

Exchanging Views: Knowledge Transfer Through Literary Translation

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ABSTRACT

Translation supports cultural interaction by fostering mutual understanding and enabling people to access foreign cultures. Logically, translation also furthers knowledge transfer in a broad sense. Drawing on recent scholarship that focuses on the migration and mobility of literary products (Damrosch, 2003; Casanova, 2004), this article seeks to show that the knowledge generated by both the practice of translation and the interdisciplinary area of Translation Studies is a key factor in shaping the image of a national culture.

INTRODUCTION

Translation supports cultural interaction by fostering mutual understanding and enabling people to access foreign cultures. Logically, translation also furthers knowledge transfer in a broad sense. In a seminal work in the area of cross-cultural management, Nigel Holden argues that translation is not only the vector for the successful transfer of cross-cultural knowledge but also a form of cultural knowledge transfer (2002). He expands on this notion in a later article, co-authored with Harald von Kortzfleisch, affirming that translation “is by far the oldest universal practice of conscientiously converting knowledge from one domain [...] to another” (2004: 128–129). If translation is an integral part of the successful transfer of intercultural knowledge, then translation theories can provide a key to the understanding of the nature of the transfer of knowledge from its source into global networks (2004: 135). Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of literary texts since, unlike other means of cultural expression, the international circulation of literature depends to a great extent on translations that consecrate national authors, texts and traditions in the international sphere.

Literary translation represents one of the major ways in which complex and differentiated conceptions of Australia as a cultural nation become accessible to educated, internationally networked, globally mobile and financially influential populations around the world. Yet, while considerable emphasis has been placed on cultural exchange programmes in the visual and performing arts for the purposes of bolstering image and influencing trade, little attention has been paid to the export of literature in translation as a cultural product, and especially to the role of translation as a subtle mechanism of so-called cultural diplomacy. Drawing on recent scholarship that focuses on the migration and mobility of literary products (Damrosch, 2003; Casanova, 2004), this article seeks to show that the knowledge generated by cultural exchanges and, in particular, exchanges of literature in translation, is a key factor in shaping the image of a national culture. The body of Australian texts which, through translation, is made available to an

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Italian-speaking readership constitutes an extension of a national archive. Thus, arguably the translations of contemporary novels, together with the paratexts (critical reviews, promotional materials) that accompany them, contribute to shaping the image of Australia and its culture for an Italian-speaking readership.

FORMS OF MOBILITY: CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AND LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION

In 2005, the United States Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy submitted a report to the US State Department in which it was strongly argued that literary culture and its dissemination abroad is one important way to restore the world's view of the United States and continue a "tradition upon which to build a permanent structure of cultural diplomacy."¹ Specifically, the authors note that:

translation lies at the heart of any cultural diplomacy initiative; some misunderstandings between peoples may be resolved through engagement with each other's literary and intellectual traditions; the poverty of insight displayed by American policy makers and pundits in their view of other lands may in some cases be mediated by contact, in translation, with thinkers from abroad. (2005: 12)

While the United States' initiative is largely ideological and concerned with "soft power", the use of culture to improve trading opportunities has become widespread in many countries over the twentieth century (Anholt, 2002). Hence the *Creative Nation: Commonwealth Cultural Policy* introduced by the Australian Federal Government in 1994 focused not only on the national imperative to foster cultural development but also on the economic potential generated by cultural activity. One of the initiatives implemented under the *Creative Nation* policy was a Translation Programme administered by the Australia Council Literature Board over a six-year period (Australia Council for the Arts, 1994–1995). Another government initiative intended to strengthen links between Australian and overseas publishing houses and literary agencies, is the ongoing Visiting International Publishers (VIP) programme. Launched in the late 1990s, the VIP programme invites overseas publishers to Australian literary festivals in Adelaide and Sydney.

More recently, a report, entitled "Australia's Public Diplomacy: Building our Image" submitted to the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade in 2007 noted that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's "Images of Australia" Branch has primary responsibility for implementing Australia's public and cultural diplomacy programmes to advance Australia's foreign and trade policy objectives. Its programs aim to create positive perceptions towards Australia and to ensure that Australia's international image is "contemporary, dynamic and positive" (2007: 31).² The wording is remarkably similar to that of a Canadian report on the benefit of including "cultural workers" in official delegations abroad as they help to promote "a positive image of Canada as culturally diverse, creative, innovative and modern."³ In both the Canadian and the Australian policies, the focus is on the export of culture for trade initiatives through image development and management, but little is said (unlike in the US initiative mentioned earlier) about the linguistic and cultural transfer without which a cultural policy can hardly be said to exist as an effective form of strategic communication.

