

LA VITA AGRA-DOLCE: ITALIAN COUNTER-CULTURES
AND TRANSLATION DURING THE ECONOMIC MIRACLE

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: *La vita agra-dolce: Italian Counter-Cultures and Translation during the Economic Miracle*

My dissertation research focuses on Italian literature of the 1960s, specifically translations from the American counterculture and poetry of the neo-avantgarde. Through a detailed study of three specific translational moments—Fernanda Pivano’s translations of Allen Ginsberg’s counterculture poetry, Luciano Bianciardi’s translation of Henry Miller’s controversial *Tropic of Cancer*, and the neo-avantgarde poets Edoardo Sanguineti and Alfredo Giuliani’s translations of British high modernist writers like James Joyce and T.S. Eliot—I explore the literary-historical period of the post-World War II economic boom in Italy. While recent translation studies scholarship focusing on Italy has addressed the Fascist period and the upsurge of translations under censorship, my aim is to build upon a similar idea of translation as cultural resistance in order to examine the relationship between translated and original texts during a period where the explosion of industry and prosperity led intellectuals to reconsider the ideological function and purpose of art. My study will be framed within polysystems theory as developed by Itamar Even-Zohar, which reconfigures the organization of literatures to include all the literary works produced in a given language (i.e., to include translations). My notion of translation is informed by the position continually theorized by Lawrence

Venuti, that is of translation not as an equivalent reproduction of a source text but a type of interpretative writing that radically transforms a text, placing it within an entirely new literary, linguistic, social, and historical context. While the polysystems approach is well-established within translation studies, I hope to contribute to Italian literary scholarship by combining pivotal author-based and translator-based case studies. Against the view of closed national literatures and the exclusion of translation, my revisionary approach will illuminate the role of translation in the formation of cultural and literary identity.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: ITALIAN COUNTER-CULTURES AND TRANSLATION DURING THE ECONOMIC MIRACLE

You may recall the iconic sequence in Federico Fellini's film *La dolce vita*, in which the buxom American actress Sylvia wades childlike through the Trevi Fountain. Marcello, the Italian tabloid journalist and sometime ladies' man, gazes at her with manifest desire as she revels in the water oblivious to his attentions. The moment she notices him, she trickles water on his forehead, the sound drops out, and night turns to dawn. This baptismal scene inaugurates the Italian awakening to the future. While the film exposes cosmopolitan decadence in a Rome suddenly plunged into modernity, the encounter between the world-weary Marcello and the giddy Sylvia mirrors Italy's encounter with the United States, an encounter whose impact, as the fountain scene suggests, is by no means reciprocal.

La dolce vita caricatures the Italy of the economic miracle—or post-war boom—whose scope has been likened to the Industrial Revolution in Victorian England. These dramatic changes also set the stage for a major shift in Italy's relationship with the Anglophone world and the United States in particular. While Italian film came to dominate canons of world cinema, the relationship of influence was mostly the reverse where literature was concerned—the influx of translation from foreign languages (and increasingly from English) during Fascism only accelerated after the war to reach the high levels of today. Thus, while the United States translates a notoriously small amount of foreign texts—around 3%, not only of fiction, but also non-fiction and scientific

material—Italy is more characteristic of many countries in the world, where translations account for about 25% of its textual production and of those, 50-60% are from English (Lottman 1991:S5). This reflects the literary prestige of English as well as its prominence and ubiquity as the world's lingua franca.

These numbers serve as concrete reminders not only of globalism, especially in the form of Anglo-American cultural dominance, but also as ciphers for the sort of influence that English ultimately wields. For Italy, French was the literary language to contend with and draw on at the beginning of the twentieth century. During the subsequent Fascist era (1922-1943), English began to take over as the primary language of influence. In part, this is due to the so-called myth of America (as the promised land and also antidote to Fascism), which took root through cultural representations such as novels and comic books that came to Italy through translation. English took definitive hold in the 50s and 60s, after the United States liberated Italy with bombs and bubble gum—that is, with manpower and capital—and Italy bounced back in an economic boom that brought industry, prosperity, and bourgeois comforts to a previously faltering state. Thus two opposing cultures develop: one which still sees the US as a paragon of artistic openness and freedom, especially vis-à-vis its counterculture, and another which treats the US as a curious novelty but not a nation with a lofty literary tradition.

My dissertation is concerned with literary translations in Italian from English during an infrequently studied period in Italian letters, especially in the context of comparative and world literature. Whereas post-1945 currents like the Latin American boom and the French *nouveau roman* are now well-known, the Italian literary environment of the 60s was dominated by the neo-avantgarde, a group of poets and

writers who renovated Italian literature within the context of neocapitalism. If avant-gardes emerge at points of social rupture, they also force us to reconsider the function and purpose of art. Italian literature, then, largely develops within the context of or in opposition to a highbrow neo-avantgarde which is met by the influx of American influences via translations from prolific writer-translators such as the *grande dame* of American literature Fernanda Pivano and the *enfant terrible* of Italian letters Luciano Bianciardi. Without a greater understanding of this movement and period, it is hard to understand where writers like Umberto Eco (an active member of the neo-avantgarde) and Italo Calvino come from, or how Italy fits into postmodern literary discourse. Furthermore, I aim to build upon the growing body of research on translation under Fascism, illuminating its literary and social impact by considering the next chapter in Italian translation history, broadening the definition of a national literature to include all the texts written in its language—i.e., to include translations within the literary system.

While translation gives a culture access to the “world,” it is also a localizing practice, one that says as much about a receiving culture as a foreign one. Thus translation enables us to study what a given linguistic community wants to take from the “outside,” and how it renders texts and ideas into its own terms. In this context, the previously cited statistics give us a good idea of the value attached to English in the Italian situation—a situation mirrored in other linguistic-national contexts.¹

¹ See, for example, International PEN’s 2007 report, *To Be Translated or Not to Be*, which reports similar figures for the surveyed countries (the Netherlands, China, Argentina, France, Catalonia, and Germany)—or far worse, like the case of China, the most populous country in the world, 0.01% of whose books are translated into other languages.

However, while translation also enables us to understand the transmission of texts, it is all too frequently neglected at the highest levels of literary scholarship. National language and literature departments often mistrust and even reject translation as an object of close reading, the backbone of specialized literary study. Scholars of comparative literature or teachers of literature courses in translation, then, may find themselves at a disadvantage, lacking the training and methodological tools to discuss translation in any substantive way, going so far as to avoid texts they cannot read in the original. Consider the following statement from a recent article in *Comparative Literature*:

World literature forces me to forego, at least as regards those languages that I do not command, all that I normally hold dear, namely close formal-aesthetic and historical analysis of texts. (Weninger 328)

Statements like this arise from the widespread conviction that translation is a second-order practice, an unfortunate “necessity” for reading foreign works, acceptable for undergraduates but never for specialists. They come from literary critics that marginalize translation while at the same time liberally and without remark cite theorists and philosophers in translation to buttress their literary analyses. Ezra Pound was critiquing much the same tendency in 1929 when he pointed out that “histories of English literature always slide over translation—I suppose it is inferiority complex—yet some of the best books in English are translations” (“How to Read” 34). As a result, close reading is performed almost exclusively on original compositions, leaving translations—no matter how significant or influential—out of national literary canons completely.

Yet translation is undeniably the essential link between Italy's own literary context and its position within world literature. Italy translates more than it is translated. This is a situation that comes to the fore during—or perhaps as a result of—Fascism. In the early 1930s, Marxist cultural critic Antonio Gramsci writes in his *Prison Notebooks* that Italy has no “popular” national literature:

Cosa significa il fatto che il popolo italiano legge di preferenza gli scrittori stranieri? Significa che esso subisce l'egemonia intellettuale e morale degli intellettuali stranieri, che esso si sente legato più agli intellettuali stranieri che a quelli “paesani”...² (Quaderno 21, XVII)

Gramsci notes a certain lack in Italian literary culture which makes it “susceptible” to foreign influence and intrusion. This is partially a counter-reaction to Fascist autarchic cultural politics and yet also reflects the literary scene, dominated by the grandiose rhetorical style of aesthete Gabriele D'Annunzio on the one hand, and introspective and abstruse “hermetic” poetry on the other.

The conflict between the local and the global has had a complex history in Italy, having much to do with the conflict between *campanilismo* and the cosmopolitan, dialect and standard Italian, and thus questions of literary language and audience. The “questione della lingua,” or language question, has been a constant in Italian literary debates from Dante on. Pier Paolo Pasolini revives the debate in a 1964 article where he begrudgingly admits the existence of the Italian national language but claims that it was not really a language anyone spoke, but rather a technological language “di produzione e di

² *What does it mean that the Italian people prefer to read foreign writers? It means that they are subject to the intellectual and moral hegemony of foreign intellectuals, that they feel more connected to foreign intellectuals than their own...*

Translations throughout are mine unless otherwise noted.

consumismo”³ (“Nuove questioni linguistiche” 37). His piece elicited a response from Italo Calvino, who later encapsulates the debate thus:

Italian—to sum up Pasolini—has finally come into being, but I dislike it because it’s “technological.”

Italian has been dying for quite some time, I say, and will only survive if it can become a language that is instrumentally modern.

(“L’antilingua,” *Una pietra sopra*, 151)

For Pasolini, mainstream literary Italian is a bourgeois artifice that reinforces the status quo. Calvino, clearly, is not so concerned with issues of class and authenticity as much as he is with modernity (where Pasolini sees capitalism and technology). Calvino is concerned with the “translatability” of Italian, or put otherwise, Italian from an external, international perspective. On the one hand, he writes, it has a “great flexibility” that “enables it to translate from other languages just a little better than any other language can”; however, “Italian is an isolated language—untranslatable” (142). This sense of “untranslatability” has to do with a certain cultural isolation that Calvino attributes to the development of various cultural “codes” specific to the Italian situation, the literary equivalent of in-jokes—“among us,” he says, “we always understand one other” (144). Calvino advocates mitigating this “untranslatability” by cultivating an awareness of the level of translatability, or communicability, of one’s language. Seeking an Italian that is as “concrete” and “precise” as possible (147) makes it possible to communicate with the world beyond the Italian borders, which for Calvino is literarily and politically essential.

³ of production and consumption.

This preoccupation with translatability and Italy's international relevance is found throughout the entire modern era. As one critic asserts, "in Italy, the twentieth century was, from the outset, characterized by a pressing European vocation" (Dolfi 45). This echoes a statement from modernist author Massimo Bontempelli on his reasons for publishing the literary journal *'900* in French. He writes:

One of the characteristics I deem necessary to foster in modern literature is innovative imagination, the ability to create such vivid myths, fables, and characters that they retain what is solid in them, even translated, even retold in other forms. One of the proofs of the value of a modern work will be its translatability. (Ferme 35)

This is the dream of a universal language, the same vision that inspired Goethe's notion of *Weltliteratur* not to mention Walter Benjamin's influential metaphysical concept of the "pure language" (*reine Sprache*) to be released in translation. At that time, however, Bontempelli hopes to use French as a vehicle through which to spread Italian literary culture and values. In this scenario, then, an imperialist claim to universality is only so much smoke and mirrors hiding the system of relations in which French literature dominates Italian (not unlike the scenario evoked by Madame de Staël a century prior, in her famous exhortation for the Italians to renew their culture through translation). It also posits a French-speaking European elite as the primary interlocutors and receptors of Italy's modern literature. English, however, is the most translated language during Fascism, since much of the Italian cultural elite could read French texts in the original (Billiani *Culture nazionali* 157, 160). Yet the position of translation under Fascism was rather ambiguous, due to the regime's conflicting views on how to achieve cultural

supremacy—whether it should be suppressed in favor of fostering Italian literature and keeping it “pure,” or whether translating was a means of appropriating the foreign and thus conquering international trends. As a result, censorship varied significantly and much foreign literature was able to “pass” through Italian borders.

After World War II, the Italian political and social landscape changed dramatically. The Italy of the boom or “economic miracle,” generally considered the postwar period from the mid-1950s to the mid-70s, in fact inaugurated a new stage in the Italian literary system. New major publishers like Feltrinelli emerged, a new generation of translators began work, and an experimental strain straddling the modern and postmodern came to the fore. In the introduction to *Twentieth-Century Poetic Translation*, Daniela La Penna writes:

[I]n the twentieth century, and especially in the post-World War II period, the political power of the US and, symbolically at least, Britain[,] has been reflected in a similar position of dominance in the literary field, thus relegating the Italian poetic tradition to the subsidiary role of a repository of earlier innovations, while producing a large market for translations of American and English poetry and fiction. The second half of the Italian twentieth century, however, proved very politically dynamic in literary and linguistic terms seeing a progressive decentralization and revision of the aesthetic, linguistic and ideological values associated with a monolingual and monological version of the canon. (2)

The aesthetic revision La Penna mentions here comprises a break with a neorealist poetics and the emergence of another neo-, the neo-avantgarde. Its central figures formed the Gruppo 63, a loosely affiliated group of poets informed particularly by Marxism and

structuralism. In part, this group emerges out of the seismic shifts in Italian culture that occurred from the 1950s on and in opposition to the neo-capitalist moment. This is the “dolce vita” by Fellini and in part, a consequence of American economic and political intervention. Yet while Italy was something of a “client state” of the US, it was also home to the largest communist party in the Western world.

The economic miracle began with the US-funded Marshall Plan, which poured over 1.2 billion dollars into Italy from 1947-51. This, combined with the American military presence in the 40s and the influx of American products and pop culture, certainly increased exposure to and interest in English; concomitantly, economic conditions also increased the possibility of travel abroad. These conditions were very different from those that had engendered the previous generation’s idealistic, primitivist idea of America. For Fernanda Pivano, who was introduced to American literature by Cesare Pavese in the early 40s and began translating under his tutelage, translating American writers was a form of ideological resistance and a way to surreptitiously import new forms, themes, and ideas. In a 1970 speech, she explains:

Later, with the mythical discovering time gone into the postwar flooding rivers of Coca-Cola and economic imperialism—I mean, after America had become a physical reality with not so much to be dreamt about and after our champions of clandestinity were accepted by the Establishment—I kept translating for a while simply because this had become my profession. (“Modern Translations” 327)

Here, Pivano describes the lull she experienced after her ideologically charged translation activity, bringing writers like Edgar Lee Masters, Ernest Hemingway, and F. Scott Fitzgerald into Italian—risky activity for which, in the case of Hemingway’s *Farewell to*

Arms, she was arrested. However, after the war, she found a new sense of purpose in translating the writers of the Beat generation, like Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac. She cultivated a close relationship with the Beat poets and championed them extensively through prefaces, books, essays, and translations. Pivano found in Beat counterculture an answer to the new consumerism in Italy.

Another literary powerhouse during this period was Luciano Bianciardi, who translated 120 works from 1955 to his death in 1971, and was also a journalist, novelist, and incisive cultural critic. His semi-autobiographical novel *La vita agra* (1962) explores the alienating and leveling effects of the economic “miracle,” portraying an anarchist manqué turned translator-for-hire. In Bianciardi’s formulation, the “agra” or bitter life is much like Fellini’s ironic “dolce vita,” replacing Rome with Milan and the image with the word. The protagonist of Bianciardi’s novel makes an analogy between social conformity and linguistic conformity, critiquing standard translation practices:

Today most translations could never, if not ironically, be called “vulgarizations,” since they go from a foreign tongue, itself perfectly clear and familiar, to a half-dead language that doesn’t belong to anybody and would need to be “vulgarized” all over again. (*La vita agra* 125)

This non-language Bianciardi ascribes to translations recalls Pasolini’s critique of “average Italian” as a bureaucratic language of convenience. Bianciardi’s novel further satirizes the editorial attempt to purge translations of dialectical inflection. This opposition to impersonal, pseudo-neutral language so masterfully executed in his novels calls attention to whether his translations also reflect this stance, especially his versions of Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn*, also published in 1962.

Luciano Bianciardi has received positive critical reassessment in recent years; the few works on Fernanda Pivano's engagement with Anglo-American literature are largely celebratory. Yet their translation work exhibits competing aesthetic aims, even where they translate the same authors—Jack Kerouac, for example. Pivano became a prominent cultural figure not by translating alone, but by becoming a popular critic, mythologizing the writers she favored, creating extensive contexts for their reception abroad while minimizing her intermediary role. Her self-effacement serves to preserve the translational illusion of presenting an unmediated version of an original text—her 1964 translation of Allen Ginsberg's poems, *Jukebox all'idrogeno* [*Hydrogen Jukebox*], for example, features an extensive introduction that says nothing about how she went about translating the poems. This self-negation and her emphasis on the directness of Beat poetics carries over into her translations, which feature very little linguistic variation and consistently produce a standard Italian where Ginsberg's English is unusual or ungrammatical.

Both Pivano's and Bianciardi's work takes place in tandem with the emergence of the avant-garde Gruppo 63. The group's most prominent author internationally was Umberto Eco, while its major poets, such as Edoardo Sanguineti and Alfredo Giuliani, have not been widely translated in English and are not well-known, though the important anthology *I novissimi* was published in English by the experimental literature publisher Sun & Moon Press in 1995 bearing a translation of the original, now anachronistic, subtitle "Poetry for the Sixties." Of the few women associated with the Gruppo 63, Amelia Rosselli has received the most attention, and some work by Italian/English bilingual poet Giulia Niccolai was translated in the 70s. However, given this work's connection to international avantgarde movements like the French Tel Quel and major

modernist writers like Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, and T.S. Eliot, their obscurity in English is remarkable. In *The Translator's Invisibility*, Lawrence Venuti explains the neglect of Italian experimental poetry in English (in favor of poet Eugenio Montale) by claiming that it clashes with “dominant poetics in Anglo-American culture, specifically its romantic assumptions: that the poet is a unified subjectivity freely expressing his personal experience, and that the poem should therefore be centered on the poetic I, evoking a unique voice, communicating the poet’s self in transparent language, sustaining a feeling of *simpatico* in the translator” (279). I would add to this factor the dominance of the Italian realist / neorealist canon in English, combined with the dominance of French poetry in the Anglo-American canon of European experimental poetics.

Yet the neo-avantgarde continues the legacy of modernist writing, and has much to offer for the Anglophone reader. As a way of suggesting this significance for international or world letters, my dissertation also considers the role of Anglo-American modernism within the neo-avantgarde. 1960 marks the first Italian translation of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Gruppo 63 members Edoardo Sanguineti and Alfredo Giuliani translate Joyce’s poems; Giuliani also translates T.S. Eliot. This revisitation of modernism could seem like a belated formalism, which points to the difficulty of periodization in comparative studies. This is a problem Frederic Jameson points to regarding “third-world” literature, though here he refers to a realist tendency:

The third-world novel will not offer the satisfactions of Proust or Joyce; what is more damaging than that, perhaps, is its tendency to remind us of outmoded

stages of our own first-world cultural development and to cause us to conclude that “they are still writing novels like Dreiser or Sherwood Anderson.” (65)

One could, however, claim that any literature in the tradition of Proust or Joyce could seem equally recycled or derivative. For example, in a 1997 article for the important American magazine *World Literature Today*, Italian comparatist Armando Gnisci laments the complete failure of Italian writers to dialogue with the world (save, of course, Eco and Calvino, whom he deems, respectively, a mere bestseller machine and a writer of quality). He writes:

The Italian writers of our time go on tilling, over and over, the dry, barren soil of an exhausted tradition, which, in its finest moments, has come up with new ways of nourishing and reviving the legacy from the ancients but has never had any real success in opening up to modernity. For a change, some of these writers hang on, obstinately, to the same tiresome, obscure operations of the most hermetic and formalistic European modernism, including, now and then, an aftertaste—a reminiscence, perhaps—from the avant-garde.

Gnisci’s extended explanation seems unsatisfactory, itself limited and provincial. Yet it offers another perspective on the reasons why the Italian neo-avantgarde made little impact on the global sphere. Translations, as I mention above, have a major role in periodization and perhaps this sense of belatedness; while Italian writers are revisiting Joyce in the 60s and 70s, Joyce has become so overwhelmingly canonical in English that to claim him as an influence in any kind of experimental poetry or narrative would be so obvious as to be unnecessary.

The diachronic element of translation reminds us of how different the function of translations is within their receiving cultures. On the whole, translation studies has moved from linguistic, source-oriented approaches to functional, target-oriented approaches. Historically, it has been often (and sometimes still is) the practice of registering translation shifts from one text to another; yet these “shifts” are crucially illuminated by extratextual factors that condition the text’s production, not least the conditions of translation, in which the simple choice of what to translate, whether on the initiative of publisher or translator, constitutes a literary-political gesture. The way in which a text is translated often has more to do with the dominant poetics or literary aesthetics of the receiving situation, inevitably written in target linguistic and cultural codes rather than reproducing immanent features of the source text. Hence the attempts to formulate translation “laws,” “norms,” or “universals” by various theorists, from Gideon Toury to Antoine Berman.

In the wake of the 2001 *PMLA* special edition on Globalizing Literary Studies, much has been made of a “translational model of comparative literature” (Emily Apter, “Untranslatables”). Translation has, albeit germinally, begun to enter the discourse around world literature, especially in the work of David Damrosch, who defines world literature with the following triptych:

1. *World literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures.*
2. *World literature is writing that gains in translation.*
3. *World literature is not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time.*

(What Is World Literature? 281)

“Refraction,” like André Lefevere’s use of the term as the rewriting or “manipulation” of a text in terms of a particular literary-ideological worldview and purpose, refers to a translational practice that creates literary traditions within specific cultural and linguistic context: “works become world literature by being received into the space of a foreign culture, a space defined in many ways by the host culture’s national tradition and the present needs of its own writers. Even a single work of world literature is the locus of a negotiation between two different cultures” (Damrosch 282). Damrosch’s work brings to the fore ways in which individual texts can be read micro- and macro-cosmically, rather than adhering strictly to models of close or distant reading, an idea reiterated in his essay “World Literature, National Contexts.” World literature itself is not global, but rather defined by national/linguistic communities within which bodies of work circulate; thus any canon or simply body of literature becomes variable and context-dependent. Italy’s version of “American literature” won’t simply coincide with France’s, Japan’s, or America’s own.

My notion of the literary system is influenced by Franco Moretti, Pascale Casanova, and more specifically as regards translation, Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury. Regarding Moretti and Casanova, I find especially useful their emphasis on the inequity of literary systems. As Moretti writes in “Conjectures on World Literature,” *“There is no symmetry in literary interference. A target literature is, more often than not, interfered with by a source literature which completely ignores it”* (56). Casanova’s model is perhaps overly capitalist, using economic metaphors to explain literary relations, yet the aspect of inequity that emerges in her picture of competition within the “world

republic of letters” is more than convincing. In a recent article on translation, she writes that:

far from being the horizontal exchange and peaceful transfer often described, translation must be understood, on the contrary, as an ‘unequal exchange’ that takes place in a strongly hierarchized universe. Translation can therefore be described as one of the specific forms that the relationship of domination assumes in the international literary field. (86)

The notion of inequity is fundamental within the Italian context, where Anglo-American cultural imperialism has a particularly strong grip. There is a strong sense of affinity between Italy and the United States, a sense that is mostly one-sided, given the prevalence of American film, television, and fiction, and the pressure to learn English. Despite the romanticized view of an idealized Italy, Americans have relatively few cultural imports from the country, which is precisely what enables such a view to persist. As the recent Best Picture Oscar win for Paolo Sorrentino’s *La grande bellezza* suggests, according to some critics in the press, the US welcomes precisely those imports that reaffirm their pre-existing notions of Italy, whereas those that disrupt dominant perceptions remain marginal or obscure. A translation from English to Italian, then, has a different function than the reverse.

My research takes an initial cue primarily from polysystems theory and the manipulation school. This represents what is typically called a target-oriented approach, the idea that translations are “facts of target cultures” and are bound by history and context. Further, this also indicates an adherence to cultural approaches to translation more broadly. The “cultural turn” in translation studies, by now well entrenched in the

field, has entailed a shift in focus from language to culture, resulting in a variety of cultural studies and sociological approaches that to varying degrees exclude or reduce linguistic analysis of translated texts in recognition of the socially embedded nature of language and texts. The descent of polysystems theory commonly known under the rubric “manipulation school,” associated with Theo Hermans, José Lambert, and André Lefevere, combines the broad perspectives furnished by a systems approach with detailed literary historiography and readings. Hermans, in his introduction to the essay collection *The Manipulation of Literature* (1985), suggests that all translation involves some degree of manipulation for purposes determined by the receiving situation (9). Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere’s 1990 collection *Translation, History and Culture* continues this line of research with contributions that explore how translators have purposefully manipulated texts in order to advance a particular ideology, ensure a text’s acceptance in its target culture by conforming to dominant discourses, enable national identity construction, and construct particular images of foreign texts, authors, and cultures. More recently (2013), Lawrence Venuti’s titular claim that *Translation Changes Everything* underscores the way that receiving situations determine a translation completely whether or not ideological motives or subversive intentions are at the forefront of a translator’s consciousness.

The polysystem model, though developed in the 70s and long since disputed on several fronts, nonetheless serves as a useful conceptual starting point for thinking about these questions. Itamar Even-Zohar identifies three conditions in which translated literature tends to flourish:

- (a) when a polysystem has not yet been crystallized, that is to say, when a literature is ‘young’, in the process of being established;
- (b) when a literature is either “peripheral” (within a large group of correlated literatures) or “weak” or both; and
- (c) when there are turning points, crises, or literary vacuums in a literature.

(*Papers* 47)

Italian literature, in these terms, occupies a “weak” or “peripheral” position in comparison to French or English, yet is a relatively strong literature in comparison with smaller European literatures. Thus it is in a strange position from the transnational point of view, similar to Jameson’s designation of Spain as “semi-peripheral” (78), and as such, often drops out of the conversation (as it does even in the Italian Franco Moretti, except brief references to Manzoni and Petrarch, or in Pascale Casanova). Indeed, the polysystem model appears especially relevant for the Italian context, where the innovatory function of translation is a critical commonplace. Translation as a form of resistance to Fascism, as I have suggested above, is the cornerstone of the innovation hypothesis, which can be seen in cases ranging from Eugenio Montale⁴ to Cesare Pavese.⁵ At the same time, however, Even-Zohar’s polysystem model cannot adequately account for the middle points on the continuum, and as Edwin Gentzler has pointed out, also fails to explain how translations can have a significant impact on so-called “strong systems” like the United States (“Translation, Counter-Culture, and *The Fifties* in the

⁴ See George Talbot’s *Montale’s ‘Mestiere Vile’: The Elective Translations from English of the 1930s and 1940s*, which asserts that Montale’s translations from English (uncommissioned, the critic specifies) represent an escape valve from the strictures of Fascist literary dictates and a way of exploring new poetic possibilities in Italian.

⁵ See, for example, Valerio Ferme’s *Tradurre è tradire*.

USA”). Even-Zohar claims further that translations play either conservative, or secondary roles (within “strong” systems), and only innovative and primary roles within weak systems, which then cannot include the impact of, for example, the translations written by Ezra Pound.

Within the panorama of world literature, then, I use the case of Italy as an illustration of the liminal space between center/periphery or dominant/dominated that connects the whole; these constructions are in every instance relational and not absolute. I would argue that this in-betweenness is part of the reason why twentieth-century Italian literature is a relatively minor player on the global sphere.

Thus, my dissertation broadly considers both the position of translations within the Italian literary system of the 60s as well as the major literary system that is the United States. First, how do the translations of Bianciardi and Pivano, especially of American anti-establishment writers, impact the Italian literary system? How are they received, read, and subsequently incorporated? How do they contribute to an idea of “America,” a myth that was formed at least in part by literary translations in the early twentieth century? Furthermore, what is the relationship between these translated counter-culture figures and the Italian anti-establishment writers of the neo-avantgarde?

I argue that theories of translation are also theories of world literature insofar as they sketch new cartographies of literary circulation, and thus that consideration of a single literary polysystem can fruitfully explore the notion of world literature as a concept that is always rooted within a particular linguistic/literary tradition and geographical space.

Chapters

Each chapter in the dissertation addresses specific cases within the Italian context of the economic boom of between the mid-1950s and 70s, drawing on a range of archival, historical, biographical, theoretical and primary text sources. There is not a single methodology, but rather an attention to the ideas and recent insights that illuminate each case.

Translation criticism within Italian studies has notably expanded, even since I have begun this research. As Italy is a translation culture, there has never truly been a shortage of translation commentary within the Italian cultural sphere. There is an understudied native history of translation theory that goes from Benedetto Croce's famous proclamation of poetic untranslatability, to Gianfranco Folena, to Benvenuto Terracini, to Franco Fortini. Moreover, due to the robust translator training programs at the university level, an explosion in critical reflection by a range of thinkers and translation practitioners. Umberto Eco, Antonio Prete, Franco Buffoni, Franca Cavagnoli, Siri Nergaard, are some of the academics and translators who have written provocative critical reflections and studies of Italian translation.

