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Respecting Complex Personhoods: Translation Studies and British New Slaveries

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Pietro Deandrea

- 1 For the past decade I have been researching the literary and artistic representations of new forms of slavery in Britain – in other words, the slaveries related to the globalising processes which started around the early 1990s. In the works I have examined, which deal with a wide range of slavery-like contexts, two dominant tropes surface: the ghost, signifying the spectral invisibility of enslaved migrants; and the camp, whereby the countless sites of institutional or illegal detention for migrants constitute a network of concentration camps in their contemporary metamorphoses (Deandrea 2015: *passim*).
- 2 In my parallel experience in the field of literary translation, I have repeatedly wondered whether, and to what extent, certain translation strategies may be considered particularly appropriate for a meaningful comprehension of the phenomenon of new slaveries. This is what I intend to reflect upon in the following pages. First, general approaches to translation applied to the area of postcolonial texts are dealt with, and measured against narratives on British new slaveries; foreignising strategies are identified as most effective for conveying the complex personhood of enslaved migrants. The second part of this article focuses on four aspects of the source text (ST) that should not be underrated (and thus not smoothed out) in the production of a target text (TT) – namely titles, interlingualism, linguistic creativity, and the contexts of new slaveries. Finally, the article moves to forms of non-literary translation

and interpreting which are fictionalised in literary texts, and explores how they magnify the ethical dilemmas inherent in such activities. This kind of involvement, it is argued, is not dissimilar from the task that the literary translator envisions for him/herself: the purpose of seeing what strategies may be deemed most effective to avoid the danger of dehumanisation for enslaved migrant subjects. All in all, the three parts take into account a list of primary texts which almost completely cover the range of fictional works on British new slaverys translated from English into Italian.

Foreignising Strategies and the Right to Complex Personhood

- 3 One of the most frequent choices a literary translator has to face is concerned with the opposition between foreignisation and domestication: should one take the readers of the target text (TT) towards the unfamiliar foreignness of the source text (ST), or familiarise the ST into a TT version less alienating for TT readers? It is an age-old distinction, going back to ancient Rome and characterising debates on translation through successive ages (Venuti 2001: *passim*).
- 4 In 1990 Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere's work marked the advent of the so-called 'cultural turn' in Translation Studies, a move beyond the previously dominant interest in the linguistic aspects of texts, which shifted the emphasis onto the relations between literary works and their cultural contexts (Munday 2012: 192–3). Within this orientation, several key reflections stress the importance of maintaining the cultural and linguistic peculiarities carried by the ST. Lawrence Venuti laments the widespread tendency, in Anglo-American publishing, to privilege translations which fluently smooth out any unfamiliar crease for the TT readers, thus giving an 'illusion of transparency' (as if the text had been written in the TT), and educating their readership to appreciate and favour texts of this kind (Venuti 1995: 1). Venuti encourages efforts to maintain the foreign, unfamiliar identity of the ST for the TT reader (20). Antoine Berman similarly rejects this general tendency to mask otherness and difference, which he calls 'naturalisation', and which he sees as driven by ethnocentric forces: his list of deforming tendencies ensuing from this attitude has already become proverbial in the field of Translation Studies (Berman 1999: 52–68).
- 5 Quite predictably, this negative light thrown on the effacing naturalisation of linguistic and cultural otherness is even more marked in scholars from Postcolonial Translation Studies. According to Douglas Robinson, translations across the coloniser/colonised (or dominating/dominated) divide are affected by 'power differentials' which inevitably impose the cultural standards of the colonisers' culture in various ways: for example, the tendency is to choose to translate fewer works from the dominated than from the dominating culture, and to conform with the hegemonic culture's preconceived notions of the other (Robinson 1997: 31–5).
- 6 Translation-wise, the impact of these power differentials is likely to favour a domesticating process. Beside pointing at this phenomenon, Postcolonial Translation Theory tends to conceive translation from a polyphonic, dialogical perspective based on cultural exchange and relations (Tchernichova 2010: 198). Under this overarching aim, one of the strategies of Postcolonial Translation Theory consists in focusing on the geographical (or diatopical) varieties of the English language that often constitute a key vehicle of expression for postcolonial writers. These 'Englishes' are today recognised as

fully deserving the dignity of languages, no longer reducible to the inferior status of broken idioms. For the literary translator from English into Italian, and crucially for the author of this article, the issue lies in the tension between the metropolitan version of the English language and its postcolonial 'others': how can s/he transfer this complex relationship into Italian? (Tchernichova 2010: 204–7). Drawing on detailed observations by an expert in the field like Franca Cavagnoli (1994: 113–21), Tchernichova rules out the recourse to Italian dialects or grammatical mistakes, because they would both reduce that language (and its speakers) to the inferior state of caricatures – and would thus reaffirm the power differentials theorised by Robinson. The solution Cavagnoli and Tchernichova offer is based on oral creativity, on the resources of that neo-standard Italian which treads the uncertain line between written and spoken, which does not coincide with grammatically standard language but, at the same time, never falls into blatant mistakes (Tchernichova 2010: 208–9).

