TRANSLATING SATIRICAL POETRY: LEOPARDI'S *PALINODIA* IN ENGLISH

LETIZIA LEONARDI
UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

letizia.leonardi1@abdn.ac.uk

Abstract: This article investigates the translation of satirical poetry using Leopardi's *Palinodia al marchese Gino Capponi* as a case study. The rationale behind the necessity to conduct an investigation of this kind lies in a twofold observation. Firstly, despite being an important part of the author's œuvre, Leopardi's satirical works have never been scrutinised from the perspective of translation. Secondly, unlike other text genres, poetry conveys irony through specific stylistic and rhetorical devices which are particularly challenging in translation. However, satirical poetry is a little explored genre in humour translation theory. As a result, the specific challenges and techniques inherent to the rendition of humour in this text type are understudied in the literature. Against this backdrop, this article proposes a five-stage methodology for analysing the rendition of irony and comic elements in poetic satire and a provisional taxonomy of strategies that can be used for translating this peculiar literary genre. To this aim, the article compares a selection of English-language poetic translations of the *Palinodia*. The translations analysed include those composed by Townsend (1887), Bickersteth (1923), Nichols (1994), Tusiani (1998) and Galassi (2010). Selected micro passages are examined using a descriptive contrastive approach with the aim to detect the impact that given translating solutions have on the text at the macro textual level. The article concludes with some considerations on the efficacy of the strategies adopted in the TTs. The proposed taxonomy is provisional and may be implemented in the light of future investigations on poetic satire in translation.

Keywords: Giacomo Leopardi; satire; poetry translation; *Palinodia*; irony; Townsend; Bickersteth; Nichols; Tusiani; Galassi.

1. Introduction

In the *Zibaldone* [2582], which is Leopardi's own private intellectual diary containing thoughts and reflections on a variety of philosophical, literary, and linguistic topics, the author talks about satire in these terms:

> The pleasure that we feel in Satire, in satiric comedy, in *raillerie* [banter], in gossip etc., in either speaking it or hearing it, comes purely from the feeling or the conviction of superiority to others which is [...] a consequence of self-love that causes us to take pleasure in the humiliation and debasement of those who are in no way or can be opposed to our self-love, our interests, etc. (Leopardi 2013: 2582).[1]

The association between satire and the feeling of superiority is not a new concept in humour theory since the idea that laughter is linked to the pleasure deriving from others' misfortunes had already been theorised by philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle (McDonald 2012: 33). Apart from the superiority theory, which refers to a sense of supremacy over others, the two other categories into which humour can be classified include incongruity and relief (*ibid.*): the former relates to the feeling experienced when a discrepancy occurs between reality and expectations; according to the latter, laughter can be seen as a form of pressure release. This categorisation is a simplification of humour theory, and its only aim is to provide readers with a general understanding of the basic mechanisms behind laughter, particularly the principle of incongruity which, as discussed below, plays a fundamental role in conveying irony in the type of satirical poetry presented in this paper.

Before discussing satirical discourse from a translational perspective, it is necessary to briefly introduce irony and satire from a theoretical standpoint. One of the main conceptual problems when tackling irony is the lack of scholarly consensus regarding its definition (De Wilde 2010: 26). Irony can be broadly considered as "the expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite" (Oxford English Dictionary 2024). In line with this, ironic statements are generally regarded as a violation of Grice's maxim of quality, particularly truthfulness (Milanowicz 2020: 208). Such an idea has nonetheless been questioned by Sperber and Wilson (1991), who argue that the violation of the principle of faithfulness is neither sufficient nor necessary for ironical interpretation. To demonstrate that, they introduced the "use-mention distinction", where "use" indicates what the expressions refers to, whereas "mention" describes the expression itself (*ibid.*: 303). Irony thus depends on a double recognition, as the reader understands that the speaker's utterance is a case of mention rather than use and identifies his/her ironic attitude to the proposition mentioned (*ibid.*: 308).

This paper does not completely reject the idea that irony involves insincerity, since, as shown by the examples below, this principle is particularly helpful to understand some of the irony mechanisms employed by Leopardi in the *Palinodia*. Nevertheless, it agrees with Sperber and Wilson's claim that irony is a

---

[1] It should be noted that the reference is to the page of the autograph manuscript of the *Zibaldone*.

recognition process and that it communicates the ironist's attitude and impressions on the message receiver (Sperber and Wilson 1992: 71). Nevertheless, irony is not identifiable by a clear set of linguistic or stylistic features (Mateo 1995: 172). Far from depending exclusively on the ironist's intentionality, as claimed by Booth's approach (1976), irony is actively attributed to the speaker's utterance by the hearer or interpreter (Hutcheon 1994: 85-96). This implies that ironic utterances presuppose a given cooperation or "conspiracy" (Mateo 1995: 73) between the sender and the receiver of the message. For such a cooperation to be possible, a certain shared contextual knowledge (Mateo 115: 74) need to exist between interlocutors.

Space constraints prevent an exhaustive account of the theoretical definitions of irony currently available in the literature. The views presented above nonetheless provide readers with an understanding of the conceptual stances that have guided the analysis of translations presented below, particularly the notion of irony as attitude, the interaction between ironist and interpreter, which makes the recognition of irony an active interpreting process (Muecke 1982), and the mediating role played by culture and context.

Satire is often improperly used as a synonym of irony. Nevertheless, a distinction exists between the two concepts. Whilst irony is a rhetorical device or technique (Singh 2012: 67), satire can be regarded as a literary genre (*ibid.*: 68). As "a multilayered mode of humorous communication" (Simpson 2004: 43), satire too escapes a univocal definition. The idea of satire being multifaceted is already implicit in the etymological origin of the term: satire derives from the Latin *satura* (meaning "full") and seems to be linked to the gastronomical word *satura lanx*, a dish of doubtful identification (Ugolini 2019). The satirical genre is varied, as it includes both verse compositions and prose essays (like dialogues, letters, and mock encomia, among others). Similarly, its tone can span from "polite amusement to angry invective" (*ibid.*). Despite its variety, some common features of satire include the "use of irony, sarcasm, ridicule or the like, in exposing, denouncing or deriding vice, follies, etc." (Singh 2012: 65), the intent to advocate reform (Elliott 2024), and the detachment of the satirist from his/her contemporaries, whose customs and beliefs he/she generally disapproves (Ugolini 2019).

