

The Hermeneutic Bond between Translation and Literature

*Luca
Rossi*

Università di Bologna - Trieste

Square answered that it was impossible to discourse philosophically concerning words, till their meaning was first established; that there were scarce any two words of a more vague and incertain signification, than the two he had mentioned: for that there were almost as many different opinions concerning honour, as concerning religion. (Fielding 99; bk. 3, ch. 3)

While offering an invaluable glimpse of the expository nature of the present study, the above mentioned epigraph taken from *Tom Jones* pays homage to the double function of a pre-text that is to say as incipit of a text and cue to reflections on it. In fact, if the considerations voiced by Mr. Square reveal the multi-layered nature of words always floating between the one absolute meaning and its relative construes, they also set the stage for the central aspect of translation, i.e. definition and foster an interpretative approach which, as will be discussed further on, may not be devoid of interest in this context. So, prior to the critical appreciation of translation as a product, I believe it is necessary to answer some key questions referring to it as a process, namely ‘What is translation? What do we translate? And why?’

Even though translation dates back to time immemorial, its theory and consequently its critical awareness (albeit still partially organic) can be traced to the sixties (Arcaini, “Modelli” 15). Since then an extensive body of theoretical works illustrating a proliferation of standpoints has testified

to the inexhaustible polymorphic complexity of the issue¹. Not only had such complexity already been proved by the extensive tradition of remarkable paratextual corpora (prefaces, forewords, editors' words, introductions) commonly added to the texts by translators, but it had always been inherent in the term 'translation' itself whose etymology clearly refers to the Latin root *translatio*. By that word, as S. Lusignan pointed out, the Romans tended to express several actions among which "the physical transport of objects, the movement of people, the transfer of rights or jurisdiction, the metaphorical transfer, the shift of ideas and finally translation proper" (qtd. in Berman, "Translation" 29; the translation is mine). Unlike other European languages, notably Italian and French, English has retained the term *translation* derived from the medieval Latin verb *translātāre* and this lexical choice seems to confirm the special capacity English has shown across time for building up, merging and bridging cultures. In fact, the discrepancy between the Italian word *traduzione* or the French equivalent *traduction* and *translation* is by no means blatant and is worth some comments. In one of his articles, the authoritative theoretician Antoine Berman reviews the Italian Renaissance scholar Leonardo Bruni's dubious rendering of *tractum* [i.e., transported], being the past participle of the Latin verb *traducere*, into the Tuscan language with *tradotto* [i.e., translated]. Till then the infinitive *traducere*, its derivative and equivalent words had only been applied to express physical removal. Thus, Leonardo Bruni's misinterpretation gave rise to a skew in meaning which progressively passed undetected into common usage, first among the Italian humanists and afterwards among all the European scholars². However, such influence did not take hold on the English ground and the strict adherence of Modern English to the proper Latin expression introduced a terminological dualism whose implications are can be considered far-reaching.

Berman again ponders on the underlying innermost semantic value of the two designations: because of its reference to the verb *ducere* [i.e. drive] today's French *traduction* emphasises the presence of an external agent who participates almost forcefully into the linguistic process, while the English corresponding word *translation* evokes a more neutral, anonymous act of rewording into another language ("Translation" 31). On the basis of the four different meanings of translation as listed in *Webster's Dictionary*, Berman draws a penetrating picture of the vital, fundamental genius of the English language: "c'est seulement la culture anglo-saxonne qui, au fil des

