

Reaching out Towards the Interstitial: Linguistic Preferences and Cultural Implications in Italian Translations of Contemporary Irish Poetry

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Abstract:

This article engages primarily with a volume of translations from Pearse Hutchinson published by Trauben in 1999, *L'anima che baciò il corpo*. While on the one hand the textual analysis of single poems reveals distinctive traits and peculiarities of each translation, on the other it highlights translation norms which are typically used in relation to poetry as a genre. Precisely, the translation strategy assessed in this article is one that articulates a manifest “mediation” of the source text. In this sense poetry translation, in neat contrast to what happens within the domain of fiction, endorses the paradoxical premise that accepting difference is a necessary step to create a condition of equality between two cultures, thus allowing difference and sameness to exist simultaneously.

Keywords: domestication, Hutchinson, Irish poetry, mediation, translation

The complexity of translation consists in many overlapping factors, which have been widely discussed in recent years in the context of Translation Studies. In this article I would like to pay particular attention to one aspect of translation which is effectively captured by George Gadamer in his statement that, in the target text, “the meaning must be preserved, but since it must be understood within a new language world, it must establish its validity within it in a new way” (Gadamer, Misgeld, Nicholson 1992, 384). More specifically, I would like to explore the practical ramifications of the “new ways” in which the target text interacts with its receiving context by appraising some Italian translations of Irish poet Pearse Hutchinson. Thereby the focus will be on source texts belonging to a relatively ‘minority culture’ – Ireland – translated into a relatively ‘minority language’ – Italian. Configurations where the translating flow under examination is moving within the Western cultural paradigm have been progressively overlooked in recent years, as the influence

of postcolonial theories have shifted critical attention towards more exotic or politically charged encounters¹. However, there is a case to be made for the study of deceptively ‘neutral’ contexts of exchange, as the absence of tangible ideological pressures provides a model where the representation of difference can be foregrounded in terms of their literary re-articulation and cultural relevance within the receiving context. The same objective is reflected by the decision to engage with poetry. As Lawrence Venuti eloquently maintained:

The marginality is in fact the first reason to move poetry closer to the center of translation studies. Poetry translation attracts a narrow audience and therefore occupies a tenuous position in the process of commodification that allows other literary genres, notably the novel, to become lucrative investments on the foreign rights market. (2011, 127)

With this in mind, I will try to assess the articulation of difference in the translations of Hutchinson’s poems as the result of a subtle balance between distancing and mediation. Textual analyses of the target texts and the paratextual elements supporting them will reveal that they aspire to the creation of new knowledge through an attentive interaction with ‘constructed readers’ who possess competencies which are plausible for somebody who belongs to an Italian cultural paradigm. In this article the notion of constructed reader is meant to refer to the conscious embodiment of the publishers’ and translators’ expectations of their potential readers. However it does not necessarily correspond to an actual reader, or ‘imagined reader’, who could be tentatively outlined through a social analysis of Italian reading habits but whose profile is bound to remain nonetheless speculative and ultimately elusive. The notion of constructed reader, as a function embedded within the translations, can instead be univocally determined through an objective evaluation of characteristics of the target text. Viewed like this, it gives a relevant indication of the projection of the reader implicitly addressed by the translation strategy implemented for a specific text. Acknowledging this close relationship between translation strategies and reception is important to understand one crucial reason behind the existing differences in the norms of translation regulating different literary genres. In particular, it provides the critical underpinning to assess poetry translation as performed by the Turin-based publisher Trauben, as an activity that allows “newness entering the world”, as Homi Bhabha would say (2000).

1. Mediating the Foreign: the Challenge of Releasing the Transformational Charge of Translation

Pearse Hutchinson’s work emerges from within a bilingual Irish tradition, which he connects with a multilingual European tradition. He marries successfully two rather distinctive veins within the domain of Irish poetry, i.e.

the Gaelic roots and the European dimension. Not only does the combination of these two traditions give voice to anxieties deriving from historical circumstances, but it can also be seen as the expression of the poet's personal feelings: his nostalgia and, ultimately, his view on men and reality. If, on the one hand, the universality of Hutchinson themes helps his poetry transcend the limits of the individual and personal sphere, on the other, the specific references to idioms and codes of different traditions – which are very rarely described – constitute a considerable challenge to the readers' comprehension of his poetic voice. This difficulty is further increased once the work is exported abroad. The driving inspiration behind a considerable number of Hutchinson's poems is the relationship between modern Ireland and the symbols of the former imperial power. The subtleties of this theme, however, can be lost when the poetry is uprooted from its original environment.

