

TOMMASO LANDOLF'S EXPERIMENTAL ART

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Abstract

Tommaso Landolf (1908-1978), is all about a finished literature, but not a similar one for the interpretations. This work aims to identify the presence of different schools of literature mentioned in chosen masterpieces same as the representatives of his prose. At the same time this work aims to interpret the presence of structuralism theory in one of the best known stories of the author, specifically “Parole in agitazione”, which we see as a written model too special according to the strategies of dealing with a literary subject.

Tommaso Landolf, graduated at the Florence Faculty in 1932, with the thesis on Anna Ahmantova (who lived at that time) gets the highest evaluation. It has been determined from the scholars as a writer obsessed after the word to build a fantastic world. His entire life was accompanied by multiple literary prizes along with his very rich creativity. He first issued the prose, which firstly took life in 1937 with “Dialogi di massimi sistemi”, “La pietra lunare”, “La spada”, “Racconto d'autunno” etc, 34 works of art in prose, novels, short stories and narrations, with which we think he stars. We do think so because they (the stories) show more his researching work as a scientist upon language.

The short narration “Parole in agitazione” is definitely a writer with dimensions of the modern and it comes as testimony of his research in a different poetry, with the features of original texts in content and shape. So you can only approach to Landolf as a writer of varieties and literary experiment, as a writer who set a finished experimental literary challenge. A similar art arouses the receptor, suggests him reading and rereading the art to achieve its review and interpretation. With no doubts this reader surpasses the limits of a disqualified reader, for the event is awkward, interesting, full of subtle situations which require careful attention and thorough examination. The subject of the story in hand is built upon a detail that makes it an artistic discovery; words and letters that come up from the mouth, go round about in a sink, yell, dance and twist and talk just like living beings, give a chance of an infinite understanding of oneself (each is one and many meanings) up to the moment when the character puts them with great difficulties in a prison-bottle from where they feel as caught in a trap.

Perhaps shared content from us is not enough to introduce the tension of the narration. We think to uphold his analyses upon the structuralism theory that starts with Saussure and deepens in Roland Barthes) On the other hand in T. Landolf's prose it is defined from the scholars as present the fantastic and surrealist by explaining this with Tzvetan Todorov's theory 'The fantastic Literature', where the fantastic raised upon a background of abnormality makes a regulation where the absurd and the awkwardness are rules and regulations. Apart from these we think that in T. Landolf's theory is seen the presence not in a very clear way but as a combination of the other literary directions like: Futurism, Imaginism, Existentialism.

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Tommaso Landolf (1908-1978) one of the most well known Italian authors of the 1900's, it is also part of the most interesting written models, very commented, yet opened for interpretations. His whole life is accompanied by multiple literary prizes along his rich creativity. He mainly issued the prose, which firstly came into life in 1937 with "Dialogi di massimi sistemi"("Dialogues of huge systems"), "La pietra lunare"("The lunar stone"), "La spada"("The sword"), "Racconto d'autunno"("Autumn story telling") etc, and many other works in prose, novels, narrations and short stories.

T. Landolf is obviously one of the modern written models. Very special in contents and in techniques of the fulfillment of the literary subject. To introduce his art according to a concluded concept is very hard, because Landolf belongs to the group of those writers whose art is a metamorphose. Landolf is the intellectual conscious not just for something different, but for a turnabout of the shape of the realistic line of art that started with positive theories. We can even say that starting from the first written works (narrations published in newspapers since 1929 which were then summarized in within his first published work, "Dialogues of huge systems", Landolf's art is a demolisher of the traditionalism of the speech in prose. Within these very narrations, it is obviously seen that Landolf has a new vision upon the world and man, a new sensitivity and eagerly seeks new artistic legacy to construct the art in this spirit. In the narration 'Compulsory Tasks', which according to me is noticed about the deep aotubiorafism if you see the similarity of the subject to Landolf's essential facts, in the main character's mouth you find these words:

“....I had noticed that Adele took care about her personal experience and liked to have a manner just like Balzak or as a naturalist to treat the subjects (the opposite of the symbolic and metaphysic manner that I would use in my times)....”