This paper investigates the translation of poetic satire using Leopardi's *Palinodia* as a case study. The rationale behind the necessity to conduct an investigation of this kind lies in two different observations. Firstly, whilst there have been initiatives focusing on the translation of the author's non-satirical lyrical texts (Leonardi 2024; Natale 2002; Perella 2000), the comic component of his poetic production has never been explored from a translational perspective. This may be ascribed to the fact that Leopardi's comic poetry has received fewer translations than the rest of his compositions in verse. Secondly, poetry results from a tight knot between form and meaning. This becomes especially evident in the case of poetic satire, where humour is often conveyed through the deployment of specific rhetorical and stylistic devices (Chaves: 2022: 20). However, satirical poetry is a little explored genre in humour translation theory. Consequently, the peculiar challenges and techniques inherent to the rendering of humour in this text type have been understudied in the literature.

Based on the above these considerations, this article contrastively compares some English-language renditions of Leopardi's *Palinodia*. This study has two objectives: on the one hand, it proposes a methodology for analysing the rendition of irony in satirical poetry; on the other, it puts forward a provisional taxonomy of strategies specifically suited for the rendition of this literary genre.

1.1. Translating Irony and Satire

One of the main issues with irony is its supposed untranslatability (Lievois and Schoentjes 2010: 11). Due to the challenges it entails, the translation of humour has often been likened to that of poetry, as both are marked by a certain dose of subjectivity and balance between formal structures and meaning (Mateo 1995: 174).

Irony is difficult to translate due some concomitant factors. Firstly, the translator may fail to recognise it (*Ibid.*: 172) due to its implicit character (Valion 2010: 106). Secondly, irony is often culture-bound and context specific, making the proximity between cultures a decisive factor in the identification and transference of humoristic elements (Mateo 1995: 174). Lastly, in literary texts especially, the perception of irony, and, therefore, its appropriate transposition in translation, is further complicated by the lack of non-verbal factors such as gestures, tone and facial expression (Żochowska 2021: 87) which, on the contrary, characterise conversational situations. In the specific case of Leopardi's *Palinodia*, other difficulties are posed by the text's datedness since, as it will be illustrated below, the poem's sarcasm is often linked to specific linguistic-cultural elements characterising the poet's own age.

While there have been different initiatives tackling the issues of translating verbal and literary irony (Chakachiro 2009, Coromines i Calders 2010, De Wilde 2010, Lievois and Schoentjes 2010, Valyon 2010, Żochowska 2021) and satire in prose (Poteau 2022),[2] research on poetic satire is still scanty. Furthermore, no specific taxonomy of strategies has been put forward for translating this genre.

1.2. Comic Leopardi and the *Palinodia al marchese Gino Capponi*

Despite being an important component of the author's œuvre, Leopardi's satirical works have attracted limited scholarly attention (Blasucci 2011: 199). As remarked by Blasucci (*ibid.*: 200), it is possible to identify three different moments in the author's ironic production: the first period includes the satirical prose writings produced between 1820 and 1822; the second one coincides with the *Operette morali* of 1824; the third one relates to the period that the author spent between Florence and Naples, when, among other texts, the *Palinodia* was composed.[3]

---

[2] The list of works indicated in this section is not comprehensive but predominantly focuses on those which are relevant to the present study.

[3] Apart from the *Palinodia* (1835), the other texts belonging to the third stage of the poet's comic production include *Dialogo di Tristano e di un Amico* (1832), *I nuovi credenti* (allegedly composed in 1836) and *I Paralipomeni della Batracomiomachia* (1831-37) (Blasucci 2011: 200).

In this article, attention will be devoted to the third period of Leopardi's satirical œuvre, using the *Palinodia* as a case study. The *Palinodia* is an epistle in verse (*ibid.*: 212) written in loose hendecasyllables (Leopardi 2019: 270). It is addressed to Gino Capponi, a Liberal Catholic intellectual belonging to the Florentine noble class and co-founder of the journal "Antologia" (ibid.: 272). The title, *Palinodia*, is a term of Greek origin meaning "retractation". This had been used by the Greek poet Stesicoro as the title of one of his famous compositions. In this work, he declared to withdraw his accuses against Elena, who, in one of his previous texts, had been imputed as the responsible for the Trojan war (*ibid.*). Here, the term has a parodic value since Leopardi's retractation is a literary fiction: the author's ideological views were based on a disillusioned perception of human life, but, in the poem, instead, he pretends to retract these ideas, thus falsely conforming to his opponents' optimistic beliefs.

The *Palinodia* can be, therefore, regarded as an attack against a number of socio-cultural aspects which emerged during the 19th century (Bazzocchi 2018: 192). The author particularly denounces the excessive reliance on the technological and scientific advances brought about by progress (*ibid.*). Whilst, according to Leopardi's opponents, progress improved the masses' life conditions, promoting happiness and wellbeing, in line with the poet's disenchanted perspective on reality, this was unable to rescue human beings from their universal miserable state (Leopardi 2019: 266). The author also criticises newspapers which, by replacing any other type of literature, had become the only source of knowledge (*ibid.*: 276). Leopardi identifies the promoters of such ideological views with the Liberal Catholic intellectuals (*ibid.*: 266), of which the above-mentioned Gino Capponi was a representative. Another important element in the text is nature. Depicted as a cruel entity, this is compared to a whimsical child, who perpetually builds and destroys its creations according to an incessant process of birth and death (Blasucci 2011: 212).

2. Materials and methods

The proposed methodology consists of five steps: identification of the mechanisms employed in the ST to convey humour; selection of representative samples; juxtaposition of translated excerpts to the ST for accuracy using a descriptive contrastive approach; comparison between translated passages; development of a provisional taxonomy for translating poetic satire based on the evaluation of results. Since 'irony cannot be easily isolatable in determinate linguistic units' (De Wilde 2010: 32), the contrastive analysis of selected passages at the microlevel was used to investigate the impact of given irony translating strategies at the macro textual level (Coromines i Calderes 2010), exploring how the ST comic effect is preserved through the adoption of fine-tuned solutions.

