

FROM NORMS TO MACRO-NORMS? The Translation of Classics seen in a Global, Diachronic Framework

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Abstract – Recently, Descriptive Translation Studies has been busying itself with single case studies rather than general surveys, with individual translations rather than normative tendencies. Ostensibly, this has been done in an attempt at avoiding the pitfalls of excessive ‘globalism’, and in order to shift the focus from the pressures exerted by society to the contributions given by translators, each according to his/her *habitus*. While recognizing the value of these ‘localizing’ studies, the present article argues that there is still scope within the discipline for developing universal concepts capable of connecting different forms of behaviour. Whenever the translation scholar aims at describing a field rather than an individual effort, it may be useful, and indeed necessary, to extend Toury’s concept of ‘translation norms’ both synchronically and diachronically. In the field of classical translation, in particular, the significance of single contributions may be lost if it is not seen in the context of international tendencies with deep historical roots – what the author proposes to call ‘macro-norms’.

Keywords: Descriptive Translation Studies, classics, comparative literature, norms, macro-norms.

1. Descriptive Translation Studies: local or global?

In the last decade and a half, the theories at the core of Descriptive Translation Studies have been criticized for their universalizing, all-embracing nature. It may be important – so the argument goes – to study the position of the translation system within the literary polysystem (Even-Zohar 1978); but that kind of general, bird’s-eye view will tend to fuse the finer details of single translations, or translating traditions, into the wider picture of some summarily-defined ‘target culture’. It may be rewarding to try and define the “preliminary” and “operational norms” which govern the selection of texts and their interlingual rewriting in any given target culture (Toury 1995, p. 58); but that kind of concentration will run the risk of obscuring all the individual contributions that do not chime in with the norm, and fail to fit into the general pattern.

Many of the critics who would like to reverse this tendency – and make DTS a bottom-up, rather than a top-down discipline – find their bearings in Bourdieu’s model of sociological description. The starting point of any translational analysis, according to these critics, should be the *habitus* of single translators, and the ways in which this *habitus* interacts with the “field” of literature or publishing in which they move (Gouanvic 1999; Meylaerts 2008). As Daniel Simeoni put it in an article on *The Pivotal Status of the Translator’s Habitus*, it is the purpose of this school to explore “the possibility of nudging theory away from the properties of systemic constructs towards the main focus of translation norms, i.e. the translator”, because “the question of agency behind norms in general and behind translational norms in particular, begs for an answer” (Simeoni 1998, pp. 1, 6).

In point of fact, agency – even outside this group of scholars – has been the byword

of much DTS research in the last few years. After the last – and arguably definitive – systematizing top-down effort produced by Gideon Toury in his 1995 *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (Toury 1995, 2012), the tendency has been away from generalization and towards description of the singularities, the peculiarities, the uniqueness of single translations and translators. Thus, there have been essays, monographs and collections of essays on the translator as writer (Bassnett, Bush 2006), on the translator as an intervenient being (Munday 2007), and on the translator-interpreter as an active participant in his/her transactions (Cronin 2006). The universal approach has rather fallen out of favour – so much so that even scholars working within the framework of norms and polysystem theory have proposed to counteract Toury’s generalizations with a measure of “localism” (Agorni 2007).¹

While this insistence on agency and on the translator as an individual may have represented a long-overdue personal ‘turn’ in translation studies, and while there may still be scope for a more precise definition of the exact nature of the translator’s intervention (Morini 2010), it is the purpose of the present article to argue that for certain general kinds of descriptive enterprises, a universalizing approach is still needed, and may indeed have to be broadened. In the following section, an attempt is made at studying the sub-system of “literary classics in translation”, with initial focus on Italy. This focus is gradually, if tentatively, enlarged – both spatially and temporally – in the awareness that Italian classical translation can only be understood in the context of world-wide (or at least European) classical translation, and the behaviour of today’s practitioners needs to be seen in the context of yesterday’s theories and practices. I propose to call this broadened version of Toury’s translation norm ‘macro-norm’ – to mark a difference in scope rather than theoretical substance.

