

Publishing Contemporary Foreign Poetry in Post-War Italy: a Bourdieusian perspective on Mondadori and Scheiwiller

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's notions of field, symbolic capital and *habitus*, this paper analyzes the strategies adopted in the 1950s and 1960s by two Italian publishing houses, namely, the major Mondadori and the minor Scheiwiller, in publishing contemporary poetry in translation. More precisely, by investigating from a sociological perspective the still unpublished correspondence between cultural agents such as editors, publishers and translators, this paper aims to illuminate the role of translation both at a macro level, in the definition of the field of poetry publishing, and at a micro-editorial level, in actual translation practices. Although the discussion focuses on a specific case study, the analysis enters the topical debate concerning the function of translation within the field of cultural production, intending to offer a valid contribution to both the history of culture and the sociology of translation.

KEYWORDS: history of culture, Pierre Bourdieu, poetry translation, publishing, sociology of translation.

This paper investigates the relationship between some key Italian publishing houses and the practice of contemporary poetry translation in the post-war period. More precisely, it discusses the specific case of two Milan-based publishing houses, namely, the small and elitist Scheiwiller and the leading Mondadori, examining how they included translation among their editorial projects as they structured their position within the field of poetry publishing.¹ In an attempt to offer a valid contribution to both the history of publishing and Translation Studies, this article analyzes the still unpublished correspondence of the two publishers² by drawing on the conceptual framework theorized by Pierre Bourdieu.³ In particular, I will adopt the concept of *field* theorized by Bourdieu (1980; Swartz 1997:117-142), applying it to the specific case of the publication of poetry in translation in post-war Italy. Considered as a structured space with its own specific rules, situated within the wider cultural space, the notion of field is particularly fruitful when analyzing the history of publishing. As John B. Thompson emphasizes, it “forces us to look beyond specific firms and organizations and makes us think, instead, in *relational terms*” (2010:4), thus overcoming a

¹ If taken in isolation, the modifier “elitist” could have moral classist connotations that may not do full justice to the readers and writers affiliated with Scheiwiller. As I will discuss further on, what I suggest here is more an idea of elitism linked to cultural perceptions and dispositions, which purposely circumscribe poetry writing/reading communities within a limited group of users.

² The archival research has been carried out at Fondazione Arnaldo e Alberto Mondadori (FAAM, Milan) and at the Archive Vanni Scheiwiller (VS), University of Milan – Centre APICE (APICE), at various stages from December 2009 to September 2011. All translations from Italian into English of the unpublished correspondence, held at both FAAM and APICE, are mine.

³ This approach appears rather tantalizing for a twofold reason. Specifically, within Italian Studies, neither Bourdieu's concepts nor the sociology of translation are extensively applied to trace the history of publishing (Billiani 2007b, Boschetti 2007 and Sisto 2007 excepted), whereas within Translation Studies, with regard to sociology, scholars concentrate more widely on other genres, disregarding poetry. However, Lawrence Venuti has recently stated that relatively “released from the constraint to turn a profit, poetry translation is more likely to encourage experimental strategies that can reveal what is unique about translation as a linguistic and cultural practice” (Venuti 2011:127), thus moving poetry to the core of the discipline.

simple descriptive analysis of agents' relations. Within the publishing field, indeed, cultural agents such as poets and publishers relate and struggle over the appropriation of capital which is not exclusively economic.⁴ Symbolic capital, namely the prestige and recognition acquired by the publisher, actually represents the most significant asset in a less economic-driven sector such as poetry publishing.⁵ In this regard, as Johan Heilbron and Gisèle Sapiro point out, translation constitutes a mode of legitimization, in which not only authors but also publishers may be beneficiaries, since "translation is a means of accumulating symbolic power for a publisher lacking economic and cultural capital" (2007:103).

With regard to the case of Mondadori and Scheiwiller, it is precisely my intention to identify, at a macro-level, the role that translation played in the definition of the field of poetry publishing within post-war Italy. Furthermore, at a micro-editorial level, the article deals with actual translation practices, in order to examine how they are to a certain degree influenced both by the structure of the field itself and by the agents' *habitus*. Significantly, this latter, considered as a system of dispositions, schemes of perception and action, engenders a negotiation within the space where the cultural agents act, being structured by that field and contributing to structuring it at the same time (Bourdieu 1977:79; Inghilleri 2005; Gouanvic 2007). This paper will hence analyze raw editorial materials, such as translation drafts, in order to point out how the two rather different publishing houses dealt textually with the element of translation within the elite genre of poetry.

This multi-layered analysis is crucial if we are to understand attitudes within the publishing sector with regard to translation. Valuably enough, the potential implications of this specific analysis reach beyond the Italian horizon, raising questions about translation and the relations with its context of production.

⁴ With regard to the specific publishing arena, the metaphor of dynamic conflict, rather than the collaborative concept of *world*, as suggested by Becker (1982), appears to be more useful to critically structure power relations and theoretically conceptualize position-taking among the publishers. Nonetheless, Bourdieu's dismissal of concrete interactional connections – which Becker and Social Network Analysis acknowledge – is debatable (Bottero and Crossley 2011).

⁵ As an elite genre, poetry is relatively less influenced by either economic or political constraints. More precisely, as far as the Italian case is concerned, Billiani points out that even during Fascism "the restrictions imposed on the publication of poetry were [...] far less stringent than those on prose" (2007b:142). Furthermore, in the immediate post-war period, the Italian publishing field had not yet undertaken the late Seventies industrial turn, which called into question the concept of relative autonomy applied to the specific Italian case.

