The adequate translation as a methodological tool

Dante's onomastic wordplay in English*

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This paper argues that the question of theoretical translatability is crucial both to source-oriented and target-oriented approaches. Reflecting on translatability requires a discussion of Toury's notion of 'adequate translation', which has two senses: the general or ideal approximation to source-text norms, and the *tertium comparationis* represented by a source-text-oriented translation (i.e. showing how the original 'can' be translated). It is argued that both senses have heuristic value in Translation Studies. The explanatory power of target-orientedness is demonstrated by discussing the various strategies pursued by seven Anglo-American translators of Dante who either re-create or avoid rewriting grotesque onomastic wordplay in *Inferno*. Zero translation policy of Dante's names is not considered to be evidence of their inherent 'untranslatability' since for an empiricist nothing is untranslatable. Evocative names may be translated in a creative way provided the rewriter is willing (or allowed) to be innovative.

1. Translatability and the notion of 'adequate translation'

In this paper I shall argue that the theoretical question of translatability lies at the core of both source-oriented and target-oriented approaches to Translation Studies. But what is meant by 'translatability'? As Pym and Turk put it, in an excellent introduction to the subject, "translatability is mostly understood as the capacity for some kind of meaning to be transferred from one language to another without undergoing radical change" (1998: 273). This definition raises a number of thorny issues (what is the nature of textual meaning? How can meaning(s) be transferred from source text to target text without radical

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change?), which could lead us into a very abstract realm. I contend that a productive (and positive) way of looking at the question of translatability is to consider Toury's notion of 'adequate translation'. Before doing this, I have to clarify my position.

I subscribe to Toury's target-oriented approach, according to which "translations are facts of target cultures" (1995: 29). This famous (and controversial) statement simply means that the position, function and linguistic/stylistic make-up of translations are "determined first and foremost by considerations originating in the culture which hosts them" (p. 26). Target-orientedness consists essentially in contextualising the target text with a view to establishing the situation of the receiving tradition and the historically determined norms affecting the translator's choices (pp. 174–175). The target-oriented scholar is concerned primarily with how a text *is* translated, that is, with translation as an **empirical** phenomenon. From such an empirical perspective,

> what constitutes the subject matter of a proper discipline of Translation Studies is (observable or reconstructable) facts of real life rather than merely speculative entities resulting from preconceived hypotheses and theoretical models. (Toury 1995: 1)

By contrast, the source-oriented scholar is primarily concerned with how texts *can* and *should* be translated. Source-orientedness then consists in two separate tasks, exemplified by the verbs *can* and *should*. The use of the latter verb falls outside the purview of Descriptive Translation Studies: it pertains to the applied extensions of Translation Studies (e.g. translator training), which are concerned with setting/prescribing norms, e.g. **required** relationships — not with explaining or predicting facts of real life (p. 19), which, being the concern of the descriptive branch, requires a focus on **existing** relationships (p. 18). The verb 'can' is concerned with **possible** relationships and therefore is legitimate within the theoretical branch of Translation Studies. Arguing in favour of translatability by indicating possible options at the translator's disposal is a source-oriented task of a theoretical (not prescriptive) kind.

I believe that the question of translatability alerts us to the constant interplay between the theoretical and descriptive branches of Translation Studies. Toury (1995: 1) regards all the branches of the discipline as interdependent, but the relationship between the theoretical and descriptive branches seems to be at its heart. On the other hand, there is a gap between theoretical/descriptive and applied extensions because the final goal of the latter, prescription, is incompatible with the goals of the former, theoretical formulation and

empirical description. It follows that it is only the prescriptive task of source-orientedness, as exemplified by the verb 'should', which is irreconcilable with target-orientedness.

In fact, Toury stresses that source-oriented and target-oriented approaches are not "diametrically opposed" (p. 173), they are only different in terms of "orientation" or "perspective". The target-oriented scholar "will come back to the source text, often even establishing the target text's shifts from it". By the same token, the source-oriented scholar cannot overlook the "target-conditions — cultural, literary, textual, or merely linguistic" governing the production of translations. In my opinion, therefore, Hermans erroneously criticises Toury for positing a polar distinction between source-orientedness and target-orientedness. Translation is a socio-cultural activity, Hermans goes on to argue, and therefore "there seems little point in trying to conceptualize it in terms of a choice along a single axis" (1999: 77). In actual fact, Toury never thought in terms of an absolute choice along a single axis.

However, Toury presumably means that the theoretical task of source-orientedness, as exemplified by the verb 'can', is on an equal footing (and overlaps) with target-orientedness only from a methodological (not an epistemological) point of view. An account of how texts *can* be translated cannot do without a descriptive element any more than showing how texts *are* translated can do without a theoretical element. Yet, it is important to bear in mind that target-orientedness is superior to source-orientedness epistemologically, i.e. in terms of **explanatory power**. In comparing translation and original, the target-oriented scholar depends on a theoretical/source-oriented element (i.e., the adequate translation, to which I shall turn in a moment) for descriptive or methodological purposes. The source-oriented scholar, on the other hand, must resort to target-orientedness in its entirety for describing the range of options available to the translator, even at a purely theoretical level, let alone understanding the significance of actual translation strategies.

The most obvious way of showing how a given source-text feature can be translated is to adopt a purely linguistic perspective focused on formal correspondence. But this throws up a major problem: how can anyone envisage the translatability potential of the source text *a priori* or ahistorically? As Toury convincingly argues, the linguistic reservoir at the translator's disposal, which in his/her eyes represents the source text's initial translatability (or, its "initial translatability potential" (Toury 1997: 283)), depends on target (cultural) conditions. He considers the example of the translation of Shakespeare's sonnets into Hebrew in the twentieth century, which evolves from "acceptability-

bound considerations within the confines of the target literature towards a growing concern for translation adequacy" (p. 126). The move towards adequacy, which entails a greater likelihood for the source text to be reconstructed entirely, has nothing to do with purely linguistic considerations. It is the canonization of modernist poetics in Hebrew culture that has expanded the linguistic reservoir, that is, the actual options available to the translator. This poses the interesting question of why certain translators choose not to avail themselves of an expanded linguistic reservoir. I shall deal with this question (which focuses on the relationship between actual translation and initial translatability) in the analysis.

If the nature of the reservoir available to translators is historically determined (or norm-governed, which amounts to the same thing), it makes little sense to consider the issue of translatability in isolation from the options offered by the target culture at a given moment in time. Since one may argue that the concept of 'adequacy' does precisely that (that is, projects an absolute, ahistorical concept of the original), a clarification is in order.

Adequacy means adhering to source norms, whereas acceptability entails subscribing to norms originating in the target culture (Toury 1995: 56–57). The choice between these two possibilities is what Toury calls 'the initial norm'. As I have pointed out, the choice between adequacy (which is basically source-oriented) and acceptability (which is target-oriented) is only a matter of general orientation, a tendency whereby the translator approximates *predominantly* either source or target norms. Toury states, in fact, that "obviously, even the most adequate translation involves shifts from the source text" (p. 57).

Although I agree with Hermans (1999: 77) that "multiple factors" are involved in the translation process, Toury's notion of an initial norm, in my opinion, is useful for forming a general idea of the translator's overall orientation. It is also crucial in revealing the general tendencies in a number of translations of the same text, which is the task that awaits us.

