

ANNALE DELLA FONDAZIONE INDA

2025 - NUOVA SERIE - N. 15

DIONISO

RIVISTA DI STUDI SUL TEATRO ANTICO



Edizioni ETS

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ISSN 1824-0240

ISBN 978-884677197-1

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GUIDO PADUANO

Translation as Craftsmanship*

1. The invitation to be here today cannot, I think, be explained by any particular expertise I have in the field of translation theory, unless you want to take as a theoretical standpoint my conviction that translation is first and foremost a practice and, even better, a form of craftsmanship. When I think of translation in general terms, as I have to do today, I see it as a satisfying, sometimes even exciting, always reassuring activity, because it is done on a daily basis, and because it involves contact with something we love and with problems that are, for the most part, circumscribable and controllable. It is an activity whose propriety lies in the somewhat physical nature of the words, which must be thought of as sound entities, and in the rhythm that must govern their sequence.

I have been talking about a daily activity, and in my case it is hardly an exaggeration, ever since I began with this experience: the autumn of 1962, when I was in my final year at high school in Venice, and my fellow students and I decided to stage the tragedy we were supposed to study that year, Euripides' *Alcestis*. We did it in Greek (God forgive us), but I was the director of the play and I decided that we needed a new translation, especially to help my fellow students understand their roles in the play.

In short, I have never stopped translating since, with the most significant change coming only two years ago, when I realised that as all my energies were declining, another energy was also declining – that repressive energy which for decades had kept me

* A previous version of this paper was given at the international workshop "Translating Latin and Greek. An Introduction for Classicists and Others. Third Workshop", Pisa-Firenze (Scuola Normale Superiore), 3-5 June 2024.

from satisfying the deepest and strongest desire of my cultural life: to translate Shakespeare, whom I love more than Homer and Aeschylus (and I can assure you that this is no small thing!). In case any of you are interested, I have now translated about half of Shakespeare's plays, and I hope to continue, with the invaluable help of Alexander Pope – himself a translator of Homer, but also a ceaseless guide for Shakespeare's ecdotic problems – and Humphrey Davy Findley Kitto. For this reason, although we are discussing the translation of Classics, I will now and then take examples from Shakespeare: I think that in some areas we can draw some useful parallels between different translation practices and different cultures.

Against this biographical background, it goes without saying that I find any servile or restrictive notion of translation disgusting, if only because of the need to justify myself. Nor do I find the biblical episode of the Tower of Babel particularly repugnant – in fact, I regard the building of the tower as a *felix culpa*, since it shows how far the perspectives on a text can be widened by transposing it into another language.

Admittedly, the goal of translating – that is, of transferring all the emotional and intellectual aspects of a text into another language and culture – has an aspiration to totality that is obviously unattainable. We can then think of translation in terms of an asymptote. The idea of an asymptote helps us to realise, among other things, that there cannot be a single model of perfect translation.

However, this aspiration to totality remains crucial for understanding the relationship between source text and translation, and for distinguishing this specific form of intertextuality – translation – from other such forms that we find in cultural history, such as rewritings or overwritings. This distinction would be obvious were it not for a misunderstanding that arose at a crucial moment in the Hellenistic era. When Plautus describes the passage from Philemon's *thesauros* to his *trinummus* with the famous expression *vortit barbare*, we can only translate this Latin expression as 'to translate'. But what

Plautus is actually doing is not translating in the strict sense we are used to – or at least not entirely. I am not referring here to the addition of new, specific features of Roman civilisation, which Eduard Fraenkel's brilliant and still unsurpassed study called *das Plautinische*, but rather to Plautus' own technique of translation. Since the discovery of the Oxyrhynchus papyrus 4407, we have been able to compare a few hundred lines of Plautus' *Bacchides* with Menander's original *Dis exapaton*. Whereas in Menander the boy's speech is divided into two parts by an *intermezzo* and a dialogue between father and son, in Plautus the boy's monologue is reunited into a single part, and the father's line to his son ("If Siro were here and told me that the sun was shining, I'd think that night had fallen and it was dark") is moved several hundred lines later and spoken by the boy to the slave himself¹. In this new position, the line will play a decisive role in the whole comic action. Moreover, whereas Menander's monologue is a subtle and disturbing analysis of the boy's own vulnerability to love, Plautus' monologue uses the same concepts brilliantly but diverts them to farcical ends, with aggressive sentences that are distorted in form and meaning. On the other hand, there are places where Plautus reproduces the source text with such meticulousness that the Greek papyrus even led to correct some corrupted lines in Plautus' play. This shows that literal translation is only *one* of the many ways in which Plautus relates to the original and exercises his literary and poetic freedom.

