

Patrizia de Rachewiltz's *My Taishan*: Confessions in the Pound Tradition

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Patrizia de Rachewiltz is part of an outstanding poetic lineage. Born in 1950 in Merano in the Italian Tyrol, to Boris de Rachewiltz, a famous Egyptologist and to Mary, herself an American writer and translator, she is the daughter of the violinist Olga Rudge and of Ezra Pound, the major poet of the twentieth century. An extremely gifted poet, Rachewiltz's poetry defies easy classification. She is the author of three books of poems, *My Taishan* (2007), *Dear Friends* (2008) and *Trespassing* (2011); as well as a series of translations into Italian and English. The aim of this paper is to place Rachewiltz's poetic legacy within the tradition of Anglo-American poetry and analyze the way in which she blends a powerful Romantic and Modernist heritage with postmodern postures and idioms. Rachewiltz's sensitivity is akin to that of Emily Dickinson, a poet very much enclosed in her own world. Her impressionistic and autobiographical style draws on Modernist poetics, which provide her with imagistic clarity. On the other hand, she adopts a confessional voice reminiscent of Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* (1959) or Plath's *Ariel* (1963) filtered by the "Deep Image" technique of Robert Bly and James Wright who strive towards the profound levels of the unconscious.

My Taishan is a book of memories, meditations and dreams, written in an imagist style adapted to a postmodern taste. In terms of form and structure, her poems are imagistic and haiku-like vignettes, elegies and dramatic monologues. Some of her poems have a meditative and

epistolary character, a tendency that culminates in her second book of poems, *Dear Friends* (2008). Rachewiltz's is a confessional and meditative poetry in which she advances sketches of her life and family. Many of her poems are autobiographical and offer snapshots of the complex psychological knots people usually find themselves in.

Like the Imagists, Patrizia de Rachewiltz cultivates the concrete image and exact annotation of impressions and immediate sensations. She tries to transcend the frontiers of the concrete objective reality by means of ellipsis, suggestive connotations, and a semantics impregnated by surrealist techniques that strive towards visionary expressions. The clarity, austerity, and hardness of her poems are in consonance with modernist aesthetics. Her syntax is composed of simple declarative phrases and basic nominal structures.

From the Surrealists or Deep Image poets, Rachewiltz learned to resort to dreams that enable her to access the unexplored regions of the psyche. Quite often, the initial scene starts out on a realistic tone:

A full-blown summer night and the web
is woven, a thin organza of peach-
colored thread
with cricket song still lingering.¹ ("Mercurial Moon" 14)

Yet soon the poem goes beyond the limits of reality and acquires the contours of an inner landscape, which maps psychic conflicts and visionary transformations of selfhood.

I will sow citrons, oranges and green,
flowers on my skin,
to call you back inside my wing.

I'll sit in the dark,
 my hands a white fan unfolding.
 I'll sit with heavy hair and vines around
 my throat. A shrouded shadow waiting. ("Mercurial Moon" 14)

Rachewiltz also draws on the visual aesthetics of the avant-garde. Beauty is to be found in small, humble, insignificant things usually taken for granted. Her ready-mades are ripostes to Stevens's jar or Williams's wheelbarrow, number and note. Such is the case of "The Yellow Chair" a poem that focuses on her and her cat Monday's favorite chair:

We like
 the cat and I
 the yellow chair
 in the corner
 where the light
 from the window
 falls easy
 to dust.
 We must not
 move it
 you and I
 so tenuous is my
 hold and
 your world. ("The Yellow Chair" 38)

Charged with symbolism, the chair is the portal of two lovers, the space “where I am lost/ and you save me,” a metaphor of an intangible happiness that can disappear with the same readiness with which “the light/ from the window/ falls easy/ to dust” (38). Rachewiltz’s ready-made acquires dream-like and visionary aspects and ends with a symbolic conclusion that brings the placid description of the yellow chair to a melancholic close:

Contemplating the spheres
 clear as water
 where I am lost
 and you save me. (38)

Following Pound’s precepts, she looks for that “precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective” (*A Memoir of Gaudier Brzeska* 89). In her poems, natural elements open and transform themselves in a constant metamorphosis, setting up signposts of the development of psychological processes, while the immediate experience of the concrete gives way to visionary moments and surrealistic sites:

The night
 has the face
 of the cat.
 Seeming to
 take little bites
 at imaginary
 tufts of grass. (“The Yellow Chair” 38)

Rachewiltz writes highly emotional autobiographic poems, which arise out of the fabric of her life, written in the first person. In this, she resembles the Confessional poets, who influenced by psychoanalytic theories, especially Freud's, explore the realities of their troubled selves and analyze their traumas and difficult family relationships in embarrassing and humiliating revelations.¹ Rachewiltz's poems also explore psychological conflicts and document important moments of her personal life – love, marriage, pregnancy, motherhood, unfaithfulness – as well as family memories. They deal with grief and traumatic experiences of loss, and focus on the traumas and wounds of selfhood. She embraces a poetics of immediacy of presence and authenticity in which poetic authority is not located in literary tradition but in the reality of the lived moment. Her poetry verifies what Paul de Man calls the general appeal of modernity to “break out of literature toward the reality of the moment” (162).

In a certain sense *My Taishan* (2007) is the feminine counterpart of Lowell's *Life Studies* (1959), the collection that marks a turning point in postwar literature. In his “studies,” Lowell sketches a family portrait which simultaneously reflects the decadence of modern civilization. *My Taishan* also draws the picture of a family album and makes painful self-exposures of the poet's rejections and broken love relationships.

Rachewiltz's poetic voice is characterized by intimate lyricism. Her main theme is the confrontation between reality and myth. “Your mind and you are our Sargasso Sea,” wrote Pound in “Portrait d'une femme” (*Personae* 57), a poem in which he advanced a Jamesian portrait of a woman who embodies the devitalized culture of his time. Rachewiltz uses another metaphor “This is spring, this is day, this wondrous/ Salzburg of the mind.” (“Like Ghosts” 66) in order to represent a moment of inner plenitude. While Pound uses the Sargasso simile as a

¹ On Confessional poetry see especially, Diane Wood Middlebrook “What Was Confessional Poetry?” 632-649; and James Breslin “Poetry” 1079-1100.

critique of the enervated culture of his time, her disclosures map the territory of personal and intimate confession.

Rachewiltz's vivid reminiscences are brushstrokes that recompose the *durée réelle* of important chapters in literary history which depict the life of her grandparents and parents: Ezra Pound, his lifelong companion, Olga Rudge, and their daughter Mary. Against this literary backdrop, Rachewiltz ascends her own mount Taishan. While doing so, she registers her own emotional and poetic struggle in attaining the supreme moment of inner reconciliation and beauty.

Autobiographical Sketches

Rachewiltz's autobiographical poems are the expression of visionary imagination, different from Lowell or Berryman's factual realism. She belongs to the tradition of the mythic poetic language of Plath and Roethke. Like them, she retreats into her private self in order to construe a shorthand of visionary poetics. Unlike them, she does not write out of concerns with the social world, or out of anger at issues of injustice in areas of gender, class or race. If the Confessionals project the inner reality on a public canvas, Rachewiltz does quite the opposite and paints the inner texture of moments that now belong to literary history.

Quite a large number of poems refer to important moments in the poet's life. Love poems are the most frequent. "The Summer of White Roses" evokes her marriage with Pim de Vroom on July 7, 1977 in Brunnenburg. The setting is surrealistic yet renders Vroom's interest in plant life photography:

Under a hard green leaf with all
the years ahead I crawled into

your caterpillar world of
 scattered altars laid on
 moss and earth. (22)

Her reminiscences are filtered by indirection and literary allusions. The title itself is an image of the fullness of love perfected in purity, as well as the epigraph “*So slow is the bride's white rose to open and/ the corn flowers have grown while we sleep*” which alludes to two lines from two different Cantos of Pound’s: “*so slow is the rose to open*” (106/772) and “*The azalea is grown while we sleep*” (107/776). Pound refers to an epiphanic moment propitiated by the dark mysterious elusive eyes of a woman associated by analogy with various goddesses, whose power transforms the surroundings (Flory 265). Rachewiltz changes and re-adapts Pound’s lines to her present situation. The rose becomes “the bride’s rose,” a reference to the resurgence of light and beauty out of darkness which Pound linked to the vision of the beloved lady, Coré and Demeter. This reference indicates the mythical way in which she envisioned her marital union. The cornflowers also introduce a biographical element, true to the big bouquet, which the poet picked with some friends the day before her marriage. Here the substitution of the azaleas for “cornflowers” is more appropriate in the Greek mythological context. However, in the midst of general rejoicing – “*Into a lovelier world we danced/ with happy hands and golden/ weeds [...] / you made me bride I/ made you rose*” – the bride’s song turns into a “*song of broken sound,*” a presentiment of the transitoriness of her happiness, and premonition of her future separation: “*my/ throat was swollen full of/ song a broken sound/ like weeping*” (22).