The publisher Trauben was probably the best equipped for the challenging task of mediating Hutchinson to the Italian audience, as it can rely on an active network of collaborators from Turin University, which hosts a *Centro Studi Celtici*. The activity of this centre has fostered the study of Irish literature and helped to establish dynamic cultural relations between Italy and Ireland. The translators who work for Trauben, can therefore count on specific expertise, and also on the 'friendly collaboration' of the author, as acknowledged at the end of the volume. This article aims to assess the strategies employed in the Italian translation of Hutchinson's poetry, in order to show how this author is presented to Italian readers and potentially perceived by them. It also suggests that these translation strategies should facilitate a dialogue between Italian and Irish culture through the creation of a contact zone inherently hybrid.

The volume titled in Italian *L'anima che baciò il corpo*, opens with a brief introduction written by the translator Melita Cataldi, Irish scholar and director of *Centro Studi Celtici*. She emphasises Hutchinson's love for languages and for words; not only for his ancestral language, Irish, or his native language, English, but also for languages belonging to other epochs and cultures, like Old Irish, Catalan, Portuguese and even Italian dialects. Thus, the translator offers an important interpretative lens to the readers, who are invited to see the poems as "riflessioni sulle parole". More specifically, these become reflections on the injustices against human nature, which are perpetrated in the form of violence and impositions upon their language (Hutchinson 1999, 8).

Hutchinson's sensitivity to language is further explored in the interview with the author included at the end of the volume. This conversation touches on issues concerning his personal and cultural background, which can retrospectively endow his poetry with further meanings and nuances. The question of the Irish language is rather prominent. The emotional layer of this delicate issue is tentatively recovered in the recounting of an anecdote about young Pearse, who was invited by his Irish-speaking mother not to address an old woman asking for money as a "beggar", but as a "poor old woman". Besides

emphasising the peculiar attitude to words and their relation with the world displayed by the Irish, the anecdote also reveals the folkloric substratum behind the language, since the “poor old woman” is traditionally associated with the representation of Ireland itself as the *Seanbhean Bhocht* (134). In the interview, Hutchinson also offers a brief history of the language, which is narrated from his personal point of view, and resonates with the commotion of somebody deeply involved in it. The Irish is described as “so old and so new”, because it was never used in a modern way until the 1950s, with the only exception of Padraig Pearse, Pádraic Ó Conaire and a few others, and as it remained “untouched by the stiffness of the Victorian age” (135). This background, especially the emotional resonance that the issue of language may have for an Irish person, is essential to embrace the discursive construction of the Self as articulated in Hutchinson’s poetry. The expansion of the textual perspective in order to incorporate the cultural Other into the familiar and the recognisable is one of the goals of the translation strategy that I propose to call mediation. This is often achieved by complementing the inclusion of relevant information in the paratextual apparatus with a number of specific interventions on the target texts.

One of the most frequent effects produced by the Italian translations in *L'anima che baciò il corpo* is that of creating a certain detachment from the content of the poetic material, so as to invite the target readers to preliminary engage with it with a critical outlook, rather than being left striving for an emotional involvement that is very unlikely to occur. This perspectival ‘distancing’ from the subject matter, which is to some extent inevitable, can be assessed in relation to “Achnasheen”, one of the poems that deals more directly with the issue of the Irish language. The translator, Rosangela Barone, chose to keep the original title. While this option is often perceived as a foreignising device, useful to bring readers close to the source culture, it also brings those unacquainted with Gaelic to unfamiliar territory – unintelligible and unpronounceable at the same time. Equally difficult to decode for most Italian readers is the Scottish placename of Beinn Àilleagan, which appears in the second part of the poem, and should instead be representative of the few Gaelic names that have not been distorted by English renaming and therefore still carry their original meaning. Precisely for these reasons, the translator seems to pursue a strategy that consciously emphasises the otherness of the poem.

