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Discursive Representations and Translation Practice:
The Constructed Reader of Irish Literature in Italian

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Submitted for the Degree of Ph.D.
to the National University of Ireland, Galway

Centre for Irish Studies
School of Humanities
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ABSTRACT

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This thesis approaches translation as a transformative act, which involves the decontextualisation of the source text and its recontextualisation within the target language culture. For literary works, the attempt to make the material intelligible or even familiar to the target reader may imply a disruption of balance in the “discoursal perspective” of the text. This dissertation evaluates the effects that translation practice might have on the reception of contemporary Irish authors in Italy. Textual evidence will be used to sustain the argument that a translation strategy implicitly constructs a reader, whose profile differs considerably depending on the genre of the source text. The target texts, therefore, display differences that go beyond the conventions of genre. More specifically, within the domain of contemporary literary fiction, a preference for “fluent strategies” of translation often produces a form of transparency that may hinder a deeper engagement with the source material by readers. In this instance, cultural differences are likely to be reduced to standardised forms of “otherness.” Poetry translation, on the other hand, seems to enact the desire to reach out towards the interstitial meaning of what cannot be translated. The strategy used in this case, by endorsing the paradoxical premise that accepting difference is a necessary step to create a condition of equality between two cultures, allows difference and sameness to exist simultaneously. In drama translation, additional pressure exists to comply with the horizons of expectations of the constructed readers, as the target text is often meant as a script to be performed live. Therefore, a play, in order to establish an effective communication with its audience, needs to be understood in terms which are broadly compatible with the ideology which holds sway within the hosting environment.
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Finally, grateful acknowledgment is made to the following for the permission to reproduce: Trauben Edizioni s.a.s, Gallery Press, Volumnia Editrice, Teatro Stabile di Genova and the Druid Theatre Archive, James Hardiman Library, NUI Galway. All possible care has been taken to trace the copyright holders of the materials used in this thesis, and to make acknowledgement of their use.
Introduction

Translation is not simply an act of faithful reproduction but, rather, a deliberate and conscious act of selection, assemblage, structuring, and fabrication – and even, in some cases, of falsification, refusal of information, counterfeiting, and the creation of secret codes.

Tymoczko / Gentzler 2002

This thesis will explore the Italian interest in Ireland provoked by the economic success of the Celtic Tiger in terms of its influence on the practice of literary translation. The works by Irish authors taken into consideration stretch back to the 1960s, a date that has been chosen to define “contemporary Irish literature” for the purpose of this project. This watershed allows a comprehensive review of contemporary Irish writing in Italian translation and, accordingly, an overview of the patterns governing the process to be as accurate as possible. Yet it leaves out works such as Ulysses, Waiting for Godot and indeed all the classics of the early twentieth century, which would require a completely different approach to the analysis of both the quantity and quality of their translations. The remarkable proliferation of translations in the last decades of the twentieth century has also caused some change in the typical profile of literary translators. For instance, whereas each prominent author from the past, such as Wilde, Yeats, Shaw, Synge or Beckett, tended to be assigned to the same translator, normally endowed with some kind of academic qualification in Anglo-Irish literature and culture, nowadays having translators with a proficient knowledge of the cultural area in which the source text is rooted is rare. While it might still be the case with smaller publishers, who sometimes work within an agenda of supporting projects proposed by the translators themselves, the norm with the big names in the Italian publishing industry seems to be that a number of regular collaborators – highly qualified in the linguistic aspect of translation – randomly engage with the authors and works published.

The translation activity taken into consideration spans the period from 1990 to 2010, which means that the publication date of the translated texts must fall within this time bracket. The corpus therefore has been shaped by cross-referencing databases of

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Irish authors with the OPAC SBN of Italian libraries (On line Public Access Catalogue of National Library Service), in order to determine what Italian translations of their works were available to Italian readers during the period under review. From a more practical perspective, the volumes printed after 1990 are most likely to be included in the electronic database. This makes the list of translated works more exhaustive, and thus more representative of what has been selected for translation in this specific timeframe. In this way, an analysis concerned with identifying why and how this material, and not other, is translated can be fruitfully conducted. The texts retrieved in this manner amount to about 570 works (cf. “Appendix I”), which means that the extent and diversity of the corpus defies any attempt at in-depth engagement with individual translations. Yet its comprehensiveness is the hallmark of this project, as it is precisely what is made available to the target audience – and what remains silenced – which provides the object of investigation. The argument is that the selection of texts to be translated is far from neutral, as it actively shapes, and is shaped by, what is perceived as the dominant idea of “Irish literature in Italy.”

Equally important, the timeframe chosen captures the economic boom in Ireland, which coincided with the cultural “fashionability” of anything Irish in Italy. This also meant a growing enthusiasm for Irish authors among Italian readers, and consequently an increased interest among Italian publishers. The nineteen nineties were momentous years for Irish writing. Not only did the artistic voice of its authors become stronger, but the activity of translation received unprecedented recognition and support. The agency Ireland Literature Exchange was funded in 1994 with the specific goal of promoting the translation of Irish writing abroad. The success of this policy was reflected by the 1996 Frankfurt International Bookfair, an event that was entirely dedicated to the literature of Ireland. The Italian press partook in the growing enthusiasm for Irish writers by starting to address Ireland as l’isola dei poeti ‘the island of poets.’ Headings such as “La Rivincita dell’Irlanda: da Heaney a Mathews un Rinascere di Grandi Scrittori” (Ireland’s Revenge: from Heaney to Mathews a Renaissance of Great Writers),2 or “L’Anno ‘Verde’ dell’Editoria Italiana” (The

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‘Green’ Year of the Italian Publishing Industry), are only a few examples of the celebratory coverage received by Irish literature and its Italian translations.

In the thesis, I will introduce the term *passione irlandese* to discuss the categories of Irish-related interest that will be used to profile the “imagined” Italian reader. An emphasis on the issue of reception is demanded by the analytical approach chosen for this project, which posits a close connection between translation strategies and the publishers’ expectations of their readers. For this reason a distinction will be introduced between “imagined” reader and “constructed” reader. While the first is a speculative idea of Italian reader that can vary according to the criteria which are chosen to profile it, the latter is a function embedded within the translation. The “constructed” reader, in other words, is the one implicitly addressed by choosing a specific translation strategy, and therefore it can be univocally determined by considering textual evidences of the target text. The difference between translation strategies, in turn, is responsible for significant differences in the norms of translation regulating the three different literary genres of fiction, poetry and drama.

The point that genre is the primary determinant of translation strategy constitutes the cohesive theme of this project, and will be addressed and developed in the chapters at the core of the thesis. It should be stressed, however, that the utmost consideration is given not to the fact that the translated versions of a novel, a poem, and a play will drastically differ for the obvious reason that different genre conventions are at play, but that, with some exceptions, each source text has undergone a different translation process that goes beyond conventions of genre. It is also important to note that this study did not set out to verify this model, but that this configuration naturally emerged from a preliminary assessment of the primary sources. This empirical approach, rather than a chosen theoretical framework, determined the final organisation of my findings. The overall structure, however, although emerging from considerations about translation practices shown by analysing the target texts, is ultimately dependent on the preconceptions about readership in the Italian publishing industry, which is ultimately responsible for those practices. On the one hand, this thesis will attempt to determine the salient aspects characterising the approach to Irish literature informing the Italian

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readership. This will lead to the prospect of an “imagined” reader who is sometimes in neat contrast with the “constructed” readers of some Italian translations from Irish authors. On the other hand, it should be noted that the object of investigation is not to determine whether or not this profiling corresponds to the truth of the matter, as this would require a sociological approach that this thesis does not pursue. Consistent with a text-oriented methodology, the goal is to determine the impact that such pre-fabricated ideas may have on readers and on the reception of Irish writers in Italian translation. For this reason, a detailed analysis of chosen texts will be used in order to evaluate the conditions of translation regarding fiction, poetry, and drama, in order to reveal the degree and the nature of “transformation” entailed by the different translation strategies in use.

The idea of an alternative “imagined” reader compared to the one reflected by the translation practices endorsed by publishers will be investigated in Chapter One, where statistics about Italian reading habits will suggest that the typical consumer of translations of contemporary literature is a “keen reader” of different literary products. In this light, the “imagined” Italian reader of Irish literature can not only be considered as somebody who has arguably acquired a reasonable amount of knowledge about Ireland through its literature, but who might be interested in further increasing this knowledge. This factor, however, does not seem to figure in publishers’ assessment of readers’ expectations. The same chapter, titled “Italy’s Ireland,” will also engage with a broader exploration of the different channels of cultural transmission between Ireland and Italy in order to determine how literary works can be affected by features commonly associated with Irishness by the receiving culture. Fintan O’Toole identifies a “zone,” cultural and geographical, which represents “the exotic, the wilderness, the vanishing archaic,” and which, following the terminology of the Australian poet Les Murray, he proposed to call the “meta-margin.” According to O’Toole much of Ireland belongs to the meta-margin, as many aspects of Irish culture that were truly marginal for most of the nineteenth century have been romanticised by cultures “at the centre.” During the years of the Celtic Tiger, it is as if “tourism has completed and commodified

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the process that Romanticism and Celticism started in the last century.”\textsuperscript{5} This chapter will explore this idea that the exotic and archaic aspects of Irish culture have become not only acceptable, but desirable for people looking at it from the outside. Defining accepted representations of Ireland is important as it enables us to assess each translation in terms of its virtual relation with them. In this way, the independent discursive construction of “Irish literature” promoted by individual translations can be seen in its capacity to attest or contest the established “literary canon.”\textsuperscript{6}

Nevertheless, in order to pursue a cultural investigation of translation, a thorough understanding of the issue of translation as a whole is needed, and thus, of the linguistic issues linked to culture-bound words and phrases. This is why “Chapter Two: Theory and Methodology” engages briefly with theories that discuss the practical options that a translator faces and that strive to provide a range of often mutually exclusive solutions. The brief survey provided traces the development of significant translation theories and more recent voices that draw from a comparative literature tradition. The divergence between these two trends, however, is more apparent than real, and most of the concepts are the result of some kind of integration of the two. The ideas emerging from this initial review are meant to set the ground for studying the impact that different translation strategies have on literary texts.

In “Chapter Three: Translating Fiction,” it is argued that some Italian publishers, in relation to works of contemporary fiction, tend to give priority to easy accessibility. The contention is that rewriting foreign texts in domestic “dialects and discourses, registers and styles,”\textsuperscript{7} may compromise the adequate understanding of some works of Irish literary fiction, especially those meant to acquire their significance in relation to the source text language and culture. \textit{The Journey Home} by Dermot Bolger has been chosen as the main case study to provide textual evidences for this argument. With regard to the translation strategy used, it will be shown that the primary objective is often to seek linguistic “domestication,” which is at the core of what in Translation Studies is known as “transparency.” A “transparent” translation refers to the production of target texts marked by a high level of readability, which is achieved by virtue of

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., p. 159.
conformity to the target language grammar, syntax and idioms. For functional purposes, it has been deemed useful to refer to the predominant translation strategy employed in Italy in relation to contemporary fiction as “pseudo-transparency.” The term employs – and at the same time, arguably, expands – the notion of transparency as articulated by Lawrence Venuti. My decision to introduce a new theoretical category also intends to emphasise that, in Italian editions of contemporary Irish literature, stylistic smoothness is unmatched by any effort to mediate the source text at a cultural level. As case studies will demonstrate, unfamiliar terminology often appears in the form of names, places, acronyms or Gaelic expressions, or more generally as a situational context inherent to the source culture. As these elements are often unaltered in the Italian translations, they may unintentionally function as an interruption of the understanding of the target readers rather than as an “expansion” of their knowledge. This shows that the significance of foreign cultural traits can be silenced not only by a bi-dimensional or stereotypical rendition, but also by a translation which exposes these traits, but which does not sufficiently expose the foreignness of the text in its linguistic preferences and paratextual apparatus. A translation which employs a homogenising language, and is presented in a format which conceals the translational nature of the text, and thereby denies the necessity of cultural mediation, falls short of meeting the requirements of a “minoritising” translation which, following Schleiermacher’s position, Venuti praises as the most desirable outcome of translation.8 If most of the implied meanings of the source text remain unattainable to the target readers, there will be no real manifestation of foreignness in the target text. In this sense, the act of translation may transform the significance of literary works. The “see-through” effect of what aims to be a transparent translation is often illusory, especially when names of people and places mentioned in the text are unknown to the target readers. Additionally, the presence of alien-sounding words only serves to produce associations inevitably distant from those they might be expected to trigger within the source language context. That is why the definition proposed here for the translation strategy most commonly adopted for the translation of fiction includes the prefix “pseudo-.”

Nevertheless, solutions to the problem of articulating difference in terms of equivalence do not necessarily require a subordination of the “other” to the receiving

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language and its conceptual world. A strategy that promotes “a mode of translation in which difference is respected and representation is overcome”\(^9\) is mainly used for the translation of Irish poetry into Italian. As it questions the idea that “translating something means representing it, and thus subsuming the other and even ‘annihilating difference’,”\(^10\) which has been posited as the outcome of many translations of literary fiction, “mediation” is the term chosen to address this translation strategy in the context of this study. According to the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz, every encounter with alternative backgrounds and viewpoints provides ground for enrichment, since it widens and changes the receiving culture’s horizons without being a cause of friction.\(^11\) This study suggests that this is the goal pursued by many Italian editors of Irish poetry. The translations, and the paratexts supporting them, show an acute awareness of the discrepancies between the two metanarratives in contact. Therefore, 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 sense, poetry translation is more likely to allow “newness entering the world,”\(^12\) as Homi Bhabha would say. Bhabha also revamped the concept of “Third Space” as a metaphorical expression for the articulation of cultural difference.\(^13\) By moving the focus to literary exchange rather than migratory movements, the term will be similarly employed to define the “cultural hybridity” that may be released by translation. A closer textual analysis, however, will reveal that even when transparency is not indiscriminately pursued, a perfectly balanced exchange is hardly attainable. Yet the general trend followed by the translation of poetry makes it possible to discuss the translation process in terms of the construction of an alternative Third Space where differences can be reconciled. An essential premise to postulate a Third Space is some kind of interruption in the “suspension of disbelief” by virtue of which paradoxical images such as a group of elderly Irish men shouting Italian jargon around the bar of an Irish pub are created by translation. Similarly, the narrating self of a poem giving voice in Italian to feelings like the grief for the loss of the Irish language

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\(^10\) Ibid.


\(^13\) Ibid.
can become acceptable only by detaching the process of comprehension from the process of empathy. Yet the empathy becomes possible only if critical intervention facilitates the comprehension of Italian readers. This is possible because poetry translation is devolved upon the few Italian specialists of Irish literature, 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. Part of the argument here is that a strategy like mediation reveals that Italian readers of poetry, unlike readers of fiction, are “imagined” as cultivated or eager to develop their knowledge of the background of the authors and their work. The result is a strategy embracing 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. This idea will be further elaborated through examples in “Chapter Four: Translating Poetry.” The authors whose work will constitute the core of my analysis are Pearse Hutchinson, Medb McGuckian, and Derek Mahon.

As far as drama is concerned, the category of “accommodation” will be employed. The term refers to a process akin to what is often referred to in discussions about drama translation as “acculturation”: “[…] to tone down the Foreign by appropriating the unfamiliar ‘reality’.”\textsuperscript{14} Part of the reason for choosing a different term from the pre-existing “acculturation,” lies in the fact that this is mainly used to describe the translation of plays as performance, whereas the present analysis attempts to keep the focus on plays as published texts. Moreover, accommodation can be thought of as a superordinate of the category of “acculturation,” which is often understood as the endeavour to make a foreign play more readily comprehensible to the target audience by means of substituting source cultural items with others which belong to the target language cultural discourse. Yet, measuring the translation strategy against the target audience’s assumed knowledge and expectations does not necessarily entail an assimilation of the foreign to domestic intelligibilities. For instance, the analysis of the Italian text and other elements of performance in The Lieutenant of Inishmore, core text of “Chapter Five: Translating Drama,” will illustrate the case when a play is consciously “elevated above” the particularity of its location, yet without re-locating it within the receiving context.

A personal interest in Irish culture is what started the journey that led me to achieving an increasing level of bi-culturalism, and this brought the gradual change of perspective in my reception of Irish literature which inspired this project. However, the findings largely transcend personal interest. Their relativity to a specific space and time is also what reveals their topicality. While only translations published before 2010 have been assessed for the purpose of this project, the process of translating Irish authors into Italian is ongoing. At the moment of writing, a considerable number of works of fiction has been translated which is not included in this corpus. New poetry collections also appeared on the Italian market, from Seamus Heaney’s *Human Chain* (2010) to an anthology of contemporary Irish poets published by Trauben. As for drama, Genoa’s theatre company is currently negotiating to buy the rights to perform McDonagh’s *The Pillowman*.

Addressing the way publishers’ preoccupations with readers’ expectations may affect translation strategies, and therefore the nature of the shift undergone by literary texts in the passage from one linguistic system to another, is a way to cultivate awareness of the theoretical intricacies inherent in cultural translation. In an increasingly global and mediatised environment, both the terms of cultural encounters and the importance of literature have to be reassessed, yet proactive measures should be taken to ensure that policies of translation are respectful of the literary merit of a work and its potential significance. Hopefully, this project is a little step in this direction, and might inspire others to take further steps.
CHAPTER I: ITALY’S IRELAND

Look at the covers of the brochures in any travel agency and you will see the various ways in which countries present themselves on the world’s mental map. Singapore has a smiling, beautiful face offering us tasty appetizers on an airplane, whereas Ireland is a windy, green island full of freckled, red-haired children. But do these images depict real places, existing geographical sites one can visit? Or do the advertisements simply use cultural stereotypes to sell a product?

Van Ham 2001

In the attempt to refine the different facets of alternative “imagined” readers of Irish literature, it is necessary to try and outline an Italian conception of Ireland, which will be partly based on the most popular ways Irish culture is projected into the international arena. While this projection, thanks to an active policy of promotion, is largely constituted by Irish literature, the popularity of certain images of Ireland is established by means other than literary, like the appeal of its landscape, its music, fascination with the Celtic, or interest in the political situation in the North of the country. For this reason, before actively engaging with the activity of translation, it has been deemed necessary to delve into other forms of interest which may determine the way the source culture is composed by the receiving culture. This chapter will show that while the circulation of commodified images of Ireland may rely on the success of stereotyped representations, these may also provoke further curiosity towards the object of representation and eventually cause an interrogation of pre-existing stereotypes. There will also be an attempt to define how the new emphasis on Irishness has affected the promotion of Irish fiction in Italy. Finally, it will demonstrate that the attributes of Ireland emerging from literary translations are processed through the lens of the publishing industries’ agenda, which often answers to “entrepreneurial” needs. Accordingly, the question will be raised if, and how, the economic imperative which dominates the publication of Irish literature in translation may undermine the readers’ potential engagement with more complicated representations of Irishness, especially those sharing the so-called passione irlandese who are positioned somewhere between a popular and a scholarly readership.

Translation actively participates in the construction of cultural knowledge of the “other.” The Italian perception of Ireland is highly dependent on discursive representations that derive from translated texts. In the earlier part of the twentieth century, for instance, the activity of Carlo Linati – renowned Italian intellectual also considered the first irlandesista – fundamentally contributed to the dissemination of Irish literature in Italy with his illustrious translations from W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, J.M. Synge, Sean O’Casey, and James Joyce, and his critical essays on Liam O’Flaherty and other Irish authors. Nonetheless the process of selection and re-structuring that translated texts undergo, ultimately makes them “representations thus configured […] to be understood as central aspects of power.” In this sense, while the act of translation can be very much involved in the creation of cultural competence about Ireland, the modes by which this competence is constructed can be heavily influenced by cultural knowledge that precedes the translation activity.

By exploring “popular” images of Ireland in Italy, this chapter will enable us to measure literary representations that have originated in an Irish context against ideas and preconceptions held by readers of the translated texts. Following a practice initiated within the discipline of Imagology, “image” is not meant literally as a pictorial representation or figuratively as some ubiquitous metaphor, but rather as something constructed by its receivers. This means that the mental shape of the “other” is determined mostly by the act of observation and, therefore, by the beholders. For this reason, this chapter, while attempting to define the image of “Ireland,” ultimately says more about Italy and the profile of potential readers of Irish literature, or the way the publishers “imagine” them, rather than revealing objective qualities of the subject discussed. The critical framework of Image Studies is a useful theoretical tool to address concepts such as stereotypes, exoticising attitudes, and reciprocal prejudices that inform the collective imagination of cultural groups. Imagological studies developed among literary scholars at the end of the Second World War, who attempted

to define “how one nation sees the other.”

While the attention has often been on social and political effects in terms of propaganda or ironic use of “national images,” literature has also occupied a prominent position within the discipline of Imagology. Research in this area has mainly demonstrated a dynamic interaction between literary output and real-life situation, as one is not shaped passively by the other. Literary imagery can only be remotely mimetic, but literary models or artistic licence may actively shape real-life attitudes towards a cultural group.

Similarly, Italian translations of Irish literature create a dynamic dialogue with the source culture: the literature not only modifies preconceptions about Ireland, but at the same time preconceptions about Ireland influence the way literature is received in the Italian context. Also, an image can be valorised either negatively or positively according to the values in place in the receiving system. For instance, the eighteenth century witnessed a resurgence of particular images of Ireland, as the strong emphasis on the past associated with its cultural profile fit in well with appreciation of the sublime landscapes and the sentimental revaluation of non-aristocratic virtues, like “honesty” and “humbleness.” At the same time, the element of “pastness” assumed different connotations depending upon the perspective from which it was articulated. As Joep Leerssen aptly illustrates in his depiction of alternative cultural representations between Ireland and Britain, the idea of Ireland is sometimes labelled as “retarded, savage and underdeveloped;” at other times it is celebrated as “a more natural state, its emotionality and fantasy unadulterated by the specious innovations and degenerate fashions of civil society.”

What is important to note is that the imagological approach transcends the difficulty of dealing with the problematic notion of “nation” by bringing emphasis to the second component of the expression “national images.” As Leerssen has stated, “cultural discontinuity does not add up to a systematic taxonomy of cultural unit-groups.” This means that the cultural differences that are registered so unambiguously in empirical terms, do not correspond to necessarily defined categories.

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21 Ibid., p. 379.
22 Ibid., p. 378.
23 Ibid., p. 22.
of cultural identity that can be discussed from an objective perspective, such as the one apparently entailed by the idea of nationality. Nevertheless, this project, although transcending the aesthetic dimension of literature, is concerned primarily with literary and discursive representations; hence, issues of cultural difference are relevant to the extent that they influence the process of translation and the reception of target texts.

A study of the Italian-Irish imagotypical system, facilitates an assessment of the “hetero-images” of Ireland set against the “auto-image” of the country. In other words, part of the difficulty of literary translation is traced back to the margin of difference between representations of Irish identity in its domestic guise, and Irishness as the “spected” conjured up by the Italian perspectival context (the “spectant”). Elements attached to Irish cultural identity are likely to undergo, in translation, the superimposition of a definite set of attributes, or, more specifically, a set of connotations implied by the same cultural item may be substantially different for an Italian audience than for an Irish audience. In certain circumstances, the images created by a foreign gaze may be less complex than those of the same culture experienced from the inside. Yet such images might be more composite as well. These variables make the reception of literary works abroad a delicate issue, as it is ultimately readers who determine how a text will be received, and a successful interaction between the target text and its readers is highly dependent on the translation strategy adopted. Sometimes, the elements of Irish culture available for mass consumption may trigger a journey of discovery for the Italian participants, and this can ultimately lead to a high level of cultural competence. However, those familiar with the more commodified aspects of Ireland do not necessarily have the knowledge to fully appreciate a critical commentary on Irish poetry, even if the single elements composing the overall picture which would allow such appreciation were potentially available to them.

This level of unpredictability leaves a margin of error in determining the effective knowledge of the Italian participant in the consumption of Irish literature that cannot be overcome. It has to be accepted that in this type of investigation there is no scope for the rigorous conclusions of exact science. However, the versatile notion of Irlanda illustrated in this chapter provides a theoretical basis which is at least functional.

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24 Ibid., p. 11.
25 Ibid., p. xiii-xiv.
for the purpose of drawing conclusions about the interaction between translated texts and their potential readers. The survey of an eclectic range of Irish related material, then, is an attempt to identify the “imagined” Italian reader of the translations that will be the subject of investigation in the following chapters. This notion will be assessed initially in terms of a “sample reader,” that is to say, the reading behaviour registered by market statistics regarding the consumption of books in Italy. In this way, the trend of publishing Irish material can be measured against Italian literary practices in general. This will help to better define the actual impact that the “passion for anything Irish” had on the Italian publishing market during the 1990s and, conversely, the impact that the market norms might have had on the phenomenon here referred to as passione irlandese.

In the Italian context, the slow but inexorable filtering through of capitalist logic within the publishing industry, where cultural orientation was originally prevalent, started in the 1980s, when the entrepreneurial mindset started to hold sway, and the next decade witnessed a steady increase of emphasis on the entrepreneurial side of this sector. A publishing house then, before being a cultural institution and a research centre, became first and foremost a business. Hence the production of knowledge, although it can be a welcome side effect, is rarely the ultimate objective. This has important repercussions for the selection of material to be translated and the translation strategies adopted, since translations are treated as commodities transacting literary capital across the international literary space. The nature of the trade in this “great market of human affairs,” to use a definition by Casanova which reprises Valery’s words, can be analysed by referring to norms proper to the cultural worlds in contact.

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26 Cf. Billiani, Francesca. *Culture Nazionali e Narrazioni Straniere. Italia, 1903-1943*. Firenze: Le Lettere, 2007. The book specifically explores “the channels, the discourses, the modes of reception and appropriation of translations from editors, writers, readers, intellectuals and the fascist regime” (‘i canali, i discorsi, i modi di ricezione e appropriazione delle traduzioni da parte di editori, scrittori, lettori, intellettuali e regime fascista,’ p. 15). However the broader approach adopted by Billiani also reveals how in the first half of the twentieth century the translation of foreign literature was generally supervised by Italian intellectuals with the desire to enrich Italian culture.


The relevant “cultural indicators”\textsuperscript{29} used to assess the value assigned to literature within a certain cultural paradigm can be rather varied. For instance, as Casanova reports, the number of writers whose portraits appear on banknotes and stamps or the number of streets named after famous writers could be seen as significant. As far as the Italian environment is concerned, however, those specific data would give a rather misleading impression, since the legitimate reverence with which some important Italian writers of the past are still looked upon, does not correspond to an appreciation of contemporary literature. Indicators such as the time spent discussing books on television programmes, or the space allotted to books in the press, would convey a rather different impression from the numerous street names commemorating Italian writers, as the former is practically nil and the latter is relegated to marginal positions within magazines or newspapers. These more empirical considerations can be substantiated with some practical data: statistics about cultural consumption (recreation, art, instruction, culture) made during the early nineties show that Ireland, with 12.08\%, scores the highest in Europe, whereas Italy is in eighth position.\textsuperscript{30} Also, although the economic turnover of its publishing industry placed Italy just after Germany, Great Britain and France, this result is largely due to the size of the Italian population. On closer inspection, the 435 books sold per million inhabitants is even lower than the 756 books sold in Ireland, where the general turnover is not even comparable due to the much smaller population of the country.\textsuperscript{31}

Other data that should be taken into consideration, specifically concerned with the publishing world, are the number of publishers and bookstores, the number of books published each year, book sales, the time spent reading per inhabitant, or the financial assistance available for writers. As pointed out by Giovanni Peresson in \textit{Le Cifre dell’Editoria 1997}, Italy lacks an authoritative national board in charge of collecting data based upon homogenous criteria. His book, drawing on available research carried out by local institutions, tries to fill in the gap by creating a collage of heterogeneous data that can at least give a rough idea of the picture of the Italian publishing scene and reading practices. The first piece of relevant information is that during the period 1980-1990, on average, translations accounted for 39.9\% of the titles published. The

\textsuperscript{29} Definition found in Casanova, 2004, p. 15.
percentage corresponded to 4,922 titles, 3,922 of which were translated from English. Yet translated texts become absolutely predominant if the actual circulation is taken into consideration, as they cater for 55.9% of the market, of which 52.5% relates to English.\textsuperscript{32} In particular, titles with English as a source language, with an average of 15,330 copies per title, had a far superior circulation than translations from Spanish, in second position, which has an average circulation of 8,410.\textsuperscript{33} In 1995, 11,589 out of the 49,080 titles published were translations, of which 6,979 were translated from English.\textsuperscript{34} Although proportionally translations account for a slightly smaller percentage of the market, the actual number of texts translated from English is still increasing. The trend however is variable. More recent data seems to show a general weakening in the position of translations in the Italian market: in 2007 they occupied only 19% of the total. Nonetheless the 7,730 titles acquired represent an increase of 43% in the import of foreign titles since 2001.\textsuperscript{35} Overall, the only tendency that is steadily shown by the data is the major role played by Italian writing so that, despite the oscillations, the role of translation is consistently quite remarkable, especially if compared with the percentage of translations published in Ireland at the beginning of the nineties, which amounted to 2.6%. However such a small figure reflects the fact that British and American writing can be introduced on the Irish market without the need of translation.

Further data from 2007 about the Italian market show that 30% of the foreign titles are narrativa, fiction. The predilection shown by Italians for narrativa is interesting, as it supports the interest in contemporary Irish authors. In the period 1980-1994 narrativa accounted for 50.5% of literary production, and it reached as high as 80.4% as far as circulation of books is concerned.\textsuperscript{36} Yet again, more recent statistics reflecting the fragmentation of the market register a decline in these numbers. Nonetheless, with 21% of sales, the purchase of narrative is inferior only to the 33% of supereconomici, special series touching on various subjects, printed in very cheap editions. Also a range of statistics investigating Italian reading preferences invariably places narrativa in the first position, followed by romanzo rosa (chicklit), gialli (crime stories), fantascienza (Sci-Fi) and poetry. The 6,320 titles of contemporary fiction

\textsuperscript{32} Peresson, 1997, p. 243.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p. 244.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 51.
published in 1995, in comparison with 1,206 titles of poetry and drama, seem to confirm this trend, especially if their circulation is taken into consideration: 67.1 million copies in comparison with 2.3 million of poetry and drama. These statistics have a direct bearing on the translation strategies adopted for each genre, as will become evident as this dissertation progresses.

The prevalence of narrativa straniera (foreign fiction) over narrativa italiana (Italian fiction) is portrayed by sales figures collected in 1993, which show the former holding 58.7% of the market in comparison with 50.4% of the latter. Another worthy point is that narrativa straniera is mainly purchased by people aged between 36-55, which constitutes 46% of the buying public, but is proportionally superior to the purchase of narrativa italiana within the 21-35 age brackets, with 38% against 33%. A closer look at the composition of the Italian population might help to explain why, despite its seventh position in the world and fifth in Europe as far as sales and titles published are concerned, Italy still fares rather poorly as far as the purchase of books per head is concerned.

In the early nineties, 72% of the population did not have a high school diploma, a percentage which placed Italy behind every country in Europe except Portugal and Spain. Although a countertendency in more recent statistics should be acknowledged, these data can still be considered quite revealing, especially if we consider that only 5.8% of people in this population bracket tend to visit and use bookstores. On the contrary, the 6% of graduates registered by statistics in 1993 are responsible for 63.4% of the book purchased the same year. One possible explanation for this is that, in Italy, graduates obtaining a literary degree used to outnumber those of all other disciplines. As it seems reasonable to surmise that literature would be among the interests of those with a literary degree, their substantial number might partly explain why narrativa constituted up to 57.2% of what Italian graduates read. Overall, the impact that higher education has in determining the possibility of becoming a “keen reader” is very evident. This is supported by statistics which highlight that people with low income but

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37 Ibid., p. 64.
38 Data collected 1994. Ibid., p. 175.
39 Ibid., p. 221.
40 Ibid., p. 18.
41 Ibid., p. 287.
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higher education read 70% of the totality of books read in one year, with an increase of only 6% if the income is also high.\textsuperscript{42} This seems to hint at a concentration of reading on the part of the same readers, which is confirmed by a statistic showing that the highest percentage of purchasers, 38%, are those buying more than 20 books per year whereas, conversely, those buying less than two books per year are only 3.7%. These data are reflected in the statement that “keen readers,” reading between 10 and 12 books per year, are between 5-6% of the total population, yet they sustain 80% of the entire publishing market.\textsuperscript{43} Although more recent statistics seem to suggest a less drastic configuration,\textsuperscript{44} an unquestionable conclusion to be drawn from this series of figures is that in Italy, although there are few readers, most of them can be considered “keen readers.”

Those general considerations about the publishing market in Italy should help assess the impact of Italian translations from Irish authors proportionally. More importantly, they should help defining the contours of Italian “imagined” readers and provide indications of their initial knowledge about Ireland. In this view, it could be maintained that at least for that fraction of the Italian population which falls within the category of “keen readers,” literary translation should constitute an important source of cultural knowledge. As it seems reasonable to assume that an Italian reader of Irish authors in translation would have read more than one work, the act of reading itself can be seen as a way to collect “pieces of information” that may contribute to construe an image of Ireland. Nevertheless, each reader will encounter a different book at a different stage of his/her own personal journey towards a closer acquaintance with Irish culture, so that the “imagined” reader will necessarily vary not only for each single book, but for each individual reading. Moreover, individual knowledge can be constituted by only one of several aspects that compose Irish identity as available to the Italian public through literary translation or other forms of cultural dialogue. As anticipated, this inherent vagueness of the “imagined” reader cannot be fully counteracted. However, it is hoped that the previous observations about reading habits, together with the subsequent attempt to describe “Italy’s Ireland,” can help to broadly define some traits.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p. 288.
\textsuperscript{44} The 2009 official report on the Italian publishing market shows that 14% of the Italian population caters for 41% of the sales. AIE, Rapporto sullo Stato dell’Editoria in Italia 2009.
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of the Italian interpretative community most likely to approach Irish literature in translation. This, in turn, should raise some questions about the “constructed readers” addressed by some of the predominant translation strategies, thus allowing to explore Michael Cronin’s suggestion that “changes in translation are rarely innocent and […] ideological pressures shape its practice.” Over the last number of years, countries’ geographical and political settings have become much less important when compared to their “emotional resonance among an increasingly global audience of consumers.” This process has been described as “nation branding.” This term alludes to the fact that the ideas that the outside world holds about a given country, are important factors in defining this country’s identity on an international level. With this in mind, Irlanda can be understood as a conceptual entity composed by the sum of how Ireland wants to be perceived, and of how Italy is likely to perceive it. Outlining its elusive contours is extremely important because often the coherence of a translation relies precisely on such images. Like communities of emigrants, who tend to recreate a homeland that no longer exists by maintaining traditions and manners already in decline at home, outsiders often engage with frozen images of foreign countries. If the emigrants’ idea of homeland is normally built around their experience of it at the moment of their departure, the outsider’s idea of a distant culture is constituted by the static elements which make such a place worthy of international attention. Usually such elements are those promoted by the tourism industry, or in other circumstances, by the media. From this perspective, the typical Irish experience is generally promoted as the magic triad of wild landscape, beer, and traditional music. This kind of interaction between cultures complies with the silent diktats of economic power since commodified versions of foreign countries make them easily “marketable” to one another. In this sense, even

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the apparently depoliticised act of translation between Ireland and Italy can be read as “mimicry of the dominant discourse,” in the shape of a compliance with market priorities. The production of Italian translations of Irish authors, then, can be credited partly to Ireland’s eagerness to promote its literature, and partly to the Italian disposition to receive it. However, the success of the commodified version of Irishness has paradoxically triggered an expansion of the notion of Ireland as well, which is reflected in the translation of its literature into Italian.

In this section the main goal is to explore the relationship between literature and other forms of interest in Ireland. It will look at the interaction between tradition, branding, and cultural enrichment in the production and advertisement of literary translations. One newspaper article that effectively emblematises some of these issues is “L’Anno ‘Verde’ dell’Editoria Italiana,” when it praises “the ‘green’ year of the Italian publishing industry.” With pictures of Yeats, Joyce, Heaney, a wild landscape and references to Irish writers such as Dubliners di fine secolo ‘end of the century Dubliners’ working tra mare e pascoli ‘between sea and pasture’, the article conveys a highly clichéd version of Ireland, yet it goes on to introduce writers who challenge this idea, or at least expand it: William Trevor, Roddy Doyle, John Banville, John McGahern, Eoin McNamee and even Aidan Mathews. This is one instance where the success of certain products and formats may indeed be dictated by “power,” but may also end up “inducing pleasures, forming knowledge and producing discourse,” as Foucault would have it, even if only accidentally. In order to demonstrate that the visibility acquired by Ireland during the nineties favoured the unexpected outcome of a broader and more multifaceted perspective on Irish culture, it is first of all necessary to understand the nature of the “timeless spell” of Ireland. It is an image of the country akin to the romanticised view of Eamon De Valera except that, from the perspective of the spectants, the political intent orchestrating the images received is excluded. That is to say, while most Italians will associate Ireland with green pastures and red-haired maidens, few of them will be aware of the political role of De Valera.

51 Ibid.
A first step in trying to articulate a “basic” notion of Irlanda, meaning the way Ireland, allegedly, is traditionally registered by a typically Italian Weltanschaung, could be made by looking at a volume of pictures and brief iconic comments named precisely *Irlanda* (1979). Although this publishing venture by Touring Club Italiano was motivated by “touristic” purposes rather than social or economic considerations – as the choice of countries such as Spain and Greece seems to confirm – the overall project was different from the conventional approach pursued by tourist guides, which are primarily concerned with instructing the visitors on “where to eat” and “where to sleep.”

The scope of the series *Attraverso l’Europa* (Across Europe), was to bring to Italian readers, or rather spectators, the “essence” of foreign countries through a selection of pictures. Nonetheless, the line between an image which pretends to be authentic and one of high “touristic” appeal is often quite blurred. My impression is that often this confusion is not endorsed in bad faith. In a context where any Irish-related knowledge is considered useless from a practical point of view, objectivity may verge on indifference. Hence only a “passion” for Ireland can generate an Italian image of Irlanda. In other words, as interest – rather than external pressures – has to be the driving force behind Italian representations of Ireland, the images deriving from it will most likely be idealised ones, and in this sense those may at times converge with the idyllic representations of De Valera’s Ireland. Although the fact that the book was published in 1979 makes it obsolete for the purpose of gaining contemporary social insights into the country, its outline of some enduring aspects associated with the notion of Irlanda is still valid. Most of the modern re-elaborations of Ireland still start from the traditional areas of interest articulated by this guide: “landscape,” “music,” the “Troubles” and the “Celtic.” Crucially in relation to the present project, these categories of identification for *Irlanda* provide a rough estimation of the amount and the nature of the knowledge of Irish-related issues with which the “imagined” reader is likely to approach Italian translations of Irish literature.

The landscape is one of the most commodified aspects of Ireland exploited in Irish-related material available in Italy. The big volume of “sublime” pictures entitled *Irlanda. Confine d’Europa* (Ireland. The edge of Europe), which exhibits on its cover the misty image of majestic cliffs, can be taken as representative of a number of similar projects, more or less tourist-oriented. The charm exerted by the Irish landscape on
Italian visitors is also attested to by a number of songs by popular or folk singers. One band worth mentioning is Modena City Ramblers, whose orientation is quite clearly announced by their name, coined in honour of the Dublin City Ramblers. They practice a fusion of Italian and Irish folk. The first album by the band (1994) was produced after a long sojourn in Ireland, particularly in the West. The title, *Riportando Tutto a Casa* (Bringing it All Back Home) – besides stressing the musical inspiration of the band by recalling the title of a Bob Dylan album – also referred to the fact that their music was the result of collaboration with Irish artists. This fusion of Irish folk music and Italian influences is clearly perceptible both in the combination of instruments and rhythms of the two traditions, the presence of the Irish language and the Modenese local dialect, and in the eclecticism of lyrics switching from the celebration of Irish lifestyle to commentaries on Italian politics.

The fascination with the Irish landscape is revealed by passionate lyrics, like those from the love song for Ireland “In un Giorno di Pioggia” (On a Rainy Day) or “Canzone dalla Fine del Mondo” (Song from the End of World), a title which again stresses the liminality of Ireland as an important part of its charm. In theoretical terms, MCR are consciously pursuing a hetero-image of the country, effectively calibrated on the Italian sensibility and expectations:

> Ho sognato che il vento dell’ovest mi prendeva leggero per mano, mi posava alla fine del mondo tra isole e terre lontane. Camminavo al tuo fianco sul molo guardavamo le barche passare, mi cantavi una musica dolce più dolce del canto del mare.[…] Seduti fra pietre e brughiere guardavamo i gabbiani volare Raccontavi la storia del bimbo che un giorno scappò con le fate […]

![Fig. 2. Irlanda. Confine d'Europa Agnès Pataux, 5 Continents Editions, 2003](image1)

![Fig. 3. Album cover for Riportando Tutto a Casa (1994), Modena City Ramblers](image2)
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E i giorni son secoli aspettando di poter tornare
di nuovo la fine del mondo cullato dal canto del mare.  

I dreamt that the Western Wind took me lightly by the hand,
It put me down at the end of the world amongst islands and faraway lands.
I walked by your side on the pier, we watched the boats go by,
You sang to me a sweet tune, sweeter than the chant of the sea. [...] 
Sitting amongst stones and moors we watched the flying seagulls
You were telling the story of the child that one day ran away with the fairies
[...]/ And days feel like centuries waiting to go back
Again to the end of the world, rocked by the chant of the sea.  

Yet, the social element of the Irish experience somehow takes over in MCR’s aesthetics,
as exemplified by other lines from the same song:

[...]L’orchestra suonava The Blackbird nel bar sulla strada del porto,
i pescatori gridavano forte fra il vino, la birra e le carte.
Raccontavi le storie di viaggi, di strade, di amici caduti,
di amori incontrati lontano e di amori che il tempo ha perduto. 

[...]The band was playing The Blackbird at the bar on the street along the docks/The fishermen were shouting loud amongst wine, beer and card games/You were telling stories about journeys, roads, and fallen friends/About loved ones met faraway and about loved ones that time has taken away.

Overall the medley of melancholic ballads and up tempo songs, which constitutes the band’s repertoire, tries to capture what it considers to be the Irish spirit, but it also endows it with a distinctive Italian flavour.

While Ireland is clearly not “home,” it represents the freedom of having gone away. In “Clan Banlieu” for example we have the following lines:

[...] Ce ne andremo a curiosare per le strade dell’Europa con le multe non pagate sul cruscotto. [...] Scriveremo cartoline agli amici del quartiere che si sciolgono nel caldo dell’estate./ Li ritroveremo un giorno e brinderemo al nostro incontro ai vecchi tempi e alle nostre nuove vite. 

54 The backtranslation provided, here and elsewhere, is mine.
55 Ibid.
[...] We’ll go looking around across European roads with unpaid fines on our car. [...] We’ll write postcards to friends back home who are melting in the summer heat. We’ll meet them again one day and we’ll toast to our encounters, to old times and to our new lives.

The enthusiasm for Ireland displayed by MCR is not an act of patriotic acquiescence as might be the case with some of the native Irish rebel songs, but an act of rebellion instead: it celebrates a bohemian lifestyle of music, camaraderie and drinking culture. MCR’s music ultimately defies both the conventional forms of Italian and Irish culture, as it is precisely from their cross-breeding that it derives its energy.

MCR, by singing the lyrics of the Italian patriotic song “Bella Ciao” over tunes of Irish rebel songs, also make a rather clear political statement, further reinforced by their participation in musical or political demonstrations clearly left-wing oriented, such as Labour Day or the 25th of April, the day of the liberation from the Fascist regime. The universality of MCR’s standpoint against imperialism or any kind of oppression is apparent even from the themes of their albums, since the distinctive Irish imprint of the music has subsequently been applied to songs dealing with Che Guevara, for instance, or more generally with the situation in South American or African countries. The left-wing association promoted by the band, then, is consciously pursued. More controversial is the association with right-wing movements of any performer of Irish traditional music both from Italy and Ireland, or of any musician creating a “Celtic atmosphere,” such as Enya. It is not uncommon that those artists in Italy, as well as Italian bands practicing Irish music like the Savona-based Birkin Tree, might be involuntarily subjected to political affiliations, that are by no means implied by them, because of their music style. In Italy, the allusion to “Celticity” made by some far-right movements all over the world has been rendered more explicit by a party that came into prominence during the late nineteen nineties, Lega Nord. More specifically, the ancient, probably pre-Christian, solar symbol known in Italy as “the Celtic rose” – the six-petal flower enclosed in a circle – has been adopted as the party symbol, and this connection with Celticity is also pursued in a number of ways, such as the regular transmission of traditional Irish music by the official radio channel of the party, Radio Padania. Music has therefore become a demagogic weapon in the hands of political parties, which creates dubious associations with different aspects of Irishness. In this sense, music may very well serve the purpose of exemplifying the incongruities generated by
contradictory appropriations, which will resurface when dealing specifically with the categories of the “Troubles” and the “Celtic.” Nonetheless, although the impact of politics is definitely worthy of attention, it should also be remembered that only a minority of the population approaches Irishness through this lens. Most fans of traditional bands such as Birkin Tree are simply motivated by a passion for music, and maybe for Irish culture, unaware or even scornful of the ideological distortions perpetrated by other groups. In the case of music especially, those approaching it with ideological biases can be seen as the minority of a minority, since both MCR and Birkin Tree are niche phenomena. Although they can count on scattered groups of admirers over the country, their music is not regularly broadcast by Italian radio stations or television channels for the casual listener. This means that the real mass impact of Irish music on Italian culture needs to be sought elsewhere, as the genres practiced by both MCR and Birkin Tree are cut off from the largest media distribution. Identifying the Irish bands and singers that have the largest appeal on the Italian psyche is quite crucial in trying to identify a more objective image of Ireland, as music—like cinema—is a more global phenomenon than literature, in the sense that it can reach a wider audience. It is interesting to note that, starting in the mid-1990s, Irish artists who were beforehand loosely affiliated to the English-speaking world started to be more carefully recognised as “Irish.” This means that, whereas at the time of the Boomtown Rats Italian fans could very well listen to the band while remaining utterly unaware that they were from Dublin, nowadays “Irishness” tends to be stressed even for the utterly de-contextualised type of music practiced by boybands such as Westlife or Boyzone. It is hard to say whether or not the economic boom known as the Celtic Tiger played a significant part in starting this wave of “hip to be Irish.” However, whereas at home Irish identity became increasingly fragmented and difficult to define, abroad it became a successful brand, and this has caused the label of Irishness to become a very fashionable one.57

The category of “Celticity” also deserves specific attention for two reasons: firstly because the Celtic is one of the elements associated with Irishness which is more copiously represented in the Italian publishing market, and secondly, because of the symbolic value it might assume or the misconceptions it might give rise to. The “Celtic” can also be considered a literary genre of sorts, like “thriller” or “love story,” to be

practiced independently from the author’s origins. This is demonstrated by the number of Italian authors writing books advertised as “Irish fantasy:” Il Guerriero di Stonehenge (2006) by Mauro Raccasi, for instance, or La Croce Celtica (1998) by Pietro Meneghelli, whose credentials as a scholar of Anglo-Irish literature arguably make him somewhat more qualified to write about the subject.58

Another author practicing this genre in a rather historically oriented way, and considered by some more qualified to articulate a “true Irish spirit” is Morgan Llywelyn, an American-based writer of Irish ancestry. Her work is widely published by Nord, a publishing house whose name alludes to the rich mythological heritage of Northern Europe, but which can also inadvertently trigger a misleading association with the Northern League. In fact, as already mentioned, the party’s appropriation of some Celtic symbols, or the adoption of green as the party’s colour, can indeed make any manifestation of Celticity a delicate subject within the Italian political context. The League’s abuse of such symbols has fuelled suspicions towards any form of “Celticity” and has led personalities such as Umberto Eco to spot in the Celtic tradition an unequivocal sign of right-wing culture or even fascism.59 The outrage at such a state of affairs is expressed in an article that appeared in La Stampa, a national newspaper printed in Turin, on the occasion of a serata celtica ‘Celtic evening’ taking place in Alassio. The event, organised by Festival Mitomodernista, saw the participation of poets, writers, actors and musicians from Ireland, and included “entertainment” such as the reading of selected passages from a recent Italian translation of the Irish epic Táin Bó Cuailgne and extracts from Bobby Sands’ diary. Baudino, the journalist who wrote the article, praised, without reservation, the cultural merit of the event, but he also took the opportunity to pre-empt any possible misunderstanding by openly dealing with the issue of the alleged association of Celticity with right-wing movements. Although this may sound ludicrous to those unacquainted with the Italian political scene, within Italy such a connection has almost the force of an acquired belief. The journalist concludes his article stating that it is time to listen more carefully to the ancient tradition of Ireland, and to recognise its influence on the great writers of modernity, “senza

affrettarsi troppo con le etichette ideologiche” ‘trying to avoid ideological labels’.

However, such straightforwardness in inviting the reader to dismantle the idea of any political affiliation of Celtic culture is rather uncommon. Sometimes the easiest way to avoid misunderstandings is by keeping a distance from anything Celtic, or indeed from anything Irish.

It is also worth noting that the 1996 translation of Táin Bó Cuailgne was the first serious attempt to bring medieval Irish narratives to the attention of the greater Italian public, as the fascination with the ancient and the folkloric as two main aspects of the Celtic does not extend to ancient tales. This means that the great epic cycles are generally ignored outside restricted university circles. A perfect example of a detailed scholarly edition is the 1979 translation of Buile Suibhne, La Follia di Šuibhne, by Umberto Rapallo. The book was published as part of a small collection devoted to Northern Sagas, edited by the German Studies scholar Gianna Maria Isnardi. In this translation the philological aspect holds a predominant role. Consistent with a work of academic provenance, the Italian translator provides an extensive endnote apparatus to cover all the possible variants, thus ensuring a rendition that is linguistically as faithful as possible to the source text. Yet such philological zeal requires a certain degree of specialisation on the target readers’ part in order to be appreciated. This approach clearly sets Rapallo’s work apart from the “popular” pocket editions of Irish folklore, which roughly try to emulate the aspects of Celtic charm found in Macpherson’s collection, but which effectively lack any original source. This type of work is sometimes known as “Celtic fluff,” because it fosters those elements which, although may not be authentic, are deemed more appealing to the international audiences, such as fairies and magic. On the contrary, the distance of Rapallo’s work from common public causes it to share the fate of some publications in academic journals, which are normally considered “by scholars for scholars.” The lack of distribution makes their popular impact, at least in terms of numbers, virtually nil.

60 Ibid.
The distinction between scholarly editions, mass publications by corporations, and the independent work of smaller publishers, will resurface at several points during this dissertation. This is important mainly because significant differences in the circulation of a given work seem to influence decisions about the translation strategies to be employed. In other words, the “imagined” reader varies according to the prospective number of actual readers that will potentially have access to the translation. For instance, translations performing an unacknowledged creative appropriation of Celtic material are normally distributed in pocket editions with no introductions and, unsurprisingly, no references. On the other hand, the few translations of Old Irish texts seem to be driven by philological interest, and therefore are presented to the public in hard copies heavy with notes, but they are printed in extremely limited numbers. The reason for this practice can be partly sought in the tradition of renowned international philologists who have engaged with Irish texts. It is a tradition which the Italian academy seems keen to perpetuate, since access to the Irish literary heritage is almost inevitably bound to occur through comparative linguistics. Rapallo himself, for instance, is a member of Società Italiana di Glottologia (Italian Society of Glottology) and his approach to Old Irish derives from a linguistic interest in the relationship between Indo-European and Celtic languages. The study of Irish literature, instead, is part of English literature courses in Italian universities, which therefore would not cover the Gaelic language tradition. Celtic Studies in Italy, thus, is primarily focused on linguistic matters, with literary aesthetics playing only a very subordinate role.

Enrico Campanile, founder of the Celtic Philology department in Pisa University, explains in his introduction to Antica Lirica Irlandese (Ancient Irish Lyrics, 1970), that in Italy the celtista (Celtic scholar) historically originates from the activity of philologists, so that the discipline naturally favours the linguistic rather than the thematic dimension of textual analysis. It follows that literary interpretation always comes after an accurate linguistic understanding, not only chronologically, but also in the hierarchy of importance. Although this situation parallels the approach adopted by Irish language departments in Ireland, it makes the position of a celtista in Italy pretty unique, as within disciplines such as germanistica or francesistica, Italian scholars often deal exclusively with literature, remaining largely unconcerned with etymologies and
linguistic reconstructions.⁶³ Even more startling is that the discipline of celtistica was not even recognised by the Italian University system before Campanile’s work. In the above-mentioned introduction he recalls the unofficial course through which he approached Irish-language texts, a course that ended with no exams and no remuneration for the lecturer.⁶⁴ This situation may possibly account for the peripheral position that Old Irish literature occupies within the Italian academy, which in turn determines its relatively marginal position in the cultural discourse of the cultivated Italian class, as their intellectual orientation is to some extent affected by the content of their academic education. This is all the more regrettable if we consider the pioneering work done in the field in Italy at the end of the nineteenth century by Graziadio Isaia Ascoli and Costantino Nigra. The Centro Studi Celtici in Turin University, active since 1995, is one of the few academic centres which have been challenging this situation, although recent cuts to education funding may seriously compromise its future existence. The Centre has consistently organised lectures and conferences on Celtic-Gaelic issues since its establishment, and has promoted courses, exchanges and publications related to the subject. The Centre was also instrumental in the award of an honorary degree to the Irish poet Thomas Kinsella by Turin University. The Centre is run by Melita Cataldi, one of the few qualified scholars of Irish literature operating in Italy who can also translate from the Irish language, and responsible for the above-mentioned translation of Táin Bó Cuailgne. Cataldi, through a highly personalised academic experience which saw her obtaining a Certificate in Irish Studies at Trinity College, built by herself a field of competence which, in Italy, was not really institutionalised as a field of research. She was also editor of a collection of verse entitled Antica Lirica Irlandese (1982) and the satiric text La Visione di Conglinne (1997, translation of Aislinge Meic Con Glinne), both published by Einaudi. A collection of a number of scéla, echtra, aislingí and immrama belonging to the Irish tradition, instead, was published in a book titled Antiche Storie e Fiabe Irlandesi (1985).⁶⁵ As Cataldi explained in a personal interview given in June 2008,⁶⁶ she wanted to simply call it storie, like the Irish word scéla, under which all the tales in the

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 13.
collection could be grouped, would imply. Nonetheless, she claimed, maintaining that the book was not a collection of fairytales was useless: the publishing house was adamant that without the word *fiabe* (fairytales) in the title, the book would not have sold. This attempt to disguise a serious work as one of Celtic fluff confirms that the market considers ancient Irish literature a domain of dangerously limited interest, whereas any affiliation of Celticity with the fairy world is looked on as profitable. All things considered then, the new interest in all things Irish, does not seem to have been particularly influential in promoting a more serious engagement with ancient Irish literature. In the 1990s, as in the 1980s, Cataldi’s publications were still the exceptions within a market saturated with often poor imitations of Celtic tales rather than actual translations from ancient texts.

Another category already mentioned as a hallmark of Irishness which has been the subject of great interest in Italy is the “Troubles.” The attention aroused by the situation in the North of Ireland in the 1970s continued through the 80s in the form of vast media coverage of the conflict. Nowadays this interest has not quite faded, probably fuelled by a rather controversial policy which has permitted some symbols of the struggle to be commodified, so that sites linked to important moments or people in the history of the North can now be visited as tourist attractions. The business of the “political tours” in Belfast – consisting of a taxi driving around the city where murals are located or where other symbols can be shown to visitors, who simultaneously are expected to “absorb” the more or less biased information provided by the drivers – can be considered the equivalent of tourist guides showing archaeological remains in Roma. The recent history of conflict, once a deterrent, is now arguably one of the reasons tourists visit that part of the country.

The commodification of the conflict can account for the continuing interest of publishers in the Troubles. Like a vicious circle, the halo of familiarity created by the media encouraged publishers to approach the subject, and the more this familiarity increased, the more publishers welcomed a chorus of voices which covered the most diverse aspects of the conflict. Amongst the Italian journalists most passionately engaged in terms of bringing atrocities committed in the North of Ireland under international scrutiny is Silvia Calamati, author of *Irlanda del Nord: Una Colonia in Europa* (Northern Ireland: A Colony in Europe). She is also the author of a volume
titled *Figlie di Erin. Voci di Donna dall’Irlanda del Nord* (Erin’s Daughters: Women’s Voices from Northern Ireland), a collection of stories by women affected by the Troubles. Calamati is also the translator of Feltrinelli’s edition of Bobby Sands’ *One Day in My Life, Un Giorno della mia Vita* (1996), and of the differently titled edition *I Diari di Bobby Sands* (2010), literally “Bobby Sands’ Diaries,” for the smaller publisher Kappa. Bobby Sands was amongst the few Irish writers to be published even before the translation wave of the nineteen nineties, and his diaries have been reprinted several times since first appearing on the Italian market. The success at the time was probably triggered by the media coverage of the hunger strikes of 1981, yet new editions of Sands’ memoirs are still regularly published by Feltrinelli, the only major publishing house with a clear, although moderate, left wing inclination.

Feltrinelli is also the publisher of Brendan Behan’s work as far back as 1960, when it published the two plays *L’Impiccato di Domani* and *L’Ostaggio* (*The Quare Fellow, The Hostage*), and the memoir *Ragazzo del Borstal* (*Borstal Boy*), then republished in 1978. As shown by the publication of Behan’s work in Italy in an epoch which preceded the most violent phase of the Troubles, a left-wing imprint in the publisher’s agenda could turn the Irish struggle for independence as catalyst of international solidarity. The line of empathy which sustains an interpretation of Republican violence as a mode of resistance to imperialist oppression is also at the base of more recent publications on the subject of the Troubles: from historical treatises such as Silvio Cerulli’s *Una Lunga Strada tra Guerra e Pace* (A Long Road Between War and Peace), to biographies like *Joe Cahill, Una Vita in Libertà, Ritratto di un Capo dell’IRA* (Joe Cahill, A Life of Freedom, Portrait of an IRA Chief in Command).

The great majority of Gerry Adams’ writings are also found in Italian translation: *Free Ireland and Politics of Irish Freedom* (1986), *The Street and Other Stories* (1992), *Before the Dawn: An Autobiography* (1996) are all edited by Gamberetti, who also published Ronan Bennet’s *The Second Prison* (1992). Bennet also features as writer of two prefaces for Adams’ work. This material is consistent with Gamberetti’s agenda, which openly pursues the promotion of a “*cultura di sinistra in generale più di sinistra militante*” ‘general left-wing culture and militant left-wing culture,’ as shown by publications such as Edward Said’s overview of the Palestine question and other politically oriented texts. Another publisher of Adams’ work is
Manifestolibri, which is affiliated to Il Manifesto, a far-left Italian newspaper. The book An Irish Voice: The Quest for Peace (1997) is translated by the ex-European Parliament representative of the Italian communist party, Luciana Castellina.

Nevertheless, these highly politicised publications cannot be seen as predominant anymore, for two reasons: on the one hand Silvio Berlusconi’s long lasting hegemony in the Italian media brought about considerable changes in the Italian political climate, which witnessed a waning of the once all-pervading ideological dichotomy between right and left, and a considerable weakening of left wing parties in general. On the other hand, contemporary Irish fiction rooted in the North has entered the Italian market, presented to the public in a much more depoliticised format. In this context, where the attention of the media, and accordingly of the general public, has tended to shift from matters of international relevance to, at times, petty national questions, publications related to the Troubles by smaller publishers immediately marks them as “niche products.” Moreover, this new wave of writers from the North is generally published by commercial publishers, and can potentially reach a greater number of readers.

It should also be noted that the introduction of literary voices as significant commentators on the conflict has enabled Italian readers to approach the situation in the North in less propagandist terms. Authors from both Catholic and Protestant backgrounds are giving voice to the Northern context. Bernard McLaverty, Robert McLiam Wilson or Eoin McNamee, respectively published by major publishing houses such as Feltrinelli, Garzanti and Einaudi, are amongst the many authors available to Italian readers in contemporary editions. Contrary to what happened in the past, politics is rarely foregrounded in the peritext or epitext surrounding these translations. Overall, the Northern Irish question, while having indeed lost its predominant role amongst the Irish-related material, has potentially acquired more substance, since it is being treated in more varied ways. Moreover it has become only one of the many topics comprising Irish identity as represented in Italian translations of contemporary Irish writing.

One of the most compelling examples of the interest in anything Irish which captured the imagination of the Italian population came in 2004 with the volume *Continente Irlanda. Storia e Scritture Contemporanee*, which included eighteen academic essays dealing with various aspects of Irish culture. 68 This interest started to significantly shape Italian culture as well, as revealed in the review by Corinna Salvadori Lonergan, one of the main Irish scholars of Italian culture, who sees in the book the embodiment of what she calls *passione irlandese*. *Continente Irlanda* is a rather exceptional endeavour, as it captures the Italian “passion for Ireland” at one of its “highest” levels of accomplishment. However the understanding of the more subtle shades of Irish culture achieved by scholarly publications like this cannot be taken as representative of the broader phenomenon to which the term *passione irlandese* also applies. Even if Irish literature came quite naturally to occupy a predominant position within a context where every Irish-related art was considered worthy of attention, the line between lower or higher, popular or specialised, forms of interest in Ireland was often crossed.

As well as music and landscape, literature was one of the favourite references to appear in the numerous articles dedicated to Ireland in popular magazines, whose primary scope was to present the country as an attractive tourist destination. *Max*, for instance, a trendy magazine mainly addressed to a young readership, had a full article dedicated to Dublin as “the city that never sleeps.” Alongside a handful of colourful pictures with basic captions, the city is presented through the words of Joseph O’Connor, so that the author and his latest book are also introduced to the readers. 69 The connection between Ireland and its literature is made even more explicit in the magazine *Anna*, traditionally addressed to housewives or middle-class women. In a long article titled “Ma che Paese, l’Irlanda!” (What a Country, Ireland!), 70 which paraphrases the Italian translation of McCourt’s *‘Tis, Ma che Paese, l’America!*, pictures of Dublin alternate with those of authors like Doyle, and the most recent publications of Irish writing released on the Italian market are succinctly but clearly touched upon.

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If, on the one hand, Irish literature has become an integral part of Italian popular culture, on the other hand, stereotypical ideas of Irishness can never be fully avoided, even when articles on Ireland appear in quality press. At times, the mere mention of Ireland is enough to attract pictures with writings celebrating the IRA, no matter what is being discussed in the article or which book is reviewed. This was the case with an article that appeared in *La Stampa*, which was simply reviewing a new collection of crime stories by Irish authors.\(^1\) Elsewhere, a review of Banville’s *Christine Falls* features a giant picture of Temple Bar, although this image does not exactly capture the essence of the book presented. Nevertheless, commonplaces images and notions associated with Ireland are sometimes merely the starting point for further elaborations which eventually “expand” the scope of the subject being discussed. For instance, in the article “Il Riscatto dell’Irlanda, da Isola Periferica a Potenza Letteraria” (The Redemption of Ireland: from Marginal Island to Literary Power), which appeared on a full page in the newspaper *Il Foglio* in 1996,\(^2\) Ireland was described as the “fairytale of a paradise lost.” After indulging in the description of past poverty, the article stressed the international attention gained by Irish literature by underlying “il consenso oltre confine, di pubblico e critica, per una cultura che nella sua millenaria storia non ha mai subito il dominio di Roma né si è piegata alle ambizioni annessionistiche di sua maestà Britannica” ‘the international consent, of both public and critics, for a culture that during its millenarian history, has never suffered the Roman conquest and was never subjugated by the expansionist ambitions of Her Majesty.’ In the same article, the number and quality of contemporary Irish writers was praised, and the following assertion made: “sembra quasi che la letteratura Irlandese, caso più unico che raro nel continente europeo, abbia scoperto la quadratura del cerchio, il segreto per conciliare qualità letteraria e piacere della lettura” ‘it seems as if Irish literature has found a way of squaring the circle, the secret to reconcile literary quality with the pleasure of reading, something extremely rare in the European continent.’ The names mentioned range from Yeats and Flann O’Brien to Heaney and McCourt, touching on Doyle and Frank O’Connor. Also, a list of books available in Italian libraries, mentioned Dermot Bolger, Neil Jordan, Eoin MacNamee, Patrick McCabe, John McGahern, Edna O’Brien and William Trevor. The article therefore was ultimately promoting an “expansion” of

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the images traditionally associated with Ireland, which is also what causes them to become the object of self-questioning.

A clear example is La Repubblica’s presentation of O’Connor’s book, The Irish Male at Home and Abroad. Joyce’s name printed on a close up of the Half Penny Bridge dominates the page, but the subtitle suggests “Ma l’Irlanda è un’Altra Cosa” (Yet Ireland is Something Else). Joyce, by virtue of the alleged audience’s familiarity with the name, might still be the stratagem used by the journalist to attract the readers’ attention, but the article itself goes way beyond that and, mainly through O’Connor’s words, effectively debunks a great deal of Irish icons, or rather the use made of them “at home and abroad.” The primary objective of the material published is to demand an “expansion” of the notion of Ireland. In this sense, the quantity and the quality of what is published, more or less deliberately, work together towards the same goal. Similar arguments could be made with regard to Yeats is Dead! (2001), the experimental thriller written with the collaboration of fourteen Irish authors. A newspaper article about the release of the book displays a whole range of pictures of Joyce and Yeats, and a giant title alluding to Miss Bloom, who is indeed protagonist of the book reviewed, but the mention is clearly meant to function as an allusion to the more widely known Joycean character. Yet the inclusion of Doyle’s and O’Connor’s pictures interferes with the familiarity of the scenario.

Actually, during the 1990s, numerous publications like Yeats is Dead!, brought Irishness to the foreground, often in iconic forms, only to offer a much more composite image through the work itself. Examples may be found in anthologies such as Yeats (W.B.Yeats and His World), by Eavan Boland and the Irish actor Micheál Mac Liammóir; Finbar’s Hotel, a collection of short stories edited by Bolger; Rose d’Irlanda, a collection of short stories by Edna O’Brien and other Irish women writers; Ragazze d’Irlanda, another collection with Marian Keyes and others; Storie di Dublino, a compilation of six short stories by contemporary Irish authors; or Irlandesi, a collection of short stories including contributions from authors such as Máirtín Ó Cadhain and Sarah Berkeley published by Sellerio. In some cases the Italian publisher or translator were responsible for the selection of stories, which means some of those collections are unique to the Italian market. More importantly, however, the growing momentum for everything Irish also allowed the translation of Boland, O’Brien, Bolger
and a considerable number of others to appear in these collections, as well as the flourishing of publications sustained by the fame of their names alone, with no signposts of Irishness on the covers as in the above-mentioned editions. Those names, whether because the trendiness of Ireland allowed them to emerge, or whether they helped Ireland to become “hip” thanks to their success, at some point started to acquire a life largely independent from their Irish origins.

Yet Irishness remained the foundation of this expanding interest. The books published everywhere else under the nom de plume of Benjamin Black, for instance, still appeared under the name of John Banville in Italy. The main justification behind the publishing house policy was that the writer had acquired a certain notoriety which would be a pity not to “exploit,” including his links with Ireland. A similar consideration can be made regarding the presentation of writers still relatively unknown in Italy by fellow Irish writers who are internationally better known. Hugo Hamilton’s testimonial in Italy, for instance, has been provided by Joseph O’Connor, whose review of The Speckled People was translated for Il Corriere della Sera, one of the major Italian newspapers. Hamilton was introduced to the Italian public as “uno scrittore che in patria è considerato un genio” ‘a writer who at home is considered a genius,’ but the heading for the Italian article also emphasises the fact that the Hamilton’s character was raccontato da Joseph O’Connor ‘presented by Joseph O’Connor.’ Like a chain reaction of sorts, O’Connor’s authority helped the newcomer to be welcomed, but the subtle connection between these two names, both actively challenging the traditional pieties of Irishness, is undeniably that of being Irish writers. Nevertheless, this still confirms that the increasing “commodification” of Irish culture, by making it fashionable, stimulated a broader and more multifaceted idea of what Ireland represents, especially in the field of literary production. In his review of Hamilton’s book, O’Connor gives insights much subtler and more “daring” than an Italian journalist could have done. In the closing paragraph, for instance, he states that “Leggendo The Speckled People […] si vedono esposti e distrutti completamente tutti i luoghi comuni dell’Irlanda della fine del ventesimo secolo” ‘When reading The Speckled People one can see all commonplaces about late twentieth-century Ireland exposed and completely destroyed.’

of Irishness, but to more problematic expressions of Irish culture as well. This is particularly true for literature, and not very surprising in view of the fact that Ireland’s literary heritage has been promoted as part of the Irish experience. This is what caused the rather extraordinary situation of literary icons being absorbed into the commodified version of the country, as happened with Franz Kafka in Prague when the city opened up to the Western capitalist mindset. Irish people’s tendency to celebrate, rather than actually read, their writers is sarcastically mocked by O’Connor in *The Irish Male at Home and Abroad*. Nonetheless, both for Kafka and Irish writers, even if commodification fails to capture their essence, it still derives from their greatness. The privileged position occupied by Ireland in the literary world is rooted in the number of Nobel Prizes and writers of international acclaim who hail from Ireland, in proportion to its limited population. Yet, the tendency – already noted in relation to music – to reclaim their belonging to Irish culture for those names previously more generally associated with the English-speaking world, is a rather recent development.

In 1993, Heaney’s poetry was still appearing in an anthology of *Poesia Britannica Contemporanea* whereas, soon after the recognition gained through the Nobel Prize, Heaney’s Irishness was enthusiastically brought to the foreground by publishers. A similar fate is shared by great names from the past, like Beckett, Wilde, Shaw, Swift, Stoker, Berkely or Goldsmith, previously perceived as quite detached from their Irish roots. What was stressed, instead, was their international fame, which was probably the reason why they had been consistently published in Italy even before the 1990s. Another reason may be that some of their works were, and still are, an integral part of official programmes of English Literature for compulsory education. Nonetheless, the very fact that they were generally ascribed to the wider label of “English literature” confirms that their Irishness was generally kept in the background. Yeats and perhaps Joyce, the former by virtue of his association with the Celtic Revival and the latter because of the numerous references to Dublin presented in his work, were the only authors generally studied in relation to their Irish origins. In the academic environment, although courses in Anglo-Irish literature might be offered as an optional subject, Irish literature as a separate discipline has not quite achieved the independence and recognition it deserves. For the publishing market instead, Joyce and Yeats –

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recently joined by Heaney – are treated like the “sacred triptych” of Irish literary icons. They are the successors of a whole range of writers from the past but, most importantly, the godfathers, or the “graddads” – as implied by some Italian newspapers addressing the new generation as their nipoti (grandchildren) – of a whole range of contemporary writers.