In decades past, studies were author-based and linguistics-oriented, thus comprising comparative textual analyses of the translations in an otherwise prominent author's oeuvre. Typical of this tendency is the recent book by Federico Federici, *Translation as Stylistic Evolution: Italo Calvino: Creative Translator of Raymond Queneau*. Other monographs have retained the focus on canonical authors while expanding into other fields of cultural studies and translation criticism, most notably Lina Insana's *Arduous Tasks: Primo Levi, Translation, and the Transmission of Holocaust*

Testimony. If we consider articles and essays, nearly every prominent Italian writer, from Leopardi to Pascoli to Pasolini has been studied as a translator. Such critical works have also been significant in my research, with studies on Luciano Bianciardi and biographical portraits of Fernanda Pivano. Still other critics have begun a broader canvas, such as Jacob Blakesley's *Modern Italian Poets: Translators of the Impossible*, which surveys the category of the poet-translator, or work by scholars like Daniela La Penna, Francesca Biliani, and Christopher Rundle. Many projects, like theirs, have begun to explore the role of cultural promoters and publishers, and to study the profiles of entire national literatures in the Italian context.

Following this Introduction, Chapter II, “‘Magari al di là delle loro parole’: Fernanda Pivano and the Translation of America,” examines Fernanda Pivano’s “second phase” in literary activity, and her role in translating and promoting the Beat poets. I focus on her translation of Allen Ginsberg’s collection of poems, *Jukebox all’idrogeno*, published in Italian in 1964 from a selection of poems published in English in the mid-to-late 50s. This collection includes the (in)famous “Howl,” whose respective function in the English and Italian contexts is considered. Her fame as a translator enabled her to fix and popularize a notion of “Americanness” for an entire generation. Yet despite her tendency toward ideological simplification, I suggest, she should be thought of as a committed or activist translator.

Chapter III, “Luciano Bianciardi and Translation as Labor,” discusses the work of Luciano Bianciardi, focusing on the discourse on translation developed in his non-fiction writings and his novel *La vita agra*, and his translation work, in particular Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn*. As a somewhat neglected writer and a prolific

professional translator, Bianciardi occupies a position between canonical author and unknown translator. As such, his work challenges the dominant paradigm of the auteur translator, as I will show. In looking at his translations themselves, I argue that Bianciardi's theory of translation as labor represents a form of Marxist critique which manifests in his translations in the form of error.

Chapter IV, "Literatures of Crisis: Translation and the Avant-Garde," takes a wide-angle approach to consider the relationship between translation, foreign literature, and the poetics of the neo-avantgarde during the 60s. Here, I trace the way that Anglo-American modernism structured and informed neo-avantgarde poetics, especially the work of Ezra Pound and James Joyce for the poet Edoardo Sanguineti and Umberto Eco's theory of the "opera aperta" or open work. The *neoavanguardia*, I argue, must be thought of as a cosmopolitan literary movement that continues the legacy of modernist translation, and is thus an unfortunately neglected piece in the constellation of modernist world literature deserving of greater attention.

Together, this portrait of translation activity in Italy during this period constitutes a mosaic of competing poetics: *counter* cultures which, through constellations of opposition and superimposition, forge new cosmopolitan networks of literary engagement.

CHAPTER II

“MAGARI AL DI LÀ DELLE LORO PAROLE”: FERNANDA PIVANO AND THE TRANSLATION OF AMERICA

La nostra letteratura fu e resta e resterà probabilmente anche dopo
il fascismo la letteratura più statica, la più indifferente alle
contingenze della vita, l'interprete meno fedele dei tempi in cui
nasce.

Eugenio Montale, “Questo era il fascismo”⁶

Tradurre significò di nuovo per me affrontare un linguaggio nato
dalla realtà piuttosto che dalla letteratura.
Fernanda Pivano, “Grazie, cari amici”⁷

A few weeks after translator Fernanda Pivano's death in 2009, there was a memorial ceremony for her in Milan.⁸ Her image was projected onto the facade of the Duomo in the city's main piazza, and with The Doors playing in the background, renowned contemporary director Paolo Sorrentino read her translation of Allen Ginsberg's “Song,” which begins:

Il peso del mondo

è amore.

Sotto il fardello

della solitudine,

⁶ Our literature was, and even after Fascism will probably remain, the most static, the most indifferent to the contingencies of life, the least faithful interpreter of its times. *Auto da fè* (20).

⁷ For me, translation meant dealing with a language born of reality, not of literature. (XXX)

⁸ September 24, 2009. Video available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sr_F7-IxzZs

sotto il fardello
della insoddisfazione

il peso,
il peso che trasportiamo
è amore.⁹

Ginsberg's poem, as epitaph, suggests the enormous love that motivated Pivano's work and her work of transporting that love which later in the poem becomes the "fardello della vita" ("the burden of life"). Ginsberg's poem (1954), refracted through Pivano's words (1966), and again through Sorrentino's voice (2009). Here, "Canzone" takes on new contextual meanings that epitomize Pivano's significance for translation history as a double figure, at once famous as a literary mediator yet invisible as a textual presence. The question of who is speaking and to whom is exploded through the multiplication of voices and addressees. Translator and author collapse into one another, becoming a single voice but at the same time speaking to each other. As in the typical use of poetic or biblical verse at memorials, the audience is invited to see the poem as both a universal statement about existence and a specific representation of the memorialized person's life.

This public memorial was scarcely the only tribute to Pivano: that same year, a writer-actor-songwriter also from Sorrentino's generation, Giulio Casale, dedicated a theater piece to Pivano entitled *Canzone di Nanda*, which was in part an adaptation of her recently published memoirs (*Diari 1917-1973*) and included several songs written for and

⁹ The weight of the world / is love. // Under the burden / of solitude, / under the burden / of dissatisfaction // the weight, / the weight we carry / is love.

about her. The following year, Casale produced the show *The beat goes on*, billed as a voyage through the American 50s through music and poetry. She was the subject of multiple documentaries, namely *Fernanda Pivano. A Farewell to Beat* (Luca Facchini, 2000), *Generazioni d'Amore. Le Quattro Americhe di Fernanda Pivano* (Ottavio Rosati, 2006), and *Pivano Blues. Sulla strada di Nanda* (Teresa Marchesi, 2011), as well as a biographical exhibition in Milan, *Fernanda Pivano. Viaggi, cose, persone* (April 6-July 18, 2011, Galleria Gruppo Credito Valtellinese). In *A Farewell to Beat*, American writer Bret Easton Ellis is interviewed, and he remarks emphatically that he can think of no other figure anywhere in the world with a similar passion to inspire people to read American literature.

The singularity of Pivano's contribution as the agent who imported so much of American literary and musical culture to Italy, who came to personify American literature, becomes apparent with even the most cursory listing of her accomplishments, which include some forty translations—including several works by Ernest Hemingway and Allen Ginsberg, as well as F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Richard Wright, and Sherwood Anderson, and the mega-success *Antologia di Spoon River*—but also hundreds of prefaces, over a dozen books of essays, not to mention articles, magazines, editorial work, promotional work, interviews and television appearances.¹⁰ What is most striking, however, is not so much the number of accomplishments but the level of fanfare, which is rare if not virtually unheard of for a literary translator. Yet Fernanda Pivano

¹⁰ Pivano translated a number of literary texts from English, and wrote several critical works, such as *La balena bianca e altri miti* (1961), *America rossa e nera* (1964), *Beat Hippie Yippie* (1972), *Pagine americane* (2005). She received a number of literary accolades and awards, and her archive is kept in the Biblioteca Riccardo e Fernanda Pivano, opened in 1998. For a complete list of publications, see *Fernanda Pivano. Biografia minima* (Tullio Pironti Editore, 2000).

(1917-2009), translator, writer, and critic, is a colossal figure in the Italian cultural imaginary, distinguished from any other translator or critic by the reverence and gratitude expressed toward her, especially in the popular press and the youth community, and the importance of her contribution to Italian culture and letters is increasingly recognized and appreciated in the academic sphere. She has become what is known as a “mostro sacro”—an irreproachable legend—described in headlines and elsewhere in such grandiose terms as the “sacerdotessa delle lettere” [priestess of letters] or the “voce dell’America” [the voice of America]. In fact, these terms often identify her as the representative of an entire nation, as in “la genovese che ha scoperto l’America” [the Genoese who discovered America] and “La donna che inventò l’America” [the woman who invented America] (Biamonte 16).¹¹ For if Italian explorers Columbus and Vespucci were among the first Europeans to invade the territory, Pivano was one of the most significant figures to import its imaginary. As the national expert in American culture, her prefaces became the stamp of approval that sold books and made names.

Fernanda Pivano’s renown makes her an ideal case for the study of translation and power. Despite institutional resistance in a country where American literature was, in the first half of the twentieth century, marginalized and even disparaged in relation to British literature, she undertook serious study of US writers, composing a genealogy and introducing virtually an entire national literature to readers. She also valorized and mythologized the writers she favored, associating them with an idea of America that became itself a kind of brand, one that earned her an enormous following in youth culture and the counter-culture. She was very selective in choosing texts to translate, and

¹¹ Paolo Biamonte (*Biografia minima* 16).

importantly, not motivated simply by financial need. She translated not primarily for money but out of an ideological program of literary-political resistance, where the battleground was the literary language, the popular and collective imagination, the possibility of protest and freedom. She is one of those whom Pascale Casanova would call “traducteurs consacants” (albeit in the case of individual writers not entire literatures), or more precisely, Pierre Bourdieu “gate-keepers,” who introduce and consecrate a text or author through translation, thereby determining import and success.

Despite her central role in the diffusion of American literature and culture in Italy, however, there is little criticism about her work, which in decades past was largely dismissed in academia while being widely publicized and celebrated in the popular media. Given the range and influence of her literary endeavors, however, Pivano’s work is essential to understanding the diffusion of American literature in Italy. In addition to translating American authors, she developed personal relationships with many of them and introduced them into Italian culture, not only through textual means—extensive critical writings, books as well as articles in popular venues, prefaces aimed at general audiences—but by bringing writers to Italy, personally hosting them and organizing public readings and events. As the most impassioned promoter of American literature in Italy in the postwar period, her preferences and choices were essential in determining who made it through the gates and became canonical. Yet her highly personal and biographical approach to literature and her disdain for formalist and semiotic approaches made her unpopular in the conservative, pretentious, and not to mention male-dominated literary-critical elite—the same qualities that ultimately made her such a significant figure in the larger cultural sphere.

Pivano was instrumental in creating interpretative communities that would influence the coming generations. Her work spans high and low culture, bringing together diverse constituencies of readers; her translations are politically subversive but linguistically normative; as an outlier in traditional Italian literary and academic circles, she resists literary norms; while she had a comfortable, self-described “Victorian” upbringing, her literary values seem peripheral if not contrary to her class background; she was politically liberal and an advocate for marginalized voices, yet had an ambivalent relationship to feminism.¹² Instead, we can say that it was a long-standing mistrust of institutions, born of growing up in the Fascist era, seeing her former schoolmate Primo Levi shipped off to Auschwitz and her friend and mentor Cesare Pavese sent into confinement and committing suicide after the war, that contributed most significantly to form her literary tastes and aesthetic tendencies, i.e. her translatorial *habitus*.

The habitus, in Bordieu, constitutes the “generative principle of responses more or less well adapted to the demands of a certain field, is the product of an individual history, but also, through the formative experiences of earliest infancy, of the whole collective history of family and class” (1990: 91). In other words, the habitus, a concept which has come to the fore in translation studies in recent years,¹³ is the dialectic of dispositions and impositions that determine one’s position within the field. Sociologist Bernard Lahire has developed the concept further to stress that the habitus is dynamic and plural, potentially shaped by a variety of competing elements that change over time. Though this idea has

¹² See Kirchenbaum; *Enciclopedia delle donne* entry by Piero Ambrogio Pozzi: <http://www.enciclopediadelledonne.it/index.php?azione=pagina&id=629#nota2>

¹³ Gouanvic 1995, Simeoni 1998, Lahire 2004, Inghilleri 2003, Sela-Sheffy 2005, Meylaerts 2005,

been criticized for emphasizing structure over agency, it is the interaction of demands and responses that generates new action.

Pivano's translatorial habitus, then, is shaped by this personal and political background, in relation to the norms and constraints of the literary system (various degrees of censorship, for example), which she challenges throughout her career. Moreover, her own brand of self-fashioning, her discursive construction of a self-image over several decades, turned her into an authoritative tastemaker. Fernanda Pivano recognized the power of the foreign as a vehicle for social change.

Emblematic of this conviction is her work with American Beat poet Allen Ginsberg, as I will explore in the present chapter. In order to understand her ideological position in the postwar decades, the chapter will outline the beginnings of Fernanda Pivano's translation career. The Fascist period was decisive in shaping her translatorial habitus. The "mito americano" established by the early Americanisti in the 30s was a key element in the development of her own literary subjectivity in reaction to the regime. Her idea of America emerged and evolved from that of the Americanisti. Pivano developed a monolithic view of America in which the nation functioned as a symbolic cypher for freedom. This view was associated with a realist, vernacular literature, and was conveyed through a profoundly humanist orientation towards language whereby transparency and communicability represented the ultimate value. The popular success of her projects suggests the efficacy of such an approach.

As she describes it, Pivano's translating activity is based on a set of habits or principles. What underlies these pragmatic descriptions is a theory that largely remains unarticulated that de-emphasizes the very material of translation, i.e., language. For her,

as we can construct from her commentary on the process, translation is an ethical act of movement toward the other that occurs not *in* language but *through* it. In her acceptance speech for the Premio Monselice for translation, she says: “a me importa di aver sempre fatto del mio meglio per capire quello che i miei autori avevano cercato di dire, magari *al di là delle loro parole*, nei libri che stavo traducendo” (XXXII) (my italics).¹⁴ It is the “beyond” of their words that constitutes the focus of her work, as I will elaborate here. Language is seen as an instrument, a reliable, unambiguous means of communication of verifiable and tangible referents.

After discussing Pivano’s habitus and resulting idea of language and approach to translation, I trace the trajectory of Pivano’s relationship with Ginsberg and her project of introducing him into Italian culture. I analyze her translation of Ginsberg’s poetry, *Jukebox all’idrogeno* (Mondadori, 1965), according to the ways in which it fuels subculture and counterculture, resists the literary status quo and opens up new avenues of expression.

Pivano’s Origin Story and the Politics of Form

Fernanda Pivano’s oft-repeated “origin story”¹⁵ harkens back to her days studying English literature at the Università di Torino in the late 30s, when she met Cesare Pavese for the second time (he had been one of her teachers in *liceo*). She was preparing to write a thesis on English literature, and he suggested she switch to American. What’s the

¹⁴ What matters to me is having always done my best to understand what my authors were trying to say, perhaps even beyond their words, in the books I was translating.

¹⁵ See for example, Fernanda Pivano, *Diari*; Elena Tapparo, *Fernanda Pivano e la letteratura americana*.

difference? she asked. He responded by telling her to read Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology*. She "fell in love" with the book, and it became her first translation project, which Pavese discovered by accident and submitted to Einaudi, who published it in 1943.¹⁶ Today, this is one of Italy's all-time best-selling books of poetry, is consistently in print in multiple editions and translations, and inspired the iconic *cantautore* Fabrizio de André's concept album *Non al denaro, non all'amore nè al cielo*, which is based on various poems from the collection.

The story of the Americanisti—Italy's group of American studies and literature scholars in the 30s and 40s, especially Cesare Pavese, Elio Vittorini, Mario Praz, Emilio Cecchi—is tinged with legend, embroiled in the literary-critical politics of the Fascist era and the Resistance. In a repressive period of autarcic cultural politics and xenophobia, Italianness was to be defined, narrated, glorified. Paradoxically, this was also a golden age of translation, not only of high literary forms but especially of popular forms like the mystery and the romance. Pavese and Vittorini famously imported a broad swath of American writers, from Herman Melville to Gertrude Stein. Most significant was the imaginary role America came to assume. As opposed to the flamboyant aestheticism of writers like Gabriele D'Annunzio, American literature presented a realist vision of everyday life that seemed nothing less than revolutionary. As Cesare Pavese puts it in an article originally published in the communist newspaper *L'Unità* in 1947,

¹⁶ See also Iuri Moscardi's thesis, *Cesare Pavese e la traduzione di Spoon River di Fernanda Pivano* (Università degli Studi di Milano, 2011), which compiles archival manuscript evidence to claim that Pavese made a significant contribution to the translation.

Ci si accorse, durante quegli anni di studio, che l’America non era un altro paese, un nuovo inizio della storia, *ma soltanto il gigantesco teatro dove con maggiore franchezza che altrove veniva recitato il dramma di tutti*. E se per un momento c’era apparso che valesse la pena di rinnegare noi stessi e il nostro passato per affidarci corpo e anima a quel libero mondo, ciò era stato per l’assurda e tragicomica situazione di morte civile in cui la storia ci aveva per il momento cacciati. *La cultura americana ci permise in quegli anni di vedere svolgersi come su uno schermo gigante il nostro stesso dramma.*¹⁷ (my italics)

America is a “theater” or “screen” where “our” or “everyone’s” drama is being played out: this passage is remarkable for its appropriation of America as a *representational space* that, dialectically, acts as an alternative to their present, their history, as a “libero mondo,” a “nuovo inizio alla storia.” Thus in the Italian context, the “myth of America” has been an incredibly potent symbol, though its positive elements—the ideology of freedom, the American dream, the self-made man, the sense of vastness, newness, and innocence, have been counteracted with images of vulgar materialism, mechanization and the loss of individuality, moral emptiness, the death of tradition, and general social decline. In short, America, conceived as lack—lack of history and tradition, renders it an

¹⁷ It became clear, during those years of study, that America wasn’t another country, a new beginning to history, but only the gigantic theater where the drama of all was staged with greater frankness than anywhere else. And if for a moment it seemed like it was worth denying ourselves and our past to give ourselves over body and soul to that free world, it was because of the absurd, tragicomic situation of civil death in which history had for the moment thrown us. American culture allowed us in those years to see our own drama unfold as if on a giant screen. “Ieri e oggi,” *L’Unità* (3 August 1947). Also in Pavese, *La letteratura americana e altri saggi*, Torino: Einaudi, 1959, 193-196.

ideal screen on which to project fantasies of an other and ideal, often primitive or more authentic, self.

Therein lie the origins of Pivano's own relationship with America. In a 1997 interview, she echoes Pavese's earlier statements, explaining that American literature offered:

un modo nuovo di vedere la vita. [...] Noi eravamo inamidati dal fascismo e dalla guerra, incatenati dalle fanfare di regime e dal supermito della patria che ci costringeva a non guardare più avanti del nostro naso. Ecco, i libri che io traducevo raccontavano le storie di poveri cristi sbattuti dalla vita, e un Paese dove c'era democrazia, libertà e pure anarchia. Erano i nostri sogni... ("Pivano e gli amici americani," qtd. in Tapparo 20).¹⁸

As for Pavese, an undifferentiated and homogenous America is associated with an alternative politics. This anti-fascist representational impulse here is what also gave birth to postwar neorealism in literature and especially film. The Nietzschean-Fascist superman is placed in opposition to the democratic "poveri cristi sbattuti dalla vita"—downtrodden regular folks. The representation of everyday people and everyday life, especially the struggles of the common people, for Pivano, is fundamentally democratic, and seemingly less degraded by superfluous artifice.

This perceived democratic character of American literature is reflected in the literary language, which too offers an alternative to the dominant "artificial" or

¹⁸ a new way of seeing life. [...] We were paralyzed by fascism and the war, shackled by the fanfare of the regime and the super-myth of the nation that obliged us not to look further ahead than our own nose. So the books that I translated told the stories of poor souls with hard-knocked lives, and a country where there was democracy, freedom, and even anarchy. It was our dream...

“calligraphic” style. As Pivano declares: “Io mi sono innamorata delle cose americane perché in questa prosa asciutta, scabra, semplice, io vedevo il modo di liberare l’Italia dalla prosa d’arte e dalla prosa fascista e dalle influenze surrealiste” (qtd. in Lima 51).¹⁹ For example, as Pivano notes elsewhere, “‘Il fanciullo giunse alla dimora o il bambino tornò a casa,’ questo è un esempio che mi tengo in testa e ben in vista quando traduco o quando scrivo. Mi mette i brividi quell’italiano da asilo delle suore che se non correggi ti porta dritto-dritto all’attimino” (Orengo 2003).²⁰ Perhaps uncomfortably analogous to America’s military power to liberate Italy from Fascist rule, “asciutta, scabra, semplice” American prose likewise has the potential to *liberate* Italy from French (“surrealist”) dominance as well as from the disinterested literary belletrism of state-sanctioned literature.

While Pavese and Vittorini are credited as the originators of the literary “mito americano,” in scholarly criticism, their role has overshadowed Pivano’s not only due to their status as writers, but also due to the focus on the “mito americano” as a function of anti-Fascism and as a literary phenomenon which flowered in the decades prior to World War II. Pivano too has her roots in this period; indeed, she never failed to attribute her work to Pavese’s tutelage, nor to claim humility and even ignorance in the face of the

¹⁹ I fell in love with American things because in that dry, spare, simple prose, I saw a way to free Italy from the art prose and fascist prose and surrealist influence.

²⁰ [High/literary/artificial register vs. standard vernacular: fanciullo/bambino, giunse/tornò, dimora/casa]
 The youth gained his abode. / The childr went back home.
 It gives me chills, that Italian straight out of nursery school with the nuns who put you in time out if you aren’t correct.

genius of her various “amici scrittori.”²¹ Yet in continuing the pioneering work of the Americanisti over the course of the twentieth century, Fernanda Pivano played a decisive role in inventing American literature in Italy. Where in the early twentieth century, French and French literature was the culturally dominant influence,²² English and American more specifically came to the fore not only as the result of postwar capitalism and globalism, but took their particular shape in Italy due to Pivano’s efforts. Following her successful translation of Edgar Lee Masters, her second endeavor was Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*, for which she was arrested in 1943; she translated several works by F. Scott Fitzgerald, by William Faulkner, Richard Wright, and others; what she did not translate herself, she prefaced or promoted. In short, Pivano not only consolidated the Italian view of American literature—which in the early twentieth century was considered a secondary and inferior offshoot of British literature—she elevated it to the status of an independent literature worthy of study and eventually a literary and even ethical model.

Yet in order to do so, she fixed the meaning of American literature as a monolithic unity, privileging those authors and styles she found to be not only consonant with her own poetics, but controversial, anti-establishment authors who could advance a literary-ideological program against Fascism, and later, against conservatism, militarism, and consumerism. Although her views of America became more complex after her first visit there in 1956 and as she developed professional and personal relationships with

²¹ This is the title of Pivano’s 1995 book of criticism / biography / memoir.

²² The literary dominance of France and French worldwide is amply documented in Pascale Casanova’s landmark *Republique mondiale des lettres / World Republic of Letters*.

American writers from Hemingway to Kerouac, America retained a symbolic charge that she perpetuated throughout her career. For her, America in its essence represents freedom and truth, over and against a European aestheticism inadequate to the representation of reality. For example, although she translated some of his work, she negatively influenced the Italian reception of William Faulkner, who is a relatively minor figure in Italy's Anglo-American canon precisely because Pivano and others have cast Faulkner as a realist author, a designation that diverges significantly from his native reception.²³ In an interview, Pivano states:

Non ero troppo in sintonia con Faulkner. Aveva un modo di scrivere troppo europeo per raccontare quel suo mondo americano, mi suonava grottesco quando raccontava dei derelitti del Mississippi, del suo Sud. Faulkner raccontava con voce joyciana e non con quella autoctona.²⁴ (qtd. in Orengo 1)

Thus a kind of vernacular realism and minimalist prose—such as we find in Hemingway—is associated with an essentialized notion of America. Her statements might recall György Lukács's denunciation of modernism as undialectical—static, decadent, fatalistic—where reality is negated and the state of things goes unchallenged, especially in her use of the word “grottesco” to describe Faulkner's writing.²⁵ Her idea and ideology of literature, indeed, is consonant with Lukács's realist prescription:

²³ This issue is also developed in: Mamoli Zorzi, Rosella. “Italian Translations of Faulkner: The State of the Art.” *South Atlantic Review*, Vol. 65, No. 4, The Worldwide Face of Southern Literature (Autumn, 2000), pp. 73-89.

²⁴ I wasn't so in sync with Faulkner. He had a way of writing that was too European for representing his American world. It sounded grotesque when he was talking about his Mississippi derelicts, his South. Faulkner told stories with a Joycean voice and not a native one.

²⁵ Lukacs, “The Ideology of Modernism.”

“literature,” he writes, “must be able to portray the contradictions, struggles, and conflicts of social life in the same way as these appear in the mind and life of actual human beings” (Lukács 1981, 143). Realism—American realism—is thus posited as a way out of the “false consciousness” of Fascism, and later as a challenge to socio-political conservatism. Yet realism, an artifice like any other literary mode, carries the danger of becoming myth—in the Barthesian sense—that is, in dissimulating its representational status, runs the risk of transforming history into nature.

Yet Pivano’s essentializing is strategic. She wilfully creates myth by privileging a particular literary aesthetic and endowing it with an essentialized national identity. While she focuses, then, on form, she seems to replace “wrong” form, as associated with Fascism, with “right” form, in this case associated with democracy and specifically the United States. Form is political, but also, the expression of a people: American writing is structurally simple, direct, realist, and whatever fails to conform to this idea is not “really” American. What might be taken as a kind of linguistic experimentalism, Faulkner’s “Joyceanism,” could be attributed to the heteroglossia of much of his work, a combination not only of different voices but of languages, Southern dialects of English and different vernaculars. In contrast, Pivano characterizes American writing as character and action-oriented, often referring to Fitzgerald’s dictum that character is action, action is character, as indicative of American pragmatism. “Il pensiero, per essere vivo, deve essere azione, perché solo questo è il modo di far capire che si sta scrivendo di cose

conosciute, esperite. In assenza di ciò, non vi è nulla di interessante” (Rotelli).²⁶ In a late interview, she says:

Gli italiani non riuscivano a capire che si trattava di un diverso approccio alla letteratura, un approccio pragmatista e non idealista. Essendo sempre stati molto vicini alla letteratura francese hanno detestato quella Americana, il cui protagonista ha come principio l'azione. I nostri connazionali non possono sopportare che un libro si basi sull'azione. Vogliono che si basi sul pensiero e sul conflitto psicologico. Invece la massima di Fitzgerald era: IL PERSONAGGIO E' AZIONE E L' AZIONE E' IL PERSONAGGIO. Questo è molto importante. Ma per gli italiani i libri americani erano volgari, scritti male. Non li sopportavano. (qtd. in *Katazen*)²⁷

Accordingly, Pivano rejects the linguistic heterogeneity of certain authors she translates, claiming that Faulkner's narrative voice is not “autoctona” [native] but European,²⁸ or downplaying the surrealism (and therefore, Frenchness) of the Beat

²⁶ Thought, in order to be alive, has to be action, because that's the only way to make it understood that one is writing about things that are familiar, that have been experienced. Without that, there's nothing interesting about it.

²⁷ Italians weren't able to understand that this was a different approach to literature, a pragmatist approach, not an idealist one. Always having been very close to French literature, they hated the American, whose principal is action. Our countrymen can't stand a book that's based on action. They want it to be based on thought or psychological conflict. Whereas Fitzgerald's motto was: CHARACTER IS ACTION, ACTION IS CHARACTER. This is very important. But for Italians, American books were vulgar, badly written. They couldn't stand them.

²⁸ This echoes Casanova's depiction in *The World Republic of Letters*, where Faulkner rises to international renown precisely because he speaks to Europe—borrowing European literary material to make something new which is then consecrated in Paris.

writers to situate them within a particular line of the American literary tradition. Elsewhere, describing American literature, she writes: “era naturale come si era impadronita del romanticismo del Far West creando una prima vena autoctona americana, la letteratura si gettasse sulla nuova situazione iniziando la vena di protesta che sarebbe rimasta tra le sorgenti più vive della letteratura contemporanea” (“Sogno in dimensione” 227).²⁹ She thus associates protest literature as a “natural” outgrowth of Americanness, and assigns it a position of prominence and value.³⁰ Although specific translations provide concrete examples of Pivano’s translational mission, her oeuvre should be considered not merely as the sum of her writings and translations but rather as an importation of the *idea of America* through selected works of literature. Pivano’s own vision of literature is that it should be *populist* and a vehicle of communicable *experience*, and this vision is embodied by her American canon which she divorces completely from European literature in order to import something new to Italy. Her

²⁹ It was natural, how it had appropriated the romanticism of the Far West, thus creating an early autochthonous American tradition, literature threw itself into the new situation, initiating the vein of protest that was to remain one of the most fertile sources for contemporary literature.

³⁰ See also her comment on the link among the authors she chose to translate: “Sì, esiste un filo conduttore che potrei semplificare con significative analogie tra il primo e l’ultimo degli autori americani da me tradotti: Edgar Lee Masters e Allen Ginsberg. Tutti e due poeti, disperati cantori in rivolta: l’uno, contro il conformismo e contro la falsa moralità di una comunità borghese ipocrita e filistea; l’altro, contro la violenza della società di massa americana che attanaglia la vita intellettuale e contro una civiltà intenta a distruggere l’uomo stesso” (Borelli). [Yes, there is a connecting thread that I could simplify by way of a suggestive analogy between the first and the last American writers I translated: Edgar Lee Masters and Allen Ginsberg. Both desperate poets in revolt: one, against the conformism and false morality of a hypocritical and philistine bourgeois society; the other, against the violence of American mass culture that has taken hold of intellectual life against a civilization bent on destroying man himself.]

construction of American literature that posits it as revolutionary within the Italian system is that it is a literature based on *action* and informed by *pragmatism*.