- 7 Any attempt to reflect on the implications of Postcolonial Translation Theory for new forms of slavery must be based on these premises. Depicted in literary texts as spectralised and dehumanised, new slaves should be represented by translation strategies capable of conveying their linguistic and cultural peculiarities, and of avoiding the temptation to find facile solutions which caricature them. My first case study is from Chris Cleave's *The Other Hand* (2008), which centres on the teenager Little Bee from Nigeria (Deandrea 2015: 66–76). At the beginning of the novel, after having spent two years in a British detention centre for migrants, she finds herself free to leave thanks to the sacrifice of her fellow detainee Yvette, who has accepted the sexual blackmail of one of the wardens and sold her body for freedom. Yvette is terrified of being deported back to her country: 'Anywhere but Jamaica. Dey mens be killin me de minnit I ketch dere, kill me dead' (Cleave 2008: 22). However non-Standard her English may be, English is her first (and only) language. Cultural considerations would then advise a strategy similar to the one elaborated by Cavagnoli and Tchernichova, based on vernacular creativity. The published Italian translation, however, adopts for Yvette an Italian brimming with grammatical mistakes which, in the target culture, are to be found among first-generation immigrants who learn Italian as a second language, often late in their lives. Yvette thus appears to the Italian reader as ignorant: a translator's footnote even defines her language as 'l'inglese sincopato delle persone incolte' – 'the syncopated English of uneducated people' (trans. mine; Cleave 2011: 29). We are faced here with a telling example of one of the deforming tendencies so deprecated by Berman: the erasure of vernacular elements, which he defines 'une grave atteinte' ('serious damage', trans. mine; Berman 1999: 64). Yvette's postcolonial identity is here reduced to a question of literacy, at least from a linguistic point of view. Even more puzzling is the fact that, sometimes, Yvette's sentences are correct and standard: we are faced with a translation strategy that is not only objectionable, but also obviously self-contradictory.
- 8 Another case in point may be found in Marina Lewycka's *Two Caravans* (2007), a rare example of a humorous novel on the topic of British new slaveries (Deandrea 2015: 76–82). Emanuel is a young man from Malawi who, together with a motley group of immigrants, is first exploited on a strawberry farm and then moves around Britain from one illegal job to the next, through an on-the-road series of collective misadventures. His character is conveyed especially by his frequent letters to his sister back home. He is not a native speaker of English, but coming from a former British colony began studying it at a very early age; his syntax is sometimes bookish and little

cumbersome, and he finds that ‘this English tongue is like a coilsome and slippery serpent’ (Lewycka 2008a: 15). On the other hand, he has always been a very proficient learner: his vocabulary is defined as ‘surprisingly sophisticated’ (182). In the published translation of his letters, however, his Italian is studded with frequent spelling mistakes (which are really an exception in the ST), usually associated with a child or with a very bad student of the language: ‘everybody sang Happy Birthday Dear Emanuel’ (42), for instance, is maintained in English in the TT but distorted as ‘eppi birdey diar Emanuel’ (Lewycka 2008b: 59), as if he were a complete illiterate. Lewycka’s Italian translators have neglected the one linguistic/cultural feature of this character that renders him outstanding among the others – and is made explicit and indisputable by the above-mentioned statement on the richness of his lexis.

- 9 These examples from the translations of Cleave and Lewycka may be partly attributed to errors by the translators, but should also be contextualised in a general attitude towards migrants, and even more markedly towards new slaves. Institutional policies and the expectations of public opinion tend to reduce migrants’ subjectivity to their personal tragedies, and their related needs for help: these people are therefore granted ‘infra-human rights’, to employ Dave Gunning’s term. What these subjectivities try to cultivate and defend in various ways is ‘their deeper sense of personhood’ (Gunning 2011: 145). Likewise, in her 1997 study of spectrality in contemporary societies, Avery Gordon states that dominated groups are denied ‘the right to complex personhood’, even by those who show most concern for them: in a statement that may be applied to new slaves such as Yvette and Emanuel, ‘complex personhood is about conferring the respect on others that comes from presuming that life and people’s lives are simultaneously straightforward and full of enormously subtle meaning’ (Gordon 2008: 4–5).
- 10 Literature, of course, ranks among the most privileged means of reshaping a distinct personhood for subjects falling under the category of cultural otherness (Santerini 2008: 9–32). Obvious as this may seem, literary translators should follow in that wake, and reflect on their strategies accordingly. The following part of this article concentrates on four characteristics of the fiction on new slaveries in Britain, and on why literary translators should take them into account. It is argued that these features are decisive for rendering that complex personhood of new slaves: in a context where awareness of this phenomenon is still limited, titles play the function of spearheading the increasing relevance of personhood; interlingualism brings into play the composite expressive means of communicating it; authorial creativity especially valorises the unique role of literature mentioned above; finally, contextual reconstructions (standing out from the experience of the so-called citizens) are crucial for the shaping of a full picture.

Translation Strategies and Case-studies

Titles

- 11 The two cases presented here add further nuances to the significance of the titles of novels in any language, since they point to several fundamental features of new forms of slavery which should not be overlooked in a translation. Ruth Rendell’s crime novel *Simisola* (1994) pioneered fiction on British new slaveries, focusing on the case of the

unidentified corpse of an African woman who will later be revealed to have been an enslaved domestic worker – one of the ever-growing category of migrants exploited in private homes by single families (Deandrea 2015: 38–48). Although her name coincides with the title, her identity remains unknown until the very end of the novel; even when her killers are caught, very little, if anything, is found out about her; and her name comes up only during a pub conversation closing the book, when it is casually uttered by Rendell's protagonist Inspector Wexford:

'If she ever had a surname no one seems to remember it. Sophie [the killer's daughter] never forgot the first name she gave them [...] but the others had forgotten it. She was called Simisola.' He got up. 'Shall we go?' (Rendell 1995a: 377)

- 12 Simisola's life perfectly epitomises the hidden, invisible existence of new slaves: this is powerfully echoed by the discrepancy between the presence of the name in the title and its almost complete absence from the book. In this sense, the novel's conclusion acts as a significant reminder for readers. The Italian version of the novel (Rendell 1995b) unfortunately opted for a complete change in its title: *La leggerezza del dovere* (literally, *The Lightness of Duty*), which eliminates that key discrepancy and therefore makes the ending – and its related issue of the invisibility of new slaves – much less expressive.
- 13 A similar approach marks another crime novel on new slaveryes, Ian Rankin's *Fleshmarket Close* (2004). The title is not simply an Edinburgh toponym: it also alludes to the several locations of human enslavement for migrants investigated in the novel, namely detention centres, run-down housing schemes and brothel-bars. As detective John Rebus comments, 'More than one kind of flesh market' (Rankin 2004: 157). *Indagini incrociate* (literally, *Cross Investigations*), the choice for the Italian title, is just as bland as the one for Rendell, and in addition loses the amplified significance related to the phenomenon of new slaveryes. However, one should specify that translators in Italy have very little power and few rights in the face of the publishing houses for which they work; in other words, they rarely have the final word on how to translate a title.

