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Franco Buffoni: the poietic encounter

Modern Italy has had two important poet-theorists of translation: Franco Fortini and Franco Buffoni. If Fortini was somewhat on the edges of academic world, becoming a university professor of Italian very late in his career, Buffoni is a full-fledged academic, with a doctorate in American literature, and with numerous professorships in his career. While Fortini opened up translation studies for Italian poets, Buffoni has revolutionized the field of Italian translation studies by broadening its theoretical framework. We have spoken before of the classic dichotomy—poetry is translatable or untranslatable—, which reigned as long as Croce’s philosophy. It was owing to later philosophers like Luciano Anceschi that poetry became to be viewed not as something establishable a priori. Likewise, in Anceschi’s thought, poetic translation became to be seen less as a zero-sum process but an independent creative work. From Anceschi, Buffoni’s “ideal mentor,” the Italian poet internalized the primacy of the poietic encounter, while also incorporating other concepts in his theory of translation—from Julia Kristeva’s intertextuality, Friedmar Apel’s notion of movement of language in time, Henri Meschonnic’s idea of rhythm, to the avant-text. Buffoni’s paradigm of translation is both a framework for interpreting translation as well as a method for translating poetry. He is clearly at variance with the other four poet-translators in this study, for whom translation is, at core, an impossibility. Buffoni sets out to overturn this conception by framing the issue of translation not as reproduction of content but as a meeting of different *poetics*.

Translation is thus always possible. Naturally Buffoni's own translations do not always equally privilege all five aspects, namely the poietic encounter, intertextuality, movement of language in time, rhythm, and avant-text. If the poietic encounter is, at heart, the standpoint from which Buffoni analyzes others' translations, it is also the standard by which his own versions ask to be interpreted. Thus, during this chapter, while I will draw on the other four notions mentioned above, which at times provide crucial interpretative guidance, I will nonetheless rely on the *poietic* encounter between the translator and the original text.

Poetic Career

Critics have divided his work into three main periods.¹ The first stage includes his first three books. In this phase, what ties together Buffoni's work is his ironic "vocazione da fantaisiste,"² inspired by Aldo Palazzeschi and Jules Laforgue. This stage is characterized, in the main, by "lightness."³ Here, for instance, is the opening of "Italiano," from *I tre desideri*, where Eliot's famous "the world will finish with a whimper" turns even more sarcastic, even playful:

Il mondo non finirà con un gran botto,
Ma con un piagnisteo, un uggìolio,
Un piagnucolio [...]⁴

The world will not finish with a great bang,
But with a moaning, a whining,
A whimpering [...]

In *Quaranta a Quindici* (1987), he adapts Pound's "Lake isle" (itself a parody of Yeats' "Lake Isle at Innisfree"):

¹ Cf. Tommaso Lisa, "Cartografie dell'oggettualità," in *L'apostrofo* 6, n. 18 (2002): 12.

² Franco Brevini, "Nota introduttiva," to Franco Buffoni, *Adidas*, 7.

³ Franco Brevini, "Nota introduttiva," 8.

⁴ Buffoni, *I tre desideri*, 41.

Oh Mercurio dio della truffa
Dammi un tavolo e un'antologia,
E venti ragazzi davanti.⁵

O Mercury god of thievery
Give me a table and an anthology
And twenty boys in front of me.

This following passage, from Buffoni's preceding volume, *Scuola di Atene* (1991), well illustrates the lightness spoken of by Brevini. A charming piece that recalls, for instance, Sandro Penna's poetry, and musically graceful, with its assonance, alliteration, and rhyme:

Ma lo vedevano gli altri al mattino
Bruno perfetto come Apollo
Provare la chiave del casello
E lento posare la catena?
Aveva mai pensato il Bruno
D'essere dio almeno per uno?⁶

But did the others see him in the morning
Bruno perfect like Apollo
Try the key of the tollbooth
And slowly put down the chain?
Did he ever think, Bruno,
Of being god at least for one?

A change comes after his provisional self-anthology *Adidas* (1993). He starts to structure his individual lyrics together in micro- and macro-narratives (whether in an individual book of poetry or a trilogy), which are no longer in an ironic and *fantasiste* vein. Rather, the tone is more objective, more focused. For example, in his *Suora Carmelitana* (1997), the first volume of a trilogy, he explores a startling new theme, within a different genre, a tale in verse, as shown here, from the beginning of the eponymous poem:

⁵ Buffoni, *Quaranta a Quindici*, 11.

⁶ Buffoni, *Scuola di Atene*, 48.

Il convento di Via Marcantonio Colonna
È del trenta. E mia zia
Che aveva lavorato nella ditta
E quando è entrata la guerra era finita
È lì dal quarantasei.

Da allora è uscita tre volte per votare
(Divorzio, aborto e quarantotto)
E due per andare in ospedale.
Per votare ci vuole la dispensa
E anche per l'ospedale.

[The convent on Via Marcantonio Colonna
Is from 1930. And my aunt
Who had worked in the company
And when she entered the war was over
Is there from 1946.

Since then she has left three times to vote
(Divorce, abortion and 1948)
And twice to go to the hospital.
To vote one needs a dispensation
And also for the hospital.]

One word in this poem would have been inconceivable in Buffoni's earlier work, and shows how his style is no longer tied to high literary models: namely the English term (untranslated) *fist fucking*: moreover, the utilization of such a term in a poem about a protagonist-nun demonstrates how far Buffoni has gone towards a forthright public repudiation of the Church, which will become more and more pronounced as time goes on.⁷

After this book is the autobiographical volume, *Il Profilo del Rosa* (2000), defined by the poet himself as a "long trip through the four decades of my life, from childhood to full maturity, but also through the places where it principally occurred." Returning to his childhood home, Buffoni finds

⁷ E.g., Franco Buffoni, *Più luce, Padre: dialogo su Dio, la guerra e l'omosessualità* (Rome: L. Sossella, 2006), as well as Franco Buffoni, *Roma* (Parma: Guanda, 2009).

Una radice ha rotto il vaso
Nell'atrio della casa riaperta
La pianta è sempre stata bagnata
Dal vetro rotto dal vento.⁸

[A root has broken the vase
In the atrium of the re-opened house
The plant has always been bathed
By the glass broken by the wind.]

The last volume of the self-described trilogy, *Theios* [Greek for *uncle*, 2001], is another *bildung*, this time of Buffoni's young nephew, Stefano, to whom the volume is dedicated ("A Stefano a quei suoi / Dentini appena incominciati"⁹). The book ends with a Shakespearean invocation to fecundity, from the pen of a poet whose own sexual identity prevents such a succession: "Procrea, procrea / Ragazzo mio, che la tua bellezza non si perda" (Procreate, procreate / My boy, so that your beauty is not lost).¹⁰

After the parenthesis of the curious volume *Del Maestro in bottega* (2002), an interesting collection of original poems and translations (what Rodolfo Zucco would aptly call a *satura*),¹¹ Buffoni published *Guerra* (2005), a poetic volume focused on his father's experience in World War II as a prisoner of war in Germany. This volume, according to the critic Andrea Cortellessa, marks a striking shift in Buffoni. From "'pure' poet, a light and wandering thing – to engaged intellectual, demonstrating and intransigent."¹² The following verses mark an undeniable break with his past poetry, including the previous trilogy:

"Sono ostriche, comandante?"

⁸ Buffoni, *Il Profilo del Rosa*, 13.

⁹ "To Stefano, to his recently emerging baby teeth."

¹⁰ Franco Buffoni, *Theios*, 72.

¹¹ Franco Buffoni, *Del maestro in bottega* (Rome: Empiria, 2002).

¹² Andrea Cortellessa, "Motivazione del premio Maria Marino 2009." Available at http://www.francobuffoni.it/motivazione_cortellese.aspx.

Chiese guardando il cesto accanto al tavolo
Il giovane tenente,
"Venti chili di occhi di serbi,
Omaggio dei miei uomini", rispose sorridendo
Il colonnello. Li teneva in ufficio
Accanto al tavolo. Strappati dai croati ai prigionieri.¹³

["Are they oysters, commander?"
Asked the young lieutenant,
Looking at the basket next to the table.
"20 kilos of Serbian eyes,
homage of my men," responded, smiling,
the colonel. He kept them in his office
next to the table. Torn from the prisoners by Croatsians.]

This political perspective will be furthered in the poet's following book, *Noi e Loro* (2008), focused on the double exile from normal society of homosexuals and immigrants. Some of the most piercing verses deal with Mehmet, the poet's lover:

Ho gli occhi di dolore e sono turco
...
In prigione mi hanno torturato
Con gli elettrodi
Ho i segni sotto il mento e sui ginocchi
Anche i piedi mi hanno massacrato.¹⁴

[I have eyes of sorrow and I am Turkish
...
In prison they tortured me
With electrodes
I have the signs under my chin and on my knees
They massacred my feet too.]