Pivano's Approach to Translation

Pivano speaks less often about translation per se than she does about her socio-bio critical method, which she borrows from American critic Malcolm Cowley and frequently describes as quintessentially American, and against the grain of Crocean aesthetics.³¹ The idea, as she puts it, is to understand of a text through its original social and biographical context:

Il metodo di Malcolm Cowley era un metodo [...] 'divulgativo' – il termine spregiativo col quale è stato liquidato, quando è stato conosciuto, è stato 'divulgativo'. Evviva il divulgativo perché il divulgativo [...] 'fa capire' le cose, 'fa capire' un autore. E allora io mi sono messa in testa di far capire questi autori in Italia [...]. [...] E allora io, con questo sistema, ho tentato di spiegare insieme la pagina e poi la vita di quest'autore e poi la società che lo circonda e poi in mondo che c'era in quel momento, quello che stava succedendo nel mondo.³² (Lima *One of Them* 35-6)

³¹ Benedetto Croce's concept of idealist aesthetics was dominant in Italy throughout the early twentieth century. Croce's famous proclamation that all language is poetry is also related to his assertion of the "possibilità relativa delle traduzioni" [relative possibility of translation]: "La traduzione, che si dice buona, è un'approssimazione, che ha valore originario di opera d'arte e può stare da sé" (*Estetica* 94) [The translation that can be called good is an approximation, which has originary value as a work of art and can stand on its own].

³² Malcolm Cowley's method was a "popularizing" method—"popularizing" is the derogatory term with which it was dismissed, when it was known, it was "popularizing." Long live popularizing, because popularizing [...] 'explains' things, 'explains' an author.

Her translation process, then, is not simply “source-oriented” but socially-oriented: a literary text is a social document and artifact, not an object of pure aesthetic contemplation. This is not to say that she disavows the aesthetic, but rather subordinates it to the sociological and the authorial (in the sense of biographically- and contextually-driven reading and the Foucauldian “author function”). Her translations, as a result, include lengthy critical prefaces that follow this socio-bio critical method, and where she discusses style, it is usually in terms of the author’s style in English and scarcely, if at all, how it has been rendered in her Italian.³³ She is reticent when it comes to translation, as if it were bad form or bad manners to talk about herself. Her invisibility is the precondition for the work’s reception. Thus her statements on translation are not to be found in her introductions, and instead are primarily scattered throughout various interviews, most of which are not contemporary reflections or critical commentaries but retrospective, often anecdotal reconstructions that began to appear after she had achieved a certain level of renown, from the 60s up until her death in 2009. These commentaries provide us with useful assertions that enable us to describe Pivano’s general theory of translation.

And so I got it into my head to explain these authors in Italy [...]. [...] And so I, with this system, tried to explain both the page and then the life of the author and then the society that surrounded him and then the world of the moment, what was going on in the world.

³³ This is typical of many translation prefaces, even when written by the translator. While the history of translation commentary includes substantial theoretical or philosophical statements that serve as prefaces (the most famous example being Walter Benjamin’s “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers” or “The Task of the Translator,” a preface to his translation of Baudelaire in which Baudelaire’s name is never even mentioned), most introductions follow a format similar to Pivano’s: providing a bio-bibliographical sketch of the author and the work, with varying levels of critical commentary, and sometimes including a brief comment on the approach to the translation, often in the form of an apologia.

Her most extensive commentary is her acceptance speech for the Premio Monselice for translation in 1975. As a sort of translator-memoir in miniature, it constitutes an emblematic statement of her position (and self-positioning) vis-a-vis authors, translation, and literary culture. Here, she follows the same socio-bio critical method, but shifts to focus on herself as its subject. Her life story and personal experience become intertwined with her literary interests and her translational approach.

Here, we see how Pivano's self-positioning as a translator is rhetorically marked by a near-hyperbolic humility and a subtle disappropriation of the texts she has translated. She subordinates herself repeatedly, not only to the authors she has translated, but to other towering figures who have come before her (such as Pavese) and even the prize committee—an attitude consistent with her self-presentation elsewhere, such as in her epistolary exchange with Allen Ginsberg. Further, she uses self-deprecating formulae such as “non so, forse mi sono sbagliata” (XXIX) [I don't know, maybe I made a mistake] “forse mi sono sbagliata di nuovo” (XXX) [maybe I made a mistake again], and ends her speech with an apology for having spoken too much and too anecdotally. Her attitude, arguably purely rhetorical, appears to typify what Daniel Simeoni, in his seminal article on the translator's habitus (“The Pivotal Status of the Translator's Habitus,” 1998), describes as the “ingrained subservience” of the modern translator (25). Here, he lays out a genealogy of the translatorial habitus, which begins with overt coercion from patrons and clients and concludes “in the current state of things in which external pressures have been internalized by the practitioner to such a degree that they have come to be seen as desirable” (12). Pivano had positive relationships with nearly every author she worked with; in the case of Ginsberg, they collaborated and corresponded extensively at her

request. He offered help when asked, but never pressured her to translate one way or another, though he did encourage her to push the limits (within reason and Italian law) of censorship.³⁴ Thus the historical genealogy outlined by Simeoni offers only a partial explanation for her deferential posture. It is a way of performing translatorial identity by embodying an ideal.

In this same speech, she also describes her translating in terms of theft. Recounting the story of how Pavese accidentally came upon her translation of *Spoon River*, she comments, “mi vergognai come una ladra” (XXIII).³⁵ Presumably, she is ashamed at being caught having attempted something she considers to be beyond her abilities, as a thief would at having her spoils found in a drawer. This comparison recurs throughout. Explaining her strategy of finding stylistic analogues for her translations, she says: “Cercai di ritrovare il linguaggio quotidiano di quegli autori rileggendo libri italiani della stessa epoca, da specialista, quasi da ladra” (XXV).³⁶ Her collaboration with Allen Ginsberg, too, is described in terms of robbing time from his life: “Rubai settimane, mesi, alla vita di Ginsberg cercando di catturare dalla sua voce l’inafferabilità della sua poesia” (XXXI).³⁷ Such sentiments are echoed throughout her epistolary exchange with the writer. For example, when he defers to her or makes statements like “it’s your book as

³⁴ Ginsberg’s original conditions for granting Italian rights to Mondadori stipulated full publication without bowdlerization or censorship of any sort, but fear of a lawsuit eventually prompted Mondadori to convince Ginsberg, through Pivano’s advocacy and mediation, to approve this solution.

³⁵ I was embarrassed as a thief.

³⁶ I tried to find the everyday language of those authors by reading Italian books from the same period, like a specialist, almost like a thief.

³⁷ I stole weeks, months, from Ginsberg’s life trying to capture the elusiveness of his poetry from his voice.

much as it is mine” (letter, 12/14/64), her response is “Dearest, I would never dream to think of your book as being mine” (12/22/64). These are very different contexts for the concept of translation as theft to appear. This is an ambivalent gesture—her apologetic tone corresponds to Simeoni’s construction of internalized translatorial submissiveness, yet elsewhere her outright embarrassment suggests something more provocative. Stealing, of course, is also a secret and potentially subversive act, calling to mind the mythological associations of Hermes with translation, as interpreter and message-bearer but also as thief and liar.

Translation as a form of accepted theft resonates with Pascale Casanova’s construction of the functioning of the world republic of letters wherein writers from the margins “[appropriate] literary and linguistic assets” (85) in order to gain access to the world literary field. In Casanova’s case, this concept structures a network of literary relations and influence based on global competition, and elsewhere she has commented on translation as a system of inequal exchange. This geopolitical/economic framework likewise dovetails with Emily Apter’s recent work *Against World Literature* where she draws on legal and Marxist discourse to assert that translation “is in many respects the legal form of plagiarism” (299). The subversion in Pivano’s case is not of the text or of the language, but of the institutional—political and literary—status quo, where her shame drives from the very fact that she is indeed appropriating foreign texts in order to further local concerns—much in the same way that, as in the account of polysystem theory, translation contributes to nation-building.

When Pivano turns to the specifics of her process, she describes them as intended to retain the foreignness of the text. Foreignizing translation is context-dependent, can

assume multiple forms, and shifts over time. Pivano offers the issue of slang by way of example. She learned, as she states, from a translation of Fitzgerald she did earlier in her career, that attempts to use corresponding slang terms in Italian (which, she claims, are more ephemeral than in American English) can rapidly date a translation. This led to her preference of a “linguaggio-base di intonazione meno specifica” (XXV) [less specific base language] in order to maintain a sense of vital, everyday language. This may appear to be a form of domestication. In relying on the current standard dialect, the mostly easily understandable and widely used form of the language, she aims for broad applicability and accessibility for various readerships and over the long term. Thus arises the contradiction that while her poetics derives from a translational ethics that, as Antoine Berman describes, “consists in recognizing and receiving the Other as Other” (74), she resorts to conventional language to do so, thereby encouraging the reading of her translations as transparent vehicles of poetic content.

Despite her populist aims, Pivano distinguishes between “traduzione creativa e traduzione commerciale” [creative and commercial translation], saying disparagingly of the latter that it is something she never considered (XXIII). Although she was paid for her translation work (even if usually quite little), the distinction here is really between commissioned translations and self-initiated projects.³⁸ As a “gate-keeper,” the very choice of whom and what to translate, thus proposing projects to publishers herself, was a fundamental aspect of her approach. Many Italian critics and scholars, perhaps most

³⁸ In a 1964 interview Pivano says “Mi piace tradurre, provo davvero un senso di felicità nel tradurre, ma soltanto gli autori che amo. Tradurre *Crociata in Europa* di Eisenhower fu infatti, un autentico supplizio, ma dovevo farlo: mi occorreavano soldi” [I like translating, I truly feel a sense of happiness when I translate, but only the authors whom I love. Translating Eisenhower’s *Crusade in Europe* was really torture but I had to do it: I needed the money.] (qtd. in Borelli).

notably Franco Fortini, have sustained the dichotomy between “traduzione creativa” or “artistica” (a concept which can be traced back to Livius Andronicus, considered the inventor of translation as an art and the first person to translate a work of literature—in this case, Homer’s *Odyssey*, thereby introducing epic to Ancient Rome) and “traduzione commerciale,” “industriale,” or “scientifica,” a dichotomy that can refer to the difference between literary and technical or non-literary translation, or can refer not just to the type of text being translated, but the technique or type of translation itself—a translation that is itself the product of an artist or that is, on the contrary, constrained by the norms of the mass market or economic constraints (high volume or fast turnaround demands, for example, even with a literary text).

After dismissing commercial translation, Pivano notes the heterogeneity of creative translation: “Via via che entravo nel mestiere mi accorsi delle contraddizioni che vi erano nascoste [...] tra le innumerevoli possibilità di realizzare una traduzione creativa. Mi accorsi che qualcuno traduceva parola per parola, altri alterando l’andatura della lingua inglese, altri alterando l’andatura della lingua italiana [...]” (XXIII-XXIV).³⁹ She characterizes her approach in primarily the latter terms, contrasting it to the tendency of most French and some Italian translators to extend and embellish relatively simple and terse English prose, and discusses her own methods of mirroring the English structure: carrying over the same punctuation; keeping track of word repetitions in order to “raggiungere una prima parvenza di ritmo” (XXV) [attain an initial semblance of

³⁹ As I got more and more involved in the craft I noticed the contradictions that were hidden [...] among the countless ways of doing creative translation. I noticed that some translated word by word, others altered the rhythm of the English language, others altered the rhythm of the Italian.

rhythm]; working towards creating a colloquial, everyday language that subverted the norms of high literary style.

Pivano says that she sought “fedeltà al ‘tono’ del testo” [faithfulness to the ‘tone’ of the text], specifying that against charges of “traduzioni interlineari” [interlinear translations], “un modo di tradurre superficiale” [a superficial method of translating] (XXVI) she obstinately defended as “una fedeltà totale al testo in tutta la sua gamma, dall’intonazione alla punteggiatura” (XXVII) [total fidelity to the text in its entire gamut, from intonation to punctuation]. She describes “essere fedele all’originale” [being faithful to the original] as her “vecchio trucco” [old trick]. Her use of the concept of fidelity here suggests that attending to specific aspects of the English, especially punctuation and repetition, and using colloquial, yet standard, forms constitutes faithfulness to the tone of the original; while at the same time it suggests an antagonism—an unfaithfulness—to academic, literary or rarefied Italian in favor of allegiance to what Pivano reads as fresh American vernacular. Appeals to faithfulness like this one are source-oriented claims that often elide, even mystify the effects of the text in the translating language—such as variations in tone or register, as abound in Ginsberg’s poetry. As Pivano herself mentions, her translations were not always met with enthusiasm, a response which she attributes to academic conservatism—a stance which aligns her not only with the historical avant-gardes but also with the countercultural movements of the time.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Franco Buffoni comments on Pivano: “Possiamo ben immaginare come reagì l’Accademia italiana alle sue traduzioni e alle sue frequentazioni. Come il suo ascendente (o meglio l’ascendente delle sue versioni) cresceva tra i giovani lettori, snobismo e una certa dismissing attitude [sic] andarono aumentando nei suoi confronti, fino a renderle praticamente inaccessibili non soltanto una canonica “carriera” accademica (alla quale, per altro, Pivano non mirava), ma anche semplici inviti per conferenze, convegni,

That her translations would be contemptuously called “interlineari” is part of her reception—indeed, her emphasis on the antagonism toward her work and those she translated has the rhetorical effect of amplifying her countercultural image. Yet in many venues, her work was appreciated. Although Ginsberg’s controversial public image and poetic content indubitably made him difficult to present to Italian audiences, he was embraced by the young counterculture as well as by some critics who recognized his poetic complexity and power. Pivano’s part in bringing him to Italy is almost always recognized. For example, Claudio Gorlier, in a review of *Jukebox all’idrogeno* in *L’approdo letterario*, writes: “il poeta Ginsberg vien reso finalmente accessibile, e dunque con la Pivano concordiamo pienamente, riconoscendole tutto il merito per essersene resa garante, attraversando la foresta infuocata della traduzione di testi tanto ardui e uscendone vittoriosa” (127).⁴¹ The book also received thoughtful and serious treatment from critics such as Umberto Piersanti (“A proposito di Ginsberg,” *Ad libitum*, 1967) and Francesca Pardi (“Poesia americana d’oggi. L’urlo di Allen Ginsberg,” *Nuova antologia*, 1966).

Recent reassessments of her translation work—especially after her death in 2009—have viewed her in this positive light, focusing in particular on her work as

seminari. Oltretutto, non dimentichiamolo, Pivano si occupava di “traduzioni”. Un termine che l’accademia giudicava riduttivo, se non disdicevole...”

⁴¹ Newspaper reviews of the book are generally positive. For example: “la brava Pivano [...] mi pare che sia soprattutto riuscita in una difficile impresa” (Luciano Ferrari, *La notte* Milano 18 Feb 1966). However, some react negatively to her perceived sentimentalism in her presentation of Ginsberg’s work. “Ma affascinata dalla figura di questo ‘poeta coltissimo e sapientissimo’, ‘intellettuale nella pelle, nel midollo, nel cervello’, sembra dividerne il sostanziale ingenuo anarchismo e la barocca religiosità con una partecipazione che le impedisce perfino di iniziare un discorso propriamente critico” (Aldo Tagliaferri, *Il giorno*, 9 Feb 1966). We see here how this judgment has recently been overturned.

cultural mediator. Sergio Perosa, in a *Corriere della sera* piece entitled “La traduttrice dei sentimenti” [The Translator of Feelings], remarks: “Avevo sempre pensato che il suo fosse un modo di tradurre un po’ ‘all’antica’, con l’occhio e la sensibilità rivolti principalmente, come si dice, alla lingua d’arrivo, all’italiano da privilegiare rispetto ad una troppa fedeltà alla lingua di partenza, l’inglese. [...] Mi sbagliavo” (11 June 2010).⁴² This comment is based on his response to the above-cited Premio Monselice speech, where she asserts a poetics of foreignizing translation.

This judgment is seconded by translation scholar Franco Buffoni, who defines Pivano’s translation method in terms of:

dell’incontro poetico: l’incontro tra due *poiein*, tra due “fare” poetici, che induce a configurare la traduzione non più come un sottoprodotto letterario, ma come un Überleben, un afterlife del testo. Nella convinzione che, prima di essere un esercizio formale, la traduzione sia un’esperienza esistenziale. [...] Perché, per Pivano, la traduzione letteraria non poteva ridursi concettualmente a una operazione di riproduzione di un testo.

Likewise, other critics have praised Pivano in similar terms:

Non era una *traduttrice* Fernanda Pivano, se per traduzione si vuole intendere la mera trasposizione delle parole da una lingua all’altra. Quest’atto assumeva infatti nelle sue mani la coerenza, la convalida irresistibile della metamorfosi più riuscita; è dunque una metastoria, questa materia incredibile che le sue mani

⁴² I’d always thought her way of translating was a little “old school,” with her eye and her sensibility trained, for the most part, as it is called, on the target language, on Italian to be privileged over excessive fidelity to the source language, English. [...] I was wrong.

hanno saputo amministrare, sempre in equilibrio fra ricerca e conquista, e che travalica appunto l'attualità del suo dato (Bubba).

This sort of statement is typical of the kinds of reassessments that have taken place in Pivano's late life and since her death, where the convergence of her critical, translatorial, and cultural activities is considered a strength. Here Pivano is seen as not "merely" a translator, but a cultural ambassador and literary mentor; her work is not restricted to "mere" linguistic and textual operations, but extends beyond the page into life: a *poiesis* never divorced from praxis. In this, critics praise her by echoing her own terms: translating "magari al di là delle parole." Yet other reassessments, perhaps also facilitated by her passing, express the skepticism about her work that she had combatted throughout her career. For example, Luca Fontana, who assumed the task of translating Allen Ginsberg and retranslated several of the poems that had become famous in Pivano's versions, alludes to the need to move beyond Pivano's translations in his introduction to "Urlo," admitting that: "ogni nuova traduzione [...] è una riconsiderazione dei nostri errori di lettura di un tempo; spesso ci dà la misura di quanto angusto fosse allora il nostro angolo di visuale" (13), and more specifically: "*Urlo*, lo confesso, mi era parsa 'poesia di protesta', e nient'altro, e per questo, per la ragione sbagliata, l'amavo" (18).

For Pivano, however, the poem's power as social protest was paramount. "Tradurre," she once said, "significò di nuovo per me affrontare un linguaggio nato dalla realtà piuttosto che dalla letteratura" ("Grazie" XXX). Her emphasis on social life makes her an activist translator, as we will now explore.

Translating Sub-Culture: *Jukebox all'idrogeno*

For Pivano, translating and promoting American writers was always a form of ideological resistance, a way to surreptitiously import new forms, themes, and ideas. In a 1970 talk on translation at PEN America, she explains:

Later, with the mythical discovering time gone into the postwar flooding rivers of Coca-Cola and economic imperialism—I mean, after America had become a physical reality with not so much to be dreamt about and after our champions of clandestinity were accepted by the Establishment—I kept translating for a while simply because this had become my profession. (“Modern Translations” 327)

This is her description of the lull that followed her ideologically-charged translation activity of the 30s and 40s. She, like the Americanisti and many others, had subscribed to the myth of America with little or no direct contact or knowledge of the nation. Once the liberation brought American soldiers and then what she aptly calls “economic imperialism,” the bubble has burst. In such a paradigm, where politics, everyday life, and literary representation overlap, Pivano found a new sense of purpose in translating the writers of the Beat movement, like Gregory Corso, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsberg, whose critical voices ultimately recuperate the idea of America. She cultivated a close relationship with the Beat poets and championed them extensively through prefaces, books, essays, translations, and book tours. Beat counterculture provided a challenge to Italian conservatism and the consumerism that the US helped to fuel.

The collection of Allen Ginsberg’s poetry *Jukebox all'idrogeno*, edited and translated by Pivano and first published in 1965 by Mondadori, was the largest compendium of Ginsberg’s poetry to appear in any language, including English.

Ginsberg's work had been published previously in Italian without making much of an impression. Prior to Mondadori's publication of *Jukebox all'idrogeno* in 1965, "Howl" had appeared in two translations: Roberto Sanesi's "libera traduzione" in the literary journal *Presenza* (1958), and Luciano Bianciardi's in the anthology *Narratori della generazioni alienata* (1961). By the 60s, an endorsement from Fernanda Pivano was significant—not only in the publishing world or to readers, but especially because it indicated an unflinching commitment to making a writer or work known which in itself acted as a strong statement of its value. The publication of *Jukebox* was a landmark event and the product of several years' work, including collaborative exchanges with Ginsberg and other Beat writers, as well as extensive correspondence with editors such as Elio Vittorini and Raffaele Crovi at Mondadori. It became an immediate bestseller, and the "ormai classica traduzione"⁴³ [now classic translation] remains in print today.

Jukebox all'idrogeno is emblematic of Pivano's construction of American literature through a dual process of cultural introduction and translation. Pivano's promotion of Ginsberg dates back to 1959, when she held a discussion on "I beatniks" at the American Embassy in Rome (November 12, 1959) and began corresponding with publishers about Ginsberg's work, first recommending him for publication in 1960. Pivano's *C'era una volta un beat* [Once upon a Time There Was a Beat] recounts much of her battle to have Ginsberg published and read in Italy. It is a story of unsuccessful readings, academic hostility, indifferent audiences, editorial disinterest. The reception of the Beats in Italy parallels, just slightly later, their reception in the United States. At first dismissed entirely or distrusted because of their unusual antics, non-conformist politics

⁴³ 2006 Guanda edition, in print since 1992, jacket copy.

and bohemian lifestyle, they were later appreciated and eventually integrated within the literary canon. Pivano was astute in realizing that the publication of a translation is not an end but a beginning, thus even before translating Ginsberg, her first step was to work towards countering the negative preconceptions of the writer and his work by publishing articles about him and the Beats. In “La Beat Generation,” an essay from 1959, she calls “Howl” a manifesto and Ginsberg the poet of his generation:

E’ [“Howl”] una lunga descrizione della vita di questi desperados moderni, ed è stato trattato malissimo dalla critica conformista che lo ha accusato soprattutto di essere totalmente ‘negativo’ e inutilmente osceno. E’ costituito da versi spogli e purissimi, appoggiati soprattutto sul ritmo, e, in un certo senso, popolari secondo la tradizione conclusa in America da Carl Sandburg. Non sono versi fine a se stessi, non sono un prodotto dell’arte per l’arte: hanno veramente la funzione di un messaggio, di una difesa dello spirito umano di fronte ad una civiltà intenta a distruggerlo. La violenza di cui li hanno accusati i critici è in realtà la violenza della società di massa che attanaglia la vita intellettuale americana. (9)⁴⁴

Besides the information she offers about “Howl,” Pivano also reveals her literary values. In contrast to “art for art’s sake,” she offers “Howl” as an example of committed literature in the most realist sense, i.e. that has a clear political and social message. Thus

⁴⁴ It’s a lengthy description of the lives of these modern desperadoes, and it has been horribly mistreated by conformist critics who have accused it especially of being completely “negative” and needlessly obscene. It is constituted of spare, pure verses that are based especially on rhythm, and in a certain sense, popular, according to the tradition that ended in America with Carl Sandburg. They aren’t verses for their own ends, they are not a product of art for art’s sake: they truly have the function of a message, a defense of the human spirit in the face of a civilization bent on destroying it. The violence the critics have accused it with is in fact the violence of mass culture stifling American intellectual life.

on the one hand, Ginsberg's social function is to critique the status quo, which is reflected in the resistance to which his work has been subject on its native soil, and on the other, his function in the Italian polysystem will be his work as a representation of the "true," more essential America that can counter the distorted values represented by consumerism and repression in Italy. Pivano's aim was to give the verses a mimetic value—they as are raw and obscene as the civilization they represent—and therefore have both literary and political import. By the time Pivano's translation came out, then, there was a fertile context for reception, both of negative press and more considered, generous readings.

In order to further ensure that Ginsberg would be taken seriously as a poet, her lengthy preface to the *Jukebox all'idrogeno* directly counters the various prejudices against Ginsberg and emphasizes his literary precursors and affinities. After recounting the text's publication history, she places Ginsberg's work within the context of the American tradition, relating him to authors he himself claimed as precursors (Walt Whitman, Christopher Smart), and discusses some of the formal aspects of his poetry. Yet she does not examine how she approached these formal aspects in translation, instead citing the English to explain Ginsberg's style; this oversight, common in her translation prefaces, obscures her own mediation in the text by encouraging readers to see the English through or despite her translation. The translator's proverbial invisibility is also emphasized by way of omission, as the focus is on the biographical and social context of his work, in keeping with her usual bio-critical method. Beginning with the "Howl" obscenity trial, she discusses the aspects of American society Ginsberg is protesting and spends several pages defending the Beats' use of intoxicants. Many contemporary

reviewers remarked positively on the introduction's usefulness, though others were critical, for example of "certi momenti quasi teologici, o profondamente ingenui" [some almost theological, or profoundly naïve, moments] (Seravalli). Pivano makes herself visible as a reader and a critic while concealing her intervention as a translator. By de-emphasizing her textual presence, Pivano facilitates the reception of Ginsberg on her terms, as a poet of *content* (with a message), not of form.

This aim is followed through in Pivano's approach to the translation. Due to her linguistic precision—the fruit of time, careful research, and collaboration with the authors and other native speakers—her collection has the advantage of basic lexical accuracy over previous translations. Luciano Bianciardi's "Urlo," for example, renders difficult locutions or slang with approximations which, although interesting in themselves, betray what appears to be either a misunderstanding of the non-standard language or a slapdash job due to time constraints. For example, "angry fix" becomes "rabbioso dilemma"; "Blake-light tragedy among the scholars of war" "la tragedia bianchi-neri in mezzo agli studiosi di guerra"; "who got busted in their pubic beards" "che si perdevano tra i peli del pube." In the presence of renderings that differ radically from the source, such as "bianchi-neri" for "Blake-light," the error is revealing of both Bianciardi's usual condition of having to work under pressure as well as a preconception of American culture that privileges its social struggles over its poetic lineages.

Pivano's translation is of another sort, free of obvious errors as she, unlike many other (American) English translators of the time, not only read widely and voraciously in the literature, but spoke the language, had spent time in the United States, and maintained relationships with the writers she translated as well as other native speakers. This of

course guaranteed her no special interpretative or linguistic powers, but it did endow her with a rare base level of cultural and linguistic expertise as well as the authority to represent all things American for the Italian counter-culture. Yet her focus on the “correct” and clear transmission of Ginsberg’s message tends to flatten the range of tones and registers in the poems which, by reducing the text’s experimentalism, implicitly encourages the kind of sociological interpretation she herself claimed not to want. Her abstract notion of fidelity, as discussed above, amounts to translating the poems in current standard dialect, with minimal attention to other aspects of the source text’s *mode* of signification, which relies heavily on nominal compression and idiolectical utterance. Her versions of his poems are easily readable, their grammar regular, the syntactical connections apparent. “Il mio lavoro,” as Pivano stated, “[...] consisteva nel capire e trasmettere i significati politici e sociologici, le speranze e anche le delusioni e i disastri esistenziali delle energie generazionali che mi circondavano” (*C’era una volta* 98).

This made Ginsberg a highly popular poet among the growing counterculture—the students of the ’68 protest movement. “Il beat,” acknowledge Pablo Echaurren and Claudia Salaris in their history of the *Controcultura in Italia*, “costituisce anche in Italia la prima forma di ribellione giovanile” (14).⁴⁵ The Beatniks Clan, a group founded by Antonio Mariani, counted over 600 members, and were among the youth that gathered around Pivano, who had developed essentially a literary salon, with a coterie of fans who would meet at her home to share their work. Poppi Ranchetti, one of the young artists whose cultural education included meetings at Pivano’s, says: “la lettura delle opere di Ginsberg, Kerouac e Corso sembra quindi aver suscitato una vivace e immediata

⁴⁵ The beat movement also constituted the first form of youth rebellion in Italy.

reazione, i giovani paiono trovare finalmente nella letteratura americana dei modelli a cui si sentono più legati, ben lontani da quelli inseriti nei canoni accademici e ancora più attuali degli autori esistenziali francesi” (34).⁴⁶

What made Pivano’s translations of Allen Ginsberg so successful over the long term is her emphasis of its ideological elements over its linguistic innovations and its sexual subversiveness. Ginsberg was cast as a popular, accessible, and democratic poet, and one that represented a form of patriotism in the form of an alternative national identity. What remains marginal in Pivano’s presentation and her translation—for the sake of a meta-discourse about freedom—is queer sexuality. While her introduction does devote a number of pages to the question of sex and sexuality, it is primarily geared toward the discourse of freedom of expression, obscenity, Puritanism, and sin, and however unconsciously, reinforces heteronormativity. For example, Pivano states: “in tanti anni di dimestichezza personale ed epistolare con Hemingway o Henry Miller o Allen Ginsberg non li ho mai uditi fare ‘allusioni’ sessuali nei loro discorsi privati. Così innocente è per loro il sesso, così naturale, così integrato nella storia divina nel mondo, che non hanno bisogno di parlarne” (62).⁴⁷ The connection between Hemingway, Miller, and Ginsberg on the subject of sex could only come from a context in which these are the best known American writers of the moment, given the enormous difference in their

⁴⁶ Reading works by Ginsberg, Kerouac, and Corso seems to have elicited a lively, immediate reaction. The young people seemed to have finally found in American literature models they feel more connected to, far from those in the academic canon and even more current than the French existentialists.

