Translation and Cultural Appropriation: Dante, Paolo and Francesca in British Romanticism

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Abstract

This contribution begins from a reconsideration of the concept of appropriation as a mechanism interlinking the consumption and production of cultural material. On this basis, the English translations of Dante's *Divina Commedia* produced in the Romantic period will be seen as part of a larger cultural project for the incorporation of major authors, texts and literary/artistic traditions in order to expand and aggrandize English or British national culture. Henry Cary's complete translation of 1814 is then placed in the context of the competing discourses and the different «synecdochic» reductions of the Italian poet created by Romantic appropriative exchanges. A particularly significant instance of this kind of appropriation is offered by versions of the «Paolo and Francesca» episode (*Inferno* V.73-143). Translations and rewritings of this episode by Leigh Hunt, John Keats and Lord Byron, together with Cary's canonical version, testify to a proliferation of meanings, ranging from the political and the public to the private and intimate sphere. Approached in terms of appropriation, Dante's text becomes visible as the producer of cultural intimations that turn it into an active and influential element in the target culture, one further agent in its multiple processes of production and re-production.

Key words: appropriation, assimilation, cultural politics, rewriting, Dante, Leigh Hunt, John Keats, Lord Byron, Henry Cary.

Resum

Aquesta contribució s'obre amb una reconsideració del concepte d'apropiació com a mecanisme d'enllaç entre el consum i la producció de materials culturals. Sobre aquesta base, les traduccions angleses de la *Divina Comèdia* de Dante fetes en el període romàntic hi són enteses com a part d'un projecte cultural més ampli, que busca la incorporació d'autors, textos i tradicions literàries/artístiques a fi d'expandir i engrandir la cultura nacional anglesa o britànica. La traducció completa de Henry Cary (1814) és vista així en el context dels discursos en competència i les diverses reduccions «sinecdòquiques» del poeta italià originats pels intercanvis apropiatius romàntics. Un exemple particularment significatiu d'aquesta mena d'apropiació l'ofereixen les versions de l'episodi de «Paolo i Francesca» (*Inferno* V.73-143). Les traduccions i reescriptures d'aquest episodi per Leigh Hunt, John Keats i Lord Byron, així com la versió canònica de Cary, són testimonis d'una proliferació de significacions que van de l'esfera política i pública a l'íntima i privada. Considerat en termes d'apropiació, el text de Dante s'erigeix en productor d'implicacions culturals que el converteixen en un element actiu i influent en la cultura d'arribada, un agent més en els seus múltiples processos de producció i re-producció.

Paraules clau: apropiació, assimilació, política cultural, reescriptura, Dante, Leigh Hunt, John Keats, Lord Byron, Henry Cary.

Summary

On cultural appropriation   Paolo, Francesca and Romantic cultural
Visions of Dante in British   appropriation
Romanticism   Bibliography

The practice of translation in British Romantic culture may be interestingly explored
through the concept of cultural appropriation, and this essay focuses on the presence
of Dante and the *Divine Comedy* in British Romantic culture in order to illuminate
the mechanism of appropriation as it operates in the overlapping spaces of translation
and rewriting. British Romantic versions of the episode of Paolo and Francesca
will further reveal the insights offered by considering translation as a syncretic,
intercultural phenomenon caught between ideas of national aggrandizement, the
expansion of the notional and expressive limits of one's culture, yet also the impor-
tation of extraneous materials threatening the limits of this culture. The concept
and practice of appropriation may thus reconfigure the status of translation as the
production of texts that are not simply consumed by the target language and culture
but which, in turn, become creative and productive, stimulating reflections, theo-
risations and representations within the target cultural context.

On cultural appropriation

The concept of appropriation belongs in a series of mechanisms including assi-
milation and incorporation, and literary or cultural criticism have often used these
principles quite freely, without positing any clear distinction between them. Thus,
in a study of Alexander Pope's poetry, Laura Brown points to appropriation as a
fundamental procedure in neo-classical verse, locating it as a textual *pendant* of
the dominant mode of eighteenth-century painting (especially landscape painting)
in which the viewer is normally defined as the possessor of the scene (Brown, 1985:
107). Similarly, John MacKenzie has discussed the incorporation of oriental musi-
cal elements in the eighteenth-century Western tradition in terms of a shift from
an initial phase in which foreign imported features «stand out as dramatically and
intriguingly alien» to a second stage where, «If…[these foreign features] are fully
assimilated… they cease to operate as an exotic intrusion» (MacKenzie, 1995: 142).
Assimilation has also been connected with eighteenth-century Enlightenment cos-
mopolitanism, expressed both by a literary genre such as the oriental tale and by the
increasing consumption of foreign, exotic products and objects. The trajectory that
brought tea from luxury commodity to everyday necessity is one outstanding exam-
ple of such a form of assimilation. In these instances from eighteenth-century
culture assimilation corresponds to a domestication of diversity – a smoothing out
or bracketing of cultural otherness. A slightly different and more theoretically
aware version of assimilation is offered by Stephen Greenblatt who, in the context
of English Renaissance writing, has defined «appropriation» as a cultural mecha-
nism through which literary representation takes over free-floating, popular or

lower-class, cultural fragments. Literature adopts «unmarked» or «unclaimed» cultural capital – to use Bourdieu's term – and transforms it into textual material (Greenblatt, 1988: 9). Greenblatt's view interestingly turns appropriation into one of the cultural mechanisms through which British Renaissance culture invented and sustained itself, recovering marginalised or «low» cultural elements to include them and make them operative within «high» culture. In this fashion he provides an important instrument for theorising and testing the continuous incorporation of fragments from popular, oral culture into Renaissance textuality. Conversely, however, cer, Greenblatt's definition of appropriation is too intimately connected to a specific cultural phase, presenting very clearly marked social overtones which may not easily transfer to other contexts.

Another, less delimited approach to the concept and practice of appropriation is offered by recent French theory, in particular by Roger Chartier's collection *Cultural History* (1988), where he reconfigures this notion as not simply the inclusion of extraneous materials into one's own culture but also their re-processing, so that the subject consuming these materials also re-produces them within specific and ever-varying practices. Chartier's theorisation starts from Michel Foucault's idea of history as fractured and discontinuous, arguing that

> … we can reformulate the notion of appropriation and place it at the centre of a cultural historical approach that focuses on differentiated practices and contrasted uses. This reformulation…accentuates plural uses and diverse readings which are not aimed at or inscribed in the text… (Chartier, 1988: 13)

At the same time, Chartier counters Foucault's idea of appropriation as control over knowledge, a form of exclusion from the power of discourse as may be gauged from Foucault's essay «What is an Author?» where he rather uncompromisingly states that «discourses are objects of appropriation» (Rabinow, 1984: 108). Foucauldian appropriation is the enclosure of (specialised) knowledge within a limited-access area which places it beyond the reach of those who are not allowed to employ such knowledge and the (institutional) power it affords. Chartier, by contrast, revises the status and weight of appropriation by removing it to a different background:

> In my own perspective, appropriation really concerns a social history of the various interpretations, brought back to their fundamental determinants (which are social, institutional and cultural), and lodged in the specific practices that produce them. (Chartier, 1988: 13)

This revisionary project draws upon Michel de Certeau's definition of consumption as another form of production in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980). Indeed, in de Certeau's study, consumption is not a mechanical process as it amounts to a recreation of the consumed objects in a variety of different contexts. Every act of consumption constitutes a new production by the individual consumer:

> To a rationalised, expansionist and at the same time centralised, clamorous, and spectacular production corresponds *another* production, called «consumption». The latter is devious, it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its *ways of using* the products imposed by a dominant economic order. (De Certeau, 1984: xii-xiii)

Consumption for de Certeau is never «a passive or unmediated social process of assimilating that which is offered for consumption by producers, but is always a process through which social meanings are constructed and contested» (Lee, 1993: 50). Chartier transposes these principles from a sociological to a cultural-historical field of analysis, describing this shift in the following terms:

> The restoration of historicity demands first of all that cultural or intellectual 'consumption' itself be taken as a form of production which, to be sure, manufactures no object, but which constitutes representations that are never identical to those that the producers (the authors or the artists) have introduced into their works. (Chartier, 1988: 40)

In the oscillation between production and consumption, cultural appropriation may then be defined as the inclusion and adoption of foreign, *other* signs into one's own cultural environment in order to aggrandize, enlarge and reinforce it. Appropriation corresponds to an assumption and assimilation of material whose diversity is perceived as naturalised, whilst still importantly retaining its *other* status. The appropriated material is simultaneously similar and alien, testifying to the resilience and expansiveness of a culture as well as to its destabilisation through the inclusion of difference. Because of such constitutive hybridity, appropriation is a useful theoretical instrument with which to approach cultural phenomena of a «comparative» kind such as influence, intertextuality, translation or transculturation.