Many of the poems celebrate an idealized, romantic love. “A Mountain Man” and “A Mountain Now” are cases in point, both represent the prototype of the romantic lover uncorrupted by civilization, who lives in the midst of nature, immersed in the primordial

innocence of a pre-lapsarian world. "Letter from a Refuge," a pastoral poem, offers a postmodern version of Philemon and Baucis, epitome of faithful love. "In a Robe of Rays," the poet presents an ideal couple, "Elysian Lovers." Hallowed by light, these "two figures in the nature of the sun" declare their love in utterly Keatsian fashion: "you are/ a thing of beauty" (84), where beauty is conceived as something "returning from a deeper well" (84). "We Are" evokes another ideal love relationship in which giving is not possessing, the two lovers encounter the long yearned unity of being that puts an end to the dichotomy of I and you, in the fusion of reality and its reflection.

However, despite these luminous examples the experience of love is mostly traumatic. Men greet the poetic persona "with swords and a heart/ full of tragedy" (50). The syntax of love is construed as "a weakness/ of heart not tenderness," "broken skin" and "bruised shreds of dawn" (50). In Rachewiltz's poems, "the angel of doom" torments the lovers "with its black wing at each dusk" (106). They are driven by "a lure" to heal "a hurt of hunger and love" (106), since love is rarely requited, but experienced as a "hunger" that is hungered for. Lovers are "butterfl[ies] with mended wings" (68), ghosts or "shrouded shadows" (16) who have lost their vitality in unending disputes, and pry "the old grief open" (66). They live out scripts of ancient tragedies driven by obscure forces. He is "mercurial/ the you I love the least" (14), prone to sudden capricious and ominous moods. The disputes between the lovers turn into "shrieks/ leave holes/ in the air,/ pellets of a hard substance" (40).

Quite frequently, fulfilled love is merely an idealized projection and belongs to the past, to the generation of parents and grandparents. Most often, the lyric persona is crippled by a yearning that is never responded to, and appears as an ordinary woman given to domestic routine "I rub my back, I rub/ the table clean of crumbs and circled smudges" ("The Wanting" 40). She

is tied to “the quiet dark craters of old habits” (40). In this she resembles Sylvia Plath’s heroine of the bee cycle poems characterized as one of the many anonymous faceless workers doomed to boredom of mechanical work:

I stand in a column

Of winged, unmiraculous women,

Honey-drudgers.

I am no drudge

Though for years I have eaten dust

And dried plates with my dense hair (“Stings” 214)

Rachewiltz’s persona is afraid that, “heavy with giving,” she will go to pieces “part of me will get lost on the cold floor,/ and shreds of me found in corners” (40). Love is more often than not, an open wound, an addiction, an enslavement:

I need a broom shaped for me, the famished I,

to cut myself free from my addiction:

this piercing black tattoo – this wanting

wanting you. (40)

Love is destroyed by “A death moth grown beside you– / obstinate. The color of mud” (58). Yet, as in Plath, the enthralled self can always free herself from the bonds of imprisonment, and emerges renewed like a baby, a bird’s cry, the essence of light:

I wake with the cry of a newly born.

As the bird’s love song springs

right at me

it gathers the light about it. (“The Light About it” 50)

The sacramental promise of ‘death do us part,’ gives way to “scream-less mouth dribbling platitudes/ cornered between the You and the I—” (58), while emotional ties solidify into “the tight-laced bondage” and bring about “a numbness broken, open” (“Lead On” 58).

In many ways, Rachewiltz shares with Lowell a sense of inner defeat and disaffection. Like him, she feels also “frizzled, stale and small” (“Home after Three Months Away” 84). Both court visions of inner and outer worlds on the verge of breakups or breakdowns, and plunge into their inner chaos, yet her tone is never tinged by philosophical nihilism or sarcasm.