Amongst the most curious publications offered to the Italian market within the broader definition of Irish literature is the report of Tom Crean’s life and deeds, by the journalist Micheal Smith, published in 2006 as L’Eroe della Frontiera di Ghiaccio by Effemme, a publisher specialising in nautical guides whose motto is “il mare da navigare e il mare da leggere” ‘the sea to be sailed, the sea to be read.’ An Unsung Hero: Tom Crean, Antarctic Survivor was translated for the series “Le Pagine del Mare” (Pages of the Sea), which includes texts such as Admiral Nelson’s biography or the chronicles of a pirate doctor and twentieth-century corsair. Although the decision to publish the history of Crean’s Antarctic expeditions was mainly justified by the consistency of this subject matter with the publisher’s manifesto, the role that Crean’s Irishness might have played should not be underestimated, as it was probably the same quality that resulted in the long lasting success of the award-winning theatrical adaption of Crean’s story by Aidan Dooley: Tom Crean – Antarctic Explorer. Despite the epic-sounding title chosen for the Italian edition – “the hero of the ice border” – the book barely enters the literary field at all. Another element which makes this book rather peculiar is that Smith wrote the biography with an intended audience in mind, specifically British or American readers with an interest in polar explorations or related subjects. Even the source text, therefore, transcends the Irish borders in terms of “constructed” readership. The “Preface” of the book, for instance, begins in the following way:

The Dingle Peninsula, Kerry, is one of Ireland’s most beautiful spots, its rich mixture of rolling hills and rugged coastline jutting out into the Atlantic; nature at its best. Visitors today come from all over the world to admire the dramatic scenery.75

This introduction of the Irish landscape in terms close to that of “Ireland Fáilte” obviously does not necessitate much mediation when presented to an Italian audience,

as it arguably embodies precisely the image of Ireland that the “imagined” reader would expect. In order to keep the same “constructed” reader, the translation tends to be quite literal, with just some nuances of extra “romanticism.” For instance some emphasis is added to the description of landscapes: “most beautiful” becomes più belle e affascinanenti ‘most beautiful and charming,’ “rolling hills” is translated as pittorese colline ‘picturesque hills.’ Interestingly “dramatic scenery” is translated as paesaggio incantato, an expression which means “charming landscape,” but through the use of an adjective which recalls the word incanto/incantesimo, literally a spell, and which therefore endows the Italian version with a “fairytale” aura which is absent from the source text. A similar “exoticising” attitude towards Irish elements of the book is also kept with regard to other issues, like the constant translation of “Irish-language” with gaelico (Gaelic). The recurring practice of translating “Irish” with “Gaelic” is a perfect example of a translation strategy that distorts the foreign while apparently preserving it. This translation behaviour in fact, together with the fact that Irish is “taught in school,” has created in Italy the common, misleading belief, that Gaelic for the Irish is like Latin for the Italians. Those who never visited Ireland are likely to be unaware that Irish is still the first language of the country and, although regularly spoken only by a minority, is still used in official communications and education. The practice of referring to Irish as gaelico probably derives from this misunderstanding, as irlandese would be perceived as English. Yet in this way, rather than trying to rectify the misconception, the translation effectively helps to perpetuate it.

Another peculiar publication is the translation of Paul Murray’s A Journey with Jonah: the Spirituality of Bewilderment. It is published by Edizioni San Paolo, which is committed to endorse the “Christian message.” A further incentive for the publication might have come from Murray living in Roma under the auspices of the Dominican order. Italian liaisons in fact can have an active role in making available to an author the right connections to have a work translated. This means that access to the Italian publishing world can be provided by personal relations or by the insights and knowledge deriving from direct cultural links with Italy. As I will discuss further on in this thesis, this is often the case with small-scale projects, mostly involving the translation of poetry. Associations with Italy can also be regarded as a favourable condition in influencing the publishers’ decisions to make a particular work available to the Italian public. This seems to be the case with the work of Julia O’Faolain, daughter
of Sean O’Faolain. She made the most out of a BA in Italian and subsequent studies in Roma by writing short stories and novels which often present Italian characters and settings. The translation of her novel *Hercules and the Night-watchman* (1999), a fictional reconstruction of Palmiro Togliatti’s love and life, is published by Editori Riuniti, a publisher born out of the fusion of two publishing houses very close to the Italian Communist Party in the 1950s. It seems reasonable to assume that the major appeal is the historical side of the story, or rather the anti-fascist statement that writing a novel about the Resistance in Mussolini’s time implicitly makes. The role played by a publisher’s political affiliation in the choice of the material to translate has been already widely demonstrated as far as the publications of works related to the Troubles are concerned. Ideological affiliation can also be seen as influencing the choices of the publishing branch of Baldini&Castoldi called “La Tartaruga,” which claims to be *il marchio più importante dell’editoria ‘femminile e femminista’ italiana* ‘the most important brand of “female and feminist” publishing,’ and boasts the active promotion of new female talents in the last twenty years. The manifesto of the publishing house makes immediately clear that, besides literary merit, being a female writer is the most important aspect triggering the publisher’s interest. It is in this light that could be explained the publication of Ita Daly’s short stories collection *The Lady with the Red Shoes*, translated as *La Signora con le Scarpe Rosse ed altri Racconti* (1996). Also two novels by Jennifer Johnston are published by “La Tartaruga;” *The Invisible Worm* (*Il Tarlo Invisibile*, 1999) and *The Christmans Tree* (*L’Albero di Natale*, 2002).

The increasing problematisation of the notion of Irishness brought forth by the success of cultural products related to the country was reflected in Irish cinema as well. The latest wave of Irish movies challenged the stereotypical focus on the rural landscape. Roddy Doyle’s *Barrytown Trilogy* is the most obvious and most successful example of Irish urban settings, an accomplishment which might have helped the success of other movies privileging the punk side of Irish life over the idyllic, like *Intermission* (2003) for instance, or *The Guard* (2011). Although some may find equally clichéd the playful attitude of Dublin’s working class as depicted by Parker in *The Commitments*, or else Irish poverty as depicted in *Angela’s Ashes* – and the risk of international misunderstandings is indeed quite high – these movies function nonetheless as glimpses of different facets of Irishness, no matter how fictionalised they might be. Moreover, the spark of success gave way to interest in Irish cinema as a
whole, facilitating a process of discovery, or even rediscovery, of less commercialised cinematic versions of Ireland, like *In the Name of the Father*, *The Magdalene Sisters*, *Song for a Raggy Boy*, *The Crying Game*, *My Left Foot* and others.

The same eclecticism that fosters a problematisation of the notion of *Irlanda* as displayed by literary and cinematic representations of Ireland is reflected in the format of numerous websites dedicated to the country and its culture. Most of these sites provide the occasional browser seeking information for hotels in Dublin with immediate access to a range of socio-historical aspects concerning the country, from the ancient settlement of the Gaels to the proclamation of the Republic, from the economy to the issue of the Irish language. Some of them also contain documentation of festivals and events somehow related to Ireland, another important way for Italians to approach Irish culture. One such event is *Riflessidiversi*, a poetry festival which every year takes place in Perugia and the surrounding area. The event is promoted by the cultural group Associazione Immagini d’Irlanda, founded in the Umbrian territory by Paul Cahill, an Irish writer who resided in Magione and who is arguably the key figure who initiated such a close relationship between Irish poetry and that part of Italy. In this case then, the peculiar attention reserved to Irish culture and art, is mainly due to the activity of the late Cahill, whose artistic legacy has been readily taken up by the web of distinguished friendships he left behind. *Riflessidiversi* is still an ongoing reality, supported by the Irish State Agency *Culture Ireland* and by the Irish Embassy in Italy. In 2008 ambassador Seán Ó hUiginn was present at the festival, which showcased a range of events, from readings of poetry in original and translation, to musical performances of Celtic harp, and a gig by Kay McCarthy, a Dublin-born artist who lives in Italy and who has become the “spokesperson” for Irish traditional music in Italy. In the same year, the 20th edition of Tratti’n Festival, a festival of music, drama and literature, was also entirely dedicated to Ireland. As is evident from a look at the programme, the aspects of Irish culture with which the festival engaged were far from being popular, like the reading by the Irish language poet Pádraig Ó Snodaigh from *Len* and his difficult poetic prose *Linda*; or the piano solo performance by the Irish composer Tom Cullivan, renowned for his soundtracks for Druid Theatre and An Taibhdhearc, the Irish language national theatre. Cullivan also presented the world premiere of “Cantata per Hiroshima,” his composition inspired by Eoghan Ó Tuairisc’s “Aifreann na Marbh,” performed by four Irish singers and the Italian orchestra from Ferrara Academy of
Music “Frescobaldi.” An issue of the cultural journal *Tratti*, entirely dedicated to Ireland, was also published on the occasion of the festival.

This initiative resembled one proposed the previous year by NAE, a Sardinian cultural journal published every three months, when a conference named “Sotto Due Cielo Diversamente Azzurri/Beneath Two Diversely Blue Skies” was organised in Cagliari. Sardinians seem to have historically nurtured quite a strong symbolic link with Ireland, “*isola lontana ma percepita come sorella*”76 ‘a faraway island yet felt as a sister.’ Both islands have been still struggling to keep a distinct cultural identity and save endangered native languages. The webpage of the journal also includes some extracts and the index, which showcases an impressive range of names involved with Italian literature in Ireland, such as Corinna Salvadori, Catherine O’Brien and Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, and others involved with Irish literature in Italy, such as Melita Cataldi, Rosangela Barone and Giuseppe Serpillo. Also remarkable are the short stories presented, written by Italian or Irish authors, such as Dermot Bolger, and, even more interesting, the range of poems, often translated into four languages: Italian, English, Irish and Sardinian. The journal, touching on a variety of subjects from publishing to drama, from myth to visual arts, presents to Italian readers the “Ireland of the new millennium […] in all her complex variety, with her aura of mystery, her beauty and her scars, her glories and her sorrows,” as Giuliana Adamo, the editor of the issue has put it. However limited the actual audience or readership for such projects might be, the number of people involved in its realisation is a sign of an active dialogue between the two countries. And even if Bolger’s short story and Ó Snodaigh’s essay on Irish writing included in NAE might be read by a limited number of people, it is a phenomenon related to the fact that contemporary Irish authors, Bolger for example, are regularly published for a wider audience by publishers like Fazi or Guanda, and Ó Snodaigh’s *Linda and Len* have been both published by Mobydick. These cultural initiatives promoting a more complex vision of Ireland function as proof of the fluid communication between those professionally involved with the work and the general readership, so clearly attested by some lines from the review of *La Letteratura Irlandese Contemporanea* (Contemporary Irish Literature), a volume which appeared in 2007 as a result of “l’eccezionale fioritura di autori irlandesi negli ultimi vent’anni”

<http://www.cuec.it/rivista/archivio/indice17.htm>
‘the amazing flourishing of Irish authors in the last twenty years.’ The review stated that the thematic presentation of Irish literature from the formation of the Irish Republic till the end of the 1940s was “intended for both the specialist in Irish studies and university students in general, as well as the many devoted readers of Irish literature in Italy, who for years have read with love and attention the dozens of Irish works translated by major Italian publishers” (emphasis mine).77 This final statement also captures one fundamental motivation for the present study: improving understanding of the reasons for the selection of Irish literature published in the Italian context, but also exploring the nature of the “love and attention” demonstrated by Italian readers.

The overall perception of Ireland that has been explored in this chapter is the background against which the assessment of particular literary translations is going to be set, or rather the assessment of the readers’ hermeneutic ventures that these translations may trigger. Any speculation in this direction has to be partly dependent on the knowledge of an Italian reader about subject matter related to Ireland, which can only be loosely, or rather intuitively, defined. However, although the survey of material available is not meant to be exhaustive, the condensed version of Ireland observed from an Italian vantage point outlined in this chapter should supply some important guidelines to help tackle this issue. At the same time, the totality of the information provided is representative, in an Italian context, of a level of competence which requires a dedication verging on obsession in order to be achieved. Some elements in particular only pertain to those academically or culturally involved with Ireland. The first part of the chapter, however, has supplied data which should help to keep the Irish-related knowledge of “imagined” readers in perspective, and has highlighted the fundamental role that the economic aspect plays in different phases of the translation process. This is particularly important as it impinges on the freedom that translators have to act in accordance with their professional assessment of target readers’ prior knowledge about the material translated. The textual analyses at the core of this thesis will demonstrate that leaving possible lacunas in the knowledge of the “imagined” reader unaddressed is more likely to provoke difficulties in the reception process. Yet this is often the case with the translation of literary fiction. The result is that target texts rarely encourage a deeper engagement with the “otherness” articulated by the source text. Yet, even when

translators themselves have a good understanding of the culture they are dealing with, they are often working to an agenda which expects the visibility of the translator to be kept to a minimum. Sometimes publishers specifically require a “format” that responds to pre-established features, like for instance stylistic fluency and the absence of footnotes. Such constraints obviously predetermine in many respects a translator’s mediation act, as their professional intervention needs to be measured against the publishers’ demands, often intended to meet the expectations of what is believed to be the largest number of “imagined” readers. Possible shortcomings of literary translation directly linked to economic imperatives will come to the fore in the next chapter as well, dealing with translation norms relating to different literary genres from a theoretical perspective.
CHAPTER 2: THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

It is my contention that the process resulting in the acceptance or rejection, canonization or non-canonization of literary works is dominated not by vague, but by very concrete factors that are relatively easy to discern as soon as one decides to look for them, that is as soon as one eschews interpretation as a core of literary studies and begins to address issues such as power, ideology, institution, and manipulation.

Lefevere 1992

This chapter will begin by providing a brief survey of different theoretical articulations in the discipline of Translation Studies. This survey will illustrate the principal terms of discussion with which a study of the intercultural dialogue between Italy and Ireland, in relation to literary translation, may be undertaken. At the same time it argues that “the ideology of translation resides not simply in the text translated, but in the voice and stance of the translator, and in the relevance to the receiving audience.”

Therefore, while linguistic preferences and deviations shown by the target texts are the main focus of this thesis, they cannot be investigated without positing the principle that understanding a work of literature is also a matter of understanding the patterns of production and reception. This also calls for an investigation of translation’s complex relation with identity, and the power relations at play between them. For this reason Italy and Ireland’s affiliation to “Western culture” and what this means in terms of intercultural translation will be discussed at length.

According to Maria Tymoczko, the ideology of translation is “an amalgam of the content of the source text and the various speech acts instantiated in the source text, relevant to the source context, layered together with the representation of the content, its relevance to the receptor audience, and the various speech acts of the translation itself addressing the target context, as well as resonances and discrepancies between these two utterances.” The journey into diverse material presenting aspects of Irishness to an Italian public, which was undertaken in the first chapter, has highlighted the “relevance”

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of elements of Irish culture to a “receptor audience.” This, in turn, allows us to assess how literary translations might undergo a homogenising process aimed at creating standardised products, which inevitably generates counterfeit versions, designed to meet audience expectations. My contention is that the reason for the failure of many translations to convey the “idiosyncrasies [...] whose origin and use are intrinsically and uniquely bound to the culture concerned” is a publishing environment which generally considers ease of access the criterion which guarantees maximum sales. In the process of translation of Irish literature into Italian, linguistic and cultural identities impose local constraints and preferences in discourse style, as the target text exists primarily to guarantee the involvement and the participation of target readers. This awareness will allow a preliminary, general assessment of how Irish source texts can be effectively altered by translation. Most of these “alterations” can be accounted for in terms of a certain “untranslatability” of cultural knowledge for readers who are assumed to have a distinct profile from the readers of the source text. The “absences” in a translated text may be caused by mismatches at the level of grammar or lexis, but, more importantly in this context, by the lack of correspondence between the semantics of the two cultural discourses in contact. This study will show that the decision-making process related to the textual transformations involved in bridging those gaps is largely dependent upon the literary genre translated. The reasons for that have to be sought in contextual factors which broadly transcend the individual translator’s knowledge, background and attitude towards the material translated. Overall, the factors which will be taken into account to assess the translation strategies implemented will be the following: linguistic and stylistic properties and the different threshold of acceptability and perception of fluency between target and source language; constraints and structural properties of the target language as opposed to those governing the source language; norms existing within the target and source language literary and publishing domains; differences between the cultural resonances of the same item within the target and source language contexts; the translator’s profile and his/her competence; the textual genre as determinant of the purpose of translation, which is in turn defined by characteristics of the readers’ profile, or “imagined” profile.

This chapter will also introduce the idea that translation, in order to re-articulate elements of the source language culture in ways that make them intelligible to a group whose identity is grounded in an alternative linguistic competence, has to be openly proclaimed. Hence, translation will be mainly assessed as a means to deal with cultural difference, and possible methods to deal with cultural diversity will be examined. In order to establish a functional definition, “culture” is here mainly understood as something not outside the text, but within it, as it is underpinned by the authorial perspective from which a given text is written.\(^{83}\) Such a definition presupposes a potential interaction with the author’s surroundings implicitly promoted by the literary text in question. In the same way as “imagology [...] aims to understand a discourse rather than a society,”\(^{84}\) this dissertation does not intend to explore “Irish culture” as such, but rather the images deriving from its literary representations, and how those are likely to interact with the typical modes of Italian reception outlined in the previous chapter. In other words, in the Italian context of reception, the text has to sustain an interaction with an “image of the foreign,” rather than with the “image of the familiar” that is most likely embedded within the text. This implies that sometimes the absences created by the semantic mismatches between the language codes in contact can be automatically filled by pre-established views of “Irishness.” In this case a translation may endorse preconceptions, legitimising them even further. On other occasions, translation may promote a deeper and more complex understanding of the notion of Irishness through its literature.

As the material considered is extremely diverse, and the source texts belong to different genres, the translation policies utilised and the translation theories to be adopted vary accordingly. Although distinctions between fiction, poetry and drama are significant and, to a large extent, intuitive, this study will show that considerable differences exist also as far as the translation strategies adopted are concerned. In this introductory context, a model of translation which appears to be predominant within each of the literary genres considered will be outlined: pseudo-transparency for fiction,

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\(^{83}\) Cf. As suggested in Hall, Stuart.. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage, 1996, since identities are “constructed within, not outside the discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices by specific enunciative strategies,” p. 4.

mediation for poetry, accommodation for drama. The choice of terminology, however, does not claim validity in absolute terms for the description of the strategies in use. It is rather meant, in the comparative context of this study, to stress how significant differences in the approach to translation exist in relation to literary genres.

CULTURAL SPECIFICITY AND TRANSLATION

In 1990, the introduction of cultural parameters within the discipline of Translation Studies was systematized by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere in their article-manifesto “Proust’s Grandmother and the Thousand and One Nights: The ‘Cultural Turn’ in Translation Studies.” This intervention provided the ultimate amendment to the discussion of translation in terms of linguistic equivalence. This also meant a move from the prescriptive to the descriptive. By stressing the necessity of evaluating a translation in light of the cultural norms in place within the receiving context, a window on issues of patronage and power was opened up.

Following the symbolic divide created by Bassnett/Lefevere’s article, the most recent developments in Translation Studies tend to engage directly with the incommensurability of culture rather than of language. In 1992 Harvey & Higgins came up with a graduating scale meant to evaluate how to execute “cultural transposition” depending on the specific case. Their theoretical conclusion is that in most cases the foreignising/exoticising manner is to be privileged, as potentially it introduces to the target culture features which are rooted in the foreign culture. This perspective anticipates the fundamental stand against “transparency” soon to be brought to the foreground by Venuti, thanks to his critical intervention endorsing “strangeness” as the main mode of resistance against “the hegemony of transparent discourse.” These theoretical approaches rely on the innate human propensity to “make sense.” Consequently, they argue for the opacity of discourse that, by releasing the shock of “not understanding,” may ultimately result in a precious “space for learning.”

Boyd White maintains: “There are opacities in all our speech, all our reading, and part of one’s competence at life includes managing this fact.” From this perspective, texts that challenge the readers’ capacity to extrapolate meaning may push them to take the autonomous initiative of filling in the gaps that hinder their comprehension. According to this line of thought, any absence in the semantic universe of the receiving culture can be addressed by leaving the “alien” entity intact: in this way target readers would see the gap, and they would appreciate that external sources of information are required in order to fill it.

Similar issues of how to express concepts which are unknown in the target culture have also been tackled by Mona Baker. The core of Baker’s contribution is the re-evaluation of linguistic categories that others have dismissed, and which effectively provide practical tools for the analysis of target texts. Her semantic approach, with its introduction of lexical sets, advises translators on how to deal with fields of non-equivalence. In her book, In Other Words (1992), she lists the various forms of difficulty in adhering to a simplistic notion of equivalence that the translator may come across:

- culture specific concepts
- a source language concept which is not lexicalised in the target language
- a source language word which is semantically complex
- distinction in meaning between target and source language
- the target language’s lacks of a super-ordinate (a term which denotes a general class under which a set of subcategories is subsumed)
- the target language’s lack of a hyponym
- differences in physical or interpersonal perspective
- differences in expressive meaning
- differences in form; differences in frequency and purpose of using specific forms
- use of loan words in the source text

The corpus of contemporary Irish literature utilised for this study, contains examples relating to most of these categories, be they religious beliefs, social customs or even types of food. The closer analysis of Italian translations will reveal a number of ways to deal with the difficulties listed by Baker which, for the most part, will corroborate the

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89 Ibid.
more general theoretical considerations presented in this chapter, and in some instances will contradict them in the form of exceptions.

Almost simultaneously with Baker, Malcom Coulthard highlighted a different aspect of the translation process: the importance of defining the ideal reader, not only in terms of linguistic competence, but also of cultural knowledge and experience.\(^\text{91}\) Coulthard is particularly interested in how the sense of belonging to a specific socio-cultural group influences the author. He locates the translator’s major difficulty in the construction of a new ideal reader who will have significantly different cultural knowledge and textual expectations. Coulthard’s prospective solution to what is a central issue to this thesis, however, appears quite simplistic. According to him, once the profile of the target language reader is identified, it is enough to match the cultural differences between the two languages. Even assuming that the “matching up” can be easily and automatically done, something which will be questioned by a number of textual examples supplied by this thesis, Coulthard does not indicate how what is here called “imagined reader” can be identified. As it appeared from the discussion in the previous chapter, for instance, the Italian reader of Irish literary texts is quite elusive. Coulthard’s setting-out of the problem is nonetheless interesting. Effectively, he goes beyond the fairly obvious observation that historical and cultural facts belong to a specific cultural domain, and that culturally specific lexis are unlikely to be known in detail beyond the borders where a given culture holds sway. He stresses that the difference in preferences, opinions and prejudices originates from the impossibility for the target text reader to match the “situational experience” of the source text reader. In this way he is also, perhaps inadvertently, pointing to the discrepancy between the metanarrative of a certain culture from within (auto-image), and the image of the same culture construed from outside (hetero-image). The images of Ireland assembled in the first chapter would hardly match any Irish person’s idea of his/her own homeland; yet they most likely constitute the perspectives from which Irish literature in translation is going to be approached in an Italian context. At the same time, the images of cultural identity existing within Irish culture are also constructions. The acceptance or exclusions of certain elements in the discursive construction of Irish identity is due to a selective forgetting and remembrance. “Selective” is the key word, as it stresses that the

contours of these images invariably change depending on the angle from which one is looking at them. This awareness should invite the translator to move across the spectrum of possibilities in order to avoid either the complete transparency of a set of stereotyped clichés where, according to Boyd White, “one finds no life at all, but a kind of death of mind and self,” or the silencing that hitting too many “empty spaces” in the cognitive universe of the target readers would imply.

Another substantial articulation of this issue comes from Theo Hermans (1999), whose study deals with the cognitive and normative expectations that readers bring to texts. However, although pragmatics and cognitive semantics contribute to define part of the incommunicability inherent to a text, a different approach is needed to examine the complexities linked to the rendition of a literary work going from one culture to another. Misunderstandings might occur when the semantic content, triggered by an apparently equivalent linguistic stimulus, appeals to mental constructions which vary according to the typology of reader. The word “fireplace,” for instance, may evoke the cosiness of the home place for the majority of Irish people, for whom, although some aspects of old familiar gatherings around it might be lost, “lighting a fire” on a winter night is still a tangible reality. In Italy, although the literary language has partly preserved the use of the word focolare to evoke the home place precisely through an etymological root referring to fire (fuoco), most young readers have grown up in electrically heated apartments. Such an approach, however, does not draw a neat line between a subjective and a culturally-determined view of meaning. For the purpose of this research, it is not relevant if somebody’s personal association with “fire” is that of fear because of traumatic personal experiences. Rather than being randomly subjective, “mental pictures” have to be defined as something generated by the filters through which a writer — working within the frames and codes of a definite culture and a definite society — has re-shaped the world.

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92 Boyd White, 1995, p. 337.
DEFINING THE “DISCOURSAL PERSPECTIVE”

The symbiosis between language and culture is at the core of many theoretical debates about translation. Baumann postulated language and culture as equal constitutive factors of a community.\textsuperscript{94} Thus, literary systems could also be read in terms of powerful public metanarratives within a community. According to Karamanian, language is posited as “the only social institution without which no other social institution can function,”\textsuperscript{95} and therefore is seen as the essential element underpinning the very constitution of culture. Overall, it is by now largely acknowledged that “languages are understood to participate in the processes by which individual and collective selves are fashioned.”\textsuperscript{96} In this section, the question of linguistic and cultural identities is addressed with the purpose of highlighting the weight that the perspective from which a text is written can carry in a translation context. Therefore the hazy line between language and culture, and the delicate site of frictions between languages and cultures, become the obligatory starting points for the study of literary translation. In this context, culture can be functionally defined as the preferences which, through the linguistic dimension of a text, contribute to the construction of discourse. Clifford Geertz, from a cultural anthropological perspective, put forward the optimistic and quite controversial programmatic statement that a culture can be “read” as a text.\textsuperscript{97} Hypotheses of identities as narratives are found also in much more recent theories. Mary Louis Pratt, for instance, distinguishes between the “biographical” narrative, which explains collectivity in terms of its evolution over time, and “vertical” narrative, which defines identity in terms of how it differs from specific “others.”\textsuperscript{98} As far as literary texts are concerned, however, it may be more useful to start from a hypothesis which swaps the terms of comparison: the uniqueness which characterises different texts is partly ascribable to the culture which produces them, which is, in turn, a “unique configuration.”\textsuperscript{99} The assumption that culture plays a pivotal role in the construction of texts would explain part of their complexity, which the input of personal narratives

\textsuperscript{95} Karamanian, 2002.
\textsuperscript{99} Definition of culture according to Aberle; quoted in Bauman, 1999.
enhances. This would account for the lack of well-defined categories of analysis which holds true both in the arenas of cultural discourse and of literary translation. Therefore, a flexible use of the conceptual categories amongst those disciplines will be privileged, partly because, as stated by Gayatri Spivak: “[…] the project of translating culture within the politics of identity is not a quick fix.”100

Although the “maddening plurality”101 of contemporary society has blurred the boundaries and many distinctions have disappeared, in the context of this study communities – whether “imagined”102 or gradually fading – are still treated as a factual reality. After all, distinctive public narratives exist even within the same cultural domain: religion, history, education, class or gender awareness, are features of distinction not only between communities; they can also coexist within the same community. Cultures, then, are not to be seen as homogenous blocks, but as porous, elusive entities made of internal contradictions. Most recent understandings of “culture” tend to challenge its foundation as an “immobilising,” “stabilising” factor,103 and dismisses the implicit “coherence” of culture as a system sanctioning supported pressures, interiorised norms and values, habits which have the reassuring power of repetitiveness, as proposed by the traditional anthropological vision.104 The emerging instability of the object of investigation, however, is no excuse for it to be neglected, and does not justify undertaking an approach to literary analysis as if the literary text consisted of “pure, objectless, single-voiced words.”105 The “notion of literature as something pure, free, and universal”106 was also critically questioned by Pascale Casanova. Although Casanova states that “each work that is declared to be literary is a minute part of the immense ‘combination’ constituted by the literary world as whole,”106 she also acknowledged that “the fable of an enchanted world, a kingdom of pure creation, the best of all possible worlds where universality reigns through liberty

104 Ibid., pp. xvi-xvii.
and equality,”107 is a chimera. In other words, the practical impossibility of defining culture on an abstract level requires narrowing the scope of the concept to its relevance to this project. This fundamentally equates to limiting the discussion of culture to the elements that have a direct impact and influence on literary works. It is for this reason that the notion of “discoursal perspective” is adopted.

In order to try to define what is meant by “discoursal perspective” I would like to start from a statement by Mikhail Bakhtin:

We find the author (perceive, understand, sense, and feel him) in any work of art. For example, in a painting we always feel its author (artist), but we never see him in the way we see the images he has depicted. We feel him in everything as pure depicting origin (depicting subject), but not as a depicted (visible) image. Even in a self-portrait, of course, we do not see its depicting author, but only the artist’s depiction. Strictly speaking, the author’s image is contradictio in adjecto.108

What he means is that the authors’ voices are not their real voices, but the voices of masks they willingly wear in order to endow their words with tones and meanings derived from their interaction with other voices which constitute the essence of their surroundings. In this sense, the text is “a subjective reflection of the objective world.”109 Yet it does not reflect exclusively the author’s consciousness, as the cultural context exercises the same demiurgic power on the author that the author has on its work. Bakhtin also states:

The words of a language belong to nobody, but still we hear those words only in the particular individual utterances, we read them in particular individual works, and in such cases the words already have not only a typical, but also (depending on the genre) a more or less clearly reflected individual expression, which is determined by the unrepeatable individual context of the utterance.110

Ultimately then, literary works may be seen as a series of “utterances” which are detached from their contexts, but which nonetheless have been shaped by where they have been conceived. Bakhtin’s fundamental point is that “any truly creative voice can only be the second voice in the discourse.”111 To him, the second voice is “pure

107 Ibid., p. 4.
109 Ibid., p. 113.
110 Ibid., p. 88.
111 Ibid., p. 110.
relationship:” what matters is not the substance of what is said, but rather the relationship it establishes with what is not said, the implicit statements of the author’s cultural background. The hermeneutic difficulty consists in the fact that when a text becomes the object of the readers’ cognition it becomes “the reflection of a reflection.” Therefore: “the understanding of the text is a correct reflection of a reflection.” In this regard, understanding a creative verbal discourse is never a tautology or duplication, since it always involves two consciousnesses and a potential third spawned by the dialogic relations between the two. This operation is rendered even more complex by the fact that the uttering consciousness expresses a multifaceted system of relations between voices which are sometimes distant, unnamed and almost undetectable, and at other times are loud and identifiable. What is subject to change from the receiver’s perspective is not the ontological status of such voices, but precisely the relations between them. It is in this respect that the position from which the system is observed is fundamental.

Bakhtin also posits a potential participant inscribed in the text itself, one he calls superaddressee, “whose absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed, either in some metaphysical distance or in distant historical times.” It is a formulation which recalls Osip Mandelstam’s idea of “reader in posterity,” as it seems to tentatively articulate in metaphysical terms the perspective from which a text is written. It does that by positing the existence of an audience able to retrieve the delicate balance between the content of a story and how the narrator chooses to tell it. During the translation process this balance is easily subjected to minor shifts. This can have consequences of unexpected proportions in the overall economy of the literary works and their reception in the target context. The major difficulty in preventing these shifts is that they are mostly due to the paradoxical fact that languages encompass “non-linguistic elements of culture,” which C.S. Peirce called “indices.” Indices can be read by the receiver as informants on the sender’s state only if s/he is acquainted with a certain psychological and physiological knowledge of the sender. Peirce resorts to the notion of “interpretant” to explain how a sign can stand for something different to different

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112 Ibid., p. 126.
114 Bauman, 1999, p. 70.
interlocutors. The interpretant is the “mediating representation” between a “sign” or
signifier and its “object,” itself a representation, a content or signified. The
transformation inherent to the use of language as mediation emerged as an issue as early
as Aristotle’s On Interpretation: “Now spoken words are symbols of affections in the
soul, and written marks symbols of spoken sounds. And just as written marks are not the
same for all men, neither are spoken sounds.” Aristotle identifies the greatest
indeterminacy in the passage from mental images to “things of the voice,” and therefore
in the “symbolic or semiotic” nature of the relation between language and the
“affections in the soul.” This Aristotelian approach is also the basis of Humboldt’s
understanding of language as dually determined. In his own words:

All signs of language are symbols, not the things themselves, not signs agreed
on, but sounds which find themselves, through the mind in which they originate
and keep originating, in a real and, so to speak, mystical connection with the
things and concepts they represent; which contain the objects of reality
dissolved, as it were, in ideas.

On the one hand, human experience and concepts of rational understanding are
universal; on the other, the culturally conditioned work of imagination “stimulates and
enacts the relations between experience and understanding.” Humboldt also
tentatively recognises some interrelation or convergence between different languages,
yet he ultimately deems translation, for the most part, impossible. Starting from a
similar premise, Quine expressed concerns about language itself as an efficient medium
of communication. According to the American philosopher, every instance of
communication between two speakers involves a “radical translation.” However, it is
impossible to analyse this process because there is no “interpersonal” evidence
available: the meaning each speaker assigns to the utterance is determined by a
psychological state, a stimulation, which is hidden to any but the person whose state it
is. Those “stimulations” are private to the individual who is expressing them and cannot

116 Peirce, Charles S. Selected Writings (Values in a Universe of Chance). New York: Dover Publications,
1966, p. 53.
119 Varsos, George “The Disappearing Medium: Remarks on Language in Translation.” Intermédialités:
Histoire et Théorie des Arts, des Lettres et des Techniques / Intermediality: History and Theory of the
be shared with others except through the very utterances, to which the addressee could assign meaning only by knowing what (private) stimulation has prompted the utterance in the first place.\footnote{Cf. Ben Amara, Radhouan. \textit{Language and Cultural Translation: An Exile & a Permanent Errance}. Roma: Aracne, 2009, p. 13.} All those views are mostly calibrated on speech acts, whose pragmatic dimension is much more neatly definable than that of the written word. Yet every text message virtually encodes a pragmatic level of meaning which can disrupt the socio-cultural appropriateness when moved across context. With literary texts, it might be thought of as a “ratio of ‘energy’”\footnote{Bauman, 1999, p. 71.} (Humboldt also employed the Greek \textit{energeia} as his term of choice), which surpasses the informative content of the linguistic element, or more succinctly, what is “written between the lines.” This is the area where most conspicuous problems are to be encountered in the translation process. Even when the approach is foreignising, this does not necessarily reproduce the source value when the “unsaid” is what endows the source text with part of its meaning. From this perspective, it is possible to illustrate how a source text can be inadvertently, or at times inevitably, transformed by its translation. Pretending that the Italian narrating voice, which a translation is bound to articulate, naturally shares the same “sensibility” as the Irish voice it substitutes, conceals the transformational charge of translation. The visible hallmarks of foreignness carried by literary texts may not be enough to remind readers that the text is written from a standpoint which, more or less consciously, assumes the writer as being within the culture he is expressing/criticising. This does not necessarily mean that a full responsive understanding is possible only if the addressee shares the same socio-cultural conditions under which the source texts is produced, partly because the act of translation itself entails the compliance with requirements of communication existing within the receiving culture. Yet the frequent choice of denying readers an immediate recognition of their inevitable disconnectedness from the otherness of the text sets up a travesty which not only compromises the reception of the target text, but effectively hinders the transformational charge of translation in its more political guise. As Venuti maintains:

If translation fails to communicate the source text but disfigures it with the concepts and interests of the translating culture, what hope is there for a translated text to reach the ethical and political goal of building a community with foreign cultures, and a shared understanding with and of them?\footnote{Venuti, Lawrence. \textit{The Translation Studies Reader}. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 341.}
A considerable number of Italian translations are designed as if catering for a bi-cultural audience in between the two languages, even if something like this exists only in theory, and its formation is hampered by the rejection of translation as “representation” of differences. The frequent lack of awareness, or the conscious disregard, of these differences may also cause misrepresentations by superimposing traits of the target culture on the source text. The neutrality that a theoretical concept like “cultural hybridity” would imply is thus thwarted by the “pull” towards the target culture to which the source culture is subjected. It is an asymmetry explained by Venuti in the following terms:

Translating can never simply be communication between equals because it is fundamentally ethnocentric. Most literary projects are initiated in the domestic culture, where the foreign text is selected to satisfy different tastes from those that motivated its composition and reception in its native culture.

**THE IDEOLOGY OF TRANSLATION**

Starting from considerations of translation as social phenomenon and cultural practice, Nico Wiersema links the evolution of translation practices to the notion of globalisation. He believes that the gradual increase of intercultural contacts between different social groups is a phenomenon which has great relevance for translation. Wiersema’s standpoint, although far from some “ultraprogressive fringe” of thought which would deny any substantive difference between alternative cultural communities and dismiss the very idea that multiculturalism may exist as “conservative,” conforms to the new trend of questioning the differentiation of cultures. Nevertheless, the model proposed by this study rests on a fundamental agreement with Trivedi’s statement that, even if the issue of globalisation has to be acknowledged in the constant growth of international relations, it may “spell […] the very extinction and erasure of translation as we have always known and practised it.” For this reason “cultural translation” is

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more traditionally conceived as a challenge to reconcile textual elements and extralinguistic circumstances which are often unsuited and sometimes contradictory. The articulation of cultural difference, accordingly, derives from the recognition of alternative historical-cultural conditions under which texts are produced and received.

The importance of trying to pin down some of the persisting differences behind the process of integration and increasing intercultural communication mainly derives from the fact that translation choices are often consciously based on a conceptualisation of reality which aims at preserving or consolidating the culture specific discourse of the target language. This can be seen as a statement for or against globalisation depending on the target language considered. Venuti, for instance, identifies the homogenising tendency which marks out most translations into English, and effectively determines what he famously calls the “translator’s invisibility.” This homogenisation, besides having repercussions in the political and social arena, is a way to ensure hegemony especially within the cultural arena. This is because it reduces the opportunities for thinking about the nature of linguistic and cultural difference. According to Bauman each moral code is “unaware of its own relativism,” an observation that seems to apply to the broader definition of “culture” as well. This problem can be exacerbated by the “asymmetry in translation patterns,” which sees the extremely broad use of English as a source language largely unmatched by the number of translations produced each year by British and American publishers. Their translated works constitute only between 2.5 and 3 percent of their total output, which exposes the marginality of translation in contemporary Anglo-American culture. Venuti described this situation in terms of: “cultural narcissism and complacency, an unconcern with the foreign that can only impoverish Anglo-American culture and foster values and policies grounded in inequality and exploitation.” In some European countries however the situation is altogether different. The percentage of texts translated is significantly higher and, as English language literature commands the capital of most foreign publishers, most of the source-texts translated are likely to belong to Anglo-American cultural domains. In this case, domesticating strategies can be a means to resist globalisation, as they help to

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perpetuate linguistic identities which are not dominant. However, this may change again whenever the source language is not English. Examining translation of Irish literature into Italian allows the exploration of those issues from different perspectives, as it includes texts from both English and Irish.

The study of the correlation between an Irish source text and an Italian target text provides an ideal ground for approaching the process of translation when post colonialism or power unbalance between two sides is not the issue. Italy and Ireland are situated at the opposite edges of Europe, and they rarely played a major role in historical events of worldwide significance. This prevents the existence of any conflict of interest between the two countries, and the contemporary scenario still backs up this superficially neutral interaction. The economic boom of the nineteen nineties harmonised Ireland with the leading European countries, but more recently it has been undergoing a recession which brought it to a crisis that Italy has been virtually suffering since its own miracolo economico ended in the early seventies. In other words, there are no issues of dominance between Ireland and Italy: the two countries occupy a similar strategic position within the European community, which is hardly threatening. Their relative “innocuousness” when it comes to imposing political or economic standards on an international level makes any form of cultural antagonism between them very unlikely. This absence of any historical acrimony, as well as any form of special alliance or migratory routes between the two countries, is precisely what makes the examination of literary translation between Ireland and Italy functional to the theoretical approach pursued by this study.

The specific case of Irish literature translated into Italian seems to confirm Venuti’s suggestion that every culture becomes “dominant” in its own home, seeing that even if the translating direction is not towards an English-speaking “first world,” foreign texts are generally “borne across” in terms of congeniality to the receiving context. Venuti brings examples of how Italian literature in translation entering the American cultural arena is often forced to conform to the target audience’s

Yet, when Italy is the target culture, the situation is reversed, except perhaps precisely for bestselling American authors, as their works are often full of icons of American culture which, by virtue of its overwhelming cultural predominance, have already been assimilated by Italian culture as well. For this reason, translators of American literature can rely on the mediation operated by the mass appeal of American movies which enable readers to recognise large or small emblems of American society. “The sheriff,” “the diner,” “New York Skyline,” “FBI” are words with immediate resonance even for people who have never visited the USA. By the same token, historical characters like Richard Nixon (or indeed any other American President), or related events, like Watergate, are familiar to the average Italian reader. The “tokens of Irishness,” which have a high international recognisability are quantitatively fewer than those of the “USA package.” They partly converge with some of the traits humorously exposed by Terry Eagleton’s *The Truth about the Irish*, like the “shamrock,” “the fairies” and “Yeats.”

This book however is a spirited meditation more than a catalogue, as the blurb claims. Despite a cover that deceivingly presents the quintessential stereotype of a smirking freckled red-haired boy, the selection goes beyond the basic elements of a hetero-image of Ireland, and includes aspects that only people who have been living in Ireland or are familiar with Irish values and traditions would appreciate. Furthermore, the sharp irony running through the commentaries suggests that the constructed reader, in fact, is a witty Irishman rather than a curious foreigner who, after all, could feel uneasy about distinguishing between Eagleton’s curious mix of objective information and sarcastic exaggerations.

Whatever the actual number of those tokens of Irishness recognised internationally, the principle is not so dissimilar to what happens to the American ones: a commodified version of Irish culture can be evoked in foreign readers’ mind by translated works, if the translator decides, or, indeed, the publisher’s policy demands treatment of those traits in simplistic terms. Hence the polyphony of a culture in all its complexity can be threatened by translation strategies which promote instead a unified,

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monolithic view of the same. An Italian professional translator recently confirmed that
the publisher Mondadori, with regard to a book set in Australia, would like the
translator’s suggestions on how iconic images of the continent, such as “boomerangs”
or “kangaroos,” could be added to the title. And the norm for translators is to go along
with these kinds of requests, as the editorial team is responsible for the final decision
about the title anyway. Although the book discussed in this occasion belonged to the
Harmony series, those practices are often extended to books with higher literary
ambitions.

Flann O’Brien’s *At-Swim-Two-Birds*, for instance, has been translated into
Italian as *Una Pinta di Inchiostro Irlandese*, (literally “A Pint of Irish Ink”). As
O’Brien’s title is in itself an ironic translation from Irish, its reference would be most
likely incomprehensible to an Italian reader, so the Italian creative version can after all
be considered legitimate. Such examples, however, also show that considering the use
of stereotypes as a foreignising device – as a more naïve distinction between
domestication and foreignisation would posit – is rather problematic. A genuine
foreignising technique should draw the readers’ attention to the alienating elements in
the target version by a momentary disruption of their automatic reception, and possibly
provide the interpretative tools necessary for an understanding of the foreignness in
terms which surpasses the readers’ preconceptions. Through the use of stereotypes,
instead, the foreign infiltrates a given cultural system only after having undergone a
conversion which ultimately reasserts the self-identity of the receiving system.136
Bauman sees in this assimilation “the primary response to be expected by any receiving
culture.”137 This position is shared by a number of cultural commentators and is clearly
theorised in terms of literary translation by Venuti: “the very function of translation is
assimilation, the inscription of a foreign text with domestic intelligibilities and
interest.”138 Yet he strongly criticises this practice, as it not only alters the possible
meanings of the foreign text by adding domestic nuances to foreign representations, it
denies the possibility of learning respect for cultural differences through a gradual
defamiliarisation of domestic cultural values which could reveal “their hierarchical

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137 Ibid.
arrangements, their canons and margins.”\textsuperscript{139} Although Venuti’s critique started from considerations about the pedagogical approach to foreign literature in America, his view has expanded to the practice of translation in general. Research shows that the typical selection of works from a dominated culture to hegemonic one tends to fit prevailing stereotypes of the foreign culture within the hegemonic culture, which eventually internalise the imported works.\textsuperscript{140} This is mainly due to the fact that acts of translation are normally initiated by the receiving culture and this, accordingly, determines the end product. Hence “some degree of compliance with stereotypes”\textsuperscript{141} is often pursued by authors in a dominated culture. They are aware that specific cultural gaps in receiving cultures are mostly filled in according to the “wishes” of patrons who, from an unquestionable position of power, act as “planning agents.” To comply, the authors have to overcome the restricted boundaries often imposed by the choice of writing in a minority language. Most scholarly research that investigates translations from a “minority-status” language to a dominant one condemns every form of reflection in the target text of the cultural values of the target society. Conversely, domestication is praised when applied to an opposite situation, because “minority-status” languages can thus be protected from absorbing foreign elements.\textsuperscript{142} Literary translation into the Irish language is a case in point where the act of translation has more to do with the assertion of cultural identity than a practical necessity. Therefore, a work of Italian literature, for instance, should be translated according to “foreignising” techniques if translated into English, but a translation into Irish would have to be domesticating.

The line of thought that sprang from the “cultural turn in Translation Studies” as theorised by Bassnett and Lefevere recognised the high symbolical value that translation can have in ideologically charged situations. This means that often the emphasis has been put on the sociological purposes of translation, as if starting from the unstated premise that the main objective of a translated work is the necessity to fill a cultural void. The ultimate focus of such theoretical approaches though is on people rather than on texts, on language as expression of cultural communities, and their conclusions follow accordingly. In this perspective they may advocate the relative

\textsuperscript{139} Venuti, Mar. 1996.
\textsuperscript{141} Jacquemont in Sidiropoulou, 2004, p. 151.
“provincialisation” of the Western hegemony which characterises postcolonial thinking as a desirable goal.\footnote{Cf. Sidiropoulou, 2004, p. 150.} This ideological element, however, is necessarily absent from the present study, for two reasons. First of all, a conscious decision has been made to root my analysis within the discipline of Literary Studies and keep the focus on the text. Secondly, but more crucially, the translating flow under examination is moving within the Western cultural paradigm. Essentially, source texts belonging to a relatively “minority culture” – Ireland – are translated into a relatively “minority language” – Italian. This creates an original configuration for which, so far, a suitable theoretical framework does not appear to have been developed. The impression of neutrality, in fact, would lead one to presuppose a rather equal mutual exchange. Nonetheless, it is difficult to present empirical data on the diffusion of translations of Italian writing in Ireland, as the Irish market can be reached by target texts which cater for an English-language audience that goes well beyond Irish borders. The crucial point, however, is that no issue of cultural identity survival is really at stake in the Irish-Italian exchange. To some extent, the Irish language material could be seen as “at risk.” Yet this pertains only to a small number of translated texts, and in any event, as will be shown by the textual analyses, the translations of these texts employ strategies which work against the assimilation of indigenous elements in the target context. Moreover, the question should be addressed from a much wider perspective, as the threat to the Irish language certainly does not come from its Italian translations. Quite the reverse, as closer analysis will show, those translations are often a means to promote awareness of Irish on the international domain.

Another important repercussion of the fact that instances of cultural translation might be less radical between Irish and Italian cultures than they are expected to be in more exotic or politically charged encounters, is that the domesticating pressure is less tangible and is generally less serious than it might be in other contexts. My contention is that the subtleties of the alterations and displacements caused by this less manifest form of domestication are the very reason why it is worth drawing attention to them. In a nutshell, the closeness of Italian and Irish cultures guarantees an illusion of understanding. This allows the target texts not to emphasise the deepest level of difference, since “fold and wrinkles” generated on the surface are foreign enough to be
interesting, but rooted in a common ground which secures them within the realm of intelligibility. The European context, in fact, caters for a perfectly marketable form of “exoticism.” From this perspective, the unquestionable, if intangible, “mutual sympathy” with which Italy and Ireland look at each other is only the starting point of much more complex forms of ideological interactions. It is a sympathy eagerly fostered as it works in commercial terms. While differences between the two cultures are clear and discernible, they are not as “strange” as perhaps those faced by a European confronted with the hermetic symbolism of certain Asiatic cultures. One popular example might be the movie *September 11*, produced shortly after the attack on the Twin Towers. Eleven directors, from various parts of the world, made a short film about the event from a personal perspective. The approaches to the task, chosen by the various directors, were very distinctive, and related to their own cultural contexts. However, the relation to 9/11 and the relevance of each story to the actual event was obvious in all but one of the films. The Japanese director Shohei Imamura closed the movie with a scene that portrays a WWII veteran behaving like a snake. Without an understanding of the symbolism of Japanese culture or the background of colonial wars in Japan, both the aesthetic and references of the film are bound to remain rather obscure for most Western viewers. In this case at least, the audience is aware of not fully understanding. In an exchange between similar cultures, instead, a loss of meaning can remain much less evident.

In reality, especially with literary works, the meanings are more than likely reduced, unless they are adequately developed so as to allow the receiving culture to reach an acceptable depth of understanding. Such depth is often denied by the combination of the pressure that a publishing house can exert on a translator, (rather than on an author) and a certain underestimation of the importance of culture-specific elements. This is particularly true for the translation of contemporary fiction, which constitutes the bulk of Italian translations from Irish literature. In this area, publishers widely accept a homogenising language and the absence of any form of explanation in the paratext as the norms; consequently they discourage attempts to articulate the meanings of the source context as comprehensively as possible. Although most of these standards are not directly traceable to written rules handed over to Italian translators, they are unanimously acknowledged by them, as they are aware that presenting a work challenging the *status quo* would simply mean facing rejection. One recent testimony to
this state of affairs was given during a public seminar by Franca Cavagnoli, Italian translator of Nobel Prize-winners such as V. S. Naipul and J. M. Coetzee, who resignedly acknowledged the force of “acquired habits” within the Italian publishing environment. Even a translator of her stature, highly aware of the cultural complexity behind the source texts she translates, cannot totally dismiss editorial norms which expect translations to be broadly “standardised” and to meet the aesthetic criteria predominant within the receiving culture. By the same token, although Cavagnoli would be suitably qualified to provide introductions or indeed any kind of critical intervention for the texts she translates, she maintained during her lecture that none of this material would be included if the publishers deemed it irrelevant or counterproductive, which they did on the vast majority of occasions.  

Cavagnoli’s statements support the argument that translators often follow the silent diktats of the agenda of the publishing industry, which in turn often answer “entrepreneurial” needs, since the survival of the business can only be guaranteed by an economic return. Important exceptions, mainly in the form of specialised publishers, prevent us from drawing conclusions which might be considered reflective of the overall activity of the publishing industry in Italy. However it seems fair to state that publishers rarely treat works of contemporary fiction as migrating entities endowed with culture-specific features and largely ignore the pressure points between systems of meaning. As a result translation is situated in a utopian realm of sorts, removed from the tensions and contradictions of cultural determination.

TRANSLATING FICTION, POETRY AND DRAMA

In their move to Italy, foreign cultural traits embedded in Irish novels -- be they historical, geographical or social -- are very often not as completely assimilated to those of the target culture as a straightforward domestication would imply. This is partly in contrast with the conscious inscription of American cultural values that Venuti theorises regarding foreign texts entering the American sphere of influence, as in Italy most foreign elements are not exactly domesticated, but simply left unexplained. Nonetheless, this can prove equally inadequate for the translation of literary fiction, the essence of which is often the subtle articulation of those very same traits. This study posits the failure to address cultural differences embedded in texts as a feature of the
dominant policy in Italy in the translation of contemporary fiction. A related argument is that target texts which preserve foreignising elements inserted within a highly normalised language, and which do not include notes, glossaries and introductions, hardly enrich the target culture. The idea is rather to give an impression of easy accessibility, so that the constructed reader is not encouraged to engage with the foreignness of the text. In this way the foreign elements may too easily become an ornament, “local colour” without further significance, even with regard to texts for which this is not necessarily true. In this dissertation, some attempts will be made to discuss an alternative to this predominant practice of translation. “Pseudo-domestication” is the term chosen to refer to a translation strategy that encourages the acknowledgments of the relativity of the constructed reader’s perspective. This should be achieved by substituting the hollowness of a “foreign remainder” transmitted in ways that make it insignificant to the target audience with a new capacity of meaning, instilled by illuminating the foreign through the familiar. Besides establishing an oppositional relationship with pseudo-transparency, the decision to employ the prefix “pseudo-” in an unusually positive light is intended to pose a rhetorical challenge to the Italian publishers’ uncritical acceptance of “transparency.” The provocation implied by this unorthodox use of terminology may function as an invitation to question whether the positive connotations normally associated to the word “transparency” do hold true within the area of translation.

In Venuti’s view, transparency is the result of an assimilation of differences “to dominant values in the target language culture.”145 Consequently, he employs the term quite disparagingly to describe the invisibility of foreign traits in imported literatures which are forcefully exposed to the domesticating pressures of the dominant English-speaking world. The Irish-Italian exchange is clearly less affected by an overt imbalance of power than that experienced by virtually every translation entering the all-absorbing cultural universe of the United States, on which Venuti’s analysis is calibrated. The transparency practiced in Italy on Irish fiction, precisely because it does not present the same traits of authority, is fundamentally different, therefore, from what happens in the United States. The norm amongst Italian publishers is not to strive to erase differences, but more simply to ignore them. Foreign cultural values are not straightforwardly

suppressed, but rather silenced or distorted by the failure to mediate, or at least recognise, their heterogeneity.

In most cases, it seems legitimate to surmise that behind the decision to ignore the possible difficulties posed by signifiers that lack an equivalent within the context of the target language culture is simply due to the fact that it constitutes an “easy way out.” The deliberate implementation of such policies is responsible for a great number of mistranslations, or rather, more accurately, missed translations. As has been suggested above, a translation can deviate from the source text even when culture-bound source words, concepts and icons, which are deeply rooted in the foreign culture from which the literary work stems, are kept apparently intact. This, for instance, can be due to a failure to reproduce the relationship between what is narrated, how it is narrated and by whom, which has been introduced as “discoursal perspective.” Take the Italian translation of Joseph O’Connor’s *Star of the Sea* (2004), which illustrates how cultural difference is not automatically valorised with the employment of the apparently foreignising techniques of leaving cultural items intact. In a text of historical and social density such as O’Connor’s *Star of the Sea*, the narration is mostly by fictional characters. These are meant to embody typical attitudes of the time, through which the historical events are filtered. If it was an historical treatise, the events themselves would be explored further in the main text; if it was historical narrative they would probably be
footnoted. O’Connor, instead, creates a game of intersections between fiction and reality, relying on his readers’ ability to figure out which is which and to draw the relevant conclusions. This might put foreign readers in the uneasy position of being at a loss, as their knowledge of the historical background of the novel is likely to be limited. Moreover, the author’s viewpoint needs to be recomposed from the multiple voices that, within the novel, articulate different perspectives. This makes the process of understanding far from straightforward, and notions such as formal or dynamic equivalence do not seem to allow for a translation able to recover the knowledge of the historical context and make meaningful to target readers the perspectives of the fictional characters from which they are told. This complexity is largely played down by the Italian edition. There is no introduction or footnotes, aside from the notes embedded in the fictional universe of the novel itself, and these only serve to further destabilise the reliability of the narration. Furthermore, the Italian edition suppresses most of the images from historical journals originally incorporated in the text, despite the fact that these are often clues to the complex historical perspective which needs to be embraced to fully appreciate the story. By doing this, and by reducing the pages’ margins, the Italian edition gives the false impression of compactness to a novel whose very essence is its scope. This illusion of simplicity can also be perceived in the Italian cover, especially when compared to the Vintage Book Edition of Star of the Sea, which displays a fusion of two paintings, the ship from The Steam Packer “Saint Patrick” on the Liverpool to Dublin Run by Miles Walter and the crowd from The Emigrants by Thomas Falcon. The visual complexity and details are erased from the cover by Italian publisher Guanda, which displays the rough shape of a ship whose only visible element is a yellow star in the middle. Overall, the narrator(s)’ disposition is partly eradicated by the way the Italian text is translated and presented and, accordingly, the implicit construction of the audience and what the novel can potentially communicate is deformed.

One important argument that emerges from an inspection of the predominant practices in the translation of fiction is the necessity for the direct recognition of translation as such. This would allow for the construction of the significance of foreign texts in forms which are not passively subservient to the needs of the receiving culture. This brings into question the publishers’ reticence to stress that a book is a translation, as if this would somewhat diminish the value of the work. By browsing a random
catalogue of Italy’s biggest publishers, we encounter German, French, American and Russian authors alongside Italian ones, with no apparent distinction between an original Italian title and a translated one. Names as diverse as George Simenon, James Hillman and Benedetto Croce, are often listed together and published in the same series. Nuala Ó Faoláin’s work can appear alongside Bill Bryson’s, Lucía Etxebarría’s or Ugo Foscolo’s, as if they were all of the same status. And the only clue that translated works are scattered amongst Italian originals, is the translator’s name in lower case letters followed by an even smaller original title. This information appears on the first internal page, where all the technical details about the publisher are given.

Part of the reason for the postmodern melting-pot of genres, epochs and languages offered by publishers can be traced to the economic crisis which has affected publishing houses since the 1990s. This forced the financial mergers of publishing firms in response to an increasingly fragmented market and this, in turn, caused the selection of material published to become extremely eclectic. Many series showcase popular and commercial genres alongside literary works. Yet introductions or footnotes tend to be avoided. This is particularly so with contemporary fiction; the format used to introduce John McGahern to an Italian public, for instance, is not so different from that used to present Cecilia Ahern’s work. This is consistent with the tacit assumption that entertainment is the primary appeal of any kind of fiction. The general impression conveyed is that of a market which is unaware of the theoretical mayhem that the dismissal of translation as merely a matter of linguistic substitution has caused. Publishers still seem to stubbornly cling to the popular belief in the “transparency of languages,” in the inherent translatability of every language system. Playing down the reality that every translation is, to some extent, arbitrary seems deliberately naïve. Italian publishers present translated texts as seeming to be as authentic and stable as the source text, an assumption that is also questioned by recent theories. Translation is still presented as the passive reproduction of a transcendent meaning. This does not necessarily mean that they are blissfully unaware that “translation is often related to


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precariousness and the absence of what is unconditionally legitimate,” they are rather consciously pursuing an agenda which builds around translations a fake halo of absolute authority. This relates to the policy of trying to ensure the maximum economic return. Drawing attention to the arbitrariness of the transformation undergone by translated texts would not be a good marketing strategy when readers are conceived of as fairly uncritical consumers who turn to literature mainly for entertainment purposes. In this scenario, enabling readers to appreciate foreign literature starting from an understanding of the source language culture in terms of its diversity from the target language culture is a concern often pushed to the background. Especially if this has to be achieved by expecting readers to re-invent themselves as critical thinkers aware of, or interested in, (post)modern literary theories.

Also symptomatic of this tendency is the custom that a translator is only allowed to work into his native language, as this level of fluency is needed to ensure that the target text reads as an original. Accordingly, this is the main parameter taken into account for the assessment of a good translation in terms of being suitable for publication. “Accuracy” or “equivalence” to the original – no matter how problematic these terms might be – is not the primary criterion, but rather the fluency, the readability of the translation. As mentioned elsewhere, it is a form of fluency which differs from domestication as a straightforward assimilation of foreignness. The erasure is limited to the suppression of linguistic differences, whereas remnants of cultural items belonging to the source text may give the impression of a foreignising approach. A good example of this might be Doyle’s *A Star Called Henry* (1999), in which real life historical characters move alongside fictional ones in early twentieth-century Dublin. This novel is packed with issues of history, landscape and identity, but they are filtered through the lens of Doyle’s corrosive irony and fast-paced style. The Italian translation *Una Stella di Nome Henry* (2000) keeps the characters and the locations (De Valera, the Four Courts, Sinn Féin) in their original form; yet Doyle’s distinctive prose style is consistently normalised. Incidental sentences, which cause the narration to be hectic and fragmented in the source text, are rendered in more conventional ways in Italian. The

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Italian version also appears “visually” tamed with the suppression of incidental traits, and Irish dialogue is standardised according to Italian graphic style. This consists of embedding the different speaking voices in inverted commas, neatly distinguishing the narrating self and the characters, whereas Doyle’s original is often blurred. Syntactic variations are also not reproduced. For example, constructions of the sentence “seen them with her own eyes, she did” is rendered with a conventional Italian syntax *li ha visti con i suoi stessi occhi, sapete.* In the same way, Jack’s jargon, indicated by the insertion of “like” at the end of the sentence, is translated every time with a different colloquialism, “accidentally, like” becomes *così, per caso,* etc. Also, the insertion of “now,” is equally suppressed: “Is that so, now?” becomes *Ah, sì?* Hiberno-English expressions employing the diminutive suffix –een become a meaningless Italian diminutive. For example, “Could you not wait till the summer for your manoeuvres, young fellow?” becomes *non potevi aspettare l’estate per fare le tue manovrine, giovannetto?* Elsewhere, typical Irish expressions employing this diminutive form, such as “You’ll have a dropeen of soup now,” becomes the neutral *ti faccio mangiare un po’ di minestra adesso...* (I’ll have you eating a bit of soup now), or instead they are simply suppressed, like in “the priesten’s name”*/nome del prete* ‘the priest’s name’. The diminutive particle *wee* shares a similar fate: “Angry wee man” becomes *piccolino arrabbiato,* which literally means the same, but does not have the same social and local connotation. Likewise, “You’re a desperate wee melt” completely loses the diminutive value with *sei uno strazio.* Finally the creative expression “a wee puss-filled gurrier” is reconfigured as *ragazzino orribile e pustoloso, un poco di buono,* which, although it maintains the semantic value of the source text, loses the explosive mix of idiomatic expressions and personal twists in Doyle’s language. The impression conveyed by this translation, all in all, seems to be a certain toning down of the source text. Colloquialism and swearing are maintained, but the exaggerations or linguistic peculiarities characterising most of the dialogue are not as prominent as in the source text. Thus, the Italian translation has a less mordant irony. This, in turn, tends to overshadow the debunking aspect of the novel. Also, in the source text, large chunks of history are summarised in long “stream of consciousness” paragraphs, or else condensed in two-line comments. Obviously these cannot be taken as exhaustive accounts of complex situations. The Italian translation keeps the historical references but erases the hyperbolic aspects of the novel. This effectively leaves its readers with no clue whatsoever that the version of Irish history they are facing is highly dramatised. No
gloss is provided to orient the Italian reader towards a sensible discernment of the historical facts from the fictionalised ones, which the novel merrily intermingles. Italian readers are, indeed, exposed to tokens of Irishness, but, as they randomly appear whenever a readymade translation is not available, they are unlikely to facilitate the reader’s understanding of the novel.

To sum up, the translation strategy most commonly used for the translation of contemporary Irish fiction into Italian widely employs “explicitation” devices\textsuperscript{150} to meet the readers’ “loaded expectations,”\textsuperscript{151} thereby improving connectivity and adjusting evaluative items and other linguistic aspects to culturally appropriate levels. Yet few efforts are made to mediate more specific, and usually more meaningful, cultural items, which are regularly left floating like inexplicable “black holes” in a familiar universe. The Mammy (1999), translated as Agnes Browne Mamma (2005), is another good example of this. Like Doyle, Brendan O’Carroll’s colourful and highly localised language is largely understated in the Italian translation. Once more, the general impression is that of a rather standard prose style which does not try to create any sense of estrangement in the reader. The Italian policy then, even if it apparently contravenes the rule of immediate “recognisability” of the target text and the promotion of “hegemony” which Venuti postulates as main features of the fluency typical of transparency, does not favour particularity or respect differences as a target text performing a “minoritising” translation ideally should. The “resistancy” hypothesised by Venuti’s preferred mode of translation should make the message meaningful through an expert use of opaqueness and foreignising techniques. While the voice of the target text re-configures the meaning to be expressed in the target culture, it still derives its significance from an appreciation of the context in which it has been originally

\textsuperscript{150} Explicitation may occur in a number of ways: by substituting a SL unit of a more general meaning by a TL unit of a more special meaning (i.e. “expensive wine” may become “Brunello di Montalcino”); by distributing a complex meaning attached to a SL word over several words in the TL (i.e. “keening” may become “vocal lament traditionally associated with mourning”); by introducing new meaningful elements in the TL text (i.e. “Kilkenny won another hurling match” may be followed by “[…] which was as unsurprising as Juventus winning another Champions League”); by dividing one sentence of the SL into two or more sentences in the TL (i.e. “After he married an English girl he gave up his Republican ideals” may become “since he married he wasn’t interested in politics anymore. His wife was more important than the fight for independence”); or by turning a phrase in the SL (lacking either the finite verb or its subject) into a clause containing both (i.e. “A quick shower and then off to the pub” may become “He had a quick shower before heading out to the local bar”).

expressed. In this way “heterogenous discourses”\textsuperscript{152} are cultivated, which vary according to the “voice” being translated. Such an achievement is rendered impossible both by the straightforward domestication posited by transparency as such, and by the illusion of transparency pursued in Italy. Both effectively erase “the sense of foreignness” that in most cases has invited translation in the first place.

It is possible, however, to consider alternative ways of dealing with the “non-identitarian nature of things and ideas”\textsuperscript{153} that is the premise of translation, and to approach the concept of hybridity in terms of a negotiation between continuity and differences. Such theoretical underpinning is useful to engage with a very different practice of translation, especially when it is compared to what has been exposed as the illusion of transparency pursued by many translations of fiction. The \textit{modus operandi} associated with the translation of poetry is here addressed as “mediation,” a term that indicates the attempt to bridge the distance between source and target language culture. This strategy, therefore, postulates a dimension that ultimately transcends both cultures in contact, a concept that will be further developed in terms of Third Space. One of the earlier formulations of “fusion of horizons” of source and target contexts is to be found in Hans-Georg Gadamer, who theorised this \textit{Verschmelzung} with regard to contemporary interpretations of historical documents. The notion of “horizon” employed here derives from phenomenology: the term “horizon” stands for the larger context of meaning in which any particular meaningful presentation is situated. A text which has become alien because of temporal distance has to be recovered through an appraisal of the difference between past and present horizons.\textsuperscript{154} In other words, a dialogue with the past is possible only if both “the alien horizon of the text and the interpreter’s own horizon”\textsuperscript{155} are taken into account. For Gadamer, the gap between these two horizons provides an opportunity to discover the link between the contemporary and the earlier context, a sort of new dimension in which both could coexist.\textsuperscript{156}

\textsuperscript{152} Venuti, 1998, p.11. 
\textsuperscript{153} Cf. Gadamer quoted in Fuchs, 2009, p. 19. 
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid. 
\textsuperscript{156} Cf. Gadamer quoted in Fuchs, 2009, p. 19.
Bassnett and Lefevere also adopt a diachronic point of view when they stress the necessity for a translation to be regularly updated in order to meet new horizons of expectations. From their perspective, then, the “fusion,” rather than embodying a form of interrelations, seems to reflect a representational stance. This seems to posit the target culture as the one that univocally dictates the norms which will establish the final outcome of the translation process. In this sense, “acceptability” seems to be privileged, as it is almost taken for granted that meeting the standards of the receiving culture is what will determine the “appropriateness” of a translation. Although, in theoretical terms, this recalls quite closely the “reassertion of self-identity” of the receiving system, something that Bauman attributed to the process of “assimilation,” the interactional nature of the translation process should not be played down. The rearrangement of the source culture for the benefit of the target culture determines a mutual opening up: on one side the source culture needs to morph in order to be accepted, on the other side the target culture has to find the decoding structures which will render the foreignness acceptable. As Bauman put it “…both partners emerge changed from every successive attempt at translation […] No act of translation leaves either of the partners intact.” By acknowledging that meanings are inevitably changed by the process of transfer, it is possible to embrace non-equivalence as the very essence of translation, and to integrate the source text in ways which make visible its translational dimension.

Significantly Venuti has recently identified poetry translation as the most fertile ground on which to challenge the invisibility of the translator:

Released from the constraint to turn a profit, poetry translation is more likely to encourage experimental strategies that can reveal what is unique about translation as a linguistic and cultural practice. It is the uniqueness of poetry as a form of language use that occasions any such revelations.

The strategy of mediation opens up a space where the heterogeneous discourses of translation can be protected from being assimilated by the domestic culture. It could therefore be seen as a form of “minoritising” translation, as it promotes the awareness of asymmetries in the process of transmission – if not always in terms of power relations as discussed by Venuti. The aim is still to resist the “assimilationist ethic by signalling

the linguistic and cultural differences in the text – within the major language,"\textsuperscript{160}
 or, in this case, simply the target language.

A good example of a translation that, by acknowledging the “difference between and within cultures as a starting point […] undertakes to open the self towards the other, thus extending and developing target and source languages,"\textsuperscript{161} is La Grande Razzia, the Italian translation of the Irish epic \textit{Táin Bó Cuailgne} by Melita Cataldi. It is one of the few cases in which the translational dimension of the text is not concealed. Quite the opposite, the critical apparatus supporting the translator’s reading of the \textit{Táin}, where Cataldi suggests interpretations that the average knowledge of an Italian reader could not autonomously formulate, has to be considered inseparable from the translation itself. Cataldi explores qualities of the text which are not specifically dependent on the source-language context or the context of the target audience. This endows the tale with resonances tending to the timeless and the universal,\textsuperscript{162} which is a clever way of creating a connection between an ancient text and its contemporary readership. On the other hand, the Italian translator is keen to introduce the Italian reader to symbols and values of ancient Celtic society in which the tale develops and acquires its meaning.