This conceptual nexus emerges in Lawrence Venuti's reflections on translation as cultural politics and, specifically, in his definition of traditional and dominant views of translation in terms of a «domestication» of the foreign into the target-language and culture:

> …translation enlists the foreign text in the maintenance or revision of literary canons in the target-language culture, inscribing poetry and fiction, for example, with the various poetic and narrative discourses that compete for cultural dominance in the target language. (Venuti, 1993: 209)

Domestication corresponds to a form of violence inflicted on the source texts and operating through the ideological «reconstitution of the foreign text in accordance with values, beliefs and representations that pre-exist in the target language» (Venuti, 1993: 209). Translation thus co-operates with the renewal, legitimation or reinforcement of cultural categories in the target culture. The cultural politics of translation work through the appropriation of *other* materials and their ideological inflection in order to contribute to national cultural expansion. And this form of

«domesticating» translation – from Schleiermacher's 1813 lecture «Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens» – may be seen at work in John Dryden's *Dedication of the Aeneis* (1697) or in texts by Romantic-period British translators and «theorists» such as Alexander Fraser Tytler's *Essay on the Principles of Translation* (1790) or in John Hookham Frere's review of Thomas Mitchell's translation of Aristophanes for the *Quarterly Review* (July 1820).

Despite their negative assessment of the «appropriative» intercultural mechanism as a kind of violence against the *other* text, Venuti's observations usefully throw light on the fact that the concept of appropriation is not a late twentieth-century critical construct applied to cultural objects and operations from a past era. The reflections on «domesticating» translation cited by Venuti indicate that theoretical or critical attention was paid to cultural phenomena related to appropriation in the Romantic period. And this theoretical reflection is parallel to the innumerable instances of appropriation offered by British culture between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century.

A first, obvious, example concerns the development of ideas of the nation and nationalism as crucial structures within which culture is included and to which it must contribute. National culture becomes an increasingly relevant preoccupation in Romantic culture, a sign of identity and superiority over competing nations that requires strengthening and expansion through the inclusion of new materials and ideas.[1] One step further from the nation, appropriation in Romantic-period culture is connected to the ideologies and practices of empire at a time which saw both the loss of the American colonies and the formation of a new empire in India. From a cultural point of view, critics have indicated how the latter possessions were often represented as a sort of ornament for the nation capable of announcing the greatness and power of the state. Thus, according to Nigel Leask, the signs of the East are foregrounded in Romantic literature in the shape of an «imperial heraldry». The East of orientalist literature becomes a sign of distinction, a «device» incorporated into the British coat of arms, and the appropriation of which proclaims the flexible limits of an imperial structure and culture which easily accommodate the alien and the different (Leask, 1992: 8).

The inclusion of Eastern materials also happens in parallel with the incorporation of closer, more directly related, European cultures into the British tradition. Medieval European poetry – from Castilian *romances* to Norse *Eddas* – is studied and translated into English as part of a larger trend to rediscover and define the origins of the English literary tradition. Similarly, the national cultural genealogy is reconstructed through the inclusion of ancient national cultures, as in the re-evaluation of medieval verse that led to the publication of Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). «Gothic» texts are recovered, edited and translated for modern readers, with a view to gaining access to the taproots of national civilization. Primitive literature is thus appropriated by modern culture in the quest

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1. The interconnections between emergent ideas of the nation and print culture in the late eighteenth century are considered in Anderson (1991) and Newman (1987).

for its own history, antiquity and originality. Yet what is perhaps the clearest example of appropriation in Romantic-period culture is the arrival in Britain of the Elgin Marbles, the sculptures from the Parthenon bought by Lord Elgin, transported to Britain and acquired by the nation in 1816 after a long polemic. The long-winded debate specifically focused on the benefits which the nation might derive from this acquisition, and authoritative figures such as the artists Benjamin Haydon or Benjamin West, or poets such as John Keats and Felicia Hemans expressed their opinion that the sculptures should be bought by the government and publicly exhibited in order to introduce new standards of excellence in British art.[2]

In various ways, orientalism, medievalism and classicism represent different forms of appropriation active in British culture between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They contemplate the inclusion of different kinds of material but, as a whole, confirm the pervasive tendency to incorporate other cultural elements and, according to Chartier's definition of appropriation, to make them active components of British culture. Even more to the point, the idea and practice of appropriation circulated widely in Romantic reflections on translation. As Venuti observes, Alexander Fraser Tytler's definition of translation as linguistic and cultural assimilation – distributed in the three levels of «work», «language» and «culture» – is predicated on the idea of inclusion and incorporation and aims at broadening the scope of national culture (Venuti, 1993: 211). Madame de Staël's *De l'esprit des traductions* (1816), which in its Italian version became part of the local debate on Romanticism, also addresses translation as the incorporation of *other* cultures. Yet another incontrovertible definition of translation as the appropriation of foreign cultural capital is offered by Victor Hugo's «Préface pour la traduction de Shakespeare» (1864) by his son François-Victor, where it is clearly stated that «Traduire un poëte étranger, c'est accroître la poésie nationale» (Hugo, 1967-70: XII, 327). Further, the popularity and diffusion of an idea of translation as appropriation may be related to authoritative cultural and aesthetic formulations such as the Schlegel brothers' conception of the syncretic nature of the «romantic» in literature and art. In his famous fragment on «Universal Transcendental Poetry» (*Atheneum* 116) Friedrich Schlegel asserts that «[Romantic poetry] will, und soll auch Poesie und Prosa, Genialität und Kritik, Kunstpoesie und Naturpoesie bald mischen…Sie umfasst alles, was nur poetisch ist… Nur sie kann gleich dem Epos ein Spiegel der ganzen umgebenden Welt, ein Bild des Zeitalters werden» (Furst, 1980: 5-6). Later, in his *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur* (1809-11), August Wilhelm Schlegel remarked in similar terms that «die romantische [Kunst und Poesie] gefällt sich in unauflöslichen Mischungen; alle Entgegengesetzten: Natur und Kunst, Poesie und Prosa, Ernst und Scherz, Erinnerung und Ahndung, Geistigkeit und Sinnlichkeit, das Irdische und Göttliche, Leben und Tod, verschmelzt sie auf das innigste mit einander» (Schlegel, 1923: II, 114). Intended

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2. In a letter later published by Lord Elgin as an appendix to his *Memorandum* on the marbles (1810), Benjamin West asserted: «Your Lordship, by bringing these treasures of the first and best age of sculpture and architecture into London, has founded a new Athens for the emulation and example of the British student» (St. Clair, 1998: 163).

as a whole cultural configuration, the «romantic» is defined as an ongoing process of inclusion of diverse materials, an act of appropriation which mingles and fuses, yet does not elide, the difference of opposites. The Schlegel's comprehensive approach to Romantic inclusiveness links the diversified manifestations of appropriation and defines them as an assimilation of new materials that actively bears on the receiving culture. Once they are reconfigured in appropriative terms, ideas of assimilation or inclusion no longer refer to mere consumption of an *other* text/object but rather describe the recreation of this text/object as a productive component of the target culture.