In Buffoni's most recent volume, *Roma* (2009), he turns his gaze to Rome. As a poet who grew up and matured in Lombardy, with its well-known Enlightenment traditions that influenced him in his progressive politics, he approaches Rome with

¹³ Franco Buffoni, *Guerra*, 54.

¹⁴ Buffoni, *Noi e loro*, 121.

foreign eyes. Here is a capsule poem that neatly shows a linkage between ancient and modern (Fascist) Rome:

Negli Horti Caesaris il dittatore ospitò Cleopatra,
A Villa Torlonia Mussolini, Hitler.
Quattro intestini ancora impauriti
Per le dimensioni dell'Oceano Esterno
Da placare con sacrifici.¹⁵

[In Caesar's gardens, the dictator welcomed Cleopatra,
At Villa Torlonia, Mussolini did the same for Hitler.
Four intestines, still frightened,
at the dimensions of the External Ocean
to be soothed with sacrifices.]

Then again, a shift towards the political is not truly foreign to Buffoni's poetics, if we recall what he wrote in 1993 about the role of verse: "Poetry [is] never tired of repeating, particular to the youngest, those two or three essentials concerning ethics and aesthetics that one no longer has the force or the courage to repeat in a loud voice."¹⁶

Through the course of his career, as Buffoni remarked, his poetry can be categorized in the following four groups: texts that have a "long stratification," "gifts of the gods," "associative," and "stories in verse." It is only when he realizes how to juxtapose these "poetic fragments" that he can create a book: they become "the tesserae of a mosaic."¹⁷ Only once they all come together (and here Buffoni quotes Pasolini's phrase about the difference between unedited film and the finished film) "that story (*storia*) becomes morale."¹⁸ The macrotext, the book, the *canzoniere*, the *quaderno di traduzioni*, have more and more assumed importance in Buffoni's outlook. Yet if he

¹⁵ Buffoni, *Roma*, 79.

¹⁶ Franco Buffoni, "Poesia e ragionevolezza," *Il rosso e il nero* 2, n. 5 (1993): 3.

¹⁷ Franco Buffoni, "Riflessioni sul fare poetico," *Nuovi argomenti* 36 (2006): 210.

¹⁸ Franco Buffoni, "Riflessioni sul fare poetico," 210.

arranges his poems long after to form together a retrospective whole, it is not so with his translations. Now he only translates poems, in fact, which he will use to form a future *quaderno di traduzioni*: the intentionality is there from the very beginning with his translations, in contrast to his original verse.

Translation career

Franco Buffoni began his career in the 1970s in a rather unlikely manner: translating poems by the American minimalist writer Donald Barthelme included in the American writer's novel *Snowwhite*, along with a volume on Henry Kissinger (and ghost-translating of other political texts). Little here would hint at the massive translations down the road. True, Buffoni also did edit two works of 18th century Scottish poets (Ferguson and Ramsay) during the same period, but it was only in 1981 that our poet-translator translated a book of poetry (by Keats): *Sonno e poesia*. In fact, it was the 1980s that saw Buffoni truly develop into the translator he became: Keats (1981),¹⁹ Byron's *Manfred* (1984),²⁰ Coleridge (1987),²¹ Kipling (1989),²² and the canonical and beautifully translated 2-volume *Poeti romantici inglesi* (1990),²³ which summed up a decade's work. In the following years, he would turn his hand to the 20th century, to Wilde (1991),²⁴ and Heaney (1991),²⁵ culminating in his 1999 *Songs of Spring*.²⁶ 12

¹⁹ John Keats, *Sonno e poesia*, tr. Franco Buffoni (Milan: Guanda, 1981).

²⁰ George Gordon Byron, *Manfred*, tr. Franco Buffoni (Milan: Guanda, 1984).

²¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *La ballata del vecchio marinaio e altre poesie*, tr. Franco Buffoni (Turin: Einaudi, 1987).

²² Rudyard Kipling, *Ballate delle baracche e altre poesie*, tr. Franco Buffoni (Milan: Mondadori, 1989).

²³ *Poeti romantici inglesi*, tr. Franco Buffoni, 2 vols. (Milan: Bompiani, 1990).

²⁴ Oscar Wilde, *Ballata del carcere e altre poesie*, tr. Franco Buffoni (Milan: Mondadori, 1991).

²⁵ Seamus Heaney, *Scavando: poesie scelte* (1966-1990), tr. Franco Buffoni (Rome: Fondazione Piazzolla, 1991).

years would pass until his next book of translations appeared, *Una piccolo tabaccheria*. Indeed, if he translated often by commission during the 1980s, his translations following Wilde were all by choice. No longer forced to translate, Buffoni has spent the last twenty years translating lyric poetry most congenial to his poetic temperament, which would fit together in a structured whole (i.e., *quaderno di traduzioni*).

The role of translation in Buffoni's career is not secondary to his own creative work, rather totally connected (*totalmente connected*) to it. Reflecting on translation allowed him to join the two "branches of my work," which were as literary scholar and poet. Buffoni goes so far as to state that it was precisely "the theory of translation which allowed me to construct a personal theory of literature."²⁷ Thus let us now move on to his specific translation ideology.

Translation ideology

To best grasp the difference in translation philosophies between Buffoni and older Italian poets, one name makes the difference: the Italian phenomenologist Luciano Anceschi. Buffoni, the "ideal disciple" of both Luciano Anceschi and Emilio Mattioli, thus did not grow up not under the dominion of Croce, like earlier generations of Italian poets. Anceschi, a follower, in his turn, of Antonio Banfi, sought to free the study of poetry from rigid a priori definitions. Contrary to Croce, Anceschi held that poetry is defined, from individual work to work, by looking at the system of relations structuring it. In Anceschi's view, autonomy and heteronomy variously define poetry. Poetry is not, as Croce argued, simply defined by what is poetry and what is not: form and content are

²⁶ Franco Buffoni, *Songs of spring: quaderno di traduzioni* (Milan: Marcos y Marcos, 1999).

²⁷ Petrosino 1.

not inviolable entities. Moreover, the history and criticism of poetic works must, according to Anceschi, be predicated on the role of poetics, expressed and latent, within the poets' works. The reflection on poetics is a vital hermeneutic guide to the poet's own practice. This category will provide the most fundamental guide to examining Buffoni's translations. If Anceschi's phenomenologic philosophy was decisive for Buffoni's own growth, so were the philosopher's pronouncements on translation, such as his preface to the translations of the *Lirici nuovi*. There, Anceschi wrote "truly, there do not exist untranslatable texts."²⁸ This maxim would always hold true for Buffoni.

Indeed, for our poet-translator, translations are not photocopies of the source texts. They constitute an independent literary genre, as Buffoni consistently repeats, following in the steps of other modern translation theorists like Jiri Levy. The focus, for Buffoni, is neither on an impossible reproduction of the original text or a free adaptation. As he writes, "There are two great diseases always necessary to try to eradicate (*debellare*): the idea that the translation can be the reproduction of a text, and the idea that it is a re-creation (*ricreazione*)."²⁹ Instead, translations are seen as "poietic encounters" (*incontri poietici*). It is not, then, a question of "fidelity": the famous dichotomies (from Cicero's *ut orator/ut interpres, brutta fedele/bella infedele*, and target-oriented/source-oriented, to Schleiermacher's domesticating/naturalizing, Lawrence Venuti's invisibility/visibility, and Mounin's *traductions des professeurs/traductions des*

²⁸ Luciano Anceschi, "Presentazione," *Poeti antichi e moderni tradotti dai lirici nuovi*, ed. Luciano Anceschi and Domenico Porzio (Milan: Il Balcone, 1945), 16.

²⁹ M. Cangiano, L. Nuzzo, and E. Santangelo, "Il secondo grado," 3, n. 7 (2008): 2.

poetes) are no longer valuable concepts, as Buffoni argues.³⁰ Rather, our poet-translator insists on “loyalty”:

The term loyalty two eyes that gazing in other eyes declare love, admitting a momentary “betrayal.” I have been loyal to your poetic loftiness (*altezza*), betraying you here and here and here: I did it to remain the most loyal possible to your loftiness (*altezza*). This is what I say every evening to the poets alive and dead with whom I try to interweave poetic dialogue.³¹

Ideally, this loyalty leads to “this small miracle which as a translation theorist I like to define “loyal recreation” (*ricreazione leale*).”³² In his prefaces to the anthologies he edited of Italian poetry in various languages, Buffoni expressly indicates what he considers a pernicious translation method. Namely, when a translator “turns [...] to the job, to ‘poetese,’ to trite themes of pseudo-lyrical or pseudo-experimental satisfied fulfillment.”³³ Rather, Buffoni’s self-described method of translation depends on finding the “prevalent element” of the text, “that inalienable one,” and starting from there. Here, indeed, is a similarity between Giudici’s and Buffoni’s translation theories, both of whom rely on the theoretical notion, propounded by Tynjanov, of the “constructive principle.” While Buffoni doesn’t mention the Russian theorist, owing to his friend Giudici’s “abundant [...] use”³⁴ of him, Tynjanov nonetheless remains in the theoretical framework. Buffoni prefers, in any case, to call on Pound, with the American poet’s three-fold category of melopoeia, logopoeia, and phanopoeia. Analyzing a poem for

³⁰ Cf. Franco Buffoni, “Perché si parla di traduttologia,” *Con Il testo a Fronte: Indagine sul tradurre e l’essere tradotti* (Novara: Interlinea, 2007), 11.