A second, and more controversial application of the term 'adequate translation', has also been suggested; namely, a source-text-oriented hypothetical construct used as a *tertium comparationis* by the scholar, "a hypothetical intermediate construct serving as a point of comparison for both the original and the translation" (Hermans 1999: 55). This application of the notion — which Toury discussed at length in his early work, *In Search of a Theory of Translation* (1980: 112–121) — is more complex than appears at first. The adequate translation is not "an actual text". Rather, it is "an explicitation of [source text] textual relations and functions" resulting from a "textemic

analysis" (pp. 116–117). It is an "intermediary invariant", which serves the purpose of identifying the functional units of the original text, thus making it possible to recognize the target text's 'shifts' away from (what appears to be) a hypothetical reconstruction of the original, formulated in the target language.

Two criticisms have been levelled at the second application of the notion of adequate translation. The first is voiced by Toury himself, who, in his later work, became wary of "the totally **negative kind of reasoning** required by any search for shifts" (1995: 84). Toury argues that he has put too much emphasis on the notion of 'shift' in his early research; he now believes that translation should be studied in "**positive terms**" (p. 85), by "uncovering those principles which are internally relevant to a corpus" (p. 84). The search for 'shifts' is only one of various types of discovery procedures aiming at formulating explanatory hypotheses regarding translation behaviour (p. 85). These observations may seem to call into question the very notion of a *tertium comparationis*. In my opinion, however, Hermans (1999: 57) goes too far when he suggests that Toury has totally "jettisoned" this construct in *Descriptive Translation Studies and beyond*. Toury, in fact, is adamant in his conviction that the notion of 'shift' is a valid one and has a legitimate place in Translation Studies (1995: 84), even though he does play down its role in his recent work. This implies that the adequate translation as a hypothetical construct still has relative validity in the methodology of Descriptive Translation Studies. The notion of 'shift' implies the primacy of the source text only if the researcher rigidly hypothesizes the original features which should allegedly be translated.

I firmly believe that every scholar who undertakes a comparative analysis has "a maximal, or optimal notion of the reconstruction" (Toury 1995: 84) of the source text under scrutiny, even if he/she does not make it explicit. As Toury (1980: 116) made clear, the adequate translation is only a **methodological** (not an ontological) construct; it does not enjoy an autonomous life as a text — and it serves first and foremost to enable the researcher to throw light on actual translations. How can one map a translation onto its source and identify 'shifts' if one has no reliable description of the original and a corresponding ideal notion of 'adequacy' in mind? Any attempt to describe the translator's interventions (or 'manipulations') in terms of deviations from the original would be impossible if we had no intermediate (however provisional) construct between source text and target text. In a very general sense, the adequate translation may be regarded as an attempt to bridge the gap between the foreignness of the original and the familiarity of the translation. As Iser cogently puts it, translatability "requires a discourse that allows the transposition of a foreign culture

into one's own. Such a discourse has to negotiate the space between foreignness and familiarity" (1995: 32).

Hermans puts forward the second, more radical criticism of the adequate translation construct, which, he claims, cannot be fixed "objectively, on the basis of formal textual analysis" because it is itself the result of a translation and an act of interpretation on the researcher's part (1999: 57). Perhaps it is true that Toury's early work justifies such a criticism. This is why in his latest book he should have devoted a larger section to the question of the *tertium comparationis* — "the centrepiece" of comparative analysis (Hermans 1999: 57) — and acknowledged explicitly that the adequate translation arises out of an act of interpretation. This acknowledgment means that the adequate translation cannot be fixed ahistorically (or else it would justify the primacy of the source text); it is only a **provisional** view of how the source text 'can' — a verb which perhaps should be replaced by the modal 'could' — theoretically be translated. For a target-oriented scholar it is obvious that translatability should not be viewed in terms of what is absolutely (that is, ahistorically) possible or impossible.

When Toury (1997: 283) refers to the entire range of potential options at the translator's disposal as the source text's "initial translatability potential", he adds, somewhat enigmatically, that there is an "ontological difference between initial potential and actual behaviour" (p. 284). What Toury presumably means is that the initial translatability potential is an unknown quantity, if considered in absolute terms. One always needs the mediation/contribution of target-oriented investigations in order to understand what the potential translation options might be in any given case (human knowledge, in fact, is necessarily empiricist):

> one convenient way of establishing different types of behaviour of an item under translation, with each realizing different parts of its translatability potential, is to compare various translations of this item, preferably into one and the same language… (Toury 1997: 283).

Although the receiving culture determines the actual realization of the source text's initial translatability potential, not even a high number of specific target texts can encompass *all* the options which are theoretically possible. As Toury puts it,

> on any source-language utterance, many different kinds of translational operations may be performed, resulting in the establishment of any number of different translations, each of which recodes in the target language *only part* of

> the initial translatability potential of that utterance vis-à-vis that language, and a *different part*, at that. (1997: 283)

The existence of a theoretical/source-oriented element in translation description does not rule out the fact that the source text's translatability is determined by the situation of the target system (which, as I have pointed out, determines the nature and extent of the reservoir available to translators). One simply has to own up to the fact that the researcher is caught in a hermeneutic circle: like the translator, s/he, too, belongs to a target system and interprets the target text by having recourse to a hermeneutic construct, the adequate translation, which is a historically determined interpretation of the source text.

However, this does not mean that we have to accept Derrida's epistemological scepticism, which holds that nobody can fix "the 'univocality' of meaning or master its 'plurivocality'", as Hermans (1999: 52) suggests. This form of scepticism undermines not only the notion of adequate translation but also any systematic semiotics or text analysis. Umberto Eco (1992: 64), who acknowledges the existence of a hermeneutic circle in every type of textual analysis, puts forward an epistemological view which is in keeping with the empiricism underpinning Descriptive Translation Studies: he claims that it is often possible to distinguish between reliable interpretations and overinterpretations of texts (pp. 52–54).

Throughout this paper I shall employ the notion of adequate translation in a 'weak', purely methodological sense. For me, the adequate translation is neither a total nor an objective (or ahistorical) explicitation of all textual relations, functions and properties in the source text (the 'strong', ontological sense of the notion, which Hermans wrongly ascribes to Toury's early thinking). It is just a provisional construct laying bare the core elements in the original. Hermans (1999: 63) is right in warning us that "an exhaustive description of a literary text" is a chimera. And yet, the fact that the researcher is historically situated and textual meaning is slippery does not mean that we cannot subject both source and target texts to rigorous analysis. I subscribe to Eco's hermeneutic view — which cannot be criticised for having a 'positivistic slant' — that textual meaning (relations, functions, properties) is not arbitrarily constructed by the interpreter. Positing the existence of immanent features that constrain interpretation does not necessarily entail an essentialist view of textual meaning. I regard the construction of a *tertium comparationis* as a **heuristic** method, a descriptive procedure akin to Eco's view of the reader's conjectures aimed at revealing the text's intention or semiotic strategies (p. 64).[1]

2. Onomastic wordplay and the issue of (un)translatability

In the bulk of this article I shall consider the behaviour of seven English translators of Dante in one particular problem-area, the onomastic wordplay in *Inferno*. Four twentieth-century translators — D. Sayers (1949), J. Ciardi (1954), M. Musa (1984) and S. Mitchell (1993) — recreate Dante's onomastic wordplays, whereas H. F. Cary (1844), a nineteenth-century translator,[2] and M. Musa (1984) and T. Phillips (1985), two twentieth-century translators, follow an avoidance policy (or zero translation strategy). Given the fact that evocative names involve a highly creative use of language — so creative in fact that some scholars argue it cannot be carried over to another language — it is necessary to tackle the question of wordplay and poetry translatability.

