

BETWEEN PHILOLOGY AND CRITICISM IN LITERARY TRANSLATION: *LA COSCIENZA DI ZENO* BY ITALO SVEVO

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The aim of this article is to present some theoretical reflections on the matter of literary translation by referring to two different methodological approaches: philology and criticism. The analysis is conducted on *La coscienza di Zeno* by Italo Svevo, one of the most relevant novels of Italian Modernism, and focuses on two paratextual aspects that, in connection with the translation of a literary text, are of particular significance: the choice of the reference text, which is linked to philology; and the strategy for title translation, which is linked to criticism.

I. TRANSLATION AND PHILOLOGY

La coscienza di Zeno is the third novel by the Italian writer Italo Svevo (1861–1928). Critics traditionally consider this novel as one of the most significant examples of Italian (as well as European) literary Modernism, on the same level of works such as *À la recherche du temps perdu* by Marcel Proust, *Ulysses* by James Joyce or *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf. Its literary renown is further proven by the considerable influence of Svevo's third novel on later literature, not only in Italy and in the rest of Europe, but also on American literature (see Mędrzak-Conway 2014).

The first edition of *La Coscienza di Zeno* was published in 1923 (Bologna: Cappelli). A second and somewhat altered edition followed in 1930 (Milano: Morreale). Published two years after the death of the author, the second edition is irrelevant and, consequently, all its textual variants must be considered arbitrary. The same can be said of the third edition published in 1938 (dall'Oglio: Milano), which follows the Morreale template. The 1923 edition, therefore, is the only truly reliable one.

However, from a philological point of view, there are certain aspects that make the 1923 volume a nonlinear text. This nonlinearity stems from a linguistic source: the geographical and cultural origins of Italo Svevo and the kind of the Italian language that he spoke. To begin with, Svevo was born in Trieste, a city that, as part of the

Austrian-Hungarian Empire, was not territorially incorporated into Italy until the end of World War I. This fact alone is of both political and linguistic significance. Indeed, as F. Vittorini notes:

'Le procedure attraverso le quali il pensiero di Svevo si articola linguisticamente sono quelle caratteristiche di un uomo che vive al confine fra mondi geopolitici' (The processes through which Svevo's thought is linguistically articulated are those peculiar to a man living between geopolitical worlds.) (Vittorini 2004, 1539).

Moreover, as Svevo himself observed, his grandfather came from a German-speaking background, which also had linguistic implications:

'Che sia il nonno tedesco che m'impedisca di apparire meglio latino? Eppure io sempre onorai ed anche studiai la mia madrelingua.' (Is it perhaps my German grandfather that prevents me from being a real Italian speaker? Yet I have always loved and studied the Italian language.) (Svevo 1966, 825).

Finally, various personal factors further influenced the Italian practiced by Svevo, as he admits:

'Ma come fare? Dalla mia prima giovinezza fui sbalestrato nei più vari paesi. Firenze – ad onta del lungo desiderio – non vidi che a cinquant'anni e Roma a sessanta mentre il mio destino mi portò in tutto il resto dell'Europa, fino in Irlanda' (But what to do? Since I was young I have found myself in several countries. Despite my long-standing wish to do so, I did not see Florence until I was fifty, and Rome until I was sixty, while my destiny carried me all around Europe, right up to Ireland) (*ibid.*).

These factors contributed to the creation of a particular linguistic medium that the first publisher of *La coscienza di Zeno*, Licinio Cappelli, considered to be both incorrect and impure Italian. He therefore deemed it necessary to intervene by correcting and normalizing Svevo's linguistic form. So-called corrections were made to the text by Cappelli's collaborator, the Italian writer and journalist Attilio Frescura, as revealed through a series of letters between Svevo and Cappelli, and between Svevo (1966) and Frescura (1973). Given that the original manuscript of *La coscienza di Zeno* has been lost, it is impossible to reconstruct the writing process behind the novel, or to evaluate the quantity and quality of the editorial intervention. For this reason, the editorial tradition of *La coscienza di Zeno* appears complex and marked by serious textual inconsistencies. Furthermore, at least until the 1980s, this complexity was compounded by the second and the third editions of the novel, which, as was previously mentioned, arbitrarily modified the 1923 version. In this regard, Giovanni Palmieri's comments in

his critical edition of *La coscienza di Zeno* are particularly relevant. Published in 1994, Palmieri's critical edition was one of the first steps towards a new philological approach that, from the 1980s onwards, has been continued by critics in recent years, not only regarding *La coscienza di Zeno*, but the entire oeuvre of Italo Svevo. As Palmieri notes:

*'Gli editori milanesi Morreale e dall'Oglio sin dagli anni Trenta (Morreale dal 1930, Dall'Oglio dal 1938) hanno ristampato i romanzi di Svevo apportando ex novo alle edizioni originali numerose correzioni linguistiche arbitrarie che, nel caso della Coscienza di Zeno, si sono sommate a quelle di Attilio Frescura; di conseguenza, tutta la tradizione editoriale successiva, dipendente dalle edizioni di Dall'Oglio, ha ereditato meccanicamente un vasto e confuso insieme di errori e correzioni illegittime [...]. Studi critici e linguistici, pur importanti, condotti su edizioni diverse da quelle che non hanno ristampato (emendandola) l'editio princeps, si espongono a veder vanificati o inficiati dati e conclusioni a causa della scorrettezza testuale delle sedi editoriali scelte. Tornare all'edizione originale e ristamparla correggendo i soli refusi è stata la scelta privilegiata nel 1985 da Bruno Maier per la sua edizione della Coscienza (Pordenone, Edizioni Studio Tesi). Dal 1985 in poi, molte sono state le edizioni del romanzo che hanno seguito questa strada, sia riprendendo l'edizione Maier sia correggendo autonomamente i refusi dell'editio princeps. (Starting in the 1930s, the publishers Morreale and Dall'Oglio (Morreale from 1930, Dall'Oglio from 1938) have reprinted the novels of Svevo, adding ex novo to the original editions numerous arbitrary linguistic corrections that, with regard to *La coscienza di Zeno*, appeared in addition to the previous corrections by Attilio Frescura. Consequently, the entire editorial tradition deriving from Dall'Oglio, has mechanically acquired an ample and confused set of errors and illegitimate corrections [...]. Critical and linguistic studies not based on the *editio princeps* would therefore be untrustworthy. To go back to the 1923 edition and reprint it, amending only the editorial misprints: this was the editorial decision taken by Bruno Maier in 1985 for his edition of *La coscienza di Zeno* (Pordenone: Edizioni Studio Tesi). Since 1985, a considerable number of editions of the novel have adhered to this method, and are either based on the Maier edition or independently amend the misprints of the *editio princeps*.) (Palmieri 1994, 423–424).*

This, however, poses certain problems concerning the translation. A good example of this can be found in the Lithuanian translation of *La coscienza di Zeno*. *Dzeno prisipažinimai* was translated by Algimantas Gudaitis and published in 2002 for the Vilnius publishing house "Alma littera". As we see on the title page of the book (p. 4), the editorial version of reference is that of Dall'Oglio:

*'Versta iš/ Translated from: Italo Svevo
LA COSCIENZA DI ZENO
dall'Oglio, editore – Milano'*

In light of Palmieri's analysis, the reference text chosen for the Lithuanian translation appears dubious. This can be proven by two factors that are especially relevant from a philological point of view. The 1923 edition of *La coscienza di Zeno*, which is now considered the closest version to the final wishes of the author, contains two incongruities concerning the internal chronology of the text. The last chapter of the novel, entitled *Psychoanalysis*, is organized like a journal, and covers the period from 3 May 1915 to 24 March 1916. The two problematic passages are: a) the page dated 26 June 1919 (Svevo 1923, 501), which clearly contradicts the rest of the dates; b) the last fragment of the chapter dated 24 March 1916, in which Zeno resumes writing his diary after a break of a few months. According to the 1923 edition, Zeno had not written any entries since May 1915 (Svevo 1923, 515); however, the previous fragment was explicitly dated June 2015.

Italian philologists have, in recent critical editions, generally preferred to treat these discrepancies as misprints, correcting them in logical accordance with the text's internal chronology ('26 June 1919' becoming '26 June 1915' and 'from May 2015' becoming 'from June 2015'). The critical editions by Vittorini (Svevo 2004) and Stasi (Svevo 2008) are two examples of this rectification. Alternatively, some versions leave the two chronological inconsistencies unchanged ('26 June 1919' and 'from May 2015'), as in Palmieri's critical edition (Svevo 1994). Palmieri interprets these two chronological mistakes as clear signs of Zeno's peculiar chronopathy. For this reason, according to Palmieri, the anachronisms should be left untouched (Palmieri 1994, 424–425). There is also a third solution to this conundrum which opts for a patchwork compromise, with the first discrepancy amended and the second left as it was in the 1923 edition ('26 June 1915' and 'from May 2015'). This option was chosen by, among others, the Dall'Oglio publishing house. Having used Dall'Oglio as its reference edition, the Lithuanian translation naturally acquires the same timeline:

'1915 m. birželio 26 d. Nuo praeitų metų gegužės nė karto nebuvau prisėdęs prie šios knygelės'
(26 June 1915. Not a single time did I sit down to continue work on this book.) (Svevo 2002, 363).

