Dottorato di Ricerca in

Italianistica. La letteratura tra ambiti storico-geografici ed interferenze interdisciplinari

X ciclo 2008/09-2010/11

Sulle tracce di Didone.
Origini e sviluppo del mito: dalle fonti classiche al “primo dramma” di Pietro Metastasio.

Abstract

This is a in-depth study of the figure of the Queen of Carthage, both in the myth and in the Italian literature, i.e. from the Classical Age up to the melodramatic development that are the kernel of Metastasio’s first opera (La Didone abandonata, 1724). Here are the titles of the singles chapters:

I) Didone: origini e connessioni del mito
II) L’età d’oro del mito: la Didone di Virgilio e Ovidio
III) Didone nella Patristica e nel Medio Evo: la ricezione del mito
IV) Didone nella tradizione umanistica. Nel segno di Elissa: donne abbandonate, maghe e incantatrici
V) Didone a corte e a teatro
VI) Verso i fasti del melodramma

Starting from the fragments of Timaeus of Tauromenium, my analysis of Dido’s story uses both synchronic and diachronic approaches to the sources, looking from different perspectives with a critical choice as regards the “historical” or “poetical” side of Dido’s death. If on one hand I investigate about the more famous version that since Virgil comes to Metastasio, on the other hand, moving from Epitoma of Justinus, great care is dedicated to the other version of the legend, where is brought to light the less know vulgate in which, aside from Aeneas, the Carthaginian queen appears as chaste and amatrix univira. Exactly on this version will build the fortune of Dido in the writings of patrology, in turn so important for the Latin works of Boccaccio.

In the first chapter, after a critical reflection about the double etymology of the two names used by Virgil (“Dido” and “Elissa: Semitic root in the first case >YNAM [N D D]Δειδών /double hypothesis >’ēl ’iššā [female deity] – ’ēl ’eššā/’ēl ’eššā [“in the fire”] in the second case), the aim is to find elements of similarity and divergence between Dido and other famous women of the classical literature, such as Helen, Antigone, Nausicaa, Circe, Andromache, but the attention is also focused on the links between Dido and the figure of Arianna by Catullus, without forget some heroines of Seneca’s tragedies.

In the second chapter, the Virgilian text (books IV and VI of Aeneid) is analised in a methodological way based on the simultaneous comparison between the versions made by Annibal
Caro, Vittorio Alfieri and Rosa Calzecchi Onesti, sometimes adding Giovanni Pascoli’s translation and comment. A paragraph is centered on the comments on Dido’s episode in the Virgilian poem made by Fulgentius and Bernard de Silvestre, whose allegorical integumenta will be very important for Dante. My interest is also centered on the version larmoyante of the Dido story given by Ovidius at first in Heroides VII, but the survey also covers the others loci of Ovidian works where Dido/Elissa is quoted.

Departing from the comment by Servius (Dido id est univira), in the third chapter the aim of the research is to investigate how much luck, and in which terms not only poetic, but also ethical and moral, Dido had in the Patristic literature. Above all, for what will be the interpretation of Dante, are the critical readings by Jerome and, conversely, by Tertullian to be highlighted. With reference to Dante, in Canto V of Inferno if it is substantially kept the Virgilian lectio (and could not be otherwise, being Virgil to indicate Didoto Dante in to the ranks of lussuriosi), it is interesting the assimilation of the Carthaginian queen with Cleopatra and Semiramis, also a founder of a city: the three women appear already united by Herennianus in the Historia Augusta. The interpretation of Dante’s text is conducted using multiple comparisons with various comments(Jacopo Della Lana, Benvenuto da Imola, Pietro Alighieri, Alessandro Vellutello). The presence of Dido in Dante’s works is as well discussed in relation to the Rime petrose (CIII), in the Convivio and the De Monarchia. Starting from the Esposizioni sopra la Commedia, the discussion moves to the presence of Dido in the work of Boccaccio. Dido appears as one of Boccaccio’s beloved figure. As proof of what I have said we can see the name of Elissa, attributed to one of seven young women members of the «lieta brigata», as well the clear reminiscence of the IV book of the Aeneid related to the dedication of the «IV giornata» to the unhappy loves, where the series opens with the tragic «novella» of Ghismonda. Besidesthe obvious similarities between Dido/Ghismonda and Madonna Fiammetta in the homonymous Elegia, also for the direct influence of the Ovidian model, it is in the Latin works that Boccaccio most conspicuously deviates from the model by Virgil/Dante to recover in full the dignity of the “historical” condition of Dido’s widowhood, in keeping with the Patristic tradition, as shown by widely in Genealogia deorum gentilium, De claris mulieribus and De casibus virorum illustrium. Even with regard to Petrarch, I have focused different relationships and the influence between the Virgilian hypotext and Petrarch’s works both in volgare (Trionfi, RVF) and in Latin language (Africa, Secretum, De remedii utriusque fortunae, Seniles). In Triumphus Pudicitie, Petrarch, like Boccaccio shows preference for the interpretation of Dido’s story practiced in the Patristic field, declaring Dante’s / Virgil’s reading worthy of the volgo ignorante.

In the fourth chapter, moving from the observations on the interpretation about Dante’s Comedia, I analize how much importance this reading has in the works and in the correspondence of Christopher Landino and Coluccio Salutati and Veggio Maffeo. Moreover, Dido’s model (together with that of Medea and Circe) is crucial for the image of the witch and sorceress Armida in Tasso, after the previous of Ariosto’s Alcina, acting in both cases the Carthaginian Queen's original reference to the figure of the woman who wants to distract the hero from his prescribed fate.

If in the fifth chapter I analize the plays of the Renaissance in which the protagonist is Dido (1524, Alessandro Pazzi de’ Medici, 1543, Giraldi Cinthio, 1547, Lodovico Dolce), in the sixth and final chapter I focus my attention on Busenello’s Didone (thereby concentrating on various passages of Francesco Cavalli’s 1641 opera) and finally on Didone abandonata, Metastasio’s 1724 masterpiece. Here are brought to light some classical sources and links, literary as well as musical.

Renato Ricco