

## Hemingway, Vittorini, and the Gramscian “Nazionale-Popolare”

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**Abstract:** 1946 witnessed the cultural and political debate between the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the journal “Il Politecnico”, edited by Elio Vittorini. The PCI criticized “Il Politecnico” for being “intellectualist” and for intensifying the crevice between intellectuals and the people, thus contradicting the journal’s initial premises, that is, the creation of a new culture. The PCI’s grounds were based on the publication of the novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* by Ernest Hemingway. The American novelist was incapable, according to the PCI, of understanding and narrating beyond his own immediate and egotistical impressions. The existing turmoil between the world of culture and the masses constitutes one of Antonio Gramsci’s fundamental themes, especially if we consider the concept of “nazionale-popolare”, which underlies the entire debate mentioned above. Persuaded that the PCI’s position derives, not only from a wrong theoretical approach, but also from a critical error in the judgment of the American writer, I will analyze the author under the light of the Gramscian category of “nazionale-popolare”. My main purpose is to suggest new means of comprehending the importance of Hemingway to Vittorini and his generation (Pavese, in primis, down to Calvino), and to read under an innovative perspective the relevance of American literature to the Italian culture of the mid-twentieth century.

**Keywords:** Hemingway, Gramsci, Vittorini, “Il Politecnico”, nazionale-popolare.

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1946 was the year in which an important dispute concerning the relationship between politics and culture took place in Italy. The poles of the debate were the journal “Il Politecnico”, whose chief-editor was Elio Vittorini, and the Italian Communist Party (PCI), under the figure of Mario Alicata. The latter criticized “Elio Vittorini and friends” for having assumed an “intellectualistic” attitude, and for having been incapable of lessening the crevice between the cultural world and the popular layers of society, as well as between the latter and the middle class (Alicata, 1968, p. 244). In particular, Alicata focuses his criticism on Vittorini’s choice of publishing Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in “Il Politecnico”, under the serial form of the *feuilleton*. The editor was blamed for considering “rivoluzionario e utile uno scrittore come Hemingway, le cui doti non vanno al di là di una sensibilità da frammento, da elzeviro” (Alicata, p. 244). For Alicata, the novel is “riprova estrema dell’incapacità di Hemingway a comprendere e giudicare (cioè, poi, a narrare) qualcosa che vada al di là d’un suo quadro di sensazioni elementari e immediate: egoistiche” (Alicata, p. 244). Literature should be “useful,” “human,” and aspire at the pursuit of “truth” (his truth, Alicata’s!). The standpoint of Alicata is not far from Stalin and Zdanov’s take on socialism realism originated in the USSR.

Shortly after the interventions of Vittorini and Giansiro Ferrata, the Secretary-General of the PCI, Palmiro Togliatti, came in defense of Alicata’s, but his unworldliness and *sprezzatura* seemed to be more in line with Urbino’s court: “il fondo delle osservazioni di Alicata mi trova consenziente. Potrei anzi aggiungere: *adsum qui feci*, riferendomi alla conversazione avuta con Alicata prima ch’egli scrivesse” (Togliatti, 1974, p. 75-76). Vittorini’s reply consisted of a long letter, published on the 35<sup>th</sup> issue of “Il Politecnico”:

Che cosa significa per uno scrittore, essere “rivoluzionario”? Nella mia domestichezza con taluni compagni politici ho potuto notare ch’essi inclinano a riconoscerci la qualità di “rivoluzionari” nella misura in cui noi “suoniamo il piffero” intorno ai problemi rivoluzionari posti dalla politica; cioè nella misura in cui prendiamo problemi dalla politica e li traduciamo in “bel canto”: con parole, con immagini, con figure. Ma questo, a mio giudizio, è tutt’altro che rivoluzionario, anzi è un modo arcadico d’essere scrittore (Vittorini, 2008, vol. II, p. 413).

This art is “arcadica” because it “non aderisce diretamente alla vita” (Vittorini, vol. II, p. 414), and also because it regards truth as a point of departure, not as a work in progress.<sup>1</sup> And Vittorini, who even champions “art for art’s sake” ideals, strenuously protects the author of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, asserting that Hemingway was a revolutionary writer

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<sup>1</sup> It would be interesting to compare Vittorini’s ideas with the pastoral proletarian literature of which William Empson talks about (cf. Empson, 1950).

belonging to the literary tradition, thus revealing that a consistent part of the polemic circled around matters of literary criticism and the Hemingway *affaire*.