³¹ Franco Buffoni, “Premessa,” in *Una piccola tabaccheria*, 6.

³² Franco Buffoni, “Prefazione,” in *Un’altra voce: Antologia di poesia italiana contemporanea con traduzione in portoghese*, 10.

³³ *L’Imbuto bianco: Antologia di poesia italiana contemporanea con traduzione in arabo*, 6.

³⁴ Letter to author, July 4, 2011.

translation, Buffoni selects either the first category (“the rhythmical-melodic inlay”), the second (“the distinctly formulated thought”), or the third (“the illumination...the epiphany, that flash, which by itself constitutes the profound meaning of the text”).³⁵ Having decided on a method, he then knows where he can “eventually carry out a sacrifice,” or in other words, where to be loyal and where to be unfaithful.

Buffoni’s five interpretative categories of translations—rhythm, avant-text, intertextuality, movement of language through time, and poetics—also serve as his own guide for translating. We will treat them in order.

To begin with, as the poet quotes the innovative theorist and Bible translator Henri Meschonnic, the rhythm of a text is its fundamental element (*l’elemento fondamentale*).³⁶ For Buffoni, a poet must first find a rhythm: once he has found a rhythm, he has found the subject. If the poet doesn’t find the right rhythm, “you can have the most beautiful things in the world to say but what you write can be at most a newspaper article.” Rhythm, which can be heard in both the “the rhythm of the heart of our mother” and “our internal breath,” “precedes the appearance of the human species.” In the last analysis, rhythm and diction come from the same source: “poetry is born when these two elements are so fused that the difference is no longer seen: as when a ballerina dances so whirling about that the ballerina cannot be distinguished from the dance, because it has become a single thing. Poetic writing, when it is successful, no more distinguishes the meaning of words from their musicality.”³⁷ It is rhythm, which according to our poet-translator, allows us to resolve the apparent conflict between, for

³⁵ Franco Buffoni, “Premessa,” 6.

³⁶ Buffoni, “Da traduttologia a ritmologia,” *Testo a Fronte* (2008): 37.

³⁷ Tiziana Migliaccio, “Intervista,” *Sincronie*. Available at http://www.francobuffoni.it/intervista_migliaccio_sincronie_estratto.aspx.

instance, an Italian poet with a quantitative meter translating a British poet with a accentual meter like Keats, Coleridge, or Byron. We will point out specific instances of this, when Buffoni offsets words, carving a new rhythm into the translation, or changes meter entirely.

The avant-text, which includes all of the materials and drafts for the final text, can be useful, as the poet-translator explains, in reflecting on the genesis of the poem. Rather than seeing a text as an indissoluble whole, born from the head of Athena, as it were, this is a method to “translate in depth, to negate that translation is a process of decoding and recoding, source language, arrival language. The reflection on the avant-text makes one reflect on the formativity – which sometimes can last decades –of a text.”³⁸ Buffoni has on several occasions used such preparatory material in his translations—whether his versions of Bernard Simeone, Eddy van Vliet,³⁹ or Seamus Heaney. We will observe a clear example of how the Italian poet-translator makes use of the avant-text in his translations of Seamus Heaney’s “North.”

The notion of the movement of language through time was first elaborated in the German theorist Friedmar Apel’s volumes, which were translated into Italian in the series edited by Buffoni for Marcos y Marcos. Buffoni had “intuited” this concept before Apel’s volumes, but hadn’t “formalized”⁴⁰ it. This concept refers to the target text’s and especially the source text’s underlying instability. If, as we know, the target language is in always in a state of flux, at a particular moment of time, so is the source language, and, consequently, the source text. In the years, decades, or centuries since the composition of

³⁸ Tommaso Lisa, “Intervista a Franco Buffoni (ovvero traduzione e movimento),” in *Traduzione e poesia nell’Europa del Novecento*, ed. Anna Dolfi (Rome: Bulzoni, 2004).

³⁹ Letter to author, July 4, 2011.

⁴⁰ Letter to author, July 4, 2011.

the original poem, the language structures of the original, from syntax and grammar to lexical and pronunciation, have changed. As Buffoni notes, “the text so-called ‘original’ is not an immobile reef in the sea, but rather a floating platform [...] How can one therefore think that this text has remained the same?”⁴¹ This specific category applies most when the translated text belongs to a different period of time, as in Shakespeare’s sonnets or in English romantic poetry. We might add that Buffoni has strongly criticized Umberto Eco’s book on translation theory, *Dire quasi la stessa cosa*, for not taking this concept into account.⁴² Equally, the target text, the translation, is determined by its historical and linguistic background. So a retranslation will change according to its temporal moment. As Buffoni noted about his translations of *Songs of Spring*, when he was gathering them together, he ended up retranslating many of the poems, since “almost none of the lexical and syntactical ‘solutions’ formerly devised worked any longer.”⁴³ In other words, he was forced to retranslate because his own language and that of the world around him had changed in the past ten to twenty years.

Intertextuality, the term originated by Julia Kristeva, refers to the fact that there is no completely original literary creation. Literature is born from literature. Sanguineti, a friend of Buffoni’s, also thought the same way about translation, as we saw in chapter 5. Translation, in this light, is not an impossible reproduction of the source text, but (as Kristeva wrote), “absorption and transformation of another text.”⁴⁴ The formerly

⁴¹ Franco Buffoni, “Da traduttologia a ritmologia,” 31.

⁴² Buffoni’s judgment on Eco’s book is summed up in the following lines: “E’ volgare intellettualmente (il concetto di “negoziazione” è invero di infimo rango) e si basa su una lunga serie di luoghi comuni, molto duri a morire, evidentemente.”

⁴³ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 16.

⁴⁴ Buffoni, “Perché si parla di traduttologia,” *Con Il testo a Fronte: Indagine sul tradurre e l’essere tradotti* (Novara: Interlinea, 2007), 15.

hierarchical relationship in translation studies, as Buffoni explains, between the “original-copy [...] acquires another dimension: it becomes dialogic, and no longer in rank but in time.”⁴⁵ We will later examine two separate forms of intertextuality in Buffoni’s translations: that between Buffoni’s and other poets’ verse, and that between Buffoni’s poetry and his own translations. The concept of intertextuality naturally leads to a discussion of poetics, because poets do not create absolutely original works, as indicated above, but reinterpret literary tradition “in the light of [their] poetics.”

This final category, the *poietic encounter*, is the most important, and to a certain degree includes the rest. For Buffoni, “translating literature means a meeting between the poetics of the translator and the poetics of the translated author.”⁴⁶ This concept links up with the notion of the movement of language in time, since this encounter occurs in “a point x in time and space that is unique and unrepeatable, since unique and unrepeatable is the status of the languages of the two works that meet in that moment.”⁴⁷ Essentially we will look at the poietic relationship between Buffoni and the source text by commenting on the different methods used by our poet-translator in conformity with his own poetics.

In general, for Buffoni, there are three modes of translation, which we could map on to Dryden’s threefold metaphrase, paraphrase, etc.: the translation *di servizio*, which aims to “only destroy the raison d’être in verses of the text,” but ends up destroying “tout

⁴⁵ Buffoni, “Perché si parla di traduttologia,” *Con Il testo a Fronte: Indagine sul tradurre e l’essere tradotti* (Novara: Interlinea, 2007), 16.

⁴⁶ M. Cangiano, L. Nuzzo, and E. Santangelo, “Tabard intervista Franco Buffoni,” *Tabard* 3, n. 7 (2008): 17.

⁴⁷ Franco Buffoni, “Gli incontri ‘poietici’ di Margherita Guidacci,” in *Per Margherita Guidacci. Atti delle giornate di studio*, ed. Margherita Ghilardi (Florence: Le lettere, 2001), 171.

court” its *raison d’être*. Its corresponding extreme, the translation *di poesia*, often ends up in “a narcissitic exercise of a poet on a given text.” Buffoni aims for the middle term, the translation *di rispetto*, where “all the elements of the original appear rendered with the correctness of the discretion of a poet who decides to truly serve the text.”⁴⁸ We will observe that the vast majority of Buffoni’s versions do indeed belong to traduzioni *di rispetto*, although some are more rightly classified as traduzioni *di poesia*. In his translations especially from the Romantics, he is more literally faithful than to translations of contemporary poetry. As Buffoni remarks, “it is undeniable that the first merit of a translation remains philologic, literal faithfulness (*letterale fedeltà*) to the original.”⁴⁹ Nonetheless, since filler adjectives are often used for metrical reason or due to rhyming, Buffoni has no qualms in excising them, as he notes when translating English romantic poets.

