

**FRANCESCO BENOZZO,**  
*The Ridge and the Song:  
Sailing the Archipelago of  
Poetry*, Udine, Forum 2022,  
pp. 32



**FRANCESCO BENOZZO**  
(ed.), *Poeti della marea: Canti  
bardici gallesi dal VI al X  
secolo*, Udine, Forum 2022,  
pp. 227



«*Homo Poeta* preceded *Homo Loquens*. We were poets before being able to speak.» In his short book *The Ridge and the Song*, Francesco Benozzo delves into the origins of poetry, into the «sacred rainbow of primeval songs sung for millions of years.» In other words, he reaches back towards its pre-linguistic origins that «worked below the level of the pre-conscious mind», activating neurotransmitters whereby the self was encouraged to connect with the other, as argued by Brunella Antomarini in her *La preistoria acu-*

*stica della poesia* (Torino, Aragno 2013). In a visionary, evocative style, Benozzo gives life to a manifesto which is indebted to Percy Bysshe Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* (1821), especially when he seems to share the Romantic poet's urge to envision the function of poetry for the future, «the indispensable awakening of poetry through these challenging and anaemic times.» In order to achieve this goal, Benozzo argues for the urgent need not to reconstruct the roots of the primeval song, but to «awaken it, reactivate it, and reproduce its first demiurgical quality» – echoing Shelley's famous dictum «the plant must spring again from its seed» when he reflected on poetical translation.

*Poeti della marea* may be seen as a concrete example of this hoped-for reactivation. Here Benozzo writes less as a shaman and more as a scholar when he introduces and translates shaman-like poets. Compared to *The Ridge and the Song*, this book deals with a later age: it collects a series of poems by Welsh bards from the Early Middle Ages in a precious double-text edition (Old Welsh and Italian). Professional custodians of

dynastic genealogies and war epics, these masters of orality opened up visions of the human spirit in their landscape poetry: «Luminosa la cima della scogliera nel crepuscolo; / ogni persona saggia sarà onorata. / L'uomo onesto accoglie chi soffre. // Luminose le cime dei salici, il pesce vivace dentro il lago; / il vento fischia sulle punte dei rami; / la natura consente di apprendere.» This symbiosis between nature and humans is exalted in the poems where the singing voice narrates his experience of metamorphosis: «fui uno scudo in battaglia, / fui una corda nell'arpa, / nascosto per nove anni / nella schiuma dell'onda.» There are also lines where these voices of wisdom express glimpses of the divine: «Principio duraturo! / Sei tu che intessi / la ragnatela del mondo:

/ ogni uomo ti teme, / tu passi senza catene. / Egli sale molto in alto / e scende verso l'oceano, / e grida con violenza / trascinando boati, / quando percuote le spiagge. / Dopo di lui, ancora lui.»

The distant age when these poets lived, their language and their culture are contextualized in detail by the author; the book also includes commentaries by Antonella Riem Natale and Gianni Scalia. While resulting from Benozzo's academic and linguistic expertise in Romance Philology and Linguistics at the University of Bologna, though, *Poeti della marea* is quite exceptional as a scholarly book: it includes a CD where Benozzo (who is also a poet and a musician) re-interprets some of the texts from the collection, singing and playing the music he wrote thanks

to his bardic harp and to the accompaniment of a group of musicians. No better way to get a feel of such an ancient art. Here Benozzo shows his original vision to the full, going well beyond the established boundaries of poetry criticism as we usually know it. And here too, as he does in *The Ridge and the Song*, he emphasizes the potential for reawakening that poetry might represent: «L'attualità dei bardi gallesi [...] è meno culturale che civile. Una dissidenza poetica permanente, legata ai grandi paesaggi più che ai branchi umani. Poche voci solitarie che continuano a raccontare il vento delle maree e il destino di uomini e donne non rassegnati a subire le ingiustizie del mondo.»

(Pietro Deandrea)