It might appear superfluous to propose a global and diachronic broadening of outlook for a discipline that has been comparative and historically-minded from its very inception (Holmes *et al.* 1978). However, the only general definition proposed by DTS in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s was based on the idea – a revolutionary one, at the time – that each and every translation is necessarily a manipulation, a “rewriting” made to “reflect a certain ideology and a poetics” (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990, preface). After that, the 1990s have provided scholars with the strategies christened by Venuti as ‘invisibility’ and ‘fluency’ – of which more below – whereas the noughties, as seen above, have witnessed a general shifting of the spotlight towards single texts and individual translators. As for the rest, what the discipline has produced is a swarm of studies on single texts, translators, periods and traditions, with little sense of larger interconnection.²

Venuti’s ‘invisibility’ and ‘fluency’, in point of fact, are the perfect illustration both of our need for macro-norms and of the ultimate inadequacy of any norm conceived of from within a single tradition, or from the perspective of a single scholar, when that norm is then exported into extraneous contexts. *The Translator’s Invisibility*, by Venuti’s own admission, was thought of as a description (and an indictment) of practices which

¹ Toury himself allows for smaller or greater degrees of deviance from the norm, and admits that the differences between any two translations may be much more evident than the similarities (Toury 1995, p. 53): but in his polysystem-based, norm-centred approach, regularities are made to stand out more than irregularities, and non-normative behaviour is studied less for its own sake than for what it tells the analyst about the system (in terms of the sanctions it attracts, for instance).

² One exception to this rule is the long-lived “medieval translator” series, taken as a whole rather than in its individual contributions. Another, at least in principle, is Morini’s 2006 monograph on Tudor translation, which attempts to see its subject in the light of a long European process of change – though as seen below, it is close to impossible to establish global-diachronic norms through single-handed efforts. Anthologies such as Robinson (1997), also tend, by their very nature, to widen the field of translation studies.

were current in the Anglo-American world at the author's time of writing – of a specific set of norms, in Toury's contemporary terms. Venuti's main idea was simple and attractive: in Anglo-American culture, the translator is currently held in such low esteem, and such is the preference accorded to reading originals over reading translations, that translators are encouraged to feign invisibility by producing fluent versions which may be paraded as originals. The problem with this idea, though, was the fascination it exerted worldwide on translation scholars and critics, who virtually used it as a macro-norm: since translators are pariahs more or less everywhere (Prunč 2007), and since it is therefore tempting to think of them as 'invisible', many commentators started to think in terms of textual 'invisibility' and 'fluency', of 'domesticating' (i.e., ideologically suspect, by Venuti's own evaluation) vs. 'foreignizing' (i.e., ideologically acceptable) translation – even where and when the less-than-exalted position held by translators did not necessarily produce 'invisible', 'fluent', or 'domesticating' translations (Kwieciński 1998; Morini 2010).

Thus, the problem with the norms defined by Venuti – who does not himself define them as norms, but whose description of general translation strategies fits in with Toury's definitions – does not lie in the norms themselves, but in the fact that they have been extended to fields outside that for which they had originally been conceived. In order to inscribe those norms within more general macro-norms that may be valid for all times and places, a more general survey would have to be made, and the results of this general survey, in turn, would have to be applied to a synchronic and diachronic variety of target cultures. Undoubtedly, there must be a connection between the Anglo-American tendency to produce fluent translations and to marginalize translators and, for instance, the Italian tendency to produce awkward, foreign-sounding translations – and, analogously, to marginalize the translator (Venturi 2009a). In order to understand that connection, the similarities and the differences, one would have to investigate the ways in which common ideas on translation have created different practices in different cultural circumstances.

Of course, no single translation scholar can command the expertise which is necessary for such an enterprise. What the single scholar can do – taking his/her cue from other scholars' studies and intuitions – is map a field and propose one or more lines of inquiry. This is the purpose of the next section, in which a tentative blueprint for the investigation of classical translation is sketched for others to employ or modify.

2. Looking for macro-norms: translating the classics

In 2009, an article by Paola Venturi appeared on *Target*, bearing the title *The translator's immobility: English modern classics in Italy*. In this article, presented as a Forum opener – and followed up by a reply penned by *Target* editor José Lambert, and meant to spur further discussion – Venturi tries to make sense of certain regularities that she observes in the translational sub-system of literary classics (in Italy). Her approach is classical DTS – polysystemic and norm-driven – and her purpose is to demonstrate the general applicability of what she defines as a "somewhat tautological maxim":

TRANSLATE THE CLASSIC SO AS TO HIGHLIGHT ITS NATURE AS A CLASSIC
(Venturi 2009a, p. 336)

The formulation of this maxim – which I will try to modify and turn into a macro-norm – is meant to solve an apparent paradox observed in the Italian polysystem: translators tend to produce versions of the (modern, English) classics which are at the same time literal

and “ennobling” (Berman 1999). In the Italian translations of *Emma*, *Middlemarch* or *Mrs Dalloway*, a painstaking attention to syntactic and lexical detail is combined with a tendency to employ high-register synonyms and to make everything – including dialogue – overly formal and ‘literary’. An example falling outside those quoted by Venturi – the incipit of *Mansfield Park* (1814) – may suffice to illustrate these seemingly contradictory aspects:

