<sup>48</sup>. Mazzinian references to the recent Roman Republic<sup>49</sup>, as well as influence from Gioberti's thought<sup>50</sup>, with his emphasis on the great Latin tradition of Italy's cultural identity, are clearly noticeable. Keeping these allusions in mind, references to Nordic «barbarians» become evident: the «barbari inquieti»<sup>51</sup> are the Austrian *in primis*, who came to «recarti morte» and «oltraggio»<sup>52</sup>. Implicit references are equally evident for the heritage of Rome – «Sacra figlia di Giano! Oh ben tu sei, / l'Arca vivente della nostra fede»<sup>53</sup> – and for the unsafe Alpine frontiers, from which Italian prophets should draw inspiration:

...nell'alta maestà infinita  
dell'Alpi nostre, e sui confini incerti  
delle Carniche genti alfin sia udita  
una voce che gridi: 'Il Genio divo  
di Virgilio e di Dante ancora è vivo!'<sup>54</sup>

In Nievo's *Versi* of 1855 political allusions are just as resounding. The first poem of the collection, entitled *Poeta e prossimo* [*The Poet and His Fellow Citizen*]<sup>55</sup>, is eloquently dedicated to the poet and patriot Arnaldo Fusinato, and addressed to

<sup>47</sup> Ivi, p. 109, v. 19: «Gianus's daughter».

<sup>48</sup> Ivi, p. 111, v. 104: «Fathers of Rome».

<sup>49</sup> Ivi, pp. 917-918.

<sup>50</sup> Giovanni Maffei has long been one of the main supporters of a Gioberti filter – obviously referring to Gioberti of *Rinnovamento* – in Nievo's political ideology. See MAFFEI, *Nievo*, cit., pp. 297-321.

<sup>51</sup> **P**, p. 110, v. 47: «restless barbarians».

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 53-54: «bring you death» and «outrage».

<sup>53</sup> Ivi, p. 109, vv. 19-20: «Sacred daughter of Gianus! You are the living Arch of our faith». In a mythological and etymological sense, Gorra interprets «figlia di Giano» [«Gianus's daughter»] as a hint at Genoa, while I would also add a first level of meaning that refers to the heritage of the «Genio latino» [«Latin genius»], i.e. the one associated with the singing of Rome, celebrated throughout the poem and personified by the nymph Canens, Gianus's daughter (Ovid, *Met.*, XIV, v. 320). According to this myth, her singing can predict the future, so it implies past present and future, exactly as the two-faced Gianus, looking to the past and the future. These are all undertones coherent with the initial invocation to the «gran Triade del Tempo» [«great Triad of Time»]: *The Latin Genius, ibid.*, v. 1, and with the topic of the «Third Rome», which is also frequent in Nievo's verse (see, for example, «the third Latin Dawn» that closes *The sea* in *Versi* (1855), ivi, p. 158), and *To Nice* in the last collection, *Garibaldine Loves*, in **AG**, pp. 129-133.

<sup>54</sup> Ivi, p. 111, vv. 94-98: «On the infinite high majesty of our Alps, and on the uncertain borders of Carnia's people, a voice will be heard, at last: 'The divine genius of Virgil and Dante is still alive!'. Italics mine.

<sup>55</sup> Ivi, pp. 115-118.

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*Ippolito Nievo's politico-military poetry*

«chi v'intende»<sup>56</sup>, celebrating a national and “useful” poetry, which offers much more than easy sentimentality:

lasciate andar la luna e le comete,  
e venite un po' abbasso, e *discorrete*  
*con chi v'intende*<sup>57</sup>.

