

## Domesticating or Foreignizing Foreignization? Joyce Translation as a Test for Venuti's Theories<sup>1</sup>

IRA TORRESI

### *Abstract*

For Lawrence Venuti, practical approaches to literary translation can be subsumed within the mutually exclusive strategies of domestication (making the text familiar for the target reader) and foreignization (making, or leaving, the text unfamiliar for the target reader). This paper hopes to show that it is difficult to assign translations of *Ulysses* to one of those two strategies because of the inherently foreignizing nature of the source text. Examples from de Angelis's Italian translation will show how macro-foreignization (preserving the sense of 'foreignness' of the original) sometimes depends on micro-domestication. Another partially domesticating option that will be discussed here is that of complementing the text with an explanatory paratext.

Lawrence Venuti's distinction between *domesticating* and *foreignizing* (or *minoritizing*) strategies of translation has been one of the most recent, and controversial, turning points in literary translation theory. It was developed in the light of the so-called 'cultural turn' of Translation Studies, and it adopts what can be termed a postcolonial perspective. A thorough description of it can be found in *The Scandals of Translation* (Venuti 1998a), where the term *minoritizing* is preferred to *foreignizing*, but for the sake of brevity, I will try to summarize it with a few quotations from the entry, "Strategies of Translation" in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. Here, Venuti writes that "domestication involves an adherence to domestic literary canons both in choosing a foreign text and in developing a translation method" (Venuti 1998b: 241), while "foreignizing translation seeks to evoke a sense of the foreign" in the target culture by "choosing a foreign text and developing a translation method along lines which are excluded by dominant cultural values in the target language" (*ibid.*: 242). To explain his ideas with a spatial metaphor that Venuti himself borrows from Schleiermacher, we could say that domesticating a text means moving it towards the reader, while a foreignizing

strategy means moving the reader towards the text, forcing him or her to meet the Other where it stands.

As is apparent, there are two stages of the translation process in which a translator has to choose between domestication or foreignization. The first is the choice of the text to be translated, and the second is the interlinguistic translation proper, which requires the development of a translation method. It should be pointed out, however, that the first stage can hardly be said to be the translator's sole responsibility. Even in those cases where it is the translator, and not the publisher, who takes the initiative to choose the source text (which is not infrequent with literary texts), the translation would never be published, and therefore become a literary text in its own right, without a publisher's approval, funding, clearance of copyright, and distribution. Additionally, in the case of translations of James Joyce, the issue is further complicated by the Joyce Estate policy. For these reasons, here I will focus on the second stage of the translation process taken into account by Venuti, that is to say, interlinguistic translation proper and, of course, its published product.

The *domesticating* vs. *foreignizing* dichotomy seems relatively unproblematic when applied to most literary works. It may be easy to understand that references to source-culture cuisine, literature, art or history are best not translated into near-equivalents that exist in the target language but disrupt referential as well as cultural connections and tend to accommodate the reader's expectations rather than respecting the original text (and, by reflex, the literary and cultural traditions it belongs to). It is equally clear that the reader, in such cases, should be led to develop a curiosity towards the Other, and be prepared to meet it where it stands.

But what happens when the intertextual links are so many, so obscure, and so deeply encoded in the very linguistic structure of the text that even native readers are unprepared to meet the original text where it stands? In such cases, we might define the source text as already foreignized, i.e., made Other to the readers it is intended for. *Ulysses* is the perfect example of such an inherently foreignized source text. As Fritz Senn puts it (2007: 107), "Joyce made his works both self-contained and dependent on externals, his own biography, Dublin particulars, and the whole range of history as it is handed down, mythology and so on." Several of such externals (such as classical mythology, literature and history) make up the very foundations of all Western cultures, but more local ones still remain unexplained, and hunting them down might at times lead to over-interpretations, especially as we move away from the time when the book was written (Senn 2007: 96-106). As a result, those several intertextual connections that might have been retrievable by

Early Twentieth-Century Irish readers (who, however, would have found the rest of the text rather ‘foreign’) may be totally obscure even for present-day Dubliners. Of course, the external references become all the more obscure when re-located in different cultures, languages and contexts. And then, there is the problem of linguistic choices, as M. Teresa Caneda Cabrera (2007: 675) writes, “how can the language of modernism, which often relies on defamiliarization, and must remain somewhat unfamiliar and ‘foreign’ to the original reader, be rendered in translation?”

