THE EARLIEST ITALIAN TRANSLATIONS OF JOHN MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST*: FAILED ATTEMPTS AND DANTESQUE INFLUENCES

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This paper deals with the history of translation in the 18th and 19th centuries. It investigates the reasons behind six unsuccessful attempts to translate John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) into the Italian language. We hypothesise that the problem was the rendering of unusually marked lexical, thematic, stylistic and rhythmical analogies with Dante's *Comedy* and, mainly, with its sources.

Adopting Antonio Bellati's Italian translation (1856) as an indicator, our study focuses on problematic aspects intrinsic to the English poem. Specifically, we suggest that the challenge was the transposition of *Paradise Lost's* peculiar mixture of style and meter: the blank verse of a Christian epic poem. This uniqueness rendered it too similar to Dante's *Comedy*. Likewise, the setting and the subject matter of the English poem were too adherent to that of both Dante and Virgil's *Aeneid* (one of Dante's main sources). Finally, it might have been difficult to translate Milton into Italian because the English poet openly imitates the Italian epic style, its rhythmical and lexical choices.

We conclude that it might have been arduous to avoid even more marked Dantesque influences in an Italian translation. In other words, this study depicts an unusual traductive instance of "excess of equivalence" for lexical and culturally specific items.

THE BACKGROUND: THE EARLIEST ITALIAN TRANSLATIONS OF MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST*

John Milton's epic poem in blank verse, *Paradise Lost,* is considered to be one of the literary masterpieces of 17th century English literature. Printed in 1667, it was soon revised and a new, extended, version arranged into twelve books – in the manner of Virgil's *Aeneid* – was published in 1674. In England, 'the greatest long poem in the English language' (Bryson 2004) was immediately recognised as an extraordinary achievement. Apparently paradoxical is William Blake's well-known pronouncement:

Milton, 'was a true poet and of the devil's party without knowing it' (Blake 1994, 5). It seems that, mainly in the pre-romantic period, the "free spirit" of the Rebel Angel – intolerant toward any form of submission or despotic authority – was the main reason for the European success of *Paradise Lost* (Harris 1985).

Translations were soon attempted in France, Spain and Germany. Likewise, a number of Italian scholars endeavoured to render the poem in the Tuscan language. The two known earliest attempts are Lorenzo Megalotti's and Ranieri de' Calzabigi's fragmentary experimentations of the first decade of the 18th century. By 1729 the first full translation was published: it was the celebrated (and reprinted until very recent times) Paolo Rolli version. Despite Rolli's professional attitude toward translation, critics expressed their dissatisfaction with his rendering of the English poem. The resulting debate lead to even more attempted and incomplete translations like that of Alessandro Pepoli and Davide Berolotti in the early 19th century. During the first quarter of the same century, only Lazzaro Papi was able to write a complete, even though largely criticized, translation (1811). In the same period, Carlo Tirelli attempted the translation of the fourth book (1811) and Vincenzo Petrobelli the first (1813); both tries were aborted. Before the end of the first quarter of the century, even Ugo Foscolo, one of the most representative neoclassical poets and a renowned translator, attempted the rendition of *Paradise Lost* into Italian; the literary critic Giuseppe Chiarini confirms this awaited translation was aborted due to unspecified 'difficulties' (Alcini 1990, 250).

None of the mentioned translators could be considered an amateur: Ugo Foscolo (1778-1827) had already translated Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* and the *Iliad,* publishing, in both cases, annotated texts which could be studied as treatises on the theory and practice of translation (see, for example, Foscolo 1842b, 401–402). Lorenzo Megalotti (1637-1712) was a renowned writer (his style was close to that of Petrarch) and an expert translator too: he mainly translated from Greek, and before attempting the translation of *Paradise Lost* had already published some works of the Greek lyric poet Anacreon. From English he had translated John Philips' short poem "The Cyder". Possibly, Ranieri de' Calzabigi (1714-1795) is the only person that could be considered an amateur translator, nonetheless, he was a scholar, a famous librettist and had edited and published the works of Pietro Metastasio.

The number of aborted translations in the mentioned period is unusually high. Nonetheless, a thorough investigation of the causes has not yet been attempted. Rather, in recent years, scholars demonstrated interest in individual translations –

especially Rolli's – corroborating the idea that the rendering of *Paradise Lost* was, at the very least, perceived as challenging. Overviews of the attempted translations and allusions to the difficulties were provided in the past by translators themselves; in particular, Antonio Bellati, in 1856, had the opportunity to investigate, compare and comment on almost all previous translations (Bellati 1856, III-XXII). This is the main reason behind our decision to investigate the outlined problematic situation through Bellati's comments and notes about his own translation. His solutions will be adopted as the reference point for a comparative analysis.

An unexpected contribute to the definition of the specific nature of the problems related to the translation into Italian emerged from a coeval debate caused by Voltaire's comments on Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Voltaire 2014, 225). Specifically, in his *Essai sur la poésie épique* (1734, but it was first published in English the year before), the French philosopher criticized Milton's failed attempt to reproduce the classical and Italian epic style (Allodoli 1907, 1–11). Voltaire compared Milton's style with Virgil's, Trissino's, and with the Italian epics of Tasso.