Stagnation in post-war Italian poetry: a publishing issue

Within the catalogues of Italian publishing houses, the post-war period saw the proliferation of contemporary foreign poetry, offered to the readership in translation. To a greater extent than previously, when poems in translation were usually published in literary journals, publishers now reserved a privileged position for translation in their poetry series, and started developing them as autonomous sections in their literary catalogues.⁶

The introduction of contemporary foreign poetry in the Italian publishing field of the Fifties was the result of the interaction between the cultural agents' perception of the stagnant state of national poetry, and the publishers' need to exploit new editorial patterns, which they sought in order to redefine their roles and positions within the publishing field. Contemporary Italian poetry was indeed experiencing a period of aesthetic redefinition, whereby predominant poetic patterns were extensively criticized and new ones were actively sought after.⁷ Furthermore, from a transnational perspective after WWII, Italy had lost its literary prestige and represented at that time a rather feeble voice in the international cultural debate.⁸ The publishing field thus perceived the need for new literary and cultural contributions to enter the sector, to face the potential difficulties raised by a national poetry in danger of stagnation.

As two rather different Milan-based publishing houses, both Mondadori and Scheiwiller took part in this 'translating turn', which crucially redefined their power relations in the passage to the post-war period. Within the poetry publishing field in the Forties, according to the Bourdieusian binary distinction (Bourdieu 1971),⁹ Mondadori represented the "larger-scale production" publishing house, whereas Scheiwiller was the representative "small-scale

⁶ After emerging from the Fascist dictatorship, the Italian poetic tradition started entering into a more fruitful dialogue with its foreign counterparts. It must be emphasized that before WWII there were already some small publishing houses interested in translating contemporary poetry, namely Giovanni Scheiwiller, Cederna and Guanda, which started the first foreign poetry series in 1939 (Ferretti 2004:114-34). However, starting from the late '50s and early '60s – which is the time frame analyzed here – the interest in foreign poetry became more significant and cohesive, included European and non-European poets, and was embraced not only by small publishing houses, but also by leading publishing houses, namely Mondadori, Einaudi, and Feltrinelli. The growing number of emerging poetry series bears witness to a more cohesive interest in contemporary foreign poetry and translation on the part of the publishing houses. Whereas, earlier on, translations of poetry had been published in literary journals and the readership had been strictly limited to translators and poets, in the post-war period, thanks to a higher percentage of educated people, the publishing market appeared to open itself to poetry. Indeed, foreign poems were now accorded a specific place within the catalogue, and some series were dedicated exclusively to foreign poetry in translation. Through the regular publication of European and non-European poets, contemporary foreign poetry seemed to gain some room (also at a market level) within the Italian literary publishing field (see also La Penna 2003).

⁷ Indeed, in the early Sixties, contemporary Italian poetry moved away from the hermeticist tradition, which had retreated into itself with its essentialist and closed style, towards new forms, such as the radical linguistic experimentations of the *neoavanguardia*. Besides hermeticism and post-hermeticism, from the mid-Forties to the Fifties another literary movement appeared on the Italian scene: Neo-realism, which confronted the intimist view of the hermeticists, aiming to move instead towards the masses. Whereas fiction production was a significant phenomenon, as far as poetry is concerned, the Neo-realist intent failed, as poetry was still an elite genre in a generally illiterate Italy. The poetic production connected with Neo-realism soon declined and did not offer anything that was particularly fruitful or of significant quality, with such authors as Rocco Scotellaro and Franco Mataricotta (Turconi 1977; Siti 1980). See Lorenzini (2002) for a broader overview of Italian poetry in the post-war period.

⁸ As analyzed by Anna Boschetti in her essay 'La recomposition de l'espace intellectuel en Europe après 1945' (Sapiro 2009:177).

⁹ Thompson (2005:39) points out how economic constraints are always operative in a publishing business and consequently he prefers adopting the idea of plural publishing fields. However, at this stage, Bourdieu's binary paradigm is still a valuable starting point in the analysis of cultural production.

circulation” publisher.¹⁰ In point of fact, Mondadori was then the biggest publisher in Italy (Decleva 1993; Turi 1997; Ferretti 1999), and in 1940 it had launched a poetry series, *Lo Specchio*, which at first published only Italian poets, namely Giuseppe Ungaretti, Salvatore Quasimodo, Leonardo Sinisgalli and Vincenzo Cardarelli.¹¹ It had thus secured the copyright of the major Italian poets of the Thirties, consequently acquiring cultural capital; and as a result, to be published in this poetry series meant being established as one of the major exponents of contemporary Italian poetry. Giovanni Scheiwiller, on the other hand, had since the Thirties published typographically accomplished books distributed in few copies (250 or so), distinguishing himself for the heretical impact of his publications.¹² During WWII, however, he struggled with economic constraints, having to ration expenditure on paper.¹³

In 1951, Giovanni Scheiwiller was succeeded by his son, Vanni, in managing the publishing house, which started focusing more specifically on poetry, still with an elitist intent (500 to 1,000 copies). As a rather new publisher aiming to broaden his father’s publishing policy, Vanni Scheiwiller appeared to be unable to compete against Mondadori’s dominating role with regard to the publication of Italian poets.¹⁴ Indeed, Scheiwiller could not enter a poetry publishing space strictly limited to Italian cultural production for two reasons, which involved both publishing policies and literary issues related to national production. On the one hand, the publishing copyrights for the major poets had been secured by Mondadori in the Forties. On the other hand, the literary field lacked significant novelty and experimentation which could have been instrumental for the small publishing house in acquiring symbolic capital in order to challenge Mondadori’s presence in the market.