In such cases, to retain the foreignizing effect of the original, domestication might be necessary, at least at the micro level, if we adopt a functionalist view of translation such as that maintained by the *Skopostheorie* current in Translation Studies. That is to say, if at any given point the text has the function of triggering in the reader’s mind an echo of the real world —Joyce’s real world— then in order to preserve this function the reference to the external world should be adjusted to the target reader’s perception of his/her world. There are two main options here. The first one is to domesticate the reference by replacing one *reale tantum* with another which is more familiar to the reader, in order to preserve the overall foreignizing potential of Joyce’s writing. This, however, is an extremely complex undertaking with respect to translating technique and amounts to the translator making a clear statement of co-authorship, which needs in turn to be backed by the publisher. The second option is to leave the reference unchanged, or changed as little as possible, and explain it in the paratext, taking for granted that the contemporary reader of a culture that is other than Joyce’s (and this comprises most native English speakers) is not in a position to actuate the foreignizing potential in any way, but just perceive the text as generically ‘strange’, i.e., foreign, Other.

Let us now look at two examples of the first option, and then we will discuss the second option in greater detail.

### **I. a.**

The input for my first example comes from the catalogue of Joycean catalogues offered by Fritz Senn in his essay “Notes towards Joycean Cataloguing,” to be published soon in the online journal, *mediAzioni*. What follows is the concluding list of Ithaca (*U* 17.2322-2326):

Sinbad the Sailor and Tinbad the Tailor and Jinbad the Jailer and Whinbad the Whaler and Nimbad the Nailer and Finbad the Failer and Binbad the Bailer and Pinbad the Pailer and Minbad the Mailer and Hinbad the Hailer and Rinbad the Railer and Dinbad the Kailer and Vinbad the Quailer and Linbad the Yailer and Xinbad the Phthailer.

This list is obviously triggered by the consonance of the two words of the original stereotyped collocation, 'Sinbad' and 'Sailor,' and created through replacing the two initial 'S's with other consonant couples (and where appropriate, changing the -or suffix with its other form, -er) as long as the substitution produces meaningful common nouns. This produces eleven couples whose second element is meaningful, thanks to the high productivity of the -or/er suffix and the high number of monosyllabic roots (x)ail- in English. The last five couples, however, are different. They are apparently senseless couples with mismatched initials created to stretch the modification string to its phonological and graphic climax, constituted by the substitution of the original 'S' with two fricatives that rarely occur together in English, as expressed by two graphemes each (*Phthailer*), and paired with an equally infrequent initial in the first name, Xinbad.

In the Italian translation by Giulio de Angelis (*UI 697*), a few choices emerge clearly as instances of micro-domestication aimed at preserving macro-foreignization:

Sinbad il Marinaio e Binbad il Bottaio e Linbad il Lattaio e Ninbad il Notaio e  
Cinbad il Cartaio e Ginbad il Giostraio e Tinbad il Tendaio e Finbad il Funaio e  
Pinbad il Pellaio e Minbad il Sellaio e Quinbad il Guantaio e Dinbad il Dentaio e  
Rinbad il Rotaio e Vinbad il Vinaio e Zinbad lo Zampaio.

The very first choice concerns the rendering of the original collocation, 'Sinbad the Sailor'—the name of the hero of a famous tale from *The Arabian Nights*. The wordplay would have required the use of two words with the same initials, but the translator chose to employ the traditional Italian version of the name, 'Sinbad il Marinaio'. This is an instance of micro-domestication: the Italian reader does not need to make much of an effort to recognize the intertextual reference to the Arabian tale, as is the case with an English native speaker when reading the source text. At the intratextual level, however, 'Sinbad il Marinaio' might at first sight fail to be identified as the prototypical element of the list of variations because its initials are mismatched, but this intratextual reference is easily recovered *a posteriori*. The following eight pairs of names and epithets, in fact, are easily recognizable as a catalogue. Moreover only their first letters differ from 'Sinbad,' and they all end in -aio, the same suffix of 'marinaio.' The homeoteleuta, even in the face of the

missing alliteration, partly save the impression that the following variations all stem from the prototypical element.