A final plea is then made to Fusinato, as an encouragement to continue writing his *engagée* poetry<sup>58</sup>. Increasingly insistent are the coded messages in the long poem *Gli Amori* [*Loves*]<sup>59</sup>, which was in fact censored by the Austrian government, and published in a mutilated form<sup>60</sup>. After a description of the political implications of the contemporary situation, which are hidden in the sentimental and war references concerning emperor Cyrus and the ancient Babylon<sup>61</sup>, Nievo launches a number of direct attacks against France, described as «maga bizzarra» and «ebra d'orgoglio»<sup>62</sup>; next, he mourns Italy, with its purple halo, «simbol di lutto e patimento»<sup>63</sup>, creating a political climax that turns the meaning of these “loves” into something more than simply sentimental: «Simbol di lutto e pentimento, o Italia! / E corro io fiducioso alle tue braccia / e a quel tuo sen, dove tesoro tanto / sta di gloria e di speme!»<sup>64</sup>; and finally, he praises the beauty of Italy, described from North to South – «Dalle ghiacciaie / nivee dell'Alpi alle infocate lave» dell'Etna –, with accolades to the greatest Italian writers, from Dante and Petrarch to Tasso, Alfieri, Foscolo and Giusti<sup>65</sup>, specifically hinting at Foscolo's *Sepolcri* [*Tombs*] and Leopardi's poem *Ad Angelo Mai*. A further patriotic reference in *Gli Amori* can be found when Nievo hints at Byron's love for Italy, especially Venice, «antica / magion di dogi»<sup>66</sup>, which was the subject of the famous ode where the English poet mourned the unhappy destiny of the city after the Treaty of Campo Formio. Nievo emphasizes: «Quel nume non volea spenta nel fango / dei profani piacer l'anima eletta, / e l'avviò pentita al sacrificio, / dove pura e bellissima di fede / più nuova

<sup>56</sup> Ivi, p. 118: «those who can understand you».

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 122-124: «Leave aside the moon and the comets, and come down a bit, *talking with those who can understand you*». Italics mine.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 129-136.

<sup>59</sup> Ivi, pp. 129-140.

<sup>60</sup> Ivi, p. 921.

<sup>61</sup> Ivi, pp. 130-131. Gorra comments this part as follows: «The verse reflects the author's continuous reprimand against the absent-minded frivolity and triviality that have a negative influence on many Italians and subjugate them to the oppressors' dominion» (ivi, p. 923).

<sup>62</sup> Ivi, p. 135, vv. 243, 245: «bizarre magician», «intoxicated by pride».

<sup>63</sup> Ivi, p. 136, v. 260: «symbol of grief and sorrow».

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 260-263: «Oh, Italy, a symbol of grief and sorrow! I run with faith into your arms and breast, where there is so much glory and hope!».

<sup>65</sup> Ivi, pp. 136-138.

<sup>66</sup> Ivi, p. 140, vv. 407-408: «the ancient seat of Doges».





Carla Chiummo

giunse»<sup>67</sup>: he is talking of Byron's destiny, but also of Venice's, especially before and after 1848.

Even in the twisted chain of episodes in the long poem *Mare [The Sea]*<sup>68</sup>, which was criticised by the famous critic Tenca for its verbosity and obscurity<sup>69</sup>, the closing part evokes both the past greatness of Italy, with a final wish for a near «terza Alba Latina»<sup>70</sup>, and Nievo's trip to Livorno as a young man in 1848, with his possible participation in the local uprising organised by Mazzini's supporters:

[...] ne' miei più fanciulleschi anni, quand'era  
nuovo a tutto il pensiero, e la speranza  
vece tenea della lontana fede  
ond'oggi faccio schermo alle presenti  
viltadi, anch'io sulle deserte arene  
del Tirreno discesi, e popolai  
de' miei sogni quell'onde»<sup>71</sup>.

In a more explicit way, the poem *Ricordi per l'anno Nuovo. Al lettore dabbene [Memories for the New Year. To the Respectable Reader]*<sup>72</sup>, deals with the War in Crimea, with little trust being put in the «Macchiavelli [sic] in erba»<sup>73</sup> who hoped to obtain more, and sooner, for Italy through cunning diplomatic agreements – Nievo prefers those who «tend[ono] al bene per più lunga strada / forse, ma meno incerta»<sup>74</sup>, with several references to all those in Italy who were careful to watch only «a qual vento volgean le banderuole»<sup>75</sup>. He also makes reference to the glorious memories of the Roman Eagle, and other Italic glories, which should inspire young generations and teach them to live as «figlio amoroso, e cittadin sagace / che alla patria soccorso e gloria dia»<sup>76</sup>.