Visions of Dante in British Romanticism

A particularly fertile area for an examination of translation as appropriation in British Romanticism is the large number of versions of Dante's *Divine Comedy* which appeared between the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. Indeed, the poem was first translated in its entirety during this period, achieving a remarkable popular success accompanied by critical reflections on its literary and historical merits.[3] Not only Dante became one of the most frequently translated foreign authors but, more importantly, his major poem obtained canonical status in English culture. A fundamental role in this appropriation of Dante was played by translation and a list of the versions published in Britain between 1780 and 1820 would include the following titles:

Thomas WARTON, Prose translation of the «Ugolino» episode in the third volume of his *History of English Poetry* (1781).

William HAYLEY, *Inferno* (first three cantos, 1782).

Charles Rogers, *The Inferno of Dante translated* (the first complete *Inferno* in English, 1782).

Henry BOYD, *Inferno*, canto I, (1785).

William PARSONS, «The Story of Francesca from the Fifth Canto of Dante's Inferno: A Free Translation» in *The Florence Miscellany* (Florence, 1785).

Henry Jennings, «Francesca» and «Ugolino» episodes (1794).

—, *Extracts from the works of the most celebrated Italian poets* (contains Francesca's final speech and the conclusion to *Inferno* V, 1798).

Henry BOYD, *The Divina Commedia…Translated into English Verse* (1802).

Henry F. CARY, *Inferno* (1805-6).

Nathaniel HOWARD, *The Inferno…translated into English blank-verse* (1807).

Joseph HUME, *Inferno: A Translation* (1812).

Henry F. CARY, *The Vision of Dante Alighieri, or Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise* (1814, 2nd edn, 1819).

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3. Out of the vast bibliography on Dante's presence in British Romantic culture, the following studies may be cited: Toynbee (1909), de Sua (1964), Cunningham (1965), Ellis (1983), Tinkler-Villani (1989), Pite (1994).

Dante's pervasive presence in British Romantic culture turns his work into an important, authoritative location for an analysis of appropriation as inclusion and production. Indeed, the *Commedia* was frequently, almost obsessively, translated and retranslated over a period of forty years, as if arriving at a «correct» version of this text were a vital addition to national culture. Moreover, its relevance was just as often discussed, debated and fought over, demonstrating the productivity of Dante's poem as an object of contention in the critical discourse of British Romanticism.

In particular, interest in the Italian medieval bard reached a climax in the late 1810s when Dante was popularised in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's public lectures on literature of 1818-19, and through critical essays for the *Edinburgh Review* (February and September 1818) by the expatriate poet Ugo Foscolo. Henry Cary's version of the *Commedia* was eventually reprinted in the «Dantean» year of 1819, when it started to sell well and became essential reading for such prominent literary figures as Byron, Scott, Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth in the 1820s. Thanks to the interlinked activities of translation and critical reflection, Dante even became fashionable reading. In Thomas Love Peacock's humorous novel *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), Mr Listless announces: «I don't know how it is, but Dante never came in my way till lately. I never had him in my collection, and if I had had him I should not have read him. But I find he is growing fashionable, and I am afraid I must read him some wet morning» (Peacock, 1986: 64).

Critical discussions of Dante, especially within reflections on the nature of literature, contributed to his acclimatisation in British culture. Specifically, he was invoked as a sanctioning authority for the development of English verse starting from Thomas Warton's fundamental *History of English Poetry* (1774-81), the third volume of which contained a prose translation of the «Conte Ugolino» episode from the *Inferno*. Dante then featured in reflections on the idea of fiction – in the sense of «literary invention» – and on the relation/exchange between author and reader. His work appealed to Romantic writers and literary «theorists» for its evocations of intensely visual worlds, its characterization and the highly individualised tales in its endless gallery of damned or blessed figures (Tinkler-Villani, 1989: 18-20; Pite, 1994: 6-38). As a result, Dante's relevance to British discussions of literary principles seems to confirm the philosopher Schelling's definition, in his 1803 essay «Über Dante in philosophischer Beziehung», of the Italian poet as the «archetype of all modern poetry», defining his work as a repertoire of, and a prelude to, the distinctive issues and features of modern literature (Pite, 1994: 22).

Within British Romantic culture, these more general preoccupations were regularly keyed to an ongoing reflection on the appropriate way of incorporating Dante into the English language and its cultural tradition. Debates on the correct way of translating Dante were concerned with the directness of his imagery and narrative, his use of a material and quotidian diction, and the metrical complexities of the *terza rima*. Language played a crucial role in these debates as it was perceived to function as the «talismanic» preserver of the essence of Dante's verse. His use of language was felt to be endowed with a primitive force and a transparency that made concepts immediately available through compressed and elaborate, though eminently natural, structures. An effective and accurate rendition of this language

was therefore a major point of contention in the process of the Romantic appropriation of Dante.

Specifically, it was the idea of the «naked simplicity» of the *Divine Comedy* that acted as a guiding principle for Dante's detractors as well as his admirers at the turn of the eighteenth century. Thus, in a letter of 29 October 1817 to Henry Cary, Coleridge praised the extremely «Dantesque» effect of his translation and approvingly remarked that «…in the severity and *learned Simplicity* of the diction, and in the peculiar character of the Blank Verse, it has transcended what I should have thought possible without the Terza Rima» (Coleridge, 1956-71: IV, 779). The near-oxymoron «learned simplicity» expresses the preoccupation with Dante's interweaving of directness and complexity as well as with the complex issue of how to import Dante's metrical form and its structural and content-related values. Not everybody, however, shared Coleridge's enthusiasm. Cary's blank-verse translation adapted Dante's diction, poetics and ethos according to a dominant late eighteenth-century ideal of sympathy; and yet his free re-elaborations of the language and tone of the encounters in the three *cantiche* were often the butt of severe criticism.[4] In the *Edinburgh Review* (September 1818), Ugo Foscolo entered into very minute details with reference to Cary's translation of *Inferno* V, paying particular attention to Francesca's characterization and the line «che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona» (V.105) rendered by Cary as «That, as thou seest, he yet deserts me not» (Cary, 1908: 21). The critic initially apologises for his seemingly excessive attention to detail, remarking that «Such observations may appear too minute and particular; but it is in things like this, that the peculiar merit of Dante consists» (Foscolo, 1818: 339). And Foscolo chooses to focus on this episode and line, for they appropriately illustrate how «…Dante unites perspicuity with conciseness – and the most naked simplicity with the profoundest observation of the heart» (Foscolo, 1818: 341). Unfortunately Cary's translation of Dante's images and condensed pictures is less than satisfactory, the critic bluntly stating that: «We are sorry to say Mr Cary has not translated these interesting passages with his usual felicity» (Foscolo, 1818: 341). It is easy to see how even in the translation of «che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona» chosen by Foscolo, Dante's proverbial «naked simplicity» disappears through Cary's syntactical interruption of «as thou seest» and the elaborate negative structure of «he yet deserts me not».