The debate features yet another protagonist, quoted *en passant* by Vittorini: Antonio Gramsci. Alicata's primary question, the noticeable cleft between the cultural universe and the people, and the lack of cohesion among the middle classes, constitutes one of the fundamental themes across Gramsci's philosophical *oeuvre*. For the latter, the cosmopolitan function adopted by the Italian intellectuals is simultaneously cause and effect of the division of the peninsula, which, since the fall of the Roman Empire, had lengthened to the *Risorgimento* and to Italy's *Unità*, and whose consequences are yet to be overcome.

From that question arises an analysis of Italian literature under the category "nazionale-popolare". There is no such thing as a popular artistic literature; the literary tradition is dominated either by the pompous rhetoric of the so-called realist writers; or by the cult of an obscure hermeticism by the poets, sons of Croce's aesthetics, divided into small schools. Thus can we explain the cultural hegemony of the foreign writers, namely the French, appreciated by the Italian reader for their ideological and sentimental closeness, and therefore read on the pages of the periodicals, rather than the more distant Italian authors.

Gramsci is, nonetheless – he who looks with great interest at the new Italian literary ferment (Svevo, for instance) –, far from championing a nationalist or pedagogic, let alone socialist, literature. To Alicata's "human" art request, Gramsci would reply:

Umanità "autentica, fondamentale" può significare concretamente, nel campo artistico, una cosa sola: "storicità," cioè carattere "nazionale-popolare" dello scrittore, sia pure nel senso largo di "socialità," anche in senso aristocratico, purché il gruppo sociale che si esprime sia vivo storicamente e il "collegamento" sociale non sia di carattere "pratico-politico" immediato, cioè predicatorio-moralistico, ma storico o etico-politico (Gramsci, 1975, pp. 2247-2248).

To assume the function "nazionale-popolare," in the gramscian lexicon, means to observe history, to look for an active, living unity with the people (i. e., the readers), regardless of the matters addressed, which might even be reactionary. Above all, "anti-nazionale-popolare" is a synonym for "anachronism."

For Gramsci, art is always connected to a given culture. He takes this word in the light of Francesco De Sanctis, i. e., a conception of life and mankind nationally considered. Only by reforming culture can one achieve the creation of a new art; not by reclaiming a moralist art, one which solely translates into the submission to a thesis.

Unlike many Marxists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Lukács and Plekanov, for instance), Gramsci separates the political-cultural judgment from the aesthetic judgment, in line with Marx and Engels, who also opposed the pastoral *agons* and the fife concerts in honor of the proletariat.

In turn, Vittorini quotes Gramsci a number of times, in order to assert the ample independence of the intellectuals (cf. Vittorini, vol. II, pp. 390-391). When he publishes in anti-Alicata mode a letter by Gramsci to his son Delio, Vittorini adds the exaggerated title "Tolstoj e Cecov sì, Gorki invece molto meno" ("Il Politecnico," 1975, n. 33-34, pp. 5-11).

In sum, "l'arte è arte e non propaganda politica," says Gramsci; and Vittorini could not agree more. Let us now address the reason why "Il Politecnico," a journal designed to be an instrument of transformation of the dominant culture, chooses to publish none other than Hemingway and his novel about the Spanish civil war. I maintain that the PCI's positions derive, not only from a fallacious theoretical approach, but also from a critical error, a bad reading of the American author. I shall therefore read a few of Hemingway's works, while taking into consideration the gramscian category of "nazionale-popolare."

As seen, for Gramsci, literature is "nazionale-popolare" when it interprets its time and remains connected to the actual national life; when it adheres to the deepest needs of the present; and when it does not simply relate to restricted groups, attached to a social differentiation which no longer exists. Thus can we explain the attack towards Manzoni<sup>2</sup>, curiously criticized as anti-democratic also in the first two issues of "Il Politecnico." Gramsci finds in *I Promessi Sposi* a psychological attitude of caste in relation to the characters of the people:

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<sup>2</sup> Also the passages of the *Quaderni del carcere* on the complex issue concerning the Italian language include a criticism to Manzoni, favorable to a hegemony of the Florentine dialect via educational politics. On the contrary, Gramsci favors Ascoli's model, who does not believe in hegemonies by decree, unsupported by a deeper national function (cf. Gramsci, p 2237).