In conclusion, for Buffoni, at core, there are two effective strategies in poetic translation: first, the search for “a larger and loftier poetic language, anonymous by definition.”⁵⁰ To this group belongs the important translators and translator-poets (not poet-translators) of, for instance, the “great season of Florentine hermeticism,” from Carlo Bo to Renato Poggioli. Buffoni is extraneous to this category. The second translation method is usually followed by poet-translators. This, indeed, is Buffoni’s own method, where the translator

⁴⁸ “L’avventura di *Testo a fronte*. Intervista a Franco Buffoni di Fabrizio Lombardo,” in *VersoDove* n. 6-7 (1997): 2.

⁴⁹ Franco Buffoni, “Nota sui criteri di scelta e di traduzioni,” in *Poeti romantici inglesi* (Milan: Bompiani, 1990), vol. 1, 118.

⁵⁰ Franco Buffoni, “Gli incontri ‘poietici’ di Margherita Guidacci,” in *Per Margherita Guidacci. Atti delle giornate di studio*, ed. Margherita Ghilardi (Florence: Le lettere, 2001), 171.

aims to make the most of (*valorizzare*) the encounter / clash between the poetics of the translator and that of the translated author, with the consequence, in the happiest cases, of producing a text worthy of entering into the poet-translator's *quaderno di traduzioni*; then of becoming part in every respect, of his work, of the canon.⁵¹

Buffoni incorporates translations into his own work: above all in his two *quaderni di traduzioni* along with *Del Maestro in bottega*. Buffoni, in fact, is the poet who has insisted the most on *quaderni di traduzioni* forming an integral part of the poet-translator's own *oeuvre*. Yet, if Buffoni, for all intents and purposes, wishes to appropriate poems through translation, he doesn't seek to massively adapt the original, like Lowell, splicing and adding where he sees fit.

Quaderno di traduzioni

Buffoni named his first volume of translations, *Songs of Spring*, after a phrase from Keats's ode "to Autumn." With this title, Buffoni aimed to emphasize two aspects: that his volume is an homage to poetic language, to poetic song; and his close spiritual ties to Keats, the poet whom he has translated most completely. Indeed, as the poet-translator noted, "to say that Keats influenced me would be like saying [...] that your mom influenced you."⁵² It makes sense then that Buffoni chose to place on the front cover a passage from Keats' "Song":

To know the change and feel it,
When there is none to heal it,
Nor numbed sense to steel it,
Was never said in rhyme.⁵³

Percepire il mutamento, sentirlo,

⁵¹ "L'avventura di *Testo a fronte*. Intervista a Franco Buffoni di Fabrizio Lombardo," in *VersoDove* n. 6-7 (1997): 4.

⁵² "Intervista a Franco Buffoni," edited by Alfonso Maria Petrosino, March 17, 2010. <http://www.criticaletteraria.org/2010/08/intervista-franco-buffoni.html>.

⁵³ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 152-153.

Sapere che nessuno può sanarlo,
Che i sensi non possono indurirlo.
Questo mai è stato detto in poesia.

Buffoni, in his translation of these verses, emphasizes the knowledge that the past is lost, and that the mind knows this. While Keats mentions that no one can heal this *change*, Buffoni speaks of the subjective process of *knowing* (*sapere*) that no one can *sanarlo*. The Italian is more final, more desolate. This feeling is also underlined by the conspicuous alliterative roles of the “p” and “s” in the translation: *Percepire, sapere, puo, possono, and poesia* alternates with *sentirlo, sapere, sanarlo, sensi, possono, questo, stato, poesia*. This alliteration ties together the whole discourse, signalling the painful inexorability of time.

Songs of Spring, published in 1999, consists of 38 poets and 125 poems, ordered chronologically,⁵⁴ drawn from poetic traditions as diverse as Dutch, French, Icelandic, Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Scottish, Spanish, and Swedish, though the vast majority are from English. Keats, fittingly, is the most represented poet in terms of quantity of pages, although Tomas Tranströmer (“absolutely one of the greatest living poets”⁵⁵) has the greatest amount of poems with 10. Other prominent poets represented are Wilde and Heaney with 8 poems, Coleridge and Spender with 7, and Byron and Kipling with 6 apiece.

More than 30 of Buffoni’s translations in this volume are excerpts from longer works (either individual poems or epic poems). These range from fragments of single poems like Spender’s “Ultima Ratio Regum” and e.e. cummings “enter no (silence is the blood)” to passages from Byron’s *Manfred*, Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient*

⁵⁴ The three Jewish-Italian poets are more or less in correct order.

⁵⁵ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 363.

Mariner, and Keats' *Endymion*. This is indeed rather an innovative practice for *quaderni di traduzioni*, which generally include complete poems, and not fragments. But this double-anthologizing, as it were, both in selecting a poem and then choosing a piece of the poem, matches up with Buffoni's own predilection for the poetic fragment: and let us not forget that *Songs of Spring* opens up with 7 true fragments of ancient poetry (Euforione and Varrone Atacino). It is also a sign of Buffoni's own appropriation of the foreign poem, a way to possess a little piece of the original. We might add that excerpting poems is a common practice of Buffoni's, followed both in his anthology of English romantic poets, as well as in his own self-anthology *Adidas*.

Within the volume itself, Buffoni creates certain intertextual echoes. For instance, the two poems by Caroline Anne Bowles ("Conte à mon chien") and Marie-Claire Bancquart ("Toi petit batard") both deal with the same subject, dogs, and form what Buffoni calls "an ideal leitmotiv." In addition, Bancquart's same poem, with its phrase "Notre eau des yeux" (translated as "la nostra acqua degli occhi") recalls Buffoni's first collection of poetry, *Acqua degli occhi*, creating in the Italian poet's words, "a small intertextual short circuit."⁵⁶ Another intertextual reference to Buffoni's volume *Acqua degli occhi* is created with Jaime Siles's poem "Variacion barroca sobre un tema de Lucrecio," with its verse "Los ojos en el agua son espejos"⁵⁷ ("nell'acqua gli occhi sono specchi"⁵⁸). Indeed, the image of eyes as mirrors in water reflects the very same intertextuality, where words mirror each other in books through time. Other examples of intertextual links within *Songs of Spring* are easily visible, as in the

⁵⁶ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 363.

⁵⁷ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 352.

⁵⁸ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 353.

succession of Coleridge fragments about the moon, for example.

Songs of Spring contains two special examples of translation that I will focus on now. First, Buffoni's translation of the Scottish poet Robert Fergusson's "The Daft Days" into both Milanese dialect and Italian,⁵⁹ and second, Buffoni's re-translation of Seamus Heaney's poem "North."

Buffoni's translation into dialect marks a significant linguistic shift, which is all the more remarkable for its singularity. No other Italian poet in *quaderni di traduzioni* translates into dialect. The Milanese and Italian translations of Fergusson reveals different specific techniques but are both united in their strategy of adaptation ("imitation" as Buffoni describes it) of the Scottish text, beginning with the title (*The Daft Days*⁶⁰ / *I ultim dì de l'ann*⁶¹ / *Gli ultimi giorni dell'anno*⁶²). Daft, in Scottish, means "frolicsome," so the Milanese and Italian translations neutralize the tone. Both renditions are more concise than the original, and if they both retain some of the original exuberant tone, are less markedly festive. The ornamental flourish of Fergusson's verse is little imitated in the translations, especially the Italian one. As Buffoni explains, "My version in Milanese dialect really turned into an imitation."⁶³ Then, he turned his "Fergussonian imitation" into Italian, at which point, "I couldn't stop continuing to actualize the text, detaching myself little by little from a translation of an imitation, and

⁵⁹ In truth, there are two Italian versions. Buffoni literally translates Fergusson into Italian, and also translates his own Milanese version into Italian. I will only treat the Milanese translation into Italian here.

⁶⁰ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 54.

⁶¹ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 55.

⁶² Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 55.