Overall, the translator’s approach to the text tries to turn to advantage the Italian readers’ limited familiarity with contemporary Ireland, by making them more perceptive to what the ancient Irish context of the \textit{Táin} represented. In dealing with the toponymic qualities of the tale for instance, she deflects attention from the re-naming of places in English -- an aspect which was highlighted by the renowned English translation by Thomas Kinsella for instance -- to the naming of places in Irish. For this reason, she focuses on drawing parallels between the involuntary sacrifices of battles taking place in the \textit{Táin} and the ancient sacrifices which were believed to render a place identifiable and controllable. This link with the past was most likely the primary function that the attention to toponyms had in the original Irish composition. Also, since an Italian reader would probably need to familiarise him/herself even with the new Anglicised version of the Irish provinces’ names, the translator prefers to leave the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{160}Venuti, 1998, p. 12.
\item \textsuperscript{161}Fuchs, 2009, p. 5.
\end{itemize}
original names throughout the text: Connachta, Ulaid, Laigin and Mumu. In open opposition to ruling translation norms Cataldi, instead of making Táin Bó Cuailnge’s translation as easy to read as possible, tries to make it meaningful. She is not concerned with reformulating the artistic merit of the text in modalities which may be more “pleasant” to a modern Italian reader. On a few occasions, her translation recalls what Benjamin called “lexicographical equivalence,” which is an extreme form of formal equivalence. In this way, the alterity of the text is kept intact by deliberately avoiding the illusion of transparency. Rather than having to passively digest lists of names, killings and places, which for the modern sensibility could be perceived as boring or meaningless, readers are guided by Cataldi’s critical insights to actively engage with the text. This is possible only because the edition, while not strictly scholarly, is at least critical, and this allows an extended introduction and extensive footnotes to be part of the translation. At the same time, Cataldi introduces important concepts of Celtic culture, which are often strictly interlocked with the linguistic dimension of Irish. This is seen in the idea of unity between the people and the territory they inhabit, expressed by túath; fir fer as the mutual deal of “honour” between warriors; or again the notion of cess, a strange affliction which prevented the Ulster soldiers to fight, as she explains during her account of the Remscél Cess Ulaid. The outcome is a text whose context is perceived as foreign, and one that can only be decoded through contrasting the known with the unknown. Normalising the text and endowing it with a sense of familiarity for the Italian reader would have forced Táin Bó Cuailgne into a framework to which it does not belong. The impression is therefore that Cataldi’s strategy succeeds in being a successful combination of accuracy and accessibility. Obviously, as with any demanding and unfamiliar work of art, it requires a certain level of engagement. Yet, Cataldi does provide all the instruments necessary for her readers to learn the ancient names of Ireland and its regions, the complex meaning of the gessa as duties and vetoes, the worth of the honour price and the fir fer. She portrays Cú Chulainn as a figure that a modern reader can appreciate, or even identify with. Far from giving an approximate glimpse of an unfamiliar culture, La Grande Razzia is rather a thoughtful journey into something that, by the end, has become much more familiar.

The same careful mediation of various elements of the foreign culture which mark the source text is generally adopted for the translation of poetry. As with the Táin, the poetry collections are usually translated by Italian scholars, working in Italy or in
Ireland. For both established and emerging scholars, the act of translation seems to assume the value of an act of self-affirmation as an authoritative voice in their discipline of study. The translation therefore, far from being an invisible art, is precisely the focus of attention, as it is taken as a proof of the translator’s ability and competence. From this perspective, the main intent of poetry translation is generally not to make the work available at a popular level. This makes it quite distinctive from the translation of fiction. However, this does not mean that the translation of poetry is immune to those “deforming tendencies” that Berman has outlined in relation to the translations of novels. Poetry shares at least the same linguistic variety and creativity as novels, and it is subject to similar problems of equivalence in translation, if not more intricate ones. As Nabokov commented about poetry translation:

> The problem […] is a choice between rhyme and reason: can a translation while rendering with absolute fidelity the whole text, and nothing but the text, keep the form of the original, its rhythm and its rhyme? To the artist whom practice within the limits of one language, his own, has convinced that matter and manner are one, it comes as a shock to discover that a work of art can present itself to the would-be translator as split into form and content, and that the question of rendering one but not the other may arise at all.\(^{163}\)

By now, this issue has been widely recognised, and it is more of a conundrum than a “shock.” Italian editions of Irish poetry surmount the problem by expanding Nabokov’s idea of translation as “the whole text, and nothing but the text.” Due to the nature of the strategy most commonly employed, the problems encountered are often the opposite of what happens to fiction. “Clarification” for instance is fairly common. Berman defines this as the attempt to make clear what is not meant to be clear in the original.\(^{164}\) In the case of poetry, this can mean that the personal interpretation of the editor, however competent and informed, is presented as the authentic one, as a range of other possibilities which a poem generally leaves open are not mentioned. Related to this is the tendency for “expansion.”\(^ {165}\) This is 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. Generally, the forms of “explicitation” that “clarification” may entail are the recovery of ellipsis, the direct expression of implicit


\(^{165}\) Ibid.
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. The analysis of poems and their Italian translations provided in the fourth chapter will provide ample examples of this. Nevertheless, although the immediate effect of these devices may seem to point towards domestication, an important difference prevents poetry translation from sliding into the territory of transparency. In poetry translation, domesticating tendencies are often alternated with digressions from the norms of the target language, and compensated for by the preservation of source-cultural allusions. However, source items are preserved only when the textual context offers sufficient clues to retrieve the meaning, or else if the loss caused by the unfamiliarity only affects the discourse at a micro-level.\footnote{Cf. Sidiropoulou, 2004, p. 146.} For instance in the Italian collection of Irish poetry from the Irish language \textit{Bollirà la Rugiada} (1996), placenames are normally left untranslated despite having a meaning which should be clear to the readers of the source text. This is because the actual translation of those placenames is less relevant to the understanding of the poem than the fact that they refer to Irish locations. Expressing them through Italian equivalents therefore would completely distort the significance of the poems. This convention, however, is abandoned if the name is somehow directly related to the content of the poem, as in Liam Ó Muirthile’s \textit{Tobar}, where the naming of the “well,” \textit{Tobar an Mhonabhair}, is translated as \textit{Pozzo del Mormorio}.\footnote{Rosenstock, Gabriel, et al. \textit{Bollirà La Rugiada. Poesia Irlandese Contemporanea. Testo Originale a Fronte}. Ed. Andrea Fabbrì. Faenza: Mobydick, 1996. Print, p. 93.} These choices show that poetry translation is characterised by more concrete efforts towards clarity of meaning, and not only a superficial clarity of language. Further evidence of this is the frequent use of footnotes, which retain the foreign while restoring its deepest meaning. This also favours the preservation of unfamiliar histories in a domestic environment. In fact, with poetry collections, the pattern of translation includes an engagement with the poetic works which generally supplies both biographical information about the author and the historical or social background of the work.

The translation of drama is an area which requires specific consideration, since the textual dimension of a play is often considered a provisional step to facilitate the production of a performance whose textual dimension is only one aspect of its
meaning, and whose ultimate goal is to trigger a reaction from a live audience. The connection between a play and its audience, then, relies on an immediate interaction which is less evident in other forms of literature. This puts additional pressure on presenting the translation in a way which complies with the horizons of expectations of the intended audience: the idea is that a successful play, even if its intent is to question or contradict the prevailing ideologies, needs to be understood in terms which are compatible with the Weltanschaung which holds sway within the environment where it will be staged. By failing to enter into a channel of communication accepted within the hosting environment, there would simply be no communication at all with the audience. With this in mind it is easy to understand the reasons for David Johnston’s statement:

> At the heart of the creation of the playable translation is a dramaturgical remoulding, because such a remoulding creates the vehicle which transports – the root of the meaning of the verb to translate – the audience into the experience of the play. In other words, rather than giving new form to an already known meaning, translation for the stage is about giving form to a potential for performance.169

The “relocation process,”170 the attempt to stabilise the reaction to alterity by manipulating the foreign for the sake of the receiving community, has always been important for drama. Nowadays, audiences and venues have become so diverse that it is impossible to presume an ideal spectator with the same cultural and ideological foreknowledge. Theatre companies have become more and more indifferent to national borders. Their role has been made more and more decisive in contextualising the play according to the commercial diktat that “the wider the audience the more successful the play.” In other words, companies, in charge of the ultimate dialogical relationship with the audience, are increasingly eager to use the mediation of different formal devices which push the dramatic text more and more into the background. The idea here is that every international audience should be allowed to relate the action on stage to their own life and localities, no matter where the play comes from. This, in turn, allows each production to approach the source text as something to be freely interpreted.

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Moreover, since a dramatic text cannot be completely detached from the public dimension of staging, a play can be interpreted and re-interpreted several times. And each time it can acquire a different social relevance according to the receiving society. This holds true even in cases when no interlingual translation as such takes place. As Christopher Murray explains,\textsuperscript{171} audiences in London and New York cannot be assumed to be as concerned with Irish national identity as people living in Ireland. Consequently, a play that at home is meant to question fundamental issues, abroad may become reductively pleasant or entertaining, as happened to a number of Friel’s plays when adapted for the American stage, although no actual translation was involved.\textsuperscript{172} The fact that nowadays international touring has acquired a predominant role, therefore, does not always produce positive outcomes, as confrontation and a greater cultural exchange are not necessarily stimulated. Quite the contrary, exporting a play may often mean generating a production so concerned with its accessibility that, in order to be internationally intelligible, might end up sliding into stereotypes. When performed abroad, then, Irish plays such as those by Martin McDonagh can accidentally reinforce negative or stereotypical notions about the Irish, especially if the public dimension involved is considerably bigger than the small crowds of Irish regional theatres. In the case of the big audiences of London mainstream theatre, for instance, hype and publicity play a fundamental promotional role in attracting people, and not everybody in the theatre is really concerned with the subject of the play. A similar conclusion might be reached as far as theatre-goers in Italy are concerned, but for different reasons. Theatres, especially the biggest Teatri Stabili — whose productions are here considered because they are the only ones which are often followed by printed editions of the plays staged — are normally attended by habitués. A substantial number of theatre-goers belong to a particular age or social group. Their standard practice is to buy convenient packages allowing entrance to a number of shows. This naturally encourages attendance at performances not necessarily selected because of personal interest.

The latest theoretical trends place increasing emphasis on the local audience as “makers of meaning,” and plays are therefore assessed in the light of the interaction they establish with spectators. This could lead to the conclusion that “Irish theatre” is


not necessarily the literature produced by Irish writers, but rather drama as watched by Irish audiences.\textsuperscript{173} Accordingly, every Italian production would automatically become “Italian theatre.” My research, however, being principally concerned with translation in its textual dimension, will keep the traditional outlook of ascribing to Irish drama those plays which are written by Irish authors. A brief digression on the extra-textual features of plays is nonetheless necessary since, in Italy, publication of plays normally occurs simultaneously with, or after, the staging. Moreover, translations intended for publication are normally not substantially different from the translation used to stage the same play. Usually the published editions are addressing an audience who have already seen the play performed, and possibly have a pre-formed judgement about it. Although this normative pattern of production does not apply to the translation of canonical international classics, often adopted in schools or in various university courses, it is very much the norm as far as contemporary drama is concerned. Therefore, it affects most of the plays which are relevant to this research.

The symbiotic relationship between contemporary drama and its staging causes translators to have a rather concrete “collective identity” in mind, one that the target text should ideally address.\textsuperscript{174} Through the dialogue between language, mindset and behaviour of stage characters, this audience must experience an “immediate” reaction and, just as importantly, a personal interaction with the play. The presence of an audience then is a significant variable in determining the translators’ approach, given that a higher level of adaptation is demanded, and thus more space for creative reconstructions is allowed. A good translation of a play is almost inevitably expected to resort to discourse structures inherent in the linguistic identity of the target context. This often requires an inventive approach, so as to achieve recognisable renditions of gender, social, and age group identities in terms compatible with the linguistic options of the source text. The real challenge of translating drama is that immediacy is one of those features which are not dispensable if the play is to be enjoyed, even beyond the level of mere entertainment. Also, and maybe especially for drama, even in the case of apparently closely related European cultures, the risk of concepts, ideas and references being misinterpreted or not fully comprehended is still latent or, perhaps, even


\textsuperscript{174} Cf. Sidiropoulou, 2004, p. 158.
inevitable. Seán O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock*, for instance, has often proved very testing to translate, because of the symbolic value attributed to the tenement houses belonging to the slum district of Dublin. Emblems of social degradation, within the economy of the play they function as a microcosm representing Ireland. The impossibility of conveying the particularity of the setting - and therefore its wider resonances - in most European countries in which the play has been staged, can partly undermine the hermeneutic value of the play and, accordingly, its aesthetic accomplishment.175

Satisfying the linguistic requirements of performability may entail adjustments on a number of different levels. For instance, when a play is originally written in a dialect, the translator is faced with a difficult decision. The adoption of a dialect within the target language might end up endowing a play with references to socio-linguistic circumstances very different from those in the source text. By opting for a neutral variant, no social associations which are inappropriate to the original context of the play will be summoned up, but an important layer of significance in the source text has ultimately being discarded. Other adjustments that may need to be undertaken concern slang and terms of endearment or of abuse, because, when literally translated, they may provoke an inappropriate audience response. Careful treatment is also required for topical allusions. While the decision to use replacements more immediately recognisable by the target audience enhance the chance of interaction and identification with the action in the play, those may not always be in character with the original work, or may not be consistent with the original setting, period and tone. All these stratagems, however, are normally left to the director’s discretion, and they are very rarely implemented in a play that has to be translated for publication purposes alone. The Italian edition collecting three of McPherson’s plays (*The Lime Tree Bower, The Weir, St. Nicholas*), for instance, not only leaves their Irish setting intact in geographical references such as Malahide Road, Rathfarnham, Mount Merrion, Blackrock, but elements of the social landscape are also kept unaltered. The historical pub in Dublin’s city centre is simply named as “Stag’s Head,” and “the chipper” is translated with the rather estranging expression *negozi di patatine fritte*, as a shop specialising in selling

fries would definitely evoke a reality far from that familiar to most Italian readers. In other cases, issues may be raised with regard to specific cultural environments, costumes, habits or norms, which may be familiar to the target audience but are felt to be conjuring up the wrong associations, especially when concerned with the more abstract realm of attitudes. Humour and irony, for instance, are not universal phenomena. Italian culture is more susceptible to slapstick gags, whereas an Irish sense of humour seems to be rooted in a sort of playful cynicism which can be distilled in Beckett’s observation that “nothing is funnier than unhappiness.” With reference to the humour employed by Martin McDonagh, for instance, whose work will be more closely scrutinised later on in this dissertation, Irish Times columnist John Waters provides an interesting sociological hypothesis. Waters argues that it is a kind of humour which has been recovered, with a sort of archaeological dig, from under the surface of the West of Ireland. In the journalist’s view, it made life bearable for generations of people living in deprivation. Therefore, even if McDonagh’s plays are neither rooted in reality, nor intended to be so, his greatest accomplishment would be to have turned the way these people laughed at themselves for necessity into a form of entertainment. The hilarity triggered in modern audiences witnessing the brutality on stage would be a re-enactment of that same archetypal cathartic effect of laughter. If some credit is given to Waters hypothesis, it would render quite problematic the exportation of McDonagh’s plays to a cultural context where this association between poverty, brutality and laughter does not have the same socio-historical resonance.

Generally, the literary norms prevailing in a community sharing a language at a particular time will determine the extent of the adjustment needed in order for a play rooted in a foreign culture to be meaningful in its new context. However, even within the same environment, the parameters guiding drama translation can be far from fixed. The case of contemporary drama in Italy shows that the nature and degree of the adjustments undergone by foreign plays in translation is rather varied. The choice of a term as vague as accommodation reflects the desire to incorporate all those different strategies. The selection of Irish plays to be staged in Italy, as will be demonstrated, displays features that at first sight seem to meet the demands of an audience longing for those features of “periphery” still attached to the idea of “Irishness.” However, as textual analyses and some focused references to performances will show, this is not always the case. Sometimes the engagement with foreign plays might be extremely
conscientious. Some productions, by virtue of an increased detachment from the locality of the play, may succeed in “surpassing” the significance of the source text without concealing it completely, which is after all what a minoritising translation is expected to achieve. The introduction of the idea of translation as accommodation allows the assessment of such productions and others which pursue a straightforward “domestication” – as both can be considered as subcategories of the concept of accommodation here formulated. Accommodation also encompasses other forms of translation, such as the varying degrees of mediation undergone by the work of playwrights published independently from performance, as in the case of Brian Friel, Conor McPerhson, or Marina Carr. It is significant that the literary genre with quantitatively less translations requires the broadest definition to denote its translation strategy, as in point of fact it exposes the absence of conventional behavioural norms of translation for drama.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The distinction […] between the field of commerce and the fields of art and scholarship has been eroded (if it ever existed as more than a fiction designed to consolidate literature as a transcendental cultural concept): transparent discourse is eminently consumable in the contemporary cultural marketplace, which in turn influences publishing decisions to exclude discourses that resist transparency.

Venuti 1991

Wieserma, a supporter of the “foreignised” approach as a means to better understand foreign culture and give the reader of the target text a more genuine image of the source culture, maintains that a text, with no pauses to explain or paraphrase, can be read more fluently. Italian publishers of contemporary fiction, possibly for pragmatic purposes, seem to apply the same reasoning. They prefer fluency even if, or precisely because, this means neglecting any complex engagement with cultural differences. Another fundamental element marking the translation strategy largely promoted by Italian publishers, i.e. the reticence to domesticate foreign words, is possibly ascribable to a similar attitude of distrust towards any form of interpretation.

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Through these choices, publishers seem to expect the readers to assume the role of spectants willing to be spared from having to question and eventually reshape the hetero-images\(^\text{178}\) inherited from their own culture. Rather than a silencing through “violence,”\(^\text{179}\) Italian publishers seem to perpetrate an accidental silencing through negligence. This is caused by the reliance on the fallacious presumption of a common understanding between domestic and foreign readers. Although notable exceptions to this pattern call for a much subtler and more comprehensive analysis of the process, broadly speaking it seems fair to state that the predisposition of publishers is to produce texts which address what Venuti calls a “utopian community,” a community that can potentially share life, meaning, praxis, experience, knowledge, insight or outlook across cultural boundaries; but that, being utopian, does not exist yet. The result is that active participation is discouraged, even in an Irish/Italian context of exchange that would present no political reason for fearing translation as a way to integrate the foreign. The reason fiction is primarily intended to serve the entertainment market must be sought in most publishers’ assumption about the readers’ profile. The prospect of a product which endorses literary investigation and demands critical effort or ethical reassessment is largely considered economically unrewarding. Poetry translation, at least in theory, attempts to find a balance between preserving the “otherness” of the poem and mediating its significance, so that it can be meaningful to Italian readers as well. This will be practically illustrated in the poetry chapter by drawing attention to some collections by Irish authors published in Italy by Trauben. The closer analysis will show that Italian editions of Irish poetry are often motivated by awareness of addressing a cultural gap in the dialogue between Ireland and Italy. The pattern of poetry translation shows an awareness that “translation […] depends on the knowable and the plottable,”\(^\text{180}\) a consideration often neglected by the advocates of pseudo-transparency for the translation of fiction. Considerations about the translation of drama have shown a tension between the adequacy factor, i.e. the relationship between the target text and its source, and the acceptability factor, i.e. the need to formulate a text that can be rapidly understood in the target language. As Sidiropoulou states: “The purpose of

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\(^{179}\) Venuti, 1993, p. 15.

theatre translation is to bring ST [source text] closer to the target audience by transforming foreign cultural values to domestic ones, rather than bringing the audience close to the foreign situation."\(^{181}\) The situation revealed by an analysis of Italian translation of Irish drama, however, both confirms and questions this statement, as the corpus, although limited, shows a range of different possibilities. The analysis of what a theatre company from Genoa has done with McDonagh’s work, for instance, will show that the Italian productions have arguably triggered meanings which might have been overlooked when his work was presented in formats more concerned with the immediate “locality” of the plays.

CHAPTER 3: TRANSLATING FICTION

[... ]a fluent strategy effaces the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text: this gets rewritten in the transparent discourse dominating the target-language culture and is inevitably coded with other target-language values, beliefs, and social representations, implicating the translation in ideologies that figure social differences and may well arrange them in hierarchical relations (according to class, gender, sexual orientation, race, nation).

Venuti 1992\textsuperscript{182}

This chapter will discuss the translating strategy broadly adopted in Italy for the translation of contemporary Irish fiction. The term pseudo-transparency, chosen to describe this strategy, establishes interplay with the notion of transparency as postulated by Venuti, as this also deceivingly posits the target language as a “transparent vehicle of universal truth.”\textsuperscript{183} Through the obliteration of the translational dimension of the target text, pseudo-transparency achieves an effect close to domestication, even if elements grounded in the Irish source culture are frequently maintained. The failure to communicate the cultural significance of the source text in terms of alterity means that the demystifying ambition that Venuti associates with minoritising translations cannot be achieved. The first part of this chapter will assess the recurrence of similar traits in translation patterns, through a general discussion of Irish contemporary fiction translated into Italian. The second part of the chapter will provide empirical observations about aspects of the main translation strategies in use by two Italian publishers committed to the translation of Irish fiction: Guanda and Fazi. This will allow comparisons between different typologies of texts, and help to assess what translations strategies are implemented and what the consequences are for the reception of the target texts. In order to gain a better understanding of the possible effects of pseudo-transparency, the final part of the chapter will be devoted to a case study of the translation of The Journey Home by Dermot Bolger, as the close textual analysis of a specific target text can practically demonstrate some of the important theoretical premises of this study. The translation Verso Casa by the publisher Fazi (1997, 2001) has been chosen because it illustrates some important repercussions that pseudo-


transparency may have on the reception of a target text. On the one hand, the combination in the novel of a subtle articulation of many aspects of “Irishness” together with a virtual lack of mediation for a non-Irish audience on Bolger’s part, makes its reception particularly problematic when the translation strategy employed conforms to dominant cultural values in the target languages. Hence it provides a perfect case study for identifying the areas in which major difficulties arise. On the other hand, some specific features of the novel make it ideal to introduce the notion of “pseudo-domestication” as a possible way to productively counteract the translation strategy predominantly implemented by Italian publishers. Any revolutionary approach to the practice of translation, however, is bound to remain a theoretical speculation until a substantial reconfiguration of the reader’s profile and the publisher’s priorities has taken place.

THE THOUSAND FACES OF FICTION

Fiction, or narrative, is a specific genre, distinct from poetry and drama by virtue of a number of characteristic formal features. As the preliminary empirical findings of this research have confirmed, the boundaries between those main literary genres are confirmed by translation practice, which is connected not only to individual translators’ abilities, but also to the framing devices imposed by publishers. This section will provide data that will allow the identification of patterns in the relationship between publishers, the types of novels chosen for translation, the profiles of the translators and the formal characteristics of the target texts.

The miscellaneous material that can be collected under the main heading of “fiction” is vast, and it can be divided into a number of sub-genres. Some established subdivisions may be helpful to trace preliminary patterns in the translation process in order to assess the differences in the strategy in use. Theoretical explanations about the impact that the strategy termed pseudo-transparency might have on different kinds of texts is also partly related to their belonging to a specific literary sub-genre. Firstly, genre fiction will be investigated, namely crime and romance, two categories of text that
used to be regarded as “stylistically neutral.”  

Although these genres, especially crime novels, have recently evolved to encompass much more complex and original forms of writing, it is not unusual amongst Italian publishers to rely on the alleged “seriality” of this kind of literary production in order to create market appeal. As a result, the Irishness of the author, or of the novel, is often seen more as an incidental rather than an essential quality of the work, and it has been rarely exploited for advertising purposes.

The silent assumptions of the publishers, the only patrons behind the publication of this type of fiction, seems to be that the features of the genre are sufficient reason for appeal to the public, which is profiled as largely unconcerned with the cultural specificity of the story. After all, cultural references or a specific cultural sensibility are very rarely at the core of a crime story or a thriller. In this light, if Irishness was employed to publicise the work by authors such as John Connolly or Julie Parson, it would have been more of a publicity stunt than a genuine attempt to be true to their work. Accordingly, the translation of works which are ascribable to this specific subgenre is consistently carried out by freelance technical translators with no competence whatsoever in the Irish cultural domain. Although this is the norm for the translation of fiction, there can be exceptions to this rule, especially if a smaller house is responsible for the publication. This is not likely to happen in larger publishing houses, as each translation is normally commissioned from a member of their translation team. For instance, the main translator of John Connolly, one of the most translated Irish authors of crime novels, is Stefano Bertolussi, a critic and poet working in theatre and cinema who is also responsible for the translation of authors such as James Ellroy and Cathleen Schine. Amongst the other translators of Connolly’s work, Andrea Carlo Cappi’s affinity with the author is noteworthy. However, this has nothing to do with Irishness; Cappi himself is a well-known author of the noir genre Italian style. This can be seen as a further proof that the most important, if not the sole, element recognised as relevant to the Italian audience, is the crime imprint of the stories.

Similarly to crime stories, when the romantic side of a novel is recognised as its main source of appeal, it is often emphasised for the purpose of enticing a larger

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184 Raymond William famously argued that “It is not that such works are identical, but there is an important sense in which the variations are so trivial that the formal similarities quite outweigh them”. Therefore “the elements of formal reproduction as it were outweigh the specific content.” Williams, Raymond. The Sociology of Culture. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995 [1981], p. 197.
audience. This might happen even when the writers in question are not straightforwardly ascribable to the “chicklit” genre. It is a willing manipulation that transcends the confines of literature in translation, and a comparison may be drawn with Italian adaptations of foreign movie titles. One illustrative example of this tendency is Michel Gondry’s *Eternal Sunshine of a Spotless Mind*. This title, which reprises a line from Alexander Pope’s *Eloisa to Abelard*, was consciously alerting the audience to the artistic ambitions of this alternative movie. The Italian title instead, *Se mi Lasci ti Cancello* (If You Leave me I Erase You), was trying to disguise the movie as a cheap love story by employing a formula, “If you leave me I…,” which was repeatedly used in the titles of movies of low artistic merit but broad audience appeal.

An example of a writer who transcends the narrow boundaries of chicklit, yet tends to be marketed as such in Italy, is Maeve Brennan. Her Irishness sometimes has been contested too, and admittedly it is not key to most of her work. However, it is interesting to note that the short story collection *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin*, becomes in Italian *Il Principio dell’Amore e altri Racconti* (the beginning of love and other stories), which not only opts for the key word *amore*, love, in the title, but also drops the second part referring to the geographical/cultural location of Dublin. This suggests that the nature of the book as a love story is considered sufficient to capture the attention of the target audience, who is therefore constructed as not especially interested in Ireland. Another author who may be considered a fitting example is Niall Williams, one of the few male exponents of the romantic genre. Williams, whose lyrical writing has won him a number of prizes and a substantial audience in Ireland, has been consistently published in Italy: his first novel *Quattro Lettere d’Amore* (*Four Letters of Love*, 1997) by Dalai Editore in 1999 and 2003, and *La Parola Amore nella Terra di Clare* (*As it is Heaven*, 1999), *La Nostra Vita nelle Stelle* (*The Fall of Light*, 2001) and *Di’ Solo una Parola* (*Only Say the Word*, 2005) by Mondadori shortly after their first English publications. It is worth noting that in this case a generic title like *As it is Heaven* has been transformed into a title carrying an Irish geographical marker. In this case, therefore, it is debatable which quality of Williams’ writing has been constructed as more worthy of attention. On the one hand, the high literary quality attested by the numerous prizes he won and the appeal of the Irish setting would appear to have played an important role. On the other hand, the fact that his last two novels, which have moved away from romantic topics, have not been
published in Italy, seems to confirm that “romance” is still a crucial aspect in determining the publishers’ interest in a novel.

The examples provided above seem to depict a very common situation as far as Italian translations of novels that are more or less loosely affiliated to crime or romance are concerned. The assumption is that the imagined readers of these sub-genres do not display an interest in the cultural domain in which the stories are rooted. This is shown also by other elements not only of the peritext, such as the cover and the blurbs, but by the epitext as well. Reviews and interviews generally stress decontextualised elements of these types of novels, such as the nature of the mystery or of tormented love. In other words, the various elements somehow related to the marketing strategy of a book tend to reflect the tendency of the publishers to target very specific sections of the audience in straightforward terms. Their publication choices and marketing campaigns are calibrated on basic outlines of the readers’ profile. Targeting overlapping interests, even when a novel would demand it, is rarely an option.

Another genre whose channels of translation can be seen as somehow detached from any form of Irishness is “children’s literature.” The importance, for children’s literature, to speak the same “cultural language” of the young readers is highlighted in a quotation from Irish author Daniel Corkery, where he tackles the issue of a Gaelic identity in an English speaking country:

[S]uch English texts as I studied for examination had nearly all been edited for nice little Protestant English boy by nice old English Protestant rector of headmasters of English Public Schools […]. Knowledge that I had not – of English customs, religion, home-life, etc. – was taken for granted. Feelings that I had not, prejudices that I had not, were taken for granted. The knowledge, the feelings, the prejudices I had were never mentioned at all; I was, therefore, all the time being implicitly instructed that all these were somehow wrong […] 185

The experience described by Corkery applies to a colonial context; however, it emphasises an obstacle which is intrinsic to every intercultural communication, and highlights how the younger members of the audience can be particularly perceptive of the alterity of values. Italian publishers seem aware of this difficulty. Within the simplified world articulated by children’s literature, a careful selection of stories which

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express what can be broadly defined as “Western values” prevails, and these are often totally assimilated to the essential values of Italian culture. Unlike adult fiction, the thrust towards homogenisation in Italian translations that can be readily understood by children is more justifiable. Nonetheless, ideological nuances in the strongest political sense of the term – although significantly mitigated compared to the circumstances described by Corkery – are arguably not completely absent, especially if it is taken into account that the assumed age of the readers makes them particularly susceptible to any form of “instruction,” that in more provocative terms could be called indoctrination. Accounts of the life of Muslims, for instance, or any other cultural experience which might challenge the stability of the Italian identity, find no space in children’s stories, if not in the form of anthologies manifestly collecting material to present as exotic. The engagement with cultural differences therefore occurs from a perspective clearly attuned to the target culture’s point of view, and “otherness” is expressed mainly in the form of charm akin to those for the fantasy worlds of talking animals and fairies. Taking this into account, the exportability of children’s literature by Irish authors into an Italian context has a double validation. On the one hand, it seems to confirm a permeability between the two cultures on the level of basic moral and social principles, due partly to the common Catholic heritage and the importance of the family, and partly to the eager embracing of contemporary commodity culture imported from the USA. On the other hand, the traditional connection between Ireland and the fairy world might be perceived as particularly suitable for a market addressing the youngest readers. From this perspective, the richness of Irish folk tradition might account for the proportionally high number of Irish authors of children literature being translated. At the same time, this can also be explained by the substantial market for children’s literature in Italy. In 1993, for instance, books for readers aged under 12 constituted 15.9% of the total share, a percentage inferior only to narrativa and supereconomici, those paperback editions produced in large numbers and sold under five euro per copy. Moreover 52% of those overall titles for children are translated, and the top place, with 828 titles, goes to books translated from English. This last figure is made more significant by the extraordinary gap separating it from the second place, occupied by translations from French, which number only 221 titles.

187 Ibid. p. 103.
188 Ibid., p. 100.
The number of translations of Irish authors falling into this category, therefore, should be assessed both in the light of these figures and the fact that Irish children’s literature often resonates with the folk heritage of Ireland. In this sense, the success of some of the Irish authors of children literature could be linked directly with the fascination with the Celtic pointed out in the first chapter. One example is the successful translations of Malachy Doyle’s work by different Italian publishers: a collection of fairytales titled *Fiabe Tradizionali dal Mondo* (Traditional Fairytales from the World) by IdeeAli (2006), *Who is Jesse Food as Io Sono l’Arcobaleno* (I am the Rainbow) by Buena Vista (2003), and *Little People, Big People as Il Piccolo Popolo, il Grande Popolo* by Feltrinelli (2002). The parameters guiding the selection seem to confirm the interest in Irish folk stories. Feltrinelli’s translation of *Little People, Big People* (1998), for instance, is from a story clearly influenced by old Irish folk tales about the Sidh and its fairy inhabitants. Yet, at a closer inspection, Doyle’s works offer a much wider range of Irish-related topic. His stories most deeply rooted in Irish reality, like *The Great Hunger* (1998), which deals with the Famine, or *Farewell to Ireland* (1998), which deals with emigration, remain untranslated, as well as those inspired by Irish epic like *The Hound of Ulster* (2007). This mirrors the situation already described as far the “Celtic” literature for adults is concerned.\(^\text{189}\) the “Irish” aspect is somehow subordinated to the fascination with fairytales in general.

One author who is very successful with his stories for children is Eoin Colfer. The *Artemis Fowl* saga, with its technologically equipped leprechauns, is the perfect youth-oriented elaboration of Irish folklore. The four titles from the series, which has enjoyed an international success, were brought to Italy by Mondadori (2002, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009). The translator is Angela Ragusa, herself an author of stories for children and recipient of “Best translator of the year” (1995) and other awards for her translation of children’s books. The same partnership Mondadori/Ragusa works for Herbie Brennan, possibly the most highly successful name in children’s literature. After all, his successful series for teenagers, *Faerie Wars*, presents the same characteristics as *Artemis Fowl*: an international bestseller drawing from Celtic folklore. Brennan’s horror stories for young readers are also widely published, mainly by E. Elle, a branch of the

\(^{189}\) See Chapter One, pp. 25-29.
publisher Einaudi – in turn part of the group Mondadori – specialising in books for younger readers.

Being published by influential names in the Italian publishing industry seems to be a recurring trait for children’s literature. Moreover, although the average press run of 6,000 for titles in this category in the early nineties is not outstanding, it would still guarantee a level of visibility to the books which is not granted to authors of “literary fiction,” often published by smaller houses with limited print runs and virtually no distribution. At times, the general profile of the translators engaged with children’s literature seems to show a respect for the genre which is often not granted to some forms of adult writing. Zartog e il Magico Telecomando from Zartog’s Remote by Brennan edited by Feltrinelli (2003), for instance, is translated by the literary translator Michele Piumini. The need for superior care, that might be expected from a specialised literary translator, may be due to the fact that translation for children – while keeping invisible the act of mediation itself – often does require some degree of mediation. The arbitrary mediation that often characterises translations of contemporary fiction directed at an adult readership would not work for younger readers, as they need real “transparency” in order to understand the material, and not the illusion of it deriving from placing paramount importance on stylistic smoothness. For this reason, a translator aware of the theoretical difficulties of cultural mediation is arguably more suitable for the task of translating for children, and this would explain the predominance of names either specialised in children’s translation or, as in the case of Piumini, lecturing in literary translation. This policy is hardly remarkable though, as it is widely accepted that children have to focus on acquiring the tools to decipher the world as they know it, before venturing into the task of acknowledging the relativity of their perspective. Contrary to what happens with adult fiction, the translation of a book for children is often a joint effort between publisher, translator and illustrator, all working together on a product which they know needs to be constructed not only to generate a profit, but also in a way which meets the specific requirements of younger consumers and remains within the ethos that the target culture deems suitable for them.

As in the case of crime and love stories, the popularity of the Celtic-fantasy formula may induce publishers to emphasise the Celtic quality of the text, or even to stretch the concept to include material only remotely related to Celtic imagery, even for
an adult target readership. An author like Morgan Llywelyn also has most of her works translated into Italian marketed as “Celtic.” This, despite her American birth, her Welsh name, and the fact that the themes of her stories are not always Irish. Moreover, her rigorous approach to the subject matter would rather set her work in the area of historical fiction; Italian publishers, however, do not seem to consider this specific genre as popular as fantasy. Nevertheless the eagerness to emphasise the Irishness of Llywelyn’s work might also be related to her main publisher’s profile, Casa Editrice Nord. Nord not only was one of the first publishers to bring fantasy and science fiction to the Italian public, but its name, “North,” suggests a particular attention to the Celtic branch, although completely detached from the later appropriation of Northern and Celtic symbolism by the political party Northern League. The publishing house in fact started its activity in the 1970s and is not associated with any political activity. It should be noted, however, that this and other considerations about the nature of publishing houses have to be handled very carefully, due to the ongoing changes in the publishing world, which sees most of the minor publishers being absorbed first by bigger publishers, then by bigger holdings. Casa Editrice Nord, for instance, was merged with Longanesi in 2002, and it is now part of the publishing group Mauri Spagnol, which controls an increasing number of Italian publishers. This has caused the range of published material to be drastically reduced, since the criteria favoured by the bigger holdings are obviously those of a secure economic return. Some independent publishing houses still resist, such as Le Lettere in Florence, whose activity will come to the foreground later in this chapter. An increasing number of smaller publishers, however, are turning into cultural associations, which combine on-line publishing with the organisation of literary contests and other events. The fantasy and science fiction field, in this respect, is mainly serviced by Delos Books, which has also published some of Llywelyn’s material.

Another publisher with a rather clear agenda which, in its manifesto, signals “spirituality, wisdom and knowledge” as its prevailing themes, is Il Punto d’Incontro. The medieval qualities of Conor Kostick’s fantasy for young readers, Epic, are probably what have led to its translation for this publisher. The importance of the publisher’s profile in determining in what way a certain work will be promoted, can be further explored by a quick look at the Irish authors of fantasy published by Mondadori. Contrary to Nord, Mondadori does not have an explicit agenda regarding its
publications. The main criterion seems to be the selection of genres with the greatest possible appeal. The publisher’s choice to exploit the success of fantasy could be interpreted from this perspective: hence the avoidance of complications that might be linked with myths, folks and legends, as they could ultimately limit a work’s appeal to a more cultivated readership. This is quite evident from the translation of Micheal Scott, an authority on mythology and folklore, and writer of many sagas directly inspired by the Irish tradition. Scott has eight of his works translated for Mondadori, but a brief look at the selection is enough to appreciate the publisher’s decision not to exploit the Celtic aspects of Scott’s literary production. The more recent and less localised saga of the *Secrets of the Immortal Nicholas Flamel*, for instance, has been preferred to novels from his older series *Tales from the Land of Erin, Tales of the Bard* and *De Dannan*. The only book of his with a clearly Irish content which has been translated is *Railway Street 19*, co-written with Llywelyn, but it is published in the series Mondadori Junior and therefore is designed for a younger audience who, as we have seen, seem to be imagined as very receptive toward Celtic folk material. The publisher’s decision to draw from the more commercial vein of fantasy is further confirmed by the publication of *Il Signore dei Demoni* (The Lord of the Demons), a translation of Peter Morwood’s *The Demon Lord*. Morwood’s production in general can be seen as having few connections with the Irish tradition. Summing up, publishers’ interest in Celtic material can be seen more as a willingness to play with the pervasive fascination for its exotic elements, rather than a commitment to represent the complexity of the historical and social circumstances also entailed by the term “Celtic.” The absence of footnotes or a critical apparatus providing historical background to the works of authors writing between history and fantasy, like Llywelyn, means that the average Italian reader is expected to approach them merely as fantasy, and entertainment. The point is that works blurring the line between fiction and reality, which will be later identified as one of the most problematic areas in translation, cannot be adequately handled by a translation strategy which overlooks the crucial difference of background knowledge between source and target readers. The stylistic domestication and the suppression, or unmediated preservation, of foreign cultural elements, discourages readers from critically engaging with the historical reconstructions that some of the Celtic works articulate.

Overall, the emphasis on the Celtic in Italian translations is often exploited opportunistically in the case of more literary writers, whereas it is usually neglected for
the more popular forms of fantasy. In this respect, Mondadori’s policy in the area of crime, romance, and fantasy, is to some extent more coherent than that of other publishers. The conscious implementation of a translation strategy that tends to even out the cultural diversity of the source text corresponds to a selection of works whose characteristics do not require an alternative approach in order to construct an adequate reception in the receiving context. This means that the strategic decision of refraining from publishing works of a more complex nature inadvertently safeguards literary fiction from being translated in the same fashion as genre fiction.

From an analysis of the fantasy genre, perceived market interest has emerged as a key factor in determining the agenda of publishers, as far as the selection of works to be translated is concerned. International recognition, in terms of literary prizes and critical acclaim, can also be seen as an important justification for the selection of works to be translated, especially those that would otherwise face a predictable lack of commercial success. This is arguably the case with Sebastian Barry, renowned in Ireland for his work as a playwright. The only two works of his translated are A Long Long Way (Instar Libri 2007), winner of the Man Booker Prize in 2005, and The Secret Scripture (Bompiani 2010), awarded the Costa Book of the Year and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. Another example comes from the translation of Antonia Logue’s first novel, Shadow-Box, by one of the major Italian publishing houses, Bompiani. Again the popularity of the book was recognised by the 1999 Irish Times Literature award, which created some expectations for Logue’s future work which have not been met so far. Nick Laird’s Utterly Monkey has been translated (La Banda delle Casse da Morto, 2007) by Minimum Fax after having won the Betty Trask Award and being shortlisted for the Commonwealth Prize. Laird’s Glover’s Mistake (L’Errore di Glover, 2010), shortlisted for the Kerry Group Irish Fiction Award, has recently been translated for the same publisher. The Man Booker Prize was again the award which boosted the profile of Anne Enright in Ireland and in the UK. Arguably, this may have led to the Italian translation of her novel The Gathering (2008).

Claire Keegan is another author who won a considerable number of prizes, and her two short story collections are published in Italy by Neri Pozza: Nei Campi Azzurri (2009) e Dove l’Acqua è più Profonda (2010). Neri Pozza has also translated three novels by Micheal Collins, who was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and won a Pushcart
Prize. Despite the Irish resonances of his name and his origins in Limerick, the setting for Collins’ stories is almost exclusively in the United States. In this case, the marketing strategy adopted by the publisher relies on Collins’ exploration of American history and society, as the Italian audience partly shares with Ireland a mythological perspective on the “American dream.” Even when the dark side of America is the object of interest, as in Collins’ novel, the fascination seems to remain intact and is eagerly exploited as a selling point. Jane Harris’ only book that gained international attention by being shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction, *The Observations*, is also published by Neri Pozza. Again, despite the Irish origin of Harris, the book is set in Victorian Scotland, and no form of Irishness explains this book’s appeal. A very different atmosphere, but with a similar detachment from Irishness, characterises the translation of Gerard Donovan’s philosophical novels. *Schopenhauer’s Telescope* was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2003, and published in Italy by Neri Pozza in 2004. Another of his novels, *Julius Winsome*, was translated by Donzelli in 2008.

As well as prizes and awards, movie adaptations can increase the chances of publication of a given work; indeed those two elements of success often go hand in hand. Although the impact of a movie on the sale of a book remains unverifiable, there is clear link between the success of a movie and the book on which it is based. The relation between Italian translations of Irish authors and successful movies will be discussed in the following pages. As has been suggested, a policy like pseudo-transparency is largely calibrated on the demands of occasional readers, rather than to meet a specific personal or professional interest, as it happens with translations of poetry, for instance. For this reason, books which have been adapted for the big screen, especially those with a mainstream appeal ensured by a cast of illustrious actors or the receipt of some awards, are more likely to be published and, indeed, more likely to become bestsellers. As prizes and movie adaptations are an index of literary achievements, in this case there is no apparent clash between the commercial and the “artistic” agenda behind the mechanisms of cultural reproduction. It does, however, confirm the commercial imperative for translation. The intentional “exploitation” of the movies’ success on the publishers’ part is quite evident in the recurrent practice of using a shot from the movie, or the image of the protagonist, as covers for the books, sometimes in new editions re-designed on the occasion of, or just after, the movie release. One example of an Irish work, whose Italian translation is arguably dependent
on the appeal of the corresponding movie directed by Jim Sheridan and starring the 
Oscar-winning actor Daniel Day Lewis, is Christy Brown’s *My Left Foot*, published in 
Italy by CDE and Mondadori (1990). A more recent selling phenomenon is John 
Boyle’s *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, re-published in Italy by BUR (2008). The 
translation also reached first place in the best-selling chart of the publisher. Another 
example is the cinematic transposition, with Jeremy Irons and Juliette Binoche, of 
Josephine Hart’s *Damage*. The 1992 movie was followed by an Italian edition of the 
book in the same year, and, being Hart’s first novel, it granted the author enough 
prestige to have all her subsequent literary production published in Italy by Feltrinelli.

Neil Jordan is an exception to the pattern illustrated so far. Jordan, despite being 
a novelist, has never used one of his own works for a movie adaptation. However, since 
he has reached international fame as a movie director rather than as a writer, it is 
arguable that the appeal of his novels is more easily linked to the authority of his name, 
evitably attached to the success of his movies. Moreover, in some cases, the link with 
cinema is foregrounded in Italian translations of his fiction. *Sunrise with Sea Monster*, 
for instance, is translated for Bompiani by the cinema critic Alberto Pezzotta (2010). 
Another rather anomalous case is the work of Brian Moore. Although the success of the 
movie *Blackrobe*, based on his 1985 novel, might indeed have contributed to making 
him known to an international audience, it seems unfair to imply that the translation of 
his literary production is due this single episode, especially as 
his books are published by Fazi, Piemme, and the smaller 
Anabasi, with a total of seven titles translated. Part of the 
international appeal may be ascribed to the life story of the 
author, who, born in Belfast, subsequently travelled widely 
and ultimately settled in Canada. The topics of his books are 
varied and wide-ranging, and his novels are generally 
regarded as having a universal scope.

Patrick McCabe is an author who would deserve 
publication by virtue of the literary quality of his work alone. 
However, the publication of *Breakfast on Pluto* by Fandango, 
translated in 2007 as *Colazione su Plutone*, suggests that the real trigger behind the 
translation was Neil Jordan’s movie based on the novel. In this case, the connection is
made explicit by the fact that Fandango is a film producer and distributor before being a publisher. It is significant that the only other book by McCabe published in Italy is *The Butcher Boy*, also brought to the big screen by Jordan. Garzanti’s edition of McCabe’s novel, however, is very difficult to assess: on the one hand a renowned publisher and a translator like Riccardo Duranti, lecturer in English Literature and Literary Translation who has long been involved in the translation of Irish poetry, would seem to confer some prestige on the translation; on the other hand, the overall presentation of the product is poor. The pulp quality of the book is the only aspect clearly emphasised by the paratextual elements, like the overpowering blood-stained effect on the book cover. Moreover, a gross mistake in the biography, which attributes Eugene McCabe’s *Death and Nightingales* to the author, certainly does not help. Duranti’s translation of *The Butcher Boy*, however, was not triggered by the movie’s notoriety, as the first Italian edition is dated 1994, well before the screen adaptation of the novel (1997). Nonetheless there is no need to look for exceptional circumstances in order to justify the sloppiness of McCabe’s first Italian translation: time pressure and formal constraints are unexceptional with larger publishers, and Garzanti is part of the corporation GeMS. Yet again, no introduction, afterword or glossary is provided to bridge the historico-social background that McCabe’s fragmented narration confusingly evokes. The overall impression is that Duranti’s competence as a translator of Irish literature has been drastically overshadowed by conditions dictated by the publisher. A translation practice showing such a deep-seated preference for a target text that is pleasant to read, and immediately understandable at its most superficial interpretative level, is arguably a result of the ingrained acceptance of such working circumstances. The goal of a smooth translation guaranteed by linguistic competence in the foreign language and a good writing style in the target language can be achieved through a much more instinctive, less time consuming process than a translation informed by a critical engagement with the source text and the cultural background it springs from.

Most authors mentioned in relation to a movie adaptation would have reached international fame even without the success of the movies based on their novels. This should become even more self-evident when dealing with authors like Roddy Doyle and Frank McCourt. Yet, some kind of relation between the success of a writer like Doyle and the cinematic ventures triggered by his work is undeniable and therefore worth exploring. The massive distribution of movies based on Doyle’s first trilogy has
certainly made a substantial contribution to making Doyle’s literary work internationally successful, and accordingly translated. In Italy the movie *The Commitments* has also been released and become a classic, followed by the two other movie adaptations from *The Barrytown Trilogy: Bella Famiglia (The Snapper, 1993)* and *Due sulla Strada (The Van, 1996)*. It is no surprise then that sixteen of Doyle’s works have been translated into Italian, regularly re-presented to the Italian public in new editions from 1996 to 2010. Contrary to what one might expect, however, the commercial success has not meant the serial production of quick and approximate translations by an array of casual freelancers. Doyle is one of the few authors consistency translated by the same person, Giuliana Zeuli, who has been involved both with the Irish translators and interpreters association (ITIA) and Ireland Literature Exchange (ILE), and thus is one of the few translators of fiction with a solid background in Irish culture. The Italian translations of Doyle, then, seem to take place in unusually favourable conditions, although the limits imposed by pseudo-transparency do frame a specific kind of reception, as evident from a brief analysis of *A Star Called Henry* in chapter two.  

The successful cinematic transposition of *Angela’s Ashes* can also be seen as contributing to McCourt’s international fame. Although the high literary prestige of the author has been secured by a number of awards and the receipt of a Pulitzer Prize for *Angela’s Ashes* (1996), the ultimate drive to make him internationally known has arguably been provided by the movie directed by Alan Parker. The work by McCourt has been translated in its totality for Italian readers, mainly by the publisher in the RCS group Adelphi. *Angela’s Ashes*, however, is also published by minor publishing houses. Quite unsurprisingly, the translation by Claudia Valeria Letizia is the same both for the expensive hardback and the cheap pocket editions, a practice which shows that the value of a publication depends on factors other than the actual quality of the translation. After all, within the Italian publishing industry, it is the norm to commission new translations only when the language of previous translations is outdated. This is because a translation has to be fluent according to modern standards in order to be acceptable, no matter what the period was in which the original work was written. Successful works by Oscar Wilde, for instance, are often re-translated, as most of the existing translations

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[190] Chapter Two, pp. 71-73.
date back to the fifties, and the language employed sounds archaic and too literary to contemporary ears. The contention here is that different approaches to translation should not solely be determined by diachronic changes, but should also operate on a synchronic level.

As for Angela’s Ashes, for instance, many editions have been published, but this does not mean that the readers are presented with any real choice. The translation by Letizia, offering a pleasant and entertaining rendition of McCourt’s most celebrated work, is the only one available both on the editions published in series of Supereconomici, and in more expensive publications. Her attempts to achieve stylistic smoothness with a slangy Italian which is not regionally marked are indeed effective, and have possibly contributed to the Italian success of the novel. Yet, on many occasions, the subtleties of McCourt’s darkest humour are not well served by the pseudo-transparency of this translation. The interaction with the actual social and historical circumstances of an impoverished Ireland – and with it all the reasons for the controversy that McCourt’s memoir provoked – remain absent from the predominantly light-hearted Italian translation. Nonetheless, the effort to envisage an alternative translation strategy is more of a theoretical exercise than an actual necessity within the publishing world. As already stated, Letizia’s translation has proved more than enough to match, in literary terms, the popular success of the movie. Until a clear demand to fill a gap in the market emerges, publishers will not feel the need to address as a problem the current hegemony of translations following similar diktats of established policies and practices. However, paradoxically, such a demand will not materialise before the gap is filled. Essentially, the diversification of the market is precluded by a stalemate between readers, who are hardly aware of having a choice and that alternatives are possible, and publishers, who do not offer a choice on the basis that there is no demand for it.

This state of affairs may be partly responsible for the reticence, in the Italian publishing market, to translate writers whose work is deeply rooted in Ireland but not easily ascribable to one of the most marketable Italian representations of the country. For instance, in Italy, the work of Colin Bateman – a writer who has merged the subject of Northern Ireland with an irreverent look typical of some writers from the Republic like Doyle or O’Carroll – has encountered a certain resistance. Northern Irish settings
usually appear in autobiographies, realistic novels or literary writing, so that the most automatic response is normally an empathetic understanding from readers. Bateman’s books, which only tangentially touch on the Troubles and always with an ironic outlook, must have fallen short of the audience’s expectations. Since the publication of his first two novels, _Divorcing Jack_ and _Cycle of Violence_, by the small publisher Zelig in 1997 and 1998, the rest of Bateman’s work remains untraslated in Italy.

Other examples of writers who are under-represented in the Italian literary landscape include multi award-winning author Aidan Matthews, whose collection of short stories _Lipstick on the Host_ (Rossetto sull’Ostia: Racconti, 1994) is translated by Bollati Boringhieri, and novelist Michael Curtin, whose novel _The League Against Christmas_ is translated by Marco Y Marcos. A simple justification could be applied to Matthews and Curtin, who have not really established themselves in the first rank of Irish writers in Ireland. Séan O’Reilly also has only one novel published by a minor Italian publisher, but in this case, the novelty of O’Reilly’s voice in the Irish literary landscape, might be a reasonable explanation for the lesser visibility of the author in Italy.

The case of John McGahern, widely hailed as one of the most important Irish authors of the latter half of the twentieth century, is more representative of the tendency to overlook authors whose work deviates from the most successful formulae. Of his eleven novels, only two are translated into Italian: _Il Pornografo (The Pornographer)_ in 1994 and _Moran tra le Donne (Amongst Women)_ in 1997. Einaudi’s selection of _The Pornographer_ as the first of McGahern’s novels to be translated is already quite indicative of a general reticence amongst publishers to engage with works of high literary standards but less accessible to the target audience. _The Pornographer_, a misleading title which might create the illusion of mass appeal, is a tortured love story, and is possibly one of McGahern’s works that can be appreciated also, although not exclusively, on a more superficial level. On the linguistic level, McGahern’s dry and concise style does not seem to suffer much from the linguistic normalisation that frequently characterises Italian translations of contemporary fiction. The macro-level of his novels, though, is very likely to be affected by lack of adequate contextualisation. The choice of translating this novel has all the characteristics of a compromise between the exigency of representing an influential writer like McGahern on the Italian market,
and the necessity to “protect” the readership from works which would require a more critical translating approach than the one conventionally adopted in relation to contemporary fiction. The decision to translate Amongst Women can be read in the same light. The book was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, and the role of awards, as noted, is a criterion of selection for publishers like Einaudi. Nonetheless, the translation reveals a general adherence to norms pointed out in relation to other Italian translations of Irish contemporary authors. The only attempt to recover the symbolic dimension of the patriarchal figure of Moran, and to link it with its significance in an Irish context, consists in a very concise description in the flap: la storia di una nazione in rapido mutamento ‘the story of a nation which is rapidly changing.’ The allegorical articulation of specific Irish historical-social circumstances, however, constitutes a large part of McGahern’s work’s literary merit, and is arguably the reason for its success in Ireland. The impression is that the lack of a foreword to introduce the significance of the historical background, and some critical perspective, may partly compromise the “absolutely just responsive understanding” of imagined Italian readers, as they will mostly remain unable to appreciate the symbolical level of the novel. The translation strategy does not clearly reflect the awareness that Ireland, in the receiving context, is a hetero-image. By failing to construct an adequate reception for target readers who, accordingly, were to be considered as spectants, the translation strategy may ultimately be held responsible for the less than enthusiastic reception of McGahern in Italy: both Il Pornografo and Moran tra le Donne appear to have gone quickly out of print.

Obviously there is no guarantee that a different translation approach could have granted commercial success to McGahern’s work: most of the output within the genre that in Italian is called letteratura impegnata is bound to be met by little commercial success. Yet an alternative strategy could have better preserved some of the novel’s qualities, and perhaps allowed a deeper level of engagement with the story – at least by the few readers who are eager to go beyond easy reading. This ultimately could have granted some appreciation for the literary merits of a novel like Amongst Women, and maybe gained attention outside the restricted circles of academia, where the work is read in the source text language and with an awareness of the source language culture. Some of the major Italian publishers’ seem to partly overlook the fact that different types of texts address different audiences, with different tastes and education. Yet the trend is to play down those differences, or rather to play with the boundaries. In other
words, whenever an author does not automatically belong to one of the categories of mass appeal, his/her work might be forced to comply with the traits of a more popular, recognisable genre.

Overall, for the Irish novels taken into consideration so far, the actual translation strategy seems to be unimaginatively set on pursuing stylistic fluency and avoiding any paratextual intervention on the translator’s part. These features also recur in the “transparency” pursued by the translation of children books and the straightforward domestication that is normally used for crime or romance, independently from the source texts’ actual degree of affiliation to the conventions of genre fiction. It should be acknowledged that the import of most novels by authors such as John Connolly, Cecilia Ahern, or Peter Morwood, does not necessitate a re-elaboration in terms of the target culture in order to trigger from the readers an “absolutely just responsive understanding.” In this sense, the strategy termed pseudo-domestication, or other forms of critical translation, would be not only superfluous but in most cases impracticable for many writers in the catalogue of popular publishers like Mondadori or Sperling&Kupfer. What this survey intends to bring into question is the shortage of publishers implementing alternative translation strategies, mindful of the individuality of literary texts, especially those whose integrity and artistic significance can be compromised by a translation neutralising their stylistic peculiarities and/or cultural specificity.

Nonetheless, a number of publications that seem to question the normative patterns in fiction translation do exist, and they will be examined in the final part of this general survey. More specifically, it will be shown that, in particular instances, the standard approach neglecting any kind of critical engagement for the translation of works of fiction can be challenged by smaller publishers. As they constitute an exception both with regard to the profile of the translator involved and the format of the edition, they defy a straightforward adherence to the norms of the prevalent translation strategy discussed so far. Significantly, the challenge to these conventional patterns seems to be determined predominantly by the publishers, which means that the format their publication will follow must be in accordance with their general policy. The most common amongst these “exceptional” traits is the presence of an introduction. Academic interest is definitely a decisive factor in stimulating the production of editions
equipped with a critical apparatus. This is an important preliminary observation which, in theory, remains valid for the discussion of authors more straightforwardly practicing literary fiction. The problem is that, while the necessity, or even desirability, of critical intervention is quite unanimously accepted by publishers as far as philosophical or historical works are concerned, differing ideas about the readership makes this choice much more contentious when it comes to fiction. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the works of authors belonging to an earlier period than that under consideration by this study are more likely to be published in critical editions. With regard to Irish literary fiction before the 1960s, publishers are more prone to see these works as a cultural asset, and thus endorse a translation strategy that addresses an imagined reader who is cultivated and eager to expand his/her knowledge. This is particularly true with Irish authors such as Joyce, Shaw, Wilde, Beckett. Italian translations of these twentieth-century writers exist in editions equipped with substantial critical support; at the same time, the popularity of these authors has resulted in dozens of different pocket editions. In order to differentiate between Italian translations of Irish authors from the past and their contemporary colleagues, the activity of the publisher Giovanni Tranchida Editore will be briefly considered. With Italian translations from Maurice Walsh, Seamus O’Kelly, George Moore, Liam O’Flaherty and Frank O’Connor, this publisher has shown an uncommon sensitivity towards Irish literature. Most of these translations were published during the nineteen nineties, although the source texts antedate the time span chosen for this study. Yet there are a number of crucial differences in respect to the translation of contemporary Irish fiction which are worth mentioning. The first is the profile of the translator, Carmine Mezzacappa who, unlike most translators of contemporary Irish authors, has specific expertise in Irish literature. Indeed, he was involved in the cultural scene in Turin in the 1970s and contributed, with Cataldi and Barone, to a prolific period of Anglo-Irish studies in Italy. Particularly relevant to the present argument, however, is Mezzacappa’s statement to be found in a short essay, “Tradurre Frank O’Connor” (Translating Frank O’Connor) published on the occasion of the 2010 edition of Ospiti della Nazione:

Il compito del traduttore è di attualizzare e contestualizzare nella realtà italiana messaggi importanti che provengono dalla narrativa straniera. Questa è la linea di ricerca (con un occhio di riguardo alle letterature scozzese e irlandese) che un
editore come Tranchida persegue con sensibilità invece di mirare a successi editoriali estemporanei e fini a se stessi.\textsuperscript{191}

(The task of the translator is to make relevant and give context within an Italian reality to important messages coming from foreign literature. This is the research policy [with special attention to Scottish and Irish literature] pursued with uncommon sensitivity by a publisher like Tranchida, rather than aiming at fast and ultimately futile commercial success)

Mezzacappa’s words about “contextualising foreign works within an Italian context” perfectly embody the idea of translation which lies at the core of the translation strategy is here termed pseudo-domestication. His statement acknowledges the shortcomings of the most accepted translation practices in Italy and, at the same time, shows an awareness of going against the grain with his work as a translator, which is made possible by the “exceptionality” of the publisher. The ethos of the publishing house Tranchida – that has pursued a highly cultural orientation in its publication of essays and fiction since its foundation in 1983 – is clearly revealed in his manifesto:

[…] the specific task of Giovanni Tranchida Editore has been that of bringing literary works to our attention, regardless of the culture from which they derive or the language in which they were written (indeed, with particular attention paid to both cultural and linguistic context to a level not usual for us in Italy), or else to bring back forgotten unpublished works of great writers of the past – or those which have been out of print for some time and which have thus been forgotten. All of this means of course that particular attention (in view of what stated above) has to be paid from the start to the legibility of these texts, and in consequence the quality of the translations. Since Giovanni Tranchida Editore deals with the creation and diffusion of culture, the first priority of this publishing house is to reawaken our consciences, in order to define the world by using literature as a sort of magnifying glass focused on the reality in which we live, given that this reality is too often blurred by a system which tends to homogenise our sensitivity according to predominant beliefs of the moment.\textsuperscript{192}

The edition of Ospiti della Nazione pictured above is testimony to the joint effort of publisher and translator to compensate for the “ignorance” of readers. The


mood created by the cover, displaying an historical picture accompanied by the caption *racconti della guerra irlandese* ‘tales from the Irish war,’ is further complemented by the inclusion in the volume, of essays by Mezzacappa on O’Connor and the Ireland of his times, and about Irish literature in general. Part of the contention here is that the difference in the publishing format chosen by Tranchida, when compared to that of more corporate colleagues, is somehow dependent on the choice of authors to translate. This point is also proved by the fact that two other translations of O’Connor, published by Sellerio, *Il Mio Complesso di Edipo e Altri Racconti* and *Il Raccontatore*, also contain some form of critical apparatus to introduce the material to Italian readers. In other words, a commercial edition of O’Connor and some of the other names in Tranchida’s catalogue, that is to say a paperback without any critical introduction, is very rare within the Italian publishing market.

Italian translations of Brendan Behan seem to confirm the importance of the “chronological factor” in the decision to treat a literary work as “cultural heritage” rather than entertainment. Behan’s last work, *Confessions of an Irish Rebel*, dated 1965, has been translated as *Confessioni di un Ribelle Irlandese* (2003, 2010) by the publisher Giano. The edition is equipped with an introduction by Rae Jeff, the woman who recorded Behan’s narration and an afterword which delves into Behan’s life and work. A brief footnote apparatus provides additional information about Behan’s life, the transcription of documents relevant to the story (like the C.A. Joyce letter about Behan published in the *Sunday Telegraph*) and linguistic clarifications about Behan’s slang and the few Irish language expressions employed. This format and a sober outlook were the signature marks of the newly born publishing house Giano, and the choice of authors to be translated was an integral part of a policy that aimed at producing simple but well-informed editions of international writers. The work of a much later author like Gerard Mannix Flynn, for instance, is handled by the publisher in ways very much like those of his more established colleague. *Nothing to Say*, translated as *Niente da Dire* (2004), tells the story of a child with many siblings who, after stealing a bike, ends up in Letterfrack reform school. Flynn’s translator is Dr Enrico Terrinoni, who holds a doctorate from University College Dublin. The exceptionality of those circumstances, however, is demonstrated by the acquisition of Giano, in 2007, by the bigger publisher based in Milan Neri Pozza, which in turn is now part of the GeMS group. Under the new management the design of the book covers has been radically transformed and the
support of critical apparatuses suppressed. The literary material on offer has also been notably modified; yet a rather eclectic interest in Irish literature has been maintained. Neri Pozza is the Italian publisher of Flann O’Brien, Brendan O’Carroll, Dermot Healy, Claire Keegan, Micheal Collins and Jane Harris. Contrary to the more ostensibly commercial publishers, Neri Pozza has kept some of the unusual care in the selection of its translators which had been a characteristic of Giano: Giuliana Zeuli, translator of Healy, Gaja Cenciarelli, translator of O’Carroll, and Daniele Benati, translator of O’Brien, are all names associated with translations from Irish literature, and Keegan is translated by lecturer in English Literature and Theory and Practice of Translation, Massimiliano Morini. Significantly, Collins and Harris, whose works lack Irish themes and settings, have been assigned to translators who regularly collaborate with the publisher but have no connection whatsoever with Ireland. Benati, writer and lecturer who taught in a number of universities in Ireland, is also translator of the 1994 edition of Filosofia del Jazz e Altre Storie Irlandesi, a collection of short stories by Tony Cafferky, published by Hestia. This example stresses the importance that a translator’s connections and personal preferences might have in promoting a translation project by a minor publisher. Benati, in fact, was already responsible for the 1987 publication of Cafferky’s Storie di Identità for the publisher El Bagatt, a translation of a collection of short stories whose source texts have never been published.

The importance of a translator with connections to, and knowledge of, the Irish literary world in creating the necessary conditions for an approach to translation that might challenge the mainstream parameters of pseudo-transparency, and potentially achieve pseudo-domestication, is crucial. This criterion, coupled with a relatively unknown author and a small publisher, seems to guarantee more careful mediation of the source text. Small publishers, in fact, are usually more open to accepting proposals from external collaborators and taking risks with publications which challenge the mainstream. When the cultural commitment on the translator’s part is the chief reason behind a translation project, normally the main drive for publication is a desire to make an author internationally known. The goal of a transnational corporation, instead, normally is to achieve commercial success by translating authors who have already proven popular in other countries.
The work of the publisher Le Lettere seems to confirm this pattern. *Passion Play*, the first novel by Cork writer Cónal Creedon, mostly known in Ireland as a playwright and radio scriptwriter, is translated by the publisher for the series “PAN narrativa” (2001). The edition includes an interview with the author, where Creedon comments on the reactions to the novel at home and his approach to writing, and the interviewer specifically enquires about religion and Irish history as two fundamental themes in the story. This gives Creedon the opportunity to provide a background to his novel and to reveal the perspective from which history and religion are confronted. Likewise, questions about his literary influences and his thoughts on contemporary Irish literature are occasions to introduce the readers to an Irish literary and folk tradition that might be unfamiliar to them, and ultimately to insert Creedon’s work into more precise literary coordinates. Also, there is a specific question about the language used in the book and more generally about the English language as a means of expression for Irish authors. This allows Creedon to openly discuss the issue of the Irish language, a theme that otherwise might have been overlooked, since the Irish substratum informing the vocabulary and syntax of Creedon’s language could not be conveyed by the Italian translation.

A final question refers to Creedon’s relationship with Italian literature and culture, which highlights the interesting dimension of translation as an act of conciliation between two cultures. The value of Creedon’s work, although probably narrowed by the limited access of Italian readers to some aspects of the novel, is expanded by the possibility of new associations and new interpretations. An edition equipped with a strong critical apparatus like Le Lettere’s, allows the possibility of an “expansion of meaning,” respectful of the source text. Although it might be argued that providing a critical perspective to readers may ultimately limit their freedom of interpretation, this is nonetheless an effective way to prevent misinterpretations, as so often happens with uncritical approaches to foreign literature. The interview is followed by a “Nota al Testo e alla Traduzione” (Note to the Text and the Translation), which is a thorough analysis of Creedon’s work in respect of the Irish canon, from Joyce and Synge to Doyle. The issue of linguistic registers is also discussed, in order to highlight the impossibility of reproducing a language which was not coined with a foreign reader in mind. Quite extraordinarily in the context of Italian translations of literary fiction, the translator draws attention to the discrepancies between the source and what they are
presented with. In this way, by being acknowledged, the discrepancy is somehow compensated for by the careful commentaries on the translation choices contained in the final note.

The translator Fiorenzo Fantaccini, one of the more active scholars in the field of Anglo-Irish literature, acknowledges his preference for domestication in his attempt to “Italianise” the rhythm, rather than attempting to reproduce the Cork accent in Italian. Yet the very inclusion of this admission prevents the foreignness of the text from being completely assimilated, so that the ultimate accomplishment is rather pseudo-domestication. This should provide one practical example of how this strategy might work, and give evidence of the positive connotation assumed by the usually disparaging prefix “pseudo-” in the context of this theoretical formulation. Contrary to a conventional domestication, the translator’s goal is to preserve as much as possible of the cultural otherness of the text, a goal which is evident also from the decision to keep the original title for the Italian edition. This is justified in a final note with the explanation that the Italian correspondent, la rappresentazione della passione, would have erased the historical distance between the Italian and the Irish ritual. Passion Play moreover, keeps a latent ambiguity which allows readers to set in motion their own interpretative solutions: “Un titolo aperto, dunque [...] che mi auguro susciti curiosità per un libro che possiede un sottotesto difficilmente percepibile a una lettura superficiale”\(^{193}\) ‘an open title then, [...] which I hoped it would rouse curiosity for a book which has a subtext hardly perceptible through a superficial reading.’ From these considerations also emerges unusual care in the definition of the constructed reader. In the same vein, the note explains the translator’s attempt to render in the best way possible the numerous cultural and connotative references in the dialogue. The author’s rooting of his characters in a unique and distinct community, which is somehow the real protagonist of the story, clearly emerges from those references, and the impossibility of erasing them without drastically mutilating the novel, accompanied by awareness of the extreme difficulty of making this community intelligible to the Italian readership. The proposed solution is to keep every reference, with an explanation only for those which would be completely unrecognisable by the Italian reader. In this way, at least the “flavour” of the community is maintained and some of the implied meanings partially

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restored. The exceptionality of this edition is that the translator abandons his usual “invisible” position and comes to the fore.

The case of Le Lettere is peculiar because the modes predominant in fiction translation are wholly abandoned in order to embrace a form of mediation that is close to the strategy employed for poetry translation. The different approach to the translation of Irish contemporary fiction pursued by Le Lettere is confirmed by the acknowledgment of a financial contribution from Irish Literature Exchange, which is hardly ever the case with the commercial editions by bigger publishers. The paradoxical outcome of this state of affairs is that, generally, alongside established authors from the past, authors who have not achieved high international visibility are more likely to be translated by experts of Irish literature for smaller publishers, thus benefitting from a deeper engagement with their work than that normally granted by bigger publisher to their more popular colleagues.

