

# CANTI POPOLARI LITUANI: THE FIRST COLLECTION OF LITHUANIAN FOLK POETRY IN ITALIAN

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The essay starts by analyzing an editorial project, the series *Poesia popolare indoeuropea* (Indo-European Folk Poetry), realized in Italy in 1930 under the guidance of the expert of Slavic Studies Ettore Lo Gatto. The series aimed at a vast audience, with the objective to inform and sensitize the society to ancient and folk literatures of the Indo-European area, a theme not so popular and almost unknown at that time, but also not easy to study, considering the historical period was closed to international cultures. Unfortunately, it was a short experience: the volumes composing the series were just three. The second one, *Canti popolari lituani* (Lithuanian Folk Songs) by Giuseppe Morici, is the first collection of Lithuanian *dainos* translated into Italian. This study places a special emphasis on Morici's work, analyzing its contents and, through its example, reflecting on the issue of translation.

## I. POESIA POPOLARE INDO-EUROPEA: THE SERIES BY ETTORE LO GATTO

Ettore Lo Gatto (1890–1983) was one of the most significant Italian experts of Eastern European and Slavic languages and literatures, and he can be rightly considered the promoter of this field of studies in Italy. Since 1920, Lo Gatto pursued an important activity of intellectual militancy, not only as part of the academic community, but also as propagator and cultural operator in dialogue with the entire society. His specific aim was to sensitize Italians to Eastern Europe, stimulating a new consciousness about cultural realities that were still little known or insufficiently studied at that time, but which First World War I had recently put in the limelight. Indeed, after the conflict, Lo Gatto promoted several cultural initiatives and international exchanges between Western and Eastern Europe, giving birth to a real mission, not only academic, but also and, especially, ethical, oriented towards what can effectively be defined as an Indo-European utopia of tolerance and unification between nations, achievable specifically through the instruments of literature and culture<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> In this regard we have to mention at least the I.p.E.O., “*Istituto per l'Europa Orientale*” (Eastern Europe Institute), and its journal, *Europa orientale* (Eastern Europe), co-directed by Lo Gatto and active from 1921 to 1943.

Within this perspective, in 1930 Lo Gatto conceived of a series entitled *Poesia popolare indo-europea* (Indo-European Folk Poetry), for the *Anonima Romana Editoriale* publishing house. The series was dedicated to Italian translations of ancient folk poetry of the Indo-European area. Unfortunately, this editorial initiative lasted only one year and collected just three volumes, two of them previously published. It is hard to tell why the experience was so short-lived, because there are very few bibliographic sources about this series. It is evident, however, that the 1930s in Italy as well as in all of Europe were not a favourable time for the implementation of projects of studying foreign cultures, nor for pursuing what in this article was defined as “the Indo-European utopia” of Lo Gatto, inspired by an open and international approach to knowledge.

The first book composing *Poesia popolare indo-europea* is *Leggende buddhistiche del “Mahābhārata”* (Buddhist Legends of *Mahābhārata*), a collection of legends taken from the *Mahābhārata*, the most important epic poem of ancient India. Translated by Michele Kerbaker (1835–1914), an Italian expert of Sanskrit and Indian culture, and published as early as 1925<sup>2</sup>, it is the first Italian version of legends from *Mahābhārata*. An exception should be made for a previous work by Giovanni Flechia (1822–1892) who, however, had translated just one episode from the Indian poem<sup>3</sup>. In any case both Kerbaker and Flechia witnessed the peculiar impact of linguistics, glottology, philology and comparative grammar of Indo-European languages in Western Europe throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> c., until at least the World War I. In this context, Carlo Formichini (1871–1943), philologist, professor of Sanskrit and expert of Indian philosophy and religion, should also be mentioned, the more so that he was the author of the preface of Kerbaker’s translation.

