

Cristina Matteucci

**THE FOOL IN THE WORK OF TONINO GUERRA:
FROM THE VILLAGE IDIOT MADMAN TO THE *JURODIVYJ***

University of Urbino

Carlo Bo, via Aurelio Saffi, Urbino, 61029, Italy

This article analyzes the representation of the fool in the work of Tonino Guerra. This character undergoes an evolution from the village idiot belonging to the author's first phase, to the prophetic fool close to the *jurodivyj* of Russian tradition. This feature becomes a constituent part of the entire production of Guerra after the mid-1970s, when he approaches Russian culture and spirituality and produces the screenplay of *Nostalghia* with Andrei Tarkovsky. Considering the production of Guerra, it can be divided into three phases: the juvenile phase (1946–1956), the Roman period (which emerges from 1959 and continues until around 1974) and finally his production as a mature writer. In the first phase we can recognize the village idiot belonging to the dimension of the countryside, with characters like Silvio and Gino in *I Bu* (1946–1972). The fools of *Amarcord* (1973) Giudizio and Leo, whose attention is always directed upwards, correspond to a transition phase for Guerra as a man and writer. From 1974 onwards, with *I cento uccelli*, the irruption of transcendence emerges from the work of Guerra. *Il polverone* (1978), *I guardatori della luna* (1981) and *Il miele* (1981) appear particularly rich in the details which are comparable to the script of *Nostalghia*, and demonstrate the evolution of the fool, now close to Eastern spirituality.

Key words: Italian Literature; Tonino Guerra; fool; screenplay; Andrei Tarkovsky; *Nostalghia*.

Introduction

There are many poems, novels and screenplays by Tonino Guerra in which, more or less marginally, the figure of the fool emerges. This figure does not always have the same characteristics, but rather changes in parallel with the different production waves of the author. Luca Cesari, the curator of Guerra's recent *opera omnia*, recognizes three of them: the juvenile phase, datable between 1946 and 1956, the Roman period (which emerges from 1959 and continues until around 1974) and finally the production of maturity [Guerra, 2018: XXV].

In correspondence with these three phases It is possible to identify the evolution of the character in coincidence with these three phases: from the

Cristina Matteucci — PhD Student in Comparative Cultures, University of Urbino Carlo Bo (e-mail: c.matteucci1@campus.uniurb.it).

fool who lives in the countryside the prophetic madman very close to the *jurodivyj* of Russian tradition. After the mid '70s, when Guerra approaches Russian culture and spirituality, the fools in his works are no longer village idiots, but become bearers of truth and close to oriental conceptions. An essential influence in the transformation of this theme can be recognized in the character of Domenico, the madman who has a fundamental importance in *Nostalgia*, the screenplay of which was written by Guerra together with Andrei Tarkovsky.

1. The village idiot

The character of the fool appears from Guerra's early poems. In the collection *I Bu* [Guerra, 1972]¹, Guerra uses the Romagna dialect to describe the post-war peasant world, inhabited by strange and introverted people, where some social lunatics stand out. First of all, there is Silvio, with his hat worn backward:

Quando parlava,/parlava a scatti,/tutto sbrindellato/dalla testa ai piedi,/ il berretto con la visiera rovesciata,/perché vestiva da corsa/Silvio il matto. [Guerra, 2018: 41]

But there is also Gino who, anticipating the famous madman scene contained in *Amarcord*, does not want to climb down from an apricot tree and pretends to be a cat:

Era un matto/che faceva finta d'essere un animale/fra i rami dell'albicocco. /Il suo povero padre era il miglior uomo del mondo/in casa s'abbracciava agli armadi/ e chiudeva il cassettone col ginocchio. / Gli diceva: "Gino va là vieni giù/dà retta alle parole del tuo babbo" / ma il matto si rannicchiava fra i rami/per tutta la notte faceva il verso dei gatti. [Guerra, 2018: 97]²

Silvio and Gino are both explicitly defined as fools, "matti": Silvio is characterized by his difficulty in speaking "parlava a scatti", while Gino communicates only as cats do, "faceva il verso dei gatti", so he appears more similar to an animal than a human being. As Gualtiero De Santi pointed out, the poet gives "voce e sostanza linguistica ai folli e ai marginali" [De Santi, 1994: 198], the inhabitants of a world that appears desolate and abandoned³. For Guerra, *I Bu* represents a firm starting point, but also a reference for future productions, as demonstrated by the poem *L'aria* [Guerra, 2018: 161], which will conclude Domenico's final speech in *Nostalgia*.

