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Proper Names and Proper Naming in Literary Translation:
Onomastic Choice and Communicative Equivalence*

Abstract: Proper names are frequently regarded as untranslatable, and rightly so; this, however, is not necessarily true when it comes to literary names, which is mainly due to the unique pragmatic function that the latter are to fulfill within a fictional context. In this paper I will thus attempt to present guidelines as to which names are translatable, and under which circumstances. I will argue that culture-specific and interculturally established translational norms should not, and in fact must not, replace a translation-oriented analysis of the source text. Furthermore, it will be shown that name transfers cannot be separated from the overall translational scope set for the target text. For this purpose, a comprehensive study of personal names in Italian translations of Nathaniel Hawthorne's short-story 'Mrs. Bullfrog' and Oscar Wilde's comedy 'The Importance of Being Earnest' will introduce a functional, source reader-based approach towards naming in literary translation; each text will be assessed as a whole and name alternatives proposed.

Résumé: Les noms propres sont généralement, et avec raison, considérés comme intraduisibles. En ce qui concerne les noms littéraires, cela n'est pas nécessairement vrai, car dans un contexte fictif les noms ont une fonction pragmatique exceptionnelle. Dans l'article qui suit j'essaie d'établir des principes de base pouvant nous aider à déterminer quels noms sont traduisibles et quand. Les normes traductives culturelles et interculturelles ne doivent pas remplacer l'analyse axée sur la traduction du texte source. D'ailleurs, le transfert des noms propres est indissociablement lié au projet de traduction du traducteur. Ainsi, mon étude sur les noms de personne dans des traductions italiennes de Nathaniel Hawthorne ('Mrs. Bullfrog') et d'Oscar Wilde ('The Importance of Being Earnest') repose sur une approche fonctionnelle, centrée sur le lecteur du texte source. Chaque texte est évalué dans son ensemble et, au besoin, des variantes de noms sont proposées.

0. Introduction

So far there have been few painstaking studies dealing with proper names in literary translation, especially when it comes to articles/books that amalgamate a general theory of name translation with comprehensive studies of literary texts; laudable on that score is the scholarly work by Zimmer (1981), Hermans (1988), Schultze (1991), Lietz (1992) and Manini (1996). In the present article I will approach the question in a functional, reader-based, perspective; in the first part of my paper descriptive and normative aspects of names/naming in translation will be introduced, while in the second part the acquired theoretical notions will be applied to concrete text-studies. The guidelines that I propose are meant to serve both the literary translator, who is constantly faced with the delicate task of transferring proper names, and the translatologist, who has to assess the 'success' of name renderings. In my analysis I will focus on so-called *meaningful* literary names, since the question of 'semantic transposition' (and hence of translation *stricto sensu*) concerns this name class in the first place. The points raised in this paper apply to personal names (anthroponyms) in particular, even though some are equally true for geographical names (toponyms).**1**

1. The (un)translatability of names

John Stuart Mill defined proper names as *non-connotative*, i.e devoid of meaning; in Mill's model, in fact, names are seen as mere labels attached to an individual or an entity to distinguish them from other individuals or entities that couldn't be told apart otherwise (unique reference, or minimal extension). In their function as labels, names are supposed to refer directly, i.e. the signifier is not linked to a signified, which is why their semantics lie dormant: "[Namen] sind *reine Sprache*" (Sornig 1978: 449). Another characteristic of names, which follows as an inevitable corollary of what has just been described, is their untranslatability. *Name translation* thus clearly represents a contradiction in terms, "da nur übersetzt werden kann, was eine sozial verständliche, konventionalisierte, eine codierte Bedeutung [...] hat" (Kalverkämpfer 1996: 1019). That names are untranslatable *interlingually*, can also be seen as a logical consequence of the impossibility to translate them *intralingually* (rewording), i.e. names lack synonyms (denotative equivalents).**2** It is in this sense that Kalverkämpfer (1978: 87) points out that parallel names like Fr. *Louis*/Ger. *Ludwig*, Fr. *Guillaume*/It. *Guglielmo*, Eng. *Thames*/It. *Tamigi*, as well as morphological adaptations (e.g. *Cicero* > It. *Cicerone*, *Horatius* > Eng. *Horace*), cannot possibly be regarded as 'synonyms' of each other, that is they do not constitute cases of translation *stricto*

sensu; they are rather language-specific variants of one name, i.e. different sound-sequences of the same name.**3**

On the formal plane, translation thus always presupposes semantic transparency, "die Verstehbarkeit einer appellativischen Bedeutung" (Kalverkämpfer 1996: 1019), from the synchronic point of view. A name cannot be translatable if it does not fulfill this criterion; Zimmer (1981: 64) distinguishes between five morphological categories of proper names: transparent names (*Müller*), transparent compounds (*Schaumlöffel*), pseudo-transparent compounds (*Hundzettel*), partly transparent compounds (*Langlotz*) and non-transparent names (*Föll*).**4** A (partial) translation is, theoretically speaking, possible in all name classes except for the last one (which, however, makes up the highest number of names in Western culture). Thus, while on the one hand names are said to be untranslatable as a consequence of their binary semiotic nature, some of them are, on the other hand, formally identical to common nouns, and therefore, it seems, translatable. The question that naturally arises is how these conflicting states may be reconciled.

2. Between the proper and the common noun: literary names

"Comparing to naming a character, naming a baby is a breeze", Kaplan & Bernays (1997: 174) write in their chapter on literary names. As a matter of fact, fictional names are not bestowed on "a zero, an unknown" (ibid.), but on developing or sometimes fully developed characters; an author may in fact change a character's name several times until he has found the *right* one; in other cases there might be a name in the beginning that gives birth to a character - its perfect embodiment. On that score, literary names are what real-life names would be if bestowed only after a person's death, namely *nomen est omen* in its purest form.**5** Even the most ordinary of fictional names is *deliberately* so, i.e. chosen to signify ordinariness, in unison with its character. Names given to new-borns, however, are ultimately arbitrary, at least in Western culture: identifying labels, regardless of the motivation that underlies them or the great care with which they have been picked. Therefore, when Fourment-Berni (1994: 564) claims that "le choix d'un nom propre par l'auteur est un acte qui *équivaut* à l'acte symbolique du baptême" (italics added), she is not quite correct - it is more than that.**6**

Literary names function within the text they are embedded in, and thus acquire a pragmatic and (con)textual 'meaning' that is intrinsically linked to the overall 'meaning' of the literary work. They are a reflection of the text that hosts them: outside the latter fictional names cease to be "Minitexte" (Sornig 1978: 455), and turn to ordinary, i.e. text-unrelated, names (e.g. when somebody decides to name a child after a literary

character). By semanticizing what is otherwise fossilized, transparent literary names become eligible for translation *stricto sensu*, quite like other lexemes. Transparent (or semi-transparent) literary names generally function as so-called *suggestive* and *speaking names* (the latter also referred to as *telling names*), i.e. names that carry within themselves a more or less obviously artificial and specific message about their bearer.**7** According to Hermans (1988: 13), "the distinction between 'suggestive' and 'expressive' [i.e. speaking] names is one of degree: in the latter case the links with the lexicon of the language, and hence the semantic load of the name, are more in evidence than in the case of 'suggestive' names". A borderline case between suggestive and speaking names are what Sornig (1978: 454) calls "Halblexeme", i.e. names that only insinuate their meaning (*Runtelzirg, Herr Wänzrich, A. Leverkühn, Cheeryble, Snigsworth, the Snark*), while other lexical blends display a more 'speaking' nature (*M'Choakumchild, Murdstone, Slyme, Maestro Trillentritsch*). Fully transparent are names like *Sir Tunbelly Clumsy*, *Millamant, Lady Sneerwell, Mr. Allworthy, Herr von Pfeiffdemkalb,* as well as allegorical names (the most speaking of all).

3. Types of name transfer

Semantic translation is just one among the options available to a translator of literary texts, since only part of the literary names encountered are in fact transparent (i.e. lexically understandable). According to Hermans (1988: 13/14), there are at least six ways of transferring literary proper names from a source text to a target text:

-*name copies*, i.e. names are reproduced exactly as they stand in the source text; this process is also known as *direct transfer* (Schultze 1991) or *orthographic transfer* (Tymoczko 1999);
-*name transcription*, which encompasses *transliteration* (e.g. the rendering of Greek, Russian, Arabic names in the Latin script) and *adaptation* on the level of spelling, phonetics and phonology;
-*name deletion*, i.e. a source text name does not appear in the target text or is replaced by a common noun (cf. 5.1.2.), and respectively *name insertion*, i.e. the occurrence of a name in the target text where there is none in the source text;
-*name substitution*, i.e. replacing a source text name either with a semantically unrelated/equally expressive target name or with a name equivalent;
-*semantic translation*, or *metonomatosis* ("Metonomasie", Kalverkämpfer 1978 & 1996); semantic translations are either literal or, more often, approximative. Schultze (1991) also mentions *partial/selective translation*, i.e. only one specific aspect of a name is translated, e.g. a diminutive suffix (Sp. Plater*illo* > It. Plater*ino*);

-*combinations* (e.g. a name is copied or transcribed, and translated - only once - in a footnote, in the text itself etc.);

Schultze (1991: 92) lists "transfer of an artistic device" as a separate mode of rendering names in target texts, i.e. "a translator imitates the artistic device according to which source side names are coined", although this rather constitutes a sub-category of name substitution or translation (e.g. Dupon*d* et Dupon*t* > Ger. Schulze und Schul*tz*e, En. Thomson and Thom*ps*on). On the other hand, a translator may choose not to imitate the artistic device of the source text and replace it with another (e.g. Fr. Dupon*d* et Dupon*t* > Sp. *H*ernandez y *F*ernandez);

Furthermore, semantic translation manifests itself in different ways within a target text: *re-naming* through substitution, syntagmatically embedded metalinguistic explanation in the target text, or metalinguistic comment in a note, the preface etc. Only name substitution through translation creates a new name in the target text, while name explanations actually constitute a special case of direct name transfer.

