



An Experiment in the Study of Translations Prismatic Jane Eyre



On difference and similarity

Professor Paola Gaudio (Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro) looks at one moment in the novel where six Italian translations vary widely, and another (from right at the end of the book) where they stick close together.

When you compare different translations of the same source text, what is most striking is the richness of the spectrum of choices made by the translators. Every translation has a particular idiosyncrasy of style, which means that each translation is always impermanent, never final. Since the two opposites are similarity and difference, the spectrum ranges from a text that is equivalent to the original on most, if not all, levels (functional, semantic, syntactical, metaphorical, etc.), to more or less extravagant choices where differences become more marked than similarities. In *Jane Eyre* there are examples of both. In particular, the first chapter offers a vivid example of diversity, whereas the last sentence of the book exemplifies extreme similarity in its translations.

The fictional autobiography opens with Jane's voice commenting on how glad she is to remain at home rather than go out into the cold and rainy day. It is not really her home, though. Orphaned, she is just an unwanted guest in the house of her aunt, Mrs Reed, who makes it very clear to Jane that she is not good enough to share her relatives' company. So, Jane leaves the happy family sitting by the fireside and, all alone, moves off to another room, where she picks up Thomas Bewick's *History of British Birds*, sits on the window seat

and draws the curtain to find herself ‘shrined in double retirement’. It is surprising to see how greatly the translations of these very few words can vary. Here are some Italian translations:

... *mi sentii protetta ed isolata come in un doppio scrigno* (Giuliana Pozzo Galeazzi, 1951)
 ... I felt protected and isolated as in a double casket

... *mi sentii doppiamente sola* (Lia Spaventa Filippi, 1956; Luca Lamberti, 2008)
 ... I felt doubly alone

... *mi trovai chiusa in un doppio rifugio* (Ugo Dèttore, 1974)
 ... I found myself locked in a double shelter

... *mi sentii doppiamente protetta* (Luisa Reali, 1996)
 ... I felt doubly protected

... *mi trovai racchiusa in un doppio rifugio* (Alessandro Gallenzi, 1997)
 ... I found myself enclosed in a double refuge

... *mi ritrovai avvolta da una doppia solitudine* (Stella Sacchini, 2014)
 ... I found myself wrapped in a double solitude

That Jane enjoys such retirement seems to be suggested by her wish not to be found. This would reflect her disposition as a private person who is not afraid to be alone, and indeed who cherishes solitude. However, the connotations of words such as *retirement*, *isolation*, or *solitude* can be either positive or negative, depending on your personality. For some people, loneliness is a blessing; for others, it is a condemnation to be avoided at all costs. It might be argued that each translator’s perception of Jane’s double retirement depends on their personal disposition, and the translation varies accordingly.

In some cases, the connotations appear positive, implying a sense of protection, and the translations emphasize how such double retirement constitutes a solace for little Jane (Dèttore, Reali, Gallenzi); in other cases, it is the loneliness that stands out, thus reflecting Jane’s temper as a sociable child who does not crave company after all (Spaventa Filippi, Lamberti, Sacchini). Giuliana Pozzo Galeazzi, on the other hand, combines the two aspects, explicating the sense of both protection and isolation provided by the curtain. Overall, however, the differences in these translations show how fleeting the meaning of a text can be; even more so when its interpretation depends not only on the general context and

surrounding words but also on the psychological attitude of the reader, who, as in this case, also happens to be the translator.

The other end of the spectrum, where similarity borders on sameness, can be observed at the very end of the novel. The centre stage for the conclusion of Jane's autobiography is occupied by St John, who appears to have become such a prominent character in Jane's life that his are the closing words. 'My Master,' he says, 'has forewarned me. Daily He announces more distinctly, "Surely I come quickly!" and hourly I more eagerly respond, "Amen; even so, come, Lord Jesus!"'

Remarkably, these words coincide with the end of the Bible, *Revelation*, 22:20: 'He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus' (King James Bible, 1611).

In contrast to the former case, this is an exquisite example of how, in spite of the unavoidable and sometimes substantial variations, the power of St John's words announcing his readiness to die remains unaltered:

... e ad ogni ora che passa io rispondo con maggiore ardore: 'Amen, vieni, mio Signore Gesù'
(Giuliana Pozzo Galeazzi, 1951)

... and at every hour that passes I respond with greater ardour: 'Amen, come, my Lord Jesus'

... e di ora in ora, sempre con maggior fervore, rispondo: 'Amen, vieni pure, mio Signore!'
(Lia Spaventa Filippi, 1956; Luca Lamberti, 2008)

... and hourly, with ever greater fervour, I reply: 'Amen, do come, my Lord!'

... e a ogni ora, con sempre maggiore fervore, rispondo: 'Amen: vieni pure, Signore Gesù'
(Ugo Dèttore, 1974)

... and at every hour, with greater and greater fervour, I reply: 'Amen: do come, Lord Jesus'

... e ogni ora rispondo con ansia maggiore: 'Amen; vieni, Signore Gesù!' (Luisa Reali, 1996)

... and every hour I answer with greater anxiety: 'Amen; come, Lord Jesus!'

... e io gli rispondo con sempre maggiore ardore: 'Così sia. Vieni pure, Signore Gesù!'
(Alessandro Gallenzi, 1997)

... and I answer him with ever greater ardour: 'So be it. Do come Lord Jesus!'

... *e di ora in ora io rispondo con fervore crescente: 'Amen, vieni pure, Signore Gesù!'* (Stella Sacchini, 2014)

... and hourly I reply with growing fervour: 'Amen, do come, Lord Jesus!'

It is similarity that dominates here: between source text and target text, and between the various translations themselves. The extraordinary translatability of this passage strikes one as somehow supernatural, indeed divine. St John's final dialogue with God does not seem to lose anything in translation, regardless of the multitude of overtones to be noticed in its stack of variants. So much so that it might be reasonably suggested that the wholeness St John finally achieves with his beloved Jesus at the end of his life – no less than at the end of the book – is not far from a pre-Babelian unity, when there was no need for translation because the word and the thing were exactly the same, any translation ultimately coinciding with the original, and its meaning intelligible to speakers of any language.



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