The English-language translations making up the corpus include those composed by Townsend (1887), Bickersteth (1923), Nichols (1994), Tusiani (1998) and Galassi (2010). The corpus is relatively small because, as discussed in the introduction, Leopardi's satirical works received fewer translations than his other compositions in verse.

3. Irony mechanisms in the ST

The first step of the analysis consisted in identifying the irony mechanisms employed by Leopardi in the ST and the stylistic devices through which humour is conveyed. Three main irony mechanisms were identified: incongruity; foregrounding; contradiction and pretence; These are achieved through specific lexical, prosodic, and syntactic devices that will be thoroughly discussed in the following sections.

4. Incongruity

The principle of incongruity has been discussed in the introduction. In the ST, this is generally obtained through tonal friction. The expedients employed to produce tonal friction include the juxtaposition of lexemes belonging to unrelated semantic spheres, the conflation of different linguistic registers, and the use of foreignisms.

4.1 Lexical variety

One of the passages where the technique of juxtaposing words belonging to different semantic field is employed is the description of a Florentine liberal coffee house in the first stanza. The interior is depicted as a trivial, ordinary reality through the enumeration of everyday objects including pastries, drinks, cups and spoons. These are parodically qualified by a series of epic formulations borrowed from the military jargon (Leopardi 2019: 275). The passage is ironic in that the juxtaposition of words which are usually associated with different socials spheres (the military environment and everyday reality) generates a certain discrepancy between the listed objects and their qualifiers.

An illustrative example of that is "branditi cucchiai" (*ibid.*, line 18), literally meaning "brandished spoons". "Brandito" is the past participle of "brandire" ("to brandish"). The verb normally occurs in collocations with nouns such as "armi" ("weapons"). The comic effect is here produced by the fact that this is used with reference to an unusual object, "cucchiai", whose meaning in Italian is "spoons". An effective transposition, then, is one which successfully manages to replicate the same sense of incongruity generated by the SL phrase. Tusiani and Nichols adopted different approaches. The former opted for a literal rendition ("brandished spoons") (Tusiani 1998: 114, line 19), whereas the latter for a freer periphrasis ("where spoons are swung and brandished") (Nichols 1994: 130, line 18). Both strategies manage to preserve and replicate the ST's comic effect through a mixture of words normally used in different environments, like the noun "spoons", depicting an object belonging to everyday reality, and verbs such as "brandish" and "swing", which can be associated with battles and the military jargon.

Another interesting example from the perspective of translation is to be found in lines 15-17: Al grido / Militar,/ Di gelati e di bevande Ordinator (Leopardi 2019: 275). The SL phrase "grido militar" ("military shout") refers to

the act of shouting which frequently occurs in military settings when giving orders. Let us compare the renderings offered by Townsend ("The orders louds for ices and for drinks, 1887: 138, line 16) and Galassi ("And a military / order that conscripted drinks and ice cream", 2010, lines 15-16). The former is an example of omission, where the adjective "militar" is utterly removed from the translation. In the latter, instead, an addition occurs since the translator inserts the verb "conscripted" which finds no counterpart in the original. Here, humour is situational since it results from the idea that customers may be ordering drinks and ice-creams shouting like military commanders. The adjective "militar" is, therefore, essential for such a visual representation to be transferred in the TT. In line with this observation, the strategies employed by Townsend and Galassi produce an opposite outcome in the translation: whilst Townsend's omission causes an attenuation of the ST's comic effect, through Galassi's addition, the irony mechanism is intensified in the translation, since the verb "to conscript" is typically used in the military environment, thus conforming to the tone of the original.

Adjectival rendition is also important in the translation of the passage "il fumo / De' sígari onorato" ("the honoured smoke of cigars") (Leopardi 2019: 274-5, lines 13-14). The cigar smoke is defined as "onorato" ("honoured") since the act of smoking cigars typified the high society hanging out in coffee shops at that time (*ibid.*). "Onorato" is a past participle here employed with adjectival function. According to De Robertis, it may be assumed that the adjective parodically refers to the smoke produced by fights in the battlefield (Leopardi 1969: 304), thus conforming to the military depiction of the liberal coffee shop. Regardless of the interpretation that one may give to the passage, "onorato" is a key term whose transposition becomes crucial for irony to be successfully conveyed. Rather than translating it literally, translators often opted for a replacement, substituting it for either another adjective with akin meaning, as in the case of Bickersteth (1923: 319, line 14), who rendered it as "lordly cigar-smoke", or a noun phrases, as in the case of Galassi (2010, line 14), who translated it as "the glory of cigar smoke". In both cases, the comic effect is preserved since using words such as "lordly" and "glory" in relation to the "cigar smoke" can produce an incongruous effect in the translations. Despite being both acceptable, Galassi's solution is preferable in such a context since not only does it replicate irony, but it also maintains the same tone as the original. Indeed, unlike "lordly", "glory" is a term typically associated with warlike scenarios, thus better conforming to the ST's military ambiance.

4.2. Conflation of different linguistic registers

Another expedient by which humour is expressed in the ST is the conflation of different linguistic registers. This creates a sudden change in tone which, in turn, generates an incongruity between reality and expectations, thus producing a humoristic effect on readers. An example of that is the rendition of "arsa cucina" (Leopardi 2019: 290, line 121). Here, humour is both verbal and culture-specific since it is produced by a twofold component: on the one hand, the combination

of an elevated adjective, "arsa",[4] and a low-register noun, "cucina" ("kitchen"); on the other, the fact that, as remarked by some critics, the expression could parodically refer to Manzoni's "arse fucine" (*ibid.*), which appears in the tragedy *Adelchi.* Sperber and Wilson's principle of "echoic mention" (1991: 306) as well as Coromines i Calderes' notion of "contrast between two voices" (2010: 66) can be borrowed to explain the humoristic effect produced by this expression. According to Sperber and Wilson (1991: 312), "irony involves echoic mention of a real or imagined utterance". In this respect, "arsa cucina" can be regarded as an echoic mention of a similar expression already used by Manzoni. Furthermore, two distinct voices can be perceived here: "the narrator's usual voice and a fake one, imitating an elevated, grandiloquent discourse" (Coromines i Calderes 2010: 68). Dealing with two opposing discourses entails a higher cognitive effort than dealing with a homogeneous one, thus producing an ironic effect on readers (*Ibid.*).