The dogma of untranslatability implies a deterministic outlook because it preempts free choice on the translator's part: s/he is allegedly so constrained linguistically that s/he is not free to re-write the source text's wordplay. This is why I shall consider first of all the issue of translatability from a theoretical point of view. Only then shall I deal with this issue from a source-oriented perspective, by showing how Dante's evocative names *can* be translated into English, and a descriptive standpoint, by considering how they *have been* translated. All this together would cast serious doubts on any claim that wordplay is theoretically untranslatable.

Onomastic wordplay as a form of linguistic creativity is considered to be polysemous. Many scholars have stressed that wordplay and polysemy — typical features of poetry — represent a powerful challenge to the translator because, their argument goes on, such features seriously resist translation. Even Lefevere, who adopted a moderate target-oriented stance, locates the major hurdle in the "locutionary level, the level of effect rather than that of communication" (1992: 58). Some scholars (e.g. Jakobson 1959; House 1973; Rickard 1975; Aphek and Tobin 1984) assert a dogmatic belief: the connotative features (e.g. phonoaesthetic effects) and the various types of wordplay are virtually untranslatable. Jakobson puts forward the most peremptory assertion when he says that "poetry by definition is untranslatable" (1959: 238).

If translatability were considered by reviewing the plethora of theoretical statements, this would result in a lengthy discussion.[3] I shall therefore consider only the two main objections to the claim of untranslatability:

Firstly, this claim rests on the (flimsy) assumption that "the sound-sense relationship" or phonoaesthetic element is "unique to a language" (Rickard 1975: 63), so that the translator cannot avoid shattering the almost mystical

bond of sound and meaning in the source language[4] (but, in fact, there seems to be a universal mechanism which generates wordplay, spoonerisms and metaphors in all languages (Toury 1997: 282)).

Secondly, the fact is that scholars like House (1973), Rickard (1975) and Ellington (1991) seem to be obsessed with the idea of formal equivalence, that is, they regard equivalence as being a purely linguistic category. In such a perspective translatability is just a loose term indicating the degree of correspondence (just as untranslatability indicates the lack of correspondence) between abstract linguistic systems and their constituents, as if languages existed in a vacuum. This explains House's apodictic statement that "the case of evocative names used frequently in literary works" represents an "instance of play on language which is invariably lost in translation" (1973: 167). House subscribes to a theory whereby semantic losses occur whenever those textual features that are formally equivalent to the original ones have not been retained.

This position is further made clear by Ellington when he explains what he means by translatability:

> there seem to be several different levels of 'linguistic play' and it appears that the degree of translatability is directly related to the level of linguistic play involved in the wit or humour. (1991: 304)

The idea that there is a cline or degree of linguistic translatability[5] implies a purely linguistic theory of translation equivalence and is therefore simplistic: as we shall see, Dante's use of creative names in *Inferno* is, on the whole, quite simple to rewrite in English, since there are close equivalents (from a purely linguistic point of view). Yet quite a number of translators adopt a zero translation strategy. If translators have the means to be creative and yet shun inventiveness one feels entitled to think that constraints of a different kind than linguistic ones come into play (and loom large) in the process of translation. And, indeed, according to the empiricist view of Descriptive Translation Studies, language constraints represent just one set of problems among many others; the researcher also has to consider the outlook of translators, their purpose(s) and the norms affecting their behaviour.

The empirical paradigm, in fact, represents the most convincing objection to untranslatability. If one adopts a descriptive and target-oriented approach, one will realise that in actual practice poetry and wordplay have been translated from time immemorial. This is Delabastita's argument, which applies to all linguistic features involved in the translation process:

> Indeed, the question whether or not translation is possible presupposes that one has in mind a clear idea of what a translation is supposed to be; if one renounces the claim that one can conjure up such an *a priori* ideal definition, the question will be simply left to answer itself in reality. As it happens, translations of (punning) texts do exist, so that the translatability of puns and texts can be (and has to be) accepted as a matter of fact. (1993: 172)

There is substantial evidence that translators can be creative, provided the situation of the target system is favourable. Embleton (1991: 188) provides a wealth of interesting examples of translations in various languages of the onomastic wordplay occurring in the French cartoon strip *Astérix*: the translators considered in her analysis follow three main strategies (which, incidentally, are very similar to those I encountered in my own corpus): "maintain the French original, choose some sort of parallel rendering, or create something totally new". For example, Embleton considers various translations of the name *Cicatrix* (recalling the French word for scar). The point is that *Cicatrix* modifies its original reference in most of the languages considered: it "occurs as English *Botanix*, German *Florix*, and Finnish *Hortonomix*, all relating to 'flowers'", which is, in her opinion, "more appropriate" given the fact that *Cicatrix* "makes flowers appear magically" (p. 185).

An empiricist therefore cannot but endorse Newmark's apparently sweeping statement that "nothing is untranslatable" (1981: 107–109). Admittedly, one could concede that Ellington has a point when he says that Newmark's "optimism about translating jokes" should be taken with a little reserve, since the latter confines his examples to European languages. "A serious attempt at translating wordplay in Hanunoo, Hebrew puns or even simple English limericks might change" an optimistic perspective such as Newmark's (1991: 304). However, one cannot accept Ellington's implied, *a priori* theory of translation: there is no doubt that Hebrew puns or English limericks would pose special problems to any translator, but this does not make them untranslatable — provided, of course, one does not take it for granted (as Ellington does) that the closer the affinity between two languages (or two linguistic features) the higher their translatability. From this point of view, translatability is a purely linguistic category, which disregards the norms governing the translator's behaviour and his/her own theory of translation. In other words, it ignores the fact that the initial translatability depends on target (cultural) conditions. As Toury (1997: 282) suggests, wordplay is not untranslatable, provided it is "habitual or conventional" in the target repertoire.

When Delabastita emphasises the "futility of the very question" of poetry's "theoretical translatability" (1991: 146), he presumably rejects abstract questions such as "how is translation to be defined?", "is translation actually possible?", "what is a good translation?", which are typical of mainstream source-oriented approaches (Hermans 1985: 9). However, he does not mean that empiricists should jettison Toury's notion of initial translatability (or adequate translation, for that matter).

The analysis undertaken here does not warrant my theoretical assertion in favour of wordplay translatability (which, as an empiricist, I accept by definition). Rather, it has the purpose of showing how source-oriented and target-oriented approaches feed into each other at all levels of translation description, even though eventually the emphasis is on the explanatory power of empirical investigations of authentic data, which is target-oriented.