About thirty years ago, Miss Maria Ward of Huntingdon, with only seven thousand pounds, had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram, of Mansfield Park, in the county of Northampton, and to be thereby raised to the rank of a baronet’s lady, with all the comforts and consequences of an handsome house and large income. (Austen 2003, p. 3)

Circa trent’anni fa, Miss Maria Ward di Huntingdon, con sole settemila sterline, ebbe la buona sorte di affascinare Sir Thomas Bertram di Mansfield Park, nella Contea di Northampton, e di venire quindi promossa al rango di moglie di un baronetto, con tutte le comodità e i vantaggi di una bella casa e *una* rendita cospicua. (Austen, De Palma 1999, p. 63; italics mine)

My italics underline the only Italian word written in excess of the source in De Palma’s translation of Austen’s opening: all the other words find English correspondents which, as if this were an interlinear version of the Bible, can be syntagmatically superimposed onto their Italian replacements. Predictably enough, the effect is awkward or very formal in terms of Italian syntax and phraseology (one would say “una trentina d’anni fa”, not “circa trent’anni fa”; and the mirror-like passive construction of “e di venire quindi promossa al rango di moglie di un baronetto” would be close to impossible in colloquial, everyday Italian usage). The occasional inclusion of a high-register term for a neutral English word (“sorte” for “luck”, where “fortuna” would have sufficed;³ the formal “cospicua” for the straightforward “large”) does nothing to make the passage easier to process.

The reasons for all this, in Venturi’s opinion, have to do with the special status accorded to classics in the Italian polysystem – and, indeed, everywhere – as well as with the general norms for writing and translating in Italy. On the one hand, the classics command a quasi-religious awe that forces translators to make their versions ostensibly ‘faithful’ by reproducing their syntax and some of their lexicon; on the other, the status of the classic also calls for linguistic strategies which – with a circular process – highlight that very status. In other words, the (modern) classic, even when its style is very colloquial or downright vulgar, must be brought up to the accepted standard for literary writing in Italian – which does not admit of low-register, colloquial, or vulgar words. Thus, another paradox is that when the classic is seen to “fall short of its prestige”, a number of elevating (Venturi 2009a, p. 336) or openly censoring techniques (O’Sullivan 2009) are used to reinstate it in its exalted position.

In the rest of the article, Venturi tries to sketch a little European history of how the classics came to be the classics, and of the diachronic reasons why the translators of canonized books are expected to handle their material with special care. She also points at analogies between Italy and other polysystems which tend to treat the classics along similar lines (Catalonian and Hebrew literature, for instance; and in his reply to, or extension of, this Forum article, José Lambert notes further parallels between the phenomena described by Venturi and very similar manifestations in the French

³ Admittedly, “buona sorte” is a stock phrase where “buona fortuna” is not (in this kind of co-text) – but “fortuna” alone would have been enough, and what is significant is that in most translations from the (modern) classics, whenever two or more options are available, the most formal tends to have the upper hand.

polysystem; Lambert 2009). Towards the end of Venturi's article, however, an episode is quoted that might appear to undermine all her theoretical construction, or at the very least to diminish its applicability beyond national borders. In this episode, Seamus Heaney is heard reading his own version of Pascoli's poem *L'aquilone* (1897) at an Italian conference – and though Pascoli is a classic poet, in the Irish poet's version his formal Italian becomes colloquial English: thus, “fanciulli” (a formal word for children) is brought down to earth – and closer to the poetic persona – with “us kids”; and “qualcosa [...] d'antico” (“something [...] ancient”) is turned into the plainer “something [...] older” (Venturi 2009a, p. 349). What has become, one might ask, of the sacredness of the classics? Is the ‘literarization’ of classics impracticable on the Italian-English axis? Or is this simply the vindication of Bourdieu's notion of habit – the Nobel-prize poet claiming his right to disregard the prerogatives of a fellow classical poet?

