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MARGINS AND CHALLENGES OF ITALIAN AMERICAN STUDIES:
THE ROLE OF TRANSLATION IN JOSEPH TUSIANI'S POETICS

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INTRODUCTION

JOSEPH TUSIANI IN THE CONTEXT OF ITALIAN AMERICAN STUDIES

Joseph Tusiani occupies a particular position in the panorama of Italian American authors.

Giose Rimanelli has defined him: “a surviving Humanist, in the old great tradition”,¹ a sentence that epitomizes his long and distinguished career as a poet, a translator and a scholar and also reveals his own classical approach to poetic materials.

Tusiani writes in four languages: Italian, English, Latin and the Gargano dialect. He arrived in the United States in 1947 and, since then, English has progressively substituted Italian in his creative process of composition becoming the “garment” of his thought.² Yet Italian is still the language of his cultural heritage and of his education, while dialect and Latin are the expressions of two intimate worlds: the former is his native, oral and traditional language, the latter is the language that allows him to dive into the heart of classical tradition; and both are revived in his everyday American experience. His poetic research moves among these languages and the cultures they represent.

Tusiani’s poetry in four languages and his work as a literary translator, which are the two entwined activities of the same creative process, reveal continuous contaminations and even though he changes the “garments” of his thought, his expressive and aesthetic issues remain the same.

When tackling Tusiani’s opus the problem of language – or rather the continuous interactions between his four languages – is of the utmost importance: themes,

¹ Giose Rimanelli a famous Italian American writer, poet and translator has celebrated Tusiani’s poetry on various occasions. This quote is from “A mesmeric sculpture: Tusiani, the Humanist” in Paolo A. Giordano *Joseph Tusiani Poet Translator Humanist. An International Homage*, West Lafayette, IN, Bordighera, 1994, p. 5.

² See below, end of chapter I, for the full quotation.

myths and feelings recur throughout his poetry, as the same sensitivity underlies all his poetic production, and each language complements another in his stratified culture. In fact, a whole range of poetic experiences is explored from different perspectives: memorial, meditative, but also ironic and with more or less apparent parodic allusions to the different cultural backgrounds of these languages, especially in the case of his Latin and Gargano-dialect poems, which allow the poet to explore expressive modalities he does not usually employ in his Italian and English poetry.

If we try to explain Tusiani's works through Benjamin's statement that each language is the expression of what can be communicated in itself and that languages can only communicate the true and pure meaning of words – i.e. the linguistic and consequently spiritual essence of things³ – we understand how Tusiani's poetics carries out research into the expressive potential of his four languages: different genres, traditional metrical forms, different symbolic and rhythmic modalities are a range of possibilities used to voice the urgency of his poetic vision.

In fact, in Tusiani's poetry creative research, aesthetic intentionality and poetic intuition coincide, and it is above all the musicality of words and lines that guides – or rather “illuminates”, – his own hermeneutical path through the languages.

This continuous confrontation between his languages is of the utmost importance when considering his activity as a literary translator first from English into Italian, and subsequently and prolifically from Italian into English. Translation allows him to relate the word of another poet to his own poetic word, and is a cultural/linguistic laboratory in which he verifies the potentiality of a renewal of a literary language when it is turned into another. His work as a translator has been extensive and has gained him a considerable reputation in the departments of Italian Studies in the United States. Tusiani has rendered into English seven centuries of Italian poetry from Dante to Montale; he has given his personal poetic rendition of famous authors, whose works had already been translated into

³ Walter Benjamin, “Sulla lingua in generale e sulla lingua dell'uomo” in *Angelus Novus*, transl. and introduced by Renato Solmi Torino, Einaudi, 1982 pp. 55-56.

English, such as Michelangelo or Leopardi, and also of poems such as the *Morgante* by Pulci whose “bulk” had previously disheartened other translators. Tusiani’s translations, as well as his poetry and his critical studies, have functioned as mediators between two cultures and have brought the Italian literary tradition into the heart of American culture and life.

Considering the richness and variety of Tusiani’s works, it becomes important to analyze how his opus is received in the critical context of Italian American studies.

He is the Italian intellectual, poet and scholar who migrated to the United States as a young adult with a degree in Italian literature. From this perspective Tusiani not only represents the living emblem of emigration but also possesses the expressive means to transform it into a literary experience.

In fact, Tusiani has sung the tragedy of immigration in his English poetry volume *Gente Mia and Other Poems*, which constitutes one of the best achievements of his whole poetic production, but even though he recognizes his own experience in the tragedy of emigration, and has poetically rendered it in his poetry and in his autobiography, his whole opus eludes the excessively rigid, ideological and political categorizations of ethnic approaches.

He shares with other Italian Americans the immigrant history of their forefathers. Indeed, in his autobiography, he considers himself as “l’ultima vittima innocente dell’antica tragedia dell’emigrazione”⁴, but from the historical point of view, the gap between the Italian Americans he met when he arrived and himself was both generational, cultural and, in a way, linguistic. By the time Tusiani emigrated, Italian Americans had already started that process of Americanization and that upward social mobility that would inexorably lead them to embrace middle-class American values and culture and to forget their Italian heritage.

Those who were once Italian immigrants are today Americans of Italian descent. They think and speak in American English. Today Tusiani considers himself an American poet and identifies with the Italian American community, but, also,

⁴ *La parola antica*, Fasano Schena, 1992, p. 199.

remains an Italian expatriate who has resided in the United States for more than sixty years and who has never given up his culture and language of origin in favor of his new adopted one. In fact, his European cultural background is not something he needs to rediscover and be reconciled to, as it is for most Italian American intellectuals, because it remains the solid basis underlying all his literary production. In the complex definition of his “identity” – an American poet, an Italian American man, an Italian expatriate intellectual – he embodies in himself the process of at least three generations of immigrants. Yet, this is not the only reason why his opus is so difficult to collocate in the arena of Italian Americana.

In the last thirty years, the field of Italian American studies has given voice to the claims of identity of all those Italian Americans who did not want to forget their history and their memories. Consequently, Italian American critics and intellectuals, who have grounded their approaches in the footsteps of all previous ethnic studies, tend to reduce his poetic production to the typical issues of immigration and to tackle his poetry thematically.

Therefore a figure like Tusiani cannot be easily collocated among other Italian American writers and, consequently, within the critical parameters of a field of study which is still somehow entangled in postcolonial dynamics. On the other hand, Italian American studies is now reaching a turning point: the immigrant experience, the assimilation paradigm, the issues of *italianità* have been thoroughly dealt with, and this field is in search of creative ways to give voice to the identity of twenty-first century Italian Americans.

Admittedly, Tusiani’s poems, so attached to traditional metrical forms and themes, do not seem to attract too many curious readers. His poetry somehow represents that traditional Italian high culture in which Italian Americans cannot find the responses for their identitarian claims. It is undeniable, though, that Tusiani’s works could bridge that gap existing between Italian American culture and Italian studies, always lamented by Italian American intellectuals, because Tusiani’s cultural, literary and linguistic mediation can express the Italian

American experience from within American culture and inside the rich literary tradition of European Humanism.

A wider perspective is provided by the Italianists (both from Italy and from the United States) and the European scholars who tend to analyze his whole poetic four-language production and his translations using other interpretive tools. They have a more global and comparative vision of his opus and don't limit themselves to labeling it thematically. Yet they haven't really explored the reasons why Tusiani expresses himself using four different languages, what role these languages have in his experiential universe and what sort of creative substratum they provide for his literary research.

Chapter 1 of this dissertation provides the necessary context to explore such a complex figure as Tusiani. A cultural and historical survey outlines the development of Italian American studies and the background that has produced it. An overlook of the last three decades of the publications of Italian American studies exemplifies the development of this field of research. The problem of the hyphenated writer is observed in the context of multiethnic American culture and through its relationship to ethnic and postcolonial studies.

The history of Italian Americans is briefly sketched through the much-debated issues of whiteness and assimilation. The myths of Italian Americans and the stereotypes about them provide an interesting reading of how Italian Americans try to root their experience in the classic heritage of their ancestors, while at the same time they have to come to terms with an "invented tradition" of stereotypes that still overshadows their real identity.

The second part of chapter 1 deals with the critical thinking of Italian American intellectuals who have tried to categorize the development and the experience of Italian American narrative according to temporal, philosophical and cognitive categories.

From another perspective Italianists have tried to classify those authors whose cultural background is Italian but whose literary production occurred in the United States.

All these attempts are interesting because they show how Tusiani's work eludes these classifications. His poetry ought to be studied because of the differences it shows from those rigid and sometimes "strained" categories but also because of the critical aporias it generates.

Chapter 2 outlines the literary biography of Joseph Tusiani through a brief summary of each of his four-language productions and through the analysis of some poems, which are explicative of his poetics. In particular, the poem "The Return", a rewriting of his own Italian ode "M'ascolti tu mia terra?", provides interesting points of analysis of how his different languages can create totally different poetic and aesthetic experiences through diverse stylistic, metrical and symbolic choices. This last issue is at the core of Tusiani's poetic research and underlies his literary translations.

The second part of chapter 2 introduces Tusiani's activity as translator. From 1960, when he translated *The Complete Poems of Michelangelo*, to 2007 when he published Montale's *Finisterre*, his work as a translator not only from Italian into English, but also of English authors into Italian, has accompanied his poetic output in four languages. This impressive number of translations has contributed to the advancement of the study of classical and Italian culture in the United States – and, consequently, but this point isn't so explicit as yet – to the legitimization of Italian American studies.

Some fundamental questions arise from this analysis: where and how mutual influences have operated in his poetry and in his translations, intertwining not only in terms of content, structure and literary models, but also – and above all – on the lexical level. In fact, it is with the problem of the choice of words that the task of the translator becomes the most arduous, as it is apparent that the ideas and cultures that words communicate go far beyond the sheer definitions found in dictionaries. Besides, when poetic translation is concerned, it becomes interesting to analyse how lexical choices must find their collocation on the double axis of

signifiers and signifieds, which continually interchange and reciprocally strengthen their semantic role.

The two final chapters, 3 and 4, provide the analysis of two Italian poems translated by Tusiani. These two works are Pulci's *Morgante* and Leopardi's "*L'infinito*", two translations that were both published in 1998 – even though both of them were the product of many years of work and great dedication on the part of the translator. The choice of these works has not been casual. They represent two very different types of poetry and are the products of two different moments of Italian literary history. Pulci's *Morgante*, is the long parodic poem of the Renaissance period translated for the very first time into English, Leopardi's "*L'infinito*", is the most important piece of Italian Romantic poetry and is perhaps the most widely translated Italian poem in the world. Probably, even now there are poets who are still trying to convey into foreign sounds and images the spellbinding beauty of this idyll. More than fifty pre-existing translations are available for English readers, and fifteen of them can be read in the appendix to this dissertation.

At the same time with the choice of these two translations I have tried to explore Tusiani's approach to two very different genres of Italian literary tradition: the *Morgante* is a poem of popular origin, its structure maintains all the characteristics of orality and needs to be at once philologically respected and modernized in the translation. The richness and variety of registers and language allows the translator a great freedom and the use of a rich lexicon, with all the pitfalls that such an approach to translation involves. The second is an example, or rather *the* highest example of the great, Italian Romantic tradition and at the same time the first expression of modern poetry. It is characterized by an elusive language and needs to be tackled not only with a thorough knowledge of Leopardi's poetics but also by putting this poem in the context of European (German and English) Romanticism, and of its philosophical and aesthetic development.

With this first translation of the whole twenty eight cantos of the *Morgante* Tusiani provides the English reading public with a faithful rendering of that Renaissance masterpiece that so strongly characterized the genre of mock heroic poetry in the following centuries in Italy and abroad and that also influenced the English Romantics. Among them we find an illustrious precedent with Lord Byron, even though the poet limited his efforts to the translation of the first canto only. In his rendition Tusiani has instilled his thorough philological knowledge as a twentieth-century scholar, his sensitivity as poet and his skills as a translator of Italian and English classics. He has partially given up the double bondage of metre and rhyme to preserve other phonosymbolic meanings, and, especially, the tone and the general lexical richness of the original.

Byron's and Tusiani's very different perspectives on translation have been contextualized by providing a survey of the oral *cantastorie*'s tradition and by exploring their parodic re-elaboration: in Pulci first, and then in his two translators, Byron and Tusiani. Pulci's characteristic burlesque style covers a wide variety of registers and exploits several rhetorical devices in its continuous intertextual parodic play with the chivalric tradition and with the narrator's obtrusive voice; some practical examples have been given by comparing and examining a few stanzas and the stylistic solutions of Byron and Tusiani in the case of the first canto, and of Tusiani alone for the rest of the poem.

Leopardi's "L'infinito", and his *Canti*, have been contextualized through an exploration of the history of their numerous translations in the English-speaking world and by examining the problems that the complexity of his poetry has posed to translators. A few pages have been dedicated to the interpretation of "L'infinito" given by important scholars of Leopardi to create the necessary background for a detailed analysis of its constitutive nuclei. This poem is so beautifully balanced that even a simple paraphrase in English would convey its content. Yet the apparent simplicity of diction – Leopardi's "vague" language – conceals a dense use of a poetic language perfectly expressed in rhythmic and musical phrasing. The complex intertwining of its semantic isotopies and phonosymbolic chains has been examined to highlight what a translator must be able to convey into the new language. A few examples of different translations

have been provided starting from the different metrical choices, to the rendition of its title and by illustrating some common solutions and some interpretative mistakes made by translators.

Finally Tusiani's "Infinity" has been examined in the light of what has been pointed out above. His metrical, stylistic and semantic choices have been analyzed by pointing out the merits, as well as some defects of his rendition. With his "Infinity", Tusiani, as the poet who wants to find the intimate music of words, is at work here together with the accurate translator and he allows the English reader to recognize Leopardi's voice in his new English sounds.

Tusiani is the man "between two languages and two lands", as he has often been labeled.⁵ Yet, although his "in-betweenness" is the condition of the typical ethnic writer, his opus remains both marginal and central in Italian Americana.

It remains marginal in the studies of Italian American intellectuals for the reasons explained above, but it is – or rather it should be – at the core of the dynamics underlying Italian American culture. The in-betweenness of his poems and translations is not to be read only according to ethnic, social or geographic parameters but also according to wider cultural and diachronic terms. His opus moves from classicism to globalisation.

⁵ *Two Languages, Two Lands* is the title of a volume which collects the proceedings of a conference dedicated to Joseph Tusiani on May 15th 1999. Cosma Siani, ed., San Marco in Lamis, FG, Quaderni del Sud, 2000.

CHAPTER 1

ITALIAN AMERICAN STUDIES: A BRIEF SURVEY

Teaching Italian American Literature, Film, and Popular Culture was published in 2010 in the MLA Option for Teaching series. This didactic tool, edited by Edvige Giunta and Kathleen Zamboni McCormick, proves that critical work in the field of Italian American studies has reached that degree of maturity that allows it to be finally thinking of the pedagogical use of its own materials.

Courses in Italian American literature and culture are progressively being introduced in various American universities and colleges, and some professorships in Italian American studies have also been established¹ in the last few years either as independent courses or within the programs offered by Departments of Comparative Literature, Italian Studies or Ethnic Studies. It can thus be stated Italian American culture has partially reached what other ethnic studies had done before, and the moment has come to provide teachers of this discipline with organized texts and criticism that foster the analysis of Italian American works in the wider context of the study of American culture.

Teaching Italian American Literature, Film and Popular Culture gathers the experiences of over thirty scholars. It begins with a section dedicated to the history of Italian Americans from their immigrant status to the still existing problem of their stereotyped image in American society, and then introduces culturally informed ways of reading Italian American texts, then including fiction, poetry, memoir, theater, oral narratives and films.

The utility of a didactic perspective in the construction of a new narrative of American life is clearly explained by the editors:

¹ In New York State at CUNY, Queens College; SUNY at Stony Brook; at Hofstra University in Hempstead NY.

In the explosion of Italian American scholarly, creative and archival work since 1980, scholars and writers have still found it necessary to foreground questions of recognition, visibility, and recovery in the critical assessment of Italian American literature [...]. What scholars have been recovering—and what we hope will enter American cultural history, particularly in our classrooms—is over one hundred years of Italian American cultural history and literary production, events and works that often played a significant role in their particular cultural movement but have largely been forgotten. Not only does their recovery provide us with a rich literature, but it also helps create a more complex understanding of American history and culture.²

Getting to a deeper appreciation of Italian American literature and setting it in the arena of multiethnic American culture has needed a long process of recognition.

As early as the 1930s there were well-known Italian American writers whose works reached a national audience: John Fante with *Wait until Spring Bandini* (1938) and Pietro Di Donato with *Christ in Concrete* (1939) portrayed two different stories of first and second generation Italian American families in the American society of the time.

Indeed these two authors, and some others,³ whose works were well received by readers and critics, were isolated cases, and their voices couldn't be speaking on behalf of a community which was undergoing a fast process of Americanization and was not interested in developing a shared sense of identity.

A few decades would pass before Italian Americans became aware that their bond of shared inheritance needed to develop a critical approach in a multicultural America.

As Gardaphé pinpoints, at that stage Italian American studies had still to find its own expressive and critical means.

The major problem facing Italian American intellectuals is not a lack of preparation for producing cultural criticism or a lack of sophistication in their critical methods, rather it is a lack of self-confidence that they can use

² *Teaching Italian American Literature, Film, and Popular Culture*, New York, MLA, 2010, p. 2.

³ Other Italian American authors who were active in those decades ought to be mentioned here: among them the poet Emanuel Carnevali who had lived in the States from 1914 to 1922 and is now considered an iconic figure of Italian American poetry; Pascal D'Angelo (*Son of Italy*, 1924) and Jerre Mangione (*Mount Allegro: A Memoir of Italian American Life*, 1943) who, in the interval of less than ten years, published two very different autobiographies on immigrants' life. I have mentioned only Di Donato and Fante because they provide us with two fictionalized stories of working class immigrants.

the culture from which they come to express themselves to the American mainstream audience. The lack of this self-confidence is one result of the immigrant experience.⁴

Italian American studies has come to an awareness later, if compared to other ethnic literary productions, but since the 1960s it has gradually grown and has become a rich and discursive field. It has followed in the footsteps of the cultural and social assimilation dynamics of other immigration or diaspora literatures; but in the panorama of American literary and critical production, Italian Americana is still struggling to find a proper collocation in the mainstream. While other hyphenated regional studies are officially part of the literary canon, Italian American writers are still at pains with the necessity to conciliate their culture with the stereotyped image Americans have of them.

Yet in the last thirty years a lot of critical and theoretical work has been done in the field of Italian American literary studies both in relation to the broader arena of American culture and other ethnic cultures, but also to the Italian heritage it is claiming as its own.

This brief survey does not aim at outlining a summarized history of Italian American studies, which can be found thoroughly explained in almost all the texts quoted below, it simply aims at providing a critical context for the issues that will be explored.

Only two extensive studies had been dedicated to Italian American literature in the United States before the eighties. The first one was Olga Peragallo's posthumous *Italian-American Authors and Their Contribution to American Literature* (1949) which had the merit of drawing together under the same common denominator a first unfinished (because of the author's premature death) inventory of names, dates and facts which had received little critical attention.

Twenty-five years later, Rose Basile Green published *The Italian American Novel: A Documentation of the Interaction between two Cultures* (1974) which was the first book-length study to provide an exhaustive and systematic analysis

⁴ Fred Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, Durham-London, Duke, 1996, p. 5.

of the Italian American literary landscape. Her work was still the product of an early cultural approach which examined the works of Italian American writers against the foil of their experience of immigration and subsequent process of Americanization, but it was also the first study to draw a classification into stages of Italian American narrative.

In the same year Richard Gambino published *Blood of My Blood: The Dilemma of Italian Americans*,⁵ an autobiographical study in which he combined his personal experience as Italian American with a cultural analysis of Italian American habits and myths. In his study he explored the idea of a “creative ethnicity” as opposed to “chauvinistic ethnocentrism” and as a point of departure in shaping one’s ethnic identity beyond one’s roots and in communication / interchange with other ethnic groups.

It was in the 1980s that critical discourse about Italian American literature emerged and flourished. The debate wasn’t limited within the geo-cultural borders of Italian Americana. A growing contribution of critical essays, came also from the fields of ethnic and diaspora studies which dealt with this topic from an anthropological, sociological or historical perspective. William Boelhower’s studies *Immigrant Autobiography in the United States* (1982), *Through a Glass Darkly: Ethnic Semiosis in American Literature* (1984), and the volume he edited with Rocco Pallone *Adjusting Sites, New Essays in Italian American Studies* (1999), as well as Werner Sollor’s *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (1986), all helped validate Italian American literature by setting it in a wider interdisciplinary ethnic and cultural context.

On the other hand, a seminal publication, which came from a “narrower” perspective, that of a silenced minority, was to shed light on the literary production of Italian American culture. Helen Barolini’s *The Dream Book: An Anthology of Writing by Italian American Women* (1985) gave voice to Italian American women writers, and introduced gender criticism into the construction of an Italian American identity within the ethnic cultural debate. This volume

⁵ Richard Gambino, *Blood of My Blood: The Dilemma of Italian-Americans*, Garden City NY, Doubleday & Company, 1974.

worked as a cornerstone for a wide array of publications by and about Italian American women writers and for the critics that followed.⁶

In the 1990s new critical voices in Italian Americana broadened the discussion using new methodological tools and theoretical strategies for a more articulate analysis of Italian American texts and started that self-critical discourse that Italian American culture lacked. Robert Viscusi,⁷ Fred L. Gardaphé and Anthony Julian Tamburri, among other scholars, have produced over the years a rich and varied body of criticism addressing aesthetic questions and exploring cultural issues that have shaped Italian American studies into the current multidisciplinary field in dialectical conversation with American culture.

Viscusi, a poet and a writer in his own right,⁸ is the author of a number of studies which have explored the complex relationship connecting the Italian American experience to American culture and to the literary history of Italy. His *Buried Caesars and other Secrets of Italian American Writing* (2006) is a seminal text that uses classical rhetorical tools to analyze the role of language in the construction of Italian American culture.

Tamburri's long essay *To Hyphenate or Not to Hyphenate? The Italian/American Writer: An Other American* (1991) examined the identity of the Italian American writer from a post-structuralist angle, tackling it from its very core and its necessary definition. This provocative essay initiated a wide discussion on the

⁶ See Mary Jo Bona, ed., *The Voices We Carry. Recent Italian-American Women's Fiction*, Montreal, Guernica, 1994, and *Claiming a Tradition. Italian American Women Writers*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1999; Mary Ann Vigilante Mannino, *Revisionary Identities: Strategies of Empowerment in the Writings of Italian American Women*, New York, Peter Lang Publishing, 2000; Louise DeSalvo and Edvige Giunta, eds., *The Milk of Almonds: Italian American Women Writers on Food and Culture*, New York, The Feminist Press, 2002; and Edvige Giunta, ed., *Writing with an Accent. Contemporary Italian American Women Authors*, New York, Palgrave, 2002.

Gender construction has been explored also by Anthony Julian Tamburri, ed., with the collection *Fuori: Essays by Italian/American Lesbians and Gays*, West Lafayette, IN, Bordighera, 1996; and Tommi Avicolti Mecca, Denise Nico Leto, Giovanna Capone, eds., *Hey Paesan!: Writing by Lesbians and Gay Men of Italian Descent*, Oakland, CA, Three Guineas Press, 1999.

⁷ Robert Viscusi had already published an interesting essay on the language used in Italian American novels in 1981: "De vulgari eloquentia: An Approach to the Language of Italian American Fiction", *Yale University Studies*, 1, n. 3, pp. 21-38.

⁸ He is the author of the long "surreal" poem *An Oration upon the Most Recent Death of Christopher Columbus*, West Lafayette, IN, VIA Folios Bordighera, 1993, and of the novel *Astoria*, Toronto, Guernica, 1995, which won the American Book Award in 1996.

problematic terminology related to Italian American and to ethnic minorities, which he later developed in his *Semiotic of Ethnicity: In (Re)cognition of the Italian/American Writer* (1998) and that still continues today in his recent essay “Second thoughts on the diasporic culture in America: here, there, wherever” (2006).⁹

From a more cultural and loosely philosophical perspective Fred Gardaphé’s *Italian Signs American Streets. The Evolution of Italian American Narrative* (1996) used Vico’s *New Science* as an interpretive instrument to focus on the history of Italian American narrative; he analyzed the different layers of a shared inheritance made up of Italian/regional oral traditions and of everyday immigrant experience; while *Leaving Little Italy: Essaying Italian American Culture* (2004) shifted its focus from the Italian inheritance to the greater American environment as a key factor shaping the writings of Italian American authors.¹⁰

Along with these individual contributions, a few significant collective efforts are noteworthy. The critical anthology *From the Margin: Writings in Italian Americana* (1991),¹¹ and the sibling collection of essays *Beyond the Margin: Readings in Italian Americana* (1998) gathered together the most representative authors, scholars and critics of Italian Americana.

Anthologies and analytical studies have grown accordingly and have become a flourishing field of research. Their appearance always represents an interesting moment of self-reflexive activity according to the diverse criteria (such as thematic, historical, of genre) that have guided the editors in the selection of works and essays.

The history of Italian American studies was marked in 2000 by the publication of *The Italian American Experience: An Encyclopaedia*, edited by Salvatore J.

⁹ Published in *Italica*, vol. 83, n. 3-4, 2006 pp. 720-728.

¹⁰ Fred Gardaphé also explored the gangster myth in Italian American narrative in *From Wiseguys to Wise Men*, New York, Routledge, 2006.

¹¹ A revised edition was published in 2000. *From the Margin: Writings in Italian Americana*, West Lafayette, IN, Purdue University Press, was edited by Anthony Julian Tamburri, Paolo Giordano and Fred L. Gardaphé; *Beyond the Margin: Readings in Italian Americana*, Cranbury, NJ, Associated University Press, by Giordano and Tamburri.

LaGumina, Frank J. Cavaioli, Salvatore Primeggia and Joseph A. Varacalli, which gathered contributions from over one hundred and sixty scholars in presenting information about the history, the (prominent and lesser-known) people, and the places of Italian America in encyclopedic format.

Recent publications of the last decade are: *Don't Tell Mama! The Penguin Book of Italian American Writing* edited by Regina Barreca (2002), and *The Italian American Reader* edited by Bill Tonelli (2003). While a geographical affiliation is apparent in the works collected by Jennifer Gillan, Maria Mazziotti Gillan and Edvige Giunta, *Italian American Writers on New Jersey: An Anthology of Poetry and Prose* (2003), and Kenneth Scambray, ed., *Queen Calafia's Paradise: California and the Italian American Novel* (2007), the identitarian issue is the one at the core of Maria Mazziotti Gillan and Jennifer Gillan's anthology, *Identity Lessons: Contemporary Writing About Learning to Be American* (1999), which includes a number of Italian American writers and poets in its wide spectrum of multiethnic voices; socially and politically biased is the anthology *Avanti Popolo: Italian-American Writers Sail Beyond Columbus*, published by The Italian American Political Solidarity Club (2008), edited by Cameron Mc Henry and James Tracy, which collects thought-provoking works by poets who re-interpret and overcome the stereotyped glorification of Columbus.

Through the decades other voices have broadened the discussion in the pages of journals and conference proceedings. Three journals still regularly publish today essays, creative works and reviews.¹² *Italian Americana*,¹³ which is published

¹² Some newspapers and periodicals deserve to be mentioned here which from the nineteenth century contributed to maintaining a link with Italian culture and society and consequently to build a self-conscious Italian American identity – and probably a language, too. *L'eco d'Italia*, *Il progresso italo-americano*, *La Follia di New York* (this journal became an important literary vehicle for the Italian American community) and *La parola del popolo*, just to mention the most representative ones, surely provide an interesting background for understanding the history of Italian American culture through the decades. A publication active from 1988 to 1992 was *La bella figura. The Literary Journal devoted to Italian-American Women*.

¹³ *Italian Americana* was founded in 1974 by Ernesto Falbo, Richard Gambino and Bruno Arcudi. It suspended its publications in 1983 and was revived by Carol Bonomo Albright in 1990. An anthology of the best pieces that appeared in its issues was *Wild dreams: The Best of Italian Americana*, 2008, edited by Carol Bonomo Albright and Joanna Clapps Herman, which contains the best stories, memoirs and poems that *Italian Americana* published in its 25 volumes. They are divided in five categories: "Ancestors", "The Sacred and Profane", "Love and Anger", "Birth and

with the collaboration of the American Italian Historical Association (AIHA), *VIA Voices in Italian Americana*, founded in 1990 by the editors of *From the Margin*, which treats literary and art issues, and the *Italian American Review* of the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute,¹⁴ which deals with societal and cultural aspects of Italian American interest.

Other reviews dedicated special issues to Italian American culture: the no more existent *Differentia, Review of Italian Thought* with a special double issue “On Italian/American Culture” (6-7 Spring/Autumn 1994), and *Melus* with two special issues: Fall/Winter 1987 (14.3-4) and Fall 2003 (28.3).

Two associations contributed to draw attention to Italian American Studies and to promote the development of the field over the years:¹⁵ the above mentioned American Italian Historical Association (AIHA), an interdisciplinary association for the study of the Italian American experience, that since its foundation in 1966 has explored and disseminated the wide-ranging experiences of Italians in America in the proceedings of its annual conference meetings;¹⁶ and the Italian American Writers’ Association (IAWA), founded in 1991 that, along with other activities, aimed at popularizing the works of Italian American writers, has the merit of having drawn and keeping updated a bibliography on Italian American culture that to-date entries more than 2600 titles.

Entirely devoted to the diffusion of Italian American culture is Bordighera Press Limited, a publishing house founded in 1989 by Gardaphé, Giordano and Tamburri and which was initially sponsored by the Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli

Death”, “Art and Self”, and are each sub-divided into prose and poetry.

¹⁴ An academic and research institute under the aegis of Queens College, The City University of New York. Another very active institution in promoting Italian culture is Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò, home of the Department of Italian Studies at New York University.

¹⁵ Italian American Societies abound either on a local or national basis to promote culture and heritage within the community, and many of them have now become supportive in the literary field. An indicative list is entered in the final bibliographical section. Among them, the most prominent one is NIAF, The National Italian American Foundation, founded in 1975 in Washington DC which closely works with government agencies and The Italian American Congressional Delegation. Other two important organizations in the promotion of Italian American culture and offering educational projects are the Order Sons of Italy and UNICO.

¹⁶ See the publication of the proceedings entitled *The Italian American Novel*, John Cammett, ed., New York, American Italian Historical Association, 1969.

of Turin.¹⁷ Bordighera publishes the semi-annual magazine *VIA, Voices in Italian Americana*, and *Italiana*, dedicated to Italian-language writing in the United States; it also started the series “Via Folios” specialized in the literature and culture of both Italian America and Italy, and “Crossings” dedicated to translation of Italian works into English.

Translation is the subject of the semi-annual publication *Journal of Italian Translation*, edited by Luigi Bonaffini and devoted to the translation of works from and into Italian, English and Italian dialects.¹⁸

In this digital era, Italian American studies sees a growing number of websites and forums taking part, but also giving shape, to new forms of research and discussion which cross cultures and borders, be they literary, historical or simply genealogical.

A digital bilingual website, *i-Italy*, has been created as a joint project of the EUSIC: Empowerment of the US-Italy Community, hosted at the Calandra Institute and promoted by the Department of Sociology of the University of Rome La Sapienza. This site, created by journalists and academics, focuses on the information and discussion of social, political and cultural events using multimedia tools. Another internet project hosted by the Calandra Institute is *Italics: The Italian American TV Magazine*, which broadcasts internet and live streaming formats of interviews and colloquia on current cultural Italian American issues.¹⁹

As this brief excursus began with the analysis of a volume published in 2010, I would like to return to the present state of Italian American culture by signaling

¹⁷ The Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli is itself very active in the publication of volumes dedicated to Italian culture in the world. See *Euroamericani 1: La popolazione italiana negli Stati Uniti*, vol. 1, Marcello Pacini, Rudolph J. Vecoli and Dominic Candeloro, eds., 1987; and *Itinera*, Maddalena Tirabassi, ed., 2005.

¹⁸ The interest towards Italian dialects within Italian American culture has gone hand in hand with the rediscovery of one's Italian regional heritage and with its revival in Italy. Joseph Tusiani's poetry in dialect must be read in this context. Luigi Bonaffini, Professor of Italian at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, has created a website on Italian dialect poetry where nearly 150 poets, both Italian and Italian American, are entered with biographical notes and poetic production.

See: <http://userhome.brooklyn.cuny.edu/bonaffini/DP/index.html>

¹⁹ A discussion network and forum for scholars of Italian American studies is *H-ItAm*: <http://www.h-net.org/~itam/>

two events which have just taken place.

Nancy C. Carnevale's *A New Language, A New World: Italian Immigrants in the United States, 1890-1945*, published by Urbana-Chicago, University of Illinois Press in 2009, has won the Thirty-first annual American Book Award for 2010. This study explores the complexity of the issue of language spoken by immigrants in America and its role in the formation of their ethnic identity, and we will see how this problem also touches Joseph Tusiani's poetics.

The second event is important for the future of Italian language and culture in the United States. In November 2010, thanks to the joint work of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Italian Embassy in Washington and the most prominent Italian American organizations, the Advancement Placement Program in Italian language and culture was officially reinstated and will provide credit for University admission from the academic year 2011/2012. This is an important step forward for the spreading of the Italian language in the educational system as it implies that Italian is considered once again a "fundamental" foreign language like French, German and Spanish.

FACTS AND MYTHS ABOUT ITALIAN AMERICANS

The facts

Figures are not necessary here to explain the well-known history of the millions of Italians who left Italy over the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first ones of the twentieth, but some information may well serve to understand how Italian Americans renounced their cultural heritage to access American society.

Italian immigrants were illiterate rural people mostly from the Southern regions

who were running away from poverty – *la miseria* – that the 1861 national unification of Italy had even made worse. They did not consider themselves as Italians as their felt identity was limited to the region, sometimes the village, they came from; and so was the language they spoke.

Their mass migration reversed the idea of Italy as the cradle of Roman classicism and Renaissance humanism in the eyes of those American intellectuals²⁰ that had looked to Europe as a cultural referent well up into the nineteenth century. These immigrants were perceived as a race on their own, disparaged both by Americans and by the Italian elites who, for years, have simply preferred to ignore their stories.

They were humble workers who went through years of hard work, if not exploitation and prejudice, and, since they had accepted menial jobs, that were usually thought to be for colored people, they were equated to blacks and placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

They became the “white niggers” especially in the South where they worked on plantations alongside African Americans and lived in the same neighborhoods.

Their enclaves somehow reproduced the Italian regional divisions, but were also melting pots where immigrants of different regions and nationalities co-habited. Thus, a new working class culture and language was to progressively identify Italian immigrants:

New linguistic pidgins mixed Italian grammars with American vocabularies, and, by the 1920s and 1930s the foodways, folk devotions, saints’ cults, proverbs, and marriage and family customs of the many and strikingly diverse regions of Italy were also blending. The result was a new folk culture that seemed Italian (especially to Americans) but was also made in America.²¹

²⁰ See the representations that Mark Twain, Nathaniel Hawthorne or Henry James made of Italy and the Italians. The pages of James’s *The American Scene*, in which the author depicts Italian immigrants in New Jersey as “aliens” and as having nothing to do with the memory he had of Italian peasants, are well-known and often quoted to exemplify that attitude. See the study by John Paul Russo “From Italophilia to Italophobia: Representations of Italian Americans in the Early Gilded Age”, *Differentia* 6-7, 1994, pp. 45-76. This essay will also appear in the due to be published *The Italian in Modernity*, Robert Casillo and John Paul Russo, eds., Toronto, University of Toronto press, 2011.

²¹ Donna R. Gabaccia, “The History of Italians in the United States”, in *Teaching Italian American Literature, Film, and Popular Culture*, cit., p. 35.

Isolated in their little Italys, Italian immigrants were institutionalized as racially inferior along with other Europeans and Asians, and their path towards assimilation also required a path to “whiteness”, as becoming white and becoming American were the two sides of the same process. David R. Roediger used the term “inbetween-ness” to describe the position of all those immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe who were considered as neither black nor white when they arrived in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century and how this confusion entrenched existing racial prejudices and practices. These racially categorized peoples, at the same time, responded by developing new identities that would fit their struggle for power in the racial hierarchy of American society.²²

This much studied and also contested issue on the Italian Americans’ “degree of whiteness” is not secondary in this survey if we approach it not from the most apparent historical or sociological perspective but in the light of a larger discussion on Italian American culture.²³

With the outbreak of World War II Italian Americans were asked not to speak the “enemy’s language”. While many of them were accused of being “enemy aliens” and put in internment camps for fear of conspiratorial activities – a suspicion which had accompanied also their adhesion to anarchist movements and union’s activism of the previous decades – the participation in the American army fighting

²² See David R. Roediger and James R. Barrett, “Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality and ‘The New Immigrant’ Working Class”, *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 16, 3, Spring, 1997, pp. 3-44, and David R. Rodeiger, *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past*, Berkeley, CA, University of California press, 2002.

²³ An extensive bibliography exists on this notion that has been explored from many angles: historical, anthropological, sociological and cultural. See David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, London-New York, Verso, 1991, and *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness*, London, Verso, 1994; Eric Arnesen, “Whiteness and the Historians’ Imagination”, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 60, Fall 2001, pp. 3-32; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1999, and *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America*, Cambridge, Harvard UP, 2006; Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno, eds. *Are Italians White? How Race Is Made in America*, New York, Routledge, 2003 [Italian translation: *Gli italiani sono bianchi?*, Il Saggiatore]. See among those who contested it: Th. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945*, New York, Oxford UP, 2003.

against Italy by Italian Americans was massive.²⁴ These second- third-generation Italian Americans were eager to embrace their adopted country's values and thus show their loyalty to the United States.

This was the decade when Joseph Tusiani arrived in the United States. When he started his American life, in 1947, his personal story couldn't any longer coincide with that of the Italian immigrants who were, at that time, already into the process of assimilation. He was surely aware of what their experience had been, as life in the Bronx put him in direct contact with their stories, and he went through the trauma of emigration himself, but his position within a cultural elite – the literary circles he attended – the gradually changing economic conditions in the community and his working position must have attenuated the impact with the problem of discrimination. He experienced, though, the ideological passage to whiteness, and the replacement of the concept of race with that of ethnicity which was debated in those years. His ethnicity, however, as we shall see, is felt in a very different way from the one imposed onto other Italian Americans.

This desire to become more and more assimilated into mainstream American society was accompanied by that necessary shift to whiteness in the post war years, while the term ethnicity replaced through the 1960s, but did not change, the basic discrimination implied by the concept of "race". Thus a biological prejudice was then substituted by a social construct. Ethnicity became widely used in the United States to describe the pluralist perception of American democratic society, but reinforced the notion that "being white" was the social divide between white Americans and Africans.

Rightly, Giunta and Zamboni McCormick comment:

this pernicious comparative strategy, which only perpetuated racism, can be helpful in understanding the construction of Italian American ethnicity along a continuum of whiteness, in which whiteness carries the privilege of

²⁴ It is estimated that a number between 500.000 and one million Italian Americans joined the army during World War II. It is a very high number if compared to the percentage of the Italian American population in the US. For their activism in anarchist or union movements see the crude photographic documents of the lynching on 20 Sept. 1910 of two Italian immigrants who were labor agitators during the cigar makers strike in Tampa, Florida. In *Without Sanctuary. Lynching Photography in America*, James Allen, ed., Santa Fe, NM, Twin Palms Publishers 2000, pp. 167-169.

legitimate, full American identity.²⁵

In becoming “white” Italian Americans wanted to shake off their memories of exploitation and suffering, of political activism and of fighting against social injustice, and to make clear the distinction between them and other less-than-white immigrants.

In his study *Italian Americans: The Racialization of an Ethnic Identity* David A. J. Richards stated that Italian Americans had made a “Faustian bargain” for Americanization (and with American racism) and had smothered their history for the privileges of the whites.²⁶ Consequently, in the eagerness to embrace this new status they started to develop and to be associated to racist and bigoted attitudes.²⁷ By the 1970s this newly acquired “white pride” “often struck American intellectuals as an expression more of backlash against the increasingly assertive claims to equality by African Americans than of claims to legitimacy in a multicultural America.”²⁸

When Tusiani’s collection of “ethnic” poems *Gente Mia* was published in 1978, in the wake of the ethnic revival, the approach to all these issues had been intellectualized.

With their assimilation into American life Italian Americans got rid of the

²⁵ *Teaching Italian American Literature, Film and Popular Culture*, cit., p. 17.

²⁶ David A. J. Richards, *Italian American: The Racializing of an Ethnic Identity*, New York, New York UP, 1999. See the chapter “Italian American Identity and American Racism” pp. 189-198.

²⁷ The relationship of Italian Americans with African American communities has always been difficult even though they initially shared jobs, neighborhoods and lived peacefully. The Ethiopian war (1935-36) and the rise of Fascism with its racist policies somewhat inspired feelings of “ethnic” nationalism which compensated Italian Americans for their marginal position in American society and changed their attitudes towards African Americans and Jews. Since then, the tensions between the two communities occasionally rose and culminated in the Bensonhurst homicide in 1989 of a seventeen year old African American. This murder provoked a response by Italian American intellectuals who started to explore the causes of what had made Italian Americans both victims and prosecutors in their assimilation process. When Italian Americans became at all intents white and moved to middle-class suburbs they embraced conservative ideals, and the percentage of those who supported restrictive immigrational policies was even higher than that among Americans. See Rudolph J. Vecoli “Gli italoamericani e la razza” in *Merica, Forme della cultura Italoamericana*, Nick Ceramella and Giuseppe Massara eds., Isernia, Cosmo Iannone Editore, 2004, pp. 83-95. It is noteworthy here to point out, as will be analyzed below, that Tusiani started his poetic production by writing a poem dedicated to the deeds of “Amedeo di Savoia” in 1943.

²⁸ Donna R. Gabaccia, op. cit., p. 41.

ethnicity that had been attributed to them with a sort of collective psychological repression.

Yet despite their complete Americanization they did retain some traditions of their immigrants' culture, which were reduced to few family habits and rituals. But these were not the habits American observers identified as the typical ethnic manifestation of Italian American culture: another more elusive ethnicity would stigmatize them to the present.

The myths

The phrase “invented ethnicity”²⁹ or “invented tradition”

can help us develop a further perspective on the distinctive path that dominant stereotypical representations of Italian American immigration and assimilation have followed and how those stereotypes have, for many, obscured genuine historical inquiry and understanding.³⁰

This perception had started to take hold since the beginning of the twentieth century, when Italian immigrants were considered naturally violent, criminal and overly eroticized.³¹ All these attributes were then synthesized and somewhat softened into the stereotyped gangster figure³² in films like *Little Caesar* (1930) and *Scarface* (1932) and later made immortal by the novel *The Godfather* (1969),

²⁹ See Erich Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge-New York, Cambridge University Press, 1983; and Werner Sollors, *The Invention of Ethnicity*, New York-Oxford, Oxford UP, 1989.

³⁰ *Teaching Italian American Literature, Film and Popular Culture*, cit., p. 21.

³¹ Some criminal organizations which did exist in a small percentage of the population were generalized to the whole people of Italian Americans, and the Mafia myth started to be indissolubly associated to Italian Americans in the American collective imagination. But for all the ethnic groups that in turn were cast as gangsters, the immediate ethnic association was “with Italian Americans and the mythic antecedents of U.S. organized crime: the Mafia of Sicily, The Camorra of Naples and the 'Ndrangheta of Calabria”. Gardaphé, *From Wiseguys to Wise Men*, cit., p. xiv.

³² I'm referring here to the fictionalized gangster, the one which produces a double attitude of attraction and repulsion in the audience, not to real-life criminals. It is worthwhile noticing that this “romanticizing” of the fictional gangster contributed to the creation of a cultural icon to be imitated, generating real gangsters that started behaving like the Hollywood ones.

which has developed its own successful fictional genre and still is the most powerful representation of Italian Americans.

Scholars of Italian American culture have defined this phenomenon the “historical amnesia” which goes hand in hand with the fact that, after all, Americans of Italian descent prefer to be equated to the stereotyped image of the romanticised gangster,³³ or of the exotic “Romeo” Rudolph Valentino, rather than having to come to terms with their real past.

Despite continuous and outspoken criticism on the part of Italian American intellectuals who denounce that the real portrayals of the Italian American experience is still overshadowed by this omnipresent *mafioso* myth in narrative, films and in the entertainment industry at large,³⁴ it is undeniable that Puzo’s novel and Coppola’s films are the most successful and influential myths that Italian American culture has so far produced.³⁵

Their problematic heirs, the successful HBO TV series *The Sopranos* has inspired a number of popular-culture writings that seem to reinforce a problem of self-representation of Italian Americans, beside the perception Americans have of them. Even though some contend that the relatively sympathetic fictionalized figure of the Italian American gangster may have helped Italian American assimilation into white America and, consequently, this stereotype has become part of American identity.

In a way, the whole Mafia myth has generated its own epic, and

³³ “This representation appealed both to non-Italian Americans, who could plug it into the larger tradition of the American gangster, and to many Italian Americans, who recognized on some level that, if one had to be labeled a criminal, it was better to be romanticized than persecuted.

The invented tradition of the American gangster represented Italian Americans on the silver screen as relatively sympathetic figures; it helped develop a strong Italian American presence in the entertainment industry and may even have aided in the assimilation of Italians into white America”. *Teaching Italian American Literature, Film and Popular Culture*, cit., p. 22. Robert Viscusi reinforces this notion by suggesting that this stereotype alienated Italian American literature from itself to strengthen the claims that belonged to another national project. This has generated a blindness in Italian Americans: “any precise knowledge of their real purposes, interests, struggles, or heroic leaders has been replaced by the ubiquitous luminescent cloud of semidivine Mafia dons and movie stars”, in *Buried Caesars*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2006, p. xvi.

³⁴ See the controversy created by the reality show “Jersey Shore” broadcasted in 2009 by MTV for the use of the word “Guido/Guidette” and the stereotyped portrayal of eight young Italian Americans vacationing and living together on some resorts of New Jersey.

³⁵ See Robert Viscusi, *Buried Caesars*, cit., p. 16.

if *The Godfather* films function for many as *the* story of Italian American immigration, then *The Sopranos* represents *the* story of Italian American assimilation.³⁶

These stereotyped images filled a void in the self representation of Italian Americans, suspended the re-examination of the complex Italian American experience, and delayed the acceptance of a large body of creative and critical literature on the part of Italian Americans as well as within the dominant American culture.

Yet works on the real Italian American stories existed and continued to be written. Italian American literature just needed to produce its own critical voice that would recover culture and memory under the common shared past of a collective identity.

As a reaction against these invented myths, Italian American intellectuals and artists have looked back to their classical heritage – their own mythical past – and have developed their own responses placing themselves in an ambivalent position. On the one hand, they have voiced contemporary Italian Americans' true experiences to contrast the stereotypes, the discrimination and the marginalization they have been subjected to. On the other hand, they are reinforcing a distant and less tangible cultural link to the homeland of their ancestors.

This operation is highly culturally biased, even though the range of publications labeled as Italian Americana can please readers on different levels, through both high and low forms,³⁷ but the most surprising aspect of this fictionalized re-working of one's own Italian American identity is that it goes hand in hand with the critical contribution of scholars who root it at the core of classical tradition.

Classical myths underlie Western civilization and, modern culture has developed on their archetypes. Thus, if the Mediterranean is the cradle of Greek and Latin

³⁶ *Teaching Italian American Literature, Film, and Popular Culture*, cit., p. 25.

³⁷ A number of anthologies have been published in the last years about creative fiction and non-fiction, women's fiction, creative writing on food, together with biographies, correspondence and memoirs. For full bibliographical reference see the final section in *Teaching Italian American Literature, Film, and Popular Culture*, cit.

mythologies, then Italian Americans have a right to look back at their geographical and cultural roots.³⁸

In the last decades, Italian American culture has developed myths of different origins: Greek myths, which are probably more deeply rooted in the Southern regions – originally constituting the Magna Graecia – where most of Italian immigrants came from, and Roman myths which lend themselves to a more historical reading and an ideological interpretation. They can assume a paradigmatic value, whether individual or collective: there are myths which can be epitomized by personal stories – either real or fictional – and myths to which scholars have turned to ground their theoretical debate.

A whole new culture claims to be defined from their recovery: their recurring returns in history, their “translations” in the metaphors and symbols of literature and art, as well as their philosophical, psychological and aesthetical re-use seem to have the same function as the myths *in flagranti* of primitive cultures.

Myth becomes a hermeneutic instrument, it interprets man and is interpreted by him. In fact, Károly Kerényi stated in one of his basic formulas that “the myth of man” was simultaneously a subjective and an objective genitive.³⁹

The role of myth, as analysed by Blumenberg, was to mediate between pre-historical man and his inability to face existence; it gave him the courage to confront himself and his environment and the ability to interpret, construct – but also de-construct – history.

Gehlen defined this way of facing the anxiety of existence the law of *Entlastung*, i.e. of “ex-oneration”: the ability man has to *un-burden* himself from the weight of a contingent situation.⁴⁰ It is therefore apparent that there are some ancient myths playing a definite role of *Entlastung* in the Italian American’s condition.

³⁸ The point in question here is culturally ambivalent: Classical mythology and Classical Studies have become institutionalized in college courses across the United States and claim their position in the panorama of interpretative models and tools. Yet, it cannot be forgotten that, in the wake of Post-colonial, Gender and Native Studies, regional literatures are emerging from the spectrum of the diverse American cultures and are claiming a part in the canon of national literature.

³⁹ Furio Jesi, *Materiali mitologici, Mito e antropologia nella cultura mitteleuropea*, Torino, Einaudi, 1979, p. 75.

⁴⁰ See the Introduction by Gianni Carchia to Hans Blumenberg’s Italian edition *Elaborazione del mito*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1991, pp. 9-10: “Ora, proprio in termini gehleniani, il mito è visto da

Moreover, the issue is not only literary or cultural, but above all anthropological. The myths that Italian American writers have chosen to illustrate the experience of Italian American men and women must be popular and, at the same time, function as foundational myths.

This is the case of some archetypal female figures who become essential in this intellectual recovery of memory and of the past describing the emotional, psychological and physical condition of Italian-American women.

Women, from the first Italian immigrants to modern Italian Americans – as different as their destinies may be from one generation to another – are equated to modern Persephones or Demeters.

The daughter of Demeter, the goddess of fertility, is abducted by Hades from her familiar land – Sicily⁴¹ – and is obliged to live in exile in the underworld until, thanks to her mother's repeated prayers, she is temporarily reunited with her. The emotional paradigm of the migrant woman, who is obliged to leave her fertile land to become an outsider in a new hostile environment, is thus well represented by this myth.

Furthermore, the theme of fertility evokes all those food rites and celebrations in which the whole Italian American community can easily identify and where women are re-located in the role of "goddesses" guarding the family's hearth and home. These women can find an archetype for their housewife role in the cult of the primeval Mother.

Blumenberg come una sorta di *Entlastung*, di esonero; esso è affrancato neli confronti delle pretese avanzate dall' 'assolutismo' della realtà. Illuministicamente, il mito è una difesa dalle minacciose potenze della vita nuda, visione apotropaica capace di renderci familiare il mondo, procedendo a nominarlo, a dividerne i poteri, a illuminarlo con zone di 'significatività'.

⁴¹ According to Martorana, in *Il riso di Demetra*, Palermo, Sellerio, 1985, the origin of this myth is Sicilian and not Greek and is located by the Lake Pergusa near the city of Enna. He further theorizes that she was in fact an original primordial Sicilian deity with no relation to the mother, Demeter, that was later incorporated by the Greeks in their Pantheon.

Persephone was the goddess of an island, as Demeter was of Crete and Aphrodite was of Cyprus. Pre-Hellenic goddesses and their cult resisted the invasion of Indo-European Hellenic peoples as islands were marginal territories not easy to be reached. They were the goddesses of life and death conceived as cycles of Nature. Consequently, islands have always been seen in the literary imaginary as places of wonder and of fear, characterized by arcane sounds and signs that need decoding and as places that need to be geographically discovered as if they were female bodies. See Sergio Perosa, *L'isola la donna il ritratto. Quattro variazioni*, Torino, Bollati Boringheri, 1996.

The myth of Persephone daughter/traveler/migrant/ has a continuing relevance in the literary output of ethnic or diaspora women writers; particularly, in the collective psyche which has formed Italian American women and in the critical analysis that surrounds them.⁴²

From a wider social perspective, the position of Italian American women implies a sense of “double alienation”, as Helen Barolini writes,⁴³ due not only to the perception of themselves as second class citizens, but also to “the added tensions inherent in their traditionally assigned female roles”.⁴⁴ Their displacement from one culture to another marked a real crisis of identity leaving a heritage of conflict to their children who, in the attempt to assimilate, gradually downplayed their Italian roots.