⁴⁷ Over the many years of my personal and epistolary relationship with Hemingway or Henry Miller or Allen Ginsberg, I never once heard them make sexual “allusions” in their private conversations. For them, sex is so innocent, so natural, so integral to the divine history of the world, that they don’t need to talk about it.

treatment of sex, sexuality, and gender. Indeed, not needing to talk about it defines not the naturalness of sex but rather the privilege accorded to heterosexual writers and topics.

Yet although Ginsberg is a landmark voice in the queer canon, as his poetry celebrates the body and explores homoerotic desire and gay male sexuality, as scholars suggest even in the US context, this was not brought to the fore until recently. Tony Trigillo, summarizing the criticism, writes: “Despite Ginsberg’s iconographic image as a gay poet, pre- and post-Stonewall, it has taken the major shifts in literary criticism produced by queer studies to acknowledge the gay tradition in which Ginsberg writes” (Trigillo 48). On the other hand, it is also widely acknowledged that the Beat movement and San Francisco Renaissance were landmarks in the development of a transnational queer poetics (Infante 2013). Allen Ginsberg’s poetry is a landmark in the epochal shift in the West from homosexuality as practice (sodomy, in the male context) to homosexuality as identity. Foucault’s well-known genealogy of the homosexual in Europe describes the discursive shift toward legitimacy thus:

The appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and ‘psychic hermaphroditism’ made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of ‘perversity’; but it also made possible the formation of a ‘reverse’ discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified. (101)

Despite significant elements that make Pivano's work seem misguided or conservative to contemporary readers, *Jukebox all'idrogeno* can be read as a key work in the "formation of a 'reverse' discourse" that works to make visible marginalized sexual acts and identities through the legitimizing power of American endorsement, even though much of this discourse is presented in a homogenizing code that registers the social and textual limitations of the time.

The Italian gay canon itself is a recent operation of historical reclamation, gathering homoerotic works and works focusing on homosexual themes, as well as encompassing writers believed to have been homosexual. One of the critics seeking to construct a genealogy of gay literature in Italy, Giovanni Dell'Orto, comments on the dominant reticence and invisibility that have characterized the Italian scene:

Non c'è nella letteratura italiana il corrispondente di un Gide. Salvo poche, troppo poche eccezioni, gli intellettuali italiani che sono omosessuali si limitano a spargere cortine fumogene sull'argomento, o al massimo a sfruttare un certo dire-e-non-dire per stuzzicare le curiosità morbose del pubblico. Per il resto riempiono il cassetto di inediti, destinati a rimanere nascosti (nascostissimi!) per decenni, a volte secoli. Da Leopardi a Settembrini, da Saba a Pasolini la letteratura italiana (e non solo quella) ne è piena.⁴⁸ (6)

⁴⁸ There's no one in Italian literature who corresponds to someone like Gide. Except for a few, too few, exceptions, Italian intellectuals who are homosexual restrict themselves to put a smokescreen over the topic, or at best to utilize a certain say-without-saying to stoke the morbid curiosity of the public. Otherwise they fill their drawers with manuscripts destined to remain secret (super-secret!) for decades, sometimes centuries. From Leopardi to Settembrini, from Saba to Pasolini, Italian literature (and not only) is full of them.

Notorious examples mark this history, as in the posthumously published works alluded to here (Settembrini's *Neoplatonici*, Saba's *Ernesto*, Pasolini's *Amado mio*), as do cases of censorship or seizure, such as Giò Stajano's 1959 exposé *Roma capovolta*. Multiple factors contribute to this culture of repression. The Catholic Church has exerted enormous power over Italian social mores, deterring open discussion and acceptance. Institutional repression is also reflected in and reinforced by the traditional concept of family, which continues to exert a strong influence. Politics, too, historically eschewed alternative sexualities, from both left and right. Fascism excluded the possibility of non-procreative sexuality, persecuting homosexuality and homosexuals outright, and for Communism, homosexuality was a "degenerazione borghese" (Pasolini's infamous expulsion from the party stands as a prime example).

Yet the climate post-'68 begins, if gradually, to shift, toward the dawning of the gay rights movement, and Fernanda Pivano's contribution to that movement has been noted by several important figures. Politician and former president of the association of gay journalists Gaynet, Franco Grillini, calls Pivano one of the first allies of the Italian gay community, commending her "coraggio di proporre ad un'Italia ancora molto bigotta esponenti della cultura omosessuale statunitense (oltre che beat) come Allen Ginsberg."⁴⁹ Here, simply introducing the author constitutes a major step. Further, Pivano had a column in the first Italian gay magazine *Fuori!*, whose founder, Angelo Pezzana, said that Pivano was "la prima, nella introduzione a 'Jukeboxe all'idrogeno' [sic] di Allen Ginsberg, a capire e a rivelare quanto l'identità omosessuale fosse una componente di

⁴⁹ courage to introduce to a still very pious Italy exponents of US homosexual (not just beat) culture like Allen Ginsberg.

grande rilievo nella nuova cultura che arrivava dall’America” (qtd. in Chizzini).⁵⁰

Pezzana’s statement underscores the significance of American influence as a model and a source of legitimation for gay culture in Italy. Indeed, Pasolini had met and admired Ginsberg, whom he referred to in *Poeta delle ceneri* (written 1966, published 1980) as a “poeta fratello” [brother poet] and a “vivente contestazione” [living contestation]. In a letter to Ginsberg (1967), Pasolini writes:

sei costretto a inventare di nuovo e completamente - giorno per giorno, parola per parola - il tuo linguaggio rivoluzionario. Tutti gli uomini della tua America sono costretti, per esprimersi, ad essere inventori di parole! Noi qui invece (anche quelli che hanno adesso sedici anni) abbiamo già il nostro linguaggio rivoluzionario bell’e pronto, con dentro la sua morale.⁵¹

Pasolini reinforces the common binary between tradition and innovation, where Italy’s long cultural heritage casts a repressive shadow and the US’s relative newness renders it the testing ground for progress.

The question of visibility and gay literature offers an illuminating analogy with translation. The way homosexuality is coded, identified, or made (in)visible within a text can be considered alongside the way that translatedness is made more or less visible, wherein a foreignizing translation would be considered more “out” whereas a domesticating translation would be “closeted.” These terms are intended to describe a

⁵⁰ the first, in her introduction to Allen Ginsberg’s ‘Jukebox all’idrogeno,’ to understand and to show how homosexual identity was a major component of the new culture coming from America.

⁵¹ You’re obliged to invent from nothing, completely—day by day, word by word—your revolutionary language. All men in your America are obliged, in order to express themselves, to be inventors of words! Whereas we here (even if we’re just sixteen) already have our revolutionary language nice and ready, with its moral already in it.

spectrum, not mark a binary, and are subject to variable readings: there is no fixed relation relation between essence and referent, or identity and what signifies translatedness or queerness. In fact, translations challenge standard notions of originality and authority in a manner similar to the way that queerness confronts heteronormativity. Both fields reflect on representation and otherness. Keith Harvey, one of the few critics to focus on the relationship between sexual identity and translation, writes that because gay literature “[blurs] the generic divisions of autobiography and fiction” (138), it both reflects a community and actively works to build community. The way that a community assembled around Fernanda Pivano is a concrete instance of the power of translation to construct new communities. Yet on the textual level, Harvey asks the key question “How does the explicitly gay material emerge from the translation process?” (148). This is the issue I will examine as we turn to Pivano’s renderings of Ginsberg’s poems.

The following statement of Pivano’s about Beat aesthetics serves as a useful springboard toward reading her translations:

E’ chiaro dunque che, mistici o anarchici, il loro problema è carattere morale prima che estetico. In questo si riallacciano ad una posizione pragmatista tipicamente americana; ma anche se il loro intento estetico non ha ancora assunto lineamenti precisi è facile intuire che da questa ricerca di un valore morale originario e intatto debbano passare alla scoperta di mezzi espressivi altrettanto primordiali e immediati. (“La Beat Generation,” 13).⁵²

⁵² Therefore, it is clear that, whether mystics or anarchists, their problem is of a moral character, over and above the aesthetic. In this they align themselves with a typically American pragmatistic position, but even if their aesthetic intention has not yet developed exact traits it is easy to see that from this search for an originary, intact moral value, they

Pivano, reading in the late 50s, defines the Beat aesthetic as imprecise but founded on “mezzi espressivi [...] primordiali e immediati” and asserts that their problem is of a “carattere morale prima che estetico.” Her idea of “primordial and immediate expressive means” becomes rendered into the current standard dialect of Italian, i.e. the language she determines to be the most timeless, and as such, the least subject to aging or becoming rapidly dated. Yet by unhinging Ginsberg’s poetry from time, Pivano renders immediacy and timeliness into timelessness and ideological neutrality.

Let us turn to Pivano’s rendering of the “explicitly gay material” throughout *Jukebox all'idrogeno*. Ginsberg’s English employs a rich lexicon, including terms such as queer, fairy, faggot, even the idiolectical “ignu.” Italian has a similarly rich lexicon of terms that have been employed derogatively as insults and also within the queer community as forms of reclamation, yet this is not the register created in Pivano’s version.

Before delving into Pivano’s register, it must be emphasized that there are practical reasons why the Italian Ginsberg’s queer voice is muted—namely, obscenity laws and censorship. Just as “Howl” was famously brought to trial on obscenity charges in the US, Pivano and Mondadori worked within certain constraints in order to keep the text from facing requisition or legal action in Italy. It was on the basis of one line from “Howl” in particular, “who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy,” that copies of the book coming from the London printer were seized by US customs. This line in Pivano’s version reads “che si lasciavano inculcare da

need to move to the discovery of means of expression that are equally primordial and immediate.

motociclisti beati, e strillavano di gioia,” which is arguably less graphic, as “inculare” is, however vulgar, a relatively high-frequency word in colloquial Italian.

It is impossible to measure Pivano’s intentionality where graphic material is concerned, but some amount of self-censorship was necessary, as attests the extensive correspondence between Pivano and the book’s editor, Elio Vittorini, and between Pivano and Ginsberg. Pivano worked with both of them to arrive at an amenable solution in order to avoid redactions or other problems. The English was published in full, and any expletives or vulgarities in the Italian would appear with dots; for instance, “cazzo” was printed as “c.....”. Of course, readers would realize they were reading a censored text, and would easily be able to identify the missing word. Although the censorship in the initial publication was not the choice of the author or translator, and was easily superseded, the form in which a text is printed determines how it is read nonetheless. In Pivano’s Ginsberg, the term used to translate the various words for “homosexual” in English is, invariably, “pederasta.”

Poem	Pivano	Ginsberg
Death to Van Gogh’s Ear!	Franco ha assassinato Lorca il figlio pederasta di Whitman	Franco has murdered Lorca the fairy son of Whitman
Ignu	Ignu può essere un pederasta ma gentile ignu fa pompini agli arcangeli per la strana emozione	The ignu may be queer though like not kind ignu blows archangels for the strange thrill
In the Baggage Room at Greyhound Howl	il pederasta Sam che mordevano i poliziotti nel collo e strillavano di felicità nelle camionette per non aver commesso altro delitto che la loro intossicazione e pederastia pazza tra amici	fairy Sam who bit detectives in the neck and shrieked with delight in policecars for committing no crime but their own wild cooking pederasty and intoxication

America

America ora mi rimbocco queste
maniche pederaste

America I'm putting my queer
shoulder to the wheel

The terms “fairy” and “queer,” both as adjectives and nouns, are rendered by the term “pederasta”; only in one case, from “Howl,” is “pederasty” used in the English. The Italian term “pederastia” is an ambiguous and controversial signifier that bears witness to the shift in sexual practices and identities. The term “pederastia” (from the Greek *παις* (boy) + *ἐραστής* (lover) had been long in use in Italian as a synonym for sodomy, referring to any type of homosexual activity, no matter the age of its participants. The connotation of pederasty to indicate pedophilia, or sex between an adult and a youth, seems to have overlapped with the connotation of male homosexuality in the twentieth century as well. For example, gay theorist and activist Mario Mieli defends pederasty as adult-child love in the seminal 1977 text *Elementi di critica omosessuale*; other self-declared “pederasti” include Sandro Penna, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Aldo Busi.

Indeed, Pivano’s use of the term “pederasta,” while homogenizing and conservative, cements the association between homosexuality and pedophilia without admitting other iterations of queer identity in-between. At the same time, she locates Ginsberg within a poetic tradition of veiled homosexual poets, like Sandro Penna and Aldo Palazzeschi, like Garcia Lorca, in whose poems (in Lorca’s case in translation) repeatedly use the term “pederasta.” Ginsberg’s iconic poem “America,” referenced above, is emblematic of the tension between nation and sexuality that runs throughout the text. Ginsberg goes through several descriptions of an America that is sick, beset by McCarthyism, warmongering, consumerism. The final line, “America I’m putting my

queer shoulder to the wheel” associates queer identity with the body itself; Pivano’s solution, relying on the Italian version of the saying—instead of putting one’s shoulder to the wheel, one rolls up one’s sleeves—ties pederasty to an incidental, the speaker’s sleeves, which disassociates homosexuality from the self.

Pivano’s style is highly consistent, and so examples of this kind of levelling occur throughout the collection. What is happening in the Italian text is something that works less on the level of linguistic innovation per se and more on the level of poetic content and extra-poetic commitment. Ginsberg is central to Pivano’s narrative of American literature, which is not only about the liberation from strict forms (formalism, *l’art pour l’art*, linguistic experimentalism) but also a broader accessibility based on a democratic vision of literature as by and for the people. Her translations set Ginsberg against the experimentalism of the neo-avantgarde⁵³ and align him instead with Pasolini and the tradition of lyrical, politically committed poetry. That Pasolini is his closest likeness in Italian poetry is no coincidence, and in both instances, homosexual references remain more or less veiled in their work in Italian.

Yet especially in the context of the Italian 60s, where gay literature was generally suppressed and homosexuality silenced and persecuted, Ginsberg’s poetry nonetheless

⁵³ This is evident in her presentation of Ginsberg, but we also find the following in a letter from Pivano to Ginsberg: “[...] I changed the plan of the anthology; also because I wanted to show once for ever that it is foolish to think of you as an experimental writer; because you are the leader of the full generation of poets” (letter, Feb 16 1963). And in a later letter, about the title of the book: “He probably wants [the title Jukebox H2] because there is a group of poets here who are making what they call programmed poetry, meaning poetry composed through electronic computers . I suppose you know what I am speaking about.

I would hate to raise even the suspicion of any connection of you with them, although they are serious and nice persons. But I don’t want to interfere too much and I let you decide” (letter, April 1, 1964).

introduced new models and possibilities for self-expression in the Italian literary polysystem and beyond. In this sense, we can consider Pivano a committed translator who represents translation as a form of “impegno” [commitment]. Although her translation demonstrates bias toward representing Ginsberg as a vehicle of essential Americanness and universal freedom, this bias is precisely what lends the translations their political charge. As Maria Tymoczko writes of committed translation:

Translators must make choices, selecting aspects or parts of a text to transpose and emphasize. Such choices in turn serve to create representations of their source texts, representations that are also partial. This *partiality* is not merely a defect, a lack, or an absence in a translation – it is also an aspect that makes the act of translation *partisan*: engaged and committed, either implicitly or explicitly. [...] The partial nature of translations is what makes them also political. (Tymoczko “Activist Translation” 24)

Pivano, in fact, should be seen as an *activist* translator, whose work seeks to respond to the domestic social and political situation through the literary.

CHAPTER III

LUCIANO BIANCIARDI AND TRANSLATION AS LABOR

La verità industriale risiede nella catena di effetti che il mondo delle fabbriche mette in
moto.
—Elio Vittorini, “Industria e letteratura”⁵⁴

Sono un autentico manovale della carta stampata.
—Luciano Bianciardi, “Il lavoro del traduttore”⁵⁵

Non ci restano che gli artisti a voler sembrare operai.⁵⁶
—Ennio Flaiano, *Diario notturno*

Defined in its constitution as a “democratic republic founded on labor,” Italy once boasted the largest and most diverse Communist party in the West. As such, it also produced some of the most significant Marxist thought of the twentieth century, especially in the form of critiques of labor. Antonio Gramsci’s well-known comment on “Americanism” in his *Prison Notebooks* posits that the Fordist model of production represents “the biggest collective effort to date to create [...] a new type of worker and of man” (302).⁵⁷ The emergence and spread of American models of production constitutes one of those gradual yet irrevocable epochal shifts that Gramsci calls a “passive revolution” [*rivoluzione passiva*]. In the case of Americanism, this takes place on two fronts: the industrial, with the international spread of new forms of production,

⁵⁴ Industrial truth lies in the chain of effects that the world of the factory sets in motion.

⁵⁵ I’m a genuine [authentic] print- [carta stampata] making machine [manovale].

⁵⁶ The only ones left who want to look like factory workers are the artists.

⁵⁷ “[...] il maggior sforzo collettivo verificatosi finora per creare [...] un tipo nuovo di lavoratore e di uomo” (Gramsci 2165).

consumption, and economic relations, and the cultural, with the influx and ascendancy of American mass cultural products.

The process of modernization in Italy that Gramsci described so presciently only took hold long after his death, in the post-World War II era. The Marshall Plan, the unofficial name for the European Recovery Program, was the US initiative to provide economic support to countries ravaged by the war. This influx of funds enabled the development of Italian business and industry and contributed to demographic shifts with the growth of the major cities, particularly in the North. At the same time, culture was not immune to these shifts, and with wide-scale industrialization and growing consumerism invading all spheres of life came the inexorable commodification of the work of art.

For several reasons, translator and writer Luciano Bianciardi (1922-1971) is an emblematic figure in the history of this cultural shift.⁵⁸ Indeed, as he says, “so bene d’essere, senza modestia, un uomo mediocre [...]. Ma appunto per questo io credo che la mia testimonianza abbia qualche interesse, perché è tipica della mia generazione” (“Nascita di uomini democratici,” 1952, *Antimeridiano* 295).⁵⁹ As a recent transplant to the urban center of the “miracle,” Milan, from the provincial Tuscan capital of Grosseto, his experience registers the disconnect between the social and intellectual community of the

⁵⁸ For more on Bianciardi’s biography, in addition to his own writings and correspondence, see: Maria Clotilde Angelini, *Luciano Bianciardi* (La nuova Italia, 1980); Pino Corrias, *Vita agra di un anarchico: Luciano Bianciardi a Milano* (1993); Gian Carlo Ferretti, *La morte irridente: Ritratto critico di Luciano Bianciardi, uomo giornalista traduttore scrittore* (2000); Alvaro Bertani, *Da Grosseto a Milano. La vita breve di Luciano Bianciardi* (ExCogita, 2007); the documentary *Bianciardi!* (Massimo Coppola, 2007); as well as the autobiographical novel *Tutto d’un fiato* (1977) by Bianciardi’s longtime companion and translation partner Maria Jatosti.

⁵⁹ I’m perfectly aware that I am, modesty aside, a mediocre man [...]. But that’s precisely the reason why my testimony should be of interest, because it’s typical of my generation.

small town and the cold functionalism of the depersonalized, mechanized city. As a writer of autobiographical and historical fiction, a journalist and cultural commentator, his writing distills the social and cultural shifts that characterize the Italy of the boom. And finally, his work experience briefly as an editor in the publishing industry and then for many years as a translator-for-hire, documents the industrialization of cultural work as well as the ascendancy of American cultural and literary models. In short, Bianciardi was not only an eyewitness to the social and cultural changes from the pre-war to the post-war period, he was also critical of the culture industry while at the same time immersed in it.

While a fair number of critical works have focused on Bianciardi as a critic of the economic boom “oggetto della modernità” [object of modernity] (Coppola and Piccinini), or as a translator, few have made much of the structural connection between the two. Yet the practical, theoretical, ideological, and literary aspects of his career converge within translation. In this chapter, I draw on the way that Bianciardi’s personal experience and his literary and non-fiction writing illuminate his cultural engagement as well as his translation work. His relevance to translation as a form of counter-culture, or cultural resistance, is twofold: first, because his commentary provides a Marxist theory of translation as a specific form of material labor, and second, because his translations themselves show the traces of industrialization and alienation that underlie his concept of translation.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ It should be noted that Bianciardi, while invested in the plight of the working class, was not a member of the PCI (Italian Communist Party), nor did he directly subscribe to Marxist theories, ideals, or notions of progress. A self-described “anarchist” (which manifested as skepticism and critique), Bianciardi should be understood as an intellectual whose thought makes an important contribution and complement to Marxist critical

Bianciardi wrote eight books of his own, but the bulk of his textual production took the form of literary translation. Over the course of his relatively short translation career (1955-1971), he produced at least 120 translations, half of which were translated during the particularly frenetic period from 1955 to 1961. Given such numbers, it is no surprise that he translated a broad range of works, from various historical and non-fiction works to novels by authors such as Saul Bellow, Richard Brautigan, John Steinbeck, and most famously, Henry Miller, whose *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn* were a major influence on his own writing.⁶¹ Bianciardi also translated more than was ultimately published, due to circumstances like projects or commissions falling through, and some of his work was corrected and published anonymously or under other names.⁶²

Bianciardi also commented on his translation work in a small number of published articles and more extensively in personal correspondence and interviews. Closely tied to the central social and political issues of the time, the metaphorical discourse surrounding translation in these writings is based on forms, technologies, and

theory. Although I will use the term Marxist throughout this chapter, we might think of Bianciardi's relation to Marxism primarily in terms of Foucault's call for "forms of thought and analysis that are not irrationalistic, that are not coming from the right and that moreover are not reducible to Marxist dogmatism" (*Remarks on Marx* 94-95).

⁶¹ For a complete bibliography, see: Irene Gambacorti, *Luciano Bianciardi. Bibliografia (1948-1998)*, Firenze: Studio Editoriale Fiorentino, 2001. This list is also available at: <http://www.lucianobianciardi.it/Opere/Traduttore2.htm>.

⁶² The most evident case is his translation of Jack Kerouac's *I sotterranei* [*The Subterraneans*], which was so heavily edited by Fernanda Pivano that he declined to sign the work, leaving the translation attributed to "anonimo." Another recently revealed example is *Il generale immaginario* [*A Confederate General from Big Sur*] by Richard Brautigan. In the article "L'esperienza del traduttore" he mentions translating Sagan's *Le piace Brahms?* whereas the text itself attributes the translation to a Maria Heller. See also Irene Gambacorti's comments in *Carte su carte di ribaltatura* (164), where she states that Bianciardi claims to have translated 140 books, whereas just over 100 are known.

overarching concepts of labor and work. This commentary constructs a theory of translation in relation to industrial modernization and cultural production, the process that is also referred to, not incidentally, as “Americanization.” His statement on this process, embedded in the novel *L'integrazione*, incisively reveals Italian neocapitalist culture to be a mere shadow of the American system:

I ceti medi italiani sgobbano, corrono come allucinati dalla mattina alla sera, per comprarsi quello che credono di desiderare; in realtà quello che al padrone piace che si desideri. Come in America [...] ma un'America soltanto negativa, rovesciata nel cannocchiale. In America il fenomeno lo ritrovi eccome, moltiplicato per mille, ma lì almeno alla tensione, alla fatica, corrispondono certi vantaggi veri, se non quello di sentirsi parte di una enorme potenza. La civiltà americana moderna è come una grande macchina a gettone, tragica, che ti inghiotte, ma almeno qualcosa ne esce fuori. Qui invece tu non hai l'America, ma l'americanismo semmai, una copia cioè che riprende dal modello solo gli aspetti negativi, senza darti nulla in cambio.⁶³ (*L'integrazione* 35-6)

Here, bourgeois labor is tied to consumerism and purchasing power in mechanistic terms similar to those employed by Henry Miller in various works, including the *Tropics*. Gramsci's and Bianciardi's descriptions of Americanism, composed some

⁶³ The Italian middle classes break their backs working, they rush like mad from morning to night, so they can buy what they think they want; in reality, what the master wants them to want. It's like in America [...] but only a negative America, flipped upside-down in the telescope. In America you find this phenomenon, of course, a thousand-fold, but at least there the tension, the effort, are met with certain real advantages, if nothing other than the sense of being part of a great power. Modern American civilization is like a big, tragic vending machine, it swallows you up, but at least something comes out of it. Here, on the other hand, you don't have America but at most, Americanism, a copy that takes only the negative aspects of the model without giving you anything in return.

twenty-five years apart, are both critical and skeptical of progress even while recognizing its inevitability. Yet within the world of labor, translating occupies an ambiguous position within conventional class structure and concepts of work, hovering between the intellectual and the manual, the material and the immaterial. Bianciardi's commentary highlights a tension usually obscured in translation theory between the practice of translation seen as an artistic or artisanal craft or trade ("*mestiere*") and as pure labor (as in the branch of the practice usually referred to in English as "technical translation"). The latter is generally marginalized in translation studies, reinforcing the dichotomy between art and commerce, leisure and work. In Bianciardi's account, the translator—who throughout the Italian tradition has only been visible as the poet-translator who translates by vocation and at leisure—is a new type of worker in the ambivalent, Gramscian sense, under the sign of Taylorism and rationalized labor, more of a hired hand than a disinterested artist.

Bianciardi's insight into translation as an index of the changes in cultural work and labor structure more broadly has been acknowledged by critics, although not explored in much detail. The following comment by critic Giuseppe Nava, in a published roundtable on Bianciardi as translator, can be considered typical:

Io credo che Bianciardi abbia profondamente colto il completo stravolgimento che il neocapitalismo opera all'interno di questa ideologia del lavoro. Il lavoro di traduzione presenta infatti in quegli anni le stesse necessità di continuità e di ritmo che l'organizzazione industriale impone ad ogni forma di lavoro: ed è

proprio nel tradurre che Bianciardi fa esperienza di questo nuovo assetto e organizzazione della produzione.⁶⁴ (Nava 168)

Thus we do see the suggestion of the structural connection between cultural critique and translation, but this is as far as this suggestion goes. Yet this is the thread that binds his work together.

Labor is at the heart of Bianciardi's critique from the beginning, and becomes interwoven with translation once this becomes his own work, starting in 1955. Bianciardi's concept of translation as labor can be drawn from his most sustained reflections on translation, the brief articles "Traduttori traditori" [Translators Traitors] (1955, the beginning of his translation career, on film adaptation and the translation of movie titles),⁶⁵ "Il lavoro del traduttore" [The Translator's Work] (1961),⁶⁶ and "Il traduttore" [The Translator] (1969).⁶⁷ Throughout these texts, as well as in his personal correspondence, two fundamental parallel ideas of translation emerge: 1) translation as a kind of material labor analogous to industrial factory work and manual labor; 2) translation as an immaterial or intellectual labor that is like yet distinct from original writing, as it is not self-motivated. These are both facets of translation as a service, a form of *techne* in response to a commission. For Bianciardi, translation is not an abstract

⁶⁴ I believe that Bianciardi deeply grasped the complete upheaval neocapitalism creates within this ideology of work. The work of translation presents in those years the same necessities of continuity and pace that industrial organization imposes on all forms of labor: and it is precisely in translating that Bianciardi gains experience of the new structure and organization of production.

⁶⁵ "Traduttori traditori." *Cinema Nuovo* IV 53, February 25, 1955, p. 150.

⁶⁶ "Il lavoro del traduttore." *Notizie*, 1961.

⁶⁷ *Pagine e idee*, 1969.

linguistic process but a kind of *embodied* intellectual labor with a material outcome. It is, as he calls it, a “*mestiere onesto*” or honest trade.

Marx’s description of alienation underlies these concepts of material and immaterial labor, of the worker’s relationship to what s/he produces:

The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and size. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. The *devaluation* of the world of men is in direct proportion to the *increasing value* of the world of things. Labor produces not only commodities; it produces itself and the worker as a *commodity* – and this at the same rate at which it produces commodities in general.... This fact expresses merely that the object which labor produces – labor’s product – confronts it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer. The product of labor is labor which has been embodied in an object, which has become material: it is the *objectification* of labor. Labor’s realization is its objectification. Under these economic conditions this realization of labor appears as *loss of realization* for the workers; objectification as *loss of the object and bondage to it*; appropriation as *estrangement*, as *alienation*.... (Marx, *Economic and Social Manuscripts*)

Marx’s definitions are so familiar that they have been absorbed into critical thought, but merit direct consideration. In the case of literature, an immaterial or intangible thing in philosophical and in legal terms, thoughts in linguistic form are made material, as books, by a host of anonymous workers who remain obscured by whomever is considered the author (as ideator) of the work. Literature abroad takes on the character of a commodity

even more than in its original context—national contexts and cultures become markets, readers consumers. Bianciardi, as word-worker, experiences the loss of realization of the self at the expense of the object, to which he is bound, irrevocably, yet which, once it is realized, is alien to him; this, as he suggests, and epitomizes, is the translator's condition.

