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RECEPTION OF LUIGI PIRANDELLO'S TRANSLATION IN THE CONTEXT OF NINETEENTH CENTURY ITALIAN TRANSLATIONS OF GOETHE'S *RÖMISCHE ELEGIEN*

Abstract

The article focuses on Luigi Pirandello's Italian translation of Goethe's *Römische Elegien* (1896, Livorno: Giusti). It presents the previous Italian translators and reviews how Pirandello's version was received by his contemporaries. Its reception is examined through the writings of three reviewers (Tommaso Gnoli, Luigi Parpagliolo and R. – probably Ruggiero Bonghi), who demonstrate that the translation was favourably received in the Roman cultural environment close to Pirandello. The article then highlights the features that his contemporaries found most innovative and impressive in Pirandello's translation.

Keywords: Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Luigi Pirandello, reviews, *Roman Elegies*, translation studies

Ricezione di Luigi Pirandello traduttore nel contesto delle traduzioni ottocentesche de *Le elegie romane* di Johann Wolfgang Goethe in lingua italiana

Riassunto

L'articolo è incentrato sulla figura di Luigi Pirandello traduttore de *Le elegie romane* di Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1896, Livorno: Giusti). L'autrice presenta le precedenti traduzioni dell'opera in italiano e successivamente osserva come la versione di Pirandello fu accolta dai suoi contemporanei. La ricezione viene esaminata attraverso i contributi di tre recensori (Tommaso Gnoli, Luigi Parpagliolo e R. – probabilmente Ruggiero Bonghi), che dimostrano che le traduzioni furono accolte in maniera favorevole nel cerchio culturale romano di cui Pirandello faceva parte. L'articolo poi evidenzia le caratteristiche più innovative della traduzione pirandelliana a loro giudizio.

Parole chiave: Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Elegie Romane*, Luigi Pirandello, recensioni, traduzione

This study investigates the reception of Luigi Pirandello's Italian translation of Goethe's *Römische Elegien* [Roman Elegies], made when the famous Sicilian playwright was still a young man. As is well known, the Italian author (1867–1936)

was awarded the Nobel prize for literature in 1934 and is considered one of the greatest playwrights of the twentieth century. Universally acclaimed above all for his dramaturgical and narrative work, Pirandello had actually approached poetry before any other genre and in fact had wanted to be a poet in his youth, as he recalled in a famous biographical note.¹

Pirandello's poetic output, still the least investigated, includes collections such as *Mal giocondo* (Palermo 1889), *Pasqua di Gea* (Milan 1891), *Elegie renane* (Rome 1895), *Zampogna* (Rome 1901) and *Fuori di chiave* (Genova 1912), the four poems *Belfagor*, *Pier Gudrò*, *Laðmache*, *Scamandro*, a number of occasional poems and his poetic translation of Goethe's *Römische Elegien* (Livorno 1896). This translation has been re-evaluated in recent years, as demonstrated by the publication of a new edition by Marta Fumi (Fumi, 2017) and of two articles for the journal *Pirandello Studies* (Aletta, 2018; Fumi, 2019). These studies have reconstructed the context in which the translation was written and underlined its stylistic characteristics with respect to the German original (Fumi) and have focused on the metre (Aletta). The present contribution, then, adds a further tessera to this mosaic, investigating how it was received and considered by Pirandello's contemporaries from the same cultural environment, after briefly presenting the Italian translators who had preceded Pirandello.

The Italian translators of the *Römische Elegien*

Goethe died on 22 March 1832 and was by then already renowned in Italy, despite his works having been read there in there only English or French translations. Thanks to the translators, by 1840 all Goethe's major poetic works could be read in Italian,² while the critics' articles in literary journals helped promote German literature in Italy. Goethe was deemed a great writer, blessed with great talent. He was appreciated by many famous Italian authors: Vincenzo Monti, Ugo Foscolo, Alessandro Manzoni, Giuseppe Mazzini, Giosuè Carducci, Gabriele D'Annunzio and Luigi Pirandello.³

Giosuè Carducci made a "bizzarro" [fanciful] (Fasola, 1909: 156) remark about the *Roman Elegies*:

¹ "Fino a tutto il 1892 non mi pareva possibile che io potessi scrivere altrimenti che in versi" [Right up to the end of 1892, I could not envisage myself writing in anything but verse] (Pirandello, 1993: 1286).

