The Impact of Foreign Literature on Italian Literature

Italian literature has always been written and cultivated in a larger historical, linguistic, and cultural milieu. The first movement of Italian poetry, *La scuola siciliana* (The Sicilian school), which grew up around the emperor (and poet) Frederick II in the first half of the 1200s, was born from troubadour verse. In fact, one of Giacomo da Lentini’s first *canzoni* is partly a translation of a poem by Folquet de Marselha, as has been well established.¹ As Michelangelo Picone writes, “It is therefore within the depths of linguistic translation that the origin of the dawning [Italian] literary tradition is hidden.”² If Italian poetry, thanks to the vast influence of Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*, provided a model for much of European lyric verse, and if Italian literature dominated Europe with Machiavelli, Ariosto, and Tasso in the Renaissance, things were no longer the same in the eighteenth century. As Pascale Casanova argues in *La république mondiale des lettres* (The world republic of letters), France became the centre of the literary republic of letters during the reign of Louis XIV: French was now considered the “Latin of the moderns.”³ Italian novels owed their birth in the eighteenth century to translations and adaptations of Richardson and other English novelists, often through intermediary French translations.⁴ Likewise, in the twentieth century both Italian poetry and prose drew on foreign models.

**Italian Poet-Translators**

The category of poet-translator was not unknown to Italy before our era. I have already mentioned Giacomo da Lentini, whom Gianfranco
Folena aptly calls “the first poet-translator of Italian literature.” Yet something new occurred in the twentieth century: poets began translating to earn a living. Indeed, all of the five poets concentrated on in this study – Eugenio Montale, Giorgio Caproni, Giovanni Giudici, Edoardo Sanguineti, and Franco Buffoni – were professional translators for a period, and they weren’t the only Italian poets who relied on such income. But in a broader sense, these figures turned abroad and to other languages, because Italian literature had definitively lost its international dominance: it had become “peripheral” to the European system of literature. The overwhelming importance of French (and German) symbolist poetry was crucial for the development of modern Italian poetry. In short, Italian poets developed an additional vocation: translator. Along with translation, however, Italian poets generally incorporated another aspect into their careers: they were often the foremost literary critics of their era. One thinks naturally of figures such as Eugenio Montale, Andrea Zanzotto, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Franco Fortini. Thus, Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo observes, “An aspect that distinguishes twentieth-century Italy from other countries, on the whole or on average, is not so much the frequency of poet-translators … as much as the fact that these figures are placed at the center of the triangle poet-critic-translator.” A poet-critic like Piero Bigongiari went so far as to say that “translation was a ‘primordial act of criticism.’” It is this threefold combination of poet, critic, and translator, which developed in the twentieth century that was the catalyst for the birth of quaderni di traduzioni (notebooks of translations). Translation, considered the most profound way to read a text and “una superiore filologia” (a superior philology) as one of Italy’s most distinguished poet-translators commented, became the preferred occupation for generations of Italian poets. Through translation, Italian poets honed their poetic techniques, experimented with new poetic metres, and theorized new poetics; indeed, they often published more translations than original work. As the critic Oreste Macrì pointed out,

Between poetry and criticism, a broad, dense, and continuous activity of translation by poet-translators and translator-poets was situated, such that translation was strictly specified as a veritable autonomous literary genre: an initiative specific to a sort of animus traduttorio, as poetry and criticism were strictly understood. The three genres converged into the metagenre of the anthology.
This metagener found its apex in the *quaderno di traduzioni* (notebook of translations). With this new genre, the land of Petrarch gave rise to a quintessentially modern volume: an anthology of foreign verse drawn from different languages and different cultures, structured according to definite criteria, translated by one poet. Yet for poetic versions to acquire such importance, translations needed to be distinguished from mere *volgarizzamenti* (vernacularisations), a process first described by Gianfranco Folena in his *Volgarizzare e tradurre* (Vernacularising and translating), and then Alison Cornish in her *Vernacular Translation in Dante’s Italy: Illiterate Literature.* From Annibal Caro’s 1581 translation of Virgil onwards, translations into Italian began to be regarded as original works in their own right. But Caro’s *Eneide* revealed another prejudice still at play: namely, the superiority of epic (and drama) over lyric poetry. As Gérard Genette makes clear, lyric poetry struggled hard over the centuries to attain an equal footing with the other two genres, due to the “massive silence” about it in Aristotle’s *Poetics.* Only during the nineteenth century did lyric poetry finally attain the same theoretical status as the other two poetic genres, thanks to its reconceptualization by Friedrich Schlegel, August Wilhelm Schlegel, and Friedrich Schelling. This in turn would lay the ground for the custom of poets collecting their translations of lyric poetry.

**Bibliography on Italian Poet-Translators**

Scholarship on modern Italian poetry has long been disfigured by the sins of omission and neglect with regard to poet-translators. While Folena’s classic study examined the role of translation in the Italian Middle Ages, scholars have been slow to recognize the overwhelming importance of translation for twentieth- and twenty-first-century Italian poetry. The relative absence of translation studies in Italy is due to the fact that tradition (*la tradizione*) has always been overvalued at the expense of translation (*la traduzione*). Most major studies of modern Italian poetry ignore or downplay the importance of translation: one will look in vain for chapters dealing exclusively with this theme in histories of twentieth-century Italian poetry like Gianni Pozzi’s *La poesia italiana del novecento* (Twentieth-century Italian poetry), Silvio Ramat’s *Storia della poesia del novecento* (History of twentieth-century [Italian] poetry), and Frederic Jones’s *The Modern Italian Lyric.* The same absence is seen in multi-volume histories of Italian literature,
such as the *Storia della letteratura italiana* (History of Italian literature) published by Salerno and the *Storia letteraria d’Italia* (Literary history of Italy) published by Vallardi. If we turn to academic journals, the case is quite similar. Over a 113-year period, the *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* published only thirty-nine articles dealing with translation, about one every three years. And, to take another type of example, the prestigious journal *Studi novecenteschi* has devoted, on average, less than one article a year to translation studies of any sort. The foregoing should not be considered remarkable if anthologies such as *Poesia del Novecento* (Twentieth-century poetry) are published, which take for granted that the title refers explicitly to Italian poetry. This type of parochialism is shared by all literary cultures. Yet this myopic view of Italian literary history overlooks the vitally important role of translation.