In other words, translation, to use Lawrence Venuti's canonic formulation, "continues to be an invisible practice, everywhere around us, inescapably present, but rarely acknowledged" (1992: 1). The general silence on translation has been one of the key motivations for the development of a wide-ranging collaborative research project on the reception of Australian literature in non-Anglophone markets.⁴ The project on which this article is based is designed to provide, in the long

run, a knowledge base upon which authors, translators, literary agents, publishers and cultural institutions can draw in order to contribute to the global flow of Australian literature in better informed ways, since, as Robert Dixon has argued, translations instantiate Australian literature as “belonging not just to the nation but also to an expanded field in which national literatures come into being in complex and competitive relations in world literary space” (Dixon, 2009: 253).

The term *Weltliteratur* coined by Goethe (Eckermann, 1998: 165–166) has re-emerged in recent years as a prominent domain of literary conceptualization in the wake of theorization on globalization (Casanova, 2004; Damrosch, 2003; Moretti, 2003; Saussy, 2006). World literature is “a literature that gains in translation” in the sense that “the whole corpus of originals and translations is of greater value than the original alone, both in terms of artistic value and cultural impact” (Thomsen, 2008: 16; see also Damrosch 2003: 288–297). Theories of world literature build upon systems theories (Lotman 1990) or upon Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory of cultural production (1993). This paradigmatic shift implies a re-orientation of the analytic methodology from individual textual analysis to systemic analysis, from “literary texts” to “literary objects”. Such an approach permits a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics underlying literary production and offers empirical support for the claim that literature is “produced and managed as a cultural formation by a range of institutions and their affiliate figures – publishers, editors, reviewers, academic critics – who are paid to think about it” (Davis, 2008: 7). It is a methodology that assumes a pragmatic logic of the global market of literary production, distribution and consumption and, consequently, ignores traditional literary hierarchies.

In the global flows of literature in translation, genres take on a new significance, based upon their statistical weight rather than the value accorded to them by literary critical elites (Smith, 1988). Peripheral literatures also acquire prominence in world literary systems, as cultural innovation frequently comes from the border regions (Casanova, 2004: 175–179; Lotman, 1990: 134; Even-Zohar, 2000: 193). The gradual rise of European interest in Australian literature⁵, which is still a relatively peripheral sub-system within the literary world system, has gone hand in hand with shifts in the international perception of Australia itself: from colonial backwater, to destination of economic migration, and subsequently, with the changing international status of Australia, from a destination for economic migration to a destination for life-style migration or tourism.

IMAGINING AUSTRALIA IN ITALY⁶

In one of the few scholarly works published on the subject, Guerrino Lorenzato (1995) suggests that, historically, Australia’s image in the Italian imaginary has been one of either Myth or Utopia. Focusing on the second half of the twentieth century, Lorenzato describes Italian imaginings of Australia as “a series of perceptions” which, filtered through the optics of various Italian journalists and commentators, create the perception of a place where:

il “diverso” esiste solamente in funzione di un *alter mundi*, di un rovescio naturale evidente nell’ambiente [...] paradiso terrestre, luogo penitenziale o antipode selvaggio (1995: iv)

“difference” functions only in terms of an *alter mundi*, a reversal of nature apparent in the environment [...] Terrestrial Paradise, purgatorial place or antipodean wilderness.⁷

Lorenzato’s survey of media reports over the period 1960–1980 reveals how European perceptions of Australia remained fairly stable. His findings also confirm the enduring perception of Australia as both an actual tourist destination and a utopian ideal associated with immense and unspoilt natural landscapes bathed in brilliant light; a place so radically different, that Mario Praz, renowned

scholar of English literature, compared it to the “altro polo” in which Dante located Purgatory (in Lorenzato, 1995: 94).

By and large, Italian perceptions of the supposed “exotic otherness” of Australia remain fairly widespread to date. Indeed, the interest in Australian literature in Italy is closely linked to this perception. Giovanni Tranchida, explaining his interest in publishing Australian fiction, draws on the well-worn *topoi* of the country’s vast unpopulated landscapes (“terra nullis”), its unique fauna and flora, its Aboriginal peoples, and concludes that not much has changed, over the years, with regard to the Italian “imaginary map of the antipodes, especially the cultural map”, and that perhaps the “tyranny of distance” has contributed to a vision of Australia based on those glossy travel brochures that tend to both exaggerate and limit themselves to the “exotic aspects”.⁸

It is generally assumed that translations of narrative texts reflect the target readers’ interest in the foreign culture underlying the text. The narrative text offers the foreign experiences of a foreign author to which the target language reader is introduced by a translator, who in this respect acts as a mediator.⁹ As cultural artefacts, texts chosen for translation tend to be “what is seen abroad as “Australian” in markedly – marketably – stereotypical terms” (Huggan, 2007: xii). It is within this context that I locate my discussion of Italian translations of Australian fiction in the second half of the twentieth century, attempting to assess whether the product of translation merely confirms stereotypical imaginings or whether it adds breadth and depth to the cultural repertoire that represents contemporary Australia in Italy.

AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE IN ITALY: WHAT DO THE STATISTICS SAY?

The Italian-language sector of the project has generated a catalogue of 461 translation entries published in the period 1950–2010 (Gerber and Wilson, 2011: 12). The most obvious feature of the data collected to date is the very marked increase in volume since the mid-1990s: of a total of approximately 115 literary titles translated since 1945, more than half (i.e. 62) has been translated since 1996. Of these, only major canonical works and some genre fiction (such as Greg Egan’s science fiction novels) achieved conspicuous sales and media attention in Italy, while interest in works by Aboriginal Australians remained marginal.¹⁰

A glance at the numbers for the decade 1996–2005 reveals that the overall number of translations – literary and genre fiction – grew exponentially from 25 in the previous decade to reach a total of 81. Of these 31 could be classified as “literary” titles, revealing a marked disparity between canonicity and translation volume. Canonical “literary” or high-brow literature actually makes up a fairly small sector of the overall translation volume. The vast majority of translations are of popular genres such as romance, fantasy, science fiction, crime novels and children’s literature, which in most literary markets make up the bulk of the texts produced.¹¹ While a number of prominent contemporary Australian authors have had multiple works translated into Italian, including J. M. Coetzee (14 titles),¹² Peter Carey (8 titles), David Malouf (8 titles), Neville Shute (9 titles), Christina Stead (5 titles), Tim Winton (7 titles), and Patrick White (5 titles), the largest number of titles translated are those that would appeal to a “middlebrow” readership (Carter 2004), such as the works of Colleen McCullough (17 of her 22 titles) and Morris West (21 of his 28 titles).

While the choice of texts to be translated is most often motivated by economic factors, cultural, social and ideological factors also have a significant role to play in the global literary market. Trends in publishing can be read as the commercial face of Itamar Even-Zohar’s “polysystem” theory (2000), which aims to investigate the interrelated collection of systems that governs the production and reception of literature within a given culture, including ways in which translated texts are positioned within cultures. The buying trends of different cultures indicate the preferences and tastes of a culture and the palatability of certain outputs. Knowing, for example, that there is a

strong Italian market for science fiction means that Australian science fiction novels automatically have a place to go within that literary system, as evidenced by the popularity of Greg Egan, acclaimed as “l'autore di spicco” (the leading author) of the latest generation of science fiction writers and published in Mondadori's best-selling *Urania* series,¹³ and Matthew Reilly, who has had seven of his eight novels translated into Italian, all of which have been commercially successful.

The reasons behind the extraordinary spike in translations during the 1996–2005 decade are complex, but the growth is at least partially linked to the Australian Government funding initiative mentioned earlier which, in this decade, targeted Italian publishers. There is a discernible trend to select titles which reflect a notion of “Australianness” as defined by settings and authorship. This is substantiated by a survey conducted among Australian members of PEN in 2006 which indicated that an author's chances of being translated increased considerably if s/he was a literary prize winner and if the text contained “a strong dose of the Australian landscape” (Škrabec, 2007: 38).

THE RECEPTION OF TRANSLATED LITERATURE

As Bourdieu (2008) reminds us, texts circulate without their context; their signification is provided by the context of their reception. Translation as a cultural phenomenon demands that disciplines of national literary studies exceed their own borders and explore the entanglements of a given national literary heritage with the cultural archives of other nations, cultures and languages. This imperative in turn draws attention to the increasingly complex interactions in “Western society [that] as a whole has turned into an immense contact zone, where intercultural relations contribute to the internal life of all national cultures” (Simon, 1996: 161). The notion of a “contact zone”, or better a “translation zone” (Apter, 2005), supplemented by Gerard Genette's understanding of a literary work as “rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions” that surround and extend it, “precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: *to make present*” (1997: 1), provide useful concepts to consider how translated works meet and engage with an already existing culture, whose discourses, carried in the media (in the form of reviews, critiques, responses), can have a sizeable impact on the new, incoming cultural products. Genette defines anything that affects the reader's ability to make sense of the text: promotion, celebrity status of the author, cultural knowledge, and so on, as “paratext”, further sub-dividing this into “peritext” and “epitext”: peritext being the paratextual factors that are physically attached to the text (cover design and blurb, preface), and epitext being those factors “not materially appended” to the book (interviews, press releases) (Genette, 1997: 344). Both are of interest here: the peritext because it has much to do with marketing, usually being put in place with a didactic or promotional intention; and the epitext, not only because it consists typically of reviews that are directly linked to defining the novel in some way, but also because it is constituted by various promotional activities or interviews which discuss broader details of the author's life, the source culture of the text, or even the conditions of production of the work. All of these are said to have a paratextual effect, in that they do not directly link themselves to the text, but do influence readings of the work and, therefore, are inseparable from the transfer of that text into another cultural milieu – thus are manifestly part of the knowledge transfer process.