Il "carattere "aristocratico" del cattolicesimo manzoniano appare dal "compatimento" scherzoso verso le figure di uomini del popolo. [...] I popolani, per il Manzoni, non hanno "vita interiore," non hanno personalità morale profonda; essi sono "animali" e il Manzoni è "benevolo" verso di loro proprio della benevolenza di una cattolica società di protezione degli animali. [...] Egli trova "magnanimità," "alti pensieri," "grandi sentimenti" solo in alcuni della classe alta, in nessuno del popolo, che nella sua totalità è bassamente animalesco (Gramsci, p. 896).

To the aristocracy of Manzoni, Gramsci counterclaims the evangelical spirit of primitive Christianity (not conditioned by the Counter-Reformation) of Tolstoy. In the *oeuvre* of the Russian novelist, who interprets the Gospels in a democratic sense, there is no sentimental separation from the people: the "humbles" are not puppets, but possess, on the contrary, an interior life; in the narration, they can profoundly influence the upper-class or erudite characters, not in Manzoni's fictive way. In the latter, one finds the disposition for a benevolent condescendence, rather than human identification, towards the people, found as well in the Catholic Church. Manzoni is too catholic to accept the Latin expression *vox populi, vox dei*: "tra il popolo e Dio c'è la chiesa, e Dio non s'incarna nel popolo, ma nella chiesa. Che Dio s'incarni nel popolo può crederlo Tolstoj, non il Manzoni" (Gramsci, p. 1703). In fact, according to the idea of religious art of the Russian author: "le concezioni del mondo non possono non essere elaborate da spiriti eminenti, ma la 'realtà' è espressa dagli umili, dai semplici di spirito" (Gramsci, p. 2245).

For Gramsci, Manzoni's "anti-nazionale-popolare" attitude triumphs in the Italian literature of the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the authors defined by Gramsci as "i nipotini di padre Bresciani"<sup>3</sup>: catholic or laymen writers in which Gramsci detects a character technically "sagrestano," partial, propagandistic and Jesuitical (Gramsci, p. 2199). In the novels by these authors, the features of Manzoni are exacerbated: the poor characters are puppets devoid of interior life, represented with no exceptions by a vein of paternalism and commiseration.

Many of Hemingway's works present an authorial disposition to favor Gramsci's objections to Manzoni and the "bresciana" literature. In *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, published in 1940, Robert Jordan is surrounded by people of modest economic conditions, guerrilla men used to living in the mountains and handling the cattle. Nevertheless, many of these characters express doubts about their own life, speculate, make themselves the spokesmen for an ideology, and we are transported into their inner thoughts: Pablo, hesitant between desertion and fighting; Pilar, true group leader and sorcerer-like or popular philosopher; the old Anselmo, upon which I would now like to focus.

His take on the war, exposed in the repeated dialogues with Robert Jordan and shared by the latter (as well as by the fascist lieutenant Berrento), represents the central idea of the novel, expressed by John Donne's epigraph which opens the book: "any mans *death* diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; And therefore never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for *thee*" (Hemingway, 2004a, p. 2). If Anselmo, on the one hand, does not question his militancy in favor of the Republic and is a formidable opponent of fascism, on the other hand, he knows that Franco's soldiers are men just like him, who happen to be fighting alongside the fascists. They are not fascists; they could be guerrilla men, or anything else, for that matter. In the following passage, Anselmo is feeling cold, and observes the enemy's line, while waiting for Robert Jordan:

The fascists are warm, he thought, and they are comfortable, and tomorrow night we will kill them. It is a strange thing and I do not like to think of it. I have watched them all day and they are the same men that we are. I believe that I could walk up to the mill and knock on the door and I would be welcome except that they have orders to challenge all travellers and ask to see their papers. It is only orders that come between us. Those men are not fascists. I call them so, but they are not. They are poor men as we are. They should never be fighting against us and I do not like to think of the killing (Hemingway, 2004a, p. 201).

Anselmo realizes that, in the great lottery of existence, chance is enough to determine whether a person belongs to one or the other army. His sickness when forced to kill an enemy materializes, almost physically, in the inner *diminishment* which, in Donne's epigraph, a man experiences when another man dies, and represents the melancholic side of the accusations Hemingway addresses to the *masters of war* in the preface of 1948 to *A Farewell to Arms* (Hemingway, 1948, pp. vii-viii).

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<sup>3</sup> Padre Bresciani was an Italian Jesuit of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, author of essays and novels characterized by a pompous rhetoric and hostility for the ideas of the *Risorgimento*.

