

Italy, Garibaldi and Goldoni Give Lady Gregory ‘a Room with a Different View’¹

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Abstract: *This paper analyses the complex influence of Italy on Lady Gregory’s imagination. On the one hand she considered the Italian fight for independence a good example for Ireland. Reading Garibaldi’s Defence of the Roman Republic was “comforting” to her. On the other, she looked at Eleonora Duse’s efforts to create a national theatre with sympathy and with pride as she succeeded where the Italian actress had failed. She had a wide knowledge of Italian literature which she could read in the original. In her youth she even translated passages from Dante’s Commedia, but what is more important and revealing is that, at the height of her own creative career, with the intention of providing a more international repertory for the Abbey Theatre, she translated Goldoni’s La Locandiera. The choice of this play and the technique adopted for the translation cast new light on her view of life and on her work.*

Lady Gregory’s relationship with Italy was a long and profitable one and her biography as well as her literary work provide evidence for this fact which still has not been investigated.

As for her life: I shall quote extensively from her journals and her autobiography *Seventy Years*,² which consists of a series of long narratives of strong dramatic quality, as the writer objectifies her world in a dynamic context of interrelated voices. She speaks of herself in the third person singular and gives us either a smiling or thoughtful or ironic “portrait of a Lady” in relation to the people or events she comes across.

The following paragraphs are her avowal of love for Italy:

While in her early twenties [...] being given the charge of an elder brother, whose health had failed, she left the large household [...] for a quiet hotel on the Riviera. [...] As she saw it, Cannes was not France, it had no history, no national life [...] But with the springtime in each of these three years there came what made up for all, a few weeks of Italy. (SY, 19)

As many girls of her social background she had a good knowledge of Italian literature. She could read it in the original and in accordance with the taste of her age she always kept in her room a bust of Dante which had been given her by Sir William for their engagement. She remembers that during her first visits to Italy before marrying:

[...] having begun to learn its language, and to know a little of the grammar, with the audacity of the young she began to read Dante, at first with the help of a French translation, and then, making her own, she wrote it out to the very end of the *Purgatorio* and the triple stars. And the beautiful sound of the language was added to the other unbounded joys of those blossoming Italian Aprils. (SY, 19)

Isabella Augusta Persse, born in Roxborough, Co. Galway, in 1852, married Sir William Gregory, former Governor of Ceylon, in 1880. He was then sixty-three years old and could have been her father. As a father he started caring for her education since the beginning of their relationship:

After my marriage my husband told me that very soon after he had first met me, and when I knew him but slightly, he had, in making his will, left to me the choice of any six books in his library at Coole. And after marriage he directed in his later testament, that not six, but all, should be mine through my lifetime.³

Among the books of the library at Coole⁴ sold in 1972, there are over fifty titles related to Italy and to Rome and to Roman antiquities in particular, collections of prints of Roman monuments, history books etc. Most of them were published in the 1830s and must have been in the library long before Sir William turned over the pages of Domenico Amici's *Raccolta delle principali vedute di Roma* (1835) or Feoli's *Raccolta delle più insigni fabbriche di Roma antica* (1810), eager to follow with his new and intelligent wife either Luigi Canina's *Indicazione topografica di Roma antica* (1831) or James Hakewill's *A Picturesque Tour of Italy* (1820). No wonder that Lady Augusta began her married life in Italy:

Rome, and then Athens, Constantinople, a wonderful wedding journey. In Rome the pictures and statues and churches were too many and too confusing for a short visit. I was rather bewildered by it all. There were too many ages huddling on one another in Rome – 'the exhaustless scattered fragmentary city' as it is called by Goethe. (SY, 30)

On the same occasion she thus describes her social life:

My first real dinner party (at the Embassy in Rome) was a sudden entering into society after my quiet years [...] My first ball also was at the Embassy, it was in honour of the [Princess Royal of England] and in honour of her the

Roman Princesses had brought out their tiaras from bankers' strong rooms. Of my few balls it was the most dazzling and glittering and brilliant.[...] On another day to be remembered we went to the Pope's reception at the Vatican and received his blessing, which he gave very solemnly [...] I had brought rosaries with me that I might give them to some devout old women at home, when they had received Leo the Thirteenth's blessing.(SY, 31)

But Venice was the place she preferred, "so long as [she] lived, Venice was to [her] as home" (SY, 285), since Augusta had often been Lady Enid Layard's⁵ guest at Palazzo Cappello on the Grand Canal.

At the end of the nineteenth century Venice was under Austrian rule. Napoleon had offered Venice and its territory to Austria as a token of peace, after the short unfortunate experience of a Republic, inspired by the French Revolution. Having lost its international trading supremacy, the city was then facing the first signs of its unending decadence, but kept all its charming atmosphere, as it does still today.

