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Shadows Over the Bush: A Voyage Through the Italian Translations of Four Short Stories by Henry Lawson

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Abstract

Bookstores' shelves are full of translated works performed by practitioners motivated by different reasons: professional translators, bilinguals who want to experience the practice of translating, scholars who wish to translate their favourite author, etc. How and to what extent does their reading of the Source Text influence the creation of the Translated Text and readers' understanding of it? This article aims to demonstrate how an extemporaneous practitioner performed the translation into Italian of four short stories by Henry Lawson and what consequences her interventions produced. A comparative analysis of the STs and the TTs explored the contexts of culture and situation (life in the Australian bush in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: its inhabitants, namely the first settlers, their language, habits and feelings). The results of the analysis are described through the most relevant examples, grouped in four categories: calques, proper names, cultural words and contextual information. The issues highlighted in each example are discussed with reference to Antoine Berman's 'deforming tendencies', and more appropriate translations are suggested. Back-translations reinforce the analysis.

'Henry Lawson is the voice of the Bush and the Bush is the heart of Australia,' stated A.G. Stephen in *The Bulletin* in 1895. With these words Stephen recognized Lawson as one of the first writers able to give a voice to rural Australia. The Bush and its inhabitants are described through the pen and eyes of a perceptive observer. Lawson's characters, with their habits, attitudes, feelings and values, powerfully portray the weirdness of life in the lonely Bush. In fact, his stories have historical value, for they document the life of the first settlers/inlanders and their everyday struggles. They do so on two levels: 1) the struggle against an unknown, unpredictable and threatening environment still inhabited by its original peoples, and 2) the settlers' feeling of national identity generated by their sense of being foreigners in the land where they were born.

The type of language used is that of story-telling put into written words through the literary form of the 'short story' or 'sketch'. Lawson sought to combine the tradition of oral yarns and folkloristic tales with the structures of a written form, using devices such as blistering and informal dialogue, monologues, the use of the first person to establish a relationship with the reader, questions to the reader, comments by the narrator to establish his presence as a teller, together with narrative techniques such as analepsis, prolepsis and digressions. Also, through the vividness of his descriptions he tried to communicate the gestures, body language and

movements typical of verbal speech in order to adjust the transcription of life in the bush to the framework of a written story. Lawson's language is the vernacular, he lets his characters speak their everyday language, the only language they know. In doing so, he gave academic status to Australian English, which is a mixture of English, Irish dialect and Aboriginal loans, differentiating it from British English. Lawson's style and language were undoubtedly shaped by his poor education and the speech of the people around him. Nevertheless, his ability to impregnate words with colours, flavours, and emotions, and his mastery of humour and irony, allow him to create witty metaphors, parallels, and powerful images, which lets the reader leap into the Bush and feel part of it. Humour underlies all of his short stories, even the more dramatic, since, for Lawson, humour characterizes the Bush people who need to play down the toughness of their life. However, it is a bitter humour, intentionally producing the opposite reaction.

The Australian readership of the time received a portrait of an Australia in which they could easily identify the peculiarities of their land: the affirmation of the settlers' national identity through recognizable and typified Bush characters. Similarly, Lawson's stories appealed to a foreign readership, giving it an insight into the newborn country. Lawson was well aware of this; in fact he wrote: 'From the age of seventeen, until now, with every disadvantage and under all sorts of hard conditions, I have written for Australia, and all Australia, and for Australia only. I was the first to introduce the Bushman to the world. I believe that I have done more than any other writer to raise the national spirit and the military spirit in Australia' (Lawson 1916: 239).

From the analysis above, it is clear that the difficulties of translating Lawson are twofold: culturally bound words and the language used. Words referring to Australian flora and fauna, artefacts, food, clothes, houses, towns, transport, work, leisure and organizations need to be conveyed in the light of the concepts and the values they carry. The language, bare, stripped-down, but so impressive, hides the *non-dit* behind the words, which communicates more than the words actually written; the rhythm of the narration that appeals to readers, making them curious and keeping them reading, needs to be preserved. In light of all this, the translation approach and the translation strategies to adopt in transferring meanings should be able to cope with the language used, the innovative style, and the culturally bound words presented in the texts.