Another author translated with support from ILE by a small publisher is Brendan Kennelly. Although the author is well-established in Ireland, his name has not attained huge international recognition, outside the literary/academic community. The translation of *The Crooked Cross* for the publisher Ibis (2001) meets all the parameters of an edition challenging the *status quo* of translation practice in Italy. The format is similar to that of Le Lettere’s publications: a long introduction in which the translator illustrates her criteria for choosing that particular work by Kennelly amongst his vast output, still untranslated into Italian. Quite clearly the circumstances are repeated for the realization of the translation more as a cultural endeavour than a commercial one: a translator knowledgeable in Irish literature is in charge of the translation project, and the publisher functions as the ultimate agency approving, and making practically possible, the circulation of the work.

All the authors analysed in the final part of the survey share a high level of literary accomplishment, and that has to be considered an essential premise for the production of a more critically engaged edition. Yet the opposite is not always true. Authors practicing high literary standards, when published under different circumstances, are very likely to be translated with the goal of giving the impression of easy accessibility to potential target readers. This can be further exemplified by a closer
look at the production of the two publishers most consistently committed to the translation of Irish literature: Fazi and Guanda, which together cover a considerable portion of Irish literary fiction published in Italy.

“Contemporary Irish Fiction” in Italy: Fazi and Guanda

In this section, the work of Fazi and Guanda will be explored, as these two publishers have succeeded in turning “contemporary Irish fiction” into a category in itself in Italian publishing. Through their selection of authors, they have shown a commitment towards Irish literature that sets their publications apart from the occasional Irish name making an appearance in other catalogues. Whether driven by the Irish popularity of the 1990s, or by the unusually high standards of Irish literary production, Fazi and Guanda managed to meet the demands of a substantial readership by creating a specific publishing site for the heterogeneous material which can be gathered under the label of “contemporary Irish fiction.” Guanda’s specific interest in contemporary Irish literature, in particular, is openly stated in its online manifesto, where l’eccezionale fioritura irlandese ‘the exceptional Irish flourishing [of contemporary literature]’ is pointed to as a significant part of the publisher’s international literature supply, followed by a list of names like Doyle, Banville, Trevor and Dunne.

Banville is one of the contemporary Irish authors whose work is almost entirely and, indeed, almost exclusively translated by Guanda, which is also the publisher of his Christine Falls (2007/2009) and The Silver Swan (2008/2010), the crime novels that in English are signed with his nom de plume Benjamin Black. Unlike what happened with other European languages, the Italian translations of Black’s novel were marketed with Banville as the signature name, so that the appeal to the established readership of his previous work was maintained. The Italian edition of Christine Falls, translated as Dove è Sempre Notte (there where is always dark), also takes the opportunity to appeal to the long-established Italian passion for crime stories. The book is presented in a black cover with the stylised figure of a dead woman and the shadow of a smoking figure wrapped in a long coat. These two iconic images traditionally linked with detective stories are accompanied by an advertising campaign which avoids any allusion to Irishness.
Although it should be noted that a cheap exploitation of Irishness is by no means a policy openly pursued by Guanda, the Irish element was often gently emphasised in the Italian editions of other works by Banville, even in cases when this might have been slightly daring – like the straightforward identification of the island of *Ghosts* (1993) with Ireland, as suggested in the online presentation of the Italian translation *Isola con Fantasmi* (Island with Ghosts).

“Blotting out” the Irish dimension for works originally written under the name Benjamin Black, might be equally misleading, even if many would argue that this is what Banville consciously does with his work under his pseudonym. The problem arises when erasing the source context is coupled with the straightforward adoption of pseudo-transparency as translation strategy. This means that Banville’s works are presented to the public in precisely the same way as Connolly or Collins’ American-set stories, giving the illusion of belonging to a wider genre of interchangeable crime stories. This is not really the case, as not every crime story is extensively relying on internationally accepted images of the States. That is the case with Banville’s *Christine Falls*, a detective story whose intricate plot may appear conventional, but whose complexity transcends the conundrum of figuring out a culprit. As a result, a target text concealing its translational dimension may alter the novel’s discursal perspective, thus having a substantial impact on the foreign reception of said work. America is still an important part of the setting in Banville’s novel, but it escapes any pre-packaged representation. Rather, the American viewpoint is there mainly as a counterpoint to Irishness: namely it is the lens through which the perception of Irishness is at times filtered. A paragraph like the following is quite revealing:

In the house he walked into the kitchenette, wanting to know what there was for dinner. Claire said she had not thought about it yet, what with Father Harking visiting and all, and anyway she wished he would say *lunch*, which is what folks ate in the middle of the day, not dinner, which sounded so low-class. “so Irish, I guess you mean,” he said over his shoulder […].

The American’s judgment on Irish people and their habits is put under scrutiny by the source text, as it emerges from the juxtaposition of Andy’s observation “so Irish” immediately after Claire’s observation “so low-class.” However to the source text’s readers, it is clear that the trivial terminological dispute represents a cultural clash, as

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there is no right or wrong in referring to the main meal as “lunch” or “dinner.” The Italian version instead endows Claire’s point of view with a correctness which it does not have in the source text, since in Italian the terms used for the two main meals, pranzo e cena, are not susceptible to regional differences or register variations. If it was not for Andy’s final comment’s così irlandese, so Irish, the confusion between the two meals could very well be taken by Italian readers as Harkin’s personal idiosyncrasy, and even then it remains unclear why an Irish person should swap the names of the two main meals. The point is that such small details effectively cause an alteration of the discoursal perspective. In Banville’s book the Irish perspective is the one taken for granted as a starting point. The American perspective, introduced as a counterpoint, interacts with it. In translation, such interplay is lost, and with it the depth of the discoursal perspective. Harkin’s description, “he was bog-Irish to the roots of his oily red-hair,” and his being a priest, is not meant as a stereotyped representation of Irishness per se, but rather as a way to trigger an interplay between the perception that Irish people have of themselves and the simplistic depictions that may be imposed from the outside. Banville’s game is lost when submitted to the scrutiny of a foreign audience. Stereotypical utterances, rather than functioning as acts of defiance aimed at destabilising the notion of audience’s expectations, can be mistaken for acts of acquiescence towards those same channels of reception they want to challenge.

The reason for this shift is that Banville’s Ireland, however vaguely, is still undeniably there, not only as a background to the story but as a cultural “package” with which the reader needs to actively engage in order to go beyond the immediate surface of the novel. The austere power of the Catholic Church, the ghost of the clash with Protestantism, the ritual appearance of Irish words and the glimpses of rural landscape, are elements of Christine Falls whose deeper significance is not mediated for the benefit of a readership unacquainted with the specific Irish nuances of those signifiers. By deciding not to emphasise the Irish elements of the story, the Italian translation effectively erases the cultural specificity of the setting altogether, denying an appreciation of the novel that goes beyond the immediacy of the crime plot. Contrary to what happens with Connolly, failing to mediate the foreign remainder in the translations of Banville’s work hampers the possibility to discern further layers of significance existing in the source text. This limits the interpretative options of the target reader, thus affecting their engagement with the text and their overall appraisal of the work. This is
further confirmation that the employment of a similar translation strategy may result in
a noticeably different outcome, even for two texts which apparently belong to the same
sub-genre. Across genres these differences can be even more substantial but, without
further critical engagement with the novels and their translations, the potential pitfalls
are far from being immediately apparent. That is probably the reason even publishers
like Fazi and Guanda, committed to the production of high quality publications and
allegedly pursuing excellent standards of translation, follow parameters not so
dissimilar from those of big commercial publishers dealing almost exclusively with
genre fiction.

Joseph O’Connor is another author who has been brought to the attention of
Italian readers mainly through Guanda’s translation activity. The publisher’s catalogue
features seven of O’Connor’s eleven works to date. Although most of O’Connor’s texts
are deeply rooted in Irishness as far as the language used and the context depicted are
concerned, on many occasions some form of mediation is embedded within the texts
themselves. This means that, even in cases when the translation strategy does not
implement additional clarification within the main text or in the form of an additional
critical apparatus, his work is less likely to be incomprehensible to an international
readership than those that take their Irish qualities for granted. Star of the Sea for
instance has been previously provided as an example of difficulties linked to the
discoursal perspective, which means that in translation the macro-level of meaning is
likely to be distorted or effaced. However it is also an example of how the micro-level
of a novel may remain accessible to a foreign readership despite being imbued with
references to Irish history and the Irish language. This is because the historical notions
evoked by O’Connor alongside the fictional plot are not assumed as being already
known to the readers. Rather than using historical events as a backdrop, O’Connor uses
the fictional plot as a pretext to give an insight into the appalling conditions of Irish
immigrants during the years of the Famine and the historical reality of the time. The
whole social context is carefully recreated and most of the explanations needed in order
to understand it are provided in the source text. Yet for the Italian reader, the story not
only lacks the emotional resonance that it might hold for somebody in Ireland who has
experienced emigration personally or famine indirectly through collective memory.
Although most elements are provided in the story so that the international reader’s
journey into unfamiliar territories gradually becomes understandable, this only allows
Italian readers to move from virtually no knowledge at all to some form of basic knowledge. Imagined readers of the source text, instead, are expected to move from a summary knowledge of the subject to a more in-depth and nuanced critical perspective, as O’Connor’s contribution goes beyond the objective description of an historical account. In this sense, the process of translation has changed the discoursal perspective: both source and target text readers are expected to undergo a “progress” during their reading experience, but of a very different kind.

Dunne, with eight books translated, also features prominently. However, due to the successful genre advertised as chicklit practiced by Dunne, pocket editions by TEA and Mondolibri often follow Guanda’s publications. The commercial success achieved by Dunne has led Guanda to promote her as one of its signature authors. Dunne is not only invited to Italy for literary festivals and promotional tours, she also frequently appears in the spotlight of the publisher’s homepage, with reviews of her work and personal interviews, and her comments are often used as a blurb to promote other Irish writers. As attested to by a newspaper article which appeared in 2000, Dunne in Italy is a publishing phenomenon: her books are published in Italian translation before the source text editions are released.195 Another female author comprehensively translated by Guanda is Nuala O’Faolain, as all five of her books appear in the catalogue. The Northern Irish author Bernard McLaverty is also present in the catalogue with Un Istante di Felicità (2000), Donna al Piano (2000), Scuola di Anatomia (2003) and Cal (2004). The eclecticism of the publisher’s interest in Irish authors is also attested by the translation of the rather unusual work by Christopher Nolan: Sotto l’Occhio dell’Orologio (2000). Trevor, even though slightly less contemporary, with nine of his works translated, is also generously represented in Guanda’s catalogue.

Fazi shares the same eclecticism practiced by Guanda. The publications range from Neil Jordan to Molly Keane, from the slightly older cosmopolitanism of Moore to the more recent Europeanism of Hamilton. The editions of most of the Irish authors published by Fazi are the only ones available on the Italian market. These include works by Eugene McCabe and Bolger. The former features in Fazi’s catalogue with only one title, Death and Nightingales, which is the only Italian translation from the work of this

renowned Irish author. If part of the justification for this single translation can be found in the fact that this novel is considered McCabe’s masterpiece, it also shows a relatively poor representation in Italy of this writer, further evidence of a trend already identified whereby authors who engage in more complex representations of Ireland are less likely to be published in Italy.

Bolger features with two titles: *The Journey Home* (1990) and *The Family on Paradise Pier* (2005), the first of which will provide the main case study to demonstrate the limits of the publisher’s preferred translation strategy. In contrast, *Death and Nightingales* deserves a moment of attention as one of the few examples where a challenge to the goal of stylistic fluency seems to be attempted. The opening of the novel is reproduced in an Italian which is anomalous both from the syntactic and the terminological points of view. “A lack of bird-call, a sense of encroaching light and then far away the awful dawn bawling of a beast in great pain” becomes “*un’assenza di richiami di uccelli, una sensazione di luce incombente e poi in lontananza il terribile principiare del gemito di un animale in preda a una grande sofferenza.*” The Italian version follows rather literally the English construction, creating the impression of an “artificial” language rather than a natural flow. This procedure is normally frowned upon by translators following more conventional practices, as a purer form of Italian is normally preferred to what is believed to be a hybrid “translationese.” The contention here is that “translationese” would be a more appropriate term for the repetitive style practiced by Italian translators no matter what the style of the source text. The literary outcome of a translation like that practiced by Chiara Vatteroni, translator of *Death and Nightingales,* might indeed put pressure on the Italian language, but it can function as a minoritising translation, by revealing the translation dimension of the text and giving an idea of McCabe’s style at the same time. This is also achieved by maintaining the original term every time that an Italian correspondent is not available, especially with regard to cultural words such as “banshee,” “ceilidh,” “commons,” “haggard,” “hedgemaster,” “townlands,” “pishogues.” These words are italicised in the text, a device which draws attention to them, and then briefly glossed at the end of the book. Also terms which could be domesticated without major “cultural” losses, like “scones” or “otter-board,” are kept in their original form, and even the measure of weight is left as “stones,” rather than been domesticised as “kilogram.” The actual translation strategy implemented at a textual level then is one of “foreignisation,” yet a fuller response to
the text’s foreignness is hampered by the absence of mediating devices with regard to the culture specific macro-themes present in the story. The tension between “us and them,” in the form of the latent conflict between the native Irish Catholics and the Protestant Ascendancy still perceived as “invaders,” is an essential *leitmotiv* of the novel, which is constantly touched upon but never fully explored. It is a tacit premise, for which the conflict between Elizabeth and Bill Winters functions as a symbolic counterpart on an individual, human level. At the same time, the real historical background to the events is constantly evoked, by mention of Charles Stewart Parnell, and brief allusions to his political role and private life. These details might be familiar to the educated Irish reader, but are unlikely to be recognisable by the educated Italian reader, the imagined reader of this translation. Significantly enough, the glossary at the end of the Italian edition does not cover the historical figures mentioned in the book, so that no real historical background is provided at all. For this reason, although partly “minoritising,” this translation overall does not achieve the communicative level necessary to illuminate the foreign through the familiar. Further attempts in this direction are deployed in the para-textual elements of the cover and the flap. The ambiguous, undetermined dark landscape of the cover, together with an introductory note on the flap emphasising the classical tragedy features of McCabe’s work (the unity of time and action), provide an effective perspective for the target reader to approach the novel in terms more suited to the Italian cultural paradigm. An epigraph from Shakespeare’s *The Life of Timon of Athens* further confirms this parallel. However, without a balancing mediation of the Irish cultural and historical elements, such a strategy might result in a further obliteration of the Irish dimension of the story. The novelties of the linguistic and stylistic solutions proposed by the translation, in fact, are not matched by a challenge to dominant translation practice on the level of cultural mediation.

This brief engagement with McCabe’s translation further confirms the difficulty of identifying clear patterns in the translation strategies adopted by Italian publishers and translators. Closer analyses of other single translations reveal other interesting variations. For instance, occasionally, some of Fazi’s editions seem to partly challenge even the most common feature of fiction translation: the absence of critical apparatus. Very rarely, and for reasons difficult to assess in a cases when such normative behaviour is not the standard policy of the publisher, a foreword or an afterward from an
expert can sometimes be introduced. The Italian edition of Keane’s *Good Behaviour* (*Buone Maniere*, 1999), for instance, has an afterword by Viola Papetti, a lecturer in English Literature. Another element that sets Fazi apart is that it quite commonly supplies its editions of foreign literature with glossaries akin to the one mentioned with regard to *Death and Nightingales*, although the focus of the explanation of linguistic or cultural aspects might vary. In the translation of Tóibín’s *The Heather Blazing*, for instance, a novel in which Ireland is the quiet but active background of a human tragedy, a brief glossary is attached to provide some very basic information about Irish history and culture. Two lines of explanation for the Irish political parties Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are provided, and an extremely concise profile of De Valera. The limited information restored by the short glosses, however, is insufficient to convey the real import of culture-specific themes in the novels, especially when more complex forms of fiction are considered. Yet the inclusion of the glossary shows at least an awareness that something needs to be mediated, even if this is often done in insufficient ways.

Fazi counteracts the general adherence to pseudo-transparency also for another reason: the fact that the publisher’s on-line catalogue, besides providing a quite substantial description of each book, also supplies links to press releases and reviews. In this sense, even where there is a lack of critical perspective in the peritext, this is somehow compensated by an element of the epitext which is made more easily available to readers. Nonetheless, even a review offering illuminating insights will exist after the actual translation, and therefore be shaped by the translation choices already made. Alternatively, critical insights can exist before translation, which means they are inspired by the source text, and therefore ultimately by a text which is “other” than that presented to the Italian public. To completely overlook this aspect though would be unfair, as the web is playing an increasing role in shaping people’s response to literature, and an awareness of actual reception is what ultimately justifies most of the considerations about translation presented by this study. For instance, young Northern Irish author Liam McLiam Wilson benefitted from the support of a virtual community of readers. McLiam Wilson, who features in Fazi’s catalogue with two novels, *Eureka Street* (1999) and *Il Dolore di Manfred* (2004), was referred to as an “internet phenomenon” by many official reviews thanks to the numerous comments by readers in a number of on-line forums. The majority of this virtual activity transcended the domain of the publisher’s website, and indeed it was partly provoked by the previous
publication of Ripley Bogley by Garzanti (1996). These observations also support the idea that, although commentaries on the internet can be pertinent for assessing the reception of a novel, they cannot be seen as a complement to the translation strategy implemented by the publishers. For this reason, they are not taken into consideration for a direct evaluation of the Italian translations: they are “consequences” of the target texts, not elements of it.

Overall, the more rigorous approach adopted by Guanda and Fazi in contrast to more commercial competitors emerges in a number of details. There is no attempt in Guanda’s marketing strategy to emphasise the latent romantic and pathetic qualities of Dunne’s books, for instance. By the same token, neither of the two publishers is keen to stress the Irish qualities of their products in commercial ways, as often happens in the most immediate paratextual elements of other Italian editions of Irish literature. Fazi’s approach to the translation of titles and the choice of book covers is fairly “neutral:” Ireland is introduced in the synopsis contained in the flaps of the editions, but no stereotypical Irish depictions or gratuitous references appear on the covers. The translations of the titles Hugo Hamilton used for the works about his childhood – The Speckled People (2003), The Sailor in the Wardrobe (2006) – are quite typical. The first one is translated in 2004 as Il Cane che Abbaia alleonde (The Dog who Barked at the Waves), an image which reprises a passage in the book, and the second, quite literally, Il Marinaio nell’Armadio (2007), which maintains the surreal, ambivalent meaning of the original. Although these choices may appear reasonable, they should not to be considered the only obvious solutions. The French edition of The Sailor in the Wardrobe, for instance, locates the book in the successful thread of Irish memoirs by entitling it Le Marin de Dublin ‘the sailor from Dublin.’ By the same token the German translation of Headbanger is titled Der Letzte Held von Dublin, which again plays with the Irish location, whereas the Italian edition by the smaller publisher Chronopio is simply titled Lo Scoppiato (2000).

In Guanda’s editions, as in the case of Fazi, the Irish setting is mentioned in the on-line synopses of Irish works in their catalogue, and often the authority of more popular Irish writers is used in the form of blurbs promoting the work of less famous colleagues. Otherwise, no attempt is made to play on Irishness in populist ways. The titles and the covers of the books do not endorse stereotypical depictions of Ireland.
This is consistent with the modern outlook chosen by the publisher for its books, which privileges abstract, stylised images to traditional representations. This is aptly illustrated by another of O’Faolain’s Italian editions, *La Storia di Chicago May* (2007), a translation of the fictionalised biography *The Story of Chigaco May*. Although the first details given about Chicago May in the flap’s description is of her copper hair and her Dublin origin, the image on the cover presents the lower part of a stylised feminine figure leaning on a chair in her shift, which clearly does not evoke any association with Ireland. By the same token, in the title of O’Faolain’s memoir *Are You Somebody? The Accidental Memoir of a Dublin Woman* (1999), is reduced to the more ambiguous *Sei Qualcuno?* (2000, 2005), which keeps only the first part of the English language title. The choice is rather curious since, in this case, the straightforward inclusion of the volume in the Irish memoirs genre, where it belongs, would not have not stretched its meaning. However, arguably, the attentive readership of Irish literature who Guanda quite specifically targets, knows exactly which authors belong to their area of interest. From this perspective, the strategy of promoting authors by transcending the Irish interest of their work, already seen with Benjamin Black’s translations, may be an attempt to attract to Irish literature people who would not deliberately pursue this interest.

A similar degree of inconsistency in the translation practices of these two publishers exists with regard to the choice of translators. Some of them are highly qualified for the translation of Irish literature, such as the aforementioned Giuliana Zeuli, sole translator of Doyle’s work for Guanda, or Laura Pelaschiar, a translator with a doctoral thesis on the contemporary novels of Northern Ireland, who is a recurring name in the translations of Colm Toibín’s novels published by Fazi. Another of Toibín’s works, *Love in a Dark Time: Gay Lives from Wilde to Almodovar* (2002), is translated by Pietro Meneghelli, lecturer in English literature with a specialisation in Anglo-Irish writing. Yet the qualifications of the translators seem to vary from author to author for no apparent reason. The translator of Hamilton’s work for instance does not benefit from any evident connection with Ireland, although consistency in style and coherence in dealing with the recurring themes of the author are apparently guaranteed by the regular employment of the same person. Nonetheless, proof of the quality of the work can be deduced from the fact that the translation *Il Marinaio nell’Armadio*, in 2004, won the Premio Giuseppe Berto, an award in memory of one of the great Italian
authors of the twentieth century. However, it should also be noted that these awards are based on the premise that a work in translation has to be read as if it were an original. The criteria for a translation to be positively judged, therefore, are not adherence to the source text or the preservation of foreignness in the target text, but rather an assimilation of the peculiarity of the original to the stylistic tastes of the target culture, with smoothness and immediacy as indispensable features of the target text. An example is the receipt of the prestigious “Premio Monselice per la Traduzione” by Marcella Della Torre for her translation of Banville’s Christine Falls (Dove è Sempre Notte). Banville, curiously, is one of those authors published by Guanda who, despite the high literary profile of his work, is translated by a wide and varied array of professionals, whose commitment is towards the publishing house rather than to the author. Della Torre had no specific background in Irish literature and culture, and the merit recognised to her translation is most likely due to the artistic qualities of the Italian languages she employs. The latest part of this chapter will provide, through a case study, a more detailed exploration of some of the consequences that may derive from overlooking the importance of cultural specificity when translating a novel.

**LINGUISTIC PREFERENCES AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS IN BOLGER’S THE JOURNEY HOME**

The final part of this chapter presents a textual analysis of the Italian translation of Dermot Bolger’s novel The Journey Home by Lucia Olivieri. The main objective is to determine the ways in which the translation strategy most widely adopted in Italy in relation to contemporary fiction can affect the reception of the target text by Italian readers. The Journey Home has been chosen specifically because the novel is particularly susceptible to misinterpretation by readers starting from a different cultural perspective. The Irish dimension of the story is taken for granted by the author, which means that no explanations for the sake of clarity are provided to readers when culture specific content is encountered. Conor McCarthy, in an article for the Irish University Review, underlines the fact that Bolger’s work “tends to depict the condition of Irish modernity, without offering a sustained analysis of it.” As far as The Journey Home is concerned, McCarthy sees this as a problem, mainly because Bolger’s reading of the suburban Dublin experience of modernity exposes a position with which he
fundamentally does not agree. My argument is closer to Terence Rafferty’s conclusions about the American reception of the novel, or rather the lack of it. Rafferty notes in an article for *The New York Times Book Review* that at the core of *The Journey Home* lies the trial of young suburban Dubliners who “can’t get a grip on what it means to be Irish anymore, can’t decide if they even want to be and don’t understand why their lack of a clear national identity should leave them feeling so hollow and so desperate.” That, he believes, is the reason for the American audience’s difficulties in relating to the novel, and accordingly the reason it reached the US only in 2008 in a University Press edition. Bolger’s novels are often seen as belonging to a genre loosely defined as “new Dublin literature.” McCarthy defines Bolger’s world in *The Journey Home* as “that of the belated young post-Lemass Irish representatives of a post-war Western consumer society that succeeded, until the economic crises of the nineteen seventies, in making the bourgeois dream appear accessible to the masses.” McCarthy’s reading of the novel as an expression of “belief in the incompatibility of a political ideology that draws its inspiration from tradition, and an economic practice based on modernisation,” leads him to a clear conclusion that the novel’s “polemical point is to suggest that modernity in the Republic has been betrayed by nationalism.” The article provides a pertinent contextualisation of the novel, and explores it from an angle which is, to some extent, compatible with Bolger’s alleged willingness to “take the Irish novel and kill it.” This means that, although on the surface there might be no apparent feature immediately reducible to the Ireland of De Valera’s dream, the author is engaging with tradition, even if only to overcome or dismantle it. As McCarthy further explains, Bolger “is caught in the tension of trying to offer a recognisably ‘realistic’ portrait of Irish society in the late twentieth century, and a sense that such a novelistic project may no longer be aesthetically viable or politically acceptable.” *The Journey Home* is set in the suburban area of Finglas, where Bolger grew up. Yet the striking contrast that this setting establishes with the Georgian grandeur which characterises the

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197 Ibid.


199 Ibid., p. 103.

200 Ibid., p. 104.


Dublin novel *par excellence*, *Ulysses*, is an important layer of significance for the construction of meaning in the novel. Bolger himself acknowledges that the Dublin he is writing about, even though it is his hometown, is partly influenced by a literary tradition that inspired him with “several shots of fiction, all of which describe streets you know immediately.”\(^{203}\) There is no attempt in the Italian translation to contextualise the novel in this sense. It is true that in the pocket edition of the Italian translation a short blurb appears reporting a review from *The Irish Times* which assessed Bolger’s novel as “The best novel about Dublin after Joyce.” This could be misleading though, if it is understood to mean that it belongs to the same tradition, rather than posing a challenge to it. Moreover, the picture displayed on the cover depicts a young couple taken during the student movement in France in the 1960s. Overall then, the promotion of the Italian edition relies on the appeal of a decontextualised rebellion, along with a Dublin of Joycean remembrance. Although these two “tags” may indeed be associated with Bolger’s novel, they do not convey the message of the book. Such reductive terms, which aim at achieving accessibility for Italian readers, also leave them without any relevant interpretative key. Without some kind of explanation, the complex and original aspects of this novel, “full of rage and full of melancholy and full, to overflowing, of home truths,”\(^{204}\) are very unlikely to be fully appreciated by readers of the target text. The presence of a minute glossary at the end of the Italian edition of *The Journey Home* does show an awareness of the cultural distance of the work, yet it is too small a compromise to provide any significant mediation for Italian readers. A general approach pursuing pseudo-domestication will be juxtaposed as a possible alternative for the translation of this novel, as it would enable readers to appreciate the import of the source text in terms which are intelligible to the target-language culture. The idea is that by attuning the material to the target culture, the significance of the source text can be enhanced in ways which ultimately are more respectful of its meaning.

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\(^{204}\) Rafferty, “Young Dubliners.”
Bolger’s *The Journey Home* was originally published in 1990. His work is often recognised by critics as being “extremely literary,” especially with regard to his use of language, which often relies on the use of imagery and a highly poetic style. *The Journey Home* primarily deals with a young Dubliner’s search for identity; Hano is representative of a generation trapped between an old rural sensibility and a new urban one. Hence the advance of the urban landscape is endowed with a distinct symbolism: the progress of a new identity in contrast with the old one, so that the landscape becomes the poignant objective correlative of the character’s identity. Hano’s internal quest is visually represented by the protagonist’s journeying across the urban landscape of Dublin and later in the Irish countryside. In this sense, the “journey” of the title encapsulates the message of the novel, as it refers to the physical, cultural and metaphysical journeys undertaken by the characters and, at the same time, reveals that “in fact all the actual journeys […] are variations on the theme of the search for ‘home’.” For Hano it is the struggle to find a place of rest, somewhere he can really belong. The Italian title, *Verso Casa*, literally “towards home,” partly misses this focus by shifting the attention towards the word “home,” the only noun in the title, whereas the crucial part of “the journey” is left to be weakly expressed by a preposition of movement. This is further complicated by the fact that in Italian *casa* is a much less poignant word than “home,” as it is a single concept referring both to the building, a house, and the sense of belonging it may evoke. In the Italian *casa* the building takes centre stage, as the same word is commonly used to refer to rented accommodation or a friend’s house that is visited occasionally. Therefore the Heideggerian “dwelling” that can be perceived through a word like “home” slides into the background. Effectively then, by translating the title as *verso casa*, both the sense of a search and the sense of identity which can be attached to the word “home” are lost. “Towards the house” is simply an indication of movement towards a place, such as the everyday commute from work.

The absence of a distinction in Italian between “home” and “house” has some repercussions for the translation of this specific novel, precisely because the two

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206 Cf. McCarthy, 1997: “Ireland is divided between country and city; Dublin is split between rural colonisers and the ‘crazy, unofficial lives’ (a phrase of Colm Toibin’s) of denizens like Shay and Hano […]”, p. 6.
207 Ibid., p. 4.
elements of the original title, “journey” and “home,” are “declined” over and over again, functioning not only as symbolic but also as “practical” pillars of the whole novel. For instance, after having crafted a brief, almost lyrical description of his mother’s and father’s activities in the house and garden, Hano comments: “I felt that square of earth was home, a green expanse formed by the row of long gardens.”\textsuperscript{208} The Italian translates: quel quadrato di terra era la mia casa, una distesa verde fatta di quei lunghi giardini uno accanto all’altro\textsuperscript{209} ‘that square of earth was my house, a green expanse made by those long gardens one besides the other.’ The attempt to recover the sense of familiarity conveyed by “home” is made by introducing the possessive mia, my. Even so the meaning of the original is hardly matched. The fact that the English does not employ the adjective “my,” somehow endows Hano’s comment with a certain sense of gloomy resignation and ineluctability. There is an almost ontological quality to it, a certainty that that place “was home.” In the Italian edition the meaning of “home” seems to wane regularly, as happens in the free translation of a crucial sentence in the book, which in the Italian edition is placed in the summary on the flap:

Home was not the place where you were born but the place you created for yourself, where you did not need to explain, where you finally became what you were.

As the fact that this passage is in a foregrounded location shows, the Italian edition recognises the importance of this sentence, yet the poignancy of the original is partially lost in the linguistic re-elaboration:

Non è sufficiente nascere in un posto per sentirsi a casa. La propria casa si trova là dove non sono più necessarie spiegazioni e si diventa finalmente sé stessi.

It is not enough to having been born somewhere to feel at home. Your home is there where explanations are no longer necessary and you finally become yourself.\textsuperscript{210}

The major difference in the Italian version is that there is no mention of “creating your own place” as in the source text. Hence, the strength of this concise evocation of Hano’s struggle to find a place is largely downplayed. Consistent with the most established

\textsuperscript{210} The backtranslation provided, here and elsewhere, have the purpose of functioning as a gloss to the Italian text, in order to convey the meaning while altering as little as possible the actual structure of the passage commented upon.
criteria of acceptability in contemporary translation theory, the tension between the concern for a more elegant Italian syntax and that of a “literal” translation is resolved in favour of the former. As a consequence, the target text fails to stress the urge to define “home” in order to find one’s own identity, which is the key to the passage in the source language, and indeed to the whole novel.

The juxtaposition between home and house is a supporting theme in the whole novel, and it reappears strongly towards the end. In the source text, the word “house” is often used with connotations of vacuity and loss of identity which symbolise precisely everything that Hano’s search for a “home” is trying to overcome. The following passage clearly shows some difficulty in keeping these two dimensions separated in the target text:

Those rows of new bungalows clinging in defence to the main road, how brightly painted they looked, like a bulwark against what will come. How solid they seemed like the terraces of houses where I was born. But this crumbling house in the wood is the future, is our destination, is nowhere. I never understood it till now; soon it will be all that’s left for the likes of you and me to belong to. City or country, it will make little difference, ruins, empty lots, wherever they cannot move us from.211

The Italian version translates:

Quelle nuove villette, tutte rispettosamente in fila lungo la strada, sono state dipinte a colori vivaci per proteggere i loro abitanti da ciò che verrà. Sono solide e robuste come le case a schiera in cui sono nato, ma è questa casa diroccata nel bosco il nostro futuro, la nostra destinazione ai confini del mondo. Lo capisco soltanto ora: presto non rimarrà altro luogo al quale quelli come te e me potranno appartenere, nel quale sentirsi a casa. Strade di città o di aperta campagna farà poca differenza, abiteremo ruderi e lotti abbandonati, tutti quei luoghi da cui non riusciranno a cacciarci.212

Those new bungalows, all respectfully aligned along the street, have been painted in bright colours to protect their inhabitants from what will come. They are solid and resistant as the terraces of houses where I was born, but is this crumbling house in the wood our future, our destination at the edge of the world. Only now I understand it: soon no other place will be left to which those like you and me could belong, in which to feel at home. City or rural country streets it will make little difference, we’ll inhabit ruins and empty lots, all those places from which they won’t be able to send us away.

In the Italian version, the word *casa* and the verb *abitare* and derivatives are used to describe both the experience Hano is fleeing from and what he is aspiring to, whereas the English creates a dichotomy between the false security of “houses” and a sense of “belonging” to be searched for “nowhere.” This juxtaposition will reappear at regular intervals throughout the book. “Nowhere” in the source text functions as the definition of a non-place – the denial of the existence of a place or the spatial collocation of an object, or simply a place that cannot be found. No single Italian word expresses those concepts together. In Bolger’s text, “nowhere” stands against all those places that are created by false identities, and that contribute to perpetuate those false identities. Denying attachment to any one place is an affirmation of a more genuine identity. It indicates the only way Hano has to affirm his own identity. In Italian *non-luogo* could be used as a philosophical neologism to express the same concept, but its impact would be very different from the common English use of “nowhere,” and it would not convey the further associations of the word. The translation turns “is our destination, is nowhere” into “la nostra destinazione ai confine del mondo” ‘our destination at the edge of the world,’ which is understandable in the sense that “nowhere” as such cannot be translated into Italian. More questionable is the choice to use repeatedly the word *luogo*, place, to describe Hano’s destination, which somehow contradicts the implicit meaning of the source text. Moreover, in Italian, verbs like “looked” and “seemed,” which refer to bungalows and terraced houses in order to emphasise the mere appearance of solidity and stability, both in a practical and figurative sense, are not reproduced. In the translated version, the houses “are” brightly painted and solid like the one in which Hano was born.

This downplays the implicit sarcasm of the source text, as happens with the translation of the hyperbole in the sentence comparing the houses to “a bulwark against what will come,” which becomes more neutrally “to protect their inhabitants from what will come.” Also, in the Italian version, the expression *sentirsi a casa* ‘feel at home’ is used to translate the English “to belong to,” creating another unrequired parallel between Hano’s destination and what he is escaping from. By the same token, the elliptical, diaphanous prose of the original passage becomes standardised in translation. For instance, the verb *abitare*, to inhabit, is introduced before the list of the elements which constitute Hano’s destination. These indeed are places, *luoghi*, as the Italian translation specifies, but in this context they stand as the exact opposite of “place.”
Hano’s destination is not a home, least of all a house or anything you could inhabit, but rather “nowhere,” a non-place.

Another passage presenting similar difficulties is the following: “Here we are again,” Shay said, “back to nowhere. The fuckers will never find us here.” In Italian it reads: “Eccoci qua,” disse Shay, “di nuovo ai confini del mondo. Nessuno ci scoperà mai.” The fact that the same solution as in the previous translation has been adopted for “nowhere” shows at least a certain coherence and an awareness that the word in this book does constitute an important semantic unit. The problem is that here Shay is simply referring to their house that is just outside the district where they grew up. The coordinates of “nowhere” are variable and sometimes metaphorical. They may reflect the mental state of the character who is uttering the word, rather than a geographical reality. The expression “the edge of the world” chosen for the Italian translation is more “precise” than “nowhere,” as it suggests marginality, which is not necessarily the case in the contingent situation of the novel. In *The Journey Home* “nowhere” is a place outside the world, or else deeply inside the human consciousness of the protagonists, the liberation from the “where” that has had such a heavy, negative influence on Hano and Shay’s lives. Also, in the Italian translation, the colourful expression “the fuckers” is missing. The Italian “No one is ever going to find us” not only suppresses an aspect of Shay’s personality by downplaying his feelings in that moment. More importantly, the source text clearly implies that the power of their imaginary “non-place” consists in being an alternative to a “whereness” which produces only “fuckers.” The Italian translation, by substituting “the fuckers” with “nobody,” misses the point that Hano and Shay’s “nowhere” is not hidden from everybody: only those corrupted by living within the world have to remain locked out. Furthermore, the coherence is broken on a previous occasion, where yet again the word “nowhere” is endowed with a specific semantic weight: “We came from nowhere and found we belonged nowhere else” (emphasis mine). The Italian text opts for the translation *venivamo da un luogo inesistente e non appartenevano a nessun altro luogo* (emphasis mine), literally “we came from an inexistent place and we did not belong to any other place.” The choice could be justified by appealing to the restrictions of the Italian language, yet on a

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213 Bolger, 1991, p. 76.
214 Bolger, 1997, p. 98.
macro-level it upsets the lexical balance of the source text. Not only does the translation fail to recreate the mesmerising semantic refrain achieved by the continuous repetition of words like “nowhere” and “belong,” but also the indiscriminate use of “luogo” fails to convey the idea of Hano’s mental spaces as “somewhere else,” distant from all the “real” places.

In any event, the semantic cohesiveness given by the internal repetitions is undermined from the start by the decision not to translate the word “journey” in the title. The after-effects on the poetic function of the prose are evident in passages like the following:

> How can you learn self-respect if you’re taught that where you live is not your real home? At fourteen I tried to bridge the gap by journeying out into my father’s uncharted countryside.216

The Italian translation reads:

> Come potevamo imparare a rispettare ciò che eravamo, se ci veniva insegnato che il luogo in cui abitavamo non era la nostra vera casa? A quattordici anni, cercai di colmare quel vuoto esplorando le inesplorate campagne di mio padre.217

> How could we learn to respect what we were, if we were taught that the place we inhabited was not our real house? At fourteen, I tried to fill in that void by exploring the unexplored lands of my father.

The force of the expression “journeying into an uncharted countryside” is not aptly captured by “esplorando le inesplorate campagne.” Campagna in Italian normally refers to small pieces of land outside town owned by urban citizens, thereby evoking a very “controlled” and “civilised” idea of nature. The Italian expression then recalls something rather ordinary, experienced by most children in Italy, and the peculiarity of “uncharted” and the vastness expressed by “countryside” are missing. Also “journeying” is translated as esplorando, exploring. The Italian variant viaggio would have more aptly captured the evocation of a vast literary tradition as the word “journey” does. More importantly, consistent with the novel’s conscious engagement with a generation of dispossessed, “journeying” gives the idea of “going through,” thus

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underlining Hano’s failure to possess those territories. This connotation is lost in the
verb “to explore” as used in the Italian version. The toning down of the leitmotiv of
dispossession/belonging continues with the substitution of “to live” with abitare, to
inhabit, which causes a similar shift of significance as occurs from “home” to “house.”
“Inhabit” is only part of living, and perhaps evokes the more practical connotation, not
necessarily encompassing the nuances of experience inherent to somebody’s identity, as
the verb “to live” does. All these choices are consistent with a translation strategy which
favours stylistic smoothness. Abitare is indeed a natural choice to combine with casa,
but this very “naturalness of discourse” works against the original, where these
recurring themes, and all their reverberations, are consciously emphasised. Also, in the
Italian passage, Hano is trying to colmare il vuoto, fill in the void, rather than “to bridge
the gap.” Again, the change is not minor: the concept of bridging is fundamental to the
novel, in that it refers both to the time of passage between a rural and an urban identity,
and to Hano’s personal efforts to create a bridge between his existence and his
surroundings. His life is not “empty,” his problem is not the absence of things or people,
but his inability to communicate with them. The stylistic choice of normalising the verb
“to bridge,” for which an exact Italian translation does not exist, erases this symbolic
layer of meaning.

The real objective of Hano’s “journeying,” as illustrated by the paragraph above,
is clarified in the text by a line following shortly after: “…as I set off to find Ireland.”218
By finding Ireland he would have found himself, his identity as an Irish person. The
Italian expression used in translation, in cerca dell’Irlanda,219 is very straightforward,
as attracting attention to a sentence by means of peculiar language is not countenanced
by the conventional policy of translation of contemporary fiction. In this way, however,
the important concept the sentence is expressing may go unnoticed, especially because
the simple reference to Ireland for the Italian reader does not have any immediate
connection to identity. A more literal translation, like quando io uscivo per trovare
l’Irlanda for instance, by emphasising the pronoun io, I, would remind the reader that
the narrative voice is engaged in a personal search for identity, and would create a more
direct stylistic correspondence between Hano and Ireland. Also, the verb trovare, to

find, rather than *in cerca*, to look for, might have communicated better Hano’s need for something more pressing than a stroll through the countryside.

It could be argued that similar stylistic choices which could break the illusion of transparency would draw attention to linguistic deviations which are not present in the source. This is true, but the prevailing view embraced by Italian publishers, to hastily label any translation strategy challenging fluency as “translationese,” can be equally absurd. In the case of *The Journey Home* a translation less concerned with stylistic conformity to Italian standards could have left some space to show more sensitivity towards the key ideas of the source text and ultimately establish a deeper connection with its “meaning.” The web of resonances created by the terminology employed by Bolger is probably not meticulously constructed by the author, as it derives from the specific literary-socio-cultural context in which the novel is rooted, and the modalities the author employs most likely constitute the most “natural” way he found to give voice to it. Yet the context in which the translator and the Italian readers will receive the novel is different, therefore the same words are deprived of their original significance. Declaring the “alien” nature of the text, therefore, would have made visible the central themes in the novel which do not necessarily relate to the immediate experience of the target audience. The result of the attempt to open up *The Journey Home* to as many people as possible by presenting it in an easy-reading format effectively reduces the spectrum of interpretations also for more scrupulous readers. Although readers falling within the population brackets considered as “educated” may overcome a number of the translation problems described above, especially if they cultivate a personal interest in Ireland, the overall presentation of the book certainly does not help readers to approach the book from a coherent critical perspective.

Fig. 4. Cover of Pasolini’s controversial movie *Salò e le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (1975)
With this in mind, I would like to explore briefly the possibility of an alternative approach to the translation of *The Journey Home* that can show, in principle, a way to deal with other texts presenting analogous complications. The first step towards the achievement of pseudo-domestication, the type of minoritising translation proposed here, would be a more effective use of the paratextual elements in general, and the book cover, in particular, in order to achieve a “domestication of references.” For instance, a hypothetical edition emphasising the parallelism between *The Journey Home* and Pierpaolo Pasolini’s *Salò o Le Centoventi Giornate di Sodoma* – quoted by Bolger himself as source of inspiration for his novel – could have successfully integrated the novel into the Italian market through an act of cultural mediation. The reference, in fact, is most likely to be intelligible to the Italian imagined reader, and would have created the possibility of a new interpretative horizon for the novel far from being reductive. The acknowledgment of Pasolini’s cinematic masterpiece as the novel’s subtext would have immediately enhanced the metaphorical value of the visually strong sexual abuses present in the novel. This is a central theme of the novel, which is less extensively commented upon in this analysis only because overall, it is much less damaged by the translation process. However this could be the very reason to choose to emphasise this aspect in presenting the novel to Italian readers. Such an approach would have guided Italian readers in a legitimate, fertile direction, without any distortion or reduction of the source text meaning, but rather with an enhancement of its latent potential. Moreover, by introducing the cultural reference to Pasolini, the Italian translation would have targeted a specific class of readers prepared to engage more deeply with the novel. This profile after all, according to the statistics presented in the first chapter, would correspond to the greatest proportion of book buyers.

The possibility of a clear reference to an Italian cultural icon makes clear in what way this translation strategy appears to be domesticating, and makes the examples of *The Journey Home* particularly suitable to explore pseudo-domestication as an alternative to the strategy described as pseudo-transparency. Obviously, in other instances, the domesticating tension will find expression in other ways, which need to be customised to the particular novel and should follow a critical engagement with the work. Unlike pseudo-transparency, which tends to erase the interpretative possibility from the translation, pseudo-domestication invites a critical perspective as a positive, even necessary, possibility in the approach to the novel to be translated. On a theoretical
level, pseudo-domestication would basically consist in applying on a more comprehensive basis the practical solutions that Venuti suggests for executing a “minoritising” translation of literary texts, as it would use paratextual elements of presentation and marketing towards the same purpose. In the examples Venuti provides of his own translations of Italian literature into English for an American audience, he demonstrates how the substitution of intertextual references meaningful to the source text audience, with others which are equally meaningful to the target text audience, can be used to serve the potential meaning of the source text. The idea of a Pasolinian reading of a Bolger’s novel illustrates a similar situation, and provides an almost visual representation of how the meaning of the source text can be enhanced in light of the assumed knowledge of the new readers.

The linguistic dimension of a text is clearly crucial, especially in literary texts, yet it is only one of the difficulties encountered in translation. Often linguistic issues are intertwined with cultural ones, and in these cases even successful linguistic acrobatics might not be sufficient to translate the full extent of the source text’s meaning. In The Journey Home, for instance, “dispossession” is a central theme, which McCarthy’s summarises as follow:

[…] Bolger’s characters travel, but their journeys are all too often the sign of the re-insertion of the economy and the re-inscription of the culture into a world-economy of goods, capital and labour, of cultural images and social horizons, over which Ireland and its citizens have all too little control. So they share the bourgeois quest for identity, while suffering literal displacement.

Different parts of the novel tackle rather explicitly issues which directly derive from the characters’ sense of displacement:

We grew up divided by only a few streets so you’d think we would share a background, yet somehow we didn’t. At least not then, not till later when we found we were equally dispossessed. The children of limbo was how Shay called us once.

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221 Ibid.
222 McCarthy, 1997, p. 5.
The Italian translation reads:

Siamo cresciuti a poche strade di distanza; si potrebbe pensare che abbiamo vissuto esperienze simili, ma non è stato così. Almeno non a quel tempo, non fino a quando non scoprimmo di essere entrambi degli esiliati, figli del limbo, come disse una volta Shay.\(^{224}\)

We grew up only a few streets away; one might think we lived through similar experiences, but this was not the case. At least not at that time, not until we discovered we were both exiled, the sons of limbo, as Shay once said.

The translation highlights the fundamental problem that the literal Italian equivalent of “dispossessed,” dispossessato, is barely recognised as a word, and would not be accepted as a suitable translation. The Italian translator then opts for esiliato, exiled. This could be justified by the existence of Bolger’s poetry collection Internal Exiles, which places the term close to the author’s sensibility. Yet the broader scope of historical and social conditions covered by the word “exile” denies the historical particularity of the Irish experience. More importantly, the meaning is fundamentally different: “exile” is somebody who cannot live at home, not somebody who does not feel at home while living there. The closer correspondent would have been esiliati in patria, a concept similar to that of “internal exiles.” The Italian translation somehow compensates by bringing “children of limbo” in an attributive position, which functions as partial clarification of the concept expressed by “exiled,” and yet fails to fully capture the symbolic significance of “detachment from the land,” the Irish property par excellence, which is at the core of Bolger’s novel. Moreover, the notion of “internal exiles” appears later on in Hano’s reflections, providing a further nuance to his tormented personality, whereas in Italian, this cannot but be a reinforcement of a point which has already been made:

I didn’t understand it then, but I grew up in perpetual exile: from my parents when on the streets, from my own world when I was at home.\(^{225}\)

This becomes:

A quel tempo non lo sapevo ancora, ma io sono cresciuto in esilio perpetuo: dai miei genitori quando ero in strada, dal mio mondo quando ero a casa.\(^{226}\)

At that time I didn’t know yet, but I grew up in perpetual exile: from my parent when I was on the streets, from my world when I was at home.

The substitution of the verb “understand” with the verb sapere, to know, is the more significant shift operated by this translation. Hano is talking of something he felt without understanding, not of something he did not know. In other words, he already knew the feeling of being in exile, only he could not fully understand it.

The emphasis on the detachment between Hano and Shay and the rest of the world is another crucial aspect of the novel, strictly linked to another fundamental theme: incommunicability. After living experiences outside his “home,” for instance, Hano comes back with stories his father “couldn’t comprehend.” Although the Italian translation non poteva comprendere employs a verb with the same etymological root as the original, the Italian use of the verb is very common, and it almost totally overlaps with the verb capire, to understand. The verb “comprehend” has a rarer, more specific use, and it almost suggests that father and son were not speaking the same language. It expresses more forcefully that the father could not grasp what the son is talking about, because their mental universes do not match. Later on in the text, the English formulation describing an attempt at dialogue between father and son states: “neither knowing how to talk.” The Italian, remarkably, reduces the strength of the expression by translating this as incerti sulle parole da pronunciare ‘uncertain about the words to be uttered.’ In the source text, the incommunicability is far more totalising: it is the act of talking itself that fails, not the mere choice of adequate words as the Italian would suggest. At some point in the recollection of his life, Hano mentions his friendship with an old Protestant woman:

Then came the final betrayal of something even he couldn’t define when, at fifteen, I chose the first friend of my own.\(^{227}\)

This was translated into Italian as:

Infine a quindici anni strinsi la prima amicizia e commisi il tradimento finale di un sentimento che neanche mio padre sarebbe stato in grado di definire.\(^{228}\)

The translator tries to be literal by translating “the final betrayal” with *il tradimento finale*. Yet, in Italian, the adjective *finale* may give the false impression of a chronological attribution, in the sense of “the last one,” whereas the meaning of the English expression is closer to “the most serious betrayal of all (so far).” Also, in the Italian formulation, it seems that Hano’s betrayal consists in “making friendship,” rather than personally “choosing” that particular friendship, as appears clear from the source text. Moreover, whereas the “imagined” Irish reader should have no problem in recognising that the sense of “betrayal” towards his Catholic dad derives from the fact that the old woman was a Protestant, for the Italian reader the extent of the historical burden of this opposition can be much more elusive. It is the background of Irish historical circumstances that justifies the employment of such a strong word as “betrayal,” and its Italian counterpart _tradimento_ seems to lack a real justification within the target text. Moreover, in English, the betrayal is towards “something” not further specified. In Italian, this becomes a betrayal of a _sentimento_, a feeling. Although the choice is still vague enough to adequately express the sentence meaning, the emphasis on Hano’s incomprehension of what was really happening is partially lost. Hano was not intentionally betraying his father, but it happened all the same, because he did not have a clue as to what “thing” he was really betraying.

The theme of a hybrid identity in between nostalgia for the rural and aspiration to the urban also lies at the core of the protagonist’s tormented personality. This is particularly difficult to understand in terms which are not specifically rooted in Irish culture, precisely because the novel creates such a strong association between Irish identity and landscape. The link between physical elements of the landscape and identity is constantly reiterated in the novel. The deteriorated state of the lawn of Hano’s parents’ house, for instance, is repeatedly linked directly to Hano’s father sense of dislocation in the present time. The following passage is an example:

[… ]while outside the weeds and nettles chocked his dreams. Sometimes he’d cough and, looking up, ask me to chop everything down.  

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The impression given is that the overgrown garden is physically choking Hano’s father, who coughs and looks up as if to search for air, and then asks his son “to chop everything down.” The Italian version reads:

[…] mentre in giardino le erbacce e le ortiche soffocavano i sogni di mio padre. Qualche volta tossiva, alzava gli occhi e mi chiedeva di dare una ripulita al giardino.  

First of all, the final expression *dare una ripulita al giardino* ‘to clean out the garden’ is much less strong than the original, and generally the whole tone of the Italian translation is more realistic and composed. Hano refuses to work in the garden, even if he would like to, because it is what he “watched him do.” It was part of the essence of his father’s identity, something that inexplicably he cannot do himself (‘those photocopied rejections seemed to have sapped my strength’). Hano’s relationship with nature is subject to different conditions. To him nature still represents something real which has been lost. Just after the meeting with his father he grabs one of the nettles growing in the garden, so that he can feel something real, but the only real feeling he gets from it is pain. Later on, Hano interprets his inability to deal with the overgrown garden as a symbolic refusal to uncover the childhood memories hidden there. The parallel between identity and nature is further reinforced by metaphors, comparing Hano with desert flowers which remain hidden under the sand for years, waiting for a single day of rain during which they will exhaust their biological cycle; or with a bird ready to fly for the first time. This happens after Hano’s realisation that, by refusing to cope with the garden, he would remain buried there himself, as if he “had been trying to hold up time, to live on in the past having no future to put in its place.” The English expression seems to stress that, in the novel, past, present, and future can be almost visualised as distinct *places*. This implication gets lost in the Italian translation, which develops the English gerund so that “the future,” rather than Hano, becomes the agent: *avevo cercato di fermare il tempo, per continuare a vivere nel passato, visto che non potevo sostituirlo con un futuro che mi contemplasse* ‘I had been trying to hold up time, to live on in the past, seeing as I couldn’t substitute it with any future which would contemplate me.’

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232 Ibid., p. 11.
Hano’s gradual detachment from his surroundings also emerges in the following line: “I seemed to have lost the power to sleep, gradually losing track of the everyday world.” The Italian version reads: *Era come se avessi perso la capacità di dormire, come se stessi progressivamente perdendo il contatto con la realtà.* By reiterating the conditional form *come se*, as if, the Italian emphasises the hypothetical nature of the sentence, leading the reader to think that the loss of contact with reality is Hano’s sensation, and not an actual process, like what happened to his father. The English underlines this parallel by employing the word “world,” the same word used to describe the father’s condition, whereas the Italian switches to *realtà*, reality, which again evokes a more abstract situation, a state of mind rather than an actual condition. All in all, the Italian sentence seems to put the emphasis on the hallucinatory quality of Hano’s experience, due to his abuse of drugs and lack of sleep. This element is certainly important in the original version, but again, it seems that Hano’s gradual detachment from a world he does not understand is the only way to cope rather than a willing choice. Ultimately, he is a victim of circumstances just like his father, although his behaviour would suggest a more active role in his alienation compared to his father’s apparent passivity.

A significant comment on Hano’s father is “The present made no sense in his world.” The Italian version translates quite freely *non c’era spazio per il presente nel suo mondo* ‘there was no room for the present in his world’. In the Italian formulation, it almost appears as if leaving out the present is the choice of a hard and sullen man. The English “made no sense,” instead, quite clearly underlines that it was no choice at all: his father is a victim of the changing circumstances as much as Hano is, the lack of communication between them is not due to personal reasons, but to “environmental” ones. The whole issue of incommensurable distance between father and son is wonderfully summed up in the following paragraph:

“What’s going to happen to you, son?”
His voice was low, humble with bewilderment. I would have liked to touch his shoulder, to somehow reassure him. Looking at him I knew that I would leave home soon, that only poverty was keeping me there. Ever since our fight about

the old woman in the fields we had both lost the simple ease which had once existed between us. I knew that he was thinking about days further back, times I’d waited beside the lilac bushes wanting to feel important, hoping he’d ask me to fetch some tool from the shed. I longed to say, Tomorrow dad, we’ll take those tool down, fix up the garden the way it used to be. But I couldn’t. I had to turn away.

“I don’t know. [...]”

The translation reads:

“Che sarà di te, figliolo?,” mi chiese sottovoce, disorientato, smarrito. Avrei voluto rassicurarlo, appoggiargli una mano sulla spalla. Mentre lo guardavo, compresi che me ne sarei andato presto di casa, che soltanto la povertà mi tratteneva ancora. Il conflitto nato al tempo della ne donna del bosco aveva distrutto la naturalezza e il sentimento semplice che ci aveva unito. Sapevo che mio padre si era ormai rifugiato in un passato remoto, in un’epoca in cui, nascosto tra i lillà, io aspettavo che mi chiedesse di andargli a prendere un attrezzo nella capanna per sentirmi importante. Avrei voluto dirgli: Domani papà prendiamo gli attrezzi e rimettiamo a posto il giardino. Vedrai che tornerà tutto come prima. Ma non ce la feci. Fui costretto a voltargli le spalle.

“Non lo so. [...]”

In English, the father’s words are isolated, as if anticipating that they will remain unanswered. This impression is further enhanced by the fact that Hano’s answer follows, also isolated, at the end of the long paragraph, so that the only words uttered function as a graphic frame for all that remains unsaid between them. In the Italian version, the effectiveness is diluted by the fact that the father’s words are immediately followed by descriptions of the father’s attitude while he was speaking. Disorientato, smarrito ‘bewildered, lost,’ however, does not fully capture the depth of “humble with bewilderment,” the English definition of the father’s voice, which once more seems to underline the difficulty of finding a way of communication with his son. The Italian translation also suppresses the adverb “somehow,” which, in the original, renders Hano’s idea to “reassure his father” all the more remote, because improbable. Also, by inserting the conjunction mentre, while, the Italian translation sets Hano’s revelation that he would soon leave more precisely in the same temporal dimension as “looking at his father.” In English, the simultaneousness of thought and event is not so explicit: there is indeed an epiphanic sense, but it is more the acquisition of awareness of something that Hano has always known. This endows the revelation itself with a certain ineluctability, a theme pervading the whole novel, in the sense that for Hano there was

never an option besides leaving. The more tragic nuance of the original version also emerges in the recollection of Hano’s relationship with his father in the old days. In English, that closeness is described as a “simple ease between us,” whereas the Italian chooses the stronger expression il sentimento semplice che ci aveva unito, which implies that there was a time where the two were really close together (essere uniti). Moreover, the passing mention of the woman living in the fields can be harder to grasp for the Italian reader in the context of Hano’s conflict with his father, since the only known information about her is that she was a Protestant. Without accurate historical background, it is hard to read into this friendship the symbol of a generation which does not share the same values that had so heavily influenced the life, actions, and, above all, the identity of previous generations. The dichotomy between Catholicism and Protestantism, deriving in part from the Irish necessity to negatively define themselves as non-British, had lost meaning for the new “secular” generation of the urban era, for whom Britain stood more as an opportunity than a threat. Another substantial difference is that, in the source text, Hano’s father “was thinking about days further back.” In the Italian version, Hano knows that his father si era ormai rifugiato in un passato remoto ‘had by now taken shelter in a remote past.’ Again, the Italian interpretation opts for having the father almost totally responsible for his detachment from the present, as the expression “took shelter” suggests. Also, the Italian version expands the English “fix up the garden the way it used to be” into the more explicit “rimettiamo a posto il giardino. Vedrai che tornerà tutto come prima” ‘we’ll fix up the garden. You’ll see, everything will be the way it was before.’ Apparently, the Italian translation is making clear the implicit symbolic meaning of fixing up the garden, possibly to compensate for the fact that, on many other occasions, the symbolism linked to the “land” is lost, and for the Italian reader the symbolic value that the garden has for the father’s identity would not be immediately obvious. For instance, in the original, in his recollection of the past, Hano is hiding by the lilac bushes, which in Italian are simply translated as lillà. This, however, does not create a perfect correspondence with the previous decision to translate “the arc of bare lilac bushes” as l’arco spoglio dei lillà, a crucial description of where the father was standing just before the conversation. In the Italian formulation, it is not clear that the lilacs, and not the arc, are bare; and, if the adjective refers to the lilacs, then the image evoked is an “arc of lilac,” which does not exactly match Hano’s hiding place. Although these appear to be small details, in the original they clearly function as further proof that the landscape is intended as objective correlative of
identity, which means that elements of the landscape are intended to embody in more explicit, “visible” forms, emotional aspects of Hano’s personal journey. This symbolic correspondance is partly missed in the Italian translation. Hano’s father’s identity is repeatedly linked to natural elements of the countryside, so that quite clearly the “bare lilacs bushes” stand for the painful decay of that type of identity, which was still “flourishing” when Hano was younger.

Also pertinent to the relation between identity and place is the following description of Hano’s father:

Every evening that winter my father’s face was like ash, gathered from a burnt-out half-century and spread in a fine crust over his bones.\(^{240}\)

The terms of this description are very “physical.” The debris of what the past century has burned has gathered on the father’s face. The places which once made up his identity, are now non-places, destroyed places, and this determines his new unfortunate condition. The Italian translation is not quite as “physical” as the original:

Quell’inverno vidi ogni sera sul viso di mio padre le ceneri di cinquant’anni andati in fumo, un velo sottile di detriti che si andavano accumulando sul suo scheletro.\(^{241}\)

Every evening that winter I saw on my father’s face the ashes from fifty years which went up in smoke, a thin veil of debris which went on gathering on his bones.

In the Italian version, the personification of everything which has burnt-out on the father’s face is slightly less explicit; indeed the Italian translation might be taken as an abstract metaphor of old age.

On other occasions, the symbolism that serves to emphasise the new detachment of the urban class from the rest of the nation, from the “land” that played such a predominant role for the previous generations, is more explicitly linked to the Irish landscape. For instance, Hano’s stupefied question “where the fuck is Leitrim?” stands for the young Dubliner’s alienation from his rural roots. The Italian translation dove cazzo è Leitrim? is quite literal; however, because of a different usage of swear words, it

\(^{240}\) Bolger, 1991, p. 9.
seems to voice anger rather than the disbelief deriving from Hano’s identity crisis. Another example of the difficulties in maintaining the same level of symbolism in translation is found in Hano’s realisation that “Looking back, my life was like a candle, briefly sparked into flame in that old woman’s caravan among the fields […].” What Hano is acknowledging in the source text is that he had a glimpse of his own self, allegedly an urban Catholic one, when living in an old Protestant woman’s caravan in the middle of the countryside. The translation fails to state where the caravan is, “among the fields,” subtracting a very important element of signification in the context of a novel where the search for identity is so strictly linked to territory and landscape. The deepest meaning of these apparently unimportant lines is that the dispossessed boy from the city feels alive only amongst the fields, filled with a sense of identity which is not his own, but which he perceives to be genuine. Thanks to Shay, Hano had an illusionary moment of urban identity as well, but it will only be with Kate that he will find a comfortable sense of identity, in the purely human dimension of his existence, detached from any place and the identitarian implications it might carry. The “fields” function as a preliminary epiphany of this final fulfilment, a step towards liberation from the constrictions and the expectations of the oppressive environment of the city. The fact that the translation not only fails to emphasise them, but even “suppresses” them, shows that such an interpretative lens is completely overlooked by the Italian translator, and therefore hidden from the Italian reader who relies on the translator’s mediation for an adequate understanding of the text.

The fragmentation of Hano’s identity is further explored when he and Kate finally reach the countryside. The following discussion summarises a number of supporting themes in the novel:

“Well it was drummed into me subtly,” he said. “Places like this were meant to be more Irish than the streets I was born in. It was weird, all twisted up in our heads, wanting to blow up the Brits and following their football clubs. All the teachers with bog accents talking about Íosagán and Peig like the glorious shagging kingdom you were excluded from. It was gas, neighbours would call across the hedge to my father. Have you been down home, John? After thirty years they still asked.”

The translation presents some important differences:

First of all, “drummed into” is translated as *inculcare*, leaving out the adverb “subtly,” which conveys a rather different picture of the ways in which the kids were brought up to share some conventional beliefs. Secondly, the places which Hano is visiting now were not *più irlandesi*, more Irish in an ontological sense, as the Italian suggests, but “meant to be,” which recalls the “subtlety” previously alluded to. Even in the process of visiting them, Hano does not know whether they really are more Irish or not. Hence, the assertiveness of the Italian sentence is slightly out of place. Also, the idea conveyed by the English version is that the education methods employed to raise the kids cause all of them to perceive the world in a “weird” way, with things “twisted up in their heads.” In the Italian version, it is almost as if Hano’s state of “confusion” was a personal condition. Also, the English expression “blow up the Brits” clearly alludes to some factual events like the IRA bombings, whereas the Italian hyperbolic translation “to wipe the Brits off the Earth’s surface” seems the nonsense fantasy of a child. The English “bog accent” employs an element of the landscape to denote the teacher’s place of origin, whereas the Italian, to keep the same slightly pejorative connotation, employs the vague expression of *accento contadino*, farmer’s accent. More importantly, the Italian passage suppresses the clear reference to the two works of Irish literature studied in school, substituted with the rather neutral sentence “At the time Gaelic was taught in school.” Such a formulation is inadequate, since Gaelic was still taught in school at the time Hano is speaking, and still is. *Íosagán* by Padraig Pearse and Peig Sayers’ autobiography are two texts which were often used to teach Irish to pupils. “The glorious world” the kids were excluded from is an allusion to the fact that the precarious linguistic competence provided in school has never really approached the linguistic sensibility of a native speaker. Hano’s tone during the speech is bitter and resigned, an attitude partly revealed by the particular use of language, which contains informal expressions such as “glorious shagging kingdom” and “it was gas,” completely lost in the English version as “sotly.”

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the highly formal style of the Italian translation, which suggests a much more composed, and hence, less passionate, demeanour on Hano’s part.

The importance of the landscape is also crucial in that it articulates past and present as “changing places.” The following description is an example:

The only sign of man was the high-frequency wires strung out between humming pylons that bisected the sky. Otherwise the landscape looked the same as had greeted druids who tramped here to lay down their dead thousands of years ago.\footnote{Bolger, 1991, p. 146.}

In Italian it becomes:

Tutt’intorno l’unica traccia umana erano i fili dell’alta tensione che fischiavano e sezionavano il cielo correndo da un pilone all’altro, altrimenti il paesaggio sarebbe stato identico a quello che dovevano aver visto migliaia di anni prima i druidi giunti fin lì a seppellire i loro morti.\footnote{Bolger, 1997. Trans. Olivieri, p. 178.}

The most important change is that the “here” of the original is substituted by lì, there, which suggests a look from the “outside” rather than the struggle of an ego in perpetual search of a “here” where he could belong. Sometimes the translation overlooks even more crucial aspects of the symbolic importance attributed to the landscape. For instance, when Hano and Katie, during their road trip, pass the “half-built fields along the North Road into the countryside of Kilshane Cross,”\footnote{Bolger, 1991, p. 233.} the Italian translation qualifies Kilshane Cross as a paesino, village, but it turns the “half-built field along the North Road” into i cantieri in costruzione che costeggiavano la North Road ‘the building sites along the North Road.’\footnote{Bolger, 1997. Trans. Olivieri, p. 337.} Such a formulation glosses over the crucial information that there were “fields” where the building sites have been erected. The theme is extremely important because it is reprises by Hano in his reflections towards the end of the book, when the advance of what is called “progress” in Ireland is depicted in apocalyptic terms:

For a while longer the lorries will keep coming, widening the roadways with their tyres, dumping the plastic sacks into the quarry until the holiday homes
grow so close that the continentals will object. Our role is to offer tranquility, not rivers awash with the eyes of dead fish.  

From this passage, the difficulty for an Italian reader to share the discoursal perspective of the book appears quite clear. Italians belong among the “continentals,” those who will shake their heads looking at Ireland from outside. The translation reads:

“I camion continueranno a fare su e giù ancora per un po’ allargheranno la strada con i loro pneumatici e getteranno i loro sacchi di plastica nella cava. Quand le villette per le vacanze cominceranno a essere costruite troppo vicino alla discarica, dal continente si solleverà un coro di proteste. Il ruolo della nostra isola è quello di offrire tranquillità e non fiumi infestati dai vitrei occhi di pesci morti.”

“Our role” becomes il ruolo della nostra isola ‘the role of our island,’ which keeps the first person plural possessive, but emphasises the fact that it is somebody belonging to the Irish island who is talking. There is also an implicit critique of the image of the Island as it has been promoted abroad; the image that, being a target of this policy, Italy is likely to have:

The last corner of Europe, the green jewel free from the paths of acid rain. A land preserved intact for the community. German tongues clicking in amusement at how it was run in the last years.

The translation reads:

[…]l’ultimo angolo verde d’Europa, il gioiello di smeraldo della Comunità sarà così protetto dalle piogge acide. Un paradiso per turisti che risuonerà delle voci divertite dei tedeschi che denigreranno l’operato del governo irlandese negli ultimi anni.

[…] the last green corner of Europe, the emerald jewel of the Community will be thus protected from the acid rain. A heaven for tourists, which will be filled by the amused comments of the Germans, who will denigrate the actions of the Irish Government in the last years.

The Italian version slightly expands the meaning implicit in Bolger’s concise picture; in so doing, part of the bitterness in the tone gets lost. The translation does adapt the linguistic stylistic devices typical of the tourist industry to Italian equivalents, but it is

probably less clear that Bolger’s intention is a postmodern use of those same mediums he is criticising. The same applies to the long following paragraph about Dublin, where stereotypical views of Irishness are inserted into a futuristic description of the country:

[...] I’m released back into a city ringed by golf clubs. Exclusive restaurants between the green canals, sporadic insurrections still in the shanty towns. The crowd of youth not dispersed by the water cannon but by the bored cameraman finally screwing the cover over the lens. Out there electric fences will hum in the evenings, crackling when a stray dog stumbles against them. In the white pillar beside the solid wooden gates an intercom will wait for messages. Motorists gliding silently through the woodlands, the drone of Dutch and French over the car telephones.
And the chosen million Irish left: red-haired girls in peasant aprons bringing menus to diners in the converted castles, at one hand of the scale; at the other, middle ranking civil servants who will close their eyes at night, knowing that once we could have stood up as equals, not been bought out like children by the quick lure of grants. Irish officials, knowing they began too late to reach the top posts, will swap electronic gadgets with their neighbours, wondering some evenings about the times of their youth, never speaking of them in front of their children, like parents a century and a half before ashamed of their Gaelic tongue.252

The stereotypes are still recognisable in Italian, and readers should be able to realise that Bolger’s employment of features of Ireland they normally find in a tourist brochure is meant to be a poignant critique. The finale of the novel ideally places *The Journey Home* close to books such as *1984* or *Brave New World*, but the abstract level of its critique is more difficult to grasp because the setting, rather than being decontextualised, is somehow hypercontextualised. The characters are not moving within some futuristic representation of reality where every border has been smashed and redrawn, they are firmly rooted within a temporal and geographical reality: the Irish “peripheral postindustrialization”253 of the Eighties. This specificity is what partly precludes the emotional involvement of foreign readers. The closing of the paragraph, “wondering some evenings about the time of their youth, never speaking of them in front of their children, like parents a century and a half before ashamed of their Gaelic tongue,” can hardly have the same emotional resonance for Italian readers for whom the language issue in Ireland is no more than an acquired notion at best.