Unlike what takes place in the works of the “nipotini di padre Bresciani,” Hemingway’s characters manifest, or not, an inner life, are brave or coward, faithful or treacherous, intelligent or stupid, regardless of the social class they belong to and the prestige of the group in which they are included. The element of moral separation among the characters is a democratic one; it translates into technical ability and *know-how*: one knows *how* to do what one is supposed to do, whether the action involves fishing, shooting, bull-fighting, writing, planning a guerrilla tactic, even drinking. An example, which can actually give an account of some of Alicata’s complaints, can be extracted from the revolutionary hero André Marty, the lover of firing squads and summary executions who, in the finale of *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, delays the delivery of the message of Robert Jordan to General Golz. A republican corporal describes him to Andrés and Gomez as follows:

That old one kills more than the bubonic plague. Mata más que la peste bubonica. But he doesn’t kill fascists like we do. Qué va. Not in joke. Mata bichos raros. He kills rare things. Trotzkyites. Divagationers. Any tipe of rear beast. [...] Tiene mania de fusilar gente. Always for political things. He’s crazy. Purifica más que el Salvarsán. He purifies more than Salvarsán (Hemingway, 2004a, p. 436).

Some pages later, Marty’s technical skills as commander are described in the following manner:

He sat there, his moustache and his eyes focused on the map, on the map that he never truly understood, on the brown tracing of the contours that were traced fine and concentric as a spider’s web. He could see the heights and the valleys from the contours but he never really understood why it should be this height and why this valley was the one. [...] And later, men who never saw the map [...] would climb its side to find their death along its slope or, being halted by machine guns placed in olive groves would never get up it all (Hemingway, 2004a, p. 440).

Marty cannot do his work; he is technically inept and, from a moral standpoint, he is horrible. The fact that the moral universe connects itself to certain technical skills is also manifest, as announced earlier, in much more trivial moments than war. In *Green Hills of Africa*, the novel of 1935 which tells the story of a safari in Africa, and whose protagonist is called Mr. Hemingway, the indigenous guides are defined by their professional abilities. Among the good guides, one can find the experienced, morally and technically impeccable Droopy, and M’Cola, an able carrier of weaponry, even if not perfect. Interestingly, in the last episode of the kudu hunting, M’Cola acts in perfect symbiosis with Mr. Hemingway, because the latter is also a good and able hunter, even if not perfect. Contrariwise, Garrick is an utterly incompetent guide, unable to distinguish a kudu male from a female, ridiculous in his impersonations of American actors, incapable of standing the heat and the fatigue. In the troubling moment when everyone but M’Cola stops looking for the wounded kudu, the protagonist thinks: “if there had been no law I would have shot Garrick and they would all have hunted or cleared out. I think they would have hunted. Garrick was not popular. He was simply poison” (Hemingway, 2004b, p.180). Garrick is worthless as a guide, and worthless as a man.

The connection between interiority, moral and technique becomes explicit and assumes an open lyrical-symbolical tone in *The Old Man and the Sea*, from 1952. It is true that the old Santiago returns without a single piece of the marlin and that he committed, so he admits, a grave mistake: “I went too far” (Hemingway, 1993, p. 104). But his excellent fishing abilities are not at stake here, nor are the attention he devotes to every detail, the resistance to pain, the heroic enterprise of fishing all by himself the biggest fish of his life. From the moment Santiago’s boat sails off, a direct bond between the fisherman and the natural elements (sea, sky, clouds, moon, sun, etc.) is set in motion. Sailing and fishing configure themselves as an experience which involves all the senses: the old man starts rowing and in the darkness he hears the sound of the other boats’ rows; heads offshore and leaves behind the scent of the coast, to embrace the ocean’s; observes the fluorescent algae; hears the resonance of the flying fish. It all happens within a one-page length. After the marlin has bit the bait, Santiago sees his relationship with the fish as intimate, fraternal, almost natural, I would say. The suffering, the ailments, the exhaustion, the hunger are shared by both fish and fisherman at the same time; and the old man knows that when speaking about himself, he is speaking about the fish. This connection is sanctioned by the fishing line, and its nature is a symbolic one, in the goethian sense of seeing the universal in the particular.

Agostino Lombardo reminds us of the close bonds, via Gertrude Stein, between Hemingway and the European symbolism, and considers Hemingway’s prose “controllata e consapevole, colta e financo preziosa” (Lombardo, 1957, p. 14). In fact, the issue of technique, of know-how, which emerges throughout his *oeuvre*, involves the activity of the writer as well.