In a 1959 letter to the Anglo-American poet Ezra Pound, Vanni Scheiwiller clearly identified the problem in the existence of minor Italian poets who were in thrall to the hermeticist tradition, which represented the poetic canon prevalent in the wake of Montale and Ungaretti. Furthermore, those minor poets were unable to gain European stature; unable, that is, to acquire a consistent literary prestige on the international level. When asked by Pound to quote a list of ten significant contemporary Italian writers, Scheiwiller found the task extremely difficult, since only Montale could be included. In fact, according to the Milanese publisher, Italy had too many young poets, but all minor. Furthermore, these minor poets were not capable of gaining a more solid status, thus hardly anyone could be published and read on a European level.¹⁵

On the other hand, the established poetic canon, the privileged possession of the major publishing houses such as Mondadori, lacked innovative features, too. Indeed, in the late Fifties, this leading Milanese publisher reaffirmed the lack of enlivening Italian poetic voices, which, if they had existed, would have constituted substantial literary and cultural experimentation. This same lack forced the reappearance in the catalogue of already familiar

¹⁰ With regard to the definition of “large scale circulation” applied to Mondadori’s poetry production, we should not forget that we are dealing with an elite literary genre.

¹¹ Mondadori had been able to negotiate with the Fascist *régime* (Billiani 2007a; Rundle 2010; Rundle and Sturge 2010), and benefitted from the economic stagnation of the publishing market, which particularly hit the small publishing houses.

¹² Giovanni Scheiwiller’s publications concentrated more widely on artworks, without neglecting poetry, especially foreign, namely the Russian Sergei Yesenin (in 1938) and the Irish W.B. Yeats (in 1939).

¹³ This is one reason for the mini-book format (Ferretti 2009:11).

¹⁴ Although he inherited substantial symbolic capital of literary prestige from his father’s publishing strategies, he wanted to follow his own editorial path.

¹⁵ APICE, Archive VS [later only VS], correspondence Ezra Pound, Vanni Scheiwiller to Pound, Milan 19 March 1959.

authors, such as Alfonso Gatto, a major voice of hermetic poetry, along with Ungaretti, whose poems were reprinted, thus confirming a lack of poetic innovation and indicating stagnation in the publishing field. Appointed editor-in-chief of *Lo Specchio* in 1958, the well-known poet Vittorio Sereni¹⁶ critically outlined this situation. When the Italian poet Vittorio Bodini suggested that the reason why his work had not yet been published was the presence of very talented new contemporary Italian poets, Sereni strongly opposed this claim, listing several already established hermetic poets such as Gatto and Ungaretti, whose works were merely reprinted.¹⁷

Hence, both the elitist and the leading publishing houses were in need of innovative poetic contributions in order to gain literary prestige, which was something Italian poetry seemed to lack. The solution appeared to rely on the more vibrant foreign counterparts, as a quantitative assessment of both publishers' catalogues reveals. Specifically, Scheiwiller started publishing several series of contemporary foreign poets, namely 'Acquario' [Acquarium], which included Ezra Pound, the German Gottfried Benn, the Greeks Yiannis Ritsos and Giorgos Seferis, and 'Poeti stranieri tradotti da poeti italiani' [Foreign poets translated by Italian poets], which published the Spanish Jorge Guillén, the Brazilian Murilo Mendes and the Hungarian Gyula Illyés. In 'Nuova serie letteraria' [New literary series] in 1956, contemporary Bulgarian poets were published for the first time, whereas in 1965 it was the turn of contemporary Greek poets and in 1966 contemporary Dutch poets. At the end of the Sixties 52% of the books in the catalogue were dedicated to contemporary foreign poetry.¹⁸

A few years afterwards in 1959, Mondadori also started opening the catalogue to contemporary foreign poets. These included the Greeks Kavafis and Seferis, the Spanish Rafael Alberti, the Anglo-Americans Theodore Roethke, Denise Levertov and Thom Gunn. Between 1959 and 1969, nearly one third of the published books were dedicated to contemporary foreign poets, which is quite significant considering that *Lo Specchio* was born as a poetry series focused exclusively on contemporary Italian poets.¹⁹ This high number of translations is not only intriguing statistically, but encourages a more stimulating qualitative analysis of the Italian field of poetry publishing, as I will outline in the next section.

Translating to acquire symbolic capital: a centre-periphery dynamics

Engagement with the practice of translating contemporary foreign poetry reveals specific dynamics in progress within the Italian field of poetry publishing of the Fifties. Translation functioned in this context as a strategic way for publishers to position themselves within the publishing space and acquire the literary prestige necessary to accumulate symbolic capital and thus some degree of power (Heilbron and Sapiro 2002:5). Precisely since the major exponents of contemporary Italian poetry were legally inaccessible, whereas the minor ones were culturally unproductive, for a small publishing house the solution to this *impasse* was to rely on other sources to nourish its catalogue, and translations worked efficiently in this sense (Serry 2002). Indeed, by translating contemporary foreign poetry, Scheiwiller could challenge

¹⁶ Due to limited space, it will not be possible to expand too much on the figure of Sereni as a poet. For further analysis of both his editorial role and poetic attitude, and how the latter influenced his collaboration with Mondadori (1958-1975) see Ferretti (1999).

¹⁷ FAAM, Arnaldo Mondadori Historical Archive [later omitted], *Italian Authors Editorial Office*, file Vittorio Bodini, Sereni to Bodini, Milan [later omitted] 6 July 1960, typescript [later ts].

¹⁸ The quantitative assessment for Scheiwiller is based on the titles of contemporary foreign poetry in D'Orsi and Barzetti (1978), whereas for Mondadori on Moggi Rebulla e Zerbini (1985).

¹⁹ Unfortunately, neither sales figures nor exhaustive print-runs are available in the archival sources, and to my knowledge, with regard to the post-war period, so far there does not exist a thorough study of this significant issue (see, instead, Rundle (2010) for the publication of translations in Fascist Italy).