4. Proper names in translation-oriented analysis

4.1. *Regulative and constitutive translational conventions*

In her analysis of realia in literary translations, Nord (1991) concludes that the transfer type for proper names is linked to translational conventions prevailing (both dia- and synchronically) in the translator's (and thus the target readers') socio-cultural community. Translational conventions are based on mutual expectations, namely the target readers' expectations that a translator will conform to a certain pattern of behaviour and respectively the translator's expectation that the readers expect him to conform. Hermans (1991: 164) looks upon conventions (or norms, once they have turned from preferential to almost 'obligatory') as a translator's guide (an anchorage to clutch at) in his task to cope with a source text that offers a wide range of potentially 'correct' translations. Nord (1991) distinguishes between regulative conventions, i.e. non culture-specific conventions as to how to handle specific translational situations (the realia), and constitutive translational conventions, i.e. the culture-specific expectations as to what constitutes a 'good' literary translation for which genre (narrative, poetry, drama), namely "documentary (or overt) translations", which preserve the 'foreign' character of the source text, as opposed to "covert translations", which 'domesticate' the source text by integrating it into the target cultural system (ibid.: 105/6). Specific translation problems pertaining to the microtextual level (regulative conventions), such as proper names, are ultimately determined by the constitutive conventions, which concern a literary genre.

4.2. *Skopos and loyalty*

In Nord's (1991) functional approach towards translation, the translation type (overt vs covert translation) is viewed as the result of a commission (or instruction) set by a client (the initiator) or by the translator himself for a specific type of addressee (target readership); Vermeer (2000) defines translation as goal-oriented, i.e every target text is accomplished with a specific purpose (*skopos*) in mind. The function that the target text has been assigned (the target situation) can, but needn't, be identical with the function of the source text (the source situation): one skopos may be a maximally faithful imitation of the original, another achieving equivalence of function in source and target text (intertextual coherence), or the translation scope may require a shift in target function with respect to the source text (e.g. an adult literary work translated for children, manipulation of the source text message for a specific ideological purpose). The (self-)commissioned scope, in its turn, is influenced by translational conventions or norms, which tell the translator what function for a target text (i.e. what kind of relationship between source and target text) is being looked upon as acceptable within his culture. In this model the translator is expected to fulfill his obligations towards the target recipients, the initiator of the commission (if it isn't the translator himself) and the author, all of whom rely on the translator's *loyalty* (Nord 1991: 94/5), e.g. that the latter justifies/explains (in a note, in the preface) unusual courses of action that the set up goal has forced him to take, sometimes against the culture-specific translational norms.

4.3. *Names and the notion of communicative equivalence*

In his study on Norwegian literary names in German translations, Lietz (1992) examines the target names in a functional type of framework which is based on the concept of *communicative equivalence* ("kommunikative Aequivalenz", 132). In this kind of approach, the translational goal is to reproduce the communicative value (or 'message') of the source text, that is to evoke the same reactions, feelings - achieve the same effect - with both source and target readers. Communicative equivalence relies on the source recipients of a literary text, and respectively on an average communicative value, i.e. how a text is commonly/collectively received and understood by the source readership (the reception of a work being, obviously, subject to changes in diachrony).**8** The average communicative value is not derived empirically (by testing a representative sample of source readers in a given synchronic period), it is based on the translator's insight into the

source text (and, if possible, on the consultation of critical literature) and may shift with each translator. In this model, communicative equivalence alone is responsible for the modifications that the target text undergoes with respect to the source text - modifications that are due to the cultural distance between source and target readership, again as determined by the translator. In the present article, proper names will be viewed as intrinsically linked to the communicative value of the source text: they may function as indices of the linguistic and cultural setting and/or contribute actively towards an effect within the text as a whole or within a portion of the text; at the same time, on a subordinate level, they possess a context-independent value (the name per se provides information). In order to decide whether to import or modify a source name, the translator has to determine the relevance of the latter for the immediate context in which it appears, and more importantly, for the text as a whole. He will, however, only consider those functions inherent in a name that can be inferred by the source reader, rather than what an author might have had in mind when coining/choosing a name. According to Lietz (1992: 135), names themselves have a communicative value which is determined by three factors, namely *reference*, *meaning(fulness)* and an *aesthetic component* (the latter being tantamount to what Newmark 1999: 25 calls "euphony and elegance"). Regardless of the mode of transfer, choosing a target name usually implies a selection, i.e. reproducing a specific aspect of a name may preclude the reproduction of another.

Since proper names are by definition *monoreferential*, it is the translator's responsibility to ensure that source and target name are related to one and the same referent; this does generally not constitute a serious obstacle, as long as "die [...] Namen wie selbstverständlich im neuen Uebersetzungstext verwendet [werden]" (Kalverkämpfer 1996: 1020); difficulties may, however, arise in the following cases:

-if *authentic names* (names denoting real-life people/entities) and *embodied names* (real-life/biblical/literary names bestowed on fictional characters/entities) only have what Fourment-Berni [1994: 554] calls "une référence unique rélative", i.e. they are not recognized as authentic/embodied by the target readership.

-if source and target names do not automatically convey the same semiotic-symbolic meaning (e.g. a source male given name is female in the target language).

-if target readers have a hard time recognizing/memorizing source names (e.g. due to their high number and their foreignness).

-if a name that is historically established within the target culture is replaced with another.

Unless the immediate context provides enough clarification, it is the translator's task to ensure that misreadings be prevented by resorting to

stylistically appropriate referential means such as a note or a text insertion (cf. 4.6.).

On the level of *parole* (i.e. semantic-connotative) names are *meaningful; meaningfulness* ("Bedeutsamkeit") is defined as "die Summe der mit einem Namen verbundenen [...] Assoziationen, Vorstellungen und Gefühle" (Lietz 1992: 110). It is both individual and collective (although only the second is relevant for our purposes), linguistically and extralinguistically determined, and subject to changes in diachrony. More than a century ago Schuchardt (1895: 5) noticed: "Gottlieb kann sich ohne jede Schwierigkeit in volksthümliche Gesellschaft begeben, was franz. Théophile nicht kann"; a character in a French text written/set in that period whose name is *Théophile* ought thus not to be rendered as *Gottlieb* in a German translation (but rather as *Théophile* or its Latinized form *Theophilus*), if the sociological element is what the translator intends to reproduce (for further examples, cf. Newmark 1988, Lietz 1992).

As far as lexical-denotative (i.e. *langue*) meaning is concerned, etymologies ought not to be reproduced, as knowledge of the latter is usually confined to the author and to specialists only, and thus irrelevant in a reader-based translational framework: for a translator of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the history of the name *Algernon*, of Norman French origin meaning 'moustached', may be an interesting piece of information as such, since it forms an ironic contrast with *Algernon Moncrieff* (a character portrayed as rather effeminate), which, however, need not be transmitted to the target readership. Much more pertinent to the concept of communicative value is synchronically understandable (i.e. transparent) denotative meaning inherent in speaking/suggestive names. Fully transparent names appear to be the least problematic in translational terms (e.g. Nestroy's *Flora Baumscheer* > *Flora Pruningshears*, Goethe's *Herr Mittler* > *Monsieur Courtier*, Sheridan's *Careless* > *Ohnsorg*, the latter two preserving their status of real-life surnames), although a literal translation is not always possible or plausible, as a French translator of Dickens remarks in an explanatory note with regard to the name *Stephen Blackpool*: "Blackpool, littéralement 'mare noire' *(mais le nom est très plausible en anglais)*, suggère une stagnante désolation" (Dickens 1956: 1342, italics added). A literal rendering of this metaphorical name would indeed lead to the creation of an unnatural-sounding French surname, and thus to the loss of a source text artistic device. In fact, more often the alternative is an approximate rendering (*Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange* are *Hurle-Vent* and *le Manoir de la Grivelière* in Brontë 1995 and respectively 1969) or semantic substitution (il *Dottor Azzecca-Garbugli* has become *Doktor Pfiffikus* in Manzoni [1997]). Even allegorical names, which are

maximally characterizing and minimally identifying, may occasionally defy a literal translation, due to linguistic and cultural constraints (Pablé 2001): for instance, how should a German translator cope with a female character and at the same time allegorical figure, whose name is *Faith*, if 'religious faith' is masculine (besides the fact that the real-life given name *Faith* does not exist in German)? Semi- or pseudo-transparent literary names (e.g. portmanteau names) are the most insidious ones from a translational point of view, since, being (deliberately!) only insinuating, they do not admit of one clear interpretation, but rather rely on the fact that they trigger different syntagmatic/paradigmatic associations with each reader; translating/substituting such polysemantic names involves the risk that target readers are biased towards one particular (felicitous?) lexical association, or towards new (desirable?) associations. As Manini (1996: 171) rightly points out, "who would claim to know the exact associative range of [Dickensian] names like *Peggoty* or *Abel Magwitch*?". A German readership faces analogous difficulties when confronted with *Quarrengrüller*, an onomatopoeic name that doesn't mean anything, and still one feels it is the *right* name for an anarchic lone wolf. The semantic loss that translating/substituting meaningful names inevitably causes is at times compensated by a semantic 'gain', that is by an element which is in unison with the source text 'message': in Brontë (1969), *Wuthering Heights* has been rendered as *Hurlemont*, which is homophonous (or almost) to *hurlement* , 'the howling of wind' but also 'a scream, a cry (of rage, despair or suffering)' - indeed a subtle name play, considering Heathcliff's madness when Catherine dies Edgar Linton's wife, and the suffering that the owner of the haunted manor-house inflicts onto others as a consequence of that.