The debate that arose from these comments was detailed by Ettore Allodoli in his work on the relations between Milton and Italy (Allodoli 1907). Noticeably, Allodoli extends Voltaire's comparison with Italian poets, including Ariosto and Dante. Allodoli points out that Milton was writing in the post-Elizabethan era 'when Italian exerted a remarkable influence on English thought'. He continues that 'enormous is the Italian influence on Milton' and specifies that 'while the versification and structure of Milton's epic are modelled on Vergil […],' the 'external forms' are imitations of the Italians': 'he wanted to be the English Tasso.' Milton was 'indeed a true humanist' and founded his models in the 'soft and sweet [poets] that eulogized Beatrix and Laura.' Dante and Petrarch were, according to Allodoli, the two Italian models that most influenced Milton's literary production: 'The Italian influence […] is evident in the meter chosen for the 7th sonnet [of his *Poems*]' that Milton called a 'Petrarchan stanza.' However, according to Allodoli, 'it was the Italian nature to strike Milton's imagination,' since the English poet spent years in Italy. All these "Italian influences" are perceived by the Italian literary critic despite Milton writing (in the poem *Quintum Novembris*, v. 51) that Tuscany is '*veneficiis infamis*' (Allodoli 1907, 1–11).

In light of these supposed Italian influences, our paper investigates the reasons behind the unsuccessful attempts to translate John Milton's *Paradise Lost* into Italian. We hypothesise that the problem was the rendering of unusually marked lexical, thematic, stylistic and rhythmical analogies with Dante's *Comedy,* and, mainly, with

its sources. Adopting Antonio Bellati's Italian translation (1856) as an indicator, our study focuses on problematic aspects intrinsic to the English poem. Specifically, we suggest that the challenge was the transposition of *Paradise Lost's* peculiar mixture of style and meter: the blank verse in a Christian epic poem. This uniqueness rendered it too similar to Dante's *Comedy*. Likewise, the setting and the subject matter of the English poem was too adherent to that of both Dante and Virgil's *Aeneid* (one of Dante's main sources). Finally, it might have been difficult to translate Milton into Italian because the English poet openly imitates the Italian epic style, its rhythmical and lexical choices; therefore, it might have been arduous to avoid even more marked Dantesque influences in an Italian translation.

INTRODUCTION

Dealing with the history of translation, a methodological premise is required, firstly, to define the concept of the "history of translation" itself. The question can be (and has been) formulated as a dilemma: either it is the "history of translations" or it has to be intended as "the history of the science of translation" (Osimo 2002; Kelly 1979). The two interpretations are not reciprocally exclusive; nonetheless, they radically differ. Umberto Eco's studies on translation are emblematic of the latter definition. Noticeably, this understanding of the concept of "history of translation" forces Eco into the radical claim that before the 20th century there were no theories of translation: 'By the way, when a theory of translation did not yet exist, from St. Jerome to our century, the only interesting observations on the subject were made precisely by translators themselves' (Eco 2003, 13).

Similarly, possibly based on the same approach, in recent years, the history of translation in Italy was investigated in the collective work *Ubersetzung. Ein International Handbuch zur Ubersetzungsforschung* (Kittel 2004, 1907-1981). Nonetheless, precisely because of the preconceived idea that there was no theory of translation before the 20th century, in the chapter devoted to *Die Ubersetzungskultur in Italien*, dealing with the very productive 19th century (in terms of translations and debates about the theory of translation), only Alessandro Manzoni is considered. Even Vincenzo Monti and Ugo Foscolo's relevant theoretical studies and experiments of translation were neglected.

Undoubtedly, this "nihilistic" approach offers little opportunity to implement a practical analysis of translation during the early-modern period, which is the field of our study. Rather, the alternative attitude – to consider the history of translation as "the history of translations" – might prove fruitful in terms of methodological approaches

able to unveil a theoretical debate on the "theory of translation" even if *ante litteram*. The comparative exploration of concrete and problematic translations might lead to the recognition of shared practices and approaches to translation. In other words, this perspective might lead us to recognize a theory of translation before it was openly formulated.

As an example, a number of studies contributed to a better understanding of the perception of translation in the past by opting for the more inclusive of the two above-mentioned approaches. The methodological premise of these studies was based on the definition of the *theory* of translation as the *history* of translation, i.e. the history of the founding principles of translation. The most evident advantage of this perspective is the possibility of including in the theoretical analysis a number of ancient philosophers, thereby extending the chronological limits of the research. These benefits are well illustrated in works that coherently illustrate the diachronic development (or, on the contrary, the stagnation) of the theory of translation from ancient times to modern days. We are referring to Dauglas Robinson's *Western Translation Theory from Herodotus to Nietzsche* (Robinson 1997). The central idea emerging from this collective work is that historians, philosophers and "translators" provided, direct or indirect, observations about the aim, meaning and the process of translation. These observations, even if scattered in an unordered manner, should be considered theoretical reflections on the act of translation. Accordingly, the task of modern scholars is, on the one hand, to extrapolate these "seeds" of theoretical consideration through the hermeneutical investigations of the texts; on the other hand, it is necessary to order, systematize, and generalise the acquired material. The possibility opened by such an approach, as mentioned, is that of a more inclusive history of translation.