The opening pages of *Green Hills of Africa* expose a parallel between hunting and writing (and we already know that Mr. Hemingway is a relatively good hunter): “the way to hunt is for as long as you live against as long as there is you and colors and canvas, and to write as long as you can live and there is a pencil and paper or ink or any machine to do it with, or anything you care to write about, and feel a fool, and you are a fool, to do it any other way” (Hemingway, 2004b, pp. 8-9). The hunting episodes and the daily reflections are so intertwined that this book, more than about hunting and literature, is, I would argue, about hunting, i. e., literature.

The depictions of the various tasks that some characters perfectly execute entail, in a sense, the descriptive virtuosity of Hemingway. The more complex the hunters’ maneuvers and heterogeneous the landscape, the more detailed and complete the description. Nothing is left unsaid in Hemingway, not even the tips to avoid your lenses from becoming misty: “the glasses were the biggest hazard and I used to carry four handkerchiefs and change them from the left to the right pocket when they were wet” (Hemingway, 2004b, p. 39).

During the safari breaks, Mr. Hemingway reads *Sebastopol* by Tolstoy, a writer who has had a great advantage: “an experience of war” (Hemingway, 2004b, p. 47). And “writers are forged in injustice as a sword is forged” (Hemingway, 2004b, p.48). What makes Tolstoy a great writer is the fact that he portrays a “real” Russia (Hemingway, 2004b, p.72) and that he speaks “truly” about the war (Hemingway, 2004b, p. 47). If, for Mr. Hemingway, writing is a work (Hemingway, 2004b, p. 48), it demands professional ethics:

If you serve time for society, democracy, and the other things quite young, and declining any further enlistment make yourself responsible only to yourself, you exchange the pleasant, comforting stench of comrades for something you can never feel in any other way than by yourself. That something I cannot yet define completely but the feeling comes when you write well and truly of something and know impersonally you have written it that way (Hemingway, 2004b, p. 100).

To write “well” and “truly”: once again, technique and moral go hand in hand. Mr. Hemingway supports the notion that, in literature, “there is a fourth and fifth dimension, that can be gotten” by means of a prose “that has never been written. But it can be written, without tricks and without cheating. With nothing that will go bad afterwards” (Hemingway, 2004b, p. 18). Even if Hemingway’s position has a dubious theoretical value, let us see to what extent it can be attuned to Gramsci’s thought and to Vittorini’s ideas.

As seen, Gramsci’s reproach of the Italian literary scene attributes to the writers a dedication to a propagandistic art, Jesuitical, which reveals anti-democratic, paternalist, and moralist feelings towards the people. In the twenties and thirties, these feelings no longer belong to the present time and originate in the total separation between the artists and the potential readers, who in fact prefer the foreign authors. Both the realist prose writers and the hermetic poets adopted a “bookish” tradition, which has nothing to do with the actual life of the population. “Queste passioni e questo dramma però devono essere rappresentati e non svolti come una tesi, un discorso di propaganda, cioè l’autore deve vivere nel mondo reale, con tutte le sue esigenze contraddittorie e non esprimere sentimenti assorbiti solo dai libri” (Gramsci, p. 2123). For Gramsci, this tradition fulfills itself in an oratorical, pompous style, which makes the comprehension unintelligible and obscure. It is the tradition of the dannunzian “laureati” poets and of their works, brimmed with plants with high-sounding names, to which Eugenio Montale opposes the lemon-trees of his childhood: “Ascoltami, i poeti laureati / si muovo soltanto fra le piante / dai nomi poco usati: bossi ligustri o acanti” (Montale, 2005, p. 11).

In the novel *Green Hills of Africa*, Mr. Hemingway digresses, as already seen, upon literature, in the resting moments that the hunting activity provides. Speaking of those American classics who go under the category “very good men with the small, dried, and excellent wisdom of Unitarians; men of letters; Quakers with a sense of humor” (Hemingway, 2004b, p. 14), among which we find Emerson, Hawthorne, and Whittier, Mr. Hemingway formulates a true theory of influences, according to which a classic cannot derive from or resemble a preceding classic; he can only, on the contrary, plunder the minor writers, those who many times scribble thousands of pages with the single effect of suggesting one word to the great author. Behind this theory lies a criticism to the “bookish tradition,” accounted for by the words with which Mr. Hemingway follows his speech:

Also all these men were gentlemen, or wished to be. They were all very respectable. They did not use the words that people always have used in speech, the words that survive in language. Nor would you gather that they had bodies. They had minds, yes. Nice, dry, clean minds. This is all very dull, I would not state it except that you ask for it (Hemingway, 2004b, p. 14).