Despite such criticism, however, Cary's version was familiar to his contemporaries, and Romantic poets, in particular, were deeply influenced by his translation in ways that have been accurately traced by Ralph Pite (1994). Even outside the scope of Cary's *Vision*, individual literary debts are useful indicators of the productivity of Dante's work in British culture of the Romantic period, and critics have recovered the numerous intertextual traces left by the *Divina Commedia* in the works of Percy and Mary Shelley, Byron and Blake. Appropriation thus literally appears as the inclusion of foreign materials which, by operating in the receiv-

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4. Valeria Tinkler-Villani (1989: 183) observes that «…Cary rejects Dante's succinctness and vernacular language for the more elevated neoclassical idiom of the time» and the syntactical convolutions proper to the Miltonic tradition such as inversions and enjambements.

ing culture, expand and transform its textuality in the process (Havely, 1998). Dante was appropriated and made significant in British culture through his reinvention (and that of his masterpiece) according to the cultural imperatives and ideological trends of Romantic Britain. The poem was then approached through such contemporary aesthetic categories as the pathetic and the sublime, especially through their joint formulation in the Gothic literary mode. Also, the *Commedia* was described generically either as an epic, most notably by Horace Walpole and Anna Seward, or as a historical satire denouncing the vices and corruption of Dante's contemporaries, as in Thomas Warton and James Beattie (Tinkler-Villani, 1989: 38-46). The Romantic period also saw a multiplication of the meanings of «Dante» as the theological poet envisaged by William Blake, or the author of a work about the Christian transition from fall to redemption; the medieval chronicler; the purveyor of novelistic *vignettes* with a certain dark or Catholic *frisson*; Coleridge's metaphysical bard; the poet of liberty writing against tyranny and corruption in Church and State; the author of shocking tales such as the «Conte Ugolino» episode, and, by extension, a Gothic, gloomy and ruthless author, enjoying gory descriptions and meting out terrible punishments.

An insight into the multiple meanings of British Romantic appropriations and adaptations of Dante is once more offered by Henry Cary's translation and its gradual evolution. In point of fact, Cary, who started his literary career as a poet, developed an interest in Italian literature which, in time, led to his translation of Dante. This Italophile passion was severely criticised by his patroness Anna Seward – the Lichfield-based intellectual and poet – since it would damage his poetic gift by making it deviate from the national tradition of writing. On 1 February 1792 she wrote to one of her correspondents: «His ear has been debauched by the luscious smoothness of Italian tones, till it delights no longer in the bolder and more majestic sounds of the English language. I hope the contagion of this apostasy will not spread» (Seward, 1811: III, 113-14). Yet the fascination was to remain and, to Seward's disapproval, was to influence Cary's literary interests and eventually feed into his *magnum opus*, which was from the very beginning involved in a debate between British national literature and genius and an *other* cultural tradition felt as alien and contaminating.

Cary's literary interest, moreover, was connected to a genuine passion for the political and patriotic dimension of Italy, its decadence and occupation by foreign powers or dynasties. This interest may well have derived from a fascination with the traditional Italian literary genre of the invective against foreign conquerors and the attendant lament for Italy's prostrated state. But, in addition, the political aspects of Cary's Italophilia also reflect contemporary views of Italy as an imaginative geography of resistance to foreign tyranny, loss of national sovereignty, and what was gradually becoming an ideal land for liberal-minded British intellectuals. Cary's awareness of this political mythology may be deduced from his translations of a few sonnets by the seventeenth-century poet Vincenzo da Filicaia (1642-1707). Filicaia was popular for his patriotic effusions and was soon to become one of the favourite Italian authors for Romantic poets of liberal tendencies such as the young Robert Southey, Lord Byron or Felicia Hemans who, at different times, wrote trans-

lations of his sonnet «Italia, Italia o tu cui feo la sorte». In the late 1780s, Cary himself produced a «prose translation of Filicaja's Sonnet on the degeneracy of Italy, her desertion of her ancient valour, and devotion to indolence, shadowed forth by allegoric allusion to the infidelity of a once faithful wife to an honourable husband» (Seward, 1811: II, 351). Although this text («Dov'è, Italia, il tuo braccio? E a che ti servi») is actually a denunciation of Italian degeneracy, it features an allegorical depiction of Italy as an unfaithful wife which is in unison with the allegory of Italy as a beautiful woman ravished by foreign invaders in the more popular sonnet quoted above.[5] If, on the one hand, Cary's interest in Filicaia anticipates the later Romantics' political interest in Italy, on the other, it indicates some intriguing ideological undertones in the context of his translation of the *Divine Comedy*, one of the founding texts of this Italian literary tradition of political jeremiads and invectives.[6]

Nevertheless, it would be reductive to consider Cary's version of Dante exclusively in the light of this diversified interest in Italy as an *other* cultural and political dimension. This aspect alone could not fully explain the relevance of Cary's text to a mechanism of cultural appropriation. Indeed, a foremost preoccupation in his translating activity is that of acclimatising Dante and his language within an English (or British) context. So important was this aspect that Paget Toynbee, the early twentieth-century comparatist and scholar of Dante, asserted that «Cary…once and for all made Dante an English possession» (Toynbee, 1909: I, li). If, after Cary's *Vision*, the appropriated status of Dante was no longer an issue under discussion, the translator himself seems to have been deeply committed to finding the correct, natural way of transposing Dante and making his text assimilable. Thus, one of his earliest approaches to the *Commedia* was a comparative search for connections and exchanges between the Italian and English traditions. In a letter to Cary of 1794, Anna Seward tellingly alluded to «the parallels you have discovered, between Dante and Milton» (Seward, 1811: III, 349). Further, one of Seward's last letters to the translator, written in August 1806 and discussing the merits of his recently published *Inferno,* saw the old poet and former patroness identify in Cary's Dante «the *prima stamina* of several images of Milton and other poets» (Seward, 1811: VI, 302) whilst loudly proclaiming the superiority of the English epic poet («O! how the hell of Dante sinks before the infernal regions of our own Milton!», Seward, 1811: VI, 303), his «sonorous magnificence of phraseology» and the «never-stooping dignity of numbers Milton employs in the infernal regions» (Seward, 1811: VI, 305).

Both Cary and his readers, here represented by one of his earliest and most attentive admirers, were alert to the difference of Dante's work and language, their distance from the national tradition. Yet, they were also aware of their closeness and familiarity through national precedents such as Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

5.   For Filiciaia's sonnets, see Muscetta and Ferrante (1964: I, 960-63).
6.   «Liberal» interpretations of Dante were not the prerogative of the younger, post-Waterloo generation of Romantic writers. In fact, as Valeria Tinkler-Villani has remarked, «English readers of the *Commedia* at the end of the eighteenth century drew from the poem two points of interest: the figure of Ugolino as a victim of political oppression, and the figure of Dante as a defender of his city-republic and as the spokesman for civil and religious liberty» (1989: 294).

Translating successfully meant negotiating this simultaneous closeness and distance in order to arrive at the creation of a language that might turn Dante into a «national», appropriated text. And for Cary, the translation of Dante's poem was intended to bring about an enrichment and an enlargement of the national literary tradition. His preference for Italian verse as «the poetry of imagination» was also dictated by its being more suitable for English-language versification than the poetry of «judgement» represented by the French tradition. In a view that interestingly anticipates Byron's similar opinions, Cary defined Italian poetry and its father as particularly close to the English literary tradition, so that appropriating the *Divina Commedia* might contribute to reinforcing what is «proper» to the national poetic line of Chaucer, Spenser and Milton.[7] His translation of Dante is thus animated by the ideal of «cultivating» national literature, feeding and nurturing it through the appropriation of other materials and the inclusion of extraneous elements turned into active and operative features of the receiving culture. Appropriately, William Wordsworth judged Cary's *Vision of Dante* «a great national work» (Havens, 1922: 354).[8]

The first authoritative translation of the *Commedia* discloses a series of preoccupations related to the transposition of Dante into English which reveal the ideological weight of this project – its national tenor and its connection to images of resistance to tyrannical governments or foreign occupation – issues which reach their climax in the reading of the Italian poet by the younger generation of Romantic poets in the late 1810s. In effect, one of the most influential versions of «Dante» as a synecdoche – the superimposition of man and work – was his interpretation as a figure of opposition and resistance. Dante was worshipped as the political exile condemned by the Florentine government as a traitor, and his masterpiece was a testimony to his political opposition to tyranny and corruption, representing both a general indictment and a series of acrimonious *ad hominem* attacks. In Byron's case, Dante figured as one in a series of revered «poets of action», literary heroes who were «brave and active citizens», playing an active role in the public arena as opposed to the increasing contemporary exclusion of the poet from political intervention (Byron, 1973-94: III, 221). Byron and other liberal Romantic *literati* transformed Dante into a symbol of libertarian ideals and action against tyranny as well as an emblem of the patriotic poet and the exiled voice of truth (Ellis, 1983: 20-23).

