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Nation(s) and Translation in Italian Cultural and Literary History

Introduction

Reflecting on the rise of modern national communities, Naoki Sakai, in “The Modern Regime of Translation and the Emergence of the Nation,” argues that the question of language is not only central to the constitution of state sovereignty and identity but implies the creation of a “modern regime of translation” (106). This regime is founded upon “*bordering*” (108):¹ a process of separation and differentiation between the inside and the outside, the same and the other “so as to postulate the internal systematic unity of a national or ethnic language” (106) that did not exist in the multi-lingual societies of pre-modern times. Like Sakai, Lawrence Venuti also reflects on the relationship between nation and translation, pointing to the benefits that nation-building projects derive from the organization of diverse cultural spaces into the sameness and uniformity enabled by translation: “[N]ations do ‘indeed’ profit from translation. Nationalist movements have frequently enlisted translation in the development of national languages and cultures, especially national literatures” (“Local Contingencies,” 177-78). At the same time, however, Venuti also highlights the threats that such “*bordering*” implies for the nation. Since translation, he writes, “works on the linguistic and cultural differences of a foreign text, it can communicate those differences and thereby threaten the assumed integrity of the national language and culture; the essentialist homogeneity of the national identity [...]” (178). In doing so, Venuti aligns himself with the pioneering work of Itamar Even-Zohar and the School of Tel Aviv for whom, in the polysystem of the target language/nation, translation can play an active role not only in upholding unifying concepts of national language, but also in creating linguistic and cultural variations that are thus beholden to the source language (Even-Zohar). Translation, therefore, far from being a neutral and fairly innocent practice of moving structures and contents from one language to the other, can be used to validate or undermine paradigms

¹ Also, “[b]ordering’ is a poetic act of inscribing continuity at the singular point of discontinuity. What is at issue, therefore, is not border but *bordering*. This process of inscribing a border, or a separation, is also generally what we call ‘translation’” (108).

according to the translator's ideology and positioning vis-à-vis the idea of Nation.

Both the centrality of the "regime of translation" and translation's role in sustaining as well as threatening nationalist projects find in Italian literary and cultural history a paradigmatic example. While a comprehensive revisiting of this history exceeds the scope of our introduction, we briefly recall some of the most significant developments in the complex nexus between nation and translation in the Italian context, before proceeding to a presentation of the fifteen essays that comprise this issue of *Annali d'Italianistica*.

Translation in Italian Cultural and Literary History

Well before the formal creation of the Italian nation-state in 1861, various forms of proto-nationalism informed by translation practices had been circulating in the Italian peninsula. During the Middle Ages, an idea of Italy had surfaced in the works of poets, writers and intellectuals, including Dante, Petrarch and Brunetto Latini. Already in his enigmatic "profezia del veltro" early in the *Comedy* (*Inferno* 1: 100-11), Dante refers to a leader, possibly Henry VII of Luxembourg or perhaps even the ruler of Verona, Can Grande della Scala, who would save Italy and establish an earthly kingdom of love, wisdom and virtue. However, it is in *Purgatorio* VI where Dante, in dialogue with the almost coeval *De vulgari eloquentia*, engages in a protracted discussion of linguistic origins, translation and nationhood that would set the stage for the *questione della lingua* in centuries to come.

The source is the encounter between Vergil and Sordello in Purgatory, when the latter, having asked the Latin poet to explain where he is from, hears the word "Mantua" and readily responds "O Mantoano, io son Sordello / della tua terra" (6: 74-75), before sharing a protracted embrace. The exchange is emblematic: two poets, one Latin, one a Lombard troubadour, who sang in a mix of Lombard *vulgare* and Old Occitan, bond over one word describing a geographical location of origin. Ostensibly, the word "Mantua," shared in the two poets' idioms, bridges the gaps between Vergil's Latin and Sordello's Occitan/Lombard dialect. Equally, it identifies a "nation," Mantua, that closes the gap between two beings who, until the moment of reveal, had little in common. It is this ability of language (and possibly the commonality of poetic sensibility) that touches Dante, and leads him into one of the *Divine Comedy's* most famous invectives: "Ahi, serva Italia, di dolore ostello, / nave senza nocchiere in gran tempesta, / non donna di provincia, ma bordello!" (6: 76-78). The passage is often cited as emblematic of Dante's rage against the factionalism of local communes and regional aristocrats, who were guilty of dividing the peninsula into fiefdoms. Yet, in launching the invective, Dante counters the present state of the peninsula as a divided geographic entity with the role that language plays in bringing together the two poets across temporal and, if Vergil's Latin and Sordello's Mantuan must meet, cultural-linguistic divides. And, if language brings the two souls together in juxtaposition to the divisions that are wrecking the peninsula, Dante must assign to language

and its translation the role of unifier across temporal boundaries.