4.4. *Translating meaningful names at all costs: what's the price?*

Scholars like Bantas (1990, 1994) and Tymoczko (1999), who support the view that meaningful names should never be left unchanged in a translation - even if only one portion of the name can be rendered (Bantas 1990: 188) - seem to disregard - or at least fail to mention - the consequences that this practice can have for the literary work as a whole; in fact, translating meaningful names of a source text that features a coherent source culture may result in the target text portraying a culturally hybrid world (cf. Schogt 1988: 75), in which target language names appear alongside source culture names - a realistic scenario if the latter have no equivalents in the target culture and/or if translational norms encourage the practice of importing 'meaningless' source names (considering that the name repertory in a literary work does generally not consist of transparent names only). Whilst adverse to literary aesthetics, the creation of a heterogeneous world is undesirable if the value of the source text is intrinsically linked to the

source culture. That is why Newmark (1999: 26), according to whom "if there is an allegorical or meaningful element [in a name] that is alive and striking, it should in principle be translated", suggests translating the name of the Dickensian character *Wackford Squeers*, which he associates to 'whack', 'queer' and 'squint', as *Proogle Sheels* in a German text, and respectively as Italian *Randy Strabics* and French *Bigly Matrack* (Fourment-Berni [1994: 567]); Newmark's method consists in "first translat[ing] the word that underlies the proper name into the TL [whack > *prügeln* and squint > *schielen*], and then to naturalize it back into a new SL proper name" (1981: 71). Analogously, for a town called *Wrottesley* he suggests German *Foulton* and French *Pooriton* (1999: 25), both forms preserving the Anglo-Saxon toponymic suffix *-ton*. The very attempt at accomodating target and source culture (by making a name accessible to the former without forsaking the latter) is indeed laudable, because it aims at semantic equivalence without domesticating the realia of the source text (of particular relevance in 'realistic' novels like those by Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens); if adopted consistently, however, Newmark's method will yield rather absurd results: Dickens' character *Charley Bates*, often referred to as *Master Bates*, would needs become *Master Beard* in a German text, to preserve the sexual innuendo. Obviously a boy called *Bates* and a boy called *Beard* (!) don't quite conjure up similar images. Furthermore, this practice presupposes that the target reader be acquainted with the source language orthography and phonology, for if he doesn't, *Proogle Sheels* or *Foulton* are simply English names. Ideally, meaningful names should be mutually transparent, i.e. possess a similar denotational/connotational meaning for both source and target reader: in the feature film *Miracle on 34th Street*, the protagonist's name, *Kris Kringle*, an elderly gentleman who claims to be the real Santa Claus, reminds English speakers of *Christmas* (the given name *Christopher* and, hence, *Christian*) as well as of sleighs and bells (ring + jingle), while a German speaker will associate the same name with *Christkindl* ('Baby Jesus' but also 'Father Christmas').**9**

4.5. *(Un)written rules for name translation*

The ultimate decision between translating meaningful names or simply copying them should therefore always depend on the *benefits* that the target readers can draw from either transfer type with respect to the text as a whole. Newmark's normative guideline for literary name translation (1981, 1988), though still somewhat vague in its formulation, relativizes exaggerated views that call upon translators to "hunt" the author's intentions behind a name and then render them (Bantas 1994: 82), which is tantamount to saying that intentions must be detected, even if source readers are not aware of any. However, Newmark (1981: 71/2) does not decline that there are in fact scenarios which are favourable to

semantic translation, namely if "the translator is convinced that the connotations of the proper name is at least as important as the nationality, if the work is an allegory without national application", and respectively "if the culture and the message are approximately equally important" (e.g. Charles Dickens), in which case source language names should be newly coined for the target readers (cf. *Proogle Sheels*). Newmark's concept of 'message' applies to both the name as such and the name value on a micro- and macro-textual level, while 'culture' (or 'nationality') is synonymous with local colour, and only pertinent to the text as a whole. I thus propose the following refinements of the above-mentioned scenarios (in their turn open to further challenges): semantic translation (and semantic substitution) is advisable when names are suggestive/speaking and the setting of the story unspecified in its cultural dimension (e.g. Dante's *Inferno*, cf. Fourment-Berni 1994: 566); it is not, however, if the source text is set in a 'real-life' source cultural world.**10** A translation or adequate substitution becomes almost imperative (though not always practicable) iff. a non translation/substitution of one or more meaningful names will result in the target reader missing ironical, humorous, satirical etc. information which is *crucial* to his understanding and full artistic appreciation of the source text as a whole or of relevant passages: thus the macro-textual message takes precedence over culture. As far as Newmark's attitude towards allegory is concerned, I have argued (Pablé 2001) that even if a work is an 'allegory *with* strongly national application', the allegorical name ought to be rendered, provided that the abstract concept or type personified is known across cultural boundaries: thus 'universal allegory' takes precedence over culture. Hawthorne's New England tale *Young Goodman Brown* is a case in point: the female name *Faith* - Puritan in origin and motivation - is the name of Brown's goodwife, who at the same time personifies religious faith, trust and faithfulness; this, in its turn, gives rise to numerous puns on the name/noun *Faith*, which are meant as ironical comments on both Goodman Brown himself and the Puritan condition. By translating the transparent name *Faith*, the cultural dimension of the short-story is inevitably disturbed; a translation of the given/allegorical name, on the other hand, makes the double reading of *Faith* as a character and as an abstract concept accessible also to non Anglophone readers. Finally, translation may also be considered if *all* source names in the text can be adapted to a target language form (cultural homogeneity), provided that the message is not too closely linked to the source text culture.**11** It is my belief that any active encouragement towards name translation/substitution on a general basis overestimates the function assigned to meaningful literary names within the overall text: thus culture tends to take precedence over the message that a name conveys about its bearer - a message that usually becomes accessible through the character's, or other characters', actions in the course of the

story; Schogt (1988: 75) points towards this aspect when saying that in a high number of literary texts "names *underline* but do not create the impression the reader gets from the text about the [characters]. If he does not notice the connection he does not miss very much, except the feeling of being an insider" (italics added).

4.6. *Name equivalence and metalanguage*

If we assume a rather cautious attitude towards unhesitating translation of meaningful names, it seems to me that metalinguistic interventions by the translator might constitute the happy medium between re-naming through translation/substitution (cultural and, possibly, aesthetic loss) and importing source names (semantic loss), cf. also Manini (1996: 173); while the rather common practice of resorting to notes at the bottom of the page (footnotes) finds little support among the scholars (Bantas 1990, Pym 1992 et al.), since they violate the aesthetic aspect of literary translations, syntagmatic-embedded name translations are acknowledged as a metatextual means (cf. Kalverkämpfer 1996: 1022), as long as "die notwendigen Zusatzinformationen stilistisch nicht mit dem Gesamttext in Konflikt geraten. Oberste Priorität hat der Textfluss" (Lietz 1992: 194). Embedded name comments are in fact indispensable whenever an author has relied on the source readership knowing the meaning of a name, as in Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*: after introducing the protagonist *Ichabod Crane* (the surname functioning as a speaking name), the narrator goes on to say: "The cognomen of Crane was not inapplicable to his person. He was tall but exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, long arms and legs [...]" (Irving 1975: 33). The German translator (Irving 2000: 6), whose readers would not be able to grasp the connection between Crane's physical appearance and his surname, has thought fit to insert a metalinguistic comment, rather than translating (and thus Germanizing) Ichabod's family name: "[...] lebte ein ehrenwerter Herr mit Namen Ichabod Crane, *das heisst Kranich,* der sich im Schläfertal aufhielt".**12** Neither Lietz (1992) nor Kalverkämpfer (1996), however, mention explicitly that embedded metalinguistic commentaries are inappropriate when dealing with non fully transparent literary names (such as *Wackford Squeers* or *Quarrengrüller*), mainly for aesthetic reasons. Under these circumstances, the recourse to endnotes (separated from the actual translation) and, to a lesser extent, introductory notes (e.g. in the preface) seems to constitute the most elegant way of commenting on names metatextually, preferable to re-naming, since one does not 'impose' the arbitrary interpretation on the target reader (in fact one only hints at it). The French translator of *Hard Times* (Dickens 1956) applied this method (endnotes) to interpret the numerous suggestive names, among which *Gradgrind* (il y a surtout l'idée de 'moudre', renforcée par une allitération implacable) *Bounderby* (c'est à peu près Monsieur

Plastronneur), *McChoakumchild* (c'est à peu près 'étouffeur d'enfants' par gavage), *Sparsit* (ce nom suggère la lésinerie, au propre ou au figuré).