The conclusion of the novel is that the prospect of hollow inauthenticity is the only possible alternative to the ruins Hano is going to live in. In view of this climax in the finale, it would have been all the more crucial to keep intact every allusion to violence against the landscape, as it constituted the symbolic step towards an increasingly threatening future, which culminates in Hano’s dystopic vision at the end. Yet this was not always the case. In the translation of “the plastic bags of litter burst in the ditches, the slip-stream of big truck blowing through my hair,” the Italian version omits the apparently small detail of “plastic” bags. But “plastic” is the most stigmatised symbol of pollution, so that its mere mention somehow reinforces the point of the violence exerted on nature in the name of progress. This topic, far from being marginal, is all the more important in the general import of the novel, since the violence against nature functions as objective correlative of the violence exerted on the boys by the politicians, another central theme. In this sense, the two themes are intertwined and equally crucial. For readers acquainted with the setting of Bolger’s novel, however, the socio-cultural circumstances of the setting may prove equally difficult to decipher. The target text faces the challenge to replicate without alteration some of the information implied by the source text. For the “imagined” Irish reader, the sense of realism in the novel is constantly intensified by vivid details accurately provided by the author. Both the hallmarks of the urban landscape in which Hano moves in the first part, and the countryside crossed in the second part, could be actually followed on a map. Indications like “Pier in Rush,” “amusements in Skerries,” “cove in Loughshinny,” “Portrane,” “Donabate,” “Howth,” “Clontarf,” “Deansgrange,” or “Drogheda,” “Gormanstown,” “Slane,” “Kells,” “Virginia,” “Stradone,” “Ballyhaise,” “Belturbet,” “Ballyconnell,” “Bawnboy,” “Glangevlin,” “Dowra,” are only some of the places marking Hano’s mental and actual wanderings. The realism of the geographical descriptions, however, is in contrast with the fictional political background of the novel. Normally, in a novel, private incidents are the invention of the author. Yet, unless the setting is clearly sci-fi or fantasy, public events and personalities are not, especially when a novel is meant to provide valid insights about a specific socio-historical time. Bolger contravenes this conventional norm by introducing, in a realistic setting, the fictional public figures of Patrick and Pascal Plunkett. At the same time, the whole novel is underpinned by real historical facts that Bolger uses as temporal coordinates. The historical background, however, is given by quick allusions, which do not allow a reader without specific knowledge of the events to recognise them. Therefore, for a reader who is not familiar
with the Irish natural and social landscape, drawing a line between fiction and reality, and hence reaching a consistent interpretation of what the interplay between the two means, can be extremely challenging. The following paragraph is typical of the amalgamation of past and present, fiction and reality which takes place in the novel. Hano’s reflections are triggered by a historical element of the landscape, Kilmainham Gaol:

The letter was located on the top storey of the court-house beside the hulk of the abandoned jail. I crossed the river and walked up past the barracks, going over the litany of names in my mind. It was where Emmet and Ann Devlin has been held and tortured; where Ernie O’Malley had escaped with the help of Welsh guards; where James Connolly had been strapped to a chair and carried in by the British to be shot; where the poet Joseph Mary Plunkett had become bridegroom and corpse within an hour of dawn. When Patrick Plunkett first stood for election in the sixties he used to fake a connection by quoting verse from his namesake in the election leaflets that Pascal made my father and other workers deliver door to door.  

The translator seems to be aware that the encounter between past and present articulated in this passage is not easily decipherable by the “imagined” Italian reader, and some concrete attempts at mediation are made. The “abandoned jail beside the court-house” is more clearly referenced as Kilmainham Gaol, and it is more clearly specified that it is there all the events which are listed afterwards took place. In this way, somebody familiar with Irish history is more likely to pick up on information which otherwise would have been clear only to those acquainted with Dublin’s urban landscape. Moreover, further details about the Gaol are given in the final glossary, as well as basic information about Ann Devlin, Ernie O’Malley, Emmet, who is expanded to “Robert Emmet” in the Italian version, and James Connolly. The reference to Connolly is also clarified for the benefit of the Italian reader. The “enigmatic” allusion to “being strapped to a chair before being shot” is rendered slightly less obscure by the additional information that he had been seriously wounded before his execution. The same applies to the line about Plunkett: the poetic but hermetic formulation that “[he] had become bridegroom and corpse within an hour of dawn” becomes “una mattina all’alba, un’ora soltanto dopo il suo matrimonio, celebrato tra quelle stesse mura, Joseph Mary Plunkett vi era stato giustiziato” ‘one morning at dawn, just an hour after his wedding, celebrated within those same walls, Joseph Mary Plunkett had been shot to death.’ The

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254 Bolger, 1991, p. 16.
Italian translation also adds to “the litany of names” mentioned in the passage the adjective *nota*, notorious, although this, arguably, is not the case for the majority of Italian readers. The attempt, therefore, is probably to make clearer that those names were very well known to Hano, as they should be to the majority of Irish readers.

Taking everything into account, the Italian translation attempts to recover some of the passage’s informative quality, which might otherwise be missed by the target readership. Yet, the emotional connotations that this information may carry for an Irish person cannot be grasped without inserting those death sentences into the larger historical context, and without an appreciation of the symbolic meaning they have assumed over time. Moreover, the Italian reader may be left puzzled by the subtle incorporation of fiction into real historical coordinates. At the end of the passage, in fact, Pascal and Patrick Plunkett appear. According to Hano, they faked a connection with the real historical figure Joseph Mary for the purpose of propaganda during political elections. This can be all the more confusing for a reader only vaguely familiar with Irish history, as this fictional event closely recalls what really happened in the first by-elections after the Rising, when Count Plunkett, Joseph Mary’s father, successfully stood for a seat in North Roscommon. In addition to that, later on in the book a further fictional figure is introduced, Eoin Plunkett, grandfather of Pascal and Patrick, whose invented biography is intertwined with historical facts and figures.\(^{255}\)

In this instance, Bolger’s poetics verges on that practiced by Doyle in *A Star Called Henry*. For instance, he sarcastically comments on Eoin’s life as follows: “He survived, the aura of holiness around his Easter medal protecting him.” Similar to what happens in Doyle, the sarcastic nuance is hardly conveyed by the Italian translation: “Tuttavia l’aura conferitagli dalla medaglia ricevuta per la partecipazione all’insurrezione di Pasqua riuscì a proteggerlo.” The translation neglects the hyperbolic filter given by the world “holiness,” and it applies an unspecified “aura” to the person rather than to the medal itself, which might be taken as the genuine expression of the prestige of a valiant fighter. However, this normalisation of Bolger’s discoursal perspective is probably the lesser of two evils in a context of pseudo-transparent translation, since Bolger’s ironic look is not directed at the historical event.

\(^{255}\) Ibid., p. 16.
itself, but rather at the way in which it has been remembered for decades. Therefore, considering that the Rising itself is not necessarily taken as known in the target context, a sarcastic observation on its sociological consequences would almost certainly have been ground for misinterpretation. In most cases, however, the translator’s choices which deviate from the original are not due to incompetence or negligence on her part, but to a certain degree of unavoidability due to the discoursal perspective. Alternative solutions, while settling some of the problems, would create new ones. This inevitability emerges in more clear-cut terms with the analysis of passages which, from a merely linguistic point of view, display a perfect formal equivalence to the source texts, but whose dynamic equivalence is instead compromised by their cultural implications.

For instance, in the initial part of the book, Hano describes the feeling of committing an act of betrayal every time he writes English soccer players’ names in his copy book. The Italian edition offers a literal translation of the paragraph. Yet, in cases like this, the impression lingers that this is not enough to achieve the desired effect. The Irish/British conflict, in Italy, is generally perceived in simplistic terms, and the majority of the Italian population not only would be hardly aware of resentment towards the English in the Irish Republic, but some would have an idea of Irish which all too often straightforwardly overlaps with English. At any rate, it should also be remembered that the expression “the majority of the Italian population” does not correspond to “the majority of Italian readers.” As stated elsewhere, the large majority of books sold in the country are bought by a mere 14% of the Italian population, so that it seems fair to assume that the “imagined” Italian reader would possess a higher degree of knowledge than average.

In the context of this study, a few examples deemed representative of the larger corpus taken into consideration have been used to show that, in Italian translations of Irish contemporary literature, the potential of those elements more deeply rooted in Irish culture is rarely exploited in positive ways. Italian editions rarely provide readers with means to approach distant issues with a fresh, but informed, look – which potentially could be more perceptive than an Irish look, for which certain issues have been worn out by use and abuse over time. A smooth but culturally unmediated translation is more likely to generate puzzled looks. It is possible, therefore, that some Italian translators of Irish contemporary fiction are constructing, or are forced to construct, readers who are
not expected to establish an “absolutely just responsive understanding” with what is discussed in the translated text, as there is no attempt to help them appreciate the literary re-elaborations of complex nuances or perspectives on specific cultural themes. As a consequence, translation may inadvertently favour simplistic readings of novels, which ultimately become reassertions of reductive pre-conceptions rather than exerting the destabilising pressure which is often considered a quality of good literature.

Stripped of its highly metaphorical quality, *The Journey Home* remains a bleak, depressing novel. This example demonstrates that some publishers’ unquestioned acceptance of standards deeply ingrained within the Italian publishing industry could be counterproductive not only in terms of the respect for literature as a work of art, but ultimately in terms of the market success so sought after by the publishers themselves. This chapter intended to make observations about the translation techniques of fiction, and to make room for possible alternatives that might counteract the hegemony of the translation strategy that the term pseudo-transparency tentatively captures. This strategy, analysed in relation to the novel *The Journey Home*, has proved unable to successfully resolve questions like semantic difficulties, culture-specific themes, significance of the landscape and the interplay between fiction and reality. The same areas could be fruitfully investigated with regard to other translations as well, as it is within such coordinates that major shifts in the discoursal perspective are likely to occur. As shown with *The Journey Home*, a re-articulation of the text that possibly achieves a customised interaction with the “imagined” reader’s horizons could occur only through both linguistic and stylistic choices which emphasise the “foreignness” of the text together with a critical apparatus aimed at making the “otherness” of the source text intelligible in terms familiar to the target audience. In this sense, even if possible solutions would be different for each individual text, the reassignment of a prominent role to the critical apparatus is possibly the most crucial step in the proposal of any alternative translation method aimed at reconfiguring the role of literary translation.
CONCLUSIONS

Because translation traffics in linguistic and cultural differences, it ought never to maintain the cultural and social status quo but always to challenge it and, if the conditions are advantageous, to inspire the development of new communities and institutions in the receiving situation.

Venuti 2011

The survey of Italian translations of Irish fiction has served the purpose of indicating that a strategy of “resistancy,” the term that Venuti employs to refer to a translation pursuing an ideology of “autonomy” which challenges “the hierarchy of cultural values in the target language,” is very rarely implemented with regard to contemporary Irish writing. It has also highlighted the paradox that the predominant strategy employed to translate contemporary fiction is a means to attract those potential readers who might benefit from a different approach. In other words, the inclusion of critical tools in the paratext would be particularly helpful for those readers who might be hesitant to buy translated novels if they do not appear “transparent.” In this respect, it is worth remembering one final time that data about Italian reading habits indicate a concentration of reading on the part of the same people. This would suggest that some Italian publishers are largely basing their strategies on measures calculated for the benefit of those who do not avail of their goods, as occasional buyers do not constitute the bulk of the market. In contrast, the “keen readers,” who in most cases are the actual buyers, are often left wondering why translations from the work of a Nobel Prize author may be completely undistinguishable, both in the format and the quality of the translation, from the latest best seller from the USA.

While the modes of translation described as prevalent within the Italian publishing industry may leave the relevance of a great deal of works collected under the all-inclusive label of “contemporary Irish literature” virtually unaltered, the accessibility of other works may be reduced by the same techniques. This happens primarily when the source language text draws significance from being culturally “other.” In this instance, suppressing or standardizing the cultural diversity embedded in the novel in order to comply with domestic conventions may severely compromise the reception of

the target text in terms of its potential meaning(s). The textual analysis of *The Journey Home* has indicated that the achievement of a successful “minoritising” translation as posited by Venuti is often hampered by syntactic and semantic constraints which force the translator to reconstruct the linguistic texture in ways that are at least acceptable to the target audience. This, however, should not automatically become a pursuit of stylistic uniformity on every occasion. Although transparency will remain the ideal approach to technical translations and, indeed, most literary ones, the ground might be opened up to the employment of more diverse translation methods, catering for the specific needs of specific texts. Although current translation practices have forced the assessment of *The Journey Home* to be primarily textually-oriented, the present commentary on the novel gains part of its significance from having tried to deal with “what is not there.” This is because the theoretical interpretation proposed in this thesis tries to emphasise that some of the difficulties posed by translation could be overcome only by a pertinent critical intervention. In particular, for *The Journey Home*, an introduction touching on the interaction between elements of the urban and natural landscapes and how this contributes to the significance of the novel was arguably the only way to solve some of the problems awkwardly handled by the translation itself.

Ultimately, translation can be performed as “an act of cultural restoration which aims to question and possibly re-form, or simply smash the idea of, canons at home” only by foregrounding linguistic and cultural differences and, at the same time, striving to situate the source text within that cultural otherness that makes it meaningful. Only in this way can the assimilationist ideology informing so many Italian translations of contemporary fiction be effectively overcome.

One last observation concerns the tensions between popular and knowledgeable readers, as these are often reflected in the tension between translation approaches depending on whether the target text is expected to perform a commercial or an academic function. These are also key factors which concern virtually every translation process, and their resolution is what eventually determines the way in which linguistic and cultural elements in the text are going to be handled. Books which can be considered “less Irish” than *The Journey Home* usually are not significantly affected by translation, independently from the degree of mediation implemented by the author.

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This is because they either belong to different forms of genre fiction, often characterised by specific stylistic features and recurring themes, or because they appeal to more European and universal topoi, which are normally clarified by authorial intervention each time they transcend the cultural background which is deemed to be familiar to the imagined readers. This would be the case with most novels by Gerard Donovan or Brian Moore, where an international dimension is often consciously pursued. Ultimately then, the general guidelines for assessing, on a theoretical level, when a text is more likely to be affected by the modalities of translation described as pseudo-transparency, is to evaluate the degree of cultural specificity together with the level of mediatory action intrinsic to the source text. These insights, however, are normally not available to an Italian reader about to buy a literary translation. Without previous knowledge of the authors and their work, it is practically impossible for the readers to distinguish between works which indeed belong to genre fiction and those intentionally presented as easily accessible in order to catch the customers’ attention and allegedly their interest. An example of deceptive uniformity in the Italian market are the translations of Catherine Dunne’s *The Walled Garden* and Maeve Binchy’s *Tara Road*, becoming *Il Viaggio Verso Casa* and *In Viaggio Verso Casa* respectively, which could be roughly translated as “The Journey Home” and “On the Journey Home.” This indiscriminate employment of the topos of “the journey home” shows the publishers’ willingness to exploit tested paradigms which have proven successful, or which may stir a sense of familiarity in the audience. Yet this may ultimately trivialise them. This practice is affecting not only the books whose titles are dramatically changed, as happened to Dunne’s *The Walled Garden* and Binchy’s *Tara Road*; more importantly, it ends up belittling a book like Bolger, the only novel that was actually intended to be a more profound exploration of the topic. Dunne’s novel, for instance, narrates the story of a woman rekindling her relationship with her dying mother, an inner journey relating only slightly to the social circumstances of Ireland. The literary universe of brands, hairdressers and easy sentiments narrated in *Tara Road*, instead, defines a way of life whose borders are determined by “status” rather than by geographical or cultural reality. By being presented in formats which are largely comparable, and translated according to the same modalities, three very different books become uncannily similar.

Yet, the solution is not so obvious. Although the textual analysis in this chapter has shown that Bolger’s novel, unlike the two other works mentioned above, is heavily
affected by the translation strategy used, it is possible that readers largely accustomed to the illusion of transparency would be suspicious of a translation stressing the foreignness of the text. Therefore, although diversity in the translation methods used could ensure an approach more mindful of the peculiarities of each source text, there is a risk that, without an appropriate preparation of the audience, any change would indeed merely limit the access to more complex forms of writing.
CHAPTER 4: POETRY AND MEDIATION

What is translation? On a platter
A poet’s pale and glaring head,
A parrot’s speech, a monkey’s chatter,
And profanation of the dead.
The parasites you were so hard on
Are pardoned if I have your pardon,
Pushkin, for my stratagem.
I travelled down your secret stem,
And reached the root, and fed upon it;
Then, in a language newly learned,
I grew another stalk and turned
Your stanza, patterned on a sonnet,
Into my honest roadside prose –
All thorn, but cousin to your rose.

Nabokov, 1955

This chapter investigates the dominant translation practices re poetry in Italy. The first part of the chapter is as broad as possible in order to include as much as possible of the relevant material published in Italy, and therefore provide a comprehensive outlook on the situation of Irish poetry translated into Italian. While this approach disallows any attempt at detailed analysis, it enables us to draw more general coordinates. This should also facilitate a comparative analysis between the translation of fiction and poetry. Poetry as a genre is significantly different not only as far as its hermeneutic categories are concerned, but also with regard to its production, distribution, and reception. This chapter argues that such differences are reflected in the translation process, and thus, validates the theory that the genre of the source text is primarily what determines the translation practices employed. The term “mediation” will be used in a new technical fashion in order to refer to what empirical research has revealed to be the most common practice amongst Italian translators of poetry. Mediation will be defined further in the light of the notion of Third Space and the readers’ profile, two factors which are essential to the discussion of this strategy. “Third Space” is here understood as an ideal meeting place between two cultures potentially activated by translation. It is a hybrid space that is generated only when the target audience is enabled to decode the unfamiliar through what is familiar to them. This

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Chapter will assess the general conditions necessary to the creation of this “space,” and will contrast them to the very different circumstances that characterise the translation process as far as fiction is concerned.

The general survey, however, will support a more adequate evaluation of the comparative aspects of the findings also within the genre of poetry. It will show that while “mediation” can be considered a valid way to describe the character of the translation process largely applied to Irish poetry, this policy can be further broken down into different sub-strategies. The different qualities of some of the Italian editions of Irish poetry will help to discern alternative approaches behind different translation projects, which, arguably, are meant to meet the diverse needs of the imagined readership. For instance, the two main opposing trends as far as the work of Irish authors is concerned would be to emphasise the supranational European dimension of a poem, or else to display a high degree of familiarity with the contemporary situation in Ireland. This latter option generally is meant to encourage readers to gain a deeper insight into the poems through an acquisition of knowledge related to the cultural alterity of the source text. By bringing the readership into the equation, these considerations in turn will allow further speculations about the translators’ approach to each single volume and to what extent their strategy is dependent on a specific constructed reader. The notion of mediation then will be addressed more narrowly by restricting the analysis to general aspects of the translation policy adopted by the publisher Trauben. This publisher’s commitment to the translation of Irish poetry is clearly demonstrated by a full series in its catalogue devoted to “Poesia Irlandese” (Irish poetry). An overall assessment of this series will show that the preferred translation policy embodies the idea of mediation the way is understood in the context of this study, as in every publication a rich apparatus of notes and introductions is there to serve the translation. The target text in turn is there to serve the source text, whose complex significance remains the primary focus of attention. Trauben’s consistency in pursuing such an attentive rendition of single poetry collections, together with the attempt to provide a well-balanced representation of the Irish poetic scene in general with its choice of authors, makes its publishing endeavour rather unique. The reasons for its commitment to Irish poetry have probably to be sought in its rather “elitarian” status, and the fact that it works in close collaboration with Turin University, host of the only established Centro Studi Celtici in Italy. Yet the format adopted for Trauben’s
editions is not so dramatically different from the majority of works translated by other publishers. In that regard, the publisher’s activity can be taken as fairly representative of the way in which Irish poetry is introduced to the Italian market. Its production provides a repository of translation models, from which it is possible to undertake a closer enquiry about the ways in which Irish poetry is introduced to Italian readers. The final part of the chapter engages with close textual analyses of the translations of three Irish poets published by Trauben: Pearse Hutchinson, Medbh McGuckian and Derek Mahon. This investigation will practically illustrate some of the translation strategies most commonly adopted for the translation of poetry. Textual analysis, besides providing an idea of the specific ways in which each single target text may “fall short of and exceed [the source text] because the translation is written in a different language for a different culture,” will generate observations about the translation process that are generally pertinent to poetry as a genre. To some extent, the discussion of individual translations will demonstrate the impossibility of making critical statements of absolute value. Yet, by setting the findings about poetry against the backdrop of the most common translation practices which have been previously verified with regard to fiction, some major differences in the choice of the translation practice which are strictly related to the genre of the source text can be further highlighted. For instance, the reasons pseudo-transparency is not a feasible option for the translation of poetry, will become evident by addressing the high level of linguistic manipulation associated with this genre. In other words, the “opaqueness” of language inherent to many poetic compositions defies in principle the pursuit of a transparent translation. The ongoing comparison between the translations of the two genres should allow a better appreciation, by contrast, of the implications of the more accepted and acceptable policies amongst publishers of poetry in translation. Finally, by virtue of textual analyses of individual poems, the construction of Third Space will be developed in more concrete and practical terms. The assumed knowledge of the readers will return to the foreground, as any meaningful conclusion about the commentaries accompanying the target texts, and the paratextual elements supporting them, will have to be measured against the intended readers’ profile.

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In Italy, there is a common belief that there are more poets than poetry readers. It should also be noted, though, that the interest for poetry is sometimes not registered by official market statistics. Frequently the natural home for the translation of an individual poem, or for a small group of poems, is to be found in scholarly journals, as poetry translation is mostly undertaken by Italian scholars working in the field. Consistent with this premise, the recurring names involved in the translation of Irish poetry are a limited number of scholars based in Italy or in Ireland, including Giorgio Melchiori, Melita Cataldi, Roberto Bertoni, Rosangela Barone, Giuseppe Serpillo, Francesca Romana Paci, Carla de Petris and Donatella Abbate Badin. However, since this kind of material really only circulates within the academic community, a different set of parameters would be required in order to assess its impact and the web of hermeneutic possibilities that may be generated amongst the Italian imagined readership. It is true, however, that some of the observations about academic journals’ limited potential to reach a wider audience might apply to some of the publishers who specialise in poetry as well. They are normally small, local businesses, without official distributors. Nevertheless, they often make up for the lack of resources with enthusiasm and a competent team of collaborators; conditions which are seldom encountered within the market-oriented publishing. That is why the process of translating poetry needs to be viewed from a perspective altogether different from that of fiction, where economic reward is often the main priority guiding publishers’ decisions.

The survey conducted in the first section of the chapter is meant to highlight some general patterns in the translation of Irish poets by publishers who specialise in poetry and/or the cultural diffusion of important authors. The translator’s profile is the first significant aspect to be tackled, as it constitutes an important difference with respect to what has been learned as far as the translation of fiction is concerned. Normally, the patrons of poetry translation work in close collaboration with experts within various cultural disciplines. These experts are responsible for the translations, and sometimes even for proposing translation projects to the publisher. One such case is the publication of a collection by Michael Hartnett called *Seminando* (Sowing). It was translated by a professor of English literature, Edoardo Zuccato, for Crocetti Editore, the publishing house in charge of the popular poetry magazine, *Poesia*.
Personal connections as well often play a crucial role in the selection of works to be translated, which indicates that the needs of the imagined Italian reader are somehow subordinated to the individual interest of the publisher or translator. This is the case with John Montague’s *Il Campo Abbandonato* (1998) and *Il Quaderno Smarrito* (2002) by Passigli. The translator of the two collections is Alessandro Gentili, an expert in Montague’s work, who is a personal friend of the author. Gentili had already edited an anthology of Irish poetry titled *Rosa di Macchia* (translation of Montague’s poem “The Wild Dog Rose”) for the same publisher that collected works from Montague himself, and from Austin Clarke, Patrick Kavanagh, Denis Devlin, Thomas Kinsella, Desmond O’Grady, Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon, Paul Durcan, Paul Muldoon, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Thomas McCarthy and Eavan Boland. Personal connections are also the basis of the collaboration between William Wall and the Italian poet William Stabile. Wall, on his website, reports that he started to collaborate with Stabile through his nephew’s Italian wife. This led Wall to translate some of Stabile’s poetry for the Irish poetry review “shop,” while Stabile included some translations of Wall’s poetry in his collection *Contrappunti e Tre Poesie Creole* (2006).

Sometimes the role of the key behind-the-scenes figure who is the translator goes much further than proposing a translation project to the publisher. For instance, it is not hard to see the vital role played by Bertoni in the “exchange project” between Irish and Ligurian poets, which consisted of a number of Italian poets reading in Dublin and a corresponding number of Irish authors reading in Lerici, Liguria. Bertoni is a native Ligurian who currently lectures in the Italian Department at Trinity College Dublin and he is largely involved in the translation of Irish poetry. The exchange project in turn, led to the publication of *Poesie a Lerici* (2003), a collection of Brian Lynch’s work translated by Bertoni himself and published by Trinity College. Arguably, the event prompted the translation of another collection by Lynch, simply titled *Poesie Scelte* (2008), published by Puntoacapo, a local publisher based in Liguria and specialising in poetry. While the publication of *Poesie a Lerici* was a result of the organisation of public readings, with the event *Tratti’n Festival* it was rather the other way around. In 2008 this annual celebration of drama, literature and music had Ireland as the guest country. This is probably due to the fact that Mobydick, the publishing branch of the *Cooperativa Culturale e Editoriale Tratti* based in Faenza, (which is also the association behind the organisation of the event) is one of the most consistent
publishers of Irish poetry. The tag *cooperativa* ascribed to the Italian association is also important in that it clearly underlines that its status is not that of a profit-oriented business but one of a cultural project. This policy accounts for the organisation of the two-week marathon of Irish culture that took place in Bologna, Faenza, Forlì, Cesena and Ferrara. A number of Irish writers were invited to the event while others were represented through readings from their works.

Initially established as a distributor of the literary review *Tratti*, edited by Andrea Fabbri, a university lecturer covering the literature of the British Isles, the publishing house Mobydick soon expanded its scope by trying to cover “*scritture inedite, non omologate*” ‘unedited, not homogenised writings,’ in the sense that they do not belong to the mainstream canons). For a period of time, Mobydick has been a remarkably prominent publisher of Irish poetry. As the catalogue and the publisher’s manifesto show, the intention of a series like “Le Nuvole” is to give voice to poetry in Italian dialects and in those languages with a so-called “minority” status. With more than fifteen titles available, Mobydick is the major European publisher of translated Welsh poetry and one of the few publishers that has translated poetry from the Irish language. One of Mobydick’s most remarkable publications is the little volume *Linda* by Pádraig Ó Snodaigh, which presents the lengthy Irish prose poem accompanied by an Italian translation by Barone, a recurring name in the area of translation from the Irish, and one of the few Italian scholars fluent in Irish. A work tackling the complexities of a confrontation between Irish and Hebraic culture in such an unusual poetic style, apparently defies every rule of audience appeal. This makes the selection of this work for publication extremely audacious. Nevertheless, at a closer look, the choice seems to follow some logic. First of all, Ó Snodaigh himself is involved in translating and has translated Italian poems by Luzi, Fortini, Conti, Doplicher, and even *Anonimo Veneziano* by Giuseppe Berto into Irish. Also, the publishing of *Linda* becomes much less surprising when considering that, even before the Irish boom of the 1990s, Ó Snodaigh’s activity had resulted in the Italian publication of his collection *Cumha agus Cumann (Solitudine e Compagnia)*, which as early as in 1985 had established the fruitful collaboration with Barone. This possibly makes Ó Snodaigh the first Irish-language poet ever to be translated into Italian. Taking into account that his later work

262 A term with a geographical, and not political connotation, as Fabbri himself is eager to point out in the introduction to one of his volumes.
“Len” was also published by Mobydick, he has probably been translated into Italian more often than any of his contemporaries writing in Irish. Once more, this privileged position might be seen as being largely dependent on Barone’s field of expertise and personal links with the poet. Most of this information about Ó Snodaigh is provided in the flap text to the Italian edition of Linda. The mention in the Italian edition of Ó Snodaigh’s translations of Fortini, Berto and the other Italian authors with whom he has engaged, may be seen as a further attempt to create additional appeal. Enticed by a glimmer of familiarity, Italian readers can be introduced to new, uncharted literary adventures. The paratext, then, is actively participating in the strategy of mediation, as it bridges the cultural distance from the material translated. Thus it also creates the conditions for the Third Space to be opened, as it subtly implies that, via knowledge of Irish literature, the notion of Italian culture can be enriched. Without this fundamental step of creating acceptance and even curiosity towards the material, there would be no reason for making the experience of reading Ó Snodaigh in Italian possible.

An appreciation of the way in which this strategy works helps to add further clarification to the notion of Third Space, as in this case the pushing of boundaries resembles an advance which somehow recalls the triadic process posited by the Hegelian dialectic. The synthesis of the two cultures is achieved through gradual steps towards mutual understanding. This consists in overcoming the “other” – an act of sublation that Hegel called “Aufhebung.” This is what Derrida in La Différance called relever, a verb whose composite meaning he disputes at length in his only extensive article on translation, “What is a ‘relevant’ translation?” Without going too deeply into the intricacies of translating a verb such as relever, it would be enough to note that, in the crucial moment of employing it to discuss the effect of translation, Venuti, responsible for the English translation of the article, chooses to render the term as “elevates, preserves, and negates.” This is probably the formulation that most accurately expresses the “disruptive” nature of translation. The unknown is made

264 “Isn’t this what a translation does? Doesn’t it guarantee these two survivals by losing the flesh during a process of conversion [change]? By elevating the signifier to its meaning or value, all the while reserving the mournful and debt-laden memory of the singular body, the first body, the unique body that the translation thus elevates, preserves, and negates [relève]?” Derrida, 2001. Trans. Venuti, p. 199.
intelligible by removing its Otherness, so that it can be discovered or even incorporated into the *Sein*, to be consistent with the established parallelism with Hegel.

It is a strategy, therefore, that encourages the interest of people not necessarily familiar with Irish culture. Barone constructs a readership that is not acquainted *a priori*, but is interested in acquiring a certain type of knowledge. It is possible to see this in a number of the choices she makes. In an appendix, she dutifully clarifies some of the more obscure aspects of the work under the heading “Su Alcuni Riferimenti alla Storia della Cultura Irlandese” (About Some References to the History of Irish Culture). Here she also gives some general insights about Irish history and culture and provides explanations for mythological references in the text. Some basic notions are taken for granted, such as the names of the Irish regions and provinces, or concepts like the “coffin ships” (*navi bara*) and even the *ogham* alphabet. Yet she offers substantial help with regards to Irish language issues: the original Irish expressions for terms like the Gaelic League (*Conradh na Gaeilge*), or some ancient Irish toponyms like *Temair* and *Temuir* at the origin of Tara, are provided, as well as some specific concepts expressed by the Irish language, like the *tech srepta* of Tara.

Another significant contribution by Mobydick to the diffusion of Irish language poetry in Italy is the anthology of contemporary authors *Bollirà la Rugiada*, which gathers a number of significant voices such as Colm Breathnach, Micheal Davitt, Biddy Jenkinson, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Liam Ó Muirthile, Cathal Ó Searcaigh and Gabriel Rosenstock. The selection of authors is justified based upon their contribution to contemporary Irish poetry in a salient introduction by Fabbri. In this collection, the Irish texts are presented alongside their Italian translations and Fabbri also provides some insights into the poetic qualities of some of the texts presented in the collection that might have been missed by a reader unfamiliar with Irish. For instance, he describes Davitt’s language as recalling Dylan Thomas, so that his poetry results in “un linguaggio poetico dal tono talora dolce e ironico, ma più spesso secco e pungente, apparentemente assurdo e cerebrale ma in realtà profondamente diretto alla concretezza della vita e delle cose” - a poetic language with a tone at times sweet and ironic, but more often thick and poignant, apparently absurd and cerebral but in reality
deeply addressing the concreteness of life and things." Moreover, Fabbri briefly but effectively covers the topic of the Celtic languages and the precarious position of those surviving, with a particular emphasis on Irish Gaelic. There are also references to some of the illustrious predecessors of the poets collected in the anthology, namely Máire Mhac an tSaoi, Seán Ó Ríordáin and Máirtín Ó Direáin, who are very unlikely to be known by an Italian readership, as, although the lack of digital archives makes it impossible to speak with certainty about translations before the nineties, no Italian translation of their works appears to be published. Shortly after, Fabbri, in an attempt to illustrate the stylistic features of the new generation of poets, touches on some of the reasons that make the New Wave more appealing to an international audience:

[Rosenstock, Davitt, Ó Muirthile, Ñí Dhomhnaill] hanno segnato uno strappo rispetto alla generazione precedente, aprendo ad influenze culturali che superavano i confini irlandesi e rivolgendosi ad un pubblico più urbano che rurale, più radicale che ideologicamente conservatore.

[They] marked a watershed in respect to the previous generation by opening up to cultural influences which went beyond the Irish borders and by addressing an audience more urban than rural, more progressive than ideologically conservative.

In this sense, the Irish language comes to represent "non separatismo [...] ma ricerca di una dimensione sovranazionale europea attraverso l'espressione di un idioma non omologante" ‘not separatism […] but the search for a supranational European dimension through the expression of an idiom which does not have a standardising power.’ Although the general impression given by the lack of pronunciation guides and explanatory notes for the rhythm of the metres is that the importance of Irish is rather ascribed to the language as something to be discussed more than something to be used, all in all, readers are confronted by the visual effect of the source texts and additional explanations, in the introduction, of some of the sound patterns in the poems. Thus, this volume aims at improving the starting knowledge of its constructed Italian reader as far as the Irish language and its sonic qualities are concerned. More importantly, the introduction makes sure that at least some of the significance of the choice to write in Irish is conveyed to the target readers.


266 Ibid., p. 8.
It is quite interesting that in the introduction, concepts such as Heaney’s “sense of place” are mediated by the work of the German scholar Hans-Christian Oeser, whose insights are also present in the flap text of the edition. The peculiarity of employing a German “filter” for the interpretation of Irish reality is understandable in terms of the concept of “hetero-image,” as the Italian audience share with the German scholar an outsider’s perspective on Ireland. The critical frameworks provided by observers located within the Irish perspective would articulate instead an “auto-image” of the country and its culture, which is arguably more difficult for a spectant to relate to. The presence of Oeser’s critical stance, moreover, accounts for a certain self-referentiality: Oeser is in fact the contributor of the article “La Poesia Irlandese tra Due Lingue” (Irish Poetry in Between Two Languages) in the collection of essays Lingue in Poesia, also published by Mobydick and edited by Fabbri. In any event, the introduction to Bollirà la Rugiada soon expands its critical framework to include Declan Kiberd and two of the poets translated, Ó Muirthile and Rosenstock. The anthology’s self-evident orientation towards high culture, as opposed to marketable material, is further attested to by the brief paragraph acknowledging the collaboration between Ireland Literature Exchange and the Cooperativa Culturale Tratti for the production of the edition. This creates the rather unusual situation in which the alleged priority of both parties acting as “patrons” is the promotion of culture. Barone’s role in the proceedings is given as “support,” but she is not credited with the translation. Apparently, the only alternative to having Barone translate from the Irish was to organise workshops in which a number of translators were working together with English cribs. And in which, when possible, the poets whose work was translated took part as well. The same procedure was employed for the translation of Gabriel Rosenstock’s Irish Stories, also published by Mobydick (1997). This unusual edition with illustrations for young readers was in the hands of one of the publishing house’s translators, Mario Giosa, who had previously translated Theo Dorgan. Giosa was involved in the public readings of Irish poetry for Tratti’n Festival.

Nevertheless, despite the publishing house’s original and apparently productive approach, one concrete reason that explains the necessity to organise those workshops is that there is a serious shortage of Irish-Italian translators. Mobydick overcame the difficulty by using as translators people who did not have Irish. Another possibility is exemplified by the volume La Barca degli Spiriti Buoni (1996), a collection of Ní Dhomhnaill’s poems translated by Catherine O’Brien. Although O’Brien, an established
Irish lecturer of Italian, is fluent in both languages, most of her translation work consists of translating Italian authors into English. Working in Italian as a target language contravenes the predominant normative practice of allowing translation exclusively into one’s native tongue. This shows the degree of flexibility that is necessary when working with the literature of what is considered to be a “minority language” and also explains the often inadequate representation that many authors writing in Irish might have in foreign countries. The translation into Italian of a single collection of such an important author as Ní Dhomhnaill is testimony to this state of affairs and, together with other evidence emerging from this survey, demonstrates that endeavours to translate Irish poetry written in Irish are often due to personal connections. This ultimately makes the corpus of translated works available in Italy relatively arbitrary.

To return our attention to the Mobydick catalogue, the publisher’s engagement with English language Irish poets is also worth considering. For one of the biggest names on the Irish literary scene, Ciaran Carson, the translation is undertaken by Bertoni, who is also the translator of Carson’s Breaking News (Squarci di Notizie, 2003) for Trauben. The collection published by Mobydick is titled Il Tempo è Conversazione (1998), meaning “time is conversation.” It is worth noting that as recently as 2011 one of Carson’s earlier collections, First Language, was translated for a different publisher, but this time by translators not directly involved with Ireland. This further attests to the “dispersion” of Irish authors in various contexts of publication. On the other hand, it indicates an interest that is not strictly confined to academic-related activities, both in terms of translators and readers.

Another author published by Mobydick, originally published by Dedalus Press, is Theo Dorgan. The Italian collection is entitled La Casa ai Margini del Mondo (1998), literally “the house at the edge of the world.” Another poet in the catalogue is Tony Curtis, whose Dal Confine (2000) is translated by Andrea Bianchi and Silvana Ferrero, two professional translators who played a key role in the translation of Mobydick’s Welsh-language poetry. Also published by Mobydick is Fred Johnston’s collection Canzoni con Accompagnamento d’Arpa (1996), translated by Daniele Serafini, himself a renowned poet and translator of Irish and English poetry. As far as the selection of translators is concerned, Mobydick’s policy is quite eclectic, with a mixture of poets, professional translators and renowned scholars operating amongst its ranks. Paul Cahill
was also a crucial collaborator, and Mobydick has published a single Italian translation from his work, *Specchio*, which was prefaced by MacDara Woods and his wife Eiléan Ní Chuilleáin. Cahill has been in turn editor of Woods’ *Biglietto di Sola Andata* (1998), “one way ticket,” a collection specifically put together for the Italian market, also published by Mobydick and translated by the Italian poet Rita Castigli. The duo Woods/Castigli is also responsible for the Irish-Italian poetic collaboration *Above Pesaro/Pesaro ai Miei Piedi* (1999), written by the two poets in their respective languages. This volume, with obvious references to Umbria, contains a foreword by Cahill, whose work during his period of residency in Perugia is a perfect example of how personal volition plays a pivotal role in creating the circumstances necessary to foster cultural connections and, subsequently, publications that respond to a specific area of interest.

*Above Pesaro/Pesaro ai Miei Piedi* is published by the Perugia-based publishing house Volumnia. The same team of Castigli as translator and Volumnia as publisher is responsible for the Italian publication of Ciaran O’Driscoll’s *The Old Women of Magione*, inspired by the poet’s long stay in Italy and dedicated to the late Cahill. Volumnia’s editions are quite distinctive, as the publisher’s interest can be mainly accounted for in terms of poetic connections to Italy, especially with the Umbrian territory. The poems, therefore, are often meant to “bring Italy to Ireland” rather than the other way around. Volumnia’s strategy is to somehow reconcile the paradox of presenting Italy as something foreign to Italian readers by giving additional visibility to the translator Castigli. For instance, at the beginning of *Vecchie Donne di Magione* (2006), Castigli’s “acknowledgments” appear right beside O’Driscoll’s. This practice – although the diktats about the invisibility of the translator are much more inconspicuous for poetry – is still uncommon, as it assumes an equal status between author and translator. However, this might be due to the rare circumstance that Castigli herself is a poet. Moreover, the literary stature of Castigli is somehow enhanced by the fact that she is more recognisable than her renowned international colleague within the geographical community served by Volumnia. The volume is also worthy of attention because the very essence of the poems consists in articulating the contact between Irish and Italian sensibility and this creates interesting issues in the context of translation. The first poem, for instance, has an Italian title, “Ora di Partire,” literally meaning “the hour to leave.” Castigli curiously translates it as “Tempo di Partire,” also used in Italian but
effectively a calque of the English “time to leave,” which almost gives the impression of the translator “correcting” O’Driscoll’s use of Italian. Castigli’s poetic freedom in approaching O’Driscoll’s work is confirmed by her rendition of the body of the text, where she actively modifies the metrical structure and re-adjusts the terminology where it is deemed appropriate. Yet, Castigli’s technique, which results in a target text characterised by “estrangement” and literary echoes, quite aptly embodies another example of a “minoritising” approach as defined by Venuti. The translation of the first line of the same poem for instance, “You have reached a halfway house,” reads “Nel mezzo del cammino / hai raggiunto una casa” ‘in the middle of the way, you reached a house,’ an opening which, in the translated version, overtly recalls the illustrious Dantean verse of “Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita / mi ritrovo in una selva oscura.” Castigli is somehow enhancing the experience of the Italian reader by providing literary echoes that are easily recognizable by her constructed readers, even if the reference in the source text is somehow less direct, more ambiguous than its translation. Castigli’s choice not only renders more explicit a latent possibility of the source text, it also ideally compensates for the references to the Irish literary tradition, which are likely to go unnoticed in translation. In other words, the Italian version becomes imbued with literary qualities recognisable by the imagined Italian readers, which substitute the qualities of the source, but effectively remain faithful to the literary tone of Wood’s poem.

In theoretical terms, Castigli prefers a dynamic equivalence to formal equivalence, in order to grant the target readers an effect comparable to what the source text may achieve within the source culture. This is true also in terms of the linguistic manipulation of the poems. In this sense, her technique recalls the one Venuti discusses in relation to his translations from the Italian poet De Angelis, which – after a definition by Philip Lewis – he calls “abusive fidelity.” It is a concept very akin to pseudodomestication as, in Lewis’ own words, “it is as if the translation sought to occupy the original’s already unsettled home, and thereby, far from ‘domesticating’ it, turns it into a place still more foreign to itself.” However, in Venuti’s formulation this concept is

268 Ibid., p. 11.
very much calibrated on poetry, as the “unsettled home” mentioned by Lewis is specifically referring to the “abuse” that poetic texts regularly impose on their own language. A review of the opening stanza will show how Castigli is trying to assert the independence of her translation, and at the same time to maintain a degree of “strangeness” that directly relates her text to its source:

[...] and friends
whose grasp of love was tenuous
are no longer around,
and day follows day and you know
that things have changed but hardly dare
to admit it, their friendship was sloth
they were drinking you into their death
until the taste of whatever life
remained in you no longer pleased
their palates, and they spat you out,
and you’ve landed on the ground
in front of this halfway house
which is really the carriage of a train
in the dullness of a pre-dawn station.

[...] e gli amici
la cui presa d’amore era men forte
non ti stanno più accanto
e un giorno segue l’altro e sai
le cose son cambiate e tu non osi
ammetterlo, quella amicizia era indolenza,
ti si bevevano nella loro morte
finché il sapore di una qualche vita
rimasta in te non li ha stufati
cosi ti hanno sputato,
e sei attirato al suolo
davanti a questa casa a mezza via
che è poi in realtà un vagone ferroviario
nel grigio che precede un’alba di stazione.  

While avoiding a word-for-word literal rendition, Castigli maintains the eccentricity of O’Driscoll’s language. Although the translation cannot perfectly match the poetic style of the source text, it is a sensible approximation of how this may sound in Italian. In this way, it is clear that the numerous Italian “themes” are approached from a point of view that is “other,” which helps to maintain Italy as a “hetero-image,” as inscribed in the source text. Overall, Castigli is advocating a strategy of “resistancy,” which aims at reproducing in the target text similar effects to its source “by resorting to analogous techniques of fragmentation and proliferation of meaning.” Venuti further articulates this notion in relation to his own experience, yet it is my view that the general traits of “resistancy” can be useful to describe many of the poetry translations analysed in this chapter:

[...] the translation establishes an abusive fidelity to the [source] text: on the one hand, the translation resists the transparent aesthetic of Anglo-American culture which would try to domesticate De Angelis’s difficult writing by demanding a fluent strategy; on the other hand, the translation simultaneously creates a

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resistance in relation to De Angelis’s text, qualifying its meaning with additions and subtractions which constitute a “critical thrust” toward it.272

Although this definition comments exclusively on the linguistic dimension of the target texts, it is coherent with what mediation entails at a paratextual level, as it essentially constitutes a further “critical thrust,” elucidating what inevitably remains excluded from the translation proper.

Even if the publication of Woods and O’Driscoll in translation is clearly due to the “special circumstance” of having spent a long time in Italy themselves, there is another line of investigation that could be pursued in the attempt to identify patterns behind the selection of Irish authors to be published in Italy. Both Woods and O’Driscoll, in fact, are originally affiliated to the publisher Dedalus Press and they are only some of the Irish poets published in Italy who originally feature in this publisher’s catalogue. The frequency of this connection may lead one to believe that the reasons behind it are more than a mere coincidence. What is suggested here is that, apart from the translator’s input, another criterion, which favours the dissemination of Irish poets’ work abroad, is a direct interdependence between “active” and “passive” translation. This means that the work of authors, who have experience of translation, particularly but not necessarily from Italian, is more likely to be translated. It is a connection that has already appeared in the discussion of Ó Snodaigh’s publication in Italian and that could apply to poets like Hutchinson and Mahon, both involved in the translation of Italian poetry at some stage during their careers and now published in Italy by Trauben.273

The large proportion of Italian translations from artists whose names appear in the catalogue of Dedalus Press could be read as endorsing the connection between the activity of translating and the activity of being translated. In other words, the work of an author’s personal involvement with translation, or else the display of some interest in translation on the part of the publishing house that issued their work originally, are more likely to be translated into Italian. Significantly Dedalus Press has been described by UNESCO as “One of the most outward-looking poetry presses in Ireland and the UK.”

272 Venuti, 1991, p. 11.
Not only is it the only Irish publishing house specifically committed to translation, it also supports a dedicated series named “Poetry Europe,” which is responsible for the regular publication of a number of titles from around the world. In the case of Dedalus Press, its targeting of the Italian market may be explained by the presence of an Italian, Raffaella Tranchino, as its sales manager. Yet the most likely justification is that those involved in translation themselves are generally more aware of how to pursue and promote international interest in their work and can rely on a web of contacts that make the actual translation more likely. For instance, Pat Boran, chief editor of Dedalus Press, has two collections published in Italy: *As the Hand, the Gloves (Come la Mano il Guanto*, 2006), published by Raffaelli Editore, a self-defined “elite publisher,” whose main role is to supply, via the internet, material which is not normally available in bookshops, and *Il Jukebox. Castelcomer* (2008), by Edizioni del Leone. Considering Boran’s relatively new appearance on the Irish poetic scene, his respectable position in the Italian market is probably due to his frequent presence at international book fairs, as this is arguably an effective way to establish the necessary connections to make translation projects possible.

Another Dedalus writer with a strong personal commitment to translation is Desmond O’Grady, who counts amongst his productions ten collections of translated poetry and the *Selected Poems of C. P. Cafavy* (1998). Three of his collections have been published in Italy: *Il Galata Morente* in 1996, from *The Dying Gaul and other Poems, Esule dall’Esilio* published by Trauben in 2004, and *Arcipelago* by Città di vita in 2005. The renowned poet John F. Deane is also a key figure within Dedalus Press, as he is one of its co-founders. His reputation and the award of an Italian poetry prize may account for five poetry collections being published in Italy: *I Nostri Anni Via in un Sospiro* (translating as ‘our years gone in a whisper’) by Edizioni Eva, *Tra le Mani il Divino (Manhandling the Deity)* by Gedit, *Il Profilo della Volpe sul Vetro (Christ, with Urban Fox)* by Edizioni del Leone, *Il Piccolo Libro delle Ore (A Little Book of Hours)* by Edizioni Kolibris, and *The Instruments of Art = Gli Strumenti dell’Arte*, by Atelier. Francis Harvey is also an award-winning poet from Dedalus. His collection of poems *Fabbricanti di Pioggia (The Rainmakers)* was published in Italy by Edizioni del Leone.

Evidently this publisher from Venice displays a certain interest in Irish authors and it might be worth noting that this is one of the few cases in which the only form of
critical apparatus presented by the volume appears on the back-cover and is, therefore, significantly more concise than those normally encountered for the translation of poetry. The exceptionality of these editions lies in the fact that no footnotes or translators’ note are included: the target texts are the only element of the translation in this case. Edizioni del Leone’s approach is different from the patterns identified thus far. The constructed readers appear to be people of refined poetic taste, appreciative of the beauty of the poetic qualities achievable within the Italian language rather than interested in using poetry as a means to gain insights into a foreign culture. The translation strategy reflects this by putting all the emphasis on the translated text as an aesthetic product of independent value. After all, this “exception” captures the very essence of what is conventionally accepted as translation as Derrida has pointed out:

To make legitimate use of the word translation (traduction, Übersetzung, traducción, translación, and so forth), in the rigorous sense conferred on it over several centuries by a long and complex history in a given cultural situation (more precisely, more narrowly, in Abrahamic and post-Lutheran Europe), the translation must be quantitatively equivalent to the original, apart from any paraphrase, explication, explicitation, analysis, and the like.274

This traditional understanding of the process of translation is probably what still informs the attribution of awards, as the case of poetry, at least in this respect, is not so different from what has been suggested in the case of fiction. Edizioni del Leone’s Profilo della Volpe sul Vetro (2002), for instance, was awarded the “Premio Internazionale di Poesia Città di Marineo,” as the assessment is based exclusively on the translated text and not on a comparison and evaluation of how accurately the source text is conveyed to the target audience. The translation by Roberto Cogo, therefore, is a perfect candidate for awards, not because of an in-depth knowledge of Irish culture or for his skills as a translator, but rather for his ability as a poet in his own right. Cogo, indeed, has authored a number of poetry collections and has been awarded prizes for his own work. This leads to the conclusion that the translations best placed to be positively judged in terms of awards are re-articulating the source text in terms which are acceptable and successful within the Italian language poetic tradition, which is akin to what happens in relation to fiction. It is worth noting that the collections by Volumnia translated by Castigli, also a poet, constitute another exception to the norm in terms of an almost complete absence of critical intervention. This shows that Edizioni del Leone

is not an isolated phenomenon but that it represents a parallel, albeit minority, pattern of translation practice.

A final departure from the standards of poetry translation identified so far are the collections translated by the publisher Via Del Vento, like Medbh McGuckian’s *Scene da un Bordello e altre Poesie* (Scenes from a Brothel and Other Poems), and Eavan Boland’s only Italian translation *Falene e altre Poesie* (Moths and Other Poems). On this occasion the two volumes were produced without the standard “assistance” of the source text. As the translations were provided by Giovanna Iorio, whose qualifications seem to be assured by a previous collaboration with Bertoni and Cataldi for the translation of Ní Chuilleanáin’s work, it seems fair to assume that it was not a case of lack of resources to determine the presentation of the material in a less scholarly fashion, but a conscious editorial choice.

The most notable exception in the publication patterns of poetry identified so far is to be found in the activity of bigger publishers. Mondadori, with its series “Lo Specchio: I Poeti del Nostro Tempo” (The Mirror: Poets of our Time), has consistently given coverage to the biggest names of contemporary poetry on the international scene. In this context, it is no surprise that the Nobel Prize winner Seamus Heaney had a number of his collections published in the series. The sanction of Heaney’s international fame by the Nobel Prize has placed his poetry in a completely different market and Mondadori is not the only major publisher that has consistently published his work. Heaney is also the only poet published in translation by Guanda and Fazi: the former has published three of Heaney’s collections in its poetry series and the latter has published three of his essays and his *Beowulf* translation in the essay series “Le Terre.”

The most important feature that sets the publication of poetry by bigger publishers apart is an element that has been already noted as far as the translation of fiction is concerned: they commission their translations. Whereas for fiction this practice – which partly reveals the profit-oriented thrust behind undertaking the translation project – has been identified as the norm, in the case of poetry, it remains an exception. Contrary to fiction, however, the translation is still entrusted to people with some expertise in Irish literature who provide an introduction or an afterword for the edition. An interesting feature of the critical apparatus, both in the Mondadori and the
Guanda editions of Heaney’s poetry, is the emphasis on the European, rather than the distinctively Irish, aspects of the work, an approach that could be interpreted as pursuing a more commercial enterprise, in the sense of an attempt to open up interpretative approaches potentially more familiar to a wider audience. The preference for such a solution could also be ascribed simply to the fact that this critical perspective is indeed suitable for some aspects of Heaney’s work.

Paul Muldoon is the only other Irish author published by Mondadori, who, in 2008, issued a collection of his poetry simply title *Poesie*. This choice seems to be justified by the fact that Muldoon’s award-winning work, the 2002 collection *Moy Sand and Gravel*, has gained international attention from many critics. Moreover, Muldoon is sometimes considered to be Heaney’s younger counterpart by virtue of the older poet’s longstanding support for him, which Mondadori’s advertisement for the volume does not fail to mention.

Taking everything into consideration, the selection of authors to be translated and those who publish them appear to be far from being completely arbitrary; yet it is very difficult to formulate a general exacting rule that encompasses the whole network of patterns at work. The unpredictability that marks the translation process constantly re-emerges. For instance, another author who has often been considered almost as relevant as Heaney, Paul Durcan, has not had any work translated into Italian since the eighties, a situation for which there is no apparent explanation. Durcan’s only appearance in Italy is with a collection titled *Policarpo e Altre Poesie (Polycarp and Other Poems)*, published by El Bagatt in 1986 and—unusually—translated by an Italian philosopher, Ottavio Di Fidio.

From the information gathered so far, despite some glaring oversights, it seems fair to state that the representation of Irish poetry on the Italian scene is fairly “adequate,” at least as far as English language poetry is concerned. The number of titles and authors available on the Italian market is quite substantial, and, although the main criterion of selection is not necessarily the fame achieved in the home country, broadly speaking, the names to be found in Italian catalogues do correspond to authors who are quite renowned at home. It might be relevant to note that the majority of works published, especially by smaller publishers, acknowledge Ireland Literature Exchange’s
contribution to the realisation of the project, suggesting that the existence of this agency may have favoured the selection of Irish authors, especially those published in series which do not display any particular disposition towards Irish literature. On other occasions, especially with the more “scholarly” editions, the translations are realised with the help of funding coming from university departments or research institutes.

In at least one case, it can be surmised that the peculiar interest in Irish poetry has acted as a good enough reason to trigger the publication of a luxury edition of a collection of Irish language poetry, an expensive volume apparently defying any possible economic consideration. The volume, titled Dán is Scór/Venti e una Poesia, consists of thick, wide, manuscript-like papers held together by a handmade binding. It contains twenty-one compositions, presenting the source texts and Barone’s Italian translations. The first poem presented is an end-of-the-sixth-century poem of praise for Colum Cille “Ní Díscéoil Duë Néill” (Non Senza Nuove è la Terra di Niall), the oldest extant poem in Irish, written by Dallán Forgaill. Each poem follows a chronological progression that leads to more modern and more contemporary poets such as Ó hAirtneide and Ní Dhomhnaill as well as authors never translated into Italian before, like Ó Riordáin, Ó Direáin and Mac an tSaoi. The project is quite difficult to situate, as the format, the limited circulation and the presence, alongside unedited works, of extracts from works already published in Italy, like Táin Bó Cuailgne and Aislinge Meic Con Glinne for instance, would suggest that it has been designed as a “collector’s item:” a product specially manufactured for the few Italian experts involved in the study of Irish literature, or for passionate admirers of Irish poetry. Yet Barone’s introduction provides some very general information about a number of basic topics, such as the ancient world of the Celts, the role of the filí and the importance of the oral tradition, the Viking invasion and the Norman conquest, the Flight of the Earls, Cromwell and the Penal Laws, the Celtic Renaissance, the Plantation and the Great Famine, and other fundamentals of Irish history. References are also made to the rather controversial book by John O’Donohue, Anam Cara – Spiritual Wisdom from the Celtic World, considered by some scholars to be verging dangerously close to a “new age” interpretation of Celtic history. However, the ample knowledge of ancient Irish literature and civilisation elsewhere displayed by Barone discredits the idea of an unprofessional use of the material on her part. Rather, O’Donohue’s book, while it might indeed be superfluous for the most committed Celtic scholars, does offer precious insights on ancient Celtic
culture to people approaching it from a non-expert perspective. For instance, the notion expressed by the title, *Anam Cara*, is explained by Barone in a way that, no matter how simplistic, effectively conveys to somebody previously unacquainted with it both its “social” meaning and the Irish etymology of the words. The ambition of *Dán is Scóir/Venti e una Poesie* can be found precisely in its attempt to reach an almost excessive exhaustiveness, as if to capture the essence of the Irish language tradition in full by bringing it back to its Celtic origins. The selection of material also clearly reflects a venture of an unusually wide breadth: ten texts from “ancient” and “middle” Irish (7th-12th and 13th-15th century), like the famous composition about the cat Pangur Bán or an extract from the mythical voyages of Máel Dúin, and ten texts from “modern” Irish (16th-20th century), plus a final work by Pearse Hutchinson, which is a translation from the Italian poet Umberto Saba, “La Capra.” This last component seems to celebrate the meaning of the work as an ideal meeting place between the Irish language and Italian culture. Moreover, as Barone suggests in the introduction, it evokes circularity, a *leitmotiv* within Celtic culture that is in striking opposition to the linear and dualistic tradition that Italian culture has inherited from Greek and Latin influences. This idea of circularity recalls the exact same terms that were used for similar instances of articulation of Third Space as a place where, through translation, Italian and Irish cultures meet and merge. In a way, by translating back into Italian an Italian author after he has been translated into Irish is the epitomisation of that process already seen in Wood’s *Pesaro ai miei Piedi*, where an Italian theme finds articulation in the foreign perspective of the source language before being translated back into Italian.

Taking everything into consideration, this merging between Irish and Italian culture seems to be the main overriding theme of *Dán is Scóir/Venti e una Poesia* and this idea is consciously reinforced and highlighted by the translator. This, in turn, could explain the decision to deal in the introduction with a range of issues in broader terms, rather than dwelling on specific instances in a more detailed and specialised fashion. Issues as diverse as Kiberd’s critique of Irish society, the different measures undertaken to safeguard the Irish language, or the recent tendency to commodify poetry and authors by turning them into parts of the Irish urban landscape – from the poetic verses on the DART to giant reproductions in Dublin airport – are all aspects briefly touched on in Barone’s introduction. In her search for a comprehensive approach to the subject, she
also deals with the reasons for attempting the translations in the first place, despite the immense difficulties in recreating the same effects as the source texts:

L’impegno e l’amore con cui la traduzione è stata elaborata vanno invocati a favore di chi ha osato tradurre, mirando, in prospettiva, alla moltiplicazione dei fruitori italiani in grado di familiarizzare direttamente con l’idioma irlandese e la sua polifonica e policroma letteratura.

The commitment and the love with which translation has been conducted have to be invoked in favour of those who dare to translate, aiming, potentially, to the multiplication of Italian users able to familiarise themselves directly with the Irish language and its polyphonic and polychromatic literature.

The effort to stress all the possible “sounds” and “colours” displayed by the selected poems is indeed evident, especially in the rich endnotes, which supply readers with hyper-condensed information on several aspects of every single text, alongside interpretative solutions for particular compositions.

The notes include glosses, philological issues, descriptions of traditional literary genres such as the *aisling*, information on manuscripts, accurate historic bibliographies and scholarly references, especially for the “early poems,” biographical notes on the authors with references to other relevant works and their impact on the Irish literary tradition, and their participation in Italian events or previous translations. Ní Dhomhnaill’s journey to Italy to present the translation *La Barca degli Spiriti Buoni* is mentioned, for instance, as is Ó hAirtnéide’s poetry reading during the International Association for the Study of Irish Literature International Congress in Sardinia and the subsequent publication of “Il Volto della Galetacht (Gné na Gaeltachta)” in *Antologia Europea – Le Prospettive Attuali della Poesia in Europa*, edited by Fabio Doplicher.

Other information provided in the notes include historical context, geographic and social information, especially as regards habits and customs of the ancient Celtic civilisation, like *caoineadh* (the Irish word behind the English “keening”) that took place during wakes, as well as mythology and symbols; pronunciation, linguistic aspects and direct comments on translation choices. In the comments on the early poems, particular attention is paid to the links/juxtaposition between pagan and Christian culture, once more offering comparisons with Classical literature where appropriate.

More importantly, Barone tries to capture, at times in one or two lines, the very essence

of a cultural tradition which is precisely what makes the poem commented upon meaningful. All this seems to indicate that, ultimately, the intended purpose of this rare volume is that of a learning experience, although the nature, weight, and scope of the information provided, suggest a rather selected, as well as selective, audience.

To sum up, this survey of eclectic material seems to show an ethos which prioritises the transmission of knowledge over the pleasure of immediate accessibility, a policy which attempts to pursue pleasure through knowledge. This attention to mediation is almost excessive in the extraordinary edition Dán is Scóir/Venti e una Poesia, but it is virtually the same approach adopted for the majority of Italian publications of translated poems. This is possible due to the theoretical premise that the intrinsic value of poetry rests in the search for deepest meanings that often transcends immediacy. Even if differently distributed, and with a different specific weight, most editions of Irish poetry are supplied with paratextual elements that form a more or less robust critical apparatus aimed at highlighting the poetic work and mediating it to the audience. While fluency might still be regarded as preferable, transparency is not pursued through a thorough adherence to “the dominant aesthetic in the target-language culture.”

It is accepted that the aesthetic charm of the form might reside in a language which challenges the domestic conventions as, “in order to give the reader the sense that the text is a window onto the author, the translator must manipulate what often seems to be a very resistant material – i.e., the language into which he is translating, in most cases his mother tongue.”

In practical terms, all this is realised by virtue of the involvement in the translation project of a small number of experts with competence in Irish literature and culture. As has been briefly shown, the same standards are reasonably well met also by bigger publishers although, in keeping with the appeal to a more mainstream audience, the critical apparatus they supply can be less weighty than those of more scholarly editions. In rare cases, the source texts are not included, as in the collections translated for Via del Vento, or no introduction is provided, as in the volumes by Edizioni del Leone or Volumnia. In the latter case, the choice seems to be justified by the fact that the subject matter of both collections published – Wood’s Pesaro ai Miei Piedi and

277 Ibid., p. 286.
O’Driscoll’s *Vecchie Donne di Magione* – is Italy, which arguably, does not need much mediation on an “informative” level. As the brief analysis of Castigli’s translation has shown, the poetic result is achieved mainly through stylistic devices which operate directly on the target texts, which display the notion of “abusive fidelity” in its full theoretical potential. Fundamentally, however, this survey has shown that – to differing degrees – the use of mediation for the purpose of creating a Third Space is a recurring feature. This theoretical conclusion will now be practically explored by engaging more closely with the work done by the publisher Trauben.

**TRAUBEN’S SCHOLARLY MEDIATION**

The policy of the publisher Trauben will be the main object of investigation in this section of the chapter. It will be explored by briefly relating some of the volumes in the series “Poesia Irlandese” to the analytical data that have emerged from the broader approach to Italian editions of Irish poetry. While some of the characteristic traits of Trauben publications will be contrasted with the previous findings, the focus of attention will be on the nature of the publisher’s commitment to Irish poetry, the possible reasons behind it, and what impact its policy might have on the reception of the target text.

The publisher’s attempt to comprehensively cover the numerous sides and different forms of expression that are considered representative of contemporary Irish poetry can be seen in the choice of what to publish. A mere look at the chronology of the works in its catalogue will reveal the care in its selection. This is confirmed by the fact that the three first authors published by Trauben – Hutchinson, McGuckian and Mahon – have been deemed suitable examples for the portrayal of recent developments in Irish poetry and how this has been handled by translators in Italy. In five years, eight titles of Irish poetry were published in the Trauben series “Poesia Irlandese,” and after that the commitment to publish Irish authors has still proved fairly regular; enough to be considered rather exceptional. Trauben’s selection of authors comprises men and women, from the North and from the South, writing in English and in Irish. This is part of the reason that makes this publisher’s output an optimal case study to document the modes of translation of Irish poetry into Italian. In total, eleven volumes to date have
been published: the collections by Hutchinson, McGuckian and Mahon in 1999 and
2000; Desmond Egan’s *Carestia* in 2001; Ciaran Carson’s *Squarci di Notizie* in 2003;
Desmond O’Grady’s *Esule dall’Esilio* in 2004; Eoghan Ó Tuairisc’s *Messa dei Defunti*
in 2004; Eileán Ní Chuilleanáin’s *Testo di Seta* in 2004; Michael Longley’s *Lucciole
alla Cascata* in 2005 and John Montague’s *Visita Medica al Confine* in 2007. For such
a small publisher with no official channels of distribution, it is quite a remarkable
achievement, since it provides the most significant contribution in bridging the gap
between the Italian audience and some of the most significant contemporary Irish poetic
voices. Nevertheless, if the ambition to represent Irish poetry comprehensively made
Trauben a natural choice for the critical approach of this study, it also partly sets it aside
from the majority of other publishers who are involved in the translation of Irish poetry.
While to some extent Trauben’s policy is representative of, and ascribable to, a more
general tendency to deal with the translation of poetry in terms of mediation, by the
same token the level of “specialisation” achieved by some of its editions is rather
unusual. This can be related to the particular status of the publisher, which is based in
Turin and operates within a strict relationship with the city university. Essays and
academic research are the main areas covered by Trauben, whose publications are
divided into sections very much resembling the division of academic departments:
Anthropology, Architecture, Philosophy, Drama, English Studies and others. Amongst
them, there is one section dedicated to Irish Studies, which contains volumes such as a
collection of essays on Sean Ó Faolain, released for his centenary celebration, and the

It is in this context of productive collaboration with *Centro Studi Celtici* in Turin
University that the publication of the series on Irish poetry should be situated. A further,
more prosaic reason for the publisher’s substantial engagement with Irish poetry, could
be seen in the fact that Trauben’s director is the husband of Cataldi, the aforementioned
scholar of Irish literature, head of the *Centro Studi Celtici* and herself a translator of
Anglo-Irish literature and medieval Irish texts. A work which arguably derived from
these rather exceptional circumstances is the 2006 publication of the volume *Omaggio a
Thomas Kinsella*, inspired by the conferring of a *Laurea Honoris Causa* on the Irish
poet by the Italian university. The anthology of translations of Kinsella’s work,
published for the occasion, created an opportunity for the major Italian scholars of Irish
literature to collaborate, and includes eleven translators in all: Giorgio Melchiori, Melita
Cataldi, Rosangela Barone, Carla de Petris, Donatella Abbate Badin, Giuseppe Serpillo, Riccardo Duranti, Valerio Fissore, Alessandro Gentili, Francesca Romana Paci and Giovanni Pillonca. The volume opens with a short introduction by the Dean of the Foreign Languages and Literatures Faculty, entitled “Presentazione di Thomas Kinsella”, that attempts to capture the relevance of Kinsella’s poetic work by setting it within the Irish poetic tradition for the benefit of an Italian readership that is not necessarily familiar with it. Single poems are discussed in relationship with Kinsella’s theoretical framework of the “Divided Mind,” a notion which the Irish poet uses to refer to the bilingual and fragmented aspects of the Irish literary tradition. “Nightwalker,” for instance, introduced as one of the most significant poems of the second half of the twentieth century, is described as a metaphor articulating the main stepping stones of a journey through Irish reality, from independence to the nineteen sixties. By the same token, “Fifteen Dead” is also contextualised in the brief introduction, by reminding the readers that the final part of the poem is a commemoration of the civilians who died during Bloody Sunday in 1972. Hence, the work is immediately identified as a moment of major concern by Kinsella in the politics of the Troubles. Finally, some reference is made both to the poet’s English translation of Táin Bó Cuailgne, of which an extract is presented in the Italian anthology, and to his translation of Irish poetry contained in the volume An Dunaire. 1600-1900: Poems of the Dispossessed. A further investigation of Kinsella’s contribution to An Duanaire is presented by Cataldi in a second introduction, where she elaborates on the theme of “re-possession” starting from Kinsella’s line “enrich the present/ honouring the past.” A brief introductory note touching on the theme of “dislocation and loss” is also provided by Abbate Badin, the second key figure of Centro Studi Celtici.

On these concise, yet solid bases, the volume gradually constructs a secure interpretative framework before the reader is brought face to face with the poetic work itself. Kinsella’s Lectio Doctoralis on the occasion of the Italian conferral is fully reported at the beginning of the volume and provides an unusually thoughtful introduction for a collection of poetry, since he is addressing an Italian audience and therefore produces an informative piece calibrated to the target-audience’s knowledge, or rather, the assumed lack of it. It is a device, however, employed in other editions by

279 Ibid., p.11.
Trauben, in which interviews with the author function as introductions or afterword. In his address, Kinsella talks widely about the delicate relationship between the English and the Irish languages, filtered by his own personal experience. He tells an anecdote about his original surname, Úí Chinnseallaigh, which is derived from the adjective cinneal, “arrogant,” of which the English version has lost its meaning and which he ironically recognises as an apt description of his temper. He then goes on to expand upon the Irish language tradition, touching on the ancient Irish saga and bringing to the attention of an Italian academic audience familiar with Swift the name of one of his contemporaries, the Irish language poet, Aogán Ó Rathaille, whose greatness was obscured by a blatant disregard for the Irish language tradition at the dawn of the eighteenth century.