² See Fasola, 1909: 151.

³ See Fumi, 2017: 34–35.

Properzio resuscitato barcollerà talvolta per una tale ebrietà nuvolosa dei sensi, come gli accadeva da vivo per vino, ma non mette mai cipria.⁴ (Carducci, 1909: 37).

Carducci proposes a link between Propertius and Goethe: the *Roman Elegies* are the work of a reborn Propertius who is 'intoxicated' with love and may sometimes 'stumble' due to the sensual excess, but the love he celebrates is not lascivious, fleeting or rhetorical: it is a pure, genuine feeling that 'non si imbelletta', has no need for face powder. Carducci's opinion of the *Elegies* is therefore very positive.

Goethe's fame in Italy in the mid 1800s was founded on the success of both *Werther* and *Faust* and it then grew exponentially up to the turn of the century, when there was a flurry of critical works about Goethe's figure and literary corpus. Meanwhile, a greater understanding of German among Italy's cultural elite gave access to the original texts.

The success of the *Römische Elegien* in Italy⁵ was neither immediate nor rapid. Interest in Goethe's work first manifested itself through the publication of individual elegies translated into Italian, followed by the publication of the entire translated work and of critical articles. The first poem to be published in Italy was the 3rd elegy, in 1828, in the journal *L'Eco* (n. 34, p. 134), with the title *Elegia di Goethe* [Goethe's elegy]. The elegy portrays the love between the poet and Faustina, including it in the context of other mythological love affairs, in which mythical female figures, like Faustina, readily gave themselves to their lovers. The second elegy translated into Italian would not be published until 1868: the 5th elegy, by Silvio Andreis, in *Mignon*, an extract from the journal *Il Trentino*. This elegy is considered the manifesto of the Goethean link between Rome, love and classicism; love is described as a feeling that embraces every facet of human experience: physical, intellectual and spiritual.

1875 saw the publication of: the first integral translation of the anthology by Andrea Maffei, for Le Monnier, reprinted multiple times; the first translation in metre of the *Elegies*, by Anselmo Guerrieri-Gonzaga, in the journal *Italia*; Domenico Gnoli's complete translation (*Gli amori di Wolfango Goethe* [Wolfango Goethe's love poems], for the publishing house Vigo in Livorno) and the article *Wolfango Goethe a Roma* [Wolfango Goethe in Rom] in the journal *Nuova Antologia*. As we read in a passage from the Pirandello essay *Illustratori, attori e traduttori* [Illustrators, actors and translators] Maffei's and Gnoli's translations were known to Pirandello (Pirandello, 1908: 100).

Maffei's and Guerrieri-Gonzaga's translations have been judged "monotone e declamatorie" [monotonous and rhetorical] (Pistelli Rinaldi, 1985: 72), which

⁴ [Propertius, if reborn, would feel lightheaded by the dazing voluptuousness of the senses, as he did for wine when he was alive, but he would never put on face powder.]

⁵ On this topic see Avanzi, Sichel, 1972.

was the manifestation of a translation style that experimented with form and technique rather than with emotional delivery. Despite all of that, Maffei's translations enjoyed great success.

In the following years the publication of individual translated elegies⁶ and some critical articles continued (see Trezza, 1881 and Scarfoglio, 1883).

In 1880 there was another integral translation of the anthology, by Antonio Zardo: *Liriche tedesche recate in versi italiani* [German lyrics translated into Italian verses], with a second edition in 1883. Enrico Nencioni deemed this translation to be

fatta con amore; è abile e coscienziosa, e in complesso merita le lodi avute in Italia e in Germania. Spesso riesce allo Zardo di conciliare la scrupolosa interpretazione del testo con una notevole fluidità di strofa e di verso.⁷ (Nencioni, 1886: 211).

Meanwhile, individual elegies continued to be published (see Michelangeli, 1884; Bruno, 1888; Giuffrida, 1890).