How exactly this influences a translation is something that remains to be clarified. The question is whether the reference text should be chosen through a – broadly speaking – philological approach, which means paying attention to the latest critical editions of the work to be translated, and trying to choose between them. When *Dzeno prisipažinimai* was printed in 2002, the by-now essential *opera omnia*, edited by Mario Lavagetto (Svevo 2004), as well as the recent critical edition of *La*

coscienza di Zeno by Beatrice Stasi (Svevo 2008)¹, were not yet available. However, other philologically significant versions were available at the time as more valid alternatives to the unreliable version by Dall'Oglio². The point here is not to confuse a translation with a critical edition of a book. Nevertheless, it is true that the philological issues generally connected with a literary text on the one hand, and the act of translation on the other, are linked to each other by a specific object: the text to be recovered or translated. Which kind of text should be considered as closest to the author's wishes should be of primary concern from the perspective of both philology and translation, the first being an essential premise of the second.

II. TRANSLATION AND CRITICISM

Another aspect characterizing literary translation is its implication for criticism. As we have seen regarding the sphere of philology and the textual complications arising from it, a translated literary text can create an additional constellation of complexity, in this case related to the sphere of meaning and content.

A literary text cannot be separated from the cultural space in which it was conceived and realized. It is a direct product of that space, testifying to a common *weltanschauung* and, at the same time, being the hermeneutical result of a subjective and individual experience of knowledge, comprehension, interpretation, narrative reconstruction and retelling of reality. Therefore, a constant and keen awareness of that cultural space is decisive in a good translation.

In the case of *La coscienza di Zeno*, this is immediately apparent from the title. As the Italian critic E. Saccone has pointed out, the title of the novel has seldom been faithfully translated into other languages. Generally, the result is:

'Un'interpretazione scorretta che ha favorito molti equivoci e seri fraintendimenti di lettura, spostando l'attenzione, ad esempio, dal genere romanzo, cui dichiaratamente il sottotitolo richiama, a quello delle confessioni e dell'autobiografia.' (A wrong interpretation that has encouraged numerous equivocations and serious misunderstandings, such as shifting attention away from the genre of novel, as the subtitle clearly says, to the genres of confession and biography.) (Saccone 1973, 46).

¹ This critical edition is part of the ongoing National Edition of Svevo's *opera omnia*. Currently, in addition to *La coscienza di Zeno*, the National Edition includes: Svevo I. 2011. *Commedie*. Ed. by Guido Lucchini. Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura; and Svevo I. 2012. *Una vita*. Ed. by Simone Ticcianti. Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura.

² See the quoted Svevo 1985 (ed. by Maier) and Svevo 1994 (ed. by Palmieri), but it has also to be mentioned, at least: Svevo I. 1993, edited by Arrigo Stara.

The translation of the title conforms to three main variants. The first option is simply to avoid translating it and resort to the association-laden name of the main character, Zeno Cosini. This was the case, for example, with the prompt translations into French – *Zéno* (Svevo 1927), German – *Zeno Cosini* (Svevo 1929), and the succeeding translations into Polish (Svevo 1936) and Slovenian (Svevo 1961), both of which proposed the title *Zeno Cosini*, as in the first German version.

The second variant is to modify the original ‘coscienza’ into ‘confessioni’, as, for example, in the first translation into English – *Confessions of Zeno* (Svevo 1930) and in the above-mentioned Lithuanian version. This modifies the original title but in a different way to the first solution; it intimates both internal self-justification and critical intent. Indeed, in the final chapter of the novel Zeno defines his writings as ‘confessions’:

Il dottore presta una fede troppo grande anche a quelle mie benedette confessioni che non vuole restituirmi perché le riveda. Dio mio! (Svevo 2004, 1050) (The doctor puts too much faith also in those damned confessions of mine, which he won't return to me so I can revise them. Good heavens! (Svevo 2001, 404)

Be that as it may, the fact that Zeno uses the term ‘confessioni’ still raises serious doubts in terms of translation. For example, in the Lithuanian version (as well as the 1930 English version), the autodiegetic narrator and the implicit author use the same term, ‘prisipažinimai’, cf.:

Daktaras pernelyg tiki tais mano prisipažinimais ir nesutinka, kad juos peržiūrėčiau. Dieve mano! (Svevo 2002, 337).