The third volume composing *Poesia popolare indo-europea* (we will go back to the second one later) is *Canti Popolari Bulgari* (Bulgarian Folk Songs), a collection of Bulgarian folk poems selected and translated by Luigi Salvini (1911–1957), expert of Slavic, as well as Finnish, Hungarian and Romanian languages, but with a particular passion for Bulgarian. The preface is by Giuseppe Damiani (1892–1953), another Italian scholar of Slavic studies, translator, literary critic and cultural mediator between Western and Eastern Europe. Unlike *Leggende buddhistiche del “Mahābhārata”*, this edition of *Canti Popolari Bulgari* is the first ever, while further and amplified editions were to have followed<sup>4</sup>. As it was mentioned in reference to the collection of Buddhist legends by

<sup>2</sup> Kerbaker M. 1925. *Leggende buddhistiche del “Mahābhārata”*. Roma: I.R.E. But previous versions of Buddhist legends from *Mahābhārata* by Kerbaker had already been printed starting from 1900: Kerbaker M. 1900. *Leggende buddhistiche del “Mahābhārata”*. Napoli: Tessitore; Kerbaker M. 1901. “*Il sacrificio*”. *Racconto del “Mahābhārata”*. Napoli: Detken & Rocholl; Kerbaker M. 1902. “*Il Sauptika Parva*”. *Libro 10 del “Mahābhārata”*. Napoli: Tessitore; Kerbaker M. 1904. *Sommario del “Mahābhārata”*. Napoli: Tessitore; Kerbaker M. 1906. “*La morte di Vaca, ossia Il Racaso di Ecaciacra*”. *Racconto del “Mahābhārata”*. Napoli: Pironti; Kerbaker M. 1908. “*Savitri*”. *Racconto del “Mahābhārata”*. Napoli: Ricciardi.

<sup>3</sup> G. Flechia 1902. *Un apologo indiano*. Torino: Clausen.

<sup>4</sup> See at least Salvini L. 1958. *Canti popolari Bulgari*. Roma: Edizioni di Cultura AIB.

Kerbaker, this one by Damiani can also be considered among the first translations into Italian of Bulgarian folk literature, being preceded just by an anthology by Domenico Ciampoli (1852–1929)<sup>5</sup>.

## II. *CANTI POPOLARI LITUANI*: THE COLLECTION BY GIUSEPPE MORICI

*Canti popolari lituani* (Lithuanian Folk Songs) is a collection of Lithuanian folk poetry, selected and translated by Giuseppe Morici (Dini 2013). A previous edition of the book had been published, without any relevant differences, in 1925<sup>6</sup>.

As the first translator of significance from Lithuanian into Italian, Giuseppe Morici represents a key figure regarding the spreading of Lithuanian literature in Italy. First of all, Morici was an expert on Donelaitis: he wrote several essays about the greatest Lithuanian poet, in those contexts offering also, for the first time translated into Italian, some samples from the poem *Metai* (Morici 1993). But being only samples, it is only with *Canti popolari lituani* that Morici effectively offered the first important translation of Lithuanian literature into Italian. Indeed, Lithuanian folk songs had never been translated before, as Morici himself declares in the preface of the volume: “this work has to be considered the first attempt to bring this folk poetry, almost totally unknown to us, into Italian”<sup>7</sup>. It had previously only been briefly mentioned in a literary section of the universal history written by the historian Cesare Cantù (1804–1895; Cantù 1841, 478–479).

Due to the not primarily academic aim of the project pursued by Morici, as well as by the same Lo Gatto, in both versions (1925 and 1930) translations appear without the original texts. *Canti popolari lituani* is not a critical edition, neither was it conceived as an academic study. However, it is prefaced by a rich and well-structured essay (Morici 1930, 7–47), in which Morici offers an exhaustive overview of Lithuanian folk poetry, and that appears quite accurate and reliable in contents, despite its basically informative intents.

The first part of the essay (Morici 1930, 7–10) is an extremely concise but incisive summary about Lithuanian History, a subject of study and research that, analogously to Lithuanian language, literature and culture, was still almost unexplored in Italy during those years, so only some titles by the historian Nicola Turchi (1882–1958) can be mentioned (Turchi 1920; Turchi 1933). The summary starts with the origins (11<sup>th</sup> century) and covers the period until February 1918, i.e. until the beginning of the first period of national independence of Lithuania<sup>8</sup>. One of Morici’s intentions was to

<sup>5</sup> Ciampoli D. 1913. *Canti popolari bulgari*. Lanciano: Carabba.