Despite the aptness of this analogy, however, discourse considering translation as a form of labor is rare within the field of translation studies. Bianciardi's work is strongly rooted in its time, connected to the changing editorial landscape with the growth of publishing, literacy, and international literature, as well as to the protest and workers' movements that cultivated awareness of work conditions, labor practices, and daily life. Yet it also complements contemporary translation theory indebted to Marxist theory as well as the practical conversations in the professional and academic field surrounding issues such as credit, copyright, and remuneration.

Most critical discussions of Bianciardi's translations raise issues such as the latter by mentioning, at least in passing, the fact that he translated to earn a living and the frenetic pace at which he worked.⁶⁸ Critics mention this because these are the terms in which Bianciardi discussed his own work, yet what gives pause is not the strangeness of needing an income or receiving compensation⁶⁹ but the fact that Bianciardi translated exclusively on commission. The majority of Italian writer-translators in the modern era have translated primarily for non-pecuniary motivations, such as the promotion of or an

⁶⁸ See, in particular, the papers published from the 1997 conference organized by the Fondazione Bianciardi, *Carte su carte di ribaltatura: Luciano Bianciardi traduttore* (Ed. Luciana Bianciardi).

⁶⁹ In Bianciardi's case, he was also maintaining two households: his and Maria Jatosti's in Milan, and his wife and children in Grosseto.

affinity with a particular foreign writer or literature, or self-interested writerly education and edification.⁷⁰ In the Italian context, numerous writers have a number of translations to their name, and most major writers have at least one token translation; thus their choice of texts to translate and their approach are studied as significant sub-productions or facets of their entire *oeuvre*. Within world literature more broadly, the signature of a well-known author as translator of a work confers his or her prestige onto the text and in effect the translator is placed on the same level as the author, thus creating a dual signature.⁷¹ As Emily Apter states in her discussion of translation, authorship, and ownership, “The compound signature guarantees value-added literary capital, a joint-stock interest, or co-ownership of creative property” (Apter 2013: 309).⁷² In such instances, translation is considered more or less implicitly as a variant of a translator-author’s writing, and as such remains within the realm of art, not work or labor.

Typically, then, *auteur translation* (a compound partially based on the concept of “auteur cinema” used in film discourse and that translates the Italian phrases *traduzione* “artistica,” “creativa,” or most closely, “d’autore”) is taken as pure of economic concerns or market constraints, and is thus opposed to industrial or commercial translation, which

⁷⁰ See Jacob Blakesley, *Modern Italian Poets: Translators of the Impossible* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 2013), a comprehensive study of the poet-translator figure (i.e. “auteur” translators) and the genre of the *quaderno di traduzioni*.

⁷¹ This is visually reinforced by the placement and prominence of the translator’s name compared to the author’s on book covers, jackets, and title pages.

⁷² Bianciardi and Miller constitute one example among many. See, for example, the Einaudi series “Scrittori tradotti da scrittori,” which published 82 volumes between 1983 and 2000.

is shaped by extrinsic constraints, the specifics of a commission or a “skopos.”⁷³ In Bianciardi criticism, the issue of economic factors is set aside, and the focus shifts toward the way the translations reflect Bianciardi’s writerly sensibility or prowess, or his transnational literary affinities, such as the influence of texts he translated on his own literary production. The following statement is typical:

La categorizzazione che Fortini ricordava tra “traduzione d’autore” e “traduzione di servizio”, infatti, in casi come quello di Bianciardi entra decisamente in crisi, perché lo statuto della traduzione bianciardiana è quella di una traduzione di servizio, da ultimarsi in tempi brevissimi, che è però curata e preparata con gli strumenti e la sapienza della traduzione d’autore.⁷⁴ (Nava 170)

Studies replicating this model thus attempt to locate his individual voice and stylistic signature in the translations, or to determine whether he had an impact on the selection of texts to be published.⁷⁵ Yet treating Bianciardi in the same manner—as a writer who happened to translate—reinforces the construction of translation as a secondary or derivative practice, subordinate to original production.⁷⁶ It also invokes the Foucauldian

⁷³ Alternatively, in Franco Fortini’s formulation, the division is between “traduzione d’autore” or “creativa [creative or auteur translation], and “traduzione didascalica” or “di servizio” [didactic or service translation] (*Lezioni sulla traduzione*).

⁷⁴ The categorization defined by Fortini of “auteur translation” and “service translation,” in fact, in cases like Bianciardi’s is thrown into crisis, because the condition of Bianciardian translation is that of the service translation, to be completed very quickly, but which is curated and prepared with the tools and the knowledge of the auteur translation.

⁷⁵ This is also the case with the new edition of Bianciardi’s translation of Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer*. The new Mondadori edition, *Tropico del cancro*, aims to correct the translator’s errors yet preserve his style, an operation reminiscent of analogous practices in textual criticism with original authors.

author function, whereby Bianciardi's status as writer serves as guarantee of the value of his translations, in fact making possible a host of problems related to degrees of ghost-translating and plagiarism.⁷⁷ The translator's "invisibility" is overturned by the writer's visibility, turning virtually any work translated by a familiar name into a "traduzione d'autore" or auteur translation.

Yet clearly Bianciardi's work does not fit comfortably into such a schema. The very idea of auteur translation is predicated on the divorce of literary genius from remunerative labor, and thus reinforces the Romantic concept of authorship as a strong individual consciousness guiding a literary work that is the product of original inspiration. As such, it also mirrors the same structure of economy and exploitation it ostensibly negates: often the auteur, rendered visible by his or her pre-existing authorial prestige, is dependent on the uncredited work of others, i.e. varieties of ghostwriter, or ghost-translator. Bianciardi's work, however, poses a challenge to the Romantic concept of authorship that perpetuates the binary opposition between translator and author.

Key to understanding Bianciardi's relationship to translation are his origins in his provincial hometown of Grosseto, in the Tuscan Maremma. After learning English during military service (1943-44), where he acted as an interpreter for a British unit stationed in Italy, he was a teacher, librarian, and cultural promoter in Grosseto. Then in 1954, in a mining town near Grosseto called Ribolla, there was an explosion that resulted in the

⁷⁶ This is an opposition that has been amply critiqued in translation theory and in poststructuralism more generally.

⁷⁷ In Bianciardi's case, for example, the collaborative role played by his long-time girlfriend Maria Jatosti is likely under-credited. She may be considered a co-translator in several cases, though she is named as such in only one instance. See the "Intervista a Maria Jatosti" in Antonella De Nicola, *La fatica di un uomo solo*, 198.

death of 43 workers. The lack of safe working conditions in this and in many similar sites in the area sparked his historical consciousness and also entered his conscience: Ribolla affected him as a kind of trauma. Consequently, his first major publication was a work of investigative journalism he co-wrote with Carlo Cassola on the working and living conditions of miners in the region (*I minatori della Maremma*, written and published in part in 1954, then published as a book in 1956).

I minatori della Maremma [The Miners of the Maremma] describes the mine microcosmically as a kind of city defined not only by its infrastructural organization of street-like passageways and intersections, but also by its hierarchical system of human relations. The term “manovale” (manual laborer), which Bianciardi would later use to describe his own translation work, first appears in his writing in this context, under the rubric of the generic definition of mining positions used by the Ministero del Lavoro (Labor Ministry), though Bianciardi and Cassola counter that this term is imposed from above and not actually used by anyone within the mining field, where terms like “manovale” are replaced by much more specific designations. In this same section of the book, they also observe the “aumento dei ritmi di lavoro” [increase in the pace of work] (36), and conclude that safety regulations cannot be scrupulously followed while also increasing the rate of production. Together, these statements suggest a connection between the Labor Ministry’s detached generalizing of jobs that are actually quite distinct and their disregard of working conditions that potentially led to the explosion.

For Bianciardi, the Ribolla disaster was a major factor propelling him to leave the *provincia* for the city. While Grosseto was his home, Milan was the center of power in Italian economic and cultural life. Thus when he was invited to come and work for the

nascent publishing house Feltrinelli, he took the chance, albeit reluctantly, and moved to Milan. This experience reflects the shifting demographics of the period, with economic growth and industrialization concentrated in the North causing large-scale emigration from the South to the North and from provincial areas to the urban centers, especially Milan and Turin. The Ribolla disaster was also an inspiration for Bianciardi's semi-autobiographical novel *La vita agra* (The Bitter Life, published in English as *La Vita Agra—It's a Hard Life*), in which the protagonist moves to Milan with the intent to bomb the chemical company whose negligence caused the deaths of forty-three miners in his hometown. This episode resurfaces in his work not only as a memorializing gesture but also as a symptom of a sort of survivor's guilt. Honoring these workers also means honoring their work over and against the work which, from the faraway offices of the metropolis, motivated by the capitalist logic of increasing profits at any price, quite literally profits off the bodies of its workers.

Thus, while Bianciardi is essentially an intellectual, he does not want to be considered as an ivory tower intellectual defined by distance from manual labor. Rather, he expresses solidarity with the working class:

Io sono con loro, i badilanti e i minatori della mia terra, e ne sono orgoglioso; se in qualche modo la mia poca cultura può giovare al loro lavoro, alla loro esistenza, stimerò buona questa cultura, perchè mi permette di restituire, almeno in parte, lavoro che è stato speso anche per me... (*L'antimeridiano*, 295)⁷⁸

⁷⁸ I'm with them, the laborers and miners of my land, and I'm proud of it; if my small amount of culture can somehow be of use for their work, their existence, I'll judge that culture as good, because it allows me to repay, at least in part, work that has been expended for me...

Further, not only is he referring to the working class in general but that “della [sua] terra,” so that he is positioning himself as an *organic* intellectual with specific roots, provincial in the most positive sense. And the provinces are associated not only with intellectual energy, but with humble (“honest”) work. In an article called “L’alibi del progresso” [The Alibi of Progress], he asks: “è lecito discutere tanto sui pericoli dell’automazione, è lecito sfottere chi ne discute, quando in Italia ci son contadini che ancora grattano la terra con uno stecco appuntito?” (*L’antimeridiano* 460).⁷⁹ The irony, of course, that Bianciardi wants to emphasize is that the success of the economic, technologically sophisticated capital depends on the invisible labor of the farmers, miners, builders. And to the occupations of tilling the soil, digging in the mines, building highways, he aligns wordsmithery.

In his case, this word-work is structured as a binary between writing and translating: writing is essentially an optional leisure activity, a form of self-indulgence, whereas translating is the activity by which he earns his living and is thus characterized by schedules, figures, effort and struggle—as one critic comments, “il traduttore che è a suo modo come il minatore” [the translator who is, in his own way, like the miner] (*Carte su carte* 166). In the piece “Il lavoro del traduttore,” Bianciardi writes:

non mi lamento oltre il lecito; continuo a sterrare come un terrazziere delle parti mie, cartella dopo cartella, libro dopo libro, e a volte, la domenica, col fiasco del vino davanti, mi diverto a cantare una vecchia storia, a inventare un ‘dispetto’. Ma

⁷⁹ Is it really valid to argue about the dangers of automation, it is valid to mock those who discuss it, when in Italy there are still farmers digging at the soil with sharpened sticks?

solo la domenica, solo la domenica, per riposarsi, uno scrive un libro suo.

(*L'antimeridiano* 876)⁸⁰

Here, writing is associated with diversion, personal whim, and rest, whereas translating is considered as repetitive physical labor. A few years later, in a letter to a friend, he admits:

“guarda, di essere uno scrittore mi importa abbastanza poco, ma al mio lavoro di traduttore ci tengo, perché so la fatica, l'intelligenza e l'umiltà che mi è costata e mi costa” (qtd. in Angelini 47).⁸¹ Later, to the same friend, he writes: “naturalmente traduco.

Tu mi chiedi perché non mi libero da questa schiavitù e non scrivo invece un bel libro, ma [...] i libri sono la domenica della mia vita, succedono a ogni morte di papa [...]. I giorni di lavoro, io lavoro, e lavorare per me significa tradurre” (qtd. in Angelini 47).⁸²

He valorizes translation, but based not on translation as an intellectual or creative or artistic activity, but precisely as what is conventionally considered their opposite, i.e. onerous, difficult work.

Thus this concept is not only based on translation's remunerative potential—that Bianciardi was able to make a living on translation commissions, as he also made money on articles and books. Rather, translation implies an ethical relation to an other in the form of a debt. As a friend said of him,

⁸⁰ I don't complain more than is normal; I keep on digging like a navvy from back home, page by page, book by book, and sometimes, on Sundays, with a jug of wine by my side, I amuse myself by telling an old story, coming up with a rant. But on Sundays, only on Sundays, to relax, does one write a book of his own.

⁸¹ Look, being a writer doesn't matter so much to me, whereas I care about my work as a translator, because I know how much effort, smarts, and humility it has cost (and still costs) me.

⁸² Of course, I'm translating. You wonder why I don't free myself from this slavery and write a great book, but [...] books are the Sundays of my life, they only happen every blue moon [...]. On workdays, I work, and work for me means translating.

Luciano non credeva che scrivere fosse un lavoro, forse credeva addirittura che fosse un peccato, di fronte alla gente che lavora davvero, penando. Il lavoro è un fatto fondamentale, importante, un debito. Traducendo, traducendo, traducendo, gli sembrava di pagarlo, spiando.⁸³ (Arpaia VII)

Whereas translation as work is equated with “pena,” the idea of hardship, struggle, toil, suffering, trouble, writing is not work, and therefore a kind of indulgence, a sin expiable through a translatorial act of contrition. Later, after the publication of his most successful novel *La vita agra*, he complained in another letter about having to promote the novel, saying: “Mi comincio a vergognare, e perciò stamani ho ricominciato col solito lavoro di tutti i giorni, per riconquistare la stima di me medesimo” (qtd in Bertani 124).⁸⁴ Far from the author/translator binary, what might appear to be a manifestation of translator humility or servility (as described in Daniel Simeoni’s “The Pivotal Status of the Translator’s Habitus”) in the form of shame at authorial attention and self-promotion is recast in terms of self-esteem’s dependence on labor.

In keeping with this materialist discourse, Bianciardi often discusses his work in terms of sheer output. In June 1956, he writes that he’d translated five books the previous year, in ’59 he mentions the “solita valanga” [usual deluge, lit. avalanche] he has to translate; he makes claims such as having translated 150 pages in two days and two nights, or translating twenty-six books in a single year. In a letter from 1964, he writes:

⁸³ Luciano didn’t believe writing was a job, he may have even considered it a sin, in the face of people who really work by toil. Work is a fundamental, important act, a debt. By translating, translating, translating, he thought he was paying it back, expiating it.

⁸⁴ I’m starting to feel ashamed of myself, so this morning I returned to the usual, everyday work, to regain my self-respect.

“Traducevo a ritmo infernale: ottanta libri complessivi, la bronchite cronica, gli incubi notturni” (14).⁸⁵ Having begun in 1955, he averaged about ten book-length translations a year, which, as he describes it here, is a source of great anxiety and even physical distress. Further, he doesn’t consider himself to be an excessive case, but rather, prototypical. Indeed, he calls translation a “mestiere micidiale”—a lethal occupation, noting the incidence of suicide among translators, citing names like Cesare Pavese and Bruno Tasso (qtd. in Lizzani). The closest case to such a view is that of Eugenio Montale, who translated poetry both electively and professionally, in the latter case with evident reluctance, referring to his “sgradita attività di traduttore,” [disagreeable translation activity] famously referring to it as his “mestiere vile” [vile trade].⁸⁶

Why work in this way? Besides the need to make ends meet, this level of “output” was driven by increased demand for foreign works. The postwar period, culminating in the 60s, saw the beginning of the remarkable growth in publishing and the translation market that still characterizes the Italian literary system today.⁸⁷ As a result, more texts needed to be translated, and more quickly. Bianciardi himself, of course, witnessed this first-hand, first on the editorial staff at Feltrinelli and later as a translator:

Oggi si traduce molto, ogni genere di cose, dalla narrativa alla saggistica, alla memorialistica alla poesia. I ‘tempi di lavorazione’ si fanno sempre più stretti, se

⁸⁵ I was translating at an infernal pace: a full eighty books, chronic bronchitis, nightmares.

⁸⁶ Montale also frequently made recourse to ghost writers and translators, such as Lucia Rodocanachi and Maria Luisa Spaziani, as several critics have shown, and made liberal use of the translations of others, even in the form of direct plagiarism. See Blakesley (59) and Talbot.

⁸⁷ See Daniela La Penna, “Traduzioni e traduttori,” 300.

specie si vuole star dietro all'attualità di successo. [...] Se vuoi vivere traducendo e basta, devi d'altronde imparare a tradurre in fretta. (qtd. in Angelini 28)⁸⁸

The transnational spread of culture—i.e., the emergence of globalization—which creates the demand for near-simultaneous publishing across national boundaries, in turn creates the impulse to follow publishing trends and make literary successes (usually from the centers of literary power or “world republic of letters” to marginal or minor markets) available to diverse publics as quickly as possible. The predominance of speed over all other criteria thus reflects literature’s subsumption by the culture industry on an unprecedented scale. In such a scenario, translation is not a leisurely pursuit defined by the search for the *mot juste*, but rather a job subject to the time-card logic of the Fordist factory.

In this construction, which reflects the epochal shift in industrial production in Italy more generally, translation is considered as a type of manual labor, thus an embodied practice that results in a tangible object. In the essay “Il lavoro del traduttore” [which could be translated as “The Translator’s Labor,” “Job,” or “Work”], Bianciardi describes a conversation with an old friend that inspires him to reflect on the nature of his work and what it produces. This friend, a construction worker, boasts of having helped build the Kariba Dam between Zimbabwe and Zambia, one of the largest in the world, and that he is now working on the “Autostrada del Sole,” the highway from Milano to Napoli. Bianciardi wonders how and what he could relate. “E io cosa potrei raccontargli? [...] Che tradussi *La guerra di Suez*, centocinquanta pagine, in due giorni e due notti? [...]

⁸⁸ Today we translate a lot, every sort of genre, from fiction to non-fiction, from memoir to poetry. The ‘production schedules are getting tighter and tighter, especially if one wants to keep up with current successes. [...] If you want to live on translation alone, you have to learn to translate fast.

Che durante l'anno 1960, bisestile, io ho riempito di parole oltre cinquemila cartelle dattiloscritte, a formare ventisei libri? No, non son questi ormai i discorsi che sbalordiscono" (873).⁸⁹ Although Bianciardi doubts the possibility of eliciting admiration from his interlocutor, implicitly suggesting that his work is of superior value, he attempts to find the points of contact between their achievements. The Kariba Dam and the A1 are public works, themselves indicators of economic growth and modern progress, created for the larger community and used in large numbers on a daily basis. The only way Bianciardi could compete is to focus on his output, yet his heightened consciousness of relative working conditions causes him to feel inferior nonetheless—his work product certainly doesn't affect people on the scale that something like public infrastructure does.

As "manual" labor is defined by its physicality, Bianciardi's remarks defy the conventional wisdom that textual production is a largely if not entirely cerebral endeavor, reminding us that it is in fact an embodied practice. He uses a variety of interrelated metaphors to describe the work of translation, all of which focus on its ontological presence and materiality. Usually, these are analogies drawn between different types of manual labor or tasks, but he also occasionally draws on the image of the draft animal. For instance, he makes remarks such as: "sgobbo, traduco come un mulo" (qtd. in Terrosi 31); "ho lavorato come una bestia" (qtd. in Terrosi 7).⁹⁰ Translating like a mule is such an improbable simile its effect is virtually comic, while working like a beast is the simple repetition of a well-worn expression. In both instances, the idea rests on the

⁸⁹ And what could I tell him? [...] That I translated *The Suez War*, a hundred and fifty pages, in two days and two nights? [...] That in the year 1960, a leap year, I filled over five thousand filled over five thousand typewritten pages with words, forming twenty-six books? No, that won't impress anyone these days.

⁹⁰ I slog away, translating like a mule; I worked like an animal.

anthropocentric subordination of animals for labor while at the same time critiquing it as a form of excess or abuse for human or animal alike. The translator as “beast of burden” serves as a reminder of the exploitation in cultural work.

It is a short leap, then, from animal labor to manual labor. “Tradurre,” Bianciardi explains, “è oltre tutto una fatica fisica e psicologica da sterratore [...] I ‘movimenti di terra’ il traduttore li fa con la vanga e la barella, come i terrazzieri delle mie parti quando lavorano al fossone” (*L’antimeridiano* 875).⁹¹ This is a metaphor of multiple layers. First, Bianciardi’s discourse replicates Cartesian dualism but critiques it, always referring to body and mind at the same time. Translation is described as an effort both physical (“fisica”) and psychological (“psicologica”), and it bears noting that he describes translation as psychological rather than mental or intellectual, or even creative. It is not a feat of intelligence, in other words, or a demonstration of linguistic virtuosity, but of a test of psychic fortitude. This despite the physicality of the specific type of task that furnishes the analogy, that of digging and transferring soil. Translation, etymologically and metaphorically long considered in spatial terms as a type of movement (trans- + -latus) from one terrain to another, here is reconceived as shifting the terrain itself. And the terrain takes on another layer of signification as a very specific terrain (“delle mie parti”), the land of Grosseto worked by the diggers. Thus Bianciardi’s remark associates the excavation work with language to work with the soil, which expresses his individual desire for class solidarity as well as his sense of guilt over leaving his provincial origins behind for (the) capital. Yet beyond Bianciardi’s particular situation, conceiving of the

⁹¹ Translating is above all the psychological and physical effort of a digger [...] the translator excavates with a shovel and a wheelbarrow, just like the navvies back home working on the canal.

translator as laborer offers a “grassroots” alternative to the attempt to raise the profile of translation by asserting it as a kind of co-authorship.

In another memorable formulation, he describes translation as “la fatica di un uomo solo alle prese con un libro straniero davanti ai tasti di una macchina, con una pila di fogli bianchi che faticosamente, uno dopo l’altro, si anneriscono” (24).⁹² In this case, he focuses on the technology actually used to translate (the typewriter) and the literal product of the work, the ink-covered white sheets. Literalizing the process of translation into physical act and product functions as a defamiliarizing gesture that reminds us, in a manner analogous to the above examples, that translation is *work*. Nothing could be further from Benjamin’s metaphysical (and prescriptive) “task” (*Aufgabe*).

There are other examples of associating translation with embodiment within translation theory itself. Many theorists have commented on the “erotics” of translation, from George Steiner to Gayatri Spivak, as an intimate act, though more often than not as a relationship to a textual body. More pertinently, Douglas Robinson’s “somatics of language” in *The Translator’s Turn* (1991) provides a critique of “the Western insistence of deprivileging the body—intuition, emotion, somatic signals—in the study of linguistic communication” (xiii). However, Robinson’s discourse tends to irrationalize translation, ultimately valorizing the anti-intellectualism of purely affect-based or belletristic approaches. Robinson’s somatics, paradoxically, remains entrenched in the immaterial. Obliquely, the translator’s presence has been inaugurated by Lawrence Venuti’s watershed call for visibility, which highlighted the ways in which textual and extratextual visibility are mutually determining. In other words, seeing the translator in the text—even

⁹² the work of a lone man wrestling with a foreign book in front of the keys of a typewriter, with a pile of white sheets that, with much effort, one by one, are made black.

thinking or knowing to look—means recognizing the translator as a physical person with agency and identity, with rights and needs. This becomes even more apparent in the smaller yet growing body of research that addresses interpreting, such as Vicente Raphael’s recent work on the “uncanny body” of the interpreter at war.⁹³ For our purposes, the concept of embodied translation is best thought of as a socio-phenomenological construct, as in Pierre Bourdieu’s statement that “practical sense, social necessity turned into nature, converted into motor schemes and bodily automatism, is what causes practices” (*Logic of Practice* 69). Understanding and belief are bodily phenomena—*The Logic of Practice* establishes not only a relation between theory and praxis (“militant craftsmanship,” as it is called in the English) but between cognition and a state of the body.

Bianciardi’s embodied critique becomes clear in his own writing, where he continually satirizes the quantification of cultural labor and the industrialization of literature. This was a theme that came to the fore in the 60s, which saw the decline of neorealism and the birth of the neo-avantgarde as literature sought ways to address the present social and political situation. Elio Vittorini’s introduction to the 1961 issue of *Menabò* dedicated to the theme “industria e letteratura” considered the function of literature within the context of the economic miracle, advocating for the critical, sociological, and literary examination of the new industrial reality as “*altra natura*” or second nature. Indeed, Bianciardi was one of a number of writers to turn their attention to the conditions in the factories and the world of labor (writers like Paolo Volponi, Lucio

⁹³ A number of literary translators, at least male translators, started out as army interpreters—from William Weaver and Gregory Rabassa for the US to Beppe Fenoglio and of course Bianciardi himself in Italy.

Mastronardi, and Ottiero Ottieri). Vittorini emphasizes, however, that the need for this attention was not merely a question of content, of shifting focus or theme; the structural changes wrought by the new socio-economic reality had to find expression on the structural level. In short, they demanded a new language. That Bianciardi's work expressed the conditions of the present in a new language is widely acknowledged by critics. Alberto Gessani and Mario Terrosi, in one of the first critical revisitations of Bianciardi's language in 1985, state that "l'originalità de *La vita agra* risiede, più che nella denuncia esplicita, nel mostrare proprio nel linguaggio e nell'io, dall'interno, il deserto [. . .] che quest'epoca ha fatto in noi" (52).⁹⁴ Italo Calvino's subsequent essay on the same subject describes *La vita agra* along precisely the formal lines discussed by Vittorini:

L'assunto linguistico di Bianciardi nel suo nuovo libro che parte dalla parodia (a Kerouac, Gadda, Henry Miller) e dalla esibizione scherzosa delle più varie competenze lessicali, dimostra di poter servire a rappresentare ed esprimere un quadro e un giudizio della realtà industriale più complesso.⁹⁵ (La 'tematica industriale' 19)

Calvino only hints at the role of translation in the success of Bianciardi's depiction of industrial reality, yet the novel's intertextuality (what Calvino here calls "parodia") is not

⁹⁴ The originality of *La vita agra* lies not so much in direct contestation but in its demonstration in language and in the self, from the inside, the desert [...] that this epoch has left in us.

⁹⁵ Bianciardi's linguistic range in his new book, drawing on parody (of Kerouac, Gadda, Henry Miller) and a playful exhibition of the most varied linguistic talents, shows its ability to represent and express a portrait and a judgment on the industrial situation as a whole.

incidental to its subject. As a novel about the existential and working conditions of the translator, translation is woven into its very fabric.

Bianciardi's *La vita agra* is widely acknowledged as one of the finest examples of "industrial literature," although it is unique in depicting not the prototypical protagonist—the *operaio* or factory worker—in the expected place—the factory, but rather the translator, shuttling between editorial offices and a home desk. Thus the novel functions as a metacommentary on the nature of textual production itself, divesting authorship of its metaphysical aura through a defamiliarization that operates on the level of the macro-structure of the text. As previously mentioned, the novel opens with its protagonist heading to Milan with the intention of setting a bomb at the offices of the chemical company that had caused a fatal explosion in his hometown. But he quickly goes from aspiring revolutionary to the much more staid position of translator-for-hire, which functions as the springboard for exploring the alienating and leveling effects of the economic miracle.

Indeed, his incendiary plans quickly shift to the linguistic, which we see in the blatantly parodic declaration of poetics at the beginning of Chapter two of the novel:

Proverò l'impasto linguistico, contaminando da par mio la alata di Ollesalvetti diobò, e 'u dialettu d'Ucurdunnu, evocando in un sol periodo il Burchiello e Rabelais, il Molinari Enrico di New York e il lamento di Travale—guata guata male no mangiai ma mezo pane— Amarilli Etrusca e zio Lorenzo di Viareggio. (583)⁹⁶

⁹⁶ I'll try a linguistic melange, contaminating as I see fit [...]