siècles, a fait de sa langue une langue *communicationnelle*” (“Translation” 32). As the scholar points out, English is the outcome of an uncommonly extensive process of linguistic grafting which has brought about a sort of lexical exhaustiveness in that subsequent Celtic, Latin, Germanic and Norman influences have given English an unprecedented number of synonyms. This lexical patrimony allied with a synthetic, direct sentence construction, which he calls “plain style”, has nowadays established English both as a technical mode of expression and a privileged target language for translations from languages of Far-East countries. In the end, resuming his former intuition of neutrality conveyed by the term ‘translation’, Berman reasserts that English has a peculiar capacity for transmission because, he concludes, regardless of *signifiants*, its tenet is to vehicle “translinguistic concepts” (“Translation” 33). All this can fit very well within a fixed system of linguistic signs, but languages are known to be ever-evolving and around such a core contemporary English has developed a whole lexical and syntactical body in quite different directions, moulded, as from the start, by factual causes rooted in historical, political and social events. In other words, by mainly dealing with John Donne’s rhetoric and other related subjects, Berman omits taking into consideration the transformations and the functions of English, above all in the light of colonial and post-colonial experiences. Though tempting, the dismissal of external influences in favour of language self-sufficiency is a misleading, idealistic sophism. Because language vehicles our feelings, impressions and reactions to the external world, its destiny is inevitably linked to our human experiences. Therefore, the present state of the English language must be viewed in terms of a two-fold evolution: the formation of English was perhaps the first case of an *ante litteram* globalisation which, by way of invasions and migrations, mingled heteroclite cultures combining their different set of values and linguistic focuses. Then, paradoxically, British Empire colonialism, which first led to the mass expansion of English, has entailed fragmentation and disruption in the long run. Nowadays, as the linguistic spread largely confirms, the prominent role and vehicular function of English are not accounted for by any innate characteristics but by the vast public of English-speaking countries, a public of Calibans or Fridays who could hardly oppose, if only for practical reasons, the learning of English. Moreover, because this language was the medium whereby the voices of the colonised could be heard in the world, English has been slowly trans-

formed into several hybridised non-native Englishes. Thus, the colonised peoples set in motion a centrifugal force contrary to the original one that presided over the formation of Modern English.

Now, these layered observations serve only to focus on the deeper level that Ladmiral would call “philosophie de la traduction” (“Philosophie” 11). Translation could easily mislead today’s beneficiaries by seeming a mere linguistic process carried out in compliance with the dictates of modern linguistics (Ladmiral, “Pour une philosophie” 7). Nonetheless, the act of translating consists above all of a transcultural process which establishes the inextricable vehicular function and, ultimately, the *raison d’être* of translation itself. After all, without a dense contextual reference, linguistic signs, which are by nature arbitrary, would lose their effectiveness with the consequent incommunicability among human beings. This postulate implies a reconsideration of the various descriptions of translation from as wide a perspective as possible.

In her seminal study *A Model for Translation Quality Assessment* Juliane House specifies that “the essence of translation lies in the preservation of “meaning” across two different languages” (25). The same formula is echoed in Willis Barnstone’s illuminating, pivotal book, *The Poetics of Translation*: “translation is the activity of carrying meaning from one language to another[...].” (16). Most likely both scholars elaborated on Nida’s critical discourse which helps to recapture the essentials. According to the American linguist, translation means: “reproducing in the receptor’s language the closest natural equivalent of the message of the source language, first in terms of meaning and second in terms of style”(75). In fact, as the cornerstone common to all these propositions is *meaning*, it may be argued, by way of pun, what *meaning* means. With analytic precision House identifies the three units of meaning as a whole: semantics, pragmatics and textuality (25-31). On a purely linguistic ground, the three offshoots of meaning require no special comment. By contrast, a literary overview may cast an interesting light on the potentialities of language, in particular of the English language.

A highly ingenious passage from Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* can be chosen as a relevant example. As early as 1817, the farsighted English Romantic poet had already dealt with the impossibility of intralingual translation of true poetry and had highlighted a surprisingly modern conception of ‘meaning’:

I include in the meaning of a word not only its correspondent object but likewise all associations which it recalls. For language is framed to convey not the object alone, but likewise the character, mood and intentions of the person who is representing it. (qtd. in Colaiacomo 40)

In this excerpt, the poet states that meaning has to be perceived from a double perspective. On the one hand, it acts as a filter between linguistic signs and the material objects that they designate. On the other, it evokes a parallel, complementary world of implicit references related to both the speaker/writer and the circumstances in which the speech act is performed. Almost a century and a half before linguists such as Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), Coleridge split language into two utterly new provinces: semantics and pragmatics. Coleridge's awareness of the pragmatic aspect of meaning is decisively stressed by his mention of the speaker's "character, mood and intentions". So, the poet discloses *in nuce*, the crucial potentialities of the illocutionary force which, today, Juliane House defines as "the particular use of an expression on a specific occasion" (27). It is necessary for translators, in their day-to-day professional task, to pay particular heed to this last phrase because "occasion" opens a complex debate on text translating procedures. Illocutionary force can only be correctly inferred after a careful reading of the structural units of the text which will be later considered *translation units* or rather, the minimum fragment of the text which contains all the information, pertaining to context and co-text, for a congruous translation to be carried out. By way of illustration, as far as semantics is concerned, the Italian sentence "*Le foto del ragazzino apparvero su un giornale locale*" lends itself to a whole series of translations, some, of course, better than others. This alleged Italian "*ragazzino*" could well be a "*child*", a "*bairn*", a "*kid*", a "*lad*", a "*boy*", a "*guy*", or even a "*teenager*". Besides, the colloquial Italian word "*foto*" may be rendered both with "*photos*" and "*pictures*". However, this lexical choice does not solve the significant ambiguity which arises from the absence of contextual information. In fact, the mere co-text of the sentence does not enable the reader to understand whether the "*ragazzino*" is a talented photographer or if he himself appeared in a local newspaper. On a linguistic basis, he would then either be the agent of or be affected by the act of taking pictures. In the second case, the reason for his being in the paper might also influence the translation of the sentence. Supposing that instead of being missing, which could be the case, the "*ragazzino*" has won a prize or

