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CHAPTER 10

The Role of Women in Translation History: Translating and Collaborating in the Re-shaping of Italy in the Early Romantic Period

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Introduction

Translation enables the circulation of knowledge and makes newness and originality travel. It plays a crucial role at times of transition, yet the role of translation in the development of new female modes of expression has only recently started to be analysed. The main reason for this neglect is the supposedly derivative nature of translation, considered a secondary activity to original writing, so traditionally regarded as a copy lacking the element of novelty of ideas that has characterised artistic production since the origins of the Romantic movement in Europe (see Venuti 1995). Hence, feminist critics have generally paid more attention to literary

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genres perceived as more empowering for women, such as the novel. Yet the specificity of women's contribution to translation may prove to be a highly productive source for historical analyses of cultural developments.[1] A focus on gender enables critics to question the definition of translation as a unified category, by effectively bringing a set of peripheral textual practices, such as editing and reviewing, to the fore.

In my volume on eighteenth-century women writers and translators (Agorni 2014), I tried to trace women's appropriation of an imagined Italy and their exploitation of this cultural geography in the framing of discourses that could be productively used for the development of a tradition of British women's writing. My current research is taking my analysis a few decades further in time, to the early nineteenth century (Agorni 2021), in a reversed perspective, taking into account the function of intercultural practices, and translation in particular, in shaping the renewal of Italian culture that laid the basis for the formation of a unified Italian state. The role played by women in the renovation of literature and in the introduction of new approaches to translation in this historical period has been paid hardly any attention, and just a few women writers, seen as exceptions, were praised for their efforts by reviewers at the time.

This article will attempt to bring out the specificity of women's cultural activity in Italy in the early Romantic period, a time characterised by an impressive number of translation activities in a cultural system that aimed to be recognised as "Italian". In this respect, the introduction of the new genre of children's literature via translations produced by women appears particularly significant.

[1] Translating was an important opportunity for many early modern European women writers, who struggled to find an entrance into a literary arena traditionally reserved for men. Research on women translators, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has grown in recent decades. See, for example, Agorni (2014) on the relations between English and Italian literature; van Deinsen and Vanacke (2019) on female translators in Dutch; Jaffe and Yagüe (2015) on translations of theatre texts from French into English and Spanish, and Domitova 2019 for the Russian panorama.

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The Target Cultural System: The Italian Literary Scene

In 1816, Germaine de Staël published her well-known essay "On the Spirit of Translation",[2] which triggered a strong literary controversy between two factions, referred to as Classicists and Romantics, respectively.[3] Particular attention was paid to translations from modern languages: for the first time in history, there was an unprecedented emphasis on the use and methodology of translation in an "Italian" geographical area that was trying to define itself in terms of culture, given the impossibility of creating a unitary political project. In this period, in fact, the Italian peninsula was still fragmented into a series of states governed by foreign powers.[4]

Two approaches to translation were set against each other: on the one hand, an adaptive translation strategy advocated by the Classicists, and on the other, a source-oriented and culturally sensitive approach promoted by the Romantics. In Translation Studies, these two approaches represent a fundamental binary opposition and have been defined by Venuti (1995, 1998) as domesticating and foreignizing strategies, respectively. As the terminology suggests, domesticating practices are all those approaches that aim to produce a translation adapted to the literary tastes

[2] The article was first published in Italian under the title: "Sulla maniera e l'utilità delle Traduzioni" (De Staël 1816). See the English translation by C.C. Wharram, https://romantic-circles.org/pedagogies/commons/translation/commons.2014.translation.wharram.html, last accessed March 2022.

[3] The literary dispute between Classicists and Romantics is one of the most studied literary events in Italian literature. The two factions were mainly competing through articles published in periodicals, especially in the Habsburg-dominated Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia. On the one hand, *La Biblioteca Italiana* was supported by the Habsburg government, while on the other hand, the liberal periodical *Il Conciliatore* was the work of a group of intellectuals who were carriers of the new European romantic ideas, including Federico Confalonieri (1785–1846), Silvio Pellico (1789–1854), Giovanni Berchet (1783–1851), Piero Borsieri (1788–1852) and Ludovico di Breme (1780–1820). The periodical was censored and finally closed after about a year by the Austrian government. See Avitale (1959), Bellorini (1943), and Calcaterra (1951).

[4] In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Italian territory was divided into a series of distinct states ruled mainly by foreign powers, such as the Habsburgs in northern Italy, who dominated both Lombardy and the former Venetian territories, the Spanish in the Kingdom of Sicily in the south, and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany ruled by the House of Lorraine. The Pope governed over a vast territory in the centre of the peninsula.