This is what Wanda Santini has called Bianciardi's "antilingua," claiming that Bianciardi's narrative presents situations of miscommunication and disintegration of the subject against the neocapitalistic idea of communicative efficiency. Indeed, Bianciardi's work, from *Il lavoro culturale* to *L'integrazione* to *La vita agra*, form a trilogy (known as "la trilogia della rabbia") that satirizes the excess of logic in the bureaucratization of language. Making an analogy between social conformity and linguistic conformity, the protagonist of Bianciardi's novel critiques the translation practices that have become standard:

Tradurre, comunemente, si dice oggi. Ma nel Trecento dicevasi volgarizzare, perché la voce tradurre sapeva troppo di latino, e allora scansavansi i latinismi, come poi li cercarono nel Quattrocento, e taluni li cercano ancor oggi; sì perché que' buoni traduttori facevano le cose per farle, e trasportando da lingue ignote il pensiero in lingua nota, intendevano renderle intelligibili a' più, [...] Ma adesso le più delle traduzioni non si potrebbero, se non per ironia, nominare volgarizzamenti, dacché recano da lingua foresta, che per sé è chiarissimo e popolare, in linguaggio mezzo morto, che non è di popolo alcuno; e la loro traduzione avrebbe bisogno d'un nuovo volgarizzamento. (67)⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Translation is the common term today. But in the fourteenth century they said "to vulgarize," because the word "to translate" seemed too Latin, and at the time Latinisms were avoided, just as they were later sought-after in the fifteenth century, and even to some extent today; because those good translators did things just to do them, and transferring thought from unknown languages to a familiar one, intended to render them intelligible to the majority [...] But today most translations could never, except ironically, be called "vulgarizations," since they go from a foreign tongue, itself perfectly clear and familiar, to a half-dead language that doesn't belong to anybody; and their translation would need to be "vulgarized" all over again.

This non-language Bianciardi ascribes to translations recalls the “questione della lingua,” or language question, where the increasing standardization of Italian was debated as either a necessary modernization and unification or a threat to the linguistic and cultural diversity of regional dialects, as well as Pasolini’s critique of “average Italian” as a bureaucratic language of convenience—a no-man’s language.

This linguistic standardization also contributes to the reception of translations as transparent representations of a foreign text. In a prescient critique of the translator’s invisibility, Bianciardi also remarks that in the end, the outcome of the work goes unnoticed: “Non è un mestiere avventuroso; le sue gioie e i suoi dolori dall’esterno si vedono assai poco. Il meglio che ti senti dire, quando hai finito: ‘Non sembra nemmeno tradotto.’ E cioè tu sei tanto più bravo quanto più riesci a sparire, a non far credere che ci hai messo le mani” (874).⁹⁸ Praise, Bianciardi points out with irony, consists in the denial of the translator’s efforts that produced the very object of praise. The illusion of transparency—that a text appears not to have been translated at all—can be facilitated by a fluent translation style, as amply documented in Lawrence Venuti’s *The Translator’s Invisibility*. Fluency is achieved through the use of the current standard dialect, essentially the lowest common denominator of language—usually what is considered the opposite of the literary, based either on formal innovation or tradition-steeped poeticism. The use of the most standard form of the language, thus facilitating the greatest readability by the largest number of people, is also an industrial, capitalist logic, making

⁹⁸ It is not an adventurous trade; its joys and pains can hardly be seen from the outside. The best thing you can hear, once you’re done, is: “It doesn’t even seem translated.” That is, the better you are the more you manage to disappear, not to make anyone think you laid a hand on it.

possible the negation of the translator's labor and alienation from the product of that labor.

Bianciardi's statements act as a critique of the effacement of the traces of labor in translations as industrial products, subject to the Taylorist maxim "time equals money" that has spared no form of work, including "il lavoro culturale" [cultural work]. It is no coincidence that Paolo Virno cites Bianciardi in *Grammatica della moltitudine* [*Grammar of the Multitude*] as an important point of reference for the consideration of intellectual labor, for his writing lampoons the "business" of literature, from publishing to editing to translating. Bianciardi's version of the culture worker, as Virno describes it, neither makes something from nothing (*ex nihilo*), nor transforms an object into something else; what he produces is not visible. In this sense, by uniting cultural work, including translation, with manual labor, Bianciardi attempts to expand the category of the working class, making visible their efforts, and not only their products.

The relationship between translation and labor found in Bianciardi's commentary is made manifest in his translations themselves. Bianciardi's translations are generally full of errors or imprecisions, to an extent that would be unacceptable for a language professional today. These errors fall into several categories: missing words, phrases, or even paragraphs; bowdlerization, which may be the work of editors or of necessary self-censorship; misreading or misunderstanding phrases so that affirmative statements are made negative or vice-versa; incomprehension of American slang or various types of cultural allusions. Not only is fallibility always a reminder of humanity (*errare humanum est*), but of an object's creation and existence in a specific time and place. Errors are the

paradigmatic case of textual materiality; they register the historicity of a text, and make visible the work that usually remains invisible.

Bianciardi's English was not always up to the task, and he virtually relied on a single dictionary, but the majority of the errors in his translations appear to be the result not of inability or failure to comprehend, as many of his solutions to difficult phrases or slang terms are impressively inventive. Rather, they primarily appear to be the result of lack of time to read or review—they are oversights. Oversight, of course, contains opposite meanings: failing to see by passing over, and overseeing as in vigilance, watching over. Bianciardi's errors are oversights that call to mind the materiality of the printed word.

They also function as examples of the linguistic remainder in translation, that excess that stages “the return within language of the contradictions and struggles that make up the social” (Lecerle 182). Focusing on the errors and imprecisions in his translations, then, we see how the unexpected in language creates a texture that differentiates what would otherwise remain unnoticed. The linguistic remainder can be considered a version of the Freudian slip or parapraxis (James Strachey's translation for *Fehlleistung*): it is the “other of language” that points to what has been repressed, for example jokes, puns, agrammatical or nonsense language. Lawrence Venuti imported the concept of the remainder into translation studies, using it to describe “linguistic forms and textual effects that simultaneously vary both the current standard dialect of the translating language and the formal and semantic dimensions of the foreign text” (Venuti “The Translator's Unconscious” 219). The remainder has a defamiliarizing effect, disrupting the regime of transparency in translation and rendering the translator's work

visible. In this sense, it also points to the situatedness of a text, locating the text within space and time, within history, as the product of a specific speaker, in this case the translator (and not the author).

Error would constitute a specific manifestation of the linguistic remainder. Error, when noticed, implies a loss of control, an instance or a condition of incompetence, and thus is what usually renders a translator visible in the negative (and most common) sense. When translations are positively received by critics and academics alike, their attributes are attributed to the author, while any mistakes or infelicities in the text are attributed to the translators. In “The Translator’s Unconscious,” Lawrence Venuti urges not simply dismissing translation mistakes as evidence of a specific misinterpretation or general incompetence, but rather suggests the psychoanalytic reading that some “errors exceed even the experienced translator’s conscious intention, taking the form of misconstructions or misreadings that are symptomatic of an unconscious motivation, a repressed anxiety, an unsatisfied desire” (238). In this sense, errors become, to borrow the Joycean maxim, “portals of discovery.” As Venuti reads them, errors are examples of the linguistic remainder in translation, textual effects that exceed lexicographical equivalence, calling attention to the cultural and historical conditions of the work. Along these lines, Bianciardi’s errors can be read as a kind of remainder that reveals not so much an individual unconscious but a larger cultural unconscious. As Adorno famously put it, the “unsolved antagonisms of reality return in artworks as immanent problems of form” (Adorno 6).

Not only are individual errors significant, but the mere willingness to err, the acceptance of error as part of the job, is itself a function of alienation from the work. By

contrast, Bianciardi's prominent contemporary Fernanda Pivano saw translation as a vocation and espoused extreme fidelity first and foremost in the form of accuracy, itself an indication of a certain class mindset.⁹⁹ She was also occasionally in the position of correcting the errors of other translators. Working for Feltrinelli, for example, she rejected and re-edited Bianciardi's translation of Jack Kerouac's *Subterraneans*. Bianciardi, in turn, declined to sign the translation and the translation was ultimately credited to "anonimo." In Pivano's personal copy of the 1961 anthology *Narratori della generazione alienata*, which contains Bianciardi's translation of Allen Ginsberg's "Howl," she marked an "x" next to the numerous lexicographical mistakes.

An illustrative example from this poem is the translation of "Blake-light tragedy among the scholars of war," a hallucinatory compound image of a vision Ginsberg had of the poet William Blake. "Howl" is renowned as a protest poem, a stringent critique of how America has "destroyed" the "best minds of [a] generation," and so the line juxtaposes one of the best (Blake) with the worst, thinkers who work towards the perpetuation of war—towards destruction. Bianciardi translates the segment as "la tragedia *bianchi-neri* in mezzo agli studiosi di guerra" (my italics, 177). Bianciardi's rendering "bianchi-neri" [white-black] at first glance may make him look like an amateur or a poor English speaker. Though "Blake" and "black" are virtual homonyms, it should be at the very least apparent that "Blake" is a proper name. Yet reading "Blake" as referring to the color black and then transposing "light" as the color white seems to

⁹⁹ Pivano was solidly middle-class; she needed to work, but never needed or tried to rely on translation as her primary source of income. Because it was poorly paid, translation was "women's work." A good number of translations were the work of "signore dal doppio cognome," that is married women who translated here or there on the side and were not financially dependent on the job. See Vincenzo Mantovani, "Vita marginale di un capitano di ventura," *Gli autori invisibili*.

simply be a creative misreading, either due to an assumption that the English was a typo (which itself suggests the text was too hastily edited or printed), or a translation too hastily done. It is also a normalizing translation, one that renders an allusive, abstract, and surreal compound image (“Blake-light”) into familiar, standard, unremarkable language, suggesting the color of television and film or race and by extension, racial conflict. Indeed, considering the full line makes the racial referent clear: “who passed through universities with radiant cool eyes hallucinating Arkansas and Blake-light tragedy among the scholars of war,” evokes the historic Brown Vs. Board of Education verdict calling for the desegregation of schools across the US as sparked by the crisis in Little Rock, Arkansas. We must allow for Bianciardi’s agency, yet at the same time not fall into the intentional fallacy. It is a productive error—a “portal of discovery” that removes the literary allusion, but inscribes a new, relevant socio-cultural association that makes possible a new reading. But for our purposes, the essential aspect is that the nature of the error suggests an oversight due to haste. Even in the case of poetry, the work points back to the conditions of its production.

A slightly earlier translation, Bianciardi’s version of Harvey Swados’s 1957 book of stories *On the Line*, itself about workers on the assembly line, tellingly contains a high concentration of lexical errors, as Gaetano Prampolini points out in “Bianciardi traduttore di narrativa americana.” “Greenhorn” is rendered as “uomo all’antica,” for example; “the depression faces of the women,” where depression is a noun modifier referring not to an emotional state but to the historical moment of economic crisis in the US, becomes “i volti depressi delle donne.” Yet such errors appear side-by-side with felicitous solutions drawing on a variety of linguistic registers. It is precisely the co-existence of successful

elements with inaccuracies that makes Bianciardi's translation work an index of the industrialization of culture in Italy and not merely a sign of linguistic ineptitude or insufficient cultural literacy.

In the short essay "Il traduttore" (1969) Bianciardi discusses the challenges of translating, and mentions some of his own errors:

Ci sono poi altri inconvenienti più spiccioli e talvolta comici. Come gli attori, anche i traduttori pigliano le 'papere'. A me accadde di far stare un personaggio, in piedi, davanti alla vedova. Per mia fortuna qualcuno se ne accorse prima che il libro fosse stampato, e mise il personaggio al posto giusto, cioè davanti alla finestra.

Un palese errore di lettura, favorito dal fatto che in lingua inglese le due parole sono quasi identiche: *window* è la finestra, *widow* è la vedova. Un mio amico fece correre le ostriche, giù in Africa. Sedotto dalla parola inglese, *ostrich*, s'era dimenticato che in realtà si trattava di struzzi. Addirittura, certi errori di traduzione sono ormai entrato nell'uso comune, e nessuno ci fa più caso.¹⁰⁰

Bianciardi's nonchalant attitude towards mistakes may be surprising. Yet the fact that errors are not uncommon, rather than an anomalous aspect of Bianciardi's translation work, further attests to the pressure to translate more material and to do so more quickly.

¹⁰⁰ There are other minor, sometimes humorous inconveniences. Like actors, translators too have slips of the tongue. Once I put a character standing at the widow. I was lucky that someone noticed before the book was printed, and placed the character in the right spot, i.e., at the window.

A simple reading error, fostered by the fact that in English the two words are nearly identical: the word for *finestra* is "window," whereas *vedova* is "widow." A friend of mine had oysters running around in Africa. Seduced by the English word "ostrich," he had forgotten they were not *ostriche*. Some translation errors have even become common use, and no one notices them anymore.

Maria Clotilde Angelini concurs that “è interessante infatti anche vedere i ritmi di traduzione di Bianciardi perché questo ci può aiutare a capire quanti errori presenti nelle traduzioni bianciardiane siano davvero dovuti a semplici sviste, oppure alla fretta e al fatto che, come Bianciardi stesso ci racconta, il suo modo di lavorare era basato sulle sue dettature, e su Maria Jatosti che batteva alla macchina da scrivere” (*Carte su carte* 162).¹⁰¹ Errors, too, need not be dismissed because of their inaccuracy with regard to the source text but rather read as productive and suggestive misreadings.

The increasing industrialization of cultural work has led to the perfectability of literary works so that many of Bianciardi’s errors have been noticed and corrected in subsequent publications or translations. In some cases, these later changes are the result of de-censoring a text. For example, the new publication of marginal Beat generation writer Richard Brautigan’s *A Confederate General in Big Sur*, led to the exploration of why Bianciardi chose not to sign the translation when it was published in 1967. As reported in a 2009 article in *La Repubblica*, new translator Enrico Monti, working off of Bianciardi’s text, notes that the kind of errors he found seemed due to bowdlerization of even faintly lewd material, so that “ass” becomes “profile,” “balls” becomes “skin,” and “great [...] belches” “imbarazzanti rumori” (Pappalardo 49). Such shifts are unlikely to have come directly from Bianciardi, who did not typically shy away from suggestive material.

While we cannot determine whether Bianciardi was more invested or put more effort into certain translations, we do know that some of the books he worked on became

¹⁰¹ It’s interesting to look at Bianciardi’s translating pace because it can help us to figure out how many of the errors in Bianciardi’s translations are really due to simple oversight, or rather to haste and the fact that, as Bianciardi himself tells us, his work process was based on dictation, and Maria Jatosti who typed everything out.

central in his literary consciousness. Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn* are usually cited as Bianciardi's most significant and successful translations and also those that exerted the most influence on his own writing style, in a case of the notion of translator-author "simpatico." Indeed, Bianciardi himself became particularly enthusiastic about working on Miller's writing. According to a friend, Bianciardi "non faceva altro che parlare di Miller" during the year he was working on the translation, 1961.¹⁰² "Il lavoro lo dominava completamente. Alla sera ci leggeva le pagine che aveva fatto durante il giorno e si vedeva con quanto sforzo, con quanto entusiasmo stava traducendo" (Carlo Ripa qtd. in Corrias 138).¹⁰³ Bianciardi lists "Enrico Molinari," his Italianized version of the author's name, among his literary masters. Not only does a certain baroque excess of language, as Edoardo Sanguineti identifies in Henry Miller,¹⁰⁴ also characterize Bianciardi's writing, especially in *La vita agra*, but also the two are thematically kindred. Bianciardi admired it for its sexual frankness and general candor, as well as for its raucous style which was not common in Italian prose. While all this interest and attention might lead one to think that his Miller translations show fewer linguistic inaccuracies or oversights, this is not the case.

Various Italian editors had been publishing Miller's work since the late 40s, but in the early 60s, several books were published in addition to the (in)famous *Tropics*. By the time Bianciardi translated the *Tropics*, he had already done Miller's *Arte e oltraggio* (1961), and later did *Proprio pazzo per Harry* (1964) and *Come il colibrì* (1970). Thus he

¹⁰² did nothing but talk about Miller.

¹⁰³ The work dominated him completely. At night he'd read us the pages he'd done that day and you could tell how much effort, how much enthusiasm he put into the translation.

¹⁰⁴ Edoardo Sanguineti, "Henry Miller: una poeta barocca."

had the advantage of at least some familiarity with the author's work. Henry Miller, as Massimo Bacigalupo asserts, "per noi è stato uno scrittore degli anni '60" ("Henry Miller in Italia" 115),¹⁰⁵ which corresponds to its similarly belated reception in the US. *The Tropic of Cancer* was first published in France in 1934 but was banned in the US until it came out in 1961, and was the subject of an obscenity trial in which the press (Grove) came out the victor. Thus the Italian edition was essentially contemporaneous with the US edition, coming out in 1962. The Italian edition, an omnibus including both *Tropico del cancro* and its sequel *Tropico del capricorno*, had no notes or introduction, but did come with a companion volume, *Prefazione ai Tropici*, with various essays by critics like Mario Praz and Edoardo Sanguineti. The publication was semi-clandestine in order to avoid obscenity charges—editor Valerio Riva recounts that they had to pretend it had been printed abroad, as during the Fascist years, and it was sold "under the table" at bookstores (*Carte su carte* 163).

Riva, who directed two series for Feltrinelli at the time, describes their editorial vision:

Ma noi non volevamo fare una edizione corretta, volevamo invece che fosse il più possibile scrupolosamente integra ed assolutamente, assolutamente aderente al testo originario. Nella traduzione invece Bianciardi era stato molto libero, così la traduzione fu mandato, d'accordo con lo stesso Bianciardi, a Mario Praz.¹⁰⁶ (qtd in *Carte su carte* 163)

¹⁰⁵ was, for us, a writer of the 60s.

¹⁰⁶ We didn't want a corrected [i.e., censored] edition, we wanted it to be as complete [unabridged] as possible and absolutely absolutely close to the original text. Bianciardi,

The fact that Bianciardi's manuscript was corrected and revised by Mario Praz, the noted scholar of English literature as well as author and translator, serves as an important reminder that any book, like a film, is always a collaborative effort. Any aspect of the text could also be the product of a change Praz made, or any other proofreader or reader. Mondadori, in 1991, asked Guido Almansi to work on a new edition, and he decided that Bianciardi's style was unsurpassable, and decided instead to produce a corrected version of Bianciardi's translation. This is, of course, due to Bianciardi's status as an *auteur* translator, but is also because of the mixture of more or less felicitous mistakes and ingenious solutions in an inventive literary Italian.

Partly autobiographical, *Tropic of Cancer* is the first-person, stream-of-consciousness account of a struggling expatriate writer's life in 20s and 30s Paris, and is typical of the American modernist depiction of "degenerate," bohemian Paris. Miller's language works especially through repetition and accumulation, linguistic excess. Errors and imprecisions in the first edition are frequent. Below is a small, representative sampling of the kinds of translation shifts that can be considered errors. There is no consistency as to where Bianciardi makes errors, though they tend to be certain types. Some are of omission, some are misreadings in which one English word is mistaken for another similar word ("amabili" [lovable] for "lovely"; "comunicarsi" [to communicate] for "communion"; "uccello" for "chock," presumably misread as "cock"); some are slight but significant ("pagano" [pagan] for "gentile"); we have an affirmation in the place of a negation, simply due to the oversight of the word "no."

however, was very free with the translation, so it was sent, with Bianciardi's approval, to Mario Praz.

Miller	Bianciardi
lovely lesbians (3)	amabili lesbiche (10)
gentile (9)	pagano (16)
I am throwing away all my sous. What need have I for money? I am a writing machine. The last screw has been added. The thing flows. Between me and the machine there is no estrangement. I am the machine... (28)	Butto via tutti i miei soldi. Che bisogno ho di danaro? Io sono una macchina che scrive. Han messo l'ultima vite. Gli ultimi accessori. Fra me e la macchina non ci sono estraneazioni. Io sono la macchina... (33)
What do you take me for? Am I an entertainer on salary, required every evening to play an intellectual farce under your stupid noses? Am I a slave, bought and paid for, to crawl on my belly in front of you idlers and lay at your feet all that I do and all that I know? Am I a wench in a brothel who is called upon to lift her skirts or take off her chemise at the bidding of the first man in a tailored suit who comes along? (65)	Per chi mi avete preso? Son forse un attore salariato per recitare tutte le sere, dinanzi ai vostri musi da schiaffi, la commedia dell'intelligenza? Son forse uno schiavo coprato e pagato che debba inchinarsi ai vostri capricci di sfaccendati e offrire in omaggio tutto quello che so e fo? [final phrase in the English left out] (67)
chock-full of energy and nothing to do about it (66)	uccello pieno di energia, ma a vuoto (68)
All the while someone is eating the bread of life and drinking the wine, some dirty fat cockroach of a priest who hides away in the cellar guzzling it, while up above in the light of the street a phantom host touches the lips and the blood is pale as water. (96-7)	Intanto qualcuno mangia il pane della vita e ne beve il vino, un grasso sudicio bacherozzo di prete che si nasconde in cantina a gozzovigliare, mentre sopra, nella luce della strada, una moltitudine di fantasmi si sfiora con le labbra e il sangue è pallido come l'acqua. (97)
He gargles his throat again and takes a long look at the cavities. (101)	Fa un altro gargarismo, e si scruta a lungo in fondo alla gola. (101)
that's a whore for you (105)	una puttana che per te va bene (104)
It's like receiving communion (130)	È come comunicarsi (127)
There are no ready-made infernos for the tormented. (180)	Per i dannati esistono inferni prefabbricati. (172)

Isolating linguistic missteps may seem like nit-picking or may seem like the sort of translation policing that does little to further the field. Yet in the critical context of a translator normally considered as an *auteur*, where a stylist like Bianciardi's capabilities or textual authority are never called into question, there is room to then go beyond his achievements in order to consider the effects of error on reading. One is inclined to conclude that errors may change a micro-level reading without inhibiting an overall appreciation for a text. But the careful reader of translations can easily notice inconsistencies that act as reminders of the materiality of the text and the translator's labor all too often elided, ignored, made immaterial.

CHAPTER IV

MODERNISM TRANSLATED: A GENEALOGY OF THE NEO-AVANTGARDE

The construction of a history of translation is the first task of a *modern* theory of translation. What characterizes modernity is not an infatuation with the past, but a movement of retrospection which is an infatuation with itself.
—Antoine Berman, *The Experience of the Foreign* (Trans. S. Heyvaert)

American literature in Italy, first representing a model of countercultural resistance, as does any vanguard, is eventually appropriated by the mainstream and becomes the status quo. The Americanisti of the prewar era promoted a transgressive and progressive model of translation as a form of anti-fascist literary and cultural resistance. The subjects of the previous chapters, Fernanda Pivano and Luciano Bianciardi, were exemplary importers of American literature, for different reasons; Pivano's work was directly aimed at sociopolitical, counter-cultural opposition, whereas Bianciardi's emblemized the transition to industrial translation—the commercialization of Italian culture, precisely the conditions Pivano's Beats sought to reject and that Bianciardi and many others critiqued. Thus as American culture became the dominant foreign influence in Italy, its products also tended to become commercial, conventional, regressive, the prelude to the very problematic globalization that has taken over the cultural sphere.

Within the cultural climate of the neocapitalist order and the consolidation of “Americanization,” the Italian neo-avantgarde arose out of a sense of crisis in language and representation. Angelo Guglielmi's statement in *Avanguardia e sperimentalismo* (1964) typifies this sense. “Ogni ponte tra parola e cosa è crollato,” he writes. “La lingua in quanto rappresentazione della realtà è ormai un congegno matto. Tuttavia il

riconoscimento della realtà rimane lo scopo dello scrivere. Ma come potrà effettuarsi?” (57).¹⁰⁷ The question posed by the critic, one of the founding members of the neo-avantgarde collective il Gruppo 63, is the key question on how to address the new reality heralded by the emergence of modernity in the Italy of the economic boom. This historic cultural shift demanded new forms of representation, a rupture with traditional poetic forms. Instead of focusing on Italian literary and poetic traditions, the neo-avantgarde turned away from neorealism, which had sought to represent everyday life, coming to terms with the realities of the war and postwar reconstruction, and looked outward for innovative models and international alliances. For the neo-avantgarde, Modernism was a mode that offered a historical model for representing the gap between word and thing. As Samuel Beckett once commented about Joyce’s *Work in Progress*, “His writing is not about something; it is that something itself” (27).

The aim of this chapter is to analyze the role of translation and foreign literature within the neo-avantgarde group, il Gruppo '63. Several artists and intellectuals were associated with this group (Edoardo Sanguineti, Amelia Rosselli, Umberto Eco, to name a few), which officially formed in October 1963 at a conference in Palermo.¹⁰⁸ The core

¹⁰⁷ Every bridge between word and thing has collapsed. Language as the representation of reality is a device gone mad. Yet recognizing reality remains the aim of writing. How can it be done?

¹⁰⁸ Those present at the original meeting or later affiliated with the group are: Alberto Arbasino, Luciano Anceschi, Nanni Balestrini, Renato Barilli, Achille Bonito Olive, Giorgio Celli, Furio Colombo, Corrado Costa, Fausto Curi, Roberto Di Marco, Umberto Eco, Enrico Filippini, Alfredo Giuliani, Alberto Gozzi, Angelo Guglielmi, Germano Lombardi, Giorgio Manganelli, Giulia Niccolai, Elio Pagliarani, Michele Perriera, Lamberto Pignotti, Antonio Porta, Edoardo Sanguineti, Giuliano Scabia, Adriano Spatola, Aldo Tagliaferri, Gian Pio Torricelli, and Sebastiano Vassalli. Still others were loosely affiliated, including Luigi Malerba, Nico Orengo, Amelia Rosselli, and Carla Vasio.

of the group, however, is generally considered to be coextensive with the poets included in the *Novissimi* anthology, which was published in 1961: Alfredo Giuliani, Edoardo Sanguineti, Antonio Porta, Nanni Balestrini, and Elio Pagliarani. The group's periodical vehicle was the magazine *Il verri*, founded in 1956 by the noted critic Luciano Anceschi.¹⁰⁹ Thus although the group officially formed in 1963, taking a name after the model of the German literary collective the Group 47 (or Gruppe 47), the currents that it consolidated had been in the making since the Fifties.

As a cosmopolitan group of intellectuals, they had ties to many European intellectual trends and literary schools past and present. Structuralism and semiotics were key in the conceptual framework of the neo-avantgarde, as was twentieth-century modernist writing more generally, including the historical avant-gardes, especially Italian and Russian futurisms. Despite being a diverse group, they were united by a dissatisfaction with the ideals of postwar reconstruction and neorealism's mimetic approach to narrative and political engagement. They agreed that new forms of commitment were necessary, and considered linguistic experimentation to be at the heart of the movement. The thrust of this aim was essentially Marxist: language should break the semantic patterns sedimented by the bourgeois establishment and conservative repression. Although the group, like any avant-garde, was future-oriented and in search of the new, they also pursued models of newness itself, looking at the history of innovation. One of the most relevant traditions for this aim was Anglo-American modernism. The economic boom constituted a key moment in the Italian literary world's

¹⁰⁹ Anceschi published the collection *Poetica americana*, featuring essays on Eliot and Pound, in 1953.

reconsideration of modernist literature, as the reception history and the new literary production demonstrates.

Composed of university professors, publishers, writers, but also employees of state television network RAI, the neo-avantgarde was both inside and outside of the establishment. As such, their poetics and aesthetics sparked controversy and debate. They were accused of being decadent, irrational formalists, dangerous revolutionaries, incorrigible Marxists, the rear-garde of the avant-garde or belated futurists (Gambaro 86). Some found them interesting, but kept their distance, like Calvino; many who might be considered more conservative, like Eugenio Montale, attacked them outright. Their poetics is diametrically opposed to that of translator Fernanda Pivano, for example, who on various occasions opposes her own views to their aestheticist and formalist approaches to literature.¹¹⁰ In this sense, they recuperate the most experimental of modernist literature, thereby following and advocating an alternative Americanism counter to the dominant tradition so heavily influenced by Pivano. Thus the neo-avantgarde marks a

¹¹⁰ “La critica, secondo me, dovrebbe spiegare gli autori, e invece secondo le nostre prassi la critica li esamina, li esamina esteticamente: questa era la critica crociana. Esteticamente allora, non so, questo concetto della rosa sul davanzale ritorna nel capitolo quarto e nel capitolo sesto, per esempio, poi si va avanti e si rasenta la formula di adesso che è quella che ha importato Umberto Eco di dire 'la parola rosa viene detta dieci volte', allora arriva Balestrini, 'sì, col computer si può fare la critica perché si può subito sapere quante volte è usata la parola rosa'. A me interessa che mentre una persona scrive e vede la parola rosa pensa all'immagine della rosa e questa immagine gli ritorna in certe occasioni, anche simbolicamente...” (Pivano, qtd in Chizzini)

[In my opinion, the critics should explain the authors, whereas according to our practices the critics examine them, examine them aesthetically—this was Croce’s approach. So aesthetically, hm, this motif of the rose on the windowsill recurs in chapter four and chapter six, for example, going on to the formula of today, which brought Umberto Eco to say “the word rose is uttered ten times,” then along comes Balestrini, saying “we can use the computer for criticism because we can figure out instantly how many times the word ‘rose’ was used.” What interests me is that while someone writes and sees the word “rose,” she thinks of the image of a rose and this image recurs in certain instances, even symbolically...]

passage from seeking out the foreign for anti-fascist, realist forms of expression to exploring experimental, linguistically-oriented literary models. Franco Buffoni points out how the cultural climate has changed. “I nuovi poeti sanno un po’ l’inglese,” he writes. “Hanno l’America come punto di riferimento (e non più Parigi come ai tempi dell’ermetismo e ancora di IV Generazione e Linea Lombarda. Un’America diversa da quella di Pavese e Vittorini, l’America di Ginsberg e—per l’appunto—dei *Cantos* di Pound” (*La Traduzione Del Testo Poetico* 104-5).¹¹¹ In an essay in the *Novissimi* collection, Giuliani puts it thus: “Così non abbiamo nessuna difficoltà a comprendere, in questo momento, e inserire tra i nostri arnesi anche il tipo americano (di cui parla Charles Olson) di quel verso ‘dinamico’ o ‘aperto’ o ‘atonale’ che abbiamo già sperimentato negli ultimi anni” (220).¹¹² Whereas American literature had previously been considered in terms of realism, the neo-avantgarde traces a genealogy that places it alongside the experimentalisms of Europe.