done something memorable, it would even be possible to translate the sentence as follows: "*the child was pictured in a local newspaper*".

Very much on the same level, the pragmatic aspect of language requires special attention. Most of our acts of speech are intended to convey instructions or to get others to provide us with information. Therefore, the illocutionary force directly appeals to the function that enables us to recognise the goal a given speech act is aimed at. Another example might be of use in presenting this point: "*La porta è aperta!*" Here it is not hard to attempt a correct translation into English because the elements of the sentence work on a one to one equivalent in the target language:

"*La porta è aperta!*" ' "*The door is open!*"

Depending on the context, both the English sentence and the Italian one may express different intentions on the part of the speaker so that different reactions would be expected from the addressee who could interpret it as:

1. an invitation to come in after having knocked on the door or an invitation to leave (nobody keeps the addressee from leaving);
2. an expression of surprise and a warning too (something is not right);
3. a reproof implying that the addressee should shut it;

In the end, the translator must be an experienced handler of the language and an expert in the source and target cultures he is coping with. Let us use this short sentence whose province can be assumed to be an imaginary tale: "*At twilight the dark shadow of a yew tree got up to the window and rested on the feverish boy's bed*". Here, elements such as "*twilight*", "*dark shadow*" "*yew tree*" and "*feverish*" are quite obvious indexes of a sense of ending. Then, since botany is not the information focus, an Italian reader would be rather perplexed by a word for word translation: "*Al crepuscolo, la nera ombra di un albero di tasso raggiunse la finestra e indugiò sul letto del bambino febbricitante*". In fact, though faithful, this translation fails to meet the cultural scope of the target language. The English reader clearly perceives that the boy is doomed to die, while the Italian one misses much of the symbolic value of this assertion.

A specific case in point can be taken from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. The catalyst of the novel is the death of Sir Hugo Baskerville which takes place in mysterious circumstances in the Yew Alley of his Devonshire estate.

Sir Charles was in the habit every night before going to bed of walking down the famous Yew Alley of Baskerville Hall [...] Half-way down this walk there is a gate which leads out onto the moor. There were indications that Sir Charles had stood for some little time here. He then proceeded down the Alley, and it was at the far end of it that his body was discovered. (19)

Although the novel is not rich in symbolic substrata the setting of this event does not seem accidental especially because the same alley is also the border line between the manor and the terrible surrounding moor where supernatural events are reported to have happened. The Italian translation of "Yew Alley" as "Viale dei Tassi" (Gallone 15), which is faithful both to the text and the natural environment of the region, unfortunately suggests a rather imprecise image in the mind of its readers: the yew being a rather uncommon tree in Italy it is difficult to realise what its shape and characteristics are. Moreover, the sense of doom which is instilled in the original text is completely obliterated - it is worthwhile recalling that Hugo Baskerville's death is believed to have occurred as the consequence of a curse. Perhaps a footnote explaining the macabre allusion to the yew tree as a cultural equivalent to an Italian "cipresso" could have been functional to the full appreciation of the literary value of the text³.