Referring specifically to the state of research in Italy, Bruno Osimo's *Storia della traduzione* (The History of Translation) is an inclusive example. Nevertheless, the renowned Italian theorist of translation, even when focusing – in a chapter of the mentioned book – on the 'Reflections on the Language of Translation from Antiquity to the Present', pays greater attention to general theoretical aspects rather than to the works of individual translators. Obviously, this is in accordance with the general aim of his study: while presenting and analysing the contributions of more than one hundred thinkers and scholars with different backgrounds, Osimo claims he intends to focus on 'reflection upon the language of communication, and the evolution of the concept of translation during the centuries' (Osimo 2002). A similar interest in the diachronic evolution of semiotic or linguistic thought is evident in a number of recent studies

dealing with the 'historical understanding of translation' and the possibility to revisit 'time in translation studies' (Torop, Osimo 2010).

In the context of the Italian history of translation it is possible to mention several scholars that have already established a tradition in the study of the 17th to 19th centuries translators' commentaries as a means to delineate a history of translation methodology. Mario Fubini, in the preface to his 1951 edition of Ugo Foscolo's translation, was able to retrace the traductive *iter* from Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* to Foscolo's *Viaggio Sentimentale*. Working on two copies of the translation – the 1813 published version and a copy of this book with the interlinear commentaries written by the poet-translator – Fubini produced a study capable of portraying a rigorous method and a defined cultural-linguistic approach to the translation. The translation activity of the renowned poet Ugo Foscolo (1778–1827) is considered the highest peak of a flourishing interest in practical-methodological aspects of translation. It was a debate that, in the early 19th century, focused around the Italian renditions of Homeric and classical poems, but extended to implicate the translations of modern European literature.

While the translation of French literature was of less concern in Italy, being less problematic for the evident cultural and linguistic affinities, the rendition of English literature proved more defiant. With reference to the Italian history of translating English literature, a stimulating and productive period can be recognized in the two centuries from the flourishing of odeporic literature transposition in the Florentine language – dating from the late 17th century – to the great classical translation experiments of the second half of the 19th century. Indeed, one of the first Italian translators mentioned in Douglas Robinson's work is Leonzio Pilato, a late-medieval translator of Homer (c. 1360). This inclusion confirms, once again, the possibility of extending the chronological limits of the history of translation. The relevance of the second chronological limit set above for the history of the translation in Italy (the early 19th century) is supported by a number of studies focusing on the debate about the rendering of epic poems in Italian just before the unification of the country in 1861 (Mari 1994). Unfortunately, while the limits are often stretched, most histories of translations neglect to consider a large part – i.e. long periods and a number of translators – of the theoretical debate to concentrate on already openly formulated theories.

This article, dealing with the history of translation, is intended as a specific case study formulated in order to demonstrate how a translator's reflections, comments and "experiments" could contribute to the understanding of the chronological development of theoretical reflection. Interesting analyses are often offered by translators

themselves in the prefaces to their works. These introductions frequently assume the form of short histories of translation or, at least, of a specific traductive tradition and include observations about problematic aspects otherwise not perceivable anymore to the modern reader.

As an example, Antonio Bellati's preface to his 1856 translation of Milton's *Paradise Lost* is rich with historical details. It deserves to be extensively quoted as an illustrative instance and source of a number of hints about both Bellati's traductive practice and the history of Miltonic translations:

> In early March 1855, I published the first and the second book of Milton's Paradise Lost as a sample of a new translation. […] I felt the need to illustrate it with some notes […]. Writing them I mainly referred to Giacomo Prandeville's commentaries which integrate the Paradise Lost edition published in Paris by Baudry in 1841; it is the publication which I used as a reference. However, I decided to omit all esthetical observations considering them superfluous after those published by Addison in Le Spectateur, and reproduced in Italian by Rolli as a critical apparatus to his redaction; [obsolete after the commentaries of] Voltaire in his Essai sur la poésie épique […] in which he not only criticizes Milton, but even Homer and the other epic poets […];[obsolete after the commentaries of] Delille in the notes to his translation, or better to his paraphrases of this poem. I confined myself to a few commentaries [more than one hundred pages of notes!] and explanations of the text itself or of my translation and to the extended quotation of the authors Milton referred to […] and, clearly, he had most of them in front of him, and sometimes he intended to allude to them openly […]. To me, it seemed useful […] to report these passages in full […] and especially those taken from the Bible which was the main source of our poet. (Bellati 1856, iii-iv)

At least two kinds of considerations result from the reading of this passage: on the one hand, the commentator presents a series of French and Italian translations, implicitly, remarking that some can barely be considered proper translations – rather they are paraphrases of Milton's poem. A similar order of reflexions deals with the approach to the translation itself – something we would call methodology.