The answer to these questions cannot but be tentative, and ultimately mixed: the British literary tradition is probably less formal than its Italian counterpart; and Seamus Heaney, as a canonical author writing in a prestigious language (arguably, the function of the Nobel prize is to create ‘living classics’), could probably get away with a colloquial rendition of any classic, even if it belonged to a less marginal tradition. However, in order to verify whether Venturi's norm for the translation of classics is simply invalid for Anglo-(Hibernian)-American culture, many more instances of Italian-English translation would have to be investigated; in order to decide whether the kind of language employed in classical translating depends on the changing power-relations between languages and cultures, a number of Italian-English translations would have to be compared with a number of, say, French-English or Spanish-English translations – or, even more significantly, with a number of English translations from some of the most marginal tongues of the earth. Finally, some historical researching would have to be done on the historical development of classical translation in Britain and Italy, on the differences between Britain and the States, on the differences between fin-de-siècle culture and the early twenty-first century, on Pascoli's and Heaney's respective positions in their polysystems (or fields), on Pascoli's reputation in Britain and the States, and so on.

Before the list is stretched to infinity, however, the first step to be taken in order to verify the global validity of Venturi's macro-norm might be to reverse her research fields. What happens when Italian classics get translated into contemporary English? Heaney's version of Pascoli, as seen above, seems to point to an inversion on the formal-informal, oral-written axis – but Heaney is a translator with a special *habitus*, and Pascoli belongs to an age in which Italian literature had already lost much of its international prestige.⁴ It is perhaps more appropriate, therefore, to look at Anglo-American versions of Italian classics belonging to a historical period in which most Englishmen prized Italian literature over any domestic productions. And if the centuries of Anglo-American greatness, in political as well as cultural matters, are surely the nineteenth and the twentieth, it was in the Renaissance that Italy was last perceived to be at or near the centre of the world. Therefore, looking at latter-day translations of an Italian Renaissance classic like Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1581) might tell us whether the “immobility” of Italian translators finds some kind of parallel in the Anglo-American world – and extending the survey to near-contemporary versions of Tasso's masterpiece will constitute a further verification of that parallel.

⁴ The same kind of inversion on the formal-informal axis seems to hold for a recent American edition of the works of another nineteenth-century Italian poet – Jonathan Galassi's translations from Leopardi (Leopardi, Galassi 2010).

Curiously enough, the first decade of the twenty-first century was opened and closed by an American and an English version of the *Liberata* – Anthony M. Asolen’s *Jerusalem Delivered* (2000) and Max Wickert’s *The Liberation of Jerusalem* (2009). Though both are consistently workmanlike, these two versions are very different in linguistic texture, and in the kind of reproduction they attempt of Tasso’s language and prosody. Asolen’s American version is formally freer: it does not try to replicate the original stanza form, and it is written in modern, though not slangy, American English. Wickert’s *Liberation*, by contrast, attempts to follow Tasso’s *ottava rima* with absolute precision (though not always with full rhymes) – and the translator intersperses his lines with aureate terms which give them a very formal, ‘literary’ taste. The opening stanza will be enough to illustrate the difference:

Canto l’arme pietose e ’l capitano
che ’l gran sepolcro liberò di Cristo.
Molto egli oprò co’l senno e con la mano,
molto soffrì nel glorioso acquisto;
e in van l’Inferno vi s’oppose, e in vano
s’armò d’Asia e di Libia il popol misto.
Il ciel gli diè favore, e sotto a i santi
segnì ridusse i suoi compagni erranti. (Tasso 1971)

I sing the reverent armies, and that Chief
who set the great tomb of our Savior free;
much he performed with might and judgment, much
he suffered in the glorious victory;
in vain hell rose athwart his path, in vain
two continents combined in mutiny.
Heaven graced him with its favor, and restored
his straying men to the banner of the Lord. (Tasso, Asolen 2000)

I sing of war, of holy war, and him,
Captain who freed the Sepulchre of Christ.
Greatly he wrought by force of mind and limb,
and greatly suffered, nobly sacrificed.
Vainly did Hell oppose him, Asia grim
vainly combined with Libya, Hell-enticed.
Heaven favoured him and guided back, to fight
under his sacred flag, each errant knight. (Tasso, Wickert 2009)

Asolen’s version is so fluent that the translator could almost be said to be invisible – though one might note, in passing, that Tasso’s stanza is at least as fluent, if not more so. The translator does not attempt any close reproduction of the author’s syntax and prosody (enjambments are used, for instance, but quite often not the same as Tasso’s), and he only puts in a rhyme or a half-rhyme when he can think of one (and of course, in the crucial couplet). Wickert’s version, by contrast, keeps so close to Tasso’s original that it often sounds stiff. The translator’s determination to reproduce the *ottava rima*, and as many original line and phrase terminations as possible (“the Sepulchre of Christ”, “by force of mind and limb”, “Vainly did hell oppose him”, “each errant knight”) forces him to use a very awkward syntax and some rather far-fetched line endings (“and him”, “Asia grim”). All this, together with the occasional old-fashioned word – like “Sepulchre”, arguably more of an ‘inkhorn’ term than its Italian etymological counterpart – makes Wickert’s version sound very similar to the Italian translations of the English classics.