This is the anxiety of existence, the burden which myth is called upon to defuse.

The myth has particular resonance for the Italian American woman who travels in order to reconnect with her ancestral heritage, to discover a new identity, and to recover what, perhaps had been lost in the acculturation of her mothers, grandmothers, and great grandmothers, in a way reversing their emigration: thus, the myth can be used as another metaphorical device for analyzing the acculturation process Italian American women have experienced and also as a rite of passage as the daughter makes the necessary break from the culture of birth, represented

⁴² This myth has seen a more or less original evolution in their writings; modern Persephones can be found in novels and poetry, but the two genres that best exemplify this act of recovery are travel writing, mostly in the form of non fiction, and memoirs, as in Edvige Giunta’s words: “Through memoir, storytelling becomes history-telling – the telling of histories that have been rarely written or heard”, in Mary Ann Castronovo Fusco. “In Person; Telling her Story in Italian American”, *The New York Times*, June 4, 2000.

There are writers of an older generation and younger ones: Helen Barolini’s *Umbertina* (1979) and her more recent memoir *A Circular Journey* (2006), Barbara Grizzutti Harrison’s non-fictional travel memoir *Italian Days* (1989), Sandra Mortola Gilbert’s autobiographical essay “Mysteries of the Hyphen: Poetry, Pasta, and Identity Politics” (1997) and poem “Doing Laundry”, Jean Feraca’s poem “Vision in the Grove/6”, Susan Caperna Lloyd’s memoir *No Pictures in My Grave: A Spiritual Journey in Sicily* (1992), Anna Monardo’s novel *The Courtyard of Dreams* (1993), Maria Laurino’s collection of essays *Were You Always Italian? Ancestors and Other Icons of Italian America* (2000), Teresa Maggio’s memoir *The Stone Boudoir: Travels through the Hidden Villages of Sicily* (2002), an unpublished play by Rosemarie Caruso *Suffering Heart Salon* and the poems by Daniela Gioseffi.

⁴³ Helen Barolini, *The Dream Book*, cit., p. 3. Expanding on this issue, she adds: “Italian American women have long been denied the possibility of finding themselves in literature. Where are our models, the voices that speak for and of us? How can we affirm an identity without becoming familiar with the models by which to perceive ourselves? [...] We are what we read, but, in the case of Italian American women writers, we can seldom read who we are”. p. 28.

⁴⁴ Alison D. Goeller, “Persephone Goes Home: Italian American Women in Italy”, In *Melus*, vol. 28, 2003, p. 74.

by Demeter, and back again, forging her path to becoming her own woman.⁴⁵

With men the archetype of reference is the god Hermes, the trickster,⁴⁶ and it proves to be particularly interesting as it intellectualizes and reverses the perception of a stereotype.

Fred Gardaphé in *From Wiseguys to Wise Men* analyses the meaning and effects of masculinity in the gangster's fictional figure, and identifies it with the archetype of Hermes who "like any gangster kingpin, is the wiseguy, the man with the plan".⁴⁷

Hermes is a god with a complex identity and is endowed with positive and negative qualities: he is the god of inventions and of practical intelligence but also of thefts and devices; besides, he is the father of other gods and the lover of nymphs, and can be seen as an archetype for performing masculinity.⁴⁸ Thanks to these ambivalent characteristics, it becomes apparent why his myth can embody the peculiar type of power represented by the stereotype of the *mafioso* in Italian American gangster novels. It's the stereotyped macho behaviour which goes hand in hand with the stereotyped female submissive role of Italian American women. The use of this myth is certainly less introspective; the *Entlastung* is resolved through a real grip on power, which, if not totally legal, has its proper political, social and ideological repercussions. Consequently, the whole phenomenon of

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. 76.

⁴⁶ A prototype of this trickster – surely not of the *mafioso* – can be found in one of the first famous immigrants to the United States. Lorenzo Da Ponte had written the libretto for the *Don Giovanni* opera before emigrating to the U.S., but it was he who organized *Don Giovanni*'s première in New York in 1825. If his *Don Giovanni* is a trickster par excellence, Da Ponte's whole life draws quite near that of his creature: he was a priest banished from Venice for being a libertine, fallen out of favour with the Viennese Court and constantly running away from one country to another followed by his debts.

⁴⁷ Gardaphé, op. cit., p. 6. Gardaphé uses Jungian psychoanalytic tools to interpret and analyse the figure of the gangster, especially in the mother-son relationship and in the way his publicly displayed macho behavior influences his relation to women or is used to muffle his feminine traits.

⁴⁸ He has Eros the winged god by Aphrodite and another "powerful" son Priapus by the Goddess Mother. Hermes too was represented as an ithyphallic god having in himself the fertile principle of creation. This feature was typical of a mature Hermes, while young Hermes was represented "at rest" as only old people could have a perfect fecund spirit. See P. Mildonian "I viaggi di Penelope" in Daniela Ciani Forza, ed., *Quale America? Soglie e culture di un continente*. Vol. II, Venezia, Mazzanti Editori, 2007, p. 327.

mafia has become itself a myth, and the gangster has been transformed into a figure of mythic proportions.

Like the Greek god Hermes the *mafioso* becomes the model of the self-made man who gains power through profit or fraudulent appropriation. And, like the trickster, he is the one who provides for *chaos* and *change*. The “tricky” nature of that deity served to bring disorder into order and to make whole, in archaic societies, the totality of life.⁴⁹ But in the modern world good and evil are two separated notions and the *mafioso*-trickster, in whom good and evil are indissolubly entwined, represents that fringe behavior against which American society can state its values and formulate what is acceptable and what is not. Obviously what matters here is the fictional gangster, which has a life of its own and has become omnipresent in the American collective imagination as to create a double attitude of repulsion and attraction towards this type of hero.⁵⁰

In fact, like any true myth, it has generated its proper epic and has been reinvented again and again as a genre moving away from the confines of the romanticized gangster à la Don Corleone and producing new representations which undermine its very basis and function as criticism of both the Italian and American cultures.⁵¹ Post-modern parodies debunk that notion of masculinity by playing with the deviant sexuality of grotesque emasculated *mafiosi* or the rise to power of female gangsters.⁵²

⁴⁹ See Carl G. Jung, Karl Kerényi, Paul Radin, *Il briccone divino*, Milano, Bompiani, 1965.

⁵⁰ There's a much quoted definition that Robert Warshow, in 1948 gave in his famous essay “The Gangster as Tragic Hero”. He stated that “The gangster is the man of the city, with the city's language and knowledge, with its queer and dishonest skills and its terrible daring, carrying his life in his hands like a placard, like a club. [...] for the gangster there is only the city; he must inhabit it in order to personify it: not the real city, but that dangerous and sad city of the imagination which is so much more important, which is the modern world. And the gangster – though there are real gangsters – is also, and primarily, a creature of the imagination. The real city, one might say, produces only criminals; the imaginary city produces the gangster; he is what we want to be and what we are afraid we may become” Robert Warshow, “The Gangster as Tragic Hero”, in *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre, and Other Aspects of Popular Culture*. Garden City, NY, Doubleday [1962] 2001, p. 101.

⁵¹ See Gay Talese's novels *Honor Thy Father* (1971) and *Unto the Sons* (1992), and Ben Morreale's *A Few Virtuous Men* (1973).

⁵² See Giose Rimanelli's *Benedetta in Guysterland* (1993), Frank Lentricchia's *The Music of the Inferno* (1999), and Louisa Ermelino's *The Sisters Mallone: Una Storia di Famiglia* (2002).

This complex hermetic figure has provided a modern and ethnicized urban version of the culture hero when the myth of the cowboy or of the Western outlaw – the John Wayne icon – declined as a tough-guy icon. It has therefore become a strong powerful social and cultural image, which can be juxtaposed to the old myth of the frontier in American folklore. Yet, it has soon found its popular parodic realization in Tony Soprano⁵³ who believes himself and his gang to be the contradictory and “problematic” descendants of the Romans. Indeed, he is unable to see himself in the future, obsessed as he is with a distant imperial past, but also with the recent history of organized crime, which he has mythologized as if it was a type “of gangsterhood golden age”.⁵⁴

Two expansionist myths of the past – the Roman Empire and the American frontier – embodied by their historical champions, have thus been replaced by the urban mafia myth.⁵⁵

As we have seen these two myths necessitate an approach which takes into account both their intellectual re-elaboration by Italian American intellectuals and their possible stereotyped reception in American culture.

AN ITALIAN AMERICAN ETHNOPOETICS

As already pointed out, the issues explored by Ethnic studies can nowadays be considered as the basis on which many ethnic groups have constructed their claims for a cultural identity. The ensuing dynamics governing the relationship

⁵³ In chapter 8 of *From Wiseguys to Wise Men* entitled “Fresh Garbage: The Gangster as Today’s Trickster”, Gardaphé analyses this figure who is no longer the producer of modern myth but its humorous, almost “hysterical”, product.

⁵⁴ Gardaphé, op. cit., p. 154.

⁵⁵ For the mafia myth interpreted as related to Western culture see Gardaphé, op. cit., p. 10 and Warshaw, above; for Caesarism, see Luigi Barzini, *From Caesar to the Mafia*, 1971.

between dominant and ethnic cultures have given rise to the debate on the “revision” of canons to include a body of diversified minority literatures in the spectrum of multicultural America.

From its first publications onward, Italian American studies has followed the same track and has developed on this discursive background. Ethnic, political, social, historical aspects have been explored using postcolonial – and postmodern – tools to assess the evolution of Italian American narrative.

In her essay “Italian American culturalism: a critique” Renate Holub uses the Gramscian notion of nonmonolinearity of relations derived from “The Southern Question” – “La Questione meridionale” – to assess the diverse functions of Italian American culturalism in the current social and political context of the United States:

The Italian American ethnic project is based on a shared inheritance of cultures that have their place of origin not in the United States but in the geography and history of Italy. In this sense the Italian American project is only somewhat monocultural, while simultaneously being multicultural. It is monocultural to some degree in its conception and in its point of departure – the link with the Italian heritage, understood in its broadest sense – and it is clearly multicultural in its effects: It adds a new or particular cultural dimension to the apparently value-neutral “universality” of U.S. American standard culture. Thereby, Italian American culturalism participates in the celebration of currently evolving multiculturalist movements and contributes to their legitimation.⁵⁶

One of the issues explored by this ethnic approach has been the necessity to define what is Italian American ethnopoetics in the American multicultural context.⁵⁷ From a narrower point of view, this definition implies the question on how Italian American culture manifests itself in the various art forms, and how it comes to elaborate that elusive notion of *italianità*⁵⁸ which ought to be found at the bottom of every Italian American writing.

⁵⁶ Renate Holub, “Italian American Culturalism: A Critique”, in *Beyond the Margin*, cit., p. 51.

⁵⁷ In *Beyond Ethnicity*, cit., Werner Sollors underlines the contradictory semantics of the term “ethnikos”, which has the double meaning of “universal inclusive peoplehood (shared by all Americans) and of exclusive otherness (separating ethnics from Yankees or mainstream culture)”, p. 26.

⁵⁸ For a discussion on the notion of *italianità* see the introduction to *From the Margin: Writings in Italian Americana*, cit., where the editors write “What is this *italianità* that these and other writers

Joseph Tusiani's work can be studied from both a "concept of *italianità*" and an ethnopoetic perspective. However critics are divided on approaching Tusiani's opus from these two angles, as the first requires a comprehensive and sometimes difficult reading of his whole multilingual output, while the second can be applied only to its ethnic "partial" interpretation. This double perspective is required by the complexity of Tusiani's poetics, but also by the fact that the criteria used to analyze an ethnopoetic literature require parameters that are sometimes rigid, especially in the definition and collocation of an author with such a rich and varied opus.

In a politically biased study of 1998, still influenced by all those postcolonial claims, Justin Vitiello asked a few questions which are at the core of the Italian American debate and seem to point to literary figures so difficult to situate within that ethnic community as Tusiani:

How can we interpret – with our tools of ethnopoetics, comparative studies, and contemporary schools of literary analysis – the ethno-literary elements compounded or disintegrated in the transition from Italian to Italian American and, perhaps, to mainstream or avant garde forms of artistic expressions? Can there exist bi- or multi-lingual/cultural writers (or *cantastorie*) who harmonize in convincing vocal strains the folk and literary aspects, the dialects and languages, the historico-cultural myths and visions of their original and new lands?⁵⁹

These questions imply the necessity to define ethno-literary elements evolving in Italian American narrative, the criteria determining which authors fall under the

are interested in recovering? What lies at the base of their need or desire for such a recovery? *Italianità* is indeed a term expressive of many notions, ideas, feelings, and sentiments. To be sure, it is any and all of these things that lead young Italian Americans back to their real and mythical images of the land, the way of life, the values, and the cultural trappings of their ancestors. It could be language, food, a way of determining life values, a familial structure, a sense of religion; it could be all of these and certainly much more. Undoubtedly, a polysemic term such as *italianità* evades a precise definition." p. 6. It should not be forgotten, though, that *italianità* is an ambiguous term in the eyes of some Italian American scholars as, together with its nostalgic cultural meaning it conjures up some Fascist innuendos.

⁵⁹ Justin Vitiello, "Off the Boat and Up the Creek without a Paddle – or, Where Italian Americana Might Swim: Prolepsis of an Ethnopoetics", in *Beyond the Margin, Readings in Italian Americana*, cit., p. 37. These questions are addressed to respond and relaunch the debate on Italian American studies as was presented in the pages of the introduction to the volume *From the Margin, Writings in Italian Americana*.

wider umbrella of Italian American *cantastorie* and, consequently, which works can be considered part of this large corpus.

First, there were Italian immigrants, then they became Italian Americans,⁶⁰ whom later it seemed more appropriate to call with the non completely matching synonym of Americans of Italian descent. Today, this intellectual community also comprises writers and poets born in Italy and living in the United States like Joseph Tusiani. The number of these expatriates, especially in the academic world has increased in the last years, and new implications must be taken into account. These new “immigrants” are educated professionals attracted by career prospects in the academic or business fields and their presence confirms that the cultural distance between them and Italian Americans is greater than the one between the latter and other Americans. Their bilingual skills have allowed them to work, publish and move dynamically in both countries, further compelling the debate on the issues of nation and language within the boundaries of Italian American culture.

It is apparent that these simple categorizations, with all the many variations they imply, raise a series of issues which go way beyond the question of labels.

The role that “the mysterious” concept of *italianità*” plays “in the creation of Italian / American art”⁶¹ has guided much of the critical work of Italian American studies; a difficult task, in a context where the shared inheritance of Italy is often reduced to a pale reflex of memories desultorily emerging in these products. Italy for these Americans of Italian descent doesn’t play in many cases a more important cultural role than their everyday American life. Their fiction, Gardaphé comments, is “less a means of presenting what it means to be Italian in America and more descriptive of what it means to carry the cultural trappings of *italianità* into everyday American lives”.⁶² Besides, the work of categorizing Italian American art, i.e. the building of an Italian American canon, is something in

⁶⁰ Tamburri proposed the use of the slash Italian/American for the adjective to overcome the “problematic” hyphen in his *To Hyphenate or Not to Hyphenate. The Italian/American Writer: An Other American*, Montreal, Guernica, 1991.

⁶¹ *From The Margin*, cit., p 1.

⁶² Fred Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, cit., p. 23.

progress and with unstable borders, as new publications always require new critical readings of both contemporary and past literature and also new cross-reading strategies of works that were originally labeled either popular or high literature.⁶³

This problem was also practically faced by those scholars who have attempted to compile a comprehensive bibliography of Italian American literature.⁶⁴ In deciding who was to be part of this canon they had to transcend the limited perception of what *was* and *is* the Italian American experience. They had to evaluate if a more or less explicit Italian “ancestry” mattered in the biographies of these authors; how deeply they felt or desired this cultural link, and what to do in case of writers who simply preferred to ignore their Italian origin.⁶⁵ Then some implications had to be taken into account: how their *italianità* thematically appeared in their writings, and if and how these writings dealt with Italian American subject matters, and also, finally, how a plurality of languages – American English, some form of Italian dialect and Italian – had to be included in this “multicultural” project.

Stages of Italian American Writing

In the debate on the “evolution” of Italian American culture, scholars have considered necessary to periodize it.

It becomes even more appropriate here as Tusiani evades for many reasons a distinct temporal and thematic collocation according to the ethnic paradigms

⁶³ According to the criteria already used to define modernity by T.S. Eliot in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919) and by Ezra Pound in his essays.

⁶⁴ The Italian American Writers Association (IAWA) has created a database for bibliographical references which is updated every year. In December 2010 it comprises 2651 titles. The introduction by James J. Periconi illustrates its methodology and purposes. The bibliography is online on the website www.iawa.net/

⁶⁵ Tamburri defines the absence of “explicit” Italian American subject matter as an “Italian/American signifier in potentia”, “Rethinking Italian/American Studies: From the Hyphen to the Slash and Beyond” in *Beyond the Margin*, cit., p. 246.

supported by cultural studies and adopted by the Italian American criticism of the nineties. His literary output, we will see, cannot simply be framed within the typical thematic or temporal grid of so much of ethnic literature.

Tamburri makes the issue clear when he states that both the roles of Italian American literature and of Italian American intellectuals ought to be redefined from that of “the raconteur of what took place – a role that may lead more toward nostalgia than analysis – to that of cultural examiner and, eventually, cultural broker.”⁶⁶ Tusiani’s poetry and translations do belong to this type of role, but remain tangential, in a way, to more accurate distinctions, such as the ones underlying the different stages of hyphenation which are based on political and ideological readings.

Italian American intellectuals have approached this issue from different perspectives, but Tamburri is probably right when he indicates Daniel Aaron’s work “The Hyphenate Writer and American Letters”, published in 1964, as one of the first studies to have dealt with the notion of hyphenation and its division into a multi-stage phenomenon for the ethnic writer within the general discourse of American literature.⁶⁷ In his essays Aaron set up three stages indicating the passage from hyphenation to dehyphenation.

In the first stage, defined “the local colorist”, the writer is the “pioneer spokesman” for the ethnic/racial or cultural marginalized group and his/her goal is to debunk the negative stereotypes of dominant culture. In this phase the writer appears somehow conciliatory and can even create characters possessing those very same criticized stereotypes in order to humanize them, win the readers’ sympathies and dissipate prejudice.

The second-stage writer is “the militant protester” who, being less willing to please, abandons “the use of preconceived ideas in an attempt to demystify negative stereotypes. [...] By no means, therefore, as conciliatory as the first-stage

⁶⁶ Anthony J. Tamburri, “Rethinking Italian/American Studies: From the Hyphen to the Slash and Beyond”, in *Beyond the Margin*, cit., p. 271.

⁶⁷ As is quoted in Tamburri’s long essay *To Hyphenate or not to Hyphenate*, cit, p. 28, according to Daniel Aaron Americans held the new comer at hyphen’s length from the established community, so that even geographical proximity denied him full and unqualified national membership despite official disclaimers of the contrary.

writer, this person indicates the disparity and, in some cases, may even engage in militant criticism of the perceived restrictions and oppression set forth by the dominant group.”⁶⁸

The third stage is the “American” writer, the one who has appropriated the dominant group’s tools – a language, for instance, considered more acceptable – and travels from the margin to the mainstream, as he or she can view it no less critically, but more knowingly. “This writer feels entitled to the intellectual and cultural heritage of the dominant group. As such, he or she can also, from a personal viewpoint, ‘speak out uninhibitedly as an American’.”⁶⁹ This does not mean that the writer has abandoned the cultural heritage of his marginalized group, but that he succeeds in transcending a parochial perspective and in transporting those literary materials to the province of the general imagination.⁷⁰ Yet Aaron clarifies, as other scholars quoted below do, that this distinction may at times be blurred, especially between one stage and another, as these different stages of hyphenation can manifest themselves along one author’s literary career.

Rose Basile Green was the first Italian American to attempt a systematic classification of Italian American narrative in *The Italian-American Novel: A Document of the Interaction of two Cultures*. Ten years after Aaron’s essay she divided the history into four stages, from immigrants to third generation Italian Americans, that she labeled as: 1) “The need for assimilation”, 2) “revulsion, 3) “counter-revulsion”, and 4) “rooting”.

Gardaphé comments that even though Basile Green greatly assisted critics and scholars in the mapping of Italian American culture, her work was still a product of the ethnic revival period and represented an early stage of cultural examination

⁶⁸ Anthony Tamburri, “Rethinking Italian/American Studies: From the Hyphen to the Slash and Beyond” in *Beyond the Margin*, cit., p. 247. The second stage writer, according to Aaron is likely to attract “double criticism” from both the dominant culture in that he portrays an “ ‘un-American’ image of American life” and from his own group who feels misrepresented.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, p. 247.

⁷⁰ I’m paraphrasing here Werner Sollors’s analysis of ethnicity in literary forms: “...from “parochial” marginality to “universal” significance.” *Beyond Ethnicity*, cit., p. 241.

that reproduced “the same monologicistic, methodological trap that reads Italian American texts through critical paradigms created by the dominant culture.”⁷¹

The three stages for Gardaphé

Further elaborating on the differences informing the cultural products of the various ethnic groups, Gardaphé⁷² aims at creating a “culture-specific” approach to Italian American literature – in the wake of other “culture-specific” forms of criticism – which would identify the distinctive features – the Gramscian “cultural self-inventory” – of Italian American writing. This self inventory should contain the characteristics that distinguish Italian American literature from other literatures, and that are derived from both Italian and American cultures. He laments that criticism coming from cultural or ethnic studies has limited itself to point out the mimetic functions of Italian American narrative. Conversely, a culturally specific approach requires the exploration not only of the historical but also of the ideological contexts out of which this literary production emerges, so that it becomes possible to recognize the signs distinguishing Italian American literature from other American literatures.

Gardaphé categorizes the text created within Italian Americana by trying to highlight how the “signs” of *italianità* become manifest in such works and by drawing a development in Italian American narrative that takes into account the process of cultural transmission from oral Italian folk culture to the written narratives. Thus, he proposes his own culturally “specific methodology”, which is an updated original development of Aaron’s “hyphenate writer”, in order to disambiguate Italian American contributions in the wider American literary scene. Gardaphé equates the stages through which ethnic literatures move to the three ages of history formulated by Vico in his *New Science* by interpreting their

⁷¹ Fred Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 9.

⁷² *Ibidem et passim.*

cultural products in an original way.⁷³ the pre-immigrant past is the Age of Gods, in which primitive societies record expression in poetry (*vero* [sic] *narratio*), and this is the poetic stage; the immigrant experience can be read as the Age of Heroes, in which societies record expression by generating myth – the mythic stage; the post-immigrant experience is the Age of Man in which democratic societies are born and in which, through self-reflexion, expression is recorded in philosophic prose – the philosophic stage. These three stages have their contemporary cultural parallels in realism, modernism and postmodernism and, eventually, Italian American literature can be seen as moving from the poetic, through the mythic into the philosophic, and from orality to literary tradition.⁷⁴

The three stages for Tamburri

Tamburri proposes his own classification starting from and expanding on Gardaphé's. Both Aaron and Gardaphé look at narrative from a generational perspective, and its development follows a time based analysis. Tamburri

⁷³ Vico's *New Science*, seems to procure Gardaphé with some versatile tools, especially when Vico explores the pitfalls inherent in Western civilization and tends to create universal categories. Gardaphé has on other occasions adapted Vico's philosophical thought to the diverse forms of Italian American narratives: in his *From Wiseguys to Wise Men* he employs it to describe the evolution of the gangster genre in Italian American narrative and film.

⁷⁴ Gardaphé explains this paradigm of Italian American "signs". The narratives of the first stage "are rooted heavily in Italian folk culture, reveal a dominance of Italian over American traits, and display a fairly extensive use of Italian language. Within this mode we can observe a shift from folktale to autobiography [...] a movement of the Italian alien subject toward conformity with mainstream American society." In the narratives developed in the mythic mode are present "models of behavior based on heroic figures who inspire a struggle with destiny. [...] There is an obvious dominance of Italian American traits over both Italian and American traits, yet there is a significant presence of Italian words and phrases. It is in this mode that we can observe the transition from autobiography to autobiographical fiction. The subjects in these narratives rebel against both Italian and American cultures and thus fashion the hybrid Italian American culture." The philosophic mode is for him an "incredible" mode as it challenges and destroys previous literary and cultural models: "Folkloric elements, when present, are used to deconstruct the dominant/official culture. This mode evidences a transition from autobiographical fiction to experimental fiction as well as a dominance of American traits over Italian and Italian American traits. Although linguistic signs of Italianness are not obvious, they are visible to the trained reader. The subjects in these narratives are likely to rebel against any tradition." *Italian Signs, American Streets*, cit., pp 16-17.

elaborates his own approach on cognitive parameters that he draws from Peirce's three levels of consciousness – or modes of being – as are offered in his *Principles of Philosophy*. Tamburri considers the first stage (“poetic”, premodernist) writer as one recording his experiential feelings without the contribution of an analytical thought. This writer, he states, “is not concerned with adherence to or the creation of some form of objective, rhetorical paradigm. He or she is an *expressive* writer, not a paradigmatic one”.

The second stage (“mythic”, modernist) writer shifts his/her ethnicity from expressive (i.e. from immediate sensorial feelings) to descriptive. Ethnicity becomes then the tool communicating his or her ideology, and the writer becomes aware of the dominant culture and willfully uses ethnic signs to construct an ethnic paradigm. This analytical engagement with the Other makes of him/her a *comparative* writer.

The third stage (“philosophic”, postmodernist) writer may seem to be willing, at first glance, to get rid of his/her ethnicity or to engage in a parodic rendering of his/her experience. Yet he/she never explicitly renounces his/her cultural heritage. This is the writer of the reflexive stage “in which everything becomes fair game. All this is due to the “postmodern prerogative” of all artists, be they the parodic, the localizers, or other, simply in search of rules for what will have been done.”⁷⁵ This writer can contemplate his/her own level of awareness less critically and from a more detached perspective: this third-stage postmodern writer is thus the *synthetic* writer who has become conscious of the process he/she has gone through either temporally or cognitively.

In Tamburri's idea, the three categories of *expressive*, *comparative* and *synthetic* writer should not be taken as a hierarchy as they “represent *different* modes of being dependent on *different* levels of consciousness. [...] Ethnicity is not a fixed essence passed down from one generation to the next.”⁷⁶ Ethnicity – i.e. *italianità* – is rather something reinvented and reinterpreted again and again either

⁷⁵ Anthony Tamburri, “Rethinking Italian/American Studies”, in *Beyond the Margin*, cit., pp. 248-249. Peirce's three stages of consciousness progress from a state of nonrationality (“feeling”) to practicality (“experience”) and on to pure rationality (“thought”). Ibid., p. 248.

⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 251.

generationally or by each single individual, and these stages can thus coexist in a single work of a writer, or his/her opus may encompass all three.

This is how Tamburri synthesizes his analysis in a graph⁷⁷:

Aaron		Gardaphé		Peirce		[Tamburri]
first-stage “local colorist”	↔	poetic “premodernist”	↔	“firstness”	→	expressive
second stage “militant protester”	↔	mythic “modernist”	↔	“secondness”	→	comparative
third stage “American”	↔	philosophic “postmodernist”	↔	“thirdness”	→	synthetic

Tusiani’s poetry and the classification into three stages

The lengthy description of all these patterns is somewhat indicative of the endeavors Italian American intellectuals have made to describe the development of narrative in Italian Americana and, conversely, of the possible limits such rigid parameters may imply despite all their flexible application. As already pointed out, surely both Gardaphé’s ethnographic approach and Tamburri’s poststructuralist approach constitute in themselves an overcoming of the Anglo American monocultural perspective and have gone way beyond in shaping the identity of the Italian American writer and the changes of his/her narrative.

These ordered patterns adopt (and freely adapt) retrospectively Vico’s three ages or Peirce’s fundamental semiotic and philosophic concepts of “firstness”, “secondness” and “thirdness” to explain the evolution of Italian American narrative. However, when we come to where Tusiani should be placed within this frame, we suddenly realize that his collocation is not simple at all, as his whole poetic production cannot be encoded in this grid.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 251.

A first practical obstacle is that his personal story is chronologically displaced. From a temporal perspective he should fall horizontally into Aaron's and Gardaphé's second and third stage. His writing starts and develops when all those first immigrants had been assimilated, and first-generation Italian immigrant writing had been superseded by more urgent needs to give voice to a new hybrid Italian American culture. Despite the time gap, his own first-hand immigrant experience should place him in the first stage category, but it is too late, by then, to be the "pioneer spokesman" of an ethnic marginalized group. Besides, until the end of the fifties he was still writing Italian poetry while all assimilated Italian Americans were by then using the English language.

Tusiani passes all the phases of the ethnic experience, but in his case the process of assimilation remains a process first of confrontation – he never gave up his culture of origin – and then of acceptance. In an interview of 1999 he says he wants to be considered as an "American",⁷⁸ in fact by then he has spent a whole life in the United States translating his own experience in multilingual poetic forms.

These approaches show how Tusiani cannot be classified according to some postmodern categorizations which don't encompass the complexity of his poetic production.

According to Gardaphé's stages his poetry should be modernist, and it is true that it is neither premodernist nor postmodernist. On the other hand his rewritings and translations can be read as parodies of sorts. Under this light, they belong to postmodern dynamics, but they are not held by any "destructive" or questioning ideology and don't defy the cultural or formal models that others question, they simply underline a necessary distance which is both linguistic and cultural. Such parodies represent a homage to traditional forms and genres aimed at revitalizing classical texts. Tusiani's parodies are an act of love in front of an art which runs the risk of being forgotten. They operate a radical textual transformation but also reveal their belonging to a double tradition.

⁷⁸ For the full quotation see at the end of this chapter.

Even the issue of a primeval “orality” derived from Vico is not fully applicable to Tusiani’s poetry which refers to great traditions of poetic languages in Italian, English and Latin, and which is supported by a very refined idea of the musical resources of orality in writing.⁷⁹ When he utilizes local oral traditions, as he does with his dialect poems, he is always perfectly aware that he is transposing those materials from one register to another, and handling them from a learned – not a popular – perspective.

Moreover, as far as orality is concerned, the learned perspective from which he approaches his materials is at odds with oral productions. His orality does not refer to a form of expression that precedes writing, but to the presence of oral paradigms in poetry. Conversely, his poetry is based on the musical quality of oral diction, and metre and rhyme are considered fundamental to *illuminate* the deep meaning of words.

It is true that many of the elements so far underlined perfectly intersect, in the years of the ethnic revival, with Tusiani’s ethnic volume *Gente Mia* published in 1978. And it is not secondary to stress that this is the type of poetry that is constantly mentioned and quoted by Italian American criticism, for it perfectly embodies the themes of the Italian American writer and somehow summarizes a common ideological position.

The rest of Tusiani’s very wide multilingual production is nearly ignored by Italian American scholars. It is studied by the Italianists who operate within the American educational system, but they approach this subject matter from a different perspective and with different goals, as will be shown below.

⁷⁹ See Paola Mildonian, “ ‘Voce da voce’: L’oralità trasferita”, in *L’oralità nella scrittura*, Maria Teresa Bion, ed., “Annali di Ca’ Foscari”, vol. XLV, n. 2, 2006.

The question of a history of Italian American Literary Studies for Viscusi

That Tusiani has little room in studies that are still marked by a strong inward-looking activity and outward-looking ideology can be proved by a very recent contribution by Viscusi who comments that all this self-reflexive critical activity – despite its attention to local matters – is nonetheless connected to new global dynamics.

His essay – published in the volume *Teaching Italian American Literature, Film and Popular Culture*, with which this discussion has begun – proposes an analysis of the past, the present and future prospects of Italian American literary studies tackling them from a postcolonial perspective and placing them in the wider field of diaspora studies: “while the inner concerns of this discursive arena have seemed to drive its growth, almost everything that happens in a diaspora culture responds to larger and wider forces than may be visible on a local scene narrowly observed.”⁸⁰ He claims that diaspora literatures inevitably question both “national borders and language separations” and he considers the history of this field of study as falling into three large periods that he calls “colonial” (1820-1941), “postcolonial” (1941-1991) and “global” (1991-present).⁸¹

He uses these terms underscoring that despite the historical existence of Italian colonies, the position of Italian immigrants in the United States was that of people living in a colonized relationship both to the culture they moved to and to the one they left behind. Their *italianità* could only be deferred to Italy for its cultural

⁸⁰ Robert Viscusi, “The History of Italian American Literary Studies”, in *Teaching Italian American Literature, Film, and Popular Culture*, cit., p. 43. He points out how in the field of diaspora studies a new polarity has been created by the fact that Italy, a place of origin for migrants, has in the last few years become a point of arrival, and also how the cultural political map of Italy as a referent has been redrawn by the reality of the European Union and the rise of secessionist parties.

⁸¹ He divides the three periods according to dates which are interesting both from the cultural and historical perspective. 1820 is probably an approximate date indicating the publication of the *Memorie di Lorenzo Da Ponte*, which, he considers as connecting “the beginnings of Italian American literature with the glories of European culture”, Ibidem, p. 46. The beginning of the postcolonial period coincides with Mussolini’s declaration of war to the United States on 11 december 1941. The global period begins in 1991 when Italian American intellectuals founded the Italian American Writers Association (IAWA) and a number of forums, journals and publications in Italian American literary studies started exploring the field and embracing new and wider cultural forces.

authenticity. Thus their immigrant status was that of a conventionally colonized group socially marginalized and resisting the imposition of the language and values of the dominant culture. Consequently, with the term “postcolonial” used to refer to the second period, Viscusi suggests that Italian Americans have been completely colonized by assimilation.

It is interesting to point out how the language issue, that Viscusi defines as the dynamics of “linguistic polarities”, is dealt with according to these diaspora parameters:

In the Italian American colonial period, the dominant literary language of Italian America is Italian: in this context, the metropolitan culture of Italy and of its national language exercises enormous gravitational pull [...] Thus when Italian Americans in this period do write in English, they are always working against the background of a massively italoophone literature. In the postcolonial period, the dominant literary language of Italian America is English: in this context, the metropolitan culture of the United States exercises an enormous hegemonic presence. Anglo-American space, with its huge capacity for expansion, surrounds every act of language. Thus when Italian Americans in this period do write in Italian, they are always working against the background of an extensively anglophone literature. In the global period, Italian American writers begin to rediscover and reevaluate Italian speech, including dialect, alongside their predominantly Anglo-American speech. In sum, the languages that writers use need to be considered against the background of the geographies that affect their use.⁸²

Perhaps this greater attention to language issues could help us in finding Tusiani’s position in Viscusi’s “history”, but only if these parameters can be applied with a certain freedom.

In Viscusi’s chronological periodization Tusiani’s work should be situated in the postcolonial and global periods. Yet Viscusi states that: “a frequent feature of colonial literary production was an unquestioning reliance on the aesthetic standards and ideology of the homeland.”⁸³ It is apparent that Tusiani’s opus is

⁸² Ibidem, p. 44-45.

⁸³ Viscusi then comments: “Thus it was that visiting intellectuals often found little to admire in a culture that appeared to them slavishly imitative and grotesquely syncretic. Among these “visiting intellectuals”, the most famous was Giuseppe Prezzolini, professor of Italian at Columbia University, who in his collection of essays *I trapiantati*, Milano, Longanesi, 1963, surveyed the literary production of these immigrants “with a keen and not totally unsympathetic eye”. Ibidem,

characterized by an “unquestioning reliance on the aesthetic standards and ideology of the homeland” but he cannot be included, either chronologically or aesthetically, in the production of the colonial period.

In these sentences Viscusi refers to almost illiterate writers who (mis)used Italy’s literary tools to voice their experience. On the contrary, Tusiani’s works are the product of his learned and competent approach. Therefore, his poetry and his translations should be analyzed in the constant reference of Italian literary models. The problem is that he arrived with his literary background and developed his own poetry when “postcolonial Italian America” was creating its own cultural models as distinguished as possible from Italian traditional ones.

Yet one wonders if at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century new developments in literary theory as well as in postcolonial, (post-)cultural, (post-)ethnic studies, will overcome these perspectives in which issues of ethnicity and of identity still seem to be so pivotal.

Italian American studies has found in this field a rich discursive background, but now, after thirty years, the different approaches going from poststructuralist textual analysis through the ethnographic, to the postcolonial and the interdisciplinary, supporting all the work of self assertion that has been done so far, should probably leave space to new methodologies.

It is undeniable that Italian American studies has not reached the same visibility that other ethnic studies have achieved years ago and it still requires an action both political and cultural to officially enter the mainstream; and this action should be taking place both in the academia and in the media world.

On the other hand, nowadays, Italian American studies has gained a certain recognition in both Italian and American cultures; the immigrant experience is no more an urgent issue, the assimilation paradigm has been thoroughly dealt with, the more or less hidden signs of *italianità* have been detected, and all those hard-to-die stereotypes are now a manifest and debated reality. Nonetheless, all this

p. 46. Quite unsympathetic, though, would be his attitude towards Tusiani on their first meeting. See below, chapter 2, note 107.

rich introspective gaze and criticism solicits a new critical awareness. Recently Gradaphé has claimed that the future of Italian American identity will not come from geography but from “imagination”.⁸⁴ This statement is surely indicative that Italian American studies has reached a turning point and needs to be recoded to face a changing audience and to meet new challenges.

Why cannot Tusiani’s poetry be “qualified” according to the parameters of all these different approaches? Despite their diverse perspectives, they all start from the assumption that this specific Italian American literature ought to be mapped through the evolution of its own distinctive signs and in the dynamics of its relation to both Italian and American literature.

As long as these critical studies remain “entrapped” in their own postcolonial ideological condition and face Italian tradition from an ideologically charged perspective they will lack the tools required to interpret and collocate Tusiani’s poetry. His poetry belongs to a literary heritage which is not Italian American, not popular and not ideological.

Italian American studies claims, and rightly so, an affiliation to Italian culture, but it is not ready to accept it *in toto*, especially when it carries in itself those traditional values and forms which may be interpreted as not particularly appealing to a modern reader, or too “stiff” and aloof from more urgent and practical expressive needs. Besides, Italian American culture still bears a certain grudge towards that high Italian culture that has always snubbed their literary presence – and they still lament this cultural absence.⁸⁵ Tusiani’s poetry belongs to that very type of culture, his whole production is deeply rooted in that tradition

⁸⁴ At the Centro Studi Americani during the seminar “The US of America as World: the World and America” Rome, 3-7 May 2010, and at the conference “Italian-less Italian-ness / Italianità senza italiani” at the Scuola Superiore di Studi Umanistici, Bologna, 25 November, 2010.

⁸⁵ The lack of attention received on the part of Italian literary studies both in Italy and in the Italian departments of U.S. universities has been on various occasions pointed out. A conference organized by Hofstra Cultural Center of Hofstra University, Italian Academy for Advanced Studies of Columbia University and the Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimò of NYU on 14-17 April 2010 had the eloquent title: “For a Dangerous Pedagogy: A Manifesto for Italian and Italian American Studies – A conference intended to provoke a radical rethinking of Italianistica”. The topics of the first- and second-day panel discussions were quite emblematic for the issues explored so far: “A necessary dialogue, or for a rapprochement between Italian Studies and Italian American Studies”, and “For a critical and self-critical pedagogy: Italian American categories”.

and imbued with those literary models. This fact may have prevented Italian American critics from fully appreciating his work.

Are Italian American authors all Italian Americans?

Another issue debated within this field of research has been what could be defined as the “degree of Italian Americanness” of Italian American writers. This issue is important as it refers directly to Tusiani’s possible inclusion in the field of Italian American studies, and it is particularly interesting here to analyze how Italian scholars writing from an American perspective have dealt with this identity/cultural problem.

Paolo A. Giordano is one of the critics who has drawn attention to those multifarious poetic voices in Italian Americana. In his essay “Emigrants, Expatriates and/or Exiles: Italian Literature in the United States”⁸⁶ he analyses those writers born and educated in Italy, who either temporarily or permanently reside in the United States and who write both in Italian and English. “Through their writing a distinctive American voice in Italian literature – or an Italian voice in American literature – has begun to define itself.”⁸⁷

This necessity has been felt with poetry, and two publications, both issued in 1993, have become indicative of the presence of Italian poets in the United States: *Italian Poets in America*, a special edition of *Gradiva: International Journal of Italian Literature*, edited by Luigi Fontanella and Paolo Valesio, and *Poesaggio* (the crisis of *poesia* and *saggio*) edited by Paolo Valesio and Peter Carravetta.

Joseph Tusiani is, perhaps, the most preeminent voice of the collection among other poets, scholars and academics whose criticism has been quoted in the pages of this survey: Giovanni Cecchetti, Giose Rimaneli, Peter Carravetta, Luigi Fontanella and Paolo Valesio.

⁸⁶ In *Beyond the Margin*, cit., pp. 225-242.

⁸⁷ Introduction to *Beyond the Margin*, cit. p. 13.

Italian Poets in America anthologizes thirteen poets whose poems originally written in Italian are offered with the English translation. The sole exception is Joseph Tusiani who contributed with a Latin poem – “Nocturnum neo-erboracense” – with both English and Italian translations. The presence of a Latin poem by Tusiani among all the Italian lines of the other poets of the collection further stresses his role as the living spokesperson of that classical culture on which Italian American heritage is grounded.

Giordano considers the poets of these two collections as giving voice to “the Italian diaspora in the United States”. They “write and probably think” in Italian but live in North America, consequently their writing comes from a “peculiarly displaced position” as “by definition, [they] are not American, not Italian, and not Italian American.”⁸⁸

The same opinion was shared by Luigi Fontanella, who, in the preface of *Italian Poets in America* wrote:

It is difficult – I recognize – not to classify as “Italian American”, tout court, some of the poets here anthologized; that is poets who have been living in America for the major part of their life, and who, by now, feel equally familiar with Italian and/or English, or even prefer, at this point of their literary life, to write almost exclusively in English, the language that they have better internalized... But despite the time the poets of this anthology have spent in the United States and the inevitable American references in some of their works... one should dismiss all attempts to hyphenate them.⁸⁹

Giordano’s and Fontanella’s position clearly states that their poetry should not be confused with other Italian American outputs, and a certain resistance still exists today in considering these Italian expatriates operating in both languages as Italian American “tout court”. The distinction lies in the difference of their cultural background, even if their “present” is the same.

Yet, both Giordano and Fontanella come from this specific background as they were both born (and Fontanella also educated) in Italy and are now Italianists

⁸⁸ Ibidem, p. 228. With this definition Giordano echoes Paolo Valesio: “Il modo migliore di definire questo gruppo di poeti è, in prima istanza, la via negativa: quello che questi poeti non sono e non possono essere né come italiani, né come americani, né come italiani-americani.” “I Fuochi della tribù”, in *Poesaggio*, Treviso, Pagus, 1992, p. 257.

⁸⁹ Quoted ibidem, p. 228.

residing in the U.S.⁹⁰ who probably recognize that their own experience is quite different from – and should not be confused with – the one of American-born Italian American intellectuals. It is not secondary, then, to try and clarify why some of these critics operating from within the comprehensive range of Italian American studies contemplate the necessity of drawing a divide between these different backgrounds. In a way, they seem to provide another perspective from the one given by Italian American critics, who seem willing to contemplate in their multifaceted group authors with diverse degrees of “inbetween-ness”, as long as they show the more or less explicit signs of their Italian American condition, either ideologically or thematically. Tusiani becomes emblematic in this case, as a wider and deeper interest in his poetry – its symbols and forms, its background intercultural and interlinguistic influences – and in his translations comes from those Italian academics residing in the United States, who, in many cases, are themselves poets and translators.

In his *La Parola Transfuga. Scrittori italiani in America*, Fontanella focuses on four Italian immigrant/expatriate authors who emigrated to the States during the first half of the twentieth century. One chapter is dedicated to Tusiani.

In the first introductory chapter, Fontanella gives his own definition of the different types of Italian American writers. To the first large group of expatriate Italian writers belong those Italian immigrant authors of the first half of the twentieth century that can be easily singled out either from the temporal/historical point of view, or for the themes, and sometimes the styles, characterizing their production, which is still mostly linked to the experience of immigration and the nostalgia for the lost homeland. So far the distinction is quite obvious; but he wonders how the attribute *italo* that precedes *americano* with a hyphen – which at

⁹⁰ Paolo A. Giordano is Professor of Italian at the University of Central Florida. His rich bibliography testifies his study of both Italian and Italian American literary production. He has dedicated much of his critical work to Tusiani’s poetry and to its place within the Italian American canon. The title of his essay “From Italian Emigrant to reluctant American” in the anthology *From the Margin: Writings in Italian Americana*, cit., is indicative of this type of distinction between Italian American and expatriates.

Luigi Fontanella, himself a poet and a translator, is Professor of Italian at the State University of New York, Stony Brook, is the founder of IPA the Italian Poetry in America association and of *Gradiva: An International Journal of Italian Poetry*.

the same time connects and detaches the syntagm – should imply a presence of *italianità* in all those authors of first and second generation for whom Italy is just a pale reflection surfacing in their works. It is simply a “cultura derivata o interposta” which does not necessarily implicate a direct knowledge of the Italian language. He has thus proposed to reverse the hyphenation and to substitute “italo-americano” with “americo-italiano” and to finally possibly call “italo-italiani” [!], that is Italians-in-America, those recent ubiquitous writers that “del biculturalismo hanno fatto una componente naturale del loro cosmopolitismo letterario.”⁹¹

This, perhaps, superfluous labeling game is not distant in its intents from the categorizations analyzed above, as it tries to order the multi-layered and multi-cultural Italian American experience. It is interesting, though, as it further proves how difficult it is to place Tusiani in these different frameworks. If from the historical point of view he clearly should be placed in the “italo-americani” group of the first generation, his multilingual poems, his translations and the cultural exchanges they implicate, should collocate him in the in-between area of the two cultures, with all the anthropological repercussions this position implies.

Paolo Valesio, as well, divides Italian American poets in four groups: “1) poeti americani; 2) poeti italiani; 3) poeti italiani americani; 4) poeti tra i due mondi”.

⁹¹ Luigi Fontanella, *La parola transfuga*, Firenze, Cadmo, 2003, pp. 19 and *passim*. He supports this apparently idle labeling as such: “E’ una denominazione – me ne rendo conto – che trascina con sé qualcosa di estremamente fluttuante o discutibile sul piano semantico [...] “Americo-italiani” possono dunque considerarsi tutti quegli americani di origine italiana che, *nati in America*, sono prima di tutto americani, vivono e operano perfettamente integrati nel sistema sociale americano e non necessariamente hanno, dell’italiano, una conoscenza diretta della lingua, né, in parecchi casi, della cultura, [...] L’accezione “americo-italiano”, insisto su questo punto, andrebbe però applicata soltanto a quegli americani di discendenza italiana di prima e seconda generazione, ossia quando la cultura italiana vissuta tra le mura domestiche possiede ancora un “lievito” originario e una sua *attiva* riverberazione. Dopo queste due generazioni trovo assolutamente incongruo chiamare italo-americano o americo-italiano qualsiasi americano che d’italiano ha, ormai, soltanto il cognome del proprio bisavolo, cognome non di rado irricognoscibile o irrimediabilmente storpiato.” Ibidem, pp. 25-26. The introductory chapter and the chapter dedicated to Tusiani are enlarged and updated versions of two essays previously published in *Italica*, vol. 75, n. 2 (Summer 1998), pp. 210-225, and “Da Tusiani a Tusiani: Appunti sulla poesia in italiano e in inglese”, in Paolo A. Giordano, ed., *Joseph Tusiani Poet Translator Humanist. An International Homage*, West Lafayette, IN, Bordighera, 1994.

The poet of the last group is “chi scrive poesia in una data lingua mentre è immerso nel flusso e realtà quotidiana di una lingua diversa”.⁹²

The need to distinguish these Italian expatriates from Italian Americans should be explored. In most cases their background remains distinctly rooted to their culture of education – Italian –, and consequently we cannot speak of a recovery of that elusive sense of *italianità* which, conversely, constitutes the philter through which their American experience is perceived. For these writers between two worlds Italian heritage is the departing point rather than a return and it does not need a complex process of re-appropriation as is necessary with American born Italian Americans.

In a way, the contribution of these Italian expatriates helps to see the other cultural side of the coin in Italian Americana. Their voice bridges that gap that American intellectuals of Italian descent have crossed from American to Italian culture the other way round, directly from Italian to American culture; and they bring Italy directly into the heart of Italian America. Consequently, the culture they need to be “reconciled” to, to understand and make their own, is not that of an Italian past but of an American present.

Therefore, since the “multicultural” basis from which Italian American studies draws its theoretical assumptions is focused more on the dialectic relationship with the influence of background cultures rather than on self standing ethnic principles, it becomes necessary to comprehend in this wide spectrum also narratives, poetry and criticism written in Italian, for which Italy represents a solid cultural background rather than a distant past.

In an essay entitled “What is Italian-American Poetry?” of 1993, the poet Dana Gioia warned against the risks inherent in the study of Italian American poetry according to ethnic parameters as “the Italian American writer’s identity is rooted in history not race” and consequently: “If Italian American poetry can be said to exist as a meaningful part of American literature, it is only a transitional category” that can be most useful only to describe “first and second generation writers raised

⁹² Paolo Valesio, “I fuochi della tribù”, in *Poesaggio*, cit., pp 250-260.

in the immigrant subculture”.⁹³ Again, not only Tusiani’s opus evades a far too simplistic collocation, but also his ethnic cultural identity requires to be redefined, because he is a poet “between two worlds”.

The poet Emanuel Carnevali once declared : “I want to become an American poet”,⁹⁴ according to Fontanella with this statement Carnevali “non solo fa un’ammissione esplicita sulla sua definitiva emigrazione fisica, ma, come scrittore, fa anche una dichiarazione di poetica, volendo fare intendere che quanto scrive(rà) non soltanto è (sarà) scritto in lingua inglese ma appartiene (apparterrà) alla letteratura scritta in quella lingua”.⁹⁵

Years later, John Ciardi answered Robert Lowell’s appreciation of one of his poems published in the pages of the *Atlantic Monthly*. Both poets were famous in their own right and were born in Boston; what distinguished them was, apparently, the Italian surname of one of them. Ciardi’s reply was directed at Lowell who had defined Ciardi’s poem, which dealt with Mussolini’s Italy:

[...] the best Italian American poem he had ever seen. And I thought, “Does this son of a bitch think he is more American than I am?” Where does he think I was brought up? Because my name is Ciardi, he decided to hyphenate the poem. Had it been a Yankee name, he would have thought, “Ah, a scholar who knows about Italy.” Sure he made assumptions, but I can’t grant for a minute that Lowell is any more American than I am.⁹⁶

This statement confirms both the attitude that mainstream culture had and still has in distancing itself from apparently ethnic productions, and the fact that even first generation Italian American writers perceived themselves as Americans writing for an American readership.

These two comments seem to anticipate what Tusiani said in an interview he had with Carmen Scarpati in 1999. To the question whether he considered himself an Italian American writer or an Italian writing in America, he answered:

⁹³ Dana Gioia, “What is Italian-American Poetry?”, *VIA, Voices in Italian Americana*, IV, n. 2, 1993, p. 61.

⁹⁴ Letter to Harriet Monroe, *Poetry*, 11, 6 (1918), p. 343.

⁹⁵ Luigi Fontanella, “Poeti emigrati ed emigranti poeti negli Stati Uniti”, *Italica*, vol. 75, n. 2 (Summer 1998), p. 211.

⁹⁶ Quoted in *From the Margin*, cit., pp. 6-7.

Io direi che mi considero uno scrittore italo/americano perché in ultima analisi noi saremo giudicati per ciò che scriviamo in inglese. Uno scrittore italiano in America può anche essere uno scrittore che scrive in italiano. [...] io credo che sia la lingua che usiamo a determinare il genere a cui apparteniamo, in cui ci esprimiamo. E' questa la grande sfida, specialmente per colui che non è nato qui: poter maneggiare la nuova lingua in modo così agevole da essere accettato come uno scrittore americano. Prendi per esempio il caso di Joseph Conrad...⁹⁷

In 1999 Italian was for Joseph Tusiani a language which wasn't creatively productive any longer. The poetic, creative power at that stage – after fifty years – had been substituted by English as his “present” language and by Latin and dialect as his background languages. It is thus in the context of American literary production that he recognizes himself. Further on in the interview, he is asked his opinion about an essay Gay Talese published in the *New York Review of Books* on March 14th 1993. That essay was provocatively entitled “Where are the Italian American Novelists?”, and its publication caused a lot of controversy among Italian American writers. The first question had given Tusiani the option of choosing between Italian Americans and Italians. When the interviewer asked him to comment Talese's statement that there are no Italian American writers Tusiani's answer was:

Quando disse che non esistono scrittori italo/americani forse voleva dire che non considerava uno scrittore come italo/americano o meno perché pensava a scrittori americani. Non credo che egli volesse dire scrittore propriamente italo/americano, perché se si rimane noti solo come scrittori italo/americani ci si distrugge. Non vorrei essere conosciuto come uno scrittore italo/americano. Che vuol dire? Perché italo/americano? Prendi i miei scritti. Io sono americano. Questo è certamente un atteggiamento molto polemico.