On the other hand, the translator points out Milton's recourse to a number of sources while writing *Paradise Lost*: 'He had in front of him other authors' works to which he openly refers' and this fact, we can add, is very evident to the Italian and French reader. The Holy Writs are openly mentioned as the main source, but scattered across the whole translation there are notes about 'full passages' quoted directly from Dante Alighieri's *Commedy*. Apparently, in the translations realized by Bellati, Delille and Rolli constant pressure is exerted on the translator by the evident aura of Dante in Milton. We will return on the technical aspect of the translation, but we will focus immediately on the problematic, as we shall see, over-abundant presence of Dante.

DANTESQUES ECHOES IN MILTON AND BELLATI'S TRANSLATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The patent expression of the parallelism Milton-Dante is a constant in the Italian translations of *Paradise Lost*. To exemplify, in the epigraph of Bellati's translation – a quotation from Byron – the Milton-Dante connection is revealed to the reader: 'The highest expression of poetry should be the moral truth. Religion is beyond the human faculties. Only Milton and Dante were able to discuss it with dignity' (Bellati 1856, III).[1] However, the Milton-Dante relation is described and revealed in greater details in the translator's notes included, as an appendix of more than one hundred pages, at the end of the book (Bellati 1856, 501-607). To mention just some occurrences, the parallelism between Milton and Dante in the translation of the 25th and 26th verses of book I is revealing:

1)   Milton's original (1754 edition)   *[…] though in **pain** and*
                                                          *Vaunting aloud, but rack'd with deep **dispair***

         Bellati's translation   *Ma **dolor disperato** in <u>cor premendo</u>,*

         Dante, *Inferno*, XXXIII, 5   ***Disperato dolor**, che'l <u>cuor mi preme</u>*

Even though in Milton's original the word *heart* is not used, the uniformity of rhythm, meanings and structure with Dante's verse is too evident to the Italian reader, and, consequently, an even more marked allusion is unavoidable when adopting the language of Dante himself in the translation. Moreover, the translator here decided to move *pain* and *despair* to the first hemistich of the verse, forcing himself to integrate the second with suitable figures obviously available in a very similar verse written by Dante.

A similar case appears in the second book (Bellati 1856, 70, v. 30) where the similarity with Dante is evident in the lexical choice, in the figure of contrast and in the general meaning of the passage:

2)   Milton's original (1754 edition)   From Beds of **raging Fire** to starve in **Ice**

         Bellati's translation II, v. 30   *[…] dagli orrendi letti*
                                                          *Di **fiamme furibonde** entro la **ghiaccia***

         Dante, *Inferno*, III, 86   *Nelle tenebre eterne in **caldo** e in **gelo***

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[1]   'La poesia più alta debb'essere la verità morale. La Religione è troppo superiore alle umane facoltà. Milton e Dante soli hanno potuto degnamente parlarne'.

The parallelism between Dante, Milton and the Italian rendering of this specific verse seems less marked or even the result of a casual coincidence resulting from the recourse to the standardized *topoi* of fire and ice in Hell. Nonetheless, the context, in this case, renders the reading of Milton a transposition of Dante: it is evident to every commentator that we are reading here Dante's description of the innermost circles of Hell as depicted in *Inferno* where, in the ninth circle, Lucifer and the other damned are immersed in a lake of ice:

3)   Where Armies whole have sunk: the parching Air
      Burns frore, and cold performs th'effect of Fire […]
      From beds of raging Fire to starve in Ice […]
      Immovable, infixt, and frozen round
                      (Milton 1754, v. 29–32)

Several verses in Milton's *Paradise Lost* are lexically modelled on Dante's verses due to a peculiar mixture of epic style, classical and biblical reminiscences and specific interpretations of the doctrine:

4)   Milton, *Paradise Lost*, VII, v. 224   Than staid the fervid Wheeles, and in his hand
                                              He took the golden **Compasses**, prepar'd
                                              In God's Eternal store to circumscribe
                                              This Universe, and all created things

      Bellati's translation VII, p. 265, v. 7   *E l'aure **seste** nella man recossi*

      Dante, *Paradiso*, XIX, 40   *[…] Colui che volse il **sesto***
                                    Allo stremo del mondo, e dentro ad esso,
                                    Distinse tanto occulto e manifesto

The term *compasses* is plainly understandable to Italians since the Italian term *compasso* is attested and used since the 13th century and is etymologically identical to the English one. Nonetheless, the translator decides to opt for the obsolete term *seste*, derived from the equally antiquate form *sesto* which bears the same meaning of *compasses*. Interestingly, the Italian term is usually singular and masculine, however the translator opts for the feminine form which is plural, possibly to reproduce the plural form of the original English. The decision to render *compasses* with *seste* could be explained in full only being aware that Milton is basing the content of this passage on *Proverbs* 8:27–29, but formulates the idea of God and the Master Work as articulated in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* I, 74–82. Curiously, the same concept had been expressed, based on the same two sources, by Dante in *Paradiso*, XIX, 40 where the image of God

tracing the perimeters and limits of the universe is expressed by the word *sesto*. Manifestly, the translator is opting for a Dantesque term even though a more modern (and understandable to the reader) term was available, because the Dantesque *sesto* encompasses meanings, doctrines, classical and biblical references: it is, in every respect, the perfect rendition of Milton's *compasses*, not an approximation.