⁶³ Buffoni, *Del maestro in bottega*, 161.

falling into an imitation of an imitation.”⁶⁴

Nonetheless, Buffoni’s Milanese version is much more effusive than the Italian translation, both more personal and more expansive. This isn’t clear from the opening stanza, where, for example, the first stanza is almost exactly identical in Milanese and Italian. Yet, proceeding onwards, the contrast between the two versions becomes great. For instance, if in the fourth stanza, the Milanese runs “Alura, alura sì che ti te se bèl / Te se grand, te se còld, paës”⁶⁵ the Italian turns the direct invocation into an impersonal “Allora sì che il mio paese è grande e caldo / E bello.”⁶⁶ Likewise, Buffoni renders the Milanese “Un’aria che te la sentet subet / S’ciopà denter de ti”⁶⁷ as the Italian “canzoni / Che scoppiano subito dentro.”⁶⁸ In general, the Italian translation (in comparison with both the original Scottish and the Milanese version) is veined with sadness: witness the matter-of-fact Milanese in the 5th stanza, “E se sta tucc insemma / A cuntàss su i ball de l’ann passaa”⁶⁹: this becomes in Italian “Poi ci si mette insieme a raccontare / Le cose dell’anno che muore.”⁷⁰ In the Italian, the conviviality is diminished, a sense of solitude sets in, with the locution *mettersi insieme*, which doesn’t give the sense of togetherness of *stare insieme*.⁷¹ Moreover, if the Milanese speaks of narrating the dances of the past

⁶⁴ Buffoni, *Del maestro in bottega*, 162.

⁶⁵ “Well, well, yes, you are so beautiful, / You are so big, you are so warm, country.” Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 57.

⁶⁶ “So, yes, my country is big and warm / and beautiful.” Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 57.

⁶⁷ “an aria that you immediately feel / explode inside of you.” Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 59.

⁶⁸ “songs that explode inside immediately.” Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 59.

⁶⁹ “each is all together, recounting the things of the past year.” Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 57.

⁷⁰ “one gathers together to recount the things of the dying year.” Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 57.

⁷¹ “each is all together.”

(*trascorso*⁷²) year, the Italian speaks of the year that dies (*muore*). So, if Buffoni in his Milanese translation concludes that there is *nient de pussee bell*⁷³ than the last days of the year (an explicit statement absent from the original Scottish), this is completely removed from the Italian, as is the sensation of being together (*Insemma, inozent*⁷⁴). Rather, the Italian finishes the penultimate stanza with the premonitory *come bambini che non si pensa a dopo*,⁷⁵ much more threatening than the Milanese *i fioeu [...] pensà no a l'ann che vegn.*⁷⁶ Moreover, Buffoni elides any references to Scotland and Scottish culture, present in the original: so, *Auld Reikie*⁷⁷ [“old smoky”] turns into “paës”⁷⁸ / “il mio paese,”⁷⁹ *Tullochgorum* [“a well-known Scottish dance”]⁸⁰ becomes “domà i legrij ladina”⁸¹ / “solo rock e su il volume!”⁸² and *Highland reel*⁸³ is paraphrased as “quel che voeurem nun”⁸⁴ / “quel che vogliamo noi.”⁸⁵ Finally it isn’t coincidental that Buffoni consistently uses *alegher* in dialect and *festa* in Italian: in his Milanese version, people are fundamentally *alegher*, while in Italian they are only happy at *feste*: their happiness is conditioned and temporary.

With his translation of Seamus Heaney’s poems in 1991, Buffoni is responsible

⁷² “past.”

⁷³ “Nothing more beautiful.” Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 61.

⁷⁴ “innocent together.” Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 61.

⁷⁵ “like children who don’t think about afterwards.”

⁷⁶ “children don’t of the coming year.”

⁷⁷ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 56.

⁷⁸ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 57.

⁷⁹ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 57. Buffoni had originally translated the Scottish term as “Milan,” but, “la realtà ‘urbana’ invocata dal poeta era ancora profondamente rurale. Corressi quindi ‘Milan’ in un più generico ‘paës.’” Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 360.

⁸⁰ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 58.

⁸¹ “only Latin happiness.” Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 59.

⁸² “only rock and up with the volume!” Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 59.

⁸³ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 58.

⁸⁴ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 59.

⁸⁵ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 59.

for the introduction of Heaney to the Italian reader. When Heaney then won the Nobel Prize for Literature, Buffoni was asked to translate several poems. Not having his own volume nearby, he retranslated them.⁸⁶ Thus we have examples of first⁸⁷ and second versions of a major poem like “North.” Through observing the differences, we can verify Buffoni’s comment that “the same translator translates in a different way, even in ” The second translation of Heaney’s “North”⁸⁸ only contains 5 out of the 40 verses identical to the first translation. Buffoni brings the newer version more in line with the literal meaning: from adjectives such as *measured*⁸⁹ (*accanto*⁹⁰ -> *misurabili*⁹¹); nouns such as *althing*⁹² (*all’interno della comunità*⁹³ -> *vecchi parlamenti*⁹⁴); verbs such as *were*⁹⁵ (*divennero*⁹⁶ -> *erano*⁹⁷) to whole phrases such as *voices [...] lifted again in violence and epiphany*⁹⁸ (*voci che risorgevano in violente visioni*⁹⁹ -> *sollevate nella violenza e nell’epifania*¹⁰⁰); and, perhaps the most momentous translation change, in the rendering of *Lie down in the word-hoard*¹⁰¹ (*custodisci in dispensa*¹⁰² -> *sdraiati nel tuo tesoro di*

⁸⁶ Cf. Buffoni’s explanation in Franco Buffoni, “Ritraducendo Seamus Heaney,” in *Con Il Testo a Fronte: indagine sul tradurre e l’essere tradotti* (Novara: Interlinea, 2007), 147-162.

⁸⁷ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, p. 326 and 328.

⁸⁸ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, p. 327 and p. 329.

⁸⁹ This and all further references to the English original come from Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, p. 326-329.

⁹⁰ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 326.

⁹¹ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 327.

⁹² Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 328.

⁹³ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 328.

⁹⁴ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 329.

⁹⁵ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 327.

⁹⁶ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 326.

⁹⁷ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 327.

⁹⁸ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 327.

⁹⁹ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 326.

¹⁰⁰ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 327.

¹⁰¹ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 328.

*parole*¹⁰³). Notable here, as well, is Buffoni's concept of the avant-text. As he explains in a lecture, he had no access to Heaney's preliminary versions of "North" for his first translation, while Heaney sent them to him for his later re-translation. So, for example, Buffoni translates "violence and epiphany" as "nella violenza e epifania," far removed from the first translation's "violente visioni." Moreover, Buffoni's usage of the *passato remoto* in the second translation, e.g., *ritornai*¹⁰⁴ and *trovai*,¹⁰⁵ reflects his own movement in time and language. After an upbringing in Lombardy, where such a past tense is eschewed in oral speech, he has spent many years in Rome, where the *passato remoto* is often used. The retranslation, then, is a more philologically correct translation, closer to the English, and more aesthetically pleasing besides. Buffoni's long acquaintance with Heaney, his immersion in his poetry, their common poetics based on the terrestrial (as Buffoni notes), all combine in making his later translation of "North" a more successful autonomous poem that yet recalls the original even more deeply.

Curiously enough, the poem that Buffoni calls the most beautiful lyric in 19th century English, Byron's "So we'll go No-More A-roving" (a debatable claim itself), is translated rather ineffectively. Perhaps this is owing to anxiety of influence, or simply to the English rhythm, which combined with its particular lightness of tone, is hard to get across into Italian. But, as the opening of the Italian version shows, the translation is marred by a heaviness of touch: "So, we'll go no more a-roving / So late into the night"¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 328.

¹⁰³ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 329.

¹⁰⁴ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 327.

¹⁰⁵ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 327.

¹⁰⁶ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 108.

is rendered as "Così, più non andremo / In giro senza meta / Nella notte fonda."¹⁰⁷

Amplified into three verses, the Italian "andremo in giro" catches a dissonant note, too colloquial; likewise, "in giro senza meta," which occupies a whole verse, is simply "a-roving" in English. The English velocity is unmatched. But this type of failure is rare in Buffoni's translations.

Songs of Spring's concluding text is the prose poem by Bernard Simeone, "Madonna del Parto." This is one of only two poems in the volume that directly deal with an Italian subject. Its special significance here, confirmed by Buffoni,¹⁰⁸ placed at the end of the volume, resides in the classic Socratic metaphor of giving birth to works. Here, the Virgin Mary is nearly on the point of giving birth, yet hesitates, "vertiginosa e placida" (*vertigineuse et placide*).¹⁰⁹

Una piccola tabaccheria, which will be published in 2012, includes 38 poets and 61 poems, but not ordered chronologically like the previous volume. The title is drawn from Pound's "The Lake Isle," previously translated by Buffoni in his volume *Quaranta a Quindici* (thus forming another intertextual tie in Buffoni's work between his poetic volumes and his *quaderni di traduzioni*). Pound had originally parodied Yeats's "Lake isle of Innisfree": now Buffoni adapts the American poet. By entitling his volume of translations in such a manner, Buffoni stresses the labor *limae* of writing. In his translation of Pound, Buffoni excised the two references to divinities (*God* and *Venus*) other than Mercury. While keeping the important anaphora of *O Mercury, patron of thieves*, he eliminates repeated words (like *loose, little, bright, and profession*), and

¹⁰⁷ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 109.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Franco Buffoni to author, July 4, 2011.