Mondadori's monopoly of poetry publishing, gaining a section of the literary market still unexplored in the Fifties.²⁰

This engagement with poetry translation was effected, crucially, in accordance with the intrinsic structure of the publishing institutions and agents involved.²¹ More particularly, the fact that Vanni Scheiwiller was both editor-in-chief and publisher helped to give him some autonomy in developing these specific publishing strategies. In this sense, the unprecedented and risky publication in Italy of Ezra Pound, who was marginalized for his sympathy towards Fascism, demonstrated an unprejudiced attitude, in tune with Vanni Scheiwiller's personal and cultural dispositions. Furthermore, it represented a heretical choice in opposition to the hermeticist taste which privileged T.S. Eliot, and shaped the Milanese publisher's cultural role in the Italian post-war context. Specifically, insofar as it introduced Italian readers to the larger European cultural production, it compelled Italian critics and poets to welcome that wider cultural field. Pound, whose work was systematically published from the early Fifties, thus became symbolically a tutelary deity and reserve of prestige for the small publisher.

Moreover, Scheiwiller's catalogue was later enriched through the publication of Kavafis (1956), the US-Americans e.e. cummings (1958) and W.C. Williams (1958), Jorge Guillén (1958), Murilo Mendes (1961), the Spanish Vicente Aleixandre (1962), Gottfried Benn (1963), the US-American Marianne Moore (1964), Gyula Illyés (1966) and Seferis (1968). Vanni Scheiwiller was aware of the valuable contribution these names could bring to his catalogue, since he labeled Guillén, Cummings, Eliot, Pound, Joyce, Cocteau and Salinas as seven *golden fish*.²²

Significantly, this international bank of symbolic capital enabled Scheiwiller to affirm his strength, helping him redefine his position within the field. Indeed, the legitimacy obtained primarily with the publication of contemporary foreign poetry turned Scheiwiller into a small publisher who was able to influence Italian aesthetics profoundly. As stated by the translator and writer Claudio Magris, Scheiwiller was instrumental in shaping the national aesthetic, thus broadening the elitist intent:

He was a publisher who, with very few means, was a national presence; he contributed in an outstanding way to determine the cultural climate of our country, just like the leading publishers. To be published by Scheiwiller was a great ambition for a writer, because it meant not to be included in an aristocratic and isolated group, but to enter the national literary outlook (Kalczyńska 2000:187).

²⁰ Indeed, the scholar Paolo Giovannetti in his essay 'Un enciclopedismo in -32°' points out: "In the post-war period, the small poetry publishing houses are strongly influenced by the growth of Mondadori's *Lo Specchio*, [...]; this throws into crisis the small publishers, now unable to continue publishing some poets who had started to become well-known. Since such authors as Quasimodo, Gatti, Sinisgalli were almost 'lost', Vanni undertakes a culturally significant path, [...] and operates quite interestingly in the field of foreign poetry." (Cadioli 2009:160; my translation).

²¹ As suggested by Bourdieu (1999:23; Sapiro 2008:157) with regard to foreign literary production, small publishers are more flexible in welcoming still uncanonized literary novelties and making them an occasion for accumulating a brand of symbolic capital, distinct from that of the leading publishing houses, which benefit from their relationship with canonical poets.

²² APICE, VS, correspondence Guillén, Vanni to Guillén, 23 June 1960. The complete name of the publishing house was 'All'insegna del Pesce d'oro' (= golden fish). Although related to the publisher's name, the label "golden fish" is more widely a symbol of the honour these authors could add to the publishing house.

The publisher did indeed turn into a consistent cultural voice whose aesthetic claims deeply influenced poetic developments in the literary history of Italy in the second half of the twentieth century. Literary novelties passed through Scheiwiller's hands; Biagio Marin, a dialect poet whose poetics much differed from Hermeticism, became nationally famous thanks to his publication by Scheiwiller (Ferretti 2009:22); and in the Sixties, Scheiwiller also contributed with his publishing activity to the rise of the *neoavanguardia* movement. In this regard, Giuseppe Guglielmi defined the owner of the Milanese publishing house as a "peripheral publisher at the centre of literature" (Ferri and Tortorelli 1986:15). However, in the light of Bourdieu's analysis of the field of cultural production (1996), it would be better to adjust this definition. Publishing translations allowed Vanni Scheiwiller to affirm his cultural strength and prestige, thus claiming a more central role within the poetry publishing field.²³

Once Scheiwiller moved into publishing foreign poetry, Mondadori's outmoded commitment to Hermeticism resulted in a loss of innovation that eroded its dominance of the field. This is what the editor-in-chief Vittorio Sereni repeatedly claimed in his correspondence, pointing out how the choice of translating foreign poetry changed the dynamics of roles and positions within the poetry publishing arena. In a letter to the translator Mary de Rachewiltz, Sereni underlined how, until the late Fifties, *Lo Specchio* had neglected to claim a position in the field of foreign poetry. However, one should consider that while Vanni Scheiwiller owned his publishing company, Vittorio Sereni did not; obviously, this meant that Sereni, regardless of his poetic preferences, was not entirely free in his publishing choices, and was compelled to mediate between his own attitude and the publisher's expectations with regard to the Italian poetic canon.²⁴

However, after coming late to the publication of poetry in translation and having consequently lost several publishing opportunities, Sereni's problem now was to anticipate other publishers with regard to contemporary foreign poetic trends and voices. To that end, the editor-in-chief suggested looking more towards what was in the process of self-definition rather than towards already clearly defined poetic schools, without running the risk of specialization, which small publishers could undertake more usefully.²⁵ Hence, at the beginning of the '60s, Sereni underlined how Mondadori had to operate from a different perspective, in order to redefine its role within the field of poetry publishing. Well known poet and translator himself,²⁶ the editor-in-chief didn't perceive the turn towards contemporary foreign poetry only as a cultural issue but also as a publishing strategy.²⁷ This route had to be taken so as not to lose other

²³ I prefer to use here the terms "centre" and "periphery" (reminiscent of the core-periphery system, but here modeled on symbolic and not economic power, as in Wallerstein (2004) and De Swaan (2001)) for the spatial meaning they may produce, in order to represent the spatial dynamics of the agents' positions within the Italian publishing field. Indeed, the pairing "dominating/dominated", which Casanova (2002:8; 2004) privileged within an international perspective, might not apply productively to this specific Italian case, as they suggest a less fluid dichotomy which would not convey the idea of the spatial movement of the two forces within the field from the Forties to the Sixties.