In a social-historical background described from world wars, Landolf presents a chaotic world. The living condition of the man within it looks like the inner revolution of a pressing whirlpool that deforms, smashes the human personality. Through the typical akmeist irony, man is observed by Landolf as a concrete being with no perspective, no real valuable objective that is going to send him somewhere. Landolf's man is submerged in the endless mess, where you see nothing but yourself and regrets, his activity leads to nowhere, it is useless.

The events of his prose are mainly short, simple in its introduction up to that point they deceive, but that are followed with many sudden turnings and incoherence (a preferred technique of the author that would require a deep examination, for its effect is the causing of surprise to the reader through the destruction of the expected from him) that further make the story difficult to be followed and understood by the reader. There are occasions that the author tries to stimulate the reader to believe one thing, that in fact later results to be a lie, so in this case he is obliged to read the pretexts in order to clarify once again the subject. The logic of the figures' actions is mainly unstable there is no sense in what they do. They (the characters) look like they are sick. Through suspicious and also interesting figures, Landolf, tried to present the weird man, deeply disturbed, not understood, full of unfortunate accidents, unrewarded from life and society, whose actions reflect anxiety.

For example, in the story "The sword", the character, who finds a sword and is moved by the idea of making something very important with it, something to be remembered, murders with that sanguine object his beloved person, the girl he loved inexplicably exactly when she declares how much she loves him. The story, apart from its beginning, does not follow a normal flow of the drama growth. We don't see in the narration a true conflict to which a solution should be given. What teases the reader is the moment when the murdering object shines in the light, pierced through the fragile body which bent, sided like a leaf and slips separated like a sheet of paper. The reader does not find any strong reason toward this deed. This is more confirmed from the surprised girl, the smile and in the end the grin that accompanies the murdering action while '*....a thin red blood stream almost invisible appeared from the golden hair up to the neck and down, along the breast and the white silk'*

On the other hand the character's repentance about the useless excitement, because the sword had not served him for something 'big' leaves the bad taste of the disappointment for the actions of a pathologic to the reader.

Landolf is commented about the presence of the fatal(which is found almost in every work of his), but I think that what surprises here, which can

be characterized with the role of a linguistic suddenness too, is the liberty which Landolf uses to describe the girl's murder and reaction. She is so adorable and through the macabre action she becomes desirable (in the sense of being admirable even in such horrible moment).

"the blade of the sword went through the thin body finding no resistance, yet the girl did not fall and without moving stared at her murderer with her sweet eyes, still smiling. The white forehead shined like the dawn toward a black glass and the remote stars of the night standing above her, and there was no sign of the horrible wound..."

Moments like this get the value of the pieces of the poetic prose, the word has musicality, the images are as sudden as arousing and strangely interpose and this is part in Landolf's 'different' art, which is also an expression of his modernity and research.

The issuing of Landolf's long prose is commented as a flotsam in the Italian literature. It is often put between the initial dream and the reality. It seems like T. Landolf seeks to unite the ages in a venue between the real and the hypothetic. Lots of pages are filled with meditation that sometimes is so complicated that requires a reader with qualification. The past, the present but even the dark future closely connect together to create the time of times, the universal time for the most misunderstood creature, the confused creature, for the man.

There are figures of characters which personify the man's cohabitation with the nature and all sorts of other creatures. A testimony of this is the prose 'The lunar stone" where strangely enough stay together the reality and the pagan, man and animal. The myth and the pagan symbols. The moon and all of its phases, the appearance and disappearance of Guru with it legs of goat, animal and as well as sensual like a wonderful female, too....You cannot perceive her transformation simply as a change of a fantastic ordinary story, only through something that penetrates and interferes in meanings as well as in feelings. You cannot understand it differently only through the symbolic, within the appearance of the exchanges of the phases of the moon, symbol of fertility and feminine gender, through the sensual connection of the animal with the civilized man. Landolf supports the suddenness and the deliberate suggestion through the literary mystification. He does that so beautifully and skillfully, that the reader, even though he clearly notices the imaginary from the truth permits himself to get involved with the author's 'truth', allows himself/herself to trust and be deceived. Landolf's art time after time flows in shapes of magical realism. Landolf is a master of the text connection. We judge that he intentionally tries to connect the reader to a specific direction, as we can say to make him a free-lance of his text. There are moments that this prose

reminds us of the akmeist paintings that displayed the contemporary primitiveness, supposedly the naïve through the primitive people of Africa.