It comes as no surprise, then, that Sordello would be cited by Dante in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, the treatise he wrote around 1305 on the origins of the “vulgare” as a unified peninsular language. Here, Sordello is among the poets who, according to Dante, have successfully managed to inflect a local dialect with surrounding ones to make it more comprehensible and accessible to those who are in its geographical proximity, a significant aspect of linguistic unification that Dante, in the same *De vulgari*, sees as important to mend the Ur-moment of linguistic diffraction represented by the Biblical story of Babel.² Besides voicing fleeting expressions of nationalism at a time when there were neither nations nor nationalisms in the modern sense of the word, Dante thus points to the necessity of intra-peninsular translation as the basis for a proto-cultural nation. Evoking what Tullio De Mauro in *Storia linguistica dell’Italia unita* describes as the “selva” of dialects that characterized the linguistic reality of pre-unification Italy (1963: 25),³ in *De vulgari eloquentia* Dante proposes to bridge the linguistic differences of the regional Romance vernaculars that were born from the spoken Latin by enlisting, into a single idiom, elements from all the fourteen major dialect areas so as to create a standard, illustrious and curial koiné: the so-called *illustre vulgare*.

The reflection of an intra-peninsular translation initiated by Dante in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* was revisited in the 16th century, when Trissino translated Dante’s text in 1529. This was a crucial time in Italian political history. Not only did the invention of the press—and the emergence of Venice as a major center in

² Lest we forget, Dante’s *Divine Comedy* also requires an act of linguistic translation intended to bridge the distance between peoples and languages caused by Babel. In communicating with the souls of the Paradise, whose language has to be the language of God prior to the fall of Babel, and re-presenting it for his readers in the *vulgare* (which we might assume is the *illustre vulgare* he wishes to promote in the *De vulgari eloquentia*), Dante himself becomes the master translator of the divine language. In doing so, he also creates the foundation for the “Italian” language, which the citizens of the peninsula might want to adopt once unity is achieved.

³ As De Mauro explains, because of Italy’s physical geography, the peninsula had been crisscrossed by people coming from Eurasia, Northern Europe, and the Southern Mediterranean regions ever since pre-Roman times. By the third century BC, various ethnic groups of both Indo- and non-Indo-European origin were well established on Italian soil. While the Indo-European comprised the Gauls and Veneti from the North, the Umbrians, Latins, and Oscans from the Center, the Greeks, Messapics, and Siculans from the South, non-Indo-Europeans ranged from the Rhaetians, Piceni, Sards, and Punics, to the Etruscans, Ligurians, and Sards. The many languages and cultures of these people were allowed to survive during Roman times since, despite the Latinization of the peninsula, the Republic abided by a federal policy of linguistic tolerance. In the course of the Middle Ages, plurilingualism further increased as the Southern regions came under Arab and Norman control, while the Northern and Adriatic zones were subjected to Longobard, Frank, and Byzantine rulers. After medieval times, a mosaic of states arose thereby leading to a further consolidation of dialects.

the editorial marketplace—render the need for a shared language of communication more pressing, but political fragmentation had turned the peninsula into the pawn of an international power struggle among European state monarchies. Eventually, this power struggle would culminate in the defeat and humiliation inflicted upon Italy by Habsburg Prince Charles V with the Treaty of Cateau Cambrésis in 1559. The ever-elusive sovereignty of the peninsula's states gave new vigor and poignancy to expressions of cultural nationalism that had emerged in previous centuries. While some intellectuals, such as Machiavelli, called for a Prince to come and save Italy (*Il Principe* 1513) from foreign domination, other Renaissance writers focused on what would become known as the *questione della lingua*. As in Dante's *De vulgari*, the *questione* was, once again, the issue of translation: the transposition of native dialects into a shared linguistic code. Two main proposals emerged: *lingua cortigiana*, or the idiom spoken in courts, and the Tuscan vernacular of the *Trecento*—the literary language of Dante's *Commedia*, Petrarch's *Canzoniere* and Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Codified by Bembo in *Prose della vulgar lingua* in 1525, the literary Tuscan became widely accepted as the model for the main literary language of the peninsula of the educated elite, or a “pan-italiano” (De Mauro 27). However, even among the members of the elite, the preferred code remained the dialects and/or the minority regional languages. Regardless, several partial translations into the literary Tuscan took place to advance a cultural proto-nation. Suffice to recall Baldassare Castiglione who, alongside Francesco Valerio, reworked *Il libro del Cortigiano* into Tuscan in 1528, and Ariosto, who did the same with *Orlando Furioso* in 1532. Yet, with the publication of the peninsula's first major vocabulary, the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* in 1612, Tuscan took a step further in the consolidation of its status as the language of a pre-modern nation that lacked a political reality of unity, self-autonomy and sovereignty, but existed in the performativity of intra-peninsular translation from Italo-Romance and non-Italo-Romance languages and dialects.

Between the late 18th and the early 19th centuries, the ideas of national genus, national character and national spirit that one finds in Lord Shaftesbury, Montesquieu, Henry St John Bolingbroke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Johann Gottfried Herder, were also animating the translation agendas of Italy's intellectual circles.⁴ While the issue of intra-peninsular translation would be far from being solved,⁵ practices of translation from Classical and European

⁴ For an excellent account, see Gambarota, *Irresistible Signs*.