During the Easter 1907 Lady Gregory spent "a beautiful month" in Italy with her son Robert and with William Butler Yeats, who had joined them for his first visit to Italy. With incredible care she planned their tour of Venice:

I, having in mind what that other poet [Robert Browning] had said, [i.e. that Venice should be seen from the sea], arranged an easier voyage to the same end. [...]taking a steam-boat at Chioggia we came before the sun had set to our haven, not to the jangle and uproar of the railway station, but to set foot first upon the very threshold of the city's beauty, the steps leading to the Grand Piazza, to the Duomo of St. Mark (SY, 201-2)

Back in Venice in May 1909, she writes to Yeats:

I am in my old state room, at the corner of the water floor, looking through four ivy trellised windows at the sunlight on the water, and only hearing the splash of oars and a gondolier singing. The room is full of beautiful furniture, and when I came in last night, at midnight, from the long dusty journey and found the Italian housemaid who has welcomed me for twentyfive years, on the steps to kiss my hand, and other servants bringing Chianti in a flask and soup in a silver bowl, it felt like fairyland! (SY, 440)

Unluckily Italy was not always to be fairyland nor fair to her. On 23 January 1918, according to the official records of the Royal Flying Corps, Robert Gregory was shot down in error by an Italian pilot, who thought him German, as he had gone bravely across the lines and was flying back (cf. SY, 556n.) The following passage is very moving and is taken from the chapter of her autobiography entitled "My grief":

On 22 Nov. 1917. Robert has gone – probably to Italy [...]

On 3 Dec. [Margaret] had a cheery letter from Robert yesterday from Milan [...]. In Italy all along the line, the people cheered them and brought fruit and flowers [...]. I am glad he had such a good time after being so long at one place in France. There is danger in both countries, but Italy seems more worth fighting for, and has beauty everywhere. (SY, 551-2)

Passing to less personal matters, from the political point of view she thought Italian history, namely that long struggle for independence called the *Risorgimento*, a counterpoint to Irish history as she was witnessing it during her lifetime, mainly during the dark hours of the Black and Tans terror. In fact on 24 October 1920 she writes in her *Journals*:

I am reading Garibaldi's *Defence of the Roman Republic*, very comforting, because so many a praise of Italy's fighters and martyrs taken from its contents could stand as justly for ours. Men who would have been called to make her laws and lead her armies and write her songs and history when their day came, but they judged it becoming to die there in order that her day should come.⁶

A few days later she still reports:

27 Oct. I go on reading *Garibaldi and the Thousand*, this is not so near to our case as the Roman Republic.⁷

And finally, after a bitter remark on the satirical magazine *Punch*, she writes:

30 Oct. Reading Garibaldi still, with envy.⁸

It is very interesting to analyze the relationship between Lady Augusta and her Ireland. She identifies with her country at an almost subconscious level. Once again Italy is a useful foil to this complex feeling that creates a short circuit between nationality and subjectivity.

During her glittering days in London as wife of Sir William she met Robert Percy French, who must have been a bore and a terrible chatter-box but she adds:

Yet he would often tell things worth hearing [...] Bismarck, he said, had spoken of races, "Europe is divided into two sexes – the female countries, Italy, the Celts, have their soft pleasing quality and charm of a woman and no capacity of self-government. The male countries must take them in hand." (SY, 99-100)

She was deeply offended by this patronising view that doomed both women and races to the same subjection. One should add that the question of the 'sex' of races

and the consequent ‘war of sexes’ as a perfect counterpoint to colonial exploitation and colonial wars was in fashion among philosophers and intellectuals at the turn of the nineteenth century. Ernst Renan, for instance, in a famous essay on “The Poetry of the Celtic Races” affirms that “the Celtic race is an essentially feminine race”, while the socialist thinker Guglielmo Ferrero, whose book *L’Europa giovane* had a great influence on Joyce⁹, wrote of the importance of a new role for women for the advent of a new – “young” Europe.

Augusta was a proud, bright woman. Writing her autobiography many years later, she almost inadvertently passes a serious judgement on the subject. In fact in the same page where she mentions Mr Percy French she recalls saying to herself in her youth: “I hope never to marry anyone I shall have to make small talk for,” which she in fact managed not to do and married a man whose stimulating presence made her intelligence bloom. She ends the chapter by ironically turning Bismarck’s patronising remark upside-down: “Ireland is a female country with masculine ideals and England is a masculine country with female ideals”. (SY, 351)

* * *

The first part of my paper provides a mannered portrait of an accomplished Victorian lady, visiting Italy and enjoying its landscape and language, its culture and historical past – nothing new – but in her later years our lady was to become one of the leaders of the Irish Dramatic Movement, a woman of action and strong will, a friend of poets and artists; she was to reveal an artistic talent of which she was the first to be astonished. But her interest in Italy and Italian culture never failed and provided new stimuli.