Turning to poet-translators, there have been very few books dedicated to individual modern Italian poets qua translators. Most often, monographs about Italian poet-translators give short shrift to their translation activity, often not even including it in their bibliography. *Quaderni di traduzioni* themselves are treated summarily, if not ignored. Then again, in most languages, poetic anthologies have been little studied. Anthologies of translations have been justly described as forming part of a “shadow culture” by literary scholar Armin Paul Frank. This is definitely the case with anthologies of poetry in Italian.

Despite this overwhelming critical neglect, there have been exceptions. The Italian critic who has drawn the most attention to poetic translations in modern Italy has been Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, with a series of incisive articles and introductions dating back to his editorship of the anthology *Poeti italiani del Novecento* (Italian twentieth-century poets), where he championed Italian poet-translators. Just recently, Antonio Prete published a volume dealing with poetic translation in modern Italy, and other critics, like Laura Barile, Daniela La Penna, and Francesca Billiani, have published important articles surveying and analysing poet-translators. One shouldn’t forget the articles written by poet-translators themselves, such as Franco Fortini and Franco Buffoni, who have abundantly reflected on the process of translation. Likewise, valuable essay collections such as *Traduzione e poesia nell’Europa del Novecento* (Translation and poetry in twentieth-century Europe) demonstrate the growth of interest in the figure of poet-translator. Three studies in particular stand out for their treatment of translation in modern Italy, although their focus is not on poetry translation, and all deal with the first half of the twentieth century: Francesca Billiani’s *Culture
nazionali e narrazioni straniere: Italia, 1903–1943 (National cultures and foreign fiction: Italy, 1903–1943),\textsuperscript{31} Christopher Rundle’s \textit{Publishing Translations in Fascist Italy,}\textsuperscript{32} and Valerio Ferme’s \textit{Tradurre è tradire: la traduzione come sovversione culturale sotto il Fascismo} (To translate is to betray: Translation as cultural subversion under Fascism).\textsuperscript{33}

My book has two goals: to write a history of the new genre of the \textit{quaderno di traduzioni}, and to demonstrate how translation constellates the poetic careers of five of the most important modern Italian poets. Drawing on translation theory, I will examine the ideologies and methods underlying the translation activities of Eugenio Montale, Giorgio Caproni, Giovanni Giudici, Edoardo Sanguineti, and Franco Buffoni.

**Translation in Modern Italian Poetic Culture**

The following brief summary is not meant to be comprehensive but simply suggestive of certain key phases in modern Italian literary culture. This book, after all, is not a history of poetry translation in modern Italian culture; there remains so much work to be done, which exceeds the competence and time of the present writer. The following remarks, then, are meant to simply offer some context for the five case studies in chapters two through six, from Montale to Buffoni. I will draw mainly on Franco Fortini’s posthumous lectures (\textit{Lezioni sulla traduzione} [Lectures on translation]), and articles by Francesca Billiani, Anna Dolfi, Nicola Gardini, Daniela La Penna, Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, and Antonio Prete.

Normally poets translate from literatures (and languages) considered prestigious, which for Italian poets, until the twentieth century, meant Latin and Greek. For instance, the most translated poets in the nineteenth century, as evidenced by CLIO,\textsuperscript{34} were Virgil, Horace, and Homer, with the moderns significantly lagging behind. Yet the twentieth century witnesses a huge change, which is registered in the burgeoning genre of \textit{quaderni di traduzioni}, always featuring more modern than ancient writers. If, for instance, the volumes of translations by Carducci and Pascoli were oriented towards the past, with little room given to modern poets, the \textit{quaderni} of Anedda, Bertolucci, Caproni, Dal Fabbro, Erba, Fortini, Luzi, Montale, Raboni, Risi, Sereni, and Solmi, for example, don’t include any Greek or Latin poetry. As Nicola Gardini summed up,

In the most recent history of Italian literature the dearth of classical translations by poets becomes downright embarrassing ... among collections of
translations by the leading Italian poets (Montale, Luzi, Sereni, Fortini, Giudici, and others) not one, not a single one of the great ancients can be found in translation.35

From what languages did modern Italian poetry draw inspiration in the twentieth century, then, if not Greek and Latin? French and English, above all, as well as German, Spanish, and Russian. Modern Italian poets of all stripes translated both prose and verse. About 60 per cent of twentieth- and twenty-first-century poets translated at least one volume.36 Yet there was a clear break between eras. The generation of Italian Futurist and vociani poets generally didn’t translate poetry or they translated it into prose.37 The new period came into being, however, with the publication of the literary journal La Ronda, which opposed the avant-gardes.38 Through La Ronda’s repudiation of the “dissolution of genres and poetic meters” practised by the Futurists, the magazine ushered in “a revival of poetic translation.”39 While one of its first fruits was Mario Praz’s anthology of nineteenth-century English poetry,40 the new wave of poetry translation really began in earnest, as Mengaldo notes, between the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s: in short, “between the affirmation of the ‘new poets’ (lirici nuovi) and the take-off and consolidation of hermeticism.”41 The prime motor of this was the poet-translator Giuseppe Ungaretti, who, according to Franco Fortini, “open[ed] a new epoch for translation,” with his influential versions of Shakespeare, Góngora, and others.42 At this time, Italian poets “made the recognition of a great European tradition an indispensable element in the formation of their poetics.”

In Fortini’s opinion, poets in the 1930s translated foreign and remote texts in which they recognized themselves: “the poetry of the French Pléiade, the latter half of the Spanish sixteenth century, the English metaphysical poets, and then the nineteenth century, beginning with Hölderlin, Novalis, and Nerval, and the twentieth century with the first movement of symbolism and then the later one, up to some surrealist offshoots.”43 In other words, the Italian hermetic poets did not tackle poetry that was foreign to their own aesthetic preferences: the complete opening up to the rest of the world would only happen after the end of the Second World War.