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and knowledge of the readers of the target culture to whom the translation is addressed. For Venuti, on the other hand, a foreignizing translation strategy means a methodology that respects the otherness of the source text and seeks to reproduce its characteristics. Venuti favours the latter practice, which he believes enables the target readers to gain an insight into the specificity of the source text, although this often requires an effort of interpretation and research on the part of the readers themselves.

In nineteenth-century Italy, the Classicists' domestication strategies were aimed at readers who could read the source text in its original language and appreciate the translators' efforts towards literal, stable reproduction. On the other hand, the Romantics wanted to find new elements to introduce into the Italian cultural system in the form of both new literary genres and new contents. Consequently, they favoured an approach to translation that was both foreignizing—acknowledging the non-equivalence of the source and target texts—and culturally sensitive, so as to retain as much as possible of the original aspects of the source text while at the same time making them comprehensible to the reader.

Most of the Romantic movements in Europe were favouring similar practices of foreignization at the time, but the Italian context was producing instead a new approach that combined a strict adherence to the specificity of the source text with a concern to make the translation accessible to a new and expanding readership.[5] Hence, rather in contrast to the trends in the rest of Europe, the Italian Romantics were characterised by a continuity with the tradition of Enlightenment theories. A specific feature of Italian Romanticism was a view of literature that subordinated artistic and aesthetic creativity to practical utility: a special emphasis was placed on socio-political problems, which were often understood in aesthetic-artistic

[5] For a broad European overview of translation in the Romantic period, Murray Pittock's volume on the translation and reception of one of the most popular Romantic author in Europe, Walter Scott, may be particularly useful. Pittock deals with the reception of Scott in French, Spanish, Catalan, German, Hungarian, Czech, Polish, Russian, Slovenian, Danish, Norwegian and Swedish, with a focus on the cultural-historical characteristics that shaped the form and fortune of the translation of his works in each country. The overall picture that emerges is that it is difficult to speak of a single type of European Romantic ideology, but that many of the values represented by Scott, such as the importance of a nation's history and the emergence of a bourgeois hero, close to the reading public, were entering the culture of many European countries at the same time. This had an enormous impact on translation strategies, which aimed to adhere to the form, content and historical context of the original text, while ensuring greater accessibility for the reading public. See Pittock (2007) and Agorni (2021).

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terms. As Garofalo (2005, 248) has put it, "the main forum in the peninsula for the dissemination of Romantic ideals", the well-known periodical *Il Conciliatore*, in fact inherited many of the ideas that had circulated in Italian Enlightenment circles in the mid-eighteenth century thanks to the Lombard journal *Il Caffè* (1764–1766) of the Verri brothers.[6] Above all, the calls for a useful literature, with content that adhered to life, people's real needs, political conflicts and passions, were taken up and integrated as ideals in Italian Romanticism. Furthermore, *Il Conciliatore* (1818–1819) emphasised the pragmatic critique of the old norms, literary conventions and traditions that *Il Caffè* had previously inaugurated. To ensure accessibility to a wide audience, the articles were written in an informal and directly communicative prose. Thus, in the view of the Italian Romantics, literature played an important social role and had to be appreciated by a readership that was no longer limited to a highly educated elite.

The Enlightenment-derived conviction that literature had a high moral and social function was developed by the Italian Romantics in terms of a political nationalism that permeated all cultural ideals. The notion of national identity as a civic body to which all citizens, and especially intellectuals, could actively contribute, often led them to political commitment and concrete action against oppressive Austrian institutions, which is not surprising given their view of the civic role of literature. Indeed, after the failed revolts of 1820–1821, many Romantic literary and cultural representatives were subjected to severe government repression and imprisonment.

As I have pointed out elsewhere (Agorni 2021, 80–83), the innovative impulse of the Italian Romantics led to significant changes in the approach to translation in the first half of the nineteenth century. The demand was not just for greater fidelity to the source text, or to reproduce the effect of the original on a new readership. Rather, it was a matter of producing a mediated version through processes that today we might describe as strategies of linguistic and cultural transfer. Romantic translators wanted to offer their readers a picture of the context of the source text by freely using extra-textual apparatuses to help the audience understand the linguistic and cultural diversity to which the source text

[6] Pietro (1728–1797) and Alessandro (1741–1816) Verri founded the magazine *Il Caffè* in Milan, the manifesto of the Lombard Enlightenment. Their motto was "things and not words": in this sense they intended to abandon all classicist tendencies and promote a pragmatic culture, committed to civil battles.

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belonged.[7] These apparatuses had the function of helping the reader to discover the novelty produced by "other", i.e. external, cultural systems.