3. Onomastic wordplay in Dante's *Inferno* and the construction of a hypothetical 'adequate translation'

Dante invented a number of grotesque names for a troop of devils, the *Malebranche* (='Evil-claws', their collective name), guarding the fifth ditch of Malebolge, an area of Hell (cantos XXI-XXII; I have employed Petrocchi's edition of the *Comedy* [Alighieri 1966–1967]). The devils' names could be distortions of some proper names of Dante's contemporaries, but nonetheless they represent a form of onomastic wordplay that may be subject to analysis. It is outside the scope of this paper to review the question of 'meaningful' literary names in translation (on which see e.g. Manini 1996). Suffice it to say that whereas proper names in real life are arbitrary, evocative names in literary texts represent a "method of characterization" (Manini 1996: 163), which contributes to the text's symbolic texture. The devils' names are highly meaningful coinages because their evocative connotations overlap completely with the personalities being described. Dante's demons are personifications of vices or "devices in an allegorical design" rather than "full-sized *personae*", which is in keeping with the medieval allegorical tradition (Manini 1996: 165).

Most of the connotations of Dante's names are almost immediately intelligible to the source-language reader. Source-oriented scholars would probably regard them as highly translatable items from a linguistic point of view (they tend to have a relatively simple morphological structure). Let us proceed from the assumption that an adequate translation into English could take the

form of literal replacements. The categories employed in the presentation are taken from Manini (1996).

1. There are a few compound or **portmanteau** names (that is, names blending two nouns) which can be rendered with formally close equivalents; for instance, *Mala-coda* (='Evil-tail'), *Calca-brina* (='Walk-on-Frost'; or 'Frost-trampler', according to Mandelbaum (1995: 593)), *Barba-riccia* (='Curly-beard') and *Graffia-cane* (='Scratcher-dog'; or "Snarleyhead", as suggested by Pinski (1994: 407)). A less obvious portmanteau name is *Libicocco* (='Windy'?), which seems to originate in a fusion of 'libeccio', the Italian name for the South-west wind, and 'scirocco', the South-east wind; this neologism suggests thus a very agile devil. Another adequate translation could be "blaster" (Mandelbaum ibid).

2. The following are **transparent names** (Manini 1996: 165, quoting Zimmer 1981: 64), that is, they coincide with a common noun (or verb, I should add). From a purely linguistic standpoint, these are also highly translatable into English: *Scarmiglione* (='Ruffled' or 'Dishevelled') derives from the Italian verb 'scarmigliare', 'to ruffle or dishevel' (one's hair); *Farfarello* (='Sprite'), a Tuscan term for 'sprite, evil spirit'. Mandelbaum tentatively suggests "moth-winged", which seems a creative rendering; in fact, in *Farfarello* he finds "an echo of names for [various] evil spirits in popular folklore" (1995: 593). *Rubicante* (='Ruddy'), which recalls the adjective 'rubicondo' (=rubicund or ruddy) through similarity of sound, and indicates a mad or furious devil. According to Mandelbaum (ibid), *Rubicante* evokes the words "red" and "rabid".

3. Other names are **transformations** (that is, phonological and morphological modifications of a common noun). The adequate translation of these may require some adjustment since the humorous effect is generated by a language-specific feature: *Cagnazzo* (='Vicious or Nasty-dog'?; Mandelbaum (1995: 593) proposes "doggish") and *Draghignazzo* (='Vicious or Nasty-dragon'?) are modifications of the common nouns, respectively, 'cane' (=dog) and 'drago' (=dragon), which draw on the pejorative connotation of the suffix *-azzo* (consider the harsh and grating consonants). This suffix is commonly replaced by *-accio* in modern Italian (cane = dog; 'cagn*accio*' = a nasty or horrible dog). Italian is rich in derivative names such as diminutives and pejoratives, whereas English is poorer in this respect. However, by inserting any pejorative adjective, like 'vicious' or 'nasty' for example, one may go some way towards recapturing the original connotation, which enhances their translatability. *Draghignazzo* could also be explained as a play on two words: 'drago' (=dragon) and 'ghigno' or 'sghignazzo' (=sneer, scornful laughter), in which case it would be a port-

manteau name that could be rendered as 'Sneering-dragon'. Mandelbaum tentatively suggests either "dragonish" or "sneerer". *Ciriatto* (='Piggy'?), another transformation name, is slightly more complicated: it derives from the word 'ciro', meaning 'pig' in ancient Tuscan, modified by the suffix *-tto*, which is used for young animals (cervo = deer; cerbia*tto* = fawn; orso = bear; orse*tto* = little or baby bear). Mandelbaum suggests "hoggish" as an adequate rendering of *Ciriatto*, whereas Pinski (1994:407) prefers "Hogface".

4. *Alichino* (=Harlequin), the only name on the list which does not seem grotesque, derives from old French 'Hallequin', a typical name for the devil in the French tradition, which was used in the theatre in the Middle Ages. The first part of the name (*Ali-*) might derive from the word "ali" (=wings), but it is not clear what the second part (*chino*) could refer to. Therefore, this seems to be a **semi-transparent composite** name, that is, a name in which only one component is clearly recognizable (Manini 1995:165, quoting Zimmer 1981:64). *Alichino* might not have had ludicrous overtones in Dante's time, when it probably simply stood for an evil sprite, "who was the forerunner of the trickster Harlequin in *later comic theatre*" (Mandelbaum 1995:593; my italics).

However, only in a reductionist view would literal equivalents (i.e. formal renderings based on the morphological/structural properties of the original names) represent a satisfactory adequate translation, and hence serve as a *tertium comparationis* for the comparison of translation and source texts. A textemic analysis of the source text must also consider the textual functionality of grotesque wordplay. This does not seem to be easy, though, because the devils' names can be, and have indeed been interpreted in various, even conflicting ways in the history of the critical reception of Dante. They have been seen as representing caricatures/sketches of infernal creatures whose appearance in the narrative serves the purpose of giving life to a gruesome and terrifying atmosphere or as being an innocuous form of wordplay, the significance of which lies solely in its humorous impact on the reader. But they have also been regarded as comedy-like features totally inappropriate in a tragic poem like *The Comedy*.

Most twentieth-century Dante translators emphasise the humorously grotesque dimension of this part of Malebolge. This is not surprising in view of the fact that the general atmosphere of this hellish region is farcical: the sinners, who are punished by being immersed in a trough of pitch, constantly try to avoid the devils' pitchforks; moreover, at the end of canto XXI, the troop of devils takes leave of its leader by poking their tongues out at him and he replies

by loudly breaking wind, so that the narrative reaches a truly grotesque climax.

