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The *Padrona* of Folksongs: Biography of Evelyn Carrington, Countess Martinengo-Cesaresco

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Evelyn Lillian Haseldine Carrington, Countess Martinengo-Cesaresco (1852-1931), was a well-known writer on folksong at the end of the nineteenth/early twentieth century. If her name is less familiar in this context now it is because she was a populariser, writing in the Victorian monthly journals for an ever-increasing British middle-class audience who were eager for education and self-improvement. Her numerous essays on Italian, Greek and other song traditions were collected into a single volume in 1886, which was then republished in 1914 as a cheap 'Everyman's Library' hardback, making it one of the most widely distributed works of folk-song scholarship in the period.

Background and trajectory of a Risorgimento admirer

In terms of social and political outlook the Carrington family had a mixture of mercantile, landed, legal, military, clerical, and political connections [1]. Evelyn's grandfather, Edmund Carrington, was the first chief justice of Ceylon during the Napoleonic wars before returning to purchase a landed estate and become a conservative MP. His first wife, and so Evelyn's paternal grandmother, was Paulina Belli, reputedly of Italian aristocratic lineage though Carrington met her in India where her father worked for the East India Company (her portrait by Thomas Lawrence hangs in the Victoria and Albert Museum). The family also owned a slave plantation in Barbados, and retained links to the island after emancipation,

which explains how the Countess was able to publish in the journal *Folklore* on 'Negro Songs' (1887). Her maternal grandfather was a naval officer and brother of George Lyall, chairman of the East India Company, and also a conservative MP. Her father was a scholar, a translator of French poetry, and a clergyman, a follower of the Oxford Movement (with the result that one of his daughters converted to Rome), but even more influenced by his wife, Juanita Lyall, a (terrible) novelist who was supposedly the model for the domineering Mrs Proudie, bishop in all but name, in Trollope's *Barchester Chronicles* (Dewey 1991, 94). [2]

Despite her High Church Tory background, the youthful Evelyn had been inspired by the process of Italian Unification which she followed in the newspapers. During the Napoleonic wars Britain had been an ally of the Austrian Empire which, after 1815, would be the mainstay of anti-revolutionary, anti-democratic, and anti-national forces in Italy and beyond. Many Victorian commentators on continental politics felt that, while it had been necessary to defeat Napoleon and end French hegemony over Europe, as a result Britain had ended up on the wrong side of history. To rectify the situation, Britons should support nationalist and liberal causes, particularly in Mediterranean Europe. They were inspired by the romance of first Greek and then Italian independence. Evelyn Carrington, Countess Martinengo-Cesaresco, is an example of this group. She wrote later, 'Never did a series of political events evoke a sympathy so wide and so disinterested [in England]... Italy rising from the grave was the living romance of myriads of young hearts that were lifted from the common level of trivial interests and selfish ends... by a sustained enthusiasm that can hardly be imagined now' (1895, 71). Her study of the the famous Italian patriots, the Cairoli brothers, four of whom died in the wars of liberation and the last surviving of whom, Benedetto Cairoli, she knew personally – had already been published (1879) in Italian before she married Count Eugenio Martinengo-Cesaresco in a civil ceremony in Rome in 1882: that was a very pointed political gesture at that time and place. [3] Evelyn was resolutely anticlerical in her politics, calling the Pope's rule over the Papal States as 'a government fit for the middle ages' (1895, 185).

The Martinengo-Cesaresco family were patriotic aristocrats from Lombardy; her father-in-law was one of the leaders of the revolution in Brescia in 1849. When Piedmont invaded Austrian-occupied Lombardy (for a second time, leading to a second defeat), Brescia was almost the only Lombard town to respond to Piedmontese appeals for a popular uprising. The city held out for ten days of vicious street-fighting. After the revolt was crushed by Austrian troops, Count Giuseppe Martinengo-Cesaresco fled to Piedmont while his property was sequestered. The family was only able to return with Italian victory in 1859 (Correnti 1899). Through the family's connections, and especially the socialising in the Palazzo Martinengo at Salò on the banks of Lake Garda, Evelyn was brought into direct contact with the heroes of the Risorgimento, as well as the political life of the now united Italy.

Scholarship or Activism? In Search of the Subjugated Peoples' Voice

Evelyn Martinengo-Cesaresco is better known, both in Britain and Italy, as a historian of Risorgimento Italy than as a folklorist (Porciani 2000; Casalena 2012). Although her

sympathies were with the insurgents, she strongly emphasised the aristocratic contribution to national liberation. Her collection of profiles of leading figures in the unification process (1890) is still occasionally cited as a source, because it was partly based on her direct knowledge of the participants themselves. Her biography of Cavour (1898) was reprinted for use in schools and universities until the 1970s. She was a regular correspondent to British newspapers on Italian subjects. She was also deeply interested in the relationship between man and animals, including the rights of animals (1909); her husband was an acknowledge expert in horse breeding.