²⁴ Although Sereni's freedom as editor-in-chief of *Lo Specchio*, thanks to the elitist genre, was greater than the one he had for managing the fiction series, he was not entirely free in his choices, since, for instance, the publisher asked for a substantial number of established Italian poets to be published every year (Ferretti 1999:122).

²⁵ FAMM, *Foreign editorial office* – C, Sereni to de Rachewiltz, 28 December 1961, ts.

²⁶ Sereni's interest in contemporary foreign poetry and translation is demonstrated also by his activity as a translator. Among others, he translated the Frenchs Paul Valéry (1947) and René Char (1968), and the American W.C. Williams (1957).

²⁷ Sereni opened *Lo Specchio* to contemporary foreign poets (between 1960 and 1976, we can list Nazim Hikmet, Giorgos Seferis, Rafael Alberti, Theodore Roethke, Thom Gunn, Denise Levertov, Allen Tate, Peter

significant poets, but Mondadori could not intervene in the field using the same policies as the small publishing houses. On the contrary, it had to reject the specialization which is only appropriate in the smaller institutions and embark on a wider search for the “unsigned” new voices who had not yet found a publisher in Italy, but who could hope to achieve success and a more prominent profile in the future.

The dynamics of this situation appear to be envisaged in a letter written by Vittorio Sereni to the translator Joyce Lussu. In 1963, the latter suggested publishing Serbian poet Vasko Popa, whose literary reception in Italy was rather limited. As Sereni pointed out in his reply, Popa could be inserted into the catalogue only if he acquired international recognition, thus constituting a stock of cultural capital for the publisher. Otherwise, he should enter the catalogue of a minor publisher, since Mondadori could not take the risk of publishing him, but rather saw its role as offering a synthesis of literary innovations:

[the small] publishing houses are more able to follow specifically this or that contemporary foreign poet's career, keeping him inside the circle of a more or less specialized readership. We, on the other hand, have to draw conclusions and maintain a watching brief.²⁸

The consecration of these authors, which took place in safe conditions, since the publishing house could not choose any risky publications, would benefit Mondadori's cultural capital by securing poets who might achieve canonical status. For instance, Sereni was interested in the Anglo-American Denise Levertov, whose poetry was deeply influenced by W.C. Williams. However the editor-in-chief could publish Levertov only if her poetry underwent a really significant and independent development, which could establish her more firmly within contemporary American poetry.²⁹ In this case, she would represent a more prestigious name for the catalogue, and so overcome the economic concerns surrounding her publication. However, to secure the copyright for publishing Levertov in the future, Sereni suggested including her work in another literary series, namely *Silerchie*,³⁰ with the aim of retrieving her in due course for *Lo Specchio*.

The symbolic, legal and economic constraints of the publishing field thus restricted Sereni's freedom as the editor-in-chief of a leading publishing house even in the case of the elite genre of poetry. With regard to Levertov's case, he pointed out how working for a poetry series such as *Lo Specchio* meant allowing one's personal taste to intervene in contemporary poetry, but within the limits of a rather complex publishing situation.³¹ A necessary mediation between the composite structure of the field, the publisher's agenda and his own *habitus* was therefore demanded.

Huchel, J.C. Ransom, Yiannis Ritsos, W.D. Snodgrass), breaking the traditional Italian-focused publishing tendency exploited by Mondadori (Ferretti 1999:123).

²⁸ FAAM, *Italian Authors Editorial Office*, file Joyce Lussu, Sereni to Lussu, 24 April 1963, ts. This lends support to what Boschetti (2010:20) points out with regard to the European space, namely that once the new cultural products are brought to the fore by the peripheries (small publishers), the leading publishing houses retain a considerable unifying power, which integrates and consecrates the innovation, redistributing it to a larger readership.

²⁹ FAMM, *Foreign editorial office – C*, Sereni to de Rachewiltz, 28 December 1961, ts.

³⁰ *Silerchie* was usually more flexible in welcoming innovative and critical literary works. The series was published by Il Saggiatore, the publishing house of Alberto Mondadori, son of Arnaldo. For the relationship between Sereni and Alberto Mondadori, see Ferretti (1999).

³¹ FAMM, *Foreign editorial office – C*, Sereni to de Rachewiltz, 28 December 1961, ts..

Scheiwiller - How to distinguish oneself: *habitus* and the practice of translation

Without neglecting either target readers or the interaction with other agents involved, namely translators, we must also consider actual translation practices, because these are to a certain degree influenced both by the structure of the field itself and by the agents' *habitus*.

At a micro-editorial level, Vanni Scheiwiller's adoption of a specific translation strategy could be fruitfully inserted within the conceptual framework provided by Pierre Bourdieu, and examined as an attempt to acquire distinction which grows out of the publisher's *habitus*. Indeed, quite differently from Sereni, whose personal taste had to enter into negotiation with Mondadori's wider publishing policies, Vanni Scheiwiller was mainly sustained in his cultural operation by his own aesthetic taste. Although he was influenced by the relative lack of publishing space to exploit, which moved him towards translation, he confessed in a quite hyperbolic way that he thanked "God every night that I am neither an objective publisher, nor committed: I publish only what I like, I do my best to publish what I like" (Cadioli 2009:52).³² Son of Giovanni Scheiwiller, Vanni entered Milanese culture, locating himself in an eccentric position, which he intended to consolidate after the stagnation of WWII, thus confirming his cultural and, indeed, family disposition towards heterodoxy and the search for an enlivening art.³³ His target was to offer a cultural product which distinguished itself from the average literary production. However, his taste was not an end in itself, but was instrumental in achieving a wider purpose, that of "saving whatever it is possible to save" and of being able to "distinguish the top from the bottom".³⁴ This meant rescuing the more refined and prestigious literary niches from the mediocrity of homogeneous publication.

