PART I

Translation in theory and practice

Joyce translates Joyce

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The Italian version of two passages from *Finnegans Wake* (from 'the washerwomen's dialogue' in 'Anna Livia') occupies a special place amongst extant translations of Joyce; not only because it was the last thing Joyce worked on before he died, but also because he did not just check over the translation, but actually wrote it himself. As much is remarked by his collaborators: 'moi-même lui tenant lieu surtout de cobaye et de compagnon de travail' (Nino Frank); 'Joyce hasn't *been* translated into Italian; Joyce translated himself' (Ettore Settanni). Or in Joyce's own words in two letters (April 1940), 'the Italian translation *I made* of "Anna Livia"', 'the Italian version *I made* of "Anna Livia"'. But this Italian text from *Finnegans Wake* cannot really be called – in the usual sense of the word – a translation at all; for what takes place is a complete rewriting, a later elaboration of the original, which consequently does not stand opposite the new version as 'original text', but as 'work in progress'.

The Italian version affords a special perspective on Joyce's work, permitting us to analyse in another language what Joyce termed 'the technique of deformation', showing how the text is worked and transformed. Moreover (and it is perhaps what emerges most strikingly and fruitfully), in this translation one can catch the complexity and boldness of Joyce's technique of linguistic arrangement as it were in the very act, to reveal a very rich process, one perhaps unique in this field: namely an exploration of the furthest limits of the Italian language conducted by a great writer; a writer who was not Italian, but, according to his collaborators, 'italianista unico'.

Joyce's linguistic passion for Italian sprang in part from his understanding of the active layers which constituted the language (those layers

to be understood not as fixed stratifications, but as moving planes). In the two-fold experience of dialect (above all the Trieste dialect spoken in Joyce's family) and the language of literary Italian (at once born and worked to its highest level in Dante), Joyce came to grasp the essentially plural quality of this language. And it is the germinative nature of these two levels whose experience is paradoxically most commonplace and familiar (the use of dialect, the reading of Dante) which are actively at work in the translation of *Finnegans Wake*, helping to make of these two short extracts something wholly new and unknown.

At the beginning of 1938 Joyce decided to transpose into Italian those same pieces from *Finnegans Wake* which had been translated into French some years earlier by a group of intellectuals which included Ivan Goll, Adrienne Monnier, Philippe Soupault, Samuel Beckett. Consequently he sought the help of Nino Frank. Frank, a young Italian anti-fascist, had taken refuge in Paris where he became involved with Bontempelli's review *Novecento*. He met Joyce in 1926 through Ivan Goll and asked him to collaborate on both *Novecento* and the French avant-garde review *Bifur*. At first intimidated by Joyce, he became little by little his friend and intimate. In the same year, 1938, he organized a broadcast for Giorgio Joyce, aspiring singer, on Radio Luxembourg, in which James Joyce also participated. As Frank lafer recounted, he was daunted by the translation project, as he thought the task was rendered impossible by the monumental fixity of Italian, inadaptable as he imagined to the ceaseless 'calembour' of the English text. Joyce, however, insisted, 'We must get down to work before it's too late. For the moment there's still one person in the world who can understand what I've written, namely I. I can't promise I will still do so two or three years from now.' Two afternoons a week for three months Joyce and Frank worked together. As Frank writes in *Mémoire brisée* (1967):