¹⁰⁹ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 356.

adjectives like *damned*. He turns the poem in a more personal direction: “che mi costringe a concentrarmi sempre” from the impersonal “where one needs one’s brains all the time.” Buffoni renders more concise his Italian version. For instance, Pound uses 23 words in the final two verses of the first strophe, while Buffoni only 11. The alliteration here is quite intense, as though Buffoni were attempting to rival Pound in melopoeia: the “c” sound dominates, in Mercurio (twice), *piccola tabaccheria* (twice), *con le scatoline luccicanti, scaffali, tabacco, custoditi nel banco, capelli, chiacchierando, comunque, che* (twice), *scrivere, costringe, and concentrarmi*; likewise, the “d” in “*dio della truffa, / dammi a tempo debito.*” This is Buffoni putting Fortini’s *compensi* into practice.

In this *quaderno*, Larkin has the greatest amount of poems (6), followed by Heaney, Shakespeare, and Eddy van Vliet with four. Once again, there are a wide variety of languages represented with English, Dutch, Arabic, Portuguese, French, Welsh, and Spanish. And once more, English poetry dominates the volume. Yet one of the most interesting thematic centers of this volume involves a series of French (and English) poems: Baudelaire’s “A une passante,” Verlaine’s “L’Apollon de Pont-Audemer,” Rimbaud’s “Le dormeur du val,” Byron’s “She Walks in Beauty,” and Pound’s “Gentildonna.” All five poems speak of a person seen, either on the street, in the country, or in the mind’s eye. One of them, the translation of Verlaine, will be examined here.¹¹⁰ Already adapted in the title of the version, “Il dio di Roserio,” this powerful translation cuts to the bone. While the French begins with an exclamation about the boy, “Un solide gaillard!”, Buffoni cuts to the chase with *Diciotto anni*. With a combination of enjambments (*mani / pronte, fronte / dura, come un dio nel suo ruolo / Passa, in un*

¹¹⁰ Buffoni, *Una piccola tabaccheria*, 31-32.

fossato / Rotolare), more expressive language, owing to concision, than the original as in “il cranio sfondato” (instead of “le crâne ouvert par quelque éclat d’obus”), and “Lo vedrai vecchio e malandato spegnersi” in place of “On le verra, bon vieux, barbe blanche, oeil terni, / S’êteindre doucement, comme un jour qui finit”; colloquial language such as “Devi vederlo quando si scatena / In discoteca: nessuna gli resiste”; and the highly effective final rhyme (the only one of the translation) “In fondo a una trincea o in un fossato / Rotolare con il cranio sfondato,” the Italian rendering takes on an autonomous life. The numbers tell the story too: if Verlaine’s poem contains 126 words, Buffoni’s has only 88, or 30% fewer words. The Italian version is stronger than Verlaine’s original: the poem has been pared down and tightened. This same tendency is everywhere present in Buffoni’s translations, but particularly noticeable here. In his own words, in fact,¹¹¹ he considers this translation an “imitation,” for its liberties with the original. A similar argument could be made for Buffoni’s version of Baudelaire’s “A une passante,” which in Buffoni’s hands turns into “Lui passava.” The subject is no longer a woman, but a man. This, too, is classified by Buffoni as an “imitation.”¹¹²

The overall contrast between *Songs of Spring* and *Una piccola tabaccheria* is clear. Although each volume contains 38 poets, the first is more a collection of translations, “the best of twenty years,” as its back-cover recites. The second, slimmed down from 368 pages to 150, is a more cohesive *quaderno di traduzioni*. Confirmation of this comes from Buffoni, who writes of how in difference with past years, now he translates “in great part from empathy, from harmony (*consonanza*): “there must be a

¹¹¹ Letter to author, July 4, 2011.

¹¹² Letter to author, July 4, 2011.

connection.”¹¹³ Therefore, two particular criteria—poetics and friendship—determine the shift from the first to the second volume. If Buffoni’s main areas of poetic inspiration lie in the English romantics (present in both volumes) and French symbolists, it is only in the second volume that the latter appear (Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Verlaine). Buffoni’s acknowledges this, as well, in his notes to the volumes. In *Una piccola tabaccheria*, he describes links between his translations of 21 poets (sometimes with multiple connections, like Verlaine (with Byron, Baudelaire, Pound, Rimbaud), or Rimbaud himself (with Verlaine and Wilde), or Heaney (with Joyce and Neruda), or Spender (with Verlaine and Juana de Ibarbourou).¹¹⁴ Yet in the first *quaderno*, equivalent connections described by Buffoni are limited to only three out of the 38 poets.¹¹⁵ Moreover, if 14 poets in *Songs of Spring* are included partly out of friendship and esteem,¹¹⁶ only two such poets are in *Una piccola tabaccheria*.¹¹⁷

There are 7 poets in common between the first and the second *quaderni di traduzioni*: Auden, Byron, Heaney, Wilde, Feinstein, Shakespeare, and van Vliet. The first four have formed nodes in Buffoni’s work, in translations and critical studies. The presence of Feinstein and van Vliet can be notched up to Buffoni’s friendship with them and esteem of their work. Shakespeare remains the outlier, who nevertheless remains a crucial poetic model, with his *Sonnets*, for the Italian poet-translator.

Buffoni v. Luzi

¹¹³ Migliaccio, Intervista. Available at http://www.francobuffoni.it/intervista_migliaccio_sincronie_estratto.aspx

¹¹⁴ Buffoni, *Una piccola tabaccheria*, 148-152.

¹¹⁵ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 364.

¹¹⁶ Kathleen Raine, Stephen Spender, David Gascoyne, Elaine Feinstein, Tomas Tranströmer, Marie-Claire Bancquart, Jim Burns, J. H. Prynne, Johann Hjalmarsson, Eddy van Vliet, Dave Smith, Jaime Siles, and Bernard Simeone.

¹¹⁷ Elaine Feinstein and Eddy van Vliet.

Here we will compare the translation practices of Buffoni with Mario Luzi. Luzi (1914-2005) was an influential poet, as well as a translator of 11 works from French, English, and Spanish.¹¹⁸ His main translation activity centered on French poetry, gathered together in two *quaderni di traduzioni*, *Francamente*, and *La Cordigliera delle Ande*, spanning Ronsard to Frénaud. Translation and poetry were symbiotic for Luzi. As Antonio Prete notes about Luzi, “translating wasn’t an exercise, but an essential foundation of his very writing.”¹¹⁹ Luzi explained how “the most difficult translations I have done were when I was, also as a writer, doing something that required an experience of this kind, a comparison (*confronto*) with that author, not with an author, but with that author, with that proposal that each author brings along.”¹²⁰ Thus, he turned to Coleridge’s lyrics when he was searching for “nuance” in his own poetic tongue¹²¹; he translated Shakespeare when his poetic powers were ripe for such an encounter; he translated Mallarmé late in life when when he was “digging into the rhythmic and verbal substance of my Italian”¹²²; he translated Louise Labe, after WWII, searching for an

¹¹⁸ Charles Du Bos, *Vita e letteratura*, trans. Mario Luzi (Padua: Cedam, 1943); Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poesie e prose* (Milan: Cederna, 1949); Paul Valéry, *Cantique des colonnes* (Rome: ERI, 1949); Charles-Louis de Montesquieu, *Il tempio di Cnido*, in *Romanzi francesi dei secoli XVII e XVIII*, ed. M. Rago (Bompiani: Milan, 1951); Jean Racine, *Andromaca*, in *Il teatro francese del grand siècle* (Rome: ERI, 1960); Jorge Guillen, *La fonte* (Milan: Scheiwiller, 1961); William Shakespeare, *Riccardo II* (Turin: Einaudi, 1966); Mario Luzi, *Francamente* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1980); Mario Luzi, *La Cordigliera delle Ande* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983); Tirso de Molina, *Dannato per disperazione*, in *Teatro*, ed. Maria Grazia Profeti (Milan: Garzanti, 1991); and Ostad Elahi, *Pensieri di luce* (Milan: Mondadori, 2000).

¹¹⁹ Antonio Prete, *All’ombra dell’altra lingua*, 113.

¹²⁰ Luzi, *La Cordigliera delle Ande*, vi.

¹²¹ Luzi e Specchio, *Leggere e scrivere* (Florence: Nardi, 1993), 70.

¹²² Luzi e Specchio, *Leggere e scrivere*, 141.