5. A case-study of personal names in Italian translations

5.1. *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Mrs. Bullfrog*

Literary critics have not failed to comment on Nathaniel Hawthorne's lavish use of expressive names in his short-stories and novels, among which *Faith* (Young Goodman Brown), *Chillingworth*, *Dimmesdale* (The Scarlet Letter), Reverend *Hooper* (The Minister's Black Veil). Quite surprisingly, no onomastic study has so far been devoted to Hawthorne's tale *Mrs. Bullfrog* (1837).

5.1.1. *You may kiss the Bullfrog!*

Mrs. Bullfrog can be read as a humorous and quite ironic story, which achieves its effect, at least in part, through a speaking name, namely the invented surname *Bullfrog*. Considering what a bullfrog actually is, i.e. a very large American frog, whose voice resembles the bellowing of a bull, it is indeed funny that the story's protagonist and narrator, Mr Thomas Bullfrog, an unmarried clerk at a dry-goods store, describes himself as a "small-sized, delicate and thin-visaged fellow [...] gifted with a feminine sensibility and too exquisite refinement" (Hawthorne: 102). Moreover, Thomas Bullfrog confesses to his reader that by dealing with women day in day out he has grown excessively sensitive about female imperfections, to the point that even "if a young angel just from Paradise, yet dressed in earthly fashion, had come and offered [him] her hand, it is by no means certain that [he] should have taken it" (103) - that an angel (or in fact any decent lady) might think twice before becoming a *Mrs. Bullfrog*, is not even taken into consideration by the self-centered little man. Thus resolving to remain perforce a bachelor all his life, one fine day, while on a journey to another state, our ‘doubting Thomas’ meets the perfect woman: Laura, a charming lady with "glossy ringlets curling on her brow, tender voice, a most angelic smile, and two rows of orient pearls gleaming between her parted red lips" (106); in the space of a fortnight the two get married and eventually leave for Mr. Bullfrog's home-town. It is during their undisturbed honeymoon on a coach that beautiful Laura reveals her 'amphibian' nature, thereby doing justice to her newly acquired name: in fact, the latter turns into a veritable ogre after the coach has capsized due to the driver's carelessness: Mr. Bullfrog describes his beloved wife, who has just launched an assault on the most imprudent coachman, as a "fearful apparition [...] a phantom of grisly aspect with a head almost bald and sunken cheeks, apparently of the feminine

gender, though hardly to be classed in the gentler sex", with "no teeth to modulate her hoarse voice" - a voice that has "a mumbled fierceness", making him "quiver like calves'-foot jelly" (105).

Upon inspection, one will find that within this story there are elements strongly reminiscent of the Frog and Princess folktales, such as the transformation-revelation motive, the repulsiveness-overcoming-reward motive, the breach of promise-to take into one's bed(room)-motive (for the latter two, cf. below), and, last but not least, the very name *Bullfrog*; Solensten (1973), who, quite surprisingly, fails to point out the onomastic link between Hawthorne's tale and the Frog-Prince tale, views the former as an inversion of the latter: instead of a repulsive frog that turns into a beautiful prince, a most charming lady turns into a toad that is all gums; moreover, unlike the Princess, who can look forward to a fulfilling life with her Prince (in all its aspects), Thomas Bullfrog, confronted with a woman whose former husband refused to complete the marriage contract because of "her most unamiable temper", finds solace in Laura's dowry.

5.1.2. *La Signora Bullfrog: more 'bull' or 'frog' ?*

In a translation-oriented analysis of *Mrs. Bullfrog*, the following observations impose themselves with respect to names:

-although the story is still enjoyable without a translation of the surname *Bullfrog*, the latter offers an additional reading (an ironic-humorous dimension) that is not just confined to a single paragraph or a single character; moreover, it is through the peculiar name *Bullfrog* that the association with the Frog-Prince motive is triggered;
-the cultural aspect, very often a crucial factor in Hawthorne's fiction (e.g. *Young Goodman Brown*, *the Scarlet Letter*), has no bearing whatsoever on the comprehensive understanding of the tale, not unlike traditional fairy-tales: there are no real places mentioned (e.g. New England), Thomas Bullfrog merely speaks of "his place of business" and reports that he made a journey "into another State" (presumably another U.S. State). According to Solensten (1973: 582), "the 'place' of the journey [is] somewhere between dream and reality [...] in a neutral territory". Neither is there a specific calendar designation indicated - "it is in 'once upon a time'" (ibid.: 584);
-there are only three names of actively involved characters mentioned, namely *Thomas Bullfrog, Laura Bullfrog* and *Jehu*, the unfortunate coachman (the latter's name occurring only once). While Thomas and Laura exist as names in other Western cultures (the former occasionally adapted morphologically), and Bullfrog is invented and fully transparent, only *Jehu* displays cultural markedness; in fact, the latter used to be a name with a certain frequency among Puritans in (Colonial) New

England (in commemoration of the Old Testament King of Israel), but also became a common designation in the English-speaking world for a fast driver (after the same *Jehu*, a furious driver) and eventually for a coachman in general;

The translator of the first (and so far only) Italian version of *Mrs. Bullfrog* (Hawthorne 1994) has seen fit not to change the surname/title, thus *la signora Bullfrog*. The edition features 15 tales by Hawthorne, of which 8 have never been published in Italian before. The translational goal set for the target text, it is presumed, must have been maximal fidelity to the original, which does not encourage name translation. Another factor which might have influenced the translator's decision are the conventions (for prose texts) prevailing in Italy for the last 50 years (Manini 1996: 172-3), which promote the transfer of the original name. The possibility that the translator has overlooked the function(s) assigned to the humorous name *Bullfrog* appears less likely, for in the preface he points to the speaking character of several names in another short-story (My Wife's Novel), which have also been left unchanged. As a consequence, *Bullfrog* is certain to be perceived as an ordinary American name by the Italian reader unacquainted with English (who, in fact, would bother to look up the 'meaning' of a surname, except for the 'professional' reader?).**13**

In Italian the source name *Bullfrog* cannot be translated by its equivalent term, i.e. *Rana Gigante*, since the latter does not look like a family name at all. As it turns out, it is equally impossible to create an Italian speaking name matching the range of associations triggered by the English term, namely strength, oversize and a loud deep voice (bull), lack of beauty/charm (frog), and a double character (amphibian); considering that the name *Bullfrog*, in the context of the tale, forges links with the Frog-Prince tale, a name like *ranocchio/ranocchia* (frog) forces itself on one's mind (Grimm's tale being known in Italian as *il Principe Ranocchio*). Moreover, *ranocchio(a)* also denotes a person with an unpleasant or husky voice (*voce di ranocchia*), which actually comes very close to *Bullfrog*, were it not for the more prominent meaning of 'lively little boy/girl' (e.g. *un ranocchio di cinque anni*). In fact, *ranocchio* conveys the impression of smallness, perhaps also because associated with *pidocchio* (louse), both derived from a Latin diminutive *-uculus*. That is why *ranocchione* ('big frog') may be the preferable variant, since it eliminates any association with a toddler (*-one* is a suffix of enlargement) and retains its links with the Frog-Prince (il Principe Ranocchio). The lexeme *rospo* (toad), on the other hand, connotes ugliness and repulsiveness; the word (both noun and adjective) is also used to refer to an ill-tempered and/or uncomely person (in fact, Laura Bullfrog turns out to be a *rospo* in every single sense of the word). Since Italian patronyms often carry the plural

morpheme, the surname *Rospi*, or its hyperbolic *Rosponi* (< *rospone* 'big toad'), as well as *Ranocchioni* are likely to be the best possible name substitutes. Although in two passages the singular form is the preferable variant (to preserve contextual ambiguity), one may consider turning *Rosponi/Ranocchioni* into *Rospone/Ranocchione* in these two particular cases, thereby conveying the impression that Thomas and Laura are consciously being funny (rather than the circumstances in which they happen to find themselves in): towards the end of the story Mrs. Bullfrog tells her surprisingly pragmatic husband: "I have kept [the money] all for *my dear Bullfrog*" (108), which sounds as if Laura was implying that she knew she would marry a bullfrog (who else in fact would want her?); this announcement gets Thomas to conclude: "I rejoice at the wrongs which drove thee to this blessed lawsuit [for breach of promise], *happy Bullfrog* that I am!" (108); unlike the frog in the fairy-tale, who, after his transformation, has good reason to call himself a 'happy prince', Thomas proclaims himself 'happy frog'. Inevitably, the Italian translation (1994: 104) loses the name-related humour: "[...] li ho conservati tutti per *il mio Bullfrog*" and respectively "[...] esulto pensando ai torti che vi hanno condotto a quel processo benedetto. *Felice Bullfrog* che sono!", as opposed to: "li ho conservati tutti per *il mio Rospone/Ranocchione*" and "*Felice Rospone/Ranocchione* che sono!"**14**

The Christian name *Laura*, moreover, contributes to additional humour, especially in an Italian version (though the educated source reader will also be aware of it, cf. Newmark 1988: 215); in fact, in a literary context Laura is commonly associated with Petrarch's namesake, the perfect female. Making all names target specific thus leads to a maximally comic effect: the Italian reader is confronted with a certain *Tommaso* (although the form *Thomas* could just as well be retained), who dreams of the unattainable woman and finds her to his utter surprise; the name of that lady is, quite coincidentally, *Laura*! Laura willingly adopts the family name *Rosponi/Ranocchioni* and, in fact, turns out to be one. By deleting the coachman's name *Jehu* in the target text and replacing it with a common noun, i.e. *il nostro cocchiere* (< instead of *il nostro Jehu*), the source names have all been integrated into the target linguistic and cultural system.