“Writing Paradise” while Drawing a Family Album

The poem that gives the title to this collection, “My Taishan” refers to one of the sacred five mountains of China, associated with death and rebirth, the correlate of Dante’s Mt Purgatory, the metaphor for the tribulations of life. Unlike Pound who always refers to an imaginary Taishan, Rachewiltz visited the Chinese sacred mountain in 1999. The title points to Pound’s Mt Taishan, first mentioned in *The Pisan Cantos* at a time when he was imprisoned in a cage at DTC in Pisa in 1945. Looking towards the hills from the prison camp he imagined seeing the holy mountain. Pound’s technique consists of fusing myth and reality, and just as his characters are projected on mythical or legendary figures, so, the mountain of Pisa merges with Mount Taishan, the sacred place, the place of the heart and the spirit towards which converge purgatory and paradise: “from the death cells in sight of Mt. Taishan@Pisa” (74/447).

If Pound’s Mt. Taishan is invested with a larger cultural dimension, for Rachewiltz it represents a very intimate experience. The tribulations of climbing this mountain refer to the difficulties of attaining love. “My Taishan” stages the emotional tension of a couple doomed to

misunderstanding “I feel the knife of worship stab my tongue” for which “passion” is “still-born” (24). For her, Mount Tai is “a place of force” (24), the site of psychological conflicts and tensions that emerge from the unknown abyss of the self. Her ascent is marked by “pegs too deep to uproot” gauging “[t]he tight snobbery between us” (24). These lines remind us of Sylvia Plath’s “Rabbit Catcher,” a poem in which hunting becomes the metaphor for love which unfolds in a similar landscape, also “place of force,” (Plath 193) full of chasms, and “hollow[s],” “snares” “zeros, shutting on nothing”:

And we, too, had a relationship—
Tight wire between us,
Pegs too deep to uproot, and a mind like a ring
Sliding shut on some quick thing,
The constriction killing me also. (Plath 194)

The ascent of Taishan is not a direct route to paradise or light, but a pilgrimage across the void of loneliness beset by suffering and rites of passage. The lyrical I advances across nature and penetrates into a realm in which human traces have disappeared and are conducive as in a typical Plathian landscape – as in “Hardcastle Crags,” “Blackberrying,” or “Sheep in Fog” – to sites of total alterity where “[o]f people the air only/ Remembers a few odd syllables” (“Wuthering Heights” 168). Thus, as in Plath’s verse, Rachewiltz’s journey advances towards heights and depths that lead to categories of otherness: a space in which “black stones hold[ing] vigil, unconsumed” while “glacier winds” make human traces disappear. Yet, the light “at the end of the tunnel” (24) remains a faint elusive promise.

Paradise is a central motif in *My Taishan*. Yet what does paradise mean for Rachewiltz? It appears in three poems “Where Butterflies Go,” “My Grandmother’s Garden” and “Summer

1958.” The notion is linked to the quest of Dante and Pound, two poets who tried “to write paradise.” For Pound, paradise reveals itself in works of kindness, love and moments of beauty lost in time which have to be retrieved from oblivion. Impregnated by justice, ethics and wisdom, they have to be relived and restored for the benefit of an individual, a community and a civilization. In *My Taishan*, paradise has a more existential and immediate meaning. It translates in moments of grace and love lived in the plenitude of the other. Ultimate happiness can be found in an existential encounter that dissolves distance and disaffection.

The motif of paradise is introduced in the first poem, “Where Butterflies Go”, in which the lyrical “I” compares herself with a butterfly: “you/ have no need of paradise/ whereas I fear the knowing it” (10). Rachewiltz begins the poem with a close observation of a butterfly whose fragility, silence and flight lead her to set up certain parallels with her own destiny. These comparisons highlight the inherent limitations of the human condition. Unlike her, the butterfly is free of anguish and anxiety (For it “the sky/ is not the cradle for your sigh”) while it knows only “the quiet in the heart,/ the trembling and the triumph.” It bathes in “moon-light” free of distress: “Of mind gone wild you cannot know” since “Dark things are not for you” (10). It sings in “secrecy ... as lovers do” and it is linked to the metaphysics of light: “you lead me to your secrets/ by way of light” (10). Rachewiltz establishes a similar comparison between herself and the butterfly as Frost did in “After Apple-picking,” between the self’s troubled sleep and the unproblematic sleep of a woodchuck, an animal which lives integrated in the rhythms of nature, free from anguish. Rachewiltz’s poem shares Frost’s oblique orientation “[t]oward heaven” (Frost 68). Ignorant of the meaning of time and destiny, the butterfly perceives the fall as “The first leaf is the tale of leaves,/ a flutter of yellow and peacock blue,/ an easy passion magnified” (10). The butterfly is its “own festivity” (12). Symbol of the soul and of metamorphosis, the