<sup>6</sup> By the A.R.E. publishing house of Rome.

<sup>7</sup> “Il presente lavoro deve essere considerato come un primo tentativo di fare italiana questa poesia di popolo, a noi presso che sconosciuta” (Morici 1930, 45). My translation.

<sup>8</sup> It has to be noticed that both the above mentioned books by Nicola Turchi were written in the period of political freedom of Lithuania, and that after 1940 historical, as well as literary and linguistic studies about Lithuanian had a general and significant decrease.

analyse how Italy had perceived the idea and the cultural identity of Lithuania during the centuries. The scholar notices a first, rapid mention of Lithuanians in the *Orlando Furioso* poem by Ludovico Ariosto<sup>9</sup> and, secondly, after more than four centuries of silence due to historical and political reasons, he quotes the 19<sup>th</sup> c. melodrama *I lituani* by Antonio Ghislanzoni, which was premiered at *La Scala* of Milan in 1894 (Morici 1930, 7). But the interest of this brief historical reconstruction is most of all linguistic: indeed, Morici's main intent was to show how the Lithuanian language survived during a long succession of occupations by foreign rulers, and how this survival had substantially been possible through an oral tradition: that tradition to which Lithuanian folk songs (*dainos*) belong.

The second part of the essay (Morici 1930, 10–41) is a general and exhaustive presentation of Lithuanian language and folk literature: the linguistic genealogy<sup>10</sup>; dialectal isoglosses preceding the building process, starting with the 18<sup>th</sup> c., of the national and literary language, with a critical and detailed reconstruction of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. debate about Lithuanian dialects and their linguistic division and categorization<sup>11</sup>; the tradition of Lithuanian folk literature, in regard to which Morici distinguishes between *giesmės*, *pasakos*, *raudos*<sup>12</sup> and *dainos*, specifically focusing on the latter.

First of all, through an extensive series of examples – mostly chosen from among those texts not included in the anthology, in order to give a vision as exhaustive as possible of the entire *dainos*' tradition – Morici lists the main elements characterizing Lithuanian *dainos*.

Rhythmically, they are based on a system that Morici, maybe oversimplifying the question, compared with the ancient Latin and Greek systems<sup>13</sup>. Popular measures are definitely preferred to the epic ones (e.g. hexameter). Moreover, Morici underlines how *dainos* couldn't be thought separately from their specific singing – monodic or chorale – and musical accompaniment – generally played by the classical *kanklės* or, more recently, the accordion.

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<sup>9</sup> Canto XI, 49.

<sup>10</sup> Morici accepts the idea of a Balto-Slavic unity, presenting the Baltic system of languages (Lithuanian, Latvian and Prussian) as part of the Slavic branch of Indo-European family (Morici 1930, 10). About this issue, see at least Dini 1997.

<sup>11</sup> Morici makes references to well-known classical studies of the major experts of the Lithuanian language: Schleicher, Kurschat, Brugmann, Wiedeman, Nesselmann, Bezzenberger.

<sup>12</sup> As Morici points out, contrary to the tradition of Greek folk poetry, the *dainos* lack in funeral themes. In fact, in Lithuanian folk tradition, funeral poetry constitutes a different gender: *raudos* (laments).

<sup>13</sup> “Data la grande mobilità dell'accento del lituano, in ciò diverso dalle lingue slave, dal polacco per esempio, e più vicino al russo, non è possibile fissarne la posizione nel verso, soggetto alle leggi del rimo; per cui l'accento grammaticale, come avviene nel greco e nel latino, non coincide sempre con l'accento tonico o musicale” – “Due to the mobility of the Lithuanian accent, which is different from the Slavic languages, for example from Polish, and more close to Russian, for it is not possible to fix the position of the accent, regulated by rhythmical rules; for this reason, as it happens in Greek and Latin languages, the grammatical accent doesn't always coincide with the tonic and musical accent” (Morici 1930, 13). My translation.