The scholars predefine Tommaso Landolf's art as an art with strong features of surrealism. We support this, but firstly we would see his art even with features of the futurist poetry. It should be settled that T. Landolf comes into life exactly in the years when Futurism aroused as a cultural direction. As it is known big cities like: Milan, Florence, Rome, where Landolf would get registered to follow his studies, which are a decisive factor not only for his education but are also at the same time the beginnings of an intensive creativity, became centre of the Italian futurism.

No doubt that T. Landolf deeply acknowledged the futurist creativity in Italy and someplace else. He fully got in touch with the developments of this literary direction even in other countries thanks to extended knowledge he had in foreign languages. Landolf was born in the period of Futurism and he created works exactly when it was diminishing (we are speaking of the second period of the research of the second generation of futurists, period of time when the strong impact of surrealism is felt). But however the revealing of the fragmentized reality bit by bit in his work, the perceiving analogies, the presence of the myth in long proses (so present at the futurists of the second generation) images of the puppet man (for example in "The Gogol's wife") and the absurd of the moments, features which were displayed in the painting, are present even in Tommaso Landolf's art, that is why it is proper to admit that the Italian Futurism appears complete in his work. It is naturally merged afterwards with the surrealism. It cannot be different because surrealism comes from the symbolism and it is a deepening of futurism. So Landolf belongs to the futurism seed where the impact of surrealism prevails that determines the return back to the image with absurd and fantastic character. "For the surrealist the artistic creativity warrants itself only in the complete freedom of the spirit, the spirit that comes out of the subconscious and that allows you to learn what is left unknown to man". The majority of the characters try to get to know and explain themselves.

Apart from the others the multiple translations performed by Landolf are now well known especially those from Russian and this makes us judge that he was influenced enough from the Russian futurism, in which he aims the democratization of art and he despised the idea of 'art of the elite', by supporting the individualism of the creation and his absolute autonomy. In Landolf it is felt the influence of the Russian writers like D. Harms, N. Zaboloskij, N. Olejni, who were executed by the firing squad by enclosing the Russian avangard. Landolf had knowledge, got to know with them and was influenced by their art.

But we can also speak about features of imagism, pointing out Esenini, as one of the Russian authors deeply involved in it. The anti-

estethism, strong metaphors that cause the suddenness, the shocking images that appear in Landolf's prose, make his art fit with the art of imaginism.

If you stop for a moment at the environment where the events take place, for example in the 'Autumn confession' work you face with the presence of alogism or of the feature of ghost mania, you see irrational situations, the presence of elements of paradox and this all displayed in the entire structure of the artistic reality that Landolf builds in this work. Only the introduction preserves the features of realism in there. In the introduction it looks like the work has a classical nature of the confession but then all of this is overthrown. Then everything runs as a whirly event, where you get lost in the weirdness and the scariness, where the confusion and the desire to explain the event are felt. Some scenes are similar to editing, with a cinematographic structure, (for example the moment when the old man evokes, calls through prayers, or the scenes when the woman appears-a strange creature), so they seem like texts which have the fracture as their part and that are easy to become film scripts because even the beginning of the works is a subtle entrance in the event. The phenomenon of the editing is noticed mainly in the majority of the narrations.

The same thing happens with the characters. It is difficult for the readers to become one with them because the author does not give them this opportunity. The characters that Landolf involves are strange creatures, for example the old man and his evoking actions, the woman that is created as a weird being; neither a larva nor a man, with no kind ('Autumn narration'). On the other hand the technique of the description in details of the old man's house, the design of the environment in details, the presenting of the situation with the feeling of the fear, the constant anxiety for what is going to happen, make the work a witness of a special art where the dominant is the asymmetry. Even the confession that starts to evolve in a linear line makes a sudden turning.