As a result, translation became a vehicle for those who did not have access to foreign language and culture to understand and benefit from foreign works. One of the main consequences of this process was the new visibility of the translator. The painstaking work of linguistic and cultural mediation increasingly expected of them led them to express themselves in an original way in forewords, prefaces and footnotes. Translation thus became the object of in-depth reflection in the Italian peninsula during this historical period: it produced a debate among a variety of cultural agents, not only translators, but also reviewers, critics and editors, and even publishers.

As is generally known, the novel was the main literary genre to enter Italy through translation,[8] but it was not the only one. Another form of narrative prose, that of children's literature, was also introduced through translation. In these years, the need for a specific literature dedicated to children, a literary genre still almost absent in the Italian peninsula, began to be felt. A certain interest in the education of young people had already manifested itself in previous centuries in the form of instructive writing aimed specifically at educators.[9] On the other hand, there was a

[7] A typical example of this strategy is Gaetano Barbieri's (1770?–1853) translations of Walter Scott's novels into Italian. Barbieri translated thirteen novels and, in his early publications, the sheer number, length and detail of his footnotes provide an informed and in-depth comparison of British and Italian culture for a readership that was rapidly expanding into the middle classes. See Agorni (2021).

[8] Asor Rosa (2002) famously stressed the fact that Italy was not the home of the novel, and yet one of the most canonical texts of Italian literature, published at a key historical moment for the birth of an Italian national identity, was precisely a historical novel, Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi* (1827; 1842). On the introduction of the novel into the Italian cultural system see Agorni (2021), Irace and Pedullà (2012), Moretti (1998, 2005).

[9] The birth of children's literature in Italy is usually traced back to the work *Lo Cunto de li Cunti or Pentamerone* (published posthumously between 1634 and 1636) by the Neapolitan writer Giambattista Basile (1566–1632). It was the first collection of folk tales in Europe. The eighteenth century is well represented by Carlo Gozzi's *Fiabe teatrali*, "Children's stories for the theatre" (1720–1806), and the following century saw the birth of folklore research with Giuseppe Pitrè (1841–1916) and Vittorio Imbriani (1840–1886). But the real history of Italian children's literature began in the second half of the nineteenth century and went hand in hand with the building of the nation. In this period the role of children's magazines came forward (starting in 1834 with Pietro Thouar's *Giornale dei fanciulli*, "Children's Journal") and the model of the educational, patriotic

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lack of narrative works dedicated to children. This lack was perceived by numerous Italian literary agents, such as literary critics and reviewers, who denounced it in the main periodicals.

Translation was, therefore, undertaken, and in particular the works of one of the most successful writers in the English language, Maria Edgeworth (1767–1849). Edgeworth had already achieved considerable fame in Britain as well as in other European countries.[10] Bianca Milesi Mojon (1790–1849), a translator who was very close to Italian Romantic circles, played a key role in the translation of her works.

Bianca Milesi Mojon: A Woman Translator of Educational Literature

Bianca Milesi was born in Milan in 1790 into a wealthy merchant family and was sent to study in a monastery at an early age. When her father died, her mother took her on long journeys abroad to broaden her education (see Souvestre 1854; Alessi 1906).

Returning to Napoleonic Milan in 1814, she opened her literary salon, which became a favourite haunt of romantic circles and anti-Austrian conspirators. In those same years, the *Società delle Giardiniere* (the so-called Gardener-Girls) was founded in Milan. It was a secret society made up of upper-class women who were linked by hostile feelings towards Austria.

In the early 1820s, the Austrians began a harsh repression, with arrests, torture and imprisonment continuing until 1823. Milesi was arrested and later released. She began to get involved in social work, supporting the *Società di Mutuo Insegnamento* (Societies for Mutual Education) that Federico Confalonieri (1785–1846) had founded, with the secret aim of opening schools for poor girls.

and edifying book was *Giannetto* (1837) by Luigi Parravicini (1799–1880), adopted in the pre-unification period in schools in many Italian regions. See Ascenzi and Sani (2017).

[10] As well as giving her a high profile in Great Britain, Maria Edgeworth's ideas spread throughout Europe. As early as 1800, the French edition of her *Practical Education* was published under the title *L'Education pratique* by its first translator, Charles Pictet de Rochemont (1755–1824). In 1829, Louise Swanton Belloc (1796–1881), a friend of Edgeworth, translated *Early Lessons* into French under the title *L'Education familière*, in the same year as Milesi's first Italian translation appeared, published under the title *Prime Lezioni* (1829). See Leproni (2015). On the dissemination of Edgeworth's ideas and works in the original language, see especially Butler and Myers (1999–2003).

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Due to constant Austrian control, Milesi moved abroad, living first in Geneva, where she met the economist Jean Charles Léonard Sismonde de Sismondi (1773–1842), who introduced her to the progressive circles of the Swiss city where Edgeworth's educational ideas circulated. Milesi then moved to Paris, London, Amsterdam and Brussels.