The long poem *Poesia d'un'anima. Brani del Giornale d'un poeta [Poem of a Soul. Fragments from a Poet's Journal]*<sup>77</sup> has been interpreted by Giovanni Maffei

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 414-418: «That prophet did not want that elected soul to fade away into the mud of profane pleasure, so he pushed her, repented, towards sacrifice, which she reached pure and shining with a renewed faith».

<sup>68</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 141-158.

<sup>69</sup> CARLO TENCA, *Recenti poesie italiane. Nievo*, in «Il Crepuscolo», 7 sett. 1856, cit.

<sup>70</sup> *Ivi*, p. 158, v. 625: «third Latin dawn».

<sup>71</sup> *Ivi*, p. 156, vv. 556-562: «In my youngest years, when thinking was still unknown to me, and hope took place instead of the remote faith with which I now protect myself from present cowardice, I went down to the Tyrrhenian coast and populated those waves with my dreams». Italics mine.

<sup>72</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 159-167.

<sup>73</sup> *Ivi*, p. 161, v. 88: «aspiring Macchiavellis».

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 92-93: «tend towards the good through a probably longer but less uncertain path».

<sup>75</sup> *Ivi*, p. 162, v. 144: «towards which wind the weathercocks were turning».

<sup>76</sup> *Ivi*, p. 166, vv. 293-294: «a loving son and a shrewd citizen, giving aid and glory to his own country».

<sup>77</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 169-257.





*Ippolito Nievo's politico-military poetry*

as the allegory of a rise to a Truth described in a Mazzinian way, but with more historical and realistic, less mystic, features<sup>78</sup>. It is the supposed «journal» of a developing poet during the years preceding the fateful year of 1848, who travels through the “hot” territory between Garda and Venice. In this case, Nievo alludes to «francesi oppositori, / che fecer ne' cervelli l'anarchia»<sup>79</sup>, filling the *First Part* and *Second Part* of *Poesia d'un'anima* with elements from Dante and echoes from Giuseppe Parini, along with several references to the Italian literary tradition. The historical and political implications of this tradition are more evident in the *Third Part*, namely in *La Sibilla* [*The Sybil*]<sup>80</sup> – thanks to references to the «cittade eterna»<sup>81</sup> and to the main figures of modern “Italian” civic poetry, i. e. «Parini, Alfieri, / Foscolo, Giusti and Leopardi»<sup>82</sup>–, as well as in *Saturni* [*Saturnians*]<sup>83</sup>, with hints at a possible resurgence of Italy as heir to the «Saturnia tribù»<sup>84</sup>, whose civilisation enchanted «il minaccioso Arminio»<sup>85</sup>, the meta-historical symbol of a Teutonic threat. Even in the *Epilogo* [*Epilogue*]<sup>86</sup> – with the humorous dialogue between the poet and the reader of the «journal», who sustains «averci nulla inteso»<sup>87</sup> – Nievo seems to allude to the forced political exile in America of numerous poets and patriots after 1848 (as the son of Carlino Altoviti, in the conclusion of Nievo's novel *Confessions of an Italian*). The poet rebukes the naive reader of the journal:

«Se avessi messo più che le ciglie  
impresciuttite in questi scarabocchi,  
il vero ti saria saltato agli occhi.  
[...]  
chiesi un buon passaporto; e o bene o male  
me ne andrò là fra i Quaccheri e i Mormoni  
a cercar aria per le mie canzoni»<sup>88</sup>.

<sup>78</sup> GIOVANNI MAFFEI, *Le Confessioni nella questione della lingua*, in «P.R.I.S.M.I.», 2013, 11, *Ippolito Nievo et le Risorgimento émancipateur. Actes du colloque des 23-25 juin 2011*, edited by ELSA CHAARANI-LESOURD, pp. 22-26.