The translation of the first line should aptly illustrate how the effect of distancing is achieved also through subtle linguistic manipulations. The quite colloquial and direct verse “You’d miss the Gaelic from the placenames” becomes the more formally articulated sentence “da questi toponimi non ricavi il gaelico”, in which not only the familiar word “placename” becomes the more technical “toponym”, but the sentence is rearranged so that the idea of “missing” the Gaelic behind them is much less forcefully expressed. The core meaning of the Italian sentence does correspond quite literally to the source text, but the way

in which is formulated fails to evoke the tangible sense of loss that a verb like “to miss” implies. Later on, in one crucial stanza of the poem, other stylistic choices seem to weaken the evocative power of the source text (66-67):

<p>You'd almost think the conquerors thought/ Gaelic was God:/ its real name unnameable.</p>	<p>Ti viene quasi da pensare che nella mente dei conquistatori/ gaelico equivallesse a Dio:/ da non nominare il suo vero nome.</p>
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The English presents an unusual syntax and its real strength lies in the paronomasia, which consists in the repetition of different words with a common etymological root: think/thought, name/unnameable, which in turn creates the illusion of a link between the juxtaposed words of “Gaelic” and “God”, thus simultaneously suggesting the personification of the Gaelic language. This structure disappears in the Italian translation. Even in the last stanza, where the paronomasia is partly kept with the substantive “nome” and the verb “nominare”, the ambivalence of the noun-adjective “name unnameable” is lost. In fact, whereas the English encompasses the meaning of both something that you “don’t have to” name, because it is forbidden, and something you “cannot” name, because it is impossible, the Italian solution opts for the single meaning of “forbidden,” thereby failing to address the unpronounceable nature of the Irish language from the perspective of the English conquerors. The “distance” between the text and the constructed reader of the translation is increased also by the way the first line of the stanza is re-arranged. The source text creates the impression of an “overlapping” between the reader’s sensibility and the “conquerors thought,” reinforcing the meaning that the line “You’d almost think the conquerors thought” taken in isolation may have. This may allude to the effect of a daily confrontation with a land and a language shaped by “conquerors”, as shown by the poem which is in fact written in English. The Italian translation “nella mente dei conquistatori” automatically places the readers outside the conquerors’ frame of mind. They are just observing traits of this mentality, but they are not “haunted” by them. Amongst the other techniques used to consolidate a “distancing” effect, there is the employment of italics. This device is used in the bilingual poem “She Fell Asleep in the Sun” / “Si è addormentata al sole”:

A woman from Kerry told me
what she'd always heard growing up was
leanbh ón ngréin:
a child from the sun.

Mi disse una donna del Kerry
di aver sentito dire negli anni
leanbh ón ngréin:
un figlio del sole.

The few lines or words in the Irish language are kept unaltered but they are italicised in the Italian translation, which defies the natural merging of the two languages as in the original. This is quite legitimate since no natural merging exists between Italian and Irish. Arguably, the Italian version keeps intact the “mixed” sentence “garsúinín beag mishtake” for the same reason:

And when a friend of mine from Tiernahilla
 admired in North Tipperary
 a little lad running round a farmyard
 the boy’s granda smiled:
 ‘garsúinín beag mishtake’

E quando un mio amico del Tiernahilla
 guardava ammirando nel Nord Tipperary
 un piccolo che correva nell’aia
 il nonno del bambino sorrise:
 ‘garsúinín beag mishtake’

The stanza is supplied with an endnote that provides a translation of the last line and explains the bastardised English form “mishtake”. The endnote goes even further by giving an interpretation of the final part of the poem:

Not to mention the long,
leadránach,
 latinate, legal, ugly
 twelve-letter name not
 worthy to be called a name,
 that murderous obscenity – to call
 any child ever born
 that excuse for a name
 could quench the sun for ever.

Per non dire di quell nome lungo,
leadránach,
 latineggiante, legale, brutto,
 nelle sue dodici lettere, non
 degno s’essere un nome,
 quella crimilae oscenità – dare
 a qualsiasi bambino mai nato
 quell pretesto di un nome
 potrebbe spegnere il sole per sempre.