However, most of her early publications were in the field of folklore. Her articles regularly appeared in *Folklore* throughout the 1880s. Her *Essays in the Study of Folksongs* (1886) collected a series of articles that had appeared in the English periodical press such as *Cornhill Magazine* and *Fraser's Magazine* in the preceding decades. Although written for a broad public, these were well documented studies, drawing on the latest research in numerous languages. Given the tendency of song scholarship to retreat into national paradigms, her comparative approach was widely welcomed by reviewers at the time; it was translated into French in 1893. She was well connected with continental, and especially Mediterranean folklore specialists such as Alessandro D'Ancona, Angelo de Gubernatis and Giuseppe Pitrè, whose obituary she wrote for *Folklore* (1916). And at the end of her publishing life she returned to the topic of folksong with her translation of *A Sheaf of Greek Folk Songs, Gleaned by an Old Philhellene* (1922). As the subheading implies, this was not an unpolitical act: it was a small protest against the continuing Italian occupation of the Greek Dodecanese Islands. For the Countess, Italy and Greece, both born from national struggles in the nineteenth century, should be allies bonded by the shared experience and moral purpose of liberation. In the introduction she quoted the Italian patriot Mazzini on the independence of Greece 'whose epopoeia is still awaiting its last chant' (78). This illustrates a key element of her interest in folk song: it was the voice of the people not so much in a social sense, but in a national sense. A nation was united by the songs it shared, and which evoked its national epic. In practice she was a careful scholar, and well aware that songs were not distributed according to ethnicity; nor did she attempt to assert that Italian folk song possessed anything like the heroic repertoire encountered in the Balkans and Greece. But her heart was with Herder and his *Stimmen der Volker in Liedern*.

Although she was constantly travelling throughout Europe and beyond, the Countess was not really a field-collector; with the exception of her articles on Caribbean song, she drew most of her material from existing published collections. Nonetheless, she did have many interesting observations to make about the practice of singing which she had witnessed on her travels: in the fields, in market-squares, at funerals. For example, she described her difficulties in trying to discover patriotic songs in Naples two decades after the Garibaldian revolution of 1860, an acknowledgment which, given her patriot politics, must have hurt her (1886, 172). Garibaldi, the *bête noire* of Rachel Busk [4], was the epitome of the epic hero as far as Countess Martinengo-Cesaresco was concerned. She had met him on his visit to London in 1864, and again in Italy the following year. She wrote that his 'true place is not in the aggregation of

facts which we call history, but in the apotheosis of character which we call the *Iliad*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Edda*, the cycles of Arthur and of Roland, and the *Romancero del Cid*' (1895, 122). She even attempted, tongue-in-cheek, to portray him as 'a solar myth, nevertheless certified to be alive in the nineteenth century' (1895, 299: a reference to Max Müller's theories on the origins of folktales).

'The padrona', as she styled herself, was particularly keen on the intersection of the popular with more canonical literary and artistic traditions. She had an acute ear for the occasions on which poets like Goethe or dramatists like Webster borrowed from folk literature. Contemporaries noted that she did not really embrace Müller's mythological school nor the rival anthropological school of folklore; rather her approach was literary. Oscar Wilde, reviewing her book in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, wrote that 'it is really delightful to come across a book that deals with the subject simply as literature' (1886). And of course, if the drama and passion of Italy's political struggles were one reason why the British were attracted to the peninsula, the passion and drama of its artistic connections were another. I refer here less to the classical inheritance or the Renaissance sites visited on the Grand Tour, though Martinesco-Cesaresco was fully versed on these, and indeed wrote a well-received book on the Greek and Latin poets (1911); rather I mean the British romantic tradition. Italy was the country where Keats and Shelley died, the haven to which Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning eloped, the homeland of the Rosettis, and the inspiration of Swinburne; Italy was an essential element in the British cultural imagination throughout the nineteenth century.

Countess Martinengo-Cesaresco and her peer Rachel Busk were on opposing sides over Italian Unification, and in both cases their politics fed their engagement with folklore. None the less, folklore was a common bond between these political opponents. Given these shared interests, and shared networks, as well as their similar upbringing, it is perhaps not so surprising that Rachel Busk referred to the countess as 'my friend.'

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[1] It resembled the Busk Family. See D. Hopkin (2018), « ’Imagine I am the *creatura*’: Biography of Rachel Busk, a British Folklorist in Europe », *in Bérose, Encyclopédie en ligne sur l’histoire de l’anthropologie et des savoirs ethnographiques*, Paris, IIAC-LAHIC, UMR 8177.

[2] ‘Obituary: The very Rev. Henry Carrington’, *The Essex Review* 15 (1906), p. 94-5.

[3] *Morning Post*, 21 February 1882, p. 5.

[4] See See D. Hopkin (2018), « ’Imagine I am the *creatura*’: Biography of Rachel Busk, a British Folklorist in Europe », *in Bérose, Encyclopédie en ligne sur l’histoire de l’anthropologie et des savoirs ethnographiques*, Paris, IIAC-LAHIC, UMR 8177.