Multiple languages and multiple voices

Chiara Santin

This poem has been written in the beautiful landscape of the Lake Districts (Brathay Hall, UK). It has been inspired by the birds singing along in a majestic tree, not always in tune to each other, sometimes chasing each other, making it like a proper harmony, sometimes like a complicated cacophony of strange sounds..., a metaphor for living between two languages.

Se parlo italiano sono ancora una bambina
Se parlo Inglese mi sento fredda e distante
Le parole inglesi sono come un bel vestito elegante per andare al lavoro
Mi sento rassicurata, mi conforta.
Mi da’ spazio e coraggio,
Mi crea una certa distanza
e mi sento a mio agio.

Il linguaggio Italiano e’ ricco e complicato,
troppe regole e di convenzioni
di cui non puoi fare a meno.

If I speak Italian I am still a child
If I speak English it feels cool and distant
English words are like a smart dress
I wear to go to work.
Strangely, it’s reassuring and comforting.
It gives me space and courage,
It gives me some distance
and I feel comfortable.

The Italian language is rich and complicated,
too many rules and conventions
you cannot escape.
Come si spiega la sua ricchezza, ritmo e musicalità?

Le parole italiane sono come “l’aria di casa”
La lingua Italiana mi porta a casa, dove sono nata, cresciuta nella voglia di esplorare altri mondi, parlare altre lingue.

Tutte queste parole e ricordi riaffiorano popolando la mia mente.
Non è facile decifrare quale voce sta parlando, quale voce ascoltare, quale voce seguire.
E’ una cacofonia di voci, alcune più forti di altre, alcune come dei sussurri, alcune distanti, altre più vicine. Alcune sono stonate, altre si ritrovano insieme in bellissime armonie, come per magia.
Ci sono barlumi di armonia in questo sottofondo di voci contrastanti.

Sintonizzarsi con tutte queste voci è stancante e a volte vorrei spegnerle o diminuire il volume in cerca di sollievo.

How does that fit with its richness, rhythm and musicality?

Italian words are like “home smell”. The Italian language takes me home, where I was born and raised, wanting to explore other worlds and speak other languages.

All these words and memories Resurfacing and populating my mind.
It’s not easy to decipher which voice is speaking, which voice to listen, which voice to follow. It’s a cacophony of voices, some of them louder than others, some of them like whispers, some of them distant, some of them closer. Some of them out of tune, some coming together to create beautiful harmonies, like magic. There are glimmers of harmony against this background of conflicting voices.

Tuning in to these multiple voices can be tiring and exhausting, sometimes I wish I could switch them off or turn the volume down to get some relief.
Sono spesso confusa e frastornata ma ho imparato a conviverci.
Mi sento meno stanca, or che ho imparato a sintonizzarmi e de-
sintonizzarmi,
come ucceli che volano di ramo in ramo e orientarmi
in questo continuo vento in movimento.
Ho trovato il mio modo di attraversare questo labirinto per ascoltare le voci degli altri e quelle degli uccelli che cantano in sottotono.

I am often confused and overwhelmed yet my brain has learnt to live with it.
It is less tiring now as I learned to tune in and out,
like birds flying from branch to branch, and orient myself
in this ever-moving world wind.
I somehow mastered my way through the maze to listen to others’ voices and still hear the birds singing in the background!
Author

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