What I consider Italian literature’s “modernist turn” is marked by an intense attention to the linguistic experimentalism of modernisms from both the US and Europe, which is clear in the neo-avantgarde’s poetic production and criticism as well as their translations of writers like James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and Gertrude Stein. A deep reading of the neo-avantgarde, then, demands a consideration of both the texts that fed into their work as well as the texts that they produced and promoted in the form of translations. As

¹¹¹ The new poets know some English. They have America as their point of reference (and not Paris as it was in the era of hermeticism or the fourth generation and the Lombard line. An America different than that of Pavese and Vittorini—the America of Ginsberg, and, of course, of Pound’s *Cantos*.

¹¹² Thus we have no trouble understanding, at present, and adding to our arsenal the American type (of the sort Charles Olson discusses) of that ‘dynamic,’ or ‘open,’ or ‘atonal’ verse we have already been experimenting with in recent years.

Daniela La Penna writes, “la poetica rivoluzionaria dei Novissimi può essere seguita anche attraverso le scelte di traduzione effettuate dai singoli componenti del gruppo nel corso degli anni” (314-5).¹¹³ Many important translations appeared in *Il verri*, such as Balestrini’s anthology of contemporary German poets and translations of Ingeborg Bachmann, though most translations came from English language traditions. Eliot’s foundational critical essays, translated by Giuliani, appeared in the early 60s, thus introducing Eliotian ideas, especially the objective correlative. Previously, Giuliani had translated Dylan Thomas, and at the same time he was editing the Novissimi collection, he was one of the translators, along with Edoardo Sanguineti as well as J. Rodolfo Wilcock, of a volume of James Joyce’s poetry.¹¹⁴ Joycean poetics constitutes a central example of the aesthetics of the “opera aperta,” Umberto Eco’s foundational work of semiotic criticism, published in 1962. Having been tarnished by association with Fascism, Pound’s reputation began to improve after the appearance of the 1953 translation of the *Pisan Cantos*, and his daughter Mary de Rachewiltz’s Italian translation of the first thirty *Cantos* came out in 1961. Later, in 1967, Elio Pagliarani translated Charles Olson’s critical writings, including the influential essay “Projective Verse.” Poet Giulia Niccolai translated works by Woolf and Stein. As she was fully bilingual in Italian and English, Niccolai’s overall poetic oeuvre is marked by modernist multilingualism, as

¹¹³ The revolutionary poetics of the Novissimi can also be followed through the translation choices made by individual members of the group over the years.

¹¹⁴ In the Seventies, Giuliani’s poetics of translation would further develop, as he turned to the French Tel Quel group and an experimental translation of Alfred Jarry’s *Ubu Roi*, *Nostro Padre Ubu*. Sanguineti, too, would also dedicate his later attention to theater translation.

is that of another of the few female writers associated with the neo-avantgarde, Amelia Rosselli.

It is not that modernist writers had never previously appeared in Italian—many of them had. Nobel laureate Eugenio Montale, for example, translated a myriad of English-language writers, and introduced T.S. Eliot into Italian; Cesare Pavese translated major works by Stein. Many were interested in Joyce and translations littered various periodicals. Yet translation is one thing, transmission is another. The reception of modernist writers was mixed and patchy, and it was only in this period that it matured fully due to the historical moment in the receiving situation. The neo-avantgarde's attention to modernism is part of an even larger cultural shift toward the foreign, including foreign literary forms and themes, and toward English, as a valid (indeed, increasingly hegemonic) repository of cultural treasures and expressive possibilities. Several other translations also came out in this period. Giulio De Angelis (the translator of the first complete Italian edition of Joyce's *Ulysses*) published a translation of Virginia Woolf's arguably most experimental novel, *The Waves* (*Le onde*) in 1956; Enzo Siciliano's translation of Wyndham Lewis's *künstlerroman* *Tarr* came out in 1959; Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, for example (which Filippo Donini translated for Bompiani in 1962 as *Bosco di notte*).

Of course, the neoavantgarde is, like all avant-gardes, an art of aesthetic and political contestation; an art that calls attention to tradition by breaking with it.

Translation always represents a dialectic between tradition and innovation, as Eliot's famous statement recalls.¹¹⁵ Here, translation meets the criteria of auteur translation, as

¹¹⁵ Eliot's comment, usually taken out of context, merits quoting in full, as it provides a

these are poet-translators who, however radical, are canonical in Italian literary history, and whose translations are inevitably read against and alongside the poets' original writing. However, what is important is the repurposing of foreign traditions and the use of translation as a generative practice. This is analogous to the role of translation as a literary mode in Anglo-American modernism, as Steven Yao addresses in the important study of *Translation and the Languages of Modernism*. Interest in foreign languages and foreign cultures as sources for renewal of English literature was essential to Modernism, as he claims, to the extent that the impulse to translate and the urge to reveal translation and foreignness in literary works was in fact a defining aspect of the very concept of modernism.

Consequently, my claim is that the Italian *neoavanguardia* represents a break with the Italian literary tradition of its time through translation, and further, through literature that was itself grounded on translation as a constitutive principle. In this sense, modernism is redefined and updated by a brand of literary cosmopolitanism in which the foreign is the point of departure for the necessary distancing from the self.

The new avant-garde as a whole conforms to this principle, and following its

point of reference for the creation of a foreign literature through translation. "As for *Cathay*, it must be pointed out that Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time. I suspect that every age has had, and will have, the same illusion concerning translations, an illusion which is not altogether an illusion either. When a foreign poet is successfully done into the idiom of our own language and our own time, we believe that he has been 'translated'; we believe that through this translation we really at last get the original. The Elizabethans must have thought that they got Homer through Chapman, Plutarch through North. Not being Elizabethans, we have not that illusion; we see that Chapman is more Chapman than Homer, and North more North than Plutarch, both localized three hundred years ago. [...] I predict that in three hundred years Pound's *Cathay* will be a 'Windsor Translation' as Chapman and North are now 'Tudor Translations:' it will be called (and justly) a 'magnificent specimen of XXth Century poetry' rather than a 'translation.' Each generation must translate for itself." (Eliot "Introduction" 14-15)

writers over the course of decades would yield a fascinating portrait of foreignizing poetics in the Italian literary system. Here, I focus on tracing the presence of key figures James Joyce and Ezra Pound in the concept of the open work and Edoardo Sanguineti's translations and early poem *Laborintus*. What is the effect of the phenomenological neo-avantgarde tenet of the "riduzione dell'io" [the reduction of the "I" or subject] on the author function and thus on the translator function within the literary text? The plurivocality of the open text instantiates a new, distinctly modernist poetics of translation on the Italian scene.

Historical Modernism

This approach demands a definition of the term "modernism," which in literature, architecture, music, and art is an international phenomenon whose boundaries are continually in expansion. Modernism is a stable but slippery category in the North American context. Indeed, the term "modernism" is one of the more overdetermined in humanistic studies, and it is perhaps due to the considerable prestige it enjoys that so many scholars have yoked such a vast range of critical projects to the field of modernist studies. In the Italian context, there is no explicit tradition or category of "modernismo" as such. The era from the nineteenth to twentieth century, instead, passes through the *scapigliatura* (a "bohemian" group), *verismo* and *decadentismo*, *futurismo* (the *avanguardia*), and *ermetismo*. While the modern is a concern, it is not a unifying artistic or critical category per se.

In the broadest sense, modernism is the artistic response to the experience of modernity. Similarly, Susan Stanford Friedman offers an overarching definition of

modernism within the framework of “the structural principle of radical rupture— wherever, whenever, and in whatever forms it might occur” (505). This goes beyond the “old international modernism” (Mao and Walkowitz 739) – from Lukács’s influential notion of the novel as the expression of “transcendental homelessness” to Terry Eagleton’s foundational *Exiles and Émigrés*, or even Franco Moretti’s more recent characterization of the modernist novel as “homeless, narcissistic, regressive” (*Way of the World* 232). The “worlding” of modernism has actually rendered the nation visible (from the repositioning of major figures as in “the Irish Joyce” or “postcolonial Joyce” to the consideration of modernisms beyond Europe), while at the same time acknowledging and redefining its limits. Thus, Friedman’s definition of modernism as a form of rupture gives it a flexibility that allows it to refer to multiple national-linguistic contexts that may have historically and temporally radically different rates of industrialization and modernization. This also provides us with a useful paradigm for considering Italian modernism as both an underlying force embedded in the birth of new technologies and social relations as well as a conscious project of becoming modern—a response to modernity and a pursuit of it.

Placing Italy within the modernist context is thus to engage with what contemporary scholars have deemed the “new modernist studies” and its “transnational turn” (Mao and Walkowitz 738). The critic in the North American context who has done the most to advance the study of Italian modernism as such is Luca Somigli, who argues, “it is precisely because of [the term ‘modernism’s’] relative neutrality – its ‘foreignness’ to the Italian tradition, if you will – that it can serve as a less ideologically charged term to define a range of cultural experiences between the turn of the last century and World

War Two” (Somigli 46-7). Calling any foreign category “neutral” runs the risk of cultural imperialism, yet put in other terms, there is a strategic utility to the category modernism based on its cultural prestige in the international context. While “modernism” is foreign to the Italian tradition, the concept of the modern, the process of modernization, and the project of modernity—to which artistic modernism is undisputably bound—are absolutely integral, even obsessively so, to the Italian tradition. The true purpose of rethinking the Italian tradition in modernist terms is the new constellations that it enables on the world literary sphere.

In Italy, when and how (even where) it becomes “modern” is a category of much dispute. As Albert Asor Rosa writes:

Modernity, to be clear, is the end of the society of the *ancien régime*, the collapse of the old social structures, which were made into nations, the birth of social classes, the (economic, industrial, cultural, intellectual) hegemony of the bourgeoisie, the emergence of the mass audience, eager to hear stories, but especially to tell them. All this comes about extremely late in Italy, in an approximate and imperfect manner, with colossal internal contradictions – and it’s doubtful, even today, that it has ever been fully realized. (256, my translation)

Asor Rosa’s comment, from 2002, is a negative example of the typical rendering of the Italian historical timeline and brings us to the question of periodization more directly.

While the question of modernity, as Asor Rosa suggests, is complex and uneven on the national sphere, and was inevitably determined by international relations and encounters with modernities, the question of modernization (seen as the the concrete evidence of the transition to urbanization, industrialization, higher standards of living) is easier to

pinpoint. Virtually all accounts of Italian history place the process of modernization as beginning in the reconstruction following World War II and coming to its height in the economic boom starting in the late 50s and continuing through the 60s.

In keeping with historiographical definitions, then, it is necessary to distinguish between what I will specify as “historical modernism,” i.e. that coincides with art from the interwar period traditionally associated with Anglo-American experimentalism, and “modernism” without a period marker that indicates the project of processing modernity in art. The former corresponds to a periodization that conforms too closely and inappropriately with that of the dominant geopolitical powers (Britain and the US), by comparison putting Italy into a subordinate position, a point of view which is already all-too common. This would be Luca Somigli’s “neutral” category and would include figures from the early twentieth century like F.T. Marinetti and the Futurists, Luigi Pirandello, Massimo Bontempelli, Paola Masino, Alberto Savinio, distancing them from varieties of realism (*verismo*) as well as Americanism. The latter, on the other hand—the project of processing modernity through art, not limited to one historical period—provides us with the flexibility to redraw the constellation, to consider the legacy of world modernism in Italy and to understand why it is during Italy’s own process of modernization that it embraces Anglo-American modernism while also producing new varieties of modernism on the cosmopolitan scale. For if modernization was seen as synonymous with Americanization, as many historians and cultural commentators suggest, there is a sense in which this process inevitably demands a reckoning with the becoming-other that it entailed.

Modernist Cosmopolitanism

One of the defining elements of modernism is its international scope. While writers and artists may have dealt with national problems or local themes, the predominant ethos was cosmopolitanism. Since the 1990s, cosmopolitanism has found renewed interest across the humanities as well as the social sciences. The concept has an ancient pedigree, deriving from the Greek *κοσμοπολίτης*, i.e. *cosmo* (world) + *polites* (citizen), and thus has over the centuries been used in a variety of socio-political and philosophical discourses from Erasmus to Kant through Marx to the present “new cosmopolitanism” predicated on situatedness and the local (an ethos perhaps even better expressed by the marketing buzzword “glocal”).

What generally unites the range of concepts under the umbrella of cosmopolitanism is the idea that human beings form a single community that transcends ethnicity and nation. In the present critical context, this arises out of the critique of nationalism and imperialism marked in particular by the landmark work of Benedict Anderson and Edward Said, and is used to situate intellectuals in relation to culture and nationalism in relation to universalism. Literature, too, was famously connected to cosmopolitanism notably in the *Communist Manifesto*, where Marx relates the “cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country” (68) to the development of a positive global consciousness: “National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature” (69).

My invocation of the term cosmopolitanism is also indebted to Rebecca Walkowitz’s notion of “critical cosmopolitanism” developed in *Cosmopolitan Style*

(2006). Walkowitz associates modernist style (techniques like stream of consciousness, parataxis, collage, portmanteau, and defamiliarization more broadly) with a specifically *critical* cosmopolitanism, defined as “thinking beyond the nation [...], comparing, distinguishing, and judging among different versions of transnational thought; testing moral and political norms, including the norms of critical thinking; and valuing informal as well as transient models of community” (2). In turn, her thinking is informed by “Adorno’s conviction that social norms are embedded in traditions of literary style and that literary style is embedded in the politics of national culture,” a conviction that “makes his work particularly significant for theories of culture and cosmopolitan fiction” (27). Indeed, that the “social antagonisms of reality,” in Adorno’s memorable phrase, manifest in artistic form, is a reflection that the cosmopolitan stance is inevitably local and global at the same time, as the universal can only ever manifest in the particular.

I invoke critical cosmopolitanism as a concept because it provides a framework for thinking about the conscious opening out of the literary in Italian culture—it constitutes a critique of the polis from the perspective of the cosmos. In this it resembles the historic avant-garde, which was international in scope. Yet although the Futurists had roots and connections in Symbolism and in French and their influence extended beyond the nation, their aims were ultimately nationalist. The revolutionary potential of the Futurist avant-garde was contained, in its time, to the Italian sphere, to Italian artistic evolution and eventually to Fascism. Its aim was to herald and marshal the modern for the nation, and in doing so to dominate and establish Italian primacy among the European powers. Indeed, critic Massimo Bacigalupo, in “Modernismo e traduzione,” reads literary

modernism from Pound to Sanguineti as a “lotta per il potere [...] culturale in senso lato, una lotta animata da percezioni reali di una crisi che si cerca di ignorare” (323).¹¹⁶

In contrast, the new avant-garde of the 60s, while appearing to be detached from place, seeks a position in the “world republic of letters,” not as a play for a specifically political power or cultural primacy (as Casanova describes it) but rather to engage as citizens of the literary world—a world which, being first and foremost composed of language, is inevitably localizable to geographical coordinates. And thus it is a language that is self-reflexive, that self-reflects (for the *neoavanguardia* is another response to the perennial Italian “language question”) while seeking to transcend it, in the problematic process that contemporary thinkers have criticized for its pre-packaged marketability in the context of globalization.

The neo-avantgarde has even been criticized for its lack of attention to place: “non c’è in nessuna poesia dei novissimi la presenza di un preciso dove, di uno sfondo. La natura stessa è assente. [...] Si precipita verso dei non-dove moderni” (Zinato 92).¹¹⁷ Yet this is precisely what makes the neo-avantgarde a group of modernist cosmopolitans: modernity is most visibile, most graspable precisely in its nondescript “non-dove”—generic nowheres, Eliot’s wasteland, Marc Augé’s supermodern *non-lieux*—and the industrial expulsion of nature (think Antonioni’s *Deserto rosso*). In other words, there where there is no where.

¹¹⁶ struggle for power [...] in the broad sense of culture—a struggle animated by the real perception of a crisis that others attempt to ignore.

¹¹⁷ There’s no presence of a specific place, a setting, in any poem by the Novissimi. Nature itself is absent. [...] We fall into these modern no-wheres.

The Frame of the Open Work

Like Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco began his intellectual career as a keen critic of both popular culture and high art. Eco's concept of the *opera aperta* or open work is one of the central interpretative constructs to come out of the neo-avantgarde. First published in 1962, *Opera aperta* traces the "estetiche dell'ineffabilità" [aesthetics of ineffability] that give rise to "una ambiguità produttiva [...] che risveglia la mia attenzione e mi sollecita ad uno sforzo interpretativo, ma poi mi consente di trovare delle direzioni di decodifica" (63).¹¹⁸ The aesthetic of the open work, in short, is a built-in indeterminacy that demands a participatory and inventive response from the reader or spectator. As opposed to the closed text which leads toward a single solution, the open text demands multiple interpretations, which are collaborative: the reader is invited to "*fare l'opera con l'autore*" [make the work along with the author] in his or her "esecuzione personale" [personal execution] (51). The book targeted Crocean aesthetics, and beyond the fruitful and influential debate it provoked it was attacked by the likes of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Eugenio Montale. In the US critical context it is often read in the context of postmodernism, one of the many poststructuralist theories of reading and text from Continental Europe, probably because of the mediation of Eco's own fiction. Peter Bondanella, however, defines it as a "general aesthetics of modernism" (23).

Eco's "open work" was surely the product of collaborative reflection as the concept of openness was already in the air of neo-avantgarde aesthetic thought. Alfredo Giuliani first advocates for open writing and the engagement of the reader in the production of textual meaning. In his introduction to *I novissimi*, Giuliani writes:

¹¹⁸ a productive ambiguity [...] that reawakens my attention and pushes me toward interpretative effort, but then allows me to find some directions for decodification.

Lo scrittore ‘aperto’ trae egli stesso insegnamento dalle cose e non vuole insegnare nulla, non dà l’impressione di possedere una verità ma di cercarla e di contraddirsi oscuramente, non vuole catturare la benevolenza o destare meraviglia, perché inclina a lasciare l’iniziativa al rapporto che si creerà nell’incontro tra due disposizioni semantiche, quella del testo e l’altra, appunto, che appartiene a chi legge (20).¹¹⁹

Such a conception of the writer and the shifting of interpretative authority also bears on the ideology of authorship. If the author is not in fact the only or even relevant authority of a text, but rather creates the conditions for an interpretative event by an equal participant, Giuliani’s statement of poetics also sets the stage for a theory of translation that de-sacralizes the source author and the original text.

In defining the contours of the open work, Eco invokes writers like Mallarmé, Brecht, and Kafka, but places Joyce at the core, discussing his work throughout *Opera aperta* as well as in a longer section, later published as a separate text, called *Le poetiche di Joyce*. “E’ superfluo qui richiamare alla mente del lettore, come esemplare massimo di opera ‘aperta’—intesa proprio a dare una immagine di una precisa condizione esistenziale e ontologico del mondo contemporaneo—l’opera di James Joyce” (35).¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ The “open” writer himself draws teachings from things without wanting to teach anything; he doesn’t give the impression of possessing a truth but searching for one, vaguely contradicting himself; he doesn’t attempt *captatio benevolentiae* or to elicit wonder, because he tends to leave the initiative to the relationship created in the encounter between two semantic dispositions, that of the text, and that other disposition that belongs to the reader.

¹²⁰ It is superfluous to remind the reader, as the greatest exemplar of the ‘open’ work—aimed at providing an image of a precise existential and ontological condition of the contemporary world—the oeuvre of James Joyce.

Besides noting that Joyce forms the foundation of a purportedly general semiotic theory, we must also note that Eco identifies Joyce, the Irish modernist who had passed away before the end of World War II, as providing us with an image of the *contemporary* world. Joyce's work is cast as a model of forming the world in language.

Joyce on the Italian Poetic Scene

Not only can we use the frame of the open work to read modernism, but also modernism can be used to read the open work. The history of Joyce's reception in Italy is complex. Joyce had been present, vaguely, in the Italian literary atmosphere from his beginnings, especially given his own connections to Italy and engagement with Italian letters, and had several significant advocates, like Carlo Linati, early in his career.¹²¹ Yet for at least the first half of the century, his transmission and reception were patchy. In 1946 the critic Gianfranco Contini commented that the linguistic virtuosos of European literature like Joyce, Ponge, and Celine had no counterparts in Italian literature, which was characterized more by a "general classicism" (581), suggesting that there was little interest in modernist writing. *Ulysses* was first published in Paris, and its early reception in Italy was mediated by the French. As for the work overall, some read the English, but not in large numbers; and as in his native context, his work was often misunderstood. Various works were translated into Italian here and there. A number of stories from *Dubliners* were published in magazines beginning in the 20s, and in a complete edition in

¹²¹ Topics like Joyce's role in advancing the career of Italo Svevo, for example, or Joyce's own translations into Italian, have been widely documented. For a detailed survey, see the section "Italy" in *The Reception of James Joyce in Europe* (Wim Van Mierlo, ed.).

1933, and later in 1949, 1961, and 1970.¹²² *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* was first published in an acclaimed translation by Pavese in 1933, though he claimed to hate Joyce. Poems appeared in magazines starting in the 30s,¹²³ *Chamber Music* in a tiny print run in 1943 (*Musica da camera*, by Marco Lombardi), a few from *Pomes Penyeach* appear in Montale's *Quaderno di traduzioni* (1948) and a complete edition (*Poesie da un soldo*, 1949, Alberto Rossi). A collection of Joyce's poems, translated by Alfredo Giuliani, Edoardo Sanguineti, J. Rodolfo Wilcock, came out in 1961. 1960 marks the first Italian translation of *Ulysses* (by Giulio de Angelis for Mondadori);¹²⁴ parts of *Finnegans Wake* began to appear (translated by Luigi Schenoni and Mario Diacono, in addition to Joyce's own Italian rendering of the "Anna Livia Plurabelle" section). In the music of the neo-avantgarde, Luciano Berio composes renditions of poems from *Chamber Music* (1953), *Thema (Omaggio a Joyce)* (1958), based on *Ulysses* in consultation with Umberto Eco, *Epifanie* (1961), *Bad Girl* (based on *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 1971).

For the neo-avantgarde poets, *Finnegans Wake* in particular became an important point of reference. Alfredo Giuliani's work, especially *Nuove predilezioni* [New Predilections] (composed in 1963-1964 but only published in 1986), amply displays

¹²² Complete translations appeared in 1933 (Annie and Adriano Lami), 1949 (Franca Cancogni), 1961 (Margherita Ghirardi Minoja), 1970 (Maria Pia Balboni).

¹²³ A translation of *Chamber Music* came out in 1943 (*Musica da camera*, by Marco Lombardi), a few poems from *Pomes Penyeach* appear in Montale's *Quaderno di traduzioni* (1948) and a complete edition (*Poesie da un soldo*, 1949, Alberto Rossi). A full collection of Joyce's poems, translated by Alfredo Giuliani, Edoardo Sanguineti, J. Rodolfo Wilcock, was published by Mondadori in 1961, and still others have come out since.

¹²⁴ *Ulysses* was re-translated in 1995 by Bona Flecchia (Shakespeare and Company), and has recently appeared in two significant new translations by academic Enrico Terrinoni (Newton Compton, 2012) and writer Gianni Celati (Einaudi, 2013).

techniques of Joycean inspiration like polysemy, pun, and neologism, as in the exuberant “Yé-Yé coglino,” whose first line, repeated three times throughout the twelve-line poem, “sei uno sei uno sei uno sette con due o o sei nessuno” plays with the homonym “sei” (the number 6 and the second person singular of essere, meaning you are). The poem “Invetticoglia” invokes a Joycean libidinal, invective energy as is apparent in the first few lines:

sgrondone leucocitibondo, pellimbuto di farcirne,
la tua Scalessa sbagioca e tricchigna tuttadelicatura
la minghiottona: [...]

Poem XI is full of compounds of recognizably Joycean inspiration:

smum smum: perso l'olfatto (ominicànide) / salgo soddisfatto
al quinto piano / porcogiriromondovagare / mentegatto: coda
scopa secchio bolle / intrusivamente nervose chiavarticolazioni
il tempo rale lepri rintananti: le persiane fischialgie
d'un interno foro / mondiglio stagnante a perdiocchio.

The influence of *Finnegans Wake* was restricted in this period, however, precipitated partly by reading in the original, partly by translating (experimental poet Mario Diacono having published translation of part in 1961). While several passages circulated in translation, as had been the case with *Ulysses* a generation before, a complete translation was first published only in 1982. Thus when Serenella Zanotti, in her discussion of *Finnegans Wake* in Italy, asserts that “Schenoni’s translation was the most articulate response to the needs developed by the Italian culture in the previous decades” she is referring to the needs reflected by the hybrid, Joycean literary production of the neo-avantgarde, which in turn led to the publication of the full text in Italian.

Thus it is no surprise that some of Italy’s most experimental, modernist translators began translating with Joyce. Yet given that Joyce’s gargantuan prose works formed the

basis of his influence on the neo-avantgarde, it may seem surprising that some of its most experimental writers would have translated Joyce's under-appreciated poetic production rather than the grand epics *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. However, as Mondadori was preparing a volume of Joyce's complete works, editor Giacomo Debenedetti had begun to purchase rights and collect the sundry translations that had been made as well as commissioning translations for untranslated pieces. It is likely, therefore, that Sanguineti and Giuliani, along with the Argentine-Italian writer/translator J. Rodolfo Wilcock (not a member of the neo-avantgarde), had been asked to translate sections of the book, which was placed with Alberto Rossi's earlier version of *Pomes Penyeach* (*Poesie da un soldo*).

The dominant view is that Joyce's truly innovative work is his prose, whereas his poetry is quite conventional. That he too saw himself as a conventional poet is suggested by his comment in a letter to Ezra Pound contrasting the *Cantos* to his "old-fashioned ear" (Ellman 161). Yet of course Italians read Joyce differently. For one, the controversy generated by Joyce's prose—whether it was readable, decadent, obscene, or relevant—did not affect his poetry, which enjoyed a relative level of popularity. Its first translator, Glauco Natoli, prefaced the poems in the journal *Circoli* by saying that the purity of the style here was free from the "schemi logici e sottigliezze psicologiche" [logical schemas and psychological subtleties] of the novels that "rendono, a volte, assai gravi certe pagine dei romanzi" [at times, make some parts of the novels very heavy] (35). Alberto Rossi's 1949 translation (the *Poesie da un soldo*) was published with his translation of the "Proteus" chapter of *Ulysses*, and he stressed the connection between the poetry and the prose. Thus although his poetry is generally considered to be marginal, at best lesser achievements of linguistic experimentalism and at worst mediocre cliché, critics have

turned to it for a variety of reasons beyond the simple academic necessity of reading every last bit of marginalia.

Another relevant aspect of the Italian literary system to consider in this case is the dominance of poetry in the canon. Asor Rosa's above-cited essay is a profile of the Italian novel (part of Franco Moretti's multi-volume critical anthology) that calls its history anomalous ("La storia del 'romanzo italiano'? Naturalmente, una storia 'anomala'"), analogous to its modernization. An examination of nearly any history of Italian literature, in fact, reveals the overwhelming prevalence of poets, with a trajectory running from Dante, Petrarch, Tasso, Leopardi, to Marinetti, Montale, Pasolini. In such a scenario, it is not surprising that Joyce the poet might have greater resonance on the Italian literary scene. And as recent criticism has pointed out, Joyce's poetry is central to his entire body of work and is also worthy of further study in its own right.¹²⁵

The 1961 collection, called *Poesie*, is heterogeneous. Part of Mondadori's Specchio series, the book gathers essentially all of Joyce's poetry. The editors clearly sought out the avant-garde, with Alfredo Giuliani translating *Chamber Music* (as *Musica da camera*) and Edoardo Sanguineti a handful of poems ("Il Santo Uffizio," "Becco a gas" and "Ecce puer"). J. Rodolfo Wilcock translates a large part of the book ("Poesie della prima giovinezza" and most of the "Poesie d'occasione"), and Alberto Rossi *Pomes Penyeach* (*Poesie da un soldo*). As mentioned above, the translations by Rossi are from an earlier 1949 stand-alone book, and his introduction is reprinted in the Mondadori edition. He situates the poetry within Joyce's body of work, but makes no mention of his

¹²⁵ For a thorough overview and a variety of perspectives, see *The Poetry of James Joyce Reconsidered*, edited by Marc C. Conner.

translation nor anyone else's, though there is a brief statement in the (uncredited) preface commending the talents of the translators themselves.

