

Mirella Agorni, *Translating Italy for the Nineteenth Century: Translators and an Imagined Nation in the Early Romantic Period 1816-1830s*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2021. Pp. 182. £36.05. ISBN: 9783034336123.

The title of Mirella Agorni's new monograph echoes her earlier *Translating Italy for the Eighteenth Century: British Women, Translation and Travel Writing (1739-1797)*, published in 2002. Yet, as the two subtitles make clear, the book under review is more a *pendant* to, than a sequel of, the previous study. Both works share a focus on Italy and Anglo-Italian relations, translation history, and the underlying principle that translation shapes literary and cultural contexts. As with her previous work, Agorni's new book adopts a methodological and theoretical framing that combines system theory and a localist perspective for historical research in translation. By concentrating on forms of translation and cultural mediation in Italy from the post-Napoleonic Restoration to the pre-Risorgimento, Agorni ties her study to a recent wave of interest in the culture of the country's pre-unification era and, particularly, in the role played by translation in the formation of its nineteenth-century culture. Within this context, Agorni's recent book expands our knowledge of contacts and exchanges in an early nineteenth-century context of major transformations in the interactions among European cultural systems.

In her lucidly argued introduction, Agorni outlines the theoretical framework of the book with a light touch that will be welcome to those who are not specialists in Translation Studies. Then, in the book's six succinct chapters, she approaches her multifaceted object of analysis by drawing on a wide range of critical and cultural-historical sources, as well as primary translations and their paratexts, and periodical publications. After offering an overview of the socio-political and cultural situation of early nineteenth-century Italy, she turns to mining a variety of topics that comprise intercultural mediators, debates on translation, translation and the Classic/Romantic controversy as part of a process of cultural transformation, the definition of a 'Romantic approach' to translation, and finally a case study of Gaetano Barbieri's translations of Walter Scott's novels. The controversy generated by Madame de Staël's influential article 'On the Spirit of Translation' (1816) published in the periodical *Biblioteca Italiana* receives due attention in the third chapter and is a recurrent and familiar point of reference. Overall, thanks to these wide-ranging explorations, readers gain a much fuller and more complex idea of a richly nuanced and far from refractory cultural domain.

Foregrounding the question of imagining the nation, Agorni reconstructs a historical-cultural phase in which Italian intellectuals sought to identify how the country's culture and politics could overcome belatedness and marginality, and reconsiders the role of translation (especially interlinguistic, literary translation) within this process. Romantic ideas and forms from abroad represented a major opportunity for new conversations with other cultures in line with Madame de Staël's recommendations in 'On the Spirit of Translation'. And although conservatives and classicists saw this approach as a form of cultural subservience, it produced influentially creative effects in the writings of authors, including Alessandro Manzoni and Giacomo Leopardi, who reconfigured Romantic notions to speak directly to Italy's heritage and the early Risorgimento phenomena emerging in the 1820s and 1830s.

In her book, Agorni traces the picture of a gradually expanding reading public, new forms of mediation and the role translation plays in this context, as well as new networks of cultural players and centres of cultural elaboration and diffusion. Certainly, the overall image is a highly problematic one, and Agorni does not shirk from such questions as the loss of international prestige of recent Italian literature that instigated a generalized sense of cultural inferiority, the hindrances represented by different cultural legislation and censorship in the various Italian states, or a still limited reading public and the reduced presence and circulation of reviews and other periodicals. With these issues firmly in mind, Agorni investigates the potential of translation to instigate changes in literature and culture more broadly. Chapter four,

in particular, highlights this potential by bringing into focus a nascent approach to translation based on ‘mediated fidelity’ (p. 72), translation’s contribution to cultural self-identification, and a refreshing visibility awarded to translators, as their voices become ‘increasingly present in the extra-textual apparatus’ (p. 77).

Offering both an overview and detailed examinations of specific cases, Agorni’s study provides a mobile, lively picture of the world of translation from foreign languages (and especially English) in Italy between 1816 and the 1830s. Thus, she convincingly delineates the increasing presence of literary translations at a significant moment of intersection with other cultural-historical developments in a country that was a patchwork of states in which national discourses were only beginning to take shape. Repositioning translation at the centre of these changes, Agorni sketches a panorama populated by different figures and forms of mediation, clashing ideas, and multiplying texts and debates, enabling readers to explore an intricate and crucial period that laid the bases for an imagined nation and its projection into the future.

Diego Saglia
Università di Parma, Italy