We know from large-scale studies of translations (Bourdieu, 2008) that translators and publishers often construct a “domestic representation of foreign text and culture [...] shaped by codes and canons, interests and agendas of certain domestic social groups” (Venuti, 1998: 10). That is to say, publishers and translators work *for* the target culture: creating interest and supplying it with reading

materials that shape its readers. For example, reviewers of Italian translations of works by Henry Lawson, including respected scholars like Franca Cavagnoli¹⁴, usually begin by referring to him as the the “father of Australian literature” and by praising his ability to render the essence of the “bush”. Cavagnoli (2000) praises Lawson’s fine portrayal in *Racconti australiani*¹⁵ of “everyday” characters whose stories of daily struggles are intensified by their isolation and the continuous battle against a hostile nature. Mention is made of itinerant workers on droving treks carrying a bedroll or swag: the “matilda” of the famous ballad “Waltzing Matilda”. Cavagnoli’s explanation that “dancing with Matilda meant going on an adventure” is both a form of cultural translation and a compensation for those terms left untranslated in her review: namely, “outback” and “bush” because Australian nature is “untranslatable”. By highlighting those aspects of Australian culture and society that are, and at the same time are not, Europe, Cavagnoli (2009) kindles readers’ interest in books that she is careful to distinguish from other literature that Italian readers may perceive as exotic – such as books from Africa or the Caribbean, maintaining that when Italians read an Australian book: “Ci fa sentire [...] che l’Australia è la nostra metà in ombra, la nostra metà oscura” (“It makes us feel [...] that Australia is our shadow half, our dark side,” 2009: n.p.)

In attempting to understand the complex economies and the roles of the various agents (authors, publishers, translators) that make up the “translation zone”, key factors include the role of the author’s celebrity, the visibility of translator-advocates, like Cavagnoli, in championing a particular work or author for a particular readership and the effects of extra-textual events such as international cultural or sporting events, in promoting both an awareness of the literary works and a sympathetic understanding of their country of origin. These diverse phenomena can often be crystallized around a single event: the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000 are a case in point. During the lead-up to the “Millennium Games”, important Italian dailies actively publicized and reviewed Australian books. The *Corriere della sera*, one of the most widely-read national newspapers, published a lengthy reportage written by Franca Cavagnoli (3 Sept. 2000) in which she maps a literary journey across the country, beginning at its “heart” with Patrick White’s *Voss* (1957) fittingly titled *L’esploratore* in the Italian translation by Florentine poet Piero Jahier (1965). She then gives brief plot summaries of novels that represent different iconic localities: David Malouf (the “outback” and Queensland); Hal Porter (the “red centre”); Peter Carey (New South Wales), with a Sydney stop-over courtesy of a “sparkling translation” of Christina Stead’s first novel *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934) by controversial novelist Aldo Busi (*Sette poveracci di Sydney*, 1988). Finally, readers are directed to two collections of Australian short stories, *Il cielo a rovescio* (1998) and *Cieli australi. Cent’anni di racconti dall’Australia* (2000), both edited by Cavagnoli herself, in which Australia appears as a country traversed by “vital and heterogeneous” cultural currents, brought together by its writers to contest the versions of history offered by colonial texts and to fashion a new sense of national identity. The writings collected in these anthologies offer interesting prospects “per il continente che conserva la memoria più antica del pianeta” (for the continent that preserves the oldest memory on the planet, 2000:33).

A view shared by Claudio Gorlier, one of the founders of the Italian Society for Australian Studies (SISA) in the 1970s and a regular contributor to the Turin daily *La Stampa*. Writing for its highly respected literary supplement *Tuttolibri*, Gorlier begins by quoting extensively from A.D. Hope’s poem “Australia”, arguing that the poem encapsulates:

la problematicità appassionata e spesso tormentosa della letteratura di un continente nazione antichissimo per storia naturale (i canguri sono un felice anacronismo) e recente per storia politica (2000: 3)

the passionate and often tormented complexity of the literature of a nation-continent with an ancient natural history (kangaroos are a happy anachronism) and a modern political history.

He goes on to refer to the recent translation of Tim Winton's *The Riders/ I cavalieri*, remarking that the lack of a solid tradition has resulted in at least two distinct "lines of force" in Australian literature: the dominating, often hostile, presence of nature and the intense, contradictory interpersonal relationships, in many cases resulting from the loneliness and isolation associated with the great distances and harsh environment.