The apparently contradictory answers: “mi considero uno scrittore italo/americano” and “non vorrei essere conosciuto come uno scrittore italo/americano...Prendi i miei scritti. Io sono americano”, need to be clarified. Tusiani recognizes that his personal story and his experience locate him in an

⁹⁷ Carmen Scarpati, “Dodici domande a Joseph Tusiani”, in “*Two languages, Two Lands*”. *L'opera letteraria di Joseph Tusiani. Atti della giornata di studi – San Marco in Lamis, 15 maggio 1999*, Cosma Siani, ed., San Marco in Lamis, Quaderni del Sud, 1999, p. 145. The interview was originally in English and was translated by the author.

Italian American context. He lived for fifty years in the Bronx's Little Italy, the heart of the Italian American community, where he constructed his Italian American identity and became a writer. On the other hand, he is aware that his cultural and linguistic growth in the United States has allowed him to write poetry that has to be read in the wider American cultural context and not in the self-constrained boundaries of ethnic writings. The second point, which is a corollary to the first, is that Tusiani, back in 1999, is doubtful – if not prophetic – on the future of Italian American studies as it foresees its cultural limits and its lack of visibility. A biased ethnic approach that willfully selects those background influences that are ideologically useful, in his opinion, won't produce any lasting literature, and has little room for the gamut of his multilingual poetic production which refers back to great European cultural traditions and “translates” them directly into the heart of American culture.

CHAPTER 2

JOSEPH TUSIANI: A LITERARY BIOGRAPHY

To comprehend my life, I think of it
as a translation from a flowing past
into a flowing present, from a birth
utterly unintelligible, into
an altogether signifying sound
which I call language, life and love of it.

Joseph Tusiani, "Heritage"¹

In these lines written in 1973, Tusiani considers his whole life as a translation. And a translation indeed it has been which can be read on different levels: not only from the allegorical point of view of an immigrant's life that was obliged to geographically translate itself into the forms, values, culture and above all – in this case – the language of the New World. With Tusiani's literary production we are faced with a double-layered translation: that metaphorical level of his immigrant's self translated into poetical forms and the literary work of translation on the part of the Italian scholar who has rendered so many classics of Italian poetry into English.

It is worth tracing these layers of translations in Tusiani's life, first in his literary education and then in his poetic multilingual production.

¹ Originally published in *La parola del popolo*, 65, n. 116, marzo-aprile 1973, p. 71. Now, with an Italian translation by Cosma Siani, in *Letteratura italoamericana. I qualderni del Premio Letterario Giuseppe Acerbi*, Simona Cappellari and Giorgio Colombo, eds., Verona Fiorini, 2008, pp. 45-46.

Joseph Tusiani has had a long distinguished career as poet, translator and scholar and is internationally known for his extensive creative and critical activity.² His poetry in four languages has appeared in important literary journals, as single volumes and in a number of Italian American anthologies; while with his remarkable verse translations of Italian classics he has made available to English speaking readers seven centuries of Italian poetry, part of it, like the whole translation of the *Morgante*, never rendered into English before.

He is one of those Italian Americans who was not born in the United States but grew up and was educated in Italy.

At the age of 24 he left Italy with his mother to join his father who had emigrated to the United States of America five months prior to his birth. Tusiani only met him in 1947 when, as a young adult with a degree in Italian literature, he initiated the American part of his life.

Even if Joseph Tusiani's first years in New York are very similar to those of thousands of Italian immigrants of the previous decades, his education put him in a position which resembles that of "modern" Italian immigrants whose route in the United States doesn't follow the classic path from farm to factory to middle class status, but from being university students and then becoming professors in the academia, thus contributing to the development in the scientific field and in the humanities. In fact, as soon as he arrived there he started a long distinguished academic career that brought him to enter the literary circles and become Full Professor of Italian literature at Mount Saint Vincent College (1948-1971) and then Professor of Romance languages at the Lehman College of the City University of New York (1971-1983).

His situation within the Italian American community, from the social and "ethnic" point of view and among Italian American authors, from the perspective of Italian American studies, has already been explored in the first chapter. If, on the one

² See Cosma Siani's rich and detailed bibliography on Tusiani in the volume *Le lingue dell'altrove. Storia, testi e bibliografia di Joseph Tusiani*, Roma, Cofine, 2004, and the updates published in *Frontiere*, dicembre 2000, giugno e dic. 2001, dic. 2003, dic. 2004, dic. 2006, giu.-dic. 2007, and in the supplement of *Frontiere*, gennaio-dicembre 2008, entitled *Buon compleanno Joseph, per gli 85 anni di Joseph Tusiani*.

hand, he probably had to come to terms with the types of discrimination and stereotypes all Italians had to face, on the other, the search for a proper identity in American society – an issue that is still central to Italian Americans – was rendered for him easier by being a scholar of Classical and Italian literature.

It is generally assumed that the vast body of writing done by immigrant authors is basically autobiographical, as Paolo A. Giordano put it:

The immigrant author who wants to represent his/her life as “other”, and deal with the spiritual, psychological, and physical conflicts brought about by emigration, has the daunting task of organizing two diametrically opposed cultural systems, a culture of the present and the future (the American) and a culture of memory (the Italian), into a single working model.³

In a way, Tusiani has come to embody the voice of all immigrants and has successfully explored it in his poetry as well as in his three-volume autobiography. Even though he considers himself a victim of emigration⁴, from his position he probably did not share their dramatic stories, he rather identified with their ethnic and cultural *epos* and transformed it through his creative urgency.

In Section VI of his famous poem “Song of the Bicentennial”, published in the collection *Gente Mia and Other Poems* (1978) Tusiani expresses this awareness:⁵

³ Paolo A. Giordano, “Joseph Tusiani and the Saga of Immigration”, in Paolo A. Giordano, ed., *Joseph Tusiani Poet Translator Humanist. An International Homage*, West Lafayette, IN, Bordighera, 1994, p. 63. In this essay Giordano utilizes Boelhower’s *Immigrant Autobiography in the United States*, Verona, Essedue, 1982, and the article “The Immigrant Novel as Genre”, MELUS, Spring, 1981, to ground Tusiani’s literary work in the Southern Italian experience of immigration.

⁴ Joseph Tusiani, *La parola antica*, Fasano, Schena Editore, p. 199.

Luigi Fontanella comments that Tusiani is the symbol of an immigrant who is not really uprooted, but rather transformed, and this transformation “da un lato produce un naturale arricchimento, ch’è reciproco per ambedue le antropologie culturali, dall’altro non esaurisce del tutto quella conflittuale dicotomia interna, fatta di sofferenze (la nostalgia verso la patria lasciata) e le vessazioni (la solitudine e la discriminazione sociale patite nella nuova terra), che ha nutrito tanta poesia sia pure dal passo incerto della prima generazione di poeti italiani emigrati, o, meglio, di italiani *tout court* che scoprivano nella terra d’espatrio una propria vena creativa ma incolta”. “Da Tusiani a Tusiani: Appunti sulla poesia in italiano e in inglese” in Paolo A. Giordano, ed., op. cit., p. 87.

⁵ “Song of the Bicentennial”, *Gente Mia and Other Poems*, Stone Park IL, Italian Cultural Center, 1978. p. 8

I am the present for I am the past
of those who for their future came to stay,
humble and innocent and yet outcast.

I am the dream of their eternal day –
the dream they dreamed in mines bereft of light –
I am their darkness and their only ray,

their silence and their voice: I speak and write
because they dreamed that I would write and speak
about their unrecorded death and night.

Indeed the common themes that reverberate in this four-language production, and are treated with sensitivity and insight, are those linked to the immigrant's experience. It is the sense of uprootedness and the unhealable wound it implies as well as the dichotomic feeling of being suspended between two worlds: the old idyllic world of his native village and the new incomprehensible world, as someone who is torn away from his traditional values and finds himself in a new alien culture. Besides, this unredeemable sense of being torn between one's past and one's present calls for a questioning on identity underlying all those nostalgic feelings that pervade his poetic production. There is a recurrent "return" – a key word and concept – in his poetry to these issues which are explored not only from the psychological or anthropological perspective, but that see in a latent religious dimension the metaphysical dilemma for these existential questions, and sometimes find in it a momentary solace, at others the ultimate answer.

Of all the poems composed by Tusiani, perhaps "Song of the Bicentennial" best exemplifies the immigrant's unresolved dilemma. Two lines from this poem are much quoted and have become a sort of personal manifesto:

Two languages, two lands, perhaps two souls...
Am I a man or two strange halves of one?⁶

Another poem of the same collection is entitled "Ethnicity", and this title will become eponymous of the collection published in 2000. This is but one of the

⁶ Joseph Tusiani, "Song of the Bicentennial", p. 7. These lines are strongly reminiscent of Ennius' definition of his own trilingualism as having "tria corda". Tusiani quoted Ennius in one of his prose writings in Latin. See below in the "Latin Poems" section.

signs revealing that his personal memories are not only closely connected to the immigrants' plight, but, from the seventies onwards, become part of the ethnic cultural debate that has accompanied Italian American literary production.

In this light, the common subtitle for the three volumes of his autobiography, written between 1988 and 1992, is *Autobiografia di un Italo Americano*, a sign that what had fragmentarily surfaced from his poetry could be thoroughly expressed in prose and become part of a widely shared experience.

A poetic production in four languages

Tusiani has written poems in Italian, English, Latin and the Gargano dialect using all traditional metrical forms, from the sonnet to *ottava rima*.

If his poetry seems at times too emphatic and his eloquence a bit outdated and rhetorical, when compared to the experimental and freer use of contemporary poetic modalities, it is due to the taste he developed during his literary education. In the first half of the twentieth century, his readings and appreciations were absolutely in line with the Italian literary canon of the time which disregarded contemporary poetry and looked back to Latin and Italian classics as a philological model to build a linguistic and cultural national conscience. Thus the literary models for Tusiani were Leopardi, Carducci, Pascoli, d'Annunzio and the metrical forms they utilized. This was the literary canon that inspired him and on which he built his own poetry. Through the years he has mastered all traditional forms and metres and has never explored nor shared the themes, styles, aims and ideology of contemporary avant-garde poets.

His use of an elevated rhetoric diction has more often than not sounded outdated in the ears of modern readers and has called for a "justification" on the part of Tusiani's scholars and critics who have contended that the poet's classical, sometimes even archaic, taste or his emphatic eloquence are always compensated by deep emotional involvement and honesty of feelings.

Italian poems

Italian was the language of education and of his literary expression, the cultural vehicle he never gave up during his long stay in the United States and that he used for his prose autobiography.

His first poetic attempt was a booklet published in Italy in 1943. *Amedeo di Savoia* was written in unrhymed hendecasyllables to celebrate the useless heroism of Italian soldiers during the African campaign.

He then published his first collections of poems: *Flora* (1945), *Amore e Morte* (1946) and, after his arrival in the United States, *Petali sull'onda* (1948), which contained all those first feelings of disappointment and disillusion in front of the New World that will be less emphatically expressed in his subsequent poems.

At that early stage, his collections – which have later been repudiated by the author himself – are still affected by his juvenile enthusiasm for those poets he had felt as akin to his sensitivity. The influence of d'Annunzio is palpable: from the Italian *Vate* he took the musical quality of his sensuous rhymes;⁷ then he was influenced by Pascoli's intimate poetry and the aesthetic idea of the *fanciullino* and by Carducci's metric and prosodic accuracy; but also Leopardi and Manzoni were for him ethical and poetic models.

Lucia Petracco Sovran, who defines Tusiani in his early poetic stage as an “infallibile ‘scudiero dei classici’ ”, comments on *Flora*, the first of these three collections that was composed in the same epoch of *Amedeo di Savoia*: “vi troviamo, di conseguenza la stessa temperie giovanile, fatta di calore più

⁷ Gabriele d'Annunzio was a poet Tusiani deeply admired and read despite his books were considered “not in line” with the religious education Tusiani received during his seminary years. We know from an interview that a thirteen-year old Tusiani succeeded in meeting d'Annunzio at the Vittoriale and in reading him one of his first sonnets in 1937. In Cosma Siani, *L'Io diviso, Joseph Tusiani fra emigrazione e letteratura*, Roma, Cofine, 1999, p. 13.

scolastico che personale, più derivativo che innato. Ma è anche vero che si ha una più chiara e dettagliata prova della preparazione tecnica del giovanissimo poeta”.⁸

A certain deepening of thought and a more introspective attitude characterizes his *Peccato e luce* (1949).⁹ Critics agree that even though his poetry remains consistently “classical” as to metrical forms, rhythm and lexical choices, his readings of the English classics must have exercised a progressive influence on his style, which becomes less eloquent and redundant.

Lo speco celeste (1956) is a volume composed of five cantos in unrhymed hendecasyllables that describes the pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of San Michele Arcangelo, a place not far from his native village San Marco in Lamis, and that gives the poet the opportunity to recall his people, their archaic traditions, and also their poverty. The condition of those poor pilgrims seems to conjure up other pilgrimages, those of the immigrants, or, more widely, the human pilgrimage on Earth. In this atmosphere “realismo e lirismo diventano un’unica apoteosi poetica”.¹⁰ Cosma Siani has commented that, despite the honest religious feeling, from the stylistic point of view “il discorso è tenuto su un costante registro di eloquenza un po’ sonora”;¹¹ but in Petracco Sovran’s opinion, the symbolic transformation of this archaic reality into a timeless dimension, made even more distant by the poet’s American perspective, requires as well an archaic outdated diction.

Odi sacre (1957) is the last Italian collection.¹² In these first ten years of American life the poet has learnt English and is ready to start using it creatively.

⁸ Lucia Petracco Sovran, *Joseph Tusiani poeta e traduttore*, Perugia, Sigla Tre, 1984, p. 17

⁹ This volume was introduced by Cesare Foligno who had been Tusiani’s professor at the University of Naples and had been the supervisor of his thesis on the poetry of Wordsworth. Thanks to *Peccato e Luce*, Tusiani was also mentioned by Piero Bargellini in his *Pian dei Giullari: Il Novecento*, Firenze Vallecchi, 1951 (1965), vol. 3 p. 401.

¹⁰ Lucia Petracco Sovran, op. cit., p. 31.

¹¹ Cosma Siani, *L’io diviso. Joseph Tusiani fra emigrazione e letteratura*, Roma, Edizioni Cofine, 1999, p. 29. Cosma Siani has extensively contributed to the development of the studies of Tusiani’s works for almost 40 years. He has written a large number of essays dedicated to his poems and translations, has reviewed the author’s literary output and has kept Tusiani’s bibliography updated. Of particular interest is his essay “La traduzione poetica e l’opera di Tusiani” (1977) and his more recent volume *Le lingue dell’altrove* (2004).

¹² Alfredo Galletti writes an interesting comment on Tusiani’s poetry in the preface to the *Odi sacre*: “Il Tusiani è persuaso (e l’avvenire gli darà ragione) che – a meno di voler ridurre la poesia ad un’esclamazione o ad un singhiozzo, o, come vorrebbero certi estetizzanti ad un’intuizione

From now on Tusiani will mostly use English for his poems and for his critical writings. He will also start translating poetry into and from English, thus providing his personal contribution to bridge that cultural gap that the state of emigration, “in-between two worlds”, provokes.

After thirty-five years of English production, the collection *Il Ritorno* (1992) marks a “return” to poetry written in Italian. All his poetry is characterized by these circular intertextual and inter-language references and echoes. “The Return” was the English poem with which he was awarded the Greenwood Prize in 1957, and forty years later he would publish a whole Italian collection with a title “returning” to his first English poem and whose first poem is entitled “Lingua materna”.¹³

In those years another project needed to be expressed in his native language, the writing of the three volumes of his autobiography: *La parola difficile* (1988), *La parola nuova* (1991), *La parola antica* (1992).¹⁴ It was probably that unrelenting feeling of deracination “of not belonging, and of navigating between two distinct cultural systems that [...] pushed Tusiani to return to Italian, the language of his native land.”¹⁵

The use of the Italian language already marks a difference between Tusiani’s autobiography and those by Italian Americans who, by the time they realized they could write down their stories, were able to entrust them only to the English language.¹⁶ Tusiani himself commented that he did not think it right to translate the thoughts and words of many of the people that fill the pages of these three volumes into English.¹⁷ It is rather interesting that for a literary translator who had

ineffabile (e perché ineffabile, del tutto inespriabile) – poesia ed eloquenza sono inseparabili come il corpo e l’anima. Quando sono disgiunte, il corpo muore e lo spirito entra nel regno delle ombre. L’eloquenza del Tusiani è tutta compenetrata di entusiasmo e di passione; il lirismo vi circola come sangue generoso in un corpo robusto, e perciò la sua eloquenza è poesia.” *Odi sacre*, Siracusa-Milano, Ciranna, 1957.

¹³ *Il ritorno. Liriche italiane*, Fasano, Schena, 1992.

¹⁴ All the titles of the three volumes are completed by the common subtitle *Autobiografia di un italo-americano*, and are published in Fasano by Schena.

¹⁵ Paolo A Giordano, op. cit, p. 76.

¹⁶ In a note to his essay, Paolo A. Giordano highlights how in Rose Basile Green’s volume *The Italian American Novel: A Document of the Interaction of Two Cultures*, Fairleigh, Dickinson, UP, 1974, only six books were written in Italian and all between 1895 and 1919.

¹⁷ In Paolo A. Giordano, op. cit., p. 76.

for almost thirty years already rendered into English several Italian classics, translation still remains a slippery ground when it comes to the real-life experience of every-day language. In fact, Italian becomes the necessary expressive means when Tusiani wants to set down on paper human stories that were “lived” in Italian; and in this case the urgency of these experiences refuses the literary exercise of translation.

In this voluminous work of 958 pages altogether, Tusiani recounts his forty years of life in the United States and, again, all the struggles that immigrants had to endure.

The first volume *La parola difficile* covers the time from Tusiani’s arrival in New York to 1957 (the year he won the Greenwood Prize for poetry) and is centred on the difficulty Tusiani has in uttering the word “papà”, a sign of an unresolved conflict for the poet in recognizing his father as a paternal figure.

The second, *La parola nuova*, deals mostly with Michael, the younger brother who was born one year after Tusiani’s arrival in the United States. Michael epitomizes in himself all those generations of American-born children of Italian immigrants who grow apart from the old Italian values of their families as they do not recognize them any longer as their own. *La parola nuova* is not only the new language but also stands for a culture which is thoroughly different and needs to be daily negotiated into the lives of Italian immigrants.

La parola antica, perhaps the most interesting volume as far as this study is concerned, can be interpreted from a double perspective. The word has become “ancient”, and thus meaningless, because for all Italian Americans, after a few decades, the process of Americanization is almost complete and Italy has lost its sentimental pull. On the other hand, for Tusiani, as poet and man of letters, “la parola antica” is that Italian culture and language that is kept alive in himself and which runs the risk of being smothered by his American assimilation. The adjective *antica* has a larger meaning: it is a cultural cradle encompassing all his original poetic forms, be they popular or educated. It is not a coincidence, in fact, that in the last twenty years, together with his poetic output in English and Italian, the publications of the Gargano dialect poems and his Latin verses have

conspicuously increased and have become a sort of self-conscious intentional program.

Tusiani's poetic production has been accompanied by the publication of essays both in Italian and English in various literary journals¹⁸. Along with his critical studies on Italian, British and American poets – noteworthy are those on Emily Dickinson¹⁹ – he published some comparative essays on “Wordsworth e Pascoli”, “*Saul* nel canto di Alfieri e di Browning”, “David Gray e Sergio Corazzini”, “Urne, Elegie e Carme” (on Foscolo and Thomas Gray), “Il Risorgimento nel canto di Swinburne” and “Il Rinascimento in un dramma di Longfellow”.²⁰

All these studies appeared in the Italian American periodical *La Parola del Popolo* with which Tusiani had a longstanding collaboration. In its issues he also dedicated some essays to the Italian American political activist and poet Arturo Giovannitti and published some of his own poems.

Tusiani's critical approach is indicative both of his traditional education and of his poet/translator's interests. On the one hand, he embraces Croce's aesthetics when dealing with the idea of poetry as a result of a spiritual activity producing the union of intuition and poetic expression. Indeed, comparative criticism was perceived as way of going beyond literary Positivism but also of looking back to German Romantics who considered inspiration and personal feelings as the groundwork for poetry. On the other, his textual analytical approach – which becomes particularly evident in his essays on translation – reveals the philological and stylistic method that characterized literary education in the departments of Classical Studies in Italian universities. This close reading of poetical texts also reveals a possible affinity with the movement of New Criticism, which was being

¹⁸ Among which: *Spirit* (the journal published by The Catholic Poetry Society of America), *Modern Literary Journal*, *Forum Italicum*, *Italica*, and the Italian American journals: *Italian Americana*, and *VIA, Voices in Italian Americana*.

¹⁹ Giuseppe Tusiani, *La Poesia Amorosa di Emily Dickinson*, New York, The Venetian Press, 1950; *Two Critical Essays on Emily Dickinson*, New York, The Venetian Press, 1951; “L'Italia nella poesia di Emily Dickinson” *La Parola del Popolo*, year 49, vol. 8, n. 26, pp. 33-37.

²⁰ See the final bibliography for the full references to these essays.

popularized in American campuses at the time of Tusiani's presence in the academic world. Moreover Siani observes:

le tendenze dette erano nemiche della sentimentalità; il *practical criticism* si opponeva a qualunque forma di romanticismo e idealismo in poesia, e considerava il fatto artistico come mero dato dell'esperienza. Mentre invece quei tratti sono esistenti e determinanti in Tusiani, e il fatto d'arte ha per lui carattere speciale nell'esperienza umana.²¹

"The Return" an exercise in rewriting

The year 1957 marks an important event in Tusiani's English production. He was awarded the Greenwood Prize of the Poetry Society of England for the poem "The Return" that he had freely rendered into English from his own Italian poem "M'ascolti tu mia terra?" written during his first return to Italy in 1954. It was the first time that such a prize had been awarded to an American poet, an Italian American to be precise, who was not writing in his native language and had moved to the United States only nine years before²². This ode was centred on the symbolic presence of the mountain of his native village which remains immutable and unconcerned in front of the man returning to it after many years of absence. The mountain is transfigured into a sort of maternal womb regenerating in the poet the child he once was. Echoes are clearly from Pascoli's platonic ideal of the "fanciullino" and also from Wordsworth's "child" ("The Child is father of the Man", a line from the poem "My Heart leaps Up") and from a "pantheistic" religion of nature; moreover, in the English version some lexical choices seem to recall Leopardi's "L'infinito".

Thus Tusiani's Gargano becomes in this ode "una sorta di eden neoromantico" where:

²¹ Cosma Siani, *Le lingue dell'altrove*, cit., p. 100.

²² "The Return" was published first in *The Poetry Review* in 1957 and later was included in the *Fifth Season*. The Italian translation "M'ascolti tu mia terra" in *I quaderni de "Il Gargano"*, Foggia, [n.d. but 1955]

l'intelaiatura di idee [...] si fonde ed esprime con lo snodarsi delle immagini. La parola, educata attraverso studi di stampo classico e improntata ad un tono maggiormente colloquiale grazie al contatto con la lingua inglese, ha notevolmente attenuato il risuonare della retorica di stampo giovanile, per lasciar trasparire limpidamente il sentire del poeta.”²³

“The Return” is a personal re-writing in English of a poem originally composed in Italian. It marks Tusiani’s passage from poetic writing in Italian to English and it can be considered as his own work in progress between two expressive modalities. In it we find all those features that characterize his linguistic and poetic research in both languages: the depth of the theme of the original land and of its “maternal womb”, and its complex rendering through visual and musical synaesthsias. In fact, it becomes apparent how the two languages operate in two different ways by conjuring up Tusiani’s bilingual and bi-cultural poetic universe and by originating two quite different poems. Both poems are divided into twelve stanzas of various length and both have similar metres: the Italian ode is variably composed of hendecasyllables and heptasyllabic lines, while the English poem is made of iambic pentameters and trimeters. The first difference is given by their length: the Italian “M’ascolti tu mia terra?” consists of 184 lines, “The Return” is shorter, only 155 lines, yet the English version does not suffer from those cuts, on the contrary instead of the detailed, sometimes lengthy – surely outdated – descriptivism of the single stanzas, we have intellectualized descriptions sustained by the very musicality of his words.

A comparison of two stanzas can help us enter into Tusiani’s language and aesthetic laboratory.

Stanza 3 of “M’ascolti tu mia terra?” provides the description of a sunset on the Gargano mountain which is evoked as if it were the mother of that idyllic landscape.

Ecco il sole è già parte di te, parte
di me, sì basso che quasi ci tocca
con l’ultimo suo dir melodioso.

²³ Cosma Siani, *L’io diviso*, cit., p. 40.

E sta su quella roccia a brucar l'erba
imporporata la capra (e ci pare
che mangi il sole), e su questo declivo,
che sente il fresco favellar del mare,
sta presso il gregge il pastorel silente,
lieto di regger sull'aperta mano
un cielo d'oro e per la prima volta –
fatto da te, sua madre, madre nostra –
un vestito di raggi.
E son campane lontane e campani
vicini, ed è la sera,
questa cosa tranquilla
che inumidisce la nostra pupilla
all'improvviso e ci fa a te guardare
pensosamente prima della notte.

This is the English version of the same stanza which is five lines shorter:

The sun, the sun is here, part of you, part
Of me, so low that we can almost touch
Its fulgence, tender and melodious.
Look, on that rock the goat
Is crunching purple grass – it seems to us
It's chewing sun-rays; and on this steep hill,
Listening to the fresh words of the sea,
A silent little shepherd near his flock
Is glad to balance on his open hand
A sky of gold. And all about are bells,
And soon is evening – ah, this tranquil thing
That films our eyes with tears
And makes us gaze at you, my mountain land.²⁴

The words utilized in the Italian ode sound aulic, so that we are reminded of Siani's comment about the language used in the cantos of *Lo speco celeste*, composed in those years, that he defines as maintained on a "costante registro di eloquenza un po' sonora".²⁵ Some poetic uses like the aphaeresis for *sì basso* and all the truncated infinitives *dir*, *brucar*, *favellar*, *regger*, the noun *pastorel*, or the necessity to use a diaeresis on the vowel "i" for *melodioso* to divide the diphthong into two syllables are figures of diction that sound outdated even in Italian. The Italian stanza has some rhymes (*pare*, *mare* and the rhyming couplet *tranquilla*,

²⁴ The two versions are taken from Siani's *Le lingue dell'altrove*, cit., pp. 108-117.

²⁵ See above note 11.

pupilla, but also the internal rhyme of the not so beautiful paronomasia created by *campane* and *campani*). As a whole both stanzas are rich in internal echoes and rhymes given by alliterations, assonances and consonances (see the vertical alignment of *gregge, regger, raggi*) or the alliteration of *imporporata la capra (e ci pare*; but in the English version, all these figures of speech create a melodious whole thanks to onomatopoeic and monosyllabic words. Moreover, his English is more direct and simpler, and is neither academic nor rhetorical as his Italian may sound.

A telling difference is given by the lines describing the sun (*il sole... / ... sì basso che quasi ci tocca / con l'ultimo suo dir melodioso*). In English the sun is *so low that we can almost touch / Its fulgence, tender and melodious*. While in Italian the setting sun touches us with its melodious words and in a way it is so close that it speaks to us – a case of prosopopoeia – , in English the action is from us towards the sun: it is we who touch its light, and its light is at once both tender and melodious. It is true that even in Italian the idea of a sentimental response on the part of the viewers is implied by the double meaning of the verb *ci tocca* which can both mean that the sun is so close that it can touch us and also that it can move us. Yet the synaesthetic effect²⁶ is all assumed by the viewers for whom the sun's fulgence is at the same time a feeling (tender) and a sensorial perception (melodious). Light is thus something which is in itself melodious, and this is a key concept in Tusiani's aesthetic research, because it is through the sound of words that his hermeneutical path is illuminated;²⁷ and it is in such cases that the signifiers illuminate the signifieds in poetry.

²⁶ For the analysis of synaesthesias in Tusiani's poetics, especially for the ones produced by the interchangeable elements of light and sound in his Latin poems, see Emilio Bandiera's "*Musica vita est. La musica nella poesia latina di Joseph Tusiani*", in *Musae Saeculi XX Latinae – Acta Selecta*, Dirk Sacré, Joseph Tusiani, Tom Deneire, eds., Bruxelles-Rome, Institut Historique Belge de Rome, 2006.

²⁷ The first stanza in both poems opens with a description of the poet's split self: while his soul passed through the roots of his native mountain and allowed him to "remain" the child he once was (the "fanciullino"), his thought has ventured through "moonless paths" (... per sere / illuni procedé, sempre sgomento, / il mio pensier soltanto;). If we interpret these lines as a sort of aesthetic manifesto, the moonless paths are the paths that his poetic intuition takes through his four languages.

A nice description in both languages is the goat chewing the grass which is rendered purple by the setting sun. Undoubtedly in the English version we are confronted with another poetic tradition that Tusiani has successfully made his own. *Fresh words from the sea* are something more direct and effective than *il fresco favellar del mare*; even the shepherd belongs to a diverse tradition of pastoral poetry, but the main difference here is that the shepherd *is glad to balance* – which is something else from *lieto di regger* – that very same sky of gold that the goat is chewing.

This image anticipates a series of very vivid visual and sonorous elements in both languages. In Italian the *favellar del mare* anticipates and is chiastically aligned with *pastorel silente*, but in English the entire description seems to have gone through a process of refinement and the whole is more essential, more vivid and tightly woven together. We can see its vertical development in the alignment at the beginning of the lines of the imperative *Look*, which seems to direct our attention towards two similar actions in progress: *Is crunching* and *It's chewing*. These two actions produce noise; in fact, the following line begins with the present participle *Listening* which is then counterbalanced by the *silent* response of a little shepherd. Three lines below the action is again focused on two descriptions which provide a double perspective: one is spatial and auditory and the other is temporal and visual, and both coordinate actions are harmoniously knit together: ... *And all about are bells / And soon is evening*. The English version can easily do without the Italian metaphor of the sky, which is turned into a *vestito di raggi* made by the Gargano land, the shepherd's mother and our mother as well. These lines may be necessary for the construction of a landscape which is described almost as if it were a painting, with the reader's eye roaming from one point to another. But poetry is not like painting, as he will say in one of his Latin poems²⁸. Thus, these lines couldn't develop this description any further in English where it reaches a deeper and more intellectual perspective. The landscape is something intimate, essential and vital in which all the elements coexist, it is a landscape created by memory and conjured up through the

²⁸ See below for the analysis of his "Ut pictura poesis".

evocative musical power of words. While in Italian the poet incurs in the pitfalls caused by an “academic” use of poetic language and by an excessive descriptivism, his English activity of composition progresses towards a poetic and mythical revelation through the phonosymbolic chains.

The ending lines of these two stanzas clearly show how this description is differently constructed. In Italian the movement is somewhat slackened despite the presence of the adverb *all'improvviso* and the phonosymbolic association of *tranquilla / pupilla* with two enjambments which create a false rhythmical expectation in the reader. In English it is once again clear that what the poet is describing is a mental landscape: the evening is *this tranquil thing / that films our eyes with tears*, thus evening is equated to nostalgia and memory, and what prevents us from clearly seeing – *films our eyes – makes us gaze at you, my mountain land*. Though the eyes are dimmed with tears, the gazing is clear in the poet's memory.

Stanza 7 shows another example of the development of Tusiani's own rewriting.

Immacolato io mi sento tuttora
(eppur m'han fatto rude gli anni e il male)
come si fosse fermato il mio giorno
alla sua prima aurora
senza il declino alla sua prima sera.
E costumi ho veduto
diversi e gente diversa e, per vivere
anch'io, quasi ho dovuto
scordare i tuoi linguaggi e i tuoi silenzi
e le tue selve fiere ed incorrotte.
Ed ho imparato a dormir la mia notte
senza i tuoi cieli, per sentirmi pronto
a correre affannato, il dì seguente,
allo stesso tramonto.
E qui correvan liberi e veloci
i tuoi venti, e sui greppi e dentro i solchi
saltellavano lepri
e nascevan viole.

Immaculate I feel, though thoughts of the tomb
Have changed me. Different lands I have seen,
And different laws and lores,
And I have learned to sleep my nights without

Your skies, not to be late, the following dawn;
To trudge toward the same sunset, weak, alone.
But, swift and free, your winds were running here,
And in these furrows, in these golden spears,
The hare was leaping, and the violet
Was smiling at its frolics in the moon.

The English version consists of 10 lines instead of the 18 of the Italian, which is nearly twice as long. As in the case of stanza 3, this stanza too is rich in rhymes, and internal echoes given by alliterations, assonances and consonances, all musical elements which sustain the meaning and the rhythm. It is probably one of the most successful stanzas of the whole poems in both languages; it is interesting, though, to see its transformation into the shorter and more compact English version.

Both stanzas are articulated on the poet's sense of being still immaculate despite the passing of time and the many experiences he has encountered. The Italian stanza is divided into four nuclei connected by the coordination *E / Ed* in anaphoric position. These nuclei describe four different images: the first one presents the poet as he feels still *immacolato* even though he has been made rude by *gli anni e il male*, and the decline of his "evening" is approaching. The second and the third parts describe his past experiences: the things he has seen and the people he has known; something he has needed to learn in his new busy American life and something he has needed to forget, which is not to be found in the English version and which seems to encapsulate his linguistic story at a time when English is replacing Italian: *quasi ho dovuto / scordare i tuoi linguaggi e i tuoi silenzi...*

The last part focuses on the idyllic description of his native land; the tense is the past, but the adverb *qui* referring to the Gargano creates once again that displaced perception of something that is far away in time and space but very near in the poet's emotional perception. Even the passing of time is accentuated in the first and the third parts. The repetitions of all those time elements: *il mio giorno / alla sua prima aurora, alla sua prima sera*, and then *la mia notte, il dì seguente, / allo stesso tramonto* accompany the acquired experiences of the poet as if they were a narrative developed in time.

In the English stanza the first line poses the dichotomic state of the poet with the two words at either end of the line, *immaculate* and *tomb*. There are three coordinating conjunctions as well at the beginning of the lines and, again, the poet's experience is less narrated and more felt, more the product of the associations of his thought. The whole second part of the Italian version is summarized in *And different laws and lores*. Here too the passing of time is underlined by the repetition at the end of three successive lines of *my nights, the following dawn and the same sunset*. The poet's *trudge toward the same sunset, weak, alone* is counterbalanced by the sudden animation of the Gargano winds which run *here swift and free*.

An interesting difference between the two versions is given by the final lines: in Italian we have *saltellavano lepri* and *nascevano viole*, another vivid description of a nature animated with life. The English has: *The hare was leaping, and the violet / Was smiling at its frolics in the moon*. It is no accident that Tusiani has decided to translate the plural *lepri* with the singular *hare* and to insert a moon that was not there in the Italian version. Singulars and plurals have quite distinct implications in the English language. A plural form would be descriptive of a category, while the singular implies something more abstract, as if we were referring to the archetype or the prototype of that category. The hare leaping in the moon is, in fact, a very important symbol in many ancient traditions from the Celts, to Native Americans to East Asians, and many of these cultures saw the outline of the hare in the full moon. It is also the protagonist of a famous Buddhist folktale – and of its many variations – in which in exchange for its sacrifice it is given eternal life in the moon. For this reason in all these mythic traditions it has become the archetypal symbol of death, regeneration and rebirth, and well suits Tusiani's ending of his stanza where the "wearisome sunset" of his life can only be regenerated in ideal contact with his own mythic land. This legend at the end of the stanza develops the *different... lores* and the different peoples the poet has come into contact with in his life away from his ancestral land and provides a beautiful mythical image in the moon illuminating his idyllic Gargano.

On the a whole, the descriptive elements of his English “The Return” create visions that are more mental than evocative and produce lines which are more reasoning than narrative, and richer in cultural references if compared to the Italian version. It is not a coincidence, in fact, that on some occasions we can feel echoes from Leopardi’s “reasoning poetry”²⁹ more explicitly in his English version rather than in the Italian lines. A couple of examples will clarify how deeply certain poetic influences operate in Tusiani’s inspiration and how unexpectedly they may come up in a language which is not their own.

The Italian lines are:

M’ascolti tu, mia terra? All’infinita
tenebra (a me sembra infinita, eterna)
il grillo ancora invia il suo messaggio antico, ...

The lines in English are:

My land, do you still hear me? To this infinite
Silence – to me it seems eternal, infinite –
The cricket cries its ancient message, ...

And these are the lines from Leopardi’s “L’infinito”:

...e come il vento
Odo stormir tra queste piante, io quello
Infinito silenzio a questa voce
Vo comparando: e mi sovvien l’eterno,

In place of the Italian *tenebra*, the English version adopts a *silence* which is *infinite* and *eternal*, three terms which are for Italian readers inescapably evocative of “L’infinito”.

Another example is provided by the concluding lines of Tusiani’s poems and of Leopardi’s “L’infinito”:

²⁹ I’m referring to Antonio Prete’s definition of Leopardi’s poetry as “pensiero poetante” and “poesia pensante”. See below chapter 4, note 52.

e in un mar di candore la notte è naufragata
e in tutta questa luce il mio dolore.
("M'ascolti tu mia terra?")

Into this sea
Of loveliness the night is lost and gained,
And all my cares are drowned.
("The Return")

Così tra questa
Immensità s'annega il pensier mio:
E il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare.
("L'infinito")

We can see that Tusiani's two versions are quite different from one another: the Italian lines are developed through the two coordinate clauses around the chiasmus created in the first line by *mar*, *candore* and *notte*, *naufragata*, and with the synthetic resolution in the final line given by the combination of *luce* and *dolore*. *Luce* is aligned with *candore* and opposed to *notte*, while *dolore* explains the metaphor of the night. "Candore" (see the Latin "candidus" vs "albus") is the bright whiteness that wins over darkness, and these lines are beautifully constructed. Yet the English version proves again more articulated, concise and less "explained": the metaphorical sea of *candore* is replaced by a *sea of loveliness*, which absorbs the poet's *night* and redeems it, and, together with his *night*, all his *cares are drowned* in it. The emphasis is no longer on the dichotomy of light and darkness, but on the loneliness of night in which sorrows are drowned and purified. It is interesting, once again, to note how Tusiani's English version is closer to the final lines of "L'infinito" than his Italian poem. It is as if his literary culture found it easier to surface in a new language than in its original one. This is not a minor point if we consider how this rewriting of his own poem marks a turning point in Tusiani's literary, linguistic and cultural experience. In a way we feel that he has found a new rich and deep expressive vein as we realise that what he had once written in Italian reaches more abstract and thoughtful poetic results in English. Moreover, what is "lost and gained" in this personal exercise undergoes the same process of research that translation requires and becomes a hermeneutic instrument that Tusiani will apply to his translations of Italian poets.

English poems

English is the language that would supplant Italian. He not only used it in his everyday life and in his teaching profession but would also master it in creative ways for his poetry and translations. As a scholar he did from the cultural point of view what other immigrants had to do in their everyday life: he translated, and thus mediated, between the two cultures and, consequently, he bridged the gap between them and never gave one up in favor of the other.

His English culture had undoubtedly depended, at least before his arrival in the United States, more on British literary models than American ones. His university dissertation had been on Wordsworth's poetry, but also Robert Browning's dramatic monologues inspired some lyrical monologues of his English collections,³⁰ and John Donne was to influence his poetic elaboration of metaphysical questioning.

One of the poems that was later to be included in *Rind and All* was an imaginary dialogue with John Keats, and it appeared in the magazine *Spirit* with the unmistakable title "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty",³¹ while another of the same collection echoed Thomas Gray with the title "Elegy Written in Subway Station". In this elegy a line is also allusive to Pascoli's "X Agosto", when, in front of a man who died of a stroke, as he was getting off the train, the poet comments:

³⁰ "...ma in Tusiani non si ritrova la vena ironica che serpeggia nel suo grande modello britannico (permane la "serietà dolorante" anticamente individuata da Foligno. Tusiani ha scritto simili poemetti meditativi in pentametri sciolti lungo tutto l'arco della sua produzione inglese, toccando ambiti diversi: religioso, come visto, filosofico ("Cain, the Better Giver" ["Caino, miglior offerente"], 1987), estetico ("Marsyas, or the Supremacy of Music" ["Marsia, o del primato della musica"], 1994), esistenziale ("The Death of Lucan" ["Morte di Lucano"], 2001), o personale sotto specie amorosa ("Mount Gargano: A Love Poem" ["Gargano, poema d'amore", 2001). Come rivelano i suoi titoli, in tale tipo di composizioni sale in primo piano tutto un apparato di segni e simboli della realtà che il poeta vuole rappresentare. Ma anche qui i risultati più convincenti sono laddove pensiero speculativo e onda musicale si fondono per ammorbidire il peso dell'apparato." Cosma Siani, *Le lingue dell'altrove*, cit., pp. 81-82.

³¹ The title was then changed and in *Rind and All* it appears as "And Still the Gate is locked".

“Forgive me, silent man with staring eyes: / I do not know what nest is hungry now / Somewhere in this huge forest wild and loud.”³²

His personal taste in English poetry reflected the attitude he had towards Italian literature. He referred to a traditional canon that would allow him to refine his thought into structured and musical verses. This is probably what qualifies his poetry, but it is also its limit in a time in which new aesthetic and also communicative models changed poetic language and postmodernist claims were supplanting beat and pop avant-gardes.

This influence is revealed by Tusiani himself who, in an interview quoted by Luigi Fontanella, admits that it was through the classics of English literature that he approached this new linguistic universe:

Dall'italiano classicheggiante della mia formazione liceale passai alla nuova lingua attraverso il romanticismo di Wordsworth, il poeta della mia tesi di laurea. [...]

Quanto al fattore linguistico, sentii subito di aver messo piede, dirò, su terreno vergine. Il bagaglio scolastico, di cui dovevo disfarmi, era tutto italiano; la lingua inglese non solo non mi aveva in alcun modo contaminato (forse non ho usato il verbo giusto) ma ero io a scoprirla e quasi inventarla gioiosamente nello studio dei classici, in quello studio paziente e amoroso che mi avrebbe consentito il passaggio della conoscenza tecnica all'intimità creativa del nuovo idioma.³³

It was the Italian American writer and biographer Frances Winwar³⁴ who introduced Tusiani into American literary circles, encouraged him to start writing

³² I'm referring to the well-known comparison between the two destinies of a swallow and a man. The swallow is killed while is taking a worm to its nest: “Ora è là, come in croce, che tende / quel verme a quel cielo lontano; / e il suo nido è nell'ombra, che attende, / che pigola sempre più piano. // Anche un uomo tornava al suo nido: l'uccisero: disse: Perdono; / e restò negli aperti occhi un girido: / portava due bambole in dono.” A similar apparent allusion can be found in Tusiani's play in verse *If Gold Should Rust*, when the protagonist Giuseppe Baretta wonders on the consequences affecting the wife and the family of the man he has killed: “I went to see her for I wished to know / what kind of nest now starves because of me.” (Act III, sc. ii, 197-8) p. 194.

³³ Luigi Fontanella, “Da Tusiani a Tusiani”, in Paolo A. Giordano, ed., *Tusiani: an International Homage...*, pp. 85-86.

³⁴ Frances Winwar and Tusiani had an intellectual communion and an intimate friendship that lasted many years and that can be retraced through their reciprocal mentions, reviews and dedications in the numerous publications of those years. Winwar had herself translated Boccaccio's *Decameron* in 1930 and was a scholar of d'Annunzio (whose Vittoriale they visited together in the summer of 1954, when Tusiani returned to Italy for the first time). It was Frances Winwar who made Tusiani known to American readers by translating one of his poems and publishing it in the *Yale Literary Magazine* in November 1954 in a special edition dedicated to the

poetry in English and was for him an intellectual guide during his first American years; and it was in the United States that Tusiani reached his poetic maturity. When *Rind and All* (1962) was issued he had already started his translating activity and published *The Complete Poems of Michelangelo* (1960). From then on, the two activities intertwined and influenced each other.

In *Rind and All* the realistic observation of everyday American life is opposed to the memory of his mythic distant land of the Gargano, but more than nostalgic feelings this dualism inspires metaphors on the transience of life. And this idea of “dualism”, underlying Tusiani’s poetics,³⁵ well suits his work as a translator between two cultures. Yet, despite a similar recurrence of those autobiographical themes he had already explored in his Italian verses,³⁶ the result appears reversed. In his Italian lines nostalgic images were somehow overdressed by a sustained sonority. Here the apparently simple, almost colloquial, English of his poems betrays an enigmatic complexity of themes. His poetry becomes more and more intimate and dense, and simple glimpses of images or situations inspire philosophical and religious meditations.³⁷ A beautiful example is given by his poem “Gregorian chant on the Hi-Fi”:

Gregorian chant on the hi-fi: Hail,
Morning of Christianity, my Rome.
Though I have lost my eagle in the sky,
Oh, how I love my soul’s dark catacomb!

Low notes still crying for a happy home:
Nero is playing; Peter is in jail.
How can I choose between a harp and a cross,
I who have lost Jerusalem and Rome?

memory of Dylan Thomas on the first anniversary of his death. Tusiani’s poem appeared along with those of William Carlos Williams, Kenneth Rexroth, E.E. Cummings, Marianne Moore and many others.

³⁵ Lucia Petracco Sovran comments: “è così che il Tusiani, congiungendo visione remota a visione presente, emozione a ricordo, dolore vivo a dolore trascorso, arriva a un dualismo che si fa base di tutta la sua arte poetica: America e Italia, realtà e sogno, male e bene, materia e spirito, e così via”. op. cit., p. 55. Sovran explores this dualistic identity in the poem whose title is based on the poet’s surname which originates a sort of pun on the greek god Janus “Tus Jani”.

³⁶ In this collection, the poem “Song of the Wheat” is the English modified version of an Italian poem he had composed when he was fifteen and had later published in *Peccato e luce*.

³⁷ In 1963, one year after the publication of *Rind and All*, President John Fitzgerald Kennedy invited Tusiani to record a selection of his lyrics for the permanent Archives of the Library of Congress.

Quick, hide and listen: this is my new home –
My century, so far and still so near,
Where I believe in Life, yet fear the loss
Of living. O the grace of martyrdom!

This is my home, this lonely catacomb
Where singing freezes on a mildewed wall.
But I have lost Jerusalem and Rome, –
And emperor and slave meet my soul.³⁸

The same metaphysical atmosphere is to be found in the second English collection *The Fifth Season* (1964), the title itself alludes to a season which is beyond time and that reveals a very personal inner world of speculative activity through a minute observation of everyday reality.³⁹

Gente Mia and Other Poems (1978) concludes the trilogy of English language collections and marks the beginning of what has been defined the ethnic phase of Tusiani's poetry.

Like all the previous books this collection contains poems that had already appeared in a number of important literary journals and divides them into two sections: the first one is more specifically ethnic, the second is more meditative.

In the context of the then flourishing ethnic studies and the claims of ethnic minorities, *Gente Mia* goes beyond the nostalgic feelings and the cultural religious meditations of the first two collections. Here Tusiani becomes the “cantore dell'emigrazione”⁴⁰, and to do that he simply needs to project his own story onto the scale of the larger tragedy that touched all Italian immigrants. In the first section of *Gente Mia* we find the already mentioned “Song of the Bicentennial”, “Ethnicity” and twelve other poems whose titles eloquently epitomize the immigrant experience: “Columbus Day in New York”, “Ellis Island”, “The Barrel Organ”, “Letter to San Gennaro”, “The Ballad of the Coliseum”, just to mention a few, and it becomes the poet's responsibility to lend his voice to those who cannot

³⁸ “Gregorian Chant on the Hi-Fi”, *Rind and all. Fifty Poems*, New York, The Monastine Press, p. 43.

³⁹ For an analysis of the lyrics of *The Fifth season*, see Lucia Petracco Sovran, op. cit.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 90

speak. “Therefore, *Gente Mia*, is structurally, thematically, and emotionally informed by this heartfelt need and personal pledge to tell the story of the Italian immigrant, with its pain and hope, richness and variety.”⁴¹

In this section there is also a poem whose title “The Day after the Feast” seems to nod to Leopardi’s “La sera del dì di festa”, but instead of the idyll’s nocturnal and rural atmosphere, here we have the description of 187th Street at the end of the day’s celebration in honor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel:

Last night your children were the chanting throngs
behind your statue and the parish priest,
and now they once again
are what they were – unknown, hard-working men.

[...]

This morning everybody’s back to work
as if no holiday had ever been,
yet everybody’s more
resigned to life than ever, ever before.

Now stands are being felled, and old New York
is all the more the town where some begin
what others will complete,
the city where we only know our street.

Roaring impassive and iconoclastic,
two Sanitation trucks devour and crush
under metallic teeth
the most impressive artificial wreath

along with cardboard boxes, empty plastic
bottles, confetti, in a raucus rush
that nothing spares – not even
the remnants of man’s festive dream of heaven.⁴²

The visual element of the indifferent distant moon and the auditory impact of the artisan’s song in Leopardi⁴³ are contrasted by the “roaring impassive and

⁴¹ Luigi Bonaffini, “Review of Joseph Tusiani. *Ethnicity. Selected Poems*”, *Forum Italicum*, vol. 35, n. 2 Fall, 2001, p. 593.

⁴² “The Day after the Feast” (lines 5-8, 17-32), *Gente Mia*, cit.,

⁴³ See Leopardi’s lines: *Dolce e chiara è la notte senza vento, / e queta sovra i tetti e in mezzo agli orti / posa la luna, e di lontan rivela / serena ogni montagna. ...* (1-4); the lines *“Tutto è pace e silenzio, e tutto posa / il mondo...”* (38-39), and *“...Ahi, per la via / odo non lunge il solitario canto*

iconoclastic, / two sanitation trucks” which sweep away the remnants of the festival. In both poems an ordinary day will follow that inspires thoughts on the transience of human deeds and allows Tusiani to portray a slice of Italian American life in the Bronx.

The second part of *Gente Mia* reveals an atmosphere closer to the one created by *The Fifth Season*, in fact, all the poems of this section had been written in the years the previous collection was published. Again we find the same abstract and meditative attitude, the same sense of estrangement that seems to draw him near to that modernist poetry⁴⁴ he had tried to ignore for thirty years.

In the short poem “Aubade in Gray”⁴⁵ Tusiani meditates on God’s act of creation, by associating with expressive density the abstract concept of timelessness to its visual/auditory representation:

Gray was the color of all timelessness
when timelessness and color were all one.
There was no fire yet, there was no sun,
there was God dreaming of a light called man.

And then time trembled out of timelessness,
victory rising from no battle won.
There was no music yet, no crying done,
there was God dreaming of a voice called man.

Now look and listen. In this timelessness
the first birds twitter, the first shadows run,
heaven and earth and dusk are one,
and I am dreaming of a God called man.

The creation of man is God’s “dream” of a “light” and a “voice”; that’s the moment in which time trembles out of eternity, and in this metaphysical – and synaesthetic – speculation on creation the poet’s sees his own creative act reflected.

/ dell’artigian, che riede a tarda notte, / dopo i sollazzi al suo povero ostello;” (24-27). In *Canti*, Milano, Garzanti, intr. and notes by Fernando Bandini, 1975, pp. 123-126.

⁴⁴ Cosma Siani underlines how Tusiani never liked T.S. Eliot or Pound, yet it is undeniable that on various occasions the images Tusiani employs in his verses conjure up the atmosphere we find in the poetry of the former.

⁴⁵ “Aubade in Gray”, *Gente Mia*, cit., p. 51.