¹ The 1972 collection brings together the works in dialect of his youth ('46 – '54) — *I scarabocc* (1946), *La sciupètta* (1950), *Lunario* (1954), with *Èltum vèrs* (1972).

² Quotations from Guerra's poems, novels and screenplays are given in Italian and are taken from the author's complete works edited by Luca Cesari [Guerra, 2018].

³ Some titles of other poems contained in the collection, as *La fine del mondo* and *Il sanatorio*, appear significant in this regard [Guerra, 2018: 55, 101].

The second phase of Guerra's production, the Roman one, marks a new period but continues to address the theme of madness. On the one hand we have a man made neurotic by life in big cities, like the characters of *L'equilibrio* (1967) or *L'uomo parallelo* (1969), on the other hand, towards the end of this phase, the figure of the village idiot reappears. In 1972 the poet started his collaboration with Fellini, with whom he wrote *Amarcord's* screenplay (1973). Among the various elements that Guerra adds to the work, there is the character of the village idiot.

Giudizio, *nomen omen*, is a character teased by everyone but gifted with a superior perception of things. He is a marginal but constant character throughout *Amarcord* and he is presented from the first scene as “una specie di ritardato mentale come se ne trovano in tutti i paesi e che spesso tirano fuori le verità più lampanti” [Guerra, 2018: 2547]. For example, he is the first to identify the origin of the violin that plays the International, or to see the peacock gliding over the square during the snow storm: “Dev'essere qui sopra” he says, and everyone stares at that point [Guerra, 2018: 2654].

The other village fool we can find in *Amarcord* is Leo, “lo zio matto di Bobo” [Guerra, 2018: 2616]. He is always looking somewhere else: beyond the bars of the mental institution where he is interned, or upwards when he climbs the tree “svelto come un gatto”, as Gino did [Guerra, 2018: 2626]. The fools of *Amarcord*, Giudizio and Leo, whose attention is always directed upwards, correspond to a personal and professional transitional phase for Guerra as well as to the beginning of a new approach.

2. The irruption of transcendence

For the filmmakers and writers who were close to Tonino Guerra at the time, the period between the '60s and the '70s marks a moment of research and discovery of forms of creation and expression external to the European one, corresponding to a spiritual crisis. In this regard, Cesari speaks of “spatial agoraphobia” and “metaphysical bulimia”, referring to the need to move, to travel, to satisfy a lack of background [Guerra, 2018: LXXVII]. First were Pasolini and Moravia, with the numerous journeys they made in India and Africa during the '60s; later also Antonioni, who, after going to India, would be able to put an end to a period of creative silence. These trends and experiences are reflected in the novel written by Guerra in 1974, *I cento uccelli*, where he seems ready to make that journey which, the following year, will allow him to discover a new continent and a new metaphysical dimension, and which will be the first of a long series. The protagonist of *I cento uccelli*, a collector of noises, after having lost his wife who suffered from amnesia, leaves Rome and returns to his hometown, destroyed and abandoned after an earthquake. Only one inhabitant is left there, and he can be attributed to the category of madmen:

Un vecchio che vive ancora in mezzo alle macerie, l'unico che è restato. <...> Cominciò a maledire il mondo a quarant'anni. C'era una maledizione per tutti, per gli uomini e per le cose, per l'aria, per l'insalata, per l'acqua, per Mussolini, per Dio, e c'erano anche maledizioni contro se stesso. Urlava per le strade. Diceva: che gli venisse un colpo, che gli cadessero i denti, che morisse fulminato. <...> Poi stava chiuso in casa per un anno. Usciva soltanto di notte. Nessuno lo vedeva più. Poteva anche essere morto [Guerra, 2018: 1306].