Few works by Henry Lawson have been translated into Italian. Most of them are gathered in a collection entitled *Gente del Bush*, published by Tranchida Editore in 1992, edited and translated by Giuliana Prato, and containing translations of 'The Bush Undertaker', 'The Union Buries Its Dead', 'Telling Mrs Baker' and 'Hungerford'. Prato has also translated 'Water Them Geraniums', published by Tranchida in 1992. The translation of another short story, 'The Drover's Wife', appears in a collection entitled *Cieli Australi*, published by Mondadori in 2000, edited by Franca Cavagnoli and translated by Silvia Fornasiero. For reasons of space, I will assess the accuracy only of the four translated short stories contained in *Gente del Bush*. Before accompanying my readers through the texts and the translation

issues, I will introduce the publisher and the translator of the collection analysed.

Giovanni Tranchida Editore is a publishing house established in Milan in 1983. The personal story of its founder, Giovanni Tranchida, strongly reflects the choice of the books he chooses to publish. The publishing house was founded after a long period of cultural ferment in which Giovanni Tranchida was involved as an activist, editor and publisher. The years 1970-1980 in Italy were the so-called 'Anni di Piombo' ("years of lead") when the political dialectic was driven to extremes, resulting in street violence, armed struggle and terrorism. The 'Anni di Piombo' overlap with the years of the cultural movement led by students and intellectuals. This is the context in which, around 1970, Giovanni Tranchida started his activities as editor, collaborating with the few publishing houses engaged in what was known as the "counter-culture": *Filrosso* publishing dealt with essayists, *La Scimmia Verde* publishing with politics, feminism and education. Accused of being the brains behind a legendary organisation known as 'O' or the 'April, 7' case, he spent four years in high security imprisonment plus a year and a half of house arrest and two trials lasting another four years. But, according to Tranchida himself, the real reason why he was persecuted was because of his activity as an 'editor of a news-magazine called *Rosso*, and of a hundred other journals and pamphlets' (<http://www.tranchida.it/storia.php>). In a conversation with Cinzia Sasso, Tranchida summarizes the spirit and the orientation of his publishing house as follows: 'I'd always believed that true publishing houses were those which identified themselves with their editors, a figure who had to provide the thought behind a body of work, a decisive element, someone who brought together intellectual resources yet who gave the organization its character, direction and style. If there is no such role, a publishing house doesn't really exist, other than as an industrial structure which goes on whatever happens, as is the case with all those depersonalized, large editorial firms' (<http://www.tranchida.it/storia.php>). In keeping with this statement, Tranchida's commitment as a publisher is to rehabilitate classic works that, for different reasons, have been censored or neglected by critics, in particular works by famous writers never translated into Italian, and contemporary western works that are in some way peripheral to dominant ideologies or patterns of thought. It is clear now why Lawson, as the writer of the *Bush* and an innovator in terms of literary style, appears among Tranchida's titles.

The translator and editor of *Gente del Bush*, Dr Giuliana Prato, is a prominent scholar in Social Anthropology. Committed to ethnographically based analysis, she has carried out fieldwork mainly in urban areas in Italy, Britain and Albania. Over the years, her research interests have included religious practice in relation to theological debates on death, sin and expiation, political representation and political change, and the impact of economic policies and environmental activism, hunting with hounds, governance and legal reforms in post-socialist Albania, a mainly Muslim country. She has carried out extensive historical research on the political significance of Albanian migration to Italy and the integration of Albanian communities into Italian society. More recently, her research has addressed the relationship between social, political and economic change and global processes, such as

the politics of immigration and transnational power relations. Dr Prato is also a lecturer. She has taught Political and Economic Systems, Ethnicity and Nationalism, and An Introduction to Social Anthropology. She has cooperated with bio-physical anthropologists, contributing to conferences and research projects, and jointly supervising research students. During her career, she has written three books about urban anthropology (<http://kent.academia.edu/GiulianaPrato>). It is curious, though, that her list of publications does not include her translation of Lawson's short stories. The reason for this may be that it is not pertinent to her research. Despite her brilliant and respected work as a scholar in the field of Anthropology, Dr. Prato does not appear to be a professional translator. My research has not produced any information about any background she may have in translation studies.