> Joyce éprouvait à jouer avec le vocabulaire italien la même volupté qu'à se livrer à ses jeux en anglais. J'ajouterai donc, sans la moindre fausse modestie, que Joyce est au moins pour trois quarts dans ce texte italien, moi-même lui tenant lieu surtout de cobaye et de compagnon de travail [...] Une douzaine de lignes par après-midi, telle était notre moisson. Cela se faisait dans la chambre de Joyce, une chambre sans caractère, dont je n'ai gardé nul souvenir, et où il se tenait le plus souvent étendu sur un divan en robe d'intérieur. Dans la pièce, déjà passablement sombre, l'air semblait s'obscurcir, je l'ai noté, au fur et à mesure que nous avancions dans notre chirurgie, à mesure surtout que les paroles de Joyce, toujours longuement méditées, et tombant à la manière de verdicts, devenaient plus rares, plus circonspectes, plus lointaines. Je lisais et interprétais le texte à ma façon, apès quoi Joyce me l'expliquait mot à mot, me révélait ses divers sens m'entraînait à sa suite dans la mythologie complexe de son Dublin. Alors commençait le lent tennis des approximations, ces mots courts que nous lancions comme des balles au ralenti, à travers une atmosphère raréfiée. Cela tenait, à la longue, de l'incantation.

Joyce was highly satisfied by the result and on the occasion of his birthday, 2 February 1939 (the same day which saw the publication of *Finnegans Wake* and the disclosure of its hitherto secret title), he asked Frank to read the Italian translation aloud – twice in a row.

But the history of the translation was not yet complete. A new co-worker had appeared, Ettore Settanni, presented to Joyce by Frank himself. Settanni expressed great enthusiasm for the translation, but nevertheless proposed some amendments. Frank did not have much faith in Settanni's understanding of Joyce's work (nor for that matter his knowledge of English); he gave Settanni carte-blanche to continue whilst himself opting out.

A year later, in March 1940, Settanni, by then back in Italy, notified Joyce that the first fragment had been published in the Rome review *Prospettive*, edited by Malaparte and Moravia. The text was signed 'James Joyce, Ettore Settanni'; in his letter Settanni advised Joyce that the name of Frank, a well-known anti-fascist, would have hindered publication: 'His name does not appear for reasons he will understand immediately.' In the same letter Settanni also mentioned having made some slight changes on grounds of euphony. Joyce, a little disturbed by this, wrote to Frank entreating him to find out what were these 'sweetenings' ['addolcimenti'] effected by Settanni in 'our text'.

Years later (in 1955) Settanni republished the translation of *Prospettive*, this time signed: 'James Joyce, Nino Frank, Ettore Settanni'. The only known text in existence remained that of Settanni and it was this version I published in 1973 in the review *Tel Quel*. Nino Frank (who still lives in Paris) having read this issue of *Tel Quel*, put me in possession of that first unpublished version which he and Joyce had worked on, together with some other unpublished documents of that period; that first version which Frank had read aloud that special evening at Jolas's home in February 1939.

Examining the two texts I could see the changes made by Settanni were not for the most part crucial. Some (for instance the change of gerunds into relatives) might even have been deemed improvements, as Frank generously noted on the manuscript he sent me. But others undoubtedly expressed intended censure both political and sexual. For instance, the word 'gerarca' in the expression 'gerarca e gitana'[1] is, given the context ('Siam pur sempre della gangera': in English, 'Gammer and Gaffer we're all their gangsters'), clearly being used irreverently and ironically by Joyce. In the *Prospettive* edition 'gerarca' is substituted by the innocuous and neutral word 'caporione' [ringleader, gang-leader], losing the political allusion and the rhythm and alliterative effect into

the bargain. At the beginning of the passage the expression used by Joyce–Frank, 'che cozzo ha fotto'[2] (in the English version 'What was it he did a tail at all') is altered by Settanni to the more chaste 'che cospito ha fotto';[3] the same linguistic device is used (double switch from 'a' to 'o') but the sense is watered down.

