Illuminating Botteghe Oscure’s British Network

In the wider context of the reception of British twentieth-century literature by Italian literary magazines, the English-language section of Botteghe Oscure represents a crucial experiment. Founded in 1948, in Rome, by princess Marguerite Caetani (protagonist of the interwar scene with Commerce) and edited by Giorgio Bassani, for twelve years (1948-1960) Botteghe Oscure offered a selection of unpublished Italian and foreign literature. The magazine thus became a real transnational hub within the Italian literary field, fostering the reception of several foreign writers. Also, besides being a fundamental step in Bassani’s career and for his later engagement with Feltrinelli, it was a real laboratory for many authors, both Italian and foreign. As far as its British contributors and correspondents are concerned, we find, among others, Dylan Thomas (whose Under Milk Wood first appeared in Botteghe Oscure) or the underground writer Alexander Trocchi, who in those same years had founded the Merlin magazine in Paris.

In my paper I will provide a survey of British literature published on the pages of Botteghe Oscure, illuminating through archival material the magazine’s British connections and its unique international dimension. Further, I will set Caetani and Bassani’s selection against the background of the reception of British literature by other literary magazines (for which I will provide a map, underlining the main trends). This will allow me to focus on some cases – Dylan Thomas, John Lehmann, Stephen Spender, for example – highlighting the different forms of their presence and identity within the Italian literary field as it was shaped by magazines. In this sense, I will tackle the implications of very form of Botteghe Oscure – the anthology – for its role as an agent of literary transfer and dissemination.