<sup>79</sup> **P**, p. 187, *Poesia d'un'anima, Parte prima*, XIV, vv. 2-3: «French opponents, who stuffed brains with anarchy».

<sup>80</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 236-241.

<sup>81</sup> *Ivi*, p. 236, I, v. 3: «eternal city».

<sup>82</sup> *Ivi*, p. 241, II, vv. 73-74.

<sup>83</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 242-252.

<sup>84</sup> *Ivi*, p. 249, v. 245: «the Saturnian tribe».

<sup>85</sup> *Ivi*, p. 250, v. 305: «the threatening Arminius».

<sup>86</sup> *Ivi*, p. 257.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 3: «not having understood anything».

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 16-18, 22-24: «If you had not put your head in the sand while reading this scribbling, truth would have jumped clearly into your eyes... I asked for a good passport, and in a good or in a bad way, I will go among Quakers and Mormons and look for fresh air for my songs». Italics mine.





Carla Chiummo

### 3. Nievo's last collections of poems

The encoded political message is more evident in Nievo's two other collections of poems: *Le lucciole* [*The fireflies*] (1855-1857)<sup>89</sup>, and *Gli amori garibaldini* [*Garibaldian loves*] (1860). In the latter, one can perceive the underlying meaning of the love for Italy, rather than for a woman, already in the opening poem of the collection, *L'amore garibaldino* [*Garibaldian love*]<sup>90</sup>. Indeed, the hidden meaning of the sentimental motive is a *topos* in Risorgimento culture: suffice it to consider the famous painting *Il bacio* [*The Kiss*] (1859), by Francesco Hayez<sup>91</sup>.

In *Le lucciole*, the moral and political message is also hidden in the titles of individual sections: *Apologhi*, *Bozzetti veneziani*, *Gli amori in servitù*, *Da lunge*<sup>92</sup> and *Sdegni* [*Apologues*, *Venetian Sketches*, *Loves under Servitude*, *From Far Away*, *Indignation*]. Le «lucciolette cattivelle»<sup>93</sup>, in *Alle mie figlie* [*To My Daughters*]<sup>94</sup> have to fly to and from «Ai romiti casolari / nel silenzio dei villaggi / [...] / fra le tenebre dei chiostri [...] / Pei tumulti delle feste»<sup>95</sup>, though, above all – the poet continues:

A chi stanco si risente  
dalla stolidità allegria  
rischiarate santamente  
l'annebbiata fantasia,  
perché al cor gli venga e al viso  
d'altro oprar più maschio riso<sup>96</sup>.

Next, Nievo opens the *Apologhi*<sup>97</sup> with the impertinent buzz of «le vespe e le zanzale»<sup>98</sup>, using the Aesop's veil for the whole section<sup>99</sup>; even the *Rondinelle* [*Little Swallows*]<sup>100</sup> fly towards Egypt, in order not to smell «il tanfo senza morte

<sup>89</sup> Nievo himself evokes the «stile enigmatico» («enigmatic style») of this collection in his letters (See MAFFEI, *Nievo*, cit., p. 93 n. 50. For the references hidden in the title of the collection: *ivi*, p. 94).

<sup>90</sup> **AG**, p. 32.

<sup>91</sup> The painting is at the Pinacoteca di Brera, in Milan.

<sup>92</sup> This title also returns in the other collection *Amori Garibaldini*.

<sup>93</sup> «little nasty fireflies».

<sup>94</sup> **P**, p. 263, v. 8.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 13-14, v. 17, v. 19: «Towards the solitary farmhouses / in the silence of the villages...in the cloisters' dark...amidst the tumult of festivals».

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 25-30: «To those who are tired of stolid merriness, devoutly clear up the foggy mind, so that their heart and face remember to act with a more manly laughter».

<sup>97</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 265-310.