APPARENT DANTESQUE INFLUENCES
AND AUTHENTIC CLASSICAL MODELS

The traductive instance analysed above points out to an interesting clue: apparently, the number of episodes quoted directly from Dante's *Comedy* is relatively low in Miltons's *Paradise Lost* compared to the number of primary sources shared by the two poets – in our opinion the real cause of such marked, but in part apparent, Dantesque influences. Bellati's one hundred and six pages of notes about verses modelled on classical authors are revealing. The coincidence between Milton and Dante is greater if considered in the light of common classical models:

5)	Bellati's translation VII, p. 263, v. 1	*[…] quel ch'io voglio è Fato*
	Lucan, *Pharsalia*, V, 91	*[…] Deus […] magnusque, potensque* *Sive canit Fatum, seu quod jubet ipse canendo* *Fit Fatum?*
	Dante, *Purgatorio*, XXX, 142	*L'alto fato di Dio sarebbe rotto.*

In the light of the idea that the perceived Dantesque influence is caused specifically by the sources common to Milton and Dante and not mainly because of Milton direct recourse to Dante, it is possible to reanalyse two of the instances investigated above.

6)	Milton's original (1754 edition)	[…] though in pain and Vaunting aloud, but rack'd with deep despair
	Virgil, *Aeneid*, I, 208	*Talia voce refert; curisque ingentibus eger* *Spem vultu simulat, premit altum corde dolorem*
	Bellati's translation I, 169	*Ma dolor disperato in cor premendo,*
	Dante, *Inferno*, XXXIII, 5	*Disperato dolor, che'l cuor mi preme*

Virgil's *Aeneid* was among the most extensively used sources by both Milton and Dante for obvious reasons: the thematic affinity with their own poems and specifically

the topic of katabasis; the fact of being a classical pagan poem but perceived as very close to the Christian vision of the netherworld; the fact of being one of the richest collections of *topoi* handy for the description of the netherworld itself and of the feelings it provokes (as illustrated in the passage above).

In other occurrences, the lexical identity is softer, but the similarities are to be found in the rhetoric figures and the assonance with common sources:

7) Bellati's translation V, p. 179 v. 15   *O Sole, o tu che **all'universo** immenso*
                                             ***Occhio** ed <u>anima</u> sei*

    Dante, *Purgatorio*, XX, 132   *A parturir li due **occhi** del **cielo***

    Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, IV, 228   *'**mundi oculus**: mihi, crede, places'. Pavet illa, metuque*

    Pliny the Elder, *Nat. His.*, I, 6   *Hunc mundi totius esse <u>animam</u>*

Even if not openly mentioned in all of the passages transcribed above, the Sun is at the centre of this paragon with the eye. It is certainly not an original choice, since the tradition to depict the Moon, the stars, and specifically our star, as the eyes and soul of the universe goes back at least to Pliny the Elder.

Similarly, even more marked are the similitudes between Milton and Dante if filtered through the common source of the Old Testament's *Book of Job* in another already-mentioned passage:

8) Milton's original (1754 edition)   From Beds of raging Fire to starve in Ice
    Bellati's translation II, 600   *[…] dagli orrendi letti*
                                             Di fiamme furibonde entro la ghiaccia
    Job XXIV, 19   *Ad nimium calorem transeat ab aquis nivium*
    Dante, *Inferno*, III, 86   *Nelle tenebre eterne in caldo e in gelo*

Bellati's translation is often literal and usually very respectful of the lexical and rhythmical choices of Milton. In some cases, however, the necessity to provide the Italian reader with the exact meaning of a verse, but also because of the need to evoke sensations the original verse did, Bellati is induced to refer directly to Milton's sources rather than to the English text itself. The Bible, Virgil's *Aeneid* and Dante's *Comedy* are among the most evident models used by Milton, and, at the same time, the most easily accessible already-prepared "translations" of *Paradise Lost.* This is the reason for the general impression given by the Italian translation of being a reading of the *Comedy* rather than an original text. This impression is noticeably patent in the first two books.

It is not just a matter of lexical analogies; rather, speaking of the Milton-Dante relation, it is a perfect identity between lexical choices and the subject matter these words are used to illustrate (see Harris 1985). More precisely, the lexical identity reflects the identity of an unorthodox interpretation of the faith and a critical attitude toward Church institutions: 'In a number of literary works J. Milton criticises the temporal power of both the Catholic and Anglican Churches, condemning their corruption' (Alcini 2008, 9). It is difficult not to perceive echoes of Dante's harsh criticism when representing the corruption and moral decadence of the Roman Church.