There are other changes which reveal simple incomprehension of the allusions, Irish or other, to be found in the text. For instance in the Joyce–Frank version we have 'un ghigno *derriso* del *corcontento*, ma chiazze *galve* dal cervel *debolino*' which retains in the Italian the series of Irish place-names to be found in the English ('and his *derry's* own drawl and his *corksown* blather and his *doubling* stutter and his *gullaway* swank'); whereas in Settanni's rendering we are given 'E la voce che ogni frase si trascina, gonfiabocca a doppia tartaglia' whereby Ireland disappears. In the same way 'Anatraente[4] io ti rapino' ('For mine ether duck I thee drake' becomes 'Selvaggianitro dell'ali si sovrasto' at the expense of Anna Livia. Or else 'rhurlavano' becomes 'riurlavan' thus losing the suggestion of the river Ruhr (in English, 'her bulls they were ruhring'); 'aniemia' becomes 'nienia' ('a reedy derg') taking away this time the allusion to the river Aniene. And so on and so on. That these 'addolcimenti', so out of tune with Joycean poetics, did not arouse more resentment in Joyce (as an act of disrespect toward a text in some sense doubly his) is explained by the particular circumstances of the time – anxiety about the war and the silence which greeted *Finnegans Wake*.

What emerges above all from the detailed analysis of the Italian version is that *this* translation is no pursuit of hypothetical equivalents of the original text (as given, definitive) but a later elaboration representing (in relation to the first text seen as really – literally – 'work in progress') a kind of extension, a new stage, a more daring variation on the text in process.

Comparing, say, the very first lines of the first fragment, we find in the English a language of ordinary communication (where only the invocatory 'O' at the beginning and the numerous identities of sound hint at *another* dimension beyond the flatly narrative) whilst in the Italian a complex displacement is worked, brought out in the different levels of language. In the opening of the fragment, the elimination of the 'O', and the particular typographical effect associated with it in the English version, signals very clearly the refusal of the ordinary rules of translation in their most rudimentary aspect of *fidelity*. In the whole fragment one observes a systematic emphasis on the spoken register: as though Joyce wanted to make the washerwomen's talk still more colloquial and familiar in Italian – almost as though the English text were

but a provisional stage, a first approximation of an expressive intention which might yet be more precisely encapsulated. This accentuation of the *spoken* is manifest in the insistent use of exclamations ('Beh', 'altroché', 'oibò' etc.) and in the lexical and syntactical modifications which increase the familiarity of address ('che cozzo ha fotto', 'per amara di donna', 'ha regiona'), the constant elimination of the anaphoras of the 'literary' effect: 'Tell me all. Tell me now' becomes 'Dimmi tutto e presto presto'; 'look at the shirt of him; Look at the dirt of him;' becomes 'che sudiciume di camiciaccia'. In the Italian, common phrases or proverbs are multiplied: thus the passage 'Ma chi fa il rio paga il fio [...]. Bene gli stano le postribolazioni' is made up of a series of popular Italian sayings not immediately related to the English version; expressions which are not proverbial, not idiomatic, are left out of the Italian; the phrase 'I know he well' which acts as a kind of parenthesis to the series of sayings in the English, disappears in translation.

At the same time this total immersion in the world of idiomatic Italian is far removed from simple mimesis, from a reduction to the spoken level of discourse. On the contrary, analysing the language of the passage one finds the text organized entirely according to the rules of a *poetic language* with three levels: rhythm, syntactic structure, phonic texture. The two translated fragments maintain a scansion which is rhythmically varied but extremely clear (especially on the last page). Regular lines are easily recognizable (above all hendecasyllables, decasyllables, octosyllables); for instance:

'Rimboccamaniche e scioglilinguagnolo' (dactylic endecasyllable)
'Ma la zucca per te se mai ti pieghi' (endecasyllable)
'Il sito cerco, trovati l'ora' (decasyllable)
'Sugna Purca Qua Ramengo' (octosyllable)
'Padre saturno di quinti e quante' (decasyllable)
'D'Anna Livia le figlifiglie' (octosyllable)
'Il mio cupo capo cade' (octosyllable)
'Mi sento pesa come quel sasso' (decasyllable)
'Dimmifiaba d'alberoccia' (octosyllable)

And even where complete lines cannot be isolated, a hidden and fragmentary scansion is delineated, appearing and disappearing, clipping-off and then coming back to the surface in half-lines, shreds of verses, only to merge back, shade into some more irregular phrase; similar to the irregular turbid flow of the river over which the washerwomen are leaning.