butterfly partakes of a dual condition, it is material yet intangible, its flight defeats sorrow and pain, while it discloses the secrets of the terrible lightness of being: “unbearably light you carry our own/ bodiless plight” (12). The lyric persona aspires to attain the exemplary condition of the butterfly, shares in its cycles of becoming, metamorphosis and the “triumph” of light over notions of the fall.

A central poem in the collection, “Summer 1958”, is Rachewiltz’s *rite de passage* into the hardships of life. The poem captures the moment of Ezra Pound’s arrival at Brunnenburg, after thirteen years of imprisonment in St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, D.C.. This is how Noel Stock describes Pound’s return on July 18, 1958 to Italy: “On the path which descends from Brunnenburg Castle he met, for the first time, his grandchildren – Walter, aged eleven, and Patrizia, aged eight; Walter was so excited after the years of waiting that he burst into tears as his grandfather approached.” Stock does not mention Patrizia’s reaction of whom he says later that at the request of her grandfather she fulfilled the task of writing out the menu before each meal decorating the list with little drawings (450-51). “Summer 1958” is a confession of her silent experience of his homecoming. For Patrizia, born like her brother during Pound’s imprisonment, her grandfather had become a mythical figure more powerful than reality itself:

I was eight and he was coming.
A giant with large wings.
My plaits felt tight as ropes
hauling a ship into a safe harbor. (42)

To the obedient little girl with braids “tight as ropes,” reminiscent of Baudelaire’s “Le beau navire,”² Pound appears like a winged and unattainable colossus. The distance between reality and legend seems overwhelming. The child’s wonder and emotion are also ours. Through the

eyes of the eight year old, we, too, perceive him as a godlike figure. The great poet is “so tall, so steep so, out of proportion.” His presence is overbearing. Timid and fearful, the child “knelt and made the sign.” In myths being in the vicinity of the divine is marked by some sort of disaster, since the divine is too powerful for human beings to bear. Overawed, the child remains paralyzed unable to respond to her mythic grandfather. Yet the encounter with this mythical figure brings about the awareness of another order. The child discovers not the power, but the human vulnerability of the colossus:

I did not know then that even giants
 have fears and suffer if put in a cage
 like a beast. (42)

Although the poet prophet “mesmerized” the children “with his voice” while reciting his poems, his gigantic figure increases the sense of vulnerability, fragility and solitude of the self. Some years later she sees the colossus as an old and tired man, broken on the Venezian Canale, immersed in “Silence,/ the ultimate cry for mercy” (44).

Besides this awareness that the high and the low share the same common fate of human vulnerability, the poetic persona reaches an awareness of an aesthetic order: Pound’s poetry is a song that makes words eternal, conceived along the lines of Rilke’s “Gesang ist Dasein.” His poetic quest is a yearning towards the Ultimate, the correlate of the *Maiastra*, the magical bird of the Romanian sculptor, Brancusi, whom Pound admired and with whom he had had a close friendship:

Words sprung from there made eternal
 as Brancusi’s bird. Levitated and bent
 as hot iron. A life of it. (42)

Brancusi's bird, the very essence of the soul's aspiration for transcendence and spirituality, is the epitome of Rachewiltz's animal world which abounds in variety of birds.

In "Summer 1958", attaining paradise would have meant for the speaker to have been able to overcome her own paralyzing timidity by holding the hand of the broken poet so as to bridge the void that separates a pitiful reality from the unattainable grandeur of myth:

If then I did not take his hand in mine
I close my eyes and know where there is
PARADISO.

And Paradise is finally attained, however briefly, in "Borobudur," the second to last poem of the collection, which celebrates an ecstatic moment of plenitude at the sight of a Buddha statue in a Indonesian temple.

For one
beautiful day
there had been peace³
and a thousand years
in a wink.⁴

Both *Life Studies* and *My Taishan* are family albums. Yet the stories they tell are completely different. Rachewiltz's parental figures are models she recreates with love and admiration. Her memories are not a daughter's bitter indictments of her parents, but rather exercises of love.