In 1892 D'Annunzio published his own *Elegie Romane* [Roman Elegies] which led to renewed public interest in Goethe's *Elegies*. So much so that the following year a new translation came to print, by the first woman translator of the *Elegies*, the journalist and writer Luisa Macina Gervasio, who adopted the pseudonym Luigi di San Giusto.

The next translation was Pirandello's, published by Giusti in Livorno in 1896. It received no fewer than three reviews that same year. Reading and studying these reviews is very helpful to understand how Pirandello's translation was received by his contemporaries.

Reception of Pirandello's translation. Three contemporary reviewers

The volume of Goethe's *Roman Elegies* translated by Luigi Pirandello numbers 92 pages and is quite small (19 x 12.5 cm). The twenty *Roman Elegies* are presented only in the Italian version and are preceded by a dedication sonnet that Pirandello composes for his friend Ugo Fleres, illustrator of the edition.

The first valuable consideration on Pirandello's translation can be found in a few lines published in an editorial note in the journal *Rassegna Settimanale*

⁶ In 1877 professor Emilio Teza from the University of Padua translated ten Roman elegies and worked on them even in 1888 in the article *Frammenti inediti delle «Elegie Romane» di Goethe* [Unpublished fragments of Goethe's «Roman Elegies»] in the journal *Rivista Contemporanea*.

⁷ [Made with love, well done and studied, deserving of the applause it received in both Italy and Germany. Zardo often manages to balance and merge the scrupulous interpretation of the text with a fluid strophe and rhythm.]

Universale on 5 January 1896 (year 1, 1st issue), before the volume was released (the *terminus ante quem* is 25 March 1896):⁸

L'editore Giusti di Livorno pubblicherà prossimamente le *Elegie Romane* del Goethe, tradotte da Luigi Pirandello. Siamo lieti di poter offrire ai nostri lettori una primizia con la traduzione dell'Elegia VII; traduzione fedele, nitida, elegante.⁹ (Pirandello, 1993: 536)

The 7th elegy was published separately and the Italian translation was deemed precise, clear and elegant. This version features certain variations compared to the 7th elegy in volume, indicating that until the publication for Giusti Pirandello returned to his text with a *labor limae*. We can consider these few lines on Pirandello's *Roman Elegies* as the equivalent of today's promotional 'teaser', designed to whett the appetite of the journal's readers in advance of the forthcoming publication of the whole collection.

The same year, following the publication, three reviews were published: one by Tommaso Gnoli in the journal *Rassegna Settimanale Universale*, immediately after the publication (on 26 April), and two others in June. One published on 7 June in *Il Fanfulla della Domenica* by Luigi Parpagliolo, and the other signed with just the initial "R", in *La Cultura* on 15 June.

1. Tommaso (or Tomaso) Gnoli was a friend of Pirandello and they were both members of the Roman cultural club headed by Ugo Fleres. Gnoli's review is the lengthier and was written to advertize the volume as it came to market. This review was in the *Fra libri vecchi e nuovi* section [Amid books old and new] and was entitled *Nuova versione dell'Elegie romane* [New version of the Roman Elegies]. It enabled Pirandello's work to speak for itself, quoting numerous lines that would introduce the anthology to the reader. Pirandello is presented as "l'autore delle *Elegie Renane*" [the author of Rhenish Elegies], an original work of poetry published in 1895 and inspired by Goethe's *Roman Elegies*. The reviewer puts emphasis on the metre: Pirandello is shown as the translator *who dared* to translate the *Roman Elegies* sticking as closely as possible (given the difference between the two languages) to the original metre: 'German' elegiac couplets. This feature marks Pirandello's translation as the closest to the original, highlighting its difference from those of Maffei and Gnoli, who used free hendecasyllable and rhyming triplets. In Gnoli's opinion, Maffei's is "troppo poeta" [too much of a poet], since he "aggiunge a tutte le sue traduzioni, piegando, adattando il pensiero e la forma degli altri secondo la sua indole originale" [adds

⁸ For the reconstruction of the date of publication see Fumi, 2017: 21.