At the beginning of her own fruitful adventure, in 1899, Lady Gregory wrote of Eleonora Duse’s plan of building an open air theatre near Rome in the Alban Hills, where Italian literary plays might be produced. She was fully aware of the practical difficulties of such an ambitious project, which she was to face soon after on her turn and says:

[Duse’s] idea was to find forty noble ladies – Signore Nobili – who would give or guarantee each a thousand francs. But Italy is passing through a time of financial stress and strain. There were not enough noble ladies, or they were not noble enough. Duse has given up, for the time, the idea of a material building.¹⁰

She concluded her article in *The Daily Express* by thus commenting: “We have, indeed, no Duse as yet, but as in Italy the actress called forth the play, perhaps in Ireland the play may bring an actress into being”.

To this Ann Saddlemyer rightly adds: “In later years the plays did produce the actors in Ireland, but the theatre [the Abbey] called forth more playwrights”.¹²

Moreover Lady Gregory was fully aware of the differences between the two schools of acting, Italian and Irish. In an interview in *The New York Daily Tribune* of November 26, 1911, she says:

Last year I saw the Sicilian players [she is probably speaking of the company of the famous actor Angelo Musco who was then touring England] and was deeply interested in their use of gesture. So wonderfully sensitive are these people's hands to form and action that their plays could have been understood by watching their gestures only. The directors of that company had realized the natural trait of the people and had developed it into an art that was full of meaning. In the same way we [she is obviously referring to herself and Yeats] realized that the Irish are not light and graceful in movement and quick of manner and action, so we did not try to cultivate these traits in them. We realized that they had beautiful voices naturally, so we let gesticulation count for very little and developed the subtle shades of the voice and depend on their vocal power for dramatic effect.¹³

And *Spreading the News* of all her plays provides a wonderful example of how hers is not a "comedy of manners" nor a "comedy of humours" but in fact is a "comedy of rumours", of voices.

Yeats and Gregory have often been accused by critics of having created a nationalistic theatre, narrow in its scope and therefore doomed to implosion after the glorious years. This is not true if we look carefully at their plans and experiments as reported in *Our Irish Theatre*. They were fully aware of the need to introduce the whole Western Dramatic tradition in their repertory. In *Paragraphs from Samhain, 1909*, we read:

The creation of a folk drama was,[...], but a part of the original scheme, and now that it has been accomplished we can enlarge our activities, bringing within our range more and more of the life of Ireland, and finding adequate expression for the acknowledged masterpieces of the world. A theatre, as we conceive it, should contain in its repertory plays from the principal dramatic schools. We have begun with three plays by Molière, – as their affinities with folk drama have made them easy to our players. During our next season we shall add to them one of Goldoni's comedies. Our players have, however, given a good deal of their time to the speaking of verse, and we are about to produce *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles.¹⁴

This is how Goldoni came into her life. By the end of 1909 after spending her spring holidays in Venice, Lady Augusta set about translating Goldoni's *La Locandiera*. It was a difficult task, as Gabriele Baldini points out in his OUP edition of the play:

Goldoni is one who, with others such as Rabelais and Joyce, is doomed to lose much in translation.[...] the reader should be warned from the beginning that, to get at the very heart of Goldoni's gift as a dramatist, he ought to learn or polish up his Italian, and indulge in long stays in Venice in order to grasp all the subtleties of Venetian dialect. Indeed, some experience of Venice and of the Venetian atmosphere is more necessary to an understanding of Goldoni than any knowledge of the literary and theatrical background.¹⁵

One might say that Lady Gregory was well-equipped for her job. Not only she knew Venice but moreover Palazzo Cappello-Layard was exactly opposite the Teatro S. Angelo on the other side of the Grand Canal. In this theatre Goldoni worked from 1747 to 1752 and there *La Locandiera* opened on the eve of 26 December 1752. *La Locandiera* was, in fact, Goldoni's last play for the company of Girolamo Medebac, who exploited him with a binding contract, but whom he left in 1753 after having made a new contract with the Noble Vendramin, owner of the Teatro S.Luca at the other end of the sestiere of St. Mark.

