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**Past and present
in translation collaborative practices and
cooperation**

Guest Editors

Giovanni Iamartino
(University of Milan)

Mirella Agorni
(Ca' Foscari University, Venice)

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Editors

David Katan
University of Salento

Cinzia Spinzi
University of Bergamo

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Translation Studies and the History of Books: a productive collaboration?

Mirella Agorni
Ca' Foscari University Venice

Abstract

Translation historians, such as Littau (2011, 2016, 2022) Belle and Hosington (2017) and Coldiron (2012, 2015) among others, have attempted to demonstrate the interdependence between translation activities and new conditions of book production that expanded the literary market. Littau, in particular, has paid special attention to the technologies behind the production and distribution of translations, making us more aware of how knowledge transmission processes operate materially.

Book format, paratextual elements and, above all, data on the material production and distribution of books are key factors in understanding what is translated and how it has been and is being translated, both in the past and in the present. Hence, all these factors deserve the same degree of attention as linguistic and cultural adaptation strategies, elements more familiar to Translation Studies scholars.

Firmly grounded in Translation Studies, in this paper I will exploit the notion of 'collaboration' in order to tentatively explore the theoretical intersections between historical studies of translation and the discipline of Book History, and analyse the relationship between translation and the evolution of the book market.

A brief case study on the momentous changes of translation in the 19th century in the Italian territories will attempt to shed light on the potential for greater interaction between the two disciplines, while admittedly remaining within the scope of my expertise, namely Translation Studies.

Keywords: Translation Studies, translation history, History of Books, expansion of the book market, 19th-century Italy

1. Introduction

The crucial role that translation has played in the development of cultures has been intensively explored over the past fifty years or so, at least since Steiner's pioneering work in 1975, and further enhanced by the so-called

‘cultural turn’ in Translation Studies in the 1990s.¹ However, that celebration of translation’s pivotal status, innovative at the time as it signalled a new international positioning of the discipline, now risks appearing outdated. Today, Translation Studies enjoys a well-established academic relevance and the problem is rather to avoid disciplinary fragmentation, as the discipline encompasses increasingly varied fields of study in terms of research objects, methodologies and specific goals. Furthermore, much has been written about the benefits of interdisciplinary research, a fundamental principle in the development plans of our universities, particularly appropriate in a field as transdisciplinary by its nature and definition as Translation Studies (it is enough to mention Rizzi, Lang and Pym 2016).² But leaving aside the complex issues of impending fragmentation, here I would like to address just one of the challenges that, in my view, lie ahead for Translation Studies.

Several voices have been heard arguing that the discipline should expand beyond the investigation of interlingual and intercultural phenomena, particularly in those areas where translation activities are engaged with various technological devices, such as AVT and its various branches, or when technology is applied to translation production, as in machine translation (see, for example, Malmkjaer 2013). Another more recent trend that is actively driving Translation Studies beyond its linguistic and intercultural concerns is research focused on the topic of ecotranslation, inaugurated by Cronin 2017 by embracing a broad ecological dimension that includes everything human and non-human.³

Setting aside these complex and fascinating paths for the moment, I would instead like to focus on the material and social aspects of translation and its relationship to the activity of book production, which is particularly significant when translation is ‘on the move’, i.e. when we analyse this activity in terms of geographical and historical mobility. For this reason, I would like to focus my attention on the relationship between Translation Studies and the Book History, addressing the specificity of this exchange

¹ The so-called ‘cultural turn’ is a theoretical shift in translation studies that took place during the 1990s and is mainly associated with the work of Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere.

² Rizzi, Lang and Pym 2019 devote a whole chapter to the topic of interdisciplinarity, particularly in historical studies on translation. See “On Interdisciplinarity: Trusting Translation History”, pp. 87-108.

³ On this same line also see the relationship between translation and biosemiotics in Marais and Kull 2016.

and the collaborative dynamics that arise when studying translation phenomena alongside the activity of book production and circulation.

2. Translation and the books: a brief historical overview

Translation Studies and Book History have many aspects in common, as both of them deal with some of the most fundamental activities in knowledge production and transfer. The aim of this article is to examine whether it is possible to adopt, or rather exploit, a broad concept of ‘collaboration’ – the central theme of this *Cultus* issue – to draw some potential and actual connections between the two disciplines, in order to promote an optimistic outlook for future developments.