In these stanzas the word “illegitimate” is evoked without being uttered. The explanation in the endnote is necessary because the clues provided by Hutchinson to figure out the unuttered word might not be very enlighten-

ing for an Italian reader, who should be looking for the word “illegittimo.” Although “legal” and “ugly” may still apply, “latinate” would lose its distinctiveness since it refers to the majority of the Italian vocabulary and “twelve-letter name” is simply not true for the Italian eleven-letter word. In this and many other instances, the endnotes play a pivotal role in conveying the full import of the poetic work and they have to be seen as an integral part of the translation. The textual analysis of the translation proper, therefore, cannot be assessed as a single specimen of text without a context, as it comes to acquire its full significance only in conjunction with other parts of the volume, which is intended to be read as an organic whole.

These examples can give a preliminary idea of the policy followed by Trauben, partly based on leaving as unaltered as possible the visible hallmarks of foreignness carried by the poems. At the same time, readers are alerted on the fact that these texts are written from the writer’s more or less conscious standpoint. He therefore articulates his own culture and has a very different perspective than that of his Italian readers. This does not mean that a full responsive understanding would be possible only if the audience shared the same socio-cultural conditions in which the source text is produced, as this would defy the idea of translation itself, an act that entails the compliance with requirements of communication existing within the receiving culture. However, the choice of placing the Italian readers “outside” the texts while at the same time supplying them with an ample array of critical tools seems a rather effective way to grant them immediate recognition of their inevitable disconnectedness from the otherness of the texts. Moreover, this choice allows to guide the reception of Hutchinson’s poems in Italian towards a more challenging and enriching experience.

2. The Deliberate Acknowledgement of the Arbitrariness of Translation as a Way to Overcome it without Eradicating Difference

As previously mentioned, thanks to Cataldi’s critical intervention and an interview with the author, the volume *L’anima che baciò il corpo* provides important insights on Hutchinson’s poetry. The brief introduction in particular can be read as a form of “compensation”, since here the translator tries to make up in advance, through commentaries, some inevitable alterations that will occur in the body of the texts. For instance, she directly comments on Hutchinson’s experimentation with words by stating that this is clearly reflected in his poetic style, especially in the mix of heterogeneous forms and registers. It is as if the translator wanted to justify why, on so many occasions, the Irish poet’s creativity with language appears thwarted in its Italian variant, where the formal and grammatical constraints to be met are different. One pertinent example is found in the poem “The Frost is All Over” (70-71), where the translator is faced with the line “and winged them blood-flowers”, whose strength derives from a formal condensation, due to the transformation

of “wing” into a verb and the creation of the compound “blood-flowers”. As both these processes are almost inconceivable in Italian, the directedness and intensity of this poetic expression is almost impossible to reproduce. Hence, the translated sentence results in an expanded version of the English verse: “e imposerò loro ali di fiori di sangue”. The need for clarity compromises not only the source text’s audacity with language, but its conciseness as well.

Even texts with fewer evident poetic qualities present challenges for the translator, due to natural asymmetries in languages. For instance, in the third text selected for the collection – going by the telling name of “Prose” / “Prosa” (19-20) – there are problems in keeping an adequate pace in translation. Concise lines like “They grudgingly agreed – he was truly an O.K. name” need to be developed in Italian into longer sentences: “Benché riluttanti acconsentirono alla richiesta: si trattava veramente di un nome sicuro”. With the addition of the concessive conjunction “benché” (although), the explicitation of the object “richiesta” (request), and the informal “O.K. name” becoming the more determined “nome sicuro” (safe name), the target text is once more sacrificing the colloquial briskness of the source. An even clearer case is the development of the expression “scholar-preambled” into the full-length sentence “dopo essere stato presentato secondo le formalità accademiche”, literally “After having been introduced according to academic formalities”. Although taken as they are those translation choices could easily fall within the realm of linguistic domestication – as fluency in the target language prevails over the stylistic effect of the source text – it has to be remembered that the source texts are readily available beside each translation. This means that the constructed readers are still able to interact with them and appreciate the stylistic effects of the English or Irish language, while being instructed about the meaning by the target texts.