The closest she comes to Lowell's or Plath's Freudian family sketches and scathing tone is in "My Grandmother's Garden" which evokes memories of Olga Rudge, the poet's grandmother. She is another mythical character who intimidates the little girl with the

overbearing superiority of legend. Once more, the encounter with myth produces suffering and loneliness. Her grandmother's haughtiness places her so out of reach that in her presence, the child's "name falls open like a desert flower/ and withers, inadvertently" (18). Left in her care, the "hungry child, hid bread/ in the cracks of the garden wall" (18). The grandmother's blue veins match the fragile china and the art of growing roses. Hunger is the vital cry of the child that contrasts with the aesthetic preoccupations of her grandmother whose sense of propriety and amusement ("a fashionable hat," "the gondola ride") is more important than life's basic needs. Her aesthetic sense prevails over the demands of life. She creates a sinister shadow reminiscent of the paintings of de Chirico's *Disquieting Muses* present also in Plath's poem with the same name. Like Plath, Rachewiltz draws on the same visual images in her description of family dynamics. The grandmother takes on the role of a Fate, an ill godmother, one of the Moirai, who in folklore and legends was not invited to the child's christening – Olga Rudge did not attend her granddaughter's wedding –, and she casts a dark spell on the child's destiny, dooming her: "to feel a stronger prison than my darker self" (20). She covers the girl's "head with/ a golden net" (18) as if wanting to increase her suffering, and throws a dark shadow on her honeymoon, a prelude of a lost paradise "[i]f paradise is to be here it will have to/ include both me and her" (20).

Rachewiltz's family story is more often than not, a luminous one. Mary de Rachewiltz, the poet's mother, emerges as an Antigone who has lived *in illo tempore* in the times of the heroes, "the green of time" (46), and who repeats the script of an ancient tragedy. She preserves the memories of "the dear poet" (48), a bastion against the vicissitudes of fate and oblivion.

A vastness of sky in your eyes,
an infinite

succession of antique verses

renew themselves

in your soul, wrapped with care

by heedless winds

and the green of time. ("Quieter Again" 46-48)

Like Plath, Rachewiltz also draws on the vocabulary of antique tragedy and statuary when she evokes family relationships. "A vastness of sky in your eyes" and "the "succession of antique verses" recall Plath's oracular evocations of her father "an oracle/ Mouthpiece of the dead" through "the weedy acres of your brow," "the immense skull-plates" and "the bald, white tumuli of your eyes" in "The Colossus" (Plath 129). However, Rachewiltz's scenarios lack Plath's Freudian vengeance and Oedipal conflicts. She embodies a different story: that of love and fidelity that defeat death.

Associated with nature, "the valley," "the bird," "the cherry sap," "the cross/ of roses," and "the river" (46-48), the mother is a luminous figure. Her filial love permeates the landscape. She confronts "the solid walls" of time and broken lives. Her faithful reminiscences of those who are no longer there animate the empty space. Mary is the quintessence of devotion and loyalty. Through her love and constancy, the presence of "the deer poet" is brought back to life in the melancholy of summer dreams. She recreates his figure in a return "to the womb where the slow/ river speaks of the dear poet" (48). Her memory restores the past and makes possible a new beginning expressed aphorisms reminiscent of Frostian wisdom: "the strength of remembering/ is in starting all over" (48).

Rachewiltz's poems present a dense intertextuality with many modernist texts, Frost, Eliot, and Stevens, and allude to key ideas and motifs of Pound's *Cantos*. "The Blackbird's Feast," another poem which centers on the poet's mother, is a case in point. Rachewiltz's poem shares Stevens's suggestive figurative language about the workings of the imagination in his "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" while adopting the confessional style of family memoirs. Her poem is not composed of loose fragments as Stevens's, yet it works with the same hard imagistic images. Her blackbird maintains its single, univocal identity, yet it also changes from moment to moment, as the sunshine varies, and the lyric voice's feelings and memory change, while sound modulates into different tones. In Stevens's poem, the blackbird does not have a constant signification but a constant function: it shows what a poetic figure suggests to the imagination, and it orders and illuminates reality by unearthing its hidden relations. In Rachewiltz's poem, the blackbird is a vortex of emotional and imaginative meanings, intriguing because of its enigmatic personal meaning, and equally abstracted from a larger context with no referential language and little common ground between the speaker and the reader.