Possibly, it is because of these doctrinal analogies that the Italian translator is sometimes unconsciously or reluctantly induced to recur to Dante even when Milton is not quoting the *Comedy* or one of its sources. It is not just Bellati that has this kind of problem. The celebrated Rolli is considered to be the author of 'the most marked Dantesque influence in an Italian translation' (Longoni 2003, LVIII-LIX):

9) *Paradise Lost*, I, v. 516-517   Beyond / The flowry Dale of Sibma **clad** with Vines

Rolli's translation (1729)   *Dietro di Sibma alla fiorita valle / Tutta di pampinose uve **vestita***

Dante, *Inferno*, I, 17   ***Vestite** già de' raggi del pianeta*

As commented by Alcini (2008, 16), 'the translation of *Clad* with *vestita* is technically very precise', however, other lexical options were available. Even though Rolli added the decorative adjective *pampinose,* 'Rolli's translation adheres much more closely to the verses of Milton than, as an example, the later version realized by da Lorenzo Papi.'

The main problem an Italian translator of Milton faces is the already available almost-perfect translation of Milton's most meaningful verses. This is precisely because Milton himself had recourse to very well-known classical sources, which had already been translated, after stylistic and interpretative discussions, into Italian. However, while in the English original these mentionings of classical texts are probably perceived as scholarly quotations or just as distant models, in Italian they are perceived as very recognizable "national" authors' literal quotations. This is even more evident when Milton's specific source was an Italian verse in turn modelled on Dante's, or on a classical source used in the *Comedy.*

10) Aeneid, II, 53   *Insonuere cavæ, **gemitunque cavernæ***

Tasso, *Jerusalem Delivered*, IV, 3   *Treman le spaziose atre **caverne**, e l'aër cieco a quell **romor rimbomba***

Milton's *Paradise Lost*, II, v. 789   *From all her **Caves**, and back **resounded** Death.*

Bellati's Italian translation of Milton   *Tutte al **grido ululâr** l'ampie **caverne***

The references to Tasso are so frequent and marked that a separate study would be necessary to investigate the phenomenon; preliminarily, we should note that these similarities are of two kinds: either they are direct quotations of Tasso in *Paradise Lost*, or they are the result of the literal quotation of the same classical source (Harris 1986).

Less evident, lexically, is the adherence to Dante, or, more precisely, the coincidence with him in the analysed verses. Nevertheless, the full passage of the above quote is a reference to *Inferno*, III, 129–132 where the 'darkened plain' of Hell trembles after Virgil utters the name of *God* and informs Dante that 'no good soul' ever travels on Charon's boat; here, the cave of Hell trembles at the mention of *Death*. To an Italian reader, the lexical, literary, rhythmical and conceptual references are too many to avoid in a translation where the identical reproduction of verses is already formulated in written form in that same language.

ITALIAN MODELS: THE ITALIAN AND
THE CLASSICAL EPIC METERS AND STYLES

A number of studies focus specifically on the Italian influences in Miltons's poetry. Milton's attempt to imitate the Italian epic poem was evident, as mentioned before, to the French philosopher Voltaire as well. Even though the scholar is critical of Milton's style, in the context outlined above in our study, Voltaire's comparison of Milton with Tasso is revealing. Voltaire's words are quoted and criticized by Paolo Rolli, the first Roman literary figure and librettist able to publish the full twelve-books of the Italian translation of *Paradise Lost* in 1729 (actually published in 1730): 'By the way, *in the remaining part [of the Essay] it is easily understandable that his [Voltaire's] attempt to demonstrate that Paradise Lost is a poor Poem, even poorer than he deemed Jerusalem Delivered, a vain attempt*!' (Rolli 2008, 94).[2] We are not interested in aesthetic comments: interesting, obvious and intricate is Milton's direct recourse to, or imitation of, Italian sources. In *Paradise Lost* numerous references and verses modelled on Italian epic poems cause (unusual) problematic situations to the Italian translator: while the English text generically evokes Italian, classical or biblical inspirations for English readers, the same verses sound in Italian exactly like those verses already written by national poets. Right from the start of Milton's poem the Italian reader is projected into his own liter-

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2   *'Nel resto poi facilmente si scopre come a poco a poco egli [Voltaire] tenti di provare alla fine che il Paradiso Perduto è un povero Poema, anzi molto peggiore di quel ch'ei pensò far apparire la Gerusalemme liberata. Vano Attentato!'*.

ary tradition rendered by a metrical form which is very familiar as classical, and hearing words already uttered by Italian poets:

11)   Milton's *Paradise Lost*, I, 16   Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime.

This opening, standard (together with the invocation of the muses) for an epic poem, goes almost unnoticed when written in English. However, the literal Italian translation is too recognizable to the Italian reader:

        Bellati's translation   *Cose non mai tentate in prosa o in rima.*

How could an educated Italian not recognize in the translation the famous verse from the opening of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*?

        Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* I, 2   *Cosa non detta in prosa mai, né in rima.*

The difference between Milton and Ariosto is limited to the use of a conjunction which the translator reproduces as in the English original, and in the recourse to different verbs with very close meanings: *tentate* "attempted" (attempted in poetry that is, said or written) and *detta* "said". Nonetheless, both the lexical choices and their distribution (in metrical form) into the two hemistichs are identical.