Nonetheless, poetic translations weren’t carried out solely by recognized poets. Professional translators, critics, and professors contributed as well. As Luzi writes, “the translators (Leone Traverso, Sergio Baldi, Renato Poggioli, Carlo Bo, Vittorio Bodini, and Vittorio Pagano) gave a
valuable contribution, who put into circulation poetic ideas and images, with input from other countries." The category of translator-poets flourished.

Of course, the 1930s would also be known for prose translations: this decade, famously called the “decennio delle traduzioni” (decade of translations) by Cesare Pavese, whose translations (along with those by other authors like Elio Vittorini) from writers such as Melville, Joyce, Faulkner, Dos Passos, Anderson, and Stein marked an era. Italian prose would come to terms with this infusion of foreign narrative with the rise of neorealism.

In the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, the overwhelming number of translations, above all of Stéphane Mallarmé, along with Paul Valéry, while to a lesser extent Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud, attest to the poetic masters and the poetic language Italian poets were looking to. Mallarmé, specifically, was the key poet for the Hermetic poets, like Mario Luzi, Alessandro Parronchi, and Piero Bigongiari, all of whom produced translations of “L’après-midi d’un faune” (The afternoon of a faun). The utopia of a perfect poetic language unsullied by the tribe was part and parcel of these poets’ ideology and faith, though their utopia was at times religious, at times aesthetic.

Yet American and British poetry attracted Italian poets as well: notably William Shakespeare, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and W.B. Yeats. Yet, while modern American narrative was in vogue in the 1930s during Fascism’s heyday, due to its anti-Fascist political connotations, both modern American and British poetry was much less translated.

German-language poetry was occasionally translated by Italian poets during this period, yet the influence of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Hölderlin, Rainer Maria Rilke, and other German-language poets was seen more in translations in magazines than in separate volumes until the late 1930s and early 1940s, when Leone Traverso, Gianfranco Contini, and Giaime Pintor came out with their volumes of translations of Hölderlin and Rilke. Their renderings inspired more than one generation of poets, and they inspired the most important translations by Franco Fortini.

Modern Spanish poetry owed a great deal to its spread in Italy to translations by translators Oreste Macrì, Carlo Bo, Vittorio Bodini, and Dario Puccini, in particular. Poets like Piero Bigongiari, Mario Luzi, and Eugenio Montale translated poems by Jorge Guillén.

Readers of Russian poetry were well served by translations by Renato Poggioli, Tommaso Landolfi, and Angelo Maria Ripellino.
who became the pre-eminent post-war translators of Russian literature. Russian literature was widely read and was always considered important because of the strong current of Communism among Italian intellectuals. Giudici made an impact here, too, with his later translation of *Eugene Onegin*; one might also remember that Ungaretti also translated some poems from Russian.

The canonization of translated poems in modern Italy progressed slowly. Luciano Anceschi’s 1943 anthology, *Lirici nuovi: antologia di poesia contemporanea* (New lyric poets: Anthology of contemporary poetry), provided the first, most significant inclusion of modern poetic translations into Italian within an Italian poetic anthology, so that along with original compositions by Italian poets were their translations of foreign poetry. This was complemented by Anceschi’s second anthology, completely dedicated to translations, the 1945 *Poeti antichi e moderni tradotti dai lirici nuovi* (Ancient and modern poets translated by the new poets). Anceschi later recounted that this volume, co-edited by Domenico Porzio, “was born from the realization any poetry reader could have: all of our most representative poets dedicated themselves to translation.” According to Anceschi, this was a historical novelty, since “previously it rarely happened.” This anthology featured translations by ten poets: Attilio Bertolucci, Piero Bigongiari, Beniamino Dal Fabbro, Mario Luzi, Eugenio Montale, Salvatore Quasimodo, Camillo Sbarbaro, Sergio Solmi, Giuseppe Ungaretti, and Giorgio Vigolo, and would constitute a precedent for many other anthologies to come.

The post–Second World War period signalled a change in translation practice. There was a significant increase in published translations, and an even greater opening up to poetry from all across the world. Anthologies of foreign poetry thrived: as Leonardo Manigrasso writes, “The 1950s are a decade packed with anthologies of foreign poetry.” In line with this, translations often were “traduzioni di servizio” (service translations): much, if not a majority of this translation work was not carried out by poets but by professional translators. Moreover, Italian poetics had changed: *ermetismo* (hermeticism) was no longer at the forefront of poetic discourse. Francesca Billiani revealingly quotes a 1949 letter from the publisher Giulio Einaudi to Francesco Tentori Montalto, a translator aiming to publish with him: “Your volume on Spanish poetry ... is not totally satisfactory either in its historical perspective or its hermeticist [ermetizzante] tone.”

In 1956, the small press Scheiwiller published the important volume, *Poeti stranieri del ‘900 tradotti da poeti italiani*. Here, thirty-eight
translators were included (some of whom no longer form part of the recognized canon of modern Italian poets): Luigi Bartolini, Giorgio Bassani, Attilio Bertolucci, Carlo Betocchi, Piero Bigongiari, Vittorio Bodini, Luciano Budigna, Giorgio Caproni, Raffaele Carrieri, Emilio Cecchi, Beniamino Dal Fabbro, Luciano Erba, Luigi Fallacara, Franco Fortini, Giovanni Giudici, Vittoria Guerrini, Margherita Guidacci, Piero Jahier, Libero de Libero, Mario Luzi, Curzio Malaparte, Eugenio Montale, Alessandro Parronchi, Corrado Pavolini, Gaiaime Pintor, Renato Poggioli, Giacomo Prampolini, Salvatore Quasimodo, Roberto Rebora, Nelo Risi, Camillo Sbarbaro, Vittorio Sereni, Leonardo Sinisgalli, Maria Luisa Spaziani, Francesco Tentori, Leone Traverso, Giuseppe Ungaretti, and Diego Valeri. Scheiwiller would go on to publish a handful of mini anthologies of foreign poets translated by prominent Italian poets: Eugenio Montale’s 1958 translations of T.S. Eliot and Jorge Guillén, Giuseppe Ungaretti’s 1961 versions of Murilo Mendes, Mario Luzi’s 1961 renderings of Jorge Guillén, and Nelo Risi and Edith Bruck’s co-translated 1966 volume of Gyula Illyés’s poetry.64 In 1963, Scheiwiller published a bona fide quaderno di traduzioni, Sergio Solmi’s Versioni poetiche da contemporanei,65 and the following year, the Milanese publisher came out with an especially interesting anthology of André Frénaud, translated by fifteen Italian authors, nearly all poets.66