Inevitably, such a brief and limited analysis must end up yielding mixed results, and posing more questions than can be answered by a single scholar: is there a difference,

for instance, between England and the US in the treatment of classics? There probably is, but in order to verify the hypothesis, many more transatlantic translations of the same source texts would have to be analyzed. Or on the contrary: does the comparison between Asolen and Wickert simply demonstrate that while certain translators may feel awed when faced with a canonized text, others simply go about their business and try to produce as fluent a version as they can – the difference, in this case as in all others, being one of *habitus*? Of course, each and every translator has his/her own style, and will react differently to the same source text: and yet each and every translator's *habitus* has a social dimension, so that in the end the personal and the geo-cultural explanations cannot be easily disentangled.

On the other hand, it must be stressed that if Asolen's and Wickert's versions are wide apart stylistically, they look much less distant when other aspects of their production are taken into consideration. As stressed elsewhere by Venturi herself (Venturi 2009b, p. 237), the kind of language chosen by the translator is not the only mark of canonization that can be stamped upon the translated text. Another very important factor is the overall aspect of the book containing the translation – and in this sense, the American and English editions of Tasso are practically one and the same, and they resemble most editions of the classics printed by prestigious publishing houses everywhere. Whatever the language employed to represent Tasso's lines, the book containing Tasso's prestigious poem must be made to look prestigious itself – up to the classical stature of the poem. And since classics are thought to be difficult and instructive (Venturi 2009b), they must have introductions, notes, and glossaries, as well as prefaces in which the translators step out to justify their choices and expatiate on the edition(s) they used (this is something which even the self-assured Asolen feels impelled to do).

It appears, then, that Venturi's macro-norm has to be made more general in order to comprehend all aspects of classical translating, or all the strategies through which a translation can be made to look classical – strategies which go beyond mere literality and/or formality. One might perhaps reformulate the macro-norm as follows:

PRESENT THE TRANSLATED CLASSIC SO AS TO HIGHLIGHT ITS NATURE AS A
CLASSIC

Where the idea of 'presentation' would include everything, from the translation itself through the paratextual elements to the cover illustration. In Italy, for instance, the classics are often re-printed with introductions and comments by canonical critics – Austen's *Emma*, for instance, is prefaced by "an essay by Walter Scott" (Austen, Zazo 2002) – so that the classical author's authoritativeness is raised to the second power. When that is the case, the linguistic techniques used in the target text itself (techniques which are probably influenced by Italian ideas on high literature) are reinforced by the inclusion of paratextual elements that emphasize the seriousness of the whole enterprise. In other cases, such as Asolen's translation of Tasso, the weight of classicality may be made to bear on the paratext alone.

Another problem raised by the above analysis of the Tasso translations is that the inherent power of the classics seems to interact in complex ways with other forces at play – forces having to do with the uneven distribution of prestige across national and linguistic borders. The possible differences between contemporary Britain and the US have already been mentioned – but what about the power relations between contemporary Italy and Britain, or contemporary Italy and the US? For if it is true that Tasso's *Liberata* belongs to a time in which Italy was more prestigious than England, it is also self-evident that twenty-first-century translations of this Renaissance masterpiece cannot help being

influenced by the disparity in cultural power between Italy and the Anglo-American world *today*. While in 1584 Giordano Bruno could boast that it was needless for him to learn English in England “because all gentlemen of any rank [...] can speak Latin, French, Spanish and Italian” and “are aware that the English language is used only on this island and they would consider themselves barbarians if they knew no other tongue than their own”,⁵ the contemporary world is rather more Anglo- than Italo-centric. This state of affairs diminishes the perceived prestige of Italian classics in England and (above all?) America – which, as Venuti has noted, allows for and indeed rewards the use of domesticating strategies in translation.