Interlingualism

- 14 Abi Morgan's play *Fugee* (2008) is a meta-theatrical, Brechtian play for teenage actors who continuously get into and out of their characters; the story is centred on unaccompanied minors who are refugees in London, uncared-for by immigration authorities and sometimes exploited as labour force. The protagonist Kojo is from the Ivory Coast; at the beginning, he breaks the so-called fourth wall to inform the audience about the linguistic setting of the play and the non-naturalistic way in which it is staged: 'Don't worry. Even if I am speaking my language, the actor makes it sound like English. The others won't understand me. But you will. And you're the people I want listening to me' (Morgan 2019: 20).
- 15 Not least because of the geographical mixture of the under-age refugees, various scenes are in more than one language, and my obvious translation approach was to maintain this. The interlingual setting also influenced another translation choice, when the play highlights the peculiarities of the English language:
kojo *Fugee*. Slang for refugee[s] of political oppression or natural disaster who are usually applying for residency. Also used as an adjective. *Fugeed*. Means something that has been lived in, soiled, stained, looted or otherwise damaged by a lengthy dirty habitation.

'Wow, man, that's a great new plasma TV! Thanks, I got it cheap from some fugees down the market.' [...]

'Get away with your nasty dirty fugeed T-shirt.' (Morgan 2019: 74)

- 16 In the published English/Italian parallel-text version of the play, the possibility of changing everything into Italian was excluded. The reference to the English language was not only maintained, but made more explicit (see the underlined phrases):

kojo *Fugee. Profugo*. Termine gergale della lingua inglese per 'rifugiato', a causa di oppressione politica o disastro naturale, che solitamente richiede il permesso di soggiorno. Anche utilizzabile come aggettivo: 'da profugo', *fugeed*. Indica qualcosa di vissuto, insozzato, macchiato, cannibalizzato o altrimenti danneggiato da un insediamento prolungato e malsano.

'Wow, amico, che bella 'sta TV al plasma nuova! Grazie, l'ho presa per pochissimo dai profughi, i *fugees*, giù al mercato.' [...]

'Ma vattene, te e la tua sudicia maglietta da profugo – fugeed T-shirt!' (Morgan 2019: 75)

- 17 Making the centrality of the English language more explicit implied inserting a double version of the words in question, rather than their Italian translations only, and adding 'della lingua inglese' ('of the English language') in the first line. While this meant departing from a literal translation of the passage, the underlying aim was to remain more faithful to the spirit of the play, for a number of reasons: the exactness of the adjective 'fugeed' would not have been matched by a perfect Italian equivalent; in a play dominated by anti-naturalistic alienating effects, such an inter-linguistic choice might have a similar distancing effect for an Italian audience; the whole play immerses this multi-national cast of characters (not only Kojo) in the difficulties of learning English and speaking it 'properly', so the audience is made to taste a similar situation, albeit briefly; for the same contextual reason, an overtly dictionary-like explanation (even more accentuated than the original) seemed appropriate for the translation of this excerpt.
- 18 This is certainly an approach falling under the 'foreignising' category mentioned at the beginning of this article, with the intention of valuing cultural otherness. Berman, for example, argues for the importance of respecting the polylinguistic nature of the ST and its layers of different idioms (Berman 1999: 51–2; 66). On a more general level, Robinson urges translators to think beyond the boundaries of their prescribed, introverted submission to the ST according to the case at hand:
- The important thing is that you are no longer programmed to assume that role in *all* translation tasks. You are flexible, able to psych out a situation and react to it appropriately [...] It is a dialogical sensitivity, an awareness of the complexity of specific situations and a flexible response to that complexity. Situational ethics. (Robinson 1991: 208)
- 19 In addition, I consider this strategy extremely appropriate for the specific context of this play. Pushing the target audience (or readers) outside their own fluent language and culture toward the ST of the play implies a promotion of interaction, an 'interculturalism' that Michael Cronin finds preferable to the 'multiculturalism' composed of static cultural communities, especially with regard to the relationship between translation and migration (Cronin 2006: 48). According to Cronin, migration 'means that translation can no longer be seen as simply an aspect of the "foreign" [...] but is increasingly present on the "domestic" front' (65). Or, to put it in Michaela Wolf's words, the translator is 'no longer a mediator between two different poles, but her/his activities are inscribed in cultural overlappings which imply difference' (Wolf 2008: 15).

Emphasising the presence of translation in our domestic context points, by analogy, to the need to acknowledge the presence of enslaved migrants and of their linguistic otherness, and therefore to the need to go against the grain of their spectral invisibility.

Linguistic Creativity

- 20 Linguistic features convey meaning, experience, living conditions – in a word, identity. The same applies to the identity of new slaves in Britain, as the following examples demonstrate. The protagonist of Ali Smith's *The Detainee's Tale*, for example, is first enslaved on West African farms from the age of 6 to 21, then escapes to Britain only to find himself exploited through a succession of different jobs, the description of which is at times telegraphic:

Room, van, warehouse. Warehouse, van, room. Four in the morning. Nine at night. Packing shoes. Ladies bags. Sorting dresses. Cleaning microwaves. They give you a cloth for this. Cleaning TVs. Cleaning fridges. They give you a roll of white rubber to wrap the electric things. They give you a winter jacket, one pair of jeans and a towel. They give you two shoes. They tell you it's cost them a great deal of money to bring you here. They say you'll be working till you've paid it all back. There aren't beatings but there's shouting. There is a lot of shouting. (Smith 2016: 53)