In her introduction to *Gente del Bush*, Prato gives the readers a comprehensive and detailed picture of the Australian outback in Lawson's time. In fact, she includes information about the country's history, literature, language, geography and demography through clear and exhaustive examples contained in the preface and six footnotes in the main text. These help the reader to better understand culture-specific terms. Her description of Lawson's characters is impressive, making the distinctive features of the Bush's inhabitants emerge vividly. In addition, she does not neglect the gender issue, underlying the role of women in that context. Her introduction also contains an analysis of Lawson's style and language and its impact on the reader. Finally, to give the reader a complete picture, she directs attention to criticism of Lawson during and after his life, stressing his importance as one of Australia's foremost creative writers .

This kind of introduction is typical of the Italian translation of foreign classics. It is part of the paratextual strategies that canonize foreign works into the Italian literary polysystem. Translated classics occupy a peripheral position in the Italian literary polysystem due to the conservative forces at work (Even-Zohar 1978/2004). Therefore, as classics, Henry Lawson's works fall into that peripheral space the Italian literary polysystem assigns to canonized foreign work.

As clearly stated in the introduction, the intended audience of the translated volume is the general reader. In fact, the final purpose of the translator/editor and the publisher is to contribute to Italian readers' image and knowledge of the part of Australia narrated by Lawson, unfamiliar to the Italian general public.

The role of the translator is to facilitate the transfer of message and meaning from one language to another and create an equivalent response in the receptors. The message in the source language is woven in a cultural context and this has to be transferred to the target language (Nida 1964: 13). Thus, the *intentio auctoris* (Eco 1990) of giving a voice to the Bush's characters (as described above) both to Australia and the world should be reflected in the translations of his works into any language. Indeed, I would argue that in the case of Lawson's short stories the *intentio operis* (Eco 1990) can't be interpreted otherwise by the translator, since the author himself clearly explains his purpose, giving the readers instructions on how to read his works. Hence, the ability of the language to make meanings

independently of the intention of the author is here reduced to its minimum. The only way to avoid this restriction is to ignore the author's instructions by using Lawson's texts for personal purposes, reading them only for inspiration or amusement. But, again, this can be the case for readers, but not for translators, whose aim is to produce an equivalent effect to that produced by the original text in its target readers.

One might assume that Prato's awareness of the author and the text's intentions and her broad knowledge of Australian culture would have allowed her to produce a consistent translation. Surprisingly, the translations do not meet these expectations; and I will explain how and why the original texts are not appropriately represented in the target texts, and therefore are not enjoyable to read. I suppose that the main reason for the failure lies in Prato's apparent lack of knowledge of translation studies. Indeed, I could not find a consistent translation method or strategy in her translations. It seems that she translated Lawson 'by sense'. The 'by sense' approach leads her to translate only at the textual level, which is the first level of translation, the level of the literal translation and translationese: the translator intuitively and automatically transposes the source language (SL) grammar into its ready target language (TL) equivalent, into the sense that appears immediately appropriate to the context of the sentence (Newmark 1988: 22). According to Newmark, accuracy "represents the maximum degree of correspondence, referentially and pragmatically, between, on one hand, the text as a whole and its various units of translation (ranging usually from word to sentence) and, on the other, the extralinguistic 'reality', which may be the world of reality or of the mind" (Newmark 1988: 30). In fact, he identifies, within the textual level, three other levels of translation, which I will shortly describe, since I will refer to them in discussing the translations. The second level of translation is the referential level, the level of the sign, in which the real world, the image of the real world, matches the language, the signified matches the signifier. The third level is the cohesive level: through conjunctions, reiterations and lexical chains the author creates underlying conceptual or signifying relations which reflect his stream of thoughts and moods. The fourth level is the level of naturalness from a grammatical and lexical point of view. This is the level of interferences between the SL and the TL since it concerns word order, syntactic structures and collocations. All these levels are interconnected and need to be considered to produce a sound translation. The emphasis on the textual level only produces serious repercussions on the other three levels, seriously compromising the production of the target text. Upon reading and analyzing them, as I do below, it becomes clear that Prato, by following only her intuition, translates freely, interprets and re-writes. The result is a failure in communication. The translations seem to have no soul because they are referentially and pragmatically inaccurate. Moreover, the naturalness of the TL is often lost due to interferences producing grammatical mistakes and awkward syntactic structures that prevent the reading from being enjoyable.