Both articles draw attention to the "geographies of circulation that supersede and interrupt the borders of the nation state" (Baucom, 2005: 36). To grasp these geographies means that we have to think beyond the cognitive limits of specific national spaces and imaginaries, and work through the mechanics of literary exchange, particularly for those texts that travel between countries and cultures that are geographically (and linguistically) far apart. Since the mid-1990s Australian literature has increasingly entered a sending phase (Lotman 1990: 144–7), and the voices of Brenda Walker, Gail Jones and Beth Yahp have joined those of Henry Lawson and Dorothy Hewett enabling Italian readers to access worlds viewed "da angolazioni inedite [...] da parte di scrittori di talento che spesso restano confinati in remote nicchie geografiche e culturali" ("through unfamiliar perspectives by talented writers who are often confined to remote geographical and cultural niches").¹⁶

The extent to which the publishing industry itself positions readers to receive foreign cultures can be investigated through media reviews of translated narratives as well as through press coverage. Critical reviewers contribute to those paratextual effects which function in the translation zone, with the power to either maintain or subvert stereotypical imaginings of a foreign culture for its readership.¹⁷ Space does not allow me to go into detail here but, briefly, an analysis into reviews of the Italian translation of Tim Winton's novels, sourced from the website of his Italian publisher Fazi and from print media, reveals a consistent tendency among reviewers to establish parallels with authors and themes within world literary canons: for example, Winton's writing is described by one critic as:

a metà strada tra la grandezza di disegno dei naturalisti dell'800 (Zola, Verga, Balzac), e le inquietudini tutte post-moderne di un McEwan o di una Woolf (*Il mucchio selvaggio*, 29 April 2003)

halfway between the grand designs of the 19th Century realists (Zola, Verga, Balzac) and the typical postmodernist anxieties of a McEwan or a Woolf.

More recently, the same tendency has emerged in reviews of Craig Silvey's novel *Jasper Jones*:

Viene considerato la versione australiana de *Il buio oltre la siepe* per la sua denuncia del razzismo, viene accostato alle opere di Mark Twain per gli accenni all'amicizia e all'ironia (*atlantidelibri*, 4 June 2010)

Considered the Australian version of *To Kill a Mockingbird* for its denunciation of racism, associated with the works of Mark Twain for its allusions to friendship and its ironic tone

In comparing Winton to Woolf or Zola, and Silvey to Harper Lee or Mark Twain, the Italian reviewers play an important part in the process whereby national literature and writers become part of the international literary scene both through translations and the association with universally acclaimed writers invested with noteworthy cultural capital (Casanova, 2004: 133 and passim). Such "internationalization" is noticeable in the cover blurbs of the Italian translation of books by David Malouf, Peter Carey and Tim Winton, among others, which often refer both to the international and the Australian literary prizes awarded to the author in question. The paratextual effects they generate are recognized as fundamental in bringing Australian-originated literary fiction to

prominence within the international marketplace. For instance, noting the achievements of Winton's long-awaited novel, *Breath/Respiro*, one reviewer remarks approvingly that winning a significant number of prizes in the Anglosaxon context, the latest being the Miles Franklin Award, confirm "il buon Tim come uno degli autori di punta della narrativa internazionale" ("good old Tim's status as one of the leading authors of international fiction").¹⁸

By and large, Australian texts are not, to use Damrosch's definition, "actively present within a literary system" that extends beyond a national context of production and reception (2003: 4). However, as Tranchida notes, Australian literary production has been particularly "intense and varied" from the 1970s thanks to Federal government policies aimed at promoting cultural activity and, for some years now, Italian readers have been able to undertake "felici e coraggiose incursioni in questa ramificata mappa letteraria australiana" ("exceptional and daring forays into this branched literary map of Australia") and find numerous publications, "classic" and "new", by Antipodean writers that epitomize its variety, with respect both to genre and subject-matter.¹⁹

Thus, while Australian literature in Italy remains peripheral, it is now most often positioned as a new and innovative artistic expression, largely due to those recurrent themes that contribute to preserving the finest exemplars of a type of literature that could perhaps be defined as "minoritaria, ma nient'affatto minorata" ("minor but certainly not inferior", Scandroglio, 2005). This shift of perception has been accompanied by a broadening of the palette of cultural products available from Australia on the international market, from film (recently, for instance, Baz Luhrman's hyperbolic *Australia*) and TV (especially soaps, from *Neighbours* to *McLeod's Daughters*) via music (from AC/DC to Kylie Minogue), to indigenous art, which, in general has a wider recognition than indigenous literature, although often this is limited to fairly conventional artifacts (e.g. dot paintings). The paratextual effect is evident in the influence of film and television over perceptions of culture, and hence other culturally-specific texts. Potential readers are likely to have come across images from film and television – or even more likely the internet – before they approach a text: to give just one example, the book trailer of *Beautiful Malice* posted by Mondadori on YouTube has had 2,080 views at the time of writing, with most of the comments recorded from people who have not (yet) read the book but have expressed enthusiastic interest in doing so (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TePjqPzoW60>).