Another instance of micro-domestication is that of forgetting the lexical content of the original epithets and preserving the alliterations. Here the sound effect, which is so foreignizing in a genre such as the novel—much less so in other genres, such as poetry, or advertising—is saved through lexical and morphological domestication. This operation also has a side effect that makes the series of names stand out as a proper catalogue rather than a random list, thus reinforcing the intertextual link with Homeric poems. It is easy to note, for instance, that the English suffix *-or/er* denotes a person who performs the action denoted by the verb to which the suffix is attached, which can be a generic one (as in ‘hailer’, ‘bailer’ or ‘failer’). In Italian, on the other hand, the suffix *-aio* always indicates a profession or activity related in some salient way to what is denoted by the lexical root. This increases the internal cohesion and coherence of the Italian catalogue and characterizes the various Binbad, Linbad, Ninbad etc. in a much more concrete way, as for instance through the visualization of the tools and instruments, uniforms, and workplaces traditionally linked to their respective professions—which fully recovers the descriptive function of Homeric epithets.

As we move towards the end of the catalogue, the translator’s choices become even more subtle. Once again, de Angelis seems to intervene in the source text in order to enhance the sense of systematization of this curious catalogue, making it clear that it is not just a random list. Instead of passing, as Joyce does, from ‘regular’ pairs to apparently meaningless pairs with mismatched initials, here de Angelis splits the two elements of divergence. First we have two meaningful couples that do not alliterate, and act as an intermediate, buffer zone. Finally, we have four pairs beginning with the same consonants again, but with meaningless epithets (with one exception, ‘vinaio’ or ‘wine-seller’). None of these assortments occurs in the original list. In the last four couples, moreover, there is a sort of gradient of foreignization, too. One could concede that ‘dentaio’ (‘tooth-fixer?’), albeit surely non-standard Italian, might be interpreted as a jocular allusion to a dentist. And ‘rotaio’ might be reconstructed by the reader as a ‘wheelwright,’ somebody who makes or repairs wheels, written in such a way as to only partly recreate Roman pronunciation (the standard Italian pronunciation and graphic rendering being ‘ruotaio,’ the Roman one ‘rotaro’—in either case the word is not common today). Therefore, the foreignizing impact of these two terms can be potentially overlooked, as it is milder than in the English ‘kailer’ or ‘yailer,’ and because ‘rotaio’ is followed by the standard Italian

'vinaio'. At any rate, in the last epithet the suffix -aio is applied to 'zampa,' an animal's paw; thus, 'zampaio' sounds like 'paw-maker' or 'paw-monger,' which is very difficult to interpret as a real profession and stands out as particularly strange. This appears to have the same climactically foreignizing function as 'phthailer.' It is therefore clear that, in this example, de Angelis has made a few micro-domesticating choices in order to preserve the macro-foreignizing impact of the catalogue itself.

**I. b.**

Another example of micro-domestication within the text is the rendering of the famous advertising copy of "Lotuseaters":

*What is home without  
Plumtree's Potted Meat?  
Incomplete.  
With it an abode of bliss.  
(U 5: 144-147)*

This is one of the refrains that recurs throughout *Ulysses*, so it is important that the copy is retained, and that it 'rings a bell' when it occurs again without the division in lines and the italics that easily betray its promotional nature. In English, there is just one half rhyme between 'meat' and 'incomplete' that should facilitate memorization. The translation, on the other hand, introduces several other devices that were frequently used in the Italian advertising language of the time<sup>2</sup> to facilitate the memorization of jingles and catchphrases –assonance, consonance, and a faster rhythm than in the original<sup>3</sup>:

*Una casa cos'è  
Se la pasta di carne Plumtree non c'è?  
Incompleta.  
Quando c'è è una casa da re. (UI 75)*

The advertisement occurs next in "Lestrygonians" (*U* 8: 742-743 and 749; *UI* 167), where it appears with the same wording as the previous occurrence (except that the last sentence is separated from the first two), but has the same layout as the surrounding text, without the italics and the line separation. Its promotional nature, however, is made clear by Bloom's comment, "What a stupid ad!" (*U* 8: 743), which in Italian is: "Che pubblicità stupida!" (*UI* 167). What interests me here, however, is de Angelis's treatment of 'plumtree' when it ceases to be a proper noun (the name of the producer of potted meat): "What a stupid ad! Under the obituary notices they stuck it. All up a plumtree. Dignam's potted meat" (*U* 8: 743-745). The Italian translation reads, "Che pubblicità stupida! Sotto gli annunci mortuari

sono andati a cacciarla. Plumtree vuol dire susino per salirci su tutti. Pasta di carne di Dignam” (UI 167).