She returned to Italy in 1824, moving to Genoa, where she met the doctor Benedetto Mojon (1784–1849), also a patriot, whom she married and by whom she had three children. A friend of Mazzini, she opened a salon in Genoa that hosted revolutionary circles. In 1833 she decided to leave Italy for good and moved with her family to Paris, where she and her husband died of cholera only a few hours apart in 1849.

Milesi's social activity was also reflected in her literary work in a series of publications on pedagogical topics and, above all, in an intense activity of translation from English of Edgeworth's works. Her translations include: *Prime lezioni di M.* Edgeworth (1829) (*Early Lessons* 1801); *Cenni pel miglioramento della prima educazione de' fanciulli, libera traduzione dalla nona edizione inglese*, 1830 (free adaptation of *Practical Education* 1798); *Prime letture pe' fanciulli di tre in quattro anni*, di M. Edgeworth, 1831 (new, expanded edition of *Early Lessons*; other editions of the same work were published in Italian in Modena in 1832 and in Milan 1835); *Inni in prosa per fanciulli*, by A.L. Barbauld, 1832 (*Hymns in prose for children* 1787); *Benedetto: letture pei fanciulli da otto a undici anni*, di M. Edgeworth, 1839[11] (*Frank*, being a sequel of *Early Lessons*); and *Raccolta di dodici novelle*, di M. Edgeworth, 1847 (another expanded edition of *Early Lessons*).

The translation of *Prime Lezioni*[12] in particular has an interesting publishing history. It was first published in 1829 in Milan, containing the short stories "Benedetto", "Le arance", "Il cagnolo fedele", "Enrico e Lucia". This edition was followed by other editions in which other

[11] Extracts were also published in the periodical *Guida dell'educatore*, edited by R. Lambruschini, in July 1836.

[12] The first edition of E*arly Lessons* was originally published in 1801, printed in London by Joseph Johnson. Edgeworth continued to work on it, adding and continuing the stories in a series of different editions that ended with the novella "Harry and Lucy" in 1825. The first edition consisted of ten volumes, small enough to be hand-held and printed in large, child-friendly type. But this format must have been expensive and by 1815 *Early Lessons* was reduced to just two volumes, printed smaller to contain all the stories. See The Hockliffe Project, Maria Edgeworth, *Early Lessons*, http://hockliffe.dmu.ac.uk/items/0098.html, last accessed 30 May 2022.

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novellas appeared in 1831 as *Prime letture pe' fanciulli di tre in quattro anni* and were then published again in 1832 and in 1835. In 1833–1834 a second revised edition entitled *Prime Lezioni di Maria Edgeworth* in four volumes was published in Milan, in which the number of short stories had increased considerably.

Although the educator Lambruschini in 1836 (Lambruschini 1836, 39–40) wrote that the first translations of Edgeworth's works by Milesi had not met with much success in Italy, the history of publishing gives us a different version, not only in terms of the editions published, but also and above all if we consider the reviews in the main periodicals of the time.

As early as August 1829, the pro-Austrian journal *La Biblioteca Italiana* opened its review of the first translation of *Prime Lezioni* with praise for the original author. Edgeworth was in fact described as follows:

> Mrs. Edgeworth's name is as famous in England as it is among any learned nation, since she has spent the best part of her years in the profound investigation of human nature, in order to establish the basis of a good system of practical education, such as will bring man to that point of possible happiness to which he is called by his pre-eminence over other beings. (Anonymous reviewer, *Biblioteca Italiana* 1829, 271)[13]

Edgeworth's work was appreciated for the "order, clarity and truth" with which the pedagogical notions were conveyed to children in the form of short stories set in simple and familiar contexts.

The reviewer dedicated ample space to the translation, and the translator was praised for her complicated job of "vulgarizing an English book full of familiar and technical words" (ibid., p. 273). However, a list of terms were judged to be too difficult or refined for a volume addressing children, for example the use of the expression *gremiti di foglie*, "full of leaves" where simpler verbs could have been used, such as *ricoperti, sparsi* "covered, scattered", or the use of a literary term such as *fiammeggiare* "to blaze" instead of the more colloquial *ardere* "to burn" (ibid.).

[13] "Chiarissimo nome si è quello della signora Edgeworth sì in Inghilterra, come presso ogni colta nazione, dacchè Ella ha speso la miglior parte dei suoi anni investigando profondamente l'umana natura onde stabilire le basi di un buon sistema di pratica educazione, tale da condurre l'uomo a quel punto di possibile felicità in considerazione cui è chiamato dalla sua preminenza sugli altri esseri". All translations from English are my own, unless otherwise stated.