- 21 Should a translator adopt a familiarising strategy and thus confer fluidity to this sequence of extremely short sentences? They are a linguistic representation of a series of exploitations, based on a wide range of jobs (expressed by lexical variations) against a background of repetitive enslavement (expressed by anaphoric repetitions and the hammering rhythm). They certainly deserve to be maintained through the adoption of a foreignising strategy, eschewing that rationalisation of the ST openly deplored by Berman (1999: 53–4). The same is true of the following description, set after the protagonist has written to the Home Office to claim asylum, been arrested for being undocumented, then temporarily freed but not allowed by the system to work, study or take public transport while his case is pending: 'And being out of detention, and knowing they can put you back in detention? It is all like still being in detention. Detention is never not there' (Smith 2016: 55).
- 22 Even though Italian and French are characterised by a tendency toward lexical variation rather than repetition (which is more tolerated in English and German), repetitions in literature are frequently significant of an author's personal style (Cavagnoli 2012: 65). The passage above is a case in point: smoothing out the marked repetition of 'detention', even partially, would imply losing the obsessive presence of this pending imprisonment in the protagonist's mind – an obsession justified by his helplessness in the face of Kafkaesque immigration procedures. Similarly, the final double negative in 'never not there' should be kept in order to preserve its emphasis on the inescapable denial of humanity operated by all those institutional prohibitions.
- 23 Literary translators are always faced with the challenge of transposing their author's creativity into their TL – in the case of texts concerned with British new slaveryes, that creativity is what best conveys the complex personhood of new slaves and the intricacy of their situations. Smith's character and Ishiguro's clones analysed below embody the elaborate facets that Gordon sees as composing complex personhood, which means that all people (albeit in specific forms whose specificity is sometimes everything) remember and forget, are beset by contradiction, recognize and

misrecognize themselves and others [...] get stuck in the symptoms of their troubles, and also transform themselves. (Gordon 2008: 4)

- 24 The risk of normalisation, here, is sometimes hard to avoid. An appropriate example is represented by Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005). It is a dystopia set in an alternative-history England, which imagines that cloning and organ transplants have become a widespread practice to cure otherwise fatal diseases; its protagonists are a group of students-clones raised in a model college in order to become perfect organ reservoirs from their early adulthood. This very popular novel, which paved the way for Ishiguro's 2017 Nobel Prize, has been read through countless interpretations, including the one that considers the book an allegory of contemporary forms of slavery and of the psychological mechanisms they entail (Deandrea 2015: 150–71).
- 25 Once a translator is aware of the manifold interpretations lying beneath Ishiguro's language, the main challenge remains how to render the author's Beckettian talent for infusing the simplest vocabulary with polysemic nuances. A word like 'guardians', for instance, includes the many facets of the college staff: their guiding and protective role (guardian-angel like) and their more coercive function (as in 'to stand guard') all converge in it. This, in turn, is related to the education of the clones, based on soft power and half-revealed truths. How to maintain this gamut of meanings in a single Italian word? It is likely that the Italian translator of this novel had sometimes to concede defeat in this regard (Riva 2017: 87). The same could be said of expressions such as 'speak garbage' or 'talk rubbish' (Ishiguro 2010: 165, 24), given that the protagonists are used as organ receptacles to be emptied out in due course and then (presumably) discarded as waste. Ishiguro's clones thus manifest that aspect of complex personhood whereby victims are haunted 'by things they sometimes have names for and sometimes do not' (Gordon 2008: 5).
- 26 In a generally successful translation, finding an Italian equivalent capable of being, like the ST, both naturally colloquial and metaphorically significant remained an unresolved problem, where the Italian 'dire cretinate' or 'dire scemenze' (literally, 'talk nonsense'; Ishiguro 2015: 173, 29) inevitably flattened the figurative facets of the ST (Riva 2017: 121–4). In these translation choices one can notice Berman's category of the effacement of underlying networks of signifiers (Berman 1999: 61).
- 27 In order to signify the extent to which the clones have internalised and accepted their exploitation, Ishiguro's language is replete with euphemistic half-neologisms which, again, are only apparently simple – and which in some cases have been overlooked by the Italian translator. Transplants are called 'untidy' when they leave a donor with serious health problems (Ishiguro 2010: 99): if translated with 'complicata' (literally, 'complicated'; Ishiguro 2015: 107), it neglects the agency of surgeons in the exploitation of the protagonists (Riva 2017: 100–1). Throughout the novel, death is also euphemised starkly in the intransitive verb 'to complete', as if it were a natural, not man-made, termination of a life cycle (Ishiguro 2010: 99, 273); the Italian translator opted for making it explicit and transitive by adding 'il suo ciclo' or 'il loro ciclo' after the verb (literally, 'his cycle' or 'their cycle'; Ishiguro 2015: 107, 282). Thus the translation partly erased the unsettling implications conveyed by that verb (Riva 2017: 105–6), falling victim to what Berman would call a lengthening or over-translation that obscures the suggestiveness of the ST (Berman 1999: 56).
- 28 Another case in which a word that is key for the context of British new slaveries proved treacherous in the TT can again be found in Rankin's *Fleshmarket Close*. Even though its

Italian translation is almost impeccable and certainly deserves praise, there is one unsatisfactory detail worth analysis, which emerges after Rebus and his colleague have visited the ghastly Whitemire detention centre and feel helplessly frustrated at what they have just seen:

‘That’s the problem though: who is it I *am* pissed off with?’

‘The people in charge?’ Rebus guessed. ‘The ones we never see.’ He waited to see if she’d agree. ‘I’ve got this theory,’ he went on. ‘We spend most of our time chasing something called “the underworld”, but it’s the *overworld* we should really be keeping an eye on.’ (Rankin 2004: 142)

- 29 The term ‘overworld’ is here decisive because the resolution of the mystery in the novel is based on a recurrent element in the literature of British new slaveries: the continuity between illegal exploitation and forms of enslavement induced by the institutional criminalisation of migrants. Thanks to its linguistic contiguity with ‘underworld’, ‘overworld’ represents here a neologism meaning ‘the criminal side of the powers-that-be’. It should not be taken as conveying its accepted meanings, such as the ‘community or totality of privileged or conventional, law-abiding citizens’; or ‘the celestial or immaterial world’; or ‘the terrestrial world as viewed from underwater’ (from www.lexico.com/definition/underworld). Unfortunately, the Italian translation chose to embrace the last of these three, going for ‘mondo emerso’ (Rankin 2009: 142).
- 30 This is not to imply, in the above-mentioned cases taken from Ishiguro and Rankin, that there are better solutions immediately to hand. On the contrary, they represent difficult problems of translation, where the authors’ creativity requires an equivalent creativity on the translators’ part, without ever losing track of the specific situation posed by the ST. In his discussion of the role of creativity in translation, Lance Hewson points to, amongst other things, the relevance of appropriateness; following Berman, he identifies this criterion as respecting ‘the fundamental contract linking a translation with its original’ (Hewson 2006: 59).
- 31 Being a relatively recent phenomenon, new slaveries pose unprecedented creativity-related challenges for translators, where the urge expressed by Tchernichova on postcolonial translations acquires even more importance: to extend the potentialities of the TL, explore its unregulated zones, and widen its suppleness while avoiding lacerations (Tchernichova 2010: 209, 211).