In fact, unless the translator himself manages this process of cultural transformation, he does not fulfil his task, thus subverting the primary objective of translation so far described: bridging cultures as distinct from linguistic signs. Then, literature offers a particularly challenging ground, especially because translation and literature are intertwined and often mingle their respective scopes of influence. In fact, thanks to epigraphs, quotations, bits of dialogue written in a language different from that of the main text, translation subtly intrudes into literary writings. Indeed, before a category of translation professionals was formed, translation had been almost exclusively conceived as a literary practice entrusted only to writers and scholars of literature. In line with this tradition, during the 20th century many great Italian writers such as, to quote but a few, Cesare Pavese, Elio Vittorini, Salvatore Quasimodo and Piero Jahier powerfully contributed, through their magnificent translations, to the strengthening of the cultural bonds between the English language and the Italian one as well as between their speakers. A similar concern was the object of E.M.Forster's Italian works which heralded a new conceptualisation of

Italy in the English mind and which ended by promoting an interesting linguistic contamination. In the early years of the 20th century Forster's fascination for Italy matched by his interest in studying the impact of Italian life on British middle-class subjects shaped the story of two well-known novels: *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) and *A Room with a View* (1908). The latter serves my purpose in that it contains a specific passage devoted to translation and is tinged with enthralling critical reflections⁴.

[Mr Emerson:] 'The Lord knows. Possibly he does know, for I refer to Lorenzo the poet. He wrote a line – so I heard yesterday – which runs like this: "Don't go fighting against the spring" '.

Mr Eager could not resist the opportunity for erudition.

'Non fate guerra al Maggio', he murmured. ' "War not with the May" would render a correct meaning.' (*Room 84*)

Mr Eager, or rather "Rev. Cuthbert Eager, M.A. Oxon." (3-4) embodies the imposing weight of an academic lecturer and champions the prim conservatism which the Emersons try to destroy. This contrast of social outlooks transpires like a rough tapestry from their clashing interpretations and renderings of the celebrated line. Mr Emerson offers a "tactile valuation" (29) and a concrete recreation of Lorenzo il Magnifico's alleged epigram. By contrast, Mr Eager follows "the standards of the spirit" (29) and turns the Renaissance motto into rhetorical virtuosity. So, in Mr Emerson's words one may easily recognise the imaginative scene of a bodily fight in which the adversary, "Maggio", has cast off its metonymic value to become a more visible "spring", the season of youth and new loves⁵.

In the translation assessment, this piece of information proves to be a significant hermeneutic clue. Rev. Eager is wrong when he refers to "a correct meaning". In fact, because both translations convey the same meaning, he should have talked about style. Mr Eager suggests a seemingly literal translation which contains a sophisticated, archaic negative form. However, he is aware that Mr Emerson's translation is overtly partial, it is intended to spur the heroine of the novel and the reader to reform their attitudes in favour of an unconditional surrender to the impulses of life⁶. On the contrary, the poet's line avoids such straightforwardness because there is no didactic goal in sight; the poet is merely describing his ethics of life. More than an order, he tends to express an exhortation which conforms the ideology which relates the whole poem "Ben venga maggio" to the

Renaissance theme of vitality: “Arrendetevi, belle, / a’ vostri innamorati; / rendete e’ cor furati, / non fate guerra il maggio”(Poliziano 118). Most certainly, as Oliver Stallybrass observes, Forster could read these lines in his copy of *The Life and Times of Niccolò Machiavelli* by Pasquale Villari and on 16th December 1903 he copied the final line in his diary (Stallybrass). Unfortunately, the Italian historian had mistakenly attributed Poliziano’s famous CXXII *Rima volgare* “Ben venga maggio” to Lorenzo il Magnifico (Villari 143). In addition to this wrong attribution, which, by itself, would not change the interpretation, Pasquale Villari had also distorted Poliziano’s line (144). In fact, he quotes “Non fate guerra a maggio” thus, “maggio” could function both as a time reference and as the object of the imperative as Forster was led to believe⁷. At any rate, the idea of “war” has to be construed as a playful tug-of-war. Love is the sport of spring and the poet invites the young and the old to take part in the game, “che li zitelli e grandi/s’innamoran di maggio” (Poliziano 120). Therefore, “war not” stands for “give into it” or “Do not withdraw from May” implying that the denial or the sacrifice of the love impulse would be a deliberately perverse act.