⁵ In the famous article “Nuove questioni linguistiche” of 1964, Pasolini argued that the standardization of Italian occurred after the Second World War, when the neo-capitalists of the northern industrial societies established their technocratic idiom: “Voglio dire che mentre la grande e piccola borghesia di tipo paleo-industriale e commerciale non è mai riuscita a identificare se stessa con la intera società italiana, e ha fatto semplicemente

languages and debates over the contribution of translation to the national culture were vigorously pursued. Translations from the Classics included the *Aeneid*, by Alfieri, posthumously published in 1805, and Giacomo Leopardi's second canto of *Aeneid*, in 1817. Yet, it was not Vergil but Homer who received the greatest attention. Melchiorre Cesarotti authored both a prose and verse version of the *Iliad* in 1786 and Monti translated it in 1810. Leopardi tackled Homer in a translation of the first book of *Odyssey*. Ippolito Pindemonte produced a version of the *Odyssey* in 1822, while Foscolo worked on translations from both the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* from 1803 to 1826.

This widespread interest in Homer is particularly relevant to understand the intricate relationship between nation and translation. To explain, these translations were completed at a time when the philological debate over the epics and the "questione Omerica" that had taken place uninterruptedly from the 3rd century BC all the way to the 18th century, was acquiring unmistakable nationalistic tones among intellectuals such as Melchiorre Cesarotti, Ciro Saverio Minervini, Mario Pagano and Vincenzo Cuoco, among others.⁶ Homer's epics were not simply translated into Italian but, as Paola Casini in *L'antica sapienza italica* and, more recently, Annalisa Andreoni in *Omero italico. Favole antiche e identità nazionale tra Vico e Cuoco* have argued, they had become a cornerstone in the construction of an identity-building process that sought to relocate the Greek texts within an Italian cultural tradition. For example, at the end of the 18th century, Minervini advanced claims over the Italianness of Homer's epics—the so-called "Omero Italico." Not only did Minervini, like d'Aubignac and Vico before him, negate the historical existence of Homer, but he claimed that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* did not originate in Greece but in Italy and were Greek translations of the oral fables of an older native Italian tradition born on the peninsula's soil and only later disseminated and circulated in Greece. While Minervini's thesis was the target of some critiques, what lay beneath these interpretations was a growing cultural nationalism that sought to establish the "Italic" origin of the epics and, with it, the cultural primacy of the Italian peninsula, especially vis-à-vis France. Other expressions of cultural nationalism founded in translations from the Classics are also illustrated by the rhetoric that informs Vincenzo Cuoco's *Il Platone in Italia* (1806). Cuoco's epistolary novel, which the author claimed to have translated from the Greek, narrates the travels of Plato with the Athenian Cleobolo in Southern Italy, or Magna Grecia. From the faulty premises of the Italian birth of Pythagoras and the shared origins of *all* the inhabitants of Italy and Greece, *Il*

dell'italiano letterario la propria lingua di classe imponendola dall'alto, la nascente tecnocrazia del nord si identifica egemonicamente con l'intera nazione, ed elabora quindi un nuovo tipo di cultura e di lingua effettivamente nazionale [...] Perciò, in qualche modo [...] mi sento autorizzato ad annunciare che è nato l'italiano come lingua nazionale" (97).

⁶ By "questione omerica" we refer to the debate over Homer's sources, his identity as a bard, and the textual incongruities between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

Platone in Italia can then elevate Southern Italian civilization to a higher degree of superiority and sophistication than that of the Greeks.⁷

But besides from translations into Italian of Latin and especially Greek epics, the 18th and early 19th centuries also witnessed the publication of numerous works of European literatures. Translations from French, German, and English texts included Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), a work which greatly influenced Goldoni's *Pamela nubile* (1750) and *Pamela maritata* (1760); Chenier's tragedies of post-Revolutionary and Jacobin France, translated by Franco Salfi in 1794-95; and Gaetano Grassi's 1782 and Michelangelo Salom's 1796 translations of Goethe's *Werther*. Often, these translations were done by authors who were also translators of Classics, such as Cesarotti and Foscolo. For example, Cesarotti authored several translations of Voltaire's tragedies before working on his translation of "Poems of Ossian" written by McPherson in 1772. Foscolo not only translated Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* between 1807 and 1813 but was deeply influenced by Sterne and Italian translations of Goethe's *Werther* when he composed the epistolary novel that is widely considered the prototype of the national novel of the Risorgimento: *Le ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* (1804).

To some extent, the flourishing of translations from European languages that took place from the 18th century onwards was spurred by the many proposals advanced by the thinkers of the cosmopolitan Enlightenment for a national language freer from the strictures imposed by the *Accademia della Crusca's* promotion of the literary Tuscan of the *trecento*. Stated otherwise, translations from other European literatures, especially French and English, carried the promise of a modernizing force to counter the perception of antiquarianism of the Italian national culture. Some of the proposals of the intellectuals of the Enlightenment had coalesced around the magazine *Il caffè* (1764-66). Founded by Pietro and Alessandro Verri on the example of Addison's and Steele's *Spectator*, *Il caffè* championed translations and foreign borrowings—in the words of Alessandro Verri: "parole francesi, tedesche, inglesi, turche, greche, arabe, sclavone."⁸ Yet, in another emblematic example of the contradictory relation of translation and national identity, the program of *Il caffè* remained anchored to the national cause as translations from European languages were seen as a resource in the formation of a national Italian language capable of expressing the ideas and the new economic, scientific, and social realities of a modern nation in the making.