This synecdochic image was influenced by monumental and authoritative historical works such as Henry Hallam's *A View of the State of Europe during the Middle Ages* (1818) or Simonde de Sismondi's *De la littérature du midi de l'Europe* (1813) and *Histoire des républiques italiennes du moyen âge* (1809-18). In these

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7. Tellingly, in a letter to Leigh Hunt of 9 February 1814, Byron wrote: «I have always thought the Italians the *only* poetical *moderns*: - our Milton & Spenser & Shakespeare…are very Tuscan and surely it is far superior to the French School». (Byron, 1973-94: IV, 50).

8. The success of Cary's appropriation and assimilation of Dante can also be measured through the positive assessment of his effortless «Miltonisation» of Dante by a critic such as Raymond Dexter Havens who stated, of Cary's lines in his translation, «Miltonic they certainly are, but so unobtrusively, so naturally, does he use his Miltonisms that he may have been almost as unconscious of them as is the average reader» (Havens, 1922: 355).

liberal narratives of medieval history, the Italian city-states were praised as instances of democratic representation and enlightened oligarchies, flourishing before the formation of the Renaissance *signorie* and the return to individual power (Pite, 1994: 46-8). Also popularised by Foscolo's writings, this liberal Dante stood in some essential relation to the British ideal of the «Gothic» – that is pre-Norman and pre-feudal – liberties of Britain, dating back to a time when enlightened Saxon kings, such as Alfred, ruled with the help of primitive parliaments. More specifically, the liberal view of Dante belonged to what has been called a distinctive «Cult of the South» in British Romanticism, the idealised imaginative geography of Southern Europe constructed by Whig and radical intellectuals and based on what was seen as a long-standing tradition of democratic culture and libertarian upsurges in Italy, Greece and Spain (Butler, 1982: 113-37).

Before its elaboration by the younger Romantic generation in the post-Waterloo era, this view had been espoused by a closely connected group of poets, the «Della Cruscan» *coterie*, active in the 1780s. Led by the flamboyant and politically controversial Robert Merry, the Della Cruscans were expatriate writers living in Florence, sharing radical and liberal ideals, and collaborating with a group of like-minded patriotic Tuscan *literati* in their opposition to the autocratic policies of the Austrian Grand-Duke Leopold. They consciously modelled their cultural and political activities on the circle of the medieval Florentine *stilnovo* poets composed by, among others, Dante, Guido Cavalcanti and Cino da Pistoia. Further, their major publication, a joint effort entitled *The Florence Miscellany*, appeared in 1785 and featured both imitations and translations of Dante, most signally a version of «Paolo and Francesca» by William Parsons. These early inclusions of Dante in the Della Cruscans' anti-establishment anthology are a prelude to the poet's adoption by disaffected second-generation Romantics and their several shades of political radicalism. Of course, this version of Dante presented an obvious contradiction in that it overlooked the poet's political inclinations in favour of Empire and against the temporal power of the Church. In Steve Ellis's words, «As far…as the Romantics are concerned, the monarchism of the *Commedia* fades into insignificance within the dramatic setting Dante has created for it, and Dante, with all his nostalgia for the authoritarian past, becomes the prophet of the radical future…» (Ellis, 1983: 23). Through this selective adaptation of Dante's politics, the younger Romantics popularised him as a poet of action and denunciation, and as a forerunner of Italian patriotism, an intellectual whose defeated but firm stance reflected their post-revolutionary ideals and disillusions. Dante's relevance to a British national tradition was never far off because, as Caroline Franklin has aptly remarked, «…Dante's influence on Chaucer and especially the republican Milton could suggest an alternative Whiggish canon in which British contemporary expatriate liberal poets guarded and handed on the torch of liberty, supposedly kept alight since classical times by the Italian republics of the Middle Ages» (Franklin, 2000: 118-9).

The concluding part of this essay concentrates on a selection of translations and rewritings of the Paolo and Francesca episode by second-generation authors in the context identified by this liberal construction of the Italian bard and his major poem. The liberal, «Southern», interpretation of Dante bears on the diffusion of

«Paolo and Francesca» among younger Romantic poets such as Hunt, Keats and Byron, and can help to explain its growing popularity alongside the «Conte Ugolino» episode with its Gothic violence keyed to a depiction of political oppression. Gradually, «Paolo and Francesca» came to represent the lighter, softer tones of the *Commedia* – especially its pervasive sense of pity – but its interest also lay in its tale of rebellion to patriarchal, marital and domestic tyranny.[9] Seen from the perspective of the liberal Dante, the episode reads like a tale of resistance, almost the plot of a failed revolution so often encountered in poems by the younger Romantics. Unveiling these undertones may illustrate how Dante was not just translated (as well as read in the original) in order to be simply consumed by British readers, but how this consumption was also, in Chartier's and de Certeau's words, a «production» that endowed Dante and his poem with a new operational potential within the target cultural/linguistic environment of British Romanticism.[10]

Paolo, Francesca and Romantic cultural appropriation

The second generation of British Romantic poets and intellectuals gave pre-eminence to a form of translation and rewriting of Dante as an important component in liberal cultural discourse as well as in their own autobiographical fictions. A specific episode on which the younger poets' concentrated was that of Paolo and Francesca, Ugo Foscolo himself confirming this popularity in his article in the *Edinburgh Review* for September 1818:

> We shall add but one example more, to show the difficulty of explaining the beauties of Dante's composition by any general description. The passage we select is from the episode of *'Francesca da Rimini,'* as being most familiar to the English reader, both from its own popularity, and from the beautiful amplification of it which Mr Hunt has lately given to the public. (Foscolo, 1818: 340)

Foscolo's observation reiterates the interconnection between translation and rewriting in the appropriation of Dante, pointing out how these operations came to the fore in the work of James Henry Leigh Hunt, a radical journalist and experimental poet who, in 1816, published a version of the Paolo and Francesca episode entitled *The Story of Rimini,* revised and republished in 1817. This version is characterised by an enormous expansion of the story-line, as Dante's sketchy narrative is extended into four cantos of rhymed couplets. The poem was corrected by Byron and dedicated to him, yet this did not save Hunt from the harsh criticism of the reviewers who saw his text as the expression of an immoral, subversive and anti-traditional poetics advanced by a pretentious, low-class poet.

From the point of view of adherence to Dante's original, Hunt's *Rimini* rarely incorporates lines from the *Divine Comedy* itself. Even the crucial line «That day

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9. On this episode as a paradigm of Dante's «gentler» poetic mode see Byron (1973-94: V, 193-4).
10. The following examination of «Paolo and Francesca» and second-generation Romanticism starts from the perceptive contextualisations and insights in Havely (1995).

they read no more» (III.608, Hunt, 1923: 26), the climax of Paolo and Francesca's adulterous passion, is Hunt's transformation of the original first person to a third-person narrative, which turns the confessional style of Dante's text to a Romantic metrical-tale mode. Hunt himself was aware of the distance between his own narrative poem and Dante's masterpiece, and in the *Autobiography* (1850) he later remarked: «[I] took leave *in toto* of the brevity, as well as the force of Dante» (Hunt, 1949: 258). He knew that, by sacrificing brevity and force, he was distancing himself from the guiding principle of «naked simplicity». But if, on the one hand, *The Story of Rimini* dissolves what was generally seen as Dante's original directness, on the other hand, it registers and expands different aspects of Dante which were active in Romantic translation, scholarship and poetry.