The way in which the two disciplines should be approached collaboratively, particularly at times of historical, cultural and technological transition, has been illustrated in a seminal essay on translation and the evolution of printing in the Renaissance period by Coldiron:

To study printing and translation as co-processes in linguistic, social, and material transformation thus gives us direct, dual access to a moment of tremendous technological change, and a moment of equally tremendous cross-cultural interaction. (Coldiron 2015: 6)

As early as 2017, Belle and Hosington pointed out that just a few studies had effectively connected these two interrelated fields. However, as Armstrong (2016: 103) had shown shortly before them, the relationship between translation and the materiality of book production had been addressed, particularly by scholars concerned with the mediation and transformation of texts in late medieval manuscript and print culture. Indeed, most studies on the relationship between Translation Studies and Book History have been produced by scholars working in the early modern period, such as Coldiron (2012; 2015), Armstrong (2015), Littau (2011; 2022) and Rizzi (2020; 2018), to name a few.⁴

This is not surprising, since the early modern period witnessed a momentous transition from manuscript to print culture. In the second half of the 15th century, thanks to the invention of printing technology, Europe

⁴ Colombo’s 2019a and 2019b contributions on 19th-century ephemeral literature are an important exception to the prevailing interest in this topic by scholars focusing on the early modern period.

witnessed an enormous change not only in terms of the production and consumption of texts, but also and above all in terms of their circulation. The development of book production and circulation was due to technical advances in printing technologies, which enabled publishers to reduce the price of books, with considerable consequences for cultural progress in Europe. The evolution of printing, as with all other media technologies, had a dramatic and permanent impact on writing and reading practices, and arguably also on translation, as Littau has claimed:

If media technologies (from the human body to the computer) make a difference to practices of writing and reading, as historians of the book have demonstrated, then surely the same technologies have also made a difference to practices of translation. (Littau 2011: 261)

As a consequence, the study of translation can only benefit from a parallel meticulous analysis of the technologies underlying its production, and Translation Studies should take advantage of the methodologies already extensively developed by book historians in this field.

In the course of the 17th century, and later in the 18th century, printed books began to be mass-produced, thus satisfying the rapidly growing demand for reading by an increasingly literate middle class that needed to find more affordable prices. In this way, print technology reached a mass audience and laid the foundation for the creation of a literary market. Furthermore, the new reading public did not read Latin, the language of the educated elite, but appreciated books in the vernacular.

Bachleitner⁵ (2018) has emphasised an important double effect of the connection between print production and translation in this historical period. On the one hand, the extraordinary increase in the mass of readers demanding literature in the vernacular strengthened the national borders within which these languages were spoken. Latin significantly lost its role as the language of communication in Europe, while the number of new, less educated readers increased. It can therefore be argued that the new printing technologies were behind the gradual emergence of national literatures

⁵ As early as 2009, Bachleitner modified Robert Darnton's (1982) original proposal of a "communication circuit" by including translation in the dynamics of production, circulation and consumption of books. Bachleitner's field of investigation was the production and translation of books in the German territories in the 19th century, but his argument about the crucial link between translation and the technologies of knowledge production and distribution can be applied to all other historical periods.

(2018: 107). On the other hand, another consequence of the development of print technologies must be acknowledged, which is particularly interesting for the purposes of this article. Indeed, translation became increasingly important as a fundamental tool to ensure communication between peoples, thus counteracting linguistic fragmentation. From the early modern age until almost the beginning of the 18th century translation functioned as a crucial bridge in Europe, in a much more complex communicative context than in the pre-printing era. To sum up, it can be maintained that print technology significantly created the conditions for the emergence of a strong demand for translation in Europe from the 17th century onwards.

3. Print technology and translation methods: two parallel paths?

Translation Studies and Book History are both actively involved in the study of the dissemination of knowledge across linguistic borders. As Colombo has aptly argued, scholars working in the two disciplines must necessarily come to terms with the relationship between translation and transnationality, i.e. with all the issues related to the “transnational migration of literary works, genres, modes and trends as well as in transforming national literatures and cultures more generally” (2019a: 153).

But it must also be acknowledged that media technologies have made possible the development, communication and circulation of knowledge throughout history and, consequently, also of translation. In this respect, the contribution of Book History is particularly important for Translation Studies, as the former provides the tools for new forms of materialist analysis. Book historians have long distanced themselves from abstract theories by reminding us that when we analyse a cultural product, we are not only dealing with its content on a linguistic level, but we are also addressing that product as a material object. Therefore, the study of translation in relation to print production offers crucial insights into the ways in which meanings are produced, processed and disseminated, as Coldiron has demonstrated with reference to the printers and translators of the English Renaissance:

Printers, like translators, control the distance between the reader and the prior foreign text. Just as the translator may elide or enhance cultural distance with each lexical and syntactical choice and with register, tone, and style, so too the printer may elide or enhance the

work's foreign elements with choices of *mise-en-page*, ornaments, initials, and typography. (Coldiron 2015: 173)

A seemingly obvious but perhaps not sufficiently explored consideration is that at the origin of all cultural objects and their transfers, including translation, are the processes of their production. These processes must be studied in their materiality, shaped by the technological resources that have been developed throughout human history.