The old man communicates with blasphemies and curses, writes incomprehensible words on the walls and performs meaningless actions such as remaining locked in his house for a whole year. At the same time though, this man becomes for the protagonist, who has lost everything, the only point of reference, "l'unico che è restato", the only one who seems capable of providing answers to his spiritual and existential questions. That is the same type of relationship which will originate between Domenico and Gorchakov in *Nostalghia*.

1974 marks the beginning of the third phase of Guerra's production. This is the moment in which the irruption of transcendence takes place, opening the door to a new aesthetic and narrative world, and, consequently, to a different type of fool. In all the works that Guerra created after 1975, when Russia started to become his second home, we can recognize the fruits born from the bond with the Russian world and oriental spirituality. According to Franco Brevini "è su questo sfondo che acquistano il loro pieno valore le figure di matti che popolano le sue poesie e i suoi romanzi" [Brevini, 1987: 270].

Between 1976, the year in which he met Tarkovsky, and 1982, the year that corresponds to the beginning of the video shootings of *Nostalghia*⁴, Guerra wrote *Il polverone* (1978), *I guardatori della luna* (1981) and *Il miele* (1981). These works appear particularly rich in details which are comparable to the screenplay of the movie, and demonstrate the evolution of the fool, who is no longer a village idiot, but becomes tied to a religious dimension. In the prosimetrum *Il polverone* there are no particular figures of fool characters, whilst composition number sixty, *I cancelli aperti*, deals with an important aspect of the theme of madness:

Una nuvola di farfalle volò nell'aria della piazza e il traffico si fermò perché tutti furono presi dalla meraviglia di quell'avvenimento. Qualcuno capì perfino che c'era un messaggio. E allora una voce di solidarietà spinse quella gente ad aprire i cancelli del manicomio per dare spazio e amore a quell'umanità che era chiusa là dentro [Guerra, 2018: 1487].

The author refers in poetic terms to the Basaglia law⁵, which was approved in Italy that same year. The social and human consequences brought

⁴ Throughout this period the two authors worked on the film's script, as attested in Tarkovsky's diaries [Tarkovsky, 2014].

⁵ Italian law approved in 1978 which reformed the psychiatric system in Italy.

by this new system would become part of Guerra's subsequent production, as can be noticed in *I guardatori della luna*, published in 1981. The story of the protagonist, Marco, is divided between Italy and Russia and is intertwined with the story of Carla, a young girl who spends a period of hospitalization in one of the last mental institutions remaining partially active. An old Russian Jew is also hospitalized with her. He is struck by "agitazione psicomotoria da nostalgia ereditaria" [Guerra, 2018: 1571] suffering due to the distance that separates him from Jerusalem and he is described as he tries to perform a solemn ritual:

Il tentativo del vecchio era quello di percorrere un numero di chilometri uguale alla distanza che separa Roma da Gerusalemme. Solo in questo modo avrebbe potuto assaporare l'illusione di trovarsi davanti al Muro del Pianto una volta completato il viaggio [Guerra, 2018: 1573].

He walks tirelessly along the corridor trying to travel the same distance that separates him from Jerusalem. He is the first real holy fool to appear in Guerra's work. He performs a solemn ritual which makes him similar to a *jurodivyj*: he is Russian, he is interned in a mental institution because allegedly mad. He is marginalized by society and performs an action that is incomprehensible to the eyes of normal people but deeply charged with spiritual meaning. When he dies, "il suo viso era rischiarato e tutto il corpo era così leggero che sembrava spinto da una corrente d'aria" [Guerra, 2018: 1579]: in fact, there are no earthly obstacles that can be opposed to eternal immortality. All these aspects are very close to those that represent the figure of Domenico in *Nostalghia*⁶, considered crazy by those who do not understand his words and his attempt to cross the pool with the burning candle in his hand. A ritual very similar to this is described in the dialect poem *Il miele*⁷, set once again in a semi-abandoned village:

La domenica passata ho dato un'occhiata al ponte/ e ho visto il figlio sciocco della Filomena/ che aveva in mano una candela accesa. / La fiamma era dritta e non la muoveva neanche la brezza/ che veniva giù lungo il fiume. Quale grazia domanderà? / Una vita normale o andare avanti con la sua testa matta? / Prima di arrivare alla croce del mulino/ che era lì a due passi, si è fermato e ha soffiato sul lume [Guerra, 2018: 199].