Beside this intrusion of translation in the narrative, the Italian translators of *A Room with a View* have to tackle with a further unfamiliar situation. By dwelling on the structural elements of the passage E. M. Forster here joins the Italian line to two English corresponding versions. Since the second one reproduces every word of the original lines, Italian translators have to face the impossibility of rendering Mr Eager’s erudite sentence because it would be a sheer repetition of the source text and the Italian reader would fail to recognize it as a new version at all. The first ‘pioneer’ translator to make this novel available for the Italian reading public was Giuliana Aldi Pompili who, in 1954, created for the novel the fanciful title *La finestra sull’Arno*. Its revised edition which appeared four years later with the faithful title of *Camera con vista* still contained many inadequacies as exemplified by the word “mice” and “boiler” (Forster, *Room* 133, 171) translated as “gatto” and “bollitore” (Aldi Pompili 146,183). Let us examine Aldi Pompili’s translation of the extract:

“ - Lo sa Dio. Forse egli lo sa, poiché mi riferisco a Lorenzo il poeta. Scrisse un rigo – così lo udii ieri – che dice press’a poco: ‘Non lottate contro la Primavera’. Il reverendo Eager non poté resistere all’opportunità di far sfoggio di erudizione. - Non fate guerra al maggio, - mormorò, - per essere esatti.” (95)

Also in this short passage Aldi Pompili left several inaccuracies: “rigo” stands for “line” and “dice” stands for “runs”⁸. Moreover, in an attempt to solve “so I heard yesterday” the translator wrote “così lo udii ieri” thus associating, by means of the pronoun “lo”, the verb group of the interpolated clause to the “rigo” instead of associating it to the action expressed by the main sentence verb group. In other words, Forster’s sentence implies that it is Lorenzo il Magnifico’s writing the cited verse that Mr Emerson has heard about, not just that Mr Emerson has heard the verse. Leaving aside the fact that the pronoun “lo” is superfluous and that no equivalent of it exists in Forster’s text, it is furthermore modified by “così”. Thus, the reader seems to be ambiguously driven to refer it to the “rigo”. As a result, “così” and its modifier “press’a poco” convince the Italian reader that Mr. Emerson is not attempting his own translation but that he is trying to remember how the line runs. Such a departure from E.M. Forster’s text is surely not an inconsistent detail because it erases the complicated pattern of social forces that the two characters synthesise⁹. In fact, the abundance of approximations “così, press’a poco” allows the translator to sort out the above mentioned problem of distinguishing the Italian quotation from its literal translation offered by Mr Eager’s “erudition”. The line is in fact presented as a straightforward quotation and is made to be followed by the expression “per essere esatti” which obviously leaves out any mention of the act rendering “an exact meaning”. So, Aldi Pompili resolves to obliterate Mr Eager’s translation and strongly impoverishes the poetic theme of the novelist whom she evidently could not fully appreciate¹⁰. A more precise rendering of Forster’s intentions would be:

“-Lo sa Dio. Magari lo sa davvero poiché alludevo a Lorenzo il poeta. Scrisse un verso – così ho sentito dire ieri – che recita :

‘Non lottate contro la primavera’. ”

Il signor Eager non potè resistere all’opportunità di sfoggiare la sua erudizione.

“Non fate guerra al Maggio” mormorò. “ ‘War not with the May’ ” renderebbe il significato esatto in inglese.

The syntax of the English language almost forces the character to use “like this” but this happens by accident, otherwise he could have inserted “*more or less/ something like this*”. It might be assumed that Mr Emerson - who does not appear to be able to speak Italian - the line by has overheard Lorenzo il Magnifico from an English guide and he has attempted

his own *impromptu* translation of it, a process which is detected and repeated by Mr Eager with quite different results.

Thus, the practice of literary translation constantly confirms the axiom that translation is only *prima facie* an exercise based on language¹¹. On the contrary, the definitions of translation so far advanced are characterised by linguistic-procedural aspects; in other words it is true that they focus on translating but it is now time to refer the initial “overwhelming question”, (“*What is translation?*”) to the factual result of the process, i.e., the text that can be read in another language. The vast amount of criticism on translation, the so-called Translation Studies, above all neglects to account for the validity of our rightful interest in such an evanescent an outcome that greatly varies depending on its performer. Such a dramatic assertion echoes the disillusioned preoccupations that Willis Barnstone voices in his sagacious book: “In the vast, illuminating, and confusing critical literature on translation, particularly literary translation, the lack of definition of central problems and categories is disconcerting”(29). This awkward matter has been further developed by Tim Parks who, after long experience as novelist and translator, has published a bold study in which he states in resolute terms: “It has to be said that much of this [the current literature on translation] is disappointing, or at best unbalanced: there is an overwhelming concentration on theory at the expense of practical analysis”(IV). Tim Parks substantiates his remark with two main reasons. Firstly, the careful scrutiny of a translation restricts the area of investigation to one case and has to be accompanied by quotations from both the original and the translated texts which discourage many critics and readers. Secondly, translation assessment is in some respects influenced by our “sensitivity to language usage”, and Tim Parks maintains that “this is embarrassing for those who, in the general anxiety to present their area of interest as a science of demonstrable proof, increasingly consider literature as a branch of linguistics” (IV). Since translation resides in the subtle play between words and content, the translated text is subjective, partial, perishable¹², always perfectible, a one way dead-end track which, with the prominent exception of the Rosetta stone, cannot beget another translated text: “[...] literary translation, like all activities of writing, is not a predictable, objective and repeatable exercise but a venture into variations, not a science with data whose validity is proved by repeatability but an art of differences”(Barnstone 20). We may then wonder whether or not ques-