In fact, no other description of “Emerson, Hawthorne, Whittier, and Company” (Hemingway, 2004b, p. 14), which pairs with the fragment which culminates in the satire to T. S. Eliot in *Death in the Afternoon* (Hemingway, 1999, p. 113), can be more apart from that of Hemingway as a writer. In the collective imaginary, he does not seem to exactly align with the definition of “gentleman” or “very respectable person.” But that is not very interesting or, at least, not as much as what follows. The authors in question have no body, only mind; they do not use the words that people have always used in oral speech.

On the contrary, Hemingway plunges in the daily linguistic register, that is, the conversation among co-workers or friends not separated by social divergences or age differences; the sentence is spurious from the affected lexicon, from the precious puns, from the flowers of rhetoric. The dialogues, and the way of introducing them, present a simple grammatical construction, similar to a daily conversation, where parataxis prevails over hypotaxis, which, when manifested, hardly ever presents second-degree subordinate clauses. One could, without scandal, speak of speech mimesis, although, let it be clear, that does not necessarily mean that the dialogues are “simple,” “banal,” etc.

The Mr. Hemingway of *Green Hills of Africa* attacks straightforwardly the books fully stocked with rhetoric:

We have had writers of rhetoric who had the good fortune to find a little, in a chronicle of another man and from voyaging, of how things, actual things, can be, whales for instance, and this knowledge is wrapped in the rhetoric like plums in a pudding. Occasionally it is there, alone, unwrapped in pudding, and it is good. This is Melville. But the people who praise it, praise it for the rhetoric which is not important. They put a mystery in which is not there. (Hemingway, 2004b, p. 14)

In the simile, “pudding” stands for rhetoric, while “good plums” relates to “actual things,” the real things that can be apprehended by means of other men’s stories or by traveling. Rhetoric blurs and surrounds real things by mist, the things that matter. Perhaps Mr. Hemingway is not far from saying that an author must “vivere nel mondo reale” (Gramsci) or “aderire direttamente alla vita” (Vittorini).

Let us return to the quote taken from *Green Hills of Africa*: its second part still lacks analysis. The absence of common language in “Emerson, Hawthorne, Whittier, and Company” results in the disembodiment of these writers; they have a mind only: “Nor would you gather that they had bodies. They had minds, yes. Nice, dry, clean minds. This is all very dull, I would not state it except that you ask for it.” Once again, we can read these considerations as opposed to the image Hemingway wants to give of himself as an author.

Some of the omitted fragments of the published version of the short story *Big Two-Hearted River* (1925) should now be taken into consideration. The narrator paraphrases the thoughts of the protagonist, Nick Adams: “There were so many tricks. It was easy to write if you used the tricks. Everybody used them. Joyce has invented hundreds of new ones. Just because they were new didn’t make them any better. They would all turn into clichés. He wanted to write like Cezanne painted” (Hemingway, 1972, p. 239). In Nick’s mind, “writing like Cezanne painted” counterpoises the literary “tricks,” the rhetorical acrobatic evolutions which make writing easy, unlike commonsensical notions:

Cezanne started with all tricks. Then he broke the whole thing down and built the real thing. It was hell to do. He was the greatest. The greatest for always. It wasn’t a cult. He, Nick, wanted to write about country so it would be there like Cezanne had done it in painting. You had to do it inside yourself. There wasn’t any trick. Nobody had written about the country like that. He felt almost holy about it. It was deadly serious. You could do it if you would fight it out. If you’d lived right with your eyes (Hemingway, 1972, p. 239).

To write about the landscape before him, Nick wants to adopt the position Cezanne would assume were he to paint that river whose surface was stirred by the trout, that swamp, those woods. In order to do so, one must do away with “tricks”: Cezanne broke down (flattened) the whole “trick”-apparatus, and replaced it for the “real thing.” It is a procedure that can only be done within oneself, and it involves fighting and having lived guided by one’s eyes.