Rodolfo Wilcock's renderings are lyrical and inventive, especially the limericks, but here I will focus in particular on Sanguineti's translations "The Holy Office," "Il Santo Uffizio," and "Gas from a Burner," "Becco a gas" and "Ecce puer." While "Ecce Puer" commemorates the birth of his grandson and resembles the lyric compositions of *Chamber Music*, the other two poems Sanguineti handles demonstrate Joyce's power of satiric invective. "The Holy Office" was written in 1904, and is part *ars poetica*, part satirical stab at Celtic Revivalists. It was in fact originally a self-published broadside, circulated privately in Dublin. These are Sanguineti's first published translations, and they fit his irreverance well.

In the poem Joyce separates himself from the pillars of Dublin literary society: W.B. Yeats, George Russell, J.M. Synge, Oliver St. John Gogarty, Padraic Colum, John Eglinton, George Roberts, Seumas O'Sullivan, mocking their allegiance to the Revival as an outdated, overly romantic, and provincial expression of Irish nationalism. In this, "The Holy Office" also sets the true artist against society, in a forerunner of the famous image in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916): "The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails" (252). The poem begins:

<p>Myself unto myself will give This name Katharsis-Purgative. I, who dishevelled ways forsook To hold the poets' grammar-book, Bringing to tavern and to brothel The mind of witty Aristotle, Lest bards in the attempt should err Must here be my interpreter:</p>	<p>Io voglio dare questo appellativo a me stesso, Catarsi-Purgativo. Ho abbandonato ogni intricata via per tenere il manuale di poesia, portandomi alla bettola e al casino di Aristotele arguto il sale fino, e perché i bardi non sbaglino adesso io devo qui interpretare me stesso:</p>
---	--

Wherefore receive now from my lip Peripatetic scholarship.	ora dalle mie labbra esce, attenzione, una peripatetica lezione.
---	---

Right away we see that Sanguineti follows Joyce's simple rhyme pattern and then writes the lines in rough hendecasyllables, the dominant metrical form in Italian verse. At the same time, Joyce's language is more arch, mock-religious ("myself unto myself") whereas Sanguineti's language is more colloquial, more of a street wit, a modern pasquinade. As the poem turns to infernal imagery, we are reminded of both writers' evocations of Dante:

To enter heaven, travel hell, Be piteous or terrible One positively needs the ease, Of plenary indulgences. For every true-born mysticist A Dante is, unprejudiced, Who safe at ingle-nook, by proxy, Hazards extremes of heterodoxy	Per entrare nel cielo o nell'inferno, per far paura o far pietà in eterno, come sussidio sono necessarie le spinte delle indulgenze plenarie. Perché ogni autentico misticizzante spregiudicatamente è sempre un Dante che, in salvo al focolare, si avventura ai confini del dogma, per procura
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As the poem progresses, the speaker is increasingly antagonistic, positioning himself as a purgative (in the more scatological sense of "katharsis") for Dublin's deluded:

But all these men of whom I speak Make me the sewer of their clique. That they may dream their dreamy dreams I carry off their filthy streams [...] Thus I relieve their timid arses Perform my office of Katharsis.	Ma tutti questi a cui gratto la rogn di questa cricca mi fanno la fogna. Sogni di sogno si sognino pure: porto via queste fetide acque impure; [...] Catarsi esercitante uffizi ingrati così soccorro i culi intemorati.
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We can virtually hear echoes of Sanguineti's *Laborintus* in "Sogni di sogno si sognino pure: / porto via queste fetide acque impure." Perhaps it is no surprise that, as one critic

put it, by the 70s Joyce was considered “a contemporary Italian poet” (Risset 157, my translation).

Edoardo Sanguineti as Late Modernist

After translating Joyce, Sanguineti went on to become one of the most interesting translators in Italian letters, and was also an extremely prolific poet, a Marxist intellectual and literary critic, and novelist. His theory of the “dicibile” or speakable in translation was related directly to his interest in theatre. He translated plays by Aeschylus, Euripides, Seneca, Shakespeare, Corneille, Molière, Ionesco, Brecht. He also translated a number of poems; he translated the *Satyricon*; he translated *Faust*. As such a pedigree suggests, Sanguineti was not invested in a single literature or time period, but rather was encyclopedic in his range of interests.

In this, he is much like Ezra Pound, who, like Joyce, has a complex history of reception in Italy, in part because he also had a relationship with the country, and especially for his Fascist sympathies.¹²⁶ He had met a fate similar to that of the Futurists, whose association with Fascism kept the neo-avantgarde from claiming any aesthetic affinity with them. Yet as with Joyce, Pound had his resurgence, signalled by the 1953 publication of Alfredo Rizzardi’s translation of the *Pisan Cantos*, according to Niccolò Zapponi, and later the translation of the first thirty cantos, by Pound’s daughter Mary De Rachewiltz in 1961. As Franco Buffoni’s account of Pound in twentieth century Italian poetry states: “Deve maturare in pieno la crisi degli anni sessanta, alias la crisi della

¹²⁶ In an unusual instance of cultural translation, Pound has become the namesake for the Italian neo-fascist association Casa Pound. Pound’s daughter Mary De Rachewiltz has unsuccessfully tried to dissociate her father’s name from the group.

rappresentazione, con conseguente netta scissione tra soggetto e oggetto, tra esperienza individuale e cosa, perché si possa finalmente ricominciare a parlare di Pound come di un maestro” (104).¹²⁷ The 1967 anthology *Da Pound ai novissimi* makes the lineage, what Luciano Anceschi called “la funzione Pound,” explicit.

In the 2004 study *The New-Avant Garde in Italy*, John Picchione suggests that the neo-avantgarde could be considered as divided into two camps, one which can be considered modernist, and the other postmodernist. The former still believes in the project of modernity, holds that art has a political and social emancipatory power and revolutionary charge, the latter subscribes to the loss of grand narratives and the idea of literature as play. Thus the modernist camp “perceives language as a constant projection of something other than itself on the ground of the dialectical relationship it establishes with the social, political, and any other extra-literary aspect of life” (48).

Based on this construction, Picchione places Sanguineti with the modernists. Lucia Re reads Sanguineti’s ideological and aesthetic position in similar terms.

For Sanguineti, the mythologies of the neo-capitalist bourgeoisie could only be countered by using counter-mythologies. [...] Poetic discourse as he saw it was precisely an alternative, critically productive source of myths and symbols, which could “deform” and contrast the mythologies of the dominant bourgeois culture. (145)

¹²⁷ The crisis of the 60s—also known as the crisis of representation, with the consequent scission between subject and object, between individual experience, and thing—had to come to a head for Pound to be reclaimed as a master.

In this sense, ideology was expressed in language, but language still had the power to alter ideology in turn. Faith in progress, in grand narratives, remains, which is one of the primary distinctions that separate a modernist worldview from a postmodernist one.

Indeed, it is commonly acknowledged that Edoardo Sanguineti's first poetic work, *Laborintus* (1956), is both a literary work in the tradition of Anglo-American high modernism as well as an expression of neocapitalist alienation. His is not a poetry that repeats the Poundian injunction to "make it new" but forecasts its own obsolescence; poetry that doesn't plot to "[uccidere] il chiaro di luna" [murder the moonlight] but taxonomies its corpse; poetry that intervenes in the social through linguistic defamiliarization; and thus, a poetry that resumes the avant-garde project of reconsidering the relationship between art and life and yet, as Sanguineti claims, makes the avant-garde into "un'arte da museo" [museum art]—the very opposite of the Futurist injunction. As Tommaso Lisa has noted, "Sanguineti porta a conclusione il modernismo di Eliot e di Pound" [Sanguineti brings the modernism of Eliot and Pound to a conclusion] (Lisa 234), which acknowledges modernism—and not the Italian Futurist avant-garde—as Sanguineti's poetic predecessor.¹²⁸ Recognizing *Laborintus*'s modernist precursors thus shifts the position of the text, locating it on the modernist map. In this sense, the text as a work of literary ecology that utilizes multilingualism and citation to historicize the alienation of the self in the modern world.

¹²⁸ "Il grande rilievo di Eliot era la sua utilizzabilità in rapporto alla tradizione culturale italiana: rappresentava in fatti colui che mediava Dante nei confronti della modernità. Egli restituiva a una tradizione culturale che l'aveva perduta la grande libertà di scrittura offerta da Dante" (Sanguineti, qtd in Gambaro, 24). [The great importance of Eliot was his utility in relation to the Italian cultural tradition: he represented the one who mediated between Dante and modernity. He restored to a cultural tradition that had lost it the great freedom of writing that Dante had offered.]

Sanguineti's poem reprises the distinct feature of high modernism's constitutive difficulty—that is, its resistance to mass consumption—exemplifying the kind of anti-realist “commitment” advocated by Theodor Adorno, for whom modernism, and specifically Samuel Beckett, represents the height of aesthetic truth in a post-Auschwitz world.¹²⁹ In a way similar to Pound's revolutionizing of poetic language through translation and a translational mode of writing, *Laborintus* constitutes a break in the self-referential or provincial tradition in Italian poetry, a proto-*travestimento* which is revolutionary precisely because of its “foreignness.”

Laborintus appropriates widely from other texts, not out of pure textuality or linguistic play but rather out of a poetic praxis of cultural engagement, as Sanguineti indicates throughout the poem in phrases like: “riportiamo il linguaggio a un senso morale” or “daremo al mondo il giusto aspetto” (sec. 4). The polyphonic language of *Laborintus* manifests this dialectical, utopian strain, as a *total artwork* that aspires toward a synesthetic representation not *through* language but *by means of* language:—to hazard a paraphrase, looking right at the world, we will make the world look right.

Sanguineti's poem works through *foreignization*, by which I mean both *defamiliarization* in the Brechtian sense, that is, essentially a theatrical interruption in perception, and in a more literal sense, the *making foreign* of Italian poetry—the elimination of what has become, as Sanguineti called it, “poetese.” The work of

¹²⁹ Sanguineti, as is widely noted, was a lifelong communist and his thinking was deeply influenced by theorists like Adorno, Benjamin, and Marcuse, for whom avant-garde art represents the “Great Refusal.” Consonant with such an approach (to Marxist aesthetics), and certainly influential for the Gruppo 63, is Galvano della Volpe's 1960 text, *Critica del gusto*, where literature is not considered to reflect historical reality but rather contains its historicity within its linguistic and formal structure.

defamiliarization is accomplished, first and foremost, through the disavowal of the lyric “I” that facilitates affective engagement and reader identification. The neoavanguardia “riduzione dell’io” echoes Eliot’s call for “the extinction of personality” and an “impersonal poetry” in “Tradition and Individual Talent.” In *Laborintus*, the “io” functions primarily as a grammatical expedient, as linguistic matter, and it is treated with the same externality as the other so-called “characters” in the poem. This depersonalization, part of the work of foreignization, utilizes three interconnected techniques, typical of modernist writing: parataxis, citation, and multilingualism.

Parataxis, by failing to offer the sort of interpretative guidance that provides temporal orientation and establishes causal relationships between semantic units, is a distinctive feature of much modernist writing. In *Laborintus*, this goes a step beyond the short declarative sentences characteristic of Hemingway or Stein, but rather opens up to “la possibilità allora dico di una discontinua dichiarazione” (sec. 19), emphasized by the near-total absence of punctuation. Here is one among the innumerable examples:

è finita è finita la perspicacia passiva primitiva è finita eppure
in uno stadio enunciatemente ricostruttivo di responsabile ricomposizione
è finita infine è atomizzata e io sono io sono una moltitudine
attraverso ritentate esperienze Mare Lacus accogliami (sez. 4)

This “discontinua dichiarazione” also coincides with the evocation of a “continuous present,” to borrow a phrase from Stein, as the poem’s various sections can be read to form a linear narrative—of the descent into the Palus Putredinus—but also can be read separately, in any order, and in fact the *Laborintus* poems have often been published as individual poems. Thus parataxis is also a macrostructural feature of the text.

Sanguineti's paratactical phrases also appear as individual fragments because of their citationality: To Eliot's "fragments I have shored against my ruins," Sanguineti places the fragments of culture in conflict with the ruins of the self: As he writes in *Laborintus* 2, "indico l'ustione linguistica frammenti che costellano / il notturno giardino dei succubi." This could also characterize Eliot's "Waste Land," which, as Marjorie Perloff notes in *Unoriginal Genius*, elicited a primarily negative response due to its extensive citationality, in which the use of other authors' words and foreign phrases disrupts the illusion of pure expression of lyric emotion. Similarly, Montale (who translated Eliot starting in the late 20s), considered it an inferior poem, "unita solo esteriormente, cucita con lo spago" [only superficially united, sewn together with twine] (*Secondo mestiere* 1155).¹³⁰ What seems to be a fairly familiar poetic practice by contemporary standards met with diffidence, and by the atomic era, as in Sanguineti, takes new forms. *Laborintus* is a profoundly citational text, recycling from the "waste land" of the page. Its title reprises a thirteenth-century rhetorical treatise; the poems freely appropriate material from a variety of writers from ancient to modern, from Greek to German to French; but also visual art, from the paintings of Van Gogh to the films of Luis Buñuel, not to mention the structural basis borrowed from Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy*. As Fausto Curi writes, "è saturo del già detto. Era appunto il già detto e non il dicibile, il suo orizzonte espressivo. O meglio: il dicibile, nel suo orrizonte, non poteva che essere, al primo costituirsi del linguaggio, il già detto" (*Struttura* 186).¹³¹ This echoes

¹³⁰ united only superficially, sewn together with twine.

¹³¹ It is saturated with the already said. Precisely the already said, not the sayable, is its expressive horizon. Or rather, the sayable, in its horizon, couldn't be anything but, at the first construction of language, the already said.

Sanguineti's own declaration: "La mia tesi di partenza è questa: che tutto è citazione. [...]
La mia è una pretesa quasi d'ordine antropologico: quando dico che tutto è citazione
voglio dire che noi viviamo citando" (*Scribilli* 26).¹³² Here Sanguineti reflects a
performative theory of language as the stylized repetition of (speech) acts, and also, in a
departure from poetic conventions, he claims all of language as valid poetic material.
Indeed, it is only through inclusion in the poetic sphere that the exhausted signifier can be
made unfamiliar and thus be seen anew.

Not only is it citation that disrupts poetic voice and unity but the use of foreign
words and phrases. Modernist multilingualism highlights the constructed nature of the
text by rendering language visible as material, and disrupts the "purity" of a national
literature. The inclusion of foreign material has a profoundly alienating effect, in Pound
as in Sanguineti, where citations are seamlessly embedded, often in disguised form,
within the text. Regarding this practice, Adorno writes in the 30s that:

The more alienated human beings have become from their things in society, the
more strange are the words that will have to represent them if they are to reach
them and to indicate allegorically that the things have been brought home. The
more deeply society is cleft by the contradiction between its quasi-natural and its
rational character the more isolated will foreign words necessarily remain in the
area of language, incomprehensible to one group of human beings and threatening
to the other; and yet they have their legitimacy as the expression of alienation
itself. ("Foreign Words" 289)

¹³² My point of departure is this: everything is citation. [...] Mine is a pretext of an almost
anthopological order: when I say that everything is citation I mean that we live by citing.

That is, the use of foreign words at once alienates us from language and functions as the register of that alienation. Examples abound in Sanguineti, but the foreign material seems to intensify as the poem proceeds, oscillating between Italian, German, Greek, French, English, and Latin. For example:

ELIAEL quod nuper ELLIE diximus della tua delicatezza
in integre affinché dimenticanze acque le palpebre e coltivate
non la mentale arsura si aprono o in donazioni un monde arithmétique
corrompa in filologica et je puis di significazioni incredibile
m'ocuper per esempio insistenza des nombres narrativa
e vanno finalmente equivalenza le nazioni emotiva a riposare le matin
sotto le monarchie de l'espérance!

Ellie, the figure who functions as the poetic speaker's psychic projection of eros, transforms and disappears in this section, which also evokes a surrealist juxtaposition of images. The paratactical structure here verges on asyntaxis: the “monde arithmétique / corrompa in filologia,” concluding in the ironic “e vanno finalmente equivalenza le nazioni emotiva a riposare le matin sotto le monarchie de l'espérance,” a transformed citation from Vico's *Scienza nuova*: “vanno finalmente le Nazioni a risposare sotto le monarchie.” Here, we move swiftly from the psychic landscape to the linguistic realm of polysemy to a totalizing vision of history.

Moreover, not only is he a Poundian writer, but a Poundian translator. His poetics of translation, as it develops and evolves over the years following the neo-avantgarde experience, is quintessentially modernist. Thus in this first work of Sanguineti's, we glimpse the seeds of his later practice of *travestimento*—which he uses to mean not only

translation but also transformation, travesty, disguise—in a continuation of a modernist poetics of the generative process of translation.¹³³ His use of citation recycles the “già detto” in an apocalyptic poetic gesture that breaks with Italian tradition yet recuperates a cosmopolitan modernist poetics of foreignization.

¹³³ See also Steven G. Yao, *Translation and the Languages of Modernism*.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: THE NEW AMERICANISM

It doesn't exist, America. It's a name you give to an abstract idea...
Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*

This study was inspired by a sincere intellectual and personal curiosity about the prestige or cultural capital of English abroad. Why has English become hegemonic, and what does it mean to wield its power? The “language question” has taken on a new turn in the contemporary age, one whose roots lie in the period of the economic miracle. In contemporary Italy, the state of Anglophilia and Americanism is constantly evolving. One of its most salient aspects—and this is not unique to Italy by any means—is the use of the gratuitous Anglicism. This is not only in the business or marketing world (or perhaps is a reflection of how dominant the world of commerce is in everyday life). Just today the cover of the *Corriere della sera*'s supplement *ViviMilano* reads “Le vie del running.” Often one has the uncanny experience of encountering terms that appear to be English, but are just a bit off. The near-creole called Itanglish or Italgiese is virtually its own tongue.

Linguists, of course, have long observed and taxonomied this phenomenon. As Virginia Pulcini explains, English spread in Italy after the Allied Liberation in World War II. The reaction against Fascist linguistic purism favored receptivity to linguistic change. Further, foreign language influence was no longer seen as a threat to standard Italian, which had steadily overtaken dialect due to the increase in literacy and the linguistic unification that happened primarily through the mass media (153). Contemporary translator Mariarosa Bricchi comments, “già negli anni Sessanta Tullio De Mauro aveva

scritto che ‘non è possibile un’indagine sull’italiano standard senza tenere conto delle traduzioni’. E credo che sia sempre più vero” (65).¹³⁴

That English could take over has become something of a literary topos. As Paolo Nori’s alter-ego translator-narrator remarks in *Le cose non sono le cose*:

Tra trent’anni, se andiamo avanti così, gli scrittori italiani scriveranno anche in inglese, ci sarà un periodo di bilinguismo in cui l’italiano terrà ancora botta. Poi, tra sessant’anni, gli scrittori italiani saranno considerati scrittori dialettali, pubblicheranno con minuscole case editrici, li leggeranno gli amici, i parenti, ne parleranno solo i giornali e le televisioni locali.¹³⁵

Of course, the irony of Eliot’s oft-lifted line about “purify[ing] the dialect of the tribe” is that it is an embedded translation of Mallarmé’s “donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu,” which in turn is his poem on the “Le tombeau d’Edgar Poe.” Multilingualism is a historical fact; no language is pure.

Studying translation is essential in understanding these linguistic shifts. Yet translations are unconventional and controversial objects of study, especially in foreign literature departments in the US. The present dissertation is a project that would perhaps fit best in an Italian department of Comparative Literature, where, for example, the translations I examine could ostensibly be known and taught. But in the United States,

¹³⁴ Already in the 60s, Tullio De Mauro had written that ‘an investigation of standard Italian that doesn’t take into account translations is not possible.’ I believe this is more true now than ever.

¹³⁵ In thirty years, if things keep going the way they’re going, Italian writers will also write in English, there will be a period of bilingualism in which Italian will still keep on. Then, in sixty years, Italian writers will be considered dialect writers, they’ll publish with miniscule publishing houses, they’ll be read by their friends and relatives and only talked about by newspapers and local television.

studying translations as part of national literatures (or literary polysystems, to be more precise) is a worthwhile challenge, which itself poses a challenge to the often-unquestioned homogeneity of cultures.

The heterogeneity of Italian culture, as evidenced in translation, is embodied first by the title of this dissertation: “La vita agra-dolce: Italian Counter-Cultures and Translation during the Economic Miracle.” “La vita agra,” in fact, has entered the language as a kind of catchphrase used to refer to the sworworking conditions and various struggles of translators in Italy. My hyphenated term, “La vita agra-dolce,” forces a sort of double take due to its proximity to “agrodolce,” the word for “bittersweet,” or in culinary terms “sweet and sour.” Of course, here I am invoking Bianciardi’s precursor and complement, Federico Fellini’s iconic 1960 film, *La dolce vita*, the film with which I began this dissertation. The film captures the same cultural and social situation that is the object of Bianciardi’s critique, the Italian society of the economic boom, or as it is also called, economic miracle that brought unprecented prosperity to the country. Both in a figurative and a real-world sense, la vita agra is a byproduct of la dolce vita, indeed, is the very essence of capitalism. Here, I use *La vita dolce* as a referential starting point s a theoretical-intertextual reference primarily to evoke the following two concepts: one, Americanism, represented primarily by the eruption onto the Italian scene of the American actress Sylvia, so unforgettably played by Anita Ekberg. “La dolce vita,” a symptom of the aimless decadence associated with too much *benessere*, finds its counterpart in “La vita agra,” which reveals the plight of the “working stiff” in the increasingly industrialized and commercialized nation.

What I hope to have shown throughout this dissertation is that the economic miracle is correlated with a rise in literacy, readership, and reading practices, and therefore the world of publishing and translation, a virtual print revolution that gives rise to the “translation culture” that characterizes the Italy of today.

The idea of “counter-culture” is also central here, even if it has not seemed prominent throughout the previous chapters. The term counterculture, of course, generally refers to a group or movement that stands in defiance to mainstream cultural mores. As my dissertation focuses on the “economic miracle,” that puts us in the 60s, a time period especially associated with countercultural practices. This specific referent is part of my use of the term, which also seeks to contextualize competing aesthetic perspectives and poetic debates within a political framework of social and cultural resistance. What can appear like mere cantankerousness or seem like a petty literary antipathy or feud, are representative of larger aesthetic and cultural tendencies and trends. We have Fernanda Pivano who is counter to both mainstream Italian conservatism and fascism, but also the artifice and aestheticism of avant-garde groups like the Gruppo '63.

This “countering” of culture takes place within language. In the Italian context, the age-old “questione della lingua” or “language question,” or problem,” describes the debate over which language should form the basis for a literary Italian that spans from Dante’s *De vulgari eloquentia* to the present. My example is Calvino’s concern with the translatability of Italian, part of the renewed intellectual debate in the postwar period. While Calvino’s advocates for a precise and concrete form of the language, others, like Pasolini, have more expressionistic approaches to language, right up to the contemporary contemporary Sicilian writer Vincenzo Consolo, whose lecture “The Disappearance of

the Fireflies” presents the language problem as an effect of a society where consumerism has become absolute, where the public is underread and disengaged. His solution is to mine the underutilized resources of the Italian language, from Latinisms to archaisms, dialect to rare terms, as a form of resistance to literary homogeneity and the flattening of language under the influence of mass media.

Translation, too, is meant to be an oppositional term alongside the many “counter-cultures” evoked by the title. I present translation within the Italian context as counter to hegemonic culture, nationalism, and fascism writ large. The translations studied in this dissertation come from a somewhat less frequently studied period in Italian letters, especially in the context of comparative and world literature. Yet these translations are key in illustrating the literary trade imbalance characteristic of Anglo-Italian literary relations, as well as the lack of symmetry mentioned in Franco Moretti’s map of world literary currents or the “inequality” emphasized in the Bourdieusian analysis of Pascale Casanova. Both Casanova’s and Moretti’s work enables me to think through a specifically literary form of inequality that translation both hides and highlights. In this sense, I focus on the enormous “cultural capital” attributed to English in the Italian literary sphere, arguing that it is an effect, in part, of socio-economic factors arising in the decades following World War II, some of which are common to many countries, like the growth of the global market and the rise of global English, and some of which are specific to Italy, such as the Marshall Plan, industrialization, and internal migration. Yet I also agree with Casanova’s point that geopolitical conditions cannot simply be mapped onto literary ones, and that the “world republic of letters” has a certain level of autonomy as its own specific system with its own geographies and hierarchies. Indeed, it is telling

that Italy appears in Casanova's book only briefly, and only in reference to the "tre corone," Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio.

Therefore, the central question I sought to address here is how translation interacts with native literature. Of course, this gave rise to a number of additional questions, like What is the relationship between translation and literary production? How do the translations of American writers, especially anti-establishment writers, impact the Italian literary system? How do they contribute to the idea of America on the larger cultural level? And once America's cultural hegemony is cemented, what new forms of resistance emerge? The nature of the material lent itself to a "case study" approach, which led me to draw on a diverse set of methodological approaches and theoretical insights.

The basis for all this was polysystem theory, as developed by translation studies in the 70s, identifies three situations in which translated literature tends to flourish: when a system is young, as in a newly formed country; when a system is peripheral, weak or small with respect to other literatures; and when there are "turning points, crises, or literary vacuums" (47). While this theoretical paradigm has been critiqued and in many ways superseded, I find it to be much a part of many contemporary theories of world literature, and furthermore, it helps me to define the Italian literary situation. Italian literature is really neither a major nor minor literature in the world literary sphere, occupying the liminal space, as in Umberto Eco's memorable formulation, on the "periphery of empire." My work responds to the growing body of research on translation within Italian studies, coming from scholars such like Francesca Biliari, Daniela La Penna, and Christopher Rundle complementing traditional critic-scholars like Franco

Buffoni, just to name a few. Of course, my work is indebted to that of Lawrence Venuti, whose notions of invisibility, foreignization, instrumentality, and hermeneutics form the conceptual background for many of my insights.

Another aspect of my methodology was historical. As a counterpart and response to the research on translation during Fascism, I chose to focus on the postwar period and turn to translation during the economic boom, and sought out the most prominent cases that would illustrate the period. Choosing my texts according to their prominence led me to consider the unique features of each, though this led to some discontinuity between the chapters, as I got into the material and found rather divergent aspects from each to be most compelling. For example, Fernanda Pivano was the figure I began this project with. An dedicated and learned Americanist with an uncommon grasp of English and an infectious enthusiasm for American literature, first because she formed a bridge between the more famous anti-Fascist Americanists, particularly the writer-translators Cesare Pavese and Elio Vittorini, and the continued postwar anti-Fascism of leftist intellectuals like Pier Paolo Pasolini. But what struck me even more was her apparent fame, in utter defiance of the by now proverbial “invisibility” of the translator. Yet what I found was that her real world visibility was paradoxially guaranteed by a textual invisibility that she herself, like many translators, promoted. This combination of invisibility and visibility was actually what enabled her to fix and popularize an essentialized notion of “Americanness” for an entire generation.

The next translator I turned to was Luciano Bianciardi, whose translation significance first stood out in terms of its quantity: some 160 or so book-length translations an approximately 15 year period. Certainly, this is an instance of working on

commission, a relatively under-acknowledged positionality in translation studies, especially in the Italian context. Although Bianciardi was also a writer, his translation work was central to his writing and was his primary occupation. This led me to ask a very different set of questions, with respect to those of the previous chapter. Why translate so much, and what effect does that have on the text and its reception? This led me to consider the effect of the economic miracle on the publishing industry. Translations were produced and read (“consumed”) in increasing numbers by an increasingly linguistically homogenous public. Translation in the age of mechanical reproduction, though, signifies the pressure placed on the translator to produce at a mechanistic rate, leading to uneven results which can manifest in the form of error. What I find in Bianciardi’s translation commentary and translation work, then, is a theory of translation as labor that represents a form of Marxist critique. Finally, I came to the last chapter through the prolific experimental lyric poet Edoardo Sanguineti, who was one of the most innovative translators to come out of Italy. My historical framework here forced me to consider only his work from the postwar period through the boom, and so I broadened out to consider not only Sanguineti but also the literary group he belonged to, the Gruppo 63 or self-proclaimed “neo-avantgarde.” Here I see an engagement with foreign literature that stands in stark contrast to the others. Corresponding to the dominant writer-translator model, the neoavantgarde turns to high modernist writers like James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound, in order to develop their own trajectory of experimental and unconventional writing while eschewing any nationalist paradigm. The neoavantgarde represents a form of critical cosmopolitanism, an engagement with the foreign that

enables resistance to the local. In this sense, each case study presents writers and translators that stand counter to culture as well as to one another.

“La vita-agra dolce” deals with translation as a form of cultural resistance. For the contemporary left, the new Americanism, so to speak, resides in the promise of multiculturalism as Italy’s ever-changing demographic revolutionizes the artistic sphere.

Yet Americanism need not be regressive, and linguistic tension can herald release. As Jacques Lezra urges in a recent piece on translation, “How is what we call ‘politics’ transformed—translated—when ‘translation’ becomes a ‘political concept’ (and joins terms we might more readily be willing to call ‘political’: *a people; a tongue; representation; interest*)?” Italy offers not one, but many answers.

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