These similarities and echoes of Italian poetry (but we should rather say identity) are the consequence of Milton's familiarity with the Tuscan language and poetry:

> *One Source of his particularity was his familiarity with the Tuscan poets: the disposition of his words is, I think, frequently Italian, perhaps sometimes combined with other tongues. Of him, at last, may be said what Johnson says of Spenser, that he wrote in no languages [Ben Johnson, in Timber, or Discoveries (1641)], but has formed what Butler called Babylonic dialect, [Samuel Butler in Hudibras 1662-78] in itself harsh and barbarous, but made by exalted genius, and extensive learning* (Alcini 2008, note 21).

The result, ironically, is that sometimes Milton's verses are easier to properly understand for an Italian reader than for an average English reader, as noted by Scott Elledge referring the incapacity (or subjectivity) of copyists and editors who usually "corrected" Milton's language:

> '*In the ms. [...] Capitol was corrected to Capital, as it appears in the first and second editions. But, Milton probably meant capitol, which comes from [...] capitolium, the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill and means a building in which a legislative body meets*' (Alcini 2008, note 40).

The choice of Milton to adopt blank verse for his Christian epic poem is relevant in the comparison with Dante's choice to opt for *terza rima*. For both poets, the chosen

meter is not just a question of rhythm. Likewise, it is not simply the result of the desire to adhere to a certain poetical tradition. The verse – its metrical value – is a signifier full of meaning. While the originality of the Dantesque *terzina* of hendecasyllables was (and still is) the source of a number of disputes about its significance and symbolism, Milton openly explained his original political-religious interpretation of the heroic couplet. In the preface to *Paradise Lost,* he compares the ancient freedom of blank verse as antithetical to the modern slavery of the rhymed verse:

> *'Rhyme being no necessary adjunct, or true ornament of Poem or good verse […], but the invention of a barbarous age […]. This neglect then of Rhyme […] is to be esteem'd an example set of ancient liberty recover'd to Heroic Poem, from the trouble-some and modern bondage of Rhyme'* (Milton 1754, xxviii-xxxix).

These claims were interpreted as the first political reading of the heroic couplet (Venuti 1999, 99). Dealing with the meter – the blank verse – chosen by Milton and its rendering into Italian, the nature of the problematic translation is, to a certain extent, similar to that of the rendition of the lexical choices: the models are classical or directly Italian, as claimed by Scott Elledge (we are quoting his comments indirectly from Alcini 2008):

> *The Earl of Surry is said to have translated one of Virgil' books without rhyme; and, besides our tragedies, a few short poems had appeared in blank verse. […] These petty performances cannot be supposed to have much influenced Milton, who more probably took his hint from Trisino's Italia Liberata; and, finding blank verse easier than rhyme, was desirous of persuading himself that it is better.*

As an example, the Italian metrical taste is evident in Milton's practice of carefully avoiding recurring words in close sequence. This habit is evident when the English poet reformulates his sources in order to eliminate repetitions 'in full respect of Italian poets' intolerance, from Petrarch on, toward repetition'. (Dante I. 1996, LIV. Cf. Alcini 2005 for the rendition of blank verse in the Italian translation).

As a consequence, to translate *Paradise Lost* into the Italian language meant, in particular, for the early 19th century translators to participate in the debate about the most appropriate rhythmical-metrical solution to rendering the epic verse of classical literature. It was a thorny debate focused on the rendition of dactylic hexameter in the non-quantitative Italian meter. It was a debate that opposed the most renowned Italian literary figures and translators like Monti and Foscolo. It might have been a risky choice for a less-than-celebrated translator.

This is probably the reason why Ugo Foscolo himself experimented with the translation of the first verses of *Paradise Lost* after a similar experiment with the *Iliad* and the debate about the translation proposed by Vincenzo Monti.

12)   U. Foscolo *Principio del Paradiso*   U. Foscolo *Versione del Canto Primo*
       Perduto di Milton   *dell'Iliade*

Dell'uom <u>la prima innobedienza,</u>   <u>L'ira, o Dea, canta</u> **del Pelide Achille**,
e il frutto Dell'arbore vietata, onde l'assaggio   *Che orrenda in mille guai trasse gli Achei,*
Diede noi tutti a morte e all'infinite   *E molte forti a Pluto alme d'eroi*
Miserie, lunge dal perduto Edenne,   *Spinse anzi tempo, abbandonando i corpi*
Finchè l'Uomo divino alle beate   *Preda a sbranarsi a cani ed agli augelli:*
Perdute sedi redentor ne assunse,   *Così il consiglio s'adempia di Giove,*
<u>*Canta, o Musa*</u> *celeste! E tu in Orebbe,*   *Da che la rissa ardea che fe discord*
E tu del Sinai sul secreto giro   *Il re d'uomini Atride e il divo Achille.*
                    (Foscolo 1842b, 401)   (Foscolo 1842a, 451)

Not only are there evident lexical analogies: *dea – musa, canta – canta*. There are syntactical identities: *Dell'uomo* – del *Pelide Achille*; and thematic analogies: the disobedience, or the fury, of a man angering the deity. Analogies emerge in the metrical form too. The rendition of the English blank verse and that of the dactylic hexameter of Greek poetry should be identical in the Italian language. The latter was the source of a lively and partially unsolved debate. The former, when adopted for a Christian epic poem modelled on the Italian epic style, in many cases proved equally challenging.