If these are mere coincidences, there was at least one good reason for choosing *La Locandiera* and that is that Lady Gregory always remembered Eleonora Duse's performance as *Mirandolina* in London at the turn of the century:

Many years ago I had the joy of seeing Duse in the ironing scene; and the lovely movements of her hands and the beauty of her voice that called 'Fabrizio'! are still clear in my memory.¹⁶

The 1910's were important years for the Abbey. While Lady Gregory was probably busy translating Goldoni's play, which she entitled *Mirandolina*, the beginning of 1910 brought new theatrical ideas to Yeats. Gordon Craig, the English stage-manager and experimentalist, had agreed to produce *Hamlet* for Stanislavsky's Moskow Art Theatre and had already begun planning it to be staged with his screens, the "thousand scenes in one scene", and had also begun to work on designs to illustrate Yeats's *Plays for an Irish Theatre*. When they met on 7 January 1910, Craig's description of his system fired Yeats's enthusiasm. Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory:

8 Jan. 1910: I am to see his model on Monday at 5 – I think I shall, if it seems right, order one for us.[...]I asked if we would get his scene in time for Oedipus but he wants us to play about with his model first and master its effects. If we accept the invention I must agree, he says, to use it for all my poetical work in the future. I would gladly agree. [...]That we shall have a means of staging everything that is not naturalistic, and that out of his invention may grow a completely new method even for our naturalistic plays. I think we could get rid of side scenes even for naturalistic plays.¹⁷

We shall see how Yeats's intent was faithfully accomplished by Lady Gregory, who used her *Mirandolina* as guinea-pig for Yeats's experiments, getting rid of side scenes and – in a second version of the play – actually getting rid of two characters, the two actresses.

But now let us see in some detail what Craig's method was. Edward Gordon Craig speaks thus of his invention:

[It] consists in the use of a series of double-jointed folding screens standing on the stage and painted in monochrome – preferably white or pale yellow. The Screens may be used as background and [...] may be so arranged as to project into the foreground at various angles of perspective so as to suggest various physical conditions, such as, for example, the corner of a street, or the interior of a building.¹⁸

Yeats plotted the results of his experiments with the model stage and the screens in a small quarto notebook, which remains in the possession of the Yeats family and reveals how intensely he worked at the application of Craig's principles to the needs of the Abbey Theatre stage. As I had no opportunity of seeing the notebook myself, we have to rely on what Liam Miller tells us about the pages dedicated to the staging of *Mirandolina*:

The notebook opens with a series of sketches and notes based on Lady Gregory's play *Mirandolina* which was first produced at the Abbey on 24 February 1910. Yeats arrived back in Dublin for the first production of *The Green Helmet* on 10 February and looked at the rehearsals of *Mirandolina*, full of enthusiasm for Craig's scenery. He revealed his new view of stage presentation in a note printed in the Abbey Theatre programme of the first performance: "The rather unsatisfactory scenic arrangements have been made necessary by the numerous little scenes, and the necessity of making the intervals between them as short as possible. We hope before very long to have a better convention for plays of the kind."

The *Mirandolina* notes occupy pages 1 to 11 of the notebook and begin with a blurred watercolour sketch, probably a front elevation, with the word "kitchen" on top left and, below a drawing, a note that seems to read "spotty lemon yellow".¹⁹

The rest is more or less a list of possible colouring of screens carefully registered by Miller. It is clear that the Abbey Theatre producers had to cope with many difficulties in staging a play that needs two scenes in Act I, another two in Act II and two more in Act III. This first performance of Lady Gregory's version of Goldoni's play might have persuaded her to cut the scenes with the two strolling players, but as it was the shortened version that she chose for the first edition published in 1924, the cut must be seen in the perspective of her more mature artistic awareness.

When speaking of a play, one should take into account whatever is available of its first performance and we are very lucky to have a first-hand report of the evening of February 1910. Joseph Holloway, the Abbey Theatre equivalent of Samuel Pepys, is openly harsh on the “unsatisfactory scenic arrangements” for which Yeats himself had apologized in the programme of the first performance. Obviously the notes on *Mirandolina* were not included by Robert Hogan and Michael J. O’Neill²⁰ in their published selection from Holloway’s journals, so we are quoting directly from the manuscript, which is in the Dublin National Library. It was difficult to make out Holloway’s handwriting, but it was worth doing so. He begins by referring to Duse’s performance in London mentioned by Lady Gregory:

Eleonora Duse made a big hit in the role of the beautiful hostess of the Inn – *Mirandolina* – in the original Italian comedy and when I saw her play in it eight or nine years ago in London I remember I was charmed with her vivacity and coquetry. [...] Miss Irene Vanbrugh appeared in an English version of the comedy as the fair bewitcher in England with a fair amount of success, though she was overshadowed by the charm of Duse’s portrait.²¹

Then he speaks of the Dublin production with exceptional skill and competence:

In a pièce so much out of their line as this – a comedy of manners – the Abbey players did remarkably well and when they fairly got started entered merrily into the spirit of the fun of things. The pinkcloths with the lavatorylike arrangement of doors and crude untrimmed windows were very trying to play in front of, but one nearly forgot them in the brightness of the playing. I think Maire O’Neill as the coquettish, yet prudent *Mirandolina*, would have looked more captivating had she worn a cap and made less a feature of her patience. She was particularly good in her scenes of fascination with the at first unwilling Captain [*Cavaliere Ripafratta*] and her playing foretold that when she became more accustomed to the role she would be a right-merry little witch of an innkeeper [...] a few performances make a great difference with the artistic perfection of the playing of this company as a rule. [...] The dresses were good but the terrible scenery killed their effectiveness. Pink in this case was not the pink of perfection! [...] Eileen O’Doherty and Eithne Magee, as two strolling players acted well but without sufficient sparkle. Two such merry maids would surely have more of the devil of mischief in them!²²

It is time to move from the stage to the page as the scene of the Abbey production had been entirely due to Yeats’s choice. Holloway notices that Lady Gregory was not even present that night. He adds:

It is a merry delightful comedy well translated into English by Lady Gregory. Luckily for the success of the pièce the English was not kiltartanized as in her translations from the French of Molière.²³

If the critic preferred the neat polished English of the 1910 production, Lady Gregory worked in a quite different direction in successive re-writings of the play as she writes in the introductory note to the 1924 first published edition: “I translated Goldoni’s *La Locandiera*, calling it *Mirandolina*, for the Abbey Theatre, thinking it in key with our country comedies”.²⁴

The choice of this one play among the others written by Goldoni was definitely hers and this is very interesting, as it is interesting to notice how constantly she went back to her translation which became an adaptation, a creative re-writing. With the passing of time Gregory’s artistic awareness became more sophisticated. Sometimes she seems to anticipate Yeats’s “minimalist” later plays. One thinks of *Purgatory* in reading the following passage:

[...] I wrote *Grania* with only three persons in it [...] I may have gone too far, and have, I think, given up an intention I at one time had of writing a play for a man and a scarecrow only, but one has to go on with experiment or interest in creation fades.²⁵

In the introduction to the first published edition of *Mirandolina* Lady Gregory speaks of a later production I could not find note of. On that occasion she cut down the number of parts. Due to Kathleen Barrington’s great kindness I was given an unhopd-for piece of information, taken from the Abbey’s unpublished archives in which the play is mentioned again after 1910 in the year 1914. Thus Gregory speaks of her decision:

When we were putting it on again I left out two characters, the actresses, as I found the scenes into which they come delayed the action and were not needed. And I gave the whole play at that time an Irish setting, so getting a greater ease in the speaking and in the acting. And even now that it is back again in Italy, the dialogue is in places less bound to the word than to the spirit of the play.²⁶

From what she said of the difference between Italian and Irish actors, “the shades of the voice”, the spoken word was the most relevant element in her dramatic theory. She was aiming at naturalness, at simplicity; the ease of the spoken word is characteristic of her best plays. This was also at the root of her translations. In 1923 she was again working hard on *Mirandolina*, re-writing the missing part of the two strolling players, as she writes in her journal:

24 Aug. 1923: Fagan writes asking if he may use my *Mirandolina* for his Oxford Theatre. 'It is so full of life and charm and so infinitely better than the wooden one beautifully published by Clifford Bax.' But he wants to put back the Dejanira scene, and to call the play *Mine Hostess*. I am agreeing reluctantly to the scene but refusing to change the name as Putnam is publishing the play under that name and my chief desire in translating or indeed writing a play is to get it into a spoken language, and I don't think 'Mine Hostess' belongs to any language I have heard.²⁷

Fagan is referring to the Palmer edition of *Four Comedies*, one of which is *Mine Hostess* translated by Clifford Bax, published in London in 1922 and reprinted in the OUP edition of *Three Comedies* with an introduction of Gabriele Baldini. Lady Gregory's – though a truncated version – is far better than the literal translation of Bax. As further and perhaps funny evidence it is worth mentioning that the first translation of the play in Chinese by Chias-Chu-Yin was based on the English of Lady Gregory, published in Pekin in 1927 and reprinted in *Selected Plays* in 1957.

Her refusal to use Bax's title for the play is also very significant as it implies a sort of affectionate possession of the hostess, the female subjugation she would never accept. For much the same reason her dislike of the scenes with the two strolling players is also worth noticing, as the two actresses are stereotyped versions of female coquetry without brains.