Landolf's prose is a deep experiment which we think that surpasses the tendency that had as novelty the authors who belonged to modernism and this is demonstrated so clear by the presence of different literary schools in Landolf. Landolf melts the lines of the modern art and the avangard to get up to the theories of the postmodernist. But is should be said that this presence is not shown very clear but as a combination, sometimes unclear, some other times clearer, spontaneous and as well as self-conscious that in a way makes the specialty of his art. So in Landolf's art meeting points even with the existentialist school can be found. We find these meeting points mainly within the characters. They perceive the reality as a stop, as an obstacle for the existence. Many of them are lonely beings and some are passive like caught in a trap. They do not carry real living constant values where to depend on. As loners, empathic, always preserving the ego, they try to crawl,

persecuted from the anxiety and fear reminding us of Kafka's characters. Maybe the author has got to know with Kafka through the German language at the time when he was writing 'Autumn confession' (1947), because before this period of time when the narration 'The metamorphose' was published (1916) in a literary magazine, Kafka was less known, he would not merely promote his fame within a tiny literary circle.

Comments about the meeting points with the art of skapilaturists are now known. The preference about the extreme situations, extraordinary, destroying sensual passions, illnesses (for example psychic pathology), unconsciousness, make Landolf to be determined as one of the latest skapilaturists.

But what makes T. Landolf distinctive is his work with the word. He is determined from the scholars as 'a writer obsessed after the word to build a fantastic world'. Expert of more than ten languages, a loner, nonsocial, always on a fanatic preservation of this non-involvement among the people, Landolf during his life had all the time needed to eagerly dedicate as a scientist to his art. True facts of this are not only the considerable number of the works he left but also of the very special profile of this creativity. Landolf's art is a constant research on the language. We think that in fact Landolf at the same time tried to enter through the fantastic infinity of the word's understanding. From the biographical data, since the time of university the obsession he had of the word is testified about its strength and opportunity. This is seen since the beginning of his school prose*at that time I had something religious and superstitious, love and fear of the words (that remained for a long time) in which I concentrated all of the burden of the reality, which I used to find in different objects of the world, putting it into simple words; the words were almost my only realities.*

The above fragment clearly states Landolf's effort to enlighten upon the mission of the words. This brings us into mind a verse from the Bible 'and the first was the word, and it was with God and it became God...'. We think that Landolf seeks and finds the mystic and divine in the word, in its power to present a reality so true as well as illusive.

The fear, that can it fully reflect the world, the dilemma if it is the reality, life, or the reality is itself, is often object of his art.

Landolf was worried about 'the imprisonment' in the final understanding of the word. The fact that he activated not only old words but also dead ones, presents the intensity of his desire to escape from this 'imprisonment'. Landolf's relationships with the word are feverish researches upon the semantic classes, upon the forms of the words. Every word in itself is a symbol that makes it at the same time supporter of a culture. So everything is a metaphor and crucial power. This process of

Landolfian research in fact reflects the research upon the art of the word as well as upon itself.

Let us stop for a while at the story ‘Parole in agitazione’ (‘Words in agitation’). The subtext of the prose is the worry of the non-mastery of the expressive opportunities of the word. It seems like the worry of the ending as a stranger in relation with the meanings of the words penetrates and electrifies all of the character’s actions.

But what happens to this character? Which is the subject?

Briefly it is this: One morning, when he was brushing his teeth, words which slide noisily in the sink come out of the man’s mouth instead of the amount of the tooth brush. To the greatest surprise they jump, fling, bump, make noise and even speak. The man listens to how they complain, fight and scream to one another and to him about the naming of their meanings, which they think they have taken way from each other. After a very long dialogue, where the character expresses surprise upon the never heard naming and the demands of some of them to exchange the meaning with some other word, requires from the words explanations about the meaning and by deceiving and with violence puts them in a bottle content of getting rid of their mess. He promoted each of them with one final meaning and that at last he learned one thing; what does it mean *to wash your mouth with words*, expression that in fact you could give the meaning of :‘for the sake of the rule, just to get through this, a rough-and-steady job, for the sake of the appearance, a job done with no considerable result’.

It is now known the determination, *it seems as Landolf works with an opened vocabulary*, being said apart from the others about the reactivating aspect of the dead words by him.