“edenic exile of form and perfect harmony”¹²³ from the postwar despair; and he translated Tirso de Molina when he needed to “dissolve a little bit my theatrical language in a species of liturgy, also scenic, simpler [...] but more collective, if you like, choral.”¹²⁴

Luzi, like Caproni, asserts that he doesn’t theorize about translating: “I have never truly thought of being able to theorize about an eminently empirical object like translation that, which whatever way you look at it, always appeared such to me.”¹²⁵ Even so, he affirms, like Buffoni, that translation is an ideal encounter between the original poet and the translator: “the translation of a poet is a meeting (*incontro*), a meeting given in certain moments, at certain levels of convergence or of friction with the original.”¹²⁶ Thus, for instance, when Luzi was translating Coleridge, he describes himself as “alone with the text.”¹²⁷ Indeed, taking up one of the most important images of the Ancient Mariner, he suggested that “it is necessary for you to be in the open sea when you translate, alone with your man.”¹²⁸ The fact that Luzi, as a Francophile, didn’t know English well, allowed him the freedom to translate differently than he would have translated a French author, “truly that distance, between mythic English and the language I was forced to use, was a territory susceptible of many adventures that I never would have permitted myself to run with a language more obliging like French.”¹²⁹ This is, of course, the same line of reasoning that Giovanni Giudici put forth for why he chose to

¹²³ Luzi e Specchio, *Leggere e scrivere*, 141.

¹²⁴ Luzi e Specchio, *Leggere e scrivere*, 141.

¹²⁵ Luzi, *La Cordigliera delle Ande*, vi.

¹²⁶ Luzi and Specchio, *Leggere e Scrivere*, 140.

¹²⁷ Luzi and Specchio, *Leggere e Scrivere*, 140.

¹²⁸ Luzi and Specchio, *Leggere e Scrivere*, 140.

¹²⁹ Mario Luzi, *La traduzione del testo poetico*, 116.

translate from languages structurally different from Italian. Yet, we should remember that Luzi’s translation of Mallarme’s *Plusieurs sonnets* segmented and decomposed Mallarme’s ductile verse, even though French is so close to Italian.

According to Luzi, the meeting between poet and translator, this “subtle duel,” is freighted with ambiguities. Poetic translation by its nature is an “obscure negotiation of concessions, resistance, claims without proof of legitimacy between author and author.”¹³⁰ So much so that at the end it is not clear who comes out the winner, or loser. As Luzi remarks, “one will never know who was the victim and who the executioner (*carnefice*).”¹³¹ In the best of cases—with no “brawl” (*colluttazione*)—there is a “lucky, happy marriage” (*felice connubio*). A new text is born, “an autonomous text,” in which the translator has managed to “burn off the difference, the distance.”¹³²

For our comparison, I have chosen two passages from Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

Table 5.1. <i>The Rime of the Ancient Mariner</i> (vv. 203-211)		
Samuel Taylor Coleridge	Franco Buffoni	Mario Luzi
We listened and looked sideways up!	Noi ascoltavamo e scrutavamo intorno!	Noi ascoltavamo e guardavamo fisso!
Fear at my heart, as at a cup,	La paura nel cuore, mi sembrava,	Al cuore come al fondo di una coppa
My life-blood seemed to sip!	Stesse a succhiarmi il sangue!	La paura attingeva tutto il sangue!
The stars were dim, and thick the night,	Densa la notte con le stelle opache	Le stelle cupe, densa era la notte,
The steersman’s face by his lamp gleamed white;	E bianco il viso del timoniere alla lanterna:	Il volto del nocchiero raggia esangue
		presso la sua lanterna;
From the sails the dew did drip -	Dalle vele la guazza cola lenta.	Dalle vele stillava giù rugiada
Till clomb above the	Ad un tratto si leva sopra a	Finché s’alzò sul ciglio

¹³⁰ Luzi, *La Cordigliera delle Ande*, vi.

¹³¹ Luzi, *La Cordigliera delle Ande*, vi.

¹³² Luzi, *La Cordigliera delle Ande*, vi.

eastern bar	oriente	dell'oriente
The horned Moon, with one bright star	Una falce di luna, ed una stella	Col corno della luna una splendente
Within the nether tip.	Risplende sulla punta, in basso.	Stella vicino alla sua punta inferna.
<i>Poeti romantici inglesi</i> , tr. Franco Buffoni (Milan: Bompiani, 1990), 318	<i>Poeti romantici inglesi</i> , tr. Franco Buffoni (Milan: Bompiani, 1990), 319	Samuel Taylor Coleridge, <i>Poesie e prose</i> , tr. Mario Luzi (Milan: Cederna, 1949), 33

Table 5.2. <i>The Rime of the Ancient Mariner</i> (vv. 414-421)		
Samuel Taylor Coleridge	Franco Buffoni	Mario Luzi
“Still as a slave before his lord,	Come schiavo dinanzi al suo padrone	“Come schiavo al cospetto del signore
The ocean hath no blast;	Immobile è l’oceano e senza vento:	sta immobile l’oceano e non respira;
His great bright eye most silently	Con l’occhio grande e luminoso	il suo grande occhio luminoso mira
Up to the moon is cast—	Fissa la luna silenziosamente...	fissa la luna silenziosamente —
If he may know which way to go;	Se puo sapere quale via seguire:	per conoscer la strada da seguire;
For she guides him smooth or grim.	Perche, calmo o infuriato, è lei la guida.	Perché, quieto o infuriato, essa lo guida.
See, brother, see! How graciously	Ma guarda, fratello, guarda con che grazia	Vedi, fratello, vedi con che grazia
She looketh down on him.”	Dall’alto lo osserva.	dall’alto essa lo guarda quasi rida.”
<i>Poeti romantici inglesi</i> , tr. Franco Buffoni, vol. 1 (Milan: Bompiani, 1990), 330	<i>Poeti romantici inglesi</i> , tr. Franco Buffoni, vol. 1 (Milan: Bompiani, 1990), 331	Samuel Taylor Coleridge, <i>Poesie e prose</i> , tr. Mario Luzi (Milan: Cederna, 1949), 53.

The most striking contrast between Buffoni’s and Luzi’s translations turns on the use of poetic tradition. Luzi inserts Coleridge not into contemporary 20th century Italian poetry, but earlier. Through a frame of end-rhyming, abundant hendecasyllables (along with occasional settenari), and archaic and aulic diction, Luzi’s *Ancient Mariner* is indeed rendered ancient. For example, Luzi utilizes an exclusive and aulic poetic register with the following words drawn from the first passage: *volto, raggia, esangue, stillare*, and

inferna. Likewise, the second excerpt shows how Luzi's rhymes require additions or modifications to the text. In rhyming *respira / mira* and *guida / rida*, he had to add, for example, *quasi rida*, absent from the English, and use the archaic *mira*. He personifies the ocean, *non respira*, in line with high Italian poetic tradition. In general, Luzi's translation retains more than a whiff of the archaic, whether through poeticisms (even such adverbial locutions like *al cospetto di*), or apocope (*conoscer*). This antique patina is, on the other hand, generally foreign to Buffoni's version. Rather, Buffoni focuses more on the "rhythms of the original rather than the metre,"¹³³ and doesn't use end-rhyming. His free verse is studded with alliteration and assonance. In the first three verses of the second passage, the recurring "o" marks the *oceano*, which gives way in the fourth verse to the vowel "a" in *luna* (*fissa la luna silenziosamente*): the contrast between the ocean and the moon is thus emphasized down to the very phonemes of each word. We can notice half-rhymes as in *guida / guarda*, or *occhio / silenziosamente*. Although Buffoni doesn't dye his version in classical tradition, he does explicitly draw on Dante and Leopardi. For instance, the second verse recalls their "senza vento." And his use of *guazza* in the first passage is assuredly archaic (used, for instance, by Mario Praz in his purple, archaizing version of the *Ancient Mariner*¹³⁴). One last point to be made: while Luzi was a novice *Anglista*, whose command of the language was very shaky,¹³⁵ Buffoni spent his academic career as a professor of English literature. Evidence of this is seen in Luzi's misinterpretation of the final verses in table 5.1. Luzi speaks of the *splendente*

¹³³ Edoardo Zuccato, "The translation of Coleridge's poetry and his influence on Twentieth-Century Italian Poetry," in *The Reception of S. T. Coleridge in Europe*, ed. Elinor Shaffer and Edoardo Zuccato (London: Continuum, 2007), 209.

¹³⁴ Mario Luzi, *Poeti inglesi dell'Ottocento* (Florence: Bemporad, 1925), 139.

¹³⁵ Franco Nasi has pointed to (most probably) another misreading of Luzi: Franco Nasi, *Istituzioni poetiche e traduzioni: le Lyrical Ballads in Italia* (Milan: Medusa, 2004), 109.

stella rising, while Coleridge has the horned Moon (Buffoni's *Una falce di luna*) as the subject of this verb. Possibly the archaic *clomb* caused problems for Luzi. Yet the fact that Luzi was not well versed in English, as Buffoni rightly suggests,¹³⁶ and that he therefore relied on previous Italian versions, Mario Praz's *in primis*, contributed to making Luzi's translation even more antiquated.

