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Review of Oodgeroo Noonuccal's *La Mia Gente* (Translated by Margherita Zanoletti)

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Noonuccal, Oodgeroo. *My People. La mia gente*. Translated into Italian by Margherita Zanoletti, 2021.

The work *My People* by Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1920-1993), has been translated for the first time in Italian by Margherita Zanoletti, with the title *La mia gente*. However, this is not Noonuccal's first entry into the "world literature" via translation (Wilson 78); she has been of great academic interest for many of her works in both China and India as two examples (Xu; Kar). *La Mia Gente* is subsequent to an earlier collaboration of Di Blasio and Zanoletti who translated *We Are Going: Poems* by Noonuccal. *My People* collects poems of Noonuccal's first two books, *We Are Going* and *The Dawn Is At Hand* and an additional seven writings.

Whilst Australian literature translated into Italian has become a part of the Italian national literature, primarily in popular genres (Di Blasio and Zanoletti, *Encrucijadas*), before 2000 few Aboriginal texts were known. Di Blasio and Zanoletti (*Encrucijadas*) assert there is a growing series of Italian publications dedicated to Aboriginal texts, although their Italian audience remains principally within academic circles.

La mia gente has two parts, the first is an introduction and discussion of the source author, the text, and the translation, and the second part features the collection in both English and Italian of seventy-five poems, an interlude and the conjointly written discussion by Noonuccal and her son Kabul. Literature on translated works of Australian Aboriginal writers is concerned these books misrepresent the original intentions of the author and distort the perception of Australian Aboriginal peoples by European communities (Čerče and Haag). Yet, Zanoletti has taken a progressive step forward by opening with an essay penned by award-winning Aboriginal Australian novelist Alexis Wright, member of the Waanyi nation of the southern highlands of the Gulf of Carpentaria. The essay is well selected for its reflection on the rich diversity within Aboriginal literature and how it should not be narrowly confined. The essay introduces the context with Wright's eloquently powerful insight, thus, Italian readers with potentially little prior knowledge are introduced to Oodgeroo Noonuccal through the lens of an insider. In the subsequent chapter, Zanoletti provides a biography of Noonuccal, focusing on her life as a writer, educator and political activist, capturing the intersectionality that directed Noonuccal's life and works. Oodgeroo Noonuccal, first published under the Anglo-Saxon name Kath Walker, was the first Indigenous poet and the first Aboriginal woman to publish a literary work (Zanoletti, *Intersemiotic*). Zanoletti provides a descriptive analysis of the fundamental characteristics of the collection within a historical-political context under three frameworks. The translation of Australian Aboriginal texts "is a complex task involving difficult negotiations across cultural, linguistic, and historical contexts" (Čerče and Haag 86) and the final part of the introduction discusses this translation process.

Mudrooroo, a writer and close friend of Noonuccal, wrote that she never described herself as a poet but when pressed, as an educationalist. This primary aim may support the translator to focus on the semantic meaning rather than the aesthetic structures, employing a literal translation approach. Faced by the challenge of hybridism in the original text with code-switching between English, Aboriginal English and Aboriginal lexical items, Zanoletti (*La mia gente; Intersemiotic*) states her aim was to recreate a communicative approach as close to the source as possible, whilst acknowledging the limitations of the target language. However,

Zanoletti (*Intersemiotic*) also discusses the process of recontextualising, intermediating and transmitting the work in a creative way.

A glossary has been included since the first edition of *My People* to define the Aboriginal lexical items woven with English in the original poems, an indicator of Noonuccal's political and pedagogical work, always educating and guiding the reader. Code-switching was a key device of Noonuccal to move the reader emotionally and Zanoletti does justice to the original text. The translator retains code-switching between Italian and Aboriginal lexical items and includes a glossary (*Intersemiotic*). It has been noted the asterisks indicating words defined is, at times, inconsistent with that of Noonuccal. For example, *playabout*, an Aboriginal English lexical item appearing five times in the source text, was asterisked, however Zanoletti opts to translate the item into Italian in different ways (*di celebrare, un passatempo della comunità, che spasso, celebrazioni*). Similarly with the vernacular items *fella* and *fellow*, appearing more than twenty times throughout the source text, are translated as *amico* or *compagno* or otherwise omitted entirely.

Another interesting example is in the poem *Jarri's Love Song (La canzone d'amore di Jarri)* where the source text has the item *pitcheri* asterisked, a native Australian plant with narcotic properties. Rather than retaining the item with an asterisk in the target text, it is translated as *brocca* in Italian which is a pitcher (jug). Whilst a jug has no semantic resemblance to the native plant, it is curious the resemblance between *pitcheri* and the English *pitcher* to the degree that one might be concerned there was a mistranslation resulting in *brocca*. However, the inclusion of *pitcheri* in the glossary would support otherwise. A reader can only ask why this lexical item that was code-switched in the source text was not also retained in the target text, consistent with the overall approach. Interestingly, Zanoletti does retain the foreignizing strategy of Noonuccal within the same verse by adapting the target text to have another Aboriginal lexical item. *Didgeridoo* is asterisked although the source text had written *drone-pipe*, which in and of itself was an interesting choice by Noonuccal. The Oxford English Dictionary lists the second sense of drone-pipe is the didgeridoo, with a quote of its use recorded in 1905 (2023, drone pipe entry). The use of drone-pipe is an example of Noonuccal's poetic device of using the language of the 'colonizers' as she amalgamates two worlds through interlingualism (Zanoletti, *Intersemiotic* 245). As Zanoletti replaces the Aboriginal lexical item, *pitcheri*, with an Italian word, and adds an Aboriginal word via *didgeridoo*, she shifts the asterisk in the verse whilst preserving the dimension of interlingualism. Perhaps the translational challenge was not *pitcheri* to begin with but the translation of drone-pipe, thus the solution being didgeridoo and the resulting shift.

When under the critical lens of a review it might be easier to highlight the non-literal solutions of a translator and conjecture their acceptability (Čerče and Haag), this would only detract from the complex work involved in translating deeper multi-levelled meanings which a translation can only communicate its interpretation of, as the translator "re-experiences" the source and the result reflects the translator's voice, sensitivity and writerly style (Zanoletti, *Intersemiotic*). The examples discussed demonstrate the translator addressing the challenges of poetry which already employs a foreignizing hybridity of cultures in the source text. Zanoletti has contributed a valuable text to the growing series of Aboriginal literature in Italy which one can hope will reach not only academic circles but beyond.

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