While translation is the most effective way to carry stories across cultures, the outcomes of the process can never be truly controlled. Once a translation is dispatched into a new culture it takes on a life of its own. It has been set free, so to speak, from its national and other source affiliations and has become a hybrid – more cosmopolitan than the home-grown artefact that was the original text. A glimpse of the paths of knowledge transfer forged by the mobility and dissemination of literature in translation is offered by a brief consideration of the websites of the more active publishers in this area. The mission statement of Edizioni e/o (a small independent publisher founded in 1979) is fairly typical of the current publishers' rhetoric: the "publishing endeavour [is] as much a cultural enterprise as a business venture, [and] that dialogue between nations and cultures has never been more important than now".²⁰ The Australian writers on the publisher's list – Kate Holden and Peter Kocan – have been selected because their autobiographical narratives are seen as indicative of a new contemporary Australian society, one that may well defy expectations of Italian readers of Australian translated narratives.

While recognizing that Australia is a large and heterogeneous country and its writers cannot be grouped into one school or tendency, Tiziano Gianotti (Giano Editore)²¹ maintains that there is "something else" in new Australian writing, that due to its irreverence, makes it stand out:

dal conformismo di tanti autori ideologici delle nostre latitudini. Ciò che caratterizza gran parte dei nuovi autori australiani [...] è che cercano di uscire dal luogo comune di una letteratura post-coloniale tenendo le distanze dalle sirene e dalle mode della letteratura post-moderna, soprattutto americana (in Scandroglio 2005)

from the conformism of so many of the ideological authors in our latitude. What characterizes many of the new Australian authors [...] is that they try to dispel the cliché of a post-colonial literature while avoiding the seductions and fashions of post-modern literature, especially American

The rhetoric of recent critical reception is encapsulated in the title of Ida Bozzi's article (2009): "Sorprese. Una generazione di narratori scala le classifiche e ottiene riconoscimenti. Banditi, mare e avventura. I nuovi scrittori australiani. Da Roberts a Winton, voci (e temi) dell'ultima frontiera" which offers the reader surprises and adventure through award-winning, chart-topping books by a new wave of authors from a "distant frontier". Noting, a little tongue-in-cheek, that we do not know if the two major concerns of Australians are truly "sports and criminals", as author Steve Toltz maintains, Bozzi underscores how both emerging and established writers (Toltz, Man Booker Prize shortlist 2008; Peter Carey, twice winner of the Booker Prize) portray "the spirit of rebellion" that distinguishes the "former penal colony". The latter view resonates with Scandroglio's opinion that the irreverent quality of Australian writing sets it apart from other contemporary Anglophone narratives (2005: n.p.).

Research into the intercultural movement of texts indicates that, frequently, books are chosen for translation because of a providential correlation between the symbolic capital of a particular author and the interests of a publisher acting to implement his/her cultural and/or commercial corporate strategies. Such is the case of Giano Editore, which claims that the publication of Craig Silvey's second novel *Jasper Jones* proves this publisher's commitment to importing high-quality books for the Italian market (promotional write-up in *Libri News* 23 May 2010). The novel has, in fact, garnered glowing reviews in Italy. Exemplary in this regard is the one that appeared in *Corriere della sera*, which contains all the epitextual elements calculated to provoke the maximum interest in the potential readership: details of the author's life, the source culture of the text, its quintessentially Australian setting, not least the global marketability of the work due to the universal appeal of the story:

lo straordinario talento narrativo di Craig Silvey, un ventiseienne australiano che è nato e vissuto in un frutteto a cento chilometri da Perth, ci aiuta a visualizzarlo nella sua spietata semplicità e bellezza con il romanzo *Jasper Jones* [...], un vero gioiello della lettura perché i dialoghi sono vibranti e la trama è originale, poi perché si ha la sensazione di vedere e ascoltare la voce di una minuscola e remota collettività, un atomo di società blindata, il cui istinto di conservazione e le cui convenzioni vengono scossi dalle tensioni generazionali. Che sono le tensioni vicinissime a noi, attorno a noi. [...] *E non sorprende che dagli Stati Uniti alla Cina gli editori ne abbiano acquisito i diritti. È una storia che non ha confini.* (Cavalera, 2010: 44, emphasis added)

the extraordinary narrative talent of Craig Silvey, a 26-year-old Australian who was born and raised in an orchard 100 kilometers from Perth, helps us to see the country in its ruthless simplicity and beauty with his novel *Jasper Jones* [...], a gem to read because the dialogue is vibrant and the storyline is original, and because one has the feeling of seeing and hearing the voice of a tiny and remote community, a microcosm of a closed society, whose self-preservation and whose conventions are shaken by generational tensions. Tensions that are very close to us, all around us. [...] *It is not surprising that publishers in the US and China have acquired the rights. It is a story that has no boundaries* (emphasis added)