Italian readers are therefore provided with insights that may prove vital for a fuller understanding of Kinsella’s work. The abundant notes at the end of the collection function as finishing touches and elucidate relevant details about Kinsella’s poetic production, ideas about the Irish mythical tradition which the poet did not touch upon, and interesting parallels within the Latin tradition with which the constructed reader is expected to be familiar. Yet the author’s introduction is definitely the most valuable instrument to understand not necessarily the details, but the moods and the “drives” behind his poetry. In this respect, although some of the observations emerging from this brief analysis are strictly related to the peculiar nature of this “special” edition, the efforts made to enhance the fundamental qualities of a poetic collection for the benefit of the new readership are echoing those found in the other volumes published by Trauben. Overall then, a careful mediation of the poetic material can indeed be seen as a hallmark of the publisher. The publisher’s decision to engage with translations from Irish underlines the desire to be comprehensive with its representation of Irish literature. Its catalogue, apart from the bilingual collection L’Anima che Baciò il Corpo, features one quite extraordinary work, Eoghan Ó Tuairisc’s Messa per i Defunti. The complexities related to the translation of this long poem go beyond the fact that it is written in Irish and that it is probably Barone’s major undertaking in the area of translation. The Irish language dimension of the text is also emphasised by the “dedication” and the “acknowledgments,” both presented in bilingual format despite having been written by the Italian translator. The paratextual additions to the Italian edition includes a foreword by Micheál MacCraith that focuses primarily on the life and
work of Ó Tuairisc, where the equivalent of names normally known under their anglicised form, such as Dúghlás de hÍde for Douglas Hyde or Pádraic Mac Piarais for Padraic Pearse, are used. The intent seems to be the inscription of Ó Tuairisc’s work within a rich Irish-language tradition, rather than placing it at the margins of the Anglophone literary tradition. The implicit cultural statement made by bringing the Irish language to the forefront is evident also in the decision to translate Barone’s interventions back into Irish. In this way, the volume is offered as enriching not only for Italian culture, but for the Irish language tradition as well. In that sense, it is possible to ascribe the project to the pursuit of a Third Space, as the pushing of boundaries becomes even more evident than in other editions by the same publisher. The criticism that accompanies the translation of *Aifreann na Marbh* is an extremely thorough commentary that, in theory, would prove quite helpful even for Irish readers approaching the poem. Precise guidelines are provided in order to open up access to the poem’s many cultural references, so that the multilayered nature of the text can be fully appreciated. Biblical and other literary echoes, both Irish and international, are fully covered by Barone’s commentary, and their meaningfulness in relation to Ó Tuairisc’s poem highlighted. In particular, the Italian translator explores the influence of Dante on Ó Tuairisc’s poem, an investigation that, as Mac Craith recalls, has been openly wished for by Colbert Kearney, Ó Tuairisc’s pupil, who is a sensitive commentator on his master’s work.280 Also, the linguistic clarifications provided in the endnotes are often relevant not only to readers of the target text. Through careful justification of the solutions adopted in translation, Barone is effectively highlighting the deepest structural and symbolical resonances in the Irish source. It is quite evident that with such refined critical tools at hand the readers of the Italian edition of *Aifreann na Marbh* can potentially reach an understanding of Ó Tuairisc’s work that is even more profound than that of an Irish native speaker, who does not have access to the same interpretive framework. A brief look at the initial line of the poem and the related endnote exemplifies Barone’s method, which are consistently followed throughout the whole composition:

Músclaíonn an mhaidin ár mishuaimhneas sióraí.  
L’alba desta il nostro eterno disriposo.

The actual translation is supplied with two full pages of notes, providing a linguistic, literary and cultural commentary. As for the linguistic aspect, Barone’s main concern is to highlight any minor distancing from the original, occurring on the micro-dimension of the text, in terms of macrostructure. The term *an mhaidin* for instance, “morning,” becomes *l’alba*, dawn, in the Italian version. Barone explains this solution as deriving from the need to maintain the feminine gender of the word, which is important in view of the future connection of *maidin* with the assonant term *maighdean*, virgin, which appears in its place in an otherwise identical sentence found in the later section of the poem “Dies Irae.” The endnote also acknowledges the importance of the noun’s gender for the metaphorical universe evoked by the poem. In the Irish language, for instance, rivers are always feminine, because according to the “Celtic mens,” as Barone calls it, water was perceived as the feminine element that enabled the ground to become fertile. This Celtic *forma mentis* is actively reflected in Ó Tuairisc’s poem where the image of the river Liffey is surrounded by sexual resonances that take for granted the river’s feminine nature. For this reason, Barone often expands the references to the Liffey as *l’acqua*/*la corrente (del Liffey)*, as both words “water” and “flow,” are feminine in Italian, whereas the substantive *fiume* is masculine and, for this reason, most river names are perceived as masculine as well. A second example identified by the translator is that of *súil* and *béal* (“eye” and “mouth”), where the first is feminine and the second masculine. A literal translation however, *occhio e bocca*, would have swapped the two genders, compromising the subtle symbolism of the text. Hence Barone’s choice to employ synecdochic terms, like *pupilla* (pupil) and *labbro* (lip), which maintains the same gender distribution of the source text.

As for literary and cultural commentary, Barone explores the role of the poet in the epoch of the atomic bomb, the main subject partly concealed in Ó Tuairisc’s symbolic world. Barone interprets Ó Tuairisc’s poetic role as a modern re-elaboration of the ancient Irish poetic-prophetic figure of the *fíle*, the “master of the Word” in early Celtic society. In this sense, Ó Tuairisc’s poetics are aligned to the celebration of the “power of the word” by Shakespeare and Keats, as seen in opposition to Theodor Adorno’s sceptical statement about the relevance of poetry after Auschwitz, as the
poetic word has been rendered hollow by the atrocities committed by the human race. Instead, in Ó Tuairisc’s poem, the poet is the one who “rejoices in the sacrifice” and suffers a personal *via crucis* in order to empower the reviving quality of the Word as Logos, the creating force. The Biblical tones are also clearly underlined by Barone’s commentary: not only the more obvious reference to the *incipit* of John’s gospel – “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” – but also the implicit recall of the Book of Isaiah. Nevertheless, the most interesting aspects of Barone’s strategy are to be found in the translation itself. The Italian scholar seems to have worked out her personal version of an “estranging” approach to the rendition of style which, in the domain of prose, has been identified as an essential premise for any challenge transparent translations. In the Italian version of the initial line of the poem, which functions as a recurrent refrain for the whole first section “Introitus,” the translator introduces the non-existent word *disriposo*, a grammatical negation of *riposo*, rest, to convey the idea expressed by the Irish *míshuaimhneas*, also composed by a negating prefix and the substantive *suaimhneas*, rest. By manipulating the Italian language, Barone is arguably trying to bring the target text closer to the structure and the “tone” of the source. Her conviction that most of the interest and the appeal of Ó Tuairisc’s work resides in the use of Irish allows her to create a language, for her translation, that is not merely Italian anymore, but rather Italian modified in order to accommodate Irish lexical and syntactical structures. In this light, *Messa per Defunti* can be seen as the embodiment of a translation strategy based on a form of mediation that incorporates a rich and exhaustive critical apparatus in support of a target text marked by a linguistic inventiveness. Hence, both the features of the source text are highlighted both in term of aesthetic qualities and cultural resonances. Although the complexity of *Aifreann na Marbh* demanded from Barone a more sophisticated critical engagement than a less ambitious collection of poems might have required, it seems fair to recognise in a translation strategy striving for mediation the preferred approach promoted by Trauben. This, however, is realised in rather different modes depending on the specificity of the work to be translated.


282 Cf. Isaiah 55: 10-11. “For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but waterveth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater. So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”
HUTCHINSON, McGUCKIAN AND MAHON

Selecting works which can be representative of the diversity existing within contemporary Irish poetry, and also of the different aspects of the translation strategy adopted to deal with it, is a daunting task. Although some elements may recur, their combination is often specific to each individual author and the result achieved may vary. Yet, it is hoped that the European influences in the bilingual Irish and English tradition practiced by Hutchinson, the subjective style of a Northern Irish woman like McGuckian, and the mix of classical reference and Northern Irish sensibility in Mahon, can be taken as representative of how different aspects of Irish culture can be mediated to an Italian audience. The assortment of themes, as well as the differences in poetic style and language, will allow for reflections on the practice of poetry translation in general, both from a cultural and a linguistic point of view.

Pearse Hutchinson’s work emerges from within a bilingual Irish tradition, yet it connects with a multilingual European tradition, marrying successfully two rather distinctive veins within the domain of Irish poetry: the Gaelic roots and the European dimension. In Hutchinson’s poetry there is an element of “biographical fallacy” and the combination of these two traditions not only gives voice to anxieties deriving from historical circumstances, but also expresses 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 inherent 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, and the subtleties of this theme can be lost when the poetry is uprooted from its original environment.

Trauben, for all the reasons listed above, was probably the publisher best equipped for the challenging task of mediating Hutchinson to the Italian audience. The edition can boast the collaboration of Cataldi with Barone and Marco Sonzogni, three authorities in the field of Irish Studies, whose credentials are displayed in their profiles.
at the end of the volume. Moreover, the translators could count on the “friendly collaboration” of the author, which is also acknowledged at the end of the volume. The following analysis intends to engage with the translation strategies employed in the Italian edition of Hutchinson’s poetry so as to investigate how he is presented to an Italian audience and potentially perceived by it, and in what way this may facilitate a dialogue between Italian and Irish culture through the creation of a Third Space.

The volume opens with a brief introduction written by Cataldi. 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. In this way Cataldi offers an important interpretative lens for Hutchinson’s poems, through which she invites the reader to see them as riflessioni sulle parole283 ‘reflections on words,’ or, more specifically, as reflections on injustices against human nature perpetrated in the form of violence and impositions upon their language. Hutchinson’s sensitivity to language is further explored in the interview with the author included at the end of the volume. This conversation with Hutchinson touches on issues of 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 through the recounting of an anecdote about young Pearse, invited by his Irish-speaking mother not to address as “beggar” an old woman asking for money at the door, but as a “poor old woman.” Besides emphasising the different sensibility that distinguishes Irish from English, 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.284 In the interview, Hutchinson also engages with a brief history of the Irish language, narrated from his personal point of view, which resonates with the emotion and commotion of somebody deeply involved. Irish is described as a language “so old and so new,” because it was never used in a modern way until the 1950s - an exception being made for Padraig Pearse, Pádraic Ó Conaire and a few others - and “untouched by

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284 Ibid., p. 134.
the stiffness of the Victorian age.” 285 This background, in particular the emotional involvement that the issue of language may have for an Irish person, is essential to embrace the “discoursal perspective” articulated by Hutchinson’s poetry. Providing the target readers with these notions, therefore, equals to supply them with the critical tools to informatively approach the Italian translations.

Alongside this “journey from inside” Hutchison’s poetry, the final section of the volume also includes three short reviews of the poet’s work, one by Alan Titley, another by John Ennis and the third by Gabriel Rosenstock. These generally highlight the poetic achievements and principal themes of Hutchinson’s poetry. The choice of relying on authoritative voices that are prominent in the Irish literary scene, even if practically unknown in Italy, suggests rather clearly the targeting of an audience interested in Irish literature and thereby already familiar with those mentioned. In other words, this specific edition of Irish poetry, contrary to what happens with more commercial operations, does not attempt to “create” or “conquer” a new audience, but is content to address the needs of an existing one, no matter how small or specialised it might be.

Besides the insights provided by the interview, the most practical tools for a full appreciation of Hutchinson’s poetic works are provided for in Cataldi’s introduction. This can be read as a form of “compensation,” since she tries to make up in advance, through commentaries, some inevitable alterations that will occur in the body of the poems. 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 Cataldi wants 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 translator’s inability to maintain the intensity of an expression like “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.” Both these processes are inconceivable in Italian. Hence, the translated sentence results in an expanded version of the English verse: e imposero

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285 Ibid., p. 135.
loro ali di fiori di sangue ‘and imposed on them wings made with flowers of blood.’

The need for clarity compromises not only the source text’s audacity with language, but its conciseness as well. It seems that the power given to the English expression by its directness is partly, irremediably spoilt. Even texts with fewer evident poetic qualities present challenges for the translator, due to natural asymmetries in the languages. For instance, in the third text selected for the collection – going by the telling name of “Prose”/“Prosa” – 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 directness 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 target texts could easily fall within the realm of linguistic domestication – as fluency in the target language neatly 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 text.

In other instances, the peculiarity of the Irish voice is tentatively maintained in the translation proper as well, such as the literal translation of “A lovely crisp cracking thing” to una bella cosa nuova e frusciante. Yet, 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

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286 “The Frost is All Over.” In Hutchinson, Barone, Cataldi, Sonzogni, p. 70-1.
287 “Prose”/“Prosa.” In Hutchinson, Barone, Cataldi, Sonzogni, 1999, p. 20.
288 Ibid.
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 we have seen, very rarely can be maintained in the translated version without disrupting other characteristics simultaneously presented by a poem. By openly highlighting the main reasons which make Hutchinson’s sense of rhythm so difficult to reproduce in translation, rather than acknowledging its failure, Cataldi is effectively “making it work.” Again, this is in complete contrast with the translation of fiction, where every admission of “imperfectibility” of the translation is discouraged by the publishers.

A closer look at the very first poem appearing in the Italian collection, “Malaga,” will exemplify most of the issues that have been touched on so far. Indeed, in the source text, descriptions of places and people are rendered vivid precisely by the sounds through which they are evoked. The irregular but very important rhymes and repetitions 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/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 *abbadonare*, to abandon, 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 actually 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. All the more so because it causes the Italian version to switch the focus from the jasmine itself to some impersonal, unidentified subject which “let itself go” to its scent. *La sera portava il grande sollievo del gelsomino* “the evening brought jasmine’s great relief” would have been a more natural translation for this sentence, but the cohesive effect created by repetition would have been lost.

Overall, the translation shows a notable awareness of the meaning and effect of the source poem, as *gelsomino*, jasmine, is the only word which maintains its position at the end of the verse. 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. Yet this attests to the critical sensibility with which the translation is performed, as the effect ideally produced on target readers is compatible with what 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 the same poem “Malaga” 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 for “strong weed stalks”), yet others have been only partially reproduced or entirely omitted, like “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, like the formulation of the smooth, fast-paced line “at night along the beach with a strong voice like peace” in a more fragmented and moderate tempo with 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. This makes the target text more readable according to criteria not dissimilar from those encountered in the translation of fiction.

The linguistic fluency of the target text is after all another criterion highly prioritised by Cataldi and, as previously noted, the content of the translation may reflect this agenda to the extent that it mildly differs from the source text. This is also the case with a crucial verse of the poem “Malaga,” where the Italian version prefers a sentence that preserves a more acceptable use of Italian over one fully reproducing the meaning of the original sentence: “some hint of certainty, still worth longing I could teach” becomes qualche barlume di certezza che ancora valga poter insegnare. Although in

Italian the personal pronoun *io* is often superfluous where is grammatically necessary in English, in this case the translator has chosen to turn the sentence into an impersonal one and suppress the desiderative quality expressed by the verb “to long.” A literal back translation would be “some hint of certainty still worth being able to teach.” It is true that a literal translation of the source text into Italian would have resulted in the long and heavy sentence “qualche barlume di certezza che ancora valga la pena desiderare che io possa insegnare.” In this case though, the doubt remains that in this crucial final moment of the poem, the evocation of the poetic “I” and its desire to “teach” could have been important for the appreciation of a further layer of significance in the poem.

The weight of pronouns in different languages is often an issue in translating poetry. In the transfer from English into Italian, it is often difficult to determine whether the presence of the personal pronoun is simply dictated by grammatical reasons or whether it is meant to reflect emphasis. Both English and Italian are subject-verb-object (SVO) languages, but, whereas in Italian the conjugation of the verb in most cases clarifies whether the subject is masculine or feminine, singular or plural, in English the absence of complex conjugations makes omitting the subject grammatically incorrect. This means that Italian grammar does not require the same syntactic explicitness of English as far as personal pronouns are concerned and, when this occurs, it normally implies a much stronger emphasis on the agent(s). For instance, in English a statement such as “I speak three languages” has a simple “matter-of-fact” value, the Italian formulation *io parlo tre lingue* entails that the stress is on the *Io*, I, thus implying something like “(unlike you) I speak three languages,” or “(I am better/most qualified because) I speak three languages.” The neutral version of the Italian sentence, without any implication on the pragmatic level of discourse, would be *parlo tre lingue*, since the *io* is already indicated by the “–o” ending of the verb *parlare*, and a hyper-determination of it would necessarily add force to the concept.

In the English language, the most common way to add emphasis to a personal pronoun is through intonation, a feature which remains hidden in written English. That is what makes the choice of the translator quite difficult at times, especially in the field of poetry, where linguistic subtleties are meant to convey greater meaning. Hence, the most common choice in poetry translation is to play down the emphasis by neutralising the subject in the Italian version, since the alternative option of grammatically
emphasising it is more risky, as it indicates a specific reading of the poem more likely to be perceived as a misinterpretation than the opposite solution of simply glossing over the emphasis. A further reason which makes emphasising the subject quite rare is the deictic quality of the pronouns. Even setting the issue of emphasis aside, a straightforward translation is made problematic by the fact that, in cross-cultural translation, first-person pronouns come to have different immediate referents.

The “I” and the “we” of original poetic work have, as referents, individuals and, more importantly, communities whose defining traits do not correspond to those of the target readers. In this sense, it is as if translation challenged the notion that a particular language is inherently linked to the population that speaks it. The choice of the name Sinn Féin for the patriotic Republican Party is indicative of the axiomatic belief that language embodies specific traits and connotations of the culture that has nurtured it, or which it has nurtured. The simple utterance of the communal pronoun “we ourselves” in the Irish language is meant to be the quintessential expression of Irish identity, with all its unuttered implications. However, in translation, this association is deceptive: nous is not necessarily the French or wir the Germans. The pronoun noi in Italian translations of Irish poetry does not refer to an Italian collectivity, but to an Irish one. In translation, the target language becomes the lingua franca, which is meant to give voice to every cultural identity. After all, this possibility is somehow pre-empted by the fact that most Irish poetry is written in English, a language by now regarded as the lingua franca par excellence. Translation requires the same “suspension of disbelief” as Hollywood movies where every ethnic group in every part of the world speaks English, usually with some distinguishing accent as a hallmark of difference. The readers of literary translation have to be “willing” to believe not only what is being said, but also how it is being said. Whereas the conventions followed by Hollywood movies are normally highly codified and specifically measured against the expectations of international audiences, the cultural dialogue in actu through literary translation may require a more “original” effort of understanding. In Italian editions of Irish poetry, for instance, the Italian vocabulary has to suffice to express concepts ranging from the thoughts of an old man in Connemara to the worries of a mother teaching her Irish child to speak English. This implies a detachment between the language and the cultural identity it usually expresses, which can be particularly strong in the case of Irish language poetry, as the decision to use Irish as a medium of expression usually indicates a conscious decision
of the author. In this context, words need to be seen as mediators, “bridges” to access a reality other than the contingent situation to which they are normally related. Translation, then, often depicts a world with no contingency at all, in the sense that it is a world that does not exist. The use of the category of Third Space is meant to describe precisely this “imaginary” reality that is constructed by literature in translation. The reason for arguing that this journey to the Third Space is more likely to happen in the translation of poetry is entirely due to the translation strategies adopted and there is no reason why a novel should not guide its readers toward a Third Space if the necessary mediation is provided.

“The Frost is All Over” is a suitable example for addressing in more practical terms the issues related to the deictic dimension of personal pronouns and the problems it may cause in translation.

To kill a language is to kill a people./ The Aztecs knew far better: they took over/ their victims’ language, kept them carving/ obsidian beauties, weeded their religion/ of dangerous gentleness, and winged them blood-flowers/ (that’s a different way to kill people)./ The Normans brought and grew, but Honor Croome/ could never make her Kerryman verse English:/ Traherne was in the music of his tears.

We have no glint or caution who we are:/ our patriots dream wolfhounds in their portraits,/ our vendors pose in hunting-garb, the nightmare/ forelock tugging madly at some lost leash./ The Vikings never hurts us, xenophilia means bland servility, we insult/ ourselves and Europe with artificial trees,/ And coins as gel tog beauty now/

Uccidere una lingua è uccidere un popolo./Lo sapevano ancor meglio gli Aztechi: si appropriarono/ della lingua delle vittime, continuarono a far loro eseguire:/ belle incisioni di ossidiana, ne ripulirono la religione/d’ogni pericolosa pietà e imposero loro ali di fiori di sangue/(un altro modo di uccidere un popolo)./I Normanni qui si insediaronno e allignaronno, ma Honor Croome/mai riuscì a rendere inglese il verso del suo poeta del Kerry:/ Traherne era nella musica delle sue lacrime./

Non abbiamo un’idea né un profilo di chi siamo noi:/ i nostri patrioti sognano minacciosi levrieri nei propri ritratti:/ i nostri venditori posano in tenuta da caccia per l’ossessione/ di chinare la fronte al cospetto di un qualche guinzaglio smarrito./ I Vichinghi mai ci arrecarono danno, xenophilia/Significa blando servaggio, siamo noi che insultiamo/noi stessi e l’Europa con finte genealogia,/ e monete ora castrate d’ogni bellezza/

as, from the start, of power.

[...]
The frost, we tell them, is all over, and they love
our brogue so much they give us guns to kill/
ourselves, our language, all the other gooks.

[...]
To call a language dead before it dies/
means to bury it alive; some tongues
die/from hours or days inside the coffin, and when/
the tearful killers dig it up they find/
the tongue, like Suarez, bitten to its own bone./
Others explode in the church, and stain the bishop,/ whose priest could speak no Gaelic to “his flock”/
but knew to sink a splendid tawny goblet/
as deep as any master of the hunt.

Is Carleton where the tenderness must hide?/
Or would they have the Gaelic words, like insects,/ crawl up the legs of horses, and each bite,/ or startle, be proclaimed a heritage?/
Are those who rule us, like their eager voters,/ ghosts yearning for flesh? Ghosts are cruel,/ and ghosts of suicide more cruel still./ To kill a language is to kill one’s self.

come, fin da principio, d’ogni potere.

[...]
“La gelata è finita” – annunciamo loro – ed adorano tanto/
la nostra parlata che ci danno fucili perché
noi si uccida./ insieme a noi stessi, la nostra lingua e ogni altro barbaro.

[...]
Dichiarare morta una lingua prima che muoia/Significa seppellirla viva; qualche lingua, sì, muore/Se rinchiusa per ore e giorni dentro la bara;/all’esumazione i suoi assassini in pianto ritrovano/la lingua –
come fu per Suarez – morsicata fino all’osso;/ qualche altra lingua esplode, schizzando sul vescovo officiante/
il cui ministro non sapeva parlare gaelico al proprio “gregge,”/
ma era bravò a trinciare da una splendida coppa brunita./col gusto e l’abilità dei veri maestri da caccia./

S’annidrà la tenerzza nella lingua di Carleton?/
O faranno sì che le parole gaeliche, come insetti, striscino su per le zampe dei cavalli/
e ogni morso,/ ogni sussulto, sia proclamato patrimonio nazionale?/Quelli che ci governano, come chi fanaticamente vota per loro,/ sono forse fantasmi in cerca di carne? I fantasmi sono crudeli,/
e i fantasmi dei suicidi ancora più crudeli./ Uccidere una lingua è uccidere se stessi.

“The Frost is All Over” is one of the few poems where the question of the Irish language is explicitly tackled as the subject matter, albeit with the “reduction” and “dissemination” typical of poetry, to use the terminology introduced by Alain Badiou.292 A deeper understanding of the poem is dependent on the recognition that some elements in the text should trigger a sympathetic appreciation of the full scope of the tragedy that the loss of the Irish language represents. In this case, the translator has

292 Cf. Badiou, Alain, Ray Brassier, and Alberto Toscano. *Theoretical Writings*. London; New York: Continuum, 2004, p. 242-3: “Subtraction organizes the poem around a direct concern with the retreat of the object: the poem is a negative machinery, which utters being, or the idea, at the very point where the object has vanished.” And “dissemination […] aims to dissolve the object through an infinite metaphorical distribution. Which means that no sooner is it mentioned than the object migrates elsewhere within meaning; it disobjectifies itself by becoming something other than it is. The object looses its objectivity, not through the effect of a lack, but through that of an excess: an excessive equivalence to other objects.”

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clearly chosen to put additional emphasis on the personal pronouns in the Italian version of the poem. The English reiteration of “we,” “our,” “ourselves” and “us” is matched by an equal quantity of noi, nostri and noi stessi. Because of the grammatical reasons previously given, an expression like siamo noi che insultiamo noi stessi strikes the Italian reader as much stronger than its source, “we insult ourselves,” not only because of the more abundant presence of markers for the first person plural, but because the standard sentence structure of the English is counterpointed by a more unusual translation. In Italian, the full clause siamo noi che has been added to put the stress on the subject, rather than the simplest version insultiamo noi stessi, which would, in itself, be a perfectly acceptable translation of “we insult ourselves.” The same strategy is employed for the translation of “they give us guns to kill” in the central stanza, that becomes ci danno fucili perché noi si uccida. Because of the grammatically unnecessary insertion of the pronouns noi in nominative position, the Italian sentence could be backtranslated as “they gives us guns so that we can kill.” Such a reiteration of marked emphasis on the pronouns disavows the possibility of being arbitrary, and suggests some degree of intentionality on the translator’s part. From this perspective, the explicitness of the theme might have been taken as a reason to assume that the otherness of the narrating voice will be acknowledged by readers. Therefore, the additional emphasis on the personal pronouns would function as a device to underline the gap between the speaking voice of the poet and the receiving ear of the reader, rather than encouraging a misleading identification as might happen in the translation of poems which are less explicitly “other.”

This strategy is corroborated by the translator’s moves towards explicitation in the body of the text, accompanied by further explanations in the endnotes – all devices that help to decipher elements of Irishness in the poem. On the whole, every effort is made to illuminate the meaning of the poem through a careful mediation of its content, starting from the assumption that the elements comprising the subject matter are not automatically shared by the new audience. The clear emphasis on the noi in the Italian translation then can indeed be seen as a strong assertion that it is an Irish point of view which is to be articulated since, as also indicated in the endnotes, there is no mistaking the cultural sensibility of the narrating voice. The Italian translation promotes an understanding of the poem in Irish terms by effectively emphasising its distinctiveness: firstly, by illuminating the inherent “Irishness” of the poem and, secondly, by
constantly reiterating that the narrating voice is expressing the sensibility of those “us” already identified as “others.” The additional visibility given to both the pronoun noi and the otherness of the voice uttering it, make as explicit as possible the “fictional” dimension of the translation. Neutralising the strangeness of the poem would have also neutralised its meaning. This poem required a full embracing of the “paradox” of translation in order to be fully understood from an Italian point of view without its message being erased or distorted by too great a degree of assimilation. The delicate balance of Italian and Irish cultural, social, and emotional awareness required from the reader posits an in-betweenness that questions a rigid compartmentalisation of the sense of belonging, a new dimension suspended across Irish and Italian culture that can be opened up through mediation. What happens is the enhancement of the value of the poem in universal terms: in the Third Space old symbols are set in a new context and acquire a renewed significance. This option of interpreting the poem by transcending the borders of both Italian and Irish culture is not only left open by the Italian translation but, in some cases, seems to be consciously embraced. For instance, the poem’s last verse, “To kill a language is to kill one’s self,” which, together with the opening verse “To kill a language is to kill a people,” gives an epiphonemic edge to the poem. This is translated in Italian as uccidere una lingua è uccidere se stessi. While the expression se stessi is the more standard, fluent solution, which apparently ignores the implications of the “deconstructed” version of “one’s self” present in the source text, the result achieved is rather a universalisation of the message. The lack of emphasis on the individual and introspective dimension created by the peculiar use of language in the English version creates a centrifugal effect where the source text is trying to be centripetal. This could have been achieved by a less standard translation, like uccidere una lingua è uccidere il proprio io. The choice of the plural se stessi instead projects the epiphonemic message of the poem on “whoever affected,” rather than “wrapping” it around the narrating voice that, as has been demonstrated, is distinctively Irish. Taking everything into account, it is possible to identify a certain “distancing” from the subject matter, which, after all, is implied by the very notion of mediation. It is a tendency that is even more evident in poems where the issue of the Irish language is Hutchinson’s poetic inspiration, but the theme is developed in much more subtle and indirect ways. Once more, the personal pronouns are good indicators of the shifts put in place by the translator. The turning of a title like “She Made her False Name Real” into “La Donna che R ese Autentico il Suo Falso Nome” is a good starting point to
delve a bit further into the matter. The most immediate way to translate this would be *rese autentico il suo falso nome*, without the need to insert a subject in the sentence. In such a formulation, however, the gender of the speaker would remain ambiguous and this would not be a particularly successful reproduction of a title which reveals the gender in question as the first piece of information. The alternative *lei rese autentico il suo falso nome* is correct and formally equivalent to the source, but it sounds heavy and slightly awkward in Italian. This is possibly because the grammatically correct version would require the third person feminine *ella*, the usage of which is perceived as archaic and is nowadays restricted to grammar books. Arguably, the superfluousness of specifying the subject is the very reason for its demise and the taking over of the accusative *lei*, by now commonly, but “mistakenly,” used in the place of the subject as well. Similar considerations might lie behind the translator’s choice of introducing *la donna*, the woman, as a subject. In this way, however, the immediacy, the “proximity” to the subject evoked by “she made” is pushed to some distance by the expression “the woman who made,” as if the reader is observing the woman from outside rather than sharing her experience. A similar “distancing” device is kept even when this woman is finally “met” towards the end of the poem. The “old woman called Jaumeta” becomes *una vecchia che chiamavan Jaumeta*, ‘an old woman who was called (by them) Jaumeta,’ as if again the narrator was observing from the outside, and not from within the “community” of which the poem speaks. It is as if the translation is operating a certain transition of perspective, which is, after all, not only legitimate but necessary, since the concept of translation implies an “audience transition” as well. A look at the first stanza of the poem may help to clarify why the language used might help Irish readers to be absorbed within the emotional dimension evoked by such a distant context in space and time as the Jewish conversions in Mallorca, which Hutchinson acknowledges to be his historical inspiration.

When the Holy Office descended upon us to make us all saints,
to change our names with tongues of flame,
to make us all saints instead of the devils they knew
we
were
under pain of all those tongues
of turning not living devils but most unholy ghosts,
we changed our names, not being martyrs, to the names they gave us.
As the issue of renaming, which emerges quite clearly from these lines, can be considered as relevant to the Irish situation, it seems fair to assume that this might resonate with the direct or indirect experience of a considerable number of Irish readers. Also, the two epiphonemic lines following the stanza, by virtue of the “abstractness” of the poem so far, seems to perfectly encapsulate feelings which are still very much alive in Ireland: “A change of name’s a trivial thing:/ it only leads to century of bitterness.” Instead, the Italian reader, during this initial part of the poem, where the context is still obscure, may be engaged by the atmosphere, but is left wondering which situation this epiphonemic opening is supposed to articulate. As the poem goes on, capturing any similarity with the Irish question becomes more and more difficult for those who are not directly acquainted with it, as the list of Yiddish names and their new Spanish versions evoke a rather different cultural context. Unlike an Irish reader, for whom those events from the past might be perceived as a model to validate critical observations that can be applied to their immediate environment, the Italian reader is more likely to appreciate the poem in rather literal terms. Hence, the change of perspective that the translation seems to promote might be part of a strategic plan that takes into account those differences in the interpretative horizons of the audience. The translation subtly preserves the distancing introduced from the title and continued throughout the poem.

The choice to translate the word “bitterness,” which appears in the two crucial lines mentioned above, as patimenti, generally meaning “ordeals,” could be read in the same light. Patimenti, despite being stronger as a word than bitterness as it derives from the verb patire – which is normally referred to pena, pain – somehow reduces the hint of sarcasm that may be ascribed to the source text, as in Italian it is more likely to be taken as a literal reference to the actual sufferings of the Jews in Mallorca to which the poem directly refers. In other words, whereas the Irish reader can possibly share a taste of that bitterness and maybe even have a critical opinion about the forms that such bitterness has taken over the years, Italian readers are left to look at distant sufferings and there is no implicit invitation to question their nature. The translator apparently chooses to gloss over this hidden layer of significance. There is no direct intervention that highlights a possible parallel to the Irish experience. The only clarification in the endnote is the reproduction of Hutchinson’s original note where he briefly summarised the historical events which took place in Mallorca and acknowledged the book from which he recovered the real names of the Jews involved. However, setting the poem in the context of the whole volume, with the support of Hutchinson’s interview and poems like “The
Frost is All over,” it becomes more likely that the target readers would find resonances with the Irish experience. The story of the old Jewish woman in Mallorca, however, cannot be assimilated to any personal experience by Italian readers. Therefore the translator has adopted a strategy which leaves them gazing at the scene as if from a distance.

A similar detachment seems to be pursued also by the second translator, Barone. In “Achnasheen” she also has to deal with the Irish language question, in terms even more direct then in “The Frost is All Over.” Once more the “distancing” of the Italian audience is, to some extent, inevitable. For instance, the choice of keeping the original title, which on other occasions might be seen as a foreignising device useful to bring readers close to the source culture, is likely to set readers unacquainted with Gaelic in unfamiliar territory – unintelligible and unpronounceable as well. Equally impossible to decode for most Italian readers is the Scottish placename of Beinn Ailleagan, which appears in the second part of the poem, that should instead be representative of the significance of the few Gaelic names which have not been distorted by English renaming. Precisely because of these insurmountable difficulties, which deny the target readers the immediate identification sought in the source, the translator seems to pursue, yet again, a strategy that emphasises the distance of the poem. The first line is typical of this strategy: 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, where 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 not clear anymore. The core meaning of the Italian back translation, “You cannot draw the Gaelic from these toponyms” does correspond quite literally to the source, but the way in which it 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 power of the source text:

You’d almost think the conquerors thought/
Gaelic was God:/
its real name unnameable.

Ti viene quasi da pensare che nella mente dei conquistatori/
gaelico equivalesse a Dio:/
da non nominare il suo vero nome.293

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 version and with it the suggestive power of the source. Even in the last stanza, where the paronomasia is partly kept with the noun 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 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 language shaped by “conquerors,” as the fact that the poem itself is written in English demonstrates. The Italian translation “nella mente dei conquistatori” ‘inside the conquerors’ mind,’ 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.

Similar hints of detachment from the subject matter, or rather of a foreign look imposed on it, are to be found in “Look, no Hands”/“Guarda, Senza Mani:”

I hate the winter, and blame drinkers/
for hiding in dark pubs when the sun shines outside. /
And could be enjoyed at sidewalk tables.  
Aborro l’inverno e critico i beoni /
che si rifuggiano nel buio di un pub /
mentre fuori c’è il sole /
bello a godersi sedendo all’aperto.294

First of all, the choice of words again is rather formal. The common “I hate” is substituted by the rather peculiar aborro, roughly translatable as “I loathe” in English. The choice of a word that readers would not use on a regular basis is once more a device

which would arguably make them feel “apart” from the narrating subject. More importantly, in the quoted stanza, the neutral term “drinkers” is transformed into the heavily negative and informal beoni, which would be closer to the English “drunkards.” Although the negative reinforcement might be justified as compensation for the fact that the original verb preceding the object is to “blame,” whereas the Italian has the milder form criticare, to criticise, the strategy seems to be the superimposition of an Italian point of view onto the Irish reality of “people drinking in a pub.” In the Irish version, the real guilt recognised in the “drinkers” by the narrating Self is not that of having been drinking per se, but, rather, that they are hiding from the sun. In the Italian version, the narrating voice criticises “the drunkards who take shelter in a pub while the sun is shining outside.” The overall effect is rather different. First of all, the conjunction “while” indicates the sun as the norm, rather than the “dark pubs” in the source text, which significantly, in Italian, becomes “the darkness of one pub,” which suggests that the pub, rather than the sun, is the exception to the rule. It is as if the translator had adapted the situation to an experiential context more natural to her readers. Also, the source text verb “to hide” is substituted by the less judgemental “to take shelter,” which seems to legitimise the drunkards’ decision to enter the pub. Overall, then, the impression conveyed by the Italian is that the reason for guilt lies in the very fact of being in a pub associated with the heavy drinking evoked by the subject beoni, which quite contradicts the following verse “and could be enjoyed at sidewalk tables.” This sentence reiterates that the narrator’s critique, in the source text, has nothing to do with the habit of drinking, but rather with the foolishness of avoiding the rare sun.

These small accommodations towards the target reader’s sensibility, however, are necessary to avoid those short-circuits in the comprehension mechanism, which we have seen might happen in the context of translating fiction where usually no mediation at all is carried out. Disregarding the target readers’ sensibility would prevent the creation of the Third Space. From this perspective, shifts that might seem to cause alterations of meaning at a micro-level might be necessary shifts to facilitate interaction with the macro-dimension of the poem.

Another way to create a foreignising effect is the use of italics that we have seen employed for the word “pub” in the previous poem. The same 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 a child from the sun.

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

The few lines or words in the Irish language are kept unaltered but italicised in the Italian version, which defies the natural merging of the two languages achieved in the original. This is quite legitimate since no natural merging exists between the Italian and the Irish languages. 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 probably necessary because the clues provided by Hutchinson to figure out the unuttered word might not be very enlightening 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.
Chapter 4: Translating Poetry

For poetry in the Irish language, the role played by the endnotes is equivalent to that of the English ones, which means that no extra weight is given to linguistic matters. This observation highlights another aspect of the policy behind the edition: the aim is to address an important literary gap through a careful mediation of the culture from which the poetry derives, and not to provide a philological treatise on the Irish language. As acknowledged in a review of the poetry series by Serpillo, “[è] difficile da valutare, se non si conosce la lingua di partenza, quanto dell’emozione, delle immagini e del pensiero di un testo resti nella sua traduzione,” it is difficult to evaluate, when one does not know the source language, how much of the emotions, the images and the thought of a text remains in its translation. However, as Serpillo also asserts, “L’eccellente qualità delle traduzioni dall’inglese ci permette di confidare nella buona qualità di quelle dalla lingua celtica, di cogliere il piacere estetico che esse ci danno senza eccessiva perplessità.” The excellent quality of the translations from English allow us to rely on the good quality of those from the Celtic language, of enjoying the aesthetic pleasure they convey without too much perplexity. What is interesting, however, is that the search for aesthetic pleasure does not seem to be a priority for Italian translations from the Irish language. Quite the reverse: the general preference displayed by the translators seems to be a strict adherence to the original texts, also as far as morphological or syntactic structures are concerned, to the detriment of more literary results. The desired fidelity of the Italian versions can be more fully appreciated when compared to translations into other languages of Hutchinson’s poetry.

In the poem “An tAnam Phóg an Corp” for instance, the Italian translator keeps intact the unusual image of the soul kissing the body, which is also chosen as the title for the collection. The choice of “formal equivalence” is also explained in an endnote that 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.” A French translation of the same poem instead prefers to slightly normalise the poetic image by having the soul “embracing”

296 Ibid.
the body (“L’Âme qui Embrassa le Corps”). 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. Yet, curiously, the French translation tends to play down the Catholic tones 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 figure in the famous story by Patrick Pearse rather than the saviour of a more religious affiliation. Not so in the Italian translation, which turns Íosagán into the immediately recognisable figure of Gesù bambinello, baby Jesus, and rather enhances the biblical tones by choosing the expression dell’intero creato, of all creation, for the translation of na ndúl. 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 in stylistic terms in ways that go beyond the changes dictated by achieving an acceptable degree of fluency as we have seen happen with the Italian translation. For instance, i bhfothain ag Críost is rather literally translated in Italian as rifugiata nel Cristo, sheltered in Christ, 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, and normalised in the French dans un sourire en sang. Also the syntactic structures of Irish are much

300 Ó Gormaile, 2007, p. 77.
more faithfully followed in the Italian version. The following stanza might be taken as an example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Irish</th>
<th>Italian</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Í Mar ghaoth scíth’</td>
<td>Lei Come vento domato</td>
<td>Tel un souffle de repos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I gcíll na cruinne</td>
<td>Nel sacro tempio del mondo</td>
<td>Elle se trouve</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 comparison in the second line. Taking everything into consideration, the Italian translations seem to resist the allure of poetic embellishment. Yet this does not contradict Serpillo’s statement about the aesthetic pleasure of the poems, since it is that very adherence 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 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.

One final Irish poem that is deserving of a brief mention is “Ceol”/“Musica.” Here the perspective familiar/unfamiliar is curiously reversed, in the sense that the poem, with a dedication to Franco Loi, is actually a poem celebrating the “music” of the Italian language. The central words of the poem are “ciao” and the personal name “Barbara,” which appear like floating alien entities within a rhythm revolving around the sounds of the Irish language. Obviously, this effect could not be reproduced through the Italian translation alone, so once again the importance of presenting the source text to readers as part of the translation strategy emerges. Only through comparison are readers able to appreciate the distinctiveness of the two Italian words within the dynamics of the poem. However, what the Italian version of “Ceol” really contributes to the present argument is the curious epiphany that, however difficult, rendering familiar the unfamiliar is much easier than the opposite. This poem presents a case where a double effort is required from readers who not only have to move closer to a foreign perception and embrace a new perspective on things, but, also, from there, are invited to look back at themselves with uncontaminated eyes, unaware of, or unacquainted with, the substance of their daily reality or their own sensibility. The process of translation is,
therefore, even more challenging than in normal circumstances, as the readers are expected to “unknow” what they know already. Even so, this process of “translating back,” although only “ideally,” should somehow release, and perhaps even enhance, the artistic qualities of the work if any credit has to be given to Viktor Shklovsky’s idea of *ostranenie*, or defamiliarisation. According to the Russian critic and writer, a great part of the aesthetic value of a literary work would consist in overcoming the desensitisation caused by over-familiarity with the subject matter. One way to achieve a revitalising effect is to render the familiar unfamiliar.\(^3\) Indeed this “technique” is often evident in the work of great writers. It is frequently employed by Heaney, for instance, mostly in relation to the conflict in the North, so as to highlight the necessity of removing the veil of familiarity to bring back the emotional response that the situation deserves.

One of the most telling examples of “defamiliarisation” however is to be found in the poem “Making Strange.” The closing of the poem is particularly significant in this sense:

 [...] 

A chaffinch flicked from an ash and next thing
I found myself driving the stranger

through my own country, adept
at dialect, reciting my pride
in all that I knew, that began to make strange
at the same recitation.

The utopian hybridisation of cultures predicated on the notion of Third Space takes places precisely within the borders of the ideal circle drawn by the act of looking back at one’s own culture with a new sense of “strangeness.” For this reason, the circularity implied by this “looking back” is here proposed as akin to the process of translation between two cultures in general. It occurs in a “purer” form, so to speak, when the translation concerns a poem like Hutchinson’s “Ceol,” as it is like “translating back” Italian culture for the Italians after an estranging journey in Irish land. It functions as a fitting “visualisation” of the Third Space, as the area “encircled” by the process of

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\(^3\) The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar’, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.” In Shklovsky, Victor. “Art as Technique.” *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader.* Ed. David Lodge. London: Longmans, 1988, p. 12.
translation is more self-contained and, thus, more clearly defined. It is the place where the target culture merges with the source culture to the point of becoming a new entity, which is both and neither at the same time. Only, this time, it is the target readers’ own culture which has undergone a “de-forming/re-forming” process. In this sense, it might be an instance when the readers of the translation might more easily recognise entering a Third Space, although they might not have the same name for it. Through translation, “Ceol” and “Musica” cease to be two separate entities which refer to “music” in the mind of an Irish or an Italian person: they become a single, complementary entity.

In this sense, the process of translation, with all due differences, could be seen in the light of André Bazin’s theory about cinematographic adaptations of literary works. The derivative product may create compensations for its source by highlighting aspects of the original text which would have otherwise been overlooked. In the case of poetry translation, the target text exists symbiotically with its source; thus, together, they come to create a system of meaning which transcends the limits of the source text alone.\(^{302}\) In essence, in this specific theoretical formulation, Third Space comes to indicate a “supranational” view of reality, which is released by translation whenever a particular vantage point of observation is denied. Figuratively, we could say that it is as if the reader’s eye needed to become ubiquitous so as to grasp the meaning.

The “back translation” of elements of the target culture after they have been filtered through a foreign outlook makes for a neater illustration of this characteristic. By stressing the relativity of one’s own cultural assumptions, translation challenges self-referentiality of the domestic culture. The proposal here, however, is that this emancipation of the target culture from its own rigid framework of reference is perfectly conceivable as an implicit goal of every act of translation carried on according to the norms of mediation as outlined in this study.

Passione per l’Aria, a collection of translations from Medbh McGuckian, an author considered to be one of the most innovative voices in female poetry, is also a publication that provides relevant insights about the translation of Irish poetry in Italy.

The title of the volume is a free translation of the last line of the famous poem “Captain Lavender”/“Capitano Lavanda.” The editor is Simona Vannini, who worked as senior tutor of Italian in UCD. Apart from minor shifts from the matrix identified for Hutchinson’s volume, like the placing of the index at the end rather than at the beginning of the volume, the format is akin to other publications by Trauben: introduction, source texts alongside their translation and final interview with the author. The only serious divergence from the previous edition is the total absence of endnotes dealing with individual poems. At first glance, this appears a rather daring choice since McGuckian’s poetry, animated by a fierce thematic and structural inventiveness, is regarded as extremely complex from both a creative and existential point of view. However, all the reasons for this complexity are carefully accounted for by Vannini in her extensive introduction where she deals with the proliferation of indistinct narrating voices.

Vannini introduces the stylistic features of grammatico-syntactical experimentation and touches on the metaliterary tendencies to deconstruct and personify artistic and existential issues in McGuckian’s work. Furthermore, as well as dealing in general terms with the poetic stance and the main themes in the collection, Vannini compresses in her introduction some specific hermeneutic suggestions and provides articulate readings of individual poems. This can be seen as an active compensation for the absence of endnotes. The main difference is that, whereas endnotes generally provide information that can be used by the readers for their interpretations, Vannini in the introduction puts forward her own “ready-made” interpretation of the poems. The risks linked to such an approach are observed by Serpillo in his review of the poetic collection: “*[Vannini] nel pur generoso tentativo di facilitare la lettura e la compresione al lettore, giunge a isolare single poesie per darne un’interpretazione che risulta quasi sempre riduttiva e talvolta arbitraria [...]’ *[Vannini] in the generous attempt to facilitate the reading and the understanding of the readers, ends up isolating individual poems to give an interpretation which is almost unfailingly reductive and arbitrary.”

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The issue raised by this critique is certainly relevant; however, it should also be noted that the alternative of an absence of hermeneutic solutions could also compromise the “absolute just responsive understanding” of Italian readers. Although on several occasions McGuckian’s work relies on an intimate understanding of distinctively feminine experiences, a gender-based approach appealing to the individual sensibility of female readers would be a reductive way to explore her poems. Even if McGuckian’s engagement with the public sphere is rarely blatantly exposed on the poetic surface of her writing, basic background knowledge of the socio-political issues obliquely touched on by her work is certainly helpful.

As Vannini argues in her introduction “l’individualità femminile e quella politica si fondono in un’unicà entità” “the feminine and the political individuality merge in a single entity.”304 The narrating voice is not only manifestly a woman, but Irish as well. The impression that mere subjectivity can be enough for a full appreciation of the poems is, therefore, highly deceptive: the polymorphous identity of McGuckian’s poetic voice needs to be linked to the socio-political fragmentation of Ireland as the place in which McGuckian was born and her poetry is rooted. After all, McGuckian was born in Belfast in 1950: she grew up in close contact with the political specificity of the North and she witnessed, as a young adult, the years when the violence reached its most tragic peak. In the final interview, she mentions an “obsession” she had with political prisoners and the injustices suffered by Ireland, which she partly overcame thanks to her work as a writer. Her poetry, therefore, is far from that neat detachment from ethico-political issues of which it has been sometimes accused.

In the interview, McGuckian clearly asserts the importance of the Irish background for her poetry. When asked what Ireland means for her, the poet’s answer is: “It means everything,” and she goes on by expanding upon the complicated but deep relationship with her native land, which she cannot understand but without which she could not live.305 And although she manifests her desire to “break the limits of this nation so narrow and terrible,” she also acknowledges herself as belonging to an Irish

305 “Conversazione con l’Autrice.” Ibid., p. 121.
“spiritual tradition.”\textsuperscript{306} This dialogue with tradition emerges quite clearly in a number of poems, including “The Soil-Map”/“La Mappa del Territorio,” where the poet sets up a subtle process of identification with Queen Medbh. Despite her extraordinary importance within the domain of Irish mythology, Medbh is more likely to be known by an Italian audience through subsequent literary re-elaborations. For instance, in the Italian context, Shakespeare’s elaboration of the queen as Mab is probably more recognisable than the Irish figure, as her evocation by Mercutio in Romeo and Juliet, being part of programmi ministeriali (national programmes) of English literature, is widely known amongst the Italian population. Hence, Vannini’s attempt to restore the Irish relevance of Medbh by making reference to her role in the great epic Táin Bó Cuailgne is undoubtedly praiseworthy, all the more so as the poem with its verse “You are never without one man in the shadow of another,” closely recalls a verse from “The Pillow Talk” prologue to the Táin: “I never had one man without another waiting in his shadow.” Equally important, Vannini gives an account of the famous “friendship of the thighs” promised by Medbh throughout the Táin in order to sanction alliances. In this way she enables even readers without a specialised interest in Irish medieval literature to capture an unmistakable reference to the old epic that a literal translation l’amicizia delle cosce would not have covered. In this case, the translator, far from giving an arbitrary interpretation of the poem, is providing some objective knowledge of a cultural universe with which her constructed reader is unacquainted. This allows the emergence of connotations that would have remained otherwise unappreciated by most Italian “imagined” readers. More often, mythological echoes meet contemporary socio-political issues as in the poem “The Dream-Language of Fergus”/“Il Sogno-Linguaggio di Fergus.” Here the name of the Irish legendary champion of the cycle of Cúchulainn, also famous from Yeats’ literary re-elaboration in the poem “Who Goes with Fergus,” becomes the name of an Irish baby who is learning to speak English. The introduction also stresses that Fergus is McGuckian’s mother’s maiden name, and, more importantly, the name of her son, to which the poem is dedicated. Although it is hardly conceivable that the poet would have assumed knowledge of such biographical data to enable an understanding of the poem, and the Italian translator is actually surpassing the limit of the poem’s autonomy by providing private information that cannot be considered part of the collective memory of a community, this “surplus” of mediation can be seen as

\textsuperscript{306} Ibid., pp. 122-3.
functional to the operation of rendering the “private” sphere intelligible to a foreign readership. Even though the “private” sphere is quintessentially what is not shared, it should be remembered that, through translation, the poem is moved to a different social context and the “terms and conditions” of the “private” sphere are changing accordingly. Family issues, such as the challenge of “raising children,” are differently understood by different communities. What is important for an understanding of the poem is not necessarily that McGuckian’s son is called Fergus, but that the poem is about an Irish baby who is learning to speak English, and not about an Italian baby, for whom such issues of language and identity do not exist to an equivalent degree. The theme of the poem springs from the private to touch on the collective: the painful awareness of the loss of identity linked to the loss of a language, mixed with the even more distressing thought that Irish is at risk of losing the semantic potential of a living language able to express the hectic complexity of the contemporary world. Consequently, this is what makes McGuckian’s poetry very difficult to export: the geopolitical fractures are reflected in human psychology and it is through the individual that the collective finds its expression. The surface of the poems may be occupied by the quiet voice of interiority, but this voice is deeply rooted in the need to continuously redefine a contested national identity.

Another poem where the domestic private dimension is intertwined with the official stories of the loud external reality is “Dovecote”/“Colombaia.” It deals with the personal experience of the re-definition of the self after pregnancy and giving birth simultaneously with the re-definition of the identity of the Catholic community after the hunger strikes of 1981. The historico-national coordinates are, therefore, extremely important to the general import of the poem. It follows that the Italian translator’s attempt to restore them may be considered once more pertinent. Slightly more questionable, however, is Vannini’s eagerness to provide a detailed, clear-cut explanation of the rich symbolism present in the poem: the doves as sacrificial victims of the political strategies of the country; the kimono as symbol of the self-punishing quality of the suicidal act; the bow as symbol of the female body that regains a straight shape after giving birth; the compound bow standing for the opposites of England/Ireland, North/South, Catholics/Protestants; and, the difficulty of reaching

unity due to excess rigidity. She rigorously applies the concept of harmony between opposites, drawn from Zen philosophy, for a thorough reading of the poem. This is one case in which Vannini, however well-informed, provides a pre-determined interpretation, which leaves very little space for any hermeneutic alternative.

This tendency to hyper-interpret is, at times, counterbalanced by a certain restraint in providing information which is not immediately relevant to her own interpretative lens, as in the brief mention that the collection *Shelmaier* (1998) was written on the occasion of the bicentenary of the 1978 rebellion without any further elucidation on what the rebellion was about, by whom it was led and how it ended. In this respect, the general delineation of the reader’s profile appears rather indistinct and perhaps inconsistent. Whereas Irish mythology is carefully mediated, knowledge of Irish history is, instead, assumed at a rather specialist level. Likewise, while the hermeneutic capacities in poetry reading are, on the one hand, seemingly questioned by the presence of very detailed readings of individual poems, on the other hand they are relied upon by the translator’s choice of pursuing a translation “la più letterale possibile, in modo da lasciare al lettore il compito di risolvere le molteplici aporie e gli enigmi delle poesie qui riportate”308 ‘as literal as possible; in this way the reader is left with the task of solving the numerous aporias and the riddles which are present in the poems here collected.’ This theoretical statement is clearly reflected in Vannini’s methodology, as her translations seek to adhere as closely as possible to the source texts. However, as it appeared from the discussion of Hutchinson’s poetry, perfect equivalence is very often a chimera and a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses entailed by this approach can be achieved only by means of a more detailed textual analysis of some of McGuckian’s poems and the corresponding Italian translations. The first passage to be considered is taken from the poem “Sky-Writing”/“Cielo-Scrittura:”

308 Introduzione. Ibid., p. 13.
Italian language and this partly undermines the whole idea of “literalness.” “Startled,” for instance, could be translated in a number of ways, of which the Italian spaventate reproduces only one of the many possibilities that the English term may have, namely “frightened.” By the same token, the word “vessel” in English can refer both to a “ship” or a “pot,” whereas in Italian there is no word that encompasses those two very different meanings. Consequently the translator is forced to opt for the single solution of vaso, a “vase,” or “pot.” In McGuckian’s poetry, meaning is not generally dictated by the internal coherence of the piece. Within the source text, there is no mention of “sails” or “plants” for instance, which would help to clarify the intended meaning of “vessel” in the poem and to guide the translator in her choice of either one or the others accepted meaning. In McGuckian’s poem, the vessel “holds” the personified “October dawns,” which are “startled” by its “restrictedness.” In the Italian translation, these dawns become “frightened by a restricted vase.” But, why not “amazed by a restricted boat,” a version which would still be faithful to the terminology employed in the source text?

The real question is whether the poetic value of the poem ultimately derives from one of those specific meanings or from the conscious ambiguity of the words and the scene they evoke. Even when a literal rendition is the stated intention of the translator, the process is not as straightforward as might be expected. The translation of the title of the poem, “Cielo-Scrittura,” eloquently underlines the translator’s efforts towards formal equivalence, yet it highlights its pitfalls as well. In Italian, in fact, there is no gerund form corresponding to the infinitive and the nominalisation of the verb at the same time. Therefore, the translator is obliged to make a choice between scrittura, the noun, and scrivere, the infinitive, and, maybe, in such an ambiguous expression, even scrivendo, the literal translation of the gerund form found in the English “I am writing,” io sto scrivendo. A further problem with such a short title is that the creation of compounds is rather uncommon in Italian. Italian is a language which necessitates the use of prepositions in order to define the dependency between two words. The simple juxtaposition of two nouns by a hyphen does not say anything about their relations, so that an expression like “Cielo-Scrittura” not only might mean scrittura nel cielo, cielo di scrittura, scrittura del cielo or whichever other more or less meaningful combination one may think of, but effectively does not mean anything at all. Being unable to provide in one expression the full range of meanings opened up by the English title, the translator opts for a solution that brings the experimentation with language a step further than the source text itself. She effectively substitutes a clear, grammatically correct
expression with an Italian neologism that at first glance lacks grammatical and semantic coherence.

Another case in which the experimentalism of the Italian version almost surpasses that of the original is in the closing stanza of “Captain Lavender:”

Emphasise your eyes. Be my flare-path, my uncold begetter, my air-minded bird-sense. 

Fa’ risaltare i tuoi occhi. Sii la mia pista illuminante, il mio non gelido agente generante, il mio uccello-senso passione per l’aria.

In the second line, the translator uses the strategy of maintaining the content of a neologism in the source text by a literal explication of its meaning, namely “uncold” becoming non gelido, “not cold,” or “not chilled.” Then the translator attempts to compensate for the alliteration and assonance of “emphasise your eyes,” which is lost in the Italian fa’ risaltare i tuoi occhi, with the curious translation gelido agente generante, which transforms “begetter” into a rather more complex “generating agent.” However, the real creative effort occurs in the last line. Here the imaginative, but rather straightforward, “air-minded bird-sense” becomes an Italian sentence where the literal translation of “bird-sense” functions as an adjective for the expression “passion for air,” which is meant to translate “air-minded.” As it stands, a line like il mio uccello-senso passione per l’aria sounds semantically awkward, yet it also shows the translator’s audaciousness in trying to mould the rather rigid Italian language into new shapes, which is after all what McGuckian, on many occasions, does with English. The reason why the Italian sentence is perceived as ungrammatical is because it apparently switches the syntactic functions of the source text terms and seems to create an adjective-plus-noun expression. Yet, in this case, the possessive “my” in Italian should be declined as feminine, since it directly refers to the feminine noun passione (la mia uccello-senso passione per l’aria). The actual translation, instead, presents a masculine declension, mio, which relates the possessive “my” directly to uccello-senso, which syntactically indicates that this is a noun as well. Overall then, the Italian sentence creates another juxtaposition of two nouns without any paratactic device connecting them, as in the title, and it is up to the reader to create the links necessary for this line to make sense. The fact that the rather enigmatic expression passione per l’aria was chosen as the title for the whole collection may be a way to hint at the hermetic qualities of the poems. Contrary to what happens with fiction then, exposing an absence of transparency is not necessarily treated as a deterrent, perhaps because ermetismo (hermetic poetry) is a
respected and well appreciated movement within the Italian poetic tradition that counts amongst its exponents the Nobel laureate Eugenio Montale. Once more then, textual evidences suggest that assumptions about the profile of readers of a specific genre play an important role in determining which translation strategy is adopted. Vannini attempts to circumvent the theoretical premise that it is impossible to create a text which develops and explicates the meaning of McGuckian’s poems without irretrievably changing them, by following as exactly as possible the *littera* of the source text. By maintaining the semantic and syntactic ambivalence of the original poem, the target text remains open to a number of interpretative solutions, some of which may match the source text. This approach also exposes the translator’s awareness that every minor divergence may cause a nuanced shift in meaning which can have important consequences for the reconstruction of meaning, or at least part of the meaning that might emerge from reading the source text. Yet, in actual fact, the only viable option for the translator cannot be to take no liberties at all, but rather as few liberties as possible. Differences of a terminological nature or in the diverse scope of syntactic manipulation allowed by the two languages, demand solutions that sometimes result in substantial changes. A final example from “The Over Mother”/“Fin Troppo Madre” should serve to sum up the main features of Vannini’s approach and the potential problems that may sometimes arise from it:

In the sealed hotel men are handled/
As if they were furniture, and passion/
Exhaust itself at the mouth. Play kisses/
Stir the circuits of the underloved body/
To an ever-resurrection, a never-had tenderness/
That dies inside me./
My cleverly dead and vertical audience,/
Words fly out from your climate of unexpectation/
In leaky, shallowed night letters –/
What you have spoken?

Nell’albergo sigillato gli uomini vengono maneggiati/Come fossero mobili, e la passione si esaurisce/In bocca. I giochi di baci stimolano/
I circuiti del corpo poco-amato verso una/ Eterna-resurrezione una mai-avuta dolcezza/
Che muore dentro di me./
Mio pubblico, intelligentemente estinto e verticale,/
Le parole volano via da questo clima di non aspettative/In colanti, vacue lettere notturne/
- quale tu ha parlato? -

Although structural differences in the two languages make an identical distribution of the verses impossible, the tendency is still clearly to create a gloss on the source text that once more can be followed almost word for word. Yet again the problem is with the failed equivalence of some of these words. The substitution of “underloved” with *poco-amato* (“little loved,” in the sense of “not much loved”), rather than the more accurate *sottoamato*, for instance, denies a possible parallelism between men and goods, which
would work quite well in Italian, where the adjective *sottocosto*, underpriced, describes items that are sold at prices lower than their original value. Also, the audience “cleverly dead and vertical” of the source text becomes *intelligemente estinto e verticale*, where the choice of “extinct” rather than “dead” denies the possibility suggested by “cleverly dead” that they had deliberately “desensitised themselves,” or their feelings. Moreover, it fails to function as a natural juxtaposition to the “ever-resurrection” of the previous stanza. This, together with the mention of “death” in the morbid climate of unspoken sex pervading the poem, may offer an indirect reference to “orgasm” in its figurative expression of “the little death.”

The suppression of “your,” referring to the “climate of unexpectation,” is also a minor, but nonetheless substantial, departure from the source text. It becomes in Italian the impersonal *clima di non aspettative* where, once again, the neologism “unexpectation” is rendered by the negation of its positive correspondent “not expectations.” The failure to link the attitude of “unexpectation” directly to the “you” of the poem — the “cleverly dead and vertical” audience addressed in this stanza — breaks the internal continuity of the discourse, which ends up with a direct question to this “you-figure,” so well-determined in its vagueness. This alteration may result in a further hindrance for the Italian reader in figuring out the meaning of a poem which is so opaque. Once more, the syntactic deviations from the standard are tentatively reproduced by Vannini in the few hyphenated neologisms (*poco-amato, eterna-resurrezione, mai-avuta*), but this time they maintain an immediate intelligibility in Italian as well. This is because they merely consist in linking together with a single word the two components of adjective-noun which would naturally follow each other in any case. The fact that, in this case, the Italian version does not quite reach McGuckian’s audaciousness as far as syntactic experimentation is concerned is also confirmed by the decision not to follow the Irish poet in her use of the adjective “shallow” in a newly coined “dynamic” version: “shallowised.” Whereas, in English, the strain on the grammar, besides attracting attention to the element, can enhance its meaning, in Italian a similar procedure would probably only further obscure the sense. The English suffix “-ised” is often linked to the process of “having been rendered,” as in *modernised, standardised, polarised*, so that quite intuitively it is possible to surmise from the context that the “shallowised night letters” have been rendered shallow. Although, grammatically, there is an Italian correspondence in the suffix *-izzato*, a
different sensibility towards language malleability would make the Italian *vacuizzate* much stronger than in the source text, so that Vannini’s choice to play down experimentalism and opt for the simple adjective *vacue* actually guarantees a more elegant translation.

In any event, particular merits or faults in single translations, as well as the vagueness with which the reader’s profile seems to be at times delineated, when taken as isolated instances are not sufficient factors to gauge the success of the translation strategy. As for Hutchinson’s translations, the balance that makes the collection successful or not, has to be sought in the whole structure of the volume rather than in the individual components, which are autonomous but interdependent as well. From this perspective, every paratextual element has to be seen as a way of serving the choice of adopting a literal rendition of the source texts as the preferred translation strategy. Hence, the assessment of textual translations decontextualised from the whole project would give an unfair account of the Italian edition, since the rich introduction, suggesting critical perspectives that may be successfully applied to the poems, makes up for the partial “plainness” of the unmediated literal translations, which, at a first glance, plainly reproduce the “non-sense” of the original. This is a methodology consciously adopted by the translator, as it appears clear in the introduction, where Vannini acknowledges that in McGuckian’s poetry “[…] la complessa ambiguità simbolica e semantica delle sue immagini dà a ciascun lettore un ampio margine di libertà nell’interpretazione dei suoi versi” ‘the complex symbolic and semantic ambiguity of its images allow each reader an ample margin of freedom in the interpretation of her verses.’ With this recognition of the readers’ freedom of engagement as a distinctive feature of McGuckian’s poetry, the translator attempts to achieve the same in her translations by trying to reproduce as faithfully as possible the style of the source text. Such freedom is further enhanced by the absence of endnotes, the role of which is to channel the hermeneutic endeavour by providing specific information. At the same time, though, some guidance is provided through the translator’s critical insights in the introduction in order to achieve a more complete perspective.

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309 Introduzione. Ibid., p. 12.
With this in mind, it should be possible to counter Serpillo’s statement that giving preliminary insights into poems composing a collection addressing a foreign readership may result in it being “reductive and arbitrary.” Within the model of mediation illustrated here, in fact, the interpretative tools provided by forewords or introductions constitute essential components of the translation strategy. As far as *Passione per l’Aria* is concerned, moreover, Vannini’s alleged “arbitrariness” is mitigated by the fact that she does not present her solutions as holding absolute validity. Not only is an extensive critical bibliography provided at the end of the volume, but also a comparison with further readings of some of the poems commented upon is recommended in the introduction itself, where the chapter “Medbh McGuckian: The Intimate Sphere,” in the volume *Improprieties* by Clare Wills, is quoted in a note to the main text. The legitimacy of putting forward interpretative patterns is validated as well by the final interview with McGuckian. In it the poet unreservedly provides interpretative solutions for the poems “Elegy for an Irish Speaker,” “Captain Lavander,” “Good Friday 1995” and “Shannon’s Recovery.” In this way, McGuckian indicates that her pursuit of elusiveness of meaning is not intended as a deliberate flight from fixed interpretations. The interview, besides providing some personal or general information, also shows how small linguistic subtleties can carry wider resonances of long processes, attitudes to life or even judgments on history, as in the last stanza of “Shannon’s Recovery”:

And welcome back  
Ourselves, our own almost,  
the coldness of my mouth now.

E un felice ritorno  
a noi stessi, quasi a noi stessi,  
al gelo della mia bocca ora.

The poet underlines how “ourselves” may function as a reference to Sinn Féin, of which it is a direct translation, but, more importantly, how the following phrase, “our own almost,” encapsulates the poet’s judgment on Sinn Féin’s policy, something that did not really work but that “almost” made sense, and almost made Ireland “its own” by aspiring to independence. Without the clarification provided in the interview, such an allusion would have been almost impossible to recover, as there is little that the translation proper can do to help the cause. The “welcome back” is substituted with a wish of “safe home to ourselves, almost to ourselves,” which loses the idea of “ourselves almost belonging to ourselves” to which the source text is alluding.310 Yet

this cannot be taken as a mark of a “poor translation” as it is not the task of the target text alone to reproduce the aesthetic qualities and density of meaning of the poem.

As in the case of Hutchinson, the interview restores an approach that is respectful of the meaning of the source text. Hence the accomplishment of the edition can be seen again as reaching towards a Third Space at least, as with McGuckian’s poetry it is very difficult to find the right balance between hyper-interpretation and failure to provide the necessary coordinates to allow readers any personal interaction with her work. With the complexity of meaning at play the limitation of the Italian edition is not that the translator tried to excavate too deeply into some of the poems, but rather that she did not explore some others enough. Yet she was probably relying on the rather reasonable assumption that once the main themes of the poems have been explored they become easier to identify if they recur in other poems.

The real key for the appreciation of McGuckian’s poetry is probably to encourage readers to embrace the poems as an instrument to penetrate the deepest, more complex layers of reality, for which the syntax and semantics of ordinary language prove inadequate. In this sense, the Italian edition does not fall too short: the interpretation of chosen poems can show the way in which to handle those intricate pieces of art. At the same time, the literalness of the translations preserves the reader’s liberty to engage personally with the texts and their hermeneutic value.

The third author who has been chosen for an in-depth examination of the Italian translation of his work is Derek Mahon, whose poems were also collected by Trauben in 2000, under the title L’Ultimo Re del Fuoco. The format of this edition is very much like the two volumes previously analysed, and the translations presented are again assessed by Serpillo in his review of the series “Poesia irlandese.” Some consideration of the review will be incorporated into the present critique of the volume, although the conclusions reached are fundamentally different. First of all, it is possible to note that, while Serpillo expresses satisfaction with one of the two translators, Giovanni Pillonca, he is less enthusiastic about Roberto Bertoni’s effort. However, what is of real interest is the reasons he gives for this judgment: the translations by the former are deemed
faithful and reproduce the musicality and rhythm of the source text, those by the latter are held to be plain and arbitrary at times.311

Such a neat distinction between the two strategies is difficult to sustain. Pillonca, for instance, highly praised by Serpillo, displays a certain degree of arbitrariness in the syntactic and terminological manipulation of the following lines in “Ovid in Tomis”/“Ovidio a Tomis:”

Six years now
Since my relegation
To this town
By the late Augustus.

Sono trascorsi sei anni
da quando Augusto buonanima
mi regolò
in questa città.312

Firstly, the components of the sentence are interchanged without any apparent motivation, since the Italian construction would not require them to be anchored in a specific position, and the order of the source text could have been followed without any strain: sono trascorsi sei anni/ da quando fui relegato/ in questa città/ da Augusto buonanima. The solution adopted by Pillonca distances the Italian structure from the original without any apparent benefit. Turning Augustus into the agent, rather than the narrating self as in the source text, causes a shift in the focus of attention. The meaning is additionally altered by the choice of Augusto buonanima, as the Italian buonanima is a fairly archaic expression usually reserved for relatives and friends as it implies some affection for the deceased. For this reason, it seems a fairly inappropriate choice for the translation of “the late August,” who is the person responsible for the relegatio of Ovid, the narrating voice of the poem.313

The general impression is that both translators alternate between more productive solutions and less successful ones, and the higher degree of appreciation accorded to Pillonca’s translations is due to his numerous, subtle attempts to bring the poetic qualities of the text closer to Italian taste. Interestingly, this further exposes some of the more established criteria for the evaluation of poetry in Italy. For instance, in the

311 Bertoni e Pillonca sono separate da una diversa sensibilità linguistica, che rende sostanzialmente piatte e talvolta arbitrarie le traduzioni del primo, che soffrono nel confronto con quelle di Pillonca, che a un maggior rispetto del testo originale unisce un più fine senso della musicalità e del ritmo della parola.” Serpillo, Il Tolomeo, p. 142.
first poem translated, “Spring in Belfast”/“Primavera a Belfast,” the devices of parallelism and repetition displayed by the source text in the closing lines are substituted, or rather enhanced, by an enjambment and a chiasm, two rhetorical figures that are common in Italian by virtue of its longer syntactic structures and the higher degree of mobility of adjectives. The stylistic difference is evident through a simple comparison:

[…] should engage more than my casual interest./
Exact more interest than my casual pity.