As for the replication of the tonal friction generated by the noun and its qualifier, an original technique has been adopted by Nichols (1994: 133, lines 120-21): "blazing kitchen". Although mismatching the meaning of "arsa", "blazing" works as a befitting match from the humoristic perspective. The adjective is often figuratively employed in English in collocations such as "blazing beauty" (Oxford English Dictionary 2024). When used in connection with an ordinary noun such as "kitchen", it manages to produce an incongruous effect similar to that generated by "arsa cucina" in the original text. On the other end of the spectrum, Bickersteth's "scorched kitchen" (1923: 325, lines 120-21) looks like a transliteration of "arsa" and does not consider the figurative significance that the adjective acquires in the ST's context.

Apart from issues of semantic appropriateness, the difficulty of such a lexical transposition consists in finding a term which not only does convey the same sense as the ST's adjective, but which also belongs to an analogous elevated register. The target language does not offer a direct counterpart, so that "arsa" has either been neutralised, namely transposed by means of ordinary English equivalents (as in the case of Nichols and Bickersteth), or completely omitted (as in the case of Tusiani). The ST's irony mechanism is considerably reduced when both neutralisation and omission occur. Nevertheless, in some cases the ironic effect can be compensated by translators through the insertion of a comic expression which does not occur in the source. This solution was, for example, adopted by Tusiani: "And the kitchen / Will thrill to bright new shapes of pans and pots" (1998: 117, lines 120-21). Although the adjective "arsa" is removed from the TT, "will thrill to bright", which finds no counterpart in the original, works as an appropriate addition. As a verb of feeling, "to thrill" is normally associated with people. In the TT, instead, this is used in connection with an object. The kitchen is thus depicted as a personified entity, thereby producing a sense of incongruity and matching the ST's ironic effect.

Lastly, as mentioned above, further difficulties are posed by the parodic character of the phrase in question. Parody involves imitation (Sperber and

---

[4] "Arsa" has the literal meaning of "consumed by fire" but is used here in the sense of "filled with or blackened by smoke" (Leopardi 2019: 290).

Wilson 1991: 311) and may be translated provided that the target culture is familiar with the literary work which is being imitated or mocked (Fawzi 2014: 6). In this case, regardless of the solution adopted, part of the ST's comic effect is lost in translation due to TL readers' unfamiliarity with the parodied reference. "Arse fucine" is used in a 19th-century Italian tragedy, and may, therefore, not be easily recognised by the receiving English-language audience.

4.3 Foreignisms

The ST also displays some cases of intra-sentential code-switching. The use of foreign words is a feature registered in the author's prose writings which were not meant for publication, such as the letters or the *Zibaldone* (Bellomo 2018: 212). In the *Zibaldone* foreign terms are used to convey specific nuances of meaning and semantic connotations that the corresponding Italian words lack. For instance, the French verbs *choquer, étonner,* and *révolter* denote the act of striking something, but with a negative connotation (they suggest an excessive contrast that endangers the beauty and elegance of a work) that that the Italian *colpire* does not carry (*ibid.*: 213).

The *Palinodia* represents an exception not only because it is the only published poem where the use of foreign words is registered, but also because foreignisms are specifically employed for satirical purposes. These exotic references, which are all in italics in the ST, highlight a series of socio-economic aspects which had been introduced by progress in 19th-century society. It is not by chance, in fact, that these are used in connection with a group of lexemes designating technological advances. The foreignisms employed in the ST include the French "choléra" (Leopardi 2019: 280, line 44), the English "pamphlets" (*ibid.*: 299, line 206) and the German "walser" (*ibid.*:281, line 48), the latter describing the Austro-Hungarian dance which became popular in Europe in the early decades of the 19th century (*ibid.*).

Except for Tusiani, who left foreignisms unaltered, translators adopted a domesticating approach, replacing foreign words with their respective English equivalents ("cholera" and "waltz"). Although the neutralisation of exotic references does not produce semantic distortions, it inevitably results in a reduction of the original's irony mechanism. On the contrary, Tusiani's foreignizing approach is preferable in this context as it gives readers a more accurate account of the original text's linguistic variety whilst preserving the author's ironic attitude and disapproval of the century's belief in progress.

A distinct remark applies to "pamphlets": as an English term, this constitutes a foreignism in the SL but not in TL. In such a case, the translator needs to decide whether the ST's linguistic alterity should be eclipsed or reflected in the translation. In order to give readers a sense of the linguistically varied vocabulary used by Leopardi, Tusiani left the term in italics as in the original, thus setting the word apart from the other lexicon employed in the text. In most of the translations analysed in this paper, instead, the word has been simply transposed in its English spelling.

5. Foregrounding

The second irony mechanism identified in the ST is foregrounding: the reader's attention is directed towards key comic elements, either through the alteration of the customary syntactical order of elements within the sentence — this is what Coromines i Caldares defines as "false focalization" (2010: 67) — or through a forced interruption of the natural flow of reading. To this aim, syntactic and prosodic devices, such as the hyperbaton and the enjambement are employed.

5.1. Hyperbatons

An illustrative example of the use of uncustomary syntactic arrangements for ironic purposes is "ferrate vie" (Leopardi 2019: 280, line 43). In the 19th century, "vie ferrate" was a technicism (*ibid.*: 280) used to designate the railways. In the *Palinodia*, the comic effect is produced by the atypical position of the adjective, since "ferrate" is unconventionally placed before the noun. Whilst in English qualifiers normally precede the noun, adjective-noun inversions are less common in Italian. In the original text, the hyperbaton is thus employed for comic purposes as it makes the passage sound fictitiously elegant and sophisticated (*ibid.*). Due to linguistic differences, the original's humoristic effect cannot be easily replicated in translation. Indeed, whilst in the ST, the adjective-noun inversion is a specific stylistic device used by the author to produce irony, in the TT, this is dictated by the grammatical rules of the English language. Consequently, renderings such as "iron roads" (Townsend 1887: 139, line 42), for example, are conceptually appropriate but stylistically ineffective as they reduce the ST's implied ironic effect.

