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For Anthony Burgess, novel writing is not merely an exercise in creativity, unbridled fantasy and intellectual freedom; it can also be one of his ways of getting back at those people who made life difficult for him.¹ For him, novel writing also constitutes a practical way of displaying his fascination for languages and for the power to communicate by means of languages. Carol M. Dix states: '(...) Burgess is one of the few authors writing today in England who makes the fullest use of the raw materials of writing, that is the words themselves. His linguistic explorations or experiments make him at once one of our most adventurous writers; (...)'.² Burgess not only makes use of languages which are really existent; he also tends to create new linguistic systems and to make his characters speak these fictitious languages.³

His 1977 novel *ABBA ABBA*⁴ is no exception to the Burgesian rule regarding multi-language use. Though the novel is obviously written in English, one comes across the odd Latin expression (e.g. *O ave Eva* (page 95); *Aspeeeerges meeeeee* (page 107); *Mater Dolorosa* (page 119)); French or Italian sentences (e.g. *Il faut cultiver notre jardin* (page 8); *Madame, vous ne me verrez plus, etc.* (page 270); *Parla bene il signore la nostra lingua* (page 130); *Come ti chiami ?* (page 36); *Un altro sonetto...Su un altro gatto ?* (page 48)); the Scottish dialect (*Aye, aye, ye rest yon heid the noo, yer grace* (page 36)) as well as a mixture of Franco-Italian (e.g. *Altessa, cara principessa, mon ami est souffrant, la sua inamorata non, ne, sa fiancee, vous comprenez, aime un altro* (page 27)). A particular feature of this novel is his creation of not just one, but *two* fictitious or semi-fictitious languages. These are what I have termed *Italish* and *Engliano*. The former is usually characterized by 'incorrectly' written Italian words, such as *Gulielmi* (It. 'Guglielmi'), *Altessa* (page 27) (It. 'Altezza') and *aprossimamente* (page 36) (It. 'aprossimativamente') or by Italian words with an

English grammatical feature, such as (*they*) *piacered each other* (page 42) < It. 'piacere' or *he coda'd* (page 51) < It. 'coda'. As for *Engliano*, of which various examples abound, this mainly consists of a more or less word by word rendering of Italian constructions, such as, e.g., *A sonnet on the penis with a tail* (page 15), where Keats is playing on the Italian word 'coda' ('penis' or 'tail'); *Is lettera, misiter* (page 36) (It. 'è una lettera, signore'); *in the Piazza of St. Peter's* (page 40) (It. 'nella Piazza di San Pietro'); *He spoke the Roman* (page 45) (It. 'parlava il romano'), and so forth.

Moreover, *Romanesco*, the dialect which is typical of the inhabitants living in the heart of Rome, in particular Trastevere and Testaccio, also makes its presence felt in *ABBA ABBA*. How is it that dialect is so high up in Burgess's linguistic hierarchy? J.J. Wilson's (alias Burgess's) translation of Belli's sonnet *The Tower* (page 102) sheds some light on the latter's (but also the former's) concept of languages:

The Tower

'We'd like to touch the stars', they cried, and after,
 'We've got to touch the stars. But how?' An able-
 Brained bastard told them: 'Build the Tower of Babel.
 Start now, get moving. Dig holes, sink a shaft. A-
 Rise, arouse, raise rafter after rafter,
 Get bricks, sand, limestone, scaffolding and cable.
 I'm clerk of works, fetch me a chair and table'.
 God meanwhile well-nigh pissed himself with laughter.

They'd just got level with the Pope's top floor
 When something in the mouths began to give:
 They couldn't talk Italian any more.
 The project died in this linguistic slaughter.
 Thus, if a man said: 'Pass us that there sieve',
 His mate would hand him up a pail of water.

Basically, the Tower of Babel had brought about 'a linguistic slaughter' whereby, status-wise, the difference between one language and another, and between language and dialect, becomes negligible. Indeed, Burgess is even clearer about his 'philosophy' on languages when, using Keats as his mouthpiece, he states: 'Dialect, dialect, dialect. What in God's name is the difference between a language and a dialect? I'll tell you. A language waves flags and is blown up by politicians. A dialect keeps to things, things, street smells and street noises, life' (page 78).

Therefore, Burgess's viewpoint is clear: real, fictitious and semi-fictitious languages and dialects are to be considered on the same footing, and deserve the same degree of dignity. Indeed, though languages are certainly a sign of 'life', dialects – which are basically languages shorn off of their status and outward elegance – are even more closely cemented to life ! Therefore, dialect is considered at a par with other linguistic systems in *ABBA ABBA*.