If Gold Should Rust appeared in 1994 and was a late publication of a verse play whose first act had received in 1968 the Alice Fay di Castagnola prize, an important award of The Poetry Society of America. The play is the imaginary re-elaboration of a real event that befell the Italian writer Giuseppe Baretti when he was residing in England in 1769. He was accused of murder while defending himself from a man who had assaulted him. The writer was then spared a life sentence, thanks to the intervention of influential friends like Samuel Johnson, but the fictional Baretti finally decides to return to Italy to atone for his sense of guilt. The play, written in iambic pentameter, belongs to that literary tradition of dramatic poems that dates back to Milton's *Samson Agonistes* and includes Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, Byron's *Manfred* and, for certain aspects, also T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*. The presence of the ghost of the murdered man who returns to debate with Baretti, conjures up Hamlet's ghost and a similar dialogical conflict with his own conscience. It is that type of closet drama more based on the versified reflections of the protagonist than on action, and thus more for reading than for performing. In its lines it is possible to find many echoes of his poetic production both in style and in themes, and the autobiographical attitude of the intellectual who, cut off from his roots and faced with a traumatic episode, feels compelled to reflect on his own social function.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ I'd like to quote in its entirety a long excerpt from Tusiani's autobiography *La parola nuova*, reported by Siani in the "Introduction" to the play, in which the poet identifies with Baretti on recalling the awarding of the prize: "Io che venivo dall'ignoto e remoto Gargano, cosa ci facevo lì, quella sera, fra quella gente che non era gente mia? Chi mi ci aveva portato? Mi ci aveva portato un altro emigrato di nome Giuseppe... e, finalmente, mi sembrò tutto chiaro. In Giuseppe Baretti, il protagonista del dramma premiato quella sera, avevo visto me stesso, avevo analizzato la mia irrequietudine, la mia nostalgia d'Italia, e la tremenda disperazione per non sentirmi più né italiano né americano. Non stava succedendo a me quello che era successo a lui, due secoli prima? Scapolo come me, era stato accolto nel Circolo Letterario del Dr. Samuel Johnson come io ero stato accolto nella Poetry Society of America. Aveva scritto tre opere in inglese, ed io altrettante, se non di più. Aveva sentito il bisogno, anzi il dovere, di difendere l'Italia dalle accuse di un signore inglese che si atteggiava a Roger Ascham redivivo, ed anch'io, in più di un'occasione, avevo fatto altrettanto in un'America che mi chiamava *dago* o, negli ambienti più evoluti, specialista di pizza e spaghetti. Aveva dato notizie su autori italiani ignorati, e avevo, anch'io, fatto conoscere un aspetto ignorato della grandezza del nostro Michelangelo. [...] a me sembrò che il programma della serata, che avevo nelle mani, magicamente si trasformasse nei tre volumetti inglesi del Baretti: *The Italian Library*, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of Italy*, ed *A Dissertation upon the Italian Poetry*. E mi parve, anche, di udire, a distanza di due secoli, la domanda che gli rivolgevano: «Signor Baretti, Lei pensa in inglese o in italiano? Se riesce a pensare in inglese, come fa a dimenticare di pensare in italiano, che è la Sua lingua materna? E, se pensa ancora in italiano,

Recent collections of English verses are *Ethnicity, Selected Poems* (2000) which includes the first ethnic part of *Gente Mia* and nine other poems that had been published individually in various journals, and *Collected Poems* (1983-2004),⁴⁷ which contains some previous “short collections” – namely some of his Latin verses – and some dramatic monologues published before, among which: *Cain, the Better Giver. A Lyrical Monologue, Marsyas, or the Supremacy of Music* and *The Death of Lucan*, written in iambic pentameter and characterized by intensity of thought and musical phrasing. Cain and Marsyas both develop the intimate and clashing colloquy of man with divinity, and in both Tusiani overturns the traditional story. His Cain is the good brother who does not understand why God, who created life, prefers the gift of the animals slaughtered by Abel to his offerings of flowers and fruit. Unable to understand why a lifeless thing is more worthy than something alive, in the end Cain kills Abel and turns him into an extreme and incomprehensible sacrifice to God.⁴⁸ Similarly, Marsyas contends that it was Apollo who challenged him to an unequal duel while he just wanted to celebrate the god’s gift to him. But music – the god’s gift – will survive his death, as will poetry in the case of Lucan, obliged to commit suicide by Nero’s envy for his sublime poetic art. Through these “personae” Tusiani explores existential issues from a religious, aesthetic and philosophical perspective, and unfolds the complexity of his poetics.

come fa a tradurre in perfetto inglese quello che pensa nella lingua nativa?». Quante volte quella stessa domanda me l’ero sentita rivolgere io da gente che ti giudica dal lieve accento straniero che accompagna ogni tua parola! [...] Povero Baretto! In legittima difesa uccise un aggressore notturno in una Londra infestata di ladroni, e lo avrebbero tutti unanimamente decapitato («Che ti aspetti da un discendente del demonio Machiavelli?») se, in suo favore, non fossero accorsi a testimoniare il grande Dr. Johnson, David Garrick, Joshua Reynolds ed altri. In simili circostanze, di me gli americani avrebbero detto: «E che ti aspetti da un discendente di Al Capone?». Ecco, su quel processo di cui sanno ben poco gli stessi italiani, io avevo basato il mio dramma in versi, il “lavoro in corso” che la Poetry Society of America aveva premiato. Strano! Finanche quell’assegno mi ricordò la pensione annua di ottanta sterline che Re Giorgio III fece assegnare al letterato torinese dopo la sua piena assoluzione.” Joseph Tusiani, *If Gold Should Rust*, Cosma Siani, ed., Castelluccio dei Sauri FG, Edizioni Lampyrus, 2009 .

⁴⁷ Despite the dates indicated in the title, two anterior poems are included in the collection that were published in the sixties: “Apologia”, 1963 and “Insomnia”, 1968. The volume, published in 2004, also contains the translations by several authors of all the poems except for the verse play *If Gold Should Rust*.

⁴⁸ *Cain: the Better Giver* is originated by the ambiguity with which this episode from the *Genesis* seems to support the life of nomadic shepherds rather than agricultural civilization.

In fact Tusiani defines his English poetry as an effort to enter the intellectual activity of “magna America”⁴⁹ where Magna necessarily recalls the classical culture of which he feels a spokesperson and also that part of Italy the “Magna Graecia” where he comes from. And in the interview with Fontanella referred to above he admits:

La mia esperienza globale di poeta e traduttore di poesia (non so come si possono scindere i due aspetti di un'unica attività creativa) io la vedrei concretizzata o riflessa in *Rind and All*, *The Fifth Season*, e, soprattutto, nella seconda parte di *Gente Mia*. Perché? In quale modo? Non so. Penso che a un critico astuto non debba sfuggire, per esempio, il segreto estetico, anzi “latino,” di una lingua inglese che si incontra e scontra con quella dei poeti della Poetry Society of America e della Catholic Poetry Society of America, di cui, nei miei anni più fervidi, fui, rispettivamente vice presidente e direttore.⁵⁰

Here Tusiani highlights the important similarity between Latin and English poetry. English words reveal for him a musical quality that he can no longer find in Italian, if not on the level of versification, while both Latin and English are characterized by a musicality which is found on the level of the languages themselves, thanks to the presence of a rich variety of onomatopoeic sounds, monosyllables or alliterative chains, which can be found in Italian as well, but risk being associated with some type of child language. Moreover, Latin and English have similar metres, quantitative and accentual, while Italian lines are syllable based and are characterized by rhythmic stresses. English is a living language and Tusiani needs a living expressive modality to give voice to his poetic inspiration. This may seem an apparent contradiction with his ample use of Latin verses: yet Latin can be a vital language too, in that it does not have to come to terms with any oral implications and can be enlivened again thanks to his parodic reappropriation of a world into whose forms he “translates” his modern reality.

⁴⁹ See Giovanni Cecchetti, “Joseph Tusiani e l’emigrazione coatta”, in Paolo A. Giordano, ed., *Tusiani: an International Homage*. cit., pp. 51-52 and passim.

⁵⁰ Luigi Fontanella, op. cit., p. 87.

Latin poems

Latin, the language of classical education, is another medium through which Tusiani has discovered specific aspects of his poetics. Since the publication of his first collection of nineteen poems, *Melus Cordis* in 1955, his Latin output has greatly increased in the last thirty years. His verses have been published in several collections and in the major Latin journals.

He is today a renowned poet in the Neo-Latin community and especially acknowledged is his experimental and innovative use of Latin poetic language. In the eyes of some purists this may seem a sort of departure from strict classical models and a contamination of sorts within the humanist tradition of quantitative and modern accentual metres, but again his “creative” skills with Latin prosody and metres testify to his love and mastery of poetic diction in whatever language he chooses.

In Tusiani’s Latin verses we find the same themes that have been explored so far: from the nostalgic feeling for his native land and the questioning on his emigrant’s identity to the metaphysical contemplation of things that become emblematic of the passing of time, or the vague restlessness left by his religious sensitivity. He alternates a variety of tones, from the bemused and the epigrammatic to the sympathetic or that of speculative thinking; and it becomes apparent that there is a deep and stratified allusive process to centuries of a cultural tradition which is superimposed on decades of personal experience, and more often than not his refined lines redeem the urgency and realism of their content.

The risk of an academic exercise *per se* with Latin is implicit, yet he succeeds in remaining the deep meditative poet he is in his other languages and his own voice is still heard above the learned play with accents and quantity issues, even though his lyrical thought does not develop to the extent it does in his other languages. While his Italian, English and dialect poetry can be long and discursive,

meditative or mock-heroic, his Latin poems are concise, and their brevity suggests the fragmentary, almost epigrammatic quality of his compositions.⁵¹

Therefore the most apparent and widely discussed element of his Latin poetry, as we have seen, is the creative form of his compositions.

Dirk Sacré,⁵² Professor of Latin at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven and a student of Tusiani's Neo-Latin poetry, assumes that probably the fact that Tusiani never became a professional classical scholar prevented him from worrying too much about the technical rules of Latin versification and allowed him to handle Latin with greater freedom.

In Tusiani's first collection of Latin verses – *Melus Cordis*, which dates back to 1955 – Sacré notices a “twofold departure” from what other contemporary poets write.

Not only is there an unprecedented boldness in imagery – even to the point that it is not immediately obvious to the reader – but also a novelty in prosody and metre: the majority of the poems consisted of so-called metrical verses, which in reality had only a vague resemblance to classical hexameters and pentameters; in his *caesurae*, in his practice of homo- and heterodyne feet, in the elisions, in the application of coincidence of feet and words, and above all in his prosody, Tusiani took unseen liberties.”⁵³

Similarly, in an article of 1975 Lucia Petracco Sovran stated that Tusiani “wavers between the *notum* and the *novum*. The result is a naive and seemingly strange compromise wholly his own”.⁵⁴

Apparently, Tusiani seems to accept with his Latin poems that experimental attitude that basically renews traditional models and which he outright rejects in his Italian and English output. Bandiera interprets this casual use of classical

⁵¹ Siani comments “In inglese, italiano e dialetto Tusiani scrive interi poemetti. Non così nel latino, in cui le composizioni lunghe sono assai rare e non superano la cinquantina di versi: l'osservazione e la meditazione prendono forma concisa e dichiarativa più che snodarsi in lunghe argomentazioni o in storie allegoriche. [...] Forse è proprio il disimpegno dall'architettura di pensiero a lasciar luogo a prove leggere eppur pensose”. In *Le lingue dell'altrove*, cit., p. 95.

⁵² Dirk Sacré, an important Latinist, has been a long time student of Tusiani's Latin poetry, has edited some of his collections, and also drawn up a bibliography of Tusiani's Latin verses that had been sparsely published in magazines and journals.

⁵³ Dirk Sacré, “Joseph Tusiani's Latin Poetry: Aspects of its originality”, in Paolo A. Giordano ed., *Joseph Tusiani Poet Translator Humanist*, cit., p. 164.

⁵⁴ In Lucia Petracco Sovran, *Joseph Tusiani poeta e traduttore*, cit., p. 101.

modules as Tusiani's urgency to immerse classicism in contemporary life – and thus to compose once again and on another level his dichotomic self. Latin, even more than the Gargano dialect, becomes the language that par excellence overcomes his linguistic and cultural dilemma, to signify that “strumento complessivo, unificante, liberatorio, sublimante”⁵⁵ that reaches back to the very roots of Italian culture.

In his subsequent publications Tusiani has greatly rectified his Latin prosody but has continued to utilize it as a sort of framework for his visions. Rightly Sacré points out that in this clash between the old and the new lies Tusiani's uniqueness in the scene of Neo-Latin poetry. In fact, he does not want to push his verses backwards to compete with classical Latin poetry, on the contrary, he pushes Latin diction to the present and creates a poetic idiom that can express Tusiani's perception of our *tremenda aetas*.⁵⁶

If on the one hand his Latin output represents a conspicuous work of prolongation of that humanistic tradition we are all indebted to and its promulgation within American culture, on the other Tusiani does not limit himself to using it as a learned exercise as many Neo-Latin poets do, but as another expressive means that allows him other forms and genres to voice his poetic self. The way he inserts modern terminology in it is in fact interesting.⁵⁷

An example is the elegy he dedicated to the memory of John Fitzgerald Kennedy⁵⁸ whose assassination stands for a transfiguration of human tragedy. The elegy combines myth and technology; the airplane carrying the president's casket

⁵⁵ Fontanella, cit. p. 94. A few paragraphs below Tusiani agrees: “Sì, in latino, nella lingua pudica e solenne dei pochi, sono riuscito a dire cose che forse non avrei mai detto, o saputo dire, né in inglese né in italiano. Forse il latino è la “parola antica” di chi, avendo due lingue e due patrie, non sa quale di esse più gli appartenga o lo contenga. Indubbiamente esso è la base solida (e profondamente italica) su cui poggia la mia ars poetica”.

⁵⁶ Dirk Sacré, op., cit. p. 167.

⁵⁷ In *La parola antica*, p. 222, Tusiani comments: “Di una cosa ero certo: la falsariga della cultura classica aveva, anzi ha, rovinato l'ottanta per cento della produzione neolatina col penoso risultato di sonorissimi versi e pochissima poesia; aborro ed aborro, perciò, ogni dotto riferimento a personaggi ed eventi mitologici e, con esso, ogni frase classicheggiante. Anche se si serve del latino, il poeta del ventesimo secolo deve usare espressioni ed immagini del suo secolo; deve, insomma, essere se stesso, e certo non è se stesso chi si attiene al copione di una dizione sorpassata.”

⁵⁸ The poem was entitled “JFK: Obit XI. XXII. MCMLXIII” and was published in *The Classical Outlook*, 50.3 1972-1973.

becomes a “mechanica avis”, an “aquila ferrea” taking that modern Ganymede to the gods claiming him. But even titles like “Ripa Hudsoniana” or “Nox Americana”⁵⁹ exemplify how the poet contextualizes his Latin verses.

Another widely studied peculiarity of his Latin output is the exploitation of its seductive musical quality. On various occasions the poet has equated poetry to music, underlining that music is at the core of his aesthetic sensitivity. Several of his poems in four languages have titles containing musical genres (serenades, canzonettas, sonatas, symphonies) and have music as a prominent part in their constitutive framework and in their larger symbolic meanings.

Michele Coco defines the lines of Tusiani’s “De Venere Dea ac Poeta quodam fabella” as being characterized by a “musicalità suggestiva” and reproducing a “sonorità mimetica incredibile” to conclude that

L’alessandrinismo, talvolta esasperato, è un vezzo di tutta la poesia tusiana, tutta o quasi tutta d’origine letteraria, tutta o quasi tutta riferita a suoni, colori, sensazioni, colta, costruita, classicamente atteggiata.”⁶⁰

While Tusiani, allowing himself some metalinguistic play, describes Latin in the five-line stanzas poem “Lingua latina” as:

Me doces sonitu sacro
arborum fremitus leves
et maris melos intimum,
siderum harmoniam vagam
noctis in patula umbra. (11-15)⁶¹

John T. Kirby expands on these lines and considers that while the *topos* invoked is that of the “music of the spheres”, its connection with the knowledge of the Latin language is Tusiani’s innovation.⁶² Noteworthy are also the musical effects

⁵⁹ “Ripa Hudsoniana” was published in *Confinia lucis et umbrae*, Dirk sacré, ed., Leuven, Peeters 1989; “Nox Americana” in *Carmina latina I*, edited and translated by Emilio Bandiera, Fasano, Schena, 1994.

⁶⁰ Michele Coco, quoted by Lucia Petracco Svoran in cit., p. 102-104.

⁶¹ “Lingua latina” *Confinia lucis et umbrae*, cit.,

⁶² John T. Kirby, “The Neo-Latin Verse of Joseph Tusiani”, in Paolo A. Giordano ed., op. cit., p. 188. In this study Kirby also analyzes the musical effects of Tusiani’s lullabies where the combination of sounds and metre almost hypnotically reproduce musical effects aimed at lulling to sleep.

created in Tusiani's lullabies – a genre Tusiani borrowed more from popular than from classical tradition and in which sounds become so meaningful in themselves as to leave behind the content they carry. The allusion here is to the obvious structuralist definition of the poetic hypersign as accumulating in itself a wealth of potential information.

The equivalence of light and sound in his poetry has already been explored by Emilio Bandiera, who has pointed out a number of examples where the simultaneous presence of these two elements generates life.⁶³ Light implies warmth and signifies love, that love that emanates from God, while music (sound in general) is the effect of life and of God's creation of the universe. In this, Bandiera comments, Tusiani is Franciscan while also following the Medieval theory of Thomism. He also highlights Tusiani's synaesthetic use of both these perceptions. It is interesting to point out how they work in his poetry too: if in man's veins music runs like blood and produces warmth – which is an attribute of both light and love – in Tusiani, this love is the love for poetry, and the music of words illuminates their deeper meaning.⁶⁴ His poem entitled "Novitas" seems to encapsulate this exact passage from love of creation to love of poetry through his synaesthesia:

Nunc maiora canam: sed quid nisi germina parva
Subter humo lente lenta expectantia lumen?
Quid nisi te solum, nidorum flebile murmur
Quod cras musica eris super arva fluens radiosa?

⁶³ As an example Bandiera quotes a brief poem composed of only two Sapphic stanzas entitled "Mane" in which the reader is left with the apparent doubt of what gives life, if light or music:

Albicat caelum tenero tremore
Et maris tersum speculum cietur.
Quid fit? Omnino nova lux marinas
Lambit arenas

Nunc aves purum spatium pererrant
Candidasque alas frutices salutant.
Quid fit? In plantis hominumque venis
Musica vita est
(In *Carmina Latina I*, cit., poem n. 74)

⁶⁴ See below the quotes from his essay on Emily Dickinson.

Nescio quid maius sit, quid minus. Imperiosa
Lux oritur mentesque hominum mox suscitatur omnes:
Flores et volucres, fecunda est undique vita.
Vivo et ego rursus, vivendo et viva saluto
Omnia quae cerno, pars vera et vivida eorum.
Non homo sum moestus, tenebras qui novit amaras,
Sum Natura novo et contento corde renata,
Caelum et terra fide coniuncta redemptaque tandem.
Sum mare, sum rivus, totus sum diva Poësis.⁶⁵

The poet equates his existential rebirth to the regeneration of life in nature and becomes himself *diva Poësis*. But if we read this poem from a metatextual perspective, it is his personal elective understanding and communion with the elements generating life – light and music – that inspires his own poetry.

This aspect of Tusiani's poetry has already been highlighted in the analysis of "The Return", where his English poetic language produces a landscape which is more intellectualized than described. Tusiani rejects the Horatian statement that poetry is like painting in a poem which questions it from its very title "Ut pictura poesis?", because painting cannot be enjoyed if someone is blind, while music can describe the enlivening qualities of the sun and does not prevent anyone who is deaf from intimately understanding it. This poem too, ought to be read as a statement on his own poetics, which is characterized by a *lucente loquela*, a language revealing itself from its own very musicality of words and lines:

"Ut pictura poesis erit"? Quid dicis, Horati?
A tali ludo, sapiente ac lege colorum
omnes excludis caecos et semivedentes.
"Ut pictura poesis"? Ab hac *lucente loquela*
ipse ego, non caecus, cum *finit celsa favilla*,
inculpabiliter dirimentibus arceor *umbris*.
Sit potius nobis *ut musica tota poesis*
(*internum melos est innata opulentia surdi*),
musica quam reddit resonantem flamma diurna
sed quae, luce absente, potest supponere solem.
Oh, sine pictura pergam resistere vitae,
qui perpressus sum *tot noctes* insidiosas
quot vixi *sub sole* dies: facile est *tenebrarum*
prospicere imperium super omnes res hominesque

⁶⁵ "Novitas" n. 3, in *Carmina Latina II*, introduction and translation by Emilo Bandiera, Galatina, Congedo, 1998.

aeternum. Sed difficile est et inutile funus
transitus in terra sine *vivo sanguine cantus*.
Me praecedant, me per magnum iter usque sequantur
murmura cunctarum rerum, responsa *animata*
cunctis murmuribus stellarum; totius orbis
me *melos* impleat et magico praemuniat *hymno*
contra praescriptae ventura *silentia* Finis.⁶⁶

Apart from the already explored double presence of light and music, and the concept of music as the blood of life, this poem seems to develop further what has already been seen in “Novitas” and in “The Return”. Poetry is for Tusiani that experience in which not only his aesthetic research is realized but also that innermost place in which his dichotomic self – made of present and past, body and soul, thought and emotion – is reconciled.

Sometimes also a simple and vivid visual impact characterizes Tusiani’s Latin verses. Much quoted is his description of a photograph in the epigram “Photographema maritimum”:

Unda tacet subito, subito tacet hora diurna:
sistunt ecce simul tempus et Oceanus.
Alta voce puer ridet ludens in harena
atque eius risus tota creata tenet.⁶⁷

The description of a product of modern technology succeeds in conveying the simultaneity of landscape and action in front of the click of a camera. The ekphrasis here freezes, as photography does, its instantaneity, but the poetical vision is all generated by the polysemy of verbs like “sistunt” or “tenet” which seem to suggest beyond their literal meaning that the child’s laughter holds nature under a spell.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Ibidem, n. 16. The Italics are mine.

⁶⁷ In *Confinia Lucis et umbrae*, cit., p.13.

⁶⁸ For the analysis of this epigram see Kirby, pp. 199-201 and Sacré, pp. 168-169 in Paolo A. Girodano, op. cit.

Tusiani's most famous Latin poem "In vehiculo subviario", 1973,⁶⁹ epitomizes all these sensory – visual, auditory – and technological aspects that have been highlighted so far.

The poem is written in rhythmical eight-syllable couplets and is imitative, at least in some of its lines, of Medieval goliardic poetry, especially of the "In taberna quando sumus". It describes the masses of commuters that take the subway to go to work every morning:

...
Tanquam miserae sardinae
Stant personae matutinae
Semper notae sed ignotae,
Mixtae maestae mutae motae,
...

and offers an indicative example of the poet's mastery in creating sound and rhythm effects, as the monotonous drone of the train: "Unda profunda profunda profunda" is repeated through the lines as a hypnotic refrain with the use of onomatopoeic sounds.

This song attracts the reader with his double level of parodic play with that Medieval tradition which was itself already a goliardic parody of classical and liturgical heritage. Yet the self-amused and amusing tone becomes more and more serious as the poet interrogates himself on the destiny of those anonymous fellow passengers and his sympathetic feelings are somewhat reminiscent of the English "Elegy Written in a Subway Station".

To conclude, Tusiani's versatility and at the same time his converging of themes in whatever language he expresses himself, can be easily proved by his very words.

Saepe, praesertim in hortis tristitiae animum abfuscantis, me ipsum interrogo ad causas explorandas, cur etiam nunc, in fine vigesimi saeculi ac vitae meae, carmina mea latina pangam. Horatii utor hexametro ad me ipsum agnoscendum vel probandum: "Caelum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt." Heu! Verum non est quod vates cecinit. Animus quoque alieno sub caelo mutatur. Res amara fit animus, fit feritas eadem caeli marisque

⁶⁹ It appeared in the journal *The Classical Outlook* 51.3 (1973-74) and was reissued in 1984 in the volume *Rosa Rosarum. Carmina Latina*, [no place of publication,] American Classical League, [no date of publication], pp. 33-34

novorum. Migratio est aberratio: erratio a noto ac certo in ignotum et incertum, a matris lingua ad laboris loquelam... Ergo desperatione prope motus Tusce canere perrexi aut, Musa tacente, classicos poetas italicos in versus Anglicos verti. Hoc nunc est aenigma: utra lingua est vere mea? Tusca an Anglica? Quis sum ego – omnis homo an duo homines aliena dimidia? Et ubi sunt radices meae? Lingua latina unicam fortasse praebet solutionem illusionemque supremam. Aut fortasse, ut de se dicebat Quintus Ennius, mihi quoque tria corda in pectore sunt.⁷⁰

Gargano dialect poems

The Gargano dialect was his native language, the language that poor rural people spoke and that he himself used to communicate with his mother (even though mixed with local pidgin and Italian) till her death in 1998. In dialect Tusiani has written a rich variety of collections of poems and the number of publications has intensified in the last twenty-five years. Since the early nineties Tusiani has started to return yearly to his native village and since then he has published dialect poems almost every year; for him “la scrittura dialettale è divenuta quasi un programma”.⁷¹

In the last few decades vernacular poetry has flourished and has attracted the consensus of “official” literary criticism.⁷² The reason could be the fact that in the wake of ethnic studies, local productions have found their moment of interest and visibility. Besides, the variety of Italian dialects as languages in their own right, and the literary dignity of many of them, is a well-known case of study among Romance philologists and linguists, and has always encouraged their retrieval,

⁷⁰ In Sacré, cit., pp. 178-179.

⁷¹ Cosma Siani, *L'io diviso. Joseph Tusiani fra emigrazione e letteratura*, Roma, Edizioni Cofine, p. 79

⁷² An interest towards dialect literatures can be traced back to Benedetto Croce who distinguished between a spontaneous popular and unaware dialect production and a learned dialect literature, aware of the existence of more vernacular traditions which had its origin in the seventeenth century. See his chapter entitled “La letteratura dialettale riflessa, la sua origine nel seicento e il suo ufficio storico”, in Benedetto Croce, *Uomini e cose della vecchia Italia*, Bari, Laterza, 1943 (1956), vol. I pp. 223-236. See also Mario dell’Arco and Pier Paolo Pasolini eds., *Poeti dialettali del Novecento*, Milano, Guanda, 1952, and, more recently, Franco Brevini, *Poeti dialettali del Novecento*, Torino, Einaudi, 1987.

despite the fact that the interest in building a national unity – and identification – required the adoption of Italian as a national language.

In this area, several neo-dialect authors have retrieved those languages they feared might get lost in an era of global communication.

Siani explores the difference between a neo-dialect poet and Tusiani's use of the Gargano dialect. The former uses dialect as a weapon against the leveling operated by national post-industrial languages, which tend to erase local languages, and consequently values and cultures. The neo-dialect poet is not the spokesperson of a language community anymore.⁷³ This last aspect underlies Tusiani's approach to Latin, not to dialect. While Latin is an ancient dignified language uncompromised by the processes of standardization of modern languages, dialect is still a very lively and lexically connoted language which keeps representing for him a tight familial and cultural bond. On the other hand, Tusiani is part of this neo-dialect approach not only in chronological terms, but also because, once again, it is to this old traditional language, that he turns to spiritually reconnect to his native land and to recover that part of his identity left behind by emigration.

On another level, this return to dialect aims at solving the problematic interplay of his different and conflicting linguistic codes.

Il ritorno ad un linguaggio *elementale*, che possa risolvere il dimorfismo culturale ed estetico dell'autore, lacerato tra la compostezza ed eleganza classica delle sue composizioni in inglese e in italiano ed il bisogno di massima comunicabilità, di servirsi di uno strumento assai meno diaframmato delle due lingue dominanti, che tendono a guardare le cose dall'alto, a frapporre tra lingua e realtà il peso e la mediazione di una cultura che mira ad appiattare differenze e particolarismi, rappresenta d'altra parte un tentativo di ricongiunzione tra memoria personale e collettività, io soggettivo

⁷³ Tusiani usa il dialetto come uno dei suoi registri, accanto all'inglese, all'italiano, al latino. Il neodialettale non ha regole se non la rappresentazione dello smarrimento, e si sgancia volutamente dalla tradizione egemone, cercando i simboli del proprio essere, l'esperimento verbale, il frammento impressionista. Tusiani tende a ricomporre, e ricomporsi, in storie e rappresentazioni di sapienza antica, in allegorie che tendono a una regola d'esistenza." Cosma Siani, *Le lingue dell'altrove*. cit., Roma, Edizioni Cofine, 2004, p. 94.

e comunità, in una ricerca inquietante, necessaria, della patria perduta dopo lo strappo, la lacerazione, il dislocamento culturale.⁷⁴

Làcreme e sciure (1955), *Tìreca tàreca. Poesie in vernacolo garganico* (1978), and *Bronx, America. Poesie in dialetto Garganico* (1991), are all collections of poems celebrating the same nostalgic rural themes that we find in his Italian or English poetry. More interesting, for the translator, are all those poems in which he mixes local traditions with learned reminiscences of the Italian poetic tradition and that show a humorous vein seldom to be found in his poetry.

Among them it is worthwhile mentioning here all those dialect poems which refer to specific genres of Italian poetry. *Annemale parlante*, 1994 exploits the old animal fable derived from Aesop to Phaedrus to La Fontaine and clearly echoes Casti's poem and some fables that can be found in the *Morgante*.

To sixteenth-century Italian and German traditions of zoo-epics about insects⁷⁵ belongs *La Poceide: Poemetto in dieci canti in dialetto garganico*, 1996, a mock-heroic poem whose sestets are reminiscent of John Donne's "The Flea", as they tell the story of fleas and mosquitos which do not want to suck the blood from humans who are affected by cholesterol problems.

Na vota è 'mpise Cola, 1997, narrates a traditional local tale of the prodigal son of a rich family who spends his life wasting his father's money on feasts and dinners. His father fills a hollow beam with gold and before dying he tells Cola that when he has dissipated all his money the only thing left him to do will be to hang himself on that very beam. His father's prophecy comes true and when he is finally left in misery and full of debts, he tries to hang himself and discovers the treasure hidden inside. His lesson learned, Cola invites all the friends who had turned their backs on him in the moment of need and prepares for them a dinner of bare bones. To their surprise he shouts at them "Cola hangs himself only once!".

⁷⁴ Luigi Bonaffini, "La poesia dialettale di Joseph Tusiani" in Cosma Siani ed., "Two Languages, Two Lands". *L'opera letteraria di Joseph Tusiani*, San Marco in Lamis, Quaderni del Sud, 2000. p. 103.

⁷⁵ Teofilo Folengo's "macaronea" *Moscheide* (1521) became a model for a type of German protestant satires involving insects, which were quite successful in the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries such as Johann Fischart's *Floh Haz, Weiber Traz*, [the battle between fleas and women] (1571) and G. Rollenhagen's "batrachomyomachia" *Froschmäuselerkrieg* [the battle of frogs and mice] (1566).

Siani points out how this story has origins wider than the Gargano area. It can be found in Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*, but as the sources of that play were Greek, probably this story is part of a Pan-mediterranean ancient sapiential tradition in which he also envisions Plutarch and Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*.⁷⁶ In fact it is from Greek myth and tragedy that the theme of the revenge and the deceit during the banquet is derived. In fact, in the Prometheus myth, the titan prepares a banquet of bones to deceive the other gods⁷⁷;

Similarly complex are the formal references: the use of heroic couplets is – in the author's admission – an indirect homage to Pope's *Rape of the Lock* and *Essays*. The lexical richness is also testified by long improbable lists of food echoing a stylistic feature of the *Morgante*, whose translation Tusiani would publish the next year. The stanzaic form of the *Morgante*, *ottava rima*, will be used in *Lu Deddù*, 1999, another mock-heroic poem on Noah and the universal deluge. In the poem Noah dreams of landing with his Ark on the island of Manhattan and there he is fascinated by a world where everything is new, from skyscrapers to tomatoes and cigarettes. An octave of this poem is an example of a typical Pulcian stanza built on anaphoras, which was itself a parody of those of the *cantastorie*'s tradition:

Inte Manatta passeja Nuvè,
inte Manatta ce sente signore,
inte Manatta je ppprincipe e rre,
inte Manatta li rire lu core,
inte Manatta – june duva e ttre –
inte Manatta ce ajjenchie d'amore,
inte Manatta – ched'è che non è? –
inte Manatta ce sfoca Nuvè.⁷⁸

In 2008 Tusiani was awarded the special literary prize for poetry “Giuseppe Acerbi”. In an interview published in *I Quaderni del Premio Letterario Giuseppe Acerbi* Cosma Siani asked him if he preferred to use one language to another in

⁷⁶ Cosma Siani, *Le lingue dell'atrove*, cit., pp. 92-93.

⁷⁷ This theme is also present in a more gruesome form, which recalls ritual cannibalism, when Tantalus serves his own son Pelops in a banquet for the gods to prove their omniscience, but the gods discover the deceit and punish him.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 168

his poetry, and if there were feelings, emotions or thoughts that he could better express in one language rather than in another. His answer confirms what has been so far highlighted:

Sì, nelle quattro lingue che uso, noto delle differenze. In latino mi sembra di avere espresso sentimenti amorosi che, per pudore o esitazione linguistica, non ho saputo o voluto confidare in italiano o inglese. In inglese sono riuscito a dare stura o sfogo alle mie inclinazioni metafisiche, forse alimentate, nel corso dei miei studi, dalla lettura di Donne e Crashaw fino a Browning. In italiano ho scritto poca poesia, forse perché nella lingua materna ho, per così dire, esaurito ogni energia per raccontare la mia emigrazione nei tre volumi autobiografici. Nel nostro dialetto garganico, infine, forse a causa dei miei frequenti ritorni in patria, ho creduto di esoricizzare l'avanzare della inevitabile senectus riascoltando i suoni dell'infanzia lontana e illudendomi, così, di essere ancora il fanciullino che più non sono ma, come tutti, mi porto dietro. Tu hai detto: "sentimenti che mi accorgo di *voler* dire più in una lingua che in un'altra". Ma non si tratta di *voler* dire; si tratta, invece, di una lingua che, più di un'altra, nel momento di grazia, s'impone alla nostra coscienza o, come direbbe Dante, "ditta dentro".⁷⁹

Language issues in Joseph Tusiani's poetics

As a scholar and a translator of Italian classics, Tusiani knows very well the importance of words, and the crucial term "word"⁸⁰ is not only repeated three times in the titles of his three-volume autobiography *La parola difficile, La parola nuova, La parola antica*, but appears also as the title of a poem "The Difficult Word" in the English collection *Gente Mia and Other Poems*.⁸¹

Consequently the problem of the translation of words – a metaphor of a wider perspective on the translation of culture – is uppermost in Tusiani's production, and it becomes apparent if we focus on the term "word" of his autobiography. *La parola nuova* evidently epitomizes his relationship to the new American culture

⁷⁹ Cosma Siani, "Joseph Tusiani. Quattro domande", in *Letteratura italoamericana. I quaderni del Premio Lteerario Giuseppe Acerbi*, cit., p. 215.

⁸⁰ Two of the many early poems that Tusiani published on the pages of *Spirit*, the journal of the Catholic Poetry Society of America in the years 1957-1961, have the titles "Words and the Word" and "The Word Unsaid".

⁸¹ In the poem he explores the conflict of his relationship to his father and the difficulty he has in pronouncing the word "papa". The first volume of his autobiography is centered on the same topic.

and his first steps in a poetical production in English, while *La parola antica* stands for a return to his original languages, dialect (native and affections), Italian and Latin (education and culture).

We have seen that his four-language poems are almost always sealed off from each other, what unifies them is the urgency of the vision and the handling of recurring themes through different genres. Yet from the purely linguistic perspective, he does not make use of any code-switching, unless he is imitating the pidgin of Italian immigrants, or when words of a different language conjure up whole symbolic fields that function as a metaphor of his “dual” identity and that deliberately pose linguistic questions – as in the poem “Song of the Bicentennial” quoted below. In these cases, indicative occurrences of hybridization are some “borrowings” or some key words returning again and again in his poems in different languages.

A telling example is provided by the volume *Gente Mia and Other Poems*. This is a collection of English verses, but, as the unifying issue is the immigrants’ experience, the phrase epitomizing them cannot but be Italian, “gente mia”, while the single poems portraying their life in their everyday American environment are necessarily written in English. This psychological, but in Tusiani’s case also purely linguistic problem is faced again and again both in his poetry and in his autobiography.

In the following lines of “Song of the Bicentennial”, Tusiani stresses how language is endowed with cultural/affective values that are lost when the process of Americanization begins and how the immigrant loses a part of him/herself during this linguistic/cultural transformation.

Now every thought I think, each word I say
detaches me a little more from all
I used to love – your faces, ancient friends,
and all our phrases of so much delight
as needed no translation in my mind.
Mother, I even wonder if I am
the child I was, the little child you knew,
for you did not expect your little son
to grow apart from all that was your world,

the world that he saw first with your own eyes –
simple and untranslatable, composed
of one unclouded clarity of light.
Yet of a sudden he was taught to say
'Mother' for Mamma, and for cielo 'sky'.
That very day, we lost each other. Now
I know you look at me as though I were
a little more and yet a little less
than what a son – your little child – should be.
Oh, they have taught me to translate all things –
even my very self – into some new
and old infinity of roots and boughs,
so that I wonder whether I am old
or whether I am new beneath the sky,
beneath the cielo of my long-lost land.⁸²

This is but one of the clues suggesting that for Tusiani the language question has also been a sociological problem if not a spiritual dilemma⁸³

In his autobiography as well as in his poems he considers his bilingualism as a fracture that, if summed up, cannot recompose a whole, and he wonders on the consequences of writing in a language which is not his own:

Posta in termini diversi la domanda è: fino a qual punto l'emigrato può assimilare la nuova lingua e la nuova civiltà, e in che maniera dimenticare e rinnegare se stesso in mezzo alle nuove e impellenti esigenze della sua vita? Anche se la risposta sia priva di validità scientifica, il poeta ci dice che non

⁸² The same concept is developed in linguistic and sociological terms in the third volume of his autobiography, where he reflects on the notion of "creative bilingualism". Though long, the passage deserves to be quoted in full: "Due lingue. La realtà dello sbarbicamento (uso questo termine per indicare lo sradicamento completo) comporta diversi problemi o traumi, prima di tutto quello di un nuovo linguaggio. Progredendo nell'acquisizione della lingua straniera, si corre il rischio, per ragioni di umana vanità, di ritenere inferiore quella materna?..."

Non si cade in questo pericolo se il fenomeno del bilinguismo lo si considera non come conquista ma come rinnegamento forzato delle proprie origini e di se stessi. Il bilinguismo, cioè, diventa sinonimo di disintegrata unità familiare, per cui una madre non è più in grado di comprendere il proprio figlio. Dal giorno in cui il figlio dice «Mother» per «mamma» e «sky» per «cielo», fra madre e figlio c'è già una separazione spirituale che lo studioso di linguistica non può catalogare. Se le parole sono suoni articolati che simboleggiano e comunicano un'idea, il termine «mamma», a differenza di «mother», il nuovo termine acquisito, simboleggia e comunica un intero mondo di sentimenti che nessuna espressione straniera può comprendere e rispettare. Abolirlo significa rigettare l'esistenza di una fanciullezza intimamente legata a tutti gli episodi, piccoli e grandi, e a tutte le emozioni, importanti e non importanti, connessi ed ispirati da quell'unica parola. Non assimilazione o americanizzazione, dunque, ma ambivalenza, un'ambivalenza di pensiero e sentimento, di dubbio e di certezza, di sogno e realtà." *La parola antica*, pp. 143-144.

⁸³ See Paolo A. Giordano "From Southern Italian Emigrant to Reluctant American: Joseph Tusiani's *Gente Mia and Other Poems*", in *From the Margin*, cit., p. 317; also in "Joseph Tusiani and the Saga of Immigration", in *Joseph Tusiani Poet Translator Humanist*, cit., p. 66.

esiste, e non può esistere, un assorbimento totale, e che non potrà mai esserci un'accezione totale, cioè spirituale, delle tradizioni della nuova terra.⁸⁴

Thus Tusiani's use of his native language in his poetry and for his translations, which are the product of a similar creative activity, becomes in Cecchetti's words "volontà di ricupero di se stesso e insieme accettazione terapeutica di un destino".⁸⁵

Tusiani wrote his first poems in Italian, but when he migrated to the United States Italian poetic language gradually ceased to have a creative potential for him and English became his living language, the language of his maturity.

...fu in questo paese che cominciai a vivere da adulto. Tutte le mie esperienze più importanti perciò, sono collegate alla lingua inglese che, di conseguenza, ora considero la principale 'veste del pensiero', anche se la lingua d'infanzia resta come un ricordo di un mondo idilliaco al di là del tempo.⁸⁶

English became then his "veste del pensiero" and substituted almost completely Italian as a poetic language in the interval of seven or eight years. Italian remained the language of his original culture and of his prose autobiography, and cannot be otherwise as prose is the telling of one's memory, while poetry is the sudden illumination given by memory as it emerges through words.

Italian and English belong to two parallel and similar contexts, one eventually replaces the other, while Latin and the Gargano dialect are the languages of his cultural roots. But the Gargano dialect remains a living language, as it is his native language, the one allowing him to translate orality into the written forms of literary tradition. Latin remains productive for the opposite reason, because it never comes to terms with the characteristics of a spoken living language. Cecchetti underlines how his acquisition of a new language ought to be inscribed once again in the wider experience of immigration. The kind of "schizophrenic" condition imposed by external circumstances and by time (Am I a man or two

⁸⁴ Joseph Tusiani, *La parola antica*, cit., p. 144.

⁸⁵ Giovanni Cecchetti, "Joseph Tusiani e l'emigrazione coatta" in Joseph Tusiani, *Poet Translator Humanist an International Homage*, xxx, 1994.

⁸⁶ In *Le Lingue dell'altrove*, cit., p. 19. Originally in "Italian Poets in America. An Anthology", Luigi Fontanella and Paolo Valesio, eds, *Gradiva*, vol. V, num. 1, 1992-1993, p. 137.

strange halves of one?) that Tusiani tries to compose in his creative work functions as a therapeutic acceptance of his destiny. Thus Tusiani writes in English, Cecchetti continues, “per potersi trapiantare e, trapiantandosi, riscoprire se stesso”⁸⁷ Under this light, the endeavor to embrace a new language is accompanied by the intense desire for a return to one’s original language that can be the local dialect, or, for a man of letters like Tusiani, Latin:

Nel caso dell’emigrato che non ha più una lingua che possa chiamar sua, e che amaramente e disperatamente cerca di afferrarsi qualcosa che gli ricordi un passato anche remoto ed ancestrale, non acquista valore salvifico la lingua latina dei suoi padri?⁸⁸

In fact, his Latin production is a typical parodic homage to the forms of classic tradition, and a countersong that on some occasions even touches the syncretic aims of postmodern approaches. Yet both Gargano-dialect and Latin poems allow him to express himself in ways he wouldn’t be able to either in English or in Italian because each language fills an expressive void in his stratified culture. For Tusiani this continuous confrontation among his languages is of the utmost importance and it is from this perspective that we should explore his translations from Italian into English and viceversa. They mediate between these two languages and cultures but also allow him to relate his own poetic word to the poetic word of another poet.

The voice and the word

Tusiani’s poetry requires to be studied leaving ethnic parameters and themes behind, or rather by going beyond them to embrace wider interpretive ways.

⁸⁷ Giovanni Cecchetti, “Joseph Tusiani e l’emigrazione coatta”, in *Joseph Tusiani Poet Translator Humanist*, cit., p. 55.

⁸⁸ Joseph Tusiani, *La parola antica*, cit., p. 223.

I would like to paraphrase here what he wrote in 1950 in an essay entitled “La poesia amorosa di Emily Dickinson”. In those pages he prophetically warned against the risks of categorizing her immense production thematically: “La personalità poetica dell’usignolo di Amherst risultò conseguentemente scissa e dispersa in tante note musicali, priva del punto di partenza canoro.” The departing point for Emily Dickinson is love:

L’amore, scrive la Dickinson, è anteriore alla vita, posteriore alla morte, inizio del creato ed esponente del respiro. Quando questo amore ha inizio nella vita di lei? Prima della solitudine, o dopo? No, il suo amore ha inizio col suo canto.⁸⁹

This quote is particularly telling if we apply it to Tusiani’s poetry for two key concepts: love and music. First of all, it exemplifies the limits of all criticism about his poetic production which either collocated it “thematically” in the field of Italian American ethnic writing, or did not collocate it at all, as Italian and European scholars have done when facing his multilingual poetry. None of them has so far tried to understand the reasons why Tusiani uses all these languages, and how all these languages – and their literary traditions – contribute in creating a whole aesthetic and poetic experience.

What was love in Dickinson, a love that coincided with her song, in Tusiani is his song that becomes an act of love, in which aesthetic intentionality coincides with poetic intuition. His aim is to find the right expressive modality, and all his poems in all four languages, as well as his translations, reveal his incessant research into the expressive potential of poetic language. In this, his poetics is very close to Croce’s idea of poetry but also to Benjamin’s notion that every poetic act should aim at a pure superior language.

In the essay on “The Task of the Translator” Benjamin quotes Mallarmé’s statement in which the French poet claims that languages are numerous because

⁸⁹ Joseph Tusiani, “La poesia amorosa di Emily Dickinson” in *Joseph Tusiani tra le due sponde dell’oceano*, Antonio Motta and Cosma Siani, eds, *Il Giannone*, anno V, num. 9-10, gen.-dic. 2007, p. 17. This essay was originally published in 1950, New York, The Venetian Press.

they are imperfect, and a supreme one is missing, the one allowing us to reach the truth (les langues imparfaites en cela que plusieurs, manque la suprême⁹⁰).

Yet languages, with their variety and imperfections are limited and each language is the expression of what can be communicated in itself. In his essay “On language as such and on the language of man” Benjamin explains:

essa comunica l'essenza spirituale che le corrisponde. E' fondamentale sapere che questa essenza spirituale si comunica *nella* lingua, e non *attraverso* la lingua. [...] La lingua comunica quindi, di volta in volta, l'essere linguistico delle cose, ma il loro essere spirituale solo in quanto è direttamente racchiuso in quello linguistico, solo in quanto è comunicabile.⁹¹

In this love for what each one of his languages can communicate lies Tusiani's poetics.

The second keyword in the quote about Dickinson's poetry is the music of her song. It is obvious that poetry has in itself a musical quality, as it is evident that all its phonetic, rhythmical and prosodic elements concur in creating a whole musical pattern.

As already pointed out, music has always occupied a very important role in Tusiani's aesthetics,⁹² and Emilio Bandiera has on many occasions highlighted the synaesthetic quality of his poetry, in which light and music are two sensorial elements closely entwined and interchangeable.

Light and music are two commonly exploited metaphors in poetry and in Tusiani's perception are developed “traditionally”. Light illuminates the mind; the sources of warmth, like the sun or fire, stand for love according to a tradition that goes back to medieval Thomism, and together they allow man to understand a reality generated by the love of God. Even music contributes in this creative act of love. It is something more than a Pythagorean concept of the universal harmony generated by the music of the spheres, it is a gift that God gave to man, and it is

⁹⁰ In the Italian edition of *Angelus Novus*, “Il compito del traduttore”, transl. and introd. by Renato Solmi Torino, Einaudi, 1982, p. 37.

⁹¹ Ibidem, pp. 55-56.

⁹² Tusiani is not a musician nor a musicologist, but he practises every day on his electric organ. Some of his poems have been set to music; he composed the lyrics for a religious music drama in 1960 and wrote the essay “Osservazioni sul ‘Torquato Tasso’ di Gaetano Donizetti” published in *Frontiere*, anno IV, n. 8, dic. 2003.

what gives life and sound to raw dumb matter (“Musica vita est”). Yet, these traditional elements are elaborated in Tusiani’s poetry in very modern terms, his synaesthesias echo those of French symbolism, in which words become central, magical and allusive and their musicality is itself at the core of the poetic act.⁹³

But if we apply all this to a narrower analysis of his poetics, we can see that these synaesthetic elements are at the service of his very poetic act as they illuminate the deep meaning of words through their sound.

Even his elaboration of myth belongs to the poetic act and not to a revived and re-actualized mythology, as is the case of the aforementioned Persephone or Hermes of Italian American studies (see chapter I of this dissertation), where the need is to re-enact the sense of their torn roots in some ancestral representation. For Italian Americans the central mythological loss is that Italian/Mediterranean culture whose memory becomes itself the founding myth of Italian American literature.

In Tusiani, myths are neither *in flagranti* nor so contextually connoted and specified and he does not need to find a compensation in them. His myths are to be perceived more as poetic rather than existential metaphors: the mother-mountain of the Gargano, the myth of Pascoli’s “fanciullino”, the Ganymede image used for JFK’s last flight⁹⁴ or the hare in the moon are all myths deeply imbued with literary memories enacted through his poetic words.

Tusiani’s recovery of Italian literary tradition has very little to do with other linguistic and cultural elaborations such as those “buried Caesars” explored by Viscusi in his study.⁹⁵

⁹³ Hugo Friedrich had highlighted the prevailing of the musical aspect over its semantic value in Symbolist poetry and had explained: “La poesia basata sulla magia del linguaggio e sulla suggestione conferisce alla parola il potere di essere il primo motore dell’atto poetico. Per una tale poesia, reale non è il mondo, bensì unicamente la parola.” *La struttura della lirica moderna*, Milano, Garzanti, 2002, [Dis Struktur der modernen Lyrik, 1956].

⁹⁴ In Ganymede’s myth used to interpret JFK’s death he revives that model of Medieval figural reading that was studied by Erich Auerbach in “*Figura*” in *Studi su Dante*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1963.

⁹⁵ Robert Viscusi, *Buried Caesars*, cit.

Italian literature is not for Tusiani a historical or thematic ghost he hangs onto and needs to revive in order to recover his own roots. For him it is not important to conjure up some elusive presence like Dante or other strongly connoted identitarian figures and reconcile his own poetry to them. He is just expressing his own poetic self through the cultural means of his literary background and his poetic production in four languages ought to be analyzed as such.

What is important for him is not to share the “ponderous remembrances” or the “Roman totems”⁹⁶ with other Italian American writers, or the usual patterns of Italian language and culture that they still try to represent in their works. Tusiani’s aim is to find the words that can convey his whole stratified multilingual experience.

Tusiani considers himself an Italian American man but an American poet. His multilingual experience can be easily inscribed in a multicultural America that admits in its own enlarged canon literary expressions in languages other than English. Yet the Italian American ethnic experience can but partially explain and contain Tusiani’s works, even though he recognizes himself as part of it.

There is also a problem of belonging: Italian and American languages have their own literatures referring to specific imaginaries, ideologies, national projects and supplied with a large institutional force on many levels. As Italian American culture is none of these things but maintains a subordinate, almost colonial, relation to them, it somehow engages in its own inbetween-ness⁹⁷. Italian Americans need to achieve a critical awareness of these inherited ideological burdens, to invent their own cultural patterns by articulating a free and critical relationship both with Italian culture and with the notion Americans have of Italy.

⁹⁶ Ibidem. In Viscusi’s opinion, a first and most visible structural evidence of their contradictory position is given by the problem of the language used by Italian American writers in general. For them “language is always the scene of conflict, always open to the temptations of grandiose solutions, always susceptible to deflation and revision”, p. xiii. See also chapters 1 “English as a Dialect of Italian” and 2 “*De vulgari eloquentia*: Ordinary Eloquence in Italian America”.

⁹⁷ “Like other colonials, Italian Americans must learn to see themselves at the center of their own world, not merely on the periphery of someone else’s. This takes time, and it takes writers. Italian American writings [...] grapples with the meaning of Italy in Italian America. The Italy of the mind is large and complicated. Its meanings in the lives of Italian Americans are many and not always easy to sort out - or even to discover. But writing does this necessary work, taking old meanings apart and using the pieces to assemble new ones.” Ibidem, p. 5.

Clearly Tusiani's position is different. He directly refers to Italian and to English and American literature, superseding the claims of Italian American culture.

Tusiani's choice to maintain his native language, and to become one of those very few illustrious mediators between two cultures, is of primary importance within the Italian American debate, where the acquisition of the new language has always implied the eventual loss of the native one.⁹⁸

Tusiani's languages compensate for and complete one another, and he becomes the complex mature poet of his multilingual production when he realizes that writing in his new language produces better results than in Italian. However, all these aspects become of the utmost importance when dealing with Tusiani's activity as translator.

Joseph Tusiani translator of seven centuries of Italian poetry

Oh, they have taught me to translate all things –
even my very self – into some new
and old infinity of roots and boughs,
so that I wonder whether I am old
or whether I am new beneath the sky,
beneath the cielo of my log-lost land.⁹⁹

Tusiani's work as a translator, not only from Italian into English, but also from English into Italian, has gone hand in hand with his poetic output. Mutual influences intertwine in his poetry, in his rewritings and in his translations, not

⁹⁸ The question of language, or rather the loss of language on the part of Italian Americans, is of primary importance when discussing the experience of emigration. The children and grandchildren of Italian immigrants deliberately forgot their native idiom (mostly local dialects rather than Italian) in their effort to Americanize and only today are the great-grandchildren of Italian American origin recovering the native language of their ancestors as a part of a wider challenge to include Italian American culture in the American canon.