5.2. Enjambments

Another stylistic device frequently used by Leopardi in the Palinode is the use of epithets (these will be discussed in Section 6.3). The adjectives employed in epithetic formulations are often placed on run-on lines. Far from being purely stylistic ornaments, these enjambments contribute to the comic effect of the text (Leopardi 2019: 276), rhythmically separating strings of qualifiers which normally occur in close succession. This is because they create suspense, forcing the reader to focus on the information provided in the following line. An example of that is to be found in "Vidi l'eccelso/ Stato e il valor delle cose terrene" (Leopardi 2019: 276, lines 22-23), where "eccelso stato", meaning "lofty state", occurs on a run-on line and antiphrastically refers to the ephemeral condition of earthly things and human beings.

As a result of structural differences between Italian and English, the ST's versification cannot be reproduced in the TL, so that the deployment of enjambments with ironic effect is inevitably lost in translation. A compensative strategy used by Tusiani consists in substituting the ST's prosodic elements for different phonoaesthetic devices. The enjambment is thus replaced with an alliterative pattern in "**l**ofty **l**ot" "I see the lofty lot and the whole worth / Of earthly things" (Tusiani 1998: 114, lines 23-24). Furthermore, "lot" is assonance

with "worth" at the end of the same line. In this way, not only is the antiphrastic effect effectively replicated in the TT but, through the introduction of additional phonoaesthetic devices, the ST's irony mechanism is intensified.

Alliterative patterns are frequently adopted by Tusiani to match the use of enjambments in the original. Another example relates to the rendition of "caro / Sangue" ("dear blood") in "E già dal caro / Sangue de' suoi non asterrà la mano / La generosa stirpe" (Leopardi 2019: 182, lines 59-60). The passage refers to 19th-century colonial wars. The adjective "caro" has an ironic value since it refers to the fact that human beings, who are ironically referred to as "la generosa stirpe" ("the generous race"), killed their own similes for the acquisition of new wealth — the concept is reiterated by the expression "fraterne schiere" (*ibid.*: 283) meaning "brotherly troops", in line 65. "Caro sangue" has been effectively replaced by Tusiani as "**b**eloved **b**lood" (1998: 115, line 62), where, again, the alliterative pattern seemingly makes up for the missed reproduction of the ironic enjambement in the original.

6. Contradiction and pretence

As discussed in the introduction, irony can be regarded as "deliberate insincerity" (Pfeifer and Pexman 2023: 2). The type of insincere expressions used in the *Palinodia* can be better understood in the light of Muecke's concept of "impersonal irony" (1969, cited in Chakachiro 2009: 47), including, among other examples, praising to blame, innuendo and insinuation, and pretended error. In other words, in the ST, the author expresses apparently positive judgements to implicitly criticise his contemporaries' beliefs. The stylistic devices adopted to convey this form of insincerity include the use of polysemous adjectives, apostrophes and vocatives, and epithets.

6.1. Polysemous adjectives

The analysis revealed that in the ST sarcasm is often dependent on polysemy. This particularly applies to some adjectives used in relation to the author's critique of newspapers, which, as mentioned in the introduction, is one of the main themes of the *Palinodia*. Two examples shall be discussed here. The first is "la giornaliera luce / Delle gazzette" ("the daily light of newspapers") (Leopardi 2019: 275-6, lines 19-20). The adjective "giornaliera" has a twofold interpretation: on the one hand, it can be read literally in the sense of "daily", thus referring to the fact that newspapers are released on a day-to-day occurrence; on the other, in the passage, it also acquires the meaning of "something which only lasts one day" (*ibid.*) The latter connotation refers to the ephemerality of the information disseminated by newspapers, which were destined to be quickly replaced by fresher news. In the translations analysed in this paper, "giornaliera" has been rendered literally as either "daily" or "day by

day".[5] In such a case, the impossibility of replicating an equivalent comic effect is given by the lack of semantic coincidence between "giornaliera" and its corresponding TL counterparts. In fact, unlike "giornaliera", which, in this context can give rise to ambiguous readings, "daily" and "day by day" have the univocal definition of "every day" (Cambridge Dictionary 2024; Oxford English Dictionary 2024), thereby causing a semantic discrepancy between the original and its translations. Therefore, in this case, literal translation results in a reduction of the ST's irony mechanism.

The second example is "larghi fogli" (literally meaning "large sheets") (Leopardi 2019: 278, line 35). Again, the phrase is an implicit reference to newspapers. The adjective "larghi" is used ambiguously as it ironically suggests that newspapers' sheets where large in size but poor in content (*ibid.*: 278-9). Based on this observation, renderings employing adjectives such as "ample" and "broad", as in Tusiani's "the ample papers" (1998: 115, line 37) and Nichol's "the broad / pages"[6] (1994: 130-31, lines 35-6), can be considered appropriate since they preserve the ST's ambiguity. On the contrary, Galassi's replacement, "broadsheets" (2010, line 36), may not succeed in conveying the ST's implied sarcasm as the term correctly suggests the newspapers' format, without, however, necessarily implying an ironic discrepancy between the sheets' size and their content.

6.2. Apostrophes and vocatives

As observed by Caesar (2016), apostrophe is a frequent device in Leopardi's poetic production. In the *Palinodia* this rhetorical device acquires a peculiar satirical tone. Two examples shall be taken into account here. In the former, humour is produced by the unusuality of the apostrophised object ("the beards"). In the latter, the addressed element is Gino Capponi. In this case, irony is grounded on an innuendo since the poet's silent interlocutor is referred to as by an adjective, "candido", which is employed in an ambivalent sarcastic manner.

As for the first example, it is necessary to specify that the beard, a key comic element in the text, was a distinct trait of the Carbonari and the young liberals at the time of the poet (Leopardi 2019: 305). References to the beards, therefore, acquire a profound satirical value in the poem inasmuch as they sarcastically convey the poet's polemic against the socio-politic reality of his century. One of these allusions is to be found in the last stanza, which ironically opens with what

Blasucci defines as a "triumphal apostrophe" (*ibid.*): "O salve, o segno salutare, o prima / Luce della Famosa età che sorge" (*ibid.*, lines 260-61).