Following the French Revolution, the upheaval of Napoleon's Italian campaigns on the orders of the Ancien Régime, and the Restoration that ensued after the Congress of Vienna (1815), the peninsula's long tradition of cultural nationalism became increasingly wedded to demands for political sovereignty,

⁷ Pythagoras was born in the Aegean island of Samos but moved to Croton around the age of forty. He died in Metaponto.

⁸ Verri, "Rinunzia avanti notaio degli autori del presente foglio periodico al Vocabolario della Crusca" (145).

autonomy and self-determination. A growing cohort of writers rekindled the cultural nationalism tied to the Tuscan literary language and the Classical heritage while others pursued innovation by looking North rather than to canonical Italian texts and the elitist and outdated linguistic strictures codified by the *Accademia della Crusca*. Perhaps no other debate illustrates the tensions of 19th-century translation nationalism than the so-called “polemica classico-romantica” that took place after the publication of Madame de Staël’s “Sulla maniera e utilità delle traduzioni” in *Biblioteca Italiana* on January 1816.

Madame de Staël was a well-known figure in Italy’s intellectual circles. Her *Corinne ou l’Italie*, published in 1807, had been translated into Italian and reprinted eleven times. Her *De L’Allemagne*, written between 1810 and 1813 and translated in Italian in 1814, had disseminated many of the Romantic ideas of Friedrich and August Schlegel, including the freedom of the creative imagination, the importance of poetic interiority but also of the past as a unique repository of a nation’s spirit. However, spurred by her enthusiasm for Northern Romanticism, in “Sulla maniera e utilità delle traduzioni” Madame de Staël encouraged Italians to abandon their revisiting of Classical languages and Graeco-Latin literatures and start translating the works of Northern European writers instead. In her words,

Dovrebbero a mio avviso gl’italiani tradurre diligentemente assai delle recenti poesie inglesi e tedesche: onde mostrare qualche novità a’ loro cittadini, i quali per lo più stanno contenti all’antica mitologia, né pensano che quelle favole sono da pezzo anticate, anzi il resto dell’Europa le ha già abbandonate e dimenticate. Perciò gl’intelletti della bella Italia, se amano di non giacere oziosi, rivolgano spesso l’attenzione al di là dall’Alpi [...].

(7-8)

Madame de Staël continued by noting that Shakespeare was faithfully translated by August Wilhelm Schlegel and staged in German theatres seamlessly, “come se Shakespeare e Schiller fossero divenuti concittadini” (8). While few intellectuals, such as Pietro Borsieri, sided with Madame de Staël and made a case that translation would enrich Italian national literature, citing, among others, the example of Dante’s familiarity with the poetry of the troubadours,⁹ others were decidedly less favorable. Among the latter were Carlo Botta, Pietro Giordani, Giovanni Berchet, and even the young Giacomo Leopardi. Pietro Giordani commented that the advice of Madame de Staël was an invitation to turn Italian national literary works into monstrous hybrids of Northern and Southern texts—“componimenti simili a centauri” (24)—the effects of which would leave the Italian nation behind and, ultimately, erase national belongings: “cessare affatto d’essere italiani, dimenticare la nostra lingua, la nostra istoria, mutar il nostro clima e la nostra fantasia” (24). Among those who entered this heated debate was Giacomo Leopardi. In “Lettera ai sigg. compilatori della biblioteca italiana in

⁹ See Pietro Borsieri, “Le Avventure letterarie di un giorno o consigli di un galantuomo a vari scrittori.”

risposta a quella di Mad. la baronessa di Staël Holstein ai medesimi” of July 18, 1816, he responded to Madame de Staël that her advice was a vacuous one: “Vanissimo consiglio!” (881). Moreover, in a sentence that encapsulates well the national translation agenda of many Italian intellectuals, Leopardi exhorted readers: “Leggete i Greci, i Latini, gl’Italiani, e lasciate da banda gli scrittori del Nord” (881). A more complex and arguably nuanced view, however, was expressed by Giovanni Berchet in his *Lettera semiseria di Grisostomo al suo figliolo*, a satiric pamphlet that is one of the most significant examples of the aesthetic theory of Italian Romanticism. In *Lettera semiseria*, Berchet partially sides with Madame de Staël on the grounds that Italian literature should reject a pedantic imitation of the Classics, or classicism, and become a modern literature for the contemporary readership. Berchet then includes two translations of his own making from the German writer Gottfried August Bürger, *The Ferocious Hunter* and *Eleanor*, and praises these German texts for their ability to reach their contemporary bourgeois readers, before contrasting them with the mythological apparatus of classicist texts that no longer relates to the Italian audiences of his time. Yet, to reprise Venuti’s comment, Berchet’s letter is not only an illustration of translation as resource—in this case, the founding of a Romantic aesthetic for a contemporary Italian bourgeois reader modeled upon the German example—but also of translation as a threat to an Italian national identity that is grounded in the verisimilar, in realism and in historical subjects, rather than in the fantastic and marvelous creations exemplified by Bürger’s *The Ferocious Hunter* and *Eleanor*.