The point has already been raised by Littau (2016: 90), who has argued that translation methods have changed throughout history according to the available technological resources, and that the study of translation should be complemented by the study of the media that support its implementation. A paradigm shift is therefore required in the study of translation phenomena through an integrated approach that takes into account not only the linguistic and cultural codes involved in the transfer, but also the concrete means of knowledge transmission.

Print technology has been responsible for fixing the written word. As Bachleitner (2016: 107) has aptly argued, word-for-word translation became much more important from the Renaissance onwards. Then, in due course, thanks to the revolution that print technology created not only in the production of books and transmission of knowledge, but also in people's reading habits, the reading public grew enormously, producing a demand for easy and comprehensible reading.

As a result, particularly in the course of the 17th century, fluency and readability emerged as key criteria, also in translation. The link between the physical materiality of the book and the way its content was conveyed through translation in such a crucial historical period, when the method of the *belle infidèle* became established in France, has been explored by Littau, who writes:

Can the translational strategy of fluency, which according to Venuti (2000: 55) first emerged in the late seventeenth century, be explained at least in part with reference to typographical changes made possible by print innovations, insofar as inter-word spacing now combined with new typefaces, page layouts, punctuation, chapter breaks, etc. introduced greater legibility, smoother readability, and by extension favoured more immediate intelligibility? (Littau 2016: 91)

The expansion of the book market had a significant influence also on the translator's profession. At the beginning of the 19th century, various

intellectuals, journalists, writers and teachers took up this profession in many European countries. Indeed, the growing demand for translation by the reading public increased the number of those beginning to do this type of work.

Translation can thus be firmly embedded in a kind of virtuous circle that sees the material production and transmission of knowledge in the book market increase dramatically as a result, and at the same time as a trigger, of a new approach to reading. As Bachleitner has argued: “The fact that the emerging class of authors, *translators* and journalists that was called ‘intellectual proletariat’ by eighteenth century critics could earn a living by writing was the condition for literary mass production” (2018: 106, my emphasis).

In the course of the 19th century, new legislation to guarantee intellectual property went beyond national borders, a clear sign of the economic importance that translation had acquired. One of the earliest supra-national copyright legislation that also mentioned translations was signed by the Kingdom of Sardinia and the Austrian Empire in 1840 (Palazzolo 2013). In the historical periods before the regulation of copyright and translation rights, the price of books, and of translations in particular, was the result of bargaining between supply and demand and was therefore subject to economic competition. This type of competition naturally led to lower prices. With the advent of the new legislation, the situation changed radically, creating not only a significant increase in prices, but also a greater awareness in the reading public of the value of literary products, and of translations in particular.

The study of translation alongside that of the material conditions and technologies behind its realisation appears extremely promising. It also seems a preliminary confirmation of the importance of collaboration between the two disciplines of Translation Studies and the Book History. However, a risk looms on the horizon, somewhat similar to the one Lefevere warned against in the early 1990s in his review of Even-Zohar’s polysystemic theory (1990), when the Belgian scholar put forward a revision of that theory, in which he perceived an abstract and mechanistic tendency. Instead, he wanted to emphasise the crucial presence of the human element in the production, distribution and transmission of cultural products. For this reason, he suggested the introduction of “instruments of control” (Lefevere 1992), represented by people and institutions (made up of people) that have a crucial influence in orienting, manipulating and/or safeguarding the reception and consumption of cultural products.

However, nowadays a so-called humanising approach (Pym 2009) in translation has become a sensitive topic because it is seemingly at odds with a broad ecological trend that would rather analyse human and non-human resources on equal terms in cultural production.⁶ I have already mentioned this trend by referring to the concept of eco-translation, elaborated in particular by Cronin 2017. Littau also explicitly criticises an overly anthropocentric emphasis that she considers pervasive in most of the humanities, and primarily in Translation Studies. As she has put it herself: “The anthropocene is impossible without its material infrastructure” (Littau 2016: 84).

4. Translation Studies and Book History: collaboration or subordination?

The question of how to envisage a collaboration between two distinct disciplines such as Translation Studies and Book History, so as to create a fruitful dialogue with mutual benefits, rather than establishing a predominance, even only on a methodological level, of one over the other, is not easy to answer.