<sup>98</sup> *Ivi*, p. 265, v. 3: «wasps and mosquitoes».

<sup>99</sup> One of the pseudonyms used by Nievo is indeed «Esopo senza padrone» [«Aesop without a master»].

<sup>100</sup> **P**, pp. 269-271.





*Ippolito Nievo's politico-military poetry*

/ di questa sepoltura»<sup>101</sup> in the Italic sky, and, in a similar way, «the Kitten», in the poem with the same title<sup>102</sup>, has jumped «on the ministry's desk»<sup>103</sup>, and so it can finally and allusively say: «Unto e agiato / son campato, / perchè ingrato / sono stato!»<sup>104</sup>; while in *La nebulosa* [*Nebula*]<sup>105</sup> the ray of a «fievole stella»<sup>106</sup>, after a two thousand years' long journey, «tremò di speme»<sup>107</sup>, «scese al bramato nido»<sup>108</sup> e «si mescolò un istante / col Tiberino fiume. / Un guizzo die' d'orgoglio; / poi morì di cordoglio»<sup>109</sup>. Here the references to contemporary history are quite clear.

After recalling with nostalgia and sadness Italy's past glories in the *Muse d'Aquileia* [*Aquileia's Muses*]<sup>110</sup>, and in *L'ultimo esiglio* [*The Last Exile*]<sup>111</sup>, some of Nievo's most engaged verses can be found in *Bozzetti veneziani* [*Venetian Sketches*]<sup>112</sup>, where the very use of this adjective is a warning against easy and “sketchy” interpretations. Indeed, this important section of *Lucciole* dedicated to Venice contains no frivolous sketchiness – let's not forget that the first group of the *Bozzetti* was published in the weekly magazine with the eloquent title «Quel che si vede e quel che non si vede»<sup>113</sup>. In this section, just to cite a few examples, the «cavalli di San Marco»<sup>114</sup> are associated with Italian politicians, who are always apparently and uselessly in turmoil, but actually immobile in their inertia: «A immagin dei politici / l'altissima quadriga / scolpita a eterna briga / eternamente sta»<sup>115</sup>. Next, the well-known Venice doves are ironically envied because, unlike the doom of the Italians, in «fiacca età»<sup>116</sup> they enjoy full «libertà»<sup>117</sup>, while others feed them: «Beati voi cui

<sup>101</sup> Ivi, p. 271, vv. 103-104: «the stink without death of this cemetery».

<sup>102</sup> Ivi, pp. 272-274.

<sup>103</sup> Ivi, p. 273.

<sup>104</sup> Ivi, p. 274, vv. 65-68: «Greased and well-off I have lived, because ungrateful I have been».

<sup>105</sup> Ivi, pp. 303-304.

<sup>106</sup> Ivi, p. 303, v. 8: «feeble star».

<sup>107</sup> Ivi, p. 304, v. 36: «trembled with hope».

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 42: «descended to the longed-for nest».

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 45-48: «[...] mingled for an instant with the river Tiber. She had a twist of pride and then died from sorrow».

<sup>110</sup> Ivi, pp. 311-319.

<sup>111</sup> Ivi, pp. 285-295. Here the prophet Dante, born again, after a long and deceiving pilgrimage outside and inside modern Italy, exclaims: «se in questo secolo / speso avessi la mia vita mortale, / la Divina Commedia / saria tutta da ridere, / ed il Trino suo Regno uno Spedale!» [«if I had spent my mortal life in this century, the Divine Comedy would be all comical, and the three Reigns just one hospital!»], ivi, p. 289, II, vv. 176-180. Ivi, pp. 285-295.

<sup>112</sup> Ivi, pp. 321-354.

<sup>113</sup> «What one can see and what one cannot see».

<sup>114</sup> Ivi, p. 323: «Saint Mark's horses».

<sup>115</sup> *Ai cavalli di San Marco* [*To Saint Mark's Horses*], *ibid.*, vv. 9-12: «Like politicians, the very high quadriga, sculptured in eternal turmoil, eternally stands still».