In the excerpt, it is not clear how Cezanne’s pictorial technique is conceived. One deduces that the process originates in some sort of internalization of the external world, perceived through the sight. But that account may not be enough: the ability to write in this fashion is originally configured as a problem of positioning oneself before the landscape, which has to do with the physical involvement of the person who wants to write. The reaction of the protagonist can be read under this light, when he understands the manner Cezanne would have painted the river: “Nick, seeing how Cezanne would do the stretch of river and the swamp, stood up and stepped down into the stream. The water was cold and actual. He waded across the stream, moving in the picture” (Hemingway, 1972, p. 240). Nick is not only “mind” but, unlike the American writers criticized in *Green Hills of Africa*, he is mainly body. Moreover, if the “gentlemen”

are, on the one hand, “nice, dry, clean minds,” Nick, on the other hand, is a dirty, wet body. Seeing how Cezanne would have painted that fragment of a landscape, he reacts accordingly, by wetting his legs and bust, and entering the picture, as it were. It is also worth noting that the water of the river is, besides cold, “actual.” The artist must get involved with the real and describe it the way he feels it, without tricks and artifices.

Hemingway wrote an introduction for the American translation of *Conversazione in Sicilia* by Vittorini, published in 1949 under the title *In Sicily*:

Vittorini from the time he was old enough to leave home without permission at seventeen learned his Italy in the same way American boys who ran away from home learned their own country. The Italy that he learned and the America that the American boys learned has little to do with the Academic Italy or America that periodically attacks all writing like a dust storm and is always, until everything shall be completely dry, dispersed by rain (Vittorini, vol. II, p. 1137).

The theme of the voyage as a learning method for writing, as seen in the passage from *Green Hills of Africa* where the “pudding” of rhetoric was deplored in favor of the plums, is now readdressed. Vittorini is the seventeen year-old boy, who has escaped from home and learns the life of his country not through the books but via direct contact, via his traveling. But what mostly matters is the confirmation that good writers are marine animals, wet bodies, unlike the “dry minds” of the academics, creatures of the desert:

Rain to an academician is probably, after the first fall has cleared the air, H<sub>2</sub>O with, of course, traces of other things. To a good writer, needing something to bring the dry country alive so that it will not be a desert where only such cactus as New York literature reviews grow dry and sad [...]; such a writer finds rain to be made of knowledge, experience, wine, bread, oil, salt, vinegar, bed, early mornings, nights, days, the sea, men, women, dogs, beloved motor-cars, bicycles, hills and valleys (Vittorini, vol. II, p. 1137).

The rain that Vittorini brings forth is Sicily itself and his ability as a writer lies in watering the dry land with this rain. And if, according to Hemingway, there is some “rhetoric” in the book, it is due to the fascist censorship, which, in 1937, when the novel was first published in Italy, forced the author to use a few tricks: “It is necessarily wrapped in cellophane to pass the censor. But there is excellent food once you unwrap it” (Vittorini, vol. II, p. 1138).

As seen, the gramscian concept of “nazionale-popolare” entails both a linguistic component (against the courtier rhetoric and an obscure language), and another component that can be defined as sentimental (adhesion to the life of the people, that is, the readers). Wyndham Lewis writes about Hemingway:

Take up any book of his, again, open it at random: you will find a page of stuff that is, considered in isolation, valueless as writing. It is not written: it is lifted out of Nature and very artfully and adroitly tumbled out upon page: it is the brute material of every-day proletarian speech and feeling. The *matière* is cheap and coarse: but not because it is proletarian speech merely, but because it is the prose of reality – the prose of the street-car or the provincial newspaper or the five and ten cent store (Lewis, 1987, p. 32).

“Speech and feeling” are the two crucial points that, as I will try to demonstrate, allow for a reading of Hemingway in the sense of “nazionale-popolare.” For Lewis, Hemingway’s stories are told in the tone and with the vocabulary of the people there described; the rhythm is “the anonymous folk-rhythm of the urban proletariat” (Lewis, pp. 23-24). At the same time, the author and his characters represent “the Noble Savage of Rousseau, but a white version, the simple American man” (Lewis, p. 20), whose feelings developed in the “democratic, leveling school” of the First World War, and in a “levelled nation” (Lewis, p. 23), such as the United States. Lewis’s interpretation does not deny, however, Hemingway’s technical abilities, which can be accounted for by the adverbs “artfully” and “adroitly”: what characterizes the novelist’s “bovine genius” (Lewis, p. 36).

The analogy with Gramsci’s thinking interests us in the sense that it puts Hemingway’s ideas into perspective: the idea of plunging into the real and describing it exactly as one experiences it, without tricks and cunning, is somewhat naïf and its intrinsic theoretical value is scarce, if not null. While literary auto-representations, they hide a truthful sense, though: to “bossi ligustri o acanti,” Hemingway prefers the beech woods of Michigan or the heterogeneous African hills. Hemingway’s prose is free of the flamboyant, oratory and Jesuitical rhetoric denounced by Gramsci and Vittorini. Having said this, it should be clear that his *oeuvre* comprises a rhetorical construct, as it were. Agostino Lombardo rightfully

notes that his prose is “controlled, cult, and even precious”, thus criticizing the myth of a Hemingway said to write with no control, abruptly, negligently - thus technically deficient.