The Contexts of British New Slaveries

- 32 The specific complexities of new slaves’ conditions, too, need to be considered carefully as the essential starting point for an appropriate translation. In the case of Ali Smith’s already mentioned short story, the protagonist’s situation (typical among contemporary migrants in Britain) is clear and self-explanatory. In other cases, references are less explicit in the text, and therefore a translator risks being unaware of important details. Going back to Lewycka’s *Two Caravans*, Tomasz ends up on a poultry farm where the foreman presents the local labour force as follows:
- Chinesers are the best. No papers. No speekee English. No fuckin’ clue what’s goin’ on. Mind you, some folk do take advantage. Like them poor bleeders down at Morecambe. Jabber jabber jabber into the mobile phone, tide comin’ in, and nobody’s got a clue what they’re on about. (Lewycka 2008a: 117)
- 33 This is a colourful rendition of one of the greatest tragedies in the history of British new slaveries. In February 2004, twenty-three Chinese migrants drowned in

Morecambe Bay while working as unauthorised cockle-pickers, because they were not familiar with the local fast-moving tides. When they found themselves trapped by the waters, they called emergency; however, it was hard for them to communicate their situation – not only for linguistic reasons (as hinted by Lewycka's foreman), but also because they could not identify their location with any precision, thus embodying the problematic relation with space which characterises new slaveries (Deandrea 2015: 97–110).

- 34 The version produced by the Italian translators of *Two Caravans* is: 'Certo che, se blateri al cellulare, non ti accorgi che si alza la marea e anneghi' (Lewycka 2008b: 148). This could be translated back into English almost literally as: 'of course, if you're blabbering on the cell phone, you don't realise the tide is rising and you drown.' Besides constituting a linguistic simplification which produces a much blander TT, in this case the problem revolves around the knowledge of the bare facts: in the Italian version, the phone call is one cause of the tragedy, not a desperate emergency call – as it, in fact, was. Even when one has accepted the priority not to simplify the identity of enslaved migrants, and the need to grant them the 'right to complex personhood' mentioned by Gordon, the peculiarities of the phenomenon of British new slaveries require thorough research into historical facts. That remains a necessary condition, without which neither good intentions nor translating skills can avoid the risk of misinterpretation.

Conclusion: Interpreting and the Ethics of Translation

- 35 I wish to conclude by briefly straying beyond the confines of literary translation. Some of the literary texts examined above include characters working as interpreters for migrants and asylum seekers who are being approached with a markedly criminalising attitude by immigration authorities – a strategy for which Britain has become infamous (Bosworth & Guild 2008: 703–12). This happens, for example, in Morgan's play *Fugee*, where immigration authorities are embodied in the Social Worker:

SOCIAL WORKER: Who paid to get you on the flight?

TRANSLATOR: It was his uncle. He's already said it was his uncle.

SOCIAL WORKER: Just translate, please.

TRANSLATOR: Did you use an agent, did someone in your family pay to get you over here?

KOJO: My uncle.

TRANSLATOR: And you had papers?

KOJO: Visa. He told me to destroy it. I flushed it down the toilet on the plane. On a fake visa.

[...]

SOCIAL WORKER: I have down his story. You can stop now.

[...]

TRANSLATOR: Your uncle just sent you over with nobody?

SOCIAL WORKER: She can stop now.

TRANSLATOR: Where are your parents?

KOJO: I have no parents.

TRANSLATOR: You have no family?

SOCIAL WORKER: He's not fourteen.

MANAGER (to audience): See... See... He's just a kid... He's just a kid.

KOJO: What's he saying?

TRANSLATOR: He's saying –

MANAGER: He's age-disputing you.

KOJO: What does that mean? What does that mean?

[...]

TRANSLATOR: He thinks you're not a child, Kojo... He thinks that you're lying...

(Morgan 2019: 80, 82, 84)

- 36 The interpreter's emphatic attitude, and the related gestures of resistance against what is institutionally required, can also be detected in Rankin's *Fleshmarket Close*, when Rebus and his colleague Wylie return to Whitewire detention centre to speak to the murdered man's wife, in the presence of an interpreter from Glasgow's Kurdish community (the murdered man and his family are Kurdish, too):

'Inmates are allowed to make phone calls out,' Traynor [the centre's manager] clarified. 'There's a pay-phone... they're welcome to use it.'

'If they have the money,' the interpreter snapped.

'He never tried contacting her?' Wylie persisted.

'It's always possible he heard things from those on the outside,' the interpreter answered, without posing the question to the widow.

'How do you mean?'

'I'm assuming people do actually *leave* this place?' Again she glared at Traynor.

'Most are sent home,' he retorted.

'To be disappeared,' she spat back. (Rankin 2004: 244–5)

- 37 In situations like these, the two interpreters seem perfectly aware of what Cronin writes about the importance of translation in migration contexts, where this practice is

not a matter of idle theoretical speculation or a hidebound classroom exercise destined to excite the jaded appetites of pedants, but is a question of real, immediate and urgent seriousness [...] [which] can in some instances indeed be a matter of life and death. (Cronin 2006: 45)

- 38 Moira Inghilleri similarly emphasises the importance of the interpreter's role, which 'often requires more than linguistic or cultural skills, as deliberations [...] are habitually fused with social, political, and discursive instruments of power', so that 'the communicative and ethical demands on translation become far greater' (Inghilleri 2017: 31–2). When they are required to adhere to the 'role morality' of their profession, which is supposed to 'uphold structural hierarchies of power', they should apply 'constant scrutiny as well as innovative and creative interpretation' supported by their 'ordinary morality' (57–8).