In a less obvious form, the intertwining of translation and re-writing has often occurred in both directions: on the one hand, target texts that differed significantly from the source text were called translations, thus gaining an authoritative protection; on the other hand, texts that were not at all fresh and original were called rewritings, but were in fact nothing more than translations (we may think for instance of Marie-Joseph Chénier's flat rewritings *Oedipe Roi* and *Oedipe à Colone*).

¹ Men. *Dis Ex.* 84-6 PCG; Plaut. *Bacch.* 699-700.

2. In any case, what is required of a real translator is no small thing: the translator has to take on two roles at the same time, which appear to be different but are not, at least in my opinion, incompatible. These two roles are that of the philologist and that of the writer.

Let us start from the philologist. That the translator should be a philologist was emphatically stated, as always, by Wilamowitz: «Die Übersetzung eines griechischen Gedichtes kann nur ein Philologe machen», only a philologist can translate Greek poetry². I do not want to deny this statement, even if this absolute tone contains some elements of corporate closure that can lead to unpleasant results (take, for example, an infamous case in the history of Italian theatre, namely Enzo Degani's review of Pier Paolo Pasolini's translation of the *Oresteia*³: a paper written by a philologist who bluntly accused Pasolini of not being a philologist). Rather, I would like to complete Wilamowitz's statement with the opposite, or rather, the symmetrical assumption: no one can be a philologist unless one is also a translator. I am convinced that translation does not limit itself to the use of existing philological skills, but creates new, broader and more complex ones. Going through each and every word of a text is, in my opinion, the philological act *par excellence*, because it leads to an invaluable cognitive possession.

This assumption of mine, I believe, cannot be challenged either by those who work as literary interpreters or by those who call themselves philologists. As far as the literary interpreters are concerned (a task that seems unavoidable for those who teach subjects called Greek and Latin *literature*, even if it is often *de facto* ignored, at least in Italy), they rightly tend to consider philology as an indispensable tool for understanding any literary phenomenon; moreover, structuralist and semiotic approaches have taught us to consider the literary message as composed of parts. Literary interpreters, therefore, cannot ne-

² WILAMOWITZ 1925, 1.

³ DEGANI 1961.

glect philological attention to detail, which is also a fundamental task of any translator.

But those who see philology as an end and not just an instrument will also have to agree with my assumption. Scholars in this field tend to see philology as a hard, objective science – a view that Peter Szondi rightly defined as a scientific ideal borrowed from other disciplines⁴. Be that as it may, I observe that those philologists usually consider subjective elements as the most dangerous threat to their activity – an objective argument would be rendered arbitrary by the intrusion of less than objective elements. This intrusion of subjective elements can happen both when we add external assertions to the discourse *and* when we selectively remove, often in good faith, textual elements that elude us or disturb our theses. Certainly, the latter strategy is forbidden to a translator. *Hic Rhodus, hic salta*: a translation must always decide and always take into account *all* the elements of the text. This obligation to always decide is, in my opinion, the best guarantee of what we can call, if not objectivity, then at least the resistance of reality to arbitrary interpretations.

For this reason, of all the activities that can be carried out with texts, translation is the most ethical, since it is the only one that prevents one from shirking responsibility for one's choices. It is true that to say this is to reiterate the aspiration to totality mentioned above, since no significant element in the source text can be removed by the translator. However, it is the specific task of the translator to decide what is significant and what is not – which brings us back to the image of the asymptote.

Paradoxically, the clear-cut act of translating is often more productive than the heavy and often chaotic mass of bibliography that fills most so-called scientific commentaries. From a theoretical point of view, it is also the opposite of what deconstruction has taught, legitimising virtually every possible reading of a text.

⁴ SZONDI 1967, 27.

Philological precision is a fundamental tool for following the poets in their most daring images and metaphors, and for resisting the temptation to paraphrase them – which is tantamount to trivialising the poetic style rather than translating it.