Going back from page to stage, we have the reviews on *The Manchester Guardian* (18 Aug. 1925) and on *The Saturday Review* (22 Aug., same year). The reviewer speaks of a production of Lady Gregory's "shortened" *Mirandolina* directed by Edith Craig, with Miss Ruth Bower in the leading role at the Everyman Theatre, Hampstead, London. After having gone into a long comparison between Molière and Goldoni, affirming that "comparisons of Goldoni with Molière are as senseless as contrasting a sugar dainty with a joint of beef" – the reviewer obviously being a "Beef-eater" – he thinks that: "Lady Gregory has not been fair to little Carlo. He wrote a thin play and she has made it thinner",²⁸ adding that

This narrowing of canvas is a mistake. Without the playful ladies the jejune quality of the intrigue is emphasised, and Lady Gregory has taken from Goldoni without adding at all richly from her individual and powerful resources of comic invention. It needs an obstinate faith in the eighteenth century to carry one with relish through such a pièce as *Mirandolina*, but that faith is burning strong at the moment and Goldoni should profit by its warmth.²⁹

On the contrary, Lady Gregory's translation is still very modern: it has a fast pace and a pleasant rhythm. It is less than half its original length. It is divided into three acts and five scenes instead of sixty one. It requires only two scenes: large room at an

Inn, with rough furniture and three doors; in Act III, a table and linen to be ironed; Captain's Parlour in Act II is furnished with a table laid for dinner.

Some observations are to be made. The famous aside of Act I, sc.ix which is Mirandolina's *manifesto* and sums up her intentions, is dispersed into bits and pieces in dialogues with other characters, with the result that she never speaks directly to her audience, losing the wonderful explicit complicity with her public which was a feature of the *Commedia dell'Arte* that Goldoni thus skilfully uses:

Scena nona

Mirandolina sola.

Uh, che mai ha detto! L'eccellentissimo signor Marchese Arsura mi sposerebbe! Eppure, se mi volesse sposare, vi sarebbe una piccola difficoltà. Io non lo vorrei. Mi piace l'arrosto, e del fumo non so che farne. Se avessi sposati tutti quelli che hanno detto volermi, oh, avrei pure tanti mariti! Quanti arrivano a questa locanda, tutti di me s'innamorano, tutti mi fanno i cascamorti; e tanti e tanti mi esibiscono di sposarmi a dirittura. E questo signor cavaliere, rustico come un orso, mi tratta sì bruscamente? Questi è il primo forestiere capitato alla mia locanda, il quale non abbia avuto piacere di trattare con me. Non dico che tutti in un salto s'abbiano a innamorare: ma disprezzarmi così? È una cosa che mi muove la bile terribilmente. E' nemico delle donne? Non le può vedere? Povero Pazzo! Non avrà ancora trovato quella che sappia fare. Ma la troverà. La troverà. E chissà che non l'abbia trovata? Con questi per l'appunto mi ci metto di picca. Quei che mi corrono dietro, presto presto mi annoiano. La nobiltà non fa per me. La ricchezza la stimo e non la stimo. Tutto il mio piacere consiste in vedermi servita, vagheggiata, adorata. Questa è la mia debolezza, e questa è la debolezza di quasi tutte le donne. A maritarmi non ci penso nemmeno; non ho bisogno di nessuno; vivo onestamente e godo la mia libertà. Tratto con tutti, ma non m'innamoro mai di nessuno. Voglio burlarmi di tante caricature di amanti spasimati; e voglio usar tutta l'arte per vincere, abbattere e conquassare quei cuori barbari e duri che son nemici di noi, che siamo la miglior cosa che abbia prodotto al mondo la bella madre natura.

In Lady Gregory's hands it becomes:

Mirandolina. That man is no better than a bear.

Count. Dear Mirandolina, if he knew you he would be at your feet.

Mirandolina. I don't want him at my feet, but I don't like to be made little of.

Count. He is a woman hater. He can't bear the sight of them.

Mirandolina. The poor foolish creature! He hasn't met yet with the woman who knows how to manage him – but he'll find her – he'll find her or maybe...maybe...he has found her! I hope she will punish him and put him

down...and conquer him and get the better of him and teach him not to run down the best thing Mother Nature ever put a hand to!³⁰

[...]

Marquis. By all that's damnable...I would marry you! (*Goes out*)

Mirandolina. (*looking out of door after him*). Oh! What is it he said? Your High Excellency the Marquis Misery would think of marrying me! But if you should wish to marry me, there is one little bar in the way...I myself would not wish it.³¹

[...]

Fabrizio. But I am someway thin-skinned. There are some things I cannot put up with. Sometimes it seems as if you will have me, and other times that you will not have me. You say you are not giddy but you always take your own way.

Mirandolina. But what sort of an owl do you take me for? A bit of vanity? A fool? I'm astonished at you...What are strangers to me, that are here to-day and gone to-morrow? If I treat them well it is for my own interest and the credit of the house. I live honestly and I like my freedom; I amuse myself with everybody but I fall in love with nobody. [...]³²

Act I gives us another example of Lady Gregory's manipulation-adaptation of Goldoni's play to her ideas. The two suitors, the mean Marquis and the prodigal Count give Mirandolina gifts after the practice of courtship in Goldoni's age, but our Lady's practical and puritanical attitude to money prevents her from putting up with such an irrational liberality; therefore she inserts a reason for their generosity: the gifts are given Mirandolina on the eve of her birthday!