The reader comes across the first example of the *Romanesco* dialect at page 15, when Gulielmi comes up with 'a fine word (...) that you will not find in Dante. It is for the male organ and it is *dumpennente*'. Keats is immediately attracted to this term, which he considers to be a 'delicious' one, probably because of its strong adherence to real 'life', which consequently arouses in the English poet's mind a semantic coarseness whilst evoking a linguistic melodiousness at the same time ('*Duuuuuum* – A pendent pen, dumb and in the dumps' – page 15).

Gulielmi, who is quoting from the dialectal poet Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli, goes on to give a philological explanation on the way the Romanesque dialect operates (Gulielmi actually defines it a 'language') and an etymological one on this word in particular: 'an *n* and a *d* following become a double *n*. *Dumpendente*. The origin of course is the Latin *dum pendeat*' (page 15).

Back home in *Piazza di Spagna* John Keats, unable to find solace in the Italian works of established writers such as Torquato Tasso or Vittorio Alfieri (and this is a clear indication of the 'limited' linguistic powers of standard languages), turns his attention towards the dialectal sonnet of this unknown (to him) Roman poet: 'The poem was in the Roman dialect, not easy to understand, but two know words leered out – *cazzo* and that glorious *dumpendenne* (...)' – page 24). Of course, through the use of these coarse terms which stand for 'penis', the *Romanesco* dialect, unlike standard Italian, manages to set Keats' imagination alight. However, what particularly interests me is this case in Burgess's inconsistency *vis à vis* the spelling of *dumpendenne*. Despite the fact that at page 15 the author, through Gulielmi, had gone to pains to describe the linguistic phenomenon *nd* > *nn*, which is typical of Southern Italian dialects,⁵ here Burgess (represented by Keats) is involved in a case of hypercorrectism: conscious of that phenomenon whereby the Latin nasal consonant *n* followed by the voiced dental

consonant *d* becomes a double *n* in Southern dialects, Burgess transforms into *nn* the nexus *nt* (but *t* is an unvoiced dental consonant) in the third and fourth syllables rather than the nexus *nd* in the second and third syllables. This lapsus on the author's part goes to show that though Burgess is well documented on the mechanism governing the transformation of *nd* into *nn*, he is not always well conversant with the actual spoken dialect itself. Grammatical rules and theory are one thing, the spoken dialect (or language) is another.

ABBA ABBA comes to an end with the expression *Bona sera*. The fact that Burgess decides to finish off this work, which has introduced the reader to various linguistic systems (English, French, Italian, Franco-Italian, Latin, Milanese, *Romanesco*, etc.), with these two words is, in my opinion, a choice of a certain relevance. Burgess deliberately opts for *romanesco* to end his novel because this is one way of ascertaining the vitality of the dialect: standard Italian *buona sera* would have been more elegant and, maybe, respectable, but in a novel which deals with the coarseness of everyday life, including sickness (many English romantic writers suffered from various maladies) and death (Keats's), dialect is much more akin to 'real life'. Therefore, the diphthong *uo* is reduced to *o*, *alla romana*, and hence: *bona sera*.

In this novel, toponomastics play an important role in the retention of foreign lexis and pronunciation. It is not always easy to replace original place-names with a 'translation'. In *ABBA ABBA*, Burgess generally opts for the English version in the case of names of big towns or countries, such as Rome, Naples, Florence, Turin, Milan etc., or of nouns or adjectives deriving from them (e.g. Venetian, Milanese, Spanish, Roman, Tuscan, Umbrian, Florentine, etc.). However, when it comes to smaller or specific places, such as churches, streets, squares, etc., Burgess tends to retain the original nomenclature. Thus, he writes of 'the piazza of St. Peter', 'Pincio', the 'Barcaccia', 'San Pietro', 'the Castello', the 'trattoria', the 'Cupola of St. Peter's', the 'Stradone dei Giardini', etc. The author does not even resort to the use of italics when writing these place-names because he actually perceives the Italian language as the *natural* and *spontaneous* way of writing them.

There is just one instance in the novel when dialect is maintained, it being felt as an integral part of the Rome landscape. This is the case of 'the Porto de Ripetta ferry' which first appears at page 40. Unlike, e.g., the *Basilica of Santa Cecilia* (page 19), where Italian *di* is translated into English *of*, or the *Via di Pasquino* (page 48), where Italian *di* is maintained, here Burgess maintains Roman *de* and does not substitute it either with It. *di* or English *of*. As regards the 'Porto de Ripetta ferry', Burgess remains consistent both when this place-name appears again in a prose context (page 67) and in a poetic one (page 100 – *The Ark 1*):

The Ark 1

God said to Noah: 'Listen, er patriarch.
 You and your sons, each take his little hatchet,
 Lop wood enough to build yourselves an ark
 To these specifications. Roof and thatch it
 Like Porto de Ripetta ferry. Mark
 Me well now. Chase each make of beast and catch it.
 And catch a male or female that will match it.
 Then with your victuals, zoo and wives, embark.