Some examples. At line 44 of Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* Clytaemestra's offerings to her dead husband are called a χάριν ἀχάριτον, a "graceless grace". The phrase beautifully expresses the essential contrast between truth and mystification – and what is most interesting is that the effect is produced by language contradicting itself. In the Italian translations of the twentieth century, only one translator, who was not a philologist, Pier Paolo Pasolini, managed to find this specific poetic point and translate it, reproducing the oxymoron with a good degree of precision: «quest'empio atto di pietà», while more recent translations by professional philologists fall short: «tributo non gradito», «sgraziato favore»⁵.

Often paraphrasing seems to be a good strategy to help the reader or spectator, but it actually leads to significant losses in terms of poetic meaning. In Shakespeare's *Othello*, after Othello calls Desdemona a whore, Desdemona asks Iago, «Am I that name, Iago?»⁶. This line is almost invariably translated into Italian with «Merito quel nome?». This translation may seem easier to understand or make sense of, but in fact it completely misses the point – the complete, even metaphysical identification between Desdemona's violent experience and her own essence. She doesn't 'deserve' («merito») the name, she *is* the name: a crucial element if we are to understand how drama itself works. I am not suggesting, of course, that we should always make literal, word-for-word translations – I will return to this point shortly.

Before that, a few observations on another crucial concept, that of ambiguity. The translator is constantly called upon to make a difficult *redde rationem* in facing ambiguity, which has rightly been described as a constituent feature of literary diction.

⁵ Battezzato in DI BENEDETTO, MEDDA, BATTEZZATO, PATTONI 1999²; FANOLI 1997.

⁶ *Othello*, IV.ii.

Ambiguity is hardly ever transferable to another language, except in fortunate cases, although its plurality of meanings can sometimes be transferred from the single word to the phrase or to another conceptual unit.

The most superficial and often the most difficult form of ambiguity is the play on words, or pun, which usually denotes the comic style, although it is not limited to comedy. We often think that puns are the ultimate limit of translatability. I am generally less pessimistic, as long as translators have enough leeway to transfer ambiguity into their own language. However, there are cases where even the most optimistic translator has to admit defeat. Take for instance the (French) title of a novel by the brilliant Italian writer Tommaso Landolfi: *LA BIERE DU PECHEUR*, a title written deliberately in capital letters to avoid any possibility of disambiguation through the French accents – the title, then, can mean either “the beer of the fisherman” or “the coffin of the sinner”, or “the beer of the sinner”, or “the coffin of the fisherman”.

As translators and interpreters, we often exaggerate, and tend to see ambiguity where there is none. I have often seen this happen with Aristophanes and Shakespeare – according to several eminent scholars, the Republic of Letters should be seen more as a brothel or a gathering of sex maniacs. Just think of the English verb ‘come’, which is ubiquitous in Shakespeare and in English: the number of sexually oriented hypotheses that could be made – and that many scholars have indeed made – is disconcerting.

3. Understanding and translating ambiguity brings us to the second competence that a translator should show, in addition to that of a philologist: that of the writer.

Every translation, of course, involves an important element of creativity, which is not affected by the severe constraints imposed by the source text, but rather benefits from them. As counterintuitive as it may seem, creativity does not increase the distance between source and target text: on the contrary, it organises that distance in specific artistic modes of representation that have lit-

erary significance. Again, this is not a value judgement – it is simply a description of the process.

In fact, to say that any Italian translation produced in 2024 belongs to the Italian language and literature of the 21st century reveals an intrinsic weakness of any translation: translations have a fleeting life, and it takes only a few decades for any translation to wear out – which is all the more remarkable when we consider the eternal youth of many literary masterpieces. In the light of all this, I am tempted to say that it is this very transience that makes the need for a contemporary language in translation all the more urgent.

This point is far from obvious. On the contrary, it has been the object of heated discussions. Those discussions were summarised by Giulio Lepschy as an opposition between advocates for a “naturalizing” translation and advocates for an “estranging” translation⁷. The reference was to an authoritative assertion by Schleiermacher: «Entweder der Übersetzer läßt den Schriftsteller möglichst in Ruhe, und bewegt den Leser ihm entgegen; oder er läßt den Leser möglichst in Ruhe und bewegt den Schriftsteller ihm entgegen»⁸.

The first path was famously taken by Walter Benjamin, who agreed with Rudolph Pannwitz’s thesis according to which «unsre Übertragungen, auch die Besten, gehn von einem falschen Grundsatz aus: sie wollen das Indische griechische, englische, verdeutschen an, statt das Deutsche zu verindischen, vergriechischen, verenglischen»⁹. In Pannwitz and Benjamin’s terms, to ‘Greekize’ a modern language means to choose to reproduce the main morphosyntactical elements of the source language even when those elements contradicts the basic linguistic mechanisms of the target language.