- 39 This is exactly what the interpreters created by Morgan and Rankin do: clearly, their sense of morality cannot be limited by what is institutionally prescribed or proscribed. Textually speaking, the interpreters' importance is highlighted by how they function to strengthen the centre manager's empathy for Kojo (in Morgan's play), and to reveal (albeit involuntarily) a key detail for the resolution of the investigated murder (in Rankin's excerpt above). On a theoretical level, they belong to the category of 'intervenient translator' formulated by Carol Maier: someone who faces other people's traumas with an ethical involvement, at the cost of bearing a 'shattering effect' (Maier 2007: 3). As she declared,

I liked *intervenient* as an adjective because it reminded me of the individual as an individual, it included what an individual does but also the way she conducts herself; it refers not so much to the product of her activity as to the doing – the praxis – as it were. (Boéri 2016: 100)

- 40 Although literary translators may seem different and distant from these interpreters, one aspect they all share is a potentially subversive ethical approach. Significantly, this

emerges as crucial in the writings of all the above-mentioned translation theorists who advocate foreignising approaches for literary translators. When translating a novel, a poem or a play, literary translators are expected to transpose the alterity of new slaveries as a form of otherness whose complexity cannot be reduced to patterns familiar for the target reader. Berman argues for the need to recognise and receive the Other as Other, thanks to an ethical translation as opposed to an ethnocentric approach (Berman 1999: 74–5; 27). Robinson posits a ‘subversive translation’ against translators’ ‘prescribed role’ which tells them that ‘[i]t is a simple life: just stay inside the role. People, real people’, Robinson adds, ‘are more complicated than that’ (Robinson 1991: 231–2). Venuti envisages foreignising strategies as assuming a political role of ‘resistancy’ against the dominant norms of one’s culture (Venuti 1995: 23–4). Such views are certainly appropriate for the role of the literary translator of texts on new slaveries, in the face of the ever-emerging xenophobic values of our age – even more so when one sees how Venuti, in his history of translation, highlights in many historical periods the role of foreignising strategies as culturally innovative (Venuti 1995: 115–6, 148, 308–9).

- 41 Besides, those interpreters also share with literary translators a deep involvement. Their respect for the new slave’s ‘complex personhood’ necessarily implies a fully human engagement on their part, too, akin to Robinson’s notion of ‘somatics of translation’ and its call for an involvement of translators’ ‘ultimately unsystematizable human response’ and inward exploration of the ‘somatic complexity of real translation’ (Robinson 1991: 21–2, 34); a process whereby a translator may eschew the automatic necessity to ‘get from personhood to toolhood [...] denying his or her personality [...] systematically suppressing personal experiences, personal desires, personal preferences’ (203).
- 42 What emerges in the work of these translation theorists, then, is an encouragement for literary translators to nurture their own complex personhood, too, while respecting the one of the new slaves they are translating – and to do so according to the contingencies they come across with, which are sometimes as unexpected as the articulations of complex personhood itself: ‘between what is immediately available as a story and what their imaginations are reaching toward’ (Gordon 2008: 4).

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- 43 In recent years (2016–2020) I have expanded my teaching to include graduate courses on literary translation, thus turning a lifelong interest and practice into a didactic activity. These courses have been a constant source of inspiration, beside leading to the publication of, amongst other works, my translation of Abi Morgan’s *Fugée*. I wish to thank my students for our encouraging discussions, and Elisa Riva for her suggestive dissertation on the Italian translation of Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*. As usual, a big thank you to R. A. Henderson, for her constant guidance.

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ABSTRACTS

This article has a double thematic concern, namely, contemporary forms of slavery in Britain and literary translation. On these premises, it reflects on which translation strategies can be most effective in conveying the narratives related to the phenomenon of new slaveries, by analysing almost all the fictional works in English which have been translated into Italian.

Part 1 concentrates on Translation Studies with regard to both postcolonial literatures and narratives around British new slaveries. It brings to the fore Avery Gordon’s concept of ‘complex personhood’, emphasising the need to consider the enslaved subjects’ complex personhood in translating practices. Moving from Lawrence Venuti’s and Antoine Berman’s theories of translation to Douglas Robinson’s and Viktoria Tchernichova’s reflections on postcolonial translation, it is argued that this priority can be satisfied through techniques based on foreignisation. This point is tested on the Italian translations of Chris Cleave’s *The Other Hand* and Marina Lewycka’s *Two Caravans*, which end up reducing two specific non-standard usages of English to caricatural representations.

The second section of the article points to further unexplored aspects of the published Italian translations of these texts. Its focus is narrowed to four of their facets: titles, interlingualism, linguistic creativity, and the contexts of new slaveries. In the Italian versions of Ruth Rendell's *Simisola* and Ian Rankin's *Fleshmarket Close*, banalised titles operate to conceal fundamental aspects of the phenomenon of British new slaveries. Interlingualism is another common feature of these texts: reflecting on the case study of Abi Morgan's play *Fugee*, this article connects its Italian version (which emphasises the polyglossia of the original text, considering it as another case of foreignisation strategies) with the stress on interculturalism and the polylinguistic nature of texts posited by translation theorists such as Berman, Robinson, Michael Cronin and Michaela Wolf. There follows a reflection on a crucial aspect of fictional literature, linguistic creativity, taking as its first example Ali Smith's short story *The Detainee's Tale*; starting from an analysis of the ways in which the Italian translation of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* risks flattening the polysemic suggestiveness of the author's pared-back language, it then focuses on the problems posed by neologisms through Rankin's *Fleshmarket Close* and using the criterion of appropriateness, as suggested by Lance Hewson's discussion of the role of creativity in translation. The final section of part 2 goes back to Lewycka's *Two Caravans*, and its implicit references to historical facts around British new slaveries, to argue the importance for a translator to have a knowledge of the context of this historical phenomenon, alongside the required linguistic skills.