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In addition, some spelling inaccuracies were criticised that seemed to be the result of dialectal variations, at a time when a coherently unified Italian language was not yet established. For example, Milesi used the term *gioco* (in use today) instead of *giuoco*; *panna* (in use today) instead of *fior di latte* or *crema*.

Another review appeared in 1829 in the periodical *Antologia, Giornale di Scienze, Lettere e Arti* (Anthology, Journal of Sciences, Literature and Arts), edited by Gian Pietro Vieusseux (1779–1863), which was definitely more progressive than the *Biblioteca Italiana*. The anonymous critic praised Edgeworth's works according to very similar criteria as in the *Biblioteca Italiana* review:

> What precisely distinguishes them is their great simplicity, which one would hardly believe could be reconciled with the vagueness of their form and the instruction with which they are filled. It seems to me that the author has solved in them one of the most difficult problems of the art of composing. (Anonymous reviewer, *Antologia* 1829: 139)[14]

In spite of the positive reception of the translation, the reviewer immediately brought a few shortcomings to the attention of the readers:

> If one examines her work in detail, one will perhaps observe that some sentences could have been made even clearer, some phrases could have been changed into more appropriate ones, some definitions in the small glossary, placed between the last lesson, could have been left out or improved. And nevertheless, this work will seem to all to be most felicitous. (ibid., 139)[15]

Once again, as in the previous review, the criticism was mainly based on the criterion of children's ability to understand the translation.

[14] "Ma ciò che le distingue propriamente è la loro grande semplicità, che appena si crederebbe potersi conciliare con la vaghezza della loro forma e coll'istruzione di cui sono piene. A me sembra che l'autrice abbia sciolto in esse uno de' più difficili problemi dell'arte di comporre".

[15] "Esaminando minutamente il suo lavoro, si osserverà forse che qualche periodo poteva rendersi ancor più chiaro, qualche frase cangiarsi in altra più propria, qualche definizione del piccolo glossario, frapposto all'ultima lezione, tralasciarsi o migliorarsi. E nondimeno questo lavoro parrà a tutti felicissimo".

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In 1834 another Milanese periodical, *Ricoglitore italiano e straniero* (Italian and Foreign Collector), welcomed Milesi's translations of Edgeworth's works. In addition to *Prime Lezioni*, the journal also referred to Milesi's other translations of educational literature, a genre still underrepresented in the Italian literary scene:

> One cannot help but sincerely praise Mrs. Mojon's generous intention in providing Italy with excellent family books, of which we are so lacking to the detriment of good morals. (Anonymous reviewer 1834, 316)[16]

Milesi's translation method was appreciated, and the reviewer's allusion to the translator's efforts to make the text more effective is rather remarkable. No explicit mention was made of the intended audience of children, but it seems evident that the reference to the "quality" of this literary genre was meant in terms of adequacy[17] with respect to the purpose of the text and its target audience. On this basis, all the translator's interventions were considered adequate:

> The translations of the works listed here are carried out with fidelity, candour of style and propriety of language; nor do they lack that array of corrections, word declarations and changes to the text that the quality of such works requires. (*Ricoglitore*, 316)[18]

In 1834 the *Biblioteca Italiana* published a new review of the second edition of the *Prime Lezioni*.[19] The reviewer referred to the positive reception of the first edition in 1829 and congratulated the translator

[16] "Non si può a meno che lodare sinceramente la generosa intenzione che la signora Mojon si è proposta a sé stessa di venir fornendo l'Italia di ottimi libri di famiglia dei quali tanto difettiamo a scapito della buona morale".

[17] According to Gideon Toury translators normally operate between the two poles represented by the notions of adequacy, or "adherence to source norms" (Toury 1995, 56), and acceptability, or adherence to target language norms.

[18] "Le traduzioni delle opere qui enunciate sono eseguite con fedeltà, candore di stile e proprietà di lingua; né vi manca quel corredo di rettificazioni, dichiarazioni di parola, modificazione del testo che richiedeva la qualità di siffatti lavori".

[19] *Biblioteca Italiana* (1834, 383–384). The translator, "having obtained many corrections from learned persons benevolent to her, has reformed the translation of the part of this work already printed", "ottenute molte correzioni da dotte persone a lei benevole, ha riformata la traduzione della parte di quest'opera già stampata", p. 384.

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because she had collaborated with the reviewers by taking most of their suggestions on board.

