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Book Review: "Mini-Gems of Scholarship"—Toma Sava's Edition of Henry Neville's *The Isle of Pines*

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Once upon another time, probably last year, I came across an edition of Francis Godwin's *The Man in the Moone*, an early 17th-century text. The edition pleasantly surprised me with its accuracy, the dedication of its editor, and his decision to promote this almost-forgotten text to 21st-century readers. When questioning his option, I found out that there had already been a previous enterprise, another "mini-gem of scholarship" and edition, but of a late 17th-century text, Henry Neville's *The Isle of Pines*. Another *fine translation & editing*, which proved that scholars in English studies could find, without major difficulties, unexpected sources for polishing their research skills and challenge, at the same time, the critical killing instinct of their peers.

Unlike *The Man in the Moone*, whose author was an Anglican bishop, *The Isle of Pines* was written by a politician. And unlike its science-fiction predecessor, it is a Utopian narrative, and an Arcadian fiction, and a Robinsonade anticipating Defoe. Still, just like *The Man in the Moone*, Henry Neville's book is a text hanging on, or at least pretending to hang on, to another text. Thus, an intertext that took turns, along the centuries, just like *The Man in the Moone*, being either *gone, but not forgotten* or *forgotten, but not gone*. The truth was that—whenever these texts found a devoted editor and, as a consequence, a new readership—both books increased their initial impact. Which, somehow, accounts for Toma Sava's decision to lovingly approach them and introduce them to academic readers (at least).

Published in 1668, *The Isle of Pines* raised controversy from the very beginning because of the (presupposed) narrator's frankness in depicting aspects of the love life of five cast-aways, a man and four women, on a paradisiacal island somewhere along the coast of India.

Although it did not match the morals of the Puritans—actually, Henry Neville was one of Oliver Cromwell's opponents—it did match the slight licentiousness of some of the literary works of the time. Centuries later, in our time, it came to be perceived as a reversed utopia, a *pornotopia* more exactly, for imagining a patriarchal society in which women were used merely as reproductive tools and sexually (even) discriminated against on account of racial traits. So, the warning placed by the editor at the beginning of his introduction, "Caveat emptor" (Sava 2019, p. 5) or "let the buyer beware," may be entirely justified.

Toma Sava covered plenty, or most, of these critical opinions, which is one of the strengths of his almost forty-page introduction and of the footnotes in the translated text. He resorted to sources on various and divergent/convergent issues, such as popular works, oblivion, castaways, utopia, eroticism, sexual freedom, patriarchal society, intertextuality, reader response, and, last but not least, the different editions of Henry Neville's work. Multiple lenses—be them from the second decade of the 20th-century, like W. C. Ford's edition, or from one hundred years later, John Schecker's edition—can only be of help in establishing the proper status of this 17th-century literary curiosity: "is it a utopia, a farce, a pamphlet, a robinsonade, or all these together?" (Sava 2019, p. 23).

Interestingly, besides questioning the literary identity and the avatars of *The Isle of Pines*' editions, this one places in the same volume large portions of another 17th-century work, Hans von Grimmelshausen's picaresque novel *Simplicius Simplicissimus*. The German author published his masterpiece in two installments, the first five "books" in 1668, and a *Continuatio* a year later. It is this *Continuatio* that Toma Sava has chosen to illustrate the effect that *The Isle of Pines* had on its contemporaries, as Grimmelshausen's story described a character totally opposite to Neville's protagonist, although living in a very similar location. Grimmelshausen must have been aware of the English author's little fantasy, but here temptation is rejected and, instead of a patriarch indulging in sexual promiscuity, we find a repentant hermit, fiercely protecting his spiritual condition, while the paradisiacal island becomes a place for meditation and reconnecting with divinity.

In this respect, considerations from a comparative perspective are made in the last part of the introduction, but I think readers would have also benefited from such considerations had more of them been included in the footnotes to the fragments from the German author. When they intersect, travel literature and the picaresque novel, both taking their characters and readers to places imaginary or not, used to be a powerhouse in 17th-century literature. Through his analysis and with so many references, the editor (and translator) laid the groundwork for a very appealing project, if further pondered upon.

Just think, for instance, how texts circulated and through which mediation channels, in real life but in fiction as well, as was the case, in both works, with Dutch sailors/merchants/explorers. In this respect, Henry Neville's story is claimed to have been introduced to readers (presumably English) by a certain Cornelius Van Sloetten, who inserted it in a frame-letter sent via Amsterdam. Regarding Hans von Grimmelshausen's *Continuatio* of Simplicissimus' adventures, the account belongs (apparently) to another Dutch ship captain, who is willing to deliver to the world back home the message of the reclusive protagonist. Also of interest could be the mention of Portuguese navigators, who, as frequently as the Dutch, were deeply involved in (inter)mediating texts and mentalities.

All in all, readers, even if not particularly involved in such scholarly quests into former colonial empires, may find absolute pleasure in deciphering the patterns of behavior and mentalities of older times. And it is the real merit of such endeavors, like Toma Sava's, to stir their curiosity and—why not?—inflame their imagination.

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