⁹ [The publisher Giusti of Livorno will soon publish the *Roman Elegies* of Goethe, translated by Luigi Pirandello. We are pleased to offer our readers a first fruit with the translation of the 7th elegy; a faithful, clear and elegant translation.]

to all his translations, bending and adapting the thought and form of the others to his original taste]. The great defect of his version is that “il distico tedesco sia spezzato, costretto entro più versi endecasillabi, e nemmen sempre dentro un numero intero di versi” [he splits the German couplet, forcing it into multiple hendecasyllables, to the point of using an odd number of lines] (Gnoli, 1896: 8). Speaking also briefly of his own father Domenico Gnoli, the reviewer underlines the mismatch between the content of the lines in Goethe's and in Pirandello's, since “ciascun distico è adagiato in una terzina” [each couplet is set in a triplet] (Gnoli, 1896: 9). The opposite characteristic, on the other hand, is one of the strengths of Pirandello's translation:

Ora Luigi Pirandello, allo scopo di serbare intero il carattere dell'opera di Volfango Goethe, ci dà le venti *Elegie* tradotte in distici e illustrate [...]. Fin dalla prima elegia appare chiaro l'intento unico che ha guidato il traduttore nella sua versione: ridare per quanto era possibile fedelmente i versi divini, in modo che, aiutato dal metro identico, dovesse risultare dalla lettura del suo libro quasi l'impressione stessa che dall'opera originale.¹⁰ (Gnoli, 1896: 9)

Pirandello's metre is considered the innovative feature that makes his translation closer to the original than the previous ones by Maffei and Gnoli. This unprecedented use of elegiac couplets enabled him to maintain the distinctive character of Goethe's work and to offer his Italian readers the closest possible version of the “versi divini” [the divine lines], leaving them with the same impression as having read the original poem.¹¹

Tommaso Gnoli also highlights other positive features of Pirandello's version: “la fedeltà, l'esattezza fino allo scrupolo” [his accuracy, his scrupulous exactitude], which, “mentre formano uno dei pregi migliori di quest'opera, ne sono le uniche cause di qualche difetto, di qualche verso stentato, di qualche distico che troppo si avvicina alla prosa, di qualche vocabolo poco poetico” [while constituting one of the finest qualities of this work, are uniquely responsible for certain defects, certain laboured verses, certain couplets that are too close to prose, several excessively prosaic words]. The reviewer, however, immediately adds “a questo pericolo, in cui qualunque altro traduttore che avesse tentato una versione quasi letterale sarebbe ad ogni passo caduto, il Pirandello sfugge quasi sempre in grazia della sua natura poetica, del suo sentimento del bello, del suo temperamento artistico” [Pirandello almost always avoided this

¹⁰ [Now Luigi Pirandello, in order to preserve the whole character of Volfango Goethe's anthology, gives us the twenty *Elegies* translated into couplets and illustrated [...]. From the very first elegy, the translator's sole intent is clear: to deliver the divine lines as closely as possible, so that, by using exactly the same metre, the reader would receive almost exactly the same impression as when reading the original work.]

¹¹ For a deep analysis on Pirandello's metre see Aletta, 2018.

trap, into which any other translator who had attempted an almost literal version would have stumbled at every step, by virtue of his poetic nature, his feeling of beauty, his artistic temperament] (Gnoli, 1896: 9).

Fidelity to the original text is indeed a feature of the Pirandellian translation. It manifests itself in the distribution of lines (in almost all cases the content of the Italian line corresponds to that of the German one), in the arrangement of words within the line and in lexical precision. In particular, there is a clear tendency to keep the same words that appear in the original at the beginning and end of the line. This occurs in about 42% of cases. Sometimes, Pirandello opted for freer translations, which tend to suppress certain adverbs, personal pronouns or adjectives, or to translate certain expressions in a slightly different way from the original, but overall he remained fairly faithful to the original text.¹²

Gnoli's only negative comment is that some lines contain 'unpoetic' words or sound close to prose. However, the dactyl rhythm of the lines is almost always clearly perceptible. According to Aletta's analysis, Pirandello follows a consistent scheme in more than 97% of the lines (Aletta, 2018: 76). As for the lexicon, the fact that Goethe celebrates carnal, concrete love instead of abstract or idealized love requires a language that is neither lofty nor sublime. A lexical choice of this kind chimes perfectly with the poetic tone of the original. To my mind, a different choice would not have been suitable.