Stylistically, these folk poems present – “as in the Homeric poetry”<sup>14</sup>, adds Morici – a copiousness of epithets, repetitions, variations on a theme, symmetries and refrains. Particularly abundant are also diminutives and terms of endearment. Lexically speaking, they are among the most difficult aspects to be translated, as Morici affirms: “all seems minuscule in this Country. The Italian language, that at any rate has a hypocoristic sweetness, cannot be compared to Lithuanian”<sup>15</sup>.

Thematically, Lithuanian *dainos* relate most of all the simple daily life. Images of the village and the house with a rural setting are predominant. The private and intimate dimension is preferred to the public, epic and civil one: similarly the countryside chronotope is preferred to the city chronotope, which, anyway, is not completely absent.

Also, the *dainos* are populated by animal images, often personified, and natural elements such as the forest, the plain, the hills, the sea, the lake, the river and the stream, the stars, the thunder, the moon, the sun<sup>16</sup>, frequently treated as goods or spirits<sup>17</sup>. Among vegetation, particularly frequent are trees – willows, firs, oaks, lindens – and the private garden with its typical plants, in particular the peony and, above all, rue<sup>18</sup>. As for animals, they are present, in particular working and farm ones – cows, horses and goats –, but also wild ones<sup>19</sup>: wolves, foxes, bears and birds, who occupy a quite important place, especially the cuckoo, the nightingale, the woodpecker, the titmouse, the hawk, the duck and the dove.

Moreover, the *dainos* can reveal something about working life, both in the fields as well as at home, with all the vocabulary connected with that. The more frequent categories of workers are shepherds, farmers, harvesters, weavers and housekeepers. They all live an hard life, and the only entertainment conceded – dancing and drinking beer<sup>20</sup> – can

14 “*Come nella poesia omerica*” (Morici 1930, 13).

15 “*Tutto pare minuscolo in questo paese. La lingua italiana, che pure ha molta carezza ipocoristica, non può alla lunga competere con la lituana*” (Morici 1930, 20). My translation.

16 Morici offers a particularly interesting in-depth examination of these last three natural elements, *perkūnas* (thunder), *mėnulis* (moon) and *saule* (sun), analysing their mythological or folkloristic meanings with a comparative approach that puts in dialogue different folk traditions: from the Lithuanian to the Latvian, from the Indian to the Greek, from the Latin to the Romanian and the Italian (Morici 1930, 36–41).

17 Morici 1930, 29. About the issue of rather small presence in Lithuanian *dainos*, of religious feelings, the relationship between ancient paganism and Christianity, and the difference between theology, mythology, and folkloristic demonology, see Morici 1930, 34–41, where this complicated question is analyzed in a constructive dialogue with further experts on the topic, like E. Gisevius, A. Brückner, G. Bergmann).

18 Morici compares the dominance of the plant of *rūta* in Lithuanian folk poetry with the rule of myrtle for German folk poetry and of basil for Greek folk poetry (“*il mirto dei canti tedeschi e il basilico dei canti greci*”, Morici 1930, 15).

19 Even if diminutives and terms of endearments, also frequent in this case, contribute to nullify their natural wildness.

20 Beer (thought through both a passive and active approach: men and women can drink beer in taverns or they can produce it at home) is a relevant occurrence in Lithuanian *dainos*, comparable to wine in Greek, Latin and Italian folk poetry, for the role played in night revelry as well as in celebrations, especially weddings.

be found in taverns only on non-working days. Not less present are feelings and human relationships: affection and respect between parents and children (especially between mother and daughter)<sup>21</sup>, brothers and sisters; seduction, love and engagement between young people<sup>22</sup>; weddings, family and married life<sup>23</sup>.

According to Morici, all these aspects reveal an ancient society based on a simple, quiet, but also industrious family system, defined almost by a patriarchal society and by a strict ethic of work adverse to richness and idleness<sup>24</sup>. In such a society, love appears as a proper "*fons signatus*" (Morici 1930, 27), characterized by a soft sentimentalism devoid of obscenities and impulses of eroticism and passion. To create this general effect of softness, a big contribution is given by the habitual use of terms of endearment and diminutives, so difficult to translate into Italian that quite often Morici just ignored them.