In order to measure the balance, or imbalance, between English-Italian and Italian-English classical translation, therefore, one may need to look at what happened to Tasso’s *Liberata* when Italian culture was universally looked up to on English soil. And interestingly enough, the first two translations from Tasso’s masterpiece ever published in England – both within two decades since the appearance of the original – make a very similar pair to the one formed by Asolen’s and Wickert’s versions. On the face of it, comparing Richard Carew’s translation of the first five canti (1594) with Edward Fairfax’s complete edition (1600) appears to yield very little in terms of common normative ground. While Carew’s lines are so close to Tasso’s that they occasionally stretch English syntax beyond comprehensibility, Fairfax’s are much more fluent than either Carew’s or Tasso’s (Morini 2006, pp. 121-135):

I sing the godly armes, and that Chieftaine,
 Who great Sepulchre of our Lord did free,
 Much with his hande, much wrought he with his braine:
 Much in his glorious conquest suffred hee:
 And hell in vaine hit selfe opposde, in vaine
 The mixed troopes *Asian* and *Libick* flee
 To armes, for heauen him fauour’d, and he drew
 To sacred ensignes his straid mates a new. (Tasso, Carew 1594)

I Sing the warre made in the Holy land,
 And the Great Chiefe that Christs great tombe did free:
 Much wrought he with his wit, much with his hand,
 Much in that brave achievement suffred hee:
 In vaine doth hell that Man of God withstand,
 In vaine the worlds great Princes armed bee;
 For heau’n him fauour’d; and he brought againe
 Under one standard all his scatt’red traine. (Tasso, Fairfax 1600)

Seen from a modern point of view, this is a perfect illustration of the difference between Venuti’s ‘foreignizing’ and ‘domesticating’ techniques. From the very first line, Carew’s desire to recreate the Italian line in English (“I sing the godly armes, and that Chieftaine” differs from “Canto l’arme pietose e ’l capitano” only by the noun/adjective order inversion) contrasts with Fairfax’s paraphrasing technique (“I sing the warre made in the Holy land”). Carew’s literalism leads him to create inversions which make the meaning of his stanza very difficult to follow (“Who great Sepulchre of our Lord did free”), while Fairfax’s fluent, end-stopped lines only admit for a single, very neat enjambment in the

⁵ “Coloro che son honorati et gentil huomini [...] tutti san parlare o’ Latino, o’ Francese, o’ Spagnolo, o’ Italiano: i quali sapendo che la lingua Inglesa non viene in uso se non dentro a quest’isola, sé stimarebbono saluatici, non sapendo altra lingua che la propria naturale” (Bruno 1999, p. 385). Translation by Frances A. Yates.

final couplet. Judged in its entirety, Carew's version can only be read as a crib for Tasso's *Liberata* – while Fairfax's *Godfrey*, in terms of literary style, stands half-way between Tasso and more domestic models, like Spenser; "Fairfax's style is easy as Tasso is not", as the editors of a modern edition point out (Tasso, Fairfax 1981, p. 22).

But once again, though these two versions are very different in terms of style – far more distant from one another, in fact, than Asolen's and Wickert's – some similarities of attitude emerge if both enterprises are seen in context, i.e., as manifestations of translation theory and practice in Tudor times. For at the end of the sixteenth century, it was still very common to cut from or add to the source text in literary translation, particularly, but by no means only, if the source text was not very prestigious or did not belong to a prestigious tradition (Morini 2006: 3-34). Therefore, the very fact that Carew and Fairfax did not change the *inventio* and overall *dispositio* of their original – no stanzas are missing from their translations, and even Fairfax's 'fluent' modifications are rather subtle – testifies to the awe inspired in the translators by Tasso's work, by the venerable genre he re-elaborated, and by Italian literature generally. So, if it is not enough to look at the translated text itself to judge a translation, neither does it suffice to look at the text, or at the book, in isolation: any translation enterprise only becomes significant – in a polysystemic sense – in its historical context.

In that historical context, another qualification is needed before the Tasso translations can be made to fit into a macro-norm on the translation of classics. In the Tudor age, certain prestigious Italian poems fared rather worse than the *Liberata* in terms of faithful reproduction of their invention and disposition. Only a few years before the appearance of Carew's version, Sir John Harington had produced a sumptuous folio translation of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* that was hundreds of staves shorter than its source – and Harington had defended his cuts by saying in his introduction that it would have been superfluous to "obserue [Ariosto's] phrase so strictly as an interpreter, nor the matter so carefully, as if it had bene a storie, in which to varie were as great a sin, as it were simplicitie in this to go word for word" (Ariosto, Harington 1591, preface). The use of Christian terminology ("sin"), as well as the covert allusion to Saint Jerome, mark the distance between Ariosto's secular masterpiece and the truly 'canonical' books inspired by God – telling us that literature was not yet "spilt religion" in the late sixteenth century (Hulme 1994, p. 62).