It matters not
 that all we say is made of sound, as on water on a
 windy day. And that there's but the moment,
 gone, swift as shadows
 in our eyes.

Something returning from a deeper well,
 the far-gone sighs, the long gone
 dead.

Hard rock,

a solid glitter of purple memories,

a blooming glow of leaf-green fate. (“The Blackbird's Feast” 108)

The blackbird becomes a possible bringer of reconciliation: its flight forwards towards the future encompasses the return to the past and the evanescence of the present. Meanwhile its song points to that elusive “changing essence” that “catches our own/ in the freshness/ of the unchanging sound” (108). The blackbird appears in Mary’s garden, who kept a little vineyard in order to feed with its fruits the birds of the sky. The blackbird sits on a “fragile bough [which] bends but does not break” (108). Words dissolve into sound and evanescent realities as if written on the changing surface of water in a moment that turns ephemeral. Yet, time’s constant flight forwards is countered by a return: “Something returning from a deeper well,/ the far-gone sighs, the long gone/ dead” (108). Rachewiltz also strives to attain Eliot’s “still moment,” the intersection of the timeless with time. Time’s forgotten realities remain “carved/ in a beam of stone” (108). There, in Mary’s garden, near the cypress, symbol of the dead, “the past [is] a music gone” (108). The line echoes Eliot’s “The future is a faded song, a Royal Rose or a lavender spray/ Of wistful regret for those who are not here to regret” (“Dry Salvages” III: 134). Yet, although the past is as “swift as shadows/ in our eyes,” it can eschew the irreversible advance of time:

Where the beginning

is gay

and green and time as all time's work

will keep it

carved

in the beam of stone. (108-10)

Many of Rachewiltz's verses can be read as elegies, written for or about friends, lovers, and family. Among them, "For Jas" is about the poet James Laughlin (1914-1997), and "River End" an elegy that evokes a pastoral world that is long gone and the kindness and human decency of Johana and Jakob Marcher, in whose care, Mary de Rachewiltz, grew up as a child in the little village of Gais.

In certain ways, Rachewiltz enriches the conventions of the elegy which she turns into a kind of dramatic monologue of ghosts and living steeped in the Eliotian notion of time, which reminds us that: "We die with the dying:/ See they depart, and we go with them. /We are born with the dead:/ See they return, and bring us with them" (Eliot, "Little Gidding" V: 144). In Rachewiltz's elegies, the dead make imagined confessions of the love they profess for the living. "Beloved" is an elegy in which Pound expresses his love for his daughter, Mary, the "you" to whom the poem is addressed. The poetic persona addresses Mary while voicing the feelings of her dead father. The poem is set in the Piazza San Marco, where Pound spent the last years of his life. The Piazza is covered by thick mist, an element that sets the tone of a ghostly atmosphere which propitiates the comeback of the departed:

He may be seated on the steps
in the sun,
watching you on a calmest day. (60)

The first line evokes Pound's beginning of Canto 3: "I sat on the Dogana's steps" (3/11). The style recalls the detached and direct tone of the imagists who avoid sentimental formulations, and the modernists' cultivation of objective correlatives and technique of impersonality. In modernist fashion, there is no I in the poem, and feelings are projected onto the external scene, Venice, the sea, and the black the swans:

Pearl water world where the black swans
 between moving poles gently
 sparkle his name
 beneath the algae and the shell. Deep set
 eyes on stone
 are done with weeping. Now dolphin's eyes. (60)

The intensity of suffering brought about by the absence of the father is so vivid that the lyric I transforms his return into a palpable possibility. Yet the suffering is projected in modernist fashion on the surroundings: the “pearl water world,” “the pole” and the “black swans” which “sparkle his name/ beneath the algae and the shell” (60) conjure him and make him present. Even the tears proceed from “deep set eyes on stone,” a cubistic image in which the fragmented eyes turn into “dolphin's eyes,” a symbolic animal of salvation. Filial and paternal love is fused in this elegy in which presence and absence are reconciled. The power of love makes the ghosts of the past return into the light of day, as in Eliot or Baudelaire's misty cities.