⁹⁹ "Song of the Bicentennial", *Gente Mia*, cit., p. 5.

only in terms of content, structure and literary models, but also – as we have seen – on the lexical level.

Actually he considers poetry and translating as two interdependent aspects of the same creative process, which also implies his scholarly approach. In fact, in his long and distinguished academic career he published various essays on the poets he was also translating.¹⁰⁰

While Tusiani was becoming fluent in English he translated English and American poets into Italian. His Italian translations from English comprise an anthology on Wordsworth, the poet of his graduation dissertation, entitled *Wordsworthiana*, (1952)¹⁰¹, the critical anthology *Poesia missionaria in Inghilterra e in America*, (1953),¹⁰² and the collection *Sonettisti Americani*, with the introduction by Frances Winwar.¹⁰³ From 1954 to 1959, he published an anthology with the title “Antologia della poesia americana”, in instalments in the issues of *La Parola del Popolo*, the Chicago Italian American magazine,¹⁰⁴ and in 1956 he translated “Il poeta guerriero” a chapter of d’Annunzio’s biography written by Frances Winwar.

Then his translating activity into Italian stopped, but for two last publications after an interval of almost fifteen years. In 1971 he published the anthology *Influenza*

¹⁰⁰ His scholarly activity accompanies that of the translator. In fact, he published on Dante, Carducci, Machiavelli, Michelangelo, Parini, Boccaccio, Tasso, Foscolo, Montale, Leopardi among others (the order is chronological), all poets whose works he also translated.

¹⁰¹ The previous year he had published three translated poems of Wordsworth in *Il corriere di Foggia*, 20 aprile 1951.

¹⁰² It included poems by Henry Walpole, Edmund Spenser, Richard Crashaw, John Dryden, Alexander Pope, John Henry Newman, Francis Thompson, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Alice Meynell, Lionel Johnson, Robert Stephen Hawker, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, John Bannister Tabb, Frederick L. Hosmer, Louise Imogen Guiney, Blanche Mary Kelly, Joyce Kilmer, Sister Mary Emmanuel, Jessica Powers, Thomas Walsh, Alfred Barrett S.J, Edward Everett Hale and others.

¹⁰³ Translations of David Humphreys, Edgar Allan Poe, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Emma Lazarus, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Alan Seeger, William Ellery Leonard, Thomas S. Jones, Clement Wood.

¹⁰⁴ Among the poets Tusiani translated were: Anne Bradstreet, William Cullen Bryant, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, Edgar Allan Poe, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Edgar Lee Masters, Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg and Vachel Lindsay. For full reference information on “Antologia della poesia americana” see the final bibliography.

cristiana nella poesia negro-americana, which comprised more than thirty poets,¹⁰⁵ and in 1994 a translation of the poems by Giuseppe Antonio Borgese.¹⁰⁶ The passage from English translations into Italian to translations from Italian into English can be more or less indicated in the year 1956, with Tusiani's first publication of his English poem "The Return", which was, in fact, the rewriting of the Italian poem "M'ascolti tu mia terra?" he had written two years before. We have seen how in this self-adaptation to new expressive means he succeeded in saying more, using a language which is more dense and rich in cultural references. The award he received for this poem also shows that he had by then mastered the English language, as both Frances Winwar had encouraged him to do and Prezzolini before her had less benignly advised him to¹⁰⁷. From that date onward his "new" English poetry would progressively replace Italian, and his translations would be from Italian into English. In fact, the dates almost coincide and this is when Italian ceased to be "productive" as a literary language that it became a language from which to translate.

He published the first translation of *The Complete Poems of Michelangelo* in 1960. This volume received a certain amount of attention and was also published in London in the "Unesco Collection of Representative Works". It received contrasting criticism on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, and reviewers were divided between those who praised the translations and those who considered the English "Michelangelo" too supple for the sharp and dry rigidity of his original lines. The translator maintained the structure and rhyme of the original, and also

¹⁰⁵ Among them James Weldon Johnson, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Jean Toomer, Melvin B. Tolson, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Margaret Walker, Gwendolyn Brooks, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Martin Luther King.

¹⁰⁶ Borgese had written a letter to Tusiani to thank him for an introductory note he had written for Borgese's poem "le Gebbie" published in *La Parola del Popolo* (n. 6 April-June 1952). In that letter he stated "Lei ha aggiunto pensiero al pensiero, canto al canto", and in a following letter he hoped that Tusiani and he would collaborate in the future, but that never happened because Borgese died that same year. See "Formazione di un poeta italo-americano", in *Joseph Tusiani tra le due sponde dell'oceano*, cit., pp. 173-175.

¹⁰⁷ A newly emigrated Giuseppe Tusiani presented himself to Prezzolini with a letter a recommendation from his Professor Cesare Foligno. Prezzolini sharply dismissed him by inviting him to go back to Italy or to start learning English. This anecdote can be found in several essays on Tusiani. Among them see Petracco Sovran, op. cit., pp 24-25.

his metrical choice was variously received.¹⁰⁸ In the same year he also translated and published Foscolo's "Sepulchres".

Since then his translating activity has been continuous and unrelenting. He published in literary journals and magazines single poems that were then collected in comprehensive anthologies or in single-volume editions of one poet's works. In 1963 he rendered into English *Lust and Liberty. The Poems of Machiavelli*¹⁰⁹ and from 1965 to 1968 some "Canti" from Dante's *Inferno, Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. To Dante he would return for the volume *Dante's Lyric Poems* in 1992.

In 1970 he translated the whole *Jerusalem Delivered* by Tasso, the following year *The Tears of the Blessed Virgin and the Tears of Christ*; later, in 1982, *The Creation of the World* and in 1987 *The Amorous Pyre*. With Tasso's works he experimented with the *ottava rima* form he would later utilize for the *Morgante*, with his solution of six iambic unrhymed pentameters and a final couplet.

From Boccaccio he translated the *Ninfale fiesolano*, 1971 and some sonnets in 1975.

In the years 1971-1974 he published his three-volume anthology of translations from Italian poetry, which comprises 113 famous and lesser known poets and 581 works: *The Age of Dante, Italian Poets of the Renaissance, and From Marino to Marinetti*. In those years he also translated Manzoni's "Il cinque Maggio", and later in 1985, Manzoni's *Inni sacri*.

In 1975 Tusiani published *America the Free. Five Odes* by Vittorio Alfieri, and Giovanni Pascoli's "Paolo Uccello"; he would later translate Pascoli's "Italy" in

¹⁰⁸ In his essay on poetic translation Tusiani somehow replied to his critics' objections by writing that the translator must be ready: "a far fronte all'indignazione dei critici. Nella fattispecie, essi lo accuseranno di aver reso chiaro ciò che nella poesia di Michelangelo era oscuro, levigato ciò che era aspro, e cantabile ciò che era semplicemente parlato. Per l'ennesima volta si rifaranno alla «qualità marmorea» del verso di Michelangelo. Ma sarebbero in grado di dire precisamente ciò che distingue la qualità marmorea di Michelangelo da quella di un Galeazzo di Tarsia? E si rendono conto che, se si trattasse solo di qualità marmorea, la poesia di Michelangelo non sarebbe affatto poesia? Ebbene, preoccupazione del traduttore è – o dovrebbe essere – ciò che vive sotto la superficie marmorea. "La traduzione poetica", in *Joseph Tusiani tra le due sponde dell'oceano*, cit. p 129.

¹⁰⁹ His translation of Machiavelli's poems allowed Tusiani to become reconciled with Prezzolini. They met in 1960, and Prezzolini, who had forgotten their previous meeting, asked Tusiani if he could use some of his translations for his own Machiavelli. Tusiani sent them, but the texts in Prezzolini's *Machiavelli*, which would be published in 1967, are slightly different from the ones in Tusiani's translations.

1979. From 1981 to 1983 he published in instalments Ugo Foscolo's *Le Grazie*, and, in 1987, D'Annunzio's *Laudi*.

In those years he started to publish some cantos from the *Morgante* which would be completed and published in 1998. In that same year he also published *I Canti* by Giacomo Leopardi.

Translation being an ongoing activity for Tusiani, in the last decade he has rendered Lalla Romano's *Autumn* and in 2007 Montale's *Finisterre*.¹¹⁰

An interesting point when reading through this long list of Italian poetic masterpieces is that he has done all this work by obeying his own personal taste, rather than to publishers' or academic impositions, and this further proves that translation is for him a laboratory in which he verifies the potentiality of a literary language as it can be turned into a language which is at once alive, creative and productive.

Tusiani's translations have gained him a considerable reputation in the departments of Italian studies in the United States, as anyone in the field could hardly match what he has done in terms of quality and quantity. Yet, while it is undisputed that his translations have contributed to the advancement of Italian culture in the United States, it still remains implicit that his translations might have further legitimized the presence of Italian American studies in American culture at large.

We have seen that Tusiani's work as a translator does not receive the same attention in Italian American studies as his ethnic poetic production does. I think this is a gap that ought to be filled, as translation participates in the process of renewal of a language and consequently of a culture. Rightly Cosma Siani comments that these two activities – I would add three: poet, translator, essayist – represent: "l'infessso tentativo di far combaciare due culture, due lingue, due

¹¹⁰ For a complete and updated bibliography of Tusiani's translations, see note 2.

sensibilità (poeta tradotto e poeta traduttore), due diversi mondi, pur nella consapevolezza che mai potrà raggiungersi l'identificazione totale."¹¹¹

From this perspective Tusiani's translations seem to respond completely to the identitarian claims of Italian Americans who need to find a balance between their present culture and that of their heritage. In a way Tusiani was the first to support this interpretation when he felt that in the English language and American culture he could possibly dig new roots and build a new self. Yet he knew that the sum of two languages and cultures, as in the case of all immigrants, does not make up for a lost wholeness:

Traducendo la mia lingua materna, traducevo me stesso, quello che ero stato e di me ricordavo; e, usando la nuova lingua, quasi intendevo dare una spiegazione, se non uno scopo, all'insulso sradicamento di mio padre, voluto da un capriccio del destino"¹¹²

What we know – and certainly Tusiani knows – is that to interpret the importance of his literary translation from the “immigrant's experience” wouldn't do justice to the value of his work. Besides, we have already explored how his poetics and his translations transcend the ethnic issue and require to be studied in a much wider cultural and literary context.

Tusiani himself approached the subject in completely different terms in his essay “The translating of Poetry” published in 1963¹¹³.

In open controversy with Robert Frost's statement that poetry is what gets lost in translation, Tusiani responded that poetry is what can be saved in the passage from one language to another and it is what is finally found in translation.

¹¹¹ Cosma Siani, review of “Petracco Sovran. *Joseph Tusiani poeta e traduttore*”, *Rivista di Studi Italiani*, III, 1, giugno 1985, p. 166.

¹¹² *La parola antica*, p. 145. In the previous pages, Tusiani had commented: “Posta in termini diversi la domanda è: fino a qual punto l'emigrato può assimilare la nuova lingua e la nuova civiltà, e in che maniera dimenticare e rinnegare se stesso in mezzo alle nuove impellenti esigenze della sua vita? Anche se la risposta sia priva di validità scientifica, il poeta ci dice che non esiste, e non può esistere, un assorbimento totale, e che non potrà mai esserci un'accettazione totale, cioè spirituale, delle tradizioni della nuova terra.” Ibid. p. 143.

¹¹³ It was impossible for me to find this essay in the original English, version. All quotes are taken from its recent translation by Cosma Siani in “La traduzione poetica”, in *Joseph Tusiani tra le due sponde dell'oceano*, cit. The original was “The translating of Poetry,” *Thought*, vol. XXXVIII, 150, Autumn 1963, p. 375-390.

He also referred to Goethe as an authoritative precedent who stated that poetry “requires” translation and to Lafcadio Hearn, who told one of his students that a great poem by Calderón, Petrarch or Shakespeare still remains a great poem even in translation. To these statements he added his own comment that “la poesia che non può essere tradotta non ha alcun valore nella letteratura mondiale; non è neppure vera poesia.”¹¹⁴ And below: “riteniamo che la poesia *possa* essere tradotta, e che quello che in traduzione va perso non è il nucleo poetico, ma soltanto le parti esornative, accessorie o non indispensabili”.

In the essay there is an interesting comparison, once again, with other arts and, as for poetry, the *ut pictura poësis* cannot be applied to translation:

Tradurre una poesia significa copiare un originale: ma la copia di un dipinto o di una statua implica problemi molto meno complessi che non la resa di un verso da lingua a lingua. Pittura e scultura possono essere per lo meno riprodotte in fedeltà di materia tangibile – tela e marmo. La poesia no, poiché la materia di cui essa è fatta è proprio la cosa, o *quidditas*, destinata a subire il cambiamento. [...] Ebbene, la poesia è suono, ma anche altra cosa espressa attraverso il suono. Tale «altra cosa» è fatta di pensiero, di sentire, di colore e di ritmo combinati nella maniera più misteriosa e perfino illogica per attingere la più logica e limpida unità. Si può tradurre tutto questo?¹¹⁵

Tusiani also claimed that only a poet can translate another poet, and in the translation of poetry all the elements of the original must be harmoniously recomposed into a new poem, which, even though not perfectly equivalent to the original one, can reveal the same spirit that inspired it:

Il poeta che traduce un altro poeta sa che la sua è prima di tutto un'opera di vita, poi di musica e di colore, e altre componenti del genere. Allo scopo di conservare tale vita, o meglio di riscoprirla e ritrasmetterla nella sua pienezza, egli ricorre a un espediente fatto di compromessi e di compensazione. Egli sa, cioè, che c'è qualcosa in quella particolare poesia che è l'anima e altro che è, per così dire il corpo. Sa anche, e vede chiaramente, in che modo formino unità, e perciò sa bene che cosa può uccidere quella vita, e cosa invece la può lasciare immutata.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Joseph Tusiani, “La traduzione poetica”, in op. cit., p.124 et passim.

¹¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 123.

¹¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 127.

Again we find the synaesthetic and musical elements that have been highlighted in his own poetic production (*musica, colore*) and that seem to guide his approach to other poets too.

Tusiani elaborates on the distinction between “the poet” and “the grammarian” that Foscolo had made for the review of the translation of Ippolito Pindemonte’s *Odyssey* to describe the different approaches to translation. He does not borrow from the more modern post-structuralist vocabulary used to analyze the translator’s activity but draws his “methodological” inspiration from the approaches of nineteenth-century authors, and this is another aspect in line with his poetic sensitivity.

He claims that there ought to be some intuitive communal inspiration between the poet and the re-creator of poetry, as that is the only condition to bring to life a poem in a new language.

Yet the responsibility of translators, when they tackle important works such as those translated by Tusiani, is enormous. As Gateano Cipolla pointed out:

Such texts demand from translators every ounce of cleverness and creativity they possess and more. Scholars who translate the work of the great masters face a very insidious problem that few theorists of translation ever discuss: canonization. [...] A translator who undertakes to translate such a poem is always placed in a position of inferiority, not because his work is necessarily inferior, [...] but because his work has not been canonized. The translation of a classic always falls on deaf ears, because it is, in fact, a new work. It lacks that special quality that predisposes the reader to accept it.¹¹⁷

Indeed the problem of canonization puts the translator in the difficult position of being faithful not only to the poet’s work but also to the meaning of that work in a specific literary tradition and to the familiarity this work – and its very words – may have for readers:

¹¹⁷ Gaetano Cipolla, “Tusiani as Translator”, in *Joseph Tusiani Poet Translator Humanist*, cit., p. 228. To support this view Cipolla operates an interesting change of perspective and analyzes Dante’s sonnet “Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare” by considering Tusiani’s translation the original and Dante’s poem the translation. For an interesting analysis of Tusiani’s translations see the second part of Lucia Petracco Sovran’s study, *Joseph Tusiani poeta e traduttore*, cit.; her interview “Problems of Verse Translation from Italian into English”, *Italian Americana*, vol. II, n. 1, Autumn 1975; and Cosma Siani’s “La traduzione poetica e l’opera di Joseph Tusiani”, *Forum Italicum*, vo. XI, n. 1, 1977.

Canonization congeals: it makes statues of poems. Changing a single word destroys the delicate balance of the poem. A translator, however, must change everything. He must rebuild a new edifice of relationships between sounds and meanings with entirely different materials.¹¹⁸

Tusiani brilliantly overcomes this difficulty as his translations generally betray the translator's thorough knowledge of the materials he is handling. He is the poet and the scholar. And this is his approach to all those poems belonging to so many different cultural periods and characterized by distinctive metrical and stylistic solutions. Yet, if these two sides of his own sensitivity generally blend together and he shows the greatest philological accuracy combined with his musical skills, in other cases, the poet prevails, and his approach seems to be influenced more by his affinity – be it spiritual or artistic – with the poet translated or by his own appreciation of the poetic qualities of some lines.

An example of his philological attention is provided by the translation of the *Morgante*, where the need is to render the parodic handling of the old *cantastorie*'s tradition into a modern but at the same time precise, language.

The latter case can be seen in Tusiani's translations of Leopardi's, where his own "inspiration" and his desire to win over the choice of words or the constraints of some structured rhythm sometimes prevails over an accurate semantic transposition.

Words, again, rhythm and music underlie his poetic/translating approach. According to him the translator:

Può essere costretto a trasformare il monosillabo in polisillabo, o viceversa, così passando da un corpo a un altro corpo, e da un ritmo a un altro del tutto diverso. Ma è qui che la sua sensibilità deve dirgli in vista di quale nuova musica può arrivare ad amalgamare le qualità corporee e incorporee della parola da tradurre.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Gaetano Cipolla, op. cit., p. 230.

¹¹⁹ Joseph Tusiani, "La traduzione poetica", cit., p. 130.

Surely Tusiani's translations belong to the ages of their compositions, and like all translations will be subject to ageing. Pulci's *Morgante* and Leopardi's "Infinito" – the two works analyzed in the following chapters – were both published in 1998 and will probably follow the same course. A more remote possibility in the case of the former, as Tusiani was the first translator to have the "stamina" to tackle the length of such a poem. In the latter case Tusiani's translation is just one of the many versions that an English reader may find available. Many had tried to translate Leopardi before, and others have done it after. In October 2010 Jonathan Galassi published his own rendition of the *Canti*¹²⁰ and with it he probably adds his new and modern reading of Leopardi to the ones existing before.

I would like to conclude here with the quote of a Latin poem Tusiani dedicated to his friend Emilio Bandiera who has often translated his Latin poetry into Italian. Here the poet's words seem to lyrically translate what has been pointed out above by Benjamin's philosophy – that a language only communicates itself – and sound like a suggestion for contemporary and future translators.

The poem is entitled "Cur vertis mea carmina":

Cur vertis mea carmina,
Aemili, intrepide in tuam
Linguam quae simul est mea?
Quid me tam subito facit
Ipsi dissimilem mihi
Ut sit syllaba opus nova
Quae explicare queat mihi
Me ipsum? Desine, amice mi,
Scrutari omnia quae latent
In mentis latebris meae,
Sed tantum melos intimum
Fac tuum atque hominum omnium.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Jonathan Galassi, *Canti*. Giacomo Leopardi, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.

¹²¹ Poem dated: N.Y., 28.I.2007, in *Fragmenta ad Aemilium*, Galatina, Le, Congedo Editore, 2009.

CHAPTER 3

FOUND IN TRANSLATION: TUSIANI'S *MORGANTE*

Nel 1461, uscendo verso sera dalla terza cerchia delle mura di Firenze, Luigi Pulci provava lo stesso ironico stupore dei poeti eroicomici che cinque secoli più tardi avrebbero percorso i viali periferici di Londra o di New York.
(Giuliano Deگو)

Ma era possibile trasformare la New York moderna nella Firenze medicea, ridanciana e ribaldesca?
(Joseph Tusiani)¹

The translation of the *Morgante* has represented for Tusiani a real challenge as Gaetano Cipolla commented in his review in the pages of the *Italian Quarterly*.

Tusiani is clearly one of the very few translators around who possesses the intellectual qualities required to solve the daunting task of translating the *Morgante*. But of the very few translators, who have the wherewithal to do the job, he is definitely the only one who has also the stamina and the determination to complete the task.²

In fact, the length of the poem – thirty-one thousand lines – is just one of the obstacles that may have prevented anyone from tackling the complete translation. Moreover, the difficulties of Pulci's mock epic are given by a language which is all but simple, consisting of complex constructions, obscure references and idiomatic expressions associated to a local Renaissance culture which did not survive the passing of time. Such a poem needed someone who had to be both well versed in the tradition of Italian epic and in the philological knowledge of Tuscan Renaissance dialects, and had that poet's intuition and adventurous spirit to guide him through the meanders of a "labyrinthine text" like the *Morgante*.

¹ The first excerpt is the beginning of the introduction to the edition of the *Morgante* introduced and annotated by Giuliano Deگو, Milano, Rizzoli, 1992. The second is taken from Joseph Tusiani's autobiography, *La parola antica*, cit.

² Gaetano Cipolla, "Luigi Pulci, *Morgante: The Epic Adventures of Orlando and His Giant Friend Morgante*, translated by Joseph Tusiani. Introduction and Notes by Edoardo Lèbano. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998", *Italian Quarterly*, year xxxv, ns. 137-138, Summer-Fall 1998, p. 121.

Back in 1973 Kenneth John Atchity had attributed the neglect Pulci's *Morgante* had suffered in the English speaking world to the lack of a complete translation and indicated in Tusiani the translator who more than anyone else would be able to accomplish such a "Herculean labor of love".³

Of Pulci's poem only Lord Byron had tried a versified translation of the first Cantare, Leigh Hunt had written a summarized prose version, and some selections from cantos XXV, XXVII, XXVIII, had been proposed by A. J. Symonds.⁴

Eleven years later, Albert N. Mancini introduced Tusiani's translations of cantos V-VII of the *Morgante* published in *Forum Italicum* by highlighting that on the 500th anniversary of the death of Luigi Pulci, his poem "has been poorly served by critics and historians writing in English and it has been slighted, if not altogether ignored, in the current rebirth of interest in Italian Renaissance epic in this country."⁵

Compared to the studies in English dedicated to the *Orlando Innamorato*, the *Orlando Furioso* or the *Gerusalemme Liberata* he judged scholarship on the *Morgante* as being in its infancy. The reason was not only misunderstanding of the text, but also Pulci's "intricate relationship with the chivalric romance tradition, his anti-literary style and linguistic versatility [which were] not fully appreciated" so that his masterpiece was misread and described in terms extraneous to the poem itself. He underlined how all major epic poets, Ariosto, Boiardo, Tasso had modern translations in English, while – as Atchity had done before – he observed that the lack of a translation of the *Morgante* left the work inaccessible to all those literary specialists who did not have a thorough knowledge of the Italian language. This literary gap had probably caused the paucity of Pulci's criticism in America, and Tusiani's rendition of some cantos would be welcomed by everyone as the beginning of a new major enterprise. In fact, "a translation of the *Morgante* alone represents a project of a magnitude to tax the most ambitious scholar."⁶

³ Kenneth John Atchity, "Renaissance Epic in English", *Italica*, vol. 50, no. 3 (Autumn 1973), p. 436.

⁴ George Gordon Byron, *The Morgante Maggiore*, in *The Works of Lord Byron. Poetry*, vol. IV, London, John Murray, 1922, pp. 482-496; Leigh Hunt, *Stories from the Italian Poets*, vol. I, London, Chapman & Hall, 1846; A. J. Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, New York, Modern Library, 1935.

⁵ Albert A. Mancini, "The English Face of Pulci", foreword to Tusiani's Translations of cantos V and VII, *Forum Italicum*, n. 1, Spring 1984, p. 120.

⁶ On commenting the result of the translation of those cantos Mancini remarks: "Tusiani's translation is for the most part simple, straightforward, crisp and lean, as is the Italian text. Pulci's style is capable of amusing directness and also of vigorous descriptive effects. Tusiani strives to remove the occasional ambiguities of Pulci's Italian, and the slight amplification of the sometimes over-dense diction seems convincing, or at least very probable [...] Tusiani has pruned many of Pulci's "Florentinisms," his tendencies to idiomatic and hybrid terms. The result is a swiftly

Surely Tusiani did not need all this encouragement as the thought of translating the whole poem had already been in his mind for some years. In *La parola antica* he recalls that on the day of his fifty-fourth birthday on January 14, 1978, he seriously considered the idea:

Ed ecco che un mio vecchio sogno, fin a quel momento ritenuto impossibile, non mi parve più tale: dovevo tradurre in versi inglesi il *Morgante* del Pulci. I trentun mila versi del poema quattrocentesco mi sembrarono all'improvviso tremila, anzi appena trecento: un lavoro possibile e perfino gioioso. Dovevo, dovevo incominciare, non importava quanti anni potessi metterci a completare la versione che già vedevo e chiamavo mia.⁷

The translation began sometime in the Fall of 1979, as we infer from his autobiography, and when Tusiani started translating the *Morgante* he had already published his rendition in octaves of the *Gerusalemme Liberata* in 1970 and of other works by Tasso: the two short poems "Lagrima della beata Vergine" and "Lagrima di Cristo" in 1971, and was correcting the proofs of the poem in unrhymed hendecasyllables *Il mondo creato*, that would be published in 1982. By Easter 1980 he had completed the translation of cantos II through V:

Approfittando dell'anno sabbatico, io mi immersi nei cantari pulciani, sognando il giorno, lontanissimo ma certo, in cui avrei visto tutto il *Morgante* rivestito di versi inglesi. Del poema quattrocentesco era nota agli studiosi la traduzione del solo primo cantare, di Lord Byron. Per non lasciarmi in alcun modo influenzare dalla celebre, se pur difettosa, versione del grande poeta inglese, decisi di cominciare la mia dal cantare secondo; il primo lo avrei tradotto per ultimo, con la mia voce, diciamo, già fatta robusta e sicura di sé. Avevo appena terminato la revisione della traduzione del Mondo Creato tassiano e dovevo, perciò, dimenticare gli echi di quell'altra voce che ancora mi risuonavano dentro; il che significava il gioioso tormento di due e tre e quattro stesure di ogni ottava, facile o difficile, inceppata o piana, fino alla creazione di una musica tutta mia che fosse, però, allo stesso tempo, tutta sua, cioè del

readable English that effectively avoids for the reader who knows no Italian the slavish subservience to the letter of the original and also allows full emphasis on the continual use of demotic language and proverbial wisdom. To conclude, I wish to voice the hope that Professor Tusiani's *Morgante* may give impetus to Pulci's studies in the United States. Ibidem, p. 122.

⁷ Joseph Tusiani, *La parola antica*, cit., p. 108. A few pages below, we read that in the following year, 1979, he had started the translation. When his brother Michael suggested he should go to Italy to overcome the gloomy thoughts that his father's recent demise and Tusiani's own empty tomb inspired in him, he meditated: "Quel loculo vuoto, senza che io me ne rendessi conto, mi spingeva a non allontanarmi dal mio Pulci. Dovevo assolutamente finire la traduzione in versi del *Morgante*. Non potevo scomparire da questa America senza averle fatto conoscere un altro capolavoro della mia Italia. Dovevo farcela! Dovevo!", p. 131. Tusiani makes several references to the translation of the *Morgante* in his autobiography.

Pulci. Ma era possibile trasformare la New York moderna nella Firenze medicea, ridanciana e ribaldesca?⁸

This excerpt tells us something important on how Tusiani worked in order not to be influenced by the illustrious precedent of Byron's translation of canto I. In 1982 he started to publish his translations of the first cantos⁹. Surely the *Morgante* became so important in Tusiani's professional life as to influence his decision for an early retirement. His full immersion in the translator's activity, was however happily interrupted by his own poetic inspiration:

E allora? Non mi conveniva starmene a casa, dove avrei potuto dedicare più ore al mio Pulci? – Sì, sì, stattene a casa, caro Joseph – mi sembrava di udire la voce di Messer Gigi, – e così potrai tradurre i trentun mila versi del mio *Morgante*. Già ti chiamano il traduttore più prolifico del secolo ventesimo; ma pensa quel che diranno di te se riuscirai a portare a termine la traduzione del mio poema! [...] Messer Gigi mi aveva così conquiso che non riuscivo più a immaginare alcuna mia giornata senza dieci o venti ottave del suo poema (in certi momenti ci scappava, però, anche qualche verso latino). [...] Il miraggio era grande, e altrettanto grande era la mia ambizione: poter dare al mondo anglosassone la prima, e forse unica, traduzione del *Morgante Maggiore*. Mi sembrava perfino che mi applaudisse Lord Byron, che dello stesso poema aveva tradotto il primo cantare e, spaventato dall'enorme mole e dalle più enormi difficoltà linguistiche, si era poi inesorabilmente arreso.¹⁰

⁸ Ibidem, p. 142.

⁹ From 1982 to 1984 Tusiani published some of his cantos in the pages of *Italian Quarterly*, *Forum Italicum*, *Annali d'Italianistica* and *Rivista di Studi Italiani*. See Cosma Siani's *Le lingue dell'altrove*, cit., for a complete bibliography.

¹⁰ Ibidem, pp. 177-178. In an interview with Cosma Siani published in the *Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno* on 16 March 1987 with the title "Morgante va in USA tutt'intero. A colloquio con Joseph Tusiani", partially in Siani's *Le lingue dell'altrove*, cit. p. 64. We notice in Tusiani's attitude a "non celato spirito competitivo": "Non vedo come qualsiasi italianista che operi oltreoceano possa sottrarsi a un confronto col Byron. Non vedo, cioè, come si possa ignorare il Canto Quarto del *Childe Harold* e "Il lamento del Tasso", responsabile, quest'ultimo, finanche dell'opera in tre atti del Donizetti *Torquato Tasso*. Ma la tua domanda vuol riferirsi al *Morgante*, di cui si parlava. Le ottave del Byron sono, sì, nell'insieme piacevoli e spiritose; ma il tutto è ben lontano dall'eccellenza che il giovane traduttore credette di aver raggiunto. Il testo originale è più volte travisato; non si contano le zeppe ritmiche; numerose sono le sviste, pericolose certe approssimazioni, e addirittura madornali certi errori (vedi ottave settima e nona) dovuti all'imperfetta conoscenza dell'italiano. Certo, era poeta il Byron, e nessuno meglio di lui sapeva, anzi sentiva, che a un endecasillabo quale "E Passamonte morto rovinava" non fa giustizia la piattezza di un'espressione quale (traduco in italiano) "E il pagano Passamonte morì non redento". Ma aveva bisogno di questo *unredeemed* per poter serbare *schemed* e *blasphemed*. Ora, se moltiplichi per cento simili casi d'infedeltà, ti chiederai con me se non sarebbe valsa la pena di fare a meno della rima, almeno nei primi sei versi dell'ottava. E non dimenticare, si tratta di un solo breve Cantare, e ti assicuro tra i più facili. Ah sì, con tutti i suoi difetti, questa versione del Byron è una pietra miliare nella storia delle traduzioni poetiche, appunto perché – se pensiamo al Fairfax, magico poeta del Tasso – essa è traduzione, non più rifacimento."

In these pages he wonders if he should dedicate all his time to his poetic and translating activity or continue his academic “vocation” as a teacher (“insegnare vuol dire imparare, e come avrei continuato ad imparare lontano dai miei allievi?”), he then digresses on the various destinies of the characters of the *Morgante* and adds “...e poi, morto il buon Carlone, non devi forse tornare al tuo Messer Torquato?”¹¹

We learn here, that despite the number of works already translated from Tasso, he was still thinking of rendering into English the two pastoral dramas “Il rogo amoroso” and the *Aminta*. Of the two he would publish the first in 1987.

Tusiani completed his translation on October 9th 1986, as we gather from his autobiography.¹² It took Tusiani about six years to complete this translation and another twelve had to pass for the subsequent corrections and for Edoardo Lèbano to provide the volume with its critical apparatus. *Morgante* was finally published in 1998 with the complete title *Morgante. The Epic Adventures of Orlando and His Giant Friend Morgante*, by Indiana University Press.

THE MORGANTE AND THE MOCK-HEROIC TRADITION:

PULCI AND BYRON

Pulci's ‘domestiche muse’

Luigi Pulci started the composition of his *Morgante* in 1461,¹³ to fulfil a request of Lucrezia Tornabuoni, the mother of Lorenzo de' Medici, who had asked him to

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 179.

¹² See ibidem, p. 265.

¹³ See E. H. Wilkins, ‘On the dates of composition of the *Morgante*’, in *PMLA (Publications of the Modern Language Association of America)*, LXVI, 1951, pp. 244-250. The *Morgante* was printed for the first time in 1478. In its first edition it arrived as far as stanza 47 of *cantare* XXIII, only. The complete edition consisting of twenty-eight Cantos was printed for the first time in 1483. The added five Cantos, quite different in tone, are derived from two other anonymous texts:

entertain the Court with a poem on the well-known stories of Charlemagne and his paladins.

He found a ready-made source in a late medieval anonymous poem in 60 Cantos in *ottava rima* entitled *Orlando*. At the beginning, his aim was to remake it in a new 'literary' setting in terms of plot and characters; but the more he became familiar with the operation of transferring its content into his own poem, the more he tended to compress or expand the length of its episodes in his *ottave*. The *Morgante*¹⁴ maintains that lack of a unitarian design, which is typical of the storytellers' oral tradition, and it also preserves those defects, incoherences and repetitions implied by an oral transmission, where the single episodes stand out on their own without obeying any organized structure.¹⁵

The division in *Cantari* indicates a daily unit – usually corresponding to one episode – which, in the case of Pulci, was destined to be read aloud. A *Cantare* implies the presence of an audience and preserves other features indicating an oral context, such as invitations to pay attention, religious invocations, some direct addresses and a final farewell with the anticipation of further adventures. All these characteristics survive in its written transposition even though they are no longer necessary.

Yet, there is a basic difference between Pulci and his predecessors, who were the 'spokesmen' of the 'popular' tradition rehandling the materials of narrative romances in their rough and naïve way.

By humanizing the heroes of the Arthurian and Carolingian traditions and by deforming their adventures through the filter of their ordinary language, storytellers gave birth to clumsy heroic deeds, in which they believed, where both worlds created by imagination and common reality were linked together by their

La Spagna in rima and *La rotta di Roncisvalle*. The second edition is commonly known as the *Morgante Maggiore* to distinguish it from the first edition in twenty-three Cantos.

¹⁴ See Franca Ageno's "Le tre redazioni del Morgante", in *Studi di Filologia Italiana*, 9, 1951, for a thorough analysis of the three different original drafts of the *Morgante*. Ageno bases her philological study on the common errors which have remained in the subsequent editions, and consequently she tries to regularize misspelt writings and ambiguous punctuation marks by making a comparison between the three first-reliable editions of the work.

See also the notes to the text in the F. Ageno ed. of the *Morgante*, Milano-Napoli, Ricciardi, 1955.

¹⁵ On the repetitive and digressive structure of the poem, see: Constance Jordan, "The Narrative Form of Pulci's *Morgante*", *SP (Studies in Philology)*, 83, 1986, pp. 303-329.

narrating voice; and a sort of harmonious whole resulted from that desultory admixture of different topics. Pulci kept the detached attitude of a learned man, who could no longer share those chivalric ideals, yet without denying them altogether, he ironically transposed them into his *Morgante*. Besides, like all storytellers of his age, he was well acquainted with the *Divina Commedia*, which together with the *Decameron* and Petrarch's poetry is part of a common literary culture, and Dante's verses are ever present in his octaves, and directly or indirectly quoted, seriously or ludicrously handled.¹⁶

For all these reasons Pulci can be considered more than a mere remaker of already exploited topics.¹⁷ His contribution to that codified tradition lies in the fact that having his rough materials ready at hand, he could devote his attention wholly to the narrative framework.

In fact, the innovation represented by the *Morgante*, rests wholly on the stylistic level: the language used by Pulci is still that of the storytellers, but while the latter narrated chivalric deeds with an ordinary language and were unaware of the discrepancy between high and low, Pulci deliberately deformed the chivalric myth through his disenchanting approach.

Franca Ageno, in the Introduction to her philological edition of the *Morgante*, remarks that Pulci was a: 'Temperamento alieno dalla grandezza e dalla gentilezza cavalleresca, egli trova stimolo alla fantasia soltanto nella realtà modesta, o plebea, o picaresca.'¹⁸ Thus in Pulci's picaresque reality all those undervalued mythological figures - Charlemagne has become 'rimbambito' - find a new setting where what really matters is the momentary action, the bravado performed by one or the other character. Pulci allows no epic distance to his characters, who, thanks to the skilful use of his familiar, idiomatic language, are immersed in the reality of fifteenth-century Florence; they embody this new social mentality, thus, their

¹⁶ Indeed many critics have seen in the first Canto of the *Morgante* a sort of allegory of the already allegorical system of Canto I of the *Inferno*, since both poems begin in Spring and early in the morning, and the mountain where the three ferocious giants live is interpreted as the 'selva oscura' inhabited by the three wild animals. See stanzas XX-XXIV of the *Morgante*.

¹⁷ In fact, one of the reasons why Pulci remained so long disregarded in the panorama of fifteenth-century poets is that he was considered as a simple compiler of already existing texts.

¹⁸ F. Ageno, ed., *Morgante*, cit., p. XVI.

attitudes are inadequate to the superhuman enterprises which await them along the poem. This is the main contrast between heroic and fabulous reality – which was the literary expression of the feudal system – on the one hand, and its reduction to every-day proportions on the other: all universal values come out belittled, and what eventually stands out are the concrete particulars of existence. Thus Pulci's language has to be considered their only unifying factor. Rightly Raffaello Ramat writes:

Questa tradizione espressiva così storicamente vibrante si offriva al Pulci, nella specie letteraria, specialmente in due aspetti: quello dei cantari e quello burchiellesco. Nel primo egli leggeva, al di là dell'immediato stupore per le imprese meravigliose, la calata del mito nella misura del quotidiano che lo corrode; nel secondo il momento estremo dell'amore per l'espressione in sé e per sé la costruzione intellettuale composta di molti elementi, illustri popolari gergali, per un puro giuoco del linguaggio.¹⁹

The influence of Burchiello's poetry is obvious in Pulci's handling of the language. Burchiello, an author of jocose sonnets who lived in Florence in the first half of the fifteenth century, played with words and used them as if they were the very subject matter of poetry. Indeed, more than to the content, his attention was devoted to the combination of words, and he accumulated in his lines heterogeneous terms, which were not justified on a semantic ground but because of their phonosymbolic value.

This "surrealistic" handling of language represented the self-assertion of a middle class society against Medieval feudal values.²⁰

In this kind of poetry, reality is simply made up of objects, which are in their turn constituted by mere sounds, so that words have no metaphorical import, but are exclusively self-referential.²¹

¹⁹ Raffaello Ramat, ed., *Morgante*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1961, p. 12.

²⁰ "... espressione di civiltà borghese, ma allo stadio elementare, nel momento iniziale della consapevolezza in cui essa si manifesta come fantasia irriflessa che inventa favolosamente la rivalsea nei confronti del medioevo feudale, impadronendosi della sua materia più emblematica – "l'epica" – e manipolandola secondo la propria nuova realtà". Ibidem, p. 30.

²¹ R. Ceserani in his review of two surveys written by D. De Robertis and A. Gianni, comments that it is not true that Burchiello's poetry excludes all metaphorical value, since even the strong metonymic process created by the association of words, suggests, or rather implies a further metaphorical level of interpretation. Besides, he adds that in Pulci, Burchiello's lesson undergoes

Pulci inherits this lesson and applies it to the narrative frame of his *Morgante*, whose language, thanks to its creative musical quality, displays an already modern awareness of the autonomous reality of words.²²

This poem has been defined 'L'avventura delle parole' (Giovanni Getto), and "festa delle parole (Domenico De Robertis)²³. In its pages proverbs, pious invocations and coarse trivialities are all simultaneously present, and the narrator relates heroic deeds or comments on his task with a language full of puns and witticisms. He uses a large variety of metaphorical expressions and semantic shifts which replace the more explicit comparisons of epic tradition. And in that direction his use of litotes, hyperboles, anacolutha also has to be interpreted. Common proverbs and similes lose their characteristic as fixed formulas since they are employed with unexpected variations; and verbs are often interchanged in a 'creative' way, helping that hyperbolized description of facts which constitutes a typical device aiming at putting into relief the more apparent and grotesque aspects of existence.

Syntax too retains the basic construction of its oral derivation: clauses are often coordinated rather than subordinated, and in that, they reflect Pulci's anti-literary reaction not only to official elevated poetry but also to narrative prose which still drew on Latin patterns. Thanks to his adherence to popular standards, his stanzas are at times organized through inversion, in an extremely loose, sometimes hardly comprehensible, sequence of intertwined syntagmatic chains.

an ulterior process and "I rimandi metaforici si fanno di nuovo obbligati e prepotenti, le associazioni non più sbrigiate e scherzose, ma feroci, si fa invadente la presenza dell'io che parla." "Rassegna bibliografica, Studi sul Pulci", in *Giornale storico della letteratura Italiana*, CXLVI, 1968, pp. 423-426.

²² Moreover Pulci's attention to the many and varied aspects of language, is testified by two minor works, whose composition he had attended to before starting the *Morgante*. The *Vocabolista* and the *Vocabolario di lingua furbesca*, the former a collection of latinate terms and mythological names, the latter a 'vademecum' of jargon expressions, both attesting that lexicographic attention which constituted a common interest in fifteenth-century literature.

²³ G. Getto, *Studio sul Morgante*, Firenze, Olschky, 1967. *Morgante e lettere*, ed. Domenico De Robertis, Firenze, Sansoni, 1991. All critics agree on this creative linguistic activity of Pulci and test their imagination in finding expressions to describe it, which are usually taken from culinary vocabulary. D. Puccini uses 'voracità linguistica' and 'scorpacciate di parole' thus equating an exploited topos in the *Morgante* to Pulci's narrative technique; R. Ramat and R. Ceserani define his language as 'surrealistic'. G. Dego speaks of a 'parola fatta suono, colore, ironia giocosa' and of an 'impasto verbale espressionistico', and finally D. De Robertis describes the *Morgante* as a 'festa delle parole'.

Pulci's language is at once ironical and delighted by its own devices and conveys with great emphasis and through the use of an almost palpable imagery, the physicality of actions. Sounds, clangs, blows and thuds are so 'noisily' rendered that, as Giuliano Dego states:

Per la prima volta nella secolare vicenda del romanzo cavalleresco, Rinaldo, Astolfo, Ulivieri e i califfi saraceni sono assetati più di parole che di sangue. Più che nei generici fendenti, il loro destino di personaggi senza identità si rivela nei loro motti fulminanti, filtrati in versi rudi e potenti.²⁴

The same can be said for the vivid identification of colors and objects, or for the description of the characters' – be they knights, monks or giants. The visual impact of all these elements almost turns readers into an audience because of the performative level of representation which increases the comic purport of language and is at the same time implied by it.²⁵ In like manner dialogues seem to preserve the very mimicry of the gesture and the result is that the reader is much more involved in the verbal communication of the action than he is in the action itself. In that lies the author's ironic approach to his materials: he employs a 'hyperbolic' language, which exalts characters and deeds belonging to ritualized situations – Gano is the betrayer, Rinaldo and Ulivieri the ever-in-love – and in shifting his attention from the content to the way of telling it, he nods to the reader, with whom he shares this newly acquired literary consciousness of the genre. Pulci's public is always directly involved in his narrating process; in fact narrator, characters, and narratee are tightly linked together in this poem because of Pulci's strongly connoted language which requires first of all the addressee's complicity in the decoding process of his witty speech. If the referential function is already stressed by his mimetic and descriptive narration, he also often makes

²⁴ G. Dego, ed., *Morgante*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1992, p. 27.

²⁵ Franca Ageno writes: "Tutto rivolto agli aspetti appariscenti delle cose, alla vita esteriore e fisica, il Pulci "vede" e rappresenta personaggi e scenette con la bravura di un disegnatore esperto che fissa definitivo il gesto di un istante con linea netta e incisiva, con segno preciso e sicuro." *Morgante*, cit., p. XIX.

use of expressions which are midway between the phatic and conative functions by repeatedly calling the reader's attention. In this perspective, the translator is that "privileged" reader who finds himself/herself at the end of a long chain of internal references that his/her translation has the duty to reproduce. By "references" I am quoting what Wolfgang Iser defined as the "Appelstruktur" of texts.²⁶

Thus Pulci's "domestiche muse"²⁷ operate on this changed attitude towards epic romances, whose most visible result can be seen in the choice of the main hero who gives the title to the poem. This is no longer Orlando but Morgante: the spirit of the poem is 'embodied' not by a valorous knight but by a gluttonous grotesque giant whose bravadoes and buffooning temper directly reflect Pulci's attitude towards his poem.

If we consider this changed approach from a literary perspective, we can regard Morgante, as the character who embodies a sort of "trait d'union" between Orlando, the brave knight of Carolingian songs, and Orlando run mad, in Ariosto's poem. Pulci's *Morgante* is thus the turning point in the evolution of the genre from traditional – oral and popular – forms to a new and different narrative language modeled on written and bourgeois fruition; it also represents the starting point for the branching off into two different evolutions of the same genre. On the one hand, the development of its comic and ludicrous aspects in the birth of genuine burlesque poetry with Berni's 'parodistic' remake of the *Orlando Innamorato*; on the other, the courtly and above all refined re-elaboration of its fabulistic and mythical elements operated by Boiardo and Ariosto.

²⁶ Wolfgang Iser, "Die Appelstruktur der Texte", in *Rezeptionsästhetik. Theorie und Praxis*, ed. R. Warning, München, Fink, 1975, pp. 228-252.

²⁷ This expression is taken from letter VIII to Lorenzo de Medici: "Stàromi qualche dì ancora con teco tra questi boschi, et ragionerò con le mie più domestiche muse di te". D. De Robertis, ed. Pulci, *Morgante e Lettere*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1962, p. 952.

...and Byron's pedestrian muses

Byron's translation occurred in a highly Italophile climate. William Stuart Rose, John Hookham Frere and Herman Merivale imitated the mock heroic genre, with works inspired by Pulci, or made metrical experiments in translation.²⁸

The reason why many English poets of Byron's time, and especially his friends Merivale, Rose and Frere, turned to Italian models may be explained with the 'Spenser revival' of late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century England. In fact, while eighteenth-century Italy was re-discovering her older poets as a nimble model for new 'improvised' poetry, England, which was undergoing the same kind of influence, tended to substitute this foreign stimulus for Spenser's over-allegoric and lumbering poetic pattern.

Byron, like Pulci, used in his 'burlesque' poems a style which was intended to represent an alternative to dignified, official poetry.

Besides, in April 1819, Foscolo had published in the *Quarterly Review*²⁹ his essay on Italian epic poetry: and he considered Pulci, among Italian poets, the one who strictly adhered to the original plan of storytellers' *cantari* that was so meaningful according to Romantic canons.

Pulci's poem was characterized by combinations of buffooning episodes with sententious reflections shifting from gravity to gaiety that produced anticlimaxes, and by epigrams, quotations, colloquialisms and inconsequences, which operated sudden comic deflations of sentiment. Religious subjects were mixed with magic, marvels and trivial elements which disturbed the elevated tone and which, at a

²⁸ An example is the satire *Gli animali parlanti* by Giambattista Casti, that Rose had introduced to the British public through a free adaptation into *ottava rima* of the original *sesta rima* with the title *The Court of Beasts*. Frere had published four cantos of a mock-heroic adaptation of Pulcian burlesque style in octaves entitled *The Monks and The Giants*. Merivale had published his "Critical Observations on the *Morgante Maggiore*" and an abridged adaptation of Pulci's poem, the *Orlando in Roncisvalles*. It was this last work which first drew Byron's attention to Pulci's poetry.

²⁹ In April 1819, Foscolo published an essay in the *Quarterly Review* for the benefit of the English readers who were interested in the evolution of epic poetry in Italy. In the first decades of the 19th century in England there was widespread enthusiasm for Italian culture, accompanied by a growing public demand for books by and about the Italians. Actually, Foscolo's long essay had been occasioned by his review of two English poems published by William Stewart Rose and John Hookham Frere, which had been respectively inspired by Casti's and Pulci's works.

later time, could well have passed under the charge of heresy. These were all devices that the flexible narrative measure of the *ottava rima*, with its abrupt closing couplet, enhances, and which well suited the mobile oral quality of the *improvvisatori* of Byron's time, a quality not dissimilar from that of the storytellers of Pulci's age.

Yet it wasn't only the Italian literary tradition that provided the cultural background for Byron's burlesque style. The mock-heroic poems and satires of the Augustans (Dryden, Pope and later Johnson) were greatly admired by Byron, as were the eighteenth-century comic prose epics of Fielding, Smollett and Sterne. They gave the poet a model for an epic satire in a contemporary setting in which digressions and the "obtrusive" presence of the narrator constitute its very essence.

In this context, Pulci's improvisational poetry became an important precedent for Byron's burlesque poems in *ottava rima*. What he had not been able to realise in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, with the too dignified rhythm of the Spenserian stanza, he would be able to accomplish with the adoption of this measure, which would then culminate in his mature works: the dramatic-farcical epic of *Don Juan*, the casual and lightly mocking tone of *Beppo* and the satirical style of *The Vision of Judgement*.³⁰

Hence, Byron answered with his own 'pedestrian'³¹ to Pulci's 'domestiche' Muses.

Italy became a sort of writing laboratory for his newly exploited narrative and stylistic forms, and, therefore, the translation of canto I of the *Morgante* stands as a common denominator for his long searched-for *medley style*, which is what

³⁰ Echoes from the *Morgante* are clearly found in *Don Juan* and in *The Vision of Judgement* where some stanzas are literally translated from Pulci's poem.

³¹ Dedication, to *Don Juan*, stanza VII, in *The Works of Lord Byron*, Poetry, vol. V, London, John Murray, 1922, p. 6. The poet ironically addresses Robert Southey and claims:

For me, who wandering with pedestrian Muses,
 Contend not with you on the wingéd steed,
 I wish your fate may yield ye, when she chooses,
 The fame you envy, and the skill you need;
 And, recollect, a poet nothing loses
 In giving to his brethren their full meed
 Of merit"—and complaint of present days
 Is not the certain path to future praise.

allowed him to employ an admixture of tones and topics and to fully express his temperament in poetry. We only need to read his *Letters and Journals* to verify how the language used in these poems reflects the natural conversational ease of his prose.

His translation, moreover, reveals a love for exactness, clarity and regularity. His challenge of conveying the substance without losing the form was more Augustan than Romantic, and is perhaps already very modern.

Byron worked on the *Morgante* during his stay in Ravenna, in the first months of 1820³²; his translation is often mentioned in his *Letters and Journals* until the Spring of 1823, one year after he had moved to Pisa. In fact, this is the long interval of time that elapsed between its composition and its long-awaited publication. The first time he mentioned his translation was in a letter to Murray, his editor:

I am translating the first Canto of Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore* – & have half done it but these last days & nights of the Carnival confuse and interrupt everything. [...] I think my translation of Pulci will make you stare – it must be put by the original stanza for stanza and verse for verse – and you will see what was permitted in a Catholic country and a bigotted age to a Churchman on the score of religion; – and so tell those buffoons who accuse me of attacking the liturgy.³³

In this letter Byron anticipates the religious grounds upon which Murray was later to stand against the publication of the *Morgante*. The first two Cantos of *Don Juan*, had been coldly received by readers, who considered the work obscene and scoffing at religious matters. As is testified by his letters, Byron accomplished

³² Actually one of the three now extant manuscripts was first dated Oct. 29th 1819 and then re-dated at the end Feb. 20th 1820. Byron tried for more than two years to get his publisher to produce an edition of his *Morgante*, but his translation was eventually published anonymously in the pages of the fourth and last number of *The Liberal* on 30 July 1823. This short-lived periodical had been founded in Italy by Leigh and John Hunt with the collaboration of Byron and Shelley.

³³ *Byron's Letters and Journals*, edited by Leslie A. Marchand, London, John Murray, 1976, vol. 7, p. 35. [Hereafter quoted as Mar. LJ]. In a letter to his editor on February 21 he stated: "I have finished my translation of the first Canto of the "Morgante Maggiore" of Pulci – which I will transcribe and send – it is the parent not only of Whistlecraft – but of all jocosse Italian poetry. – You must print it side by side with the original Italian because I wish the reader to judge of the fidelity – it is stanza for stanza – and often line for line if not word for word". Ibidem, p. 42.

such a translation not only out of sheer love for Pulci and mock-heroic poetry, but basically because he wanted to exculpate himself from all those charges by appealing to a well-established genre and to a poetic tradition which admitted 'improprieties' of that kind.