This is the type of media discourse that prompts Annamaria Briganti, literary columnist for the music and culture magazine *Il mucchio selvaggio*, to ask "Gli scrittori australiani saranno il nuovo fenomeno editoriale dopo gli scandinavi?" ("Will Australian writers be the new publishing phenomenon after the Scandinavians?" 2010: 136). Referring to an earlier review of *Jasper Jones* published in the same magazine, she first praises Craig Silvey for "revitalizing the *bildungsroman* by setting it in the Australian countryside of the late sixties", and then applauds the best-selling debut

novel by Rebecca James, *Beautiful Malice*, in the “bella traduzione” (beautiful translation) by novelist Alessandra Montrucchio. The rest of the article consists of an interview with Rebecca James, in which, once again the discussion of the novel is supplemented by biographical and geographical details: we learn that James is an ex-secondary school teacher and lives in Armidale, the rural hinterland of Australia,²² with her partner and four children. The tone of the review is overwhelmingly positive: the foreign is both recognised and welcome; readers are told they will find that “l’Australia è un paese ancora da scoprire, a partire dalla letteratura.” (“Australia is a country yet to be discovered, beginning with its literature,” Briganti, 2010: 136).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

National branding seems to be increasingly unimportant in a globalized world, and “stories” seem to sell largely as good narrative material that may, briefly, fulfil some purpose in the local environment. In this context, the “cultural diplomacy effect” must be questionable. However, the intercultural movement of texts, precipitated by the selection of a title for translation, is a reflection of the cultural, economic or political power relations between nations and cultures. It is essential to recognize that the phenomenon of literary translation is a social event – an activity that is usually well beyond the control of the individual “translator as a person,” and always occurs in a social system and context. It is also worth reiterating that translation as a social practice depends on intermediary agencies and that such social agencies are located both within and outside the receiving culture. Australian literature when translated continues to belong to the national culture, indeed often aggressively markets the specificity of that national culture, yet paradoxically extends well beyond the borders of the nation, and makes up an integral part of the cultural archive of the nations whose literatures it enters via translation.

The history of the Italian translation of Australian works in the second half of the twentieth century – which saw considerable developments in the number of Australian authors and the range of texts translated into Italian – seems to show that a joint effort between Italian publishers and modest Australian funding has begun to bring some of the mild results that the US Committee on Cultural Diplomacy projects: some dissemination of ideas and information, some nuanced views on Australia, and perhaps increased empathy and understanding. Australia and its present day authors are regarded as dealing with relevant and intriguing topics in the (post)modern, globalized world and perhaps as offering alternatives to European and North American experience and models. Even though Australia is probably still not regarded as an autonomous literary entity by the general Italian-speaking public, and the image of a “Europa tradotta agli antipodi, un’Europa a testa in giù” (“Europe translated to the Antipodes, an upside down Europe,” Cavagnoli, 2009) is still prevalent, nevertheless its renown as the origin of excellent writers has definitely increased. The texts that have been translated in the last few years offer considerable insight into Australia’s heterogeneity and have clearly enhanced understanding of its literary production: the blog of Libreria Atlantide, an independent bookshop in the province of Bologna, recently proclaimed “Australia, un continente molto interessante, anche dal punto di vista letterario!” (“Australia, a very interesting continent, even from the literary point of view.”)²³ Conclusions about what the corpus of Australian texts in translation might represent in Italian culture are limited by the relatively small numbers and the diverse genres represented. It is, however, interesting to observe the relatively rapid translation into Italian of novels by emerging Australian writers like Craig Silvey and Steve Toltz, which might indicate recognition by mainstream publishers of the potential for these “fresh” Antipodean voices to generate cultural (and even economic) capital locally.

The trend in the study of translation which deals with the meaning and fate of translated texts opens a wide range of possibilities for the analysis of the relations between cultures and of the

processes of intercultural knowledge transfer. The capacity to endow a text with new life and meaning by placing it in a different linguistic and cultural setting, an act that simultaneously enriches the language and literary heritage of both the host and the receiving culture, may be the greatest achievement of translation. Literary translation is an active process, transforming what it transfers, creating something new, reinventing literature and keeping it alive. It is evident, therefore, that far from being a one-way process (from source language to target language), literary translation is very much “a concrete manifestation of cultural exchange” (Damrosch, 2003: 289).