Ezra Pound and Olga Rudge project their passion on the turbulent history of the twentieth century. “Winter's mercy” is a poem that expresses her unswerving love for Pound, a passion that defeats the desolation of winter, his absence and death. In the poem, the woman's love triumphs over fear, “the reality of faith seems to conquer/ all fear” (96). The winter landscape, a metaphor of the poet's death and absence, is galvanized by the mysterious life giving force of love which “lights up the empty side/ of darkness” and makes the sky expand “so much bolder” until a different “sky [that] speaks of the soul.” It is then that “all the imagined is.” Winter acquires mythico-religious connotations, it does not mark an absolute end, but makes possible a

new beginning. Thus, the skeletons buried “under hard soil” “will bloom in the spring / Into small hands of joy” (96). It was in the winter of his life, that Pound returned back to Olga Rudge.

“M’amour” is another poem related to Pound’s passion for a woman whose love is “the solidity and down” (98). Bathed in moonlight, she is depicted sitting at the window, a liminal space that brings together opposite states, the inner and the outer, the past and the present. A luminous ethereal figure made “beautiful” by the “eerie light,” she takes on the destiny of the moon which “drag[s] her shadow” while “her hands unfold/ white lilies in a silver beam,” the quintessence of love and femininity. Like the moon, which vanishes only to reappear, the woman’s love turns into an inexhaustible fountain. The poem speaks of “the onion-skinned soul [that] sings and stings/ its way out.” The musical reference is reinforced by “[t]he bow that bends the moon” and which creates “the silver-sharp sound,” an allusion to Olga Rudge’s violin. Her evocation is inextricably linked to love, art and beauty that defeat death and time.

[. . .] she holds to that thought
 that can't dissolve, neither in distance
 nor water or air –

 nor in the word made of substance and
 one single breath – m’amour – my love. (98)

Rachewiltz’s title “M’amour” alludes to Pound’s “Notes for CANTO CXVII et seq.” from *Drafts and Fragments* in which Pound, in a sad assessment of his life, also decries the loss of his love:

“M’amour, m’amour
 what do I love and
 where are you?

That I lost my center
 fighting the world (822)

In Rachewiltz's interpretation, "m'amour" refers to Olga Rudge,⁵ which appears to be confirmed by Pound's last lines of the Cantos, "Fragment (1966)" written in praise of her.

Stylistically, Rachewiltz, together with poets like Sylvia Plath or Theodore Roethke, draws on a mythic visionary style. She recreates characters by little details through symbolic or metonymic means, a technique which resembles Lowell's. She uses objective correlatives and produces personages through a net of images, incidents, surrounding objects and linguistic turns, idiosyncrasies that evoke a person's life: her mother by a flowering garden; her grandmother by her violin, eyes of a cat or the veins of a hand; Ezra Pound picking at his old hands; James Laughlin, by the trouser pockets burnt by his burning pipe. She has the gift of capturing her *dramatis personae* in characteristic poses and effigies of unforgettable moments.

Rachewiltz's revelations are oblique, veiled, without the typical Confessional exhibitionism and the breaking of shocking taboos. She achieves detachment by embodying emotions into carefully chosen surrealistic and imagistic projections. Poetry for her is a way of freeing herself of an inner tension, a way of gaining distance by transposing life into lyric utterance. It is basically a form of catharsis by which she puts an end to inner torment.

Notes

¹ Patrizia de Rachewiltz. *My Taishan*. Rimini: Raffaelli Editore, 2007. All references send to this edition. There is also a Spanish bilingual edition *Mi Taishan*. Orense: Ediciones Linteo 2014. Translated by Antonio Colinas and Viorica Patea. Rachewiltz never capitalizes the titles of the poems, however, I have done so as to distinguish them from verse quotations.

² “Tu fais l’effet d’un beau vaisseau qui prend le large,/ Chargé de toile, et va roulant/ Suivant un rythme doux, et paresseux, et lent.” (“you seem to be/ A lovely two mast vessel putting out to sea, / Full sail, and swaying to and fro,/ Obedient to a rhythm that is sweet and slow.”) “Le beau navire” (“This Beautiful Boat”), 104-15.

³ An allusion to Pound’s Canto 117 et seq./821.

⁴ From Pound’s Canto 114/813.

⁵ J. J. Wilhelm corroborates that Pound may be referring to Olga Rudge in this passage, see *Ezra Pound The Tragic Years 1925-1972*, 355.

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