A little further on the translator unwillingly censors the text. After having openly declared her intentions to make the Captain, a woman-hater fall in love with her before night, Mirandolina goes to his apartment with the excuse of giving him a better set of linen.

Captain. (*turns his back*) Give the things to my servant, or leave them there. You need not put yourself to so much trouble.

Mirandolina. (*making a grimace behind him mimicking his manner*). Oh, it is no trouble at all, when it is for someone like you.

Captain. Well, well, that will do; I don't want anything more.

Mirandolina. I will put it in the cupboard.³³

Goldoni was much more malicious than the Irish lady and knew 'the way of the world' and the tricks of erotic charm, as his Mirandolina answers: "La metterò nell'alcova.", which was in fact a built-in cupboard covered with a curtain near the bed, therefore *alcova* means that particular cupboard and metaphorically also 'bed-chamber'. Mirandolina is therefore threatening the Captain's own privacy. At the utmost efforts of her coquetry she reveals the strength of her determination, an almost male attitude to

conquer and possess. Remembering what Gregory made of Bismarck's words about races, Mirandolina is here represented as a woman "with masculine ideals".

This brings about the final point that this article aims at: to understand the reason of Lady Gregory's partiality for *La Locandiera* among Goldoni's plays.

Mary Lou Kohfeldt in her *Lady Gregory – The Woman Behind the Irish Renaissance* very perceptively writes:

As usual, even the plays Augusta chose to translate were part of her creative process of the plays she wrote, adding sidelights, presenting themes in another light, and while she was working on [*Grania*], she translated Mirandolina [...] the plot of which is a comic parallel to Grania. In it the charming inn-keeper Mirandolina, in no hurry to marry the suitable man to whom her father betrothed her before he died, discovers a woman-hater lodging at her inn and sets out to conquer him. Her wooing is a comic version of the mysterious fated love Grania feels for Diarmuid, Mirandolina telling her woman-hater she feels for him 'this sympathy, this feeling for one another... sometimes found even between people who have never met.' She succeeds so well with him that his attentions frighten her. She sends him away and gives her hand to Fabrizio, her father's choice, saying of her suitor: "He is gone and will not return, and if the matter is over now I call myself lucky[...]" Mirandolina side-steps love, gives up her dangerous freedom and makes the conventional marriage her father chose for her. Grania insists on having her love and gets into all sorts of trouble because of it, but in the end she too makes the conventional marriage her father chose for her.³⁴

I do not entirely agree with Kohfeldt. Mirandolina is the comic equivalent of Grania but the comparison works at a deeper level than their acceptance of their fathers' choice. Lady Gregory was perfectly aware of the fact that Mirandolina belongs as well as Grania to "the strong people of the world"³⁵ she liked best. Of her tragic heroine she said: "Grania had more power of will and for good or evil twice took the shaping of her life into her own hands".³⁶

In 1973 the Italian critic Arnaldo Momo passes a similar judgement on Mirandolina:

The locandiera hides behind the mask of honest love and acceptance of her dead father's will, her truly feminist choice of a life of independent, self-supporting work, that only her marriage to Fabrizio, a servant at her inn, cannot seriously threaten.³⁷

Grania shares Mirandolina's clear-mindedness and determination – no matter if to a different aim – Grania tells the old king to whom she has returned after her tormented love affair with Diarmuid:

You are craving to get rid of me now, and to put me away out of your thoughts, the same as Diarmuid did. But I will not go! I will hold you to your word, and I will take my revenge on him [...]³⁸

What the two women are fighting for is their right to be taken into account, not as means of pleasure or service, but as human beings, mates or partners even in tyranny or business. In fact, they both want to be in a man's "thoughts", not in his heart.

The protagonists of Laclos' *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, the masterpiece of eighteenth century libertinism, are nearer to Lady Gregory's heroines than any Romantic counterpart. Life has little to do with love and a lot to do with strong will and control both of oneself and of others. Lady Augusta Gregory, né Persse, eminent member of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy had reasons to look back at Neo-Classicism, the age of reason and empiricism: Hobbes, Burke, Congreve, Molière but also Goldoni loom in her background.