<sup>116</sup> *Ai colombi*, *To the pigeons*, in ivi, p. 324, v. 4: «a feeble age».

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 8: «freedom».



dato / da non avara mano / il pane quotidiano / lasciò la libertà»<sup>118</sup>. Then, in *Agli uomini delle ore* [*To the Men of the Hours*]<sup>119</sup>, the bronze statues that strike the hours on the Clock Tower «batt[ono] la solfa al morto»<sup>120</sup> uselessly and sadly in a city often betrayed and abandoned by its own «vizz[i]», ritint[i]» and «imparruccat[i]» inhabitants<sup>121</sup>. Finally, and even more allusively, the beautiful «Patrician woman», in the poem *La patrizia*, sadly says: «Io guardo sempre al mare. / Guardo per l'aere bruno, / guardo nel ciel!... Nessuno / veggo! ... Nessuno vien!»<sup>122</sup>.

At the end of this collection of «sketches», in *Ammenda a Venezia* [*Amends for Venice*]<sup>123</sup>, Nievo – of Venetian ancestry – declares his love for this city, «che come culla / amo de' miei parenti»<sup>124</sup>, recalling that «Perdesti assai; maggiore / ti crebbe onor: più grande / ti fan le venerande / impronte del dolor»<sup>125</sup>. Yet, after the political disappointment, Nievo once again closes the salute to the ill-fated lagoon city with a «non disperato amor»<sup>126</sup>. A succession of hopes and distress emerges in the poems *A Virgilio* [*To Virgil*]<sup>127</sup> – his near fellow citizen from Mantua – and *Ad Arnaldo Fusinato* [*To Arnaldo Fusinato*]<sup>128</sup>, with its scathing conclusion, close also to the wishes expressed at the beginning of the *Confessions of an Italian*: «I posteri otterranno quello ch'io canto, / non voi, minori troppo a ben cotanto!»<sup>129</sup>.

*Scimie milanesi* [*Milanese Monkeys*]<sup>130</sup> aren't any better off, since they (i.e. the bourgeoisie and the nobility in Milan) are defined as «Scimmiettotti acefali / gonfi la pancia, / che alle metropoli / d'Anglia e di Francia / fan provinciale / la capitale»<sup>131</sup>. But, above all, *Le tre sorelle* [*The Three Sisters*]<sup>132</sup>, from the poem with the same name, «beautiful», yet wrapped up in «miserable pride»<sup>133</sup>, undoubtedly conceal the identity of three Italian cities that are politically strategic: almost cer-

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 5-8: «Blessed you, whom the daily bread given by no greedy hand, allows your freedom».

<sup>119</sup> *Ivi*, p. 325.

<sup>120</sup> *Agli uomini delle ore* [*To the Men of the Hours*], in *ibid.*, v. 14: «beat the tune of death».

<sup>121</sup> *Dopo mezzogiorno* [*After Midday*], in *ivi?*, p. 324, vv. 4, 1: «wrinkled...coloured...wearing wigs».

<sup>122</sup> *La patrizia* [*The Patrician woman*], in *ivi*, p. 335, IV, vv. 13-16: «I always scrutinise the sea. I scrutinise dark air, I scrutinise the sky!...I see no one!...No one comes!».

<sup>123</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 353-354.

<sup>124</sup> *Ivi*, p. 353, vv. 1-2: «that I love being the cradle of my family».

<sup>125</sup> *Ivi*, p. 354, vv. 9-12: «You lost a lot; and you deserved greater honour: old marks of sorrow make you greater».

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 16: «no hopeless love».

<sup>127</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 377-378.

<sup>128</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 379-383.

<sup>129</sup> *Ivi*, p. 383, vv. 149-150: «Posterity will obtain what I sing, not you, too minor for such a great reward!».

<sup>130</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 385-389.

<sup>131</sup> *Ivi*, p. 387, vv. 105-110: «Little monkeys, without brains, with a full stomach, who make the capital look a province compared to the big cities of England and France».