In other instances, the peculiarity of the Irish voice is tentatively maintained in the target text, such as the literal translation of “A lovely crisp crackling thing” with “una bella cosa nuova e fruscante”. However, even though the recurrence of “cosa” in Italian is much less frequent than “thing” in Irish, and its introduction in an unusual position might indeed trigger a sense of estrangement, this by no means can be linked to a speech peculiarity of Irish-English. This is why the introduction plays such a significant role in shaping the real achievements of the translation. Here Cataldi anticipates most of the stylistic qualities that will be encountered in the collection, like the alternation of lyric and prose, emotional and meditative tones, civic engagement and mere divertissement. More importantly, she addresses the poet’s sharp sensibility to sounds and silence and to accents and pauses in the rhythm, a feature that, as briefly shown, very rarely can be maintained in the translated version without disrupting other characteristics simultaneously present in a poem. By openly drawing attention to the main reasons which make Hutchinson’s sense of rhythm so difficult to reproduce in translation, rather than acknowledging its failure, the translator is effectively “making it work”.

A good example of the challenges posed by a poem relying on descriptions of places and people which are rendered vivid precisely by the sounds through which they are evoked is “Malaga” (12-13), which opens the Italian collection. The irregular but very important rhymes and repetitions in this poem are quite distinctive. This clearly emerges from a simple overview of the words at the end of each verse, which appear in the following order:

beach//town/down/flower/power/peace/release/scent/went
 beach/reach/peace/release/content/scent
 child/wild/trimmed/brimmed/peace/release//teach/beach

Thanks to the rhyming scheme the pictures evoked by the words are somehow enhanced by the cohesiveness of the sound. More importantly, the repetition of “beach”, “peace”, “release” and “scent”, obsessively returning in prominent positions at the end of the verse, gives quite precise connotations to the mental image the poem is trying to convey. In the Italian version, the rhyming scheme has to be reconfigured and, compared to the source, the appearance of words in final positions seems to lack a precise pattern:

notturna//costiera/**gelsomino**/intenso/potenza/completa/**abbandono**/**gelsomino**/noi
 meridiana/coglieva/sconfinata/**gelsomino**-/brama/giugno
 urbana/**stellati**/**steli**/mese/pace/**abbandono**//insegnare/estate

The heavy rhyming patterns are not reproduced, yet the translator attempts to retain some melodic cohesion by introducing the alliterations *stellati* and *steli*, and by keeping some repetition of the same words which recur in the source text, at least in the body of the translation if not at the end of the verse. An attempt to maintain some sort of repetition can be found in the consistent choice of the word “abbandono” in order to render the English “release”, a concept which does not have a perfect Italian equivalent. Although the noun “abbandono” might very well come to mean “let oneself go”, its direct derivation from the verb “abbandonare” may suggest some negative connotations that “release” does not have. In point of fact, another perfect translation for “release” would be the Italian word “liberazione”, which expresses a concept very close to “free oneself”. Also, it is strictly associated with the word “libertà”, freedom, a nuance that the choice of “abbandono” fails to capture. In any event, this Italian rendition seems to be determined by the first occurrence of the word “release” in the verse “and even love at last had perfect calm release”, where the Italian “e persino l’amore alla fine aveva un perfetto calmo abbandono” is perfectly appropriate. The use of a derivative of the same word in the second recurrence, where the English “the night brought jasmine’s great release” turns into “la sera portava il grande abbandonarsi al gelsomino”, is slightly more problematic. In this case, the

unusual nominalisation of the verb “abbandonare” renders the whole sentence rather cryptic. This is especially true because of the switch in focus from the jasmine to some impersonal, unidentified subject that “let itself go” to its scent. In the context of the verse, “release” is rather referring to the “dispersion” of the flower’s scent, an idea that would be aptly captured by the Italian “lo sprigionarsi del profumo del gelsomino”, but in this case, obviously, the cohesive effect created by repetition would have been lost.