Here irony is produced by the combination of multiple elements including the double vocative ("o salve, o segno salutare"), this being an echo of Virgil's *Eclogue* (*ibid.*: 305), and the presence of nouns such as "segno" ("sign") and "luce" ("light"), which both refer to the beards, this being implicitly mentioned in the

---

[5] "Daily" was used by Townsend (1887: 138, line 18) and Nichols (1994: 130, line 19). "Day by day" was employed by Bickersteth (1923: 319, line 19). The ST adjective "giornaliera" has been completely omitted by Tusiani and Galassi.

[6] It should be noted that "broad pages" occurs on a run-on line, thus emphasising the ambiguous interpretation of "broad" through the use of the enjambement.

previous stanza (*ibid.*: 305). Irony is thus the result of a sarcastic allusion as the beards become the symbol of the century's salvation. This passage has not caused problems in translation except for the rendering of "salutare". As an adjective, this is commonly employed in the sense of "conductive of good health" (Treccani n.d.). Nevertheless, in the *Palinodia,* the term is to be read in the sense of "bringing salvation" (Leopardi 2019: 305). Tusiani was seemingly led astray by the unconventional use of the word in question, translating it literally as "healthy". Despite preserving the ST's alliteration,[7] his rendering overlooks the original's meaning and its underlying irony. To avoid ambiguity and preserve the comic effect, a departure may be advisable in such a case. This was, for instance, the solution adopted by Nichols (1994: 136, line 260): through a transposition, the ST's premodifier is changed into a noun phrase ("sign of salvation"), thus reproducing both the alliterative pattern and the comic effect marking the original.

As mentioned above, in the second example, the poet's addressee is Gino Capponi. A number of vocative phrases are addressed to this interlocutor throughout the text. The first of these is to be found in the incipit of the poem: "Errai, candido Gino" (Leopardi 2019: 272, line 1). The adjective "candido" has given rise to different interpretations among scholars: while some hold that it carries ironic undertones (Leopardi 2019: 272; Leopardi 2020: 424), others disagree with such a view. Bandini (Leopardi 1975: 281), for instance, interprets the term as meaning "sincero, benevolo, non prevenuto" [sincere, benevolent, and unprejudiced][8]. Similarly, Timpanaro (1982: 183) aligns himself with the minority of critics who reject any ironic reading of the adjective, claiming that "candido" has to be read in the Horatian sense of "capace di retto e imparziale giudizio" [capable of fair and impartial judgement][9] (*ibid.*). In this respect, he argues that Leopardi was genuinely impressed by the pessimistic traits of Capponi's personality, recognising in him "un'anima affine" [a kindred soul][10] (*ibid.*). However, based on the assumption that Gino Capponi belonged to the same group of intellectuals ridiculed by the author, this article adopts Blasucci's perspective, suggesting that it may not be entirely mistaken to assume that the adjective "candido" was used with an ambiguous ironic intent (Blasucci 2011: 212). This interpretation is also consistent with the satirical and mocking tone of the text. In addition, "candido" may be also implicitly connected to the verb "errai" (meaning "I was mistaken"). In the passage, the poet is, indeed, pretending to withdraw his disenchanted conceptions on human existence, ascribing his views to a general error of judgement. In line with these observations, Nichols' decision to omit the premodifier — "I was mistaken, Gino" (1994: 130, line 1) — lessens the ST's irony mechanisms since its usage becomes crucial for the reproduction of irony in the translation. The same remark is valid for the solution adopted by Townsend, where the adjective has been transposed

---

[7] The ST's passage is marked by the alliteration of the *s* sound in "salve", "segno" and "salutare". The same phonoaesthetic device is replicated by Tusiani, though through the deployment of a different sound pattern, *h,* in "hail" and "healthy": "Oh, **h**ail, O **h**ealthy sign" (Tusiani 1998: 121, line 264).
[8] My own translation.
[9] My own translation.
[10] My own translation.

literally: "I was mistaken, my dear Gino" (1887: 138, line 1). Unlike "candido", "dear" bears a neutral connotation and, consequently, its presence in the text does not produce a humoristic effect as the Italian counterpart does.

6.3. Epithets

In this section, two different categories of epithets will be considered: the former refer to the author's intellectual opponents, the latter are used to designate humankind. These generally highlight humans' mortal condition whist sarcastically denouncing the author's contemporaries' optimistic belief in progress. As mentioned above, they are often combined with specific prosodic devices, particularly enjambments.

In the eighth stanza, Leopardi sarcastically responds to the proposal of an intellectual of his time, according to which, in his works, he should dismiss his private questions in favour of public matters that could be of interest to the community (Caesar 2016: 400): "Un franco / Di poetar maestro, anzi di tutte / Scienze ed arti e facoltadi umane […]/ Dottor, emendator" (Leopardi 2019: 301-2, lines 227-231). Niccolò Tommaseo, one of Leopardi's historical enemies, has been identified by scholars as the most plausible addressee of the poet's satirical remarks.

The passage displays a peculiar stylistic construction. "Dottor" and "emendator" are the climax of a rhythmic buildup obtained through some syntactic expedients: the hyperbaton (head phrases and modifiers are discontinuous), the accumulation (the epithets relating to Tommaseo, namely "maestro", "dottor", "emendator", are listed in close succession), and the polysyndeton (the repeated use of the conjunction "e"/ "ed", meaning "and", as a connector between words). A satirical hyperbolic effect is thus achieved.

From the perspective of translation, the rendition of terms such as "dottor" and "emendator" deserves closer attention. These are used here in the sense of "preceptor" and "censor" respectively (Leopardi 2019: 302) and create a contrast between what is overtly said and what is implicitly conveyed. In other words, the ironic effect is produced by the insincerity of the statement. An effective rendition in English, therefore, is one which succeeds in transferring not only the literal sense of the terms employed but also the author's underlying sarcastic tone.