The third part of the essay (Morici 1930, 41–43) is a critical reconstruction of the written tradition of Lithuanian *dainos*. The first publications, by Philipp Ruhig and Johann Gottfried von Herder, are both not systematic: they contain just a few texts, configured as an *appendix* (Ruhig 1747) or as part of a bigger volume (Ruhig 1745; Herder 1807). So, it can be said that the first real collection of Lithuanian *dainos* is due to Ludwig Rhesa (Rhesa 1825). His volume, published in 1825, was reviewed by Goethe, who, moreover like other German poets in those years<sup>25</sup>, was a deep admirer of these folk poems.

After the edition by Rhesa, further and increased collections were published by Lithuanian scholars<sup>26</sup>, while journals – as the *Musen Almanach*, the *Preussische* and the *Neue preussische Provinzialblätter* – and scientific associations – as the *Litauische wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft* (LSS – Lithuanian Research Society), still active today, and the *Litauische literarische Gesellschaft* (LLS – Lithuanian Literary Society), active from 1879 to about 1923 – gave birth to a long and intense activity of collecting and publishing new Lithuanian *dainos*.

<sup>21</sup> In this regard, a particular section is represented by the poems of orphans, referring to whom Morici notices similarities with Bohemian, Hungarian and Latvian folk traditions (Morici 1930, 22).

<sup>22</sup> A specific section is constituted by songs about relationships between widowers and young girls, as well as between young girls and soldiers. Generally the theme of war is characterized by an elegiac tone, presented in an intimate and interpersonal key, and rarely appears reinforced by an epic vigour, or, even less, defined by historical details (Morici 1930, 31–33). Still talking about poems of love, another sub-theme quite common not only in Lithuanian *dainos*, but in the entire Indo-European tradition of folk poetry, is the theme of a ring or a wreath released into the water (Morici 1930, 20).

<sup>23</sup> Particularly numerous are the elegies of brides, sung in the evening before the wedding, and poems about relationship problems between wives and mothers-in-law.

<sup>24</sup> Several poems illustrate how a poor but hard working man is preferred to a noble or rich man who is not used to work. This kind of utilitarian and practical approach to marriage is typical of rural societies. In the Italian culture, for example, it is testified not only by the folk tradition, but also by those literary works which describe this kind of rural society. In this regard, the short stories by Giovanni Verga (1840-1922), set in a still preindustrial Sicily, constitute a particularly appropriate example.

<sup>25</sup> Morici mentions Chamisso, Jordan, Daumer, Dahn, but also Schiller and Rückert.

<sup>26</sup> As Friedrichas Kuršaitis and Simanas Daūkantas.

Furthermore, the collection of Samogitian folk songs by Simonas Stanevičius (Stanevičius<sup>1929</sup>) should be mentioned, especially because it works as an interesting geographic indicator. Indeed, the “lowland”, the western area of Lithuania, played a central role in the written tradition of Lithuanian *dainos*. The first collectors, scholars and publishers all came from an area that is geographically, historically and culturally close to Samogitia: Ruhig, Rhesa and Herder were all from East Prussia, directly linked to Prussia are also the journals quoted above, while the LLS had its venue in Tilsit, also in East Prussia. Georg Heinrich Ferdinand Nesselmann (Nesselmann 1853), the main philological point of reference of Morici – together with Leskien and Brugmann (Leskien, Brugmann 1882) –, was Prussian. Actually, the Lithuanian texts composing Nesselmann’s collection present a notable Samogitian guise, with linguistic phenomena typical of the dialect of Samogitia that recur even more frequently than in the texts transmitted by Rhesa<sup>27</sup>. In addition, it has to be noticed that the two works, the one by Rhesa and the one by Nesselmann, present some significant textual variants that testify to the presence of different oral traditions. Anyway, Nesselmann can be considered the milestone of the studies on Lithuanian folk literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Among these studies, Morici quotes in particular Schleicher 1856–1857, the already mentioned Leskien, Brugmann 1882, Voelkel 1923, Wiedemann 1897.