<sup>132</sup> *Ivi*, p. 395.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 1-3.

tainly Rome, Venice and Milan. Finally, *I due amori* [*The Two Loves*]<sup>134</sup>, and *Gli amori in servitù* [*Love in Servitude*]<sup>135</sup> introduce the key to reading the following collection as a whole: *Gli amori garibaldini*<sup>136</sup>, whose title is more overtly allusive to the predominant political interpretation.

In this last collection, Nievo's overtly political poems – written in parallel with his participation, alongside Garibaldi, in the Second Independence War – go hand in hand with an apparently sentimental theme often hint at the forced alliance with France, deriving from the Plombières Agreement. Nievo had reluctantly supported this agreement, since he wanted to obtain the longed-for expulsion of the Austrians, yet without forgetting Napoleon's betrayal of Campo Formio and the most recent French intervention in support of the Pope, against the Roman Republic. A shining example of this is the final verse of *Confessione di bigamia* [*Confession of Bigamy*]: «Ma portimi il demonio / se ora che spero aver quella cotale, / non mi fo Turco e indoppio il matrimonio»<sup>137</sup>. In other words, Nievo supports the transitory alliance between France and Piedmont<sup>138</sup>, as long as the so desired «prima amica» and «schiava»<sup>139</sup>, namely Italy, is obtained. Likewise, the words «patria» and «guerra»<sup>140</sup>, and notably the previous verses of *Un buon contratto* [*A Good Contract*] – «d'un ben maggior la speme / s'intorbida ogni dì»<sup>141</sup> – hint more substantially at key historical occurring in 1859, rather than to Nievo's amorous sighs while at war; the same happens for the dates mentioned in *Un indovinello* [*A Riddle*]<sup>142</sup>, and even more explicitly in *Il 22 maggio* [*May 22<sup>ND</sup>*]<sup>143</sup>.

Nievo's fourth and last collection of poems is truly worthy of note to shed light on his civic and political engagement, given that this collection assembles verses written from April 1859 to April 1860, and with explicit, nearly blatant, unveiled

<sup>134</sup> Ivi, pp. 402-403.

<sup>135</sup> Ivi, pp. 439-451.

<sup>136</sup> I have already tried to reconstruct this double 'clue', both sentimental and epico-political, in Nievo's last collection. See CARLA CHIUMMO, *Oltre il poeta soldato: Gli amori garibaldini di Ippolito Nievo*, in «Filologia e critica», 2013, 3, pp. 379-417. As Barbiera wrote at the end of his Preface to Nievo's *Poetry*: «Fireflies are a prelude to the fighting. *Garibaldine Loves* sing it». See *Poesie di Ippolito Nievo*, edited by RAFFAELLO BARBIERA, Firenze, Le Monnier, 1889, p. XXVIII.

<sup>137</sup> AG, p. 42, vv. 12-14: «But may the devil take me away if now, that I am longing for that one, I do not become a Turk and redouble my marriage». In the Crimea war, the Turks were allied with England, France and Piedmont. However, the metaphor of marriage, that conceals more clearly political themes, was already present in the poem of the same name – *Il matrimonio* [*The Marriage*] – from the first collection, *Versi*, in 1854.

<sup>138</sup> See also *La quistione dell'innesto* [*The Problem of the Graft*], in AG, pp. 94-95.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 4-5: «first friend» and «slave».

<sup>140</sup> Ivi, p. 43, vv. 6-7: «homeland» and «guerra».

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 3-4: «Each day the hope for something more becomes ever more turbid».

<sup>142</sup> Ivi, p. 71.

<sup>143</sup> Ivi, p. 50.