CONCLUSIONS

Finding the best equivalent for culture-specific terms or items is one of the main concerns for translators often dealing with some non-equivalent words, concepts, and expressions. One of the most difficult problems a translator faces is how to find lexical equivalents when there is not a corresponding word or phrase in the receptor language easily available for the translation. Even if close equivalents are found, they can rarely reveal and convey exactly the same messages. Referring to the specific case of the translation of Milton's *Paradise Lost* in Italian, the problem is the exact opposite: the main problem an Italian translator of Milton faces is the already available almost-perfect translation of Milton's most meaningful verses.

This is precisely because Milton himself had recourse to very well-known classical source which had already been translated, after stylistic and interpretative discussions, into Italian. However, while in the English original these allusions to classical texts are

probably perceived as scholarly quotations or just as distant models, in Italian they are perceived as very recognizable "national" authors' literal quotations. Likewise, the setting and the subject matter of the English poem was too adherent to that of both Dante and Virgil's *Aeneid* (one of Dante's main sources). Finally, it might have been difficult to translate Milton into Italian because the English poet openly imitates the Italian epic style, its rhythmical and lexical choices. Moreover, the transposition of *Paradise Lost*'s peculiar mixture of style and meter, the blank verse of a Christian epic poem, was challenging. This uniqueness rendered it too similar to Dante's *Comedy* – a Christian poem modelled on the epical style of Vergil, even if transposed in an original metrical form.

The investigated translation of Bellati is often literal and usually very respectful of the lexical and rhythmical choices of Milton. In some cases, however, with the necessity to provide the Italian reader with the exact meaning of a verse, Bellati is induced to refer directly to Milton's sources rather than to the English text itself. The Bible, Virgil's *Aeneid* and Dante's *Comedy* are among the most evident models, and, at the same time, the most easily accessible already-prepared "translations" of *Paradise Lost.* This is the reason for the general impression given by the Italian translation as being a reading of the *Comedy* rather than an original text.

Manifestly, in a number of occurrences, the translator is opting for a Dantesque term even though a more modern one is available because the Dantesque term encompasses meanings, doctrines, classical and biblical references identical to those intended by Milton: often Dante's words are, in every respect, the perfect rendition of Milton's words and ideas, not approximations.

We conclude that it might have been difficult to avoid even more marked Dantesque influences in an Italian translation. In other words, this study depicts an unusual traductive instance of "excess of equivalence" for lexical and culture-specific items.

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ANKSTYVIEJI JOHNO MILTONO „PRARASTOJO ROJAUS“ (*PARADISE LOST*) VERTIMAI Į ITALŲ KALBĄ: NESĖKMINGI BANDYMAI IR DANTĖS ĮTAKA

Moreno Bonda

S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje rašoma apie vertimo istoriją XVIII ir XIX a. Konkrečiau, darbe tyrinėjamos priežastys, dėl kurių liko nebaigti (mažiausiai) šeši Johno Miltono *Paradise Lost* (1667) vertimai į italų kalbą, o šio kūrinio vertimas buvo laikomas tikru iššūkiu. Straipsnyje pateikiama hipotezė, kad tai lėmė neįprastai žymėtos leksinės, teminės, stilistinės ir ritmo analogijos, kurias buvo problemiška perteikti dėl panašumo į Dantės „Dieviškąją komediją“ ir ypač jos šaltinius.

Kaip pavyzdį pasitelkiant Antonio Bellatio vertimą į italų kalbą (1856), straipsnyje analizuojami probleminiai vidiniai anglų kalba parašyto originalo aspektai. Atlikus tyrimą, keliama hipotezė, kad esminis iššūkis verčiant *Paradise Lost* buvo savita stiliaus ir metrikos jungimo transpozicija: angliškasis *blank verse* (epinis metras) krikščioniškoje epinėje poemoje. Šis unikalumas pavertė Miltono poemą per daug panašia į Dantės „Dieviškąją komediją“. Taip pat pažymėtina, kad poemoje anglų kalba aprašomi vaizdai ir siužetas buvo pernelyg artimi ir Dantės „Dieviškajai komedijai“, ir Virgilijaus „Eneidai“ (vienam iš pagrindinių Dantės šaltinių). Galiausiai Miltono kūrinį perteikti italų kalba galėjo būti sunku dėl poemos, kuri anglų kalba atvirai imituoja italų epinį stilių ir jo ritminius bei leksinius sprendimus, stiliaus.

Pateikiama išvada, kad verčiant Miltono *Paradise Lost* į italų kalbą sunkiausia buvo išvengti pridėtinės Dantės įtakos italų kalbos vertime. Kitaip tariant, straipsnyje aptariamas neįprastas vertimo atvejis, kurį būtų galima pavadinti ekvivalentiškumo viršijimu leksiniame, metriniame ir kultūriniame lygmenyse.