In order not to diminish this specific elitist intent, the heretical *habitus* needed undoubtedly to disguise any economic agenda, and in this regard, Vanni Scheiwiller was quite capable of weaving a narrative of contempt for economic issues.³⁵ Consequently, his purpose was not explicitly to obtain "success" through the acquisition of a wide readership, but rather the opposite:

Other texts from English, French, German, Russian, etc., will follow, if the very few supporters of poetry in Italy and abroad will be able to make those fragile paper boats – which are the good poetry books – float. *Nous savons que nous serons compris d'un petit nombre mais cela nous suffit* [we know that only few people will understand us, but this is enough for us] (Cadioli 2009:122, my translation).

³² However, I should point out that Scheiwiller could operate in the poetry publishing field, mainly sustained by the autonomous principle of "art for art's sake", as long as the field itself remained relatively autonomous with regard to economic capital. Indeed, as Ferretti underlines (2009:48-56), Scheiwiller, too, undertook an "industrial turn" in the Seventies, when economic strategies within the Italian publishing field became more aggressive and it would have been impossible for a small publisher to survive otherwise. He started seeking new sponsorships and his catalogue became less quality and taste-oriented compared to the "golden age" of the Fifties and the Sixties which I am considering here in this paper.

³³ Indeed, Sergio Romano (Ferri and Tortorelli 1986:11) emphasizes that Vanni appeared to be pushed by the same ambitions as his father, since he similarly operated to connect Italian culture with other, mainly European, cultures and he granted a privilege to heretical voices such as Joyce and Pound, but also Céline.

³⁴ APICE, VS, correspondence with Ezra Pound, 1960.

³⁵ Scheiwiller in several letters (to Jean Giono on 25 August 1957 or Antonio Rizzardi on 5 November 1962 among others) suggested that he was far from being a rich industrialist publisher as many others were in Italy, namely Feltrinelli.

He thus operated by tailoring his cultural products according to his aesthetic dispositions, and did so in the details of his practice as both editor and publisher.³⁶ Refined literary choices made in view of a very select readership were not to be modified by adopting a more popular formal framework. From a textual viewpoint, translation should thus be crafted with these exigencies in mind.

This search for a poetic output, which remains indifferent to popularizing aims, is demonstrated by the publisher's comments about the attitude of some translators. For example, Carlo Scarfoglio, translator of Ezra Pound's *Classic Anthology Designed by Confucius Anthology* (1954), sought to produce a translation that would satisfy the reader's need for intelligibility and wrote to Scheiwiller in 1962 proposing a preface for the translation which would be suitable for readers who knew very little about Pound and his work.³⁷ Scheiwiller, however, answered by commenting on the stylistic sloppiness of the translation, saying it was not brilliant but rather plain, though solid. He suggested that he was not completely satisfied with Scarfoglio's lack of poetic choices, adding also that he would have preferred Margherita Guidacci, who was a famous translator and poet herself.³⁸ Consequently, Scarfoglio had to edit his translation, previously published in a journal, now focusing more deeply on stylistic concerns. In his first version (*Nuova antologia* 1956: 415), for instance, he had eliminated any anaphora or assonance suggested in the source text: "Oh omen tree/ [...] Oh omen tree" was translated by "Auspicioso arbusto [auspicious bush]/ [...] auguroso pesco [augural peach tree]", whereas in Scheiwiller's edition (1964) the qualifier "auspicioso" was maintained in both instances in order to create a rhetoric effect similar to the one achieved by Pound's text.

Clearly, the purpose of translation for the small publishing house was not to produce ordinary readability. This is indeed what the translator Ferruccio Masini stated in the preface to his translation of Gottfried Benn's *Après lude* (1955), which was agreed upon and published by Scheiwiller in 1963: "Although it could assist 'the everyday sense' to *re-translate* Benn, trying to ease its intelligibility, we cannot avoid the risk of modifying and corrupting the 'poetic sense', perhaps too difficult, perhaps too inaccessible, but rather unique and exclusive" (Benn 1963:16; my own translation). Poetic significance should thus be preserved at all costs. This is why Vanni Scheiwiller even refused to collaborate with a well-respected scholar and translator firmly in the Hermeticist tradition, Oreste Macrí, who could have brought academic reliability to the translation of Jorge Guillén, because Macrí was philologically accurate but unable to achieve poetic results.³⁹ In fact, the publisher strongly believed that poets should be translated by other congenial poets, and this was his particular line in taste which – rightly or wrongly – he followed to the extreme.⁴⁰

Scheiwiller usually opted for a translation privileging elegance of style, dismissing any attempt to use a more common language for the benefit of a larger readership that he

³⁶ According to Heibron and Sapiro, "The *habitus* of the translator [but also of the publisher who revised the translation], the mode of acquisition of linguistic competence, the type of education and training, the publishing norms, the national tradition with respect to translation norms – all contribute to orienting linguistic and stylistic choices" (2007:104).

³⁷ APICE, VS Archive, file Ezra Pound, Carlo Scarfoglio to Vanni Scheiwiller, Rome 15 January 1962.

³⁸ APICE, Vanni Scheiwiller to Ezra Pound, Milan 9 December 1958.

³⁹ See APICE, VS, correspondence Jorge Guillén, Vanni Scheiwiller to Guillén, Rome 3 July 1960.