Overall though, Gnoli believed that Pirandello's poetic skills and artistic temperament prevented him from allowing these minor elements to ruin the poetic flow of his translation. According to Tommaso Gnoli, "il traduttore seguita pienamente, felicemente a volgere in italiano i distici dove sempre l'amore si mescola con la storia, la mitologia, l'arte, Roma" [the translator fully and happily renders the couplets in the Italian language, where love always blends with history, mythology, art, Rome] (Gnoli, 1896: 9).

In the second part of the review Tommaso Gnoli presents a few translated lines of the *Elegies*, so that readers of the journal could hear the sound of the lines, and delineates gently, as if it were an impressionist portrait, some moments of the love story celebrated there.

Gnoli hence found and praises two successful features of Pirandello's translation: the use of elegiac couplets and the adherence to the original text, which distinguish Pirandello's work from that of his predecessors.

2. As a second reviewer, Luigi Parpagliolo wrote about Pirandello's *Elegies* in the journal *Il Fanfulla della Domenica* on 7 June 1896.

Parpagliolo's review opens with a brief presentation of the four translators of Goethe's *Roman Elegies* of which he is aware, active in Italy, "dove non si traduce nè molto nè bene" [where translations are neither numerous nor good]

¹² On this topic see Fumi, 2017: 41–45 and Fumi, 2019.

(Parpagliolo, 1936: 235): Andrea Maffei, Domenico Gnoli, Luigi Di San Giusto (the pseudonym of Luisa Macina Gervasio) and Luigi Pirandello. Of these four authors Parpagliolo emphasizes the metric choices: Andrea Maffei's "verso sciolto" [blank verse] (Parpagliolo, 1936: 235), Domenico Gnoli's triplet, Luigi Di San Giusto's hexameter and, finally, Luigi Pirandello, "il quale si servì anche dell'esametro, ma dandogli quell'armonia, che Andrea Maffei non credeva possibile" [who also used the hexameter, but giving it a harmony that Maffei thought impossible to achieve] (Parpagliolo, 1936: 236).

According to Parpagliolo,

Tutti e quattro, a dire il vero, si studiarono, per quanto fosse difficile impresa, di essere fedeli all'originale; e fecero bene poichè, come dice lo stesso Maffei, 'lo stile è tutto in queste *Elegie*, ed una traduzione libera le sciuperebbe'.¹³ (Parpagliolo, 1936: 236)

His opinion, however, is clearly in favor of Pirandello's choice of metre:

Io dico che le sciupa anche un verso che non sia l'esametro, poichè solo questo può dar loro quell'intonazione larga e solenne, per la quale appaiono come nobilitate anche le cose piccole familiari, che spesso sono il loro argomento.¹⁴ (Parpagliolo, 1936: 236)

Parpagliolo too points out the harmony and faithfulness in Pirandello's version. He compares Pirandello to the previous translators of the *Elegies* and remarks that Pirandello even used the hexameter, but still gave it a sense of harmony that Maffei thought impossible to achieve. And this choice is quite effective, in the reviewer's opinion, since it gave the lines that broad, solemn intonation that ennobles even the small, familiar things that are often the subjects of these poems.

The reviewer continues his article by examining the Goethean anthology from the point of view of its genesis and the context in which it was conceived emphasizing Goethe's passion for Italy and the sense of rebirth that this country gave to his spirit. He cites some lines by Pirandello, taken from the 7th elegy (1–14) and from the 20th elegy (19–32), of which Parpagliolo praises "l'armonia e la fedeltà" [harmony and faithfulness] (Parpagliolo, 1936: 241). Although the author declares "Non fo raffronti, che son sempre odiosi, fra questa traduzione

¹³ [All four, to tell the truth, tried, however difficult it was, to be faithful to the original; and they did well because, as Maffei himself says, 'style is everything in these *Elegies*, and a free translation would spoil them'].