Colombo speaks of the need for the two disciplines to complement each other, but she seems to support this statement mainly by referring to the ways in which translation historians in particular often need to “carry out extensive archival research and to consult databases and library catalogues”, practices that she apparently ascribes to the domain of book historians (Colombo 2019a: 151).

Another interesting, and undoubtedly true, issue on which the two disciplines should produce greater synergy concerns the way in which translation should be perceived as a social practice, involving many different agents. However, while book historians seem to be interested in studying “all the agents involved in the production, distribution and consumption” of different versions of a given text, translation scholars seem instead to focus on the agency of the translator, “and his or her relations with the other actors involved in the production, distribution and consumption of

⁶ It is worth noting that one of the outcomes of a ‘humanising’ translation approach is the increased visibility of all those who participate in the translation process. Despite this, I have previously argued that the concepts of visibility and collaboration in translation have often been seen as incompatible when considering the past. For further information on this topic, refer to Agorni 2022.

translations” (Colombo 2019a: 150). Consequently, Colombo concludes that the history of translation is above all the history of translators.

I believe she has a point here, and that Translation Studies should integrate the “inclusive perception of the publishing scene developed within Book History” (Colombo 2019b: 289). On the other hand, book historians could profit from the cross-cultural and cross-lingual focus of Translation Studies” (2019b: 289) to better understand the cross-cultural mobility of texts, genres, trends, and the role they play in shaping cultural systems.

A review of some of the most recent literature on this topic (Littau 2011; 2016; 2022) suggests that scholars have attempted to redress the presumed dominance of a human-centred view of research in Translation Studies, and disciplines such as the History of Books and Media Studies have been proposed as allies in this endeavour. Hence, the constitutive role of those technologies that have shaped cultural objects throughout history has been repeatedly emphasised by Littau, who sees translation in a relationship of dependence on the medium that makes it available – be it “papyrus scrolls, parchment books, printed books” (Littau 2022: 132). In this approach, media technologies would be responsible for the form that translation has taken over the centuries, not only influencing, but ultimately dictating translating methodologies, as Littau makes clear when she claims that technologies are the real driving force in the dissemination of knowledge across linguistic boundaries (2016: 87).

However, I am not alone in questioning the agency of non-human, technological agents that are probably the product of human intellect and creativity in response to some human need or desire. Technologies do not magically develop and function on their own, but have been invented and adapted by humans to serve purposes dictated by human needs. Bachleitner poses the question very aptly: “When Littau asks: ‘what is a printer without a printing press; or a translator without a medium?’, we must also ask: ‘what is a medium without humans?’” (Bachleitner 2016: 108). Translators, their publishers and readers, audiences and critics are undoubtedly active participants in translation processes, along with the medium that provides the structure of what is possible and common to accept as a translation. It is the combination of these factors and agents that ultimately shapes any translation.

The distinction between a relationship of primacy or collaboration between two approaches that respectively take into consideration the material aspects of media technologies (of utmost importance to book historians) and the immaterial aspects of translation (probably the field of

research most familiar to translation scholars) is very subtle and perhaps all in all confusing, as Littau herself admits that: “the translator is part of a material, medial and technologised ecology that shapes every aspect of the mind” (2016: 85). Yet, it seems to me that, even at the risk of seeming anachronistic, at a time when ecological concerns clearly show us that the age of the Anthropocene has definitively passed, the collaboration between human and non-human agents in translation, between human intervention and the materiality of the technological medium - whether one considers the materiality of the book or the virtual reality of information technology - still needs to be emphasised.

It is precisely with a view to a fruitful collaboration between the two disciplines of Translation Studies and Book History that research can best be conducted, especially when it comes to historical research on translation phenomena.⁷

For this reason, in the following paragraphs I would like to illustrate a case study, taken from my latest monograph (Agorni 2021a), in which I attempted to use some of the methodologies from both fields.

4.1. A case study: Translation in 19th-century Italy⁸

In 1816 Madame de Staël’s (1816) published a seminal essay, “On the Manner and Utility of Translations” in one of the most important periodicals in the Italian territories, *La Biblioteca italiana*. This event triggered a strong literary controversy between two factions – defined as Classicists and Romantics – with a focus on translations from modern languages. Two competing models emerged: the Classicist model, characterised by an adaptive and domesticating strategy, and the Romantic model, which favoured a more source-oriented approach to translation. Throughout Europe, in fact, Romantic movements proposing foreignising models of translation were gaining ground. In the Italian areas, on the other hand, fidelity to the source text was linked in a rather original way to the need to make texts accessible to a readership that was still developing, as we will see in the following paragraphs.

⁷ The relevance of translation history and its specific methodology within the discipline of Translation Studies as a whole is the main topic of discussion in Agorni 2021b.