On the other hand, the rather contradictory aspect of Harington's self-defence as a libertine translator is that in the rest of his introduction, he is at pains to demonstrate that the *Furioso* is a very important (one might say 'canonical', if it were not an anachronism) secular poem – and his main strategy, in that sense, is enrolling Virgil as an illustrious predecessor for Ariosto. One may surmise, therefore, that if Ariosto and Italian literature were crucial to the Tudor age, Virgil and Latin literature were even more so – and as a matter of fact, Virgil and other ancient authors were often used to 'canonize' their modern counterparts and invest their writings with authority (translations of modern literary works were typically annotated with quotations from the masterpieces of antiquity).

Furthermore, even apart from these canonization strategies, the crucial relevance of Virgil (and maybe a handful of ancient authors) can be appreciated by looking at the history of (re-)translation of what was then considered the greatest literary works of all time – Virgil's *Aeneid*: a mere cursory glance at the history of this poem in Tudor England suggests that no translator of Virgil would have been allowed to get away with Harington-like modifications. As early as 1513, when translation was still a very free and heavily domesticating practice, Gavin Douglas berated Caxton for producing a version of Virgil's poem that resembled the original as the Devil resembles Saint Augustine (Virgil, Douglas 1950-1964, p. 7). While Harington anticipated objections by answering them, the Virgil

translators tried to forestall all criticism by keeping to the ‘letter’ of their source text with quasi-religious respect (Morini, 2013).

In brief, different traditions enjoyed different degrees of literary prestige in Tudor England, just as they do in present-day Italy (where modern classics, again, can be shown to command less literal subservience than ancient ones) or in present-day Europe (witness the different treatment of English classics in Italy and Italian classics in Britain). Thus, it appears that though all classics are equal, some classics are more equal than others – and in order to allow for this graduality, the macro-norm on classical translation might be rewritten as:

PRESENT THE TRANSLATED CLASSIC SO AS TO HIGHLIGHT ITS NATURE AS A
CLASSIC, ABOVE ALL IF IT BELONGS TO A PRESTIGIOUS LITERARY TRADITION

But even this formulation presents at least one problem, if looked at in the light of the Tudor period – that problem having to do with the very term “classic”, and bringing us full circle to the unspoken logical premises of this (and maybe any) macro-normative research. Even in Venturi’s article, defining a classic is a somewhat circular process: the classics are those books which are presented as such – i.e., they appear in book series dedicated to “classics”, or “great books”, or “great literature”, and are provided with introductions, notes and glossaries. If one turns one’s attention to the Tudor period, however, defining classics becomes not only a circular process, but also, as hinted at above, an anachronism. For one thing, the men and women of the Renaissance did not have that term at their disposal (Lianeri, Zajko 2008); but even if they could have used the word itself, they would probably have applied it to Latin and Greek writings (philosophical and historical, even more than literary) rather than to latter-day European literature. After all, even if the degrees of literary prestige are left aside, one must keep in mind that Tasso’s *Liberata* had only been published a few years before its English translations; and even though Ariosto’s *Furioso* and its English counterpart are separated by more than half a century, it is fairly evident from the translator’s preface that Harington saw the Italian poet as a near-contemporary, and needed to make him ‘canonical’ by aligning it with Virgil’s universally approved greatness. In other words, if a sense of historical depth is one of the defining features of the classic (as all the literati who have written on the subject, from Samuel Johnson to T.S. Eliot, seem to agree), Tasso and Ariosto cannot be held to have had classical status in the English Renaissance.

Nonetheless, as seen above, some of the features of ‘classical translation’ are clearly present in Carew’s and Fairfax’s translations, and even in Harington’s – or at least in Harington’s preface and ponderous paratext (Morini 2006, pp. 101-102): and this presence must alert us to the disturbing fact that the mark of ‘classicality’ is, just like the respect accorded to classics in different traditions, a matter of degree; or more precisely, that what we term ‘classicality’ is a rather special case of what we might more generally call ‘literary prestige’. Classical books, as Lefevere has noted in Bourdieu’s wake, are “cultural capital”, but they are not the only kind of cultural capital; or yet again, there are various literary and non-literary works that can be defined as “what you need to be seen to belong to the ‘right circles’ in the society in which you live” (Lefevere 1998, p. 41), but not all of these works can straightforwardly be said to belong to the restricted category of ‘classics’. In contemporary Italy, the translations of books by ‘literary’ authors such as Jonathan Coe or Johnatan Franzen can be shown to display some of the characteristics observable in ‘classical translation’, while bestsellers are often translated in more colloquial Italian and with less literal adherence to the lexicon and syntax of the source (as well as with freer editorial practices dictated by haste, such as splitting chapters among a

team of translators).