Thus, the reviews published in the main periodicals of the time, to which we must add some minor ones, such as those that appeared in *L'Eco, giornale di scienze, lettere, arti, moda e teatri* (The Echo, Journal of Sciences, Literature, Fashion and Theatre)[20] and the *Gazzetta Privilegiata di Milano* (The Privileged Gazette of Milan),[21] are evidence of the considerable success of Milesi's translation. The basis for this is certainly a deficiency in the target cultural system, as theorised by translation scholars such as Gideon Toury and especially Even-Zohar (1979, 1990) in his polysystemic approach. They saw translation as the primary method for filling those gaps in the target cultural systems that occur especially in times of transition and crisis, when the traditional forms and models of a given source system are perceived as obsolete. Even-Zohar viewed translation as a primary means of cultural development, not only in the field of literature, but also in a broader socio-cultural sense. The fundamental function of translation phenomena is particularly evident in times of transition and crisis, when the traditional forms and models of a given cultural system (e.g. a given national literature) are perceived as obsolete. In this case, translation activities make it possible to rapidly import new models from outside, i.e. from foreign literary systems. New literary genres, or innovations in terms of content, are introduced, with topics and themes that have never been dealt with in the culture of origin. Once these elements are imported into the receiving system through translation, they become models that eventually influence the native production, often leading to original results. Thus, translations introduce innovations in terms of form, i.e. new literary genres, or content, that is topics and themes never dealt with before by the native culture. However, polysystem theory helps us to understand not only what is translated, i.e. which works are imported from abroad into the target cultural system through translation, but also how they are translated, i.e. which strategies are adopted that are more or less close to the original text. In Venuti's terms, as we have seen, these strategies can be defined as domesticating vs. foreignizing.

[20] Vol. 2, 1829, pp. 582–583.

[21] No. 185, luglio 1833, p. 734.

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As has been anticipated, in the first decades of the 1800s in Italy, as in most European countries, a Romantic foreignizing approach to translation had emerged. However, in these very years, the Italian Romantics were producing an innovative approach that combined a strong fidelity to the source text with a concern for making the translation accessible to an expanding Italian readership. The social role of literature was still of the utmost importance in this view, and cultural agents such as authors, translators, literary critics, reviewers and even publishers, were striving to maintain a difficult balance between concerns as diverse as reader accessibility and fidelity to the source text.

Given these considerations, a question arises: How can Bianca Milesi's translation of *Prime Lezioni* be placed on a continuum from strategies of naturalisation to those of foreignization?

Prime Lezioni: Translation or Adaptation?

Fernández Rodríguez (2014) has argued that Milesi's version of *Prime Lezioni*, and particularly of the short story *Benedetto*, has to be considered as an adaptation rather than a translation. She based her argument on the theoretical assumptions of the polysystem theory developed by Even-Zohar, Toury (1995) and Zohar Shavit (1981) for the specific nature of children's literature.

In order to support her hypothesis Fernández Rodríguez cites the review of the second edition of *Prime Lezioni* 1833–1834 which was published in the *Indicatore* in 1835 (440–446). Here, the reviewer warned readers that they would not find a "word for word, sentence for sentence"[22] (ibid., 445) translation, but rather pointed out that the translator had acted to mediate in all those cases in which the two cultural systems, Italian and English, diverged. As the critic put it: "Milesi understood very well how an infinity of things were infinitely proper to the English, and she omitted or changed them, substituting ours"[23] (ibid., 445).

Fernández Rodríguez goes into the details of most of the translator's interventions in the short story "Benedetto" and claims that the

[22] "parola per parola, frase per frase", ibid., 445.

[23] "Ben comprese la Milesi come un'infinità di cose fossero infinitamente proprie degli Inglesi, e le ommise o mutò, sostituendovi delle nostre", ibid., 445.

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consequence of this strategy is to deprive the target reader of cultural information which deserves special attention.

The most important mark of Milesi's translation approach was obviously her adaptation strategy to Italian culture. The translator changed all proper names and replaced them with Italian ones. Thus, the protagonist's name "Frank" in Italian becomes "Benedetto", which elicited a positive comment from Edgeworth herself, who, in a letter to her Italian translator, congratulated her on the appropriate choice of the protagonist's name and on the fluidity of the translation.[24] Units of measurement were adapted, "miles" became *miglia* and there were further historical adaptations: for example, Cromwell and the English civil wars were rendered as the Italian independence wars or *guerre di Indipendenza*. Geographical, historical and cultural references to England were replaced by those to the region of Lombardy, where the city of Milan is located, as in the following example, where Edgeworth inserted a long passage in the short story in which English historical events were mentioned:

> The time of Julius Cesar's landing at Deal was inquired into, and, to please Mary, he and the emperor Augustus Caesar were permitted to see Queen Boadicea, though, as Frank observed, this was absolutely impossible in reality, because Queen Boadicea did not live till eighteen years afterwards. They went to their little histories of England, France, and Scotland, and found all the kings and queens, and remarkable people, who live at the same time; and they amused themselves by making parties for these personages, and inventing conversations for them. (Edgeworth, 1822, in Fernández Rodríguez 2014, 53)