Owing to space constraints, I will limit my discussion to the inaccuracies resulting in the failure to transmit Lawson's depiction of Australian rural life. Through the comparison of examples from the source text (ST) and the target text (ST), I will demonstrate to what

extent the ‘by sense’ translation approach leads the translator to work at the textual level only, which produces distortions in the transmission of cultural knowledge and contextual information. The examples are grouped into four categories: calques, proper names, cultural words, contextual information.

Calques – The case of the translation of ‘rabbit pest’ (Lawson 2009: 198) is clearly an interference, a calque from English. It has been translated as “la peste del coniglio” (Lawson 1992: 60), back-translated: ‘the plague of the rabbit’. This implies that, during Lawson’s time, rabbits suffered from a plague, which is not true. The correct information to communicate is that rabbits were a menace for crops, like locusts. I would translate it as ‘la piaga dei conigli’ (back-translated: the plague of rabbits).

Another distortion that can be attributed to the use of a calque lies in the translation of ‘there was very little grass on the route or the travelling-stock reserves or camps’ (Lawson 2009: 197). The phrase ‘travelling-stock reserves or camps’ has been translated as ‘depositi o campi di riserva per il bestiame viaggiante’ (Lawson 1992: 58), back-translated as “‘storage or spare fields for the travelling stock’. The calque ‘di riserva’ is associated with ‘campi’, which is a calque in its turn, since Prato attributes to it the meaning of ‘field’ instead of ‘camping area’. This chunk is not clear even to an Italian reader; ‘campi di riserva’ does not really mean anything in this context, though it does in the context of soccer. It is thus hard for the reader to figure out its contextual use. I would translate it as ‘nelle riserve destinate al bestiame in viaggio, né negli accampamenti’, back-translated as ‘in the reserves assigned to the travelling stock, nor in the camps’.

The translation of the term ‘stranger’ (Lawson 2009: 41) shows clear interference of the Italian language. It has been translated as ‘straniero’ (Lawson 1992: 23), which means ‘foreigner’, a person who comes from another country. The interference comes from the fact that ‘stranger’ and ‘straniero’ have the same root. A more appropriate translation of the term ‘stranger’ is ‘estraneo’, which is actually a direct equivalent. In fact, ‘estraneo’ is someone who has any kind of relationship with the speaker, not necessarily belonging to another country.

Proper names – ‘Gulf Country’ (Lawson 2009: 196) is the name given to the region of woodland and savanna grassland surrounding the Gulf of Carpentaria in north-western Queensland and the eastern part of the Northern Territory on the north coast of Australia. This has been translated as ‘zona del golfo’ (Lawson 1992: 56), back-translated as ‘area of the gulf’, with lower case letters. The consequence is that the reader will never know that it is actually a geographical name. ‘Gulf Country’ is an endonym. According to my research, an Italian exonym for it does not exist. Exonyms are created for places significantly relevant to the speakers; places which are familiar to the speakers because of relationships that countries have developed throughout the centuries (trade relations and historical alliances, for instance). This can explain why Australian toponyms have no translation into Italian, except for very

few cases. Consequently, I would leave “Gulf Country” untranslated.

How should ‘Bananaland’ (Lawson 2009: 46) and ‘Maoriland’ (Lawson 2009: 47) be translated? These are nicknames for, respectively, Queensland and New Zealand. The information carried by the nicknames is obviously related to the main features of the two colonies. In fact, Queensland was famous for the bananas plantations and New Zealand for its indigenous people. ‘Bananaland’ has been translated as ‘the state of Bananas’, leading the reader to think that Bananas is an Australian state. ‘Bananalandia’ would have been a more adequate translation. The compounds of –landia in Italian are a calque from English, meaning ‘state’: it is a direct equivalent which preserves the touch of irony proper to a nickname. Maoriland has been left untranslated (Lawson 1992: 52). For the reason stated above I would translate it as ‘Maorilandia’.