5.2. *Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest*

Critical studies that deal with the rendering of names in translations of Oscar Wilde's classic *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) are indeed rare, which is quite surprising, considering that it is "a play about names and a play on names" (Kaplan & Bernays 1997: 172). Extensive - though name-unrelated - studies on German translations of Wilde's play have been done by Kohlmayer (1993 & 1996); Bantas (1994),

Manini (1996) and Newmark (1999), in their turn, merely touch upon the issue of personal names in *The Importance*.

5.2.1. *To be earnest or not to be Ernest*

Wilde's hilarious comedy revolves around the homophonous pair *earnest/Ernest* (adjective/proper name): the Christian name *Ernest* is derived from an Old High German noun *eornost* 'seriousness, battle', while *Earnest*, a frequent variant of *Ernest*, may have arisen as a consequence of Wilde's confusing - but legendary - pun. In a translational framework like the one proposed in this article the focus must be on the socio-cultural value assigned to the term/name *E(a)rnest* in late 19th/early 20th century England, upon which the play's reception/perception by the audience/readership ultimately relied. Wilde's contemporaries had in fact been living in an age of moral/intellectual *earnestness*, in which adjectives like *serious, severe, stern, strict, austere* and, of course, *earnest* marked a cultural revolution that had started in the 1830's. This movement had originally arisen within religious circles and addressed the lower classes, but eventually also captivated the middle and upper classes, the faithful and the philanthropists alike, who adopted the philosophy of *earnestness* as their new creed: its core message consisted in emphasizing the importance of having genuine beliefs about the most fundamental questions of life and putting those beliefs into practice according to one's talents and one's social position. The incentive had been the observation by critical minds that upper and middle class society, as a consequence of being driven exclusively by social ambitions and pleasure-seeking, had become altogether indifferent towards the lower classes and their deplorable economic situation. Although often Christians by profession, the former were only *nominally* so, i.e. their religion was pleasant and easy, their sense of responsibility, and in fact their conscience, slumbering. Members of a thoroughly *earnest* society thus needed to become hard-working, dutiful, unselfish, heedless of any conventions and constantly striving towards self-improvement; in short, a society inspired by a vision - an ideal - worth living for; a sincere and truth-loving society, in which the false and the sinful were stamped as false and sinful. Those were serious times demanding serious measures: frivolity and idleness needed to be replaced by a fervent spirit of enterprise, wasting away one's intellect by playing with ideas or with words was simply shameful.

The Importance of Being Earnest was originally performed before "an audience which included many members of the great and the good, former cabinet ministers and privy councillors as well as actors, writers, academics, and enthusiasts" (Raby 1995: 67), who had all in some way been exposed to the pervasive spirit of earnestness; the pun on

earnest-Ernest must have had an impact on Victorians that we as a modern audience/readership cannot possibly comprehend in its fullness. In fact, Wilde's play is fraught with topical references and allusions to the intellectual and moral concept of earnestness, the latter being ridiculed from different angles and by means of different characters. Already the play's title, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, accompanied by the subtitle *A Trivial Comedy for Serious People*, speaks for itself, as really*serious* people would not have allowed themselves to indulge in *trivial* commedies. The most earnest character in the play is Lady Bracknell, who is being 'serious' about everything. In her opinions one can find concepts or terms typical of someone who is *in earnest*, although they recur in slightly different contexts:**15** "I do not in any way approve of the modern *sympathy* with invalids. I consider it morbid" (Wilde 1980: 20), "Health is the primary *duty* of life" (21), "I am glad to hear [that Ernest smokes]. There are far too many *idle* men in London" (27), "I was not aware that Mr. Bunbury was interested in *social legislation*. If so, he is well punished for his morbidity" (87). Naturally - not paradoxically - Lady Bracknell has "some particular reason for disliking the name [Ernest]" (104): she earnestly disapproves of the 'culture of altruism', whose major exponent in the play is the late Mr. Thomas Cardew, "an old gentleman of a very charitable and kindly disposition" (30).

The four younger characters (Jack, Algernon, Gwendolen and Cecily) have a different notion of *seriousness*; according to Algernon, "one has to be *serious* about something, if one wants to have any amusements in life" (71); he goes on to reproach Jack for being "serious about everything", which points to "an absolutely trivial nature" (77). Jack, in its turn, says, referring to himself: "when one is placed in the position of guardian, one has to adopt a *high moral tone* on all subjects. It's one's *duty* to do so" - a duty which "can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one's health or happiness" (14). In fact, Jack's precarious state of health is confirmed by his protégée Cecily: "Dear Uncle Jack is so very serious! Sometimes he is so serious that I think he cannot be quite well" (42). Unlike her mother, Gwendolen adores the name *Ernest*: in fact, according to her, "there is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence. It is a divine name. The only really safe name is Ernest" (23/24), which is echoed by Cecily: "I pity any poor married woman whose husband is not called Ernest" (64). The two girls' keenness on marrying a man named Ernest is grounded, among others, in the fact that the latter became extremely fashionable in the last quarter of the 19th century (Dunkling & Gosling 1983: 86). In a world where appearances are everything, Ernest, being nominally congenial to the Zeitgeist, is *the name*; to be called Ernest (or to be married to one) is indeed *safe* because it saves one from being earnest, and at the same time guarantees the safety of one's social identity.

Ernest, in short, is a name that "looks everything" - behind which, however, there may be a most secretive and most wicked nature hiding, as Gwendolen and Cecily imagine in their romantic reveries (Algernon and Jack/John, in their turn, "produce absolutely no vibrations" [24]): in fact, the story of Jack's romantic origin "naturally stir[s] the deeper fibres of [Gwendolen's] nature" (38). That Jack adopts the name of Ernest when coming to London in order to escape the seriousness of the countryside is quite ironic, considering the purpose of his regular visits; when being asked what brings him up to town, Jack answers: "Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring one anywhere?" (7). It is equally ironic that by beguiling Gwendolen and Cecily into thinking that his name is Ernest and respectively that he has a brother, Jack has always, though unwittingly, been telling the truth: he has been *E(a)rnest* all the time, he who confides to Algernon that "the truth isn't quite the sort of thing one tells to a nice sweet refined girl" (34). Deception and reality thus merge into one and the same thing, so that being earnest is tantamount to not being earnest. When Jack (now Ernest for good), on being reprimanded by Lady Bracknell for "displaying signs of triviality" (i.e. non-earnestness), replies that "on the contrary, [he has] realized for the first time in [his] life the vital Importance of Being Earnest" (the audience originally heard no difference between earnest and Ernest), he has actually understood the all-encompassing dominance of form: in fact, without a *proper* name, Gwendolen would not marry him, just as without a proper lineage and address - and Victoria Station, the Brighton Line is not considered to be one - there is no hope of becoming Lady Bracknell's son-in-law. Faced with the ghastly news of being a man who "all his life [...] has been speaking nothing but the truth" (a crime, as it turns out, not even a Miss Prism is guilty of), Ernest is promptly consoled by Gwendolen, who feels "that [he is] sure to change" (104). In fact, shortly before, the same Gwendolen declares: "in matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity is the vital thing" (83); a creed that Algernon fully embraces: what one says needs to be "perfectly phrased, and [only] as true as any observation in civilized life should be" (34). Likewise, Cecily, on being asked whether she gives any credence to Algernon's (sincere!) explanation, denies, adding: "but that does not affect the wonderful beauty of his answer" (83). The play's title does therefore not admit of any double-meanings: it is "perfectly phrased", and hence appropriate as the play's final statement in the mouth of Algernon's very brother.

5.2.2. *The Importance of Being Earnest in Italian translations*

For the present analysis I have considered 5 Italian versions of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, all dating from 'recent' times, i.e. Wilde (1967), (1979)**16**, (1985), (1990) and (1993). Manini's conclusion that personal names are left unchanged in modern Italian translations of

Restoration and 18th century drama (1996: 169) have only in part been confirmed with regard to *The Importance*: no modifications on names have been operated in Wilde (1979) and (1985), whereas the translator of Wilde (1990), who pursued the same translational policy, has been inconsistent in two particular instances (cf. below). The translator of Wilde (1993) has replaced the source name *Ernest* with a target form, just as the translator of Wilde (1967), who, moreover, has integrated some of the characters' names into the target cultural system, namely *Guendalina*, *Cecilia*, *Tommaso Cardew* and *Giovanni* (the latter used by Algernon, disguised as Ernest, when greeting Jack in the presence of others).