A flood is going to test your wooden walls
 A world's end deluge. Tivoli waterfalls
 Will seem an arc of piss in a urinal.
 Ride it until you sight a rainbow. Then
 Jump in the mud and make things grow again
 Till the next world's end. (That one will be final.)'

In this last mentioned poem, the Romanesque element is further strengthened through the presence of the dialected article *er*, when Burgess/Wilson addresses Moses as *er patriarch*. Strangely enough, in the original sonnet written by Belli⁶ there is no sign at all of the article in the first line: 'Iddio disse a Nnuovè: 'Ssenti, Patriarca:'.⁷ From a semantic point of view, it does not make any sense to add *er*, which stands for English *the*, before 'patriarch' since God is actually addressing Noah in the imperative form. The English translation should therefore read 'Listen, patriarch', or even something like 'Listen, you patriarch', but never 'Listen, the patriarch'.

Therefore, why does Burgess (alias J.J. Wilson) insert the article *er* before the noun 'patriarch'? The answer is given by J.J. Wilson himself: on first reading Belli's sonnets in New York, he 'was at

once both horrified and fascinated by the strange appearance of Belli's language' (page 90). Probably, 'Listen, er patriarch', instead of the simple form 'Listen, patriarch', helps to render the English version of the sonnet more 'horrifying' and 'fascinating', at least in the sense Burgess felt these terms.

In *ABBA ABBA*, Burgess/J.J. Wilson's 'oxymorous' attitude to dialect actually reflects quite closely Belli's feeling for it. 'Horror' and 'fascination' are the terms used to describe the initial impact the Roman dialect left on J.J. Wilson; on the other hand, when Belli spoke in Romanesque for the first time, 'He spoke the Roman in a strange mixed tone of shame and defiance' (page 45). Basically, Belli's 'shame' is equivalent to Wilson's 'horror', whilst the former's 'defiance' can be more or less equated to the latter's 'fascination'. Indeed, the fascination actually stems from the tone of defiance used by Belli. When Belli shouts out (page 47): '*... Cuesti cqui sso rreliquioni -ma ar mi paese...*', he was uttering these words 'in a sort of horrified fascinated trance'. Is it Belli who speaks in a 'horrified' and 'fascinated' way? Or is it Keats who perceives the Roman dialect to be so? In my opinion, it is neither one nor the other: Belli and Keats are none other than the two complementary facets of Burgess's character, and therefore it is actually Burgess who is always 'stupefied', 'horrified' and 'fascinated' by the power of language in its dialectal Roman form.

The defiance, horror and fascination associated with the Roman dialect are not limited to the use of *romanesco*. Burgess seems to imply that these three attributes are in fact part and parcel of any dialectal form. In fact, the dichotomy between 'life/dialect' and 'artificiality/language' comes up again at page 45 when Keats recites the first three lines of Dante's *Inferno*. His Italian recitation, 'with near-Elizabethan vowels', earns him Llanos's applause. But Belli 'merely grunted'. Why is it that Belli is so unimpressed by the rendering of the *Commedia* in the original Italian tongue? The answer lies in the fact that standard language is not the *real* language of living people. It is just an artificial, bloodless and lifeless means of communication, which does not convey the real feelings of the man in the street at all.

On the contrary, dialects have the power to transmit to others all the energy and vitality typical of 'the common people'. Belli is quite a rough and coarse person not only because he is a man

of the people but also because his mother tongue is a dialect, and therefore a true expression of life. The *romanesco* dialect had had the effect of 'horror' and 'fascination' on J.J. Wilson; the following Milanese translation by Carlo Porta of Dante's initial lines is also a harbinger of 'roughness' and 'defiance':

'A mitaa strada de quell gran viacc
Che femm a vun la voeulta al mondo da la
Me sont trovata in d'on bosch seur seur affacc'
Senza on sentee da pode seguita'.

(page 45)

Belli recites these lines 'roughly and defiantly' even though he is speaking a dialect, Milanese, which is totally alien from his own. This goes to show that vitality is not typical of and exclusive to *romanesco* but is a characteristic of all dialectal forms. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that 'Belli added a growl of challenge' when explaining that the dialect of Milan was 'another kind of Italian': vis à vis standard languages, dialects do actually instil a sense of superiority and defiance, at least in Burgess's case.