In the final part of the essay (Morici 1930, 43–46), Morici deals specifically with the translation issue. First of all, he refers to his book as the first systematic work of translation of Lithuanian *dainos* in Italy, preceded only by the case of the philologist Emilio Teza who, however, translated just a few Lithuanian songs, without any systematic project. Teza’s translations are still unpublished and conserved inside his personal copy of Nesselmann’s *Litauische Volkslieder*. Furthermore, as Morici notices, they should be considered rewritings, rather than proper translations. Indeed, Teza tried to recreate lines with a rhythmic structure ascribable to the Italian metrical tradition, and this approach forced him to conspicuously depart from the original texts. One relevant example is offered by the poem *Ne pusk, ne pusk, wėjeli*. The original version is composed by two strophes of 5 lines, two iambic trimeters, two iambic dimeters and one iambic trimeter (Rhesa 1843, 11–14). As for rhyme, an unsystematic use of rhymes and assonances can be noted:

- 1) Ne pusk, ne pusk, wėjeli,  
     Ne gauskit, meduželei!  
     O dar asz lauksiu

<sup>27</sup> Just to give a few examples limited to phonetics, the most common Samogitian phenomena registrable in Nesselmann are: /ie/ becoming /é/ [Nesselmann 1853, 1: Dėwo; pėmenaczus (with /ai/ > /ā/ and /čiu/ > /čiu/); Rhesa 1843, 214: Diewo; piemenaczjus (with /ai/ > /ā/)]; /o/ becoming /uo/ (Nesselmann 1853, 1: dūwaneliū; Rhesa 1843, 216: dovaneliū); /uo/ becoming /ō/ (Nesselmann 1853, 40: dainok; Rhesa 1843, 94: dainok; /ī/ becoming /i/ (y) (Nesselmann 1853, 1: ilgay; Rhesa 1843, 214: ilgay); /dž/ becoming /d/ (Nesselmann 1853, 1: suszildau; Rhesa 1843, 214: suszildzjiau).

Sawo brolelio,  
Isz karužio parjojant.

Ne parjoj' brolytelis,  
Wyriausasis pulkaunink's.

Parbėg žirgelis,  
Brolio bėrelis,  
Kardužj priszalelės (Nesselmann 1853, 289).

In Teza's translation, the same song becomes extremely formalized, composed by two quatrains of hendecasyllables and with the following scheme of perfect rhymes: AA BB CC DD.

2) *Deh più piano soffiate veniticelli:*

*Non sospirate più, vaghi arboscelli!*

*Ancora, ancora aspetto il fratel mio,  
che vien dalla battaglia a dirmi addio.*

*Aspetta, aspetta! Non è più tornato!*

*Non vien dalla battaglia il buon soldato!*

*Torna il cavallo, il buon prode morello,*

*e ha sul fianco la spada del fratello* (Morici 1930, 43).

“Oh, blow slower breezes: / don't sigh anymore, dreamy saplings! / Still, still I wait for my brother, / coming back from the battle to say goodbye to me. / Wait, wait! He didn't come back anymore! / The good soldier doesn't return from the battle! / The horse is back, the good brown steed, / with the brother's sword on the flank”<sup>28</sup>.

This metrical structure does not reflect the original one. Even if it should be noticed that, by using hendecasyllables, Teza was able to reproduce an iambic rhythm, in some cases perfectly corresponding to the rhythm of the Lithuanian model. The third line is a good example of a perfect iambic cadence (accents are marked by the underscore): “*ancora ancora aspetto il fratel mio*” [⊃ '⊃ '⊃ '⊃ '⊃ '⊃] <sup>29</sup>. Anyway, as already said, if on the one hand this formal accuracy can certainly result in pleasure from an aesthetic perspective, on the other hand it significantly restricts the possibility to adhere to the original text. In this regard, lines 3–6 are particularly indicative: «O dar asz lauksiu / Sawo brolelio, / Isz karužio parjojant. // Ne parjoj' brolytelis» in Teza's translation becomes: «Ancora, *ancora* aspetto il fratel mio, / che vien dalla battaglia *a dirmi addio*.

<sup>28</sup> My translation.

<sup>29</sup> The iambic rhythm is also given by *synalepha*, the blending into one syllable of two successive vowels of adjacent words (i.e. ancor'ancor'aspett'il fratel mio).