The suggestive names in *The Importance*, if merely transferred, are sure to lose their meaningfulness for an Italian readership/audience (and not only for them): even though *Merriman* may remain transparent, only few will notice the appropriateness of the surname *Worthing* for Jack, a Justice of the Peace. *Miss Prism*, moreover, sounds like a blending of the adjectives *prissy* and *prim,* and reminds one of *prison* (thus suggesting narrow-mindedness). regrettably, none of the Italian translators taken into consideration comment on the (for the source reader so obviously) expressive nature of that name. *Reverend Chasuble* has his surname from *chasuble*, used to refer to the outermost garment worn by bishops and priests in celebrating the Eucharist: only one translator, i.e. Wilde (1985: 35), has commented on the name in a footnote, by translating it as "pianeta < cà sula" ('little house'), as indeed *planeta* was the usual term used for the primitive sacerdotal garments; it is not plausible, however, how this kind of information could possibly be useful for the target reader. I do not share Newmark's reservations (1999: 26) regarding the direct transfer of the names *Merriman, Chasuble* and *Miss Prism* in the latest German translation (Wilde 1999): should the latter have been changed into *Miss Prude* (< Ger. *prüde*)? Especially when considering that the meaning of *chasuble* was indicated in a typescript dating back to 1899 (Wilde 1980: 4).

5.2.3. *The Importance of Translating Ernest*

Two aspects of name rendering in *The Importance* require special attention, i.e. the given name *Ernest* and the play's *title* (both polysemantic and polyfunctional elements of the source text). As can be inferred from the list below, the translators have approached the problem in different ways:

-Wilde (1967): Ernest has become Severo; *L'importanza di essere Severo*;
-Wilde (1979): Ernest is copied; *L'importanza di essere probo*;

-Wilde (1985): Ernest is copied; *L'importanza di essere onesto*;
-Wilde (1990): Ernest is copied except for the title and the play's last statement (Ernesto); *L'importanza di chiamarsi Ernesto*;
-Wilde (1993): Ernest has become Fedele; *L'importanza di essere Fedele*;

Three translators have adopted the name Ernest for their text, although none of them has entitled their translation *L'importanza di essere Ernest*. By not replacing the source name with a target name that reproduces the homophonous effect in the target language, the ambivalence of the original title is naturally lost. *L'importanza di essere probo/di essere onesto* merely refer to the (un)importance attached to the virtues of righteousness and honesty, whereas *L'importanza di chiamarsi Ernesto* stresses the role of having a specific name, namely Ernest (and hence the more natural-sounding *chiamarsi*, which replaces *essere*). Undoubtedly, the titles *L'Importanza di essere probo /onesto* are received quite differently with respect to the original: the former are in fact strictly ironic (as the play illustrates, it is important to *seem* - not to be - honest). In order for the Italian title to approximate to the ambiguity inherent in the source title (without forsaking the name *Ernest*), one would have to find a target language-specific way of playing with the two opposing concepts (virtue versus proper name). By combining the titles of Wilde (1985) and (1990), this effect is made possible: *L'importanza di essere onesto...o Ernesto*, and respectively *L'importanza di sembrare onesto e chiamarsi Ernesto*, where homophony (earnest-Ernest) has in fact been replaced by assonance (onesto-Ernesto). The Italian reader acquainted with the text is likely to interpret the suggested titles as 'it is important to seem/sound *honest* and to be called *Ernest*'. If we postulate, as Manini (1996: 169) does, "the utter impossibility of removing [the play] from its British milieu and integrating it into another cultural system", the awkwardness of having one name in the title (*Ernesto*) and another in the text (*Ernest*) appears ultimately as the lesser evil, especially in consideration of the fact that the source pun has been safeguarded.

The decision to import the name *Ernest* into the target text has consequences on the lexical-semantic as well as on the aesthetic level, as the following passage of act 1 illustrates: Algernon, on being informed by his friend Ernest that the latter's real name is Jack, replies, with his usual wit: "I have introduced you to everyone as Ernest. [...] You look as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest-looking person I ever saw in my life." (12) The translations in Wilde (1985: 45) and (1990: 41) render the passage as follows: "Ti ho presentato a tutti come Ernest. [...] Hai perfino la faccia da Ernest. Sei la persona più tipo-Ernest che abbia mai visto in vita mia", and respectively "Io ti ho sempre presentato a tutti come Ernest. [...] Tu sei la persona

dall'aspetto più rispettabilmente e onestamente Ernest che io abbia mai visto in vita mia". It is evident that neither translation does justice to the original; it is indeed hard to imagine that the Wildean dandy Algernon, who some time later will pride himself on his "perfectly phrased" statements, would indeed be satisfied with such unidiomatic utterances, irrespective of the fact that, according to Jack, Algernon "never talk[s] anything but nonsense" (40).**17** However, the translator of Wilde (1990: 25) justifies his solution exactly on these grounds, thus treating form and contents as one: "[abbiamo rinunciato] certamente a un piccolo gioco di parole, ma - forse - lusingando la commedia nel suo (fondamentale) aspetto di *nonsense*". In a later passage, the same translator (1990: 57) tries to temper his awkward rendering by portraying Algernon as someone who takes his fancy talk seriously: on being asked by Jack whether he believes what he has just said to be clever (Wilde 1980: 33), Algy replies: "È *molto ben* detto! Ed *assolutamente* vero, come dovrebbe esserlo *ogni* osservazione nel mondo civile". In fact, by manipulating the original passage, "it's *perfectly* phrased and *quite* as true as *any* observation in civilized life should be" (34), the target reader's attention is focused, not on *how* Algernon has said it, but on *what* he has said. The translator of Wilde (1985: 66), in his turn, stays faithful to the original: "È formulata in maniera *impeccabile*! E non è meno vera di quanto dovrebbe esserlo una *qualsiasi* osservazione fatta fra gente civile"; Algernon does not, however, achieve the same perfection when announcing earlier on: "sei la persona più tipo-Ernest che abbia mai visto in vita mia" (ibid.: 45).

Another aspect to be taken into account when copying the name *Ernest* regards Gwendolen and Cecily's enthusiasm for that very name; without any adjustments, in fact, it is not clear why names like Jack or Algernon do not "thrill", whereas Ernest does.**18** The translator of Wilde (1985: 34) has felt justified to 'semanticize' the name for his readership, which he comments on briefly in a pre-textual note. When Gwendolen confesses to her wooer that her ideal has always been to love someone named Ernest, she goes on to say: "In questo nome c'è qualcosa che ispira una fiducia totale. *Mi fa pensare all'onestà"* (55). Later on, Cecily tells Algernon the same, namely "In questo nome c'è qualcosa che sembra ispirare una totale fiducia. *Non so, forse l'assonanza con onesto* " (100). Inevitably, however, the play's final pun on *earnest-Ernest* is lost in both Wilde (1985) and (1990): in the original Aunt Augusta reprimands Ernest for "displaying signs of triviality", i.e. non-seriousness, whereupon her nephew answers "on the contrary, Aunt Augusta. I've now realized for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest" (105); the humorous effect relies on the opposition *trivial-earnest*, realized on the phonetic level (which justifies Jack's 'on the contrary'), while on the level of contents the latter merely alludes to his newly acquired Christian name. The translator of Wilde

(1985: 143) renders the final passage as follows: "Nipote, mi sembri manifestare sintomi di frivolezza", which is followed by Jack's answer: "Al contrario, zia Augusta, mi rendo conto per la prima volta in vita mia della vitale Importanza di Essere Onesto". Besides the fact that *frivolo-onesto* do not actually form a contrast in Italian, Jack is indeed "displaying signs of triviality", namely by violating the very 'dominance of form' in his conclusion, i.e. by not exploiting the stylistic elegance and social safety offered by homophony.**19** In Wilde (1990: 115), Lady Bracknell says: "Nipote mio, mi sembra che tu stia dando segni eccessivi di leggerezza", whereupon Jack: "Al contrario, zia Augusta, mi sono reso conto ora, per la prima volta in vita mia, dell'essenziale Importanza di Essere un Serio Ernesto". In this version the translator has been careful to reproduce the source text dichotomy (leggero-serio); Jack's 'un serio Ernesto' looks as if modelled on Algernon's (his brother's!) previous "un serio bunburista" (92), intended by the latter as someone who is serious about bunburying (i.e. changing identity to escape the boredom of life). Uttered by Jack, who, in his brother's words, is "one of the most advanced Bunburyists" (15), this statement could be interpreted as evidence that Jack, faced with imminent marriage, has come to realize the vital importance of taking on Algernon's creed, namely that "a man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it" (16). On the other hand, *un serio Ernesto* does little justice to the wit inherent in the original pun: within the purely verbal universe of the play, in fact, to say *a serious Ernest* constitutes an instance of utter triviality; if this was really what Jack has come to realize, he would be just as serious-minded as Wilde's *Ernest Allonby* in *A Woman of No Importance*, of whom Mrs. Allonby learned one day, to her great disappointment, that he had never loved any woman before her.**20** It is noteworthy that both translators have imitated Wilde's way of spelling Jack's final statement, which in the original is visually identical with the title; the play is thus brought back to its starting-point, the dominance of form reconfirmed with each performance/reading: "I've now realized [...] *the vital Importance of Being Earnest*"; the Italian texts have: "mi rendo conto [...] della vitale *Importanza di Essere Onesto*" (Wilde 1985: 143) and respectively "mi sono reso conto ora [...] dell'essenziale *Importanza di Essere un Serio Ernesto*" (Wilde 1990: 115). Especially in the second case, the capital letters make no sense, firstly because Jack’s conclusion is not formally congruent with the title, and secondly because in Italian titles capitalized initial letters are reserved for proper names alone.