⁷ LEPSCHY 1981.

⁸ SCHLEIERMACHER 1813, 152 (= 1838, 218): «Either the translator leaves the author as still as possible and moves the reader towards the author, or they leave the reader as still as possible and move the author towards the author».

⁹ BENJAMIN 1972, 20: «Our translations, even the best ones, set off from the wrong principle, as they want to Germanize Indian, Greek, English, instead of Indianizing, Greekizing, Englishizing German».

Let us make an easy example, which also shows the risks of such approach to translation. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Book 7 line 3, we find a merely denotative expression, πατρός ἀγακλυτὰ δώματα. The source text has a hyperbaton (πατρός ... δώματα, «the father's glorious house») which is perfectly normal for Homer's style and is acceptable in English, thanks to the Saxon genitive, but is utterly strange in contemporary Italian («del padre ... la casa»). If we were to reproduce the Homeric word order in the Italian version – in Pannwitz's terms, if we were to 'Greekize' Italian – we would not only be creating an obstacle to the fluidity of the narrative, but we would be forcing a reader who does not know ancient Greek to stop and meditate on a bizarre syntactical structure. By surprisingly moving the genitive up, we would isolate it, even suggesting to the reader that πατρός has a special meaning, whereas in Homer it does not. As a sympathiser with psychoanalysis, I shudder to think what hordes of psychoanalysts might say about this particular emphasis on the concept of fatherhood. But I know that psychoanalysts are capable of much more.

Take Edoardo Sanguineti's last poetic work, his translation of Euripides' *Hippolytos*¹⁰. At line 661 Hippolytos warns Phaedra that he will come back with his father and observe her behaviour. The Greek has another hyperbaton: θεάσομαι δὲ σὺν πατρός μολὼν ποδὶ κτλ. An advocate for word-by-word translations, Sanguineti wrote «Ma osserveremo del padre venendo con il piede». Not only does this translation produce a uselessly unnatural word order in Italian, but a literal translation, «venendo con il piede», neglects the fact that, in the Greek phrase μολεῖν σὺν πατρός ποδί, ποῦς is as often a mere redundancy. Moreover, it also risks to produce a crazy double-entendre. «Del padre venendo con il piede» might then even suggest an absurd identification between foot and phallus, which by the way frequently comes up in interpretations of Greek tragedy, especially in the case of Sophocles' *Oedipus*. But perhaps the

¹⁰ SANGUINETI 2010.

message here is simpler: you are experiencing a great contemporary poet translating a great ancient poet – do you even want to understand a thing?

Of course, I am exaggerating and joking. But these examples might help us to meditate on Schleiermacher's famous assumption about either moving up the author or the reader. I suggest that we should make a simple distinction, ultimately derived from Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*. I think that translations should be as accurate as possible in reproducing the poetic *parole*, but should be careful not to affect the *langue* as a whole. There is no doubt that specific, meaningful expressions in the source text could and should retain their difference from contemporary and everyday language («Am I that name?»; χάριν ἀχάριτον). However, if this difference is not only found in individual expressions, but affects the language of the translation as a whole, this very difference loses all specificity and becomes simply a general obstacle to communication as a whole. In other words, it is important to preserve the specificity of poetic diction and style, but we must be careful not to make the language of the target text so alien that it is incomprehensible to any reader or viewer. If the language of the translation is completely obscure, we lose both the general meaning of the source text and the poetic, literary meaning of certain salient points of the source text. If we go down that road, we might as well *not* translate at all, as sometimes happens with tragedies performed in ancient Greek.

If we accept this difference between *langue* and *parole* and the consequences for our task as translators, then it is easy to understand and accept Walter Benjamin's idea that the target text should be powerfully shaken and agitated by the foreign language¹¹. As we have said, this must be done at the level of the *parole* and not so much at the level of the *langue*. I would also like to quote Benjamin's conclusion, which I find simply moving:

¹¹ BENJAMIN 1972, 20: «... sie (*scil.* die eigne Sprache) durch die fremde Sprache gewaltig bewegen zu lassen».