I will leave aside considerations about the more baroquely evocative “pasta di carne di Dignam” (which carries an evident allusion to the decay of dead human flesh) vis-à-vis “potted meat,” which brings to the fore the analogy between the pot and the coffin. My focus here will be the translation of “All up a plumtree,” which poses two main problems. The first problem is a lexical one, that is to say, the choice whether to make it explicit that there is an evident link between this ‘plumtree,’ which needs to be translated into an Italian common noun, and the previous ‘Plumtree’ with a capital P, which, as a proper noun (and a real one, too) was left untranslated. The second one is at the idiomatic level, that is to say, since the original phrase is a variation of the English idiom ‘up a tree’, meaning trapped, or in a difficult situation, the Italian translation of ‘plumtree’ should be integrated into a sentence with a similar meaning. De Angelis brilliantly solves the first problem by using the explanatory “Plumtree vuol dire susino,” domesticating the brand name so as to offer the reader a key to it, but at the same time turning the original existentialist idiom into a much more obscure phrase, made salient by assonance and consonance: “**Plumtree vuol dire susino per salirci su tutti.**” Therefore, here we have an instance of lexical domestication, which is important in order to make other occurrences, not only of ‘plumtree,’ but also of ‘plum(s)’ and related terms, more transparent.<sup>4</sup> In fact, de Angelis systematically uses ‘susina/e’ for the several occurrences of ‘plum(s)’ in the novel, with some notable exceptions.<sup>5</sup> The lexical domestication of ‘plumtree,’ however, is coupled with a choice which is so foreignizing that it is very difficult to trace it back to Bloom’s comment on the human condition, a foreignizing comment in its own right. Therefore, here we have an instance in which micro-foreignization kills macro-foreignization: the Italian reader is left to wonder what “salire su un susino” might stand for, or rather, the assonance and consonance build a sort of interpretative wall at which the reader may be led to stop, dismissing the sentence as a clever pun without any particular meaning.

## II.

The second solution to the problem of translating an inherently foreignized text is the domestication of the original text in the paratext, i.e., in the notes, introductions, and all the meta-literature that is sold together with the translated book and which may accompany its reading. An example of this is the Italian translation of *Ulysses* by Giulio de Angelis, which is currently sold by Mondadori with a companion, or *guida alla lettura*, by Giorgio

Melchiori and de Angelis himself. In this way a compromise is struck between the need to help the reader reach some kind of interpretation of the text and that of preserving the internal structure of the text itself.

It should be pointed out that this solution once again pragmatically adopts what in translation would be called a functionalist stance, similar to what is adopted by the *Skopostheorie* current in Translation Studies, and which, in the case of *Ulysses*, seems to assume the existence of a double function of the text. On the one hand, assuming that the *Skopos*, or purpose of *any* novel (seen as a member of a genre) is to provide some kind of narration, then the readers who are not in a position to make out what is happening ought to be informed; that information, however, should not interfere with the flow of the narration itself. On the other hand, what is one to do if one of the purposes of *the* novel in question —*Ulysses*— is namely that of “evok[ing] a sense of the foreign,” to quote from Venuti (1998b: 242) again, *within* the English language and literary canon? If, in its original form, *Ulysses* is as open a work as a reader can get (paraphrasing Eco [1962] 2000), the explicative paratext provides an orientation that de facto reduces the openness of the text. In other words, the domestication that is carried out in the paratext provides the reader with a reassuring anchor that was not originally foreseen. This may well be said to neutralize the text's foreignizing potential, but if we look at the issue more closely, at the same time it leaves the reader the right to decide whether to consult the paratext or not whenever s/he feels far too stranded in a foreign land —that is to say, *after* the foreignization process has been sparked off. Moreover, the paratext often does not explain every single foreignizing element of the translated text —for instance, none of the two examples discussed in the first section of this paper were explained or discussed in the Italian companion to *Ulisse* that is sold with the book.