Cultural words – The translations of ‘pub’ and ‘shanty’ (Lawson 2009: 197) are also confusing. They are both translated as ‘osteria’ (Lawson 1992: 57). But all three words have different referential meanings. I feel that ‘osteria’ is the closest equivalent to pub. Pub and ‘osteria’ have a common origin and function. Both were created in Roman times on commercial and travellers’ routes as refreshment places for travellers. Soon they became places for locals to meet up, gossip and drink alcohol. But while ‘osterie’ provided and provide mainly wines, pubs offered and offer mainly beers; moreover, the food served is different because of the differences between the two national cuisines. When an Italian reader thinks of a pub, they imagine a place with a very long bench and stools around, carpet on the floor, a very strong smell of beer and Anglo-Saxon food. Likewise, when they imagine an ‘osteria’, they see people seated around few tables drinking wine, playing cards and tasting cured meat and cheese. The interior is different, the smell is different, even though the social function is the same. Also, ‘pub’ is translated as ‘bar’ as well as ‘pub’ (Lawson 1992: 69) in the translation of the narrative of the same event, referring to the same place. The term ‘bar’ in Italy refers to a quite different place compared to the same word into English. In Italy a bar is basically a place where coffee, alcoholic and soft drinks, as well as sweet and savoury snacks (*pizzette, panini, croissants*) are sold. In Anglo-Saxon culture a bar essentially serves alcohol. We can notice here, not only that the inappropriate lexical choices produce a failure in transmitting a cultural word, but also the use of two different concepts (pub and bar) to indicate the same place. I would leave ‘pub’ untranslated, as it has now gained a global currency as a social place where alcoholic beverages are sold, while I would translate ‘shanty’ as ‘bettola’, which is a disreputable sort of tavern. According to the Collins Australian Dictionary and Thesaurus, a shanty is ‘a public house, especially an unlicensed one’.

Prato omits the translation of the cultural word ‘bushman’. The section ‘The dead bushman’s name...’ (Lawson 2009: 43) has been rendered as ‘the name of the deceased’, hence only with a qualifier, neglecting the cultural value of the word ‘bushman’. I would translate it as ‘il nome dell’uomo del bush deceduto’ (back-translated: the name of the man of the Bush deceased) or I would leave the cultural word untranslated, as a foreignizing

strategy.

The translation leaves ‘mulga’ untranslated (Lawson 2009: 45). This is largely justifiable, as it is a cultural word, but the footnote Prato provides is not comprehensive. She writes: ‘Aboriginal term used for indicating various species of acacia, in particular the *Acacia Aneura* (red mulga)’ (Lawson 1992: 47). To give the actual image of ‘mulga’ to the Italian reader, to whom it is alien, I would have written: ‘Any of a number of small acacia trees, especially *Acacia aneura*, forming dense scrub in dry inland areas of Australia’ (<http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/mulga>). The adjective ‘dense’ here is needed for the contextualization of the word in the author’s description of the area surrounding Hungerford.¹

The translation of the story ‘*Hungerford*’ contains one more imprecise footnote about the cultural word ‘doughboy’ (Lawson 2009: 27). Doughboy here is used to denote a meal. Prato leaves the word untranslated, as I would have done, explaining the meaning in a footnote: ‘A roll of dough filled with jam or fruit, wrapped in a cloth and boiled in water’ (back-translation). It actually can be filled also with meat or vegetables and deep fried in fat. In fact, later in the story the character says that it is a pity not to have enough fat to ‘make the pan siss’. This incomplete information tends to confuse the reader.

Contextual information – In ‘*Telling Mrs Baker*’ the translation of ‘the new country round by the Gulf of Carpentaria’(Lawson 2009: 196) has been rendered as ‘le campagne intorno al golfo di Carpentaria’(Lawson 1992: 56), back-translated: the countryside surrounding the Gulf of Carpentaria. This translation, omitting the adjective ‘new’, which is a marker, hides from the reader the fact that Australia was a new country to inhabit, where lands were still under exploration. I would suggest translating this phrase as ‘le nuove terre intorno al Golfo di Carpentaria’ (back-translated: the new lands surrounding the Gulf of Carpentaria).