⁸ In the first half of 19th century, the Italian territories were still fragmented into a series of states occupied by regimes constantly perceived as foreign and more or less oppressive to the population. Memorable is the remark of the Austrian Count Metternich who defined Italy in 1814 as “merely a geographical expression”.

A brief look at the history of books in this historical period shows how the Italian states lagged behind the developments in the book trade already taking place in other European countries. But some Italian cities, such as Milan in particular, distinguished themselves both by the growth of the market and by an increasing professional development in the field of culture. The evolution of the book market produced remarkable innovations, which were appreciated by many intellectuals but also criticised by others. Translation was one of the practices most affected by the radical changes in a market where the first semi-professional positions in the field of publishing were appearing.

In the first decades of the 19th century, translation became a means to enrich Italian culture and its literature. Indeed, Italian literature was in a receptive state as outlined by Evan-Zohar as a moment of “turning point, crisis or literary vacuum in a literature” (1990: 47). Publishers, critics and intellectuals in general had to come to terms with the widespread belief that Italian literature was lagging behind the rest of Europe, and translation was therefore exploited to assimilate themes and genres produced abroad. Two simultaneous factors played a key role in the development of the book market all over Europe: on the one hand, the mechanisation of printing, which made possible the production and sale of new, thin and cheap book formats. On the other, the emergence of new entertainment genres such as the novel, which fuelled the demand for easy-to-read material.

4.2. Book production in Italy: the professionalization of intellectual work

The Catalogue of 19th-Century Italian Books (CLIO) illustrates the development of the book industry during this period. While at the beginning of the century the total production of all Italian states was around 800 titles per year, by the end of the century it reached a total of 8,000 titles. On the other hand, during the course of the century, the Italian population grew from 20.4 to 31.6 million, a growth rate of 55%, while book production increased by 325% during the same period. Immediately after the Congress of Vienna, book production accelerated dramatically: from 1815 to 1823, it doubled in just eight years. Particularly in the time of the revolutionary uprisings of 1848, book production came to a standstill, but began to grow again in a rather discontinuous manner until the unification of Italy in the 1860s (data from Borghi 2003). The most productive city was certainly Milan, which published between 15 and 20 per cent of all books in the Italian territories in the first half of the 19th century (Albergoni 2006: 27).

It is also especially significant that the data reported by Borghi (2003: 115-116) see translations accounting for a significant share of all published texts (19.4%).

The Milanese literary author Cesare Cantù (1804-1895), in his essay *Condizione economica delle lettere* (The economic condition of letters) (1838), mentioned the so-called “intellectual manufactory”, which was a community of practice formed by people who derived their income from intellectual activities (Borghi 2003: 11). They were mainly scholars, writers, translators and journalists. The diversification of the roles of intellectuals is one of the most striking aspects of the development of the book trade in this historical period. The transition from the mid-1820s to the mid-1830s, when cultural agents dependent on the government were transformed into modern intellectuals living off their profession (Berengo 1980), is one of the main consequences of the evolution of the book market.

The growth of the book trade also stimulated a debate characterised by strong contradictions. The industrialisation of this sector entailed a careful cost reduction strategy that often resulted in savings in intellectual labour costs, and publishers chose to reprint old books or produce low quality editions and translations. Very often, authors, translators and literary critics were forced to accept paltry salaries, so that the imbalance between supply and demand for literary works actually resulted in a reduction of intellectuals’ salaries (Borghi 2003: 147; Berengo 1980: 301-303). From the 1830s onwards, more and more writers denounced their difficult economic conditions.

In 1858, for example, the Milanese journalist Carlo Tenca (1816-1883)⁹ drew attention to the opposition between the earlier patronage system and the newer market system. If in the former system, writers had enjoyed a certain freedom – although they were subject to the judgement of a patron – in the market system, the public risked exercising a virtually despotic power. Thus, if 19th-century literary authors believed they had freed themselves from patronage, in reality they found themselves in another form of subordination to the judgement of readers. They had to submit to the rules of the capitalist market, which were just as despotic as previous forms of patronage.

Translation was in fact one of the most sought-after jobs in the intellectual professions, but being considered an unskilled activity, it was

⁹ See Cesare Cantù, *Del commercio librario in Italia e dei mezzi di riordinarlo*, 1858 in Palazzolo 1986.

poorly paid and, as a result, translators could not support themselves with their salary and were forced to find other occupations. However, they were rather willing to devote themselves to translations from classical languages, which enjoyed a certain recognition and also better pay. Contemporary foreign novels, on the other hand, were very popular with readers and were a key resource for publishers, as copyright did not apply to this type of texts. Translations were therefore often marketed at a lower price than the original texts and often generated fierce competition between publishers.