In 1958, Garzanti published Poesia straniera del Novecento (Foreign twentieth-century poetry), edited by poet-translator Attilio Bertolucci, who was editor of the most important series of foreign poetry in postwar Italy, namely, Guanda’s “La Fenice.” This landmark volume stood out for its heft (875 pages) and its comprehensiveness: poetry from Czech, Danish, English, French, German, Hungarian, Modern Greek, Polish, Russian, and Spanish. The translators were some of the most respected poets: Attilio Bertolucci, Carlo Betocchi, Piero Bigongiari, Cristina Campo, Giorgio Caproni, Margherita Guidacci, Mario Luzi, Eugenio Montale, Alessandro Parronchi, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Salvatore Quasimodo, Vittorio Sereni, and Giuseppe Ungaretti.

The year 1959, as Beatrice Sica reminds us, “is an important date in the Italian editorial panorama of anthologies: the publisher Garzanti, in fact, publishes within a few months L’idea simbolista [The symbolist idea], edited by Mario Luzi and Il movimento surrealista [The surrealist movement], edited by Franco Fortini.”67

The 1960s would see, as Riccardo Capoferro writes, “the proliferation of ‘academic’ anthologies, exclusively based on a historical-cultural criterion.”68 The 1960s were also the decade of Il gruppo 63, the Italian
neo-avant-garde. This generation of poets would be less interested, as Fortini noted, in translation than the “third-generation” poets. Yet some of the neo-avant-garde – exemplified in poets like Sanguineti (whom we will discuss in chapter 5) and Antonio Porta, Adriano Spatola and Giulia Niccolai – would actually translate considerably, but more often non-poetic texts.

The most forthright justification for including poetic translations in the Italian poetic canon came from Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, in his 1978 Poeti italiani del Novecento (Italian twentieth-century poets). Mengaldo not only strongly defended the inclusion of translations but also included an exemplary translator, Giaime Pintor, who was not a poet. In the critic’s words, “The study of poetic translations, a fundamental chapter of this century’s Italian literary culture, has been more wished for than truly begun, up until now …” But a reversion to old prejudice can be seen in the most important recent anthology of twentieth-century Italian poetry, Antologia della poesia italiana: Novecento, edited by Cesare Segre and Carlo Ossola, which excludes translations and translators like Pintor. In addition, with the general consolidation of the Italian publishing industry, the opportunities to publish foreign poetry have decreased. Thus, the series of Quaderni di traduzioni, formerly published by Einaudi, can be seen as a swan song for a certain vision of international culture and poetics.

Quaderni di Traduzioni

Anthologies of foreign poetry translated by one writer published before the twentieth century were different in nature from quaderni di traduzioni. These precursors to twentieth- and twenty-first-century quaderni di traduzioni, most of which come from the nineteenth century, bore different titles, were rarely translated by canonical poets, and contained translations from predominantly classical languages. Such collections were variously entitled un saggio (a specimen), una raccolta (a collection), and fiori (flowers) of traduzioni (translations), or versioni poetiche (poetic versions). Notably missing is the twentieth-century term quaderno (notebook). The translators of these pre-twentieth-century volumes were above all intellectuals and writers, but not famous poets. These anthologies generally abounded in translations from Greek and Latin. Often these books were divided into two sections: one with translations and one with poems by the (poet)-translator.
If we consider the collections of translations published by important nineteenth-century poets like Vincenzo Monti, Giosué Carducci, and Giovanni Pascoli, one thing immediately stands out: they are all posthumous. None of the poets organized their anthologies of foreign poetry in any way. There was no intention, therefore, on the part of these poets, to publish a quaderno di traduzioni.

For example, Carducci edited the posthumous volume, *Versioni poetiche di Vincenzo Monti: Persio, Voltaire, Omero, Pyrker, Lemercier, Ec.: con giunta di cose rare o inedite* (Poetic translations by Vincenzo Monti: Persius, Voltaire, Homer, Pyrker, Lemercier, etc.: with the addition of rare and unpublished material). He chose to begin it with Monti’s translation of Persius, followed by portions from three disparate works, namely, *The Iliad*, Voltaire’s *La Pulcelle d’Orléans* (The maid of Orleans), and János László Pyrker’s *Tunisias*, then a section of “little versions” (*piccole versioni*), ending with a selection of rare and unpublished original poems by Monti.

Though Carducci edited Monti’s collection of foreign poetry, he did not do the same for his own translations, which were collected by later editors. Carducci’s posthumous *Versioni da antichi e da moderni* (Versions from ancients and from moderns), published more than thirty years after his death, is arranged haphazardly, with a section of Greek verse, then Latin poetry, followed by a mixture of essays on Greek and Latin literature, and an all-purpose section of modern language verse. The confusing mixture of versions and essays doesn’t form a unified whole.

Likewise, Pascoli’s posthumous *Traduzioni e riduzioni* (Translations and adaptations), edited by his sister Maria shortly after his death, is a hodgepodge of translations separated by various headings: *Dall’Iliade* (From the *Iliad*), *Dall’Odissea* (From the *Odyssey*), *Miscellanea* (Miscellany), *Da Catullo* (From Catullus), *Da Orazio* (From Horace), *Da Virgilio* (From Virgil), *Favole* (Fables), and *Poesia popolare eroica civile* (Popular heroic civic poetry). The sections *Miscellanea*, *Favole*, and *Poesia popolare eroica civile* have no chronological, linguistic, or alphabetical order.