Three days later, Byron had already completed his translation, as he informed Murray on 21 February. Byron's main concern was to point out the closeness of his version to the original text. He continued to allude to his work in his letters, while he impatiently awaited an affirmative reply from Murray regarding the publication of his work, accompanied by its corrected proofs.

About the *Morgante Maggiore* – I wont have a line omitted – it may circulate or it may not – but all the Criticism on earth shan't touch a line – unless it be because it is *badly* translated – now you say – and I say - and others say – that the translation is a good one – and so it shall go to the press as it is. – Pulci must answer for his own irreligion – I answer for the translation only.³⁴

He claimed so partly because he wanted to convince his publisher and adviser John Murray, and partly because he had become by then conscious of the efforts that translation demands, and of the poetic results it can achieve. In fact Byron was absolutely proud of his rendition: "It is superb – you have no such translation – It is the best thing I ever did in my life."³⁵ Byron's opinion on his latest achievement was quite impartial, since he always considered it as the best thing he ever composed, but the fact that he thought so highly of his translation, even while he had almost already completed the first five Cantos of his *Don Juan*, is quite amazing.

Byron's relationship with the Italian language should also be explored. He had defined himself as an "Italoquist [...] by necessity"³⁶, as early as 1810, but later embraced Italian culture and politics *in toto* during his self-imposed exile in Italy.

³⁴ Ibidem, p. 83.

³⁵ Ibidem, letter to Murray, of 28 September 1820, p. 182; and in a letter to the poet Thomas Moore: "The *Morgante* is the best translation that ever was or will be made." Mar. LJ, vol. 9, p. 118.

³⁶ Mar. LJ, vol. 2, p. 29.

In April 1819 he had written to Murray that he intended to write “his best work” in Italian: “& it will take me nine years more thoroughly to master the language – & then if my fancy exists & I exist too – I will try what I *can* do *really*”³⁷. Whether this was one of his usual provocative statements, or it represented some real intention, we will never know, but in the Advertisement to the translation of the *Morgante* he commented that he, the translator:

... was induced to make the experiment partly by his love for, and partial intercourse with, the Italian language, of which it is so easy to acquire a slight knowledge, and with which it is so nearly impossible for a foreigner to become accurately conversant. The Italian language is like a capricious beauty, who accords her smiles to all, her favours to few, and sometimes least to those who have courted her longest.³⁸

He nonetheless considered his task as a translator very seriously, and in the preface to the *Morgante*, which must be considered a sort of ‘manifesto’ of his approach towards this new literary discipline, he focuses on the problems implied by the metrical translation of a poem remote in time:

... the version is faithful to the best of the translator’s ability in combining his interpretation of the one language with the not very easy task of reducing it to the same versification in the other. The reader, on comparing it with the original, is requested to remember that the antiquated language of Pulci, however pure, is not easy to the generality of Italians themselves, from its great mixture of Tuscan proverbs; and he may therefore be more indulgent to the present attempt.³⁹

These are actually the main obstacles he had to face with his verse-translation. Language involves many problems. Byron normally succeeds in conveying the ‘freshness’ of Pulci’s Tuscan dialect, which, with its admixture of colloquialisms and solemn formulas, the Italian poet mostly used for humorous effects. Nonetheless, as Byron claims, fifteenth-century popular and proverbial idioms prove to be arduous to the foreign reader, and even more to the translator who not

³⁷ Ibid., vol. 6, p. 105. When he wrote this, he had been in Italy for two years. Unfortunately, Byron did not survive to give us proof of his progress with Italian, but it is interesting to notice here that he had the same bilingual “ambitions” we find in Tusiani.

³⁸ *The Morgante Maggiore*, in *The Works of Lord Byron: Poetry*, edited by Ernest Hartley Coleridge, London, John Murray, vol. 4, 1922, p. 482.

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 482.

only wants to translate their meaning but also to capture their essence and render it into a foreign language.

Then, he had to come to terms with the double need of preserving the literal meaning of the original text on the one hand, and the strict necessity of satisfying metrical needs on the other. The challenge was not easy, since his translation promised to be a faithful one; the *ottava rima* was a measure quite alien to English versification, and the effect created by Pulci's antiquated and dialectal idiom could not smoothly be conveyed into modern English.

Italian mock-heroic poetry was a genre that had run its course despite its reiterated revivals and evolutions into new poetic genres.

Byron overcame all these difficulties and his translation is, in my opinion, to be ranked among his poetic achievements, even though the pertinacity with which he closely follows the original throughout sometimes leads him to awkward transpositions of the Italian text. On some occasions he sacrifices the fluency of rhythm in favor of a strict rendering of the literal meaning of the original. Moreover, in order to keep the well-sustained rhythm of the original, he sometimes sacrifices the fluency of syntax through the use of inversion, but as a general rule, there are no major divergences from the content of Pulci's octaves.

ON PARODIC FIDELITY

While Byron's approach is focused on maintaining the metre and rhyme of the original octaves, Tusiani's fidelity can be considered philological in the widest sense of the term.

Both translators tackle a text which is itself a parody of a previous tradition, and parody implies a systematic inter-textual game – and also an extra-textual one – in which the narrator involves the reader, as, indeed, Pulci had done, in his erratic digressions.

This game enlightens the literary values of the past as they clash against the cultural awareness of the present. Consequently, the two translators are in a position of continuity with the original and its genre, and at the same time they detach themselves from it.

Furthermore, Byron and Tusiani are perfectly aware of facing a text which offers itself to multiple parodic solutions. Both authors live in cultural environments in which parody is at the core of the literary debate, and charges translation with new historical and aesthetic responsibilities. Here and below, we do not refer only to the twofold meaning of the word parody – the double value of its Greek prefix *παρ-*, which means “against” as well as “proximity” or “imitation” – but also to a poet’s interpretive approach toward a genre and to the close relationship between parody and translation.

At the end of the eighteenth century and in the first decades of the nineteenth, the common idea was that translation provided a sort of parodic “counter-song” to the original text. But Byron somehow goes beyond the division into the three types of translations proposed by Novalis and Goethe.⁴⁰ His translation offers a sort of synthesis between that second type, which the two German authors considered “modifying” or “parodic”, i.e. producing total alienation from the original (as in the case of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century *belles infidèles*); and the third type, which in Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* should represent the perfect equivalent of its original.

Similarly, Tusiani’s translation occurs at a time in which postmodern theories on parody and translation underline the importance of a parodic approach in the cognitive processes.⁴¹

⁴⁰ See Novalis’s Fragment n. 1306 and Goethe’s “Übersetzungen”, in “Noten und Abhandlungen zum besserem Verständnis des West-Östlichen Divans”, in *West-Östlicher Divan*.

⁴¹ The reference here is to the contributions given by Fredric Jameson, Linda Hutcheon, Margaret Rose, Daniel Sangsue, Annick Bouillaguet and Mirella Billi, who developed the theory, already introduced by the Formalists, on the innovative function of parody in the transformation of literary genres and forms. Mirella Billi (*Il testo riflesso, la parodia nel romanzo inglese*, Napoli, Liguori, 1993, p. 13) recognizes in parody a “forza positiva, proprio per questa sua natura dialettica che opera una sintesi del testo parodiato e di quello parodiante e così facendo inaugura una nuova forma autonoma, la quale mantiene al contempo uno strettissimo rapporto con la tradizione e la vivifica.”

We could say that the text producing parody withdraws from and at the same time identifies with the parodied text. As Linda Hutcheon states when she writes that “This ironic playing with multiple conventions, this extended repetition with critical difference is what I mean by modern parody”,⁴² so the two English translations of the *Morgante* illustrate how vital and innovative these instances are. Both Byron and Tusiani indeed create a new text which shows the traces of their own reading and interpretation of the original.⁴³

The rhythmical structures – rhyme, homophony, alliteration, etc., – appeal to the poet and translator, who is conscious of the fact that the otherness of his version refers to an extra-textual context and implies the reader's decoding activity, even in its manifest fidelity.

The choice of metre is significant in these two different renderings: Byron translates Canto I using iambic pentameter and keeps the same rhyme scheme as the original octaves. He thus attempts to achieve the utmost accuracy in his “line for line if not word for word”⁴⁴ translation, and overcomes what has been dismissively defined “the double bondage” of metre and rhyme⁴⁵. Tusiani's choice is based on a structure of compromise: by giving up the first six alternating rhymes in favour of non-rhyming pentameters, he pushes the rhyme forward to the heroic couplet at the end of the stanza, which is less rich in internal rhythmical references and favours a sudden acceleration in the two final lines. This is how Tusiani commented his choice in the Preface to Boccaccio's *Nymphs of Fiesole*:

In my translation, as the reader will have noticed [...] I have rhymed only the concluding couplet of each original *ottava*. Obviously, the famous rhyme pattern ABABAB-CC is infinitely more musical than a mere ABCDEF-GG. But as all translators of poetry know, the practical device of six blank verse

⁴² Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody. The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, New York-London, Methuen, 1985, p. 7.

⁴³ On the function of critical revision involving a parodic process, Mirella Billi states: “L'inserimento della parodia in un contesto pragmatico trasporta la relazione formale e strutturale tra due testi nei complessi rapporti di dialogismo instaurati tra autore, testo e lettore, allargandone la prospettiva ai contesti che mediano e determinano l'attivazione e la ricezione delle modalità parodiche”, in Billi, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁴⁴ Mar. LJ, vol. 7, p. 42.

⁴⁵ Andre Lefevere, *Translating Poetry: Seven Strategies and a Blueprint*, Assen, Van Gorcum, 1975, p. 49.

lines may enable one to remain as close as possible to the spirit as well to the letter of the original text. Following such a device, which I found extremely convenient and, as I went on with my task, even rewarding, I knew that my major concern was with the music, the suppleness, the alliteration, and even the colloquial nuances of Boccaccio's hendecasyllabic line.

I did not find myself compelled to resort to inversions, or to alter, if not to sacrifice altogether, a thought or an image for the tyrannical exigencies of rhyme. Why, then, instead of adopting blank verse for the entire translation, did I decide in favor of the rhymed couplet? It seemed to me, after completing the first twenty-odd stanzas in blank verse, that something was missing. I could still hear, clearly and with joyous feeling, the echoes of their original music; yet something was lacking. Was it color? Was it magic? Was it a sense of continuity? Was it the very aura of a narrative poem? It was then that, already aware of the lesser degree of peril in the rhyming of only two of the eight lines of each strophe, I started all over. Suddenly, as I reread the same twenty-odd stanzas, I felt that I had, almost miraculously, kept the arrangement of their original ABABABCC, so completely had each rhymed couplet succeeded in making me forget the non-rhyming of its preceding portion.⁴⁶

The problem of rhyme is well known to translators from Italian, since Renaissance Italian poetic language is much richer in rhymes than English. Tusiani's faithfulness to formal elements and structures is of a higher level, namely, it is given by a complete familiarity with the Italian tradition of *ottava rima*, which allows him to be as fluid, natural and musical as Pulci. This may appear a hybrid solution, while, instead, it requires a more complex philological operation. In fact, a translation that would maintain all the original rhymes, nowadays, would be considered a parody of the genre, but a parody conveying only the first desecrating meaning.

Obviously, we are confronted here with two distinct notions of fidelity to the original text.

Aesthetic motivation, target readers and the disappearance/superimposition of the translator's voice are the elements determining such difference.

⁴⁶ In Edoardo A. Lèbano, "Tusiani, Translator of Pulci's *Morgante*", cit., p. 238.

Tusiani's "American muses"

Given the obvious distance between the two poets and their personal stories, the issue here is how to analyze Tusiani's translations in relation to Byron's.

Byron insisted that his translations should appear with the original on facing pages, so that the reader would judge the fidelity of his operation, and he strongly referred to the model that he, sometimes unconsciously, parodied. On the contrary, Tusiani has almost always published his translations without the original, implying that his faithfulness is to the poetic text as a whole. He maintains a balance between fidelity and modernization, where global equivalence constitutes a superior theoretical model, since practical approximation provides an operational pattern. In an interview he simply commented: "... in order to translate Pulci, I have tried to interpret in modern terms the vitality of his Florentine idiom."⁴⁷ Consequently, he has tried to give the reader a "pleasure of the text" in Barthesian terms,⁴⁸ which should be independent from any pragmatic comparison. The introduction to the *Morgante* by E. A. Lèbano testifies to this approach by setting this translation in its historical and biographical context. The editor outlines the controversy over the value of Pulci's work over the centuries, and discusses Pulci's supposed irreligion (this last point had been crucial in Byron's translation, as well), while there is no commentary on the translator's contribution, and this absence further stresses the fact that the new text must maintain an autonomy of its own.⁴⁹ In Tusiani's *Morgante*, the approach is more than philological, or even exegetical, as his translation aims to be read as a work of art on its own. But here a question arises: how far is the translator's presence felt behind this work of mediation? Is it as strong as Byron's obtrusive voice?

⁴⁷ Maria Pastore Passaro, "Luigi Pulci's *Morgante*" in *Homage to Joseph Tusiani, Ricerca Research Recherche*, n. 6, 2000, p. 66.

⁴⁸ Roland Barthes, *Le plaisir du texte*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1973.

⁴⁹ Edoardo A. Lèbano has extensively commented on Tusiani's skill in translating the *Morgante* in the above quoted essay "Tusiani, Translator of Pulci's *Morgante*" and in another essay "L'arte del tradurre: Joseph Tusiani traduttore del *Morgante*", in *Joseph Tusiani tra le due sponde dell'oceano*, cit., pp 395-401.

In Byron's version the narrator's *persona* clearly predominates over the original narrator, because of the recovery of the role of storytellers in the Romantic period and, obviously, because of Byron's exuberant personality.

In Tusiani, the narrator/translator does not impose his presence beyond that of the original narrator and, in achieving this, he gives us Pulci's voice, his ironic approach to the materials of the *cantari*, his hyperbolic language and the musical phrasing of the stanzas. This is how Tusiani describes the process he follows when translating Pulci:

Un'ottava del Pulci devo, prima, leggermela tante volte finché arrivo quasi ad illudermi di averla scritta io;[...] la declamo tante volte finché i suoni italiani perdono ogni significato ed altro non suggeriscono che un vasto e sicuro sottofondo musicale su cui, all'improvviso, anzi lentamente, incominciano ad affiorare significati espressi in lingua inglese, [...] dell'idioma italiano, e in questo caso fiorentino, non resta che il ricordo o la malia.⁵⁰

As Gaetano Cipolla rightly observes: "Tusiani, like all translators, is called to interpret this text and make choices and he makes these choices sensibly and unerringly, aided no doubt by his poet's intuition and acquired through long and assiduous acquaintance with the classics."⁵¹ The choice of words and the unspoken symbolic universe they conjure up, and the necessity of maintaining the same expressive and poetic plurality of registers as the original, underlie the task of the poetic translator. Tusiani is particularly skilled in translating Pulci's strongly connoted language, a language delighted by its own devices, both in its mimetic and descriptive passages. The almost palpable imagery, as well as the physicality of actions are rendered through those rhetorical figures like alliterations, assonances, onomatopoeias that convey performative significance, involving the reader more in the act of verbal communication than in the action itself.

It is not surprising that Remo Ceserani, a scholar deeply interested in Postmodernism, should show a great appreciation of Tusiani's translation, stressing his skill at preserving the poem's typical structural procedures, such as

⁵⁰ Joseph Tusiani, *La parola antica*, cit., pp. 164-165.

⁵¹ Gaetano Cipolla, op. cit., p. 122.

the anaphoric stanzas, the Florentine expressions, the ambiguities and the metaphorical implications of his strongly connoted language.⁵²

Different parodic solutions

On some olden and newer games...

A comparison of the different versions of the two translators can provide an example of their approaches to the materials of the *Cantari* and of the complexity underlying the translating process. Their different perspectives are each in their own way respectful of the humorous parodic elements that need to be rephrased in the translators' contemporary contexts.

Canto I, stanza 32

E ritornato dove stava Orlando,
 il qual non s'era partito da bomba,
 subito venne la corda girando,
 e lascia un sasso andar fuor della fromba,
 che in sulla testa giugnea rotolando
 al conte Orlando, e l'elmetto rimbomba;
 e cadde per la pena tramortito,
 ma più che morto par, tanto è stordito.

Byron:
 And being returned to where Orlando stood,
 Who had not moved him from the spot, and swinging
 The cord, he hurled a stone with strength so rude,
 As showed a sample of his skill in slinging;
 It rolled on Count Orlando's helmet good
 And head, and set both head and helmet ringing,
 So that he swooned with pain as if he died,
 But more than dead, he seemed so stupified.

⁵² See Remo Ceserani, "Morgante sbarca in America: Tusiani grande 'vocabolista' ". Review of *Morgante: The Epic Adventures of Orlando and His Giant Friend Morgante*, by Joseph Tusiani. *Italica*, vol. 76, n. 1, Spring 1999, p. 99.

Tusiani:
Soon he returned to where Orlando stood,
who by no means had left home base at all.
Swinging a rope at once, he suddenly
let a huge stone from such a sling fly down:
as swiftly rolling on Orlando's head,
it made the count's strong helmet strongly sound.
Fainting with pain, face to the ground he sped –
So wholly stunned that he indeed seemed dead.

Here Pulci nimbly describes Passamonte's attack against Orlando and speeds the rhythm of the action to its concluding couplet.

Byron's version is objectively weighed down by the "labored" rendering of each action instead of stressing their rapid succession. Two enjambments in lines 2-3 and 5-6, instead of one in the original (in lines 5-6, but affecting a different syntagm) contribute to slow it down.

In line 2 of the original text, the expression *partito da bomba*, which is taken from the old Florentine "game of the pome,"⁵³ is solved into its 'neutral' correspondent *not moved him from the spot*, where the shortened form of the reflexive pronoun *him* is superfluous and renders the syntagmatic relation ambiguous.

The expression *partito da bomba* is rendered by Tusiani with its very modern and "American" correspondent *home base*.⁵⁴ The choice of this expression taken from the baseball game stresses the translator's parodic approach in updating his fidelity to burlesque features.

The two coordinated actions of the original text in lines 3 and 4, are intertwined with the descriptive comment, added by Byron, on Passamonte's skill in that kind

⁵³ The game of the *pome*, or '*acchiappino*' was a sort of 'hide-and-peek' where *bomba* was the spot where the players had to run to be safe. *Pome* is a phonosymbolic term which does not derive from the plural of *pomo* –apple – but has an onomatopoeic origin.

⁵⁴ See also *Morgante* canto II, stanza 8: "ma di tornare a bomba è il fine del pome" that Tusiani translates with "but touching home base is the game's sole end". We don't know, if "acchiappino" or the "gioco delle pome" required that a ball should be caught with the hands as its similarity with the French name "jeu de paume" (i.e. with the palm of the hand) seems to imply. Then, its translation with the baseball game might have a closer affinity to the original name than we think.

of job: *he hurled a stone with strength so rude, / as showed a sample of his skill in slinging.*

A more elaborate rendering of the original can be seen in lines 5 and 6, too, where anyhow, Byron introduces a device that is quite peculiar to Pulci's language and is elsewhere exploited by the Italian poet as a distinguishing mark of his colloquial style. It is the iteration of a term, either in anaphoric position, or through anadiplosis, which emphasizes the oral origin of his narrative technique, and Byron exploits this narrative device with the symmetrical and chiasmic iteration of the words: *helmet, head - head, helmet.*

In my opinion, although the stanza progresses somewhat laboriously, Byron preserves the comic drift of the description, because he succeeds in maintaining the phonosymbolic level of the rhymes. If we compare: *Orlando, girando, rotolando - bomba, fromba, rimbomba - tramortito, stordito, to stood, rude, good*⁵⁵ - *swinging, slinging, ringing - died, stupified*, we can observe that the association of the terms synthesizes Orlando's accident through the evolution of these homophonic chains, in both languages.

Tusiani makes up for the lack of rhymes in the first six lines with a skilful alliteration of the sounds [s] and [h] which sustain the rhythm alternating through the lines.

It is interesting to observe that the rhymes of the Italian text imply a process of resemantization: *bomba* for the modern reader gains its actual meaning of bullet, thanks to the acoustic and etymological (paronomastic) association with *rimbomba* and through its contiguity, not only spatial, but also semantic, with the 'weapon' *fromba*.⁵⁶ There is a semantic gap, though, as a "fromba" does not produce a booming noise but a simple imperceptible whizz. Obviously Byron does not succeed in recreating the same play, yet we can probably claim that the phonosymbolic effect is in this case implied by the sound [u] of rhymes 1, 3, and 5, whose gloomy sound evokes some dangerous entity, and the onomatopoeic

⁵⁵ Oxymoronic couple which creates a sort of comic climax.

⁵⁶ See R. Jakobson, "Due aspetti del linguaggio e due tipi di afasia", and "Linguistica e poetica", in *Saggi di Linguistica generale*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1966.

morpheme[-ing] of rhymes 2, 4, and 6, which suggests the noise produced by a metal recipient hit by an object, as indeed is the *helmet ringing* of line 6.

A similar rendering of the original can be seen in line 6 in Tusiani's version, where the translator introduces another device typical of Pulci's language. It is the phonosymbolic use of onomatopoeic sounds.⁵⁷ Pulci has *e l'elmetto rimbomba* and Tusiani renders it *strong helmet strongly sound* with the ironic addition and repetition of the adjective and adverb *strong/strongly* which is not present in the original but contributes in creating the alliterative use of the sibilant sound [s] that, if it is not allusive of the clang of a stone that hits metal, it at least evokes the hiss of a stone flung with a sling.

The rhyme in the final couplet shows some interesting reading in both translators, which develop in one direction or in another the original *tramortito – stordito* in which both participles are almost synonyms. Byron has *died – stupified*, where the adjective *stupified* comically deflates the verb *died*. Byron's rendering of the last line, though, shows his apparent misunderstanding of the original whose meaning is that Orlando was so stunned by the blow that he looked even more than dead. Tusiani, on the contrary, gets the line right, even though his first rhyme ends with the verb *sped*, which completes an extra item not to be found in the original *face to the ground he sped*. The combination of the two monosyllables *sped – dead* stresses the dynamics of acceleration that the whole stanza builds up.

Both Byron and Tusiani rearrange the narrative time of the stanza. Pulci narrates the events freely interchanging past and present within his lines, a liberty which is basically allowed by the substantial oral nature of his text, while both translators decidedly shift toward temporal coherence, and time is logically handled both on the level of events and on the level of the narrator's comments for the length of the whole octave.

The paratactic construction of the Italian octave with three conjunction "e" in anaphoric position and one as a caesura in line 6 is generally respected by Byron

⁵⁷ See also F. Ageno: "Al gusto di menare il colpo è dato maggior rilievo che al dolore del colpito. La prodezza muscolare è celebrata con allegria; ai lividi, alle ferite, alle mutilazioni s'accenna appena per meglio colorire la bellezza tecnica della batosta." *Morgante*, cit., p. XVII.

who begins the octave with an *and*, as another *and* at the end of line 2, introducing the enjambment, and has three in line 6 which contribute in creating a nice lilting alliterative rhythm, which somehow slows the action down instead of speeding it up.

Tusiani gives up all conjunctions in favor of a more condensed development of the action. On the whole, the two translators render the humor of the original episode in two ways: Byron, taken by the adherence to the original metre and rhyme, develops it basically on the linguistic level; Tusiani, who has partially given up this constraint in the six first lines, shows his philological balance between narrative content and rhythmic forms and builds the humor both with linguistic and visual descriptive elements. Rightly James Wyatt Cook observes:

Tusiani is especially skilled at finding or sometimes coining English equivalents for expressions that Pulci has drawn from Florentine street idiom, for linguistic rarities, and for proverbs whose secondary meaning weighs more heavily than their literal ones.⁵⁸

A scrap-iron heap or an ancient armoury

This octave shows how the two translators differently render epic tradition through slightly different semantic approaches.

Stanza 84 of Canto I describes Orlando and Morgante, who are taken by the Abbot to a room stored with old armour before leaving the Abbey for their adventures.

Canto I, stanza 84

E in certa cameretta entrati sono
che d'armadure vecchie era copiosa;
dicea l'abate: – Tutte ve le dono. –

⁵⁸ James Wyatt Cook, review of Tusiani's translation, "Half-serious Rhymes: The Narrative Poetry of Luigi Pulci" *Renaissance Quarterly*, June 22, 1999. See also Leslie Zarker Morgan's more "critical" review "Tusiani's *Morgante*", *Forum Italicum*, vol. 34, no. 1, Spring 2000, pp. 287-293.

Morgante va rovistando ogni cosa;
ma solo un certo sbergo gli fu buono,
ch'avea tutta la maglia rugginosa:
meravigliossi che lo cuopra appunto,
ché mai più gnun forse glien'era aggiunto.

Byron:
And in a certain closet, where the wall
Was covered with old armour like a crust,
The Abbot said to them, "I give you all."
Morgante rummaged piecemeal from the dust
The whole, which, save one cuirass, was too small,
And that too had the mail inlaid with rust.
They wondered how it fitted him exactly,
Which ne'er had suited others so compactly.

Tusiani:
They went together to a little room,
filled to capacity with ancient arms.
The abbot said, "I give them all to you."
Morgante, rummaging through everything,
finally found a hauberk he could use
in spite of its all broken, rusted mail.
He wondered how that thing was so precise,
for never had he found one of his size.

There was a word which troubled Byron in this stanza: *sbergo*, which he correctly rendered as *cuirass*. Yet he was under the constant impression that it could mean 'helmet' as well, and this is the only documented episode during the time of composition of the *Morgante*, of Byron's linguistic 'research' for a meticulous translation. Two letters to his editor Murray reveal that, for the choice of the right term, he asked both his local friends and his English correspondents.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ The passage below is long but deserves to be quoted in full, since it proves Byron's obsession with an uttermost degree of accuracy and shows that all his friends of Murray's Utican Senate who had dealt with Pulci's poem, were involved in the research. "It is strange that here nobody understands the real precise meaning of "*Sbergo*" or "*Usbergo*" – an old Tuscan word which I have rendered *Cuirass* (but I am not sure it is not *Helmet*) I have asked at least twenty people – learned and ignorant – male and female – including poets and officers civil and military. The Dictionary says *Cuirass* – but gives no authority – and a female friend of mine says *positively Cuirass* – which makes me doubt the fact still more than before. – Ginguené says "bonnet de Fer" with the usual superficial decision of a Frenchman – so that I can't believe him – and what between The Dictionary – the Italian woman – and the Frenchman – there is no trusting to a word they say – The Context too which should decide admits of either meaning equally as you will perceive – Ask Rose – Hobhouse – Merivale – and Foscolo – and vote with the Majority – is Frere a good Tuscan? If he be bother him too – I have tried you see to be as accurate as I well could –"

But despite Byron's scrupulosity this stanza shows many semantic shifts from the original and the fluency of rhythm is somehow hampered by two enjambments; nevertheless, as a whole it is one of his most impressive, since the terms he uses operate a parody in a 'pejorative' way of the content of the original.⁶⁰

The first two lines, whose content is plainly and consequentially expounded in the original: *E in certa cameretta entrati sono / che d'armadure vecchie era copiosa*, are rather awkwardly rendered as: *And in a certain closet, where the wall / was covered with old armour like a crust*. Besides changing subject in line 1, the rendering of the adjective *copiosa* with the periphrastic expression *covered . . . like a crust*, displaces the meaning from a positive quality of richness and abundance to the negative idea of something corroded and degraded. This is somewhat in accord with the objects described in the following lines and anticipates, with a vertical alignment, the rhyme of line 4. In fact, Byron adds *from the dust* which is not in the original. Indeed, line 4 too is overwrought if compared to Pulci's text. The short and effective *Morgante va rovistando ogni cosa* is rendered as *Morgante rummaged piecemeal from the dust / The whole*, and needs the first foot of the following line to be completed.

Line 5, which is again more closely entwined to the preceding line than it is in the Italian text, has another displacement of accent: while in the original *sbergo* is the subject of the clause and consequently the only thing that fits Morgante, in Byron's version, *cuirass*, the term he wanted to translate as accurately as possible, is reduced within the space of an incidental clause, so that Byron's line, through the use of an anti-phrase, implies that everything is too small for him but the above-mentioned cuirass. *Too small*, in fact, further stresses this idea through the paronomastic rhyming association with *all*, a term characterized by the opposite positive connotation. Byron's parodic attitude can be found again in line 6 where "inlaid" refers to the scattered presence of rust within the mail of the cuirass, and

Letter of 5 March 1820. Mar. LJ, vol. 7, p. 54. More or less the same drift has the letter he had sent to Murray four days before; see 1 March 1820. Mar. LJ, vol. 7, p. 47.

⁶⁰ See also stanza 39 (unquoted).

the suggestion of an original decorative pattern implied by the adjective “inlaid” is reversed into a negative one with the use of rust imagery.

As a whole, the descriptive elements of Byron’s stanza leave us with the impression of a more degraded reality than the original. Probably, what ‘influenced’ Byron’s imagination in that direction, is the verb *va rovistando* and the adjective *rugginosa* evoking the image of rummaging through an attic full of old useless objects, while, on the contrary, the original tells that Morgante is anxiously searching the *salle d’armes* for a man-size armour that might fit him. In fact, the *sbergo* is not rusty because it has been badly stored away, but because its exceptional size had made it useless for men, and this idea is further stressed in the original by the comment of the final couplet: *meravigliossi che lo cuopra appunto, / ché mai più gnun forse glien’era aggiunto.*

In Byron, what emerges is the impression of a deserted place, as the rhymes *crust / rust / dust* clearly indicate, and the *salle d’armes* is transformed into a scrap-iron heap. For this reason his version sounds particularly parodic; in the nineteenth century chivalric tradition had become a reality so obsolete to be considered ‘rusty’ by a modern reader, even though worthy of being revived. When translating this stanza Byron distances himself from its contents.

Tusiani’s version is closer to the original: the “cameretta” is not the dismissive “certain closet” of Byron’s translation, but is “a little room, filled to capacity with ancient arms,” which almost literally translates the original and maintains the irony of something little which contains, among other armours, a gigantic one. He also properly translates *sbergo* with its English equivalent *hauberk* and not with the hyperonymic cuirass.

The final couplets, as in the preceding stanza, are in both cases brilliantly rhymed. Byron changes the subject from the singular of the original to the plural form of the translation, but misinterprets the causal *ché* for a relative pronoun, which he renders with *which*. His rhyming couplet *exactly - compactly*, shows the combination of two homophonic terms which also create the comic effect produced by two adverbs in such a “stressed” final position. These generate a false etymological figure, being two terms with opposite meanings that sound like

two 'real' antonyms, but are not so because they are united by a false etymological relationship.⁶¹

Tusiani combines *precise* with *size* and perfectly finishes the description of Morgante's rummaging.

Byron's pejorative interpretation of the whole stanza is not present in Tusiani but for the interpolation of the adjective *broken* to *rusted mail*.

What is interesting, though, in Tusiani's twentieth-century 'philological' recovery of traditional masterpieces, is his attitude as translator. Whereas Byron emphasizes an atmosphere of old useless, dusty things, Tusiani translates *vecchie* with *ancient*, an adjective with a positive, noble and historical connotation, which perfectly reflects the poet's parodically respectful approach towards the epic romances of the past.

A difficult fidelity: Byron's parody of the sacred

An important feature of epic tradition is that the hero, the narrator and the audience partake of the same system of values, be they religious, political or institutional, and there's no room for a possible questioning of them on the part of both textual (hero and narrator) and extra-textual (audience) elements. In this case, we see how Byron, once again, dissociates himself from the rules of this communicative framework through another instance of exploitation of parodic occurrences.

Stanza 77 shows Orlando who has decided to leave the abbey with his new friend Morgante and bids farewell to Clairmont, the abbot.

Canto I, stanza 77

Io me ne porto per sempre nel core
l'abate, la badia, questo deserto,
tanto v'ho posto in picciol tempo amore:
rendavi sù nel Ciel per me buon merto

⁶¹ See stanza 45 of Byron's version for the rhyme *repent, content*.

quel vero Iddio, quello eterno Signore
che vi serba il suo regno al fine aperto.
Noi aspettiam vostra benedizione;
raccomandianci alle vostre orazione. –

Byron:

But in my heart I bear through every clime
The Abbot, the abbey, and this solitude –
so much I love you in so short a time;
For me, from Heaven reward you with all good
The God so true, the eternal Lord sublime!
Whose kingdom at the last hath open stood.
Meantime we stand expectant of your blessing,
And recommend us to your prayers with pressing.

Tusiani:

But I forever in my breast will keep
the abbot and the abbey and this place—
it took so short a while to love you so.
May the true God, the deathless Lord above,
reward you well for all you did for me—
He Whose great reign is ultimately yours.
We wait now till your blessings we are given,
And in your prayers remember us to Heaven.

In this stanza the rhythm progresses as smoothly in the two English texts as in the original. Indeed the content does not seem to have proved difficult for the translators, but in Byron's case, we are again faced with an enhancement of burlesque elements and with a sort of literary meta-parody, which, though funny, is not to be found in the original.

Both translators respect the basic semantic division of the topics in three distinct syntactic nuclei, from line 1 to 3, from 4 to 6, and in lines 7-8.

In Byron it is interesting to note the translation of the adverbial phrase of time *per sempre*, in line 1 with the expression *through every clime*, which shifts the accent from a temporal to a spatial level. But *clime* is basically a term which evokes eighteenth-century and romantic poetry, thus implying all that literary production linked to the discovery of new spaces.

In the Italian text the temporal level is developed through the isotopy generated by the rhyming set of line 1, 3, and 5:

... per sempre nel core
 . . .
 ... in picciol tempo amore
 . . .
 eterno Signore

where a double vertical alignment can be detected; firstly the expressions creating time specifications, secondly the terms constituting the three rhymes, which belong to the semantic field of feeling. *Eterno Signore*, in this way, is a sort of final seal on both isotopies, since the two terms of the three syntagmas refer to a universal concept both of time and of love.

A semantic equivalence of the same vertical development can be found in Byron's English version:

... In my heart I bear through every clime
 . . .
 ... I love you in so short a time
 . . .
 ... the eternal Lord sublime

which indeed mirrors the Italian lines with the difference of the above-mentioned shift on the spatial-temporal axis and, for rhyming exigencies, the insertion of the adjective *sublime* as a quality defining God. As a whole, Pulci's isotopy is defined by terms pertaining to Dolce Stil Novo poetry: *per sempre nel core – amore*, while the English isotopy is clearly connoted by terms that somehow belong to the modern poetics of the sublime with its temporal and spatial implications. Pulci's rhymes progress toward a final climax which is maintained and caricatured by Byron. This is another instance of parodic handling of the original, which Byron 'updates' to his own context, and at the same time, endows with metapoetic references, maybe with an allusion to the themes handled in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. While Pulci writes one of those octaves that are typical of epic tradition, in that it refers to religion without mocking it, Byron moves its content toward a more complex aesthetic field and his octave is overlaid with extra meaning. Thus these isotopic chains imply a narrowed

intertextual level which is auto-ironical too, and one of the distinctive features of parody is its auto-referentiality.

The final couplet begins and ends with the addition of two syntagmatic items, *meantime* and *with pressing*, which do not alter the lines either on the semantic level or in their syntagmatic sequence because of their peripheral position. *Meantime* “deflates” those time markers as *eternal* and *at the last* and anticipates the idea of *pressing*. The effect created by the semantic contiguity of the rhyming terms *benedizione* – *orazione*, which belong to the same “religious” isotopy, is toned down with the association of *blessing* – *with pressing*, which are expressions leading Byron’s version back to the more secular language of a polite epistolary style. This combination also expresses the anticlimatic association of two terms belonging to two very different fields: that of prayer, which implies some introspective spiritual time, and that of more secular and material hurry. As funny as these devices may be, they are indicative of Byron’s amused and amusing rendition, and though in tune with the typical parodic (re)handling of these materials, they are not in the original.

Lines 1 and 2 are enjambed in the original and in both translations. Lines 4 and 5 in Pulci’s and Byron’s octaves are enjambed at the same syntactic point, and Byron’s version stands out for the beautifully rendered *with all good / The God so true*, exploiting an alliterative chain of different phonemes in terms that are almost homonymic and linked together as a commonly recognized topos.

Tusinai’s version stands out as an example of a beautifully and faithfully rendered octave and the two isotopies of time and love can be easily detected even without the aid of the rhymes. The content of line 4 is moved to line 5 and viceversa: *May the true God, the deathless Lord above / reward you well for all you did for me—*. This displacement allows him to end the lines without enjambments, and as the meaning never spills over to the next line, the rhythm is better sustained throughout, even without the rhymes of the original. In fact, in *core* – *amore* – *Signore*, and *deserto* – *merto* – *aperto* both strings follow two similar semantic developments of the blessedness bestowed by the Christian faith, in which, thanks to one’s merits and through God’s love, we are allowed to leave this desert and

access His reign. It is interesting to note that the word *Ciel* at the centre of line 4 in the original is not in line 5. But as *Ciel* is too important a term in this context, Tusiani with a typical device well known among translators, postpones it and employs it to culminate the stanza in the final (half)rhyiming couplet *given – Heaven*.

A perfect fidelity: Pulci's and Tusiani's parody of the sacred

Here we have an ironic handling of a religious expression given by an intratextual reference that produces a double meaning. Byron fails to grasp it but Tusiani perfectly catches it, and the roles of the two translators are somewhat reversed in the handling of the octave if compared to the preceding one.

The abbot is in his turn bidding farewell to Orlando and is telling him that even though the monks would like to have him with them, they are aware that he is not a man destined to wear a monk's robe:

Canto I, stanza 82

ma da portar la lancia e l'armadura;
 e puossi meritar con essa come
 con questa cappa, e leggi la Scrittura.
 Questo gigante al Ciel drizzò le some
 per tua virtù; va' in pace a tua ventura,
 chi tu ti sia, ch'io non ricerco il nome,
 ma dirò sempre, s'io son domandato,
 ch'un angel qui da Dio fussi mandato.

Byron:

But to bear arms, and wield the lance; indeed,
 With these as much is done as with this cowl;
 In proof of which the Scripture you may read,
 This Giant up to Heaven may bear his soul
 By your compassion: now in peace proceed.
 Your state and name I seek not to unroll;
 But, if I'm asked, this answer shall be given,
 That here an angel was sent down from Heaven.

Tusiani:

You have to bear your armour and your spear,
whereby you'll earn in heaven just as much
as if you wore this cassock—so says God.
Because of you this giant takes his load
to heaven above. In peace, therefore, depart,
great cavalier, whoever you may be.
If asked about your name, I will insist
that God once sent an angel in our midst.

The image is in line 4. The Abbot says to Orlando: *Questo gigante al Ciel drizzò le some*, while Byron shifts towards a 'spiritualised' rendering of the same action: *This Giant up to Heaven may bear his soul*. The expression *drizzò le some* which exploits a common Biblical image of life seen as a long walk during which man has to carry his own heavy bundle, is probably used by the Abbot with an allusive hint to the episode of the horse. In fact Morgante, who had made it burst in trying to ride it, gets rid of the dead animal by lifting it up, carrying it away and throwing it into a ravine, to the great surprise of Orlando and the Abbot who witness the scene. Thus when the Abbot mentions *le some* that Morgante has raised to the sky, he ironically refers to other and more material weights that the giant has lifted up. However Byron's change of register maintains the physicality of the Abbot's expression in the verb *bear*. In the case of the original text, *some* is a sort of synecdoche characterized by a double process of parody: on the one hand it is devaluating, since 'la soma' is generally carried by an ass, on the other it is linked to a comic device which was widespread in Middle Age, that of the 'adynaton', or of 'the world upside down', which in this case implies that the horse is, like a 'soma' raised by Morgante, a human being, and not its contrary as the rule ought to be.

Even though Tusiani has to enjamb the phrase (which was anyhow enjambed by Pulci on another syntagma: *per tua virtù*), he literally maintains the ambiguity of the original by translating *this giant takes his load / to heaven above*, and the word *load* has a stronger physical connotation but also implies a spiritual meaning which is reinforced by the presence of the word *heaven*, instead of *Ciel*.

In line 5, Byron translates *virtù*, with the term *compassion*, which must have sounded to his contemporary readers, either out of place in that context, since *virtù* (goodness) is not *compassion* (pity), or like an archaism, but probably that term helped the translator to re-create the atmosphere of the original linguistic environment. Tusiani gives the term up for a straightforward *because of you*, which, again, pushes the meaning of the whole sentence toward a more secular interpretation.

Tusiani renders this octave with beautiful alliterations (*bear – spear, or cassock – so says*), while, as to the other lines of the octave, Byron succeeds in giving up the enjambment between lines 2 and 3 of the original, that Tusiani maintains, while he is compelled to interpolate the short clause in the second hemistich of line 3, *e leggi la Scrittura*, for metrical reasons, which he renders as the more explicit: *In proof of which the Scripture you may read*. Tusiani is more literal with the line division and renders this phrase as “dismissively” as Pulci with — *so says God*.

Line 6, which has an anacoluthon in the original text: *chi tu ti sian ch'io non ricerco il nome*, besides being regularized in the syntax, again undergoes the change of register towards a more formal, aulic language: *You state and name I seek not to unroll*, while Tusiani renders with the informal *whoever you may be*.

In line 8, Pulci aligns *Dio*, with *Ciel* of line 4, while Byron iterates *Heaven*. He creates here the same rhyme that Tusiani would use for stanza 77, as we have seen above, with *given – Heaven*.

Contrary to the usual approach, here it is Byron who rephrases the whole octave on a higher register, while Tusiani faithfully keeps the same “informal” language as the original dialogue. The final couplets may be read from this perspective: *domandato – mandato, given – Heaven* and *insist – midst*, where Tusiani's interpolation of *in our midst*, reinforces the secular presence of Orlando among the monks in an octave all based on the dichotomy created by the two isotopies of physical – spiritual, earthly – heavenly.

Tusiani's parodic devices

As interesting as this comparison between Byron's and Tusiani's translations is, Byron limited his rendition to the first canto only, while Tusiani completed the whole twenty-eight cantos of the poem.

Pulci's use of mock-heroic tradition, as already explored at the beginning of this chapter, implied a richly connoted language in which all visual and auditory references transform words in objects themselves thanks to specific figures of speech, such as accumulations, amplifications or superimpositions of meaning.

In his octaves the meaning of a word was not simply substituted through commonly shared language elements, but rather through its caricature – its exaggeration – or through the combination of discordant and incoherent words. All these semantic changes entailed a distortion of communicative values which was itself a parody.⁶²

Pulci's parodic instances are not to be found only in the lexicon used but also in the structure of the poem – and from this perspective the plays created by rhymes are aimed at three narrative levels: *fabula* (the story), plot and discourse.

These processes are both metaphorical (i.e. of selection and substitution according to Jakobson's definition) and metonymic (i.e. of contiguity and combination), and Ceserani points out the obtrusive presence of the narrator they reveal:

Quella del Pulci, inoltre, come è stato più volte detto, è una scrittura che si affida alle potenzialità metaforiche del linguaggio, assai più che a quelle metonimiche e, quanto alle qualità metaforiche, lavora più che sulle metafore

⁶² Remo Ceserani comments: "Si tratta, come si sa, di una scrittura che affida molti dei suoi effetti a un sistema imperterrito di gioco di parodia intertestuale: dietro alla sezione prima e principale del poema sta un testo precedente, il cosiddetto *Orlando*, che il Pulci riscrive a suo modo, ma che a sua volta era una riscrittura di una lunga tradizione di storie, trasmigrate nei secoli dall'area francese a quella franco-veneta e quella toscana, lungo canali letterari di qualche pretesa o lungo canali giullareschi. Ma non basta. Con un gusto continuo della variazione, Pulci alterna i rifacimenti parodici delle storie epico-cavalleresche con rifacimenti parodici di una quantità di altri testi e tradizioni letterarie: le terzine orride e sublimi di Dante Alighieri, le novelle del Boccaccio, la poesia d'amore petrarchesca, le vite dei santi, le sacre rappresentazioni, le cronache storiche, le dispute teologiche, ecc." "Morgante sbarca in America: Tusiani grande 'vocabolista' ". Cit., pp. 98-99.

esplicite su quelle implicite (o 'morte,' nascoste) nelle parole, lavora sulle frasi fatte, i proverbi, i luoghi comuni per recuperarne l'energia espressiva (ed espressionistica) nascosta; lavora sulle alterazioni delle parole, sulle loro ambiguità. Sui loro accostamenti sorprendenti".⁶³

This is how the "festa delle parole" is celebrated in Pulci's octaves: through surrealistic visions and deafening noises. Even the dialect or the colloquial expressions, with their references to a plebeian popular world (that of the countryside and of the kitchens instead of that of courts and battles) fulfils in these lines the triumph of this kind of materiality.

Tusiani's fidelity to this poem lies not only in his skills in reproducing all these language effects but also in producing an effective movement from one culture to another: from fifteenth-century Florence to twentieth-century New York.

His philological accuracy implies an exceptional ability that allows him to move from the semasiologic to the onomasiologic axis that underlies the choice of words, which is fundamental in literary translation. At the same time he exploits a wide lexical heritage in the interplay between signifiers and signifieds, i. e. between the homonymic and synonymic levels of poetry, which are interchangeable in poetry.⁶⁴

The mixing of registers that characterizes the original poem becomes a lexical mixing of multiethnic American culture in the translated text. We have seen it in the "gioco delle pome" which is substituted by baseball, but other cases can be highlighted.

⁶³ Ibidem.

⁶⁴ Stefano Agosti used these terms in order to analyze French classical poetry (Ronsard's sonnets) where rhymes, rhythm and all the phonic elements produce some homonymic chains which underlie the development of an implied "secret" meaning. Different, sometimes even opposed, semantic fields emerge through these homonymic chains which should be associated to other semantic fields through new synonymic chains. In *Il testo poetico*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1972, p. 43. For an application of these concepts to poetic translation see also Pier Marco Bertinetto, "Sul non fortuito incontro di Luzi con Ronsard", in *A Gianluigi Beccaria*, Torino, [n.p.] 1977, pp. 115-130.

An anaphoric theft

Stanza 133 of canto XVIII provides an example of the typical device of accumulation that Pulci skilfully exploited by creating lists of heterogeneous words associated in a metaphorical, metonymic and sometimes illogical way, where each of them justified the following ones, either on a semantic ground, or because of their phonosymbolic, sometimes onomatopoeic, value.

In this kind of poetry, words become self-referential and are used as if they were the very subject matter of poetry: reality is simply made up of objects, which are in their turn substituted by sounds. This is a device that Byron, as well, learned to exploit in some octaves of *Don Juan*⁶⁵, and which Pulci had taken from Burchiello.

Here we have Margutte boasting his arsenal of a thief's instruments:

Canto XVIII, stanza 133

E trapani e paletti e lime sorde
e succhi d'ogni fatta e grimaldelli
e scale o vuoi di legno o vuoi di corde,
e levane e calcetti di feltrelli
che fanno, quando io vo, che ognuno assorde,
lavoro di mia man puliti e belli;
e fuoco che per sé lume non rende,
ma con lo sputo a mia posta s'accende

I can make drills and bolts and noiseless files,
gimlets and picklocks of whatever kind,
ladders – it matters not – of wood or ropes,
and sliding bars, and heavy socks of felt
that keep my walk concealed from every ear:
with these my hands all this nice work I do –
also a flame that not by itself can glow,
but only with my spit when I say so.

The structure of Pulci's octave is developed on the recurrent use of anaphoras – of the conjunction “e” – combined with a paratactic syntax.

⁶⁵ See stanzas of *Don Juan*, VII, 78, 84.

The translator's task is not limited to the rendering of a rich lexicon but also to maintaining the structure of the octave.

Even though Tusiani maintains the anaphoras in several other octaves, here he gives them up but translates with semantic and syntactic precision the whole stanza. From a phonosymbolic perspective, this octave is wholly developed on the dichotomy of noise and silence: considering that the thief's tools, with their noise, can hamper his actions, the lexicon used exploits the onomatopoeic values of sounds even more than the original does. There is an intertwined play of noisy sounds created by the voiced and voiceless bilabial plosives [b], [p], and velar [k]: *drills, bolts, picklocks, ropes, bars, socks, keep, walk work spit*; and of the liquids and spirants [l] and [s], which suggest the muffling of that very noise: *drills, noiseless files, gimlets, picklocks sliding, socks of felt, concealed, also, all, flame, spit, say so*; and we notice that some keywords of this auditory isotopy partake of both characteristics.

In the original we have a mysterious "lume" that can be lit by Margutte's spit. It is probably one of those lanterns used by thieves where the light was hidden inside and could be revived by blowing on it. Margutte's coarseness, perhaps, requires some stronger physical act than simply blowing on a flame and he lights it with his "spito". The final rhyme exploits Margutte's language and its rendering is even funnier than in the original semantic opposition of *non rende / s'accende*. After this long list of a thief's paraphernalia, Margutte can even boast almost demiurgic powers: by obeying his word (*when I say so* is stronger than *a mia posta*) *a flame can glow*. Moreover the rhyme *glow – I say so*, reinforced by the final alliteration of the sound [s], reaches its phonosymbolic climax, but semantic anticlimax, in the power to set fire with a *spit*.

The professional hangman

Another stanza presenting an instance of parodic modernization is when the traitor Gano is tortured and executed in the last canto of the poem:

Canto XXVIII, stanza 11

E come e' fu sopra il carro il ribaldo,
il popol grida intorno: — Muoia, muoia! —
Intanto il ferro apparecchiato è caldo:
non domandar come e' lo conchia il boia,
che non resta di carne un dito saldo,
ché tutte son ricamate le cuoia:
sì ch'egli era alle man di buon maestro,
perché e' facea molto l'ufficio destro.

As soon as wicked Gan was on the cart,
all those around it shouted “Death!” and “Death!”
Fire was ready for the branding iron,
and do not ask me what a great tattoo
the hangman gave him: not an ounce of flesh
was left yet unembroidered on his body:
he was, indeed, in hand professional,
his hangman being skilful and sensational.

The already parodic description in Pulci borrows its language from the practice of branding cattle and tanning hides *ferro ...caldo, conchia, cuoia*, but shows a sudden comic shift with the participle *ricamate*, which ironically indicates the hangman’s “refined” dexterity on Gano’s skin. The rhymes are indicative and can be vertically read as a summary on their own: *ribaldo – caldo – saldo, Muoia! – boia – cuoia*, and *maestro – destro*. In Tusiani the iron instead of branding Gano, transforms his whole skin into *a great tattoo*, and that this very modern hangman is a competent specialist can be inferred from the final lines, which almost sound like an advertisement testifying to his reliability: Gano is in *hands professional* as the hangman is *skillful and sensational*. Thus, from an already parodied world of historic tortures, whose marks are “ricamate” on the villain’s skin, we are taken to the underworld of New York, where local mobsters trust into the hands of some tattooist or tattooer (but not torturer) their skin to be “decorated” with the marks of their everyday inglorious life.

A clash of the dishes

Stanza 56 from canto XXVII describes the massacre of the battle of Roncesvalles.

Canto XXVII, stanza 56

E Runcisvalle pareva un gran tegame
dove fussi di sangue un gran mortito,
di capi e di peducci e di altro ossame
un certo guazzabuglio ribollito,
che pareva d'inferno il bulicame
che innanzi a Nesso non fusse sparito;
e 'l vento per certi sprazzi avviluppi
di sangue in aria con nodi e con gruppi.

All Roncesvalles looked like a saucepan filled
with an enormous omelet stuffed with blood
with heads and little feet and other bones –
a special boiling and reboiling mess
that looked exactly like the blood-red stream
which Nessus down in hell was seeing still;
and it was blood the wind raised from the ground
in splashes, and in knots and clots yet bound.

The “mortito” was a Tuscan dish made with pork head and other animal parts cooked in wine and in a jelly of myrtle berries⁶⁶.