Sisson argues that cantos XXI and XXII are characterised by "satirical, grotesque and farcical elements" (1981: 546). Pinski claims that the devils "combine fear and comedy", though he stresses their grotesqueness:

> Because Dante's goal is transcendent, the Malebranche must not be only terrifying but low, and ultimately not terrifying at all, but self-defeating: the grimacing, barely substantial creatures of bad air. (1994: 107)

Canto XXI and XXII, in fact, are a "comic section of the *Inferno*". According to Phillips, Dante's creatures

> range from the sinister to the humorously grotesque, thus reflecting the variety of reactions that these episodes and characters have evinced from readers through the ages: some (like myself) have seen the activities of the Devils as a *buffo* episode, a little tongue-in-cheek like the modern Gothic horror film; others (like Ruskin) have seen in them an unambiguous representation of evil. (1985: 298)

In actual fact, Phillips' and Ruskin's perspectives are not at variance. The devils' humorously grotesque names (and actions) may be reconciled with the overall tragic atmosphere of *Inferno* (Padoan 1970–1978: 372). In other words, there is no contradiction between 'farce' and 'tragedy'. Yet, as Sayers puts it, "the mood of these two cantos — a mixture of savage satire and tearing high spirits — is unlike anything else in the *Comedy*, and is a little disconcerting to the more solemn-minded of Dante's admirers" (1949: 206). As Spitzer (1988: 174) observes, Dante commentators (and translators, I should add) in modern times have found it difficult to harmonise the farcical elements in *Inferno* XXI–XXII with the solemn tone of the *Comedy* insofar as they have failed to grasp the significance of farce in Dante's medieval perspective. They have not understood that in the Middle Ages the God-forsaken could be represented by means of "untranscendental farce". It is only by having recourse to the source writer's coeval perspective that we may fully understand the textual function of his infernal creatures. As Spitzer cogently argues, farce is required by the "nature of the crime itself with which Dante deals" in Malebolge: 'baratteria', that is, "embezzlement, graft, low intrigue, misuse of power and money". This is a "petty crime", and also one from which Dante wishes to distance himself, having been charged with it to justify the unjust sentence of exile (1988: 172). This is why both devils and sinners "are equally unheroic [and] form *one* contemptible crew — above whom stands no great figure". In fact, the farcical is nothing but the "overpowering force of an unheroic situation" (p. 173).

Dante's 'solemn-minded' admirers are therefore mistaken in expecting a great infernal figure in Malebolge, a region where

> no character is allowed to rise above the standard level of mediocre wickedness; no higher principle of a transcendental, or even of a common moral nature, is allowed to appear on the horizon. (Spitzer 1988: 173)

This hermeneutic analysis bears out the observation that the adequate translation inevitably arises out of an *interpretation*. The analysis also suggests that it is extremely difficult to establish the full range of options available to translators who wish to reproduce the textual function of Dante's onomastic wordplay. How can one re-create a grotesque atmosphere portraying the entirely God-forsaken in a nineteenth- or twentieth-century epic poem? The relationship between 'farce' and 'tragedy' is so elusive that it may trigger a variety of responses. However, in order to grasp at least some of the potential responses, actual (i.e. historically determined) choices need to be considered, and this obviously requires a target-oriented approach.

It follows that, inasmuch as the notion of adequate translation is to have an intersubjective status, the only construct that may serve as a *tertium comparationis* consists in the formal correspondents suggested above. This can only be a **working hypothesis** serving as a methodological/heuristic tool in the assessments of the actual choices made by Dante translators, which I turn to now.

4. An explanation of the avoidance policy (or zero translation strategy)

H. F. Cary (1844) does not translate the devils' names but carries them over unchanged, except for two instances, *Rubicante* and *Graffiacane*, which drop their final vowel. He does not even attempt to explain the effect of such names in a footnote (a typical editorial technique employed by translators, according to Delabastita 1993), which is even more striking in view of the fact that he has extensive recourse to explanatory footnotes.

Why should a nineteenth-century translator avoid grotesque names? I suggest that Cary's avoidance policy arises from his uneasiness with the grotesque. There is substantial evidence suggesting that Cary finds some of Dante's imagery quite distasteful.

A translator's preface is an obvious place to look for indications of his poetics: there he has no qualms about clarifying his attitude to the style of the source text. And, indeed, the reader is informed that Cary finds fault with Dante's vivid realism:

> His [= Dante's] solicitude … to define all his images in such a manner as to bring them distinctly within the circle of our vision, and to subject them to the power of the pencil, sometimes renders him little better than grotesque, where Milton has since taught us to expect sublimity. But his faults, in general, were less those of the poet, than of the age in which he lived. (Cary 1844: xxxvi)

Such an attitude was quite widespread in English literary circles at the time when Cary was translating. Coleridge echoes Cary's pronouncement (although neither of them specifically refers to the devils' names), again calling on Milton to act as a model of that sublime imagination which the realistic (and 'barbaric') Florentine does not possess. Coleridge himself remarks on

> Dante's occasional fault of becoming grotesque from being too graphic without imagination; as in his Lucifer compared to Milton's Satan. Indeed he is sometimes horrible rather than terrible … many of his images excite bodily disgust, and not moral fear. (1818: 409)

However, there may be more at stake than mere distaste for the grotesque. Dante's names represent a form of wordplay that would alert the reader to the possibility of different (and possibly contrasting) readings of the source text: if Cary had reproduced the original onomastic wordplay — thereby projecting an image of Dante as a poet who intends to amuse his readers — he would have brought to the fore the polysemous nature of the *Comedy*. I have already argued (Crisafulli 1996) that Cary expurgates the *divertissement* dimension from the target text because it is at variance with his representation of Dante as a fundamentally serious poet dealing with a momentous subject (e.g. the punishment of sinners in *Inferno* and the reward of righteous souls in *Paradiso*).[6]

No doubt, the choices translators make have to do with their understanding of the significance of Dante's onomastic wordplay. But it must be added that in the nineteenth-century British context the understanding of Dante was crucially affected by a basic or primary norm (="more or less mandatory for *all* instances of a certain behaviour"; Toury 1995: 67), which would have been binding for Cary: the translation of an epic poem like the *Comedy* had to demonstrate stylistic elevation throughout and avoid 'plurilingualism', the mingling of different registers/styles; the use of poetic imagery had to be consistent with a representation of the source text as an unmistakably serious poem. The established repertoire in Cary's time thus ruled out grotesque wordplay in an epic text (or, in other words, a primary norm restricted the source text's initial translatability).[7]

The case of twentieth-century translators is quite different since they would not be affected by the constraints operating in the nineteenth century, even

though they too may have avoided onomastic wordplay because of its polysemous nature.

If we adopt Venuti's framework (1995: 40–43) we may argue that both Phillips and Musa are advocates of 'fluency',[8] the canon of translation according to which the target text ought to be so readable and fluent as to produce the (illusionistic) effect of transparency: the translator aims at capturing the original meaning, which is conceived as a fixed and stable entity capturing the source-text writer's intention (Venuti 1995: 60–61). Transparency promotes "univocal meaning" (p. 203), that is, the 'signified' (i.e. conceptual message) is foregrounded at the expense of the signifier (e.g. sound effects): the translator avoids any play of the signifier and/or polysemy, which characterise wordplay, because these features would erode the coherence of the signified and thereby reveal the unstable nature of the source text (p. 60).

Venuti's framework, however, is not sufficient to understand why Phillips and Musa do not exploit a linguistic reservoir that must have been larger than Cary's due to the canonization of modernism in the English literary tradition (not to mention the fact that even the translators who re-create Dante's wordplay tend to produce 'transparent' renderings).

Interpretation plays an important role in the translation process, but one finds it difficult to understand why Phillips' reading of the Devils as a 'buffo episode' has led him to his zero translation strategy. The fact is that Phillips employs the old argument that literal renderings are inadequate, a fact which seems to suggest that an (implicit) theory of translation played a decisive role in his avoidance policy:

> Some English translators have attempted to find equivalents for Malacoda, Graffiacane etc. (Evil-tail, Scratch-dog…), though the results have been generally quite feeble … I have stuck to the Italian, especially since it is probable that Dante is using distortions of the names of well-known Florentines. (Phillips 1985: 298)

Clearly, the fact that Dante might have distorted the names of some of his contemporaries does not mean that his play on language is impossible to re-create in the target language.