I would like to conclude by pointing out that the application of Venuti's theories to Joycean translation is nothing new. Serenella Zanotti, for example, in an essay on the translator's visibility in Luigi Schenoni's translation of *Finnegan's Wake*, wrote:

By calling attention to the language and to the difference in language, the translator makes himself visible. Translation thus becomes an act of cooperation between the author and his translator, who can call himself an artist, a creator, or, as Schenoni does, a poet. (Zanotti 2006)

In Zanotti's essay, and in Schenoni's work, we find another principle of Venuti's theories put into practice, that is to say, the struggle for the translator's visibility<sup>6</sup> (Venuti 1995).



The dichotomy between visibility and invisibility is linked to that between domestication and foreignization. A foreignizing strategy always implies that the translator makes her/himself visible with respect to the target culture, language and/or literary canon. It also requires a more active stance to defend one's choices, for instance, against the publisher's commercial requirements. On the other hand, in the translation of authors less disruptive than Joyce, a domesticating strategy usually makes the translator less visible; in *Ulysses*, however, as we have just seen, even partial domestication does not necessarily hinder, but at times actually enhances, the general foreignizing potential of the work, just as it does not make the translator invisible.

Additionally, the assessment of a translator's work in terms of visibility and invisibility changes in relation to the standpoint we adopt. It is perfectly possible, for instance, for the translator to keep a 'low profile' with respect to the source text, translating it as faithfully as possible and therefore hiding in the shadow of the original author, seeking invisibility. However, at the same time, if the work is disruptive, inherently foreignizing as we have called it here, then the very act of translating it makes the translator conspicuous in the literary scene of the target language. Just to give one example before referring readers to Senn (1984), this ambiguity of the translator's role is clear in the Romanian version of *Ulysses*:

Ivănescu's translation renders the strangeness of Joyce's language quite faithfully, which paradoxically makes him a both visible and invisible translator. His intervention is visible in that he preserves the strangeness of the novel's language and invisible in that he also tries to remain faithful to the original. (Ieta 2007: 124-125)

In conclusion, whereas most literary texts can be either foreignized or domesticated in translation, the very nature of *Ulysses* seems to defy the options of thorough domestication and invisibility. In order to domesticate such Otherness, one would have to intervene in much more invasive ways than those taken into account here —as would be the case, for instance, in re-writing an abridged version of the novel for children. In all other cases, we might even push the issue a little further and say that each translation does not deploy its inherently foreignizing potential only because it contributes to change the literary and linguistic canon in its target language and culture. This is also because it expands and develops the Joycean corpus as it is understood in O'Neill's (2005) transtextual model, gradually making that corpus Other to its older self. After all, as Fritz Senn would say, "what is the point of translation if it is just like the original?" (quoted in Bollettieri Bosinelli and Torresi 2007: 9).

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The author wishes to thank Rosa Maria Bollettieri Bosinelli and Sam Whitsitt for their invaluable input.

<sup>2</sup> According to Liliana de Angelis's recollections, Giulio de Angelis started translating *Ulysses* immediately after reading it, around 1947, and finished the first manuscript in five or six years (Valenti 2007: 160). The translation was then heavily modified by the editors at the Mondadori Publishing House in the second half of the 1950s. The extremely popular Italian TV programme, *Carosello*, made up of commercials often based on punning, was broadcast for the first time in February 1957 (Carosello Wikipedia online).

<sup>3</sup> There is another difference between the two texts, which is more difficult to find a rational justification for, other than the fact that the translator, the editors, or the typesetters attached little importance to page layout in this example. The Italian copy is aligned to the left instead of being centred as in the English text. This might seem to make it stand out somewhat less clearly as an advertisement, especially because it is followed by bits of songs that are equally aligned to the left. However, the other devices employed by the translator seem to make it clear that Plumtree's text is advertising copy.