On another occasion Pulci describes a battlefield like a “mortito”: it is in canto XXIII, stanza 38, when Rinaldo and Fuligatto fight against the pagan Pilagi and his men: “tutta la terra pareva coperta / di *gente smozzicata* saracina, / da poter far *mortito o gelatina*.” Tusiani translates “and the whole ground was in a moment filled / with the *ground flesh* of many a Saracen— such as was good for *jam or gelatin*.” In this case Tusiani gives up such a strong visual metaphor for a more shapeless “jam” – which, however, is one of its implied meanings (see note 66) –

⁶⁶ The 5th edition of the *Vocabolario degli accademici della Crusca* (1863-1923), enters the word as such: “Nome che si mette a un Intingolo fatto con carne a pezzetti, specialmente capo di maiale e peducci di castrone, e varj ingredienti e condimenti, tra cui le coccole di mortella o mortine; e da ciò probabilmente ebbe origine la parola.” p. 569. The second edition (1623) entered it as: “Specie di gelatina, detto mortito, dall'esservi infuso dentro coccole di mortine”. P. 531

and conjures up the idea of an undistinguished mix of different ingredients.⁶⁷ Besides, the pun on the double use of the word “ground” introduces with its second meaning, *ground flesh*, the idea of a manslaughter that becomes a gigantic dish even more than the original *gente smozzicata* and it makes up for the loss of the Tuscan recipe.

Tusiani’s rendering of the same dish in canto XXVII stanza 56 with the French *omelet* is rather ironic, and in a way resumes the idea of the shapeless mixture, in which ingredients lose their original form, which could be one of the former meanings for “mortito”. Yet he lists these ingredients as in the original stanza, and the animals’ *peducci*, together with the *capi* and *altro ossame* of the third line become the *little feet* that amusingly counterbalance the *heads* and *bones* of human corpses. Obviously, “little feet” does not refer to children’s feet but to some more local and colloquial use. I think that this phrase could well have been inspired by some translation into English of a typical Hispanic (Peruvian and Mexican) dish, the “patas” or “patitas de puerco”, whose ingredients are very similar to those of the mortito and which is also served in some ethnic restaurants in the United States.

On the whole, as in the case of stanza 38, Tusiani reinforces the gruesome image by rendering explicit the blood-red stream of hell which is implicitly mentioned by the reference to the episode of Nessus in Dante’s *Inferno*.⁶⁸ The stanza also shows an interesting spatial-vertical development which is limited to the expression “in aria” in the original and which begins with the adverb “down”, of *down in hell*, and is completed in the final couplet with the description of the blood blown by the wind which is *raised from the ground* and swept away: *in splashes, and in knots and clots yet bound*.

⁶⁷ See also canto VII stanza 56 where the original has “gelatine e mortiti” to describe the effect of another battle Tusiani translates “jam and gelatin”.

⁶⁸ Dante, *Divina Commedia. Inferno*, Canto XII.

The most twisted stanza of the Morgante

One last example is probably one of the most famous of his octaves, the so called “stanza dei bisticci”, stanza 47 of canto XXIII. This is a much quoted stanza that has already been thoroughly analyzed by Cosma Siani⁶⁹ whose lines are constituted by couples of paronomastic sounds and whole chains of almost homophonic sounds which turn out to be untranslatable.⁷⁰ The double task here is to carry its meaning –secondary though it may be to the puns generated by words – and to develop a similar alternation of assonances and consonances:

La casa pareva cosa bretta e brutta,
 Vinta dal vento, e la natta e la notte
 stilla le stelle, ch'a tetto era tutta;
 del pane appena ne dètte ta' dotte
 pere aveva pure e qualche fratta frutta
 e svina, e svena di botto una botte
 poscia per pesci lasche prese all'esca;
 ma il letto allotta alla frasca fu fresca.

Before showing how Tusiani skilfully and playfully rendered this stanza, a paraphrasis is necessary even for Italian readers. The meaning is as follows:

The house looked miserable and ugly, hit by the wind, and the wattle covering it and the night let the light of the stars be seen from the inside because that was the only roof it had; [the hermit] had only some bread, sometimes, and some pears and some leftovers of fruits, and the barrel he tapped was soon finished; then, in order to offer some fish he hooked some roaches, and then, after eating, the bed was made of leafy branches.

Tusiani gives us his own version which shows his compromise between the necessary pun around which the whole stanza is constructed and its meaning.

The house to oglers ugly seemed and seedy
 Wind-worn, and the reeds' rattle and the night
 Distilled the stars down through the gaping roof.

⁶⁹ In *Le lingue dell'altrove*, cit., pp. 65-66.

⁷⁰ Tusiani had defined this stanza “l'ottava più matta della musa pulciana” and had quoted it entirely in his autobiography. *La parola antica*, cit., p. 165.

The hermit with a crust and crumb of bread
Had pairs of pears and some leftover fruit
He tipped and tapped a barrel most bartenderly,
And then for fish some fishy scales he caught:
But, oh, not bad, the bed with shoots and wrought.

The original has two couples of paronomasia in each line, one couple for each hemistich. Tusiani succeeds in reproducing six couples in his version *oglers/ugly*, *seemed/seedy*, *pairs/pears*, *tipped/tapped*, *fish/fishy*, *bad/bed*, and compensates for the loss of the rest with a rich presence of alliterations, assonances and consonances such as *wind/worn*, *reed's/rattle*, *crust/crumb*, *barrel/bartenderly*, and so on. The meaning slightly changes in order to give priority to these puns but it is apparent that here the signifiers have the best of the signifieds and the reader, of both languages, feels involved in this semantic play.

CHAPTER 4

TUSIANI AND LEOPARDI'S "L'INFINITO"

Il sentimento che si prova alla vista di una campagna o di qualunque altra cosa v'ispiri idee e pensieri vaghi e indefiniti quantunque diletto-sissimo, è pur come un diletto che non si può afferrare, e può paragonarsi a quello di chi corra dietro a una farfalla bella e dipinta senza poterla cogliere: e perciò lascia sempre nell'anima un gran desiderio: pur questo è il sommo de' nostri dilette, e tutto quello ch'è determinato e certo è molto più lungi dall'appagarci, di questo che per la sua incertezza non ci potrà mai appagare.
(Giacomo Leopardi)¹

The poems of Giacomo Leopardi represented a real challenge for Tusiani. He expressed his apprehensions in the preface to the anthology *From Marino to Marinetti* (1974), where a first selection of the *Canti* appeared in 1974:

... certain poets—especially—Leopardi refuse to be, so to speak, disrobed of their intimate garment. Had it been possible to exclude the great Recanatese from this anthology, I would gladly have done so, not to appear guilty of sacrilegious audacity. Do I love his poetry too much or am I, as a translator, only too keenly aware of the impossibility of rendering such words as “ermo,” “verecondo,” and even “giovanezza” into equally new and evasive wonders? It was this veneration, and this fear, that made me translate, [...] all of Leopardi's *Canti* before I grew bold enough to undertake countless revisions of but fourteen of them.²

From this comment we already know that it took him a certain “boldness” to operate “countless revisions” of fourteen cantos only. Assuming, once again, that every poet presents to the translator different types of difficulty, Leopardi's

¹ Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, p. 75 in *Giacomo Leopardi, tutte le opere*, W. Binni and E. Ghidetti, eds, Firenze, Sansoni, 1989.

² *From Marino to Marinetti*, New York, Baroque Press, 1974, pp. xxxi-ii.

poetry is so arduous to the translator's task, because of its unique and inimitable quality which combines an apparent simplicity of expression with perfect musical phrasing. His cosmic pessimism, the basis of his philosophical thought, finds its poetic expression in a verse which is at once strongly meditative, lyrical and intimate and, in Nicolas J. Perella's opinion, is thus "more vulnerable to distortion in translation than are other poetic genres."³ Moreover, Leopardi's linguistic and stylistic perfection – a quality that has often been described as *elusive* or *undefinable* – emphasizes the gap between the originals and its translations which, on some occasions, seems unbridgeable.

Tusiani is well aware of the pitfalls that such apparently simple diction implies:

Leopardi's idiom is unique in the history of Italian poetry. It is a language that he breathes anew, recreating and restoring it to its most primitive and innocent significance. It is as though words from a long-lost tongue were suddenly rediscovered and given each a new meaning and all a new music. How this is achieved is the innermost secret of Leopardi's genius and, at the same time, the torment of his (at least this) translator. Leopardi's theory of the negative nature of pleasure, anticipated in Italy by Pietro Verri, and later expounded in Germany by Schopenhauer, may be forgotten as theory but will forever live as poetry in the timeless beauty of his *Canti*.⁴

His conclusion in front of all the problems of language, metrics and rhythm that constitute this inimitable musicality is again expounded in the preface:

...my own conviction [is]—that Leopardi cannot and perhaps should not, be translated. His poetic diction only sounds Italian but is rather wholly Leopardian—it is, if I may say so, a language within a language, a sound within a sound, or, better still, a sound outside a sound with an echo within echoes.⁵

With his admission Tusiani has highlighted once again the axiomatic untranslatability of poetry and that inexhaustible problem of poetic translation for

³ Nicolas J. Perella, "Translating Leopardi", *Italica*, 77, 3, Autumn, 2000, p. 363.

⁴ *From Marino to Marinetti*, cit., p. xxviii.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. xxxii.

which no technical or theoretical approaches would ever provide a definitive solution.⁶

Therefore, Tusiani produced the first selection of Leopardi's *Canti* in his anthology, and about thirteen years later revised and published in the *Italian Quarterly* the translations of all the *Canti* from I to XXXIV (La ginestra) included. Not until 1998, on the occasion of Leopardi's Bicentennial, was the first complete American translation of all 41 *Canti* published in volume edition.⁷

What is interesting, when considering the issue of translating Leopardi, is that he himself was a strenuous translator from Greek and Latin classics – even his last two *Canti* are free translations of fragments from the Greek poet Simonide di Amorgo – and was aware of the difficulties inherent in the act of poetic translation.

As late as 1826, when he had already accomplished most of his translations, he wrote that even though a poet “diventasse famoso nella sua nazione, a gran pena sarebbe noto al resto dell'Europa; perché la perfetta poesia non è possibile a trasportarsi nelle lingue straniere”⁸. This statement doesn't contradict his deep and lifelong interest in the practice of translation, because on several occasions he expounded in his letters and in the *Zibaldone* personal reflections on translation which were ahead of his time⁹. He did not seem interested in the common debate about the *belles infidèles*, but aimed to deeply enquire into the process of

⁶ There is an interesting comment by Mario Luzi on his translating practice: “...ho sempre sostenuto che il problema della traduzione fosse da trattare più empiricamente che teoricamente. L'esperienza concreta di tradurre mi suggeriva questa opzione. Se, infatti, dovessi riconoscere i movimenti o definire i metodi delle mie traduzioni mi troverei nei pasticci, perché non saprei riassumerli e ricapitarli in uno schema. Non si tratta di materiale rigidamente classificabile, perché, come la vita e la poesia, non si lascia catturare.” “Riflessioni sulla traduzione”, in *La traduzione del testo poetico*, Franco Buffoni, ed., Milano, Marcos & Marcos, 2004, p. 51.

⁷ “Giacomo Leopardi, *I Canti*, Translated by Joseph Tusiani,” *Italian Quarterly*, XXVIII, 109-11, Summer-Fall, 1987, pp. 99-202; *Leopardi's Canti, translated into English verse by Joseph Tusiani*, Fasano, Schena, 1998. This edition is the first complete translation of the 41 *Canti*, as, for the first time, it also contains the last two “From the Greek of Simonides” and “Of the same”. It was sponsored by the Ministero dei Beni Culturali e Ambientali and the Giunta Nazionale Leopardiana.

⁸ Lettera a Francesco Puccinotti, 5 giugno 1826. Giacomo Leopardi, *Epistolario*, Napoli, Giuseppe Margheri, vol. I, 1860, p. 317.

⁹ See L. Portier, “Lo spirito della traduzione in Giacomo Leopardi rispetto all'Ottocento,” in *Leopardi e l'Ottocento, Atti del II Convegno Internazionale di studi leopardiani* (Recanati, 1-4 ottobre 1967), Firenze, Leo S. Olschki editore, 1970, pp. 551-557.

recreation of the original, and in this he shared the vision that Wordsworth and Coleridge had about translation. This process of recreation was defined by the poet as an act of imitation which respects the content and the form of what is being imitated as well as the means used to imitate it: “la piena e perfetta imitazione è ciò che costituisce l’essenza della perfetta traduzione”.¹⁰ Elsewhere he insisted that a stylistic recreation of the original was an act of “traslazione” (implying the etymological value of the word), and considered that some poetic translations of the classics had an aesthetic value which was independent from their apparent utility. A theoretical solution seems possible only when an almost mimetic operation can produce the same emotions and reactions in the reader of the translated text that the original does, and only someone who has the sensibility of a poet, and empathically feels the poet of the original, can succeed in this almost impossible task. In reviewing a versified translation of the Hebrew *Psalter*, Leopardi considered that the notion of fidelity is based on a sort of affinity binding together author and translator and that the translator is involved in a purely creative act:

Poco importa al lettore che il metro della traduzione somigli quello che si pretende scorgere nel testo; pochissimo, che la versione serbi la distinzione de’ versetti che è nell’originale; niente che i salmi, alfabetici o acrostici nel testo, il siano altresì nella traslazione; ma molto che il traduttore si vegga acceso, avvampato dal fuoco dell’originale, moltissimo che la traduzione conservi la semplicità, la forza, la rapidità, il calore della fantasia orientale e profetica [...] sommamente che la versione il commuova quasi come il commuoverebbe l’originale, ...¹¹

This “avvamparsi” in front of the interpretive possibilities of a text was a typical Preromantic and Romantic approach that we find in the Swiss Bodmer and Breitinger and then in German Romanticism with Goethe.

¹⁰ Giacomo Leopardi, *Lo Zibaldone*, cit. p. 1988 and also: “né il pregio dell’imitazione consiste nell’uguaglianza, ma nella simiglianza, né tanto è maggiore quanto l’imitante più s’accosta all’imitato, ma quanto più vi s’accosta secondo la qualità della materia in cui s’imita, quanto questa materia è più degna; e quel ch’è più, quanto v’ha più di creazione nell’imitazione, cioè quanto più v’ha di creato dall’artefice nella somiglianza che il nuovo oggetto ha coll’imitato, ossia quanto questa somiglianza vien più dall’artefice che dalla materia”. Ibidem, p. 2857.

¹¹ In “Parere sopra il salterio ebraico”, *Lo Spettatore*, 31 ottobre; 15 novembre 1816, p. 948.

Finally, he was to state in the preface to his translation of the Second Book of the *Aeneid*: “messomi all’impresa, son ben dritti avere io conosciuto per prova che senza esser poeta non si può tradurre un vero poeta, e meno Virgilio...”¹².

Leopardi’s meditations on translation also introduce the main difficulties that modern translators of the *Canti* encountered – even though not always made explicit in their prefaces or notes.

Besides, the notion that only a poet can translate another poet has implications that will be explored in Leopardi’s translators.

What binds Tusiani even more closely to Leopardi is that he too is a translator who is firstly inspired by the characteristics of a text, its inner musicality, its structure, and his poetic research aims to the very core of poetry itself. In fact he declared that only a translator who is also a poet can access the subtleties of poetic diction and can succeed in rendering them in another language, thanks to a process of stylistic self-reflection:

Ma ogni poeta sa quale verso, o pensiero, o immagine, o effetto sonoro, vorrebbe veder tradotti in una sua poesia, così come sa quali dettagli si potrebbero sacrificare, se la natura della nuova lingua lo richiedesse, senza mettere a rischio la vita della poesia da tradurre. Dovrebbe dunque esserci un’intuitiva concordanza d’ispirazione tra il poeta e il ricreatore di poesia, se si vuole che una composizione viva nel nuovo idioma. [...]
[*Il traduttore*] Deve sentire la poesia che vuole tradurre; e la sentirà solo se prova una subitanea accensione per l’inesplicabile bellezza di cui la poesia stessa sembra essere l’unica possibile esplicazione. Deve, in altre parole, cogliere il pensiero, il sentire, il colore e il ritmo, e cercare di combinarli non allo stesso modo ma nello stesso e con lo stesso calore. [...] deve, per così dire, trasformarsi nel poeta da tradurre, poiché la prima traduzione, o il trasferimento che davvero importa, deve essere da poeta a poeta, più che da poeta a poesia.¹³

Even though Tusiani is here referring to Foscolo’s review of the first two Books of the *Odyssey* translated by Ippolito Pindemonte¹⁴, it is apparent that the

¹² Giacomo Leopardi, “Preambolo alla traduzione del libro secondo dell’Eneide” (1817) in *Giacomo Leopardi, tutte le opere*, cit.

¹³ Joseph Tusiani, “La traduzione poetica”, in Joseph Tusiani tra le due sponde dell’oceano, cit., p. 125 [originally in English in “The translating of Poetry,” *Thought*, vol. XXXVIII, 150, Autumn 1963, p. 375-390. Translation by Cosma Siani]

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp 125-126.

“subitanea accensione” seems to echo Leopardi’s above quoted “avvampato dal fuoco dell’originale” as to the emotional involvement that only a translator who is himself a poet can have in the creative process.¹⁵

As will be analysed below, most of Leopardi’s translators are poets themselves, but the undisputed advantage of Tusiani is that he is a perfect bilingual. Being Italian, he is thus able to translate from his maternal tongue rather than into it; moreover, the fact that he has a degree in Italian classics, allows him to claim a complete familiarity with the original and to succeed in perfectly understanding the import of Leopardi’s verse without losing any subtlety or detail of the original. The overall effect is underlined by Pietro Magno and thoroughly analysed by Luigi Bonaffini in his review; both scholars agree that Tusiani’s translation succeeds in giving Leopardi a true English voice and making him sound like Leopardi in English.¹⁶ But before expanding on this issue it is useful to put Tusiani’s contribution to Leopardi in context and trace the fortune of Leopardi’s *Canti* in the English-speaking world.

¹⁵ Joseph Tusiani’s emotional involvement in the process of translation is rather “Romantic”. We ought to remember here, that he had studied and translated Wordsworth’s poetry for his degree dissertation.

¹⁶ Pietro Magno, “The First Complete Translation of Leopardi’s *Canti*. Introductory Note” in *Leopardi’s Canti. Translated into English by Joseph Tusiani*, preface by Franco Foschi, Fasano, Schena, 1998; Luigi Bonaffini, “Leopardi’s *Canti*, Translated by Joseph Tusiani, Fasano, Schena Editore, 1998”, *Forum Italicum*, 2000, Spring, vol. 34, I, pp. 311-314.

LEOPARDI'S *CANTI* IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD**The nineteenth century**

That Leopardi's genius and erudition had been appreciated abroad before they were recognized in Italy is a well-known fact. His cult grew so rapidly in Europe that George Saintsbury benignly warned his British contemporaries against the spreading of "Leopardism".

This is not the place to linger on the chronology and on the analysis of Leopardi's fortune in England and America, which has been so thoroughly investigated – among others, by G. Singh, Nicolas J. Perella and Peter Lecouras¹⁷ – but it is nonetheless important to mention the few names among his critics, admirers, biographers who, being in most of the cases poets themselves, contributed with their translations of the *Canti* to the growing interest in Leopardi in the English-speaking world.

The very first translation was by the literary scholar Arch-deacon Francis Wrangham, who translated in 1832 "All'Italia," the first poem in the *Canti*; meanwhile single prose works were also being rendered into English. In 1848 G.H. Lewes¹⁸ and in 1850 W.E. Gladstone each produced a critical essay which testifies to their deep appreciation of his works, even though Leopardi's pessimism was in part an obstacle in Victorian England.¹⁹ Indeed, Leopardi's thought could not match Victorian readers' expectations, and it is not a coincidence that his patriotic poems were the first ones to be understood and

¹⁷ Cfr. G. Singh, ed., *I canti di Giacomo Leopardi nelle traduzioni inglesi*, Recanati, Centro Nazionale di Studi Leopardiani, 1990; also in *Leopardi and the Theory of Poetry*, 1964; and *Leopardi e l'Inghilterra*, 1968. Nicolas J. Perella, op. cit.; P. Lecouras, "Leopardi's Reception in England: 1837 to 1927", *Italica*, vol. 86, Summer 2009, pp. 313-327.

¹⁸ In his above quoted essay Peter Lecouras points out how Lewes's novel *Ranthrope* was deeply influenced by Leopardi.

¹⁹ An example of the mixed feelings of "admiring disapproval" (to say it with George Henry Lewes's words, who wrote an anonymous article in the *Frazer's Magazine* in 1848) is provided by Christina Rossetti who, in her *Imperial Dictionary of universal Biography*, 1867, praised the poet for his "pure morals, a loving heart and exalted intellect" but expressed her reservations about his lack of faith.

accepted. After 1848 English readers were interested in Italian politics, and curiosity arose mainly around those Italian authors who eloquently supported Italian patriotism.²⁰ After that, reviews and articles on the poet started appearing more than once in literary periodicals. In the pages of *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1865, and in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1876 Margaret Oliphant published her translations of some of Leopardi's *Canti*,²¹ which, in Singh's opinion, for the most part constitute an improvement if compared to the first ones.

James Thomson "B.V." was, among English nineteenth-century poets, the greatest exponent of Leopardi's ethos; an English "Leopardi", as he has been called. Thomson translated the *Operette Morali*,²² wrote two essays about the Italian poet, dedicated to him his famous poem *The City of Dreadful Night* and adopted two long quotes by Leopardi as epigraphs for his book, to show his admiration for the poet. *The City of Dreadful Night* is a poem full of unrelenting pessimism which is clearly colored by Leopardian motives and themes and – again in Singh's opinion – it was through Thomson (and indirectly through Schopenhauer) that Leopardism would take deep root on English soil. Besides, thanks to his translation of the *Operette morali*, Thomson greatly contributed to the critical fortune of the poet in England.

Another important critical contribution was given by Matthew Arnold who proclaimed Leopardi one of the greatest poets along with Goethe, Wordsworth and Byron.²³ Symonds was himself a sort of disciple and emulator of the poet,

²⁰ Louisa Anna Merivale published the anthology *Italian Poetry and Patriotism* which included nine of her own translations of Leopardi's poems in 1865. Two years before she had written an essay in the pages of the *Frazer's Magazine* which was the first outstanding critical appreciation of the poet. See Lecouras, op. cit.

²¹ "A Silvia", "Le ricordanze", "La quiete dopo la tempesta", "Il sabato del villaggio", "Amore e morte", "A se stesso".

²² Published first in the *National Reformer* (1867-1877), and later in volume accompanied by a long biographical essay with the title "Essays and Thoughts of Giacomo Leopardi" in 1905.

²³ Arnold considered Leopardi superior to Byron for his sense of form and style and for the profundity of his philosophical thought and superior to Wordsworth for his wider culture and mental lucidity and because he was free from illusions in front of reality. But in the end, his criticism reflected the sensibility of Victorian period and he deemed both Byron and Wordsworth "greater" than Leopardi for the former's personality and for the latter's "criticism of life". In his preface to his *Poetry of Byron*, (1881) "Byron", *Essays in Criticism: second series*, S.R. Littlewood, ed., New York, St. Martin's, 1966, pp. 97-120. (For Arnold's criticism on Byron, see Lecouras, op.cit.) John Addington Symonds was to challenge Arnold's opinion by publishing an

though he only translated "A se stesso".²⁴ Richard Garnett, poet, translator and biographer included a translation of "L'infinito" in his *History of Italian literature* (1898).

By the end of the century, England had found in Leopardi "a poet who, in spite of his pessimism, or perhaps, in the case of some readers, because of it, interpreted better than Tennyson or Browning, the post-romantic spirit of the nineteenth century."²⁵ And translations of his *Canti*, as well as of *Operette Morali*, gradually became more numerous.

The poet, dramatist and translator Eugene Lee-Hamilton published in 1878 a selection of eight *Canti* in the volume *Poems and Transcripts*; and the poet and translator Francis Henry Cliffe, at the turn of the century, published in his *Poems of Leopardi* (1893), twenty-five *Canti*, which became thirty-four in an enlarged edition of 1903.

Yet, it was Frederick Townsend, an American man of letters for many years residing in Italy, who gave English readers the first almost complete translation of the *Canti* – thirty-eight out of forty-one – in his volume *The Poems of Giacomo Leopardi* in 1887.

From the second half of the century, American poets, as well, had been active in appreciating and translating Leopardi.

In 1853 the critic Henry Tuckerman, who traveled a good deal in Italy, devoted a whole chapter of his book *Mental Portraits* to the poet and entitled it "The Sceptical genius".

Five years later, in 1858, the first two American translations appeared in the pages of the periodical *Christian Examiner*. They were by the poet and translator Thomas W. Parsons who anonymously reviewed *Opere di Giacomo Leopardi* (1845-1846) and *Epistolario* (1849) and translated "Scherzo" and "Bruto Minore".

article entitled "Is Poetry at Bottom a Criticism of Life?" in *Essays Speculative and Suggestive*, (1894), [n.p.] Elibron Classics, 2004, pp. 337-357.

²⁴ Published in *The Cliftonian*, 1872.

²⁵ Singh, op. cit. p. 57.

W. D. Howells and H. W. Longfellow contributed with articles and translations to the growing fame of the poet²⁶ in the United States, while Herman Melville clearly referred to Leopardi in his poem “Clarel” and was influenced by his philosophy in the novel *The Confidence Man*.

The end of the nineteenth century also saw other American contributions: by Julian Hawthorne, John Russell Young, *et al.*, who edited the ten volumes of *The Masterpieces and the History of Literature*, which contained an anonymous introductory note on Leopardi and the translations of “Ultimo canto di Saffo” and “Il sabato del villaggio”, 1899; by Katharine Hillard’s article on Leopardi and translations of “A Silvia” and “Canto notturno;”²⁷ and by the poet and biographer Gamaliel Bradford, who translated “L’infinito” in his article “A Pessimist Poet”, published in *Poet-Lore* in 1893.

The twentieth century

While nineteenth-century poets and critics found in Leopardi’s sensibility a lyrical voice for their own dilemmas, with the turn of the century readers saw in his pessimism an expression of poetic modernity in tune with the prevailing cultural climate. The critical literature on the poet became extensive not only in Italy but also in the English-speaking world, even though it still remained mostly limited to scholarly or academic circles, a fact that has frustrated and still frustrates the admirers of his thought and poetry. But having become a part of the literary establishment, the numbers of his translators increased accordingly.

²⁶ W.D. Howells translated “A Silvia,” “A se stesso” and “Sopra il ritratto di una bella donna” in his *Modern Italian Poets*, 1887; H. W. Longfellow wrote a brief introduction to Leopardi in the second edition of his anthology *The Poets and Poetry of Europe*, 1870, which included translations by Thomas W. Parsons and Howells.

²⁷ In volume 15 of *Library of the World’s Best Literature* (30 vols) 1896-1898.

Ezra Pound in 1911 translated "Sopra il ritratto di una bella donna",²⁸ the great British philosopher Bertrand Russell encouraged the poet R.C. Trevelyan to translate Leopardi's poetry²⁹ into English, while the translator J.M. Morrison in 1900 and the Scottish poet Sir Theodore Martin in 1904 had published two almost complete editions of the *Canti*.

From the British academic field, two complete translations of all 39 *Canti* have been given by two eminent Leopardian scholars who also authoritatively commented on Leopardi's poems: G. L. Bickersteth, in 1923 and J. H. Whitfield in 1962.³⁰ Bickersteth was the first translator to conceive the *Canti* as a single, coherent work of art and as such it had to be rendered in English. Besides, he was also convinced that fidelity to the original entailed as near as possible equivalence of form and meaning. Whitfield's version was in blank verse and did not pay heed to Leopardi's rhymes and rhythm, and as a whole was less poetically effective than Bickertsteth's.

The American poet and translator Kenneth Rexroth translated "L'infinito" appending it in his own collection of poems *The Signature of All Things*, 1949. Robert Lowell, too, paid his very personal tribute to the poet by loosely translating "L'infinito", "A Silvia" and "Il sabato del villaggio" in his volume *Imitations* in 1961.³¹

Jean Pierre Barricelli, professor of humanities at the University of California, published his translations of the *Poems by Giacomo Leopardi* in 1963³² in a parallel-text edition using, what he called a "poetic-prose translation".

Ottavio M. Casale, published in 1981 *A Leopardi Reader*, which contained a selection of the *Canti*, the *Operette Morali*, the *Zibaldone* and the *Pensieri*; the Italian American writer Arturo Vivante published a bilingual edition of sixteen

²⁸ For an analysis of Pound's translation see Gabrielle Barfoot, "Ezra Pound as Translator of Leopardi", in *La traduzione poetica nel segno di Leopardi*, Rosario Portale, ed., Pisa, Giardini, 1992, pp. 79-88.

²⁹ His *Translations from Leopardi*, 1941 included a selection of 14 *Canti*.

³⁰ G. L. Bickersteth, *Canti, The Poems of Giacomo Leopardi*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1923; J. H. Whitfield, *Leopardi's Canti Translated into English Verse*, Naples, G. Scalabrini Editore 1962 [bilingual].

³¹ Kenneth Rexroth, *The Signature of All Things*, New York, New Directions, 1948; Robert Lowell, *Imitations*, London, Faber & Faber, 1961.

³² Jean Pierre Barricelli, *Giacomo Leopardi: Poems*, New York, Las Americas, 1963.

Canti in 1988. A recent contribution was another bilingual edition of a selection of the *Canti* by Thomas G. Bergin and the Italian American scholar Anne Paolucci. It includes some excerpts from *Zibaldone*, journals and letters quoted as commentaries to the included poems, 2003.³³

The twentieth century also saw the very active participation of Irish and Scottish contributors. From John Millington Synge who translated into prose the first 27 lines of “A Silvia”, to Patrick Creagh, Anglo Irish poet and translator, who translated the *Operette Morali* and ten *Canti* in 1982, to Desmond O’Grady, another Irish Poet who translated “A Silvia” in 1988. The most important homage, though, was paid by Paul Lawton and Eamon Grennan with two bilingual editions of selected *Canti*. Lawton published 24 poems from the *Canti* in 1996, the following year, Grennan translated fifteen *Canti* plus the “Chorus of the Dead” from the *Operette Morali*.³⁴

In 1998, on the occasion of Leopardi’s Bicentennial, Irish poets outdid all other previous contributions with a collective endeavour containing more than one-hundred “responses” inspired by his poetry and thought published with the title *Or volge l’anno / At the Year’s Turning*, taken from the second line of “Alla luna”.³⁵

Similarly several Scots poets and scholars, had published in 1987 another anthology, *A Scottish Quair*, fashioning a trilingual version (English, Scots and Gaelic) of eleven poems from the *Canti* and the “Coro dei morti”.³⁶

A few more names deserve mention: Henry Reed, British poet and radio dramatist who translated “L’infinito” and “Coro dei morti” which were both broadcast on BBC radio and printed in the fifties³⁷; the English poet John Heath-Stubbs who

³³ Ottavio M. Casale, *A Leopardi Reader*, Urbana-Chicago-London, University of Illinois Press, 1981; Arturo Vivante, *Giacomo Leopardi Poems*, Wellfleet MA, 1988; Thomas G. Bergin and Anne Paolucci, *Selected Poems of Giacomo Leopardi*, Smyrna DE, Griffon House Publications, 2003.

³⁴ Giacomo Leopardi, *Canti*, selected and introduced by Franco Fortini and translated by Paul Lawton, Dublin, UCD Foundation for Italian Studies, 1996; Giacomo Leopardi, *Selected Poems*, translated by Eamon Grennan, Princeton, Princeton UP, 1997.

³⁵ This volume also contains Synge’s unfinished “A Silvia” and Grennan’s translations quoted above. The poems in the volume are in English, Hiberno-English and Gaelic. *Or volge l’anno / At the Year’s Turning: An Anthology of Irish Poets Responding to Leopardi*, edited, introduced and annotated by Marco Sonzogni, Dublin, Dedalus, 1998

³⁶ *Leopardi: A Scottish Quair*, Edinburgh, Italian Institute, 1987.

³⁷ In *The Listener*, April 28th, 1949, and June 1st 1950.

translated fifteen *Canti* and the "Coro dei morti" in 1946³⁸; and David Gascoyne, the English surrealist poet who translated (in a limited edition) "A se stesso" in 1985.

In the nineties: the British poet and translator Alistair Elliot, who in his volume of translations by 18 Italian poets, *Italian Landscape Poems* (1993) included "L'infinito", "La sera del di di festa" and "La ginestra"; and Paul Lawton, who published a selection of twenty-four *Canti* with an introduction by Franco Fortini (1996).³⁹

A collection of different vices: Singh's translated anthology

This brief chronological survey of the translations of the *Canti* and poems is partly indebted to Singh's anthology⁴⁰ *I Canti di Giacomo Leopardi nelle traduzioni inglesi*, and does not aim at being exhaustive in the panorama of The English translations of Leopardi. In the rich introduction to his volume Singh provides the evidence of how Leopardi has been a significant presence among thinkers, poets and writers of the last two centuries.

It is probably the most comprehensive study written so far on the impact of Leopardi's poetry on Anglo American culture, and it proves particularly useful when we want to analyze all the different approaches to translations, as it contains a final detailed section on the chronology of all translations, a list of the translated poems by each translator, and notes about the translators' bibliographies.

Singh, a poet and a scholar himself, has dedicated his life to the study of Leopardi. He carefully selected and edited all the translations following personal criteria of

³⁸ In 1966, together with Iris Origo, he also edited, translated and introduced *Giacomo Leopardi: Selected Prose and Poetry*, London, Oxford University Press.

³⁹ Alistair Elliot, *Italian Landscape Poems*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe Books, 1993 Paul Lawton, *Canti*, Dublin, University College Dublin, 1996.

⁴⁰ See note 17. The anthology also contains an interesting preface by Mario Luzi and a foreword by Franco Foschi.

appreciation and of what he considers to be the best English version of each poem.

In the Introductory note he explains:

... my choice of a particular translation was by no means determined solely by the personal distinction of the translator in question. The fundamental criterion governing my choice was, of course, the intrinsic quality of the translation as such – both as poem in itself, and as a valid literary and philological equivalent in English of the original poem, maintaining as close a textual fidelity as possible, without doing violence to the naturalness of the English idiom, syntax and inflexion.⁴¹

But below he feels compelled to add: “however good the translations, the gap between what Leopardi’s poetry means to him who reads him in the original, and what it means in translation is both unavoidable and unbridgeable.”

The fact that his English *Canti* is the result of several poetic translations offers the possibility to compare different approaches to translation, and to expand on their variety. Yet, it implies a certain lack of unity and that absence of intertextual echoes that the *Canti* require and probably would have reached if translated by a single poet.

In his appended chronology of poems translated, Tusiani’s versions are the most recent to appear. Singh lists “L’infinito”, “A Silvia”, “A se stesso” published in the *Italian Quarterly* in 1987 and “Alla primavera” e “Bruto Minore”, published in *Forum Italicum* in 1989.

Singh’s knowledge is imprecise here, as we know that by 1974 Tusiani had already translated and published 14 *Canti*; his complete translation, though, would appear in 1998, eight years after Singh’s anthology.

We do not know what he thought of Tusiani’s translations. Perhaps, Singh’s partial knowledge of Tusiani’s contribution accounts for the fact that he did not choose any of his translations to exemplify/represent Leopardi’s poetry in his English anthology.

⁴¹ Singh, op. cit., p. 71.

He also does not mention another tribute by the Italian American writer, Arturo Vivante, who in 1988 had published 16 *Canti* in bilingual edition.⁴²

It is nonetheless worth considering which criteria used to Singh select different translators, because his choice can shed some light on the diverse approaches to translating Leopardi.

In an earlier essay he had stated that "le migliori traduzioni inglesi di Leopardi sembrano piuttosto delle parafrasi in prosa che aspirano ad essere poesia."⁴³ Here Singh explains that he has offered two different approaches according to the type of poem that was being translated.

For the poems that he considered more intensely lyrical, he chose translators who were themselves poets, because these types of poems require a corresponding mastery over creative resources.

In the case of longer and more discursive poems, he preferred a scholarly approach, as he thought that these poems would require a more faithful and lucid rendering of Leopardi's thought, and it had to be expressed in a language at one time fluent and idiomatic without running the risk of being either literal or prosaic.

Once again, we are confronted with the dichotomy of creative vs philological translations.

Thus, surely not of a paraphrastic character are all the creative renderings by Patrick Creagh, James Thomson "B.V.", Ezra Pound, R.C. Trevelyan, John Heath Stubbs and David Gascoyne; as are the "imitations" by Robert Lowell, which have very little in common with the above mentioned idea Leopardi had of his own *imitazioni* after Greek poetry.

But between paraphrases and imitations Glauco Cambon seems to find that right renderings ought to be able to preserve the true poet's voice and to stand on their own merit as true "independent English poems". It was while reviewing John Heath Stubbs's edition of Leopardi's *Selected Prose and Poetry* (1967) that

⁴² Arturo Vivante, *Giacomo Leopardi. Poems*, cit.

⁴³ G. Singh, "Leopardi e suoi traduttori inglesi", in *La traduzione poetica nel segno di Giacomo Leopardi, Atti del I Simposio Internazionale (Macerata, 29-30 Novembre 1988)*, Pisa, Giardini Editori, 1992, p. 58.

Cambon commented on Lowell's much discussed and "maligned" imitations: "... Leopardi's poetry (among others) has been ravaged, rather than interpreted and recreated, by a different poetical personality strong enough to use the given text as a springboard for some Pindaric flights but not humble enough to *listen* to the foreign voice being imitated", while Stubbs's translations excelled for literary style, editorial competence and philological accuracy, giving Leopardi "a true English voice by carefully listening to the unique Italian music he was transcribing."⁴⁴

Thus, if we place Singh's anthology in the international debate on Leopardi, its value lies not only in its thorough overview on Leopardi's presence in the English-speaking world, but also as it "bears an impressive testimony to the creative, critical and philosophical resources of the English language, thanks to which the various translators, have been able to respond, with illumined perception, to Leopardi's poetic and stylistic genius."⁴⁵

Since then, poets, scholars and academics have continued to test their skills with Leopardi's poetry.

Leopardi on the web

Besides Tusiani's edition in print of 1998 and some recent others,⁴⁶ a number of online translations have appeared on the web in the last decade and has added to the ones existing in print.

The contemporary American poet Carl Selph translated "A se stesso", "Alla luna", and "L'infinito" in 1999. The British poet and translator A.S. Kline made available on his website "Poetry in translation" his complete translation of the

⁴⁴ Glauco Cambon, review of "Giacomo Leopardi. Selected Prose and Poetry. Edited, translated and introduced by Iris Origo and John Heath-Stubbs", *The Modern Language Journal*, vol. 52, no. 4 (Apr. 1968), p. 229.

⁴⁵ Singh, *I canti di Giacomo Leopardi nelle traduzioni inglesi*, cit., p. 73.

⁴⁶ See above Elliot, Lawton, Bergin and Paolucci.

Canti in 2003 and also took the liberty of rearranging the order conceived by Leopardi into a new one consisting of four groups: personal, philosophical, romantic and political. A translator called Kenneth David West uploaded on the web his version of "L'infinito" in 2003; while the British translator Tim Chilcott published 34 *Canti* on his website in 2008 with a rich introduction on the problems of translating Leopardi.

A. Z. Foreman, a linguistic student with an interest in literary translation published on the blog "poems found in translation" an interesting rendering of "L'infinito" in 2009. Finally, John Holcombe provided a comparative analysis of some translations of "L'infinito" and about the problems of translating that poem (the copyright page dates from 2004 to 2007).⁴⁷

PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATING LEOPARDI'S *CANTI*

If I have lingered on the chronology, range and variety of many of the existing translations of the *Canti* in English it is because they provide a full scope for analysis of how deeply Leopardi's poetry has met the translators' interest, despite its uniqueness and difficulty, or perhaps because of that. By comparing their different versions – a selection of which has been appended to this study – we can also see how they have tried to solve "the undefinable quality of his poetry, the apparent simplicity of diction and syntax combined with a perfect sense of rhythm and musical phrasing, which defy analysis or explanation and represent a daunting challenge for any translator".⁴⁸

The question of Leopardi's language is of utmost importance. It is undeniable that the poet was writing at a time when Italian as a national language was undergoing

⁴⁷ These versions of "L'infinito" are all quoted in the final appendix.

⁴⁸ Bonaffini, op. cit., p. 310.

a process of formation, but his fascination with words has more than once contradicted what he considered to be the essential aim in poetry – clarity and simplicity – and has puzzled more than one translator, and sometimes even Italian readers.

Leopardi too expounded his ideas of what poetic language should be in his *Zibaldone* where he returned on more than one occasion to the difference between terms and words.⁴⁹ “Terms”, in their specificity, should only be used in scientific language because they are informative, and “words” in poetry, because of their ability in conjuring up accessory images, sensations and feelings:

Quindi la secchezza che risulta dall'uso de' termini, i quali ci destano un'idea quanto più si possa scompagnata, solitaria e circoscritta; laddove la bellezza del discorso e della poesia consiste nel destarci gruppi d'idee, e nel fare errare la nostra mente nella moltitudine delle concezioni, e nel loro vago, confuso, indeterminato, incircoscritto. Il che si ottiene colle parole proprie, ch'esprimono un'idea composta di molte parti e legata con molte idee concomitanti; ma non si ottiene colle parole precise o co' termini (sieno filosofici, politici, diplomatici, spettanti alle scienze, manifatture, arti ec. ec.) i quali esprimono un'idea più semplice e nuda che si possa. Nudità e secchezza distruttrice e incompatibile colla poesia, e proporzionatamente, colla bella letteratura.⁵⁰

We see how this distinction touches first Leopardi's poetry, but also, in a wider sense, the task of the literary translator.

Leopardi elaborated this notion of a vague and undetermined language – he also defined it “peregrino”, erratic – on the doctrine of sensism, which attributed to individual perceptions, rather than to abstract thinking, the true form of cognition.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, “Alle scienze son buone e convengono le voci precise, alla bella letteratura le proprie. Ho già distinto in altro luogo le parole dai termini, e mostrata la differenza che è dalla proprietà delle voci alla nudità e precisione. E' proprio ufficio de' poeti e degli scrittori ameni il coprire quanto si possa la nudità delle cose, come è ufficio degli scienziati e de' filosofi il rivelarla. Quindi le parole precise convengono a questi, e sconvengono per lo più a quelli; a dirittura l'uno e l'altro. Allo scienziato le parole più convenienti sono le più precise ed esprimenti un'idea più nuda. Al poeta e al letterato per lo contrario le parole più vaghe, ed esprimenti idee più incerte, o un maggior numero di idee ec. Queste almeno gli denno esser le più care, e quelle altre che sono l'estremo opposto, le più odiose.” Cit., p. 1226.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, pp. 1235-1236.

⁵¹ Franco Brioschi comments: “Il Leopardi rivendica all'immaginazione una sorta di primato gnoseologico, attribuendole la capacità di trascendere l'universo entificato in cui l'intelletto ci

If poetry is the language of nature, and the language nature speaks is universal, we understand how the language Leopardi uses to define it is the product of an unrelenting aesthetic research, which in his writings becomes a sort of theory of style.

Yet, despite the thematic complexity and the richness of diverse poetic forms, the lexicon of the *Canti* is surprisingly small; key words tend to be linked to the same adjectives or verbs in different contexts and thus to evoke very different signifiers – and suggestions. It is a language whose apparent descriptivism is instead expressing the various articulations of his deep and complex thought. Antonio Prete has, in fact, defined Leopardi's poetry as a sort of synthesis between "pensiero poetante" and "poesia pensante"⁵²; and the awareness of what Leopardi's language is and stands for must be handed down to the translator because the problems Leopardi encountered in composing his *Canti* are the same the translator faces in rendering them if he or she wants to do justice to their aesthetic quality.

Tim Chilcott, a literary translator, observes:

...the night is almost always *placida* or *quieta*; the moon *candida* or *tacita*, *solinga* or *pellegrina*. Woods are invariably *tacite* and fate *acerbo* or *duro*. The formulaic quality of such characterizations seems further strengthened by his deliberate use of archaisms, rather than words of his own contemporary Italian.⁵³

These syntagms create intratextual echoes among the *Canti* and when combined with a skilful use of archaic expressions (which betrays the poet's philological training) aim at conjuring up particular phonic and musical effects. What the translator must perceive, even before attempting the actual translation, is the

imprigiona, per attingere la realtà che lo fonda." In *La poesia senza nome, saggio sul Leopardi*, Milano, Il saggiatore, 1980 pp. 86-87; and below: "In effetti il sensismo, rivendicando il valore delle passioni e della fantasia, non solo gli offriva conferma nella sua polemica contro l'intelletto, ma rappresentava anzi il più autorevole precedente storico della sua intuizione vitalistica, motivata in termini di risoluta immanenza." p. 89.

⁵² Antonio Prete, *Il pensiero poetante. Saggio su Leopardi*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1980. See also his more recent *Finitudine e infinito. Su Leopardi*, Milano Feltrinelli, 1998.

⁵³ Cfr. Tim Chilcott: Tim Chilcott, Literary Translation: <http://www.tclt.org.uk/index.html>

continuous interdependence that semantic, phonosymbolic and iconic values bear to one another within different experimental rhythmic patterns and stanzaic forms. Giovanni Cecchetti compares Grennan's translations of the *Canti* to Tusiani's in his review article "Un altro Leopardi in Inglese".⁵⁴ The overall import of his observations is much to the detriment of the former's solutions and to the appreciation of the latter's, which he defines as "davvero liricamente fedeli"; and then he adds "Il Tusiani, che è fine poeta sia in italiano che in inglese, per non dire in latino, può far da esempio, quando ci si mette a tradurre il Leopardi (oltre a tantissimi altri poeti italiani)."⁵⁵

But what is worth observing here are some adjectives that all Italian scholars of Leopardi have highlighted and that both Cecchetti and Nicolas J. Perella⁵⁶ consider as crucial in the poet's vocabulary because by reverberating from one poem to the other, they put to a hard test the translator of Leopardi's skills. Two of them are quite indicative: the adjective "dolce" is a recurring one in the *Canti*: *dolce mia greggia* in the "Canto notturno di un pastore errante", the *naufregar m'è dolce* of "L'infinito" or *dolce e chiara è la notte* in "Sera del dì di festa" and *dolci alberghi* in "La ginestra".

The other is the "famous" "vago", already encountered, which epitomizes the quality of Leopardi's poetry in its own right: *vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* of "Le ricordanze", *di quel vago avvenir* of "A Silvia" and, with a more precise different meaning, *ancor sei vaga / di mirar queste valli* of the "Canto notturno di un pastore errante".⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Giovanni Cecchetti, "Un altro Leopardi in inglese", *Italica*, vol. 75, n. 2, Summer 1998, p. 242-252. See also the review by Umberto Mariani of the three editions of the *Canti* by Lawton, Grennan and Tusiani in which he compares some passages by the three translators by analyzing if and how they have been able in capturing both the melodic flow of Leopardi's rhythm and the concision of his lines. His conclusion is that "the subtle music suggested by Leopardi's occasional use of rhymes and assonances are [sic] echoed whenever the opportunity arises by Tusiani [...]. Ultimately, Tusiani's effort is the most valuable in that it is a complete translation of the *Canti*, allowing the reader to experience the entire range of the poet's inspiration and human concerns and their evolution through his lifetime." *Italian Quarterly*, year XXXVIII, nos. 147-148, Winter-Spring, 2001 pp. 122-125.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 244-245. Cecchetti was himself a scholar and a poet and translated Leopardi's *Operette Morali*.

⁵⁶ Nicolas J. Perella, *op. cit.*

⁵⁷ For an interesting analysis of the adjective *vago* in its diverse translations by one of Leopardi's translators, see: Patrick Creagh, "Quel maledetto 'vago'!", in *La traduzione poetica nel segno di*

The importance of those words in translation is that being signifiers of key concepts, they become themselves signs charged with a range of possible meanings in different rhythmical and syntactical contexts. Thus, they must be rendered with words that have the same evocative power.⁵⁸

On commenting the problem of translating Leopardi's poetic style Perella observes:

Leopardi's translators inevitably speak of the dual and apparently antithetical if not antagonistic co-presence of feeling and thought, of lyricism and rhetorical eloquence as the characteristic that makes translation of his poetry so difficult and problematic. More specifically, I think, the difficulty lies in the alternation between lyricism that tends toward a simplicity of expression even as it avails itself of a quasi-archaic elitist vocabulary, and a classicizing, at times convoluting syntax; at the best moments, there is a magical blend of these apparently discrete elements.⁵⁹

Interpreting "L'infinito"

L'infinito

- 1 Sempre caro mi fu quest'ermo colle,
- 2 E questa siepe, che da tanta parte
- 3 Dell'ultimo orizzonte il guardo esclude.

Giacomo Leopardi, cit., pp. 101-106. Giovanni Cecchetti makes a comment which sounds like a pun: "Il Leopardi è molto attento a lasciar nel vago quel che dice, perché è appunto il vago che crea visioni, cioè la poesia [...] Insomma il problema qui son le sfumature. La poesia è tutta nelle sfumature; guai se si traduce senza questa convinzione profonda." op. cit., p. 250.

⁵⁸ I'm referring here to the well-known structural definition of the "hyper-sign" in poetry, in which the relationship between phonic and semantic equivalences contribute in connoting its polysemic value. Angelo Marchese observes: "Si è discusso a lungo se la poesia sia traducibile. Pur senza accettare la teoria romantico-idealistica della poesia come geniale creazione *ex nihilo*, non possiamo non ammettere che anche la più perfetta traduzione è sempre un tradimento del senso globale del messaggio: il passaggio, infatti, dai segni connotati del testo ai segni tradotti rende al più il valore dei significati (come in ogni transcodificazione linguistica), ma perde irrimediabilmente la ricchezza semantica dei significanti, sicché tutta la tramatura fonoprosodica che costituisce, come abbiamo visto, l'anima del discorso poetico, capace di organizzare e modellare nei modi più inediti il livello dei denotati e dei connotati della lingua, si sbiadisce in una diversa, non necessaria e arbitraria successione di suoni e di accenti irrelati al contenuto informativo, l'unico elemento che, sempre in forma parziale e depotenziata, risulta comunicabile. *L'officina della poesia*, Milano, Mondadori, 1985, p. 109.

⁵⁹ Nicolas J. Perella, op. cit., p. 363.

- 4 Ma sedendo e mirando, interminati
- 5 Spazi di là da quella, e sovrumani
- 6 Silenzi, e profondissima quiete
- 7 Io nel pensier mi fingo; ove per poco
- 8 Il cor non si spaura. E come il vento
- 9 Odo stormir tra queste piante, io quello
- 10 Infinito silenzio a questa voce
- 11 Vo comparando: e mi sovvien l'eterno,
- 12 E le morte stagioni, e la presente
- 13 E viva, e il suon di lei: Così tra questa
- 14 Immensità s'annega il pensier mio:
- 15 E il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare.

It has been said that “L’infinito” is probably the Italian poem that has been most translated in all the languages of the world, and, perhaps, we should use our “imagination” and think, as we read the following analysis, of how the echoes of the lines, words and sounds reverberate in its possible replicas in different languages and different cultures. Consequently, it is the poem that has most frequently tested the skills of English translators, too.

Singh entered 40 translators in his appendix; if all the new renderings of the last thirty years are added to this number, the versions available may well be more than fifty.

All critics agree that “L’infinito” is perhaps the most elusive and fascinating of all Leopardi’s *Canti*. I’d like to quote Tusiani’s own observations as he claims that:

Di tutti I «Canti» di Giacomo Leopardi, L’infinito è la lirica meno leopardiana, anzi non affatto leopardiana. Se non ne conoscessimo l’autore, nessuno lo attribuirebbe al Leopardi a noi noto, al poeta, cioè, che in «A se stesso» ha elencato, ragionando più che cantando, i temi essenziali della sua poetica [...].

Nessuna eco di questi temi, rintracciabili in ogni altro “canto”, è percepibile ne «L’Infinito», che giustamente l’autore, in un momento di grazia poetica mai prima goduto, chiama «idillio», una poesia, cioè, di argomento campestre («colle» e «siepe» e «queste piante») ma, soprattutto, un istante, che si vorrebbe eterno, di dolcezza e di felice oblio. E’ proprio questa totale assenza della “leopardianità” con cui siamo familiari (una “leopardianità” che più volte mette a repentaglio la poesia tenendola sul ciglio del ragionamento) che fa de «L’infinito» una lirica irripetibile e quasi estranea allo stesso Leopardi.

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⁶⁰ Joseph Tusiani, “Osservazioni su *L’infinito* del Leopardi”, in Antonio Motta and Cosma Siani, eds, *Joseph Tusiani tra le due sponde dell’oceano*, cit., p. 189.

In Tusiani's opinion, Leopardi's pessimism is for a while mitigated in that intense contemplative moment which is expressed with deceptive simplicity. Tusiani's viewpoint is rather personal, as the scholars of Leopardi consider "L'infinito" one of the highest achievements of his poetry and for very different reasons than those expressed by Tusiani.