Denn in seinem Fortleben, das so nicht heißen dürfte, wenn es nicht Wandlung und Erneuerung des Lebendigen wäre, ändert sich das Original. Es gibt eine Nachreife auch der festgelegten Worte.

For in its continuing life, which could not be so called if it were not the transformation and renewal of a living thing, the original is changed. Established words also have their after-ripening¹².

Transformation and renewal of the source text are the opposite of 'Greekizing' our language – a text is transformed and renewed in response to the historical needs of the present, which we can describe as a *praesens pro praeterito*, living witness to the past.

If we ask ourselves how fully our field of study has complied with these needs, the answer does not seem reassuring to me. I shall confine these observations to Italy, since I do not consider myself qualified to judge other languages from the point of view of my mother tongue. It seems to me that, compared with other European literary traditions, the Italian poetic tradition has consistently lagged behind in the last few centuries (even our greatest poet, Giacomo Leopardi, a philologist and translator himself, shows signs of this stylistic delay). Coupled with an outdated notion of antiquity, this poetic delay has had an enormous impact on our whole style of translating the classics. I think I have read all or almost all the Italian translations of ancient Greek and Latin texts produced since the 1950s or so, and I have very often felt unsatisfied for a number of reasons: a pompous rhetoric, a rigid academicism, the remains of a fascist – if not Nazi – idea of antiquity, a general trivialisation of the discourse, and so on. What remains constant in all these experiences of mine is the sense of a considerable distance in time: it seems that the real date of these translations is not the one printed on the colophon, but one much earlier. If we were to define the style of most Italian translations of Classics, we should describe it as late Romantic, late 19th century. We should make an experiment and ask a

¹² Ivi, 12.

reader to date one of our contemporary translations of Classics without knowing the period: I think most readers would think it was made at least 100 years ago.

It is possible, of course, that my judgement has often been hasty and even unjust – it is even more possible that I have always been distrusting myself, since the faults I found in other scholars' translations were the same risks I faced in my own work as a translator. Be that as it may, the galaxy of Italian translations of Classics still seems to me, on the whole, to be outdated. Even Hermeticism and its poetic legacy – admittedly the most innovative and radical poetic experiences of the last century or so in Italy – do not seem to have left any significant traces on our translating practice. In fact, some of the most important Italian poets of the twentieth century have produced translations that have nothing to do with Hermeticism itself. Eugenio Montale's translations of Shakespeare (*Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*) and Salvatore Quasimodo's translation of *The Tempest*, for example, are all in keeping with the Romantic aesthetic we outlined earlier. The only notable exception is Quasimodo's translation of the Greek lyric poets – and the reason why this particular translation is exceptional is a surprising and unique alignment between the fragmentary nature of the source text and the poetics of the translator. In other words, the only effective translation was produced when the translator translated a text that, for some reason, was aesthetically coherent with his own contemporary language and poetics.

4. In the final part of this paper, I would like to make some specific observations about theatre translation, which in one way or another has always been the real soundtrack of my life.

The first point I would like to make is that Benjamin's beautiful metaphor of the "renewal of a living thing" should be taken literally when it comes to theatre practice. Indeed, real people, with their bodies and souls, renew a living thing, as actors live the text they are performing and share this experience with the

audience, who also live what they are watching through the filter of emotional identification. This sharing of an existential experience is an aesthetic emotion that has no equal, except perhaps in music (as Lev Tolstoj beautifully explained in his *Kreutzer Sonata*). Compared to music, however, the sensory field of theatre is much wider and is not limited to hearing and seeing, but also includes smell and touch. I remember a memorable show directed by Davide Livermore some years ago, in which the stalls were filled with rose petals, and at the same time rose perfume was sprayed all over the theatre.

For this reason, theatre translators do not need to be convinced that they need to be contemporary – if anything, they need to fear that they are not contemporary enough. In this respect, theatre translators share a terrible and constant testing ground: the show – every show – which they arrive at after a long period of work full of doubts and problems specific to theatre translation. Whereas in every other genre, the concept of authorship is unambiguous (the most notable exception being perhaps the so-called Homeric question), every theatrical text has a multiple authorship, shared at least by a written and fixed text, which we usually call the script, and by an infinitely variable staging, conceived by a director whose free artistic will is clearly different from that of the translator, and is usually much greater. Greater, but not unlimited, in my view: if directors choose to ignore the great limits of meaning and drama of a given text, I do not see why they should have chosen to stage that given text in the first place.