tioning translation is a foolish chase after a chimera entailing many equally vain sacrifices offered on the altar of an insensitive goddess. However, it is right at the bottom of this doubt that we have to look for the charm of translation. Translation exemplifies an atavistic human inclination: the search for knowledge. Therefore, it can be assimilated to an intellectual credo that materialises in an “abundant, vulgar fact” (Steiner 250). So, translation as discipline draws its dignity from the brisk, though incontrovertible, postulate by which ideas and thoughts are enhanced by facts. Thus, the analysis of translation brings to the surface not only relevant observations on the inner workings of the mind but also on its outcomes. Bearing in mind the long series of metaphors that have been used to describe translation, I shall add that the enterprise of literary translation underlies a Hippocratic oath. Every audacious translator must unlock his heart before the text, examine his literary passion and lastly set out with the watchful guidance of a personal *vademecum* he has compiled after an intense brotherly relationship with his text. Hence translation acquires the status of a vital exchange which, through critical appreciation, magnifies the potentialities of the text itself and transfers onto the translator the writer’s poetic flow. As a consequence, unlike Nida’s definition, translation crosses the threshold of a mere search for equivalents; it plunges into the widest sphere of interpretation which intends to permeate cultures. Though often undermined, such a hermeneutic component of translation has emerged regularly in the history of literary production and has broken new privileged grounds of investigation. By way of illustration, Alfredo Rizzardi acutely remarks that, in the fifties, thanks to the medium of translation, American writers like Emily Dickinson and Herman Melville managed to revitalise the stagnant waters of Italian poetical sensibility. On that specific occasion, translation complied with “a tentative critical approach – Pound’s *criticism via translation* – which might offer new ways of expression” (Rizzardi 75; the translation is mine). The fascinating challenge translation offered the new generation of Italian intellectuals stirred their creative power and revealed the ‘diversity’ that American poetry could unleash. All through that thriving age of experimentation, the criteria of literary writings were inevitably rooted in the act of translating, while translation was emphatically perceived as a necessary step towards the reinterpretation of human realities: “ ‘Each great creative season is preceded by an intense practice of translation’... ‘Each generation trans-

lates for itself”, these were Pound’s and Eliot’s reference concepts which stirred writers” (Rizzardi 75; the translation is mine). In fact, contemporary criticism has recently recaptured these programmes and has recognised the validity of the fruitful bond between translation and literature.

“Translation has been for millennia one of the most important activities - if not the most important- for the development and the spread of culture as well as for the creation of new literatures thus contributing in the meantime to the enrichment of the various languages ” (Sanchez Montero1; the translation is mine)

Both translation and literature necessarily inhabit the same world because they preside over the mental capacity to form ideologies. Like literature, translation can rightly claim to participate in “the best part of human language [...] derived from reflections on the acts of the mind itself [...] a voluntary appropriation of fixed symbols to internal acts, to processes and results of imagination” (Coleridge 197). Translation is therefore a creative act, the art of transformation as opposed to “mere repetition, analogic transfer carried out indifferently” (Franci 163; the translation is mine). In conclusion, with regard to literature, the question that has guided this virtually infinite journey into the mysterious labyrinths of the translational universe may be answered as follows: translation is the study of the writers’ souls and the performance of the most intimate nuances of a text on a foreign stage.