Furthermore, we must specify that "L'infinito" was for Leopardi an idyll, but his notion of idyll implied something other than its classical definition as a short poem aimed at reproducing the serene atmosphere of a natural scenery. Under this name he had initially collected six of his poems: "L'infinito", "La sera del dì di festa", "Alla luna", "Il sogno", "La vita solitaria" and the "Fragment XXVII", all poems which, for a long time, the poet perceived as a single whole with peculiar characteristics that could be proposed on its own to readers.⁶¹ To Leopardi the idylls expressed his imagination, feelings and thought, i.e. situations, affections and adventures of his inner life. In this we already see the basic difference from their classical origin. Thus, if the etymology of the word idyll means "little vision" – a kind of "ut pictura poësis" – representing nature and human feelings in a natural setting, in Leopardi's "L'infinito" we have something evading any form of representation. The poet captures the very instant in which man tries to grasp immensity; the instant in which the cosmic infinite is conjured up in the poet's imagination by the limited space of the hill enclosed by a hedge. The wind rustling among the leaves recalls, by contrast, "unearthly" impenetrable silences, the present and the passing of time evokes eternity. This generates a mesmerizing experience in which the mind – unable to comprehend it – for a while is lost.

This brief poem is constructed on the dichotomy of the limited and the unlimited, as we will more thoroughly analyze below and it is the limit itself – a hedge – which produces in the poet the need to express what is beyond.⁶²

⁶¹ See Marco Santagata, "Dagli idilli all'idillio", in *Quella celeste naturalezza. Le canzoni e gli idilli di Leopardi*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1994.

⁶² This image of an infinite evoked by a limit, and thus visually denied, is in contrast with the famous Romantic representation of the infinite as a category of the sublime in Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* (1817), where a man is standing – and not sitting – on a height and contemplates the void below.

Rightly Antonio Prete remarks:

Il colle e la siepe sono il punto d'arrivo d'un intrattenimento nella memoria, ma anche il punto di partenza per la meditazione sull'infinito. La loro determinatezza sotto lo sguardo è un approdo e un avvio; non c'è riposo dello sguardo, non c'è abbandono alla descrizione: la scena poetica non ha a che fare con la scena pittorica, *non ut pictura poësis*. [...] La siepe [...] è sintomo dell'assenza, dice per quel che non dice, è garanzia di un rapporto duraturo (sempre caro) non perché rinvia ad altro, ma perché esclude l'altro [...] Nell'universo della esclusione si delinea l'avventura del pensiero: ciò che è escluso diventa oggetto della vera appropriazione. Nella differenza comincia l'avventura del linguaggio.⁶³

Prete has on many occasions epitomized “L’infinito” as an odyssey of the mind and of imagination. It is the poem trying to express what cannot be expressed, and the infinite does not only imply a spatial dimension, but also a temporal one. In this attempt what finally founders is both the mind of the poet and poetry itself: if the poet’s imagination fails to grasp the infinite, his poem fails to express it.⁶⁴ The gaze of the poet is in fact focused on the boundless desire that this void that cannot be filled produces in him. In the *Zibaldone* he variously describes the same scenery of “L’infinito” as a setting that, thanks to some limit, can produce in the imagination the power to conjure up what is beyond and to reach an ecstatic state of fulfilment and pleasure⁶⁵ in that state of denied desire:

⁶³ Antonio Prete, “Lo scacco del pensiero: per un’esegesi dell’infinito”, *Il pensiero poetante. Saggio su Leopardi*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1980. pp. 51-52. For the analysis of the poem see also Franco Brioschi, op. cit.

⁶⁴ See Antonio Prete, *Il Pensiero poetante*, cit. In the chapter “Un desiderio illimitato” Prete thoroughly examines the gap existing between the poet’s thought about an infinite as analyzed in the *Zibaldone* and its *lyrical* expression in the poem.

⁶⁵ On the perennial gap existing between desire and pleasure Leopardi comments that: L’anima umana [...] desidera sempre essenzialmente, e mira unicamente, benché sotto mille aspetti, al piacere. [...] Veniamo all’inclinazione dell’uomo all’infinito. Independentemente dal desiderio del piacere, esiste nell’uomo una facoltà immaginativa, la quale può concepire le cose che non sono, [...] può figurarsi dei piaceri che non esistono e figurarseli infiniti [...] Il piacere infinito che non si può trovare nella realtà si trova così nell’immaginazione, dalla quale derivano la speranza, le illusioni, ec. [...] E notate in secondo luogo che la natura ha voluto che l’immaginazione non fosse considerata dall’uomo come tale, cioè non ha voluto che l’uomo la considerasse come facoltà ingannatrice, ma la confondesse colla facoltà conoscitrice, e perciò avesse i sogni dell’immaginazione per cose reali e quindi fosse animato dall’immaginario come dal vero (anzi più, perché l’immaginario ha forze più naturali, e la natura è sempre superiore alla ragione). *Zibaldone*, cit., 167.

La cagione è la stessa, cioè il desiderio dell'infinito, perché allora in luogo della vista, lavora l'immaginazione e il fantastico sottentra al reale. L'anima s'immagina quello che non vede, che quell'albero, quella siepe, quella torre gli nasconde, e va errando in uno spazio immaginario, e si figura cose che non potrebbe, se la sua vista si estendesse da per tutto, perché il reale escluderebbe l'immaginario.⁶⁶

This idyll is all aimed at expressing the pleasure that the final shipwreck of the poet's mind reaches. To confront himself with the unseizable (*immensità*), the poet, in an act of contemplation (*sedendo e mirando*), first uses imagination (*io nel pensier mi fingo*) instead of sight (*il guardo esclude, interminati spazi*). Then he uses his hearing (*sovrumani silenzi, il vento odo stormir tra queste piante, infinito silenzio a questa voce vo comparando*), and this comparison recalls another dimension – that of time, both time eternal and the time of history (*e mi sovvien l'eterno, e le morte stagioni e la presente e viva e il suon di lei*). Yet this comparison is unbearable because the poet seeks to grasp at the same moment what cannot in fact be simultaneously comprehended – space, past and present, infinite silence and noise, life and death; and in front of this incomprehensible immensity his thought founders by denying itself in the pleasure of the unreachable.⁶⁷

... and translating "L'infinito"

Here again we find the distinctive quality of Leopardi's poetic language: the apparent economy of diction combined with a complex stylistic texture, and the clear tension arising between the immediacy of experience and its generalisation,

⁶⁶ Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, cit., p. 171.

⁶⁷ According to Marchese, "l'infinito leopardiano non è un assoluto ontologico, ma non è nemmeno il "Nulla eterno" del Foscolo: esso corrisponde a un'esigenza spirituale comune al sorgente romanticismo europeo, la necessità di ancorare la dispersione fenomenica ad un valore metafisico intrinseco alla coscienza, pur restando ferma l'adesione al sensismo e, dopo la crisi del 1823, a un materialismo convinto." *L'officina della poesia*, cit., pp. 76-77.

between the imaginative authority produced by focal details and the abstraction of thought they evoke, which are perfectly balanced.

Glauco Cambon encapsulates the content of the poem as thus:

the experience of wonder and awe which the mind generates from its own self-absorption and self-obliteration finds perfect expression in Leopardi's slow-paced, richly modulated lines, so mystically deepened by focal silences.⁶⁸

This poem is in itself so beautiful and perfect balanced that even a simple paraphrase in English would do justice to its content. But what are the elements that make it such a unique poem and which a translator should render in the new language?

First of all the title: "L'infinito" that some translators have rendered as "Infinite" or "The Infinite", a few others as "Infinity" – and among them Tusiani. Grennan has even used "Infinitive", and some translators have left the title in Italian adding an "exotic" tinge to their translation.

"The infinite" and "infinity" are not perfect synonyms. *The infinite* implies a physical – though incommensurable – system. *Infinity* recalls an entity which is even less apprehensible and graspable and more an abstract concept than a concrete reality. Besides, the article *the* seems to stress even more the existence of a specific infinite. According to Leopardi's definition "the infinite" would be too much of a "term" rather than a "word", and the translator encounters this first difficulty of finding a "term" in a poem so *un*-defined by words. In Leopardi "L'infinito", the presence of the article expresses the contradiction of something determining an entity that cannot be determined. Thus, while "the infinite" literally translates the Italian title, makes it even more real and explains the double existence of two realities – a finite and an infinite one –, "infinity" is faithful on a higher level: the lyrical level implied by the tone and content of the idyll and also evokes and anticipates the abstract noun "immensità" of line 14.

⁶⁸ Glauco Cambon, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

Grennan's use of the verbal mode "infinitive" is a puzzling choice. Cecchetti comments: "Infinitive, perché non coniugabile, e perciò fisso, immobile e quindi privo di funzionalità immaginativa [...] non solo non ha nulla a che fare con la vastità del cosmo, ma implica addirittura il suo contrario."⁶⁹

I wonder if the Irish poet might have meant to create a sort of meta-linguistic pun on the content of the poem anticipating the final climax of the infinitive verb *naufragar* of the last line.

Other problems occur when the translator has to render the poem's metre and style.

The original poem consists of fifteen closely interwoven non-rhyming hendecasyllables with much use of enjambments which speed up the lines, while diaereses, caesuras and pauses slow them down, together with anaphoras and phonosymbolic references (echoes) which concur in creating its unique internal rhythm. As a whole, it is semantically and syntactically divided into an initial "tercet"; then there are ten lines, eight of which are enjambed, that constitute the central imaginative rush toward the end. In these lines there is only one full-stop half way through line 8 that signals the presence of a new semantic axis – of hearing and of time – rather than a rhythmic pause. From the second hemistich of line 13 to line 15 the poem ends – like a final epigraph – with the poet's almost sensuous self denial.

Franco Brioschi has analyzed in his essay how all the enjambments deconstruct in a verbal continuum the poem to give priority to its development, which is framed by an ending specularly reconnecting itself like a circular chiasmus to its beginning. The sentences *Sempre caro mi fu quest'ermo colle – naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare* produce a mirror structure of the variants: *caro mi fu – dolce m'è*, the repetition *questo – questo* and the opposition *colle – mare*:

Ma quale è il senso di tale cornice? Essa adempie la medesima funzione che il colle o la siepe svolgono nell'itinerario mentale immaginato: la forma non è altro che il punto di partenza per un'esplorazione dell'informe. Le strutture metriche e sintattiche riproducono quell'itinerario stesso. E' una poesia che

⁶⁹ Giovanni Cecchetti, op. cit., p. 247.

non describe ma *accade*. Il lettore non è chiamato ad incontrarsi con l'autore [...] è portato a vivere col poeta la sua esperienza.⁷⁰

This experience has found different structures in its English renderings. The length of the poem varies from thirteen to eighteen lines.

English being a monosyllabic language, the tendency should be toward a shorter version, even in the cases of the most paraphrastic or literal solutions. Yet, we see that longer translations⁷¹ tend to interpolate the content and dilute the indefiniteness of meaning, thus misrepresenting not only Leopardi's aesthetic but also the effect he wants to create with his poem. The risk, starkly speaking, is to undercut the poem's linguistic conciseness and trivialize it while trying to explain the poet's thought.

Lowell's 17 lines re-writing stands on its own as a free-verse Pindaric ode rhyming *aabbcbcddefegfhii*, which completely subjects the meaning to an unnecessary rhyme-scheme.⁷²

A few translators (Trevelyan, Foreman and Tusiani) have tried to keep the original structure and have translated the poem in blank iambic pentameters in the attempt (mostly successful) to convey the pulse and rhythm of the original.

Some enjambments of the original split nominal syntagms which are vertically aligned: *interminati / spazi* (lines 4-5), and *sovrumani / silenzi* (lines 5-6), or *quello / infinito silenzio* (lines 9-10) and *questa / immensità* (lines 13-14).

Anaphoras show some interesting vertical alignments too: *spazi* and *silenzi* of the two enjambed lines are aligned in lines 5 and 6, and the *sovrumani / silenzi* is then echoed by *infinito silenzio* at the beginning of line 10. *Io nel pensier mi fingo* prepares for the close of line 14 *s'annega il pensier mio*, while the endings of lines 11 and 12 create a vertical semantic whole on their own: ... *e mi sovvien l'eterno / ... e la presente*.

⁷⁰ Franco Brioschi, op. cit., pp. 103-104. Similarly Santagata observes: "E' poi da rilevare, accanto all'estrema discrezione con la quale il testo suggerisce l'idea di una chiusura speculare, il fatto che la specularità è funzionale a un discorso 'narrativo' e progressivo, intimamente refrattario alle architetture chiuse." cit., p. 165.

⁷¹ See Rexroth, Selph and Lowell in the final appendix.

⁷² For Lowell's version see Alfredo Rizzardi, "Quelle 'bizzarre imitazioni' di Robert Lowell..." in *La traduzione poetica nel segno di Giacomo Leopardi*, cit., pp. 115-123.

The anaphoric repetition of the conjunction “e”, occurring in lines 2, 12-13 and 15, further stresses the presence of this coordinative conjunction, which appears eleven times in the poem and which, by piling up a series of emotions and observations happening simultaneously, greatly contributes to the slowing down of the rhythm and, at the same time, to the suggestive accumulation of those contemplative elements, which need to be read in a single breath.

The astonishing and carefully chosen number of demonstrative adjectives and pronouns present in the poem creates a strong referential function on the double level of reality and imagination: *quest'ermo colle, questa siepe, interminati / spazi di là da quella, queste piante, quello / infinito silenzio a questa voce / vo comparando, questa / immensità, in questo mare* “indicate space and distance and both an internalized world and an externalized world (with the ultimate triumph of the poet's inner world over the external world)”⁷³. Several translators seem not to understand the importance of this repetition and simply disregard all these demonstratives and iron them out. Others substitute *questo* for *quello* cancelling the difference between what is near and what is distant or absent. Perella has also noticed that most of the translators tend to reverse the order of the two syntagms of the original comparison: *...quello / infinito silenzio a questa voce / vo comparando*” placing “this voice” before “that infinite silence”. Interesting, in this case, is Heath Stubbs's crossed rendering “I set *that* voice against *this* infinite silence” (italics mine)⁷⁴, where he puts the “voice” before the “silence” as first element in the comparison but leaves the demonstratives in their original position, or, to say it in other words, distances himself from the voice and draws the infinite near, producing the opposite effect of the original.

Then, there is the problem of how to render into English all the homophonic hues with which Leopardi so skilfully built up his verses.

Critics have pointed out how “L'infinito” is characterized by the almost hypnotic repetition of the Italian vowel “a”, the vowel of wonder and awe, in the tonic

⁷³ Perella, op. cit., p. 368.

⁷⁴ See the final appendix.

syllable: *caro, ... mirando interminati spazi / di là..., sovrumani, spaura, immensità, naufragar, mare.*

An opposite effect occurs with the sibilant “s”, especially when combined with the acute vowel “i” [ee]: together they have a strong onomatopoeic value as they expand the sound of the wind of the verb *stormir* to the whole length of the poem, creating a sense of movement in contrast with the static contemplation implied by the vowel “a”. These two sounds are in *siepe, spazi, sovrumani / silenzi, e profondissima quiete, io nel pensier mi fingo, stormir tra queste piante, infinito silenzio, stagioni, immensità* and *pensier mio*. This effect is semantically announced by the very first sound of the word opening the poem: “sempre”, it is echoed by the six repetitions of the demonstratives *questo/questa/queste*, and by *esclude, sedendo, spaura, presente*, and, especially, *suon*; all words that are so meaningful on both the synonymic and homonymic axis and which work as hinges around which the poly-isotopies of time/eternity, infinite/enclosure, silence/sound, thought/emotion revolve.

The alternations of these two sounds, wonder and whisper, generate that “spellbinding voice which, as a pure example of Leopardi’s aesthetics of suggestive indeterminacy, could hardly be duplicated in another language”⁷⁵. English is at disadvantage in trying to reproduce these sounds because in place of the openness of the Italian vowel, an English version is apt to be dominated by acute [ee] sounds (i.e. *stagioni = seasons, naufragar = shipwreck, mare = sea*).

Tusiani has given his poetic contribution to the analysis of this phonosymbolic play within the poem which is worth quoting:

La spirante alveolare impura si annuncia come suono costante fin dal primo verso: «*quest’ermo colle*»; si rafforza col secondo verso: «*questa siepe*»; si affievolisce un attimo con *esclude*, con *spazi* e *spaura*; si riprende e si autodefinisce con *stormir* e «*queste piante*»; insiste con «*questa voce*» e con «*morte stagioni*»; si allontana con un battito sordo: «*questa immensità*», e ricompare, per rimanere con noi e in noi per sempre, con «*questo mare*», che è poi la conclusione dell’idillio. Ma che cosa ha creato questo molteplice suono di vento? Ha creato un mondo in cui lo stesso poeta resta attonito, un mondo distante da un altro mondo infinito, intraveduto soltanto attraverso un

⁷⁵ Glauco Cambon, op. cit., p. 229.

facile divario costituito da *questo* in opposizione a *quello*: «spazi di là da *quella*» e «*quello* infinito silenzio». Come per incanto nasce così il ricordo (*mi sovvien*) di una eternità per la prima volta, e solo in questo momento, raggiunta e posseduta. Ma come si può «ricordare» una cosa che solo in quest'attimo vediamo e possediamo? E' possibile solo nell'assurdo del passato che diventa presente. Il pensiero si smarrisce, anzi si è già smarrito da quando lo sguardo si è visto escluso da tanta parte dell'ultimo orizzonte.⁷⁶

Translators have mostly tried to reproduce all these effects, sometimes with skilful interpretative solutions. In their renderings they have mostly played with the semantic and phonic resources that English poetic tools allowed them to utilize: they variously exploited assonances and alliterations or created onomatopoeic plays with consonants, long vowels or diphthongs.

One last observation can be made on some misconstrued passages of "L'infinito" due to a wrong interpretation of the original that Cambon, Perella and Montgomery⁷⁷, among others, have remarked. The lines are those where the poet is almost overwhelmed by the vastness of space and the preternatural silence: *e sovrumani / silenzi [...] io nel pensier mi fingo; ove per poco / il cor non si spaura....* This phrase represents a pitfall for those translators who are not completely familiar with the Italian pleonastic use of the negative form, so that they interpret the opposite of what it actually means. One example is unfortunately provided by John Heath Stubbs, one of the most attentive translators of the poet, who in his first edition of 1946 rendered correctly: *until almost / My heart becomes afraid*, but who, in the following reprint of 1967, changed it to: *Then for a while / the heart is not afraid*, which conveys the exact opposite of the poet's feeling who, instead of being on the verge of a sudden fear, seems to find a moment of solace from the external anguish. I would add other translators who have fallen into the same countersense. Carl Selph: *where for a little while the heart / is not afraid*; Robert Lowell: *here for a little while my heart is quiet inside me*; and Kline: *where the heart barely fails to terrify*. Perella's comment is

⁷⁶ Joseph Tusiani, "Osservazioni su L'infinito di Leopardi", cit., p. 191.

⁷⁷ Angela Montgomery has compared Tusiani's translations to other versions. Among them she has dedicated some attention to the analysis of "L'infinito". "Tusiani e Leopardi: «cantando il duol si disacerba»", in *Joseph Tusiani tra le due sponde dell'oceano*, cit.,.

lapidary: “This, of course, is to miss the point on which the poem turns and to undercut the element of surprise, the happy irony, as it were, of its ending.”⁷⁸

Conversely, Tusiani has deeply understood “L’infinito” because he succeeds in reaching its inmost meaning through the musicality of its lines. In fact, to the previous quote, where he analyses the phonosymbolic chains of the poem, I would like to add the following comment as an appropriate conclusion to this paragraph:

L’infinito, pur con qualche minuscolo neo, rimane l’idillio più bello della letteratura italiana. In soli quindici endecasillabi sciolti, che hanno la parvenza e la rapidità di un sonetto, Leopardi riesce a mutare in purissima vita fantastica l’immobilità di un piccolo punto geografico, riesce a congiungere a sé quello che è fuori di sé, addirittura l’eterno; ed il finito terrestre, che pur tale rimane, si fa nel suo pensiero spazio sovrumano, celeste, infinito. In tutta questa inattesa e pur sospirata stasi del tempo è naturale che il cuore per poco si spaurisca, perché il sentimento, per così dire, essendo breve e variabile, quasi non ha più il diritto di esistere in un cosmo in cui il piccolo essere mortale si è annegato, non per finire ma per ricominciare a vivere, parte dello stesso cosmo, onda dello stesso mare.⁷⁹

Tusiani’s “Infinity”

L’infinito	Infinity
1 Sempre caro mi fu quest’ermo colle,	Fond I was ever of this lonely hill
2 E questa siepe, che da tanta parte	And of this hedge, that from my view conceals
3 Dell’ultimo orizzonte il guardo esclude.	The farthest limit of the firmament.
4 Ma sedendo e mirando, interminati	But, sitting here and gazing, I can feign,
5 Spazi di là da quella, e sovrumani	Far and beyond it, still unbounded space,
6 Silenzi, e profondissima quiete	And an unearthly silence, and the deepest
7 Io nel pensier mi fingo; ove per poco	Quietude where my very heart is nearly
8 Il cor non si spaura. E come il vento	Frightened. And as this moment I perceive
9 Odo stormir tra queste piante, io quello	The wind around me rustling through these trees,
10 Infinito silenzio a questa voce	To that unending silence soon I liken
11 Vo comparando: e mi sovvien l’eterno,	The passing of its voice: eternity
12 E le morte stagioni, e la presente	I so recall, and all the seasons dead,

⁷⁸ Nicolas J. Perella, op. cit., p. 367. Also Vikram Seth has tried to translate “L’infinito”; I thank Prof. Gregory Dowling for indicating the online discussion forum on poetry and translation where Seth’s unpublished translation appears. Seth misunderstood the meaning of this phrase too, but added that he wasn’t satisfied with the translation of that line. The discussion was originated by Jonathan Galassi’s rendering of “L’infinito” published in his translation of the *Canti*, 2010. See: <http://www.ablemuse.com/erato/showthread.php?t=12528>.

⁷⁹ Joseph Tusiani, “Osservazioni su ‘L’infinito’ di Leopardi”, cit., p. 193.

13 E viva, e il suon di lei. Così tra questa	And with its lively stir the present one.
14 Immensità s'annega il pensier mio:	Founders in such immensity my mind,
15 E il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare.	And drowning in this sea is sweet to me.

The translation of "L'infinito" first appeared in the anthology *From Marino to Marinetti*, and the translator's fears before tackling such a poem have already been pointed out at the beginning of this chapter. His remarks on translating "L'infinito" provides some interesting observations on the translator's approach to this idyll from its very beginning. In fact, Tusiani expands on the choice of the very first word of the poem, highlighting that "sempre" suddenly submerges the reader in an atmosphere of expectation.⁸⁰

Despite what Tusiani states about the adverb *sempre*, I contend that, though not as strongly stressed as the adjective *caro* in the Italian hendecasyllable, the beginning with the adverb *sempre* opens up the poem to its temporal reading on the finite/eternal axis that Tusiani's rendition develops even further than in the original, as we will see below.

Tusiani turns the hendecasyllables of the original into iambic pentameters with the presence of some trochaic inversions at the beginning of the lines and the insertion of some pyrrhic feet. Siani analyzes this effect on the central pyrrhic foot created by the second syllable of the adverb *ever* and the conjunction *of* in the first line – *Fond I was ever of this lonely hill* – which dilates the rhythm and the perception of space, even before reaching the *interminati spazi* of the original, the *unbounded space* of Tusiani's translation.⁸¹

⁸⁰ "Il primo verso, «Sempre caro mi fu quest'ermo colle», sembra talmente preciso e definito da escludere ogni altra possibilità di dizione ed esecuzione. Ma da quali altri registri musicali lo elimina ed estrae il subscoscio del poeta? Leopardi avrebbe potuto scrivere «Caro sempre mi fu quest'ermo colle». Avremmo un altro perfetto endecasillabo, sì, ma l'enfasi cadrebbe sull'idea del tempo e non preannuncerebbe un'atmosfera di "caritas", di cordialità. Avrebbe potuto scrivere «Quest'ermo colle mi fu sempre caro», ancora un preciso endecasillabo, ma prosa e soltanto prosa, piattezza e non di più. Avrebbe potuto scrivere «Mi fu quest'ermo colle sempre caro» o «caro sempre», ma avremmo l'impressione di un verso forzato e quasi costretto dal poeta a raggiungere il posto giusto nelle sue stesse sillabe. Quel primo verso dunque, [...] ci immette di colpo in un clima, abbiamo detto di cordialità. Se mi fermo dopo «sempre caro mi fu», so che qualcosa ha già conquiso il mio sentimento, anche se non so ancora che cosa sia quel qualcosa, nel nostro caso il colle." Ibidem., p. 189.

⁸¹ Cosma Siani, *Le lingue dell'altrove*, cit., p. 51.

Tusiani's rendition with *Fond* at the beginning of the poem aims to produce the same effect as the original, even though, it has been pointed out, the use of inversion is not always appreciated by English readers who might prefer a translation that is closer to modern syntax. Yet he succeeds in rendering the circularity of the poem with *Fond I* in an accented position at the beginning and *sweet to me* at the end, which, as in the original, reveal the presence of the poet's body and of his sensations: its affectionate relationship with the *colle* and his representation of the *mare* in whose abyss, "drowning" is sweet to the poet.

Moreover, beginning with an accented *Fond* introduces one of the alliterative patterns that contribute in creating the phonosymbolic level of the rustle of the wind given by the repetition of the fricative sound [f] and which beautifully reverberates through the first three lines with *from*, *farthest*, and the noun *firmament*, which closes the sentence and strongly echoes – through alliteration – the very first word that opened the poem. But the sound [f] is present in other key words throughout the poem, in lines 4 and 5 *I can feign / Far*, this latter adverb vertically aligned with *Frightened*, line 8, and *Founders*, line 14.

The sound [s] is exploited as well in Tusiani's version – *sitting, space, silence, deepest, perceive, rustling, trees, silence soon, passing, voice, seasons, stir, present, such immensity, sea is sweet* – seems to be echoing the whispering silence inspired by the sound – *voice* – of the wind among the trees.

The choice of the word "firmament", though, requires some comment. This is one of the very few instances in which the translator sacrifices an important concept of the original in favor of a melodious and alliterative word: "l'ultimo orizzonte", that is the farthest limit precluded to the poet's sight and experienced through imagination, is not the firmament, the vault of the sky that can be easily "grasped" by looking upward. The former is a horizontal perception, the latter is a limitless, vertical and physical entity.

The phonosymbolic level of this poem is very important as it reproduces the musical echo of these infinite spaces, and we see how Tusiani carefully reproduces it through alliterations and with the use of assonances, consonances and paronomasias.

Yet a thorough analysis of a poem, and consequently of its translation, requires a comprehensive perspective embracing both the form of its content and the form of its expression, and their development on the different textual levels.

As to the structure of the poem, Tusiani maintains the same pattern as the initial "tercet", the following ten lines that ought to be read in a single breath – even though in his version the progression is slightly more cadenced than in the original – and the final "couplet", which in Tusiani covers the whole length of the two lines. If we further divide the poem into the four distinct and dialectic movements proposed by Marchese's structural analysis,⁸² Tusiani's version perfectly mirrors and reproduces the original. The first three lines indicate the presence of the poet in a real setting:

*Fond I was ever of this lonely hill
And of this hedge, that from my view conceals
The farthest limit of the firmament.*

These lines, which form a single period, are counterbalanced by the second movement – which goes from line 3 to the first word of line 8 – where the poet estranges himself from reality by imaging a "beyond it" and by being almost "frightened" by it:

*But, sitting here and gazing, I can feign,
Far and beyond it, still unbounded space,
And an unearthly silence, and the deepest
Quietude where my heart is nearly
Frightened.*

In the third movement – from the second half of line 8 to the first half of line 11 – the poet is brought back to reality by the rustling of the wind, and "the passing of its voice":

*And as this moment I perceive
The wind around me rustling through these trees,
To that unending silence soon I liken
The passing of its voice:*

⁸² See Angelo Marchese, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-83.

In the fourth movement the landscape has become metaphorical and immanent in the poet's mind and the distant imagined "that unending silence", in its imagined distance, becomes the almost palpable "such immensity", "this sea":

eternity
I so recall, and all the seasons dead,
And with its lively stir the present one.
Founders in such immensity my mind,
And drowning in this sea is sweet to me.

These movements are dialectically interwoven. The presence of the poet's persona in the real world of movements I and III is mirrored by the metaphysical and metaphorical world conjured up by the movements II and IV, but it is also reversed in the movements II and III where the relationship is developed by the strongly connoted value of the space and time markers.

Tusiani is also very careful with the rendering of the demonstratives and he maintains six of the original eight. He gives up *di là da quella*, for a simpler *beyond it*, line 5, but interpolates a *here* in the preceding line, which, if not a proper demonstrative, still has a deictic function in building the spatial isotopy of the close and far, the real and imagined, (and is vertically aligned with the *it* of the following line).

Also *questa / Immensità*, lines 13-14, is replaced by *such immensity*. Here Tusiani could well have maintained "this" *immensity*, but much stronger is the effect created by the vertical alignment of the assonances of *such immensity* and *this sea* of the final line.

The twice-repeated noun "pensiero": *io nel pensier mi fingo*, line 7, and *s'annega il pensier mio*, line 14, disappears in Tusiani's version. The former sentence is anticipated to line 4 with *I can feign*, and the noun *pensiero* is erased, while the latter is rendered as *Founders [in such immensity] my mind*. The choice of the word "mind" is a curious one, as all the versions listed in the appendix, except Lowell's, have kept the word "thought". Yet "mind" is the word that most appropriately translates "pensiero" in this context. The mind is the place of the

imaginative faculty, of the synergies and the synaesthesias of perceptions, and it is where soma and psyche are both active and present. This concept of mind was fundamental in the aesthetics at the turn of the nineteenth century, and was interpreted as such by Wordsworth, Coleridge, De Quincey and other Romantics. Tusiani, as a scholar of Wordsworth, knows very well what that "poetic mind" meant to Romantic philosophy and that "pensier mio" is the personal and subjective activity of the poet's imagination, and he perfectly translates it with "my mind". To these remarks, I could also add that the word "thought", with the final alveolar plosive [t] is too abrupt for the end of the line, and probably, Tusiani chose *mind* for the musical effect created by the alliterations in the final two lines of the sounds [m] and [n]. The sound [m], especially, creates a lulling alliterative rhythm that betrays how the act of drowning, of being nullified in this infinite, is an action wished for by the poet, which he welcomes with pleasure. In fact, the alliteration of the sound [m]: *immensity my mind* and the final vertically aligned *to me*, makes up for the loss of the alliterative Italian vowel [a] of the original, that, as has been pointed out, is a sound reproducing awe in front of the openness of the sea. Tusiani is perfectly aware of this musical register:

Sono del parere che ogni poesia (se la poesia è musica e la musica è la prima delle arti) nasca da un suo imperioso DNA musicale [...] ogni poesia risponde a un intimo dettato musicale che si manifesta, per così dire, attraverso un corso e ricorso di una più vocali, per cui orecchiabile e trasferibile diventa il canto di quella poesia.⁸³

But the "canto" is not only created by the single sounds; also the translation of other phrastic elements concurs in the production of rhythmic and musical patterns.

The paratactic structure of the original is kept in the translation. The four conjunctions "e" in anaphoric positions are still in the translated version even though Tusiani gives up the "E" at the beginning of line 12, but he positions an "and" at line 6 by beginning with a paronomastic *And an unearthly silence*. The enjambment *E sovrumani / silenzi* is instead ignored. In short, Tusiani maintains

⁸³ Joseph Tusiani, "Osservazioni su 'L'infinito' del Leopardi", op. cit., p. 190.

nine conjunctions out of eleven, but in the final five lines of the original, where six “e” are clustered together, he only has three, and, again, Leopardi’s rendition of a series of simultaneous emotions and of their psychological effects is somehow turned into a more discursive, cadenced and pondered exposition of the poet’s thought.

This coordinative structure finds its rhythmical correspondent in the enjambments, which musically expand the meter to the following lines, and in the caesuras and pauses within them. Tusiani reduces to five the eight original enjambments on nominal, prepositional and verbal syntagmas. The English version thus appears more regularly spaced, if compared to the original. But since four of these enjambments are on verbal syntagmas: *conceals / The farthest limit*, lines 2-3, *I perceive / The wind*, lines 8-9, *I liken / The passing*, lines 10-11, *eternity / I so recall*, lines 11-12, though limited in number, they still contribute in speeding the development of associative emotions toward the final climax.

Tusiani gives up the two beautiful enjambments of the lines 4 and 5 *interminati / Spazi* and *sovrumani / Silenzi*, with the two key concepts “spazi”, “silenzi” in anaphoric position which anticipate the *infinito* of line 10, and the *immensità* of line 14. He replaces them by enjambing in his own translation *profondissima quiete* of line 6, rendered as *deepest / Quietude*, and immediately followed by the enjambment *nearly / Frightened* in the next two lines. Here, the vertical alignment of *Quietude* and *Frightened*, at the beginning of the lines, creates a couple which ought to be oxymoronic and that makes up for the renunciation of the position occupied by *Spazi* and *Silenzi* of the original. Besides, *interminati* and *sovrumani* are translated with adjectives beginning with the same negative prefix: *unbounded* and *unearthly*, while *infinito* of line 10 is rendered as *unending*, all adjectives which describe by their very negation what cannot be grasped by human mind and imagination. They contribute in creating, through their internal echoes, the deepest meaning of the final shipwreck of human thought. Besides, A semantic isotopy is created by the prefix “un-” and by its phonosymbolic associations. Here, as in other cases, the translator succeeds in favoring its phonosymbolic rendition, even though he slightly sacrifices the exact meaning of the words.

In fact, the choice of "unearthly" instead of "sovrumani" shifts the meaning toward a supernatural interpretation of the original adjective: "not of this earth" denies the historical level, which the "sovrumani" – "more than human" – of the original, implicitly develops.

Moreover, the choice of *unending* instead of *infinito* attributed to *silence*, partly shifts the construction of this metaphysical contemplation toward the temporal axis, as does the interpolation of "the passing of" before *its voice* for the Italian *questa voce*.⁸⁴ Thus we have two time markers that are vertically encoded: *unending* and *passing* which are not in the original, and *passing* anticipates its contrary concept, *eternity*, at the end of the same line. In a way Tusiani, slightly sacrifices again the semantic value of the original in favor of its musical restructuring.

Another temporal interpolation occurs in line 8 with the addition of "this moment" to *as this moment I perceive*, instead of the Italian *E come il vento odo / Stormir*, which has no time specifications. Here, the time complement "this moment" seems to obey the translator's need to recover part of the rendering of lines 7-8: *ove per poco / il cor non si spaura*, which he translates as *where my very heart is nearly frightened*, reducing the temporal meaning partially present in the pleonastic use of the Italian expression "per poco".

From line 11 to 13 there are four time references: *l'eterno*, *le morte*, *la presente*, *E viva*, and their positions in the lines constitute two vertical oxymorons:

... e mi sovvien *l'eterno*,
E *le morte* stagioni, e *la presente*
E *viva* e il suon di lei

This is the moment that prepares the drowning of the poet's mind in front of this unconceivable infinite in which all these metaphysical emotions surge simultaneously, almost convulsively.

⁸⁴ Angela Montgomery comments on the use of "unending" and of the inversion in those two lines (*to that unending silence soon I liken / the passing of its voice*) that this choice allows Tusiani to create "un effetto altamente drammatico" because it "registra con abilità il processo del pensiero, ovvero la sua stessa fantasia. Dà il senso di qualcosa che accade..."; op. cit., p. 386.

Tusiani encodes:

... *eternity*
I so recall, and all the seasons *dead*,
And with its *lively* stir the *present* one.

all four elements are maintained even though with a light displacement in the lines and an inversion with the first two enjambed lines. The use of the phrase *lively stir* is interesting; it sums up in itself the explicit meaning of “viva” and its implied and onomatopoeic meaning of “suon”.

If we consider how the other translators have rendered these three lines we notice that Tusiani’s is certainly the one that, in the compromise of maintaining the structured meter closest to the original one, has succeeded in rendering all the poly-isotopies developed by the Italian text.

In general terms, literary translation implies the necessary shift from the homonymic to the synonymic axes, as neither isotopies, nor phosymbolism can be completely reproduced in a new language. Thus, the loss of phonosymbolic elements can be compensated by a more stressed development of the isotopies of meaning, or, as in Tusiani’s translation, viceversa: the poly-isotopies of space, time and sound of the poem are sustained throughout by a skilful rendering of their phonosymbolic level.

With Tusiani’s rendition we witness the translator’s attention to the constructive elements of this idyll and his painstaking work in trying to reproduce them in the translated language. Obviously Tusiani the poet, the man who in translation wants to find the intimate music underlying a poem, is at work behind the translator and gives us, probably, one of the best executed versions of this idyll, in which he allows the reader to recognize Leopardi’s voice.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Luigi Bonaffini, in reviewing Tusiani’s translations of Leopardi’s poems comments on this fundamental choice: “Tusiani the translator, as is the case with any poet who decides to translate another poet, must make a fundamental choice: whether to listen very carefully to the poet’s voice, and by that I mean all the characteristics that make that voice unique and unmistakable, until it is internalized, and then try to convey it through his own words in such a way that its uniqueness is still recognizable in a different language; or to regard the original poem as a pattern on which to superimpose his own distinctive and powerful voice.” Op. cit., p. 313.

At the same time we recognize in this translation all the elements that make it the symbol of Leopardi's thinking poetry and of his poetic thought, and also many of the elements of Tusiani's lyrical research in his four-language poetry.

The following comment shows how this double perspective – that of the poet and that of the translator – has inspired Tusiani's interpretation of "L'infinito":

La lirica è cominciata con un colle e termina con il mare. [...] Gli ultimi due versi, a sé stanti, possono creare una nuova poesia, una poesia del tutto diversa, ma sarebbero una poesia nella poesia. E allora, che cosa congiunge l'immagine montana con l'immagine marinaresca di questo idillio? E' un aggettivo centrale la cui assenza avrebbe compromesso, anzi distrutto, l'intera bellezza della lirica. Il nesso è *profondissima* quiete. Se invece di *profondissima*, Leopardi avesse scritto *amplissima* quiete, il poeta avrebbe dato un'idea, un senso di spazialità in perfetta armonia con l'orizzontalità iniziale esplicitamente menzionata, ma non avrebbe suggerito l'idea e il senso della verticalità in cui si può sprofondare e annegare. L'*annegare* del pensiero lo comprendiamo; è il *naufragare* del poeta che stentiamo a comprendere. Il verbo "naufragare" [...] non può applicarsi a un individuo che stia annegando. Naufrago è il superstite di un naufragio [...] sappiamo benissimo che il Leopardi voleva dare al verbo il significato di "perdersi", "annullarsi", [...] intendeva dire: «annego e mi piace annegare». [...]Ma] Quel naufragar non si tocca o si commette inassolvibile sacrilegio.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Joseph Tusiani, "Osservazioni su 'L'infinito' del Leopardi", op. cit., pp. 191-192.

APPENDIX

FIFTEEN TRANSLATIONS OF “L’INFINITO”

The Infinite

Dear to me always was this lonely hill,
 And this hedge that excludes so much a part
 Of the ultimate horizon from my view.
 But as I sit and gaze, my thought conceives
 Interminable vastnesses of space
 Beyond it, and unearthly silences,
 And profoundest calm; whereat my heart almost
 Becomes dismayed. And as I hear the wind
 Rustling through these branches, I find myself
 Comparing with this sound that infinite silence:
 And then I call to mind eternity,
 And the ages that are dead, and this that now
 Is living, and the noise of it. And so
 In this immensity my thought sinks drowned:
 And sweet it seems to shipwreck in this sea.

R.C. Trevelyan (1941), in *I canti di Giacomo Leopardi nelle traduzioni inglesi*, ed. G. Singh, Recanati, Centro nazionale di Studi Leopardiani, 1990, p. 163.

L’infinito

This lonely hill has always
 Been dear to me, and this thicket
 Which shuts out most of the final
 Horizon from view. I sit here,
 and gaze, and imagine
 The interminable spaces
 That stretch away, beyond my mind,
 Their uncanny silences,
 Their profound calms; and my heart
 is almost overwhelmed with dread.
 And when the wind drones in the
 Branches, I compare its sound
 with that infinite silence;
 And I think of eternity,
 And the dead past, and the living
 Present, and the sound of it;

And my thought drowns in immensity;
And shipwreck is sweet in such sea.

Kenneth Rexroth, *The Signature of All Things*, New York, New Directions, 1949, p. 207.

The Infinite

Always to me beloved was this lonely hillside
And the hedgerow creeping over and always hiding
The distances, the horizon's furthest reaches.
But as I sit and gaze, there is an endless
Space still beyond, there is a more than mortal
Silence spread out to the last depth of peace,
Which in my thought I shape until my heart
Scarcely can hide a fear. And as the wind
Comes through the copses sighing to my ears,
The infinite silence and the passing voice
I must compare: remembering the seasons,
Quiet in dead eternity, and the present,
Living and sounding still. And into this
Immensity my thought sinks ever drowning,
And it is sweet to shipwreck in such a sea.

Henry Reed, *The Listener* on April 28, 1949, and in 43, n. 1113, 25 May 1950, p. 924.
Also: <http://www.solearabiantree.net/namingofparts/infinite.html>

The Infinite

This lonely hill was always dear to me,
And this hedgerow, that hides so large a part
Of the far sky-line from my view. Sitting and gazing,
I fashion in my mind what lie beyond—
Unearthly silences, and endless space,
And very deepest quiet; then for a while
The heart is not afraid. And when I hear
The wind come blustering among the trees
I set that voice against this infinite silence:
And then I call to mind Eternity,
The ages that are dead, and the living present
And all the noise of it. And thus it is
In that immensity my thought is drowned:
And sweet to me the foundering in that sea.

John Heath Stubbs *Giacomo Leopardi: Selected Prose and Poetry*, edited, translated and introduced with iris Origo, New York, New American Library, 1967, p. 205.

The Infinite

This lonely hill has always been so dear
 To me, and dear the hedge which hides away
 The reaches of the sky. But sitting here
 And wondering, I fashion in my mind
 The endless spaces far beyond, the more
 Than human silences, and deepest peace;
 So that the heart is on the edge of fear.
 And when I hear the wind come blowing through
 The trees, I pit its voice against that boundless
 Silence and summon up eternity,
 And the dead seasons, and the present one,
 Alive with all its sound. And thus it is
 In this immensity my thought is drowned:
 And sweet to me the foundering in this sea.

Ottavio M. Casale, *A Leopardi Reader*, Urbana-Chicago-London, University of Illinois Press, 1981, p. 44.

The infinite

Always dear to me was this solitary hill,
 and this hedge, that excludes so great a part
 of the farthest horizon from my sight.
 But sitting and gazing, boundless
 spaces beyond it, and superhuman
 silences, and deepest quiet
 I envision in my mind; where almost
 awed is the heart. And as the wind
 I hear sighing through these plants, I that
 infinite silence to this voice
 go comparing: and I remember eternity,
 and the dead seasons, and the present
 and live one, and its sound. So in this
 immensity my thought is drowned:
 and sweet to me is shipwreck in this sea.

Arturo Vivante, *Giacomo Leopardi. Poems*, Well Fleet, MA, Delphinium Press, 1988, p. 4.

The Infinite

This lonely hill was always dear to me,
 and this hedge, which cuts off from view

the far horizon on almost every side.
But sitting here and gazing about me,
my mind conceives limitless stretches
beyond it, silences more than human,
and the profoundest calm; so that the heart
almost shrinks in fear. And as I listen
to the wind rustle through these branches,
I find myself comparing that infinite silence
to this voice, and the eternal comes to mind,
and the dead seasons and the present living
one, and the sound of it. Then in the midst
of this immensity my thought drowns:
and sinking is sweet to me in such a sea.

Thomas G. Bergin and Anne Paolucci, *Selected Poems of Giacomo Leopardi*, Smyrna, DE, Griffon House Publications, 2003, p. 21.

Infinitive

I've always loved this lonesome hill
And this hedge that hides
The entire horizon, almost, from sight.
But sitting here in a daydream, I picture
The boundless spaces away out there, silences
Deeper than human silence, an unfathomable hush
In which my heart is hardly a beat
From fear. And hearing the wind
Rush rustling through these bushes,
I pit its speech against infinite silence—
And a notion of eternity floats to my mind,
And the dead seasons, and the season
Beating here and now, and the sound of it. So,
In this immensity my thoughts all drown;
And it's easeful to be wrecked in seas like these.

Eamon Grennan, *Leopardi. Selected Poems*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 3.

The Infinite

I've always loved this hermit's hill,
the hedgerow here that mostly hides the view
of where, far off, earth meets the sky.
But sitting, gazing, I can dream
unbounded spaces past that line
and suprahuman silences,

a final depth of quietness,
 where for a little while the heart
 is not afraid. And as I hear the wind
 gust through these woods, I set that voice
 against the blue, still infinite:
 then I can raise eternity
 and times long dead, the present live--
 the sounds of it. And so it is
 in that immensity my thought is drowned,
 and it is sweet to me to founder in that sea.

Carl Selph, <http://members.xoom.it/wordreign/carl23.htm>, © 1999.

The Infinite (XII)

It was always dear to me, this solitary hill,
 and this hedgerow here, that closes off my view,
 from so much of the ultimate horizon.
 But sitting here, and watching here,
 in thought, I create interminable spaces,
 greater than human silences, and deepest
 quiet, where the heart barely fails to terrify.
 When I hear the wind, blowing among these leaves,
 I go on to compare that infinite silence
 with this voice, and I remember the eternal
 and the dead seasons, and the living present,
 and its sound, so that in this immensity
 my thoughts are drowned, and shipwreck
 seems sweet to me in this sea.

A. S. Kline, <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Italian/Leopardi.htm>, © 2003.

The Infinite

This solitary hill has always been dear to me
 And this hedge, which prevents me from seeing most of
 The endless horizon.
 But when I sit and gaze, I imagine, in my thoughts
 Endless spaces beyond the hedge,
 An all encompassing silence and a deeply profound quiet,
 To the point that my heart is almost overwhelmed.
 And when I hear the wind rustling through the trees
 I compare its voice to the infinite silence.
 And eternity occurs to me, and all the ages past,
 And the present time, and its sound.

Amidst this immensity my thought drowns:
And to flounder in this sea is sweet to me.

Kenneth David West, <http://oldpoetry.com/opoem/26184-Count-Giacomo-Leopardi-The-Infinite>, © 2003.

The Infinite

I've always loved this lonely hill,
This hedgerow too, that shuts so much
Of the far-off sky-line from my sight.
But as I sit and gaze, I picture in my mind
The endless spaces far beyond,
The more than human silences,
The deepest quiet – and my heart
All but gives in to fear. And as I hear
The wind come rustling through the leaves,
I place that everlasting silence against
The sound. I call to mind eternity,
The seasons that are dead, the living present
Now, and all the sound of it. In this
Immensity, my thoughts are drowned;
And sweet to me is shipwreck in this sea.

Tim Chilcott, <http://www.tclt.org.uk/leopardi/leopardi.html>, © 2008.

Infinity

I've always loved this single little hill,
this hedgerow too, that holds so huge a part
of the world's flung horizon from my view.
But as I sit and gaze, interminable
spaces beyond that hedge, a silence more
than man's and feelings delved from deepest peace
I conjure into mind until the heart
is all but daunted. As I hear the wind
rustle this hedgerow, so I must go on
comparing, balancing this infinite silence
beside that voice: There come to mind the Eternal,
the long-dead seasons and the present season
alive, the sheer sure sound of it. And so
in this immensity my thought is drowned:
and sweet it is to shipwreck on such sea.

A.Z. Foreman, <http://poemsintranslation.blogspot.com/2009/06/giacomo-leopardi-infinity-from-italian.html>, 2009.

The Infinite

That hill pushed off by itself was always dear
to me and the hedges near
it that cut away so much of the final horizon.
When I would sit there lost in deliberation,
I reasoned most on the interminable spaces
beyond all hills, on their antediluvian resignation
and silence that passes
beyond man's possibility.
Here for a little while my heart is quiet inside me;
and when the wind lifts roughing through the trees,
I set about comparing my silence to those voices,
and I think about the eternal, the dead seasons,
things here at hand and alive,
and all their reasons and choices.
It's sweet to destroy my mind
and go down
and wreck in this sea where I drown.

Robert Lowell, *Imitations*, London, Faber & Faber, 1961.

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Websites of Italian-American interest

AAIS, American Association for Italian Studies, helps Italianists around the world to support one another in their professional tasks: bibliographical items, scholarly background information, difficult constructions, and issues of translation and interpretation. It announces conferences and events and hosts a list whose framework for discussion is academic, non-religious, and non-political. The official publication is *Italian Culture*, an annual journal with an interdisciplinary scope. It offers articles in Italian language, linguistics, history, literature, cinema, politics, philosophy, folklore, popular culture, migration, and the influence of Italy on other cultures. It also includes articles in comparative literature and cultural studies.
<http://www.aais.info/>

AIHA, The American Italian Historical Association is devoted to the interdisciplinary study of the culture, history, literature, sociology, demography, folklore, and politics of Italians in America. Founded in 1966, the AIHA sponsors a yearly conference and has published over thirty volumes of the proceedings of the annual conferences.
<http://www.aihawebsite.org/>

Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò. Home of the Department of Italian studies at New York University, was founded with the specific intent of spreading Italian culture outside of its national boundaries. Its programs deal with literature, cinema, political and social reflection, all topics upon which Italy has for centuries founded its reputation. On the other hand, it seeks to link the discourse on modernity to that of cultural tradition.
<http://www.casaitaliananyu.org/>

CDEC, Centro di Documentazione sulla Storia e la Letteratura dell'Emigrazione della Capitanata. It was founded by Comune di San Marco in Lamis (Foggia) in February 2000. It aims at becoming a point of reference collecting all the materials on emigration. It hosts a foundation dedicated to Joseph Tusiani.
<http://www.emigracdec.com/index.html>

CISEI, Centro Internazionale Studi Emigrazione Italiana. It is a project initiated by "Autorità Portuale di Genova" in 2001 that aims to make the history of Italian emigration, which departed from the Port of Genoa, a heritage that is shared and accessible to all who are interested in knowing about it or investigating it in depth.
<http://www.ciseionline.it/index.asp>

H.ItAm is a network forum for scholars and activists relating to the Italian American Experience, and more generally, the ethnic culture of the Italian diaspora worldwide.
<http://www.h-net.org/~itam/>

IAWA, Italian American Writers Association, aims to promote Italian American literature by encouraging the writing, reading, publication, distribution, translation, and study of Italian American writing. Founded in 1991 it has the merit, along with other activities, of having drawn and keeping updated a bibliography on Italian American culture that to-date entries more than 2600 titles.
<http://www.iawa.net/get.php?q=index>

i-Italy, the "Italian/American Digital Project", is an online bilingual magazine founded by a group of journalists, academics and "public intellectuals" determined to create an authoritative point of encounter, information, and debate on the Internet concerning Italy and Italian America. It makes part of the Eusic initiative (Empowerment of the US-Italy Community) project which is promoted by the Sociology Department of the University of Rome "La Sapienza", and its goal is to facilitate the creation of a journalistic and cultural bilingual web portal dedicated to the Italian/American community. It focuses on information and discussion on current, social and cultural events.
<http://www.i-italy.org/>

Italian American Writers.Com is a rich website on contemporary Italian American literature that hosts the Bordighera Poetry Prize, which consists in book publication in bilingual edition, and provides various links to other websites and electronic magazines on Italian American literature.
<http://www.italianamericanwriters.com/default.html>

John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, a University Institute under the Aegis of Queens College, CUNY. An Institute with the purpose to foster higher education by promoting research and organizing conferences, lectures and seminars on Italian American culture. The Institute hosts the digital project *i-Italy*, and the live streaming programs *Italics*, the Italian American TV magazine.
<http://qcpages.qc.edu/calandra/index.html>

The Italian Tribune, a weekly newspaper since 1931. It offers its readers a variety of

material of interest to the Italian American community and articles about Italy.
<http://www.italiantribune.com/>

MELUS, The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States, was founded in 1973, and endeavours to expand the definition of American literature through the study and teaching of Latino, Native, African, Asian and Pacific American, and ethnically specific Euro-American literary works, their authors, and their cultural contexts.
<http://webspaceship.edu/kmlong/melus/>

NIAF, The Italian American National Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and promoting the heritage and culture of Americans of Italian descent, the nation's fifth largest ethnic group, and to raising the prominence of all things Italian in American culture and society, and making "Italian American" part of the national conversation.
<http://www.niaf.org/>

OSIA, The Order Sons of Italy in America is the largest and longest-established national organization for men and women of Italian heritage in the United States. It was established in 1905 as a mutual aid society for the early Italian immigrants.
<http://www.osia.org/>

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