Following unification, translation continued to play a central role in imagining, subverting, and re-imagining the Italian nation and its modes of belongings. The political unity of the peninsula in 1861 foregrounded the urgency of nation-building, well captured by Massimo D’Azeglio’s apocryphal phrase, “l’Italia è fatta, gli italiani sono ancora da farsi.” The issue of a shared language once again took center-stage as the linguistic diversity of 19th-century Italy represented an obvious roadblock to the unification of the Italian people. Not surprisingly, the hegemonic classes of the Liberal State were quick to perceive plurilingualism as an impediment to the shaping of a national consciousness that would render Italians loyal subjects to a legitimate state. Hence, intellectuals and politicians gave new impetus to the *questione della lingua*. Many felt that the 14th-century Tuscan used by Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio had provided a model for the educated elite and therefore was a viable “panitaliano” (De Mauro 27) worthy of being promoted to the status of a national tongue. However, even among the members of the elite, the preferred speech for daily communication was not the literary language but dialect or the minority language of their regions. More fundamental still, the literary language of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio was virtually unknown to the masses whose illiteracy rate reached levels close to 100% in some regions of the peninsula, such as the former Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the large island of Sardinia. The debate on which one of these many speeches should become Italy’s official tongue animated the intellectual scene of

the time, solidifying around the positions upheld by the novelist and poet Alessandro Manzoni and the scholar Isaia Ascoli: on the one hand, the translation of dialects into the contemporary language of the educated classes of Tuscany, or the famous “sciacquatura in Arno” of Manzoni’s *I promessi sposi*; on the other hand, the translation of these same dialects into the literary language modeled upon 14th-century Tuscan writers.

In the years when the ideals that had animated the Risorgimento were steadily being replaced by the realities of the post-Risorgimento, translation from other European languages also emerged as a powerful tool to question the nation-state of the Risorgimento: a political and territorial unity that had established a monarchic government in the 19th-century tradition of bourgeois liberalism through the extensive production of geographical, social and political margins and peripheries.¹⁰ In this complex socio-cultural milieu of *fin-de-siècle* Italy, translation continued to play a significant, if changed role. Naples and Milan became the new capital cities of translation, issuing translations of French and English social humanitarian novels by Eugène Sue, Charles Dickens, Victor Hugo, Honoré de Balzac, the Goncourt brothers, Guy de Maupassant, and Émile Zola. Translations of Fantastic and Gothic stories—the same stories that had been the target of the polemic that followed Madame de Staël’s article—became quite popular in Italian magazines and literary journals. These translations enabled, at least in part, the forging of the aesthetic program of the *Scapigliatura*, the anti-establishment movement that played a crucial role in advancing the critique of the post-unification national culture between the 1860s and 1870s. In the abnormality and uneasiness elicited by unconventional plots and the uncanny “otherness” of pathological, abnormal characters cultivated by Fantastic and Gothic stories, authors such as Iginio Ugo Tarchetti, Arrigo Boito, Carlo Dossi, Emilio Praga, and Paolo Valera, among others, found a means to question the reality of the newly unified nation-state and the hegemony of an industrial bourgeoisie. They did so by becoming cultural mediators of writers ranging from E. T. A. Hoffmann, Mary Shelley, and Heinrich Heine to Charles Baudelaire, Henry Murger, Théophile Gautier and Edgar Allan Poe, whose works they translated and disseminated. In the process, however, the work of the *scapigliati* also opened another path in the cultural history of Italy: translation as an act of symbolic resistance against the inherited nation—a project that would become ever more compelling with the fall of the Liberal State following the appointment of Benito Mussolini as a Prime Minister in 1922 and the translation of such American authors as Erskine Caldwell, William Faulkner, Sinclair Lewis, Herman Melville, William Saroyan, and John Steinbeck mostly by Elio Vittorini and Cesare Pavese.

Elsewhere we have shown that the fascist *ventennio*, rather than coalesce linguistic practices toward a “unified” national language as espoused by

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of Italy’s production of margins and peripheries following unification, see Forgacs, *Italy’s Margins*.

Mussolini and his first Minister of Education, Giovanni Gentile, via the restructuring of the educational system, engendered the fluid “bordering” described by Sakai and Venuti.¹¹ Precisely because the country was experiencing a transitory phase, in which its polysystem was weakened by the post-World War I financial crisis, on top of equally potent political and cultural crises, the autarchy of the regime was never fully implemented, thus creating a cultural and aesthetic porosity within which translation played a central role. Indeed, under Fascism, translation became the object of numerous analyses and observations by Italian intellectuals in journals and public pronouncements, as foreign texts literally and literarily invaded the Italian market, transforming the cultural scene from one of proposed autarchy into a fertile ground for cross-pollination and subversion (Ferme 76). Not surprisingly, then, at a time when the idea of nationhood was most pronounced in the public and political spheres, the practice of translation surged most visibly to undermine the concept of linguistic unity that subtended such a concept.

In the post-World War II era, the forging of the first republican nation would, once again, draw upon a robust translation agenda, to redefine national culture and pursue a difficult modernity and modernization. More recently, migrations and globalization have clearly evinced the tight bond that exists between nation and translation in a country where that bond has always been challenged by regional and political fractioning. Once again, translation is emerging as an essential gesture in imagining a nation that is irreducibly multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, diasporic, transnational and postcolonial.

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Without claiming to provide an exhaustive discussion of translation, as a cultural practice, for the politics of Italian nationhood, the fifteen essays that are collected here are organized according to a broad diachronic order and provide contextualized investigations of the intersection of nation-building and translation in different periods of Italian cultural history.