Milesi related all events to Roman history and geographical references to the region of Lombardy:

[24] "Frank me paraît un plus agréable personnage en italien qu en anglais. Et (autant qu'en peut juger une étrangère) il parle votre langue avec tant de grâce et de poésie, que je ne puis m'empêcher de croire qu'elle est sa langue maternelle. J'ajouterai que son nom italien Benedetto promet davantage est plus conciliant, plus béni (pardonnez ce mauvais jeu de mot) que celui de Franck, qu'il portait en Angleterre" in Souvestre (1854, 67). "Frank seems to me a more agreeable character in Italian than in English. And (as far as a foreigner can judge) he speaks your language so gracefully and poetically, that I cannot help believing it to be his mother tongue. I may add that his Italian name Benedetto promises more is more conciliatory, more blessed (pardon the pun) than that of Frank, which he bore in England".

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> This observation led to a speech, which ended any visit between the queens and the duchess of Italy, and between the kings and the consuls of Rome. The time when the consuls Gneo Cordelio Scipione and Marco Marcello conquered Insubria and took to Milan the Roman domination in 221 AD was inquired into. They mentioned the good progress of the Herculean thermal spas in Milan, now called Saint Lawrence Columns. Then they talked about various stories of the dukedom of Milan, the Republic of Venice, the Republic of Florence, of Pisa; of Genoa; and concluded with the dukes, the duchesses, the doges, the gonfalonieri and the most notable people who lived at that time, and they were pleased to recite the part of each of the characters, inventing their dialogues. (Edgeworth in Milesi 1839, 125, translated by Fernández Rodríguez 2014, 53)

Finally, the translator included additional information, in some cases even providing it with patriotic overtones, as in the following example:

> The conversation next turned upon one of those old towers which are called Cesar's towers, and various facts of history were mentioned. (Edgeworth, 1822, in Fernández Rodríguez 2014, 56)

The conversation turned to the scarcity of Roman monuments in Lombardy although

> Milan has long been the seat of Emperors. Blame for the almost total destruction was placed on the fact that this plain was the first place where the blind fury of the barbaric hordes who progressively flooded Italy was vented. (Edgeworth in Milesi 1839: 145–146, translated by Fernández Rodríguez 2014, 57)[25]

In her conclusion, Fernández Rodríguez points out that the main characteristics of Edgeworth's pedagogical writing are a rather conventional literary style, full of learned references, and that these characteristics were maintained in the translations into French and Spanish (Fernández

[25] "Il discorso versò alla scarsezza dei monumenti romani che si rivengono in Lombardia, quantunque Milano sia pure stata lungo tempo sede degli imperatori. Ne accagionavano della distruzione quasi totale l'essere state queste pianure il primo campo sul quale s'era sfogata la cieca rabbia delle orde barbariche, le quali inondarono successivamente la povera Italia!"

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Rodríguez 2014, 57).[26] According to this scholar, the Italian translation instead favoured adaptation strategies reminiscent of a *belles infidèles* approach.[27] This term refers to the tradition of an "unfaithful" and highly adaptive method of translation that was widespread in France from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century. This approach, however, was strongly opposed by the circle of Italian Romantics to which Milesi belonged.

What is most striking in Fernández Rodríguez's analysis is her insistence on highlighting a "deficiency" in the translation that would appear to have lost the cultural values of the original text in its adaptation to the target culture. This is an assessment that disregards the translator's interventions in the direction of a complex cultural mediation, which imply considerable expertise in the source culture and an equally strong expertise in the target culture. The voice of the translator herself could possibly help us find a more historically sensitive interpretation.

The Translator's Voice

The translator's voice was made clear on two main occasions in *Prime Lezioni*. Milesi opened the 1833–1834 edition with a short preface, in which she quoted part of the text of the first review of the *Biblioteca Italiana* of 1829, and illustrated the method she had used in her translation, explaining that she did not always stick to the original text, but deviated from it:

> when I thought it appropriate both to conform some scientific explanation to the most recent discoveries… and to substitute nomenclatures or descriptions of places or customs of England, and quotations from English authors and books, with others proper to the geography or customs or literature of Italy, in order to better serve the understanding of Italian children, and to better assist their education. (Edgeworth in Milesi, 1833–1834, xi–xii)[28]

[26] See also Fernández Rodríguez (2008, 2010).

[27] See Lefevere (1992: 35).