The translation shows a remarkable awareness of the meaning and effect of the source poem, as “gelsomino” is the only word which maintains its position at the end of the line. It is as if the translator had identified the most iconic image in the poem and recreated the effect of the pervading sensation of its scent by enhancing the visibility of the word, using the same device used in the source text. The other components of the target text, of course, needed to be accommodated around this choice. However, this attests to the critical sensibility with which the translation is performed, as the effect ideally produced on target readers is comparable to the feeling the source text may inspire in its readers. Overall, it seems safe to assume that the target text’s intermediate position between a straightforward favouring of the sounds or of the content is a deliberate strategy. In this light, the price paid by sacrificing to some extent the content and the sounds of the source has to be seen as an intentional compromise to be able to keep them both.

A closer look at one verse of this poem will give a better idea of the quantitative and qualitative nature of the compromises that had to be made in the Italian version as far as internal and end rhymes are concerned:

In daytime’s humdrum town from small child after child
 we bought cluster on cluster of the star flower’s wild
 white widowed heads, re-wired on strong weed stalks they’d trimmed
 to long green elegance; but still the whole month brimmed
 at night along the beach with a strong voice like peace; [...].

Bambini e bambini nella diurna banalità urbana
 ci offrivano mazzi e mazzi di quei selvatici fiori stellati
 dal bianco capo vedovile, attorcigliati su solidi steli
 disposti in lunga verde eleganza; ma l’intero mese
 culminava alla sera, lungo la spiaggia, con la voce forte della pace; [...].

The Italian translation does keep some of the internal repetitions (“bambini e bambini”; “mazzi e mazzi”) and alliterations (“solidi steli”), yet others have been only partially reproduced or entirely omitted, such as “White widowed heads” or “long green elegance”. More crucially, the end rhymes and internal assonances, which endow the passage with its most evident poetic qualities, are lost ([...] child / [...] wild; [...] trimmed / [...] brimmed; at night along the “beach” with a strong voice like “peace”). The rhythm is also

partly broken up by syntactic rearrangements, such as the formulation of the smooth, fast-paced line “at night along the beach with a strong voice like peace” with a more fragmented and moderate tempo, and the introduction of an incidental sentence: “culminava alla sera, lungo la spiaggia, con la voce forte della pace”. This re-structures the sentence so as to make the use of Italian more standard and the target text generally more readable.

Generally, the linguistic fluency of the target texts is a criterion highly prioritised by Cataldi and the other two translators who worked on this collection. The content of their translations may reflect this agenda, to the extent that they often mildly differ from the source texts. Among the techniques in use are “clarification”, which Antoine Berman defines as the attempt to make clear what is not meant to be clear in the original, and “expansion” (Munday 2001, 280), the addition of explanations which – when inserted in the body of a poem – can break the rhythm and effectively diminish the strength of the narrating voice. The forms of “explicitation” that “clarification” may entail are the recovery of ellipsis, the direct expression of implicit attitudes, the strengthening of cohesive or collocation networks, that is to say, the use of word sequences which are considered more natural in the target language. Although the immediate effect of these devices may seem to point towards a domestication of language which may recall the illusion of transparency famously exposed and condemned in the pivotal critical intervention by Venuti (1995), an important difference prevents Trauben’s translation of Irish poetry from sliding into this controversial territory. Thus, domesticating tendencies are often alternated with digressions from the norms of the target language, and compensated for by the preservation of source-cultural allusions. The widespread use of footnotes, which enable retention of the foreign while restoring its deepest meaning, shows that concrete efforts are made not only towards the clarity of language, but also towards the clarity of meaning. The foreign is never suppressed and careful attention is paid to making it attainable to the target readers.

The strategy of ‘mediation’ therefore favours the preservation of unfamiliar histories in a domestic environment. While achieving acceptability thanks to a certain degree of linguistic domestication, the series *Poesia irlandese* by Trauben also openly embraces the translational dimension of the texts, thus carefully avoiding any assimilation or eradication of difference. One final illustration of the fine balance between intelligibility and remoteness achieved by the Italian translators, although in a different way, can be found in the translation of the Irish poem “An tAnam Phóg an Corp”. A brief comparison with a French translation of the same poem will highlight more clearly how the Italian translator avoids the temptation of domestication and how delicately balanced is the use of strategies such as formal equivalence. From the title itself it is possible to note that, while the Italian translator keeps the unusual image of the soul kissing the body intact – also chosen as the title for the collection