Many authors harshly criticised the invasion of foreign literature, as translations were perceived as potential threats to original literary production. For instance, in his 1841 article published in the *Corriere delle Dame*, Tenca described the new professional role of the translator quite vividly. He showed his hostility towards translators who “have usurped the monopoly of the book market, and to them readers owe what is printed, good or bad” (Palermo 1967: 183).¹⁰ Accordingly, Tenca drew an almost conspiratorial picture in which translators would be allied with publishers in a struggle against authors, the real prey of the system (ibid.: 183). The Milanese author distinguished three different types of translators. The first included “translators of dead or imaginary languages”, ironically described as “decipherers of ancient inscriptions”. They were depicted as genuine “monsters of knowledge”, beloved by their readers. The second type consisted of the so-called “versifiers, i.e. translators of modern poetry”, a typology that included Byron’s translators, although “many of them had only managed to publish a few fragments of *The Corsair* or *Child Harold*” (ibid.: 184). The third group “embraces the lower class of translators”, i.e. translators of short stories and novels, “literary labourers who earn just so much per page” (ibid.). Tenca described them as being closely linked to publishers, siding against authors “whose sworn enemies they are” (ibid.). Sometimes they even claimed to be authors themselves, and unfortunately the public saw them as such. Tenca thus seemed to blame translators for all the problems of the book market system, accusing them of being responsible for the decadence of Italian literature. Translation was certainly perceived as a minor career compared to original writing, yet it must be pointed out that it was gaining unprecedented popularity at the time.

¹⁰ In Tenca’s own words, translators “have usurped the monopoly of book publications, and to them readers owe what is printed, good or bad” (Palermo 1967: 183). All references to Tenca’s works are my translations.

4.3. A new Romantic approach to translation

The publication of De Staël's article in 1816 triggered an unprecedented interest in translation in Italian cultural circles. In particular, not only did translations from modern languages abound, but also the periodicals of the time methodically reviewed these works. The languages most often translated from were French, the *lingua franca* of the time, but English and German were also increasingly appearing. In this period, it is not possible to outline a predominant translation theory on which all reviewers could agree. Indeed, these articles addressed issues such as audience appeal, the problem of translating cultural references, style and even the register to be used. The question of compliance or, as it is often put it, fidelity to the original was naturally the focus of the reviewers.

The Romantic faction gradually emerged in the course of the controversy between Classicists and Romantics, representing the ideals of a new bourgeoisie in the making, eager to measure itself against its European counterparts. The Italian Romantic authors and translators strongly believed that translation had an innovative function, both in the choice of texts to be translated, and thus to be imported into the Italian cultural repertoire, and in the strategies to be used for translating.

Not only did the countries in which a new political and cultural identity was taking shape, such as Italy and Germany, develop approaches to translation that were particularly sensitive to the linguistic and cultural specificity of the original (see Venuti 1995). The Romantic movements, despite their profound diversity in terms of goals and methods, spread throughout Europe between the second half of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century. A common feature was the rejection of the *belles infidèles* translation model, considered obsolete. For this reason, the original text was reproduced fairly faithfully in form and content, with a marked attention to the historical and geographical context in which it had been generated. Particular emphasis was therefore placed on the transposition of cultural references. As Venuti would put it, the trend that was developing virtually throughout Europe was that of a foreignising rather than a domesticating method of translation (1995).

However, it is important to emphasise that this trend took a very particular shape in the Italian territories. The respect for the identity of the original and the strong desire to come to terms with its otherness were also characterised by a strong drive for political, social and cultural renewal that manifested itself in the rejection of obsolete Classicist cultural models. Not

only writers, literary critics and publishers, but also translators found themselves caught up in the Classicist/Romantic controversy, which set two models against each other: one that aimed at innovation and embraced Romantic ideals, on the one hand, and a conservative tendency that followed classical models, on the other.

This dichotomy often emerged in reviews published in the main periodicals and the translation process acquired extraordinary visibility in this historical period, but what stands out is the fact that a sort of ‘double fidelity’ in translation was emerging: to the original text, on the one hand, and to the target reader, on the other.

The final part of this article will illustrate some reviews from the first decades of the 19th century that are particularly significant from this point of view. By shifting the focus away from the agency of individual translators and instead highlighting the role of other agents involved in the translation process, particularly literary critics and reviewers and the micro-network of relations among them, I hope to give an idea of what a collaboration, or synergy, between Translation Studies and Book History can produce.