The story ‘*Hungerford*’ starts with this phrase: ‘One of the hungriest cleared roads in New South Wales...’ (Lawson 2009: 45). In this story, Lawson narrates the founding of a city christened Hungerford by the explorers who founded it, and the government’s project to pave the way to the city. The contextual information is that Australia was a land under exploration, where road infrastructures and facilities were necessary for new urban settlements, such that the qualifier ‘cleared’ is to be considered a marked adjective. The translator chooses to render ‘cleared roads’ as ‘strade carrozzabili’ (Lawson 1992: 47), back-translated: carriageable roads. It is a direct equivalent but it does not reflect the propositional meaning, that is to say, the relation between the item and what it refers to, as conceived by the writer. In fact, an Italian reader will get the idea that there were few carriageable roads in New South Wales, but not that works were in progress to create passages through the wildness of the Australian environment and that it required very hard work to penetrate the Bush and to free the path from trees and scrub. I would suggest translating it as ‘strade rese praticabili’ (back-translated: roads made practicable). Here, again, we can notice how the literal translation compromises

¹ After checking the accuracy of the definition from Wiktionary and comparing it to the definitions contained in authoritative dictionaries, I would refer the reader to Wiktionary where they can find images and even more detailed information.

the function of the language used. A few lines down, the same expression ‘to clear the road’ is translated as ‘to blaze a road’, again, it does not give the idea of creating a road penetrating the wilderness.

The case of ‘submitted a motion of want-of-confidence’ (Lawson 2009: 45) is another loss of contextual knowledge. It has been completely misunderstood by the translator. Here Lawson is saying that a past ministry ordered the road to Hungerford to be cleared, which was not worth it, according to the narrator. The workers, who were exhausted and had run out of rations, submitted a motion of no confidence, which was lost by the government. This fact is not indicated by the translator, who translates the phrase as ‘avendo ormai perso ogni speranza’ (Lawson 1992: 48), back-translated: ‘having lost all the hopes’, mixing up all the other information contained in the paragraph. Consequently, the paragraph is nonsense for an Italian reader, not to mention that the contextual information that Australian workers could claim rights is lost through the acrobatic ‘by sense’ strategies adopted by the translator. I would translate it as ‘inoltrare una mozione di sfiducia’, which has exactly the same meaning as the English expression.

Giuliana Prato’s art of re-writing, re-interpreting and re-telling can be best seen in *Hungerford*. Here Lawson is ironic about the actual usefulness of the rabbit fence, saying that it only works as the utmost fun experience for rabbits which play leap-frog over it, besides the ‘Pasteur and the poison and the inoculation’ (Lawson 2009: 45). The contextual information that the rabbit fence is a means to protect crops from rabbits, and that they are often poisoned and made infertile (hence the reference to Pasteur), has not been transmitted in the TT. Conversely, the translation mentions ‘la periodica vaccinazione a ricordo di Pasteur’ (Lawson 1992: 48), back-translated: ‘the periodical vaccination in memory of Pasteur’, which misleads the reader, making them think that Australian farmers used to immunise rabbits. The translation of ‘leap-frog’ is also lost, even though there is a direct equivalent in Italian (‘giocare alla cavallina’). Besides, there is no trace of Lawson’s irony in the translation.

Here, through the story of a man who hates colonies, Lawson transmits an insight into the world of drovers and the unfair agreements they sometimes had to accept to earn their living. The man accepted the job as a drover on these conditions: ‘25 shillings per week and also find your own horse. Also find your own horse-feed, and tobacco and soap and other luxuries, at station prices’ (Lawson 2009: 47). The translator renders the phrase as, back-translated, ‘25 shillings per week, including horse. Including horse-feed, tobacco, soap and other luxuries at the price of the ranch’ (Lawson 1992: 53), exactly the opposite of what Lawson wrote. The reader not only receives the wrong information, but also the coherence of the narrative is lost, for the reader will not understand why the man is angry, given that the job conditions are so good that they even include luxuries. Again, the contextual information is distorted because of the translator’s misinterpretations.

‘*The Union buries its dead*’ is the true story of a union member who was driving some horses along the bank of a river and drowned in the attempted crossing. A union membership card was found in his pocket, so the union decided to arrange a funeral for