⁴⁰ APICE, Vanni Scheiwiller to Guillén, Montorio Veronese, 24 September 1960.

explicitly did not intend to reach. From the analysis of Vanni Scheiwiller's proofreading,⁴¹ found in the APICE archive, the choice of dignified terms, instead of the average ones which the translator sometimes chose according to a word-for-word translation, is predominant. For instance, in proofreading Adelina Aletti's translations from the Spanish of ten epigrams by Jorge Guillén, when the translator opted for a literal translation of "mesurado octubre" as "ottobre moderato" [tempered/moderate October], Vanni Scheiwiller chose a rather poetical expression, either "la dignità ottobrina" [the dignity of October] or "cadenzato ottobre" [cadenced October].⁴² Similarly, the poetical image of annihilating life is maintained in an airy rather than simply physical action, since "se deshace en polvareda" [it disintegrates in a cloud of dust], previously translated by Aletti as "si disintegra in polvere" [it disintegrates into powder], is replaced by "si disfa in polverio" [vanishes in a cloud of dust]. An elevation of tone is perceived also in the ninth epigram, in which "Hermosa cathedral/se eleva muy segura" ([beautiful cathedral/rises self-confident], literally translated into Italian by Aletti as "bella cattedrale/si eleva molto sicura") is turned into "splendida cattedrale/s'innalza con slancio" [splendid cathedral/soars with panache]. According to the publisher's prescription, the literary qualities of the source text should be emphasized if not enriched, and any attempt to diminish the stylistic complexity of the source text should be resisted.

Mondadori: translation for a more "average" reader

Mondadori's approach to translation practice was rather different from Scheiwiller's. Occupying a different position within the field, the editorial agents of the leading Milanese publisher undoubtedly had to mediate more fluidly between their own cultural dispositions and Mondadori's objective of addressing a larger readership, albeit a readership for the elite genre of poetry.⁴³ In practice, for Mondadori, the recipient should be a reader who was "average-engaged", a formulation that spoke to the double nature of the publishing house, which had to negotiate a path between commercial agendas and literary prestige.⁴⁴ In other words, the criteria to be satisfied were, at one and the same time, an attitude of cultural refinement and a more popularizing perspective, transcended by the distinctively elite purpose of Scheiwiller.⁴⁵

Mondadori's translations should be thus tailored to offer readers prestigious authors in a faithful and readable style.⁴⁶ Indeed, the scholar and translator Agostino Lombardo, who was one of the main editors for English literature at Mondadori, when he revised Mario

⁴¹ As stated by Mary de Rachewiltz (Cadioli 2009:60), Vanni's care over any typographical issue was significant, since he used to proofread the books at least three times together with the author/translator in order to achieve greater refinement.

⁴² APICE, VS, *Portuguese Women Poets*, file Aletti.

⁴³ For a revised account of Bourdieu's "double personages" (Bourdieu 1996:216; Parker & Philpotts 2009) with regard to the editorial roles in which both plural individual and common *habitus* intersect, see Philpotts (2012).

⁴⁴ FAAM, *Italian Authors Editorial Office*, file Joyce Lussu, Forti to Sereni 16 September 1966, ts (see also Billiani 2007b:149). The term "engaged" refers not just to a political attitude but more widely to the cultural curiosity of a literate readership.

⁴⁵ Interestingly, Sereni's direct collaborator and then editor-in-chief of *Lo Specchio* was a refined literary critic, Marco Forti, whose voice could be heard in the major Italian literary journals of that time. He was also responsible for the *Almanacco dello Specchio*, which was supposed to be published every two months, starting in 1972. In the leading article of the first volume, he stated that his purpose was to publish "the most important authors working within contemporary foreign poetry, choosing those texts or works which can illuminate by their lively topicality. [...] It shows marginal or new voices whose research appears to be mature enough to get away from a specialized circle and get in touch with a wider readership" (Ferretti 1999:129, my translation).

⁴⁶ Perhaps not as heretical as Scheiwiller, nonetheless Mondadori presented the Italian readership with several contemporary foreign poets endowed with honor and symbolic capital, such as Seferis, J.C. Ransom, Thom Gunn, Denise Levertov or Allen Tate.

Cicognani's translation of Cecil Day Lewis' poetry, pointed out the necessity of a translation that took into account readability and normalization.⁴⁷ He emphasized that the first criterion to be followed was faithfulness to the source text, and argued that the target text should not be the occasion for a poetic adventure on the part of the translator. What the publishing agents aimed to offer to their readership was the poetic universe of the foreign author, with his usually more realistic style and cultural topicality, and not just the Italian translator's poetic virtues. A target text which eased the readability of the foreign author, privileging an accurate translation that adhered to the peculiarities of the source text, was thus praised, whereas publishing agents were often suspicious of any stylistic enrichment which the translator might suggest and which could be perceived as obscure by the Italian readership.⁴⁸

The other main criterion to be taken into account was the readability of the target text, which should present foreign poets through a typical "Italian style", far from what could be defined as a translating style. In this sense, the editor and literary critic Marco Forti suggested that the translation by Mary de Rachewiltz of Levertov's poems should be revised, since it "is certainly interesting from a poetic point of view, and it may make a good impression, provided that it is revised a bit and normalized as far as the Italian is concerned".⁴⁹ The publishing agents thus encouraged a poetic output in tune with their cultural dispositions, but also needed to take into account the necessity of a wider linguistic accessibility for the benefit of a more common readership than that of the elitist Scheiwiller.⁵⁰

A fitting example of the result that was sought by Mondadori was the translation offered by Giovanni Giudici of the poetry by American poet J.C. Ransom. Indeed, the editors-in-chief within Mondadori praised the translator's ability to adhere to the peculiarities of the source text, reshaping the same poetic universe: "The book is good and I think it represents thoroughly the poet in all his different worlds and aspects."⁵¹ Moreover, they acknowledged that Giudici was also able to create a version that could nonetheless address an average readership, through the use of clarifying paratextual elements:

I think [the preface] is well done and exhaustive as regards both the historical and cultural information [...]. The language is critically appropriate but it can be easily read by every reader. In short, I think it's what we were looking for.⁵²

However, to attain this purpose, Giudici excluded from the selection of poems those which appeared to be too cultivated,⁵³ while he raised doubts about the necessity of translating Ransom's preface which was too distant from the readers' horizons, thus leaning towards a more "domesticating" (Venuti 1995, 1998) attitude:

⁴⁷ FAMM, *Italian Authors Editorial Office*, file Mario Cicognani, Lombardo's reading report, 14 February 1963, ts.