The translators of Wilde (1967) and (1993) have chosen to act against the prevailing conventions of leaving names untouched, by substituting *Severo/Fedele* for *Ernest.* If on the one hand this practice creates a culturally artificial situation (an English setting with English girls being in love with an Italian name), on the other hand this very practice allows

one to avoid many artificialities encountered in the culturally faithful translations (cf. Wilde 1985, 1990). The titles (*L'importanza di essere Severo/Fedele*) retain the ambiguous character inherent in the original; they may even be said to surpass Wilde in one aspect, and this for purely linguistic reasons: in fact, the Italian Christian names are not only homophonous (earnest-Ernest) but also homographous (severo-Severo/fedele-Fedele), thus blurring the distinction between signifier and signified altogether (i.e. also in the written text).**21** On the other hand, as the translator of Wilde (1990: 25) points out, the capital spelling in Italian titles is automatically associated with proper names, so that, strictly speaking, *L'importanza di essere Severo/Fedele* and *L'importanza di essere severo/fedele* are not congruous as they would naturally be in English. However, by replacing the source name with a functional target form (*Severo/Fedele),* the translators have been able to render the passage in which Algernon puns on Jack's first name in a way congenial to Wilde's aestheticism: "Ti ho presentato a tutti come Severo. [...] Hai tutta l'aria di essere Severo. Sei la persona dell'aspetto più severo che abbia mai veduto in vita mia" (Wilde 1967: 622), and respectively "Ti ho presentato a tutti come Fedele. [...] Hai l'aspetto di uno che si chiama Fedele. Sei il più fedele ritratto di un Fedele che abbia mai visto in vita mia" (Wilde 1993: 86). In Wilde (1967: 632), Jack becomes a name punster even before due time: "Il mio povero fratello *Severo* trapassa *severamente* a Parigi, in consequenza di un grave raffreddore", where the original has "my poor brother Ernest is carried off suddenly in Paris, by a severe chill" (35).

The substitution of *Severo* for *Ernest* appears to be a felicitous one indeed, not only because the name happens to denote a quality**22**, but primarily because *severità* is a central aspect of Victorian *earnestness*.**23** The Italian adjective *severo* is used to describe a person's intransigent attitude when it comes to norms and principles, especially in questions of education and upbringing: Lady Bracknell is indeed, in accordance to the Victorian ideal of austerity, such a mother, who is in full command over her daughter's destiny, and the same may be said for Jack Worthing, the guardian, who "always lays stress on [Cecily's] German [lesson] when he is leaving for town" (41). His "gravity of demeanour", as Miss Prism calls it, i.e. his 'seriousness', is indeed characteristic of someone who is *severo*. When Jack tells Algernon that the latter cannot possibly understand what it means to be a guardian, he adds: "Non sei abbastanza *severo*" (623), which does not parallel the original: "you are hardly *serious* enough" (14).**24** Furthermore, *severo* also depicts a life-style (*una vita severa, le virtù severe*) - the renunciation of worldly pleasures - as well as artistic/intellectual seriousness (*un' inclinazione intellettuale severa*), the treating of serious arguments. One key aspect inherent in Victorian *earnestness* that Italian *severità* does not cover is *truthfulness* - a

virtue satirically portrayed in the character of Jack, who deceives the people in the countryside by inventing a libertine brother called, ironically enough, Ernest. In fact, three translators (Wilde 1985, 1990, 1993) declare to have considered rendering the pun on *earnest-Ernest* as Italian *franco-Franco* ('frank'/'Francis'), but eventually refrained from doing so because "nel concetto di 'franchezza' si perde la seriosità [...] della *earnestness*" (Wilde 1985: 34) as well as the sense of morality that typically drives the serious Victorian (on that score *onesto* would be clearly preferable to *franco*, but the former has the disadvantage of not being a given name).

The substitution of *Fedele* for *Ernest* creates its own humorous/ironic effects within the play too;**25** Cecily's confession, "c'è qualcosa in questo nome che ispira una fiducia assoluta" (Wilde 1993: 123), is justified, considering that *fedele* has the meaning of 'trustworthy'; when Gwendolen tells Cecily about her fiancé's (Jack's) "strong upright nature", the translator (126) has replaced the term *truth* with *fidelity*, thereby punning on Jack's name: "*Fedele* è di natura sincera e forte. In lui c'è lo spirito della *fedeltà* e dell'onore". That Jack and Algernon want to get christened a second time under the name of *Fedele*, is ironic, since the latter is also a term used for a 'member of the Church', which implies that someone who is *un fedele* has already been baptized (as it turns out, Jack has already been christened *Fedele*). Another ironic element inherent in the name *Fedele* ('faithful') emerges when Gwendolen and Cecily are confronted with the possibility that Fedele has proposed to more than one girl. When Jack, at the end of the play, declares: "mi rendo conto come sia vitale l'importanza di *chiamarsi* Fedele" (152), he lays bare the hypocrisy behind his 'natural' name, for, according to him, it is only important to be called Faithful, rather than to be faithful. By opting for the verb *chiamarsi* (instead of *essere*), the translator of Wilde (1993) has deliberately avoided the name pun (while retaining it in the title), thus preferring the unambiguous, unsubtle ending. On that score, Wilde (1967) offers a much more satisfactory rendering, which preserves the name play (*Severo-severo*) in accordance to the original: "Al contrario, zia Augusta, mi rendo conto ora per la prima volta dell'importanza di essere Severo" (666).

6. Conclusion

As I have attempted to show in the present study, proper names play as a rule a subordinate role with respect to the literary text they are embedded in; in fact, the concept of communicative equivalence does not foster acculturation, i.e. the cultural dimension of a literary text (of which proper names form an essential part) ought not to be shifted towards the target side, unless the target reader's understanding of the text as a whole depends on it. Inevitably, something of the name always

gets 'lost' in the transfer process, regardless of the type. Metatextual comments (and separate notes in particular) are seen as a useful instrument to bring the source names to the target reader without depriving the former of their source cultural form. There are cases, however, in which a name translation/substitution is recommendable and thus the cultural aspect of a text of secondary importance; only a thorough translation-oriented analysis of the source text can determine if that is really the case. Translators should then be courageous enough to disregard translational conventions that prevail within their cultural community and rid themselves of an exaggerated sense of loyalty towards the author and his work for the sake of their (frequently overestimated) readership. The Italian texts studied for our purpose have, at least partly, confirmed the translators' reluctance to take action when it comes to modifying personal names: Hawthorne's *Mrs. Bullfrog* provides only vague information as to its cultural dimension (not unlike a fairy-tale), and still no attempt has been made to preserve the source text-specific humorous/ironic effects so obviously conveyed through the invented surname. Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, in its turn, cannot possibly be separated from its specific national background; still, an adequate name substitution (e.g. Severo for Ernest), accompanied by appropriate commentaries, enables the translator to reproduce a device characteristic of the author's linguistic humour, i.e. the Wildean pun, which plays an essential role within *The Importance* (not only in rapport to the text-specific *Ernest-earnest*, but also to the concept of punning in general). Quantitative aspects involved in name transfer, e.g. when it comes to rendering titles, have been treated as subordinate to the skopos of communicative equivalence: the change of quantity in my suggested title *L'importanza di sembrare onesto e chiamarsi Ernesto* appears justified, as the latter stays faithful to the original 'idea', unlike the titles chosen for the three Italian translations featuring the source name Ernest. Obviously, names, being language and culture-specific, are sometimes subject to constraints which cannot be overcome forcibly (e.g. the gender-factor related to the name *Faith* in the German translation of Hawthorne's *Young Goodman Brown*, or the suitability of German *Ernst* as a substitute for Wilde's *Ernest*, which no Romance language can possibly match).

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Notes:

1. Although this study concerns itself primarily with proper names in written texts that are part of the so-called *serious* literature, some aspects are equally valid for names in light fiction and comic books, as well as in audio-visually determined situations (e.g. names in drama performance, cf. Schultze 1991: 92/3, or in movies and cartoons).

2. Proper names can be paraphrased intralingually (and in fact also interlingually), e.g. *Scipio* vs *'the destroyer of Carthage'* or *Paris* vs *'the capital of France';* however, such 'synonyms' do not actually concern meaning in the proper sense (i.e. denotative), but are rather collective (or idiolectal) associations on the level of connotation.

3. Name pairs like Lat. *Theophilus/Amadeus* vs Ger. *Gottfried/Gottlieb* do not share the "Lautgestalt" but only the meaning (friend/adorer of God), as opposed to Fr. *Guillaume* vs It. *Guglielmo*, which derive from the same etymon, but do not share a synchronic type of meaning; semantic name pairs like *Amadeo/Gottlieb* did either arise independently from each other, or are the result of a historical (thus non repeatable) act of translation: "Demnach ist das Gemeinsame gewesen und ist nicht mehr und kann uns heute nicht mehr das Recht geben die betreffenden Namen zu vertauschen" (Schuchardt 1895: 5), i.e. although these names are translatable *stricto sensu*, they are not, under normal circumstances, translated in real-life situations, since there is no need to do so. In fact, it is unlikely that an Italian named *Amadeo*, who is acquainted with the German language, would introduce himself in a German context by saying "Guten Tag. Ich heisse Gottlieb".