Filomena's foolish son is one of the few inhabitants left in the village where the poem's protagonist was born but only recently returned. Like Domenico, he tries to perform an absurd ritual with a burning candle in his hand. He is also considered a fool, a "testa matta", and he fails in his intent. While Domenico is stopped by the villagers who fear he wants to

⁶ As Tarkovsky's diaries attest, in 1981 the screenplay of *Nostalghia* was already at an advanced stage: Guerra writer and Guerra screenwriter therefore influenced each other [Tarkovsky, 2014].

⁷ Franca Mancinelli points out many thematic and narrative correspondences between *Il Miele* and *Nostalghia* in [Mancinelli, 2014].

commit suicide by drowning in the pool, Filomena's foolish son blows out the candle before reaching the end of the bridge. Natalia Ginzburg noted that the protagonist of the poem is himself a spiritual madman, as he has "una fisionomia assorta, lunatica, visionaria": much has changed compared to the author's juvenile production, and everything becomes more oriented towards spirituality [Ginzburg, 1981].

In the vast production of Guerra's third period many figures of poors, monks, eunuchs, hermits and sages continue to appear, and they can all be traced back to the character of the *jurodivyj*. These include Vincenzo in *Il libro delle chiese abbandonate* (1988), the protagonist of *L'orto di Eliseo* (1989), Lorenzo in *Il vecchio con il piede in oriente* (1990), Remone in *Una foglia contro i fulmini* (2006) and many others.

Conclusions

The character of the madman appears since Tonino Guerra's early works. In the first phase of his production, the fools belong to the dimension of the countryside and are characterized by the impossibility of communication with others. In all the works that the author produced after the mid-70's, when he came into contact with Russian culture and spirituality, a mystical dimension close to oriental spirituality is recognizable: this is how Guerra manages to nourish his "metaphysical bulimia". The fools become bearers of truth and close to the *jurodivyj* of the Russian tradition: in some cases, they are still connected to the countryside, but in other cases, they are hospitalized or interned in mental institutions. These characters, particularly based on the old Russian Jew in *I guardatori della luna* and Domenico in *Nostalgia*, are a path by which Guerra explored the holiness of the world through the oriental religious dimension.

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Кристина Маттеуччи

ОБРАЗ «ДУРАКА» В ТВОРЧЕСТВЕ ТОНИНО ГУЭРРЫ: ОТ ДЕРЕВЕНСКОГО СУМАСШЕДШЕГО К ЮРОДИВОМУ

Университет Урбино имени Карло Бо

В статье анализируется образ «дурака» в творчестве Тонино Гуэрры. Этот персонаж проходит путь от фигуры деревенского сумасшедшего, возникающего в раннем творчестве автора, до образа сумасшедшего пророка, близкого к юродивому русской традиции. Эта эволюция становится фундаментальной частью всего творчества Гуэрры после середины 1970-х, когда он приближается к русской культуре и духовности, пишет сценарий фильма «Ностальгия» с Андреем Тарковским. Творчество Гуэрры можно разделить на три фазы: раннее (1946–1956), римский период (1959–1974) и, наконец, последний период. В раннем творчестве можно распознать образ деревенского дурачка, связанный с послевоенным крестьянским миром: такие персонажи, как Сильвио и Джино в «Бу» (1946–1972). Дураки из «Амаркорда» (1973) Джудитио и Лео, взгляд которых всегда направлен вверх, в неземную высь, соответствует переходной фазе в творческой работе Гуэрры. Начиная с публикации «Стаи птиц» (1974) вторжение трансцендентного проявляется еще значительнее. «Польвероне» (1978), «Смотрящие на луну» (1981) и «Мед» (1981) имеют множество общих деталей со сценарием «Ностальгии» и демонстрируют эволюцию безумца, теперь близкого восточной духовности.

Ключевые слова: итальянская литература; Тонино Гуэрра; образ дурака; сценарий; Андрей Тарковский; «Ностальгия».

Об авторе: *Кристина Маттеуччи* — докторант второго курса докторантуры по сравнительным культурам Урбинского университета имени Карло Бо (e-mail: c.matteucci1@campus.uniurb.it).