- 1 Enrico Arcaini expanded on this issue in his article “La traduzione come operazione transculturale”: “Per quanto ci sia un accordo abbastanza generalizzato tra gli studiosi sulla natura scientifica della traduttologia, ci sono opinioni diversificate sui fondamenti della disciplina e soprattutto sull’importanza da attribuire al fattore linguistico” (158).
- 2 See also Steiner 295.
- 3 There is a direct cultural correspondence which has to be applied here: “yew – graveyard” = “cipresso – cimitero”. Such correspondence was first established by the actual presence of these trees in such locations and was accordingly recorded and inscribed in the cultural scope of the two languages by literary works such as, for instance, Thomas Gray’s “Ode Written in a Country Churchyard”,
Beneath those rugged elms, that yew tree’s shade
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,
Each in his narrow cell forever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep. (2830, ll. 13-16)
and by Giosuè Carducci’s celebrated lyric “Davanti San Guido” in which cypresses inspire memories of the poet’s past youth and conjure up the image of his dead grandmother:
Che vuoi che diciam dunque al cimitero
Dove la nonna tua sepolta sta?-
E fuggiano, e pareano un corteo nero
Che brontolando in fretta in fretta va. (395)
The association of the yew and mourning is also recorded in *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*, “twigs or branches of the yew tree used as symbol of grief” (2652).
- 4 I am grateful to Prof. David Norris (James Joyce Centre, Dublin) whose lecture for the Third Annual of The Trieste Joyce School (Summer 1999) touched on the difference between an academic and “good” translation and stirred me to develop the commentary on the following passage from E.M. Forster’s novel.
- 5 As a matter of fact, Mr Emerson has recourse to the sentence in order to admonish Rev. Eager for sending their coachman’s girlfriend away. Later on Mr. Emerson pinpoints that their trip was aimed at admiring the beauties of spring whose effects could be seen in the teeming Val d’Arno nature. He cannot con-

- ceive of blaming man for something that is praised in nature, nor can he approve of depriving humanity of the blissful state only love and youth can secure.
- 6 The authoritative, almost brusque tone of Mr. Emerson's version possibly depends on the fact that this is his second admonishment. In Santa Croce he had already told Lucy in milder terms to abandon the loneliness of a mediocre life: "Let us rather love one another, and work and rejoice". (Forster 35). Guido Bulla provides a careful evaluation of Lucy's initiation to life (5-12).
 - 7 In his notes to the Abinger Edition of E.M. Forster's Works, Oliver Stallybrass does not maintain that the English translation of Villari's book quoted the line exactly as it can be read in Forster's novel. In fact, the edition of book I cite reproduces the line with only a minor variation "Non fate guerra a maggio" which though not precisely correct does not seem to alter Poliziano's meaning as much as Forster's further variation "Non fate guerra al maggio" (Stallybrass 84).
 - 8 Forster probably avoided "verse" because it is also synonym of "poem". However, "line" is here the exact equivalent of "verso". Unlike "riogo" which may refer to any printed or handwritten line or, even to a couple of words in its figurative meaning (*Garzanti*) and which is liable to be different in number from one printed edition to another, "verso" defines each and the same lines of a poem (*Garzanti*). As for "dice", it is self-evident that no written text can express anything orally.
 - 9 Harry Blamires notes that Forster's novels are structured along a pattern of dialectically opposing characters: some being his mouthpieces, others personifying the sterility of middle-class values (44).
 - 10 Tough still affected by an incongruous rendering of the interpolated clause and by the ostensible modifier "press' a poco", Marcella Bonsanti's translation finds a convincing solution to this hindrance:

"Lo sa Iddio: c'è caso che lui lo sappia poiché io mi riferivo a Lorenzo il poeta. Questo poeta scrisse un verso – l'ho inteso citare proprio ieri – che suona press'a poco così: 'Non mettetevi a combattere contro la Primavera'." Il signor Eager non seppe resistere all'opportunità di esibire la sua erudizione.

"Non fate guerra al Maggio", mormorò. "'War not with the May' potrebbe rendere correttamente il senso" (Bonsanti 90-91).
 - 11 Jean-René Ladmiral points out that even the theory of translation is only approximately a branch of linguistics: "la traductologie, [...] n'est guère qu'en première approximation une sous-discipline de la linguistique" ("Pour une philosophie", 10).
 - 12 As Massimo Bacigalupo writes, "La cosa importante da notare comunque è che le traduzioni si fanno nel tempo, è qui il loro limite e la loro forza, la loro testualità e la loro originalità" (43).



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