Musa's observations (which are similar to Phillips') enable us to understand why twentieth-century translators may adopt a zero translation strategy:

> The significance of the devils' names reinforces their ambivalent nature, both comic and fearful. While they inspire fear in Virgil and the Pilgrim (=Dante, who is accompanied by Virgil throughout his descent into Hell), their words and gestures are for the most part light and playful. (Musa 1984: 266)

Interestingly, Musa goes on to justify his decision not to deal with the onomastic wordplay with ambiguous words: "many of the names could be translated, but they would lose much of their grotesque appearance" (ibid). One could argue, however, that it is precisely the alleged inadequacy, in terms of rhetorical strength, of formal correspondents that could prompt translators to translate 'freely' and create new grotesque overtones in English. But Musa and Phillips do not follow the path of creative rewriters because they are in the grip of the literal method of translation: they aim, first and foremost, at achieving 'fidelity' (or 'fluency') by conveying the original content. This is presumably why they end up being caught in an aporia: being experienced translators, Musa and Phillips must be aware that creative rewritings could produce similar effects in English. Yet only literal renderings (i.e. formal equivalents) are allowed by their theory of translation — and these are perceived to be inadequate, that is, non-equivalent in terms of rhetorical strength.

Mitchell, too, rejects literal translations of Dante's demons' names into English on the grounds that they would "lose the coarse vigour of the Italian names" (1993: 187). And yet, as we shall see shortly, Mitchell's conception of the nature of translation allows her to produce creative rewritings.

I now turn to four translations featuring the allegedly elusive or inexpressible onomastic wordplay.

5. The rewriting of Dante's onomastic wordplay

Laurence Binyon (1947), Dorothy Sayers (1949), John Ciardi (1954) and Susan Mitchell (1993) rewrite the devils' names in a way suggesting that literary translators may be unfettered by a narrow view of fidelity at the linguistic level: all these twentieth-century translators reproduce grotesque overtones by drawing creatively on the resources of the target language, regardless of the fact that they could have resorted to literal renderings.[9] All four translators follow similar strategies so that their renderings may be divided into three groups: the first consists in 'literal' translations; in the second group there are names which are quite close to Dante's in that an original semantic feature or reference is preserved, though the English versions are quite innovative; the third group comprises totally new names that bear no relation to the original ones from the standpoint of formal equivalence (that is, in terms of morphological structure and semantics). In the following description, I shall only touch briefly (and tentatively) on the possible connotations of the English replacements, especially when they are not self-explanatory.

First group: Literal (or quasi-literal) translations
Binyon (1947: 113): "Evil-Tail" (*Malacoda*); "Hound Scratcher" (*Graffiacane*); "Farfarel" (*Farfarello*).

Sayers (1949: 204): "Farfarel" (*Farfarello*); "Rubicant" (=rubicund, that is, ruddy, reddish; OED: 2641) (*Rubicante*).

Ciardi (1954: 112): "Curlybeard" (*Barbariccia*); "Pigtusk" (*Ciriatto*), translating also the adjective 'sannuto' (=with tusks), which follows the Italian name in the source text; "Crazyred" (*Rubicante*), which translates also the adjective 'pazzo' (=crazy), occurring after the Italian name in the original.

Mitchell (1993: 98–102): "Curly Beard" (*Barbariccia*); "Dog Scratcher" (*Graffiacane*); "Hog With Tusks" (*Ciriatto*), also translating the adjective 'sannuto', as explained above.

Second group: Creative translations
Binyon (1947: 113, 114): "Touzlemane" (*Scarmiglione*), a compound or portmanteau name: "tousle" means to dishevel hair (OED: 3351), and "mane" is the long hair characteristic of the horse and lion (OED: 1684); "Hellequin" (*Alichino*) is phonetically similar to the Italian name and either reproduces the old French name, 'Hallequin', or recalls the word 'harlequin' (and/or, possibly, the slang word 'heller', that is, a reckless person (OED: 1215)); "Frostyharrow" (*Calcabrina*), 'frost' and 'harrow', that is, 'cause to suffer, distress' (OED: 1193); "Dogsnarler" (*Cagnazzo*), suggesting a vision of the bared teeth shown by dogs when they snarl (OED: 114); "Beardabristle" (*Barbariccia*), meaning that the devils' beard is bristling with anger or rage ('beard' and 'bristle', stiff hairs that grow on the back and sides of the pig (OED: 284)); "Furnacewind" (*Libicocco*) is a burning wind (a furnace is a combustion chamber) and could allude to the fires of a volcano (OED: 1045); "Dragonspittle" (*Draghignazzo*), suggesting a worthless thing, 'spittle' is saliva (OED: 2992); "Swinewallow" (*Ciriatto*), 'swine' and 'wallow', roll about in some liquid, viscous substance (OED: 3616); "Scarletfury" (*Rubicante*).

Ciardi (1954: 112): "Hellken" (*Alichino*), 'ken' means 'look, gaze' (OED: 1478); "Deaddog" (*Cagnazzo*), perhaps recalling the English idiom 'dead horse', 'something no longer of use' (OED: 599), or the idiom 'dead duck', 'a failure' (OED: 760); "Dragontooth" (*Draghignazzo*).

Sayers (1949: 204): "Belzecue" (*Malacoda*) from 'Belzebub', a name of the devil, and 'cue' standing for 'pigtail' or the rod with which the ball is struck in billiards (OED: 566), in which case it would suggest 'poking' or 'sticking';

"Scaramallion" (*Scarmiglione*), an item phonetically similar to the original name, but possibly suggesting 'scar' or 'scare' and 'rapscallion' (=a rogue, a rascal; OED: 2478); "Harrowhound" (*Cagnazzo*), 'Harrow' and 'Hound', self-explanatory (suggesting 'hound of hell' and 'harrowing of hell'); "Barbiger" (*Barbariccia*), possibly derived from 'barb', rare for a man's beard (OED: 180) but suggesting also one who uses a 'barb' (=a secondary backward-projecting point of an arrow, fish-hook etc.; OED: 180); "Libbicock" (*Libicocco*), apparently a literal translation in the form of an anglicization of the original name, but possibly a fusion of 'Libeccio' and 'cock', the bird; "Dragonel" (*Draghignazzo*), recalling 'dragon'; "Guttlehog" (*Ciriatto*), 'guttural', that is, 'throaty' (but also 'gutter' or 'gut'), and 'hog', a domesticated pig or a coarse person (OED: 1244).

Mitchell (1993:98–102): "Knife Tail" (*Malacoda*); "Dog Face" (*Cagnazzo*); "Windy" (*Libicocco*); "Dragon Smile" (*Draghignazzo*), possibly influenced by an evocative association of the Italian name which phonetically suggests the verb 'sghignazzare' (=to laugh scornfully, to sneer).

Third group: Original rewritings

Sayers (1949:204): "Hacklespur" (*Alichino*), 'hackle', that is, erectile hairs along the back of a dog, which rise when it is angry (OED: 1170), and 'spur'; "Hellkin" (*Calcabrina*), 'Hell' and 'kin': self-explanatory; "Grabbersnitch" (*Graffiacane*): 'grabber' and 'snitch', that is, to steal (OED: 2923).