But it cannot be ignored that Svevo does not explicitly use Zeno's terminology: he opts for another term that shows the contrast between the implicit author and the autodiegetic narrator. This is not mere pedantry because the narratological structure is integral to Svevo's singular mode of modernism, and should be maintained starting with the title.

Finally, the third main variant of titular translation is to more or less literally translate the word ‘coscienza’. This option is generally used in more recent translations, as is the case with, among others, the most recent French, German and (American) English versions – respectively *La conscience de Zeno* (Svevo 1986), *Zenos Gewissen* (Svevo 2010), *Zeno's Conscience* (Svevo 2001), as well as the Russian version – *Samapoznanie Dzeno* (Svevo 1972). All of these cases illustrate Patrizia Guida's observation about the two German versions of the novel, the first by Piero Rismondo, originally published

in 1929, the second by Barbara Kleiner, published in 2000. Guida points out how Rismondo's transformation of the title into *Zeno Cosini* was influenced both by critical and interpretive factors due to the difficult restitution of the ambiguity inherent in the original text. Indeed, the title chosen by Svevo himself is intentionally ambiguous and includes at least two key connotations. Firstly, the word 'coscienza', in opposition to the word 'incoscienza', has a specific psychoanalytic meaning: the conscious awareness of unconscious elements. There is no need to remind the reader of the intimate relationship between the epistemological revolution inspired by Sigmund Freud and Italo Svevo's third novel. The structure of the novel and its unreliable narrator also evokes the Nietzschean and Marxian notion of 'bad conscience'.

Perhaps this is why, as Guida notes, the German translator Rismondo was apprehensive about using the term 'Gewissen':

'Rismondo teme che la parola 'Gewissen' possa ricordare al lettore l'espressione quotidiana 'Gewissensbiss', ovvero 'rimorso', evidenziando, dunque, solo il secondo aspetto del significato del titolo.' (Rismondo is afraid that the word 'Gewissen' might remind the reader of the quotidian expression 'Gewissensbiss', meaning 'regret'. In this way, the German title would have signified only one of the two meanings implicit in the Italian title. (Guida 2012, 7).

In this regard, Rismondo's personal insight into the difficulty caused by the title, which Guida quotes, is of particular significance:

'La difficoltà della traduzione del titolo consiste in quello che per la parola Coscienza in tedesco non esiste un equivalente. Ci sono due parole: Bewusstsein e Gewisse. Filologicamente Gewisse darebbe il senso, ma nella lingua comune si è confusa un poco con Gewissensbiss (rimorso) [...]. È vero che l'accento di Gewissensbiss lo ha acquistato soltanto nella lingua comune, ma non abbiamo davanti a noi un'opera scritta in lingua classica.' (The difficulty of translating the title arises from the fact that there does not exist a German equivalent for the word *Coscienza*. There are two words: *Bewusstsein* and *Gewisse*. Philologically, *Gewisse* would convey the right sense, but in common language it has become somewhat confused with *Gewissensbiss* (regret) [...]. It is true that this confusion of meaning occurs only in common language, but we are not dealing here with a work written in classical language.) (*ibid.*).

Thus, the choice by Barbara Kleiner to render the title as *Zenos Gewissen*, although more neutral and ostensibly closer to the original, risks losing the ambiguity of 'coscienza'. This problem, as Saccone says, concerns not just the German language, but perhaps every language into which the novel is translated, due to the double meaning of the Italian word 'coscienza'. Its dual meaning carries specific cultural implications and contains the double key to interpreting the entire novel. At the same time, it

contains the *weltanschauung* of the period in which *La coscienza di Zeno* was written, culturally dominated as it was by Freud and psychoanalysis; and the personal vision of the author, who had a personal and critical approach to Sigmund Freud, together with a modernist vision of human nature and reality.

III. CONCLUSION

As part of translation studies, literary translation is necessarily problematic due to the particular *status* of the type of text it has to deal with. The problems that arise inevitably result in further complications, such as issues of authorship, authenticity, reliability and fidelity, and have generated a long-standing discussion on literary translation and its consequences for the literary text. Translating can be considered a form of ‘betrayal’ or ‘rewriting’³. Moreover, it can be domesticated, or follow a strategy of foreignization (Lawrence 2008), with all the textual implications that either entails⁴.