I. Translation in the Early Modern Period

Marta Celati’s “Translation of Classical Sources and a New Theory of the State in the Italian Renaissance: A Neapolitan Mirror for Princes,” argues for the importance of interlingual and intercultural translation of several classical sources (both Latin and Greek) in theorizing an ideal princely political system for the practical needs of the Kingdom of Naples. Focusing on Giuniano Maio’s *De maiestate* (1492), she identifies numerous examples of Maio’s cultural translation of Cicero’s works (from the *De oratore* to several orations), Aristotle’s *Ethics*,

¹¹ See Ferme, *Tradurre è tradire: La traduzione come sovversione culturale sotto il Fascismo* (2002), especially the first two chapters.

and Seneca's epistles and treatises, especially the *De clementia*, but also the *De ira* and *De beneficiis*. However, in her meticulous reading, Celati comes to the conclusion that, in the process of cultural translation, *De maiestate* not only recovers elements drawn from the classical tradition but adapts them to meet the specific needs of the Kingdom of Naples, a centralized state ridden with internal conflict and strife.

II. Reading Translations in 18th-Century Italy: From Venice to Naples

Valeria Petrocchi, in "Un obliato esempio dal panorama traduttivo dell'Italia settecentesca: il caso dell'abate Pedrini e la sua versione italiana del *Joseph Andrews* di Henry Fielding," provides an overview of 18th-century works of translations in the editorial marketplace of a peninsula that was not yet politically united but was becoming more cohesive around a national literary culture. She then turns her attention to the Italian version of Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742) by Giannantonio (a.k.a. Giovanni Antonio Pedrini) published in the Republic of Venice in 1752. A member of the *Accademia dell'Arcadia*, Pedrini clearly understood the gap between spoken language, dialects and written language. His translation of Richardson's novel, which relied on an intermediary French version, contributed significantly to the creation of a national Italian culture while fulfilling the needs of the new, emerging bourgeois readership catered to by the author.

The second essay of this section, Fiammetta Di Lorenzo's "Sensible Translations: Vincenzo Cuoco and the Need for an Italian Novel," provides a sophisticated analysis of cultural translation as discussed and practiced by Vincenzo Cuoco in his dual role of historian-turned-novelist. Di Lorenzo initially argues that Cuoco's *Saggio storico sulla rivoluzione di Napoli* can be interpreted as a failure of cultural translation: the inability of the Jacobins to translate the Neapolitan revolution of 1799 into a political and social vision for a republic that could be endorsed by the Southern plebs (who ultimately sided against the Jacobins and with the counter-revolutionaries). In a second moment, Di Lorenzo shows how, in Cuoco's work, the creation of a broadly shared national program rested in the expressive possibilities of the novel as a genre capable of mediating between public and private spheres, and of circulating among the city and the country, thus establishing a national way of feeling. Finally, Di Lorenzo turns to *Platone in Italia* (1804), a work that Cuoco claimed to have translated from Greek and which seeks to provide an alternative foundational narrative to Italians that does not rely on the cult of ancient Rome but rather on a pre-Roman Italic civilization that had flourished in Southern Italy independently of Greek culture.

III. Translation in the Long 19th Century

As expected, given the growing centrality of translation in the Italian national culture of the 19th century, this section comprises several essays. Raffaella Bertazzoli's "Leopardi e l'intreccio delle traduzioni tra Sette e Ottocento,"

establishes a theoretical framework to assess the dynamic relationship between translated literature and its context of reception by merging Lotman's concept of a "semiosphere" with Even-Zohar's polysystem theory. The author then focuses her attention on the impact that the translation of 18th- and 19th-century English religious and sepulchral texts had on Italian culture and especially on Giacomo Leopardi's *Zibaldone*, *Canti*, *Dialoghi* and selected *Operette*. Bertazzoli locates themes and motifs (ranging from the *contemptus mundi* to the tomb as the locus of memory and *senhal* for a material conception of life) that derive from translations of English texts. She also discusses the importance of a translated version of Goethe's *Werther* (1774) in both the *Zibaldone* and the *Rimembranze*.

Piero Garofalo's "Alla ricerca di un'identità nazionale: le prime traduzioni di Berchet," examines a lesser studied corpus of Giovanni Berchet, the translations of *Il bardo di T. Gray* and *Il curato di Wakefield* by Oliver Goldsmith. The importance of Berchet's version of *Il bardo* rests in its paratextual apparatus, which resituates the Gaelic bard of Gray in a national context to advance a patriotic agenda. *Il curato di Wakefield* includes another important paratext, the "Commiato del traduttore," which makes a case for the bourgeois realist novel as a genre suited to the contemporary middle-brow Italian reader. In this sense, "Commiato" anticipates many of the tenets of Berchet's romanticism as articulated in *Lettera semiseria di Grisostomo al suo figliuolo* where Berchet again emphasized that the novel was the literary genre most suited to interest and engage a middle of the road readership.