Ciardi (1954:112): "Snatcher" (*Scarmiglione*) describes what the devils are doing, from the verb 'to snatch' — seize, snap, bite suddenly (OED: 2920); "Grizzly" (*Calcabrina*), a large brown bear of a race found in western North America but also grey-haired or inclined to grumble, sulk (OED: 1147); "Grafter" (*Libicocco*), a person who makes gains by shady or dishonest means or someone who works hard (OED: 1127); "Catclaw" (*Graffiacane*), a name possibly created for phonetic reasons (alliteration), which evokes cats scratching dogs which attack them; "Cramper" (*Farfarello*), from the verb 'to cramp', compress or squeeze with irons in punishment or torture (OED: 540).

Mitchell (1993:98–102): "Crazy Mad" (*Rubicante*); "Buffoon" (*Alichino*), a clown or a mocker (OED: 295); "Scamp" (*Farfarello*), a worthless person, a rascal (OED: 2703); "Ancient Foot" (*Calcabrina*); "Slob" (*Scarmiglione*), i.e. a stupid, careless person (OED: 2902).

According to Manini (1996:167), the recreation of meaningful (especially portmanteau) names in a literary text can be particularly problematic. But when it comes to most of the devils' names the problem is not so much breaking them

into their components and understanding the rationale behind the coinages; the perceived problem (on the part of translators), after they have decided to try and "reproduce *the same semantic effect* in the target language" (ibid; italics added), is rather how to go about doing it.

All translators exploit the technique of word compounding except for a few cases where names are anglicized (e.g. 'Libbicock', 'Farfarel', 'Rubicant'); in some instances, they are aware of the communicative value of sounds: Sayers deals with the hard and grating sound of the consonants in the Italian suffix, *-azzo*, by employing the alliteration "*H*arrow *H*ound"; the same consideration applies to Ciardi's free rendering, "*C*at *C*law". It is also important to note that the Italian morphological structure is not a straitjacket for the creative translator: transformation names based on a systemic feature — *cagn-azzo*, *draghign-azzo*, *ciri-atto* — are generally rendered with English portmanteau names such as: 'Dogsnarler', 'Deaddog', 'Harrowhound', 'Dogface'; 'Dragonspittle', 'Dragontooh', 'Dragonsmile'; 'Swinewallow', 'Guttlehog'.

It goes outside the scope of this paper to consider in depth the sources of inspiration in the host culture, which may have influenced the translators. Suffice it to say that some of Mitchell's renderings, for example (consider "Hog With Tusks"), seem to conjure up the typical names of native American Indians. This testifies to the wealth and variety of possibilities available to translators who turn their attention to the target culture — not to mention the rich history of onomastic wordplay in the English literary tradition itself (see e.g. Manini 1996).

As regards the role of interpretation in making translation decisions, it would seem that the actual textual outcome is influenced — if not actually determined — by the significance and/or function ascribed *by the translator* to the onomastic wordplay in the Italian text: as I have pointed out, Cary's avoidance policy may be explained in terms of his representation of the source text as a serious poem. I also suggest that Sayers may have interpreted the devils as a 'buffo episode', given the fact that her rewritings harp on (and perhaps render more explicit) the humorous connotations present in the source text. In fact, Sayers claims that she "englished" most of the names because "the average English reader cannot get much fun out of" literal translations aiming at capturing Dante's allusions to the names of his contemporaries, which would be meaningless "at this time of day" (1949: 206). On the other hand, Mitchell's lexical inventions, which recall the names of Native Americans, do not seem to be as grotesque as Sayers'. Clearly, Mitchell's rewritings reflect her own reading of the demons:

> I have tried to be true to a folklore tradition that emphasises the crudeness and sheer nastiness of the devils. The devils exhibit a wild animal energy in keeping with their claws, snouts, tails, and in one case, tusks; and their names call attention to their animality. (1993: 187)

A last (but not least) observation: most of the names invented by Ciardi, Binyon, Sayers and Mitchell represent creative translations and original rewritings. These translators give life to extremely original evocative overtones in English: some of their linguistic inventions — e.g. 'Dragonspittle', 'Deaddog', 'Catclaw' — effectively convey a grotesque and/or humorous dimension; a fact which proves that the impact or rhetorical strength of the Italian names, no matter how language-specific from a formal point of view, may be recreated — **provided translators are willing (or allowed) to free themselves from the straitjacket of literalness, and to be innovative**. On the other hand, it is a primary norm (in Cary's case) or a narrow view of fidelity (see Musa and Phillips) — not the alleged untranslatability of wordplay — that restricts the translator's potentially creative behaviour.

6. Conclusions

It is only apparently paradoxical that twentieth-century translators move away from formal correspondence precisely when translation norms have ceased to restrict the reservoir available to rewriters, as was the case in Cary's time. Dante translators in the twentieth century tend to reject close linguistic (i.e. literal) equivalents, presumably because they feel that only creative rewritings would capture the textual function of the farcical in the *Comedy*. In other words, the move towards greater adequacy seems to stimulate linguistic creativity (which in turn depends on the evolution of literary taste in the target system).

Having reached this conclusion by adopting a target-oriented perspective and on the basis of real-life translator behaviour, I fail to understand Venuti's observation that this perspective "may well discourage the study and practice of translation experimentalism" (1998: 30). Rather, it is a purely source-oriented approach based on the dogma of formal correspondence that hampers creativity. My argument, in fact, sustains that the study of theoretical translatability — whether the source text's initial translatability or the hypothetical source-text-oriented translation underpinning the *tertium comparationis* — cannot do without target-orientedness, which shows that creativity (or experimentalism) is an empirical fact in certain circumstances.

The data discussed here enables us to deal with three crucial questions on the nature of translation, says Delabastita:

> to what extent are translators (and translation scholars) able actually to pin down the meaning of the source text (or for that matter of the target text), and what is the role of interpretation in that process? Can a translation unearth new meanings in the source text and so become constitutive of it? (1994: 225)

My analysis of Dante's onomastic wordplay in English has shown that there are no absolute linguistic features to be 'pinned down' once and for all. The sheer variety of the inventions in the versions considered above suggests that translating is an interpretative process in which new meanings are continuously created. But the translator's interpretation does not take place in a vacuum: it is crucially linked to target cultural conditions. Cary's is a case in point: he was not totally free, his uneasiness with the grotesque being rooted in the cultural climate of his age — a powerful constraint on creativity. In this case the translator's interpretation of the source text depends on historically determined norms holding sway in the receiving tradition.

Twentieth-century Dante translators tend to unearth new meanings because they are finally able — or allowed — to grasp the importance of the farcical in the *Comedy*. Creativity is facilitated by the fact that no primary translation (and/or literary) norm would sanction the use of onomastic wordplay in an epic poem. Clearly, one has to take into account not only the role of interpretation and of the extra-linguistic constraints affecting the rewriter's strategies, but also his/her intention or theory of translation (whether overt or covert). This, too, may represent a constraint on creativity. The illocutionary dimension (phonoaesthetic effects, wordplay) represents only one set of problems among many others.