— the French translation (Ó Gormaille 2007, 71) prefers to slightly normalise the poetic image by having the soul “embracing” the body (“L’âme qui embrassa le corps”). The difference is all the more significant when it is considered that the Italian translation introduces an endonote which reveals that the inspiration behind the poem is a tale from Irish folklore, whose ending describes the soul leaving the body on its deathbed; once at the door it turns back for one last gaze and cannot resist the temptation to go back and to kiss that body that has been “so faithful for all its life” (124). In the French text small variations also occur throughout the body of the text: the “people at the wake” (“ar lucht an tórraimh”) for instance, is turned into “les proches du défunt”, the departed’s relatives, which somehow obliterates the aspect of social occasion of the typical Irish ritual of the wake and turns it into a regular French funeral.

Even more striking are the changes in the French version of “Pietà”, where from the first verse, the name “Muire” is extended to “La Vierge Marie”, the Virgin Mary, perhaps to distinguish her from other generic characters also referred to as Mary who appear later on in the poem; or possibly because the role of Catholicism in France is less dominant than in Italy and Ireland and the association of the name Mary to the Virgin would not be as immediate. Curiously, the French translation tends to play down the Catholic overtones in other parts of the poem. The expression “Íosagán na ndúl”, for instance, is translated as “Íosagán des éléments”. Not only does the mention of “the elements” have rather pagan overtones, but the Catholic image of Jesus remains hidden behind his Irish, literary counterpart of Íosagán which, as explained in a footnote, evokes the character in a famous story by Patrick Pearse rather than the saviour in more openly religious terms. This is not the case in the Italian translation, which turns Íosagán into the immediately recognisable figure of “Gesù bambinello” and rather enhances the biblical tones by choosing the expression “dell’intero creato”, of all creation, for the translation of “na ndúl” (82-83). However, the majority of the substantial changes applied in the French version seem to be an attempt to bring the poetry as close to French tastes as possible from a stylistic point of view, in ways that go beyond the changes dictated by the need to achieve an acceptable degree of fluency. For instance, “i bhfothain / ag Críost is” rather literally translated in Italian as “rifugiata nel Cristo”, whereas the French adopts the less metaphorical expression “sous la protection du Christ”, under the protection of Christ. Elsewhere, the Latin word in the expression “i rictus na fola” is kept in the Italian “nel rictus del sangue”, but normalised in French “dans un sourire en sang” (77). Furthermore the syntactic structures of Irish are much more faithfully followed in the Italian version. The following stanza might be taken as an example:

Í	Lei	Tel un souffle de repos
Mar ghaoth scíth’	Come vento domato	Elle se trouve
I gcill na cruinne	Nel sacro tempio del mondo	Dans la cimetière de l’univers.

Even without a back translation it is quite evident that the Italian structure follows the Irish more closely, with the feminine third person singular appearing alone in the first line and the comparative clause in the second line. Taking everything into consideration, the Italian translations seem to resist the allure of poetic embellishment. However, this does not take away from the aesthetic pleasure of the poems, since it is the very adherence to the source texts that captures the strangeness of the language which, in turn, is exactly what makes the narrating voice aesthetically interesting. Moreover, similarly to what has been noted above in relation to English language poems, even when the translation resembles a gloss, this apparently reductive dimension is overcome by the whole apparatus of a volume that provides the source texts and critical tools alongside the target texts.

3. *Conclusions: A Comparative Digression*

One of the fundamental points argued throughout this analysis is that, in the series *Poesia irlandese*, the position occupied by the target text is not marginal, but subsidiary to the source texts, and in turn the other elements of the critical apparatus in the edition are subsidiary to the target texts. From the outset, this causes a disruption in the “suspension of disbelief”. By virtue of this, paradoxical images such as a group of elderly Irish men shouting Italian jargon in an Irish pub can be created by translation. Accordingly, the narrating Self of a poem giving voice in Italian to feelings like the grief for the loss of the Irish language can become acceptable only by detaching the process of comprehension from the process of empathy. However, the empathy becomes possible only if critical intervention facilitates the comprehension of Italian readers. This process was briefly illustrated by the few examples outlined in this article, but it can be representative of a large number of poetry translations into Italian. In the case of Irish poetry, for instance, translation is often in the hands of the few Italian scholars working with Irish literature and culture, who engage in a careful and competent study of the poetic work to be translated, and present it to readers with the critical support necessary for a deeper understanding.