⁴⁸ In this sense, it would have been interesting to analyze Sereni and Forti's discussion on Camillo Pennati's translation of Thom Gunn's poems and their editorial suggestions [FAAM, *Italian Authors Editorial Office*, file Camillo Pennati; Sereni to Pennati, 5 April 1962, ts, in particular, and, Forti to Sereni, 27 June 1966, ts]. Unfortunately, Pennati did not give his consent to publish the extract of the correspondence.

⁴⁹ FAMM, *Foreign Editorial Office* – C, file Levertov, Forti to Sereni, 24 January 1966, ts.

⁵⁰ One should note that the average circulation of Scheiwiller's work was 500/1,000 copies, of which 50 or more were complimentary copies, whereas *Lo Specchio* distributed at least 2,500–3,000 copies, if not more. Obviously, the numbers are not as big as those for novels, poetry being still quite an elitist genre.

⁵¹ FAAM, *Italian Authors Editorial Office*, file Giovanni Giudici, Forti to Sereni, 22 June 1966, ts.

⁵² FAAM, *Italian Authors Editorial Office*, file Giovanni Giudici, Forti to Sereni, 13 December 1966, ts.

⁵³ Billiani states: "In Giudici's opinion, what has to be selected for translation from Ransom, the intellectual who gave its name to the 'New Criticism' movement, is whatever can help to make him more readily understood and seem less intellectually obscure and elitist." (2007b:148)

I don't know if you think that I should also translate [the preface]. If so, I will translate it, although it's full of references and implicit allusions to *Paradise Lost*, which is not very familiar to the Italian readership.⁵⁴

The same perplexity was also shared by Marco Forti,⁵⁵ when he debated the suitability of translating Charles Olson. Comparing Olson to Frost and W.C. Williams he asked: "Are we sure that Italian readers, [...] can appreciate a poet who is probably their equal, but much more difficult and allusive?"⁵⁶ Mondadori's position in the publishing field, and its economic reliance on books sold, thus strongly shaped Mondadori's literary and stylistic choices with regard to translations, which were required to follow precise guidelines, as they needed to exclude any author and linguistic register that could not be addressed to a significantly wide or simply non-specialized readership.⁵⁷

Hence concluding my comparison of the approaches to translation by Scheiwiller and Mondadori, on the one hand, Scheiwiller as a publisher and editor prioritized and even emphasized the literary and stylistic qualities of the source text, in accordance with his distinctive desire to maintain a central position within the field; on the other hand, as a result of the compromise between poetic attitudes and commercial agendas, the editors-in-chief within Mondadori appreciated an accurate translation, but also welcomed a more domesticating approach by the translating agents. This could indeed help ensure the general readability of the foreign text, in accordance with the more popularizing agenda of a leading publishing house, even in the case of an elite genre like poetry. The publisher's strategies were nonetheless instrumental in synthesizing the efforts to disseminate contemporary foreign poetry mounted by the small and distinctive agents in the publishing field and to offer it to a wider reception, in a way that might influence a larger spectrum of Italian readers.

Conclusion

The close analysis of archival materials has helped unveil the publishing and translating strategies undertaken by two publishing houses in post-World War II Italy. It has also given an account of the dialogue involving publishers, editors, translators and poets and revealed itself to be "a significant factor in, and historical evidence for, any history of translation" (Billiani 2007b:140). Furthermore, the sociological approach adopted in reading the editorial correspondence has fruitfully contributed, as a methodological tool, to understanding relations and structures within the field of publishing. Indeed, it has underlined the role of translation as a means of accumulating symbolic capital in the definition of the publishing field itself, thus influencing the position-takings of the publishers involved.

Moreover, the Bourdieusian perspective has allowed us to explore translating strategies in accordance with the structuring and structured qualities of publishers' *habitus*, illuminating how translation as a practice is influenced, among other things, by both cultural dispositions and positions occupied in the field. In effect, as juxtaposed one to the other, the two publishing agents examined in this paper – Scheiwiller and Mondadori, respectively a small-scale and a larger-scale circulation publisher – were influenced in their editorial practice by the position and role they assumed within the field of poetry publishing in negotiation with their own attitudes. The final output they achieved, which entered the literary and cultural

⁵⁴ FAAM, *Italian Authors Editorial Office*, file Giovanni Giudici, Giudici to Sereni, 17 January 1965, ts.

⁵⁵ See footnote 37 for some details on Forti's activities.

⁵⁶ FAMM, *Foreign Editorial Office – C*, file Olson, 23 February 1966, ts.

⁵⁷ See FAMM, *Foreign Editorial Office – Reading Reports*, file Murilo Mendes, Sereni to Mendes, 10 July 1970, ts.

target space, was then determined by the more or less elitist purposes and editorial agendas inherently linked to their publishing structures.

Although focused on a specific Italian case study, this paper has aimed more broadly to offer a valid contribution to the history of publishing and the sociology of translation. Indeed, translation as a cultural operation should be located within the field of cultural production, so that we can understand its role and agency in the structure of the publishing space. Consequently, a valid history of publishing should not disregard the role of translation, but should reconsider its achievements through the inclusion of translation in its analytical perspective to the benefit of a complete and thorough analysis of power relations and attitudes within the cultural context.

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