The repetition remains for the words *interesse* e *fortuito*, but the latter, rather than keeping the same position in both lines, is moved in order to create a figure of speech known as *chiasmo* that is widely used in Italian poetry. The term, whose Greek root means “cross,” refers to the structure formed by two correlated words that occupy a specular position in two consecutive lines of poetry. In the Italian translation, this effect is achieved through the adjective *fortuito/a*, as in the preceding line is placed in attributive position after the noun, whereas in the following line the attribute antecedes the noun.

Also, Pillonca’s tendency to enhance the register to a more formal level could be seen as a stylistic choice intended to meet the conventions of Italian poetic tastes, as the current inclination in Italy is still very much shaped around the poetic canon of the Twentieth century. This leaves little room for the “colloquial,” a style which has been explored in more contemporary forms of poetry. In “Hunger”/“Fame,” for instance, “four sub-zero nights and days” becomes *quattro notti glaciali*, where the word *glaciali* – more appropriate to a literary register – is preferred to what would have been the conversational correspondent *sottozero*, a more literal translation of the source text. The contention is certainly not that this strategy should be disparaged, but rather that the opposite approach should not be dismissed *a priori* as unacceptable. That is the case with Bertoni who, in most cases, chooses not to reproduce domestic stylistic features in his translation. Indeed, Pillonca’s translations display some very interesting solutions. For instance, he manages to bring the necessary degree of acculturation when necessary.

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314 “Spring in Belfast”/“Primavera a Belfast.” Ibid., pp. 34-5.
315 “Hunger”/“Fame.” Ibid., pp. 84-5.
without ever sliding into straightforward, unjustified domestication. An example that shows the suitability of the choices operated by Pillonca in order to convey the actual meaning implied by the source text and adapting it to the target readers’ sensibility at the same time is to be found in the poem “The Forger”/“Il Falsario.” Here the generic term “potage” is turned into the rather specific _piatto di lenticchie_, a lentil stew, thereby establishing a hyponymous relationship to the source text. However, upon close inspection, the Italian translation presents the cultural equivalent of the English idiomatic expression “mess of potage,” meaning “something of little value,” normally associated with the Biblical episode of Esau selling his birthright to his brother Esau. The most literal Italian translation of “potage,” _zuppa_, basically “soup,” would have no such connotations. _Piatto di lenticchie_, therefore, is a more suitable translation.316

Bertoni’s style is more eclectic and unpredictable. Sometimes he “plays the register up.” In “Smoke”/“Fumo,” for instance, he prefers _rientrato da New York incolume_ to the more informal _sano e salvo_, which the source text’s “safe home” would more closely recall.317 However, the level of formality he chooses is, on many occasions, more technical than aesthetic, as in the case of “Birdlife,” a title that he renders through the scientific term “Avifauna,” a word usually restricted to manuals of zoology which the average Italian reader may very well encounter here for the first time. At other times, Bertoni shows a propensity to render as colloquial expressions phrases that are neutral in the source. This is the case with _un’idea tutta tua del bello_ as a translation for “your own idea of the beautiful,”318 in the poem “A Bangor requiem”/“Requiem di Bangor.” The same expression could have been rendered more formally as _una tua propria idea del bello_. An even greater playfulness with the register is to be found in the poem “Tithonus” where the translator, besides doing his best to maintain the short-versed, fast-paced structure of the original, mixes colloquial expressions like _non sarà mica vero, macché or rombavano via_ with a word like _ridda_, for instance, a rare synonym for “riot” that is hardly ever used in Italian.

A closer look at “Beauty and the Beast”/“La Bella e la Bestia” may serve to explain the logic behind Bertoni’s strategy. In this poem, the colloquial terminology

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317 “Smoke”?“Fumo.” Ibid., pp. 144-5.
318 “Bangor Requiem”/”Requiem di Bangor.” Ibid., pp. 150-1.
displayed in the translation may sound almost inappropriate in a poetic context. Yet, by different means, it achieves an effect that is fairly close to the hectic language of Mahon’s postmodern poem: that of shocking the reader by virtue of its quirkiness. The strange image of “the huge gorilla,” for instance, becomes *il gorillone*, a rendition which, by employing the augmentative suffix –one, acquires an almost childish dimension. The expression could have been more literally and naturally rendered as *l’enorme gorilla*, yet his unusual choice is actually coherent with a poem that carries the title of a fairytale. Similarly *sempre arzilla*, always sprightly, translates the less flamboyant expression “hanging in there” – referring to actress Vina Fay Wray in her nineties – which again brings an almost cartoonish touch to the poem. These notes are even more striking because the register of some of the formal expressions in the source are enhanced in the translation, as the following:

The little bi-planes come gunning for him now/
and Kong, by Jove, knock one of them out of the sky/
with a hairy hand. They wear him out, of course./
and he falls to extinction among the crowds below.

…Ora arrivano i piccoli biplani a bersagliarlo:/
per Giove!, Kong ne spazza uno dal cielo./
affibbiandogli una zampata pelosa.
Spezzano la sua resistenza,/ certo, lui cade, si estingue in mezzo alla folla là sotto.319

Whereas the English text keeps a smooth colloquialism throughout the stanza and finally culminates in the simple poetic image of the last line, when the beast “falls to extinction among the crowds below,” the Italian version swings from very informal expressions like *spazza*, *affibbiare* and *zampata* to the epic-sounding sentence “spezzano la sua resistenza” ‘they broke his resistance,’ to finish up in the linguistic anti-climax of the last line, “he falls, and got extinct in the middle of the crowd below.” The failure of this last line to reproduce the condensation of meaning in the source text is due to the lack of an equivalent expression in Italian to convey the idea of falling, dying and disappearing at the same time. The translation, therefore, needs to expand the single clause “falls to extinction” in two coordinate sentences to much weaker effect. Yet, overall, the apparently bizarre quality of the Italian translation is an attempt to create a sense of polylingualism which is indeed the hallmark of the source text. To judge it according to conventional aesthetic standards means one failing to see the original contribution that the translation of Mahon’s poetry can bring to the Italian

319 Ibid., pp.142-3.
literary scene. Bertoni’s translation has the traits of hybridity: something that is shocking before being beautiful but that, once accepted, can be much more enriching than translations that refuse to challenge conventions. Indeed, the Third Space can be reached only by breaking free from the boundaries of established canons.

In this light, one might question Serpillo’s verdict, as it does not seem to take into account the numerous variants at play in the translation of poetry. For instance, Serpillo points out the total loss of the rhythmical pattern in the Italian version of “The Dawn Circus”/“Coro all’Alba,” which is rendered, according to him, in unnecessarily long lines.\(^\text{320}\) Yet the fact that the Italian language strives to express concepts in ways so concise as English does can be noted in several examples of translation, and it seems unfair to indicate this as an exceptional fault. The failure to keep the same length of the lines in the translated version of a poem should not be criticised \(a\) \(p\)riori, that is, without adequately assessing the pros and cons of the translation choices made. The impression given is that in Bertoni’s translation of “The Dawn Chorus,” the rhythmical pattern has been sacrificed for clarity of meaning, probably to compensate for the limited number of endnotes dealing with specific aspects of each poem, a feature of the edition that has also been noted by Serpillo in his review. This is most likely due to the fact that the encyclopaedic range of material touched on by the thirty poems translated for the Italian edition is so vast that glossing these through endnotes would have required more space than the actual translations. Moreover, on closer analysis, Bertoni’s translating choices appear far from arbitrary: the translation of “The Dawn Chorus”/“Coro all’Alba” displays an exact reproduction of the repetitions in exactly the same positions as they appear in the original. And, although the rhyming between “miss” and “this” is lost due to their translation as rimpianto and questo/a, their obsessive recurrence at the end of the verse is maintained by exerting some pressures on the Italian syntax. This may be seen as an attempt to recover some of the poetic quality of the source text, as does the solitary rhyme between rimpianto/infranto.\(^\text{321}\)

\(^{320}\) Cf. “[...] in ‘The Dawn Chorus’ il gioco, l’intricci delle rime si perde del tutto e i versi sono lunghissimi a paragone di quelli dell’originale.” Serpillo, Il Tolomeo, p. 142.

Another translation displaying similar features, also decried by Serpillo, is “Global Village”/“Villaggio globale,” where the end rhymes are suppressed by the translation in favour of a more literal, prosaic rendition.\(^\text{323}\) When the linguistic subtleties of the original cannot be captured in an Italian equivalent, Bertoni makes the straightforward choice of expanding the Italian in order to incorporate those meanings, which may upset the balance of the poem, but guarantees the readers’ comprehension of certain nuances in the content. For instance, in “Smoke”/“Fumo,” a condensed expression like “Bone-idle” is expanded to o\(z\)ioso fino al midollo ‘idle till the [bone] marrow.’ or the ambiguous expression “blue in the face” is rendered unusually with blu (\(d\)i tristezza) in viso, ‘blue (of sadness) in the face.’ Serpillo’s review condemns the parenthetical addition because it “lacks a function,” but Bertoni is quite clearly attempting to suggest the possible alternative meaning of the English word “blue” to readers who may be unaware of it. By the same token, there is no appreciation for Bertoni’s practice of explicitation, also to be found in the poem’s translation. “Twisted ministers” becomes in Italian perversi ministri (\(d\)i Dio), as Bertoni adds the parenthetical “of God” in order to specify that Mahon is talking about priests. After all, in the Italian context, ministri would be more readily associated with politicians, especially because it appears alongside “thick industrials,” and this combination has often dominated the headlines of Italian newspapers reporting news of corruption.

Although it is true that the change of rhythm may compromise the poetic effect of some pieces, the reviewer’s attitude towards Bertoni’s translations appears far too categorical. Serpillo wonders, for instance, whether the translator is familiar with the rhetorical figure of synecdoche because his translation un or\(n\)amento con l’ideogramma a forma di sola sulla porta e sul cancello specifies that the ideogram is “an ornament,” where the source text simply states: “the sunburst ideogram on door and gate.” In the

\(^{322}\) Ibid. (emphasis mine)

\(^{323}\) “Global Village”/“Villaggio Globale.” Ibid., 132-3.

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view proposed by this study, however, it is possible to defend Bertoni’s strategy of privileging the content and providing translation which are glosses, plus additional clarifications, especially so as the Italian edition includes all the source texts as well. As the source texts are in English, it is legitimate to presume a level of knowledge on the readers’ part which should allow a reasonable appreciation of the rhythmical patterns of the source text. The straightforward dismissal of Bertoni’s strategy as a “failed” translation implies a belief that the priority of every translation should be an aesthetically pleasing outcome, even if this would imply a creative appropriation and a substantial re-elaboration of the source text. Bertoni’s premise is different: he acknowledges the dependency of his own work on the aesthetics of the source text. He practices a translation strategy that does not want to be an “appropriation” or a substitute for the source, as often happens when the role of translator is taken up by another poet rather than a scholar. Bertoni does not use Mahon as the source of inspiration to create new poetry in Italian: he is acting as mediator between Mahon’s work and the Italian audience. He does not try to achieve equally accomplished final products, but rather to “use” his Italian translations in the best way possible to make accessible and to highlight the significance of the source texts for the benefit of a new readership. Hence, the translation becomes indissolubly linked to its source text. In this sense, the translation method practiced by Bertoni embodies an ideal pursuit of a symbiotic relationship between source and target culture as posited by the concept of Third Space. It is another example of how this notion, besides being an abstract goal of the theoretical exploration of translation as an ontological process, can become relevant in assessing practical translation strategies. A criticism, such as that articulated by Serpillo, seems to miss the strength of the collection as a whole, which largely lies in the presence of the source texts and the support given by the critical apparatus. If Bertoni’s translations were displayed in the context of a “cheap” poetry edition, with no introduction and no source texts, with the target texts left to stand and to “speak” for themselves, then they might indeed be weak by virtue of the lack of poetic appeal of the target texts alone. Yet, if restored to the auxiliary position that the translations occupy within the editions by Trauben, then Bertoni’s endeavour is consistent with the publisher’s policy of enriching not only the aesthetic sensibility of the imagined readers, but also the knowledge of the linguistic and cultural universe where the poetry is rooted.
As with Hutchinson and McGuckian, Bertoni and Pillonca provide two robust introductions, which cover the themes with which Mahon engages most frequently and focuses on those aspects that are crucial to a cross-cultural understanding, such as the relationship between the poet and his community. Some elements of Irishness may at times be covered in rather conventional, and perhaps, more romantic terms, such as the role of poetry in *una società lacerata dalle divisioni e dal conflitto* ‘a society torn apart by divisions and conflict.’ Yet this basic and partly exoticised gaze is later articulated in more complex terms that are directly related to Mahon’s poetic production. For instance, commenting on “The Snow Party,” the third collection included in *Poems*, Pillonca notes how the title itself functions as the evocation of a “somewhere else” which transcends the contingent circumstances of reality. The socio-political circumstances of the North, therefore, are set as an important background to the poetry itself. More specifically, Pillonca juxtaposes the “external violence” of the conflict with what he calls the “internal violence” that the poet has to exert in order to release the fictional worlds of his poetry, and he presents the struggle to find poetic inspiration when historical events are so intractable as a theme underpinning the whole collection.

It would appear sensible, in this instance, to make a brief allusion to the notion of the “fifth province” famously articulated by Field Day, yet its absence might be justified by the fact that the work of Field Day, so highly established within an Anglophone academic environment, is actually not established at all in Italian academic discourse. Recalling it in the introduction to the Italian edition then, would have possibly complicated, rather than clarified the matter. By and large, the impression given is that references to the Irish literary scene are selected with the intention of falling within the competency assumed for an educated Italian reader. For instance, as might be expected, short digressions on Joyce and Beckett are provided in the introduction, but there is also mention of Banville. The fact that Banville’s opinion is used as a sort of authoritative voice to sanction the merit of Mahon – thanks to the writer’s unreserved praise for the poem “A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford,” which he

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324 Pillonca, Giovanni. “Una Luce per Trasformare il Mondo:’ Dagli Esordi ai Selected Poems.” Ibid., p. 10.
325 Ibid.
326 “[...] Il titolo rimanda a un sogno di un altrove non condizionato dalla pressione di una violenza esterna così inintrattabile da minacciare constantemente quella violenza interna che il poeta deve esercitare per produrre le sue supreme finzioni.” Ibid., p. 11.
defined as the most beautiful Irish poem written after Yeats died – suggests a certain “interconnection” between the works of Irish literature published in Italy. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Banville is quite widely published in Italy, and his mention here creates the impression of “Irish literature in Italian” as a sort of subcategory for the whole of Irish literature, which has an autonomous existence in the hybridised realm of the Third Space, animated by a distinctive dialogue that has little to do with Irish Literature or Italian Literature per se.

Another recurring presence in international discourses on Irish literature is Heaney, whose commentary is also used to illuminate the poem “A disused shed in Co. Wexford.” Heaney emphasises the universal by interpreting the community with which the poet is engaging in the archetypal terms of a “lost tribe.” The strict interconnectivity between local and universal, between Irish and European dimensions, past and present, is characteristic of a number of Mahon’s poems. This is clearly exemplified by “Death and the Sun”/“La Morte e il Sole,” a poem which, through Camus’ interpretation of the myth of Sisyphus, allows the development of a comparison with the unemployed in modern Belfast. The complexity of Mahon’s poetry, however, paradoxically makes it more accessible to Italian readers, since it draws upon a number of European topoi which are part of the collective cultural repository of the Italian educated class. Amongst the names mentioned as influences are Ovid, Rimbaud, De Quincey, Seferis, Malcom Lowry, Ezra Pound, Albert Camus, Edvard Munch, Van Gogh and Paolo Uccello. This list evokes an eclectic variety of traditions, from the Latin and the French to the Modernist and the Impressionist movements, which are all prominent in the Western cultural traditions to which Italy belongs. These influences are often made explicit in the poems by the title itself, an opening quotation, or a dedication, which is possibly the reason why the translators opted to rely on the reader’s understanding without providing dedicated notes for each poem.

Nevertheless, leaving the responsibility of identifying every kind of explicit reference, be it Irish or international, to the readers can be a rather controversial policy, since this “explicitness” is at times dubious. Whether the decision to leave it unexplained is, indeed, dictated by a superior trust in the reader’s abilities, or rather by

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327 Ibid., p. 11.
resignation that the shift toward a new sensibility entails the loss of some information, is impossible to say with any certainty. After all, if a reference is unknown to the reader, it might be superfluous to stress it, as its relevance in the context would probably be missed anyway. The potential constellations of linguistic and cultural items that can be recognised and appreciated by each reader are infinite and, therefore, impossible either to be fully predicted, or specifically catered for, by the translator. Eventually, the actual number of readers whose competence is met by the translation choices and those for whom some of the material remains obscure is impossible to determine. Amongst the allusions left unaltered in their ambiguity is the title “Exit Molloy”/?“Molloy Esce di Scena:” here no hint is given of a possible reference to the Beckettian figure of the Trilogy. Similarly, there is no mention that the title “Hunger” corresponds to that of an important novel by the Danish writer Knut Hamsun, one piece of information that could have been quite important, since the dedication of the poem to Paul Durcan and the absence of any direct clue to Hamsun may render this reference quite difficult to retrieve. And yet, to what extent is the retrieval of this information really vital to the appreciation of the poem? The endnote to “Hunger,” rather than explaining this quotation in the title, invites the reader to recognise a subtle allusion to a verse of the poem “The Choice” by Yeats, which is, after all consistent with the publisher’s policy to emphasise the Irish dimension of the poetry for a readership with an interest and some kind of background in the area. Nevertheless, even if information about the Irish background of the poems is indeed provided, this strategy is applied in a rather inconsistent way. For instance, the Yeatsian echoes of a line like “Oh, I can love you now that you’re dead and done” in “A Bangor Requiem”/?“Requiem di Bangor” are left unannounced, whereas the link with St. John’s gospel is explored. The line “to the many mansions in your mother’s house”328 is openly linked to the famous Biblical line “in my father’s house are many mansions,” which it clearly recalls. Equally incongruous is the provision of information in the poem “Achill” about the geographical location of the small island and the explanation for currachs, a term referring to the type of boats used in the region, when no mention is made of the rich tradition that the word aisling evokes when it appears in “Derry Morning”/?“Mattino a Derry.”

Overall the constructed reader embedded in Bertoni and Pillonca’s texts seems to be one with an extremely detailed profile, as they act as if knowing exactly what needs or does not need explanation, or else, the translators’ actions may be the answer to a very blurred idea of what the “imagined” reader will be. This precision, or perhaps instability, of the readers’ profile is confirmed by the endnote to “A Bangor requiem”/“Requiem di Bangor.” In the poem, the word “Republic” has two very different connotations. The first time it appears is quite clearly referring to the title of the work of Plato, whereas in the last stanza, more crucially, it refers to the Irish Republic, assuming its existence in opposition to the small “kingdom” of the North, in which the first part of the poem is located. Curiously, the Italian translation chooses to develop the first occurrence as la Repubblica di Platone, although the reference to the “cave” and a previous mention of Plato himself might have possibly been enough for educated Italian readers to make the connection, as Plato’s Republic is included in the educational programmes of Italian gymnasia. On the contrary, no explanation whatsoever accompanies the second translation of repubblica, even though the word in Italian is used in a very neutral way to describe the political organisation of a country and is, in no way, associated with the Republic of Ireland. For this reason, it would seem debatable whether this exact connotation could be recovered by the reader. And yet, this is a collection of Irish poetry, and it seems reasonable to rely on the readers’ ability to grasp the connotations arising from a previous knowledge, or even fondness, of Ireland.

The reality is that, although it is very clear that the translators strive to mediate the material, it is hard to confine this act of mediation within specific, clear-cut boundaries. Sometimes notions belonging to the broad field of “general knowledge” are clarified, at other times the explanations relate to relatively basic facts of Irish history and culture, such as endnotes on the date of the Battle of the Boyne or even the meaning of the acronym RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary). All in all, it is quite difficult to find a clear logic behind what is included and what is excluded from the endnotes. A certain eagerness to mediate those aspects which are not immediately related to the discourse of Irishness is displayed in the endnote dedicated to the explanation of the linguistic complexities and slang expressions featuring in the poem “Alien Nation”/“Nazione Aliena,” which deals in colourful postmodern terms with the issue of homelessness in New York.
The endnote serves to clarify single linguistic choices, like providing Italian alternatives for “gotham,” which is left unaltered in the target text, or explanations for other expressions that are either not translated at all or transposed into a domesticated Italian version – like *negri spregevoli* for “BAAAD niggaz.” The introductions, however, ultimately remain the core of the interpretative framework that sustains Mahon’s volume, and, as with the other poetry editions reviewed so far, they play a vital role in setting it aside from the pseudo-transparent trends ruling most translations within the fiction domain. By the same token, the scope for creating a Third Space has to be found also in the introductions and other paratextual elements. Bertoni’s introduction, rather than being an attempt to set the basis for a fuller comprehension of the published poems, is conceived as a general assessment of Mahon’s work, in the sense that it transcends the domain of the poems contained in the Italian collection. For instance, the translator is keen to highlight the poet’s ironic attitude to the “new world order,” not only by engaging from a rather broad perspective with the themes of alienation, exploitation, technological fetishism, virtual reality and the subsequent human detachment from an authentic contact with nature and history, but also by relating it to specific poems which are not present in the Italian selection. He mentions *The Hudson Letter*, for instance, a collection which deals with American socio-economic policies and which was translated by Bertoni himself for another publisher in 2003. Likewise he recalls “The Yellow Book,” a poem concerned with the “tourist age” and the “economic development” of Ireland, which gives him the opportunity to stress the nostalgia of the narrating voice for the condition preceding the Irish economic boom of the nineteen nineties. The complete picture of Mahon’s achievement also includes a commentary on the more recent developments in his poetry, which tends more and more to become like

Ibid., p. 136-7.
the world as Mahon describes it: “a forest of intertextuality,” but which also seems to reconcile at least with human subjectivity, if not with society.

Bertoni’s wide-ranging approach, besides giving a vivid impression of the general concerns animating Mahon’s poetry, also gives him the opportunity to comment on the general features of Mahon’s poetic style that are to be found in the poems present in the Italian collection as well. On the one hand, Mahon mocks the postmodern pastiches of writing forms and modalities that lack content and purpose, on the other he displays some cultural stances which are typically associated with postmodernity. More importantly, though, Bertoni’s insistence on Mahon’s polemical attitude towards the dehumanising aspects of postmodernity can be seen as a careful construction of a proper reception for “The Last of the Fire Kings,” the poem that gives the title to the Italian collection. Here Mahon openly exposes his willingness to “break with tradition,” something that was perceived as “heretic” when the poem first appeared in Ireland. Most of the “committed” poetry of the late 1960s and early 1970s, especially when rooted in the North of Ireland, consciously focused on local rather than cosmopolitan aspects of Irish culture. Nowadays, however, the “pioneering” postmodern attitude which caused the poem’s initial rejection has been accepted as the foundation of a new critical condition more and more concerned with the global, existential dimension of violence and alienation.

The density of these introductory pages is confirmed by the following five pages of bibliography, which includes articles, essays and reviews by international and Italian scholars, and confirms this endeavour as one undertaken with the maximum commitment and the highest respect for the poetic work presented and represented by the Italian collection. Moreover, the broader perspective from which Bertoni introduces Mahon as an author allows his poetic contribution in general, and not only the

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331 Ibid., p. 25.
333 “Last of the fire kings, I shall/ Break with tradition and/ Die by my own hand/ Rather than perpetuate/ The barbarous cycle.” Ibid., p. 50.
334 “La denuncia della violenza del Nord Irlanda, attuata tramite una presa di distanza asserita da Mahon in ‘The Last of the Fire Kings’ con l’immagine del soggetto poetante come ‘ultimo re del fuoco’ che avrebbe dato ‘un taglio alla tradizione,’ parve eretica a suo tempo rispetto alla poesie irlandese di impegno, mentre ormai si qualifica come punto di partenza dell’odierna concezione critica, ampia e sofferta, della violenza e dell’alienazione su scala planetaria.” Ibid., p. 25.
necessarily limited selection of works translated into Italian, to become part of that virtual space of “Irish literature in Italian” that encompasses the knowledge of Irish literature accessible to a reader approaching it through the medium of the Italian language. The practical utility of such efforts of translation is somewhat undermined by their nature. The reason why these editions of Irish poetry are praised is the very reason that might alienate a wider audience and cause them to be perceived as scholarly exercises for other scholars to read. The “elitarian” production which characterises these editions of Irish poetry corroborates this thesis. Ultimately the most thorough and commendable translations, which could potentially open up a Third Space, are those most likely to have poor potential for distribution. This consideration captures the double-edged nature of mediation and, essentially, what makes it problematic within a market-driven publishing environment. At the same time, it sustains an understanding of poetry compatible with Pierre Bourdieu’s “disinterested activity par excellence,” surviving not on economic, but rather “charismatic legitimation.”

CONCLUSIONS

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.

Venuti 2011

In conclusion, despite some divergences, the policies informing the translation of poems are broadly the same. Notwithstanding the exceptionality of some of the circumstances behind Trauben’s commitment to Irish poetry, the strategy adopted seems to be that of “magnifying” characteristics which are common to most Italian editions of Irish poetry. The presence of an introduction, afterword and endnotes is the norm in poetry rather than the exception. In some instances the choice of the material is entirely left to the translators, and the role of the publisher is rather that of approving proposals that are deemed relevant and making their actual publication possible. In these cases, especially for smaller publishers, the typical translator maintains a higher level of

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personal agency in respect to their colleagues’ working on commission for the big corporations. And generally s/he seems to play a crucial role both in the selection of the author to be translated and the shape of the Italian end product. For this reason, a varying degree of competence in Irish culture is normally met by translators of poetry, even when they do not occupy a lecturing position or publish their translation in an academic journal.

Overall, despite the marked variations in format and presentation between different publishers, there is an overarching scheme that is followed even with publications of poetry that appear in the catalogue of commercial publishers. Closer textual analysis of works mentioned in the general survey would merely highlight idiosyncrasies that are peculiar to a certain author, to an individual poem, or indeed to a translator, but do not present concrete alternatives to mediation as a strategy. The main theoretical findings of this chapter can be assessed by comparison with the data on the translations of fiction provided in the previous chapter. In this way, the crucial differences, which are ultimately determined by different conceptions of the intended readership for the two genres can be fully appreciated. The situation depicted confirms that genre, rather than any other factor, is the primary delineator of audience profile, or at least the publisher’s projections of these profiles. This, in turn, is what actively determines the translation strategy both at the micro-level and, even more importantly, at the macro-level of publication format.
CHAPTER 5: TRANSLATING DRAMA

At the heart of the creation of the playable translation is a dramaturgical remoulding, because such a remoulding creates the vehicle which transports – the root of the meaning of the verb to translate – the audience into the experience of the play. In other words, rather than giving new form to an already known meaning, translation for the stage is about giving form to a potential for performance.

Johnston 1996336

Drama is the final genre that this project will consider. Although it is generally understood as a “literary genre,” the performative nature of plays sets drama apart from fiction and poetry. Stage production and reception, by operating together and influencing each other, are two factors which intervene in endowing a play with meaning. In this sense, the script is often treated as the mere textual dimension of a much larger experience, where a number of non-textual features come to determine the impact that the dramatic text will have on participants in theatrical events. This condition has to be taken into account even when discussing the translation of dramatic texts, especially in Italy, where new plays are normally translated primarily for live performance, and not all are published afterwards. As the most common practice is to translate contemporary drama with the goal of ensuring communication between the actors and the spectators, elements of staging are as important as the script itself. How the play works, therefore, is determined by gestures, tone, appearances, spatial relations in the setting and the overall vision of the artistic director. Consequently, all these aspects have to be acknowledged and assessed in the discussion of Irish drama in Italian translation. At the same time, it is the published translations that are the real focus of investigation here, and the main objective is to examine the specific conditions leading to publication, which are usually tied in with performance. It is the consequences of these conditions, as far as the paratextual and textual features of Italian editions of Irish drama, that constitute the interest of this chapter.

This chapter will begin with a brief commentary on published translations of Irish plays that appeared in Italy from the 1990s on. This survey will provide some examples of policies and practices of translation in the domain of drama.

Accommodation is the generic concept which is here posited as a mode of translation able to include drama in its different manifestations, as text and as performance. This definition is deliberately broad, as it needs to encompass the diverse modalities with which the translation of Irish playwrights into Italian is approached and performed. The norm it identifies is an inclination towards “acceptability.”\textsuperscript{337} This is not necessarily “domestication.” The foreign is not always erased or assimilated, but it is tentatively rendered more palatable to the target audience, especially in terms of humour and immediacy of references, when produced for a live audience. As in the previous chapter, a detailed analysis of one text will function as a case study, in order to provide a practical close up on the process of accommodation. While in the case of fiction and poetry it was possible to identify a number of dominant traits shared by most of the translated texts belonging to the same genre, the analysis of the Italian production of Martin McDonagh’s controversial play \textit{The Lieutenant of Inishmore} can only function as one example of the negotiation of meaning between the source and target systems. In other words, the demonstration of how this negotiation is sustained is specific to the translation/production of this particular play. At the same time, it reveals ways of active critical engagement which can be employed for the discussion of any play in translation, as is shown by a briefer discussion of two other plays by McDonagh published in Italy: \textit{The Beauty Queen of Leenane} and \textit{The Cripple of Inishman}. A descriptive approach, aimed at assessing connections and variants within the system of the target language, more than between the target text and its source, will establish, more reliably, the norms and constraints governing the production and reception of drama translation in Italy. It will also illustrate the various forms that the delicate relationship between the script and the staging may take in the published version.

\textbf{Strategies and Contexts of Drama Translation in Italy}

One reason for the limited representations of Irish contemporary playwrights in Italy can be found in a theatrical environment which is still largely dominated by “static programmes.” This means that new playwrights in general, even Italian ones are

overwhelmingly outnumbered by modern classics or revivals of ancient texts. This is echoed by publications, where usually only the work by leading names of the past are published.

The only Irish playwright to have a critical edition of his work published independently from theatrical productions is Brian Friel, whose international fame is comparable to that of Seamus Heaney. The edition “Traduzioni” e Altri Drammi was published in 1996 for the series “Biblioteca di Cultura” by Bulzoni Editori, a company that specialises in the publication of academic material. The volume contains a substantial introduction by the major Italian expert on Friel, Carla De Petris, complete with a rich bibliography and chronology of Friel’s life and works. In addition, the translation of Friel’s plays provided an occasion to reflect on the act of translation itself, as the elaboration on the subject by De Petris included at the end of the volume demonstrates. The series “Biblioteca di Cultura” by Bulzoni has a more general focus towards academia as shown by the publication, a few years later, of The Cracked Looking Glass: Contributions to the Study of Irish Literature.338 From this perspective, the choice of publishing this collection by Friel is clearly independent from any staging of the plays translated. Therefore, in “Traduzioni” e Altri Drammi, no specific reference to a single production is made. This is partly because The Faith Healer was the only one of the three Friel plays in the publication that had already been staged in Italy. Indeed, a translation of The Faith Healer, by De Petris, had already been published in 1989, the same year as the first Italian production of that play. Although the publisher was the same, this edition was inserted in the series “Miscellanea Teatrale.” This series was more particularly dedicated to staged drama, yet aspects of critical theory were also included in the introduction. Dancing at Lughnasa, the third play contained in “Traduzioni” e Altri Drammi, was staged the following year by Accademia Teatrale Campogallina in Mantua. This company not only boasts two plays by Sean O’Casey in its repertoire, but, for the staging of Friel’s play, could count on Rosangela Barone’s expert help. This is consistent with an established tendency to pursue a rather scholarly approach to living icons in the literary world.

The translation of *Molly Sweeney* did not reach the Italian publishing market until 2006, when it was released by Reading Theatre. Although Friel, unlike other playwrights translated for this series, was not completely unknown in Italy, the Reading Theatre edition was successful in reviving the play. *Molly Sweeney* was staged in 2008 in the translation provided by Reading Theatre, and the production by the repertory theatre of Emilia Romagna led to a successful national tour. By adopting a perspective close to the Reading Theatre edition, which included a translation of Oliver Sack’s essay “To See and not See” alongside the play, particular emphasis was placed on the neurological aspect of blindness. In this production, the audience was invited to be blindfolded for the whole first act of the play, so that they could share with Molly the traumatic experience of regaining sight. Friel’s *Afterplay* was also published by Reading Theatre, which showed again a commitment in guiding the reception by providing some background to the play, specifically the volume contained some extracts from Čechov’s plays which function as a direct influence for this specific play. An essay on the relationship between Friel’s work and that of the Russian playwright was also included, as Friel is also known for his adaptations of *Uncle Vanya* (1998), *The Yalta Game* (2001) and *The Bear* (2002).

The only other Italian publisher who has printed the work of Irish playwrights in translation is Gremese, a publishing firm that, amongst its eclectic catalogue covering a variety of non-narrative areas, includes a couple of series specifically dedicated to drama. Although her plays were never staged by national companies in Italy, Marina Carr is represented by two translations: *Ariel*, 2007, and *Portia Coughlan*, 2010. Conor McPherson was also published by Gremese, in an edition which included three of his works, *The Lime Tree Bower*, *St. Nicholas* and *The Weir*, published in 1999. Like Carr, McPherson’s work had not been staged in Italy at the time of publication, confirming that Gremese was also one of the few publishers to embark on translation of contemporary drama without an established relationship with a repertory theatre. Nonetheless some dialogue between the staging and the written text, although elusive, can still be traced. One year after the publication by Gremese, McPherson’s play *Dublin Carol* was staged in Genoa as a mise en espace.

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Genoa’s company interest in the play, however, can very easily be traced back to their special commitment to Irish drama, which will become evident in the subsequent analysis of three plays by Martin McDonagh, all performed within the repertoire of Lo Stabile in Genoa. An overall look at the Genoa theatre productions will confirm this interest: in 2002 Mojo Mickybo by Owen McCafferty was staged and in 2004 Eden by Eugene O’Brien. McPherson was then re-staged in 2006 with a bigger production. The play chosen this time was The Weir. It was directed by Binasco, while the designer was Guido Fiorato, and the translation was by Paravidino. All those names, as we will see later, had been involved in the productions of McDonagh’s plays, and most of the team members who worked on McPherson’s production have had experience working with McDonagh. This production of La Chiusa, as it was called in Italian, won a national award as Best Foreign New Play and was published for the series “Collana del Teatro Stabile di Genova,” together with Eden and the Scottish playwright Robert Farquhar’s Dust to dust. The edition was titled Storie da Pub, so that, by choosing the pub atmosphere and the theme of storytelling as the main connecting device, the inclusion of the play about alcohol and death by the Scottish Farquhar was pertinent. Yet “Irishness” seemed to remain the focal point of the introduction, partly because the deceased in Farquhar’s play is called Finnegans, something that has led to repeated associations with Joyce’s Finnegans Wake. The idea of employing the image of a pub as the common denominator, however, exposes not only the exotic appeal of the place for an Italian audience: it highlights a blurred conception of the different realities that this icon might be associated with. The notion of “pub” in Italy can be alternatively associated with a stylised idea of an Irish, Scottish, or even British context. By employing it in the title the publisher reveals the intention to stress that the experience narrated by the playwrights is distant from the direct experience of the readers; yet there is no real effort to evoke a specific cultural alterity.

All in all, despite the brief critical introduction for each author and play, the format of the edition seems to cater for pre-established expectations of an Italian audience, without any consistent effort towards trying to challenge or even broaden them. This commercial outlook is arguably due to the shift from the earlier publisher Marietti, to Il Melangolo. This editorial change, which took place before the publication of McDonagh’s Il Tenente di Inishmore, caused important repercussions as far as the reception of the play is concerned. Although features of the old format were kept –
especially with regard to the emphasis on the “theatrical” aspect of the Italian version – the critical apparatus of Il Melangolo’s edition shrunk significantly in comparison with the editions of La Bella Regina di Leenane and Lo Storpio di Inishmann. As will be argued later, this could be due in part to the failure in providing an adequate historical background to the story of The Lieutenant, and this, in turn was a pivotal cause of misinterpretation in a number of Italian reviews.

A play deserving particular attention because of the modes of translation implemented is Barone’s translation of Tagann Godot, or Arriva Godot: Tragicommedia in Due Atti, published in 1999 by Mobydick, a publisher that thus far been has discussed in relation to poetry translations. The edition of Alan Titley’s play follows similar coordinates, although the Irish text is not printed alongside the Italian translation. The play is, in itself, very peculiar, because despite being clearly inspired by the Beckettian theme and his modes of expression, it is set in present-day Ireland, which is marked by consumerism and dominated by the media. However, serious reflections on the Irish language are also introduced. Titley’s characters are:

[...] pseudo-Gaeilgeoiri, who make a mess of their own language, contributing to its pollution through lazy resort to cheap mass-media catch-phrases, Englishisms, absurd hybridism, that is, a caricature of language, which communicates nothing and finally turns into cultural non-identity.  

Looking at a single line in the play will provide an example of the density of meaning possible only in relation to the linguistic and cultural set-up of an Irish-speaking audience: “Tusa i dtosach, a Aibhistín, mar is túisce muc ná scéal.” As Barone explains in an article commenting on her translation, and indeed in the footnote to the printed edition, this word play recalls the Irish saying is túisce deoch ná scéal ‘first a drink and then the story.’ These strong cultural roots make a cross-cultural transfer of the play particularly difficult, as the norms in operation in the target language system, and indeed the constraints posed by “drama” translation, demand quite substantial shifts. For the translation of the same passage, Barone opts for “tu per primo, Gonfiettino. Prima il bussolotto, poi il tombolotto,” where bussolotto stands for “dice-box” and tombolotto derives from tombolo ‘lace-pillow.’ She justifies the choice in terms of rhyme and

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because the suffix -otto in Italian is evocative of something “small and chubby,” which is in tune with the character Mí-Ábha (Sfighettino) who is addressed in this line. It is clear that the distance of the source text from conventional modes of appeal to the Italian audience is, if not completely erased, quite energetically overcome by Barone, who seems to prioritise keeping the sense of fun over more “cultural” concerns. The accommodation undergone by the Italian version openly tries to ensure that the text conforms to the dramatic conventions of the target system, as this is seen as a necessary step for the play to appeal to the target audience and, accordingly, to facilitate its performance. As a matter of fact, unlike the drama translations analysed so far, Barone is possibly the only one who carries on a type of translation which is highly domesticating, in the sense that cultural references are actively relocated within an Italian environment. “Conas adeirtear ‘dia dhuit’ i gConamara?” for instance becomes “Come si dice ‘buongiorno’ in Puglia?” Barone justifies the many choices that domesticate content in terms of making sense, “and even comic sense, in the mind of the Italian audience.” 341 Although the readers of the Mobydick edition do have endnotes recovering the linguistic substratum of the Gaelic language whenever a major divergence occurs, the performance text is consciously “naturalised.” The difference between Barone’s approach to Titley’s translation and her efforts in the field of Irish poetry, or the translation of Aifreann na Marbh, where she pursues scholarly mediation of the highest standards, is undeniable. This supports the thesis that the translation of drama differs considerably from the translation of other literary forms.

The alternative modalities of translation Barone employs for different types of text provides an exemplary instance of what this study tries to achieve on a broader scale. Moreover, her practical translation choices are backed up by a solid theoretical awareness that makes them all the more convincing:

In the case of a play in translation, the audience must be put in a position of laughing as soon as a humorous cue is uttered on stage (there is no space for additional explanatory phrases bound to dilute the comic effect, let alone the use of footnotes). Consequently, on more than one occasion the literal translation must be abandoned in favour of a text that could make sense in the linguistic and cultural set-up of the foreign audience. 342

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341 Ibid., p. 192.
342 Ibid.
Here Barone clearly illustrates the theoretical and practical differences between drama and other forms of translation, but she also highlights the category of “humour” as an important factor in orienting her own translation. As “humour” is largely recognised as one of the most cultural-specific categories, acknowledging the importance of being able to keep the comic effect of staged plays could partly explain the poor circulation of the work of contemporary foreign playwrights in Italian theatre. Barone, in order to make the play acceptable to an Italian audience, has to strip it of most of its location, which can be seen as rather controversial for a play whose strongest statement was probably its existence in the Irish language. Yet, the only alternative to this strong accommodation would have been silence, as the nature of drama requires the cultural and literary context of the target text to be the overriding factors. However, as she demonstrates with a detailed commentary about her translation of Titley’s play, the extremely free translation is rooted not in a superficial knowledge of the theme articulated by the source text, but conversely in a minute understanding of it. This allows her to deconstruct the meaning and recreate an equivalent, or one close to it, in the target language. And she does all this “without betraying the meaning and aim of the original Gaelic text.” In this sense, Barone’s formulation is close to the idea of pseudo-domestication. By different means, a similar goal is often pursued by the translation of other plays. This will emerge in greater detail through the examples illustrated in the rest of this chapter.

PUBLISHING MCDONAGH’S PLAYS IN ITALY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

In this section the plays by McDonagh staged by Lo Stabile in Genoa will be briefly considered, with a special emphasis on the printed editions. The Italian publication of The Cripple of Inishmann, called Lo Storpio di Inishmann, opens with the translation of an article by Fintan O’Toole, which provides a complex introduction, accompanied by numerous pictures from the movie The Man of Aran. The article introduces both the history of the Aran Islands and their mythical dimension, evoking connotations which clearly belong to an Irish perspective. The journalistic slant of O’Toole’s writing is in keeping with the style of the Italian edition as it reaches out to a wider non-academic readership; yet, the Irish critic’s contribution is as thorough and

343 Ibid.
thoughtful as a brief academic essay. In order to endow McDonagh’s drama with a deeper Irish significance, the article covers subjects from the Blasket Islands of Peig Sayers and Tomas O’Crohan, to the historical role of Eamon De Valera and his party, up to the artistic re-elaborations of John Millington Synge and W.B. Yeats; even the modern playwriting influences of the British Joe Orton and Harold Pinter, and the Irish Tom Murphy and John B. Keane, are touched on. O’Toole also mentions the postmodern quality of McDonagh’s writing, present in this play in the form of the conscious inversion of the nostalgic images of the West of Ireland, and in the sense of the characters’ forgetfulness about their own history. The Cripple exists within a tradition, but at the same time it stands against the mythology of that tradition. O’Toole warns against the deceiving naturalism of McDonagh’s style, that in this case functions as a warning which also applies to the choices made in the Italian production.

The staging of Lo Storpio follows a highly realistic approach. Not only are the interiors recreated by the designer Valeria Manari highly mimetic, but the costumes also seem to be inspired by Synge’s descriptions in his Aran Islands diaries, which are also contained in the Italian edition, in the form of translated short extracts. Moreover, numerous glimpses of the landscape are also given during the play. Not only are extracts from the Man of Aran shown to the theatre audience and the characters on stage simultaneously (while they just pretended to see the movie during the Druid’s production of the play, for instance), the Genoa performance opens with images taken from the movie projected on a transparent screen. This subsequently fades out to reveal the interior of the village shop which provides the setting for most of the action in The Cripple. In the published edition, these aspects are satisfactorily recuperated by an ample selection of shots taken during the performance, and an even larger assortment of pictures from the movie. This dimension is further developed via an article by Piero Pruazzo, “Un Regista delle Isole Aran,” which functions as an introduction to this piece of cinematographic history. The article draws attention to Flaherty’s “creative treatment of reality,” a stylistic trait which was a cause of controversy because of the tension between its documentary aspiration and fictional re-elaborations.

Although it is implicit in The Cripple’s script that the movie functions as a constant subtext for the play, in the Italian edition this aspect acquires a prominent position. This is possibly because it was the most memorable hallmark of the
performance, and was consistent with a clear statement of intent by the director Marco Sciaccaluga, as reported in the interview included in the edition. The Italian director acknowledges the provocative use made of O’Flaherty’s movie in the play, and willingly emphasises it for the benefit of an Italian audience, which, arguably, starts from a position of less familiarity with the film and the debate surrounding it. As previously mentioned, on stage the interdependence between the movie and the play is conjured up by the frequent appearance of transparent barriers, whose alternate use as movie screens, or as sails or waves in the background, evokes the related topic of the friction between documentary and invention. This is another theme that Sciaccaluga acknowledges to be a major driving force behind his direction. He also recounts his original idea of overlapping the last scene of the play with a transparent screen on which the same scene is simultaneously projected, just before the credits start to run. In the interview, significantly titled “Tra Teatro e Cinema: una Commedia Postmoderna,” Sciaccaluga openly identifies his eagerness to emphasise the relationship with the movie as a way to foreground the postmodern in McDonagh’s play, which he describes as “uno degli esempi più complessi e più fulgidi di drammaturgia postmoderna, che siano mai stati consegnati al palcoscenico” ‘one of the most complex and brightest examples of postmodern playwriting ever to be seen on stage.’ Besides the cross-fertilisation of different literary traditions and genres, Sciaccaluga indicates the playwright’s ability, to hybridise traditional Irish character with a global village mentality as a postmodern trait. More specifically, the naturalistic setting, or indeed what is a real event from the past – the visit of Flaherty’s troupe to Aran in the Thirties – is brought alive by characters marked by unstable identities who embody the linguistic and cultural neurosis of contemporary society. In this respect, Sciaccaluga’s position seems to recall O’Toole’s, who maintained:

The 1950’s is laid over the 1990’s, giving the play the apparent realism of the ghostly, dizzying feeling of a superimposed photograph. All the elements that make up the pictures are real, but their combined effect is one that questions the very idea of reality. 

345 Ibid., p. 151.
It is hyper-realism characterised by shock and absurdism, which will be encountered in the analysis of *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* as well. The major difference is that in *Lo Storpio* the anti-naturalistic quality is not overtly pursued on stage. Yet, in the interview, Sciaccaluga clearly identifies an explicit *vocazione antinaturalistica* ‘antinaturalistic vocation’ in the play, which in turn he tries to articulate by pursuing a conscious stylisation of the language.\(^{348}\) His commitment is shown by the fact that he chose to work on the translation himself. The Italian director justifies his choice by the fact that, for him, the translation of McDonagh’s language is like an *anticamera per la regia* ‘an antechamber to direction.’ This is because the rhythm of the dialogues provides a specific tone for the acting, that is somehow more important than the content of the script.\(^{349}\) Moreover the abstractness caused by the unusual syntax, repetitions, incidental sentences and swearing, again according to Sciaccaluga, enables the universalisation of localised characters.\(^{350}\) The stated goal, with his direction of *Lo Storpio*, was to harmonise the parodic qualities of the play with the naturalistic features in the plotline, avoiding at the same time any dramatic overtone.\(^{351}\) As a result, McDonagh’s characters will not ask to be judged according to the conventions of naturalism, that is by pondering their intelligence, or rather their lack of it. His directorial choices, therefore, are consistent with a view that the playwright’s aim is not to arouse people’s scorn, but rather to make them interrogate the causes of the characters’ dislocation and isolation, and possibly to critically question their own stance.\(^{352}\) The Italian edition, by foregrounding the issue of representation, assists the readers in realising that the play’s exploitation of stage-Irish stereotypes is instead a tacit request to dismantle them. For instance, when Billy, alone in Hollywood, lets himself go on to what appears to be the dying speech of a proud Irishman, a sentimental formulation is employed in order to initially move the audience to sympathise with the dying Billy, or at least so they think:

Mam? I fear I’m not longer for this world, Mam. Can’t I hear the wail of the banshees for me, as far as I am from me barren island home? A home barren, aye, but proud and generous with it, yet turned me back on ye I did, to end up


\(^{349}\) Ibid. p. 150.

\(^{350}\) Ibid. p. 154.

\(^{351}\) Ibid. p. 156.

alone and dying in a one-dollar rooming-house, without a mother to wipe the cold sweat off me, nor a father to curse death o’er the death of me, nor a colleen fair to weep tears o’er the still body of me. A body still, aye, but a body noble and unbowed with it. An Irishman.  

During the staging in Italy, this monologue was introduced by a quick montage of movie images from the thirties. In any event, the clichéd nature of the speech was soon revealed by Billy himself, who scornfully dismisses the Hollywood script as “arse-faced lines,” or even “a rake of shite.” His opinion curiously reflects the one voiced by Tiger King, the islander chosen by Flaherty as the protagonist of his movie, about the movie itself: “Ara, bhí fhios agaíne go maith gur bullshit a bhí ann ach a bhí linn” ‘Yerra, we knew well it was bullshit but what did we care.’ Essentially, Tiger’s feelings about Flaherty’s movie are exactly the same as those expressed by Billy. Although Pruzzo’s complimentary article does not report Tiger’s words, it effectively introduces the theme of mistrust towards any form of representation.

This is further reinforced by Sciaccaluga’s statement that, in the play, fiction and dramatic representation win out over realism, or else that McDonagh sides with John Ford rather than with Flaherty. He continues:

McDonagh seems to maintain that reality needs to be reinvented from art, in order to really speak; or that reality is more betrayed by an intention to document it, than by betraying it on principle. That is to say that a talented artist betrays reality only with the purpose of “capturing” an authentic interpretation.

It is a position which sides with Friel’s assertion that “the art of the writer must not be confused with the craft of the commentator.” In this sense, the Italian edition seems to endorse a reading of McDonagh’s apparent mockery of rural isolation as a critique of the pre-fabricated images meant to satisfy mass-consumption. It is an articulation akin

to the one encountered at the end of *The Journey Home*, although Bolger’s ultimate target was rather the alienation caused by urban everyday life.\(^{357}\) Yet, contrary to what normally happens to contemporary fiction, the edition of *Lo Storpio of Inishmann* does include a relatively rich critical apparatus, both interpretative and informative. For instance, a certain degree of familiarity with the setting with which the play is actively interacting is conveyed by the translation of a touristic brochure about the Aran Island written by Tim Robinson.\(^{358}\) Taking everything into account, *Lo Storpio* provides *in nuce* the same theoretical articulations that will be brought to even more dramatic outcomes with the staging of *Il Tenente*. This will become evident by comparing the two interviews with the director that seems to play the same key role that the introductions by translators play in most editions of poetry.

It is the same for *La Bella Regina di Leenane*, where, although it is a different director speaking his mind, the themes are still somehow akin to those of *Lo Storpio*, and, as we will verify later on, of *Il Tenente*. And yet again they are deemed crucial to an adequate understanding of the play, and hence discussed in detail by the director Binasco in his interview. The contrast between violence and laughter, realism and the grotesque, tenderness and brutality; the tyrannical role of technology; the cinematic quality of McDonagh’s writing and the balance between stylisation and naturalism, are the crucial areas touched on in order to orientate the reader’s response. In one interview for *The Independent*, Gary Hynes declared: “at the heart of *The Beauty Queen* lies a terrible rootlessness, for all that it’s set in this recognisable, rooted reality.”\(^{359}\) Her subtle understanding of the play was reflected in her direction, which resorted to all the theatrical means at her disposal to make the romantic yearning and fierce violence pervading the work come simultaneously alive on stage. The set for the original production of *The Beauty Queen*\(^{360}\) was handled by Francis O’Connor, who conjured up a filthy set, with dankness and dirtiness all over, cracked window panes and debris strewn across the floor, all dominated by a neon crucifix. The penumbral mood and ghostly atmosphere was also enhanced by Omerod’s lighting, and overall the image of an enclosed world was effectively conveyed.

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\(^{357}\) Cf. Chapter Three, p. 126-8.

\(^{358}\) McDonagh, 1999. Trans. Sciaccaluga.


\(^{360}\) Druid Theatre Company production, Galway, 1996.
All this was supported by energetic acting, almost a hallmark of Hynes’ “harsh, physical and direct style of performance,” which “has in itself become a comment on the social realities of modern Ireland.”361 The importance of Hynes’ directorial touch in tackling McDonagh’s “potentially sprawling satirical universe”362 was almost unanimously acknowledged, even by those critics less keen on the playwright’s achievements. One reviewer for instance, commenting on The Beauty Queen as a play “increasingly serious in content, unremittingly funny in delivery, its narrative and dialogue sharply, darkly and cruelly ironic,” significantly stated:

In the hands of a lesser director than Garry Hynes it could easily have fallen between the blackness and the humour, and with less skilful actors it could have seemed a great deal less serious and less funny.363

This can be confirmed by contrasting the Druid production with a short analysis of a smaller production of The Beauty Queen by the Mouthpiece Theatre Group at the Derry Playhouse, in 2006. The company was newly founded the previous year, and most of the team involved were inexperienced. This might explain the overly realistic reading of the play. By completely erasing the euphoric surrealism embedded in the play, this was turned into an anguished bleak story about an aggressive daughter murdering her old mother. The claustrophobic quality of the small space of the Playhouse did not showcase any “redeeming” postmodern quality to alert the audience: the setting was a modest clean kitchen, and O’Connor’s neon crucifix was replaced by the very classical image of the “burning heart.”364 All this was coupled with an acting that was too realistic to suggest that Mag and Maureen “seemed to exist in a world of dislocation in which people go to America to work, or stay at home to watch television programmes from Australia.”365 In the Mouthpiece production, the humour survived exclusively in some of the dialogue, but the delivery did not enhance this quality, but rather played it down. In this way, the shocking quality inbuilt in McDonagh’s play is brought to a completely different level. More importantly, the concept that nobody is completely

362 Moroney, Mic. Rev. of The Lieutenant of Inishmore, by Martin McDonagh. Irish Independent, 25 June 97. (Druid Theatre Archive, James Hardiman Library, NUI Galway)
364 Iconic image of the Catholic faith, representing the portrait of Jesus holding a “burning heart” in his hands.
365 Nowlan, “Celebration worthy of a New Theatre.”
right or helplessly wrong, so crucial to a successful understanding of the play, was not fully respected by the Derry performance. As played by the Mouthpiece company, the relationship between mother and daughter was clearly unbalanced, as Maureen was portrayed as extremely aggressive in her general behaviour, especially towards her mother. Conversely, Mag was portrayed in a very submissive way, with a sweetish voice and attitude. This was in clear contrast with the character of Mag as it was acted for the Druid Production by Ann Mohanan, whose confrontational behaviour and sickening appearance is often recalled in the reviews and praised for its effectiveness.

The more instinctive reaction roused by the Mouthpiece production was a shocked incredulity, as the audience felt they were witnessing the story of a poor old lady mistreated by her daughter. The discomfort was made even more tangible by the fact that this reaction was shared by only a few dozen people sitting in the small venue where the play was staged. The audience remained frozen and silent for a long time before starting a shy applause, as if the sense of “all-for-nothing” conveyed by the drabness of Maureen sitting on Mag’s armchairs, instead of claiming to be elaborated and universalised intellectually, was just an emotionally crude and cruel end for a family play.

Such a reaction was in clear contrast with the rapturous standing ovation with which the opening performance of The Beauty Queen was greeted in Galway, and it goes to show the crucial importance of production choices in guiding reception. The Druid Company, by bringing the play to numerous theatrical venues within the Anglophone geographical area without significant alteration, showed a clear conviction that, in dealing with McDonagh’s world, a conscious employment of all theatrical devices is essential. Hynes herself, in an interview for Variety, proudly affirmed that the show performed in Broadway was exactly the same as it was in Galway, because the Company “insisted on doing it our way or not at all.”

The sense of puzzlement naturally inscribed in the play, which the reviewers of the Druid production described as: “you don’t know whether to laugh, cry or gasp with horror,” because “somehow

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CHAPTER 5: TRANSLATING DRAMA

the horror always walks hand in hand with wild humour and deep compassion”368 was substantially different from the horror experienced in Derry.

Against this background, it is possible to better assess how the fusion of gentle realism and Beckettian resonances pursued by the younger director Valerio Binasco succeeded in the difficult task of pulling out of McDonagh’s play a rather moving outcome. Although the setting by Manari, despite being stylised, presents the same verisimilitude that has been described for Lo Storpio, the Beckettian influence is openly tackled by Binasco in the interview, especially in terms of considering the play as a “happening.” After all, Beckett is one of the greatest names of Irish drama and his repertoire is consistently staged in Italy. This familiarity should enable audiences to draw an association between the familial/servile relationship and claustrophobic atmosphere of The Beauty Queen, and the destructive interdependence existing between many Beckettian couples. The most obvious comparison however is with Endgame, where the parent/child relationship is doubly articulated by Hamm/Clov, where Hamm acts as tyrannical father, and Hamm/Nagg-Nell, where he plays the hostile son. The crucial difference between the two plays is that Mag sits in an armchair and is fed with porridge and other suitable meals, whereas Nagg and Nell live inside improbable bins and are sporadically fed sugar-plums by their son. In other words, Beckett’s surrealism is brought to extremes, and this precludes the play from the criticism that McDonagh’s play will probably encounter every time its representation of reality is mistaken for something which pretends to be the “real thing.” Binasco’s willingness to establish a parallelism with a surreal tradition might be a way to extend this “protection” to the controversial work of the younger playwright. This intention is already evident in the poster for the production: the stylised image of an iron with a series of spikes at its bottom, the whole depicted in bright colours reminiscent of pop-art. This poster could be seen as a first step towards pseudo-domestication, as it is essentially introducing an appropriate

368 Ibid.

Fig. 1. Poster for La Bella Regina di Leenane, Genoa 1997
response to the play by exposing the necessity to rethink the sense of security attached
to everything domestic as a central theme. A similar effect was achieved by the poster
advertising the Druid production of *The Beauty Queen* in 1996. Here the Irish
dimension was emphasised, rather than stripped away as in Genoa. A beautiful rural
Ireland framed by a plasma screen, in turn surrounded by every kind of scaffolding
typical of an urban environment under construction, is the way the Druid production
chose to visually articulate the themes tackled in *The Beauty Queen*. Binasco tried to
introduce aesthetic modalities familiar to the Italian audience. The choice to pursue a
more surreal dimension, for instance, can be seen as a way of compensating for the fact
that Italian spectators would not understand certain references to contemporary Irish
society, which largely diverge from the iconic images of Ireland typically promoted
abroad. One example of the difficulties posed by this cultural specificity can be found in
Mag’s words “there was a priest in the News Wednesday had a babby with a Yank.”
This is likely to be recognised by an Irish audience as a direct reference to a scandal
about the Bishop of Galway, who acknowledged fathering a child with an American
woman. The Italian performance, instead, chooses to enhance the residual humanity
in the characters of both Mag and Maureen. This gentle touch could be
surmised from the very choice of the title. “The beautiful queen” is a literal
back-translation, which diverts attention from the cheesiness of a beauty contest, which would require
the expression *reginetta di bellezza*. By translating it to *la bella regina* the
connotations are closer to those of a fairytale, where *la regina* is often a
soft, fragile figure in peril, generally stirring more empathy than a “beauty
queen.” The overall impression however, although leaning in an almost

![Fig. 2. Poster for *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, Royal
Court/Druid Production (1996)](image)

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369 Lonergan, Patrick. “‘The Laughter will Come of Itself. The Tears are Inevitable:’ Martin McDonagh,
Globalisation, and Irish Theatre Criticism.” *Irish Theatre Criticism*, Special Issue of *Modern Drama*
opposite direction from the Druid production, does portray equilibrium between the two characters. This ideally achieves a suspension of judgment on the audience’s part, which is what the Mouthpiece production failed to deliver.

This is vital, as the tension and the emotional violence which defines the mother-daughter relationship in The Beauty Queen is probably still the most successful of McDonagh’s dramatic achievement. So far it is arguably his most powerful allegory of a situation of conflict which perpetuates itself without fully revealing its origins, making it impossible for the onlookers to determine what is right and what is wrong. Was Mag’s hand scalded only after she burned the letter or had Maureen already done this before? The red scar on her hand seems to support Mag’s version, yet Maureen denies this and puts the blame for her mental disorders on Mag’s behaviour. For the spectators, there is no way to figure out who is lying, because the past events are not performed, and, even more significantly, both Mag and Maureen are moved by reasons which are to some extent understandable. It is the same scheme of competing “truths” which will be identified in the other plays by McDonagh: Mag does not want to spend her old age completely alone, and Maureen simply claims her right to live, to be “anything other than this.”

It is a situation in which common empathy would probably lean towards Maureen, but does this justify murder? If it is accepted that McDonagh exploits the particular situation for the purpose of conveying a universal message, or a universal question, this would be: “what point can a right cause justify violence?” a question which is also pertinent to the issue of terrorism. From this perspective, it would be possible to maintain that the situation that “there is no way out” as staged in The Beauty Queen can

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Fig. 3. A happy moment between Mag and Maureen in the Italian production of The Beauty Queen of Leenane. (Genoa, 1997).

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370 McDonagh, 1999, p. 16.
be taken as a commentary on, or a figurative reflection of, the Troubles. Nonetheless, in the press, as much as *The Lieutenant* was gauged as a play about Irish terrorism, *The Beauty Queen* became a representation of familial interdependence and any allusion to Ireland in the Italian reviews was extremely scant. The balance achieved by Binasco in the representation of the mother-daughter relationship, combined with a subtle abstractness of Beckettian stamp, worked extremely well as a metaphor for the difficulty of laying the blame when truth and lies are so difficult to tell apart. In this sense, this play could be read as a more accurate reflection of the inescapable confrontation of the Troubles than *The Lieutenant*. However, hardly any attempt was made in the Italian press to re-connect the play to its Irish cultural background. In any event, it should be remembered that those possible associations were not even exploited by the production in Derry, a city that has been closely affected by the Troubles.371 The necessity to trust the audience to be able to find their own coordinates of reception is implicitly voiced by Binasco when he states: “[...] abbiamo sempre cercato di lavorare in modo da mascherare tutto sino a che è possibile, denunciando l’ambiguità della situazione senza mai dare la soluzione, quando questa non è scritta esplicitamente nel testo.”372 ‘we always tried to work in such a way that everything is concealed as long as possible, so as to expose the ambiguity of the situation without giving a solution, unless this is explicitly written in the text.’ Also, partly recalling the position assumed by Sciaccaluga with his metaphor of “orchestra leader,” he compares being a director to a “strategist of a battle whose outcome is unknown.” The long digression included in the interview shows how this matter is deeply felt by Binasco:

[…] Credo che il mio lavoro consista nel rendere chiare le regole del gioco che sono contenute nel testo. […] Attenzione però, sto parlando solo della spiegazione delle regole del gioco, perché quello che non voglio e non posso assolutamente fare è spiegare anche come il gioco va giocato. La distinzione è vitale per il teatro: se io spiego il gioco come va giocato e gli attori lo rimbalzano al pubblico come glielo ho spiegato io, essi consegnano inevitabilmente allo spettatore solo la spiegazione del gioco e non il gioco stesso. […] Se il teatro è un accadimento io non posso fare accadere una spiegazione. La mia scommessa di regista non è quella di far vedere a tutti che ho capito il testo, ma di dargli autentica vita nel corpo, nei gesti e nella voce degli attori. […]373

373 Ibid. p. 109.
[...] I think my job consists of making clear the rules of the game which are implied in the text. [...] Careful though, I’m talking about the explanation of the rules of the game, because what I do not want and absolutely cannot do is to explain also how the game needs playing. This distinction is vital in theatre: if I explain how the game needs to be played and the actors “bounce” my explanation to the public, they inevitably convey to the spectators only the explanation of the game and not the game itself. [...] If theatre is a happening I cannot make an explanation happen. My goal as a director is not to show everybody that I understood the text, but to endow it with genuine life through the body, the gestures and the voice of the actors. [...] This explanation insists that the performance by the actors is essential to the play’s meaning. At the same time, it also shows a certain eagerness to mark a distance between the imprint tentatively given to a play by its director and the meaning that the play assumes once it is performed. In the interview included in Lo Storpio, Sciaccaluga speculated about the opportunity to delve too much into theoretical matters about the work of an author who has always acted defiantly about these approaches:

Accingendosi a mettere in scena l’opera di un autore che la pensa così, il regista – tanto più quanto nel mio caso, ne condivide appieno l’idea di un teatro come luogo in cui si raccontano delle storie – dovrebbe fermarsi qui e dimettere ogni tentazione di teorizzare. Al massimo dovrebbe limitarsi a sottolineare come il raccontare una storia non comporti affatto la rinuncia a parlare del mondo o a esprimere una visione personale, né tantomeno enunci la volontà di nascondere o trascurare una simile visione, ma significhi più propriamente l’orgogliosa affermazione che il compito di chi racconta è quello di raccontare, mentre quello di interpretare spetta di diritto a chi ascolta e osserva. 374

When bringing to the stage the work with this vision, the director – all the more if, as in this case, he totally shares the idea of theatre as a place to tell stories – should stop here and dismiss any temptation to theorize. Perhaps he should limit his task to underline that telling a story does not imply giving up speaking about the world or to express a personal vision, and even less express the willingness to hide or neglect such a vision. It rather means the proud affirmation that the task of the one who is telling is the task of telling, whereas the right to interpret is left to those who listen and observe.

As O’Toole put it, McDonagh’s writing is brilliant enough to make it difficult to envisage a completely bad production, but it is equally difficult to realise an unquestionably good one. 375 A straightforward attribution of meaning is even harder; or

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perhaps mistaking the more straightforward message for the deepest meaning of the play is the real problem.

Overall, the Italian performances of *The Beauty Queen* and *The Cripple* showed a considerable awareness of the deeper levels of significance of the plays, and they articulated them in ways which were potentially compatible with the target audience’s understanding; so did the published editions they prompted. The published plays consciously aimed for a greater intellectual interaction with the play from the target audience. This was mainly achieved by means of introductory articles and interviews. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that the published versions of the plays might have fuelled responses more respectful of the source texts. However, a rather significant imbalance between the potential meaning of the plays as they were performed in Italy and the actual reception by critics and audience has also emerged. This will become even more evident in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*.

**British, Irish and Italian Responses to The Lieutenant of Inishmore**

London-born Martin McDonagh has always been good at playing with the ambiguity surrounding his cultural affiliation and, with the help of the media, has succeeded in making the most out of it in marketing terms, arousing curiosity and expectations. The production of his plays has often reflected this hybridity, as the co-productions between the Druid Theatre, famous for bringing Irish theatre to international stages, and the Royal Court Theatre based in London, attests. Nevertheless it should be noted that *The Lieutenant* was the first play to be brought to stage without any involvement of the Galway-based Druid company. His first play, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, was originally performed by Druid in Galway to mark both the 21st anniversary of the Druid Theatre and the opening of the new Town Hall Theatre in the city (1996), two events which can be considered of some significance in the history of Irish theatre. Druid then went on to perform this and other plays by McDonagh in what became known as the Leenane trilogy, a production which was internationally acclaimed as an important milestone in Irish theatre. *The Lieutenant* in Italy is also perceived as Irish, not only by virtue of its Irish theme and location, but because, officially, its source text is the “script” by McDonagh, who was already established in
Italy an Irish playwright thanks to the productions of *The Beauty Queen* and *The Cripple*, that is also a pièce de résistance in the Druid Company repertoire.

Such considerations, nonetheless, highlight the paradoxical nature of assessing drama translations by taking into account issues of reception, because – even when totally accepting McDonagh’s Irishness – the actual intended audience of *The Lieutenant*, when it was first performed, should be considered British. In any event, this only serves to underline the blurred line of the definitions of “imagined” and “constructed” audiences. This is particularly the case when working with English as a source language, as even prose and poetry, when the English language is the medium, cannot escape the prospect of a British audience. The complication is the lack of cultural specificity of the English language, or rather the abundance of specificities that may be associated with the same language in view of its colonial past. The Lieutenant was produced by a British company, and the London-based Methuen edited its first publication; yet this is not a unique situation. The works of numerous Irish playwrights, due to the more active theatrical scene in London and the broader range of theatrical ventures in the UK, have premiered, and have initially been published there. Less frequently, but still consistently, Irish poets and novelists have found their patrons among British publishers, especially when their fame reached the international stage. Yet being published by Faber and Faber does not make Heaney’s work any less Irish. All things considered, there is no reason why McDonagh’s play should not be considered Irish, even if the English-language production used here as main counterpoint to my analysis of Fausto Paradivino’s Italian rendition premiered in London and was directed by the American Wilson Milan.

*Il Tenente di Inishmore*, is part of the series “Collana del Teatro Stabile di Genova,” and as we have seen with the two previous plays some emphasis is put on the dramatic dimension of the material published, as shown by the inclusion of pictures from the performance and details about the members of the cast. This aspect seems to be further emphasised in the Melangolo editions of *The Lieutenant*, where the brief introduction by O’Toole is accompanied by several pictures from productions of earlier plays in Italy, Ireland and the UK. Even more crucial in creating a connection to the staging, however, is the interview with the play’s director Sciaccaluga, where he clearly states his personal vision on different aspects of the play. One final factor that
demonstrates how the policy pursued by the publishers relies on the interdependency between the text and its performance is the fact that the translation published is the one which specifically served the purpose of staging the play. To explicate further, originally the translation was carried out by Maria Laura Messeri, a senior member of the Genoa Theatre staff and the most authoritative Italian translator of Synge. She was specifically requested by McDonagh’s agent in Italy for the job. However, her translation was considered too literary and old-fashioned, and thus inappropriate for the punk vibe that the Italian director wanted to stamp on Il Tenente. The version eventually brought to the stage, and published, is the one revised by the young Italian playwright Paravidino. His language was considered more suitable to voice the modes and moods of a playwright from the new generation. Such care with the linguistic dimension of the play only confirms Sciaccaluga’s perspective on McDonagh’s language already encountered discussing The Cripple, and further emphasises the director’s awareness of its importance to corroborate the interpretative lens adopted by his production. For all these reasons, a final assessment of the process of accommodation would be impossible without some level of engagement with the staging. Therefore elements of the performance will be considered whenever they are intertwined with the published counterpart of the play. Those, together with an overview of the press response to the play, will provide an overall idea of the impact that the Italian accommodation has had on the original play, both at the level of production and reception.