Two paths therefore cross: that of the director and that of the translator, who is called upon to produce a translation for a given production and, in doing so, to make a strategic choice about the script. The risk of conflict between these two people is plausible: and although there is a clear difference in power between the director and the translator, a conflict between the two of them can lead to important clarifications and thus to real progress in the overall interpretation of the text (in this respect, my experience in about fifteen productions has always been positive).

In any case, most translations are conceived with a view to publication, and are then intended for individual reading rather than performance. But we would be seriously mistaken to think that this makes the translator's task any easier. On the contrary, it makes the translator's responsibility even heavier, because in this case the translator also has to take on and carry out the work of the director.

As a matter of fact, there is no such thing as a translation of a theatrical text that can ignore the theatrical nature of that very text – it is simply not possible to read it as if it belonged to another genre. What happens when we read rather than perform a theatre text is that each reader creates an imaginary, or rather virtual, production: this production is suggested by the translator, who must be both precise and unobtrusive, so that the translation can take into account the spatial dynamics and discursive relations that make up a script, but at the same time it does not interfere with the plurality of all the possible staging options.

Given these specificities, how should we translate ancient drama? What has my experience taught me? First of all, I would like to rule out a very common possibility, based on a prejudice about the religious nature of Greek tragedy. It is true that ancient drama – and tragedy in particular – is one of those texts that Walter Benjamin called “sacred texts”¹³. Moreover, historical evidence clearly links ancient tragedy with religious festivals in honour of Dionysus. All this suggests that we should understand and translate Greek drama as a kind of religious ritual.

However, there are several reasons against this interpretation. First of all, these religious festivals were mainly a phenomenon that emphasised socio-political belonging, whereas true Dionysian experiences took place elsewhere and at other times. Secondly, the surviving ancient drama is mainly concerned with the problems of the *polis*, while what we might call religious history is discussed in only two surviving texts, *Prometheus Bound* and

¹³ Ivi, 21.

Bacchae. And even in these two cases, the discussion of religious issues is not so much an assertion of a truth of faith as a tortured and problematic observation of human reality. Moreover, even these two dramas share a principle common to all surviving ancient plays (and to almost all European drama in all epochs), the principle according to which dramatic action follows a linear flow of time. This principle is the exact opposite of the principle that governs ritual action, which takes place according to a circular flow of time. However open to various religious elements, ancient Greek drama was not essentially intended as a ritual or a religious service: all translations based on this principle – and thus providing less a play text than a ritual text to be used in a service – give a false picture of what ancient drama was and how it worked.

Of course, ruling out ritual translation does not mean that we should opt for informal, colloquial or vernacular versions of Greek tragedy. This option, in turn, is based on an interpretive stance that I do not share – namely, the scholarly tendency to find *spoudogelaion* in tragedy, that is, to see comic moments whenever the dramatic tension is released (think, for example, of the first messenger's speech in Sophocles' *Antigone*). A parallel is often suggested between parodic and paratragic moments in comedy and 'paracomical' moments in tragedy – a parallel that cannot stand: while it is normal for tragedy to be present within comedy, as a salient aspect of that contemporary life which is the constituent element of comedy itself, the movement cannot be reversed, and comedy has no institutional place within tragedy. Translations of Greek tragedy should therefore, in my opinion, always maintain a constantly elevated tone, neither too sacred nor too commonplace.

Speaking of the tone of theatre translations, one last point. The contrast between prose and verse. This is perhaps the greatest barrier between us and antiquity. For millennia, verse has been a defining feature of drama, perhaps the most important. As far as I know, the only major debate on the subject took place in eighteenth-century France, where the most outspoken advocate

of prose was Antoine Houdar de La Motte, who eventually lost. Today, however, things have changed, at least in Italy. Again, for the purposes of my discussion, I will only consider Italy and Italian theatre, because that is the tradition I know and understand best.

Of course, it is quite possible for a playwright today to write in verse, even rhymed verse. But when they do, it is a choice that carries a strong connotation – in other words, it is evidence that this is not the usual way of writing. The translation of verse is susceptible to the paradox we saw above about word order: the supposed respect for a tradition makes it clear that that very tradition has been betrayed. When we hear Sophocles' Oedipus tell his story in hendecasyllables, for example, we think more of Alessandro Manzoni's *Adelchi* than of a Greek tragedy. Moreover, modern metre tends to be more rigid than ancient metre – which gives the metre an even different aesthetic effect, one that is probably more monotonous than ancient drama must have sounded.