The creative potential in translation — depending on whether the translator decides or is allowed to be creative — implies that we need to re-think the relationship between original and translation in radically new terms: I regard the idea of otherness or diversity as being essential to the phenomenon of translating since "the relation between original and translation is based not on resemblance but on difference" (Bannet Tavor 1993: 585). In fact, in this paper I have assumed as an (unstated) working hypothesis that the dissimilarities between Binyon, Sayers, Ciardi, Mitchell and Dante are essentially positive in that they are highly meaningful. This reverses our habitual perception of things: traditionally, the differences between target and source texts have been stigmatised as signalling a real loss, hence the basically "negative kind of reasoning" they gave rise to (Toury 1995: 84).

Although this hypothesis draws on a philosophical perspective that values the notion of difference, the conclusions reached in this paper have been validated by an empirical investigation: only the examination of authentic data enables the scholar to throw light on the actual (and not idealised) state of affairs in translation. It follows that target-orientedness is far from being an "oversimplification" (Hermans 1999: 69). The constant need to contextualise — even at the level of the source-oriented study of initial translatability — implies that target-orientedness is, in fact, at the heart of Translation Studies as a whole.

Notes

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1. It is not possible to do full justice to the complexity of Eco's thinking here. I am perfectly aware that the notion of overinterpretation is a controversial one. Suffice it to say that I advocate a fruitful encounter between certain aspects of Eco's epistemology and Descriptive Translation Studies. I have to clarify, however, that Eco does not advocate an essentialist or ontological view of textual meaning (and neither do I): he emphasises methodological rather than ontological structuralism. As Robey clearly explains, this means that

> the structures identified by the analyst … should be viewed as provisional constructions, which serve the purpose of scientific understanding, but which should not be taken to represent the essential nature of things. (1985: 81)

2. The first complete edition of Cary's translation of Dante's *Comedy* appeared in 1814 with the title of *The Vision*. The last revised edition, which has only minor alterations, came out in 1844, the year of Cary's death. The most recent (and most accessible) edition is Cary (1994), which is based on the 1814 edition. I have used the 1844 edition because it is a more complete translation than the 1814 one. In fact, a few lines of the *Comedy* had been omitted from the 1814 text, but were translated in the 1844 edition. There are other differences between the two texts (mainly to do with punctuation and syntax), which, however, do not concern the treatment of onomastic wordplay. I do not contend that the 1844 text is superior to the 1814 one. It simply embodies Cary's 'final' intentions. (And see Crisafulli 1999, which discusses the highly problematic notion of the translator's intention in relation to the issue of textual criticism.)

3. Delabastita (1993, 1994) deals with this topic extensively.

4. In all fairness to deconstructionists, they have a more complex position than Jakobson and the linguists who follow in his footsteps. The way in which the deconstructionists stress untranslatability is quite different from the one used by those criticised here, since it does

not presuppose a naïve view of textual meaning; in fact, as Delabastita puts it, for deconstructionists

> the notion of untranslatability is in their way of thinking not something that should dishearten or paralyse the translator, but quite on the contrary it constitutes the rationale of translation as a human activity …: the irreducible Otherness of languages and cultures may make real translation impossible, but by the same token it underlies its necessity and greatness. (1994: 227)

This concept of untranslatability is more acceptable to an empiricist than Jakobson's static view of equivalence — the translator's task, he seems to sustain, is to grasp and reproduce an objective representation of the original (fixed) meaning. Deconstructionists consider perfect equivalence as a chimera since in their perspective there is no absolutely coherent textual meaning; hence, every translation has a provisional nature. This conception does not restrict the range of options available to translators; quite the contrary: it encourages experimentation and creativity. However, as I have already argued (Crisafulli 1999), deconstructionism (or post-structuralism in general) has a severe limitation: its radical epistemological scepticism.

5. See Ellington (1991) and Delabastita (1993) on the conditions allegedly affecting translatability.

6. In the introduction to his translation, Cary describes the *Comedy* in the following terms:

> Some have termed it an epic poem; and others, a satire: but it matters little by what name it is called. It suffices that the poem seizes on the heart by its two great holds, terror and pity; … The fiction, it has been remarked, is admirable, and the work of an inventive talent truly great. It comprises a description of the heavens and heavenly bodies; a description of men, their deserts and punishments, of supreme happiness and utter misery, and of the middle state between the two extremes. (1844: xxxiv-xxxvi)

7. The existence of a norm dictating Cary's zero translation strategy is borne out by the position of nineteenth-century reviewers, most of whom criticised the farcical atmosphere of Malebolge (and approved of Cary's dignified poetic register). *The Edinburgh Magazine* objected to Dante's representations of devils: "Dante has no great idea of the dignity of devils, which it was left for Milton first to imagine and portray; his fiends are mischievous merely, and malicious" (1818: 226). *The North American Review* considered the "few humorous passages" in *Inferno* to be "misplaced in a poem like this" (1819: 340).

Mariotti's observations, in particular, are worth quoting at length because they epitomise the prevailing attitude to Dante's grotesque devils in nineteenth-century Britain:

> To many of the followers of a more enlightened and rational Christianity, which has almost altogether shamed or laughed the devil out of countenance, the framework of Dante's Hell must certainly appear baroque and exaggerated. By the side of the proud and almost sublime Pluto of Tasso, and Satan of Milton, Dante's Alichinos and Farfarellos are poor devils indeed. Strange to say, and in conformity, perhaps, with the title of "*Comedy*", so quaintly prefixed to the poem, the *Inferno* has its humorous passages. Dante's devils are, some of them, droll fellows, who will crack their jokes with their victims, banter and argue with them; they are rude

> customers more often, blackguards up to the meanest tricks, the very fathers of lies. Spite of their frolics, however, and spite of their hideous grins, it is impossible to mistake the tragic tone that pervades the poet's mind, all along its dolorous progress. (1847: 8–9)

Mariotti emphasises the tragic tone of the *Comedy*, *despite* the presence of the devils. He is clearly ill at ease to harmonise epic poetry with the farcical.

8. In Crisafulli (1996) I employed Venuti's framework to explain Cary's attitude to punning.

9. I have not added Mandelbaum's name to this group of creative translators because he carries the devils' names unchanged in the target text. However, Mandelbaum (1995: 592–593) has recourse to the editorial technique of intervening in an explanatory endnote, where he suggests a few literal translations (most of which I have quoted in my discussion of the hypothetical adequate translation). The same applies to Pinski (1994: 407), who puts forward only four translations in an endnote.

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Résumé

L'article soutient que le principe de la traductibilité est d'un intérêt crucial, tant pour les «sourciers» que pour les «ciblistes». Au départ, il y a lieu de se référer à la notion de 'traduction adéquate' (Toury); cette notion est douée de deux significations: le rapprochement général ou idéal de normes du texte-source, et le *tertium comparationis* constitué par une traduction orientée vers le texte-source (et chargé de montrer comment l'original 'peut' être traduit). Les deux significations ont une portée heuristique dans les études de traduction. D'autre part, l'orientation vers le pôle-cible possède à son tour une valeur explicative, ce qu'illustre l'analyse des diverses stratégies déployées par sept traducteurs anglo-américains de Dante, qui soit recréent, soit évitent la réécriture de jeux de mots onomastiques à caractère grotesque de *L'Enfer*. Quant à la traduction-zéro des noms, elle n'est pas un argument en faveur de leur 'non-traductibilité', puisqu'aux yeux d'un empiriste rien n'est proprement intraduisible. Des noms évocateurs peuvent être l'objet d'une traduction créatrice, pourvu que le traducteur est disposé (ou autorisé) à innover.

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