¹⁴ [I say that a line that is not the hexameter also spoils them, since only this can give them that broad and solemn tone, by which even small family things, which are often their subject, appear to be ennobled].

e le precedenti” [I do not make comparisons, which are always loathsome, between this translation and the previous ones] (Parpagliolo, 1936: 240–241), he clearly expresses his great satisfaction with the new Pirandellian version of the *Elegies*:

Sia benvenuta, adunque, la nuova traduzione di Luigi Pirandello; poichè opera vana non è quella che tenta, migliorando per quanto è possibile quel che prima fatto, di fissare nella nostra lingua i capolavori del Genio e di arricchirne la patria letteratura.¹⁵ (Parpagliolo, 1936: 240)

3. The third enthusiastic review from 1896 (15 June) is from the pages of *La Cultura*. The author, who signs himself simply as R., may well be the founder and director of the journal, Ruggiero Bonghi: at the time he was generally the sole contributor.¹⁶

In his own words:

L'altro volume di poesie non è nuovo, anzi è vecchio molto ed ha nientemeno che un secolo di vita: ma è nuova la traduzione, che, ridonandolo alla luce sotto una veste nuova, ne ha volute risuscitar la fragranza o mostrare a coloro, che non potevano intenderlo nell'idioma originario, le recondite bellezze. Quei versi sono le *Elegie Romane* di Goethe (Giusti, Livorno), venti fiori olezzanti e smaglianti di colori, venti gemme, di cui va superba la letteratura tedesca, che un modesto e gentil poeta nostro, Luigi Pirandello, ha pensato di tradurre in italiano.¹⁷ (R., 1896: 95)

The image of the new translation that aimed to “risuscitar la fragranza” [resurrect the fragrance] of the German text brings to mind the Pirandellian reflection on the art of translation shown in the essay *Illustratori, attori e traduttori*, in particular the passage in which the Sicilian poet states that translation “tenta l'impossibile: come far rivivere un cadavere inalando gli un'altra anima” [tries the impossible, like reviving a corpse by breathing another soul into it] (Pirandello, 1908: 96). In Pirandello's reflection, which overturns

¹⁵ [Welcome, therefore, to the new translation by Luigi Pirandello; since vain work is not the one that attempts, improving as far as possible what was done before, to fix the masterpieces of the Genius in our language and to enrich our country's literature.]

¹⁶ I thank Enrico Elli (Catholic University of Milan) for this hypothesis.

¹⁷ [The other volume of poems is not new, in fact it is very old and has nothing less than a century of life: but the translation is new, which, bringing it back to light under a new guise, wants to resurrect the fragrance or show those, who could not understand him in the original idiom, the hidden beauties. Those poems are the *Roman Elegies* of Goethe (Giusti, Livorno), twenty flowering and dazzling flowers of colors, twenty gems, of which German literature is superb, which a modest and kind poet, Luigi Pirandello, translated into Italian.] The first edition of Goethe's *Roman Elegies* is dated back to 1795.

the Pascolian thesis,¹⁸ the soul is identified with what is untranslatable, that is to say, with “la forma, che – in arte – è tutto” [the form, which – in art – is everything] (Pirandello, 1908: 96). In this sense the translation, changing the form of the poetic text, tries to give poetry a new soul.¹⁹

Although it is chronologically impossible for the reviewer to have read the essay (which was not published until 1908), conceptually it is as if he had claimed that Pirandello’s translation had managed to achieve the “impossibile” [impossible]: to revive Goethe for the Italian public. The twenty elegies, into which the Italian version breathes new life, are enthusiastically described as “venti fiori olezzanti e smaglianti di colori, venti gemme” [twenty delicately scented flowers, brilliant with colours, twenty gems], with reference to the grace and formal perfection that characterize them.