<sup>4</sup> Notably, the same does not occur for other names, such as Bloom's pseudonym, Henry Flower, which is left untranslated, thus leaving the decoding of the allusive connection between the respective meanings of 'Bloom' and 'Flower' to those Italian readers who know at least a bit of English. Another pun with a proper name that is easily missed by the non-English-speaking Italian reader is the chiasmus, "Poor Penelope. Penelope Rich" (*U* 7: 1040), translated as "Povera Penelope. Penelope Rich" (*UI* 145). This suggests that the same totally foreignizing choice would have been viable, although necessarily successful, with Plumtree as well.

<sup>5</sup> In *Ulysses*, the plum can be interpreted as a recurrent symbol for sex and the drive towards life. See Stephen's *Parable of the Plums* (*U* 7: 941, 1023-1027, and 1051-1058; quoted again in *U* 17: 640-641). In all such occurrences, De Angelis consistently translates 'plums' with 'susine' (*UI* 142 and 144-145, 644), as he does in translating the call of the girl selling plums under Nelson's column, a location that links it to the parable (*U* 6: 294, *UI* 55), and in the description of Plumtree's logo ("a plumtree in a meatpot": life from death, Eros and Thanatos, a reading that is less immediate in "un susino in una pignatta," where the "meat" element is deleted) in *U* 17: 597-605, *UI* 642-643. The same translation is employed in Bloom's recollection of the viceregal party, which can also be read as an allegory of his relationship with Molly ("Scavenging what the quality left. High tea. Mayonnaise I poured on the plums thinking it was custard," *U* 8: 354-355 — "Per razzolare quel che aveva lasciato il bel mondo. Tè guarnito. La maionese che versai sulle susine credendo fosse crema", *UI* 157).

There are, however, three notable exceptions to the regularity of the mapping of 'susina/e' onto 'plum(s),' which might break the continuity of the interpretation of the susina/plum as a sensual symbol. First, in commenting on Molly's affair with Boylan in "Nausicaa," Bloom thinks, "He gets the plums, and I the plumstones" (*U* 13: 1098-1099), which in Italian becomes "Lui mangia i fichi, e io le bucce" (*UI* 365), where the mention of figs is perhaps more eloquent, especially given the allusion to one Italian popular word for female genitalia, but less consistent with the other occurrences of 'susina/e.' Second, in Stephen's Dance of Death the reference to the two "plumstained" Dublin vestals (*U* 15: 4145) becomes "imprugate" (*UI* 541), a clever pun on 'impregnate' and 'prugna' which, once again, is perfectly functional here, but breaks the lexical continuity of 'plum(s)' across the text. The third exception is a partial one, as in "Penelope" the Italian Molly remembers "quei vasetti 2 lb misti di prugna e mele di Williams e Woods Londra e Newcastle" (*UI* 723, "those 2 lb pots of mixed plum and apple from the London and Newcastle Williams and Woods," *U* 18: 940-942), but a few pages later she compares her menstrual blood to the same fruit preserve resorting to the usual 'susine,' thus making it apparent that the two terms

are actually variations on the same theme: “siamo un bel misto di mele e susine” (*UI* 740, “were such a mixture of plum and apple,” *U* 18: 1535).

These inconsistencies might have been avoided by invariably choosing ‘prugna/e’—another equivalent for ‘plum(s),’ whose sound is similar to that of another Italian popular word for female genitalia, thus preserving the efficacy of De Angelis’s solutions in “Nausicaa” and “Circe”—instead of ‘susina/e,’ and ‘pruno’ instead of ‘susino’ for ‘plumtree.’ It should be noted, however, that even the less transparent variations adopted by De Angelis (‘fichi’ e ‘imprugate’) preserve the metaphorical representation of sex and the drive towards life through fruits with soft, red flesh—a clear allusion to female genital organs.

<sup>6</sup> Venuti’s terminology does not refer to instances of unwanted visibility, that is to say, of translation blunders that make a term, or interpretation, *inadvertently* salient in its inconsistency with the target language, culture and canon. Cf. Eco 2007, where the terms ‘visibilità’ and ‘invisibilità’ are used in a thoroughly different way to Venuti’s works, which generated misunderstandings and pointed replies from the community of professional translators (Sezione Traduttori del Sindacato Nazionale Scrittori 2007). In Venuti, visibility is the result of a deliberate political strategy, which aims at claiming the translator’s right to enjoy co-authorship status (and as a consequence, the right to change the canon through foreignizing choices).