Landolf tries to go back to the genesis of the word, in its lively shape of the very remote periods of time. He is worried about the incapacity and the insufficiency of the meanings they give. From this perspective his art becomes deliberate. This deliberateness should be seen even in his tendency to make the reader curious about the used word and seen from this other point his art enriches you with information.

Ma ecco che, invece di venir fuori la solita gisgustosa miscela, vennero fuori loro, le parole...una scivolò e andò quasi a finire nel buco sul fondo, ma si riprese e si salvo'. Parevano vispe e allegre, bence un po pazzerelle. Sulla mensola fecero un monte di baletti, di lazzi e d'inchini, come fosserosu una ribalta, e poi presero a far dei cenni, da cui capii che volevano parlarmi...

But then instead of the usual unpleasant mixture coming out, they came out, the words...one slipped and almost ended in the draining tub, but recovered and was safe. They seemed agile and happy and a little crazy. On the sink they performed different dances, games and bends as if they were on

a stage and then they started to make signs from which I understood they wanted to speak....(My translation, L. Bora)

The narration above does not pay attention to the subjective line. It represents a different written model (there is no conflict in it, a plot after which the solution comes and talks about an unusual literary subject. It is more of a shape rather than a content).

We think that it presents the acknowledgement and support from Landolf to Sosyr's theories. Landolf tries to clarify the arbitrary of the connection through the shape of the word and its meaning. The calling voice of the words speaks about our incapacity to understand the relativity of the meaning of the word. But we do not think that this is the only aim of the author. This theory is very well known, archaic. It represents only the appearance, because Landolf deeply focuses up to Barth's ideas (1915-1980), about the relationships between the language as a collective wealth and the individual speech.

It is believed that Tommaso Landolf has not only deeply recognized the structuralism but also has possessed it as of his. This narration admits that the content of the literature is part of a signing system in an independent structure from the real world. We think that Landolf wanted to give us these structuralist ideas through 'Parole in agitacione' ('Words in agitation') and if we would refer to Barth's theories, the words, Landolf's text, does not lead to the construction of a model of a narrative law, but opens a fragment perspective, voices from the other texts, a code perspective where the reader is himself/herself a summary of codes and tries to construct his version, too.

Words come out of the mouth, which can be at the same time 'the prison house' of the structuralist theory. The author wants to say that the words are one and one thousand within themselves, are signs that take numerous meanings every time they become part of the constructions and different situations of speech. The author's concern is found exactly in the activation of the hidden meanings.

On the other hand this story dismisses the author's presence (as Barth's confesses). It is understood only if it seen as a literary form which should be decoded by not taking into consideration the author's presence, even though the confession is in the first person.

We think that Landolf was aware of the fact that a specialized reader was needed to his work, a reader who collaborates and helps to determine the meaning and the effect of the not familiarized language to the art. This story conducts to the reader the personal meaning of the author, which has a structuralist logic. We think that this story is a kind of manifestation of the display of his scientific structuralist theories, where he opposes the final theory of the meaning. 'The war of words' to get meanings and the character's effort to 'get deep' in their meaning, means the influence of the

reading process outside the social plan, so influence free from the cultural language.

The definition of the meaning also presents the falsity of the communication. It seems like the characters feels the obligation to set rules through the words and meanings. In this case he risks and enters a strange game to put them in order or better to discipline their crazy desire of move ways from the meanings. The seriousness with which he performs this task is replaced by the skepticism. His monologue is a question for the reader. Did I succeed? Will this system be recognized, will it be followed by the others?

The effort in this case becomes a concern, a shock. The character needs to be at the same time critical and skeptic. But how can you dare approach to the language without entering in its depth, without having the knowledge and being expert of the meaning of the words, where in a certain way the words are those which avenges the man's existence and the non recognition of the world would be connected to the non recognition of the word and its magic?

The usage of the word remains a personal action of the usage of the language. The endlessness of the world points out as logic an unlimited number of meaningful face forms of the word, the character is very curious. Will their marksmen keep the words? Even if they won't keep them they exist without the logical connection marker-the marked one. The arrogance of the words is in itself their perspective; they exist even without the man's ungratefulness.