By way of conclusion, Part 3 studies how Morgan's *Fugee* and Rankin's *Fleshmarket Close* fictionalise non-literary translation and interpreting, thus bringing to the fore the ethical and political dimension they entail, as theorised by Moira Inghilleri and Carol Meier. It is here argued that in literary translation, too, such an ethical approach is a necessary step to avoid dehumanising enslaved migrants and their complex personhood, by making reference to theoretical concepts such as Berman's 'ethical translation', Robinson's 'subversive translation' and Venuti's 'resistancy', closely connected to the favouring of foreignising strategies.

Cet article développe deux approches thématiques, à savoir les formes d'esclavage moderne en Grande-Bretagne et la traduction littéraire. Il propose ainsi une réflexion sur les stratégies de traduction les plus efficaces pour transmettre les récits liés au phénomène des nouveaux esclavages, en analysant la quasi-totalité des œuvres de fiction en anglais ayant été traduites en italien.

La première partie se concentre sur la traductologie vis-à-vis des littératures et des récits postcoloniaux concernant les nouveaux esclavages britanniques. Il met en évidence le concept d'« identité individuelle complexe » formulé par Avery Gordon, soulignant la nécessité de prendre en considération la complexité de l'identité individuelle des sujets réduits en esclavage dans les pratiques de traduction. Des théories de traduction de Lawrence Venuti et Antoine Berman aux réflexions sur la traduction postcoloniale de Douglas Robinson et Viktoria Tchernichova, il soutient que cette exigence peut être satisfaite par le biais de techniques basées sur le « dépaysement » (*foreignisation* en anglais). Ce point est mis à l'épreuve par les traductions italiennes de *The Other Hand* de Chris Cleave (*Et les Hommes sont venus* en français) et de *Two Caravans* (*Deux Caravanes* en français) de Marina Lewycka, qui finissent par réduire deux usages atypiques de l'anglais à des représentations caricaturales.

La deuxième partie de l'article s'intéresse à d'autres aspects des traductions italiennes publiées de ces textes. Il se concentre sur quatre facettes spécifiques : les titres, l'interlingualisme, la créativité linguistique et les contextes de nouveaux esclavages. Dans les versions italiennes de *Simisola* de Ruth Rendell et de *Fleshmarket Close* d'Ian Rankin, les titres banalisés contribuent à dissimuler les aspects fondamentaux du phénomène des nouveaux esclavages britanniques. L'interlingualisme est un autre point commun à ces textes : par l'étude du cas de la pièce *Fugee* d'Abi Morgan, cet article relie sa version italienne (qui met l'accent sur la polyglossie du texte

original, considérant qu'il s'agit d'une autre stratégie de « dépaysement ») à l'interculturalisme et à la nature polylinguistique des textes mis en avant par des traductologues tels que Berman, Robinson, Michael Cronin et Michaela Wolf. S'en suit une réflexion sur un aspect crucial de la fiction littéraire, la créativité linguistique, prenant pour premier exemple la nouvelle *The Detainee's Tale* d'Ali Smith ; en commençant par analyser la façon dont la traduction italienne de *Never Let Me Go* (*Auprès de moi toujours* en français) de Kazuo Ishiguro risque d'éventer la suggestivité polysémique du langage minimaliste de l'auteur, on se concentre ensuite sur les problèmes posés par les néologismes dans *Fleshmarket Close* de Rankin et en mobilisant le critère de bienséance, tel que suggéré par le débat de Lance Hewson sur le rôle de la créativité en traduction. La dernière section de la deuxième partie revient sur *Two Caravans* de Lewycka et ses références implicites aux faits historiques concernant les nouveaux esclavagismes, pour argumenter de l'importance pour un traducteur de posséder la connaissance du contexte de ce phénomène historique, en plus des compétences linguistiques requises.

En conclusion, la troisième partie étudie comment *Fugee* de Morgan et *Fleshmarket Close* de Rankin romancent la traduction et l'interprétation non-littéraire, mettant ainsi au premier plan les dimensions éthiques et politiques qu'elles impliquent, comme l'ont théorisé Moira Inghilleri et Carol Meier. Nous soutenons ici qu'en traduction littéraire aussi, cette approche éthique est une étape nécessaire pour éviter la déshumanisation des migrants réduits en esclavage et leur identité individuelle complexe, en faisant référence à des concepts théoriques tels que celui de « traduction éthique » de Berman, de « traduction subversive » de Robinson et de « résistance » de Venuti, étroitement liés à la préférence pour les stratégies de « dépaysement ».

Este artículo desarrolla dos enfoques temáticos, a saber, las formas de esclavitud modernas en Gran Bretaña y la traducción literaria. Propone, pues, una reflexión sobre las estrategias de traducción más eficaces para transmitir las narraciones relacionadas con el fenómeno de las nuevas esclavitudes, analizando la casi totalidad de las obras de ficción en inglés traducidas al italiano.

La primera parte se centra en la traductología con respecto a literaturas y narraciones poscoloniales relacionadas con las nuevas esclavitudes británicas. Destaca el concepto de “identidad individual compleja” formulado por Avery Gordon y señala la necesidad de considerar la complejidad de la identidad individual de los sujetos reducidos a la esclavitud en las prácticas de traducción. Recorriendo las teorías de traducción de Lawrence Venuti y Antoine Berman y las reflexiones sobre la traducción poscolonial de Douglas Robinson y Viktoria Tchernichova, el artículo sostiene que esta exigencia puede satisfacerse a través de técnicas basadas en la “extranjerización” (*foreignisation*, en inglés). Este punto se examina en las traducciones italianas de *The Other Hand* de Chris Cleave (*Con el corazón en la mano* en la versión en castellano) y de *Two Caravans* de Marina Lewycka, que terminan por reducir dos usos atípicos del inglés a representaciones caricaturales.