NOTES

1. Cultural Diplomacy. The Linchpin of Public Diplomacy. 2005. www.publicdiplomacy.org/55.htm (p.22)
2. Available at http://www.apf.gov.au/Senate/committee/fadt_cte/completed_inquiries/2004-07/public_diplomacy/report/report.pdf
3. *Canada World View*, Issue 17, Autumn 2002. Available at <http://international.gc.ca/canada-magazine/issue17/17t7-en.asp>
4. *Windows on Australia: Perceptions in and through Translation* is a major interdisciplinary research project being carried out by Translation and Interpreting Studies in the School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics at Monash University with support from the Copyright Agency Ltd. See <http://www.austlit.edu.au/specialistDatasets/WindowsOnAustralia/>
5. The European Association for Studies of Australia (EASA), bringing together a number of European universities, was established in 1989 (a year after the Australian Bicentenary). It aims to “promote the teaching of and research in Australian Studies at European tertiary institutions, as well as to increase an awareness of Australian culture throughout Europe” <http://www.easa-australianstudies.net/>
6. To borrow the title of a one-day conference held in 1997 by the newly constituted Centro Studi sulle Letterature Omeoglotte dei Paesi Extraeuropei at the University of Bologna.
7. All translations from Italian are mine.
8. Giovanni Tranchida Editore is an independent publisher (established 1983) based in Milan whose “specific task [...] has been that of bringing literary works to our attention [...] with particular attention paid to both cultural and linguistic context to a level not usual for us in Italy”. Works from Australia and New Zealand are featured in the thematic area “Paesaggi, Voci e Mondi dagli Antipodi”. See <http://www.tranchida.it/>
9. A number of recent research tendencies in Translation Studies focus explicitly on the translator’s agency, highlighting the social and cultural (in addition to the obvious linguistic) aspects of this role. For more on this, see Wolf and Fukari, Alexandra, 2007.
10. As Francesca Di Blasio notes, “very few Aboriginal texts are known [to Italian readers], because they are not translated and disseminated by Italian publishers” (2008: 29). She suggests that this lack of awareness can be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that in “Italian university curricula, Australian Aboriginal fiction, poetry and drama are uncommon. Anthropological and historical studies are more widespread [...]”. As far as literature is concerned, [...] the Indigenous literature of Australia is presented generically as the problematic ‘post-colonial literature’, and is not in any case thoroughly examined as a specific cultural phenomenon” (2008: 29).
11. The romance genre far outstrips any other genre in terms of the number of translations overall. In Italy, the only other clearly popular genre is science fiction/fantasy, but only in terms of numbers of authors translated (rather than numbers of works by each author). A brief investigation of blogs and web-based reader forums indicates that Australian sci-fi/fantasy authors do have a significant following in Italy (Gerber and Wilson, 2011: 13).
12. Coetzee left South Africa for Australia in 2002 and took on Australian citizenship in 2006. Thus, although he was already resident in Australia at the time of the award, he only retroactively became Australia’s second Nobel laureate for literature.
13. <http://www.railibro.rai.it/articoli.asp?id=427>
14. Franca Cavagnoli has played an important role in the translation and publication of the works of David Malouf in Italy. A novelist herself, she lectures in Translation Studies at the Università degli Studi di Milano and, in addition to a succession of Malouf’s novels, has translated numerous Anglophone postcolonial writers.
15. First published by Tranchida in 1998, reprinted in 2000, it combines two previously published volumes: *Gente del bush* and the novella *I gerani della signora Spicer* (Tranchida, 1992, both translated by Giuliana Prato). The

- short story, "The Drover's Wife" was included in a collection entitled *Cieli Australi. Cent' anni di racconti dall' Australia* (Mondadori, 2000) edited by Franca Cavagnoli and translated by Silvia Fornasiero.
16. Tranchida, http://www.tranchida.it/sec_new.php?op=viewseries&artid=370%ss879%ss460.
 17. To put it another way, "the mechanisms of the literary market, and literary taste at the target pole appear to function as commercial and aesthetic censors affecting the [...] reception of translated literature" (Vanderauwera, 1985: 199).
 18. Libreria Atlandide Blog <http://buonelettere.wordpress.com/2009/07/12/respiro-di-tim-winton/>.
 19. http://www.tranchida.it/sec_new.php?op=viewseries&artid=370%ss879%ss460&page=2
 20. Interview with Sandro Ferro. Available at <http://www.edizionieo.it/pagina.php?Id=storia#engl> Accessed 4 December 2007
 21. Giano Editore is credited with being the first publisher of Dorothy Hewett's *Neap Tide* (1999) with the title *La marea delle quadrature* (translated by Giovanna Scocchera) in 2005. The Italian version was re-published in 2009 as *Il cottage sull'oceano* by Neri Pozza, who in 2010 also published the short story collection *I raccoglitori di fragole e altri racconti (A Baker's Dozen)*, 2001)
 22. There is an editor's note to inform the reader that Armidale is in New South Wales – a two-and-a-half-hour drive from the coast – "between the city lights of Sydney and Brisbane".
 23. <http://buonelettere.wordpress.com/author/atlandidelibri/> Accessed 4 June 2010

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