But then which is the man's recognition to them? And how much freedom does he have toward their recognition and for their creation? Man, the ruler and the lawmaker, who named (marked) each one of them, he who unites the past and the present through them, feels so strange in front of the word. His effort to put the word 'in jail' represents man's violence toward it, which leads to totalitarianism in the thinking sphere. What would happen if people had or thought only of a meaning for the word? The speech would have had simply the serving function.

But on the other hand the character's effort to put into order the meanings of the words could be commented even as man's effort to put some order in this word and meaning chaos, in this personal experiences chaos.

Is it a regress or a progress this huge number of words and meanings, unknown and as a consequence useless in the man's daily sphere?

One word is always one word and many metaphors, one word is a sign that gets dissolved and assembled, a genealogical connection of meanings. Just like Derrida, Landolf puts logos and its meaning in the heart of the discussion, its determining ability "*the word is slippery. It can never determine meanings, constantly provokes meanings in connection, in different constructions. It turns in a moving image.*"

The word is one and many. It is always the mediator through the reality and because of this the language (the marker) looks like a net that covers the reality. So the words move through meanings, branch, multiply, vibrate, pulse, expand more and more, deeper and deeper, become without limits. The word is infinite and if you refer to Derrida, that infinite is even the text, part of which is it. In this context even the prose in words could have other reading possibilities as well as the reader has.

The end of the story is Tommaso Landolf's irony about the acknowledged aspect that connects with the limiting aspect of the meaning of the word, where the naming of a final meaning for it would consume it, because its naming in different constructions, even the text itself has always multiple interpretative opportunities, by always remaining an opened text. Not wanting to investigate in the informal area of the word makes it at the same time man's failure toward the proficiency of its correct meaningful form.

The loss of the word in the end of the story could be interpreted as man's useless effort to nail it in one meaning. At this point of view the word is an infinity forms of the meaning. It shines in different aspects through the meaning particularity, by becoming even representative of human subjectivity.

Landolf understood the insufficiency of the acknowledgement and the usage of the word. His tendency to reactivate old words is his vision upon the non-age of the word. It is so antique and new at the same time, it is a labyrinth through the non-contour.

...Non volevano prestarsi e facevano ostruzionismo, cercando d'imbrogliarmi, ma le costrisi a dichiarare punto per punto l'esser loro. Come non volevano mica lasciarsi acchiappare e scappavano da ogni parte; ma io, chiudendole e schiacciandole sotto la palma della mano e successivamente afferrandole col pollice e l'indirice dell'altra mano, riuscii lo stesso a imbottigliarle tutte. Parevono sorci in trappola, da quanto stridevano li dentro. Quando ci furon tutte, cominciai a farle uscire una per volta, secondo avevo stabilito; e ciascuna, come dico, dovette contentarsi del significato che le tocco. A misura che uscivano, fuggivano chissà dove e le perdevo di vista... inoltre sono un tantino preoccupato. Si, ho riferito che uscendo dalla bottiglia fuggirono chissà dove: ma sempre in casa saranno restate, e un giorno o l'altro, vedrete, mi risalterano addosso...

...They were not ready and they kept putting obstacles, by wanting to distract me, but I obligated them one by one to tell that it was them. Like they didn't want to get caught and ran way up and down; but I succeeded again to put them all in the bottle by closing and smashing them with the palm of the hand and then by grabbing them with the thumb and the index finger of the other hand. They all looked like trapped from the screaming from in

there. At the moment they were all there, I started to let them out one by one like I had decided; and each of them, how can I say, had to be content with the meaning that belonged to them. Coming out hand by hand, they escaped who knows where, I used to lose them from my eyesight...but on the other hand I am a little bit preoccupied, having in mind that coming out from the bottle, they escaped who knows where, but they always remained in the house, and one day or another, you will see, they will jump over me. (My translation, L. Bora)

The words are there but we don't recognize them. Everything that is left by the 'imprisonment' is the uselessness. "The imprisonment" did not bring any results. The language is like a river, like a moving living being, it has its laws and apart from these you cannot break in.

Approach the word and own it!

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