In many translations of ancient drama we often find a compromise solution: a prose translation of the episodes and a verse translation of all the lyric parts. Let us not even mention the problem of the anapaests, which are an embarrassing exception to both of the above alternatives, since they were probably an analogue of the *recitativo* in modern melodrama. In any case, this compromise is only superficially convincing. Think again of 18th- and 19th-century melodrama: the so-called *numeri*, the vocal numbers, intoned texts with a precise metrical pattern, but for the sake of performance or musical composition they often disrupted that very metrical pattern. In Verdi's *Rigoletto*, for example, the libretto by Francesco Maria Piave has a beautiful seven-syllable line, «il mio universo è in te», but when it is performed, in Verdi's music we hear «il mio universo, il mio universo è in te» – the anadiplosis discards the metre that we find in the libretto. We cannot be sure that such phenomena did not also occur in ancient performance: if they did, we translators of verse would be left with what appears to be a philological position but actually

turns out to be a historical mystification. Of course, I know from direct experience how the shift from prose to verse can affect the meaning of a play – and pose serious problems for the translator. Take, for example, the difference between Brutus' and Antony's speeches in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: the former, in prose, suggests the failure of empathy and social relationships, whereas the latter, in verse, is the triumph of mystification. The fact that the first speech is in prose and the second in verse dramatically contributes to this feeling, as well as to the general feeling that Antony's speech is usually perceived as better, more effective and more gripping (I myself tend to sympathise with Brutus!). What is a translator to do in such a case? Having chosen to translate Shakespeare in prose throughout, I could not leave Antony with the privilege of having the only verse passage in the whole *corpus*: that would have been the worst betrayal of the source text, which does indeed alternate between verse and prose, but in an ordinary way, not just in this one case, which would have stood out as a complete exception, when in fact it is no exception at all. What I have chosen brings us back to our definition of translation as a form of craftsmanship: I found a practical way out. I translated Antony's speech in prose, but I increased the rhythmic potential of my prose and introduced a number of lexical and syntactical features that made this speech stand out from a stylistic point of view.

Only then did I fully understand an irreversible historical process concerning drama and theatrical translation. We can say that metre and all the effects of rhythm have moved from text to performance: what was once conveyed by rhythmic patterns is now part of a wider performative system operated by both the director and the actors. This system includes the articulation of discourse, lexical correspondences, sequences, circularity, *crescendo* and *calando*, increases and decreases in emphasis and intensity, accelerations and pauses, and so on and so forth. As translators, we have to take this new system into account and work according to its rules, rather than the rules of a 2500-year-old performative system.

In conclusion, I would like to make one last marginal comment on metre. If we go back to the beginning of the 20th century, we Italians usually still find Ettore Romagnoli's verse translations of Aristophanic comedy pleasing. Does this make Romagnoli's versions particularly durable and Romagnoli's choice of metre particularly effective? I think not. To understand why, we should look at Romagnoli's verse translations of tragedy: if we read those versions – which have very similar features to his translations of comedy – we find that metre and rhyme make them ridiculously outdated and incongruous. It is precisely these aspects of ridiculous incongruity that make Romagnoli's translations of comedy seem so effective: they make us laugh. But they do so for the wrong reason: we do not laugh at the content of the comedy, but at the language of the translation, at its strange incongruity. Certainly not what comedy needs, and certainly not what it deserves: the idea that the value of ancient comedy lies not in its content, but only in the form that the translator is able to give it, still implies the lamentable belief that comedy is a lesser art. Giving ancient comedy the formal, poetic and substantive weight it deserves is a specific responsibility of the translator. Yet another.

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ENGLISH TITLE

Translation as Craftsmanship

ABSTRACT

The paper provides new theoretical considerations on translation, with particular attention to translation of classical texts, and translation of ancient drama. In particular, the paper reviews the scholarly conundrum of “naturalizing” vs. “estranging” translations. The paper suggests to regard the question in Ferdinand de Saussure's terms, separating *langue* and *parole*, and argues in favour of translations that preserve the poetic *parole* of the source text while respecting the contemporary *langue* of the target text.

KEYWORDS

Translation — Translation Studies — Drama Translation — Tragedy — Comedy

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Edizioni ETS
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Finito di stampare nel mese di aprile 2025