// *Aspetta, aspetta*, non è più tornato!» (Still, *still* I wait for my brother, / coming back from the battle *to say goodbye to me*. // *Wait, wait*, he didn't come back anymore<sup>30</sup>), with the insertion of entire phrases absent in the original text. It is a methodological choice that Morici overtly refuses: as he himself declares, he prefers and tries to follow as much as possible a literal approach. Indeed, according to him, adherence should be the first criterion of translation, in order to preserve, in the specific case of Lithuanian *dainos*, the original simplicity.

### III. FROM THE PARTICULAR TO THE GENERAL: THE CASE OF MORICI AS A SOURCE OF REFLECTION ABOUT THE TRANSLATION ISSUE

At this point, Morici can finally illustrate his personal idea of translating, offering a detailed declaration of method and, at the same time, a key to read his work. Basically, as stated, Morici prefers a literal approach. This general criterion influences different aspects of his collection: as it is in the *dainos*' tradition, rhymes recur accidentally, without any precise system, and most of all as assonances, rather than proper rhymes. The original structure and number of strophes are generally respected. In some cases, and only for rhythmical reasons, extra words have been added, but, in any case, without ever changing the primary meaning. Still for rhythmical reasons, but also due to the different structure of Italian and Lithuanian languages, and just if it wouldn't have altered the literal meaning, past tenses have been changed into present: "Lithuanian poetry loves to express action in the past tense; where it wouldn't have modified the meaning, I turned the past into the present"<sup>31</sup>. Moreover, where possible, the original prosody has been respected, for example, with the iambic trimeter hypercatalectic, which actually is one of the most easy of rhythms to be translated into Italian prosody because it can turn into a perfect septenary and, as one of the more often used rhythm in the Italian oral tradition, septenary seems to be particularly appropriate for folk poetry.

In this regard, a successful experiment is represented by Morici's version of *Mėniū Saulužė wede*. In this translation the iambic rhythm is perfect in almost every line. As before, Italian accents are marked by the underscore:

<sup>30</sup> My translation. The italics shows insertions by Teza.

<sup>31</sup> "Il canto lituano ama mettere l'azione al passato; quando non portasse alterazione di senso, ho mutato in presenti le forme del perfetto" (Morici 1930, 45). My translation.

- 3) Di p<sup>r</sup>ima p<sup>r</sup>imavera  
la L<sup>u</sup>na sposò il S<sup>o</sup>le:  
il S<sup>o</sup>le s'alzò p<sup>r</sup>esto  
La L<sup>u</sup>na lo lasciò.
- Se ne andò attornò sola:  
dell'A<sup>s</sup>tro del mattino  
s'innamorò: Per<sup>k</sup>una  
con l'ascia la tagliò.
- Perché lasciasti il S<sup>o</sup>le?  
Sola di notte andasti?  
l'astro dell'alba amasti?  
D'affanni hai pieno il cuore  
(Morici 1930, 204).
- Mėnũ Saulužę wede  
Pirmą pawasarelį.  
Sauluže anksti kėlės,  
Mėnužis atsiskyre.
- Mėnũ wėn's waiksztinėjo,  
Auszrinę pamylėjo.  
Perkun's didey supykęs  
Jį kardu perdalyjo.
- Ko Saulės atsiskyrei?  
Wėn's naktij' waiksztinėjei?  
Auszrinę pamylėjei?  
Szirdis pilna smutnybės  
(Nesselmann 1853, 1).

As well as the rhythmical structure, the translation is also notably faithful to the original. Nevertheless, this poem presents some aspects that should be underlined as particularly indicative of difficulties inherently connected to the activity of translation.

First of all, the poem represents a good example of how, as already said, in translating from Lithuanian into Italian, all diminutives just disappear: «Saulužė» and «Mėnužis» don't turn into «*solicino*» (little sun) or «*lunicina*» (little moon), they simply remain «*il sole*» and «*la luna*». Furthermore, it is especially interesting to notice that, oppositely to Lithuanian, in Italian the moon is feminine and the sun is masculine. It is an influential detail, considering not only the high frequency of these two words in the entire system of the *dainos*, but also and especially because of the meaning to which the two words can culturally be associated. In the *dainos*' tradition the sun is associated with the bride/mother, while the moon is connected to the groom/father. Conversely, with a perfect and quite considerable reversal, in Italian «*la luna*» and «*il sole*» traditionally symbolize the dichotomy between femaleness/darkness on the one side, and maleness/brightness on the other side, in a perspective that links femininity to irrationality and masculinity to rationality. This linguistic divergence hides two different points of view and anthropological interpretations of reality. For this reason, in changing the gender, Morici didn't do a neutral operation. It will be enough to notice that in the original text the betrayer is the man, while in the Italian translation the betrayer becomes the woman.