The reviewer continues:

La versione può dirsi perfetta, poiché al facile uso del verso il traduttore accoppia una così squisita conoscenza della lingua tedesca ed una tal dimestichezza colla poesia goethiana, che certo meglio non potevano rendersi quelle *Elegie*. Ed è stata idea davvero lodevole, quella d’aver conservato il verso e il ritmo del testo, e d’essersi fedelmente attenuto alla sua dizione, discostandosene quanto meno era possibile; perché così, cambiata soltanto la veste, il pensiero del poeta è rimasto immutato in tutta la sua integrità ed in ogni più minuta particolarità.²⁰ (R., 1896: 95)

In the reviewer’s words, Pirandello’s translation is “perfetta” [perfect], the work not of a simple translator, but of a “modesto e gentil poeta nostro” [humble and courteous poet of ours]. The reviewer considers Pirandello’s decision to reproduce the rhythm of the original text and the German cadence to be priceless, as is his choice of metre.

“Il pensiero” [the thought] mentioned in this passage of the review, which “è rimasto immutato in tutta la sua integrità ed in ogni più minuta particolarità” [has remained unchanged in all its integrity and in the minutest detail] may refer to what in the Pirandellian essay *Illustratori, attori e traduttori* is called the “concetto della cosa” [the concept of the thing], which “noi possiamo bene rendere, tradurre in altra lingua, farlo intendere comunque” [we can render

¹⁸ The Pascolian thesis on translation, taken from *Pensieri e discorsi* (1907), is quoted by Pirandello in *Illustratori, attori e traduttori* (Pirandello, 1908: 95).

¹⁹ On this topic see Fumi, 2015: 59–65.

²⁰ [This version can be deemed perfect. The translator’s ability with lines joined with his deep knowledge of German and of Goethe’s poetry couldn’t possibly have produced a better version of the *Elegies*. His praiseworthy idea to keep the original couplet and rhythm, his adherence to the correct diction, minimally veering off it, leaves the original thought of the poet intact, even in its smallest aspects, because only the appearance has changed.]

well, translate into another language, make it understood anyway] (Pirandello, 1908: 96). Another level of difficulty, as we have seen above, is to try to 'translate' the form of a poetic text, which remains untranslatable: "l'anima" [the soul], in Pirandello's reflection, strongly connoted; only "la veste" [the dress, the appearance], in the reviewer's words.

The success of a translation

According to the three contemporary reviews considered above, Pirandello's translation was positively received in the months following its publication (in the case of R.'s review even enthusiastically) by the Roman cultural environment close to the author. The recent studies by Fumi and Aletta have brought to light the distinguishing features of this translation, among which we must remember the innovative metre, the musicality of the Italian text, the strict adherence to the original text, Pirandello's determination to create parallelisms and connections in the text, the extensive use of rhetorical figures, the particular relationship with the classical sources underlying the work and the desire to personalize the anthology by inserting an original sonnet before the *Elegies*. Among these, fidelity to the German text and the novel use of the metre (elegiac couplets) were the features that most impressed the reviewers of the time, who also highlighted the harmony and musicality of the Italian text. It is also noteworthy that Pirandello is presented as a poet and not simply as a translator, certainly with reference to the poetic collections already published. His great familiarity with German culture is also underlined, something he was able to expand especially during the eighteen months that he spent studying at the *Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität* in Bonn (10 October 1889–17 April 1891).

Was it therefore these features that ensured the success of Pirandello's translation of the *Elegies* into the following decades? We cannot know for sure. What we can say is that Pirandello's choice of metre was certainly a happy, much appreciated and 'definitive' one, to the extent that no other integral translations of the Goethean *Elegies* into Italian were to appear for another 15 years, when Giuseppe Caprino's translation was published (1911, Milan: Sonzogno). This means that Pirandello's translation remained a benchmark at least until 1911.