Of all the translations analysed in this article, Tusiani's (1998: 120, lines 231-234) was the most effective. "Dottor" is transferred literally as "doctor". This is appropriate inasmuch as the English "doctor" formerly had the definition of "teacher, person qualified to teach" (Oxford English Dictionary 2024). Since the original text was composed in the first decades of the 19th century, it is possible that the translator purportedly employs the term in its now disused connotation to conform to the type of language used in the source. As for "emendator", this is originally rendered as "Cato". Cato was the name of a famous Roman statesman and writer, also known as "Cato the Censor". By evoking the imagery of a well-known historical and erudite figure, the term can be thus easily inferred by readers as designating a learned and knowledgeable character. This replacement is appropriate since the ST's lexical item is replaced by a reference

familiar to the target readership. In this way, both the literal sense of the original's noun ("censor") and its implied connotation (the satirical reference to Tommaseo's erudition) are preserved. The translator has substituted a neutral SL word for a cultural reference in the translation. The result is hyperbolic since Niccolò Tommaseo's features are purportedly exaggerated in an antiphrastic manner. Such a technique is effective in satire, since, as mentioned in the introduction, the aim of this genre is precisely that of espousing people's characteristics for comic purposes. The substitution of ST's formal devices, epithets in this case, for cultural references can be thus identified as a peculiar strategy to be employed in the translation of satirical elements in literary texts.

This solution can be also considered satisfactory from the stylistic perspective: Leopardi's works often contain historical and literary references, especially to classical antiquity. By inserting the allusion to a Roman character, the translator thus replicates a feature which is typical of the author's own writing mode.

The second group of epithets relate to the formulations employed by the author to designate humanity. Only two illustrative samples shall be analysed here: "beata / Prole mortal" ("blissed human offspring") (Leopardi 2019: 273, lines 5-6) and "mortal seme" ("mortal seed") (*ibid.*: 294, line 167). In both cases, issues were caused by the transposition of the adjective "mortal". This fulfils a slightly different function in the two phrases. In the first case, it is antithetically opposed to "beata". This results into an ironic oxymoron: human beings are defined as "blissed" notwithstanding their unescapable mortal condition. Translators adopted different solutions for translating "mortal": Tusiani (1998: 114, line 6) transposed it literally ("blissful mortal seed of men"), whereas, through a transposition, Galassi (2010, lines 5-6) turned it into a noun phrase ("the blessed race / of mortals"). Whilst being conceptually appropriate, Galassi's rendering may nonetheless result into a decreased humoristic effect in the TT. Indeed, while in the original irony is generated by the antithetical meaning of qualifiers ("mortal" and "beata"), in the translation such a contrastive effect is lost due to the adjective "mortal" being changed into a noun. Contrariwise, by reproducing the ST's strings of adjectives, Tusiani's rendering more successfully conveys the passage's implied irony, thereby preserving the ST's irony mechanism.

In the second case, "mortal" is opposed to "invitto" in "fanciullo invitto" ("undefeated child") (Leopardi 2019: 295) in line 270. In the original text, a comparison is established between nature and the child. Let us be reminded, indeed, that according to the author's mechanistic and materialistic conception of existence, the only purpose of nature is safeguarding the human race, even at the expense of single individuals. In its perpetual cycle of procreation and destruction, nature is thus comparable to a child "who makes and unmakes, who builds, demolishes, and recycles her materials" (Caesar 2016: 401). The contraposition between "invitto" and "mortal" thus serves to highlight the discrepancy between nature and humans, the former depicted as an invincible wicked entity whose ultimate goal is procreation, the latter as perishable individuals subject to its unpredictable whimsical behaviour. A subtle irony emerges from Leopardi's insistence on the adjective "mortal", which, as

explained above, is repeatedly used throughout the text with reference to human beings. Replicating this adjective into the TT is thus crucial not only to reproduce the antithetical relationship between humans and nature but also to convey the ST's ironic tone. As is often the case, the adjective has been omitted by Townsend,[11] thereby leaving the ST's sarcasm unmatched in the translation and producing a reduction of the irony mechanism.

Another comic epithet employed by Leopardi to refer to human beings is "civil gregge" ("civil herd") (Leopardi 2019: 299, line 207). Here, again, irony is the result of the oxymoronic effect produced by the juxtaposition of an adjective and a noun expressing contradictory ideas. The phrase is indeed a polemic attack on contemporary society: this is made of individuals who, instead of being educated and civilised, passively absorb the ideas promulgated by newspapers (these being referred to as "pamphlets" in the preceding line). Human beings are, therefore, comparable to sheep, hence the epithet "civil gregge". In Nichols' text, the adjective "civil" has been omitted, resulting in the missed reproduction of the ST's comic effect (the phrase "civile gregge" is simply rendered as "the herd") (1994: 135, line 207). Similarly, although an implied antithesis is established between the adjective and its referent, in Bickersteth's "cultured mass" (1923: 329, line 207), the neutral adjective "cultured" does not possess the same ironic value as "civil", thus attenuating the antiparasitic and humoristic effect of the original.

7. Conclusion

This study evidenced that the irony mechanisms employed by Leopardi in the ST are incongruity, foregrounding, and contradiction and pretence. Based on the analysis discussed in the above sections, it is possible to design the following taxonomy of strategies for the rendition of poetic satire: literal translation, periphrasis, omission, addition, adjectival replacement, transposition, neutralisation, domestication and foreignization.

Literal translation and omission were the most employed strategies. Whilst the efficacy of literal translation largely depended on the context in which the technique was employed, omission generally proved ineffective to match the ST's ironic effect. The same remark is valid for neutralisation and domestication, which normally resulted in a reduction of the irony mechanisms employed in the ST.

On the contrary, the ST's comic effect was normally maintained through when strategies such as adjectival replacement and transposition were adopted. It also emerged that while most of the irony mechanisms used in the ST could be transposed into the TT through translation techniques which are largely employed in other text genres, the rendering of prosodic and syntactic devices with ironic purposes call for tailored translation solutions. In this respect, results evidenced that compensation strategies, such as the substitution of a given ST

[11] "Seme mortal" has been rendered as "the human race" by Townsend (1887: 144, line 166).

stylistic device for another in the translation (e.g., the enjambment for the alliteration), produced an intensification of the ST irony mechanisms.

As a final word, the focus on a single ST may prevent a fuller understanding of the strategies adopted to transfer the stylistic devices commonly employed in poetic satire to generate humour. For this reason, the taxonomy proposed in this article is provisional and may be further expanded in the light of future studies on satirical poetry in translation.

REFERENCES

Bazzocchi, M. A. (2018) "L'ironia e la comicità", in F. D'Intino and M. Natale (eds) *Leopardi*, Roma: Carocci Editore, 181-200.