McDonagh’s plays in general, and The Lieutenant in particular, have been surrounded by heated debates. Many Irish critics seemed to believe that if the play is taken from its original context it could be viewed as derogatory towards the Irish. The explanation for the concerns regarding foreign productions of The Lieutenant can be related to what many of them consider being the play’s naïveté in engaging with its political substance. Now, while this does not compromise the general understanding of the text – and it seems to favour its exportation abroad – it does not allow for an international audience to appreciate the complexity of the situation referred to. Indeed, the overall meaning attached to the play seems liable to take different shapes according to varying contexts of reception, even when no actual linguistic translation of the script occurs. This is demonstrated by the conflicting responses generated by its performance in Dublin, Sydney and Istanbul, which took place within four months of each other (2003). The analysis of the Italian version of The Lieutenant will be carried out against
this background, and will show how the numerable claims made about the play’s “exportability” can be right and wrong depending on the perspective chosen. In this regard, it is interesting to start from statements made by the director Sciaccaluga: “La farsa di McDonagh non riguarda ormai più solo l’Irlanda” and “[...] l’Irlanda è una delle tante possibili metafore del mondo.” Sciaccaluga’s willing attempt to stress the more universal message of the play is here examined in light of Sierz’s consideration that “McDonagh’s Ireland is postmodern in its grotesque exaggeration.” The postmodern approach, in fact, makes it possible to argue that the world McDonagh depicts is not Ireland at all, or at the very least that making a statement about the Irish situation is not the crux of the matter. And, in light of this, a great deal of the criticism encountered by The Lieutenant can be by-passed. First of all, the meaninglessness of the characters’ actions could be read as the result of forgetfulness of their own history, and thus act as a challenge to the utopian sacredness with which some ideals that have characterised the Irish past are still treated, even if the historical origins that have provoked them no longer exist. Moreover, this analysis will show that, by marking the postmodern features of the play – like the inversion and derision of the tradition, the abolition of a neat line dividing the real from the imaginary, the tentative inclusion of the audience in the characters’ sense of dislocation – the Italian version transcends the context of its production. This not only potentially resists the natural disadvantages of a foreign reception; it somehow manages to capture nuances of meaning which might have gone unnoticed within an exclusively Irish or British perspective.

Nonetheless the decision to employ a postmodern metanarrative when discussing drama is not all that obvious, as the most adequate choice to express the undecidability of any major question that postmodernism entails seems to be the employment of a self-reflexive language. It is a shape that dialogue, the real essence of drama, does not assume very easily, unlike prose writing, where the definition of postmodernism can be backed up by a number of illustrious authors, such as Borges, Calvino, Pynchon, or Banville, just to name a few. Not so for drama. So, when the term “post-modern” is employed, even when describing the theatre of the absurd as practiced by Beckett, Pinter or Orton, which have clearly employed more than one post-modern

376 “McDonagh’s farce does not concern only Ireland anymore,” “[...] Ireland is just one of the many possible metaphors for the world.” (translation mine) “Ridere Sino alle Lacrime in un Mondo alla Rovescia.” In McDonagh, 2004. Trans. Sciaccaluga.
feature, it must be done with caution. Another obstacle for the assessment of drama in postmodern terms is the fact that the aesthetic project of the authorial subject is even further removed from the final product, since the way a play is received is influenced by a number of factors eluding authorial control. Nonetheless, the theme of the death of the author as narrator – difficult to evaluate without direct contact with writing as in traditional fiction – could be sought, at least in McDonagh’s case, in the media’s regular coverage of the real author. This can be easily attempted as, particularly during his early career, the playwright (mis)represented himself as the writer of simple stories. My contention is that the self-deconstructing attitude openly displayed by McDonagh is primarily understandable in terms of the self-negating aesthetics of postmodernism. Here the eccentricity of the playwright’s behaviour can be seen as a challenge to the humanist notion that creative subjectivity comes from the subject himself, which causes the author’s own image to dissolve into self-parody. From this perspective the playwright’s audacious public declarations may be intended to support a reading of the author’s real life as a performance. These propose the same distrust in the political and ethical values inscribed in his artistic project, and thus stand out as the ultimate pursuit of the “death of the playwright.” Rather than being seen as a pretentious show-off then, his assertions that theatre was the least interesting of all art forms, or that cultivating an interest in writing was a way to avoid a real job, could function as a metanarrative re-enactment of what McDonagh’s work achieves by means of quotations and demystifying re-utilisation of earlier material. By the same token, making provoking public declarations, such as having written The Beauty Queen in eight days, or of never having read Synge, should not be taken literally. The sense of bewilderment they are likely to create can be seen as a subtle way to trigger an initial interrogation of what is normally a passive acceptance of mass-mediated cultural products. In other words, by making hyperbolically visible the fusion of fiction and reality, and even by bringing it to exceed the domain of pure theatrical action, McDonagh challenges the

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378 Cf. “I think publicity-wise things are going to hit the fan. I think I’m ready for it. But I’m not overly comfortable with this stuff because I can’t analyse my writing. It’s just there. They are not the kind of plays that need explaining or any kind of comment from me. They are just stories. I don’t put a lot of thought into them beforehand and there’s hardly any point in doing it afterwards.” McDonagh, Martin. “Interview.” Sunday Tribune 17 Nov. 96. (Druid Theatre Archive, James Hardiman Library, NUI Galway)


process of desensitisation towards actual events generated by the increasing difficulty of “disinterring reality from trash.” In this sense, McDonagh’s declarations can be seen as a curious enhancement of the typically postmodern “looking-glass effect,” as if the postmodern game of “infinite repetitions” escaped the level of form to dissolve into reality. His ultimate intent can be seen, as argued by Lonergan, as a confrontation of uncritical consumerist ideology.

This level of interpretation relates to the “nihilistic worldview” that may emerge from McDonagh’s play when it is subjected to attentive scrutiny. By starting from the consideration of human existence as constantly haunted by nothingness, it would be possible to cast doubts on the very notion of human identity, and therefore to admit, as a regular ontological status, an endless personal re-invention, which is destined to never be fully accomplished. This would be at the base of the rambling consciousness that permeates contemporary society, where the imaginary has become undistinguishable from the real – given that one has turned into an empty imitation of the other. All these themes, in turn, relate back to the issue of collective homogenisation, a condition brought by the advance of a highly commercialised media network. The changes associated with it have been particularly significant in an Irish context, where an age-long struggle for national identity had been suddenly substituted by a struggle for a global identity. According to O’Toole, during the years of its economic boom in the early nineties, Ireland witnessed a phenomenon of migration that was less dynamic but equally significant as the mass shifts of the previous two centuries. As a result, the entire society “has left the old country of traditional Ireland and migrated into the strange, exhilarating, and confusing surroundings of the globalised, post-industrial, post-modern world.” Although a considerable confusion still reigns over the definition of the term “post-modern,” the crisis of the imaginary and the very idea of “original” is the one thing which seems to be recurrently codified as pertinent to postmodern philosophies. The typically postmodern vision, thus, implies the deconstruction of meaning and the manifestation of the concept of parody as a

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replacement for the very notion of truth. It is as if an all-pervading crisis engulfed the humanist concept of man and the idea of history as a linear pattern. In narrative terms, this has led to the birth of characters aware of their artificiality and the subsidence of the diachronic in favour of a hectic, achronic repetition.\footnote{Kearney, 1988, pp. 252-3.}

Generally speaking, McDonagh’s work showcases a number of elements which fall easily within this model: the characters often act like puppets deprived of human logic, endlessly enacting meaningless gags which do not improve their physical or mental condition in any way. The fact that the playwright’s main concern seems to be the disruption of a centralised mode of representation\footnote{Cf. Lonergan, Patrick. \textit{Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era}. Basingstoke [England]; New York: Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.} is the main reason a postmodernist reading of \textit{The Lieutenant} is sustainable. This disruption of an authoritative version of “facts” is mainly obtained through the representation of a variety of events which are often in conflict with each other. This approach is further legitimised by the playwright’s words when discussing the reasons for his writing: “It’s just the attempt to create something which changes the world... not in any social or political sense, but just in the \textit{perception} of it.”\footnote{McDonagh, Martin. “Interview.” \textit{Sunday Tribune} 25 June 99. Print. (Druid Theatre Archive, James Hardiman Library, NUI Galway). (emphasis mine)} The idea that the meaning conveyed by mass-mediated images is not intrinsically true, but rendered so by their institutionalisation, is not a new concept in the world of theatre. Friel has famously and mercilessly exposed the dubious authority of the external constructs of factual experience in a number of plays, from \textit{The Freedom of the City} (1973) and \textit{Volunteers} (1979) to \textit{The Faith Healer} (1979) and \textit{Molly Sweeney} (1995), or indeed \textit{Making History} (1988), which is almost a critical essay on revisionism written in dramatic form. However, McDonagh’s first-hand contact with the saturation of visual experience of the contemporary world has brought him to exploit fragmentation in an unprecedented fashion and to foreground issues of globalisation – elements absent from Friel’s work.

From this new postmodern perspective, identity is a matter of choice between elements belonging to a variety of traditions.\footnote{Cf. Bonner, Frances and Paul du Gay. “Representing the Enterprising Self: \textit{Thirtysomething} and Contemporary Consumer Culture.” \textit{Cultural Theory}. Ed. David Oswell. London: Sage, 2010. 49-70.} The formation of identity becomes a self-reflexive project. McDonagh’s characters’ floating values, with their typical
postmodern disregard for every given authority, can be considered the extreme outcome of an unreserved egotism. The stage is nothing more than the reflection of a society no longer capable of distinguishing traditional culture from the consumer culture of advertising, television, radio, billboards and fashion. As part of this cultural schizophrenia, history as well has turned into a personal pastiche made up of a selection of past events. In The Lieutenant, for instance, the principles of the Republicans are constantly diminished by the distorted view that the terrorists themselves have of those ideals. For example, when Mairead invites Padraic to watch In the Name of the Father (1993), a film about the Guildford Four, he completely misses the point of the movie and its relevance to the Republican cause. Instead of seeing the event as a symbol of the injustice suffered by Irish people, as an orthodox ideology would require, he numbly brings the rhetoric of the struggle to outlandish extremes by remarking: “Ah feck the Guildford Four. Even if they didn’t do it they should have taken the blame and be proud of it.” Interpreting such lines as a literal expression of the message of the play, however, is not only simplistic, but ultimately ludicrous. The spite is not directed against the events themselves, but rather against those who mishandle them, by turning them into emblems of something they do not know or that they fundamentally misunderstand, or simply by making such a gratuitous use of them as to eventually trivialise their meaning. It is possible to make a comparison to what happened to a popular symbol coming from a different context of struggle, the Che Guevara icon. The stylised face of the Argentinean rebel has now been reproduced on millions of T-shirts, which are sold alongside every kind of rock, pop or porno brand; the wearing of the shirt has become detached from the ideals originally symbolised by Che Guevara.

In The Lieutenant the idea of forgetfulness and fallacy as inherent to people’s attitude towards history is effectively conveyed in a number of ways. In the talk of the INLA members, for instance: they know that they must oppose Cromwell, but they can no longer remember why. Remarks such as “do you know how many cats Oliver

389 Ibid.
392 Irish National Liberation Army, a Republican paramilitary group with a socialist imprint which formed from the secession of a group of activists from the IRA.
Cromwell killed in his time?"\(^\text{393}\) function as absurd reductionism of Irish history, thus revealing how diminished are the causes held as good reasons for fighting; it is not the fight in itself that is mocked, but the mindlessness with which it is carried out. The same effect is obtained by the preposterous reduction of the Bloody Sunday massacre to the battering of a cat.\(^\text{394}\) By proposing a postmodern perspective for the reading of *The Lieutenant*, however, the objective is not to demonstrate that the playwright’s primary concern is to empty out any construction of historical actuality, but rather that he is carrying on a critique of the impossibility of finding an adequate representation for contemporary experience. In his play, this takes the form of an ingenious travesty of dramatic conventions. The contention is that, by emphasising this aspect, the Italian production succeeded in making the postmodern traits in *The Lieutenant* distinctive. The attempt to decipher the play from this angle, in turn, provides a concrete opportunity to try and solve in an original way what has been called the “McDonagh’s enigma.”\(^\text{395}\)

Critics have frequently associated McDonagh’s style of writing with the concept of a “hyper-determined reality.” The characters inhabiting his world have been described as “familiar and recognisable and yet curiously distant and hyper-real.”\(^\text{396}\) Yet this prodigious mixture of reportage and fable, subtly articulated in the Druid’s production of the Leenane Trilogy and to which those reviews actually refer, has not been assigned to any production of *The Lieutenant*. In the Italian version though, the efforts made towards achieving an effect that is “deliberately off-kilter and askew”\(^\text{397}\) are undeniable. The flight from realism is achieved through many directorial choices, mostly aimed at pursuing a metatheatrical dimension. The very appearance of the characters, for instance, dressed in loose and colourful clownlike clothes, activates more than one Beckettian echo, along with a Brechtian sense of estrangement. This is sustained by a number of devices, like letting the characters step out of their roles in order to announce the interval, or “THE END” being written at the bottom of a tin where, according to the previous dramatic action, a cat was supposed to be.

\(^{393}\) McDonagh, 2001, p. 30.
\(^{394}\) Cf. McDonagh, 2001, p. 28.
\(^{395}\) Recurring expression with reference to the divergence of responses created by McDonagh’s work, quoted in Lonergan, 2004, p. 639.
\(^{396}\) Ibid.
\(^{397}\) Ibid.
In the published edition of the play, the Brechtian reminiscence is conveyed to the reader by numerous pictures from the performance, which is inserted in a glossy appendix placed in the middle of the volume. This intentionally captures the attention of anybody perusing the book as a prospective reader. The implied statement that the pictures make “visually” is further backed up by the inclusion of an interview with the director where he clearly stresses his intention of laying bare theatrical conventions. The exhaustive descriptions by Sciaccaluga thus evoke the impact of the numerous tricks which were used during the staging, or at least induce an explicit awareness of their use. For instance:

[…] invece che ricorrere ai pur possibili effetti speciali nascosti di tipo realistico, ho preferito rendere esplicita la convenzionalità del teatro. Per cui dopo aver sparato a qualcuno si prende un pennello e lo si tinge di rosso, o gli si rovescia in testa un secchio d’acqua color sangue; e poi, magari, i cadaveri si alzano e portano loro stessi in scena i frammenti dei propri corpi da squartare.

 […] rather than employ possible special effects for a realistic outcome, I preferred to make manifest the conventions of theatre. So after somebody has been shot you take a brush and you paint it red, or you throw over his head a bucket full of blood-painted water; and then, maybe, the corpses get up and they take on stage the fragments of their own bodies to be slaughtered.

Exactly like actual spectators, the readers are invited to dismiss any realistic reading of the violence. Moreover, their understanding of the style of the play is further refined by mentioning the cultural influences of Robert Rauschenberg and Jackson Pollock from the visual arts, or Quentin Tarantino from the cinema. Readers may not have actually seen the actors defying naturalistic conventions by dismissing their fictional vests at regular intervals, but they know through the text alone that dead bodies were painted red on stage. And also that when they were the dead bodies, the actors went off stage to bring in the puppets that were supposed to represent their characters. This “puppet’s game,” far from being the mere result of technical choices, may be seen as an integral part of the meaning of the Italian production. During the performance, this stratagem is brought a step further by turning actors into puppets. Even when visible on stage, the actors would remain still and slack every time that the lights indicated that the relevant action was happening somewhere else. This is the case, for instance, when Donny and

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Davey are supposed to saw up bodies in a room, while Mairead and Padraic perform some more crucial action in the adjacent one. The actors embodying Donny and Davey, at this point, appear abandoned in partial light, with the posture of puppets whose strings have been cut, while surrounded by “real” dismembered puppets. The short-circuit between fiction and reality caused by a stage universe where puppets are meant to stand for real people and actors act like puppets, is in tune with the postmodern idea that what is human has become the imitation of an artificial replica. The emphasis is on a continuous sliding from fiction to reality, which eventually blurs the differences between the two dimensions. Another way in which the theatrical dimension of the event is laid bare by the Italian production, and arguably the most spectacular way, is the exceptional abstractness of the setting. The Italian designer Fiorato, following a line already explored by Genoa theatre company with the previous production of Euripides’ Helen, opted for a central stage surrounded by the public, a solution traditionally limited to smaller productions performed on the rear stage of the Piccola Corte.
The crooked girders collapsing towards the centre of the stage reinforce the dreamlike quality of the Italian version. The distance from the familiar cottage in Inishmore described in the script could not be greater. In the published interview, Sciaccaluga hints at the practical challenges posed by McDonagh’s style of writing, such as the frequent shifting from a country landscape to the interior of a cottage, or even to an abattoir. The designer Fiorato also described the decision behind such alternative scenery as partly due to the technical difficulty of bringing a play originally designed to be performed on a small stage to one of a considerably bigger dimension, such as the main stage of Lo Stabile. At any rate, it would be naïve to ascribe such a deliberate neglecting of stage directions recalling the “dingy country kitchen” of traditional Irish drama to merely technical requirements. In the vastness of a stage space totally devoid of vertical elements, not only “the front door,” “the window” and “the other room” disappear, so too does virtually all the furniture referred to in the original stage directions. A single armchair and a big tin container is all that is left. The line “home sweet home” is handwritten in black ink right on the container set in the middle of the scene, which in turn functions as a table, bath, and whatever the action requires. The spectators have to use their imagination to provide walls, furniture, doors and even...
the Irish landscape. In the same interview, Fiorato explains that what struck him most when he first approached McDonagh’s play were the landscapes which, of course, are not directly represented in the actual setting, but whose vastness is somehow evoked in the emptiness of the stage, since the spectators’ eyes are allowed to embrace the whole scenery at once. This also contributes to the diluting of the violence, especially when it is compared to the claustrophobic effect of the London production, where the setting of the country cottage was more accurately recreated, and therefore the actions happening on stage were witnessed in a more restricted space.

The postmodern imprint of the play is also consistently backed up by a certain “rockabilly” atmosphere, conveyed mainly in the figures of the three Northern Irish characters, Christy, Joey and Brendan. All are dressed in leather clothes and have some ostentatious technological accessories, like a bright-red dye for Christy’s hair, an orthodontic device severely affecting Joey’s pronunciation, and a mobile phone with which Brendan toys constantly. Last, but not least, each one of the INLA members brings an instrument case with weapons locked inside. These characteristics of the staging are brought to the readers of Il Tenente di Inishmore through the pictures and detailed descriptions contained in the interview, where Sciaccaluga also acknowledges the necessity of marking these characters as visually and behaviourally different because of the impossibility of reproducing in Italian what in the stage directions is indicated as a “Northern Irish accent.” From the plot, it is easy to realise that the intrusion of this urbanised gang is effectively what triggers the disruptive process which is going to take place in the rural environment of Inishmore. Even if the spectator ignores it at the beginning, the killing of a cat by the three terrorists is what starts a plotline that will end in tragedy. McDonagh, however, avoids making things clear from the beginning, so that a meaningful undecidability about who is guilty and who is not dominates the first part of the play. Gradually though, the deceptive operation set up by the Belfast gang is unveiled, and, by extension, the destructive force that globalisation may exert on rural communities reveals itself in all its power. It is as if McDonagh’s postmodern re-elaboration of the traditional Manichean conception of the stage world as a binary opposition between a small and vulnerable “inside” in contrast with the hostile and cacophonous masses of the “outside,” became more visible in Genoa.
A challenge to the prototype of the outsider (be it national, political, economical or sexual) built up by modern culture is inscribed in the hyperbolic features of McDonagh’s deranged characters, as dishonesty, moral and emotional instability affect all the personae in the play. In Genoa, the dramatic confusion of ethical values on stage is brought to its apotheosis, so that it becomes evident that the universe on stage is entirely inhabited by “outsiders.” In this way, the Italian production was technically amplifying one of the themes underpinning the play. Consistently with this approach, the tension between nature, civilisation and globalisation was also made explicit in Genoa. The insertion at the end of Scene Five of some additional material is a direct example of how this interpretative option was pursued through specific directorial choices. This was a brief scene which does not exist in the original script, and therefore does not appear in the Italian published edition either. The addition is a piece where the three INLA members, instead of exiting until their voices “fade to mumbles off stage” as the script suggests, settle down for the night and, rather unsuccessfully, try to fall asleep. They are prevented by the repeated ringing of Brendan’s mobile phone. Besides being a comic intermezzo based on gestures and facial expressions dear to the Italian tradition, the particular significance of the scene resides in the fact that the final noise coming from the mobile phone assumes the naturalistic sound of a crowing cock, which drives the gang to look for the origin of it in the natural surroundings. The final realisation that the sound is also coming from the phone functions as an allegory of progress becoming a victim of its own tricks. In this sense, it operates a postmodern destabilisation of the ontological status of nature, rendered almost undistinguishable from its fake reproduction.

Alongside the deconstruction of nature, a challenge to culture in its deeper sense of being a constitutive element of a nation is also evident in the Italian version. According to the script, at the end of the same scene with the three youngsters camping on Inishmore, Mairead appears at the side of the stage: this shows that she has overheard their conversation. The absence of barriers on the Italian stage allows a fluid passage from one scene to the next which, on many occasions, is entirely left to a minor shift in lightning. Therefore, when Mairead is supposed to be singing rebel songs on a country road while she waits for Padraic, the impression is that Mairead is singing the

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401 McDonagh, 2001, p. 31.
lines to the sleeping gang, who are also still on stage. The first stanza, “Come on ye young rebels and list while I sing/ the love of one’s land is a terrible thing/it banishes fear with the speed of a flame/ and it makes us all part of the patriot game,” seems to underline a disparity between the heroes of the song and the three dim-witted figures presented as (post) modern patriots. The tumbling down of the old sacred ideals is also echoed in the way the song is performed, that is in a rock-techno arrangement complete with loud distortions. This ignores the instructions in McDonagh’s script, where Mairead is said to be “singing quietly.”

Punk rock is also largely used throughout the play to emphasise the postmodern element of deconstruction in more popular terms. In other words, the intermittent intrusion of loud techno music as the soundtrack for the action can be seen as a way to enable even those in the audience who are uninformed of the theoretical and sociological debate surrounding postmodernism to pick up the deconstructive aspects of McDonagh’s writing. This symbolic use of music is suggested by the script itself, for instance in the fact that the confrontation between Mairead and her brother Davey is often emblematized by their musical preferences. While Mairead sings old songs imbued with a rhetoric deriving from tradition, Davey counteracts by shouting the lyrics from Motorhead’s “The Ace of Spades,” which can be seen as a proud celebration of meaninglessness. Music is also occasionally used as parodist counterpoint to what happens on stage. For instance, when the play takes a decisive turn towards exploitation and parody of Hollywood products, the music acquires the quality of some colossal soundtrack. Besides the music, in the Italian version the travesty of Hollywood’s subculture is made even more explicit on a linguistic level. The translator admitted his reliance on the “fictional” language of movies in order to overcome some of the difficulties posed by the translation:

[...]Mi è venuto un po’ in soccorso il pessimo doppiaggio dei film americani, che ha ormai influenzato il nostro modo “giovanile” di litigare così come la fonte (il film americano non doppiato ma non per questo più Irish) influenza i suoi personaggi, per cui mi è sembrato l’unico caso in cui il “doppiese” fosse consentito.

402 Ibid. p. 32.
403 Ibid., p. 33.
404 “The horrible dubbing of American movies helped me quite a bit, since it affected our ‘juvenile way of quarrelling the same way as the source material (the not-dubbed American movies which by no means
Basically, Paravidino felt entitled to reproduce Irish slang with the typical Italian dubbing of American movies, partly because the American movies’ language is what influences the Irish-speaking characters of the play. The evolution of the language on stage seems to highlight the movie dimension even further, making it more immediately evident than in its English counterpart. For instance, Davey’s response to one of Padraic’s deliriums reads in English “that sentence makes no sense at all.” This is translated by Paravidino as *questa battuta non ha nessun senso* where the word *battuta*, basically a cue, underlines the fictional dimension more than the original. During the performance, the translation is taken one step further, as the actor playing Davey delivered the line as *ma chi te le scrive ste battute?* ‘who is the writer of these cues of yours?’ which clearly alludes to some mastermind behind the madness that is being enacted on stage.

Yet speech patterns coined after the universally decipherable language of Hollywood action movies are undoubtedly used in the original version of *The Lieutenant* as well, like the sentence uttered by Mairead: “On a count of three, aye. Like in films.” From this perspective, the Italian version, yet again, only enhances a technique that, maybe more subtly, is already in use. The disruption of the audience’s participation may not be as manifest, especially from a linguistic point of view, yet a certain manipulation of the audience is indeed inscribed in McDonagh’s play. Padraic’s stubborn conviction that “something will turn up,” for instance, is another cliché taken from the movie format, seeing as, at a rational level, Padraic has no reason whatsoever to hope for some last minute rescue. Such a statement therefore reveals his consciousness of being a character, as in a commercial movie the *coup de théâtre* is much more probable than its absence. The series of *coup de théâtre* becomes almost continual in the last part of the play, when Donny and Davey, in the best horror movie tradition, are saved by virtue of Christy’s last breath confession. The play then would appear to have settled on the patterns of reception associated with a movie; yet, by the time these expectations are shared by the spectators, they are abruptly faced with the deceiving reality of “representation.” With the sudden murder of Padraic, the

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405 McDonagh, 2001, p. 53.
406 Ibid., p. 49.
protagonist, the culmination of the love story is denied, and with it the characteristic ending of popular romantic movies, novels or plays.

The procedure of employing highly conventional modes of expression and trusting the audience to dismantle them, and reconsider what is habitually digested without any critical engagement then, can be seen as one of the key elements of McDonagh’s postmodern enterprise. The playwright openly declared in an interview: “I like the trick of leading the audience up to think they are dealing with an archetypal Irish situation and then you give them a great smack and show that they aren’t.” Nonetheless, critics have rarely approached this playwright’s work as if its main concern is to confront the audience with codified sentimentalities in order to force them to question their own moral system. A possible explanation for this could be sought in the postmodern paradox that the very essence of that culture that is intended to be mocked is precisely what is used so as to contest the dominance of a fetishised system. A rather popular example, in more than one sense, can be found in the megalomaniac operation called Zooropa set up by U2. This massive multi-media show, staged during their gigs in the early nineties, was supposedly aimed at condemning the preponderant power of the media in Western society. A great number of the band’s fans and critics though mistook it for the inconsiderate exaltation of the same.

McDonagh also retrieves his material from the world of shows and pseudo-events to conjure up a pastiche of both a stereotyped past and an uncannily technological present. Basically his language has the effect of what postmodern theories define as “simulacrum:” it is an offer of “simulacra” to people already surrounded by them. This sets up a parodic mirror-play, which shows an acute understanding of the disposition of the receiving subjects. It is an artistic choice compatible with an era which has reduced history to a wide collection of discontinuous “images.” In this sense it is possible to pursue an analytical perspective which foregrounds the implicit condemnation of the bourgeois décor and its lack of concern for anything but its well-accepted codes inherent to the play. This will be done through a comparative critical analysis of the Italian and British productions, which will demonstrate how The

407 McDonagh, Martin. “Interview.” Sunday Telegraph 17 March 96. (Druid Theatre Archive, James Hardiman Library, NUI Galway)
408 Cf. Kearney, 1988, p. 32.
Lieutenant casts a spell of sorts on its audiences who, in different ways and at different moments, are left to vicariously enjoy the violence on stage and, at the same time, feel uncomfortable about their own response. The two choices the play leaves to the audience (consciously or unconsciously) is whether or not to take the decisive step of reconsidering well-codified images. If such reconsideration does not take place, the spectators will hold on to the prior state of passive consumers: the only option then is to slide back into the more comfortable position of rejecting the play as "flashily meretricious."  

The announcement uttered by a detached but friendly off-stage voice at the beginning of the Italian performance declared: "Attenzione, nello spettacolo a cui state per assistere verrano sparati molti colpi di pistola e segate molte ossa. Buon divertimento." This warning concerns the shooting which will take place during the show and, more oddly, alerts the audience to the "several bones which will be sawn." Their attention is intentionally drawn to the flamboyant brutality of the killings as if, somehow, it is merely the ostentatious way the killings are performed that audiences will find disconcerting. Curiously and significantly, the only special effects which were aimed at some kind of realism in Genoa were those linked precisely with the action of dismembering the corpses: not only were the limbs strewn across the stage quite realistic but, in the final part of the play, the constant and rather disturbing soundtrack was the apparent noise of bones being sawn. It could be argued that by stressing the form that violence takes in the play - rather than violence itself - as reason for disconcertment, the production is subtly hinting at the audience’s acquired numbness towards it. From this perspective, the few members of the audience leaving during the performance would fit in with the provocative manipulation set up by the play.  

It is indeed a perfect occasion for the remaining spectators to perhaps realise that those walking away probably read newspapers every day and watch the news on TV. Those activities may be less visually upsetting, but are essentially a great deal more distressing.

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410 "Beware. In the following show lots of gunshots will be exploded and many bones will be sawn. Enjoy." (translation mine)
411 Il Tenente di Inishmore. By Martin McDonagh. Dir. Marco Sciaccaluga. Teatro Della Corte, Genoa. 27 March 2003. Performance. A group of elderly people and a handful of other spectators were personally witnessed leaving the show at the start of Scene 9. This experience is reported by a number of reviewers as well.
than what has been witnessed on stage, if for no other reason than those images are real. The announcement’s concluding words, *buon divertimento*, may be seen as another way to subtly challenge the audience. This conventional expression is regularly heard at the start of many forms of entertainment, to the point that addressees seldom realise that it contains an intrinsic exhortation about the reception expected. In *The Lieutenant*’s case, though, something strident is perceived, because this invitation to “have fun” comes just after the disturbing image of “sawing bones.” This is bound to create a moment of puzzlement in the audience, as having fun is usually associated with very different scenarios. Possibly, this would activate a defense mechanism of sorts, encouraging them to individually assess whether what they are going to witness is in fact fun or not, and consequently, and more importantly, whether it is just fun or not.

In Britain, the general impression given by the warning before the performance is utterly different; nonetheless it can be dissected along similar lines to its Italian counterpart, so as to reach similar conclusions. In London, “no cats nor people were harmed in reality” was the unusual message broadcast by the loudspeaker before the show. This line was also included in the letter that the Royal Shakespeare Company’s director, Kate Horton, sent to ticket holders as part of a marketing strategy which focused on sensationalising the play. The same letter indicated that the play was unsuitable for children under fifteen, and even contained a warning for the “very young, elderly, pregnant or visually or hearing impaired.” 412 It is not clear whether this was to be taken seriously or was part of the big masquerade set up by the play. Less ambiguous is the subversion of priorities entailed in the message that “no cats nor people” will be harmed, which entails that even the anticipation of what is supposed to be shocking is subverted. The apparent cautioning about the torture of an animal hides the implication that the audience is expected to be more concerned about cats than about human beings, just like the characters in the play. Somehow, the invisible line separating the tilted universe of the stage from the real world is erased, or rather, the tilted laws of the fictional world invade territories traditionally belonging to the real world. Moreover, by openly stating that “no human has been hurt,” the initial announcement falls into the “tautology” of taking the trouble to say something which is normally silently agreed

upon by everybody. This trick, typical of black comedy, should ultimately further emphasise the artificiality of the representation.

Regarding the play’s confusion about the hierarchical position of human beings and animals, Lonergan suggests that the playwright’s intention is to subvert the trope which has fed the comparison of Irish terrorists with animals. While apparently confirming this mindset by presenting his terrorists as psychopaths the play is effectively emphasising the irrationality of this standpoint. By making the audience laugh at the idea that the cat Wee Thomas “always says hello to you were you to see him sitting on a wall,” The Lieutenant uses the madness on stage to figuratively show the absurdity of treating animals as if they were people, and at the same time, considering men as beasts.

Similar stratagems to those employed for the fore-warnings can be seen in the advertising posters for both the Italian and British productions, as they can be viewed with very different attitudes before and after the show. In this sense, the posters are consistent with the postmodern strategy of the play, as both are aimed at misinforming rather than informing potential spectators. Thus the audience can experience at best the two opposing emotional journeys set up for them by the two performances. The Italian poster is consistent with the alternative approach of the production: the sardonic cat’s muzzle undoubtedly escapes classification consistent with any conventional dramatic tradition. The oddity of such a choice can be better appreciated if the RSC poster is recalled. The image of the passionate embrace between a good-looking couple falls within a well-established canon, even if it is slightly spoilt by the blurred gun in the background. The overall effect, however, is

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413 Cf. Lonergan, 2005.
414 McDonagh, 2001, p. 6.
undoubtedly much less hermetic: a love story tainted by violence would be a reasonable guess as to the subject of the play. Yet a more precise definition would be that of “a violent story, with a bit of love thrown in the picture,” and such an apparently minor difference is not completely irrelevant. In a similar way, the proverbial impenetrability of the cat’s look assumes the function of the first and most patent deception that the theatre audience will experience. The black cat, however unjustified, is the trigger to the massacre taking place on stage. It seems safe to assume that very few of the audience, after the show, would feel the same warm feeling for the cat peeping out from the poster that they might have had before entering. Rather, they might have seen in the sardonic look of the feline a mischievous smile. The image of the cat is very much in keeping with the Italian strategy of playing down the potential tension intrinsic to the play.

This is a goal which is also achieved, but at the cost of humour, by the rather abstract painting of a field stained by some unspecified red spots which appears on the cover of the published version. Again the reader might be thinking of a poppy field before reading the play, only to realise later that the reference is to drops of blood by the time s/he has finished. The interview with Sciaccaluga contains a mention of Gogol as a possible predecessor of McDonagh. The impressionistic style of the Russian writer might evoke for Italian readers an idea of absurdism somehow akin to the coexistence in the poster of Inishmore, a lieutenant and a cat, as those are three objects hardly reducible to an established interpretative model. Molière is also a name repeatedly mentioned by Sciaccaluga, so that his preference for a farcical approach to McDonagh likewise becomes evident to the readers: “La farsa non è un genere teatrale minore; e McDonagh ha il merito di frequentarla, oltreché il merito di saperla fare.”415 This could be seen as a cautious formal choice in an Italian

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415 “Farce it is not a minor genre; and McDonagh has the merit of approaching it, beside the merit of being able to do it.” In “Ridere Sino alle Lacrime in un Mondo alla Rovescia.” In McDonagh, 2004. Trans. Sciaccaluga, p. 12. (translation mine)
environment highly unfamiliar with the elements of in-yer-face theatre. The exaggerated
gesticulation, the shouting or declaiming of the delivery, the way of dressing, which
clearly exposes its status as disguise, instead, belong to a typically Italian notion of the
“comic.” Yet they could be interpreted as something more than a mere accommodation
to the target audience tastes in terms of humour. The emphasis on the comic side of
McDonagh’s bewildering tragicomedy is not accidental, as it does have some relevance
for the reception of the play. This modus operandi is meticulously implemented from
the very beginning, as can be seen from the appearance of some dysfunctional objects,
like a fishing rod in Davey’s hands and a baseball bat which Donny toys with from time
to time. This technique further enhances the status of the two being “character actors:”
Davey as awkward and Donny as aggressive. A number of comic patterns reminiscent
of commedia dell’arte, are also employed: Donny kicks Davey in the back so that the
latter tumbles down; Davey tries to bribe Donny to convince him not to mention his
name to Padraic, with an offer of money in which the subservient
gestures are quite
typical of slapstick comedy. The overall interaction between the two characters is aimed
at making the public aware, right from the start, that what is required of them is bitter
laughter. The effect is almost literally opposite to what, in a review, has been described
as the standard reception of the British production. Unlike the British audience, the
Italian spectators start off laughing, and they laugh their hearts out for the first half of
the play with very little reserve, except maybe for the “biteme” too much swearing. The
references to factual reality, if grasped at all, concern something far away, and the
violence is played down by the way it is acted out, and by the constant remainder of its
fictionality. Moreover, as previously mentioned, the claustrophobic nuance gets lost
because, despite the considerable amount of corpses covering the floor and the more
intimate contact with the audience that the central plan was supposed to stimulate, the
environment created by the scenery, or lack of scenery, is too broad to convey the sense
of heaviness and inescapability which characterised the British performance.
Nevertheless, the Italian audience experiences a growing sense of disturbance at the
lack of humanity shown by characters that, rather than achieving some meaningful
sense of redemption, keep reaching new levels of brutality. Scene Nine features Donny
and Davey, the two slightly lunatic characters with whom the public is more likely to
sympathise, hacking down corpses without blinking an eye, except for complaining
about the hard work involved. This can be taken as the turning point of the play, when
the Italian audience “has had too much of it,” and also the moment when the “walk
outs” normally happen. Those leaving are arguably members of the audience who feel they are too sensitive for this kind of show or are too disgusted by it.

Overall, Genoa’s performance denied the audience a final catharsis, but this was a conscious goal of the director rather than a failure of the production. Again, the interview links back to the staging, and suggests a possible interpretation, or maybe the lack of one, to both readers and spectators, who ideally coincide: “Immagino e spero che gli spettatori rideranno molto assistendo alla rappresentazione del Tenente. Se poi qualcuno uscirà dalla sala dicendo: ‘Ho riso tanto, ma..., ‘a costui non posso dire altro che in questo testo non c’è, né ci può essere un fatto catartico.’” The catharsis was somehow further denied by the addition of the song “Sunday Bloody Sunday” by U2 at the end of the play. The very title of the song, for an Italian audience, is evocative of the tragic reality of the Troubles, more than the probably indecipherable references to the Warrington massacre or the attempt on Airy Neave’s life mentioned in the play. Arguably then, the choice to have this well-known song at the end of the play is an attempt to recover, to some extent, the factual reality which might have been only vaguely sensed by an audience unaware of even what the INLA stands for. The song, however, rather than a late after-thought aimed at restoring the historical dimension to the play, should be seen as an attempt to infuse the situation that has been witnessed with some kind of emotional weight. Indeed, “Sunday Bloody Sunday” may function as a reminder of the Irish question, not only to the quite considerable number of U2 admirers in Italy, but also to the cinema-goers able to make a connection with Paul Greengrass’s documentary movie Bloody Sunday. The movie, released in the cinema just a couple of years before the play was staged, was an informative reportage about the events on 30 January 1972, a date which has become symbolically charged within the context of Irish history. Significantly, the movie, besides sharing the obvious factual reference, also had “Sunday Bloody Sunday” as its signature tune, in a live version arguably more stirring than the studio version, whose meaning has somehow been eroded by its fame.

416 “I guess and I hope that spectators will laugh a lot while watching the production of the Lieutenant. In case someone at the moment of going away will say: I laugh a lot, but..., to this people I cannot say anything but that in this text there is not, and there cannot be, a cathartic effect.” In “Ridere Sino alle Lacrime in un Mondo alla Rovescia.” In McDonagh, 2004. Trans. Sciaccaluga, p. 112. (translation mine)
Moreover, the song can be seen as a manifesto of that “pacifist rage” that McDonagh in an interview has indicated as the reason for his writing. The lines of the refrain, “How long must we sing this song?” expresses exactly the same enraged impotence cried out on stage by Davey: “Oh will it never end? Will it never fecking end?”\(^{417}\) It is a cry which can be seen as the embodiment of frustration generated by the Troubles, but one that is not necessarily confined to them. Even in the song, the Irish situation is just the starting point towards an understanding of the same feelings of impotence from a wider perspective. In the last stanza of the song, “it’s true we are immune, when fact is fiction and TV reality,” the mention of the media explicitly evokes the global dimension of the subject. Besides functioning as an appropriate synthesis of the postmodern facet in McDonagh’s work, it also corroborates Sciaccaluga’s take on the play as something transcending the subject of Irish terrorism. Moreover, by being performed at the very end of the play, when the actors dismiss their characters’ vests for good and create a new relationship with the applauding audience, this last stanza almost assumes the power of a metaliterary comment on the play, the ultimate sanction of the fusion of fact and fiction. Nonetheless, as the sense of reality is repeatedly denied by the surplus of farce at the beginning, the song ultimately functions as something that recalls the “factual dimension.” In this sense it can be seen as an epiphany, but it lacks the reconciliatory effect that endings are supposed to grant. The audience is likely to be suddenly shaken from that state of numbness, induced by the sheer horror of the growing excesses in the final part of the performance. The overall effect, therefore, is an implicit invitation to re-assess the story, delivered by means of superficial comedy or even gratuitous brutality, in terms of the tragedy at its core.

The British audience was also forced to reconsider what they had witnessed, yet their wake up call was of a different kind: they were encouraged to view the attitude displayed by the play as one of provocation, not disrespect. Unlike the Italian audience, for the first part of the RSC production, spectators endured an increasing sense of incredulous awe and puzzlement. A typical reaction has been captured by Ashley Taggart in her article “An Economy of Pity: McDonagh’s Monstrous Regiment.”\(^{418}\)

\(^{417}\) McDonagh, 2001, p. 67.
Here Taggart gives a detailed account of the sense of unease which gripped the audience for the first part of the performance at the Garrick Theatre, London:

For the first hour, they gazed in discomfited silence, assailed as they were with images of feline slaughter, casual torture, cow blinding, all underpinned with escalating threats of ever more explicit and inventive brutality [...] 419

She noted an awkwardly mute audience listening to what they perceived as absurd lines that were supposed to be funny, 420 and, generally, a sense of shame for being there, something that seemed to keep the spectators from actually enjoying the play, especially when more precise references to terrorism and actual killings were made. 421 For instance, there are a few lines in the play referring to the murder of children by terrorists, something that those acquainted with the facts could easily relate to the 1993 IRA bombing of Warrington, in which two children lost their lives. 422 In fact, according to an interview with McDonagh in the Daily Telegraph, 423 this was precisely the event that spurred him to write the play. Such a declaration, however unreliable McDonagh’s statements may be, is hardly compatible with superficial irreverence toward a delicate political situation. Taggart identifies a moment when the seeds of provocation in McDonagh’s work are finally recognised as such. It is again at the beginning of Scene 9, when the stage is literally soaked with blood and covered by corpses, and the only movement is performed by a crying Padraic sitting on Christy’s corpse, desperately stroking Wee Thomas’ headless body. According to Taggart, it is at this moment that the “auditorium exploded with laughter.” 424 This release of tension due to a stressful accumulation of nervous energy would be utterly unimaginable as a reaction to the Italian production, as from the very beginning the audience is greeted by farce.

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419 Ibid.
420 For instance Donny reporting: “Many’s the time I trampled on my mam when she was alive. After she’s died I stopped. There seemed no sense,” and Padraic’s subsequent assertion that “There’s no statute of limitations on mam trampling, Dad,” as if “mam trampling” was a commonly committed crime. In McDonagh, 2001, p. 24; p. 43.
421 Like Padraic’s monologue on the phone: “[...] I put bombs on a couple of chip shops, but they didn’t go off. (Pause.) Because chip shops aren’t as well guarded as army barracks. Do I need your advice on putting bombs?”; or Joey’s declarations: “I’d never joined the INLA in the first place if I’d know the battering of cats was to be on the agenda. The INLA has gone down in my estimation today. Same as we blew up Airey Neave. You can’t blow up a fella just because he has a funny name. It wasn’t his fault;” or again Padraic’s comment about the Behan’s brothers: “If they’d done a little more bombing and a little less writing I’d have more respect for them.” In McDonagh, 2001, p. 13; p. 29; p. 32.
In both productions, however, McDonagh’s attempt to create a theatrical equivalent of features typical of the postmodern narrative seems to survive. The lack of any conventional moral figure on stage recalls the absence of the traditional omniscient narrator, whose authority guides readers’ understanding. The audience’s uneasiness with their own response could be explained in those terms, especially discomfort at their own laughter at such brutality: they are adrift because there is no moral guidance within the play with enough authority to address the audience’s response. In *The Lieutenant’s* world, every single character complies, in his/her own separate way, to an “alternative” moral code. It is not only the figures on stage who find it normal to kill each other, disregarding any familial link of brotherhood or fatherhood; the audience is alerted to the fact that even the characters off stage are an integral part of this state of affairs. For instance, when Mairead has to leave the family, her mum’s last words to her sound at the very least uncanny:

**Mairead:** She said good luck and try not to go blowing up kids.  
**Davey:** And what did you say?  
**Mairead:** I said I’d try but I’d be making no promises.  
**Davey:** And what did she say?  
**Mairead:** She said so long as you try is the main thing.425

If this dialogue was inserted in a traditional play, its moral vacuity would be perceived as a slap in the face, but after more than one-hour of immersion into McDonagh’s *Inishmore*, spectators have become so used to the community’s moral instability that Mairead’s mother’s words are perceived as rather sensible instead. The play is inviting its audience to tune their minds to the system of values followed by the characters on stage. “Immorality” has become almost unrecognisable insofar as it is the only morality ruling their world. In a world where relativism has become the governing concept, circularity is the necessary outcome, as no point is privileged. This implies the open admittance of the defeat of human communication as carrier of meanings and of the linear concept of knowledge.

These elements will now be assessed as the supporting symbolic structure of the play, which was exalted by some elements of the Italian production. More specifically, the visual impact of the staging, and the anti-climax effect, or “anti-catharsis” at the end, will be gauged as factors which, by conveying the idea that linear progress has

425 McDonagh, 2001, p. 57.
collapsed, contribute to endow the Italian production with a sense of circularity. This, in turn, encourages the gradual involvement of the spectators with the insanity on stage and serves to show that the “meaninglessness” of the play is a crucial element of its meaning, thereby emphasising its existential dimension. In particular, a set which assimilates Irish landscapes with crooked girders, and whose dominating element is a circular structure collapsing towards the centre, is a quality unique to the Italian production. This not only visually reflects the idea that the starting and the final point are indeterminate and even interchangeable, but that the depression at the centre of the stage somewhat anticipates the downwards direction of the play’s general mood and its reception. In this sense, the hilarity that the action of *Il Tenente di Inishmore* conveys at the beginning is partly undermined, because the set somehow pre-empts the meaninglessness of all that will be witnessed. At the end, in fact, the reappearance of Wee Thomas, rather than providing some kind of release, functions as the actual incarnation of the futility of the massacre that has been carried out in his name. And this is exactly the reason behind Donny and Davey’s impulsive anger towards him: disregarding the fact that the cat is completely innocent, both decide in the blink of an eye that he deserves shooting. The irony is that Wee Thomas does not deserve shooting any more than the others, but neither does he deserve it any less, because everybody has been shot for absolutely petty reasons. The cathartic moment of the play should lie in this, since Wee Thomas is ultimately spared and the cycle of violence is interrupted. The reason why, in my view, the Italian audience is denied this cathartic moment is that, first and foremost, the cat is reduced to a mere theatrical trick. The cat’s immateriality, besides functioning as a reductio, also sanctions its nature as different, more elevated perhaps, than the rest of the characters, the human beings. It could be argued that the choice derives from purely technical reasons, or maybe it is just an additional audacious step into the metatheatrical dimension that pervades the whole performance. Yet the director emphasises this aspect also in the published interview: “*Quello dei gatti è diventato così nello spettacolo un fatto essenzialmente fuori campo, che rinvia un poco alla magia: li si intuisce, ma li si vede solo quando sono morti*” ‘the cats became in the shows an off-stage matter, which almost recalls magic, you can “feel” them, but you can see them only when they are dead.’ The absence of any real cat on stage then can be interpreted as part of the director’s vision, especially as it is another clear departure from the British production. The possible significance of the choice is made even clearer by the director’s following statements:
In questo finale torna ancora una volta l’idea che uccidere un gatto sia un peccato mortale, mentre uccidere un uomo no. Scherzosamente, durante le prove, dicevo agli attori che dovevano pensare di recitare per un pubblico di gatti. Nella commedia c’è infatti l’idea provocatoria che l’innocenza non appartenga alla specie umana, ma solo ai gatti. Se i gatti vedessero il nostro spettacolo, credo che ne uscirebbero contenti.426

In this conclusion the idea that killing a cat is a mortal sin returns once again, whereas killing a man is not. As a joke, during rehearsal, I used to tell the actors to think as if they were acting for an audience of cats. In the comedy in fact there is the provocative idea that innocence does not belong to the human species, but only to cats. If cats could watch our show, I think they would leave satisfied.

The surrealist and, to some extent, metaphysical direction taken by the Italian director in re-defining the play for an Italian audience could be determined by the belief that the historical intricacies of the Northern Irish situation could not be portrayed by The Lieutenant, unless the spectator already had sufficient acquaintance with the matter. In the published interview, Sciaccaluga repeatedly asserts that he believes it would be reductive, or even a mistake, to read Il Tenente di Inishmore as a text about Irish terrorism. Terrorism is a component of the society where the action takes place, but the play, in Sciaccaluga’s view, is not intended to be either ideological or rebellious.427 In Ireland on the other hand numerous reviewers read the play as a statement about Irish terrorism, and reacted, according to their own ideological standpoints. Some were enthusiastic because of the brave ridiculing of republicanism and the satirising of the “private puritanism, sexual vanity and search for historical sanctions of the paramilitaries;”428 others were indignant because of the portrayal of terrorists as “retarded, puritanical psychopaths, tainted by sentimentality, ignorant of history and addicted to a murderous violence that proves futile and self-destructive,”429 or, more neutrally, amused by the “hilarious piss-take of a band of men – in this case the INLA – whose murderous activities are motivated by adolescent absolutes and maudlin

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427 “Sarebbe minimizzante dire che si parla di terrorismo. Il terrorismo è una componente della società irlandese in cui si svolge l’azione, ma il testo non è né ideologico né di protesta,” or “credo che sia un errore leggere Il Tenente di Inishmore come un testo sul terrorismo irlandese.” In “Ridere sino alle Lacrime in un Mondo alla Rovescia.” Ibid., p. 110.
sentimentality." The Lieutenant of Inishmore was seen by some commentators as one of the most offensive plays ever. One review pointed out its ability to give a triple offence:

Moralists will object to the scenes of brutality; terrorists and their sympathisers to the mockery of Irish freedom-fighters; and animal rights campaigners will fret about the simulation of dead cats and the participation of real ones.

Yet, by positing the aporetic stasis inherent in a state of conflict as The Lieutenant’s central theme, it becomes possible to argue that “the play’s denouement [does not] supply a coherent message” is the actual message of the play. This would effectively answer some of the charges directed at previous productions of the play: lack of coherence, absence of symbolism and difficulty in finding an obvious metaphor. If the play was portraying the helpless chaos which situations of conflict generate, then the failure to convey a direct political message would only be a way of actively denouncing the intractability of the problems in Northern Ireland.

In other words The Lieutenant could be seen as a dramatic articulation of Seamus Deane’s statement: “The more intractable the problem seems, the more we consign it to the realm of the irrational, the purblind, the atavistic.” In an Italian context, however, such an interpretation is hampered by the fact that, while the play does not provide an overall comprehension of the historical situation in Northern Ireland, it depicts an artistic interpretation of violence inspired by it. The task of rebuilding the dynamics of the conflict nowadays euphemistically known as the Troubles is left entirely to the audience. The action on stage is viewed as enacting the circle of violence fuelled by the dichotomic opposition of the two factions, but this is like a mise-en-abyme of the conflict where the causes for fighting seem to endlessly repeat themselves. The fact that the Italian audience is naturally more detached from the historical events in the play can make the jokes easier to enjoy, as their hilarious absurdity is less disturbed by the shadow of tragedy behind them. However, the higher degree of abstraction of the

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432 Hassel, Gerald. Rev. of The Lieutenant of Inishmore, by Martin McDonagh. What’s on in London 13 April 1996. (Druid Theatre Archive, James Hardiman Library, NUI Galway)
production does not necessarily translate into an automatic appreciation of the abstract meaning of the play. Quite the reverse, the reviews seem to suggest that, at least on the level of performance, the audience’s superficial knowledge of the Irish conflict might have defied an appraisal of the play as a metaphor of the inexorable circularity of violence, and of the associated impossibility of determining any absolute righteousness.

All things considered, the most significant difference between the Italian and what can be considered a typically Irish reception is this: what was seen as McDonagh’s trivial depiction of Irish Republicans as demented was generally met with less outrage in the Italian milieu. In this sense, the attempt by the Italian production to universalise the play seemed to go completely unnoticed. Even one actor directly involved in the performance, Aleksandar Cvjektovic, seemed to endorse a rather reductive reading of the play in an official interview. Cvjektovic played the role of James and he sided with those who interpreted *Il Tenente* as a statement against terrorism. Even more interestingly, when asked how the situation of contemporary dramaturgy in his native land – the former Yugoslavia – was, he answered that the issue of “their” war was not yet a matter of discussion or dramatic representation, since “*rischia invece di riesumare, in una parte o nell’altra degli spettatori, antichissime questioni mal sepolt.*”$^{433}$ Cvjektovic, then, clearly distinguishes between the Yugoslavian war and Irish terrorism, neglecting the similarities that the two situations may present to an

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$^{433}$ “It rather risks of bringing back, in one side or the other of the spectators, ancient resentments not completely forgotten.” In Zanovello, Silvana. “Il Teatro contro il Terrorismo.” *Il Secolo XIX* 22 March 2004. (translation mine)
external observer. In other words, he fails to see the play as an enactment of the fact that every conflict can be brought back to the same dynamics, where each faction has its own share of fault and sufferance, hard to tell apart and which are painful to be reminded of.

From this perspective the original and universal message of the play would be applicable to Ireland, Yugoslavia, Palestine and wherever else any imperial authority is imposed or a civil war breaks out. The fact that McDonagh chose to depict Irish terrorists and not Palestinian rebels, for instance, can be simply ascribed to the same reason why he chose an Irish brogue as his means of expression: because that is what he knew best and what he could best represent. The point is not that the play could have worked as well if it dealt with any other terrorist movement: it has been shown that *The Lieutenant* cannot shrink from its Irish dimension without virtually vanishing. Rather, it is possible to envisage that McDonagh’s style would have turned any terrorist from any part of the world into a maniac, as it is precisely their nature as “frenzied creatures” that endows the play with its meaning, rather than their “being Irish.” The hypothesis that the playwright employed Ireland to speak about timeless human violence seems to be further supported by the play which followed *The Lieutenant, The Pillowman*, which consciously avoids any association with Ireland. Still the two main characters with Slavic-sounding names present the same idiosyncrasies that mark the Irish characters of the previous plays. Also, the play represents in a purer form the same postmodern undecidability rooted in the aporetic situation which was implied by *The Lieutenant*. During *The Pillowman* the audience is presented with two solutions which they know to be equally negative; yet a choice has to be made. More specifically *The Pillowman* indicates a fantasy character, whose task is described by Kanturian as follows:

> See, when the Pillowman was successful in his work, a little child would die horrifically. And when the Pillowman was unsuccessful, a little child would have a horrific life, grow into an adult who’d also have a horrific life, and then die horrifically.434

In this case, the absolute abstraction of the play resists straightforward interpretations, yet the underpinning structure of the story emerges even more clearly: the clashing of two opposing “truths,” or events. The absence of any immediate referent to this world

makes it more manifestly obvious that the playwright is not interested in endorsing one truth over the other, but rather in articulating the disturbing balance that such a conflicting situation creates and, accordingly, the resigned acceptance that has to follow.

![Diagram](image)

ONLOOKER

Tab. 2. Schematic representation of the underlying structure proposed for McDonagh’s plays.

The main difference, between *The Lieutenant* and *The Pillowman*, is that the nature of the antagonistic truths in the latter, “murder of the child,” and “horrific-life,” makes more evident that the distinction between right or wrong is completely arbitrary, and ultimately dependent on the interpretation of an external point of view. Effectively, what *The Pillowman* is portraying is the helplessness which is bound to be felt when looking at the dilemma from an outside, neutral position; which in my opinion is exactly the same reaction *The Lieutenant* should have provoked.

It is hard to say with any certainty if the decision to write *The Pillowman* was a conscious answer to criticism which so stubbornly and persistently confused the context of McDonagh’s plays with its message. It is also interesting to note that the Genoa’s company, whose production underwent similar misunderstanding, is currently working at a production of the play. What is certain is that with *The Pillowman* McDonagh not only abandoned the Irish context, he deprived his play of any recognisable context; he set it in a dimension so patently surreal so as to leave no doubt that the message behind was not, and should not be, applied to a specific context. It is interesting to note that the Italian edition of *The Lieutenant* strengthens the relations between the two plays by opening the volume with the translation of O’Toole’s contribution to the programme for *The Pillowman*’s production by the National Theatre in 2003. This in turn opens with a
digression on the “Chaos Region” on one of Jove’s satellites, named the scientists “Conamara,” which O’Toole uses as the perfect metaphor for the delicate relation between local and universal in the play, and indeed for the suggested reading of the play in terms of a visual representation of chaos as the ultimate outcome of conflict and violence.

Overall, the Italian production of The Lieutenant, by openly addressing a foreign sensibility and different modes of interpretation, released the play from the localisation which concealed its deeper structure, but at the same time it cut off the historical premises, essential to understand the two coexisting truths which sustained the conflict on stage. Yet, no real alternative was available. The option of creating an explicit dialogic connection between the source and the target context would have equally compromised the import of the play. Turning the play’s referent into something more familiar to an Italian audience like mafia, for instance, would have shifted the focus to an organisation whose activities are unanimously recognised as criminal, thus compromising the balance between right and wrong which sustains the action on stage. The one parallel which would indeed be possible is suggested by Sciaccaluga in the interview: the Resistance, and more precisely the partisans’ activities, the only “paramilitary” experience which was ideologically largely supported by the population and whose historical importance is still celebrated nowadays. To be exact, Sciaccaluga mentions it when he speaks about the difference between the heroes celebrated by the Irish rebel songs and the terrorists portrayed in the play. He suggests that it is the same difference existing between a young Partisan killed during a fight against the German invaders during the Resistance and a member of the Red Brigades who, in the name of his/her ideas, has carried out a political act of murder. It is possible to argue that the substitution of Irish rebel songs with partisan songs would have conveyed more clearly the idea that the original value of a song can be completely lost or significantly distorted when re-employed as a token of recognition by a specific political group, whose younger members often ignore the historical facts behind it, as happens to partisan songs in Italy. The parallel would also work as far as the various references to “valid targets” is concerned, since the activities of the Red Brigades were also questioned in terms of their choices of political targets, especially the controversial kidnap and subsequent murder of Aldo Moro. Yet Sciaccaluga does not specifically orient the reception in this direction: the ultimate choice of establishing the connection is left to
the audience. This is consistent with McDonagh’s, and Sciaccaluga’s stance, that is to leave the responsibility of figuring out the meaning of the play to the individual members of the audience.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The real truth is that there never is such a thing as one truth to be found in dramatic art. There are many. These truths challenge each other, recoil from each other, reflect each other, ignore each other, tease each other, are blind to each other. Sometimes you feel you have the truth of a moment in your hand, then it slips through your fingers and is lost.

Pinter 2005

By allowing a certain flexibility in this elusive term, *The Lieutenant* could certainly be described as “postmodern” play, yet the visual impact of the setting chosen for the Italian production, a large space deprived of any resemblance to anything remotely familiar, was unprecedented. For this reason the foregrounding of the postmodern qualities of the play, in all its aspects, has been addressed as the most important intervention that set the Genoa production apart. The analytical approach adopted here suggests that the enhanced postmodern quality of the Italian version could have stressed that the play was not meant to be a simplistic condemnation of Irish terrorism *tout court*. Nonetheless, within the actual reception of the play, according to the Italian reviews, this interpretation still seemed to fare better than a more abstract reading of the play as a denunciation of mindless patterns of violence for violence’s sake, which was arguably what McDonagh believed the historically motivated antagonism in Northern Ireland had become. At any rate, if the postmodern quality of *The Lieutenant* was acknowledged, this would also account for the conflicting critical response with which the play has been greeted, as it is a customary postmodern practice to invite the audience to re-compose a text that the author has wilfully deconstructed. This standpoint is largely compatible with Lonergan’s assertion that “McDonagh’s work trusts audiences and producers to interpret the action intelligently themselves.”

It also highlights the importance of the individual spectator, as the ability to see the

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436 Lonergan, 2005, p. 76.
significances of the different levels of meaning opened up by each production solely relies on the audience.

Yet, while the final reception of plays has to remain elusive, it was possible to tentatively measure the hermeneutic efforts of the teams who gave life to the Italian versions of McDonagh’s plays in terms of production choices and/or the paratextual features included in the published text. They illustrate only a few of the many possible constellations of problems, advantages and “side effects” that might emerge during the process of translating drama. As for *The Lieutenant*, the possibility of cross-referencing elements of staging and reception in an Irish, British and Italian environment has helped to stress the relations existing between translation and performability and the effect that these interlocking factors might have on the response to a play. The analysis of *The Beauty Queen* and *The Cripple* has concentrated on the way the published translations of plays may be organised, and particularly the way that paratextual elements can function as a precious guide in helping the readers “decode” the cultural universe of the source texts. Yet the script alone, independent of production and performance, is very rarely the focus of edited collections of plays, especially with those by contemporary playwrights. The work of Friel has been identified as the only significant example. In the attempt to find a concept that could describe the very different processes, strategies and techniques involved in drama translation in Italy, the term “accommodation” has been employed. Evidence has been examined to show that this strategy often consists in freeing foreign plays from a very localised setting that would disturb the reception of the target audience, and generally make them more palatable according to standard parameters of reception in the receiving culture.
CONCLUSION

[T]he translator must translate the meaning to be understood into the context in which the other speaker lives. This does not, of course, mean that he is at liberty to falsify the meaning of what the other person says. Rather, 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, 1992

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Walter Benjamin stated: “A real transparent translation does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully.” At a time when reflections on translation were still mostly related to human conceptual understanding, Benjamin’s definition captures the implications of Venuti’s most recent discussion on the normative invisibility of the translator in an essential form, one cleansed of political overtones. Venuti supports the belief that there is a hegemony of English contemporary linguistic discourse, and he notes the preference, within the domain of translation practice, for what he calls “fluent strategies.” Hence he denounces the consequent effacement of the translator’s crucial intervention in the foreign text. He shows that translations are predominantly judged according to how well the translators are able to “perpetuate the illusion that the text is in fact not translated.” He adds: “The highest praise for translation is to say that it sounds as if it were an original work written in English. If the translation suggests foreignness, the translation is considered bad, or “translationese”. “Foreignness” is therefore made “intelligible and even familiar to the target language reader, providing him or her with the narcissistic experience of recognising his or her culture in a cultural other, thereby enacting an imperialism that extends the dominion of transparency with other ideological discourses over a different culture.” Such acculturation is mainly performed through the pursuit of a linear syntax, univocal meaning, current usage, and a


tendency to shun archaism, unidiomatic constructions, polysemy or any effect that draws attention to the materiality of language.\textsuperscript{441}

By examining the cultural dialogue through literary translations between Ireland and Italy, this thesis has provided insights into patterns and modalities of translation that can be considered representative of a wider context of exchange within the European tradition. Starting from the premise of language as a site of culturally determined semiosis, linguistic differences have been analysed in relation to cultural otherness or foreignness. Translation is therefore understood as a transfer which, by displacing what is perceived as different from the Self, causes a “transformation” which can involve either “a loss or an assertion of meaning.”\textsuperscript{442} This alteration of significance which necessarily follows the removal of an object or an idea from its context of origin has been the main object of study. What has emerged is that, while in some instances translation enacts the desire to reach out towards the interstitial meaning of what cannot be translated, on other occasions cultural differences are reduced to standardised forms of “otherness,” easily digestible by the target culture.

The tendency to render homogenous everything that eludes the dominant representation of selfhood has been recognised as an important drive behind a number of translation practices, especially within the domain of fiction, where the act of translation often fails to mediate between cultures. The main reason has been identified as the implementation of a strategy that has been termed pseudo-transparency, which by insisting on the translator’s invisibility and supplanting the linguistic materiality of the source text, claims to produce a “transparent” text. However, the achievement of “a putative transposable signified content presumably more or less intact” by sweeping aside “both the signifying mechanism of the original and the reading experience of it”\textsuperscript{443} has been questioned. Rather, this study has demonstrated that the “forcible replacement of the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text with a text that will be intelligible to the target-language reader”\textsuperscript{444} can result in the “silence” of transparency.

\textsuperscript{441} Ibid., p. 177.
\textsuperscript{444} Venuti, 1995, p. 18.
It has been shown that even when indicators of an alternative cultural specificity are left untranslated, this does not automatically result in untainted conservation of the source text’s strangeness. More often, spaces of unintelligibility are created, as elements of the source texts which do not correspond to the cultural paradigms of the receiving culture, are effectively deprived of their context. This often divests them of their significance, so that they remain ultimately unheard by the target readers.

Smooth integration of translated texts within the literary modes of the target culture has been found to be the goal of many translations of contemporary Irish fiction. It has been argued that, when the disparity between source and target text is consciously levelled out, the incommensurability of cultural differences is unified into an approximate rendition of abstract “otherness.” The alleged transparency assigned to target texts translated in the name of fluency and readability, derives from a failure to assess the target readers’ familiarity (or lack of it) with essential background information, and the easy dismissal of any interest in acquiring new knowledge. The term “pseudo-domestication” has been proposed for a translation strategy which calls attention to language as artifice. Such a disclosure of alterity would place the foreign in a context of relationships and associations familiar to the target readers without resulting in assimilation. Quite the reverse, it would exert a pressure on the target language culture. This strategy, by endorsing the paradoxical premise that accepting difference is a necessary step to create a condition of equality between two cultures, would allow difference and sameness to exist simultaneously, and therefore prevent “otherness” from being reduced to sameness. The goal of surpassing the definition of “otherness” in terms of separation posited by pseudo-domestication is also at the base of the main strategy employed for poetry translation in Italy. The awareness of reciprocity, which fosters mutability in the receiving culture, however, is achieved by very different means. This is partly because of the specific characteristics of poetry as a genre, as a higher level of mediation is necessary for texts which are often loaded with excess capacity for significance.

Mediation, the term chosen to describe the most common strategy employed for poetry translation, promotes an expansion of the discoursal construction of the self by incorporating the cultural other into the familiar and the recognisable. This constitutes the most evident difference when Italian translations of Irish poetry are compared to the
modalities for translating contemporary fiction. In this case, the foreign language and
culture, rather than being slyly elided, are openly embraced. This is revealed by the
remarkable number of publications where the source texts appear alongside their
translations. Nonetheless, the main reason that poetry translation can function as a “site
where a different culture emerges, where a reader gets a glimpse of a cultural other, and
resistancy [reminds the reader of] the unbridgeable gaps between cultures” is to be
found in the notes, interviews and critical introductions included in the volumes. The
fact that poetry translation in Italy is mostly carried out by scholars working in the field
has definitely had an impact in developing a translation strategy that consists primarily
in glossing the source text and complementing it with the provision of critical insights.
When a poet acts as a translator, the target text usually displays a high degree of re-
elaboration. In some instances, this may result in an “appropriation” of the source text,
when the impact of the individuality of the translator surpasses the limits of what would
normally fall within the limits of mediation. However, while this is often the case with
the translations of foreign poets for the benefit of English speaking audiences, in Italy it
is very much an exception. The norm is that translators engaging with Irish poets are
generally knowledgeable about Ireland and its literature. Nevertheless, since most
poetry translations spring from extraordinary circumstances, the impossibility of
establishing definite rules should also be noted. Overall though, it is fair to say that the
impulse to translate generally comes from the translators, who are therefore largely
responsible for the selection of authors to translate. They actively participate in the
decision-making process even after the publisher becomes involved, which suggests that
the ultimate goal is an enrichment of the indigenous literary tradition and cultural
heritage, to be achieved by complementing them with the introduction of foreign
material. The presence of motivational factors, which transcend the profit-oriented drive
of the major corporations often dealing with fiction, indicates that not every demand of
cultural production is subordinated to the same kind of economic pressure. However, it
also means that what Venuti recently noted with regard to poetry in the United States
may apply to the Italian market as well, that “most poetry translations are issued by
small and university presses, limiting their print run and distribution and making many
of them ephemeral publications.”

445 Ibid., p. 136.
As for drama, although the number of translated plays is largely inferior to the amount of material found for the two literary genres previously considered, the translation strategy employed is much less consistent. The emphasis on increased intelligibility within the target language is the one significant trait that a category like accommodation intends to single out, without losing the flexibility necessary to include the very different approaches to the translation of plays practiced within the Italian context. Such a comprehensive definition is also necessary in the light of the fluid approach towards the two interrelated dimensions of script and performance adopted by the present analysis. Even when a trend in translation practices has been identified as predominant, this is constantly re-shaped and sometimes contradicted by the actual diversity of the publishing market in Italy.

As a final but crucial point, it is important to stress the instability of the categories that have emerged from this study, and to emphasise that the existing compartmentalisation into different strategies of translation according to genre is predominantly a question of “acquired habits.” In other words, there is no natural ground for the strategies I termed pseudo-transparency, mediation, and accommodation, to be connected correspondingly to fiction, poetry and drama. This happens because of external pressures, which are mostly moulded by pre-determined ideas about the reader’s profile for different types of literary texts. The need to construct translations that meet the demand of “imagined” readers that are likely to exist in large numbers, in turn, is determined by a publishing market which is firmly located within an entrepreneurial mindset. As its own survival is dependent on sales, the act of translation is often heavily influenced by economic rather than artistic concerns. This means that translation is perceived, and treated accordingly, as a “craft.” Nonetheless, these practical considerations do end up having an impact on the artistic value of the translated text, which has been here mostly measured in terms of possible difficulties in the reception of the cultural complexity of literary works.

What ultimately emerges from the interdisciplinary approach to a large-scale corpus of contemporary Irish literature in translation is the fallacy of the assumption that every text, regardless of type, has to be translated in the same fashion.447

447 Ben Amara, 2009, p. 16.
Functionalism may be the semantics underwriting every translation, but both the effects of the source text and the best way to conserve them have to be re-assessed each time in accordance with the type and genre of text involved. Although the nature of the study has allowed a deeper engagement only with a limited amount of case studies, it is believed that the use of reasonable generalisations has helped to outline a pattern in the translation strategies in use, which is capable of wider application, and relevant to the investigation of different contexts of exchange.
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<http://www.tranchida.it/progetto.php>


APPENDIX I:

Italian Translations (published 1990-2010) from Irish Literature (1960-2010)


Kinsella, Thomas. *Omaggio a Thomas Kinsella*. Trans. Melchiori, Giorgio; Melita Cataldi; Rosangela Barone; Donatella Abbate Badin; Giuseppe Serpillo; Riccardo Duranti; Valerio Fissore; Alessandro Gentili; Francesca Romana Paci, and Giovanni Pillonca. Torino: Trauben, 2006.