4.4. The new proposal of a ‘double fidelity’

The literary author and critic Ludovico di Breme (1780-1820) published a review of Byron’s narrative poem *The Giaour* (1813) in the journal *Lo Spettatore Italiano* in 1818. In this writing, a fundamental link emerges for the first time between fidelity to the original text and another kind of fidelity, “no less important, to the Italian reader” (di Breme 1818: 119). Di Breme, one of the most important spokesmen of Italian Romanticism, encouraged translators to maintain all the distinctive features of the original text, but at the same time reminded them of the need to “translate the English character into the Italian character” (120). In di Breme’s intentions, therefore, Italian readers were to benefit from foreign works precisely because of their cultural diversity, which, however, had to be made accessible to them. While identifying himself as part of a broader European Romantic movement, di Breme paid close attention to the needs of the Italian public, which was still in its early days and thus far behind more advanced countries such as Great Britain or France. This ‘double fidelity’ was an extremely complicated task for the translators, who had to make a serious effort to mediate not only in terms of language, but also and above all in terms of culture.

Although the translation strategies of domestication on the one hand, and fidelity to the original, on the other, are seemingly at odds with each

other, in the periodicals of the time they were often addressed together. The poet and translator Sansone Uzielli (1797-1857)¹¹ offers us an original view of these issues in his review of Guido Sorelli's version of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Uzielli 1827). The reviewer identifies a potential dilemma between two opposing attitudes: literary creativity against fidelity to the main characteristics of the original. It was up to the translator to find a balance between the two extremes, i.e. to find a way to reproduce and create at the same time, and each translator had to find his/her own way, as Uzielli's own words make clear:

It seems that two qualities are required in the translator that are difficult to combine: a lively mind that suddenly discovers how the effect of the translated language can be reproduced, I would almost say created, in one's own language, and a quiet discernment to pursue step by step and conform to the author's way of feeling, and sometimes to the form in which he expresses his feelings, when this does not repulse the nature of the language into which one is translating. (Uzielli 1827: 32-33)

Uzielli's proposal is a translation that is faithful to the original and at the same time not only comprehensible to the reader, but also appealing (*ibid.* 35), although he makes it clear that translators should not employ any adaptation strategy: "Shall we be accused of defending that mode of translation which enslaves the taste, or the genius of the original author, of his nation, and of his century, to the particular taste of the translator, to the genius of his times, and of his fellow citizens?" (*ibid.* 39).

Translators' challenging task was therefore to find a way to reconcile the two extremes represented by a sort of limited creativity, on the one hand, and faithful reproduction of the source text on the other. Their responsibility was enormous, but the result was perhaps unexpected: their voices began to be heard more and more distinctly. Indeed, translators intervened, very often with a certain authority, in notes, prefaces or reviews, to illustrate their approaches or even to defend themselves against criticism

¹¹ In 1822 Sansone Uzielli translated Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* as "Il riccio rapito" and then worked as a literary agent to bring Walter Scott's historical novels to the attention of the Italian public, publishing three essays in the Italian periodical *Antologia* in 1823-24. Between 1824 and 1825 he edited a column entitled "Rivista letteraria inglese" (English literary review), also in the *Antologia*, which was specifically aimed at introducing English fiction to the Italian public. All references to Uzielli's works are my translations.

and blame. Forced to contain their creativity in translation, translators transferred their most original interventions into the paratextual material. And, most notably in this historical period, translators' voices featured in the pages of the leading periodicals of the time, reported by authoritative reviewers and critics.

4.5. The new visibility of the translator

Based on her experience in the field of Translation Studies, medieval and Renaissance literature, and text history, Coldiron (2012) has questioned the notion of translator invisibility proposed by Venuti (1995), in particular with the aim of demonstrating that this concept is specifically linked to the historical periods under consideration. For instance, she emphasised that in the Middle Ages it was not translators' invisibility that was important, but rather their visibility, i.e. a translation model opposite to that observed by Venuti in the Romantic period in Germany. The medieval literary system valued concepts such as respect for tradition and a sense of continuity with the past, observing a hierarchy with regard to the authority of classical authors. Hence, translators' visibility was crucial, as they presented themselves as custodians of an illustrious cultural tradition.

Similarly, but for completely different reasons, the focus in the early modern age was on the visibility of translators, not their invisibility. In this case, translators were identified because they made an important contribution to the interpretation of the literature of the past through their translations. As it were, they 'signed' their interpretations of their source texts.

Coldiron's argument thus makes us aware of how the concept of translators' visibility or invisibility is linked to cultural-historical changes, which cause translation norms to shift over the centuries, as these concepts "are an important indicator of ideological and aesthetic change" (Coldiron 2015: 195).