4. Manini (1996: 165) supplements Zimmer's morphological classes of names with two useful sub-classes, namely *transformations*, i.e. "single, indivisible units that may either result from the orthographic, phonological or morphological modification of a common noun" (e.g. the surnames Grass*i,* Speck*s*, Cra*i*ne), and *portmanteau names* ("a blending of two common nouns"), e.g. *Murdstone* (< 'murder' + 'stone'). Portmanteau names basically correspond to Zimmer's pseudo-transparent compounds, with the sole difference that lexical blending constitutes a deliberate act, which may be the case when a name is coined for literary purposes.

5. An author may also choose to give his character an unsuitable name for symbolic, ironic, humorous or 'aesthetic' reasons: name and character do then not form an intrinsic unity, but there still remains the author's deliberateness and premeditation in his naming practice and the knowledge that he has of his character when bestowing the name: Tennessee Williams' *Blanche* Du Bois (Streetcar Named Desire) is not 'white' and virginal as her name suggests (although this is what she longs to be), but, as it turns out, a former prostitute, while Dickens' James *Steerforth* (David Copperfield) is devious and treacherous, in spite of his trust-inspiring name.

6. Of real-life personal names, nicknames (including epithets) are closest to literary names, since they are usually not bestowed on new-borns; these kinds of names constitute an instance of *re-naming* which does not serve identification in the first place. Quite like literary names, some nicknames are 'mini-biographies' of the people they refer to. Tymoczko (1999: 232) considers the possibility that in (non Western) cultures additional names might be given at the entry into adulthood in order to 'correct' the appropriateness of one's birth name.

7. Suggestive and speaking names are 'artificial' in so far as transparent conventional names are only suggestive or speaking if the context makes them so: in Oscar Wilde's social comedy *Lady Windermere's Fan*, Mr. *Hopper*'s (real-life) surname is 'speaking' because the character 'happens' to be Australian, which is why *Hopper* is naturally associated with kangaroos.

8. When dealing with older works (19th century and earlier), the translator will have to make up his mind whether to determine the communicative value of a work from the point of view of a modern source readership or the original readership; the effect that a literary work has on source readers living in different centuries might vary considerably, also with respect to the understanding of name meanings, allusions, associations etc. A case in point will be presented in chapter 5.1., regarding Nathaniel Hawthorne's short-story *Mrs. Bullfrog*; while a modern source readership is likely to recognize in it the Frog-Prince theme, only few of Hawthorne's contemporaries must have been acquainted with Grimms' fairy-tale of the Iron Henry (whereas Hawthorne himself supposedly was, cf. Solensten 1973: 588, footnote 2).

9. Purely visually (rather than audio-visually) motivated mutual transparency of names is also possible; however, it generally presupposes the target reader's acquaintance with the source language phonology/orthography. Names like Dickens' *Scrooge* (Christmas

Carol) and Caroll's *Boojum* (The Hunting of the Snark), in their appropriate contexts, will not only strike English-speaking readers as sounding eerie or gloomy. If the source meaningful names are not taken from the source language, source and target names may also be mutually transparent; a case in point is E.A. Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado*: its protagonists' ironic names, *Fortunato* and *Montrésor*, will pose no difficulties in a Spanish/Italian/French translation; the source (i.e. English-speaking) reader, in its turn, is likely to grasp the irony by relating *Montrésor* to English 'treasure' and *Fortunato* to English 'fortunate'.

10. Transparent nicknames and epithets are exempted from this constraint, since they are descriptors rather than names *stricto sensu*: in Manzoni (1997), *l'Innominato* has thus become *der Unbenannte* and respectively *il Griso* has been rendered as *der Graue*. Analogously, conventional (non speaking) names may be adapted to a target language-specific form if a story takes place in 'no man's land'. If a source text portrays the target cultural world (as seen through the eyes of the source culture), names will naturally be nativized (e.g. Shakespeare's *Ròmeo and Juliet*, which has become *Roméo e Giulietta* in the Italian translation). Some source historical (as well as biblical/mythical/classical-literary) personages may already possess a target language-specific name form, e.g. Eng. *Richard the Lionhearted* > It. *Riccardo Cuor di Leone*, Fr. *Jeanne d'Arc* > It. *Giovanna d'Arco*, Eng. *Hamlet* > It. *Amleto*; since these names are historically established within the target culture, copying the source language form may prove to be confusing (cf. 4.3., unique reference).

11. This is what the French translator of Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften* (Goethe 1954) did: in fact, he not only substituted a French speaking name for the German one (*Herr Mittler* > *Monsieur Courtier*), but also Frenchized the remaining conventional German names, thus *Edouard*, *Charlotte*, *Odile* and *Lucienne* .

12. Metalinguistic commentaries do not only occur in target texts; in fact, there might be situations in which a name explanation/translation within the source text becomes awkward in the target text, which is the case whenever a source name belongs to the target language: In Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche du Bois explains to Mitch the meaning of her French first and last name, since the latter does not speak French: "[Du Bois]. It's a French name. It means *woods* and Blanche means *white*. So the two together mean *white woods*". In the French translation (Williams 1949: 81), Blanche ends up paraphrasing (not translating!) her own name for Mitch, who happens to speak French: "[Du Bois]. C'est un nom français. Cela veut dire: forêt blanche".

13. Given the fact that the translator of *Mrs. Bullfrog* did choose not to translate/replace the surname, he should at least have granted his target readership the possibility of grasping the functions that were assigned to the name *Bullfrog* within the original; this could have been done, for instance, by explaining what *Bullfrog* means literally in Italian and thereby pointing out that bullfrogs and Hawthorne's *Mrs. Bullfrog* do have some things in common, among which that of being 'amphibious' (the allusion works in Italian, since *anfibio* is used with the same meaning).

14. As the name *Bullfrog* forms part of the story's title, a translator might choose not to dismiss the original form altogether, thus keeping it as (part of) the target title: e.g. *Mrs. Bullfrog: La Signora Rosponi/Ranocchioni.* In case only the Italian name is retained, the original title would have to be mentioned, ideally in an endnote after the main text, accompanied by a short explanation (rather than a justification) as to why the name has been changed.

15. The words in italics inside the quotations taken from both the original and its translations are meant to illustrate specific points or meanings of specific words; no italics have been added, unless stated so, when quoting from secondary sources.

16. The text of Wilde (1979) does not constitute a primary source; information about the latter translation has been taken from Manini (1996: 169), who refers to it very briefly.

17. Presumably, Algernon's pun (the most earnest-looking person) was deleted in a Spanish translation (1960: 93) that has nativized *Ernest* into *Ernesto* for exactly this reason.

18. In fact, in the Spanish translation (1960: 100/131), neither Gwendolen nor Cecily are able to explain why they love the name *Ernesto*: "No sé qué tiene este nombre, que me fascina" (as opposed to the original, which has "There is something in that name that seems to inspire absolute confidence").

19. A conclusion which does more justice to the original (while retaining the name *Ernest* within the text) would thus be, in accordance to the previously suggested titles: "Al contrario, zia Augusta, mi rendo conto per la prima volta in vita mia della vitale Importanza di essere onesto...*voglio dire Ernesto*".

20. The Spanish translator (1969: 161), faced with the same difficulty, has tried to reproduce the original wit (lost due to the target name) by

having Jack add: "por primera vez en mi vida he comprendido la importancia *de ser formal* ... y de llamarse Ernesto". Undoubtedly, this rendering is preferable to the alternative encountered in the Italian translation (Wilde 1990: 115), i.e. "un serio Ernesto", for the Spanish *formal* has different meanings, all compatible with the character Jack Wothing, namely 'serious-minded, responsible, reliable, correct'; the translator thus tries to achieve the same effect as the original by splitting name/adjective (Earnest) into adjective (formal) and name (Ernesto). Such a solution makes sense if one is acquainted with the original pun, otherwise it needs to be interpreted as an ironic comment: Ernesto has grasped the importance of (not!) being serious and respectively the importance of being called with a name that sounds serious (for reasons that are not specified in the target text).

21. For a modern English-speaking readership, however, the situation is basically the same as for speakers of Italian, since nowadays the spelling *Earnest* is also associated with a given name.

22. For the French translator (1996: 1871), however, this seems to have been the only reason why the substitution of*Constant* for Ernest represents a successful rendering: "Il fallait naturellement, en français, trouver un équivalent, et Constant, par chance, a cette vertue d'être à la fois un prénom et une qualité". Strictly speaking, however, it is not enough to search the target language for a term that is both given name and virtue, since Wilde's play is about a very specific kind of virtue, i.e. Victorian earnestness.

23. From the point of view of a modern source and target readership, moreover, both *Ernest* and *Severo* sound old-fashioned, which is realistic considering that the play is set in Victorian England. The same name also exists in Spanish and Portoguese, which can equally expliot the homophony (*Severo-severo*).

24. In the German translation (Wilde 1999: 11/12), where *Ernest*, naturally enough, has become *Ernst*, the pun could have been rendered as "du bist nicht ernst genug"; however, the translator chose not to do so: "Mein lieber Algy, ich weiss nicht, ob du meine wirklichen Motive verstehen kannst; du bist wohl *etwas zu oberflächlich* dafür".

25. The substitution of *Fedele* for *Ernest* is equally possible in French (fidèle/Fidèle) and, to a lesser extent, in Spanish (fiel/Fidel).

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