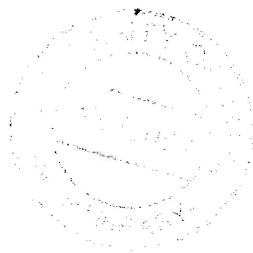
The second part of *ABBA ABBA* ('TWO') is basically a reinforcement of Burgess's 'philosophy' on dialects, as drawn up in Part One. This chapter is no longer set in Rome at the beginning of the 19th century, but in Manchester and New York during the initial decades of the 20th century. The protagonist is now Joseph Joachim Wilson, a descendent of Giovanni Gulielmi. Despite being 'himself no poet', J.J. Wilson 'was to be – by a twist if not genetic, then purely coincidental, (...) – the translator into English of the great Roman poet' (page 87). The initial affinity between the two lies in their proper names: Joseph Joachim is none other than a literal translation of Belli's names, Giuseppe Gioacchino. This affinity is further strengthened through the love of both for the sonnet form and for sonnets of a scurrilous nature: despite being 'himself no poet', J.J. 'as a boy (...) showed skill in facetious or scurrilous versifying and a passion for the Petrarchan sonnet-form' (page 87).

J.J. Wilson continues following in the footsteps of Belli, even 'before becoming acquainted with the poet' (page 89). He too is attached to the 'real' life of the common people but is totally aware of the fact that standard language is an unnatural expression of this 'realism'. He therefore makes strong attempts 'to use dialectal

elements. A Catholic provincial, aware of his foreign blood, he never felt wholly at home in the patrician language of the British Establishment and would, especially in exalted company, deliberately use mystifying dialect words or adopt an exaggerated and near-unintelligible Lancashire accent' (page 89). Italian dialects and the power to 'horrify' and 'fascinate' Belli and Keats. Similarly, the Lancashire dialect has the power to 'mystify' J.J. Wilson. On the other hand, it is Belli and Wilson who are capable of 'horrifying', 'fascinating' and 'mystifying' their listeners through their use of dialect. 'Horror' (in its Latin use of 'religious and sacred fear'),⁸ 'fascination' and 'mystification' are all terms which pertain to the world of the esoteric or the divine. Is Burgess implying that through the use of dialect, Belli and Wilson (*ergo* himself !) are actually wielding a supernatural and/or divine power?

This is probably the case. Unfortunately, however, establishment and officialdom will never be able to grasp this truth. For them, it is only the standard language that can be a vehicle for power, and therefore a Wilsonian slogan of the type 'Don't pine for a pud, make do with a spud' will be rejected 'as possessing only a dialectal validity' (page 90). It will only be the simple and common people who live the 'real' life of every day who can appreciate the 'divine' powers of dialects. Such is Susanna Roberti, the, 'countergirl in the New York office of Alitalia' who offers to help Wilson to translate Belli's dialectal poems into 'English with a Manchester accent' (page 91).

The 'horror' and 'fascination' emanating from dialectal use constitute a form of enjoyment and an alternative source of 'power', which will never be understood or appreciated by people connected with the establishment and, therefore, with 'apparent' power. For Burgess, dialects are the real source of 'real' power.



Notes

1. Cf., e.g., *Earthly Powers*, where he gets at Dom Mintoff, Archbishop Michael Gonzi and the Maltese in general, who had basically forced him to leave the island of Malta, where he had established his place of residence.
2. Cf. C.M. Dix, *Anthony Burgess*, Longman, London 1971, p.21.
3. Cf., e.g., the language spoken by the violent youngsters in *A Clockwork Orange* and the 'imaginary' language of the 'imaginary' island, Castita, in *MF*. On the latter language, cf. A. Cassola, '*MF*: a glossary of Anthony Burgess's Castitan Language', in *English Language Notes*, Vol. XXVI, June 1989, no.4, pp. 73 – 79.
4. Cf. A. Burgess, *ABBA ABBA*, Faber, London 1977. When quoting, I shall refer to this novel by page numbers only.
5. Cf. G. Rohlfs, *Grammatica storica della lingua italiana. Fonetica*, Einaudi, Torino 1988, pp. 356-359.
6. Cf. *Er Diluvio Univerzale*.
7. Cf. *Er Diluvio Univerzale*, in G.G. Belli, *Sonetti Romaneschi*, a cura di Luigi Morandi, vol. III, S. Lapi Tipografo-Editore, Città di Castello 1896, p.30.
8. Cf. E. e R. Bianchi, O. Lelli, *Dizionario illustrato della lingua latina*, Le Monnier, Firenze 1972, s.v. *horror*.