Hunt's poem particularly records the synecdochic value of Dante as a liberal symbol, surrounding the episode of Paolo and Francesca with signals that transform it into a coded tale of opposition and resistance to despotic authority. This comes as no surprise from a writer who was extremely critical of the British political *status quo* and frequently attacked the establishment from the pages of his periodical *The Examiner*. When, in 1813, he went too far in one of these attacks, his opponents took advantage of the situation to have him sent to prison for two years on a charge of libel against the Prince Regent. Written while he was serving his sentence, *The Story of Rimini* records this situation at the beginning of canto three, the crucial canto in which Paolo and Francesca's adultery is consummated. Interrupting the narrative flow of events, Hunt suddenly brings attention to himself and the «long / And caged hours» of his days in jail (III.3-4, Hunt, 1923: 13). He then expands on his condition:

> …while rains autumnal, as I sing,
> Wash the dull bars, chilling my sicklied wing,
> And all the climate presses on my sense;
> But thoughts it furnishes of things far hence,
> And leafy dreams affords me, and a feeling
> Which I should else disdain, tear-dipped and healing

<div align="center">(III.5-10, Hunt, 1923: 13)</div>

These lines may seem a confusing interpolation and another step away from Dante's mythical «naked simplicity». Yet the reference to Hunt's imprisonment and his humiliation at the hands of political authority is not entirely out of context in a poem which accurately depicts Francesca's enclosure within the prison structures of paternal authority and marital tyranny. The reference is also legitimated by the spatial parallel between Hunt's cell and the fictional setting, since Francesca is imprisoned in the elaborate series of rooms and private apartments which constitute her husband's palace in Rimini. The dominant (and Gothic) theme of incarceration may therefore be linked to Hunt's condition and read as an allegorical vehicle for his radical and liberal critique of the political system. A similar kind of coded resonance may be identified in Francesca's desire for escape, visible in her romance-reading and her growing passion for Paolo, which may be considered as

allegorical analogues to Hunt's attempt at poetic escapism, his «thoughts…of things far hence».

In its several levels, the text encodes different plots of resistance to unjust, oppressive authority and rebellion against it. It also records the eventual failure of resistance, something required by Hunt's choice of genre – the «ill-fated» romance – as well as by the Romantic myth of the failed revolution. In this light, Hunt's self-portrait at the beginning of canto III functions as a *mise en abîme* representation, a reduced and transposed version of the larger picture which, by its change of focus, reveals its crucial and less conspicuous meanings. The smaller portrait, with its disconcerting autobiographical reference, throws into relief the nexus of political and personal contents in Hunt's appropriation. What is more, the text's narrative of control, resistance and subversion was perceived (and usefully confirmed) by conservative reviewers, who variously remarked on the immoral and politically-related contents of the tale.

Hunt was primarily a radical journalist and hostile critics were not likely to forget it. In his *Autobiography*, the poet himself acknowledged that *The Story of Rimini* «would have met with no such hostility, or indeed any hostility at all, if politics had not judged it» (Hunt, 1949: 259). At the time of the poem's first and second publications, violent attacks were levelled at Hunt by the *Quarterly Review* (January 1816) and even more acrimonious accusations characterised the first two essays on the so-called «Cockney School of Poetry» by John Gibson Lockhart in *Blackwood's Magazine* (October and November 1817). The latter accused Hunt of a mixture of Jacobinism, lack of education, arrogance and immorality. In addition, *Rimini* was mentioned and denounced as a noxious influence in the «Cockney School» article against Keats in *Blackwood's Magazine* (August 1818) where the poem was explicitly linked to Hunt's imprisonment, defined as «odious and incestuous», and belittled for its «facetious instances of … harmony and sublimity» (Redpath, 1973: 468, 473). The political undertones of Hunt's medieval narrative were clear at the time of the attacks and were recognised as distinctive, defining motivations behind Hunt's rewriting of Dante.

The themes of oppression and imprisonment in Hunt's appropriation of Dante's «Paolo and Francesca» were then taken up by John Keats at a time when he was still a young follower of Hunt's. An early instance of this re-elaboration is his sonnet «Written on the Day that Mr Leigh Hunt left Prison» (2 February 1815) which does not contain any mention of Dante – its poetic godheads are Milton and Spenser – yet features the idea that Hunt may have «escaped» his imprisonment by wandering with his imagination in medievalising «halls» and «bowers» such as those described by canto III of *The Story of Rimini* (l. 9, Keats, 1988: 41). In this fashion, Keats continues, Hunt might have evaded the control of the «Minion of grandeur» (l. 5, Keats, 1988: 41), the personified instrument of institutional oppression. Written before *Rimini* was published or Keats had even met Leigh Hunt, this text uncannily employs the imagery that the latter would include in the opening of canto III of his poem with a comparable political import. The sonnet was eventually published in 1817 when Keats had become a close friend of Hunt's and knew that he was in the process of revising *Rimini* for its second edition.

In the same year of publication as the revised *Story of Rimini*, Keats's sonnet «On *The Story of Rimini*» also reconfigured the Dantean, medievalising imagery with the specific intent of celebrating an aesthetic of liberation. Hunt's text is here presented as «A bower for [the] spirit» (l. 12, Keats, 1988: 101), a figure which records the persistence of Keats's early vision of «halls…and bowers fair» in the sonnet of 1815. The material of Hunt's poem is then transfigured into a source of spiritual well-being couched in the same language of political resistance through evasion seen in the earlier text. Later, in 1819, Keats re-read Cary's translation of Dante, with which he had been familiar for some time, and compared it with an Italian edition. The outcome was yet another sonnet: «A Dream, after Reading Dante's Episode of Paolo and Francesca» (Keats, 1988: 334). This text also develops the autobiographical relevance of Hunt's appropriation of Dante, Keats positing himself as the narrative «I» and a character in the tale. His own fictional self is embedded in the episode of Paolo and Francesca just as fragments of Cary's version are embedded in his own sonnet. In effect, the lines «But to that second circle of sad hell, / Where in the gust, the whirlwind, and the flaw / Of rain and hail-stones, lovers need not tell / Their sorrows…» (ll. 9-12, Keats, 1988: 334) are a re-elaboration of Cary's «…The stormy blast of hell / With restless fury drives the spirits on / Whirled round and dash'd amain with sore annoy» (*Inferno* V, 32-4) and the images of «Large hail, discolour'd water, sleety flaw» (*Inferno* V, 9). Translation once again returns to haunt Keats's recreation of Paolo and Francesca with its dual form of appropriation: his own autobiographical inscription, which recalls Hunt's and looks forward to Byron's, and the inclusion of Cary's translated Dante, a second-order «original», in his own poetic discourse. Translation and rewriting are interwoven in Keats's elaborations of the Paolo and Francesca material between 1815 and the «Dantean» year of 1819, designing a rich intersection of poetical reinvention, autobiographical projection and intertextual quotation, together with a transposition of the political anti-establishment value of Dante in the private terms of individual liberation and spiritual growth.