By this stage, the macro-norm may be starting to look a little vague:

PRESENT THE PRESTIGIOUS BOOK; OR THE BOOK FROM THE PRESTIGIOUS
CULTURE, SO AS TO HIGHLIGHT ITS PRESTIGE

But far from making the whole enterprise of investigating ‘macro-norms’ redundant, this vagueness, or this generality, only demonstrates that such a wide-ranging research would cast light on many aspects of Western culture and its history. After all, looking at the system of ‘translated classics’ within the system of ‘literary translation’, and then within the ‘literary polysystem’ at large, is what DTS set out to do from its very beginnings in the late 1970s. And the fact that no neat boundaries can be drawn between one (poly)system and another, just like the fact that no two translators will ever produce the same kind of text, does not exempt translation scholars from looking for boundaries and formulating norms. For once the boundaries and the norms are established, the individualities and the liminal cases will remain interesting in themselves, and will become even more significant on the historical plane.

3. Conclusion: how to research macro-norms

Rather than representing the result of personal research, the above section is the account of studies by various scholars (Lefevere 1998; Berman 1999; Morini 2006, 2013; Lianeri, Zajko 2008; Lambert 2009; O’Sullivan 2009; Venturi 2009a, 2009b), woven together so as to map the field of classical translation – and it should be read as the presentation of a problem, not as its solution. Its main purpose is to show that in this kind of research, though personal agency must always be taken into due consideration (Carew is different from Fairfax), no translation can be understood in isolation (Carew works in the same age and in the same country as Fairfax – and it shows, despite the differences). Even more crucially, and less self-evidently, its purpose is to demonstrate that far from being too general, the concept of norm can be made to serve all its theoretical uses only if it is turned into a universal, all-embracing tool. If one looks at how the Italians translate the classics today, one may convince oneself that classical translation requires literal closeness and stiffness of style; but if the survey is extended to other periods and more polysystems, one learns to see the Italian norm as a local manifestation of a global and diachronic macro-norm.

Being an individual account – even if an individual account of several scholars’ efforts – the present survey of ‘classical translation’ is inevitably insufficient not only as a general description, but also as a map. First of all, many aspects of classical translation might have been included that did not fit into the limited space of an article: it would be much more productive, for instance, to consider many more textual examples, even within the traditions taken into account; it would be interesting to verify if Virgil was really the first literary writer to be translated with something approaching religious awe – and throughout Europe, not only in England; and speaking of religious awe, it would be necessary, in any general study of the macro-norm for translating literary classics, to look at Humanism as the European movement which first shifted some of the ‘canonical’ value of the Bible to non-religious writings.

Secondly, and apart from the argumentative constraints of the academic article, many other examples might have been included which fall outside the expertise or the borrowed knowledge of the individual scholar presenting the article. It is not enough, if a

macro-norm for translating literary classics has to be formulated, to gauge Italian reactions to English classics and vice versa, today and in the Renaissance: all the other European and Western traditions would have to be considered, and then a general Western macro-norm would have to be compared with the macro-norm(s) valid in the non-Western world. And the very notion of classical literature, as well as the norms for translating the classics (or any culturally prestigious books) would have to be investigated for all the relevant periods in all the relevant traditions.

Once again, this plethora of possibilities cannot but lead one to the conclusion that the definition of macro-norms is not practicable on an individual basis. It is only by creating teams of scholars working on different areas and periods that a global and diachronic understanding of translation theories and practices can be strived at. In the absence of teamwork, DTS runs the risk of producing rather disconnected efforts, and single scholars run the risk of using norms conceived of from outside their research fields as their analytical tools.

Of course, as already pointed out at the start, this is really nothing new – a shift in emphasis, another ‘turn’, rather than a big change. In fact, the occasions for discussing macro-norms are already there: real or online conferences, edited books, scholarly magazines, collective research projects. On the other hand, the research on macro-norms may require a little more cohesion than has so far obtained in DTS, and it may have to be conducted on the basis of a strong initial hypothesis, or of a number of hypotheses. These initial hypotheses may be turned inside out by the end of the research project – witness the progressive widening of Venturi’s macro-norm above – but they are necessary in order to make sense of what would otherwise look like an enormous mass of continental, national, local, individual, and rather meaningless peculiarities.

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