As far as the Romantic period is concerned, Coldiron agrees with Venuti, who associates the Romantic conception of originality with the model of the translator's invisibility. However, as we have seen above, the Italian Romantic translators engaged in a kind of double fidelity – to the original text and to its intelligibility by the target audience. For this reason, they developed a rather original type of 'visible mediation', in which translators became visible by providing readers with a variety of information to help them gain awareness of the source text's cultural specificity. Indeed,

Romantic translators became increasingly visible, as they not only often took on the role of critics in translation reviews, but also used extra-textual apparatuses, such as prefaces and notes, to discuss their translation strategies. And that no longer only concerned translations from classical languages, as in the past, but also translations from modern languages, especially French and English.

The wave of novelty produced by the Italian Romantic translators led to substantial changes in the approach to translating in the first half of the 19th century. Their efforts were not limited to greater fidelity to the letter or spirit of the original, concepts that were inadequate and repeated in both domesticating and foreignising translations. Rather, the Italian Romantic translators advocated a true mediation approach, through processes that can be described today as careful linguistic and cultural transfer. In this way, they aimed to make the reader understand the linguistic and cultural diversity to which the source text belonged and drew attention to the new developments that had emerged outside the Italian cultural system.

However, we must not make the mistake of thinking the Italian Romantics were simply looking elsewhere for literary models to imitate. Rather, they wanted to open the minds of their readers to the cultural diversity of foreign literatures through painstaking mediating translation, a process that was becoming increasingly professionalised, as not only linguistic, but also and above all intercultural skills were now required.

As I have tried to show in this very brief case study, this result was not produced by individual translators' agency, but was rather the effect of a series of interacting factors: the progress of printing and publishing technologies, the growing political debate in the Italian territories and its effects from a cultural point of view, which involved intellectuals, literary critics, reviewers, publishers and translators in a micro-network of relationships. Translation studies methodologies help us to recover above all the strategies of exchange with the foreign, tracing the path of cross-cultural textual transmission (Colombo 2019b), while the history of the book provides both the context that made these exchanges possible and opens the way to the study of the impact of these exchanges once they are embedded in the target cultural system.

5. Conclusion

In spite of the enormous growth in book production, including translations, on the one hand, and the new visibility of translators, especially in the Italian territories, on the other, translators did not acquire a new social status. On the contrary, there was a gradual erosion of translators' social and economic recognition from the 19th century onwards. In the Romantic perspective translation was seen as a means, the instrument of linguistic and cultural mediation, caught in an opposition that increasingly distanced it from the original production. In other words, if the role of translation was to enable those who had no access to the foreign language and culture to understand foreign works, the result was that translation could never replace the source text, or even compete with it, as had happened at other times in literary history. An obvious example of this are the versions from the classical languages of British authors such as Dryden and Pope between the 17th and the 18th century, who became famous mainly thanks to their translations, rather than their original works. Furthermore, as we have seen, the increase in book production, which also included translations, was due to technological changes in the printing industry and increased demand from a more literate public. The more translations were produced, the less translators were paid.

Yet an important side effect of all this was the new visibility, albeit limited to the literary and not the economic and social sphere, that translators gained in this period, especially in the Italian territories. The careful linguistic and cultural mediation present in their translations allowed their voices to be expressed in a unique manner through literary reviews, critical comments, footnotes, etc. These were written by either the translators themselves or by critics and reviewers, who provided remarks on the strategies utilised or reference to successes and failures in translation.

A striking example is the almost forgotten figure of Gaetano Barbieri (1770-1775/1853), a very prolific translator from French and English (Agorni 2021: 102-103). He was the most famous Italian translator of Scott's historical novels at the time, but among other works he also translated Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Barbieri's central role as a cultural mediator has hardly been recognised by translation scholars and even Italian literary historians often devote only a few paragraphs to him. However, using the methodological apparatus of Book History to trace book production in Italy, one cannot overlook the enormous growth of translations in the first

half of the 19th century, which saw a flourishing of Italian versions of Scott's historical novel. Barbieri alone translated and published under his own name 19 translations from Scott in 11 years.

Collaboration between the two disciplines of Translation Studies and Book History seems not only desirable, but necessary. In the field of historical research, material data on the production of books allow us to unearth forgotten pieces that enable us to fill in the contextual frameworks within which translation methodologies have been developed. Conversely, Translation Studies offer book historians the possibility to go beyond narrow linguistic boundaries and map not only production but also transfers of texts and knowledge in a broader view of the development of cultures. And if this collaboration can prove fruitful in the study of the past, as I have attempted to demonstrate, it can certainly also be of great use in the study of the present and in imagining the future.

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