Despite all, Luzi's version was, as Edoardo Zuccato justly notes, "the first significant poetic translation of the text." Its poetic power was rendered sympathetically by an Italian poet whose own use of symbols drew on the both the later French symbolists as well as Coleridge. Luzi's translation was, indeed, the "turning point that made Coleridge a permanent presence for both the intellectual circles and the general reading public."¹³⁷ Still today, after many other translations, Luzi's remains a valid translation (as Buffoni called it, "that classic one"¹³⁸). Yet, I would argue, it is in danger of becoming a period piece, due to its reliance on aulic diction and syntax, which by now sounds somewhat outdated. Buffoni's free verse version, on the other hand, is fresh and, despite lacking the formal structure of meter and rhyme, succeeds in creating a considerable amount of poetic grace in Italian. Two poetics, as different as Luzi's and Buffoni's, have given rise to two divergent modes of translating Coleridge. The Italian reader must decide for himself whether he prefers his poet aged or not.

Translation techniques

In general, Buffoni's practices a subtle art of *variatio*. For instance, in e.e. cummings' scandalous poem (for his time) "the boys I mean are not refined," which uses

¹³⁶ Letter from Franco Buffoni to author, July 4, 2011.

¹³⁷ Zuccato, "The translation of Coleridge's poetry," 202.

¹³⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *La ballata del vecchio marinaio e altre poesie*, ed. and tr. Franco Buffoni (Milan: Mondadori, 1987), 29.

the eponymous refrain four times, Buffoni alternates “Quelli che intendo io non sono raffinati” (also the Italian title), “Ai ragazzi che ho in mente io stasera,” and “Quelli che dico io sono dei duri.” Here, due to the idioms and obscene language, Buffoni both finds euphemisms and equivalent vulgar Italian expressions. The first category includes the Italian rendering of *They do not give a fuck for luck* (“E non lo fanno così tanto per farlo”), *They do not give a shit for wit* (“Non gliene frega niente di nulla”), and *they kill like you would take a piss* (“Ti ammazzano sì gli gira”). Other times, Buffoni replicates the force of the vulgar original, whether translating *tit* as *tetta*, “masturbate with dynamite” as “masturbandosi con la dinamite,” *they hump thirteen times a night* (“Ma vengono anche sette volte in fila”), or even intensifying the vulgarity, as in rendering *behind* as *culo*, or translating *they do whatever’s in their pants* as “E scopano quando gli tira.”

Nevertheless not all of Buffoni’s translations are such adaptations: the most faithful versions, almost *calchi*, are his translations from the French of Marie-Claire Bancquart’s “Toi, petit batard,” and Bernard Simeone’s “Madonna del parto”: the first a lyric poem, the second a prose poem. This can naturally be explained by the closeness of Romance languages, French and Italian, as opposed to the differences separating Italian from a Germanic language like English. Yet even in many of Buffoni’s versions of English poetry, he strictly follows the original. And sometimes the very structure of Italian manages to better the original: an example is Buffoni’s translation of Kathleen Raine’s “Lachesis,” where the assonance of *sogno* and *sonno* give a pregnancy unavailable to the original:

La nostra vita una commedia di passione, dice il madrigale di Raleigh;
 “Solo noi moriamo, noi moriamo,” ma la saggezza più antica insegna

Che i morti si cambiano d'abito e ritornano,
Da sonno a sonno passando, da sogno a sogno.¹³⁹

[Our life a play of passion, says Raleigh's madrigal,
"Only we die, we die"; but older wisdom taught
That the dead change their garments and return,
Passing from sleep to sleep, from dream to dream.]¹⁴⁰

We can hear (and see) the dead "chang[ing] their garments and return[ing]" through the near phonetic identification of *sogno* and *sonno* (but not in the vastly different English words sleep and dream).

If Buffoni normally avoids rhyme, he does use it in certain cases to end the poem, generally as a concluding couplet, or epigraph: for instance, in the triple rhyme (absent from the original) that ends the same poem "Lachesis": "Amore, dobbiamo soffrire con pazienza ciò che siamo, / Queste parti di colpa e di dolore recitiamo, / Noi, che sul collo la macina portiamo."¹⁴¹ Or, for example, in Byron's "Stanzas for music," where "Non siamo più quel che ricordiamo, / Né osiamo pensare a ciò che siamo."¹⁴² As is clear, his recourse to rhyme occurs especially to emphasize a specific message.

Buffoni, like Montale, frequently shortens the poem. The overall concision (or excision) is clear in a poem like the following from Oscar Wilde's "Panthea": "For man is weak; God sleeps: and heaven is high: / One fiery-coloured moment: one great love; and lo! we die"¹⁴³ is turned into the powerfully staccato "L'uomo è debole. Dio dorme. / Il cielo è in alto. Una scintilla. / Grande amore. Morte."¹⁴⁴ Often the concision comes from Buffoni's cropping of filler adjectives, as in a poem by Walter Savage Landor,

¹³⁹ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 243.

¹⁴⁰ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 242.

¹⁴¹ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 245.

¹⁴² Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 103.

¹⁴³ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 192.

¹⁴⁴ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 193.

“Ternissa! You are fled!” Landor reads “...And your cool palm smoothes down stern Pluto’s cheek.” Buffoni translates it as “E la tua mano rasserena Plutone.” So, the Italian poet-translator eliminated both adjectives, *cool* and *stern*, as well as *cheek*. Or in a few consecutive verses of Swinburne’s “The Garden of Persephone”: “blind buds”¹⁴⁵ (“i germogli”¹⁴⁶), “wild leaves”¹⁴⁷ (“le foglie”¹⁴⁸), “ruined springs”¹⁴⁹ (“primavere”¹⁵⁰) or even a line from Oscar Wilde’s *Panthea*: “...through the hot jungle where the yellow-eyed huge lions sleep”¹⁵¹ (“...nella giungla fino ai leoni / Addormentati”¹⁵²).

Another frequent modulation of Buffoni's consists in his setting off the end of the translation with an adjective or phrase: e.g., in Shelley's "Ozymandias," whose final Italian verses are: "Null'altro resta. Intorno alle rovine del relitto / Colossale, nuda infinita informe la sabbia si distende / Solitaria"¹⁵³; or, in a fragment of Coleridge, where the final two adjectives are highlighted,

Come quando la luna nuova o piena
Le onde grandi e infrangibili sospinge
Dell'immenso Pacifico.
E alte, lunghe.¹⁵⁴

[When the new or full Moon urges
The high, large, long, unbreaking surges
Of the Pacific main.¹⁵⁵]

This forefronting of adjectives—*solitaria* and *alte, lunghe*—effectively refers to

¹⁴⁵ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 180.

¹⁴⁶ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 181.

¹⁴⁷ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 180.

¹⁴⁸ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 181.

¹⁴⁹ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 180.

¹⁵⁰ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 181.

¹⁵¹ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 190.

¹⁵² Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 191.

¹⁵³ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 119.

¹⁵⁴ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 85.

¹⁵⁵ Buffoni, *Songs of Spring*, 84.

their substantives, the solitary sand, the surges of the Pacific. Setting off single words like this is analogous to enjambment: in fact, Buffoni often highlights words by enjambling them at the end of the verse, just as he does by ending a poem with them. Both forefronting and enjambment alter the previous rhythm of the text and particularly display a new rhythm.

Conclusion

Franco Buffoni is assuredly the most important Italian translator of modern English poetry.¹⁵⁶ His majestic anthology of English romantics will be read for generations to come (it has already been reprinted several times). He has also been a leader in advancing new theoretical approaches to translation in Italy, through his important critical essays, his editorship of *Testo a Fronte* and the multiple series of poetry for *Marcos y Marcos*, and conference organizer. What brings together the different activities of his life—poet, critic, and translator—is the concentration on the written text and its diverse formulations in numerous languages. This threefold aspect of his personality (poet, critic, and translator), which Mengaldo has elsewhere cited as the distinctive mark of modern Italian poets, indubitably enriches each of his individual vocations. Buffoni has eloquently shown how a translator must interpret a poem with a poet's eye. Perhaps most vitally, he has insisted on claiming authorial status for poetic translations that are not free imitations or adaptations, but philologically accurate poetic representations. The autonomy of the translated poem thus doesn't become unmoored from its source text, but nevertheless retains artistic independence. This occurs due to Buffoni's intense poetic dialogue with the original author and text, where translation is

¹⁵⁶ Simone Giusti, "Ragioni di un traduttore astronomo," in *L'apostrofo* 6, n. 18 (2001): 30.

not a mere *esperimento formale*, but “an existential experience intended to relive the creative act that inspired the original.”

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