him, though nobody knew the man personally. Henry Lawson participated in the funeral and narrated it from the point of view of an observer, reporting the event and the conversations he heard. In this context, the word ‘unionism’ is charged with a feeling of sympathy which has been very well captured by the translator. In fact, she translates it as, back-translated, ‘unionism’s solidarity’. In the phrase: ‘Presently someone said: “There’s the Devil.” I Looked up and saw a priest standing in the shade’ (Lawson 2009: 42), the parallel between the priest and the devil is clear. Nevertheless, the translator could not reproduce it, translating ‘There’s the devil’ with an idiomatic expression totally out of the context, as follows: ‘The Devil’s hand must be in it’ (back-translation), failing to transmit the connection between the priest and the devil. This is strange, though, since she mentioned this relationship in the preface to the book. For a deeper analysis, I can say that the parallel can be considered as contextual information. Considering that all Lawson’s characters are representatives of the Bush, its values and habits, the association of the devil with the priest can be interpreted as the feeling of the unionists towards the Church. In fact, this feeling of aversion to the Church and its devotees runs sarcastically through the story. I would translate it simply as ‘Ecco il diavolo’, back-translated: ‘Here’s the devil’. Prato also omits the translation of ‘outback’ (Lawson 2009: 43). The word refers to any remote and usually sparsely inhabited inland regions of Australia. This is a totally unjustified omission. The word gives the reader further information about the peculiar Australian geography. I would translate it as ‘entroterra’, back-translated: ‘inland areas’, possibly adding more information in the introduction.

In ‘*The Bush Undertaker*’, Lawson gives the epithet of ‘the hatter’ to the weird character of the story’ (Lawson 2009: 27). A ‘hatter’, based on the English saying ‘mad as a hatter’ is a person who prefers to be solitary and appears to be eccentric, if not actually crazy. Artisans used mercury in the process of making hats, which seriously affected their mental health. The translator preferred to translate it as ‘the shepherd’, skating over the textual reference. Another piece of misinformation is the translation of the phrase ‘he washed up the tinware in the water the duff had been boiled in’ (Lawson 2009: 28). The translator has distorted the information, rendering it as ‘he washed up the tinware in the water mixed to ash’ (back-translation), and so rewrites the phrase. Probably, Bush people used to reuse water for different purposes since the water supply was scarce because of the arid environment. This is the contextual information Lawson is giving the reader, who unfortunately, because of the free re-writing of the translator, does not receive the message.

All in all, the writer’s and translator’s aim to introduce to the world the rural Australian’s peculiar way of life, and the writer’s innovative style and language, are betrayed by the translator’s numerous inaccuracies, misinterpretations, misreadings, odd syntactic structures, grammatical mistakes, inadequate lexical choices, inappropriate register, disrespect for graphic effects, additions, omissions that are hard to justify, and distortions. All that is accompanied by a re-writing and a re-interpretation of the texts which I have discussed and illustrated above.

The essential aim of translation is the diffusion of cultures and knowledge. The

translator should be able to catch meanings in the contexts of culture and situation and transfer them as intended by the author. In the words of Gregory Rabassa, 'translation is a form of writing' (1984: 21). I have referred several times to Prato's choices in terms of creativity, free-interpretation and free-rewriting. I want to make a remark about creativity, which is a growing issue in translation studies. According to Loffredo and Perteghella (2006: 9), 'creativity is still regarded as a spontaneous process readily associated with a special individual and a sort of freedom, which is sustained by an individualistic conception of authorship'. Indeed, the translator, as a creative writer, once having discovered the essence of an original text, can decide to reproduce the meanings in a new form (Levine 1991). This does not mean that the translator can arbitrarily omit and distort contextual knowledge, affecting the coherence of the original text and misleading the reader, as occurs in Giuliana Prato's translations. It means, rather, giving a new shape while still respecting the content of the original text. What Prato does, is change information and meanings at will, to the extent that free interpretation and free rewriting are more appropriate terms to address her work. The same applies to her 'by sense' approach to translation. Some outstanding translators, such as Rabassa, John Felstiner and Margaret Sayers Peden, claim that they follow their instinct for what is right, that their work is intuitive and that translators must listen to their ear or hear the voice of the source text (Munday 2008: 150). Here again, they all refer to the rhythm of the narration, to the sound of the language, not to the meanings which must be preserved. Prato's translations also pose an ethical issue. Translators have responsibilities towards authors and readers; they must be able to explain their choices consistently, in order to justify the inevitable loss that occurs during the transfer of meanings, and describe the translation method adopted to meet the author's intention and the reader's expectations.

Giuliana Prato betrays her own aim to transmit to an Italian readership Henry Lawson's representation of rural life in nineteenth-century. The image she shapes of the Australian outback seriously affects the knowledge the reader acquires through her translations. This is not the way translators should claim visibility.

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