From a theoretical perspective, the acknowledgement of the employment of the strategy of ‘mediation’ acquires its full significance when contrasted with the predominant trend which characterises the translation of contemporary Irish fiction, for instance. Indeed Italian publishers seem to adamantly discourage any admission of “imperfectibility” of the translation in relation to most types of fiction, especially if contemporary. Although a robust endorsement of this argument would call for a much more detailed investigation², on this occasion it shall suffice to mention some standard practices broadly familiar to Italian readers, such as the lack of introduction or other critical tools, the scarce visibility given to the translator’s name and source text’s title, as well as the insertion

of translated works among series of Italian originals and similar stratagems to downplay the fact that a work has been translated in the eyes of potential readers.

The general impression conveyed by the Italian market of translations of works of fiction, hugely popular in terms of numbers, and thus profit – especially when compared to the extremely limited circulation of Trauben's translations – is one of blissful unawareness of the theoretical mayhem that the dismissal of translation as merely a matter of linguistic substitution has caused. Most publishers, particularly the big corporations with a widespread national distribution, still seem to stubbornly cling to the popular belief in the 'transparency of languages', in the inherent translatability of every language system. By presenting translated texts as seemingly authentic and stable as the source texts, they behave as if translation were a passive reproduction of transcendent meanings. This is not necessarily unawareness, but rather the conscious pursuit of an agenda which builds a fake halo of absolute authority around translations in the attempt to ensure the maximum economic return. The tacit assumption seems to be that readers of contemporary fiction are conceived of as fairly uncritical consumers, who turn to literature mainly for entertainment purposes. From this perspective, stressing the arbitrariness of the transformation undergone by translated texts would 'construct' a typology of critical reader which is not consistent with the one 'imagined' by the publishers, and would therefore constitute a bad marketing strategy.

This is in stark contrast with the policy followed by Trauben, whose list of priorities is by no means dictated by concerns about profit. As a result, its translation activity seeks to enable the target readers to appreciate Irish poetry starting from an understanding of the source language culture, in terms of its diversity from the target language culture, embracing difference rather than struggling to conceal it. This, however, is possible because these editions of Irish poetry, contrary to what happens with more commercial operations, do not attempt to 'create' or 'conquer' a new audience, but they are content to address the needs of an existing one, no matter how small or specialised it might be. Further evidence of this policy can be found in the unusual choice of 'promotional blurbs'. The three short reviews included to highlight the poetic achievements and principal themes of Hutchinson's poetry, for instance, rather than relying on the visibility of widely recognisable figures – as common practice would demand – are signed by Alan Titley, John Ennis and Gabriel Rosenstock. The choice of relying on authoritative voices that are prominent in the Irish literary scene but practically unknown in Italy reinforces the idea that the constructed readers targeted by this volume belong to a small audience already interested in Irish literature, and thus possibly familiar with those names.

Ultimately, the promotion of mediation as a policy of translation reveals that Italian readers of poetry, unlike readers of fiction, are mostly 'imagined' as cultivated or eager to develop their knowledge of the background of the

authors and their work. The result is an active encouragement of strategies that embrace the interactional nature of translation and its ability to mould the socio-cultural formation of the source and target languages into newly shaped hybrid entities. Although the perfectly balanced exchange suggested by the term “hybridity” is hardly attainable, it has been demonstrated that translation can become an expression of the articulation of cultural alterity by fostering an interstitial literary dimension where differences can be reconciled.

Notes

¹ The challenge to European centrality started by postcolonial theories is emblemized in Chakrabarty (2000) and it is a topical subject within the field of Translation Studies (see Chesterman 2014).

² For a more detailed exploration of the norms followed by many Italian publishers translating contemporary Irish fiction see Biancheri (2013).

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