Carla Chiummo

references to the military actions that were underway. One should also mention at least poems such as *A S[ua]. E[ccellenza]. il Generale Urban* [To His Excellency the General Urban]<sup>144</sup>, *I lutti di Rezzate* [Rezzate's Mournings]<sup>145</sup>, *Sullo Stelvio* [On the Stelvio]<sup>146</sup>, *Villafranca*<sup>147</sup>, *A Nizza* [To Nice]<sup>148</sup>, as well as the Garibaldian poems *Il Generale* [The General]<sup>149</sup>, *I cacciatori a cavallo* [Horse Hunters]<sup>150</sup>, *Battete i tacchi!* [Click Your Heels!]<sup>151</sup> and *Il tenentino* [The Little Lieutenant]<sup>152</sup>. These politico-military verses combine satire, in Giusti's style, with an original mixture of irony and humour when commemorating Garibaldi's improvised army. Nievo's worst disappointments, however, are not caused by the obvious limits of the «accozzaglia»<sup>153</sup> of the garibaldian «horse hunters», who weren't even able to «click their heels»<sup>154</sup>, since «Fuori che i sandali / non hanno ai piedi»<sup>155</sup>. It is the betrayal of France and Savoy with the Villafranca Armistice that upset Nievo the most, given that the triumphal march of the Garibaldians towards the Veneto had to be halted, thus abandoning once again the «martire dell'Adria»<sup>156</sup>, namely Venice, together with its «sister» Nice<sup>157</sup>, sold out to the French. In the final part of the collection, Nievo makes amends for these misplaced hopes and recalls his hopeless and enraged condemnation to bend «i ginocchi / dinanzi al fango»<sup>158</sup>, without even being able «di vergogna - morir»<sup>159</sup>. Each illusion seems to die when faced with the «Vero»<sup>160</sup>. Yet, for Nievo all is not lost, as he wrote in the *Epilogue*:

Or da quel torbido  
sogno diverso,  
reduce al terso  
raggio del Sol,  
senza né ferreo  
né roseo laccio,

<sup>144</sup> Ivi, pp. 57-58.

<sup>145</sup> Ivi, pp. 76-78.

<sup>146</sup> Ivi, p. 100.

<sup>147</sup> Ivi, pp. 104-107.

<sup>148</sup> Ivi, pp. 129-133.

<sup>149</sup> Ivi, pp. 55-56.

<sup>150</sup> Ivi, pp. 62-63.

<sup>151</sup> Ivi, pp. 92-93.

<sup>152</sup> Ivi, pp. 110-111.

<sup>153</sup> *Click your heels*, in ivi, p. 92, v. 3: «a mishmash of soldiers».

<sup>154</sup> Ivi, p. 93, v. 52.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 31-32: «On their feet / they only wear sandals».

<sup>156</sup> *Villafranca*, in ivi, p. 105, v. 63: «Adria's martyr».

<sup>157</sup> *A Nizza* [To Nice], in ivi, p. 129, v. 3.

<sup>158</sup> *La condanna*, [The Condemnation], in ivi, p. 134, vv. 9-10: «the knees in mud».

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 12: «to die of shame».

<sup>160</sup> *Alle Illusioni* [To Illusions], in ivi, p. 135, v. 10: «Truth».



*Ippolito Nievo's politico-military poetry*

libero io giaccio  
misero e sol<sup>161</sup>.

He finds himself «miserable and alone», but also free from «constraint[s]» – clearly not only of a sentimental nature – and ready to believe again in his Italian project. Thus, the very conclusion of this final collection lies in his *Partendo per la Sicilia* [*Leaving for Sicily*]<sup>162</sup>: a composition/non-composition in Sternian style made up of only eight dotted lines and a final question mark, though the title, which refers to Garibaldi's *Spedizione dei Mille*, is more than eloquent. Also the unspoken, therefore, contains a precise attitude of 'resistenza', and, although Nievo's last Garibaldian venture would cost him his life, he closes his literary and politico-military gamble by showing his brave and lucid consistency.

<sup>161</sup> *Epilogo*, in *ivi*, p. 137, vv. 9-16: «Now, different from that turbid dream, a survivor lying in the shining sun, with neither an iron nor a rosy constraint, I lie free, miserable and alone».

<sup>162</sup> *Ivi*, p. 138.