The following three essays have the 19th century as their area of emphasis. In "The Translation of Darwin and the Struggle for Italy," Andrew Robbins traces the dissemination of Darwin's ideas via translation in fields such as anthropology, criminology, political theory, psychology and literature. Here he argues that the popularization of Darwin's ideas by English sociologist Herbert Spencer and the Italian translations of Darwin's works by Giovanni Canestrini and Leonardo Salimbeni in 1864 recast the theory of evolution as the economic and cultural struggle of individuals in modern society via the survival of the fittest. As such, Darwin's Italian translations were instrumental in influencing nationalist ideology, as illustrated through the writings of sociologist Scipio Sighele.

Elena Borelli's "Traduzione o Tradizione? Il dibattito sulla letteratura italiana ne *Il Marzocco* (1897-98)" provides an informative account of the Italian editorial marketplace, where translations of French, German and English novels and short stories were avidly consumed by the emerging mass readership in the post-unification era. The popularity of these translations produced an equally prolific market for the imitation of these translated works by Italian authors. For example, Carolina Invernizio found inspiration in the works of Ponson du Terrail, Walter Scott and Alexandre Dumas for her equally successful publishing career. In turn, these imitations engendered debates over the originality of Italian national literature in the literary journals of the time, such as *Il marzocco* of November 28, 1897. In Borelli's reading of this issue, *Il marzocco* emerges as the site of

considerable tensions between the forces of an editorial market driven by readers' consumption of foreign models and the forging of a national literary culture.

The last essay of this section, Daniela Mangione and Daniele Niedda's "Una traduzione e una nazione da fare: la prima ricezione di *Tristram Shandy* in Italia," provides a discussion of the partial translations of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* by Laurence Sterne during the 19th century. Issued between 1759 and 1767, Sterne's novel initially was partially (and loosely) translated by Foscolo in 1813 as *Viaggio sentimentale di Yorick lungo la Francia e l'Italia* under the pseudonym of Didimo Chierico. However, Francesco Gritti, Carlo Bini, and Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi also authored partial translations of Sterne at the time. Guerrazzi, in particular, was especially attracted by the caustic irony and critique of institutions of Sterne's work during the crucial years of Unification. Surprisingly, however, despite this significant interest in Sterne's novel, a complete translation of *Tristram Shandy* only appeared in the 20th century, an indication, as Mangione and Niedda argue, that the work's corrosive humor might have been too politically and culturally destabilizing for a nation in the making.

IV. Between Debates and Practices: Translation in the 20th Century

Daniel Raffini discusses the opening towards European culture in the post-World War I era in "La via europea della cultura italiana nelle riviste degli Anni Venti e Trenta," which he interprets as an attempt at providing new cultural foundation to a traumatized civilization. Raffini offers insightful discussions of *La ronda* and *Il convegno*, whose collaborators included several Italian literati (e.g., Carlo Linati, Emilio Cecchi, Giacomo Prezzolini, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Eugenio Montale) who would become known for their expertise in world literature and its trends. The author also examines in detail the contributions to translation of two among the most important literary journals of the time, *La cultura* and '900. Directed by Cesare de Lollis and Ferdinando Neri, *La cultura* embodied a trend towards a universalistic idea of culture, while '900 remained more firmly anchored to a national, and nationalistic, culture. For Raffini, the opening towards European and American culture was essential to the birth of a new national identity; even though such identity would be realized only after World War II, because of the limits that Fascism imposed to the ambitions of a cosmopolitan culture.

Eloisa Morra, in "Traduzione e tradizione nella ricezione di Proust in Italia: Croce, Gobetti, Debenedetti," situates the translation of Proust's work in Italy within the context of debates over translation that animated intellectual circles in the early 1920s. In particular, Morra compares the diverging theoretical approaches to translation held by Benedetto Croce, Giovanni Gentile e Piero Gobetti. Whereas Croce's *Breviario d'estetica* and *Estetica come scienza dell'espressione* considered translation an approximation that was useful but impossible, for Gobetti and Gentile translation was essential to the constitution and renewal of Italy's national literary identity. The author then turns her attention

to controversies surrounding the partial Italian translations of Proust (who, in fascist circles, was considered emblematic of French decadence and the target of antisemitic critics), before examining the “Italianization” of Proust’s *Recherche* by Debenedetti.

Fabiana Fusco’s “*Il giovane Holden non è mai stato così giovane... Due (ri)traduzioni italiane di The Catcher in the Rye*,” examines the linguistic features in the Italian re-translations of J.D. Salinger’s novel, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), known in Italy under the title *Il giovane Holden* (published by Einaudi). She meticulously discusses the ways in which the translators (Adriana Motti in 1961 and Matteo Colombo in 2014) reproduced the American youth language of Salinger’s text, thus offering a fascinating case-study of the evolution of the national linguistic code of successive generations of youth cultures.

V. Confronting the “Modern Regime of Translation”: Sicilian Dialects as Resistance

In this section, Giovanna Summerfield’s ““Nella nostra lingua [...] il cuore della nostra identità”: Tentativi letterari siciliani e l’omologazione linguistica nazionale” makes a case for the enduring presence of dialect poetry from the 18th century onwards, touching upon authors and intellectuals as diverse as Giovanni Meli, Domenico Tempio, Salomone Marino, Giuseppe Pitrè, and Ignazio Buttitta. This presence, Summerfield argues, foregrounds the tension of cultural translation in successive forms of Italian nation-building. While, at times, writers’ use of dialects reproduces the mono-linguistic practices that run counter to the dialectal diversity of the island—thus mirroring the homogeneity pursued by the Italian nation-building projects—Summerfield locates in the works of Andrea Camilleri a linguistic hybridity that merges, without erasing them, the many linguistic realities of Sicily and Italy.