The Pirandellian translation has continued to enjoy great acclaim.²¹ For example, the literary critic and journalist Paolo Milano, who in the article

²¹ Ferdinando Pasini, in a comment which appeared in the volume *Luigi Pirandello (come mi pare)* of 1927, defines the Pirandellian translation performed "con fedeltà e con grazia" [with fidelity and grace] (Pasini, 1927: 79). In 1960, in conjunction with the publication of the first edition of the Mondadori book *Saggi, Poesie, Scritti varii* by Pirandello, edited by Manlio Lo Vecchio-Musti, in which the translated

Pirandello poeta e critico, published in *L'Espresso* on 18 December 1960, goes so far as to affirm that the translation of Goethe's *Römische Elegien* is probably Pirandello's greatest poetic work.²² This opinion, far from denigrating the author's remaining poetic production, specifically highlights the quality of Pirandello's translation: in it he reveals himself not only as an excellent *connoisseur* of the German language, but also a fine poet in his own right.

The translation is also worth considering in the context of Pirandello's early poetic production, since it was executed at a time, in 1891,²³ when he considered himself a poet, and nothing more. It is also worth calling the public's attention to the young Pirandello's relationship with the work of Goethe, a poet and writer he was to love and admire throughout his life.

The literary value of Pirandello's translation has survived into the twenty-first century. It provides very pleasant reading today, where the joyful and bright character of Goethe's *Elegies* (due to the happy and requited love celebrated therein and set against the background of a luminous classical Rome) emerges in all its glory. I can therefore agree with Tommaso Gnoli's words on Pirandello's translation of the *Elegie*, at the end of his enthusiastic review:

Roman Elegies were republished, there was a reawakening of the critics' interest in the anthology. Francesco Delbono, professor at the University of Catania, judges the version "spigliata, sicura, fluida" [agile, confident, fluent] (Delbono, 1962: 110), in a 1962 comment in the journal *Realismo lirico*, special issue 51 bis – *Omaggio a Luigi Pirandello*. Delbono's review turns out to be more balanced: the professor points out that the "traduzione metrica [...] non soddisfa in tutto e per tutto; chè numerosi tocchi del pensiero goethiano, numerosi particolari che stanno ai margini ma son pure essenziali, sono sacrificati. [...] Quattro o cinque, poi, i fraintendimenti dell'originale" [the metric translation [...] does not satisfy in everything; since numerous touches of Goethean thought, numerous details that are on the margins but are also essential, are sacrificed. [...] Four or five, then, the misunderstandings of the original], but he also observes, realistically, that "tutto ciò che l'occhio, attento e vivace, di Goethe aveva visto, non poteva entrare in una traduzione che voleva mantenere lo stesso numero di versi dell'originale" [all that the attentive and lively eye of Goethe had seen could not become part of a translation that aimed to keep the same number of lines as the original]. Despite these shortcomings Delbono's opinion remains positive; Pirandello's translation is defined as "classica" [classic], due to his ability "spesso, di conservare bene il tono del testo tedesco, senza che il traduttore – questo va rilevato – voglia aggiungere notazioni sue proprie [...] tranne forse rarissimi casi" [often, to keep the tone of the German text well, without the translator – this should be noted – wanting to add his own annotations [...] except perhaps in very rare cases] (Delbono, 1962: 110).

²² See Milano, 1960: 25. Paolo Milano's opinion is also quoted in Aletta, 2018: 77.

²³ For the reconstruction of the dates of Pirandello's work on the translation see Fumi, 2017: 13–17; for the anthology publishing history see Fumi, 2017: 17–22 and Fumi, 2020.

Leggendo questa nuova versione «il segreto della coppia felice»²⁴ viene svelato ancora una volta a noi Italiani, e direi quasi sotto una luce nuova; ci sentiamo grati al Pirandello il quale, oltre aver fatto opera d'arte pregevole, ha reso un grande servizio a quanti Italiani amano e studiano questo genio della poesia moderna che tanto amava l'Italia ed in tal modo ne sentiva il fascino, la poesia ineffabile.²⁵ (Gnoli, 1896: 10)

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²⁴ Gnoli quotes here, paraphrasing it, the last line of the last elegy (XX, 32) (Goethe, 1896: 92).

²⁵ [By reading this new version, 'the secret of the happy couple' is brought once again to us Italians almost under an entirely new light: we are grateful to Pirandello who, beside creating a praiseworthy work of art, rendered a great service to all Italians who love and study this genius of modern poetry who loved Italy so much and who felt its charm, its ineffable poetry.]

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