We could additionally single out two examples of volumes of translations published by forgotten nineteenth-century writers, which similarly lack a fixed structure. The first book, Michele de Bellis’s 1894 *Traduzioni poetiche* (Poetic translations), mixes translations in seven languages (Ancient Greek, Latin, French, German, Spanish, English, and Modern Greek) without any order. The volume opens with versions of Tibullus and Heine and ends with translations of Horace and Musaeus,
without any linguistic or chronological separation. The second collection, Luigi di Treville’s 1883 *Saggio di traduzioni poetiche* (Specimen of poetic translations), includes both translations and original poetry. The first part is dominated by versions of Heine (62 poems), followed by two translations from Romanian, nineteen versions “from the German of diverse [poets],” ten from English (predominantly P.B. Shelley and Thomas Moore), two from French, ten of Anacreon (and followers of Anacreon), one ode of Horace’s, and a handful of adaptations; the second part, *Originals*, contains some poems written in German as well as Italian, followed by thirty-one “epigrams, little stories and riddles.” The order is again pell-mell (German, Romanian, German again, English, French, Greek, and Latin), and the inclusion of original compositions varying in language and genre makes it a miscellany without a clear structure.

In short, the collections of poetic translations published by pre-twentieth-century Italian poets like Vincenzo Monti, Giosuè Carducci, and Giovanni Pascoli as well as lesser-known writers do not constitute authorial, cohesive volumes of translations. The essential requisite for making such specific translation anthologies was missing, namely, the prestige of translation. Translation was still generally regarded as inferior to the composition of original verse. The chaotic structure of their translations reveals a lack of interest among both poet-translators and Italian literary culture for an organized volume showcasing comparative poetic encounters. Italian poets were still, to a great degree, imprisoned within their national literary tradition, or else they were focused on retranslating their Latin predecessors. The poetic rush towards the modern and the foreign, which would begin at the opening of the twentieth century, was still in the future.

**The Birth of Quaderni di Traduzioni**

The first appearance of a *quaderno di traduzioni* is Giuseppe Ungaretti’s 1936 volume, *Traduzioni: St.-J. Perse, William Blake, Góngora, Essenin, Jean Paulhan, Affrica* (Translations: St.-J. Perse, William Blake, Góngora, Essenin, Jean Paulhan, Africa). It has already been mentioned that Ungaretti played a fundamental role, “beginning … the practice of translating the great, foreign classics” such as Góngora, Mallarmé, Racine, and Shakespeare. His eclectic collection of poetic versions was the first volume of pure translations – unmixed with original poetry
published by a famous Italian poet during his lifetime. While there is little coherence to the volume, either in terms of language, structure, or intertextuality, the central theme is defined by the poet-translator himself as “nostalgia.” Ungaretti would later intend to publish a more cohesive volume of translations, but this plan never materialized. In any case, while Ungaretti’s collection was widely read, it nonetheless did not cement the new literary genre.

Meanwhile, another anthology of foreign poetry that was published several years later provided additional impetus for the development of the *quaderno di traduzioni*. It was Leone Traverso’s 1942 *Poesia moderna straniera* (Modern foreign poetry) that had a mixture of predominantly German, Greek, English, and French poetry. Traverso, a gifted translator but not a recognized writer of verse, was an influential mentor for many Italian poets of the “third generation,” thanks to the “extraordinary richness of his skills, and his literary and linguistic passions.”

His important volume would be a model for the following *quaderni di traduzioni* due to the immense respect in which he was held as translator (he was nicknamed “the Khan”). Yet his title indicates more than a personal, subjective anthology; rather, a canon, “modern foreign poetry” tout court. This differentiates his collection from a *quaderno di traduzioni*. Moreover, Traverso was a translator and a professor, not a canonized poet.

Beniamino dal Fabbro was one of the up and coming Italian poets anthologized by Anceschi; he would later become a music critic. His collection, *La sera armoniosa* (The harmonious evening), published by a small press during the Second World War as well, was enlarged and published by Rizzoli in 1966. Dal Fabbro had a precise goal in mind: with his volume, consisting mostly, but not entirely, of French verse, he wanted to “make accessible to a public, in Italian verses, a poetry whose works were becoming unobtainable.” Unobtainable, he said, because in 1940, Italy was obviously at war with France, and censorship of foreign literature was becoming heavier and heavier. Dal Fabbro’s volume is not to be regarded as a *quaderno* precisely because it is a systematic collection, an anthology of predominantly (French) symbolist poetry. As he writes, his book gives a representation of symbolist poetry “a certainly incomplete map, but sketched out in its principal regions.”

In 1948, Eugenio Montale would publish his *Quaderno di traduzioni* (analysed in chapter 2), and from this point the genre was definitively born. Let us go over the characteristics of this genre.
Quaderni di Traduzioni

Quaderni di traduzioni belong to the literary genre of anthologies, but their novelty resides in the particular nature of the anthologist: a poet-translator. Teresa Spignoli defines the relationship between “translation and poetic elaboration” as “the particular characteristic of quaderni di traduzioni.”

As personalized, authorial collection of translations, these volumes have six primary and defining attributes, dealing with authorship, content, and paratextual information.

(1) Quaderni di traduzioni are translated by one poet. This distinguishes them from multi-translator anthologies. In addition, the poet-translator-anthologist structures the quaderno as he wishes. The authorial, personal nature of the collection is evident from this very fact.

(2) The volume is composed entirely of translations and not original compositions. This trait distances quaderni from mixed volumes of translations and original work, often composed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

(3) The collection predominantly consists of poetry. Occasionally, quaderni include excerpts from theatrical works or prose pieces, but the main content of the quaderno di traduzioni is always verse.

(4) The poetry is generally translated from more than one language. There are exceptions – and I have cited Luzi’s Francamente: versi dal francese, for example – but the majority of quaderni draw on a multilingual corpus of texts.