Lina Insana also addresses Sicilian dialects in her “Translating Narratives of Passage and Rescue at the Limits of ‘Fortress Europe’: Ethics, Sicilian Specificity, and the Law of the Sea.” Focusing on Davide Enia’s use of dialect in his *Appunti per un naufragio* of 2017, Insana argues that the ethical significance of Enia’s narrative is not lost on Enia’s English and French translators (Antony Shugaar and Françoise Brun, respectively) who opt for a selective maintenance of untranslated dialect. As a result, the author interprets these translators’ choices as acts of resistance against the national framework of both Standard Italian language and the logic of nationally sovereign borders.

VI. Translations from Italian in the Cultural Politics of Argentina and Britain

The last section of this volume addresses the cultural politics of translation, as they apply to a sampling of Italian texts in Argentina and to the promotion and translation of British works in Italy at specific historical junctures.

Heather Sottong, in “Bartolomé Mitre’s Translation of the *Divine Comedy*: An Anti-*Martín Fierro*,” argues that Bartolomé Mitre’s translation of Dante’s

Comedy runs counter to the aesthetic and thematic tendencies and social messages promoted by José Hernández, Mitre's political adversary and author of what is considered Argentina's greatest epic—*Martín Fierro* (1872). While *Martín Fierro* sought to bridge the cultural, social and political gap between the rural, illiterate inhabitants of the pampas and the elites who controlled their fate, Mitre, who served as President of Argentina from 1862 to 1868, negated the importance of local and rural traditions, and pursued a Eurocentric vision of a post-Independence, progressive Argentina founded on a return to European civilization, of which Dante's *Comedy* was among the most illustrious examples.

The last essay, Anna Lanfranchi's "Italian Translation Rights, the British Council and the Central Office of Information," considers the measures taken by the British Council and the Ministry of Information to facilitate translations of British works in Continental Europe during and after World War II. This activity, which is well documented in Lanfranchi's examination of archival records as well as in the correspondence between British and Italian publishers and literary agents, sought to further the national interest of Britain by promoting British life and thought through volumes on society, arts, economy, government, and science. Yet, as Lanfranchi cogently demonstrates, the national project pursued by Britain did not meet the interest of Italian publishers. Informative, non-fictional works on British history and society and other scholarly texts, though actively supported by significant financial investments by the British government, generated few sales, and were unheeded by an Italian readership whose preference was for detective, mystery, adventure novels, and romance fictions.

Conclusion

As the essays in this collection reveal, translation has come a long way from being relegated to a secondary role in literary criticism. Whereas once upon a time, writers and literary critics engaged with translation to discuss the level of fidelity and correspondence that a translated text had with an original work (to which an almost absolute agency and *auctoritas* was assigned), the pioneering work of researchers in the School of Tel Aviv (in addition to the already-mentioned Itamar Even-Zohar, one would be remiss not to mention Gideon Toury and Benjamin Harshav among others), as well as of Lawrence Venuti, Susan Bassnett (at the University of Warwick) and cultural studies theorists, built upon the seminal work of Walter Benjamin and Jacques Derrida to explode the notion that translators and translated texts are secondary agents in the transmission of words and texts across cultures. Indeed, the converging focus of post-structuralist, literary critics and philosophers on the relationship between language and ideology underscored the impossibility of assigning one lasting and "original" meaning to words in any language (thus to any text), because the relationship between language and the outside world is constantly evolving; and in the move between signifier and signified, as Derrida might say, a differential space emerges that allows for new relationships between words and the external world.

A new wave of translation practitioners and theorists have made these lessons their own. Inasmuch as translation effectively makes operative the difference between signifier and signified (Derrida 21), it occupies the gaps in meaning that exist between an author, her text and its reception, as well as between two or more languages and cultures, creating the opportunity for the target language text to alter and even subvert the “original” meaning of any text. The translated works that emerge from such activity can therefore assume a role that, depending on the cultural and historical landscape in which they emerge, has the power to destabilize and/or influence dominant ideological currents in the target language and culture. Nowhere is this more evident than in relation to the weak ideological constructs of nationhood that have pertained to the peninsula’s century-old attempt to construct “Italy” on the basis of a unified and unifying national language and culture.

The authors of our essays bring home this point, through their varied analyses and approaches to the field of cultural translation. Despite centuries-old attempts that go back to Dante to “translate” the peninsular “difference” into unity via a single *vulgare illustre*, the notion of Italy-as-nation remains a fraught one, often at odds with its past and current reality, which relies on dialectal imbrication, colonizing linguistic grafts, and even the linguistic bordering that opened this essay for its existence. Not surprisingly, the approaches and outcomes that our authors evince stand as a testament to the richness that translation studies—as a study of polysystems in dialogue with each other—brings to the relationship between language and nation-building. They also show that, as it applies to the Italian context, translation has played and will continue to play a crucial role in the evolution and expansion of the politics of nationhood into the future.

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