## CONCLUSIONS

The present study pursued three different goals. First of all, it wanted to illustrate the situation of the translation and the knowledge of Slavic and East European languages and cultures in the Italy of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with particular regard to popular culture, more than to the academic environment. The interest comes from the rediscovery of the *Poesia popolare indoeuropea* (1930), a series of ancient and folk poetry under the guidance of Ettore Lo Gatto, one of the leading experts of Slavic Studies in Italy at that time. Not much mentioned among the several works by Lo Gatto, this editorial project is worth some attention, first of all, because the traditions of poetry to be anthologized are chosen and organized as part of a unique Indo-European system. This particular approach supports an idea of common origins and union of the languages of that historical-geographical area: an idea that can almost appear utopian, thinking that it was born in a period of cultural closing and violent nationalisms, and probably for this reason it did not last long, with only three titles published. Anyway, the choice of the volumes selected to be part of the series brings to light folk and poetic traditions that in 1930 were still very little known to the Italian audience: the Buddhist legends of *Mahābhārata* and the Bulgarian and Lithuanian folk songs.

The second goal of this study was to focus on *Canti popolari lituani* by Giuseppe Morici, the first collection of Lithuanian folk poems translated into Italian. The importance of this book is first of all socio-cultural, not only for the fact that it is one of the earliest translations of Lithuanian literature into Italian, but also because it still remains the only example of a systematic work on Lithuanian *dainos* coming from the Italian intellectual environment. The analysis concerned especially the theoretical basics of Morici's work, expressed in the introduction to the anthology. Despite its intents, more popular than academic, *Canti popolari lituani* presents a strong philological structure: the textual tradition of the *dainos* is exhaustively retraced, and the textual sources – mainly Nesselmann 1953, but also Rhesa 1843, Leskien and Brugmann 1882, – are clearly declared and followed with a critical approach. All these elements collaborate to create a remarkable model of connection between popularization and academic research. Moreover, in the introductory essay Morici also offers an exhaustive panoramic of the thematic, linguistic and rhythmical system of the *dainos*.

The last goal of the present work was to choose from *Canti popolari lituani* an example that is particularly indicative of the ordinary difficulties of translation, which appear even if the translator decides, as Morici did, to use a literary and faithful approach to the original text. Surely, the poem mentioned above – *Mėnū Saulužę wede* – represents a particularly extreme case: indeed, in light of such a structural difference, as the lack of correspondence of genders for the words “sun” and “moon” in the passage from Lithuanian

into Italian, the translator cannot avoid being unfaithful to his original source. Anyway, the Italian version of this poem, *Le nozze del sole e della luna*, is an important testimony to the problems of translating, and it stimulates reflection about a question that, however, is destined to remain without answers.

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**CANTI POPOLARI LITUANI: PIRMOJI LIETUVIŲ LIAUDIES DAINŲ RINKTINĖ ITALŲ KALBA**

NOVELLA DI NUNCIO

Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje analizuojami lietuvių liaudies dainų vertimai į italų kalbą. Tyrimo objektas – pirmoji lietuvių liaudies dainų rinktinė italų kalba *Canti popolari lituani* (Roma 1930), dainas į italų kalbą išvertė G. Morici. Analizei pasirinkti istorinis ir kultūrinis, literatūros kritikos ir filologinis tyrimo metodai. Straipsnyje aptariamas istorinis ir kultūrinis rinktinės *Canti popolari lituani* kontekstas, gilinamasi į vertėjo G. Morici atliktą darbą, nagrinėjami vertėjo pasirinkti vertimo būdai, aptariami vertimai, kuriais rėmėsi G. Morici, versdamas lietuvių liaudies dainas į italų kalbą.