La segunda parte del artículo se refiere a otros aspectos de estos textos en las traducciones italianas publicadas. Se centra en cuatro facetas específicas: los títulos, la interlingualidad, la creatividad lingüística y los contextos de nuevas esclavitudes. En las versiones italianas de *Simisola* de Ruth Rendell y de *Fleshmarket Close* de Ian Rankin, los títulos banalizados contribuyen a ocultar los aspectos fundamentales del fenómeno de las nuevas esclavitudes británicas. La interlingualidad es otro punto común de los textos: a través del estudio del caso de la obra *Fugee* de Abi Morgan, este artículo relaciona su versión italiana (que apunta a la poliglosia del texto original, y considera que se trata de otra estrategia de “extranjerización”) con el interculturalismo y la naturaleza polilingüística de los textos, según destacan traductólogos como Berman, Robinson, Michael Cronin y Michaela Wolf. Sigue una reflexión sobre un aspecto crucial de la ficción literaria, la creatividad lingüística, tomando como primer ejemplo la novela *The Detainee's Tale* de Ali Smith. Comienza por el análisis de la manera en que la traducción

italiana de *Never Let Me Go* (*Nunca me abandones*, en versión castellana) de Kazuo Ishiguro corre el riesgo de menguar el aspecto sugestivo y polisémico del lenguaje minimalista del autor. Se concentra luego en los problemas planteados por los neologismos en *Fleshmarket Close* de Rankin, utilizando el criterio de pertinencia/propiedad, como sugiere el debate de Lance Hewson sobre el papel de la creatividad en la traducción. La última sección de la segunda parte del artículo retoma *Two Caravans* de Lewycka y sus referencias implícitas a los hechos históricos relacionados con las nuevas esclavitudes, para argumentar la importancia de que el traductor tenga conocimiento del contexto del fenómeno histórico, además de las competencias lingüísticas requeridas.

Para concluir, la tercera parte estudia cómo *Fugee* de Morgan y *Fleshmarket Close* de Rankin novelan la traducción y la interpretación no literaria, poniendo así en primer plano las dimensiones éticas y políticas que estas conllevan, según han teorizado Moira Inghilleri y Carol Meier. Sostenemos aquí que también en la traducción literaria el enfoque ético es una etapa necesaria para evitar la deshumanización de los migrantes esclavizados y sus identidades individuales complejas, haciendo referencia a conceptos teóricos como el de “traducción ética” de Berman, el de “traducción subversiva” de Robinson, y el de “resistencia” de Venuti, estrechamente relacionados con la preferencia por las estrategias de “extranjerización”.

Este artigo lida com duas temáticas, nomeadamente as formas de escravidão modernas na Grã-Bretanha e a tradução literária. Pretende-se assim reflectir sobre as estratégias de tradução mais eficientes para transmitir os relatos que tratam do fenómeno das novas escravidões, analisando quase todas as obras de ficção em inglês que foram traduzidas para italiano.

A primeira parte concentra-se sobre a tradutologia em relação com a literatura e os relatos pós-coloniais tratando das novas escravidões britânicas. Realça o conceito de « identidade individual complexa » elaborado por Avery Gordon, sublinhando a necessidade de considerar a complexidade da identidade individual dos sujeitos reduzidos a escravidão nas práticas de tradução. Das teorias de tradução de Lawrence Venuti e Antoine Berman às reflexões sobre a tradução pós-colonial de Douglas Robinson e Viktoria Tchernichova, defende-se que esta exigência pode ser cumprida por meio de técnicas baseadas na estrangeirização (*foreignisation* em inglês e *dépaysement* em francês). Este ponto é posto à prova pelas traduções italianas de *The Other Hand* de Chris Cleave (*Et les Hommes sont venus* em francês) e de *Two Caravans* (*Deux Caravanes* em francês) de Marina Lewycka, que acabam por reduzir dois usos atípicos do inglês a representações caricaturais.

A segunda parte do artigo aponta outros aspectos inexplorados das traduções italianas publicadas desses textos. Enfocamos quatro facetas específicas : os títulos, o interlingualismo, a criatividade linguística e os contextos das novas escravidões. Nas versões italianas de *Simisola* de Ruth Rendell e de *Fleshmarket Close* d'Ian Rankin, os títulos banalizados contribuem para ocultar aspectos fundamentais do fenómeno das novas escravidões britânicas. O interlingualismo é outro ponto comum desses textos: com o estudo de caso da peça *Fugee* de Abi Morgan, este artigo relaciona a sua versão italiana (que realça a poliglossia do texto original, considerando que se trata de uma outra estratégia de estrangeirização) com o interlingualismo e a natureza poli-linguística dos textos destacada por teóricos da tradução tais que Berman, Robinson, Michael Cronin e Michaela Wolf. Segue uma reflexão sobre um aspecto fulcral da ficção literária, a criatividade linguística, tomando por primeiro exemplo a novela *The Detainee's Tale* de Ali Smith; começando por analisar como a tradução italiana de *Never Let me Go* (*Après de moi toujours* em francês) de Kazuo Ishiguro corre o risco de achatar a sugestividade polissêmica da linguagem minimalista do autor, focamos a seguir nos problemas colocados pelos neologismos em *Fleshmarket Close* de Rankin, mobilizando o critério de adequação, tal como foi sugerido pela discussão de Lance Hewson sobre o papel da criatividade em tradução. A última secção da segunda parte volta a considerar *Two Caravans* de Lewycka, e suas referências implícitas aos fatos históricos relativos aos novos escravismos, para

fundamentar a importância para um tradutor de ter um conhecimento do contexto desse fenômeno histórico, juntamente com as competências linguísticas requeridas.

Em conclusão, a terceira parte analisa como *Fugee* de Morgan e *Fleshmarket Close* de Rankin romaneiam a tradução e a interpretação não literária, realçando assim as dimensões éticas e políticas envolvidas, como o teorizaram Moira Inghilleri e Carol Meier. Defendemos aqui que na tradução literária também, esta abordagem ética é uma etapa necessária para evitar a desumanização dos migrantes reduzidos à escravidão e de suas identidades individuais complexas, referindo conceitos teóricos tal como o de « tradução ética » de Berman, de « tradução subversiva » de Robinson e de « resistência » de Venuti, em relação estreita com a preferência para as estratégias de estrangeirização.

INDEX

Mots-clés: nouveaux esclavagismes britanniques, littérature, traductologie, mondialisation

Palavras-chave: novos escravismos britânicos, literatura, tradutologia, mundialização

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