Intimately tied to the rhythm, the phonic pattern is rich and insistent.

So at the beginning the continuous alteration of 'a' and 'o' initiates and governs the circularity of the phrases ('Guarda un po', tutta l'acqua ne ho sporca'; 'So ben io cosa quel macchiavuol'). The invention of words (the principle of 'deformation' described by Joyce) is guided by the sound, by the global sound (of the phrase and the text). And it is precisely this passage across the phonic and rhythmic levels which off-sets that 'unresponsiveness of the Italian language to word play' (Nino Frank's objection to Joyce's proposed translation of 'Anna Livia').

At the syntactic level, the 'poetic' organization of the text is manifested by one precise element: the large number (much larger than in the original) of nominal constructions (pulled out of the normal, that is to say verbal narrative structure). Thus at the beginning, 'Tuck up your sleeves and loosen your talktapes' becomes 'Rimboccamaniche e scioglilinguagnolo' (while the French translation, 'traditional' in its fidelity and uninventiveness gives 'Retrousse tes manches et délie ton battant'). This constant implementation of nominal structures sets up a sort of perpendicular axis on the narrative plane; a chain of phrases which float down (beyond the narrative), gliding easily one into another at the level of the signifier – the phenomenon is directly evoked in the text (with typical Joycean concentration), in the word 'scioglilinguagnolo', common diminutive of 'scioglilingua' [tongue twister]. This is defined by the Italian dictionary as 'word game arranged alliteratively where a gymnastic exercise of language is practised to overcome certain difficulties of pronunciation'. A term then which insists both on alliteration as organizing principle of the text and on a gymnastic exercise of language.[5] On this score, note the immediately preceding phrase in the text: 'Lava pulito e non sbrodolare!' The Italian text of 'Anna Livia' is indeed characterized by discourse conducted upon discourse, here for instance thanks to the hinted ambiguity between 'lavare' and 'parlare': the word 'sbrodolare', which means 'to soil with soup', is used here to suggest 'speech diluting thought'; washing (lavare) and speaking (parlare) seen then as the same activity: discourse moving along the words like the river running through HCE's linen.

To set in play the various levels of the language in this way presupposes, of course, a highly articulate and unrestricted employment of Italian, but a language which has at the same time a certain autonomy. This is striking (as emerges quickly from textual analysis) in the almost complete suppression of reference beyond Italian. Where the English version will offer vocabulary with a sonorousness clearly not English, or a term belonging really or fictitiously to another language, the Italian

version will insert methodically a strictly Italian term; and this through simple changes of letter(s), word or expression. Hence most simply 'Pilcomayo' becomes 'Pilcomaio' ('y' shifting to 'i'), a name perfectly within the phonetics of Italian. The word immediately following that, 'suchcaughtawan' (unchanged in the French translation), alters in each component to become the very Italian 'Piavemarea'. Looking now at a whole sequence, note how the following heterogeneous phrase with its elements of Latin, German and Greek, 'Annona gebroren aroostokrat Nivia, dochter of Sense and Art, with Spark's pirryphlickathims funkling her fran', becomes in Italian: 'Annona genata arusticrata Nivea, laureolata in Senso e Arte, il ventaglio costellato di filigettanti', where the local deformations (bearing on a letter or a syllable) are rendered *within* Italian without recourse or allusion to other languages. By contrast, the French translation of the same passage retains the sense of foreign sonority: 'aroostucratiquement', 'tokteur', etc.).

Many other instances of such 'hypertranslation' could be advanced; an incessant refusal to follow the original and draw on the resources of other idioms which indicates that for Joyce, Italian held those 'other languages'. In Italian, viewed as aggregate of strata, of reservoirs, polyglottism is transformed into 'plurilinguism', in that sense in which Gianfranco Contini defines Dante as 'plurilinguist', dialects, tones, lexical levels merging together in a contradictory co-presence (quite unlike Petrarch's transcendental Florentine 'purity').