Keats's elaborations of Dante's «Paolo and Francesca» present a breadth of scope and implications exemplifying the shifts between the ideological, the autobiographical and the spiritual which, in different configurations, may be seen at work in Byron's verse translation of the same material. Composed in Ravenna in 1820, this translation chronologically coincided with the British climax of interest in Dante and was suitably written in the town where the Italian bard spent the last years of his life, having found political asylum at the court of Guido da Polenta, Francesca's father. Byron's version sprang from a lifelong obsession with the episode from Canto V and was apparently begun in order to satisfy a request by his lover Countess Teresa Guiccioli (Beaty, 1960). Moreover, through his translation, Byron aimed at correcting Cary's version: with a reference to the latter's then canonical *Vision*, he confessed to Countess Guiccioli that Dante had been «non tradotto, ma tradito» in the English language (Marchand, 1957: II, 795).[11]

11. On Byron and Dante see Ellis (1983), Vassallo (1984), Tinkler-Villani (1990) and Pite (1994).

Byron's main attempt at reaching a higher degree of accuracy was the introduction of the original metre, *terza rima*, which Cary had avoided in favour of unrhymed iambic pentameters. In addition, Byron intended to be as literal as possible, an aim foregrounded in the preface to the translation:

> The reader is requested to consider the following version as an attempt to render *verse* for *verse* the episode in the same metre. Where the same English word appears to be repeated too frequently, he will generally find the corresponding repetition in the Italian; I have sacrificed all ornament to fidelity. (Byron, 1980-93: IV, 280)

On one level, this desire for accuracy reflects Byron's insistence on his own first-hand knowledge of sources and models for his fictional poems. Thus, for instance, in 1816 he indignantly rejected the authorship of a pirated volume attributed to him, observing that it contained a poem on Jerusalem which he could not have written, «never having yet been there» (Byron, 1973-94: V, 139). On another level, however, Byron's preoccupations with accuracy perfectly emblematise the Romantic obsession with the talismanic powers of Dante's language. In his attempt at reproducing it, he provides further insight into the Romantic translator's dilemma concerning a language/culture that is *other* and yet is also felt to be extremely relevant to, almost connate with, one's own tradition from an ideological and an aesthetic point of view.

A good indicator of this tension is the fact that Byron's translation is not actually as literal as it sets out to be. The attempt to capture the essence of Dante's language is less successful than is announced, and it is thus difficult to assess with any certainty whether it is better than Cary's. The line that Foscolo had criticised in the latter's version of «Paolo and Francesca» has a comparably dubious counterpart in Byron's text:

> «che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona» (V.105)
> «That, as thou seest, he yet deserts me not» (Cary, 1908: 21)
> «That, as thou seest, yet, yet it doth remain» (l. 9, Byron, 1980-93: 281)

Neither translation shows any great degree of required «naked simplicity», featuring different forms of elaboration which set them apart from the nearly oral directness so often praised in Dante's text. Comparing the two translations further, «Fond desires» in Cary (1908: 22) corresponds to Byron's «Strong ecstacies» (l. 17, Byron, 1980-93: 281). These different choices in diction hark back to different literary traditions, in that Cary's language seems couched in the mannerisms of late eighteenth-century sentimentalism, whereas Byron's appears more in tune with what a twentieth-century reader perceives as «romantic» and contemporary in its expression of «strong» sentimental bliss. At the same time, though, it must be borne in mind that sentimental and «romantic» modes of literary expression did not follow one another in a neat scheme of supersession and replacement. For instance, the word *ecstasy* employed in Byron's seemingly more updated version was also part

of the familiar (and clichéd) idiom of the Della Cruscan poets who represented one of the culminating points of the eighteenth-century poetics of sentimentalism.[12] Trying to establish whether Byron's translation actually improves on Cary's on the basis of diction is thus a difficult task. The same is true for the rendering of Dante's intertextual and extratextual references. In the case of the compressed, essential line «Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse» (*Inferno* V.137), Byron's version is certainly more impactful: «Accursed was the book, and he who wrote» (l. 41, Byron, 1980-93: 282). It succeeds in keeping the idea of the book and its author, as well as maintaining the tone of the imprecation from the original. Cary's line, by contrast, reads «The book and writer both / Were love's purveyors» (Cary, 1908: 22). Yet, *Galeotto* – Dante's masterful concatenation and synthesis of book, character and author – is unfortunately lost in both versions.[13]

Even though there is ample material for a contrastive analysis of Byron's and Cary's translations, such an examination seems to confirm that, despite Byron's desire for accuracy, his own version does not succeed in delivering a more correct or a more originary Dante. In addition, despite his intention to improve on the limits of Cary's *Vision*, Byron could not separate his own text from that authoritative precedent and, as a result, his «Francesca of Rimini» contains frequent echoes of Cary's lines.[14] This kind of micro-analysis registers culture-specific signs of the representative value of a translation, but Byron's manipulations of Dante's original also affords new insights by disclosing the pattern of appropriation underlying his translating activity. One of the reasons for his appropriation was indeed private and autobiographical and, in an article on Byron's continuous references to the Paolo and Francesca story, Frederick Beaty makes a very strong case for personal reasons. During the years of his exile in Italy after 1816, Byron was in constant need of icons of self-presentation, fictional and historic *personae* which might express the different sides of his own self and the multiple, contradictory aspects of his private and public personality. Beaty accordingly illustrates how the fictional characters from «Paolo and Francesca» offered Byron an array of personalities with which he could in turn identify during his Italian years (Beaty, 1960).

Nevertheless, Beaty's essay does not satisfactorily address the fact that Byron – just like Hunt and Keats before him – read the story of Paolo and Francesca through the interpretive synecdoche of a liberal «Dante» and, perhaps even more importantly for him, as a figure of oppositional literary authorship. Despite his occasional negative assessments of the *Commedia* as an obscure text, Byron's view of the father of Italian poetry was celebratory and especially keyed to his political significance: «He is the poet of liberty. Persecution, exile, the dread of a foreign grave, could not shake his principles» (Medwin, 1969: 160). Seen in this context, the ill-fated medieval love-story appears as a token tale of opposition in the face

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12. On Byron's debt to Della Cruscan poetics and early nineteenth-century sentimentalism, see McGann (1990).
13. On the translation of «Galeotto» see also Foscolo (1818: 341-2) and Beaty (1960: 398).
14. For instance, Byron's lines «That day no further leaf we did uncover» (l. 42, Byron, 1980-93: 282) are a clear echo of Cary's «In its leaves that day / We read no more» (Cary, 1908: 22).

of inevitable failure and oppression. That this is also the case for Byron may be inferred from one of the intended destinations of his translation in published form, as he made clear in a letter to his publisher John Murray in March 1820:

> D[ea]r Murray – Last post – I sent you the «Vision of Dante[»] – 4 first Cantos. – Enclosed you will find *line for line* in *third rhyme* (*terza rima*) of which your British Blackguard reader as yet understands nothing – Fanny of Rimini – you know that She was born here – and married and slain from Cary, Boyd, and such people already. – I have done it into *cramp* English line for line & rhyme for rhyme to try the possibility. – You had best append it to the poems already sent by last three posts…If this is published – publish it *with the original* – and *together* with the *Pulci* translation – *or* the *Dante Imitation* – I suppose you have both by now… (Byron, 1973-94: VII, 58)

By the «Dante Imitation» and the «Vision of Dante» (tellingly Byron is using the title of Cary's translation) Byron means his three-canto poem *The Prophecy of Dante*, written in 1821 yet, like «Francesca of Rimini», published only in 1830. Both texts moreover had been inspired by Teresa Guiccioli, the male members of whose family were politically active in the subversive, anti-Austrian *Carbonari* societies in the Ravenna area. The *Prophecy* is yet another poem in *terza rima* dealing with Italian national themes and expanding on Dante's frequent political prophecies and invectives in the *Commedia*. Its three cantos are an invocation to resistance against tyranny and an anthem for national self-assertion. Although the text does not feature any mention of the Paolo and Francesca tale, the «Conte Ugolino» plot, with its intimations of political persecution, is briefly referred to (II.90). Had it been published, Byron's «Francesca of Rimini» would have been an accompaniment to this intensely political text. And this decision was taken at a time – the summer of 1820 – when the poet himself had joined the secret society of the *Carbonari* and was busy setting up a literary periodical with Hunt and Shelley, eventually published as *The Liberal* between 1822 and 1823, and containing relevant «Dantesque» material such as a biographical account of Dante's contemporary Giovanni Villani in the second volume.