Bellomo, L. (2018) "La lingua e lo stile", in F. D'Intino and M. Natale (eds) *Leopardi*, Roma: Carocci Editore, 201-226.

Bickersteth, G. (1923) *The poems of Leopardi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Blasucci, L. (2011) *I titoli dei "Canti" e altri studi leopardiani*. Venezia: Marsilio Editori.

Booth, W. (1974) *A rhetoric of irony*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Caesar, M. (2016) "Voice, Speaking, Silence in Leopardi's Verse", in P. Hamilton (ed) *The Oxford Handbook of European Romanticism*, Oxford: oxford University Press: 390-404.

Cambridge Dictionary (2024) "Day by day" https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/day-by-day (visited 06/11/2024).

Chakachiro, R. (2009) "Analysing Irony for Translation", *Meta* 54(1): 32-48. DOI: 10.7202/029792ar

Chaves, T. M. D. (2022) "Mockery and poetic satire. Humour in self-translated Philippines protest poetry", in M. Dore (ed) *Humour in Self-Translation*, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 15-40.

De Wilde, J. (2010) "The analysis of translated literary irony: Some methodological issues, In K. Lievois and P. Schoentjes (eds) *Translating Irony*, Antwerp: Artesis University College, 25-44.

Elliott, R. C. (2024) "Satire". *Encyclopedia Britannica* (22 August 2024), https://www.britannica.com/art/satire (visited 05/11/2024).

Fawzi, M. (2014) "Approaches to Translating Parody", *Journal of Education and Sciences* 21(1): 1-17.

Galassi, J. (2010) *Canti: Poems/ A bilingual edition*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Hutcheon, L. (1994) *Irony's edge: The theory and politics of irony*. London: Routledge.

Leonardi, L. (2024) *Leopardi's voice through translation* (Ph.D. dissertation). University of Aberdeen.

Leopardi, G. (1969) *Canti. Nuova ristampa*, edited by G. De Robertis. Firenze: Le Monnier.

------ (1975) *Canti. Introduzione, commenti e note di Fernando Bandini*, edited by Fernando Bandini. Milano: Garzanti.

------ (2013) *Zibaldone (English edition),* edited by Michael Caesar and Franco D'Intino, New York: Ferrar, Straus and Giroux.

------ (2019) *Canti,* edited by L. Blasucci, Milan: Fondazione Pietro Bembo/ Ugo Guanda Editore.

------ (2020) *Canti,* edited by U. Dotti. Milano: Feltrinelli, 12th edn.

Lievois K. and Schoentjes P. (2010) "Traduire l'ironie", in In K. Lievois and P. Schoentjes (eds) *Translating Irony,* Antwerp: Artesis University College, 11-24.

Mateo, M. (1995) "The Translation of irony", *Meta* 40:1, 171-178. DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/003595aradresse copiéeune erreur s'est produite

McDonald, P. (2012) *The Philosophy of Humour.* Penrith, CA: HEB Humanities E-books.

Milanowicz, A. (2020) "Truth and Untruth in Irony", in B. Bokus and E. Kosowska (eds) *Truth and Falsehood in Science and the Arts,* Warszawa: Uniwersytet Warszawski. Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 205-211.

Muecke, D. C. (1982) *Irony and the Ironist.* London: Methuen.

Natale, G. (2002) "Multiple Translations of Giacomo Leopardi's 'L'Infinito'", *Translation Review* 63(1): 51-70, 2002. DOI: 10.1080/07374836.2002.10523812.

Nichols J. G. (1994). *The Canti. With a selection of his prose,* Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited.

Oxford English Dictionary (2024) "Blazing". https://www.oed.com/dictionary/blazing_adj1?tl=true (visited 29/10/2024).

------"Daily". https://www.oed.com/dictionary/daily_adv?tl=true (visited 06/11/2024).

------"Doctor". https://www.oed.com/dictionary/doctor_n?tab=meaning_and_use#6348 292 (visited 06/11/2024)

------"Irony". https://www.oed.com/dictionary/irony_n?tl=true (visited 05/11/2024).

Perella, N. (2000) "Translating Leopardi", *Italica* 77(3): 357-385.

Pfeifer, V. A., and Pexman P. M. (2023) "When it Pays to be Insincere: On the Benefits of Verbal Irony", *Current Directions in Psychological Sciences* 33(1): 43-50 (2023). DOI: 10.1177/09637214231205312.

Poteau, C. E. (2022) "Translating satire in *Mafalda* and *A Turma da Mônica, Translation and Interpreting Studies* 17(2): 331-349.

Simpson, P. (2004) *On the Discourse of Satire: Towards a Stylistic Model of Satiric Humour.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Singh, R. K. (2012) "Humor, Irony and Satire in Literature", *International Journal of English and Literature (IJEL)* 3(4): 65-72.

Sperber, D., and Wilson D. (1991) "Irony and the Use — Mention Distinction", In Davis, S. (ed.) *Pragmatics: A reader,* New York: Oxford University Press, 295-319.

------ (1992) "On Verbal irony", *Lingua* 87: 53-76.

Timpanaro, S. (1982) *Antileopardiani e neomoderati nella sinistra italiana.* Pisa: ETS.

Townsend, F. (1887) *The Poems of Giacomo Leopardi*, New York: Putnam's son.

Treccani (n.d.), "salutare" https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/ricerca/salutare/ (visited 06/11/24).

Tusiani, J. (1988) *Leopardi's Canti*, introduction and notes by P. Magno, preface by F. Foschi, Fasano: Schena Editore.

Ugolini, P. (2019) "Satire in Reneissance Literature", in Sgarbi M. (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Reneissance Philosophy*. Springer, Cham. Available online at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-14169-5_878 (visited 15/05/2025).

Valion, E. E. (2010) "Traduire l'ironie des rongeurs : fonction et efficacité rhétorique et aspects rhétoriques pragmatiques de la traduction du discours ironique des rats fabuleux de La Fontaine" in In K. Lievois and P. Schoentjes (eds) *Translating Irony*, Antwerp: Artesis University College, 99-118.

Żochowska, M. (2021) "Translating Irony. Translation Strategies and Techniques used by Polish translators of Pride and Prejudice", *Crossroads. A journal of English Studies* 33: 86-104. DOI: 10.15290/CR.2021.33.2.05.