In Joyce's translation this 'plural' autosufficiency of Italian is seen still more clearly in the use of *proper nouns* (designating people, places, cultural situations). Whilst the French version (or even the recent Portuguese translation by Augusto and Haroldo de Campus) tends to leave them intact, or at least retain their original colour, in 'Joyce–Frank' they undergo a systematic process of Italianization.

Thus, taking the passage: 'Ask Lictor Hackett or Lector Reade of Garda Growley or the Boy with the Billyclub. How elster is he a called at all? Qu'appelle? Huges Caput Earlyfouler' (which is given in French as: 'Demande à Lictor Huckett ou à Lector Noiret ou à Gardar de Norval ou au Boy dit Browning. Comment le préénomme-t-on encore? Hughes Caput Earlyfowler') becomes in Italian: 'Chiedi a Manganelli, o al Randelloni, o al Mazzaferrata, o al Fracco la Frombola. Che saarebbe il suo superanome? Hugo Capeto l'Eccellatore'. Here all the English sounds are removed; the names become transparent; the Italian reader recognizes them immediately as designations of the phallus transformed into characters of popular comedy. The very name of the protagonist

in *Finnegans Wake* is Italianized and enriched in a double pun ('eccellatore' is a deformation of 'uccellatore' which itself has a double meaning: 'bird-hunter' with its very clear sexual allusion[6] and 'deceiver', 'tease'). So the Italian language of itself provokes this '*unfolding*' of text and character; one name evolves into another, allusions multiply. The creative principle, the text's dynamic, is carried *inside* the language of the translation.

This is again the case with a phrase like the following, full of references reaching into other languages, other cultural spaces. 'And letting on hoon var daft about the warbly sangs from over holmen: *High hellskirt saw ladies hensmoker lilyhung pigger*: and soay and soan and so firth and so forth in a tone sonora and Oom Bothar below like Bheri-Bheri in his sandy cloak, so umvolosy, as deaf as a yawn, the stult!' In French the same phrase becomes: 'Et de faire comme si hon adourait follement les chansons gozillantes d'au delà de l'armor: "Ya elle square sot ladys insmoking lill et un piqué" et soyatera e soantera et Yangtsé de sweet, dans un "tone sonora", pendant que Oon Bothar reste en bas dans son manteau de sable tout embirassé et sourd comme un pô, le stupe!' Here the names remain foreign: the impetus of the translation is entirely gathered in the painstaking, explanatory pursuit of specific equivalents. No unique rhythm here or elsewhere in the French transports and transplants the process of linguistic invention. The use of inverted commas around 'tone sonora' can be considered a grave error of perspective (a certain timidity in translating). In *Finnegans Wake*, inverted commas which distance one linguistic element will not do; for indeed in *Finnegans Wake* the whole of language is recaptured, thrown into action. In such a text the entire language is 'in play'. And the Italian translation does indeed consist in this 'putting back into play'; it is (in relation to the original) a 'follow-up' game – truly a 're-play'. It is not written – and must not be read – as but some feeble echo of the first text.

Here is the Italian version of the above quotation: 'Facendo finta di sposimare pei cantilanti d'oltramore: *Io l'Oscar solletico, smoccogli lì un picchetto*; e così e colà più ne hai più ne metti con toce sonora, e zio Zibeppe in cappa di sabbia sí umvoloso e sodomurto, el belb'!' The names are all put into Italian, Italianized; the blend of familiar locutions from spoken Italian and linguistic innovations (apocopi etc.) are absorbed through the phonic and rhythmic elisions without, however, reducing the sentence's semantic richness. That deformation of 'spasimare' into 'sposimare' at the beginning brings in something of 'sposa' [wife] (with a simple change of vowel) alongside 'mare' retained from the original.