This article has attempted to take a step backwards in order to reflect on a question that arises prior to the act of translating. The question concerns the *criteria* that should guide the choice of the reference text to be translated. The step backwards brings us to both a philological and paratextual space (which always accompanies the literary text). Rather than commencing the act of translation by reflecting on which strategies are most appropriate for the task at hand, perhaps the translator’s attention should first focus on the selection of the optimal reference text, with the precise aim of choosing the textual exemplar closest to the author’s wishes. This can be ascertained, first of all, from a philological perspective. As we have seen in respect to *La coscienza di Zeno*, a good and trustworthy critical edition and, consequently, a good and trustworthy translation of the novel itself should be – but by no means always is – based solely on the 1923 version.

Yet, as we have also seen in the case of Svevo, the intention to respect the author’s wishes can also have paratextual meanings. Indeed, it can be particularly constructive to consider and analyze what constitutes being ‘close to’ the text to be translated: literary genre, title, prefaces and all those texts written by the author or on the author (letters, interviews, papers), which form the basis of an hermeneutical and critical tradition

³ ‘Tradurre-tradire’ (*translate as betray*), as well as ‘traduttore-traditore’ (*translator as betrayer*), are the well-known wordplays proposed by Umberto Eco (see Eco 1997 and Eco 2003). An interesting reinterpretation of this pun is offered by Ferme (2002). Translation as rewriting is a notion suggested by André Lefevere (Lefevere 1992a and Lefevere 1992b).

⁴ Cases such as remakes and adaptations present their own issues, they should be approached differently and are outside the scope and the intents of this article.

whose aim is to not misunderstand, or misunderstand as little as possible, the final intentions of the author. A similar aim should likewise be considered advantageous to translation. Being faithful or unfaithful, domesticating or alienating the literary text: these choices are all legitimate, but they can bear real fruit only by dealing with and working on a faithful version of the original text.

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TARP FILOLOGIJOS IR KRITIKOS LITERATŪRINIAME VERTIME: ITALO SVEVO. *LA COSCIENZA DI ZENO* (DZENO PRISIPAŽINIMAI)

NOVELLA DI NUNZIO

S a n t r a u k a

Šiame straipsnyje aptariamos grožinės literatūros vertimo problemos, kurias sprendžiant svarbus požiūrio klausimas: ar kūrinio vertimą nagrinėti remiantis filologiniais metodais, atsižvelgiant į iš to išplaukiančias išvadas, ar jam taikyti vertimo kritikoje įprastus kanonus. Kadangi grožinės literatūros tekstai gali būti nagrinėjami abiem požiūriais, straipsnyje aptariama, kaip ir kokių būdu filologija ir kritika paveikia vertimo veiklą, kokias priemones šios dvi disciplinos gali suteikti vertėjui, kad jis pasirinktų tinkamas vertimo strategijas. Kitas svarbus vertėjams klausimas kyla tada, kai yra keletas kūrinio leidimų ir jie nevienodi: kokį teksto originalo kalbą leidimą pasirinkti? Kaip vertimą gali paveikti filologiniu požiūriu pagrindinis kūrinio leidimas, kurio kritikai nelaiko pačiu patikimiausiu? Ir kaip vertėjui ir vertimui gali pasitarnauti kūrinio konteksto išmanymas, t. y. literatūros kritika, autoriaus kalbos, papildoma informacija? Straipsnyje į šiuos klausimus atsakoma remiantis XX a. pradžios italų moderniosios literatūros klasiko Italo Svevo kūrinio „Dzeno prisipažinimai“ (Italo Svevo. *La coscienza di Zeno*). Šis kūrinys išverstas į daugelį kalbų. Problemos jį verčiant prasideda nuo pat pavadinimo, kuriame esantis žodis *coscienza* italų kalboje turi bent porą skirtingų reikšmių. Jų pasirinkimas daro poveikį ne tik pavadinimo, bet ir viso kūrinio interpretacijai. Į lietuvių kalbą šis romanas (Italo Svevo. *Dzeno prisipažinimai*. Vilnius: Alma littera, 2002) išverstas remiantis 1930 metų leidimu, kuris ne visai sutampa su 1923 metų romano leidimu Italijoje, o kritikai tik šį leidimą laiko patikimu. Daroma išvada, kad vertimo strategijos pasirinkimas ne toks svarbus negu patikimiausio šaltinio, iš kurio verčiama, pasirinkimas, nes tik tinkamai pasirinktas originalas padeda užtikrinti tinkamą autoriaus minčių perteikimą ir interpretaciją vertime.