The democratic nature, as it were, of these considerations and its literary implications were embraced by Vittorini. On an essay from 1949 written for the periodical “American Quarterly,” under the title “American Influences on Contemporary Italian Literature,” Vittorini underlines the importance of the translations of American writers (Hemingway first) signed by the young Italian authors, in the thirties and forties of the last century. These translations played a significant role: “con esse si trovava l'autorizzazione a scrivere, finalmente, 'egli disse' e 'ella disse'” (Vittorini, vol. II, p. 537). A true revolution against the oratorical, essayistic, and intellectualistic prose of the time (Gramsci *docet*), where the dialogues occurred only as a dynamo for yet another orate, a commentary or an evocation: “non si scriveva 'egli disse,' 'ella disse,' ma qualcosa come 'in un lungo sussurro che sembrava la guancia di una nuvola venuta dai più lontani orizzonti della loro infanzia, egli l'avviluppò delle seguenti parole...’” (Vittorini, vol. II, p. 535). To write “he said” and insert a direct speech after a colon, in place of the periphrasis, became an acquired practice only possible, according to Vittorini, thanks to the mediation of the Americans. Hemingway, Stein, Anderson legitimated that practice; a “modern” but also “anti-fascist” legitimation, “proprio del tipo che occorreva ai nostri giovani per svoltare via dagli ultimi pregiudizi accademici, e accogliere senza più riserve i suggerimenti vitali della loro rabbia e della carità loro” (Vittorini, vol. II, p. 537). It should be noted that the expression “vital suggestions” resonates with “direct adhesion to life” found in the letter Vittorini addressed to Togliatti.

In the preface from 1948 to his novel *Il garofano rosso*, Vittorini had already underlined how “sembrava che gli americani avessero un'inclinazione di massa a riscuotere il romanzo dall'intellettualismo e ricondurlo a sottovento della poesia. Lo indicava il gusto della ripetizione, la loro baldanza giovanile nel dialogo, il loro procedere ad orecchio della vita e non a riflessione sulla vita” (Vittorini, vol. II, p. 489).

Lombardo writes:

Introdotta da noi durante il fascismo e nella stagione letteraria fiorita, e meglio si direbbe sfiorita, all'ombra di esso – e perciò o dichiaratamente conformista oppure isolata in un suo linguaggio, in una sua poetica di élite (che era poi, come tutti i giorni scopriamo, una poetica di decadenza) – essa fu accolta e acclamata come un'esperienza rinnovatrice, un'esperienza di libertà e franchezza, di sincerità e spontaneità, capace di rappresentare le aspirazioni non solo letterarie ma, inevitabilmente, morali, e perciò politiche, che la dittatura soffocava o inaridiva; e capace, altresì, di apportare un nuovo e positivo contributo alla lotta contro l'accademismo che troppo spesso grava sulla nostra tradizione letteraria, sulla lingua medesima che noi parliamo (Lombardo, pp. 10-11).

With the intention (gramscian *par excellence*) of founding a new culture, Vittorini picks Hemingway in coherence with Gramsci's thinking. The Hemingway “anti-nazionale-popolare” and “egoista” of the PCI turns out to be groundless and Alicata ends up belonging to the segment that “withers” the relations between politics and culture inside de party (Vittorini, vol. II, p. 409). Another case of drought or lack of water, in sum.

To unite the name of Gramsci to the binomial Hemingway-Vittorini might help understanding the enormous importance of Hemingway and the Americans for an entire generation of writers, among which, and limiting ourselves to the Italian scene, Vittorini and Pavese, even Calvino. Besides, it questions the artistic theories present in the works of both Hemingway and Vittorini, accentuating that change of paradigm in the novel between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, widely commented, even though with a militant scope, by Gramsci. If, on the one hand, the 19<sup>th</sup> century novel ended with the great work of Proust, which exhausted, as it were, the genre with its infinite periods and the intertwinement of subordinate clauses, and which so much owes to the social classes connected to the *Ancien Régime*; on the other hand, the generation just got out of the First World War, represented, among others, by Hemingway, was fundamental for the development of the literature of the last century.

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