Notes

- 1 This paper draws upon some material published earlier in Italy, namely the article "Lady Gregory, l'Italia e Goldoni", in *Il Velcro – Rivista della civiltà italiana*, 5-6, Anno XXXIV, Settembre-Dicembre 1990, pp.494-503 and upon a lecture given at University College Dublin in May 1989 at the joint invitation of the English and Italian Departments.
- 2 Lady A. Gregory, *Seventy Years – Being the Autobiography of Lady Gregory*, edited and with a foreword by Colin Smythe, New York, Macmillan, 1974. [We shall refer to this work as SY.]
- 3 Lady A. Gregory, "Coole", Colin Smythe ed., Dublin, Dolmen, 1971, quoted in *Catalogue of Printed Books Formerly in the Library at Coole – the Property of the Lady Gregory Estate*, sold by auction by Sotheby & Co. on 20-21 March 1972.
- 4 Cf. *Catalogue*, cit.
- 5 Bernard Hickey, "Lady Gregory: Coole and Ca' Cappello Layard", *Yeats the European*, A. Norman Jeffares ed., Gerrards Cross, Colin Smythe, 1989.
- 6 Lady A. Gregory, *Lady Gregory's Journals*, vol.1, Daniel J. Murphy ed., Gerrards Cross, Colin Smythe, 1978, p. 195
- 7 *Ibid.*, p.196
- 8 *Ibidem*. The books she mentions were among those sold in 1972 and are thus described in the *Catalogue of Printed Books formerly at the Library at Coole – The Property of the Lady Gregory Estate*: "Trevelyan (G.M.) *Garibaldi's Defence of the Roman Republic*, 1914; *Garibaldi and the Thousand*, 1916; *Garibaldi and the Making of Italy*, 1919, all plates, cloth, a little worn, with Lady Gregory's bookplate."(cit., p.60)
- 9 Cf. Giorgio Melchiori, a cura di, *Joyce in Rome – The Genesis of 'Ulysses'*, Rome, Bulzoni, 1984, pp. 31-56.
- 10 Lady A. Gregory, "An Italian Literary Drama", *The Daily Express*, 8 Apr. 1899,
- 11 *Ibidem*.
- 12 Ann Saddlemyer, *In Defence of Lady Gregory*, Dublin, Dolmen, 1966, p.17
- 13 "A Repertory Theatre", *Lady Gregory – Interviews and Recollections*, E. H. Mikhail ed., Totowa, New Jersey, Rowman and Littlefield, 1977, pp. 49-50

- 14 Lady A. Gregory, "Paragraphs from Samhain, 1909", *Our Irish Theatre – A Chapter of Autobiography*, with a foreword by Roger McHugh, Gerrards Cross, Colin Smythe, 1972, p.198.
- 15 Carlo Goldoni, *Three Comedies*, selected and introduced by Gabriele Baldini, Oxford University Press, 1961, p.VII
- 16 Lady A. Gregory, *The Translations and Adaptation of Lady Gregory and Her Collaborations with Douglas Hyde and W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays*, vol.IV, edited and with a foreword by Ann Saddlemyer, Gerrards Cross, Colin Smythe, 1979, p.360
- 17 Liam Miller, *The Noble Drama of William Butler Yeats*, Dublin, Dolmen Press,1977, p. 148
- 18 Ibid., p.151
- 19 Ibid., pp. 154-5.
- 20 Robert Hogan – Michael J. O’Neill, eds., *Joseph Holloway’s Abbey Theatre*, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 1967.
- 21 Joseph Holloway, *Impressions of a Dublin Playgoer*, Ms Holloway 1809, vol.I, 1910, NLI, Dublin.
- 22 Ibidem
- 23 Ibidem
- 24 Lady A. Gregory, *Collected Plays*, cit.
- 25 Lady A. Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre*, cit., p. 57
- 26 Lady A. Gregory, *Collected Plays*, cit.
- 27 Lady A. Gregory, *Lady Gregory’s Journals*, cit., p. 474
- 28 *The Saturday Review*, 22 Aug. 1925.
- 29 *The Manchester Guardian*, 18 Aug. 1925.
- 30 Lady A. Gregory, *Mirandolina, Collected Plays*, vol.IV, cit., p.200
- 31 Ibid., p.201
- 32 Ibid.,p.202
- 33 Ibid., p.205
- 34 Mary Lou Kohfeldt, *Lady Gregory – The Woman Behind the Irish Renaissance*, London, André Deutsch, 1984, pp.213-14.
- 35 Ann Saddlemyer, cit., p63
- 36 Lady A. Gregory, *Note to ‘Grania’, The Tragedies and Tragic-Comedies of Lady Gregory, Collected Works*, vol.II, cit., p.283
- 37 Arnaldo Momo, "Goldoni e i militari", *Il punto su Goldoni*, a cura di Giuseppe Petronio, Bari, Laterza, 1986, p.140
- 38 Lady A.Gregory, *Grania*, *Collected Plays*, vol.II, cit., p.44.