(5) The aim and the title of the collection – often, but not necessarily entitled Quaderno di traduzioni – makes no reference to canonicity or comprehensiveness (e.g., modern foreign poetry, Greek poetry, etc.). This is perhaps the most knotty issue in differentiating quaderni from other types of anthologies. Therefore, anthologies by two poet-translators, Salvatore Quasimodo’s justifiably famous Lirici greci (Greek lyric poets) and Diego Valeri’s Lirici francesi (French lyric poets) and Lirici tedeschi (German lyric poets) are not to be regarded as quaderni.

We can cite Luzi again for his comment on another of his quaderni di traduzioni, namely, La cordigliera delle Ande.

This is definitely not my ideal book [libro ideale] of French poetry, but simply the graph of certain points of spontaneous or provoked ignition … this is truly a quaderno, a faithful and project-less register [registro fedele].

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Luzi demonstrates the difference, here, between a normal anthology and this new series of quaderni di traduzioni. These latter are not libri ideali (ideal books) but more modest registri fedeli (faithful registers). Likewise, Sergio Solmi indicates that “the poems gathered here [in his 1969 Quaderno di traduzioni] do not at all represent … a critical selection.” On the other hand, the anthology of foreign poetry, as published in post-war Italy, represents this very “critical selection” spoken of by Solmi. Such an anthology, in contrast to a quaderno di traduzioni, “has to be a coherent and a carefully configured assortment of examples from the historical point of view. These examples have to reflect textual and extratextual elements alike.”

(6) There is introductory material that speaks to the poet-translator’s project of collecting his or her verse. This serves to reinforce the personal nature of the quaderno, separating it from more objective and academic collections.

The term quaderno itself simply means “a notebook,” and is a rather modest word (like registro fedele), rarely used by twentieth-century Italian poets. Its lack of prestige is thus inherent in its name. Quaderno implies an association with school and scholastic exercises, like translations from classical languages, which were, until recently, a fundamental part of the Italian school system. Indeed, this scholastic reference undoubtedly inspired the title of poet-translator Nelo Risi’s volume of translations, Compito di francese e d’alte lingue (Homework from French and other languages). Yet rather than constituting volumes of classical translations, quaderni are generally constituted by versions from modern vernaculars. The word quaderno humbly describes its content; whatever is in a quaderno does assuredly not deserve to be considered on the same level as a canzoniere, for example, or even on the same level as an “anthology of foreign poetry.” While a canzoniere immediately recalls Petrarch, the quaderno could refer to any anonymous notebook kept in a long-forgotten desk drawer. The quaderno di traduzioni has even been minimized as a Quadernetto di traduzioni (little notebook of translations), in Luciano Erba’s anthology of poetic versions.

Despite these humble associations, the quaderno di traduzioni has become surprisingly prestigious. This can be traced to two factors: the prominence of the most famous author of a quaderno – Montale – and the consequent imitation by other poets; and the initiative of the publisher Giulio Einaudi, the most prestigious Italian publishing house, which published a series of such books, which I will shortly describe.
It was Montale, indeed, whose title *Quaderno di traduzioni* gave the name to this new genre, and the same title was used not only by other poet-translators but also by editors of posthumous volumes. Thus, the volumes of translations of the nineteenth-century writer Ippolito Nievo and the twentieth-century poet Margherita Guidacci and novelist Beppe Fenoglio were all collected in *quaderni di traduzioni*. A canonizing editorial strategy appeared in 1980, when the poet-translator Franco Fortini and the critic Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo independently suggested to Einaudi that the publishing house start a series of *Quaderni di traduzioni*. These books wouldn’t necessarily contain the same title, but they would be conceived along the lines of Montale’s volume. In the words of Mengaldo,

In the very beginning of the 80s, Franco Fortini and the undersigned had, with singular and significant independence, the idea of proposing to Giulio Einaudi a series of self-anthologies of the greatest Italian poet-translators ... The editor welcomed the proposal with the culturally and editorially acute enthusiasm that make him unique. Thus were published in turn personal choices of poetic versions of Sereni (*Il musicante di Saint-Merry*), of the same Fortini (*Il ladro di ciliegie*), of Giudici (*Addio, proibito piangere*), [and] of Luzi (*La cordigliera delle Ande*); then the series was blocked, by reasons, let us say, of force majeure [unforeseeable circumstances].

In Fortini’s account of the birth of this genre, contained in his review of Vittorio Sereni’s 1981 *quaderno di traduzioni*, he unjustifiably leaves out the name of Mengaldo:

In order to be clear: this most beautiful book of Sereni’s is placed at the beginning of a series of the Einaudi publishing house. The series intends to include books that the poet can consider as his own, although composed of translations; a series that I myself proposed, and which one hopes will welcome works of Luzi, Giudici, Caproni, [and Andrea] Zanzotto.

That Mengaldo was crucial in the formulation of this project is, however, clear both by his own writing as quoted above and in a letter to this author, as well as by the fact that his name appears in the Einaudi archives in Turin as an “inventor” of the series.

The third source of our information about the birth of this project comes from a private letter from Giulio Einaudi to Giorgio Caproni (written on 14 January 1981), inviting him to participate.
Dear Caproni,

It is our aim to give life to a series of volumes in which some of our greatest poets – and very often of our publishing house – present a selection of their poetry translations, at times very numerous but also very scattered. They are usually most precious (and not marginal) pages, from which emerge splendid models of work and style of the word, verse, and sounds of poetic language.