The decision to append the translation of the Paolo and Francesca episode to the longer poem might seem justified by the simple fact that the latter text was on Dante and that the translation was of one of the *Commedia*'s most familiar passages and, in view of Beaty's argument, a personally meaningful one for Byron. Yet, his translation/appropriation of Dante finds an interesting echo in the longer poem that should have preceded it in the planned edition. In effect there is an interesting consonance between the story of Francesca as a subjected woman caught up in a tale of patriarchal oppression and Italy as an oppressed country gendered female in *The Prophecy of Dante*. In another modulation of the gendered discourse seen above with regard to Cary's Italophilia, oppressed Italy in Byron's *Prophecy* is represented as a feminine entity in canto II, a «beautiful land» of «ever golden fields». Such gendered imagery of Italy is linked to the semantic fields of art and beauty, the clichés of Italy as a fertile country and the garden of Europe and, also,

on the negative side, to the stereotypical view of the Italians as effeminate people who have lost the virility and valour of their forefathers. The discursive and imagistic context to Byron's feminised Italy in the *Prophecy* covers the same ground as Cary's «prose translation of Filicaja's Sonnet on the degeneracy of Italy» mentioned above, as well as the same intimations in Filicaia's «Italia, Italia o tu cui feo la sorte» that Byron translated and embedded in the fourth canto of *Childe Harold* (stanzas 42-43): «Italia! oh Italia! thou who hast / The fatal gift of beauty» (ll. 370-1, in Byron, 1980-93: II, 138).

In addition, Byron was alert to the liberal, anti-tyrannical intimations of the Paolo and Francesca episode in view of his acquaintance with the Italian poet and dramatist Silvio Pellico, whose tragedy *Francesca da Rimini* was successfully staged in Milan in 1815. Byron met Pellico in the autumn of the following year, and the latter introduced him to the circle of the Romantic and liberal periodical *Il Conciliatore*, a group of committed opponents to the local Austrian government in favour of Italian nationalism and unity. Because of his collaboration with this periodical, Pellico was eventually arrested and imprisoned for sedition in 1820, a date which both coincides with Byron's initiation into the *Carboneria* and the translation of the Paolo and Francesca episode.[15] The complex network of political meanings woven around the figure and tale of Francesca, with their relevance to the personal and political fate of Dante, were also stressed by Ugo Foscolo:

> …Francesca was the daughter of *Guido da Polenta*, master of Ravenna, Dante's protector and most faithful friend. The poet had probably known her when a girl, blooming in innocence and beauty under the paternal roof. He must, at least, have often heard the father mention his ill-fated child. He must therefore have recollected her early happiness, when he beheld the spectacle of her eternal torment; and this, we think, is the true account of the overwhelming sympathy with which her form overpowers him. The episode, too, was written by him in the very house in which she was born, and in which he had himself, during the last ten years of his exile, found a constant asylum. (Foscolo, 1818: 342)

The Italian poet and critic explains the reasons for the «human sympathy» which pervades Dante's poem as a way of tempering what readers of the period criticised as the harshness of his treatment of damned souls. But Foscolo, who was also responsible for spreading the liberal image of Dante, here weaves the poet's exile and the protection received under Francesca's father's roof together with her fate and exile from the youthful happiness enjoyed in the same house. Beside the desire to explain Dante's *pietà*, this article reveals a clear combination of Francesca's and Dante's destinies within a shared context of tyranny, exile and lost happiness. The

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15. Byron's familiarity with Pellico's tragedy emerges from the fact that, together with his travelling companion John Cam Hobhouse, he decided to translate it into English in the autumn of 1816. The poet, however, abandoned the project and left the translation to Hobhouse (Beaty, 1960: 396). Later, in a letter to Henri Beyle (Stendhal) of 29 May 1823, Byron remarked: «Poor Pellico! I trust that, in his iron solitude, his Muse is consoling him in part – one day to delight us again, when both she and her Poet are restored to freedom» (Byron, 1973-94: X, 189).

diffusion of Foscolo's interpretation was ensured by the authoritativeness enjoyed by his critical and philological knowledge of Dante. His stature as a Dantean scholar was indeed recognised by the younger generation of Romantic poets and, in the letter of 20 March 1820 to John Murray on «Francesca of Rimini», Byron himself declared that he was unable to decide on a point of textual accuracy and begged his publisher to «Ask Foscolo, the damned editors drive me mad» (Byron, 1973-94: VII, 58).

Foscolo's remarks delimit yet another configuration of the Romantic vision of «Paolo and Francesca» as a tale of private subjection and imprisonment, displacing or allegorising the condition of political persecution and exile or of an entire nation in bonds. Similarly, Byron's translation of the episode relies on a complex interlocking of the intimate and the personal, on the one hand, and the public or the ideological, on the other. Through the gendering of Italy in *The Prophecy of Dante*, the «pathetic» representation of a thwarted love affair opens up to a host of coded political and ideological references which, once more, become significant in the context of the liberal appropriation of Dante by the younger Romantics.

Presented mainly as a translation and without any other aim than that of correcting earlier attempts, Byron's version of «Paolo and Francesca» might therefore seem to «respect» the source text and culture without trying to include them in a linguistic and cultural texture liable to transforming or denaturing the original. And yet, his version of the story of Rimini is pervaded by his liberal Dantean poetics. Apparently an exercise in linguistic accuracy, his text is also entangled in the larger Romantic discourse of the liberal Dante and may thus be taken as a (temporary) point of arrival of a progress through Romantic translation as appropriation, and its links with rewriting, politics and literary criticism.

The development of the story of Paolo and Francesca in the late 1810s and early 1820s reveals that the episode moves from a sentimental *vignette* of Romantic «love stronger than death» to a complex interweaving of personal and ideological issues emerging in Leigh Hunt, Keats and Byron, through different patterns and textual embodiments. As foreshadowed by the multiple intimations in Cary's Italian and Dantean interest, their texts suggest that the translation of Dante in Romantic-period Britain was not only a complex operation but also a compromised procedure. In her study on eighteenth-century translations of Dante into English, Valeria Tinkler-Villani concludes with the observation that, by the time of Cary's *Vision*,

> Dante as a dark romantic hero, and the *Commedia* as a varying sublime landscape have become part of the English cultural heritage, attracting to themselves the creative imagination of an age, and sanctioning its aesthetics and political myths. (Tinkler-Villani, 1989: 297)

This process of «becoming part», however, seems much less settled, since the «sublimity» of both text and author function as one among many synecdochic forms of reduction by British Romantic culture. An examination of the younger Romantics' rewriting of Dante unveils that the ongoing appropriation of the *Commedia* was grounded both on a confrontation with Dante as *other*, Italian, cul-

turally and linguistically different (and certainly unassimilable), and on a vision of Dante as possessed and acclimatised in the form of a voice of resistance within the ideological and autobiographical fictions of a close-knit group of liberal-minded authors. This duality acquires particular importance in terms of that reconsideration of «consumption» advocated by Roger Chartier in *Cultural History* and corresponding to the production of a new text «which constitutes representations that are never identical to those that the producers (the authors or the artists) have introduced into their works» (Chartier, 1988: 40). Considering the localised, historically situated act of translation as a form of appropriation means recognising the violence it wreaks on the original text as well as the new lease of life which this text is given by becoming active, influential and operative in the target culture. Translation in British Romantic culture can be recovered in its implication within a process of cultural production and re-production that, by including the foreign, sustains yet also questions «proper» national writing and its underlying cultural and ideological assumptions. An act of inclusion and expansion becomes the incorporation of freely productive, irreducibly *other*, fragments in a culture poised between self-possession and dispersion.

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