[28] "quando ciò ho creduto opportuno sia per conformare qualche scientifica spiegazione alle più recenti scoperte… sia sostituendo a nomenclature o descrizioni di luoghi o di usi dell'Inghilterra, ed a citazioni d'autori e di libri inglesi, altre proprie della geografia o de' costumi o della letteratura d'Italia, per secondar meglio l'intelligenza de' fanciulli italiani, e meglio giovare alla loro istruzione".

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Moreover, the translator claimed that she had modified the original text to better grasp its intent, applying it to improve Italian education (ibid., xii), and that she had decided not to mention her interventions in the footnotes so as not to cause "obstacles to the reading comprehension of the child, who would not be able to understand them, and to whom the explanation would be inappropriate" (ibid., xii–xiii).

Milesi was thus aware of the new approach to translation advocated by the Romantics. Yet she decided to proceed differently, intervening and adapting the text to the needs of the specific readership the text was intended for, namely Italian children. Indeed, her translation project can be defined as a linguistic as well as a political project, since it links her process of linguistic mediation to her desire to promote a sense of national identity, in a true Romantic political orientation. Milesi's intention was clear in her own words:

> This Italian translation of *Prime Lezioni* will serve, I hope, to facilitate the understanding of [our?] domestic vocabulary, and thus to increasingly strengthen those ties that bind every province of Italy to a common homeland. (ibid., xv)[29]

Milesi's awareness of the purpose of her translation and its intended readers, far from recalling the *belles infidèles* translation approach, appears extremely innovative. The aim of her work was the education of Italian children, so she had adapted the source text to the specific needs of a well-identified readership. This readership was so well identified that it deserved a paratextual section specifically dedicated to its members. The second edition of *Prime Lezioni* introduced a new section in which the translator spoke directly to her readers, in a simple and colloquial language suitable for the understanding of a young audience:

> My dear children, I don't think you know what a vocabulary is, so I will explain it to you. A vocabulary is the same as a dictionary, and there will be no one among you who has not seen a Latin or Italian dictionary. Here, on the other hand, there are no foreign names, but they are all Italian, which perhaps you do not yet know, or which you have heard mentioned

[29] "Questa traduzione italiana delle *Prime Lezioni* servirà, io spero, ad agevolare la cognizione del vocabolario domestico, e a fortificare così sempre più que' vincoli che legano ogni provincia d'Italia ad una patria comune" (Edgeworth, *Prime Lezioni*, 1833–1834, xv).

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> without really understanding their meaning. My vocabulary, then, is very small: it contains only a few explanations of words and things such as dad, mom, would give you if they were always there for you when you read. (ibid., vol 2, 14)[30]

Here, the translator seems to enhance the intention of the original author, i.e. Edgeworth's pedagogical project, by allowing the translated text to be read independently by its recipients, i.e. the children to whom it is addressed. The readers of the translation are specifically identified, and the language has been adapted to their needs and level of understanding.

Conclusion

Milesi's work of linguistic and cultural mediation was innovative and modern in an Italy not yet politically unified, where a new Romantic and foreignizing ideology towards translation had already emerged. This ideology had strong social implications and favoured the introduction of a new literary genre of educational literature for children.

The translation of this new genre was judged according to modern criteria: the priority was to maintain the pedagogical function of the source text, and this meant a painstaking linguistic and cultural adaptation, which was not driven by aesthetic concerns, as in the tradition of *belles infidèles*, but rather by the need to make the text accessible to a specific readership, that is children. The reviews of the period make clear the parameters by which the critics judged Milesi's work, appreciating the translator's ability to maintain the main pedagogical purpose of the original text through a comprehensive process of cultural adaptation.

Thus, being "faithful" to the source text did not imply a strict adherence to content or form, but rather a careful preservation of those features that had made the original English text suitable for the children it addressed. This is the reason why the first reviewer of the *Biblioteca Italiana* in 1829 had suggested the terms that the Italian translator should

[30] "Miei cari ragazzi, io credo che non sappiate che cosa sia un vocabolario; perciò ve lo spiegherò. Un vocabolario è lo stesso che un dizionario, nè vi sarà qualcuno di voi che non abbia visto un dizionario o latino o italiano. Qui per altro non vi sono nomi stranieri, ma sono italiani, che forse voi non conoscete ancora, o che avete intesi dire senza capirne bene il significato. Il mio vocabolario poi è piccolino: non contiene che poche spiegazioni di parole e di cose quali veli darebbe il babbo, mamma, se fossero sempre presenti quando leggete" (Edgeworth, *Prime Lezioni*, 1833–1834: vol. 2, p. 14).

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avoid in order not to run the risk of producing a translation too difficult for children to read. The translator had cooperated by accepting those suggestions and had gone even further by addressing her target readers directly in the preface to her vocabulary.

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