I would be very grateful to be able to also have yours among these “quaderni di traduzioni” next to those of Luzi, Sereni, [and] Zanzotto.100

The Einaudi series built on the previously published quaderni of Ippolito Nievo (1964), and Sergio Solmi (1969 and 1977), and would go on to include the quaderni of six poets: Vittorio Sereni, Franco Fortini, Giovanni Giudici, Mario Luzi, Giorgio Caproni, and Edoardo Sanguineti.102 These works – Sereni’s Il musicante di Saint-Merry (The Musician of Saint-Merry, 1982), Fortini’s Il ladro di ciliege e altre versioni di poesia (The thief of cherries and other poetic versions, 1982), Giudici’s Addio, proibito piangere e altri versi tradotti (Farewell, forbidden mourning and other translated poems, 1982), Luzi’s Il cordigliera delle Ande (The Cordillera of the Andes, 1983), Caproni’s Quaderno di traduzioni (1998), and Sanguineti’s Quaderno di traduzioni (2006) – sum up a crucial period of translations.109

Einaudi wasn’t the sole editor of quaderni di traduzioni, and we can find numerous such collections published by other publishing houses both before the official Einaudi series and afterwards. To cite some of the most prominent: Tolmino Baldassari’s Quaderno di traduzioni; Attilio Bertolucci’s Imitazioni (Imitations); Piero Bigongiari’s Il vento d’ottobre: da Alcmane a Dylan Thomas (The October wind: From Alcman to Dylan Thomas); Giovanni Bonalumi’s La traversata del Gottardo: quaderno di traduzioni (1948–1998) (The crossing of the Gotthard Pass: notebook of translations, 1948–1998) and Album inglese: quaderno di traduzioni (1948–1998) (English album: notebook of translations, 1948–1998); Franco Buffoni’s Songs of Spring and Una piccola tabaccheria (A small tobacco shop), both of which we will discuss in chapter 6; Gianni D’Elia’s Taccuino francese (French notepad); Luciano Erba’s Dei cristalli naturali e altri versi tradotti (1950–1990) (Some natural crystals and other translated poems, 1950–1990) and Il tranviere metafisico, seguito da Quadernetto di traduzioni (The metaphysical streetcar operator, followed by a little notebook of translations); Tomaso Kemeny’s Notturno (Nocturne); Attilio Lolini’s Imitazioni (Imitations); Gilda Musa’s

The Structures of Quaderni di Traduzioni

Modern quaderni di traduzioni are normally arranged with particular care, and I will discuss several criteria (although more exist): title, arrangement, chronological order, theme, and intertextuality. Note that these are not exclusive, so more than one of these elements can be at play in a quaderno di traduzioni.

Poets frequently entitle their collections after a poem of a translated author who dominates the quaderno in terms of quantity of translations, or spirit, or literary influence. Here are some examples: Franco Buffoni’s Songs of Spring comes from Keats and Una piccola tabaccheria (A small tobacco shop) from Pound; Franco Fortini’s Il ladro di ciliege (The cherry thief) is a title of Brecht’s; Vittorio Sereni’s Il musicante di Saint-Merry comes from a poem by his cherished Apollinaire; and Attilio Bertolucci’s Imitazioni119 derives from Robert Lowell’s eponymous volume of translations. Gérard Genette has spoken of the significance of titles and demonstrated their various typologies: titles are highly significant since they reveal the poet’s conception of his own work.120

Besides the structure given by a title, there is often the structure provided by the arrangement of the translations. Poems chosen to begin or end the volume, or poems that are at the centre of the work, provide a framework through which to read the quaderno. By placing Ronsard’s poem at the front of his volume, Mario Luzi emphasizes how lyric poetry in the European tradition is tied to the Petrarchan loss of the beloved. Franco Fortini, consciously situating the poem by Brecht at the centre, reflects his own indebtedness to the German poet in his work; and he ends with a metapoetic poem by Raymond Queneau, “La spiegazione delle metafore” (The explanation of metaphors). Other poets conclude their volumes with their original poems, creating a link between them and the poets they translate: Piero Bigongiari ends his quaderno di traduzioni with a poem of his own written in French, “Pour ce
rêve” (For this dream); and Montale concludes his own Quaderno di traduzioni with his poem “La bufera” (The storm), translated into Latin (by poet-translator Fernando Bandini). Giovanni Giudici’s Addio proibito piangere incorporates both structuring elements by borrowing his title from a poem by Donne and beginning and ending the volume with poets significant to the translator:

Curious destiny, how this book is made, respectfully ordered by chronology: it begins with a metaphysical (the type of poet that, for the sheer suggestiveness of the epithet, I would have liked to have been then) and ends with a romantic (the type of poet which, at this point without any more suggestions, I will regret not having been able to become).  

In this case, the opening and closing poets are bookends that exhibit the predilections of Giudici, and orient the reader towards his personal affinities.

An additional criterion of arrangement is chronological, as in Attilio Bertolucci’s and Edoardo Sanguineti’s. Other poets use such an approach, but arrange their translations not by the year of birth of the chosen authors but by the year of translation, such as Giudici’s Addio, proibito piangere.

Another principle underlying some quaderni is thematic cohesion. For instance, Sanguineti’s volume, with translations from three poets (Lucretius, Shakespeare, and Goethe), revolves around the theme of erotic desire and fervour. Ungaretti proclaims that his Traduzioni rotates around a core of “nostalgia.” Generally, however, this criterion functions only in volumes with few texts or authors.

One additional type of structure can be seen at the micro-level of words, when there is a notable amount of intertextuality linking poetic translations within the collection. As Silvia Zoico notes, Vittorio Sereni’s quaderno di traduzioni “quickly reveals itself as a ‘canzoniere,’ with a dense and continuous intertextual web … Sereni’s book of translations is chosen and calibrated like one of his own books.” We can additionally think of the intertextual links within Eugenio Montale’s and Franco Buffoni’s quaderni di traduzioni, which connect up with certain lexical ties throughout their own poetic works, as will be shown later. This sort of dense continuity is, however, not very common.

An anthology implies, by nature, a canon; likewise, it would be difficult to argue that Solmi’s quaderni are anything more than personal
canons in miniature. These poetic canons (in Italian translation) are not necessarily the same as the officially received ones. As Mengaldo remarks, “As is normal, the transmission of foreign literary experiences doesn’t always occur through main streets and the lesson of the greatest [maggiori].” For instance: Fortini translates the Hungarian poet Attila József, Caproni translates Manuel Machado (instead of his better-known brother, for instance), Sereni translates poets belonging to the Négritude movement, Luzi translates the critic Sainte-Beuve, Giudici translates Hart Crane, Montale translates the Catalan poet Joan Maragall, Solmi translates the Scottish translator and poet Edwin Muir, Bigongiari translates Maurice Scève (instead of Ronsard), Dal Fabbro translates Ivan Goll, Sanguineti translates Lucretius, Ungaretti translates Jean Paulhan (instead of Claudel), and Buffoni translates Stephen Spender. None of these poets were frequently translated in the Italian literary system.

Nonetheless, the poems selected by the poet-translators often belong to different periods and/or styles of the respective poets’ careers. For instance, Montale, Ungaretti, Sanguineti, Giudici, and Buffoni all translated Shakespeare’s sonnets, and yet there is little overlap between them. Montale selected poems that recalled his beloved and muse, Irma Brandeis; Ungaretti preferred sonnets about time’s ravages through history; Sanguineti chose sonnets about desire; Giudici translated metapoetic poems; Buffoni picked poems dealing with old age. Each translator fashioned a particular image of a foreign author through his selections and omissions. Through these five translators, Shakespeare emerges as a kaleidoscopic poet, changing colour and figure according to translation. The figure of the English writer, like that of other translated poets, offers a mirror within which the diverse translators are reflected.

Structure of the Present Book

This book is organized into six chapters. The first chapter provides a rapid panorama of translation theory relevant to the study of poetic translation. Here, I introduce the themes of foreignization, compensation, and poetics, which will subsequently be used as interpretative guides in the following chapters.

In chapters 2 through 6, I examine the *quaderno* (or *quaderni*) di traduzioni of Eugenio Montale, Giorgio Caproni, Giovanni Giudici,
Edoardo Sanguineti, and Franco Buffoni. Naturally, this involves a consideration of their poetic and translation careers, as well as an examination of how their translations fit into the larger Italian literary context. These five poet-translators are chosen for several reasons. First, they belong to several generations that had different literary expectations and different poetic styles. Montale was born in the last decade of the nineteenth century and poetically made his first appearance after the First World War; Caproni was born before the First World War, and he began publishing only immediately before the Second World War; Giudici and Sanguineti were born during the rise of Fascism, and they started their careers in the post–Second World War period; and Buffoni was born after the Second World War, and he initiated his career in the 1970s. Second, each poet-translator has a distinctive profile in terms of the languages and poets he preferred translating. Montale was an Anglophile, not only the first true Anglophile poet of modern Italy but the greatest Anglophile poet in all of Italian literature. Caproni belonged to the dominant trend of Francophile poets which numbered a majority of Italian twentieth-century poets, from Giuseppe Ungaretti to hermetic poets like Mario Luzi and down to the present day. Giudici, meanwhile, was a particular case, because he translated abundantly not only from English, with more volumes of Anglo-American poetry than any of his contemporaries, but also from little-translated languages like Russian and Czech. He put Eugene Onegin, which he retranslated several times, back on the Italian map, so to speak. Edoardo Sanguineti had an even more idiosyncratic translation profile, since he translated more classical drama than any other modern Italian poet. In turn, Buffoni, who has translated poetry from English and nine other languages, is the most important translation theorist in Italy and the editor of the most important journal of translation studies in Italy, Testo a fronte (Parallel text).

The second chapter studies Montale’s Quaderno di traduzioni within a career in which he was often forced to translate for economic reasons. Montale’s own translation philosophy was based on Benedetto Croce’s: namely, faithful poetic translation is impossible. Montale’s translation approach was founded on domesticking the source text and translating it according to his own poetic style. This meant that he would rarely translate into rhyme and canonical poetic form. His quaderno would be recognized as the canonical exemplar of the newborn genre of the quaderno di traduzioni.
The third chapter investigates the translation activity of Giorgio Caproni, which culminated in his posthumous *Quaderno di traduzioni*. Through an examination of Caproni’s translation ideology, modelled, like Montale’s, on Croce, we will see how he pursues the goal of creating similar vibrazioni (vibrations) to the original poem, through the use of equivalent metres. Yet he is more concerned than Montale with the question of “fidelity,” as will be apparent with his versions of Char and Frénaud. What is lost, inevitably in translation, can be somewhat recovered through a process of compensation by increasing assonance and alliteration, as Franco Fortini suggested with his idea of “compensi” (compensation).

The fourth chapter analyses the *quaderni* of Giovanni Giudici: *Addio, proibito piangere e altri versi tradotti* (1955–1980), *A una casa non sua: nuovi versi tradotti* (1955–1995), and *Vaga lingua strana: dai versi tradotti*. His translation philosophy precisely corresponds to his poetic theory, influenced by Yury Tynjanov: poetry is una lingua strana (a strange language), and the poet’s job is to alienate the reader through a mixture of languages, registers, and tones. The poet-translator, then, utilizes the same techniques, choosing a specific “constructive principle” (metre, rhyme scheme, diction, etc.), which creates what translation theorist Lawrence Venuti has called a “foreignizing translation.”

The fifth chapter examines Sanguineti and his *Quaderno di traduzioni*. For Sanguineti, there is no relationship between the source text and the target text: there is no difference between translation and pseudo-translation. Translators are our “contemporaries,” because they are the true authors of translations. We will see how his conception of translation both draws on Bertolt Brecht’s idea of theatrical alienation and appropriates Walter Benjamin’s notion of interlinear translation. Sanguineti’s “foreignizing” translation method is aimed at reproducing certain features of the source text, especially through syntactical and lexical calquing.

The sixth chapter studies Buffoni and his two *quaderni di traduzioni*, *Songs of Spring*, and *Una piccola tabaccheria* (A small tobacco shop). Rather than viewing translation as a zero-sum process, Buffoni considers it a supremely creative activity.Translations are the result of what he calls “poietic encounters” (incontri poietici) between the poetics of the translator and the original author. Buffoni’s translations will be examined through the same framework that he has developed for examining the translations of others, namely, the avant-text, the movement of language through time, rhythm, intertextuality, and poetics.
Appendix

Following the six chapters is an appendix that contains a catalogue of published translations by 251 modern Italian poets. This appendix is the first comprehensive bibliography of translations by modern Italian poets, and it is only the beginning of what, I hope, will be an increase in studies devoted to this topic.